

ANCIENT GAELIC INSCRIPTIONS IN SCOTLAND.

W. F. Skene, Esq., F.S.A. Scot., read a communication on ancient inscribed Scottish monuments. After referring to the Ogham inscriptions at Newton and Golspie, he proceeded :—"The inscription upon which I principally wish to make a few remarks is one of much interest and importance from its connection with those very remarkable monuments, the sculptured stones or crosses of Scotland; anything tending to throw light upon the origin, period, or character of which, is of value. Hence, the discovery of an inscription upon one of them sufficiently legible not to baffle an attempt to decipher it, as well as the occurrence of the Ogham upon others, are likely to afford important *data* in this investigation. The inscription in question occurs on a sculptured stone at St Vigeans, near Arbrogath, and is included in the collection presented by Mr Chalmers of Aldbar to the Bannatyne Club. I take my copy of it, however, not from the drawing, but from a cast from the stone. It consists of four lines, and is complete in itself. It is in the same character as inscriptions on early Irish monuments, and on those at Iona; and, as it appears on the cast, it is fortunately so distinct that I think there is little room for doubt as to the reading of the letters.

"It appears to me to belong to a class of inscriptions of which there are numerous specimens in Ireland. Commencing invariably with the word *ORUIT*: *oratio*, a prayer, either in full or contracted *OR*. Then follows either of two prepositions—*AR*, upon, or *DO*, for, and after that the name of the person commemorated. I may refer to two which still exist on gravestones at Iona, shewing the use of the different article *ar* and *do*. They are both represented in Mr Graham's Antiquities of Iona.

"The first is as follows :—*OR AR ARMIN EOGAIN*.

"*Or ar armin Eogain*. A prayer for Armin Ewen.¹

¹ The second letter of the third word may be read either *r* or *n*; my remarks are made on the former assumption. If it is to be read as *n*, then the word is *ANMIN*, *anima*, the soul. Should this word be found on other similar inscriptions, it is probably the best reading.

“The explanation given in Mr Graham’s text, and probably obtained from some Gaelic clergyman, shews the insufficiency of mere knowledge of the language unaccompanied by an acquaintance with the character of such inscriptions. Dr Wilson, in his *Prehistoric Annals*, p. 507, rightly reads it ‘a prayer for the chief Eogain or Ewen.’ Armin means a hero or chief. It is so used in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1103. ‘The daughters of the foreigners of Atacliath, or Dublin, with Thorsten, son of Eric; Pol, son of Amaun and Beollan *armin*.’ It had, however, a technical signification in the Isles, where it was used to designate a particular class of the vassals of the Lords of the Isles. In the Knock MS., in describing the council of the Isles, it is said to consist of ‘Four Thanes and Four Armins or Subthanen,’ and I have met with a similar use of the term in other MSS.

“The other inscription at Iona is the celebrated one of which so many readings have been given. It must be thus read, from Mr Graham’s drawing—

Θη δε μάιλ Ƴάταριε.

and it is the sole foundation for sundry supposed inscriptions mentioned in most accounts of Iona, to which Mr Graham’s Gaelic interpreter has added another equally unfortunate.

“It is rightly read by Dr Wilson, A prayer for Mailfataric; but he is in error, I think, in translating *mail* here as *a servant*. *Mail* is a prefix to many proper names, equivalent in force, but not in meaning, to *Gille*, as Malcolm and Gilliecolm, but Patrick never could have been written Fataric. The name is a different one, and I have not seen it anywhere else. I suspect there is some inaccuracy in the copy.

“The stone at St Vigean’s is, I conceive, of older date than the beautiful Irish cross of Monaster Boice, assigned with much probability by Dr Petrie to A.D. 922; but we should naturally expect that the inscription would not greatly differ from that large class to which all that have been found on erect crosses belong. The inscription on the St Vigean’s monument reads as follows:¹—

Αροίτεν :
 ηρε υορετ
 εττ Ƴορ
 κυρ

The resemblance of the first word *Aroiten* to the word *Oroit* cannot fail to

¹ The Irish Antiquaries read the first word *Drosten*; but, on carefully examining the inscription, I cannot satisfy myself that this reading is admissible. It supposes a *d* of a different form from the usual one, and I cannot see any traces of the form required for *s*.

strike every one. It is, in fact, the plural of the word formed according to the inflections of Scottish Gaelic. One of the peculiarities which distinguishes Scottish Gaelic from Irish is the frequent formation of the nominative plural by adding *an* or *en*, as *slat*, a rod, forms *slatan*, rods; *clarsaich*, a harp, *clarsaichean*, harps. Another peculiarity is the tendency to write A for the O in Irish, of which many instances might be produced. Thus, *Do*, in Irish, two, forms in Gaelic *Da*; *Agus* in Gaelic is written in old Irish *Ocus*, &c.

“*Aroiten*, then, is *Oroit*, with the O written A, and the plural termination *en*. It means *Orationes*, prayers. This implies that there is more than one person commemorated. Accordingly, the third line begins with the Latin *et*, ‘and,’ the conjunction; and it is placed between two words which are known as proper names, the first is *Uoret*, a Pictish proper name. Thus we have the Pictish form in the Pictish Chronicle, ‘*Elpin filius Uroid, Ured filius Bargoit.*’ We have the Scottish form in the Register of St Andrews, ‘*Alpin filius Feret, Ferat filius Batot.*’ The second is *Forcur*, the old form of the name *Fearchair*, just as the name *Fergus* is written in old Scotch genealogies *Forgo*. The only word which remains is at the beginning of the second line, *ire*, and it, no doubt, represents an old form of the preposition *ar*. *Ar* is written now in Scotch Gaelic *air*, and its oldest form was probably *ir*, as I find the Gaelic preposition *ann*, meaning *in*, is written in old MSS. *Ind.*”

Mr Skene referred to various examples from Cormac's Glossary—the oldest Gaelic writing, he believed, known—and from the Irish annalists, to shew that the use of the Latin *et* in old Gaelic inscriptions was of common occurrence. He then proceeded:—“The inscription, if read in Irish, would be—*Oroith ar Feared et (or ocus) Fearchair*. Prayers for Vered and Ferquhard. It is, in fact, an old form of Gaelic written by ecclesiastics, as appears from the use of the Latin *et*, and shewing the peculiarities of Scotch Gaelic. It commemorates two individuals, one bearing the Pictish name of Voret or Veret, the other the Gaelic name *Fearchair*; and it is, I doubt not, a relic of the Gaelic spoken in Forfarshire, before the introduction of the Saxon.”