

Plaster casts of Bernini's bust of Charles I

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NO satisfactory image of Bernini's famous bust of Charles I which perished in the Whitehall palace fire of 1698 has hitherto come to light in modern times. The most widely accepted has been a marble bust, now at Windsor (Fig.43), which Katherine Esdaile published as a copy after the Bernini in 1938, but which Michael Vickers in 1978 suggested was more likely to be a copy after a lost bust by François Dieussart.¹ Two previously unnoticed plaster casts (Figs.44 and 46a–c), here published for the first time, may help to resolve, if only partially, the actual appearance of the lost work.

The history of Bernini's bust and the circumstantial evidence as to its appearance and quality are well known. Commissioned by Queen Henrietta Maria in 1635 and modelled on Van Dyck's triple-portrait of the king (Fig.44), it reached England on 27th July 1635 and survived the vicissitudes of the Commonwealth, but was nowhere to be found in the wreckage of the palace after the fire.² When it was exhibited in Rome before being despatched to England, the Duke of Modena's agent noted the diligence, care and excellence of the execution, while the young Nicholas Stone remarked on the 'exquisiteness of the worke' and reported on the 'likeness and nere resemblance itt had to the King countenance' to Bernini himself, who told him that he 'had taken so great paines and study on itt'. Bernini had been worried about the danger of the delicate and minutely carved details – including 'the little lockes of hayre' and 'the worke of the band' – breaking off in transport or when the cover was removed.³ It is also known that plaster-casts of the bust were made in England, several of which were owned by artists. Van Dyck may perhaps have had one,⁴ and after the Restoration others were in the possession of George Vertue, Jonathan Richardson Sr., the sculptor Francis Bird and the jeweller Michael Rose.⁵ Two of these, Vertue's and Richardson's (Fig.45) are recorded in drawings by their owners, Richardson's being inscribed 'K. Ch.I after a Cast from that of Bernini lost wn. White hall burn . . . 24 May'.⁶

It would appear that Vertue's cast differed in detail from the one owned by Bird for he records 'a Cast of [Bernini's bust] in possession Mr Bird Statuary – another cast I have but differing in the hair & Shoulders – which I take to be a cast of that very face of the Marble Bust. but altered in other parts by some skillfull Artist'.⁷ Since the casts of Rose and Richardson seem to have shown only the face, it is perhaps the case that only one mould was made from the original, covering only the face and part of the hair in the manner of a



43. *Charles I*, perhaps by Thomas Adye or Francis Bird (c.1737–44) after a 17th-century original possibly by François Dieussart. Marble. (Her Majesty The Queen, The Royal Collection[©]).

death mask, and that all the casts derived from this mould, Vertue's (and perhaps also Bird's, Vertue's exact meaning being, as so often, unclear) being elaborated to include the shoulders and more hair to approximate the original appearance of Bernini's marble.

The two plaster-casts published here, one in a British private collection and the other at Berkeley Castle, Glos. conform closely to that drawn by Richardson. They are clearly taken from a carved sculpture, but do not correspond with any of the extant busts of Charles I by or after Le Sueur, Dieussart and other sculptors.⁸ As in Richardson's cast, only the face is shown, though with rather more

*I am grateful to the owners for giving me their kind permission to study and publish the plaster casts, and to the National Portrait Gallery and the Courtauld Photographic Survey of Private Collections for providing photographs. I am also indebted to Prof. Justus Müller Hofstede, who encouraged me to publish them; this article was much improved by his valuable comments and corrections.

¹See K.A. ESDAILE: 'Two busts of Charles I and William III', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, LXXII [1938], pp.164–71 (where the attribution was based on a print which Lionel Cust in 1908 had suggested might record the lost Bernini), and M. VICKERS: 'Rupert of the Rhine. A new portrait by Dieussart and Bernini's Charles I', *Apollo*, CVII [1978], pp.161–69.

²See L. CUST: 'Notes on Pictures in the Royal Collections XIII: The Triple Portrait of Charles I by Van Dyck and the Bust by Bernini', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, XIV [1908], p.339. For a full, recent account, see R.W. LIGHTBOWN: 'Bernini's busts of English patrons' in *Art the Ape of Nature. Studies in Honor of H.W. Janson*, ed M. BARASCH, L.F. SANDLER and P. EGAN, New York [1981], pp.439–76. A possible reference to the project, hitherto unpublished, is in a letter from Gregorio Panzani to Cardinal Barberini: '*Perche la Regina fa fare il Ritratto del Re per darmelo da presentare à S.S.¹⁶ il Re ha tenuto seco discorso del modo di farlo, se in profilo, ò in prospettiva.*' London, Public Record Office, 31/9 17(B), 17th–27th April 1635, fol.328.

³See W.L. SPIERS: 'The Note-Book and Account Book of Nicholas Stone', *The Walpole Society*, VII [1918–19], p.170.

⁴See C. BROWN and N. RAMSAY: '*Van Dyck's collection: some new documents*', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, CXXXII [1990], pp.706–07.

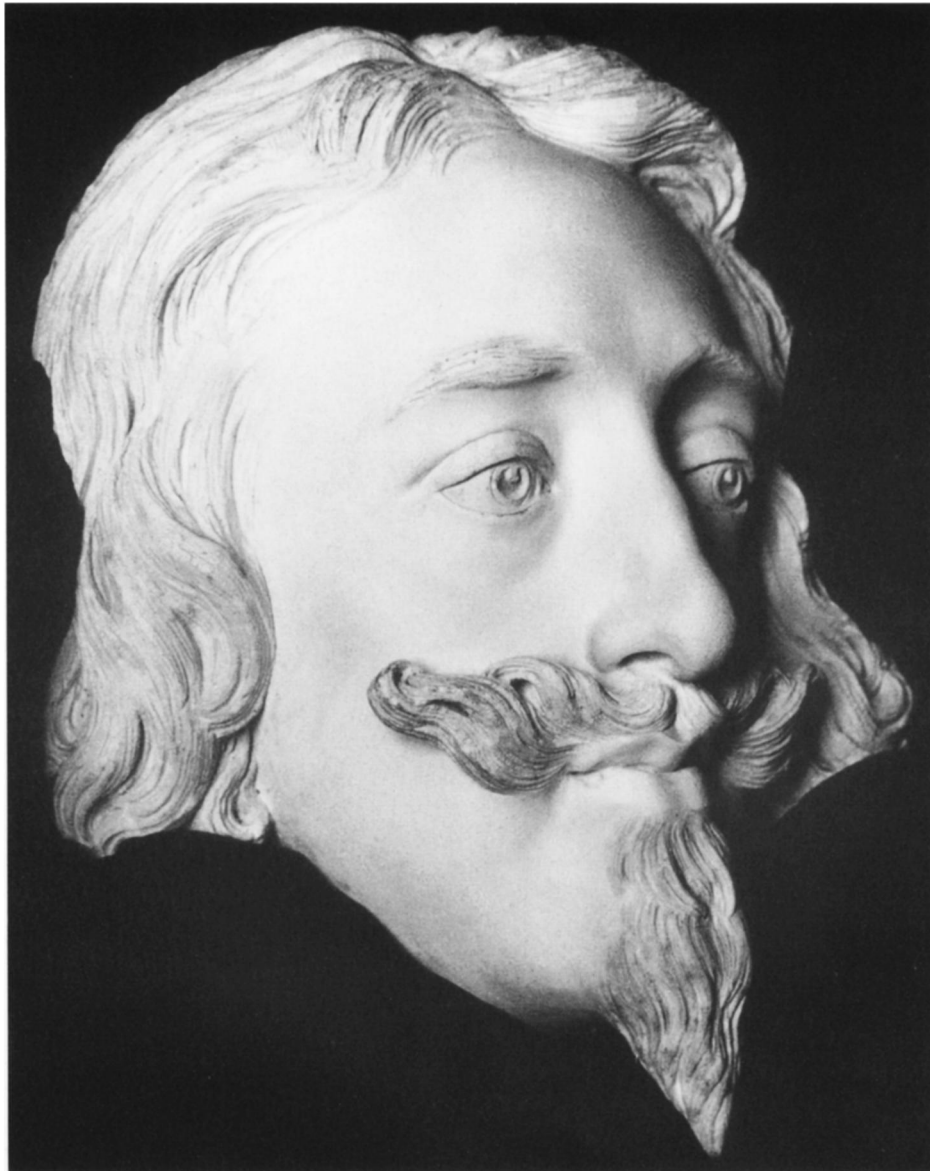
⁵G. VERTUE: 'Note Books II', *The Walpole Society*, XX [1931–32], pp.50 and 57. Rose was the husband of the limner Susan Penelope Gibson, daughter of Charles I's court dwarf; see D. FOSKETT: *A Dictionary of British Miniature Painters*, London [1972], I,

pp.288 and 481. Richardson's cast is last recorded in his sale of 1747 (*The Genuine and Entire Collection of . . . the late Eminent Mr. Jonathan Richardson*, London, 1747, lot 15), where it fetched £5.

⁶D.B. BROWN: *Ashmolean Museum Oxford. Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings IV. The Earlier British Drawings*, Oxford [1982], pp.529–30. See also G.W. SNELGROVE: *The work and theories of Jonathan Richardson (1665–1745)*, doctoral dissertation, University of London, 1936, p.554, no.10. Vertue's bust is shown on the mantelshelf in his self-portrait drawing in the British Library (reproduced in *The Walpole Society*, XVIII [1929–30], frontispiece).

⁷VERTUE, *loc. cit.* at note 5 above, p.50.

⁸See K.A. ESDAILE: 'The Busts and Statues of Charles I', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, XCI [1949], pp.9–14; C. AVERY: *Studies in European Sculpture*, London [1981–88], I, pp.189–204, 206–11, II, pp.181–90; K.A. ESDAILE: 'John Bushnell, Sculptor', *The Walpole Society*, XV [1926–27], pls.VIII, IX; J. POPE-HENNESSY: 'Some Bronze Statuettes by Francesco Fanelli', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, XCV [1953], pp.161–62, fig.14; P. WARD-JACKSON: 'Expiatory Monuments by Carlo Marochetti in Dorset and the Isle of Wight', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, LIII [1990], pp.267–74, Pl.31a; M. R. APTEED: 'Arnold Quellin's Statues at Glamis Castle', *Antiquaries Journal*, LXIV, pt.1 [1984], pp.53–61; N. D. ZIFF: *Paul Delaroche. A Study in Nineteenth-Century French History Painting*, New York and London [1977], pp.106–14 and note 66; p.350, fig.46. I have not seen the statues by Thomas Thornycroft and John Birnie Philip for the Royal Gallery at the Houses of Parliament. See also C.C. SELLERS: *Patience Wright. American Artist and Spy in George III's London*, Middletown, Conn. [1976], pp.144–45, for an anecdote in which a picture of a head of Charles I being modelled in wax plays a crucial rôle.



44. *Charles I*, here identified as after Bernini. Plaster cast, 31 by 20 by 35 cm. (Private collection, England).

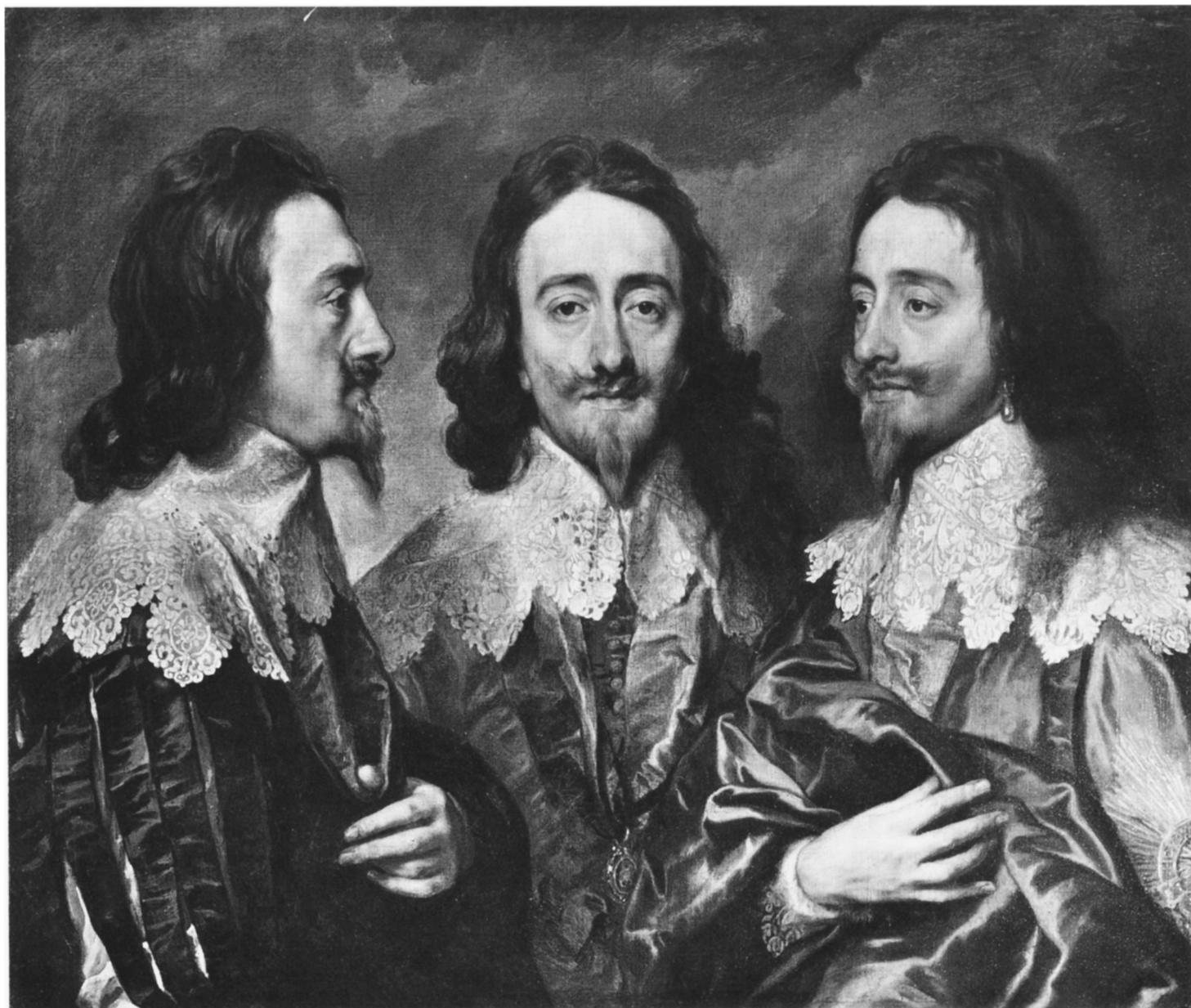
hair, and Richardson's fine pencil lines delineating the eyebrows, moustache and beard in the drawing correspond closely to the chisel marks recorded in the casts (where, in addition, the marks of the drill and undercutting are also reproduced). For example, the differentiation of the horizontal lines which move slightly downwards in the right eyebrow as against those of the left, which move diagonally upwards, is similar on both the drawing and the casts, while Richardson's depiction of both pupils and irises in the eyes suggest that the cast he drew from had incised eyes, as do the two casts published here. Though the eyelids appear heavier in the drawing, this can be ascribed to the fall of light on the cast he drew from, for the proportions and outlines correspond well to those of our two examples. The drawn nose shows the same even line from nose to tip as is found on the busts, and full lips and slightly open mouth are common to all, including the prominent groove at the median line of the upper lip (though the slight indentation in the lower lip is absent from the drawing). The drawing also follows the development of the curls of the moustache from the nose to their extremities, and although the distinction between the smaller and larger curls is blurred in the drawing, Richardson indicates their respective origins from under the tip of the nose and from the ridge of the upper lip as it is found on the casts. The drawing also follows the roughly tripartite structure of the beard in the casts with two small locks at the top from which two longer strands hang down and the small swirl to the right at the point. If the face appears slightly fuller in the drawing, this may be because it was made from a cast without the hair present on the two published here, but it is telling that



45. Drawing of a plaster cast of *Charles I*, by Jonathan Richardson Sr. Black lead, on vellum, 15 by 20 cm. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



46a–c. Three views of a plaster cast bust of Charles I, here identified as after Bernini. Plaster cast, 31 by 20 by 35 cm. (R.J.G. Berkeley, Esq., Berkeley Castle, Glos).



47. *Triple-portrait of Charles I*, by Anthony van Dyck. 84.5 cm by 99.7 cm (Her Majesty The Queen, The Royal Collection[©]).



48. *Charles I*, by François Roubiliac. Marble, 71 cm. high (The Wallace Collection, London).

Richardson shows the same sharp cut at the neck, where one supposes the collar must have been sculpted on Bernini's original.

Given Richardson's known skill as a portrait draughtsman,⁹ it is clear that his drawing must have been taken from a cast made from the same mould as the two published here. And besides the testimony of Richardson's own inscription that his cast was from the Whitehall Bernini, two other pieces of visual evidence lead us to the same conclusion.

The first is the bust of Charles I now in the Wallace Collection (Fig.48), made by Roubiliac for George Augustus Selwyn in 1759 and said by Dallaway to have been based on 'Vandyck's portraits and a cast from that by Bernini'.¹⁰ And although it is obviously a free interpretation by Roubiliac, certain features do correspond with our casts. The hair, lying flat on the head is comparable to the

hair on our two casts, with its centre parting from which it falls away in waves (but, it should be noted, it is entirely dissimilar to the hair on the bust at Windsor; Fig.43). If the hair on the casts does indeed follow Bernini's original, then it is worth noting its stylistic similarity to the hair on the bust of Costanza Bonarelli in the Bargello, Florence, executed about 1636, where we find the same fine parallel strands handled as a differentiated, though smooth and compact mass.¹¹

The second can be inferred from a remark by Vertue: 'by the Copies of King Charles the first picture. after Vandyke the three heads done for Bernini to make the Bust of the King in Marble – the profil from which Bernini copyd – seems most like the bust'.¹² And indeed, it is the profile of the plaster cast (Fig.46a) which comes closest to the three images in the painting (Fig.44). Bernini did not copy it slavishly, but slightly changed the arrangement of the hair, straightened the nose a little at the tip and, though almost imperceptibly, evened out the forehead above the eyebrows. His most obvious divergence was in the nose, which is slightly skewed to the left in Van Dyck's frontal view, but drifts to the other side in the cast (Fig.46b), but he seems to have followed other details faithfully, including the receding lower lip visible in the profile view, and the brushed up moustache with smaller curls at the centre, and the fan-like one at the left. It is worth pointing out that although many scholars have accepted the Windsor bust (Fig.43) as a copy after the lost Bernini, several have remarked on its difference from the painting in terms of physiognomy.¹³ The plaster casts now show that the bust had nothing of the vividness of the portraits of Scipione Borghese or Costanza Bonarelli, but preserved the stoic reserve of Van Dyck's presentation of the monarch.¹⁴

Unfortunately, nothing is known of the history of the cast reproduced in Fig.44. That at Berkeley Castle appears to have been there since at least the late eighteenth century, for Horace Walpole saw it in 1774 in the room where Edward II was reputedly murdered: 'In that room they show you a cast of a face in plaster, and tell you it was taken from Edward's. I was not quite so easy of faith about that, for it is evidently the face of Charles I'.¹⁵ Although Walpole does not say how the cast was displayed, it was probably in the same black octagonal box in which it is presently fixed, surrounded by an attached 'collar' of gilded plaster cherub wings, almost certainly alluding to the cult of Charles, King and Martyr, which grew up after the regicide. The other bust, which is a crisper cast perhaps taken when the mould was less worn, is in a similar box, suggesting that they might have originated from the same workshop supplying royalist demand for images of the king.¹⁶ Whatever the case, these humble casts now provide us with a more secure impression of Bernini's achievement. The fuller composition of the bust and the appearance of the finely carved details of the costume of which Bernini was so proud, must remain a matter of speculation until new evidence comes to light.¹⁷

⁹See C. GIBSON-WOOD: 'Jonathan Richardson as a Draftsman', *Master Drawings*, XXXII [1994], pp.203–29.

¹⁰K.A. ESDAILE: 'Roubiliac and Rysbrack', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, XLII [1923], p.198; M.R. TOYNBEE: 'Notes on various works of art. Bernini, Rysbrack and Roubiliac. III', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, XLIV [1924], p.94; K.A. ESDAILE: *The Life and Works of Louis François Roubiliac*, Oxford and London [1928], pp.163–65, 177, 182. For further possible influence see D. GREEN: *Grinling Gibbons. His Work and Statuary 1648–1721*, London [1964], pp.136–7, fig.192; W. KING: 'Lambeth Delft Bust of Charles I', *British Museum Quarterly*, X [1936], p.131.

¹¹R. WITTKOWER: *Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*, London [1966], p.203, no. 35, pl.61.

¹²G. VERTUE: 'Note Books IV', *The Walpole Society*, XXIV [1935–36], p.36. It should be remembered that Van Dyck's portrait remained in Rome, and in England was known only through copies until its return after 1796.

¹³E.g. WITTKOWER, *op. cit.* at note 11 above, pp.14–15, and LIGHTBOWN, *loc. cit.* at note 2 above, p.451.

¹⁴For the characterisation of the king in portraits see: J. HELD: 'Le Roi à la Ciasse', *Art Bulletin*, XL [1958], pp.140–43; R. STRONG: *Van Dyck: Charles I on horseback*, London [1972], pp.27–43; R. OLLARD: *The Image of the King. Charles I and Charles II*, London [1977], pp.189–200; F. HASKELL: *History and its Images. Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, New Haven and London [1993], pp.391ff. See also M.J. HAVRAN: 'The Character and Principles of an English King: The Case of Charles I', *Catholic Historical Review*, LXIX [1983], pp.197–98. On stoicism in portraits, see A. JENSEN ADAMS: *The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*, doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, 1985, II, pp.313–19.

¹⁵W.S. LEWIS, ed.: *Horace Walpole's Correspondence I*, New Haven [1961], p.344, letter to William Cole, dated 15th August 1774.

¹⁶As it was not possible to remove the glass of the box in which the cast reproduced in Fig.44 is housed, I was unable to ascertain whether it, too, has cherub-wings.

¹⁷For an hypothesis as to its possible complete appearance, see VICKERS, *loc. cit.* at note 1 above.