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## **Romano-British Sculpture from Dorn**

by M. V. Taylor  
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# Notes

## ROMANO-BRITISH SCULPTURE FROM DORN

An uninscribed but sculptured *stele* (shown on PLATE XIX) was said to have been found at Dorn on the Fosseway, a hamlet of Blockley, about a mile north of Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, formerly in a detached part of Worcestershire. It was found with another stone, similarly carved, in ploughing a field east of the Oxford-Worcester railway line, on the land of a farmer called William Phillips, and east of his farm, according to the Rev. Alfred J. Soden, the author of *The History of Blockley in the County of Worcester*, published privately in 1875, p. 115, with a woodcut on p. 117. The sculptures were seen by F. Haverfield when he was collecting information, about 1900-1, for his article in the *Victoria County History of Worcester*, where in vol. I (1901), p. 221, he thus describes them:

'They are altar-shaped, except at the top, with a sunk panel on the face and in it a small figure in relief. One of them measures 44 inches in height and 15-18 inches in width: the figure on it is that of a Genius, draped with a pallium wrapped round the waist and falling to the knees, booted with *cothurni* and covered on the head in some not now describable fashion; the left hand holds a patera over a low altar, the right arm uplifts a Horn of Plenty. The other stone is slightly smaller (42 inches high); the figure on it seems to resemble that just described, but is much worn and indistinct'.

Haverfield obtained a photograph of the less damaged stone but did not publish it.<sup>1</sup>

An undated letter, but written probably about 1902 or 1903, from the Rev. J. H. Bloom of Whitchurch Rectory, Stratford-on-Avon, records that a dealer 'sometime since' had removed the altars, and another letter, dated 8 March 1902, from Mr Michell Whitley, Secretary to the Sussex Archaeological Society, says that he saw them at 'Sutton's', apparently a dealer at Eastbourne. The dealer demanded 20 guineas for them and a copy of Soden's book, and Mr Whitley expressed the opinion that unless secured, the stones would cross the sea to America: 'Gloucestershire or Worcestershire should reclaim them'.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Mr L. C. Keighley-Peach, 28 February 1905, who had taken the photograph. This and other correspondence and notes are to be found in the Haverfield Collections in the Ashmolean Museum Library, Oxford. I am indebted to Mr H. M. C. Icele for the loan of a copy of Soden's work, a very rare book. Mr Icele has collected much information for a 'History of Blockley' which he hopes to publish.



**PLATE XIX.** Dorn, Gloucestershire. Roman Stela, 44 ins. high, found before 1875, now lost ( $\frac{1}{8}$ ) (see p. 194).

*facing p. 194*

This is the last known record of these stones, and it seems desirable therefore to publish the only known photograph in the hope that one or both of them may turn up sometime or somewhere.

Mr Bloom in the same letter mentions as found recently, 'two discoveries of note . . . one is a small, plain, roughly hewed altar, the other a rather large upper stone of a quern'—and a sketch suggests that the former resembled the other two altars.

Soden also records that on Dorn farm (William Phillips's land) 'and in other places, many antiquities have at times been discovered, such as foundations, wells, coins (chiefly of the reign of Constantine), pottery, sculpture etc., and, more especially, when the line of the Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton railway (which runs through Dorn), was in progress of being formed'.

Earlier and later finds are all listed by Haverfield with references<sup>1</sup>—the coins being mostly 3rd- and 4th-century—and he concludes that 'Without excavation we can hardly decide whether a villa with outbuildings stood here or some wayside village connected with the Fosse'.

This was partly true until in 1960 Dr St. Joseph photographed from the air the site where

'a rectangular enclosure, with a system of parallel streets, could be seen to west of the Fosseway. That this is beyond doubt a small Roman town is apparent on the ground'.<sup>2</sup>

The photograph also shows the Fosse to the west of the modern road, but passing immediately east of the enclosure and at a point where it changes direction.

The *stelae* are unusual in shape for altars. All three, instead of a focus between balusters, have a small excrescence; that in the photograph looks rather like a pine cone on a base, which of course often occurs on funerary monuments. But the carving clearly shows that the figure is a deity, as Haverfield suggested, a Genius, but with a peculiar headdress, and all three must therefore be connected with a shrine. In their general character of stone and carving, they resemble numerous sculptured altars in stone found in the Cotswolds and to be seen in Gloucester and Cirencester Museums and elsewhere.

M. V. TAYLOR.

<sup>1</sup> To these should be added an iron steelyard and pothook of very large size and thought to be used for measuring wool, found by the late Col. R. K. Morcom in 1937 and now in the British Museum. Published in *The Engineer*, Jan. 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *JRS*, LI (1961), p. 132 f., pl. x, 2, fig. 6, (plan).