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Notes on a Roman Inscribed Stone at Westonbirt

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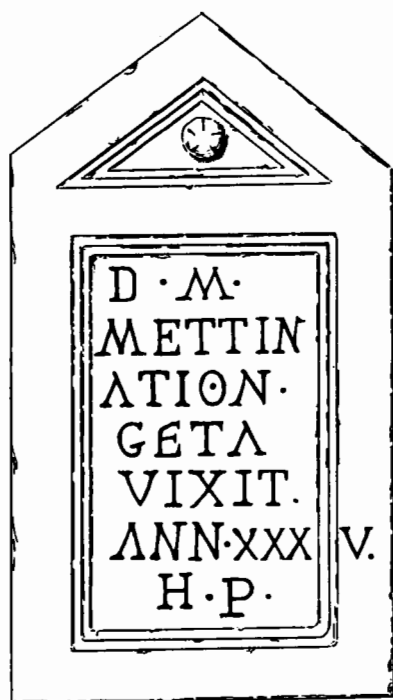
NOTES ON A ROMAN INSCRIBED STONE AT
WESTON BIRT.

By SIR JOHN MACLEAN, F.S.A., &c.

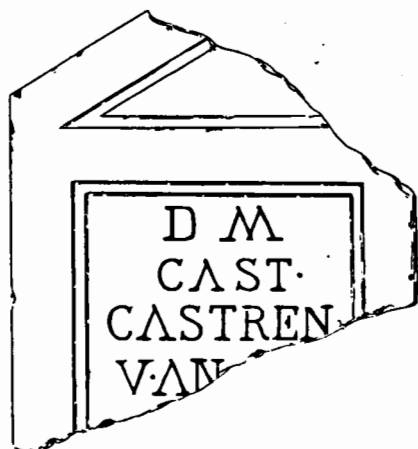
On the visit of the Society to Weston Birt on the 4th of August, 1886, attention was directed by the Rector, the Rev. D. Kitcat, to an inscribed stone in the Rectory Garden (see ante p. 210), which has not heretofore been described.

Mr. A. H. Paul, Local Secretary at Tetbury, writes me that it was ploughed up in a small enclosure¹ on Nesley farm, in the parish of Beverston, close to the boundary of Lasborough. The walls on two sides of this enclosure are very old, and are built of singularly large weather-worn stones, which look as if they had not been quarried but picked up from the surface of the ground after they had been rounded by the action of the weather. These two walls are not parallel, and the other two being modern it is difficult to say precisely what was the original form of the enclosure. Mr. Rich, who for the last forty years has been steward of Mr. Holford's estate, says there is a tradition that it was in "old times" a cattle pen, and that the ground within it is 50 per cent. more fertile than the surrounding lands. Some forty years ago and more the stone was lying in the churchyard at Lasborough, a benefice united with Weston Birt, under Mr. Kitcat's charge. Mr. Holford, the owner of the estate, had it brought up to Weston Birt, and there it was thrown aside. Mr. Kitcat having heard of it rescued it from a heap of rubbish, and, for its greater security, caused it to be placed in his own garden, where it still

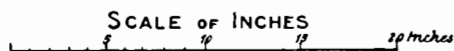
¹ Since the text has been in type Mr. A. H. Paul has written to me that he has discovered the man, whose name is Long, who found the stone. Long says it was near the middle of the field, and there was another, which was not dug up, close by it. He thinks it was in 1846. We will make further investigation respecting the other stone.



Roman Inscribed Stone found at Beverston.



Fragment on an Inscribed Stone in the Cirencester Museum, supposed to have been found near Lasborough



remains. From the waste of ages and ill-treatment it has become much abraded, so that the inscription is almost illegible. The stone is in form a parallelogram with a triangular head. The inscription is on a sunk panel about 20 inches by 12 inches, moulded at the edges, and surrounded by a border 3 inches wide. The head is moulded in the same manner, and within the triangular panel is a figure in low relief, apparently of a rose or some similar ornament. After a careful and studious examination, with the aid of several squeezes kindly taken by Mr. Kitcat, we have at length succeeded in reading the whole of the inscription, which is in seven lines, as follows :—

D M
 METTI . N.
 ATION
 GETA
 VIXIT
 ANN . XXX | V
 H P

This, extended, will read D[iis]M[anibus] METTI NATION[E] GETA VIXIT ANN[os] XXX | V H[ERES] P[OSUIT], which may be thus englished, “To the Gods of the Shades. The heir of Mettus, [who was] by nation a Getan [and] lived thirty-five years, placed [this].” Andrews gives in his Latin Lexicon *METTUS* (or *METTIVS*, genitive *METTI* (masculine), a sabine prænomen, e.g. Mettus Curtius (Livy I., 12). The V. signifying five in the number of years the deceased lived is placed on the margin of the stone, there being no room on the panel. It will be noticed that the letters H.P. at the bottom are cut larger than the others in the inscription, apparently to give them significance. (*Plate XVI. fig. 1*). Smith, in his Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities (Edition 1851, Funus, p. 561) states on this subject : The heirs were often ordered by the will of the deceased to build a tomb for him (*Hor. Sat. II., 3, 84., v., 105 ; Plin. Ep. VI. 10*) and sometimes they did so at their own expense (*de suo*) which is not unfrequently recorded in the inscription on funeral monuments as in the following example, taken from an urn in the British Museum :—

DIIS MANIBVS
 L. LEPIDI·EPAPHRAE
 PATRIS·OPTIMI
 L. LEPIDIVS
 MAXIMVS·F
 DE·SVO

The Getæ were a tribe allied to the Dacians, and though Strabo distinguishes between them he admits that they spoke the same language. They were originally a nomad race, and abstained from animal food. According to the author above-mentioned, they were a simple, honest, and brave people, "the justest of mankind."¹ They occupied that part of Europe lying between the Danube and the Dniester—the eastern part of Moldavia and Bassarabia, having the Dacians on the east and the Thracians on the south. Their relations with their powerful neighbours on the south (the Romans) were very unsettled. They sometimes stood in the character of friends and allies, and at other times were at open war. It was, perhaps, at a time when the former condition prevailed that Mettus entered the Roman army. The Getæ were received into the empire A.D. 375.

The name of Mettus, or Mettius, was honourably known amongst the Romans. The tradition is familiar to us all that Mettus Curtius, a noble youth, when the chasm in the forum gaped for the greatest treasure that Rome possessed, and the citizens were perplexed what to do, came forward and declared that Rome possessed no greater treasure than a brave and gallant citizen in arms, and offered himself as the victim demanded. The citizens yielded a silent assent, and the heroic youth, in full armour, mounted his horse, and plunging into the abyss the earth immediately closed over him (Livy VII. 6.). There are several other traditions relating to him (See Livy I. 12, &c.)

There is another inscribed stone in the Corinium Museum at Cirencester, the only one in that depository which we could find on a recent visit which is not attributed. In general character and in details it very much resembles the one above described. It is, however, only a fragment, and it is not known whence it came. The inscription, which is not complete (See *Plate XVI. fig. 2*), is

¹ Strabo; Vol. I., 462.

printed in the catalogue of the Museum, but without any explanation. It is :—

DM
CAST.
CASTREN
V'AN

The bars of the "A's" are omitted throughout. As far as the letters go they are fairly legible, but from the incompleteness of the inscription the reading is somewhat uncertain. The first line must undoubtedly be read "Diis Manibus" as on the Beverston stone. The termination of the word in the second line is contracted. It may, probably, be read as "Castor" (or its genitive "Castoris," a by no means uncommon Roman name. The word in the third line is also, doubtless, a contracted word, but the fracture in the stone is so close to the last letters in this and the fourth line as not to admit of any indication of a contraction. The word may be read as *Castrensis*, "of or pertaining to a camp," or as *Castrensianus* (or its genitive *Castrensiანი*) "a soldier whose duty it was to guard the boundary or rampart of the camp." Some 25 years ago there was, and perhaps there still is, an official at Calais who was styled "gardien des Remparts," whose duties were probably very similar to those of a *Castrensianus*. "V." in the fourth line, we read as *Vixit*, contracted, and "An" as *Annos*. The rest of the inscription is lost, but probably it concluded in much the same form as the last inscription. In conclusion, we must express our obligations to our old friend, the Rev. W. Iago, President of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, for much valuable assistance in elucidating these difficult inscriptions.

Another Roman monumental stone is mentioned by Rudge (*Hist. of Glouc. I. p. 341, 1803*) as having been found at Bowldown farm, which is close to Nesley farm, referred to above, a few years before he wrote. He states it to bear the following mutilated inscription :—

D. M. SUI ICENA ANNOS XIII VIXIT.

This in itself would seem to be unintelligible. Fosbrooke (*Hist. of Glouc. I. p. 409, 1807*) follows Rudge in his description, but neither of these authors state where the stone then was, and we have failed in our efforts to obtain any information relating to it.