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Note on
a bilingual in-
scription

1878

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MONUMENT DISCOVERED AT SOUTH SHIELDS 1878



NOTE ON A BILINGUAL INSCRIPTION, LATIN AND
ARAMAIC, RECENTLY FOUND AT SOUTH SHIELDS.

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM WRIGHT, LL.D.

Read 3rd December, 1878.

ACCORDING to a paragraph in "The Academy" for November 2, 1878, extracted from the "Shields Daily Gazette," there was discovered at South Shields, on Saturday, October 19, in digging out the foundation for a building at the back of some premises in Bath Street, a gravestone, about six feet long by two feet six inches wide. On it is carved the figure of a woman sitting on a chair or throne, with flowers in her lap and a basket of fruit at her left side. With the exception of the face, which is broken away, the carving is in excellent preservation, and of remarkably good workmanship. At the base of the stone is a well executed Latin inscription, which runs as follows:—

DM. REGINA . LIBERTA . ET . CONJUGE .
BARATES . PALMYRENUS . NATIONE .
CATUALLAUNA . AN . XXX .

Below this is a line of writing, conjectured to be in Syriac characters. The stone was unfortunately broken in lifting it. Beneath it was a small quantity of the bones of some animal, probably a horse.

This account, though in the main correct, is not perfectly accurate. According to more precise information, furnished me by Robert Blair, Esq., of South Shields (who has also most kindly sent me carefully executed squeezes of the inscription, and a drawing of the entire monument),¹ the

¹ I have also to thank Llewellynn Jewitt, Esq., F.S.A., for an early copy of a plate representing the entire monument, which is to appear in "The Reliquary" for January, 1879.

stone was found "at the site of the Roman cemetery, not far from the Castrum, and by the side of what is supposed to have been the course of the Roman road stretching to St. David's in Wales, locally known as the Recken or Wreken Dyke." It was discovered "lying face up, contrary to the usual way in which monuments are found." The mutilation of the face of the figure is supposed to have been the work of some early Christians. The right hand rests upon what may be intended for a small altar. The precise dimensions of the stone are:—

Height over all, to apex . . . 4 feet.

Width over all 2 feet 3½ inches.

Height of seated figure . . . 2 feet 6 inches.

The Latin inscription is accurately given above, but its style is vulgar and incorrect in the extreme. It states that the tombstone was erected to the memory of a woman named Regina, of the British tribe of the Catuvellauni, who died at the age of thirty, the freedwoman and wife of one Barates, a Palmyrene. Regina, and its masculine form Reginus (*"Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum,"* t. vii, 907, 914, 1336), are, as my friend Professor Hübner, of Berlin, informs me (see also his letter in the "Shields Daily News" of November 2), not uncommon names in all Celtic lands. The husband Barates probably was, as the same authority has suggested, a Syrian merchant, who traded with the Roman soldiers in Britain. A legionary Barates could not be, being a foreigner; and of the Syrian "socii," only the "cohors I Hamiorum" (if the name be really derived from Ḥamāh, ܚܡܐ, ܡܚܡܐ) occurs in England, stationed at Magnae, or Carvoran, on the Wall. The British tribe of the Catuvellauni (*"Corpus Insc. Lat.,"* t. vii, 863) is well known.¹ Dio Cassius, 60, 20, writes *Κατουελλαυοί*. Our inscription seems to offer a somewhat older form of the name, with the sound of *a* instead of *e*, Catuallauni.² Professor Hübner ascribes the

¹ See Dr. Bruce's "Roman Wall," 3rd ed., p. 275, and his "Lapidarium Septentrionale," p. 202.

² The stonecutter seems to have been rather uncertain as to the spelling of the name, for there is an O faintly visible over and between the U and A of the second syllable.

monument to "the end of the second or beginning of the third century." Dr. Bruce, as Mr. R. Blair informs me, "judging from the form of some of the letters, such as M, G, and L, is inclined to place it later, though the absence of ligatures is perhaps against this."

The line of Aramaic writing is in the cursive Palmyrene character, such as was in use at Tadmor in the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era, possibly even earlier. See Lenormant, "Essai sur la Propagation de l'Alphabet Phénicien," t. i, 2^{me} livr., pp. 238-249, and Planche XIII; De Vogüé, "Syrie Centrale, Inscriptions Sémitiques," especially Nos. 115-121, pp. 71-73, and Pl. 11. Transcribed into Hebrew letters, it runs thus:—

רגינא בת חרי ברעתא חבל

Regina, the freedwoman of Barate. Alas!

The words **בת חרי**, if correctly read by me (others read **בת חרי**, see below), seems to be equivalent to "liberta." The Aramaic word for "daughter" generally appears in the Palmyrene inscriptions in the fuller form **ברת**, Syriac **ܒܪܬܐ** (with *r* written, though not pronounced); but **בת** is found occasionally in proper names (see Nöldeke in the "Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft," vol. xxiv, p. 101). So here in a compound noun, in common Syriac **ܒܪܐܝܢ**, a free man, **ܒܪܐܝܢܐ**, a free woman, but also used of slaves who have been set free, e.g., Jeremiah, xxxiv, 9, 10; 1 Maccabees, x, 33; Judith, xvi, 24. In so-called Chaldee the corresponding word is **בַּר חוּרִין** or **בַּר חוּרִי**. The form **בת חרי** (probably pronounced *bath hērē*) seems to be intended for a construct state before the following genitive. **ברעתא**, *Bar-Atē* (*Barates*), is a proper name of the same class as **בַּן-הַדָּד**, *Bar-Hadad*, *Bapadátos*; **בַּלְחָא**, *Bar-lāhā* (for *Bar-Alāhā*); and **בַּבְּשִׁמִּין**, *Bar-Bā-shēmīn* (for *Bar-Bā'l-Shēmīn*); in which the second member of the compound is the appellation of the deity (*Hadad*, *Alāhā*, *Bā'l-shēmīn*) specially worshipped by the person so named. The name of the god 'Atē or

'Athē, usually written עתה or אֶתְהָ, is well known (see Nöldeke, loc. cit., p. 92). In Greek it is transcribed *Αθη*, as in עתעקב, *Ἀθηάκαβος* (De Vogüé, op. cit., p. 48), אֶתְהָ or אֶתְהָ, *Zaβδααθῆς* (ibid., p. 47). To classical scholars it is familiar as the second element in the name of *Ἀταργάτις*, *Ἀτεργάτις*, *Ἀτταγάθη*, that is, אֶתְהָ (De Vogüé, op. cit., p. 7), the 'Attar of 'Atē, the female counterpart of 'Atē (עֶתָר, 'Attar, for עֶתְמָר, 'Athtar, = עֶשְׂתָרְתָּ, *Ἀστάρτη*; compare עֶשְׂתָר כְּמוֹשׁ in the stêlé of king Mēsha' of Moab, l. 17; and see M. Clermont-Ganneau in the "Journal Asiatique" for 1878, pp. 529, 530).¹ The last word of the inscription, חָבַל, has been regarded by Nöldeke (loc. cit., p. 105) as a verb in the third person singular of the perfect, to be pronounced חָבַל, "periit," "mortuus" or "defunctus est"; and so it is rendered by De Vogüé, op. cit., pp. 21, 46, 52, 159, "défunt" or "mort." See also the articles of Levy in the "Z. d. D. M. G.," vol. xii, p. 214; vol. xv, p. 622. In all these cases the tombstone is that of a man, and therefore חָבַל might very well mean "he is dead"; but here, where the departed is a woman, we should have expected the verbal form to be feminine, חָבַלְתָּ or חָבַלְתָּ. I prefer therefore to regard it (with Levy, in the latter of the two passages cited) as an interjection, in so-called Chaldee חָבַל, חָבַיל, "woe! alas!"² This seems to be a more appropriate ending to the inscription on a gravestone than the bald and wholly superfluous piece of information that the person who lies buried there "is dead."

¹ It is curious to note that the name of 'Athtar, or 'Attar, has survived in Arabic to the present day, in the form of عَثْرِيّ *aththarī*, or عَثْرِيّ *athharī*, which Lane explains by "such as is watered by the rain alone, of palm-trees or of seed-produce." This observation was first made, I believe, by my friend Professor G. Hoffmann, of Kiel. Compare a similar use of بَعْل *ba'l* (i.e., Baal), and its derivative بَعْلِيّ *ba'li*.

² Nobody, I should suppose, would be silly enough to connect this חָבַל with either ἄβαλε or *vaié*.

Another interpretation of this inscription has been proposed (see Professor Hübner's letter in the "Shields Gazette" of October 31); viz. :—

רגינא בת חדי בר עתא הבל

Regina, filia Haddaei filii 'Atā, defuncta.

I venture, however, to say that, when compared with the Latin context, it condemns itself. Apart from other objections, this reading turns the British Regina Catuallauna into a Syrian woman, whose father Ḥaddai and grandfather 'Atā are named, and thus loses sight entirely of the husband Barates.

Postscript. More than one person has surmised that the last word might be read **הַבֵּל**, in the sense either of "sailor" or of "ropemaker" (**حَبَال**); but an examination of other inscriptions in which it occurs shows that this is out of the question. Much more plausible is another suggestion, first made, I believe, to Mr. Blair by the learned Jewish Rabbi of Shields; namely, that the letters **הבל** may be a contraction of some eulogistic or other formula in common use when speaking of the dead (like the Jewish **נַע, נֶעַל, זָל**, **תְּנֻצָּה, תִּמְנַח**, and the like). If so, Dr. Schiller-Szinessy thinks that it might be read **הוֹלְקוּהָ [חַוְלְקוּהָ] בְּחַיֵּי לְעֶלְמַי**, "may his (or her) portion be in the life everlasting." Be this as it may, such contractions were certainly in use at a very remote period. For example, in the Phoenician inscription commonly called the "Melitensis Quinta" (see the "Transactions" of this Society, Vol. III, p. 389), the difficult phrase at the beginning of line 4, **בעתר אדר ערכת**, is really to be read (as pointed out to me by Dr. Euting) **בעת ר אדר ערכת**, "in the time of our most worthy magistrate" (ר for **רבן**, i.e., **רבנני**).

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