

## I.

### A SCULPTURED RELIEF OF THE ROMAN PERIOD AT COLINTON.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD, C.B., F.B.A., LL.D., F.S.A.Scot.

Some weeks ago Mrs Turnbull of Hailes asked the Director of our Museum whether he could throw any light on the age or character of a sculptured relief which was built into the southern face of the north wall of her garden, immediately above the gate that lies to the west of the mansion; she had long known of its existence, but her attention had recently been directed to it afresh, when a wisteria, by which it was overgrown, was being pruned. Mr Curle was good enough to invite my co-operation in the matter. As the result of a joint visit to the spot, I have now the privilege of laying before the Society a brief account of an extremely interesting and hitherto unidentified monument of the Roman occupation of Scotland.

To all who are familiar with the provincial art of the Western Empire the illustration (fig. 1), which is reproduced from an admirable photograph taken by Miss Dorothy Mackenzie, will speak for itself. The slab, or so much of it as survives, has a maximum length of 21 inches and a maximum height of 19 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches.<sup>1</sup> At one time it may have formed

<sup>1</sup> It may be convenient to put one or two further details of measurement upon record. The height of the most complete of the seated figures is 15 inches, and the breadth of each of the three, from left to right, is 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches respectively. The greatest depth of the relief is 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  inch.

part of the upper half of an altar. On that point it would scarcely be possible to express an opinion, unless the stone could be detached from its present surroundings for an examination of the fractures, and perhaps even then the verdict would not be an agreed one. What is beyond question is that we have here a very substantial remnant of a dedication to the threefold group of "mother goddesses," whose worship



Fig. 1. Relief at Colinton.

was so popular in certain districts during the earliest centuries of the Christian era. A very exhaustive discussion of the cult of these "mothers" in its various aspects was contributed to the *Bonner Jahrbücher* by the late Professor Max Ihm in 1887.<sup>1</sup> English readers will find all the essential facts lucidly and succinctly summarised by Professor Haverfield in *Archæologia Aeliana* for 1891.<sup>2</sup> A reference to either of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Heft lxxxiii. pp. 1-200, from which figs. 2-6 have been reproduced. Cf. also the same scholar's article, "Matres, Matronæ, Matræ," in Roscher's *Lexicon*, vol. ii. (1894-97), pp. 2464 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* (N.S.), vol. xv. (1892) pp. 314-339, with Map. Fig. 7 has been reproduced from this paper.

these authorities will show that there were three Latin variants of the dominant title of the goddesses. In Britain and at Rome they are always *Matres*, and the form occurs sporadically elsewhere. In Lower Germany and in Gallia Cisalpina—in one or other, or both, of which regions the cult was probably indigenous—they are usually known as *Matronæ*, while in Upper Germany and in Gallia Narbonensis the Celtic form *Matræ* is a tolerably common variant for *Matres*.

Though ancient literature does not give us even a whispered hint



Fig. 2. Relief from Rödingen.

as to the existence of the "mother goddesses," as many as four or five hundred monuments relating to their worship have survived. Some of these are reliefs; some are inscriptions; many are combinations of the two. In type the new example from Colinton conforms generally to the varieties already recorded from elsewhere. But it presents a few peculiarities which it may be just worth while to emphasise. The best way of bringing these into prominence will be to glance for a moment at one or two of the more familiar among the published specimens.

None is more characteristic than that found at Rödingen (fig. 2), and dedicated to the *Matronæ Gesahenæ* by Julius Valentinus and Julia

Justina. It will be observed that the goddesses are seated side by side on a bench within what has been an *edicula* or miniature shrine. Each holds upon her knees a flat basket filled with fruit. The two on the outside wear a quaint head-dress which Ihm is probably right in interpreting, not as an attribute specially associated with the "mothers," but rather as an indication of contemporary feminine fashion. Very similar is the altar from Cologne (fig. 3), erected to the *Matronæ Africæ* by Marius



Fig. 3. Altar at Cologne.

Marcellus. Here, however, particular note should be taken of the shell-like canopy that forms the roof. The same feature, as well as the quaint head-dress, recurs on a relief from Mümling-Crumbach (fig. 4), which is, moreover, remarkable as showing the central figure raised upon a dais. Passing further south, we find in the Stuttgart Museum a very different representation from Zatzhausen (fig. 5). There is no shell-like canopy, and the two outer figures are standing, while it is the one in the centre that wears the head-dress. The "kindly fruits of the earth" are, however, still conspicuous, and here they include ears of corn.

Thus much for Germany. The most famous example from Gaul is

probably one found at Lyon (fig. 6), a dedication to the *Matræ Augustæ* by a physician as to whose precise name there is some difference



Fig. 4. Relief from Mümling-Crumbach.

of opinion among epigraphists; Phlegon, Philippus Egnatius, and Philenus Egnatius have all been suggested. It will be seen that the goddesses are somewhat differently dressed from their German sisters, and that the circular head-dress has disappeared. All have objects resembling apples between their knees, and the one in the centre holds in addition a patera in her right hand and a cornucopiæ in her left. For our British example we may choose a rudely sculptured relief (fig. 7) now in the Museum at Newcastle,

but perhaps originally dug up at Carlisle. The goddesses in this case have no specific local epithet attached to their general title, such as they



Fig. 5. Relief from Zatzhausen.

had on all the German inscriptions which have been passed in review. Instead they are the *Matres Tramarinæ*, "the mothers beyond the seas"—clear proof that the cult was an imported one and that the dedicator, Aurelius Juvenalis, was a sojourner in a strange land. The three figures are exactly alike, or as nearly so as may be; and their equality in power

and glory is made more obvious by the fact that a separate and identical niche in the *adnicula* is set apart for each. The lack of anything indicative of fruit is probably due to the poor capacity of the sculptor. But the circular ornaments between the springs of the arches are just worth noting.

We are now free to return to the point from which we started, and to examine the Colinton relief (fig. 1) in more detail. It is remarkable, not only as the first monument of the kind to be found on this side of the border, but also as being much superior in execution to the great majority of the representations of the "mothers" which have come to light in Southern Britain. Originally, the framework was doubtless of the usual kind, but the only part of it which remains at all complete is



Fig. 6. Relief from Lyon.

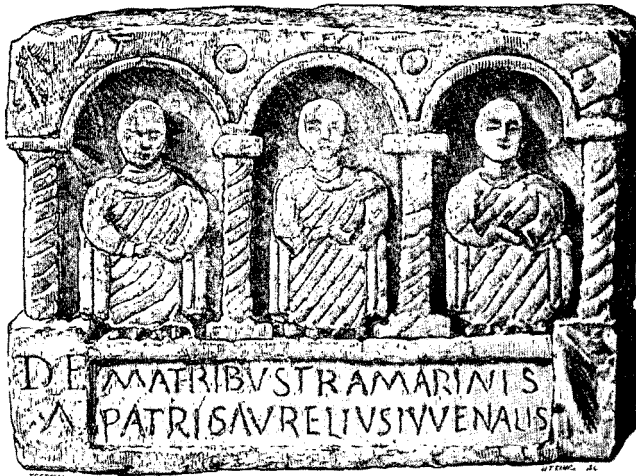


Fig. 7. Relief at Newcastle.

the base and the hollow moulding beneath it. Nothing is left of the *adnicula* save the bottom of a pillar on the extreme right. Each figure has apparently had above it a shell-like canopy which is directly reminiscent of the sculptures from Cologne and Mümling-Crumbach, except

that there the canopy was single, not triple. Between each of the three canopies and its immediate neighbour there has been a rounded knob or boss, which is in all probability purely decorative, although the possibility of its having some mystic significance can hardly be entirely excluded in view of the circles which occupy a very similar position on the relief with the *Mâtres Tramarinae* (fig. 7).

In depicting the goddesses the artist has allowed as free a vein to his inventiveness as was consistent with maintaining a close general resemblance between the thrée. They are dressed exactly alike. Round her shoulders, and above the long robe that falls in ample folds about her feet, each wears a scarf or shawl, drawn tight and having the ends fastened over her chest with a large circular fibula. Unfortunately, the headgear is sadly damaged, but it would seem to have been something in the nature of a hood or a high pointed cap. The attributes are interesting. One object common to all is a round fruit, most probably an apple. The "mother" on the left holds this in her right hand, while with her left, which rests upon her knee, she grasps the arched handle of what appears to be a deep basket, filled with ears of corn, one or two of which can be seen hanging down over the side. The "mother" on the right has her apple in her left hand, with the fingers of which she at the same time supports what must also be a basket, albeit its shape is curiously suggestive of what we in Scotland call a "luggie." Her disengaged hand is raised and laid across her breast. In the case of the central figure the apple is also held in the left hand, but from the right there dangles a splendid bunch of grapes, a fruit which I do not remember to have noted in association with the "mother goddesses" in any other relief that I have seen. Its presence here has one very obvious meaning, for the Scottish thistle is as barren of grapes as it is of figs. We may be tolerably certain that both sculptor and dedicator hailed from the banks of the Rhine or the Moselle, or at all events had in their minds the example of someone who did. This particular attribute is a symbol of the feeling which finds expression in the British inscriptions, which describe the goddesses as "the mothers of another country" (if that be the meaning of *ollototæ*), "the mothers of the home-land" (*domesticae*), "the mothers beyond the seas" (*transmarinae*).

The Colinton relief, then, was set up by Roman auxiliary troops in the first or second century of our era, most probably in the latter. Its age and character being thus determined, some inquiry as to its history naturally follows. The material for such an inquiry is scanty in the extreme, and at more than one important point it must be eked out by conjecture. Still, the quest is not altogether hopeless. I may begin by quoting the solitary printed allusion to our monument which I have so

far been able to find. Thirty-five years ago the Rev. William Lockhart, then minister of the parish, read before this Society a series of "Notes on the Early History of the Parish of Colinton." His description of the few surviving "vestiges of the ancient church" includes a sentence which undoubtedly refers to the relief we have been examining:—

"Above a doorway in a wall in the garden of Hailes House, to the west of that house, there is a rude stone with three seated figures on it, evidently representing the Holy Trinity."<sup>1</sup>

Erroneous as we now know this conception to have been, the passage has nevertheless a distinct value as giving us the explanation of the sculpture that was current among the very few people who happened to be aware of its existence. And, after all, it is not in the least surprising that it should have been so. There seems to be every reason for believing that the site of the ancient church lies somewhere within the four walls of the garden, and it was perfectly natural to connect that fact with the presence of a piece of carved stone that was plainly anything but modern.

Record, then, does not help, so that we are thrown back upon surmise. Had there been so much as a jot or a tittle of other evidence of the presence of the Romans at Colinton, the relief would have been welcomed as final confirmation. Unluckily there is none. Even the enthusiasts of the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century refrained from discovering a Roman camp here; I doubt whether they got nearer than Morningside. And, standing alone, the relief proves nothing. It may very well have been brought from somewhere else. In this connection it may be recalled that in the seventeenth century it was quite the custom to utilise Roman inscriptions and sculptures for the embellishment of Scottish country-houses. Indeed, not a few of the examples still extant owe their preservation to the prevalence of this fashion. As early as 1607, for instance, a large inscribed slab from the Antonine Wall had been transported as far north as Dunnottar by George Keith, the famous Earl Marischal.<sup>2</sup> Before the close of the century the superior claim of museums began to be recognised, with the result that in the course of the next hundred years a large proportion of these curious ornaments were transferred to more appropriate resting-places.

Here we are confronted by a difficulty. The existing house at Hailes dates, though not exactly in its present form, from the beginning of the last quarter of the eighteenth century—that is, from a time when the fashion alluded to above, in so far as it was a mere fashion, had long ago

<sup>1</sup> *Proc.*, xvii. (N.S., v.), 1882-83, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Roman Wall in Scotland*, p. 300, where numerous other cases are recorded.



died out.<sup>1</sup> The gardener's cottage has the date 1779 above the lintel, and the garden wall may fairly be assumed to be contemporary. It is hardly likely that at that period a piece of Roman sculpture would be brought from anywhere else to Colinton for decorative purposes, for there is no evidence that the then proprietor had any tastes other than those of the ordinary country-gentleman. May it not have been already there? I would venture to suggest that it had originally been built into the earlier mansion which the eighteenth-century house replaced, and that, when the former was taken down, it was relegated to the humbler position in which it still remains. The acceptance of this hypothesis would enable us to account in a very satisfactory way for the absence of any mention of the stone by eighteenth-century writers. Had it been a new discovery (or even a fresh importation) in 1779, when the garden wall was building, it could not have failed to win some notice in Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account*, published in 1797. But neither the parish minister of that day nor his successor, who was responsible for the *New Statistical Account*, issued some fifty years later, deemed it worthy of the slightest allusion. Moreover, Roman fever had been more or less endemic among Scottish antiquaries since the days of Sir Robert Sibbald. If a relief of the "mother goddesses" had been dug up at Colinton or elsewhere in Scotland at any period later than the close of the seventeenth century, the Jonathan Oldbucks of the time would have been quick to connect it with Agricola or with Lollius Urbicus. The absolute silence of written record regarding this particular piece of sculpture is explicable only on the supposition that, when Scotsmen first began to look at such things with understanding eyes, it was already so familiar that it scarcely excited remark. It may well be that the explanation quoted above from Mr Lockhart—the explanation which saw in it one of the vestiges of the ancient church—was even then available to satisfy any passing curiosity that might be aroused.

Up to this point the argument has been mainly on negative lines. But the way is now open for something more positive. If the relief was not found at Colinton, can any guess as to its true *provenance* be hazarded? The nearest site of a definitely ascertained Roman settlement is Cramond, which is less than five miles distant in a direct line from Hailes House. And there was a shrine of the "mother goddesses" at Cramond. This fact appreciably increases the *a priori* probability of the relief having originally come from there. The evidence for it is irrefragable, being supplied by an inscription which will be described

<sup>1</sup> Cases like those of Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford and the third Earl of Egremont at Wyndham Orchard (*Victoria County Hist. of Somerset*, i. p. 365) are, of course, exceptional and might occur at any period.

more particularly in a moment. Meanwhile it has to be remembered that shrines of the "mother goddesses," like other shrines, may often have contained quite a number of votive stones. One discovered in May 1909, at Nettersheim, in the Volcanic Eifel, yielded just under a dozen reliefs and inscriptions, all dedicated to the *Matronæ Aufanie*.<sup>1</sup> There would therefore be nothing surprising in two having survived from Cramond.

In the circumstances "survived" is perhaps hardly the right word to use. The inscription just spoken of was on an altar which has been lost sight of for something like a hundred and fifty years. Writing in 1707, Sibbald (who is the earliest to mention it) says<sup>2</sup> that it was "digg'd out of the Ground at *Nether Cramond*, and kept in the Lairds Garden." About twenty years later it was seen there by Gordon, who reported that its surface was threatened with rapid decay.<sup>3</sup> A year or two afterwards Horsley visited Cramond and twice examined it personally in order to verify the reading—a matter of no small difficulty, seeing that it had been "long exposed to the weather; so that great part of the inscription is now become very obscure and uncertain."<sup>4</sup> Its ultimate fate is unknown. Luckily all three witnesses are in agreement as to those portions of the lettering which are of more immediate interest to us in the present connection. Horsley's version of the whole is, however, usually accepted as the most reliable, and we may adopt it here. He reads:—

MATRIBALA  
 TERVIS · ET  
 MATRIBCAM  
 PESTRIBCOHI  
 TVNGR IN S  
 VERS C ARM  
 O I<sup>s</sup> SXXXV

Setting aside the last two or two and a half lines, which have plainly been misread,<sup>5</sup> we learn that the altar was dedicated to the *Matres Alatervæ* or *Alatervæ* and the *Matres Campestres* by the First Cohort of Tungrian auxiliaries. The precise limits of the district whence this regiment was recruited are somewhat doubtful, but they certainly included a considerable stretch of the Lower Rhine, a neighbourhood where the goddesses who now preside over the garden at Colinton would be peculiarly at home. And a second glance at the inscription reveals

<sup>1</sup> *Bonner Jahrbücher*, cxix. pp. 301-321.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Inq.*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Itin. Sept.*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> *Brit. Rom.*, p. 205 (No. xxix. on the Plates).

<sup>5</sup> Hübner suggests (*C.I.L.*, vii. p. 191) "*ins(tante) Ulp(io) S . . . [>(centurione)] leg(ionis) XX V(aleræ) V(ictricis)*," which is at least possible.

another significant link. The epithet "*Campestres*" is generic. It can stand alone as a substantive title without the accompaniment of "*Matres*," as indeed it does on well-known inscriptions from Newstead, from Auchendavy, and from Castlehill. It is otherwise with "*Alatervie*" or "*Alatervæ*." The older antiquaries interpreted this as referring to the place where the stone was found, and drew from it the conclusion that the Roman name of Cramond was *Alaterva*, an idea that probably still lives on in local guide-books. No scholar gives it any countenance to-day. It is universally agreed that in "*Alatervie*" or "*Alatervæ*" we have the solitary British example of those (apparently) local epithets which are so constantly attached to the *Matronæ* of Lower Germany.<sup>1</sup> The epithet, in short, points unmistakably in the same direction as does the bunch of grapes held in the hand of the central of the three "mother goddesses" at Hailes. If we wish to discover *Alaterva*, we must put out from the Firth of Forth and cross the North Sea. And does not a consideration of all the facts justify us in postulating a close association between the pointers? Is it not more than likely that the Colinton relief presents us with the outward and visible semblance of the *Matres Alatervie* of Cramond? Possibly some student of family history may be able to trace an intimacy or a relationship between the seventeenth-century (or earlier) tenants of the two properties concerned. If that could be done, the proof of Cramond origin might be regarded as virtually complete.

<sup>1</sup> The name appears to occur nowhere else, except possibly on an inscribed fragment found at Nantes about 1838, and published by the late R. Mowat in the *Bulletin Épigraohique*, vi. p. 369, a reference I owe to Professor Haverfield.