

II.

ACCOUNT OF THE RECENT EXAMINATION OF A CAIRN CALLED
"CAIRNGREG," ON THE ESTATE OF LINLATHEN. BY JOHN STUART,
Esq., Sec. S.A. Scot.

Some years ago, when describing an underground chamber and gallery
on the Hill of Cairn Conan in Forfarshire, I adverted to existing tradi-

tions of a structure which they supposed to have stood on the same hill side, and which was known by the name of Castle Gory. This castle was attributed to a King Greg or Gregory, and I added some reasons for believing that an ancient rath or fort really had originally been placed above the spot occupied by the chamber.

The tradition of the country has always believed that this King Greg was buried under a cairn on the Estate of Linlathen, belonging to Mr Erskine,¹ in the neighbouring parish of Monifieth, which is known by the name of "Cairn Greg."

This cairn, which is placed on a rising ground commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country, was opened by Mr Erskine in the year 1834, in presence of the late Lord Rutherford (then Mr Rutherford), and Mr George Dundas, Advocate. It was found to contain a central cist, in which no remains appeared except a bronze dagger and a small urn. These were removed to the house of Linlathen, where they have been preserved since that time. A fragment of a sculptured stone was found between the covers of the cist, and was replaced when the cairn was closed up. Having recently heard that this fragment had on it figures resembling some of those on our sculptured pillars, I was desirous to have an opportunity of examining it. For this purpose, Mr Erskine was so obliging as to open up the cairn a second time, and an inspection of it took place in the month of August last, in presence of Mr Erskine, Mr Neish of Laws, Mr Paterson, Mr Cosmo Innes, the Rev. J. Gerard Young of Monifieth, Mr Joseph Robertson, and myself.

Alexander Brymer, a mason, who took part in the operations at the first opening, and who recollected the incidents of it very distinctly, was also present.

The cist now again exposed, was found to rest on the natural surface of the ground. It was formed of great slabs of freestone, much honey-combed by the action of water. The bottom of the cist was paved with

¹ A little North from Linlathen is a large heap of stones called "Cairn Greg." A local chieftain famous in ancient Scottish Story is said to have fallen in battle here. His name was Greg or Gregory, and the place of his residence near Colliston, in the parish of St Vigeans, is still known by the name of "Castle Gory." Numerous other cairns within the circuit of a mile around the principal one mark the burial place of the other slain.—*New Stat. Acc. of Forfarshire*, p. 546.

small water-worn pebbles, and the top was covered by an enormous slab of freestone, also honeycombed, measuring about 7 feet in length, by $4\frac{1}{2}$ in breadth. On this rested another cover of still greater size and weight, which was cracked into two pieces.

The direction of the cist was east and west. It measured 4 feet 10 inches in length by 2 feet 9 inches in breadth, and 2 feet 10 inches in depth. When it was opened in 1834, a small urn, lying on its side, was found about the centre of the south side, and near the west end a bronze dagger appeared. Between the two great covering slabs there occurred a layer of earth, perhaps a foot in depth, and in it was the fragment of sculptured stone already referred to. From its appearance it seems obviously to have formed part of a larger stone, which had been broken across. A large ball of stone, about the size of a twenty-five pound cannon ball, was found somewhere about the cist, but the exact spot could not be recollected. The stone was brought to Linlathen at the time, and was subsequently lost.

The joints of the slabs forming the cist were plastered with clay, on which the marks of the thumb which had pressed it remained, and were observed in 1834. Portions of the clay so marked, were still to be seen at the recent examination.

Many stone cists were found in the adjoining fields, and were used in the construction of drains.

The evidence as to the spot where the sculptured fragment was found in 1834, rests on the recollection of Alexander Brymer. That, however, was remarkably minute; as an instance of which I may mention, that on my questioning him about the bronze dagger (which at the moment could not be found), he described its appearance very accurately, especially dwelling on the fact that it was rather square-shaped at the point. In any event, it cannot be doubted that the sculptured fragment was found in connection with the cist.

There is no reason for supposing that the cist had been opened prior to 1834, or that the sculptured fragment could have been introduced at a period subsequent to its first arrangement, as the cairn was apparently untouched until the neighbouring dykes began to be built in recent times.

The inference from these circumstances would be, that at the time

when the cist was formed, the sculptured fragment was part of an older monument, which probably had been on the spot.

If this inference be well-founded, the result would come to tell in any discussion relating to the date of the pillars with similar sculptures, for we could not doubt that they were at least contemporary with, if not earlier than, people who used bronze, and buried their dead in cists under cairns.

It will be observed that the fragment has on it the figure of the animal which has been called an elephant, and is merely in outline. It thus appears to have been one of a class of rude pillars, with similar sculpture, some of which have been found still standing on sepulchral cairns, as at Keilor in Angus, and at Insch in Aberdeenshire. These pillars are unhewn, and bear other marks of having preceded the cross slabs found so frequently in the same districts with the pillars. The elephant, and other objects which appear in outline on the latter, are filled up on the cross slabs with intricate figures, which imply, both in design and execution, a considerable progress in art.

Although there seems to be nothing apparently anti-Christian in the figures on these pillars, yet they have not been found in other parts of Christendom, throughout which various symbols of the Christian faith were diffused from the earliest times.

The position of some of them on sepulchral cairns seems also to assign them to a pre-Christian people, when taken in connection with other circumstances, and the occurrence of the fragment at Cairngreg in connection with a cist of the character already described, harmonises with such attribution.

The discovery of silver relics in or near the sepulchral mound of Norries Law at Largo,—on some of which relics figures of the same class as the elephant were engraved,—has a bearing on this point, to which I hope to revert when describing an excavation of that mound made in the course of the last summer.

The mere occurrence of burial under a cairn may not of itself in all cases be held to be conclusive evidence of its pagan character. But, as I recently observed, in describing the graves at Hartlaw, the idea of the Christian system required from the first that the bodies of the faithful should be laid in the consecrated cemeteries around the church.

We can trace the practice of consecrating cemeteries in Scotland to the time of St Ninian; and the Southern Picts, in whose province Cairnreg is placed, were converted by him.

We read, no doubt, of the burial of a converted Pict under a cairn in the time of St Columba. This was in the Isle of Skye, and may have taken place before a cemetery was consecrated,¹ but we may gather from various sources, that burials in cairns and sites of old usage (such as the great burial places in Ireland) were abandoned, and regarded as heathenish, from the first knowledge of the Christian system.

The occurrence of an urn with a weapon of bronze in the cist at Cairnreg, must be held to mark the burial there as one of heathen character.

The absence of any trace of bones in this instance leads to the conclusion that the remains were burned.

In a group of cists under a cairn at Warrackstone in Aberdeenshire, recently examined, a small urn was found in most of them without any appearance of bones. But in other spots of the area of the cairn, great traces of burning were observed, and two urns filled with calcined bones were found. Similar vestiges of burning and of burned bones were found at Norries Law; but as our attention was confined to the central cist at Cairnreg, the surface was not turned up so as to lead to the detection of any traces of burning which may have been there.

It has been suggested that the non-appearance of bones in such cists is frequently to be attributed to their complete decay and absorption in the soil. In the case of Cairnreg this could hardly be the case, as the dry-paved bottom would have hindered any such operation; and in the cists at Warrackstone, the pure yellow subsoil had not a trace of discoloration, such as the decay of animal matter produces.

It may be impossible to suggest a date for Cairnreg, but it does not seem rash to ascribe it to a period before the sixth century. Indeed, the urn found in the cist is of the rude unskilful type usually ascribed to a primitive period.

Our annals make us acquainted with a King Grig, who, along with Eocha, reigned over the Picts and Scots towards the end of the ninth century. It is possible that the traditional King Greg, who lay under the cairn on

¹ Life of St Columba, Rev. p. 62.

the dry knoll at Linlathen, may have been the predecessor of that "Dufsyth of Conan," who meets us in charters of the twelfth century,¹ and as such have been the chief of a Pictish tribe or clan like those alluded to in the "Book of Deir," as existing in Buchan, when Bede was Mormaer of that country—but if so, he must have lived at a period long before that of his historical namesake, who, after dying at place called by our chroniclers "Dundorne," and "Dornedeore," which has been sometimes identified with Dunadeer, was, according to their statements, buried at Iona, his epitaph remaining, as Wyntoun tells us, to be read in his days.²