With the recent discovery in the north of England of yet another example of the famous Latin palindromic square illustrated at the left, it is time to review the mystery surrounding this clever construction. Found at an archeological site in Manchester, this joins the other discoveries in various sites throughout the lands of the former Roman Empire. These include such as Cirencester, Pompeii and Dura-Europos in Mesopotamia. But, why should a simple message (the square translates as "the sower, Arepo, controls the wheels with care") have achieved such a widespread distribution? Is it, as some suggest, associated with Mithra, the Persian god of fire whom the Romans styled Mithras and extended his worship wherever they conquered? Or, is it Christian?

The evidence for Mithra escapes me, but the case for an esoteric Christian symbol is logically brilliant. The whole square can be transposed into a cross with two different synonyms for God as perceived by Christians. First, we have PATERNOSTER (Our Father), then we have Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

On the other hand, though no one wishes to promulgate such a theory, it could just be a clever word square that somebody created and others merely copied, a sort of Roman Kickshaw that was flawed by a non-word, AREPO.

To test my theory of Kickshawian origin, I devised a number of English-language word squares (given below), supplying definitions where necessary. Can any reader imagine what an archeologist two thousand years hence would make of any one of them which might survive? If, like their Roman counterpart, they were carved on stone and buried throughout the Word Ways distribution area what meanings can be devised? Note that the last of these is flawed by the use of the hyphenated term PUT-UP, though it, unlike the others, consists entirely of palindromes. The remainder mirror the original Roman example.
In the first square below, the asterisk can be replaced by D, H, M, R or S.

*ALES ASSET ASSET ASSET LATES
AREDE SLIVE SPALE SLEEVE AREDE
LEVEL SIRIS SAPAS SEXES TENET
EDERA EVILS ELAPS EVELS EDERA
Sela * TESSA TESSA TESSA SETAL
START DEDAL STREW SAPAS
TILER ENEMA TREV E ALULA
ALULA DEWED REFER PUT UP
RELIT AMENE EVERT ALULA
TRATS LADED WERTS SAPAS

In the list below, obs denotes obsolete modern English (plurals and verbal inflections may be presumed), and Obs denotes words obsolete before 1500 (plurals, etc., not presumable). S denotes Literary Scottish (not a dialect within Scotland). Literary Scottish is as valid as American English despite the tendency of Borgmann and others to equate it with any of the dialects of the British Isles.

ALULA n the bastard-wing, those feathers on the first digit of a bird's wing
AMENE adj pleasant, agreeable
AREDE vb to divine the meaning of (obscure words), interpret (dreams), solve (a riddle)
DEDAL adj skilful, cunning
EDERA Obs n ivy
ELAPS n a genus of venomous colubrine snakes
EVERS obs form n/adj EVILS
EVERT vb to overthrow (a government), to upset (an argument), to frustrate (a purpose)
LADED an acceptable variant form of LADEN (see OED)
LATES Obs form of n LATTICE
SAPAS n new wines boiled to a syrup: syrups of fruit juice, a conserve of fruit
SELAS obs form of n SELAH (which see)
SELAD Obs form of n SALAD
SELAH n a Hebrew textual word, possibly indicating a pause
SELM obs form of n SALAM
SELAR variant spelling of Obs n CELURE, a canopy
SETAL adj of or pertaining to the SETAE, bristles
SIRIS n any of several trees including the acacia
SLEEVE obs form of n SLEEVE
SLIVE now dialect n/vb (to) slice
SPALE n a splinter, chip or thin slice of wood
TRATS n fishing lines with many hooks, used in the tidal waters of eastern England
TREV E obs n truce
WERTS obs form of n WARTS