

ON A  
MILITARY DECORATION  
RELATING TO THE  
ROMAN CONQUEST OF BRITAIN.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES  
BY  
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ANY discovery connected with the Roman Conquest of Britain is of such general as well as antiquarian interest that I need no apology for calling the attention of the Society to a remarkable relic recording the success of the Roman invaders, even though it will not be now described for the first time.

An account of this relic, accompanied by a photograph of it, has already been published in Italian by Dr. Carlo Gregorutti, in the *Archeografo Triestino*,<sup>a</sup> a periodical which is however but little known among English readers, and it is from this source that all the actual information I possess as to the character of the object is derived.

The translation of the title of Dr. Gregorutti's interesting memoir may be given as follows, "Example of a Roman Military Decoration belonging to the category of Phalerae." The object itself was found some three or four years ago by a contractor, who was obtaining a supply of stone from one of the cavern-like quarries formerly worked by the Romans, in the neighbourhood of Pola, in Istria. It formed part of a small hoard of silver articles which had been deposited in a niche, and which had in process of time become covered by a thin layer of stalagmite. The total weight of silver was something over a pound, and the bulk of it was sold at its metal value; the few objects which appear to have been saved consisted of a kind of button, a ring, a pendant, a kind of tag, and the embossed plate which I will now describe. Its general form is that of an elongated

<sup>a</sup> Vol. v. fasc. 2.

pentagon, the extreme length of which is about 5 inches, its greatest width about 2 inches, and its shortest side, which forms the top of the plate, about  $1\frac{5}{8}$  inch. If the tag already mentioned, which is provided with a circular hole for a cord of some kind, was originally attached to the point or lower end of the pentagon the total length would have been about 6 inches. The plate is as it were divided into two areas, the lower triangular though slightly truncated, the upper trapezoidal.

In the lower part of the triangle Mars is represented marching to the right, but with the face partly turned to the left. On his head is a crested helmet, and on his left shoulder he carries a trophy consisting of a coat of mail surmounted by a helmet, with on either side an oval shield, one of them charged with a thunderbolt and the other with a rhomboid figure surmounted by a semicircle. In his right hand he holds a spear obliquely. Behind him is a mantle attached to his naked body by a girdle, and on his legs are greaves ornamented with the symbol of the thunderbolt. Along the edges of the plate is a border containing a sort of zigzag pattern, and this is continued over the head of Mars so as to form a kind of pediment. In the space between this pediment and the upper side of the triangle is a tripod between two winged gryphons. Above these is a raised and ornamented band forming a sort of base or exergual line to the upper trapezoidal portion of the plate. Around the margin of this the zigzagged border again occurs, and extending from it are seven loops or eyelet-holes, three along the top and two on either side. In the centre of this part of the plate is represented a winged Victory, standing to the right, draped from the waist downwards, and with the left knee raised. Behind her crouches a captive with his arms tied behind him, his bearded face turned to the right, his body naked to the waist, and his legs apparently encased in *braccae*. A truncated oval shield, ornamented with a *fulmen*, hangs behind the right wing of Victory, and between her and the captive lies another oval shield similarly decorated. In front of Victory is the trunk of a palm-tree, on which she supports with her left hand a circular shield, on which with her right hand she has inscribed in two lines  
 DEVIC  
 BRITTA. The whole of the plate has been gilt, with the exception of the nude parts of the figures, the shields, the tripod, and the two gryphons. There is, moreover, a gilt bracelet on the left arm of Victory, and there are some traces of gilding on the devices upon the shields.

The whole is admirably wrought in high relief, the figures retouched with the graver and partly chiseled; the inscription and the ornamental lines appear to

have been engraved in intaglio. The artistic work is not in the purest style, but exhibits a certain amount of mannerism, somewhat significant of the decadence of art.

The exact purpose which this plate was intended to serve is difficult of determination. Dr. Gregorutti is inclined to regard it as the cheek-piece of a helmet, and at the same time to bring it within the category of *phalerae*; though it seems rather doubtful whether the name of *phalera* can be properly applied to it. We may however safely regard it as being essentially a military decoration.

As to its date he is inclined to assign it to the latter part of the reign of Septimius Severus, when he was engaged in war in this island, A.D. 210 to 211, in which latter year he died at York. His reasons for not regarding it as of earlier date are partly based upon the style of art and partly on the form of the legend, **BRITTA** with two T's, a form which first commonly appears on the coinage of Commodus, **BRITANNIA** with one T being that which is usually found on the coins of Claudius, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius, though **BRITTANNIA** is to be read on a coin of Hadrian.

In this attribution of date I am inclined to concur, but I hesitate as to accepting Dr. Gregorutti's interpretation of the inscription, which he regards as typifying **DE VICTORIA BRITTANICA**. It is true that the legend **VICTORIAE BRITTANNICAE** occurs on coins both of Severus and his sons, while **DE BRITANNIS**, **DE GERMANIS**, &c., are not uncommon formulas. **DE VICTORIA** however is a form which, on coins at all events, does not occur, and I would venture to suggest that the inscription "writ large" was probably **DEVICTA BRITTANNIA**, which might well refer to the complete conquest of the island by Severus. For a precedent I need only mention the well-known coins of Vespasian, with the legend **DEVICTA IVDAEA**\* on which a nearly similar device to that upon this silver ornament occurs. There is on these a Victory in a similar attitude inscribing **S.P.Q.R.** on a buckler placed in a similar manner upon the stem of a palm-tree. By the side of the palm-tree is seated the weeping figure of Judæa, which in a great degree corresponds with that of the captive behind the Victory on the British plaque. It is true that there is a considerable space of time between the days of Vespasian and those of Severus, to which the ornament now under consideration has been assigned, but similar inscriptions prevail even in the Constantine period, such as **SARMATIA DEVICTA** and **ALAMANNIA DEVICTA**.

\* Madden, *Coins of the Jews* (1881), p. 214. Cohen

In the accompanying plate, fig. 6, is represented the reverse of another coin of Vespasian, on which the Victory closely resembles that on the ornament now under consideration, but I have also added other coins of Severus and of Caracalla (figs 7 and 8), on which the resemblance is almost equally striking. On both these latter coins the type refers to British victories, as will be seen from the legend on fig. 7, VICTORIAE BRITANNICAE.

Whether the inscription DEVIC. BRITTA. is to be read as DE VICTORIA BRITANNICA or DEVICTA BRITANNIA is a matter of comparatively small importance. The fact remains that the remarkable ornament found in Istria is one of those illustrative monuments relating to the Roman Conquest of Britain which cannot fail to be of the highest interest to all students of our national history.

Although the subject of *phalerae* has already been discussed in the pages of the *Archaeologia*,<sup>a</sup> it may not be amiss to add a few words to what has already been said by Mr. Wylie. The term is in frequent use by Roman historians and poets, and the ornaments designated as *phalerae* appear to have decorated both horses and warriors. The word seems to have been of Greek origin, *φάλαρων*, which in turn is derived from *φάλος*, a boss or plate forming part of a helmet. In Latin, however, the singular, *phalera*, does not occur, only the plural, *phalerae*, being used; as such ornaments were, as a rule, never worn singly. Their nature seems to have been but imperfectly appreciated until about forty years ago, but since that time a considerable amount of literature relating to them has grown up. Among the first to recognise numismatic representations of such objects was Signor Gennaro Riccio, who, in his *Monete delle antiche famiglie di Roma*,<sup>b</sup> identified a kind of square frame, with diagonal bars and bosses at the angles and in the centre, as being *una falera*.

This frame occurs in conjunction with a *hasta pura* and a laurel-wreath on certain coins of the Arria family, and was regarded by Eckhel and some earlier writers—as, for instance, Vaillant—as being intended for an ignited altar. A nearly similar object is shown on some Gaulish coins, with the reverse type of the charioteer; and the late M. Adrien de Longpérier, adopting the opinion of M. Deville of Rouen, and of Signor Riccio, published in the *Revue Numismatique*<sup>c</sup> for 1848, an elaborate article on these coins and on the subject of *phalerae* in general.

An article by Mr. Akerman, based on De Longpérier's paper, was published in the *Numismatic Chronicle* for 1849.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Vol. xlv. p. 101.

<sup>b</sup> Naples 1843, p. 28.

<sup>c</sup> Vol. xiii. p. 85.

<sup>d</sup> Vol. xi. p. 147.



4.



1.



5.



2.



3.



7.



6.



8.

C.F. Kell, Lith

1. A Roman Military Decoration.  
 2. 3. 4. 5. Four *phalerae*; 2 and 3 of chalcedony, 4 and 5 of jet.  
 6. 7. 8. Coins with figure of Victory.



The discovery of a set of *phalerae* formed of silver, at Lauersfort, near Crefeld, formed the subject of the *Winckelmanns Fest-Programm* for 1860, by Otto Jahn. This is, perhaps, the most complete treatise on *phalerae* which has hitherto appeared. Some notices of monuments bearing the representations of soldiers decorated with *phalerae* have also been published in the *Jahrbücher des Vereins von Alterthums-freunde im Rheinlande*,<sup>a</sup> and by Lindenschmit.<sup>b</sup> Thanks to such monuments, we know the manner in which these decorations were worn, and are also able to identify the *phalerae* themselves when found singly.

On the monuments of Manlius Caelius and Quintus Sertorius, preserved respectively at Bonn and Verona, we see that a kind of framework, apparently of leather, hangs over the cuirass in front; and on this there are on the breast two *armillae*, or *torques*, suspended; while lower down, in rows of three, hang circular bosses bearing devices upon them, among which the head of Medusa is conspicuous. On other monuments, as on that of Caius Marius, the bosses are simply ornamented by means of a series of concentric mouldings. The same is the case with the *phalerae* on the monuments of Quintus Cornelius, Caius Marius, and Lucius, and the bas-relief from the Villa Albani, on all of which the cuirass charged with *phalerae* is represented apart from the warriors.

The set of *phalerae* found at Lauersfort were nine in number, and formed of thin silver plate, the heads upon them being chased in high relief. It is needless to enter into details, but among them one represents the full-faced head of Medusa, and two others apparently busts of the youthful Bacchus. Heads of Medusa may be recognised on the centre bosses of several of the monuments, and among the detached *phalerae* which have come down to our own days several present this device. Two such formed of chalcedony have been engraved by De Longpérier from the collection in the Louvre. Several more are preserved both in public and private collections. One in my own is shown as fig. 2 in the plate, the face being rendered in a pleasing but conventional manner. The tongue does not protrude in the manner so frequently seen in the earlier representations of the Gorgon-head.<sup>c</sup>

On another which I possess, and which is shown in fig. 3, the head is probably intended for that of the youthful Bacchus. Both are formed of nearly white chalcedony, and the perforations through them—which are in both cases at right

<sup>a</sup> Heft iv. and lvi., 1875, p. 177.

<sup>b</sup> *Alt. uns. heidn. Vorzeit*, Heft iv., Pl. vi. 2.

<sup>c</sup> See J. Six, *De Gorgone*. 4to. Amsterdam, 1885.

angles to each other—would readily admit of their being tied on to flat straps in the manner shown on the monuments.

The Gorgon's head, from its prophylactic powers, was an indispensable adjunct of the *Ægis*, and from the same cause was also a favourite personal ornament. It is remarkable that, among ancient camei, by far the majority are representations of the head of Medusa. The two jet ornaments which are represented as figs. 4 and 5 in the plate seem to belong to the class of personal ornaments rather than to that of *phalerae*, but they may be of interest for comparison with them. The original of fig. 4 was found at Amiens, and that of fig. 5 in the neighbourhood of Bonn. That from Amiens is provided with a gold loop for suspension. I have a smaller but somewhat imperfect ornament of the same kind, also formed of jet, found at Rheims. It is, however, needless to dwell on this subject, which is only cognate to that of the *phalerae*.

In conclusion, I may cite in illustration of such records of the wars in Britain the opening words of an inscription recorded by Gruter: " M . VETTIO . M . F . AN . VALENTI . MIL . COH . VIII . PR . BENEF . PRÆF . PR . DONIS . DONATO . BELLO . BRITAN . TORQVIBVS . ARMILLIS PHALERIS.



