

XXX.—*A Brief Notice of the small Figure cut in Ivory, supposed by Pennant to represent the King of Scotland in his Coronation Chair, and which was discovered in Dunstaffnage Castle.*

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[Read to the Society 11th March 1833.]

THE Meeting is indebted, through our Secretary, to the politeness of Captain Campbell of Inistore, in enabling me this evening to exhibit a very curious and interesting relique belonging to Mr Campbell of Dunstaffnage. I refer to the small carved figure in ivory, which has hitherto been regarded as representing one of the Kings of Scotland seated in his Coronation Chair. The earliest notice of it occurs in Pennant's Second Tour in Scotland, in 1772, accompanied with an engraving, not well executed, but sufficient to exhibit the style and character of the figure.

This accomplished tourist, in describing his visit to Dunstaffnage, after stating that the castle had been the first seat of the Pictish and Scottish princes, and that the celebrated Coronation Chair, usually called the Stone of Scone, now transferred to Henry the Seventh's Chapel, Westminster, had long been preserved at Dunstaffnage, says,—“ Mr Campbell shewed to me a very pretty little ivory image, found in a ruinous part of the castle, that was certainly cut in memory of that Chair, and appears to have been an inauguration sculpture. A crowned Monarch is represented sitting in it, with a book in one hand, containing the Laws of the Land, which he was swearing to observe. They never took the oath by kissing the Bible, but by holding up the right hand.” (Vol. ii., p. 410.)

This may be considered as a pleasing and ingenious theory, and I regret much to offer any remarks that may tend to lessen the importance attached to this interesting relique. Mr Pennant must however have failed to observe that the ornament which surmounts the back of the chair is a fleur-de-lys; and although, with one exception, the upper spikes of the crown are broken, it is equally clear that the crown was formed of similar ornaments. This circumstance may suggest that the carving was of French workmanship. The dress of the figure is however peculiar, and

the doublet or close jacket laced in front bears an obvious resemblance to the portraits (no doubt imaginary) of some of our early Monarchs. But this fancied resemblance, taken in connexion with the place where the carved figure was discovered, may have suggested Mr Pennant's ingenious theory.

It should be observed, that since Pennant's time the figure is somewhat mutilated, unless his artist chose to represent it as entire; part of the beard, and a portion of the back of the chair have been broken off, and the fracture has no recent appearance. The figure measures $4\frac{5}{8}$ inches in height, $2\frac{2}{3}$ in breadth, and $1\frac{4}{8}$ inches in thickness.

It will be in the recollection of several of the members that about two years ago there were exhibited in this room a number of small carved figures which had recently been discovered in the Island of Lewis. It was proposed at the time, by a few of the Members, to make a joint-purchase of the entire collection, and after setting aside a certain number for the Society's Museum, to apportion the others among the contributors. By some oversight or delay, this arrangement was frustrated; and a dealer in curiosities in Edinburgh stepped in and made the purchase. The greater number of these figures were afterwards sold to the British Museum, and formed the subject of a learned and most elaborate Dissertation by Frederic Madden, Esq., read to the Society of Antiquaries of London, and printed in vol. xxiv. of the *Archæologia*. It is entitled, "Historical Remarks on the introduction of the Game of Chess into Europe, and on the Ancient Chess-men discovered in the Isle of Lewis," and is copiously illustrated with engravings and woodcuts. The conclusion which this distinguished Archæologist draws, is, that "the material they were composed of, the peculiar forms of some of the figures, the costume, and the locality, all conspire to point towards the North as their birth-place;" and having shown the existence at that period of the game of chess in Scandinavia, and the skill of the natives in carving similar figures, he infers that these chess-men were most probably executed in Iceland about the middle of the twelfth century.

The discovery of these figures on the western coast of Scotland has been accounted for by the tradition of their having been found in the wreck of a merchant vessel from Iceland. But Mr Madden has certainly been misled by some erroneous statement regarding the sand-bank where they are said to have been discovered. I understand, they were actually found inside of

a building where they could not possibly have been subjected to the action of sea-water.

In the Lewis chess-men, all the Kings resemble each other in point of costume and attitude, by holding a sword with both hands across the knees. The Dunstaffnage figure differs in many respects. The cloak or robe, which is unfastened at the neck, covers his back, and is gathered in folds over his knees, on which the hands rest, the right hand holding the corner of the robe, the left hand holding something like a book or square box. The general resemblance, however, is sufficiently striking between these figures to render it not improbable that the latter was designed for a similar purpose, and that Pennant's theory, however ingenious, of its having been intended as an inauguration image, must be abandoned.

Through the kindness of Mr Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who was fortunate enough to secure specimens of the Lewis chess-men before the others were taken to London, the Members will be enabled, by actual comparison of the Dunstaffnage figure with two of these Kings, to observe the closeness of this resemblance.

In a note, Mr Sharpe says—

“ These chess-men discovered in the Isle of Lewis had never been under water ; they were found in a vaulted room (as it was described to me), about six feet long ; they were slightly covered with sand, and there was a quantity of ashes on the floor.

“ I could not learn whether there was anything like a chimney. The room is near a spot where tradition affirms a nunnery once stood. The name of the place in Gaelic signifies—‘ The house of the black women.’

“ When I saw the chess-men, there was among them an article like the handle of a knife. I was somewhat startled with the freshness of the metal which fixes the tongue of the buckle. I procured ten of the pieces ; namely,

“ Three Queens, two large, one small ; one of the large holds a drinking-cup.

“ One Knight on horseback.

“ Two Bishops.

“ Two Kings.

“ Two Knights, one biting his shield.”

The result of the comparison of these three figures, I think, will be, that the Dunstaffnage figure is of more recent workmanship. It does not exhibit

the same hard folds of the drapery, and that character of rude and primitive simplicity which may warrant the ascription of the Lewis figures to the twelfth century, although, if carved, as supposed, in Iceland, we may readily conceive that, in a place so remote, an adherence to the same forms or types may have continued unchanged to a much later period.

[NOTE.—I regret much that some circumstances prevented a cast being taken of the figure during the time it was in Edinburgh, otherwise an engraving of it would have been given to illustrate this communication. It is no doubt carefully preserved in the repositories of Sir Angus Campbell of Dunstaffnage, Bart. In the *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. i., p. 283, and the *Statistical Account of the parish of Uig, in the Island of Lewis*, vol. xix., p. 289, among other ancient remains which are there described, besides an entire Druidical place of worship at Calarnish, not far from Loch Roag, “the stones being very large and entire,” and the ruins of a Nunnery at Melistan, mention is made of “a Danish fort or doune, at Carloway, within the bounds of the parish, with its double wall of dry stone. It is perhaps the most entire of any of the kind in Scotland: it is very broad at the base, and towards the top it gradually contracts; the height of the wall is about thirty feet, and the fabric perfectly circular.” In the *New Stat. Account*, (Ross-shire, p. 153, 1833) the minister of the parish uses the same expressions, and adds, “In the year 1831, a considerable number of small ivory sculptures resembling chess-men, and which appeared to be of great antiquity, were found in the sands at the head of the Bay of Uig, and have been since transmitted to the Antiquarian Society at Edinburgh.” At the Society on the 11th of April 1831, there was read “Extracts of a letter regarding the discovery of a number of figures carved in ivory, apparently chess-men, and of Scandinavian workmanship in the middle ages, which were lately found buried fifteen feet under a bank of sand, in the Island of Lewis.” No copy of this letter is preserved among the Society’s papers. But it is evident, that to serve some purpose, contradictory statements were circulated by the persons who discovered or who afterwards obtained possession of these Chess-men, regarding the place where the discovery was actually made.—D. L.]