

I.

NOTES ON THE OGHAM INSCRIPTION ON THE NEWTON STONE.

By WILLIAM FORBES SKENE, Esq., F.S.A. Scot. (PLATE XX.)¹

I propose to commence my observations by a short account of Ogham writing in general.

In the Book of Ballimote, an Irish MS. of the fourteenth century, but containing tracts of a much older date, is a tract on the Ogham writing,

¹ This plate contains—*first*, The main inscription on the face of the stone *secondly*, The Ogham inscription on the edge of the stone, with the stem line restored, as I conceive, after repeated careful examination, it ought to be placed and *thirdly*, The Ogham inscription arranged in lines to correspond with the main inscription. It has been lithographed from a tracing made from the stone with great care, and repeatedly compared, and its accuracy may, I think, be depended on.

of which about eighty different forms are given. The first and the oldest is what is called the Ogham *craobh*, or branch Ogham; the others are more of the nature of ciphers or modes of secret writing.

The Ogham *craobh* consists of a number of lines drawn at right angles from one stem line on each side, or drawn across it. They are grouped in clusters of five letters, each letter being distinguished by the number of lines, from one to five. There is first a group of five letters drawn from the stem line downwards, representing *b, l, f, s, n*; then a group of five similar characters drawn upwards from the stem line, representing *h, d, t, c, q*; then five similar characters drawn obliquely across, representing *m, g, ng, st, r*; and then five drawn straight across, representing the five vowels *a, o, u, e, i*. There are thus twenty letters in all formed by these lines, and their position to the stem line. There were afterwards added five arbitrary characters representing diphthongs, but these were of much later date; and it is only necessary to mention one, a \times drawn across the line, representing the diphthong *ea*.

Mr Graves justly observes in his paper upon Oghams, that the peculiar form of this alphabet shows that it does not belong to the period antecedent to the introduction of the Latin language and Christianity, but is the work of the early grammarians. The mode in which the letters are classed, the five vowels being grouped together, and the broad vowels separated from the small vowels, shows this.

There are numerous stones in Ireland bearing inscriptions in the Ogham character. It was at first the opinion of Irish antiquaries that no satisfactory readings of these inscriptions had been obtained by means of the key given in the *Book of Ballimote* for reading the Ogham *craobh*. Mr Graves therefore proposed to construct a key from the monuments themselves. For this purpose he obtained drawings of all the known Ogham inscriptions in Ireland. The principle upon which Mr Graves proceeded was, "that in any given language, or group of cognate languages, there is a preference for particular sounds and particular sequences of sounds." In order to determine what are the favourite sounds in a language, it is necessary to analyse considerable portions of it in such a way as to exhibit its tendencies to repeat and combine the several letters of the alphabet, and to construct a table showing how often, on an average, each letter is followed by each of the remaining

ones in a passage of some determined length, containing a specific number of letters. With such a table, it is then easy to read a cipher in the same language. It is necessary merely to tabulate the sequences of the ciphers; and by comparing their tendencies to repetition and combination with those of the known letters, we at once arrive at a knowledge of their respective powers.

Mr Graves proceeded to form a table of this nature from the analysis of passages in the Irish language contained in the Book of Armagh, written in the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries. He then subjected the Ogham inscriptions to a similar analysis, and the result was, that when the table constructed from the Ogham inscriptions was compared with the table constructed from the Book of Armagh, the Ogham characters corresponded with the alphabet of the Ogham craobh given in the Book of Ballimote, with one exception, that where the Ogham table had *G*, the Irish table showed the letter *C*.

The Ogham inscriptions on the Irish stones are all read from left to right, and from the bottom of the stone upwards; and the line of characters is frequently carried on over the top of the stone, and then down along another of its angles.

In Wales, there is a class of stones containing Ogham inscriptions, which are peculiar, in so far as they also have on the face of the stone an inscription in debased Roman letters.

Of these stones, eight have been described; and one of them at once showed that the Welsh Oghams are to be read by the same alphabet as the Irish Oghams. This is the stone called the Sagraus Stone, at St Dogmael's, Pembrokeshire. The inscription on the face of the stone, in Romano-British capitals, reads from top to bottom thus,—

Sagrani fili Cunotami.

The Ogham was sent to Mr Graves, who stated that he could read the inscription, provided the mark for Ogham *A* could be found in a particular place, which appeared to be wanting. On re-examining the stone, it was found that a crack had taken place where Mr Graves suspected an *A* would be found; and on using a magnifying glass, the existence of a small circular depression, cut in twain by the crack, was observed. This was communicated to Mr Graves, who, without having seen the Latin

inscription, read the Ogham as "Sagramni maqi Cunatami;" the maqi, or Irish "mac," coming in place of the Latin *fili*.

This remarkable corroboration established—1st, That the Welsh Oghams are read by the same key; and 2d, That the inscriptions are bilingual and correspond. Two other inscriptions have also been read, and found to correspond with the inscription on the face of the stone.

The Fardel Stone, in Devonshire, however, presents an Ogham inscription which, to all appearance, will not read by this key with the inscription on the face of the stone.

In these Welsh stones the inscriptions on the face of the stone are not written across the stone, but along it, either from top to bottom or from bottom to top; and the Oghams are marked upon the edge of the stone, which serves the purpose of a stem line, and are always to be read in the opposite direction from the main inscription. In most cases, the main inscription reads from top to bottom, and the Ogham from bottom to top; but in one case, that of the Trallong Stone, the Ogham reads from top to bottom.

There can be no doubt that these Welsh inscriptions belong to the post-Roman period.

The main inscription on the Newton Stone reads not along but across the stone. It was not at first observed that there was an Ogham inscription upon it. The first cast got of it was one only of the face of the stone, and showed of course only one-half of the Oghams. It was, I believe, only when the stone was more carefully examined for Mr Stuart's splendid work on the Sculptured Stones, that it was observed that a complete Ogham inscription existed. It is placed exactly like the Welsh Oghams, on the edge of the stone; but the edge is so irregular as to make it a task of some difficulty to ascertain precisely where the stem line crosses the letters. Mere drawings of the Ogham, therefore, were of little use, as not showing the stem line, and it was only when the present accurate cast of the whole stone was got, that an opportunity was afforded of examining the Ogham inscription on the stone itself, and studying the inequalities of the edge, in order to determine the position of the stem line.

A comparison of the Newton Stone with the Welsh stones, will, I think, lead us to the following inferences:—

1st, That the Newton Stone most probably belongs to the same class of monuments, and is therefore post-Roman in date.

2d, That as the main inscription is written in a character to which we have not a key, the most probable mode of explaining the inscription is to begin with the Ogham inscription, where we have a known alphabet and a known mode of writing to deal with.

3d, That in all probability the inscription on the face of the stone should correspond with the Ogham, allowing for such differences as appear in the Welsh stones. The Ogham inscription is obviously the ordinary Ogham craobh, and the only difficulties we have to contend with are, first, to ascertain whether it is to be read from top to bottom, or from bottom to top; and, secondly, to fix the precise position of the stem line where the Oghams are cut on the edge of the stone.

With regard to the first, it will be observed that, at the bottom of the stone, the stem line appears to make a bend, and then runs parallel to the edge with a second Ogham, which rather indicates that the inscription is to be read from top to bottom, as it is more likely that in cutting the Ogham the engraver should begin on the edge at the top of the stone, and then, finding he had not length enough, bring it round on the face of the stone, than that he should begin it in the middle of the stone; and this is confirmed by a circular indentation close to one of the letters, which apparently marks the end of a word. With regard to the second, the part of the Ogham on the face of the stone presents no difficulty, as the stem line is distinctly marked. As to the rest of the inscription, I have determined the position of the stem line by a comparison with the other part, and by a repeated study of the cast of the stone, and a minute examination of the inequalities of the edge; but I am bound to say that the reading of the letters in all cases is not entirely free from doubt.

The number of the letters in the main inscription is forty-five; that in the Ogham inscription only thirty. They do not, therefore, in this respect correspond. In several of the Welsh stones, however, it has been found that the Ogham only corresponds to a part of the main inscription, usually the first part, and it will be observed that the main inscription on the Newton Stone varies in the length of the lines, and falls in that respect into two parts. The first line consists of only four letters. There

then follow three lines, consisting of nine letters each. There is then a line of five letters, followed by a line of nine letters. There seems, therefore, to have been a system of regularity according to which the letters are arranged, and which appears to separate the last two lines from the first four.

In the first part of the inscription, however, consisting of four lines, there are just thirty-one letters, which corresponds so closely with the number in the Ogham, as to raise the strongest presumption that it corresponds with that part of the inscription. If the Ogham is read from top to bottom, it will be observed that there is a point after the first two letters, but the corner of the stone near where the Ogham commences has been broken off, so that there may have been one or two letters here which have disappeared.

Assuming, then, that the Ogham reads from top to bottom, and that the letters followed by a point represent the first short word of four letters on the main inscription, I have arranged the Ogham inscription in corresponding lines for the purpose of comparison.

The first point which struck me after doing so, was the correspondence of the St Andrew's Cross in the fourth line with a peculiar letter in the fourth line of the main inscription. This letter is a Rune, and appears on one of the Runic inscriptions figured by Goran'sson, in his *Bautil*, No. 25. It appears also in several of the Runic alphabets as a variety of the simple \times or St Andrew's Cross, and its value is *G*. In the Ogham, this letter is one of the five arbitrary signs added at a later date to the Ogham alphabet, and represents the diphthong *EA*; but it can hardly have that value here, as the two previous letters, as we shall afterward see, read *EA*, and it would involve a repetition of the same letters, and make the word entirely consist of vowels. It appears to me that whatever the signification may be, these two signs were apparently intended to express the same thing, and afford at least a connecting point in the two inscriptions. On each side of the letter in the main inscription is obviously the same letter, and on each side of the letter in the Ogham is the same letter, though separated on one side by another letter. These letters read in the Ogham *E*. There is also, in the ninth letter of this line, another *E*, and it will be seen that it corresponds with a letter of nearly the same shape in the main inscription. The last letter in this line is

in the main inscription obviously *I*, and in the Ogham is a corresponding *I*. The other letter on the left side of the cross is an Ogham *A*, and this should correspond with the first letter in the line in the main inscription. This letter is repeated in the second and third lines of the main inscription, and in the corresponding position in both lines, in the Ogham inscription, we have also the Ogham *A*.

Next the Ogham *A* in the third line is Ogham *O*, and in the main inscription we have also *O*. The second letter in this line, in the Ogham, is also Ogham *O*, and the third letter in the main inscription is an *O*.

The first letter in this line in the Ogham is nasal *G*,—that is, *NG* viewed as one letter, and this letter opens a clue to the character of the main inscription. Nasal *G* as an initial letter is peculiar to the Celtic languages, and by the phonetic laws of the Celtic requires that the previous word should terminate with an *N*. Accordingly we find in the Ogham that the last letter of the previous line is an *N*. Now the first letter in the third line in the main inscription is the Gothic Rune for nasal *G* or *NG*, which is a very remarkable coincidence, and shows that both inscriptions have a Celtic character. We already remarked that the third letter in the fourth line was also a Rune. We have therefore two of the letters in the main inscription formed from Runes. On the other hand the *O* and the *I* are Roman letters, which seems to point to the alphabet as being one of those not uncommon among the early Germans, which are partly based on Runes, partly on Roman and Greek letters, as the Mæso-Gothic for instance, which contains twenty-four letters, sixteen of which are based on Greek and Roman letters, and eight on Runes.

I now proceeded to construct an alphabet of debased Roman letters from the Welsh inscriptions on the stones, which have also the Ogham, and placed alongside of it the remarkable Roman alphabet on the Irish stone at Kilmalkedar, in Kerry, for future reference.

The third letter of this line in the Ogham is an *B*, and the corresponding letter in the main inscription I found in my debased Roman alphabet as an *B*. The second letter of this line in the main inscription is not represented in the Ogham, but is a debased Roman *V*, and that this is a correct reading appears from its being repeated in the second line, and the corresponding letter in the Ogham is a *U*. The first syllable of this line in the Ogham is therefore *Gor*. In the main inscription it is *Guor*, a

known variety of that syllable. In the Ogham the *R* is repeated, and then follows *M*. The corresponding letter in the main inscription is *O*, and *M* is not represented. After *AO* follow in the Ogham two *N*'s. In the main inscription the corresponding letter seems to be an *N* turned sideways, not an uncommon mistake on inscriptions, and a letter representing *TH* or *D*: *MD* and *N* are in Celtic convertible in terminations; the word reads therefore, in the ogham *Gorrmaonn*, and in the main inscription *Guoroaonth*. The next word, at the beginning of the fourth line, in both is *eage*.

In the Ogham the word that follows is on that part of the inscription parallel to the rest, and free from doubt. It reads *IOSA*, or *Josa*, the Gaelic name for Jesus. In the main inscription there is obviously here a capital letter, and I take it to be a double letter, an *E* formed upon a *J*. The next is an *S*, followed by what nearly corresponds to one of the forms of *U* in my alphabet,—*Jesu*. In both inscriptions followed by *EI*.

In the second line, the three last letters are in the Ogham *nun*, and the corresponding letter in the main inscription are an *N*, a *V*, and what may represent a final *N*. The next letter to the left is a debased Roman *T*, and corresponding Ogham is a *T*. Between this, and the *A* we have already read, is in the Ogham *O*, in the main inscription a Roman *V* or *U*, with a letter on each side, one of which has in the corresponding place in the Ogham *R*, and is probably a form for *R*. After the *A* in the Ogham is a *D* twice repeated. The corresponding letter in the main inscription does not represent a *D* in any known alphabet, as a Rune it represents *O* or *A*, as a Roman letter *F* and *K*; but it will be observed that the same letter occurs at the end of the preceding word, and in the Ogham there is here also a *D*. I cannot explain this. In the Ogham the letter next the *D* in the first word is *U*. The rest of the word is wanting.

The Ogham inscription, therefore, reads thus:—

UD
DDAROT NUN
NGORRMAONN
EAGE JOSA EI

The main inscription, assuming that the last letter of the first word

and first letter of the second word is intended to represent *D*, reads thus:—

DUUD
DARURTUNUN
NGUOROAONTH
AEGE JESU EI

This then is what I have made of the ogham ; and I have thought it would be satisfactory to the Society to shew, at the expense of being a little tedious, the exact process through which I have gone in bringing out this result. It will be seen how closely the Ogham corresponds with the main inscription. The language is nearly the same. The word *Josa* is a Gaelic form. *Jesu* the corresponding Welsh and also Latin form. *Gor* is the Gaelic form ; *Guor* the early Welsh ; the *th* at the end of the line rather Saxon looking.

The *num* has a Welsh look, and the *dd* at the beginning of the second line is Welsh.

In short, it seems to consist of mixed Gaelic and Welsh forms.

There is no Ogham inscription to correspond with the last two lines of the main inscription ; and as I am dealing at present mainly with the Ogham, and not the main inscription, I do not attempt to enter upon the consideration of that part of the inscription. I have no doubt, however, should my present attempt stand the test of further sifting, that a comparison of these letters with Runic forms, and a more enlarged list of debased Roman forms than I have made, will tend to its being deciphered.

Neither do I attempt at present to interpret the inscription which has been read ; but before closing, I shall lay before the Society a speculation which has occurred to me as to the meaning of the inscription, premising that, in the meantime, it must be taken solely as a speculation.

It is founded on the two words *Gormmaonn* and *Josa* in the ogham.

Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his extravagant history of the Britons, details the actions of a certain Gormund, who was called over from Dublin to the assistance of the Saxons in their wars with the Welsh, in the end of the sixth century. He drove the native inhabitants into Cumberland and Wales, besieged the British king in Cirencester, and established the Saxons in full possession of the country. He then espoused the cause of

a French count Isembard, and went over to France, where he fought with Louis, king of France, after which we hear no more of him.

History knows nothing of this Gormund in the sixth century; but Lappenberg has most conclusively shewn that these events are really historical, and belong to a certain Danish chief, Guthrun, in the ninth century, who fought with King Alfred, but was converted to Christianity, made peace with him, was baptised by the name of Athelstan, and established with his Danes in East Anglia, of which he became king. Now, it is remarkable that our early historians all call this Danish king Gormund, by which name he seems to have been generally known.

William of Malmsbury, in describing his baptism, says, "Their king, Gudrun, *whom our people call Gurmund*, with thirty nobles, and almost all the commonalty, was baptised, Alfred standing sponsor for him."

Alberic calls him Guormundus; the chronicle of S. Richarius, Guaramund; another chronicle, Gormont. Here we have both the forms of *Guor* and *Gor*; and the third form has *Guara*, corresponding to the *Guoro* of the main inscription, and *nd* in the termination.

Simeon of Durham, and all our chroniclers, place his death in 891, but they do not give the place of his death; but the Saxon MS. life of St Neot, quoted by Turner, says that before his death he had returned to his own country. From this it is plain he did not die in East Anglia, where he was king, but on some expedition, and this may very possibly have been in Scotland. The juxta-position of the word for Jesus with the name Gormmaonn looks very like the Dane Gormund, who had become a disciple of Jesus. The year 891 would fall in the reign of Donald, son of Constantine, who died in 900, and reigned eleven years, which would place its commencement in 889.

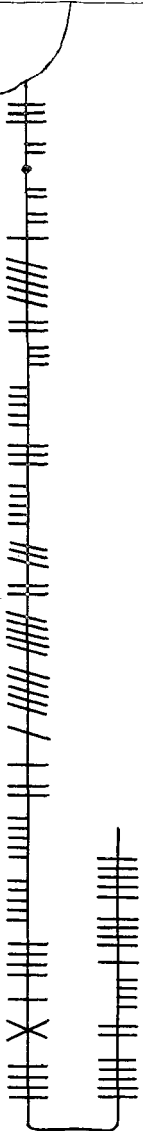
Now the Pictish Chronicle has this statement:—"Donivaldus filius Constantini tenuit regnum undecim annis. In hujus regno bellum autem factum in Vifid Collan inter Danarios et Scottos. Scotti habuerunt victoriam." I do not know whether there is any place of this name in the neighbourhood of the Newton Stone; but the first part of the name has a resemblance to the neighbouring parish of Fyvie.

If this conjecture should prove well founded, it would place the date of the Stone in the year 891.

MAIN INSCRIPTION.

𐫀𐫁𐫂
 𐫀𐫁𐫂𐫃𐫄𐫅𐫆𐫇
 𐫀𐫁𐫂𐫃𐫄𐫅𐫆
 𐫀𐫁𐫂𐫃𐫄𐫅𐫆𐫇
 𐫀𐫁𐫂𐫃𐫄𐫅
 𐫀𐫁𐫂𐫃𐫄𐫅𐫆𐫇𐫈𐫉𐫊𐫋

OCHAM INSCRIPTION.



OCHAM INSCRIPTION.

Arranged in Lines to Correspond with Main Inscription

u d
 d d a r o t n u n
 n g o r r m a o n n
 e a e i o s a e i

OCHAM ALPHABET

h d t c g m q ny ts n a o u e i
 b l p s n

OCHAM DIPHTHONGS

ea os ai ia ue

W. & A. K. Johnston, Edinburgh