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Published Version

Kruschwitz, P. (2017) 'I shall touch it with care and respect': à propos an hitherto neglected senarius from Roman Britain (EE VII 928 = RIB 659). Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, 204. pp. 24-26. ISSN 0084-5388 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/70238/

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Publisher: University of Koeln

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aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 204 (2017) 24–26

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‘I Shall Touch It with Care And Respect’: À Propos a hitherto Neglected Senarius from Roman Britain (*EE* VII 928 = *RIB* 659)

Manfred G. Schmidt
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Discovered in York in 1884 and with a date earlier than A. D. 120,[1] *EE* VII 928 = *RIB* 659, a sizeable, but severely damaged and heavily fragmented altar (orig. 81.3 × 33 cm) with a dedication for Silvanus,[2] carries two blocks of texts, clearly set apart from another by visual means.[3] The first, longer block of writing has been executed in large, carefully cut letters. It reads as follows (with its most plausible restorations and integrations):

D[eo sancto]
Silua[no s(acrum)].
L(ucius) Celerini(?)us[4]
Vitalis corni(cularius)[5]
leg(ionis) VIIII His(panae)
u(otum) s(oluit) l(aetus) l(ibens) m(erito).

Immediately beneath this, a second segment of text exists, traced in substantially smaller letters:[6]

et donum hoc, donum
adpertiniat: cautum attiggam.

[1] The date is based on the arrival of the sixth legion, to replace the ninth, at York in A. D. 120.

[2] On the cult of Silvanus in Roman Britain see e. g. P. F. Dorcey, *The Cult of Silvanus: A Study in Roman Folk Religion*, Leiden–New York–Cologne 1992, esp. 54–56 (this inscription listed on p. 164).

[3] It is now on display in the Yorkshire Museum (inv. no. YORYM 2007.6164); for the museum record (with a photograph of the altar’s fragments) see https://www.yorkmuseumstrust.org.uk/collections/search/item/?id=8641 (accessed May 2017). I studied this altar in autopsy in May 2017.

[4] The *nomen gentile* has commonly been given as *Celerinius* or *Celerin[i]us*, including in *RIB* ad loc. Autopsy shows no traces of an I between N and V. As *Celerinus* does not appear to be attested as a nomen gentile, there are four possible solutions to this conundrum: (i) the name is given without a *gentile*, but with two *cognomina* (more than unlikely); (ii) Celerinus is a hitherto unattested, yet valid *gentile* (perhaps possible, but rather unlikely); (iii) the I was originally superimposed and attached to the N or the V in the part of the inscription that is lost due to damage (possible, but in variation to how the inscription has been laid out otherwise); (iv) the stonecutter made a mistake (possible). The matter cannot be decided with certainty.

[5] Thus the commonly preferred interpretation; an alternative is *corni(cen)*. If Celerini(?)us Vitalis was indeed a *cornicularius*, then one would have to imagine that he served the legionary legate as a secretary; cf. K. Stauner, *Das offizielle Schriftwesen des römischen Heeres von Augustus bis Gallienus (27 v. Chr. – 268 n. Chr.). Eine Untersuchung zu Struktur, Funktion und Bedeutung der offiziellen militärischen Verwaltungsdokumentation und zu deren Schreibern*, Bonn 2004 (with pp. 163 and 239 no. 18 specifically on this piece).

[6] The writing is semi-cursive, with II to represent the letter E in *adpertiniat* and a clearly cursive shape of the letters G in *attiggam* as well as of the letter A throughout. – In *EE* VII 928 it was suggested to read *do: num(ini)* rather than *donum* at the end of the first line. The text layout (with slight, but clear spacing after *hoc* and *adpertiniat*, to mark syntactical transitions) suggests otherwise.

Although the piece has been known for some 130 years now, it has (with one possible exception)[7] been overlooked that this second text (written in a slightly different script,[8] and never fully executed),[9] constitutes an iambic senarius:

et don(um), hoc don(um), adpertiniat: caut(um) attiggam.

– – – –|– – ⏑⏑ –|– – ⏑ –||.

While this senarius is elegant neither from a metrical nor from a syntactical point of view, this constitutes an important addition to the miniscule corpus of poetic texts that survive from Roman Britain.

There are a number of additional observations to be made in support of a metrical interpretation of this segment (in addition to its scansion).[10] First of all, one must acknowledge that the text of the senarius has been inscribed, with care, in between lines that guided the stonecutter's writing, just like the main part of

[7] The only person who (so far) appears to have considered this option was Otto Hirschfeld ('fortasse qui scripsit versum senarium ut efficeret temptavit'; *EE* ad loc.), who, however, worked forward from a badly corrupted version of the inscribed text. The item is absent from Bücheler–Lommatzsch, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* as well as all subsequent additions to it, including the specialist editions of the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* of Roman Britain collected by P. Cugusi, Carmi epigraphici latini della Britannia, *Rend. Mor. Acc. Lincei* IX 2, 2006, 199–232 (now essentially replaced by P. Cugusi, Carmi latini epigrafici della Britannia (*CLEBrit*[2]), *Epigraphica* 76, 2014, 335–407), V. Asciutti, *Poetic Britannia. A Census of Latin Verse Inscriptions*, London 2010 (unpublished), M. Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica des römischen Britannien*, Berlin 2012 [http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000040118], P. Kruschwitz, *Undying Voices. The Poetry of Roman Britain*, Reading 2015 [URL: http://thepetrifiedmuse.blog/undying-voices].

[8] It has been argued that this second part was added by a different hand and that it thus constitutes a subsequent addition; cf. e. g. *EE* ad loc. ('videtur refecisse manus recentior'). This may be the case; if the present text exists only in its original draft stage, however, then it is entirely possible that it dates to the exact same time and was written by the same person, only superficially incised to determine and capture the final arrangement of the text across the object. The reason as to why the cutting of the letters has remained unfinished is unclear and not evident from the text itself.

[9] Only the first three letters (with a start being made on the fourth) have been cut into the surface properly (if with a rather lesser degree of care than those of the main dedication).

[10] I take the -TI(G)- of *attiggam* to represent a short syllable, as it ought to be in its common spelling *attigam*, regardless of the orthography of the inscription, just as there are other orthographical peculiarities, but no apparent prosodical violations in this piece. The claim that 'gg pro ng' (thus *ThLL* s. v. *attingo*, 1143.72), which would be a Grecism (cf. V. Väänänen, *Le latin vulgaire des inscriptions pompéiennes*, Berlin [3]1966, 67), remains without text-internal support and can therefore safely be put aside. – Specifically on *adpertiniat* (written instead of *adpertineat*, to reduce the impact of internal hiatus) see recently J. N. Adams, *Social Variation and the Latin Language*, Cambridge 2013, 103; cf. also M. E. Raybould, *A Study of Inscribed*

the inscription. This makes it clear that this piece, despite its apparently unfinished execution, was not just a random, unplanned, almost graffito-like addition, but a (reasonably) carefully planned[11] part of the overall design at some point in the monument's history.[12]

Secondly, a sudden reduction in letter size, drawing the reader closer into the text, is a common device to mark the transition from prose to verse.[13] Thirdly, the text here changes perspective, as it moves from an impersonal third person singular (*uotum soluit*) of the main dedication to a rather more personal first-person expression (*cautum attiggam*: 'I shall touch it with care and respect') in the senarius, a transition that follows an expression of pertinence (*adpertiniat*: 'and this gift, let the gift pertain') placed at the beginning of the very same line that ends with the first-person verb *attiggam*.

Theodor Mommsen, who comments on this item in *EE* ad loc., suggested that the final expression ought to be imagined as being placed in the mouth of a passer-by who is to be instructed to avoid causing any damage to this monument ('fortasse verba sunt suppeditata praetereunti significantia se aediculam laesurum non esse').[14] More realistically, however, this phrase is crucial evidence for non-silent reading of monumental texts, obligating its readership (and quite possibly in this case the dedicant first and foremost), through an act of reading out a binding declaration, to a respectful, religious treatment of a sacred monument.[15] What is even more interesting in that regard, however, is the (otherwise rarely attested) practice of making actual physical contact with an inscribed object as part of a broader ritual (and in reading a text that quite literally draws its interlocutor near through text layout and design).[16]

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Material from Roman Britain: An Inquiry Into Some Aspects of Literacy in Romano-British Society, Oxford 1999, 4. The verb *appertineo*, denoting ownership, is exceptionally rare; cf. *ThLL* s. v. *appertineo*, 279.53–59, listing a mere five instances.

[11] One may mention the use of paragraph-initial *et* in this context as well, which is a common feature in non-standard language variety texts to introduce a new thought; more recently on this matter see for example H. Halla-aho, Linguistic Varieties and Language Level in Latin Non-Literary Letters, in: T. V. Evans – D. D. Obbink (eds.), *The Language of the Papyri*, Oxford 2010, 176–177.

[12] Photo: P. K. (May 2017); ©York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

[13] This ties in with another observation on the text's structure that requires further comment, below. – Markers of transition between prose and verse in mixed inscriptions have been studied extensively by M. Limón Belén, *La compaginación de las inscripciones latinas en verso. Roma e Hispania*, Rome 2014.

[14] Similarly the editors of *RIB* I ad loc. ('I must beware of touching'), repeated e. g. in S. Ireland, *Roman Britain. A Sourcebook*, London [3]2008, 190. It seems as though the neuter of the past participle *cautus -a -um* has been used as an adverb here; cf. *ThLL* s. v. *caveo*, 643.51–52; the editor of the *ThLL* entry quite rightly, however, sees a parallel to Cic. *Brut*. 44: *et ego cautius posthac historiam attingam te audiente*, 'and I shall treat the subject of history with greater respect and care in your presence from now on'. It would thus appear that the present request is thus a rather different one from the types of admonishments against damaging or defacing monuments (as recently covered in P. Kruschwitz, Attitudes towards Wall Inscriptions in the Roman Empire, *ZPE* 174 (2010) 207–218; further on this see now also R. Hernández Pérez, Versos epigráficos contra los abusos de la propaganda electoral en el mundo romano, in: C. Fernández – M. Limón – J. Gómez Pallarès – J. del Hoyo (edd.), *Ex officina. Literatura epigráfica en verso*, Sevilla 2013, 157–169).

[15] Cf. recently M. Carroll, 'Vox tua nempe mea est'. Dialogues with the Dead in Roman Funerary Commemoration, *Accordia Research Papers* 11, 2007–2008, 37–80 and, more recently, S. Busch, Lautes und leises Lesen in der Antike, *RhM* 145, 2002, 1–45, esp. 30–33 (on inscriptions).

[16] Further on this see P. Kruschwitz, How the Romans Read Funerary Inscriptions: Neglected Evidence from the Querolus, *RhM* (forthcoming).