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## **On a Roman Ring**

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## ON A ROMAN RING,

AND ITS IDENTITY WITH ONE NAMED IN THE  
VOTIVE TABLET OF SILVIANUS.

By the Rev. JOHN JAMES, M.A., Oxon.

AMONG the gems of the carefully-preserved relics of the Roman Camp upon the heights of Lydney Park, scarcely one is more curious, as illustrating Siluro-Roman manners, than this Tablet.

It was found among the ruins of the sanctuary of a Temple dedicated to Nodens, or Nodons—a deity so called either from the Greek word *ἀνώδυνος* because, like Esculapius, Nodons was believed to have power to soothe or avert all manner of pains; or from the Latin word *Nodus* because, in the words of the late Mr. Joyce, “he was believed to exercise power over knots, or joints, of every conceivable kind,” in other words, to be a healer of gouty and rheumatic sufferers. Mr. Joyce goes on to say that “at Lydney there probably were springs, somewhat similar to the Bath waters, which are known to be very effective in human ailments” of the rheumatic sort.<sup>1</sup>

“It appears,” Mr. Joyce proceeds, “that among the worshippers of Nodens was one Silvianus, who was seeking health at the

<sup>1</sup> Since the lamented death of the Rev. J. G. Joyce, a third, and perhaps more probable, derivation has been suggested by Mr. King, the learned writer of the notes elucidatory of the plates given in the late Mr. Bathurst’s “Roman Antiquities at Lydney Park,” published by Longmans in 1879. The plates viii. and xiii. in that work seem fully to justify the suggestion contained in Mr. King’s notes thereon, to the effect that Nodons was a Latinized form of *Noddyns*—a sea god or river god—the “Greatest God” of the Silurians. He is represented in plate xiii. as emerging from the sea or river, wearing a kingly crown, drawn like Phæbus by four plunging horses, and surrounded by Tritons carrying coracle paddles; and again in plate viii. the restoration of his temple is commemorated on a tessellated pavement, which still decorates the floor of his temple, and which swarms with lively representations of salmons and sea serpents. Not that his being a sea god precluded the idea of his temple being the resort of persons seeking health, seeing that like Neptune he was one of the Greater Deities, and seems by the initials D.M. to have been *Deus Maximus*, of the Silurians.

“springs, under the favour of the god. Silvianus had a ring”—a gold ring, as it subsequently appears, “and this ring was lost. How we know not; some suppose in a bet; but, on the whole, I incline myself,” Mr. Joyce writes, “rather to think, by accident. At any rate, the ring in question was detained by Senicianus; and Silvianus affixed, in consequence, against the wall of Nodens’ Temple, a tablet”—this tablet, “stating his own loss, and containing an imprecation upon Senicianus,” to the effect of a prayer “that Nodens would not grant health to any of those bearing the name of Senicianus,” until he should restore the missing ring.

This tablet, with the inscription upon it, is given in *fac-simile* by Mr. Lavars, the lithographer to whom it was most kindly entrusted by Mr. Bathurst for the purpose. (*See Plate II.*)

It will, perhaps, have been remarked that, in reading this inscription, I pronounced the words *Divo* and *Dīmīdian* as if they were written *Dēvo* and *Dēmīdian*, which they really are. And they came to be so written, as *Spinæ* came to be written *Speen*, because gravers and stone-cutters and ordinary scribes have ever been used to spell out their words as they are commonly pronounced. And the graver of this leaden tablet, and the denizens of the Roman Station of *Spinæ*, seem to have found that the Roman sound of the letter “i,” namely “ee,” was denoted in this country by the letter “e.” But a truce to this digression upon the point of orthography, paleography, and vowel sounds.

This remarkable inscription is thus translated by the late Mr. Bathurst. (See his beautifully illustrated volume entitled “Roman Remains in Lydney Park,” page 12). “To the god Nodens. Silvianus has lost a Ring. He has given the half part to Nodens. Allow health to none amongst (those) who bear the name of Senicianus until he brings (it) even to the temple of Nodens.” It is perhaps fair to suggest that *INTER* in the 5th line should rather be taken adverbially for *interea* than as a preposition with *eos* understood. In which case it might be translated thus: “Meanwhile to none who bear the name of Senicianus grant thou health until he brings it to the Temple of Nodens.”

To the Temple of Nodens the ring seems never to have been brought. The ill-conditioned charm seems not to have wrought its

DEVO  
 NODENTI SILVIANVS  
 ANILVM PERDEDIT  
 DE MEDIA PARTEM  
 DONAVIT NODENTI  
 INTER QVIBVS NOMEN  
 SENICIANI NOLLIS  
 DETMITTAS SANITA  
 TEM DONEC PERFER  
 VS QVETEM PLVM NO  
 DENTIS

LEADEN TABLET FOUND AT LYDNEY.

desired effect in the recovery of the ring for its rightful owner, however much it may have wrought in the way of ill health to its wrongful possessor.

But the ring *has been* discovered. After fifteen centuries the lost ring has been found and identified, as I shall now proceed to shew.

The late Mr. Bathurst, at p. 13 of his published "Account of the Lydney Antiquities," when still referring to Silvianus's Votive Tablet, wrote as follows:—"It is remarkable that a gold ring was discovered at Silchester, in the year 1785, bearing the name of Senicianus." And, for his authority, in a footnote, he quoted *Archæologia*, vol. viii. p. 449. This pregnant hint would have sufficed for that ardent archæologist, the late curator, if not creator, of the Silchester Museum, the Rev. J. G. Joyce; but he probably had already taken note himself of the mention made in the 8th vol. of the *Archæologia*.<sup>1</sup> And it certainly is to him that we owe the discovery of the habitat of the ring, and of its identity with the lost ring named in Silvianus's tablet. The ring he discovered among the stored up treasures of "the Vyne," a fine old Tudor mansion not far from Silchester and Strathfieldsaye, of which last named parish he was the vicar. And he identified it as the lost ring of Silvianus by an inscription, which Senicianus, or some one of his kinsfolk, appears to have had engraved upon it as a counter charm to that upon the tablet,—thereby, if it might be, to avert the evil omen.

The inscription upon the ring, as given by Mr. Joyce in a printed letter to Mr. Chaloner Clute, the present possessor of it, is as follows:

Seniciane vivas secundè.

Which may be translated thus:

"Mayest thou live prosperously [and be in health], Senicianus."

And now you will naturally expect the Ring itself to be forthcoming, and I heartily wish it were.

<sup>1</sup> I ought to add that to the printed letter aforesaid Mr. Joyce appends a reference, not only to the *Archæologia*, viii., 449, but also to "Proceedings of the Archæological Institute," 1851, and also to *Notes and Queries*, 4th series, 1, 431. He further states that the Ring was exhibited at Somerset House, by Lord Arden, about 1785."

Here, however, is an accurate engraving of it, made by Mr. Utting, to whom it has been courteously entrusted for the purpose by Mr. Chute.



Its octagonal form and its superscription are very patent. But it is somewhat questionable whether the head upon its seal represents VENVS, the goddess whose name it bears, or Senicianus himself, with the first letters of the engraver's name, say Venus[ianus].<sup>1</sup>

It is, perhaps, due to a sister Archæological Society, the Newbury District Field Club, of which I have the honour to be a member, and of whose Transactions I have taken the liberty to lay two volumes upon the table, that I should not close this brief paper without ascribing to that Society all the acquaintance with the discovered Ring which I can myself boast. That Society, modestly yecept a Field Club, usually makes two excursions every year—one in June, and one in August or September. And the June excursion of last year included in its programme a visit to the Vynie. I was not able to take part myself in that excursion, but a report of its proceedings reached me in the local paper, the "Newbury Weekly News." And that report contained the following passage, relative to objects of vertu at the Vynie. "The

<sup>1</sup> It was not unusual to inscribe the engraver's name on carved seals, whether of gold or precious stone. An instance of this, on a cornelian, from a Roman catacomb in the writer's possession, fixes its date as that of the 3rd or 4th century, the same name, M. Servilius Gem. occurring on consular and imperial rings of that era.

Florentine Gem Cabinet, unique as it was, was superseded in Archæological interest by a gold ring, found 100 years ago, between the Vyne and Silchester"—a passage followed up by the text of that letter of my late friend Mr. Joyce to Mr. Chute, of which I have made such free use.

I need scarcely say that I lost no time in communicating to the present Mr. Bathurst the contents of that newspaper report, and the habitat of the long-lost late-found ring, the fame of which has reached us from the fourth or fifth century, in the votive tablet which that gentleman has so courteously allowed to be exhibited here, after its long silent sleep beneath the sods of the once forest wilds, now enclosed delights, of Lydney Park.

It was natural that I should also name a subject so remarkable to your indefatigable editor, and now most worthily-chosen president, Sir John Maclean.

• And it is at his instance that I have ventured to put together this slight paper thereupon. Would it were more worthy at once of your acceptance, and of the striking incidents to which it relates.

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