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A Roman coin found below Aust Cliff

by S. Smith
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A ROMAN COIN FOUND BELOW AUST CLIFF

by STANLEY SMITH

NO Roman object however trivial should be allowed to go unrecorded, if, as in the present case, it was found in a place which hitherto has apparently yielded no material evidence of Roman occupation. It is for this reason that the following note has been written. The coin in question, a dupondius of the Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54), of the 'Ceres type', was picked up by Mr A. J. Sutcliffe in October 1946, at the base of Aust Cliff, about three-quarters of a mile north of the landing stage, where it was lying among fallen debris. It had obviously been dislodged with soil from the highest part of the promontory. The specimen is in a poor state of preservation, corroded and patinated; the legend (1) has entirely perished but the emperor's head and the seated goddess (2) on the reverse are recognizable. Coins of this type were extensively and skilfully reproduced by the native inhabitants of Britain during the third quarter of the first century (3), but whether the particular coin is from the official mint or is a British imitation, owing to its condition it is not possible to say.

No Roman remains have been discovered at Aust, nor, so far as I know, has anything of Roman date other than

¹ *Obv.* TI CLAUDIUS CAESAR AUG P M TR P IMP
Rev. CERES AUGUSTA (Exer.) S C

² The goddess seated on a throne to 1 holds in her right hand two ears of corn and in her left a long torch which rests on her lap and projects some distance in front of and behind her, but not all these details are discernible in the case of the present worn specimen.

³ See C. H. V. Sutherland, 1937, *Coinage and Currency in Roman Britain*, p. 6 and pl. 1, figs. 1-3. I am much indebted to Dr H. S. Heller for having drawn my attention to the subject and for bringing to my notice this interesting work.

this coin been found in the neighbourhood, yet the name Aust is quite possibly a corrupted form of *Augusta*. The old school of antiquaries identified Aust with *Traiectus* of the Antonine's Itinerary (4) and supposed that it was from here that the Romans regularly crossed the Severn Estuary. But now the consensus of opinion associates *Traiectus* with Bitton, between Bath and Bristol, five miles north-west of the former city, and places the Roman ferry at *Abone* (Sea Mills) (5). Baddeley, 1913, *Gloucestershire Place-names*, p. 12, remarks: 'That the spot had any sort of connection with the *Traiectus* of the Roman Itinerary is unlikely; nevertheless, the original name of it having been *Augusta*, this imperial qualification must have been either preceded, or followed, by some other now-vanished name . . . it would be rash to deny that at such a vantage-point on its [the Severn] bank as Aust must have been, the Legion [Legio Secunda] may there have owned a Signal-station, Baths, or a Sanatorium'. Ekwall, 1936, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, p. 18, is more brief: 'Aust is Lat. *Augusta*. The reason of the name is not clear (6)'. Aust Cliff, which is over 130 feet high, terminates an area of relatively high ground rising to slightly above 150 feet O.D. surrounded on its three landward sides by a low lying tract little raised above sea level. The cliff commands a good view of the country on the opposite side of the river, which was inhabited by the warlike Silures. It is therefore not

⁴ The following stations are mentioned in Iter xiv of the Itinerary:—

<i>Aquae Sulis</i> (Bath) to <i>Traiectus</i>	VI	M.P.
<i>Traiectus</i>	„	<i>Abone</i>
<i>Abone</i>	„	<i>Venta Silurum</i> (Caerwent)
	XIII	„
M.P. (Mille Passim), the Roman Mile=0.9193 English Miles.		

⁵ See T. Codrington, 1919, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 3rd ed., pp. 274-275.

⁶ Among the various forms of the name given in Baddeley and Ekwall, are: *æt Austan* (Saxon); *Austrecliue*, 1086 (Domesday Book); *Augusta*, circa 1100 (Documents preserved in France); *Auste*, 1209; *Hawst* and *Awste*, 1285; *Augst*, 1368.

improbable that the Romans used it as a look-out station during the short period of twenty-five to thirty years which intervened between the occupation of the south-west of England and conquest of the Silures by Julius Frontinus, A.D. 74-78.

Mr Sutcliffe's discovery comes at an opportune moment. A bridge connecting Aust with the opposite side of the Severn is projected and the work is likely to begin in the near future. The erection of this bridge will of necessity involve excavation. Attention having been drawn to this chance find, the hope is expressed that those whose business it is to superintend operations will keep a careful watch for any further evidence of the site having been occupied in Roman times, foundations of buildings, coins or pottery, for example. I wish to thank Mr D. E. Eichholz, with whom I have discussed the various matters mentioned in this note, for his constructive criticism and useful suggestions; the coin has been presented by Mr Sutcliffe to the Bristol Museum.

NOTE.—The possibility of objects of an earlier period turning up, should also be borne in mind. Small bronze figurines of early Iron Age date have also been found at the base of the cliff, see *British Museum Guide to Early Iron Age Antiquities* 2nd ed., 1925, p. 148, fig. 173.