

I.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY AND PROBABLE SITUATION OF THE EARLIER ESTABLISHMENTS AT IONA, PRIOR TO THE FOUNDATION OF THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY IN THE END OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY. BY W. F. SKENE, ESQ., LL.D., F.S.A. Scot.

In April 1873 I laid before the Society some notes on the history of the ruins at Iona, in which I stated that none of the existing buildings reach further back than the twelfth century. Since then the Duke of Argyll has been carrying on during the last two seasons a great work in connection with these ruins. It consists in the main of clearing away the rubbish which encumbered the ruins, disclosing the foundations of these buildings previously hidden under the sod, and repairing such parts of the walls as were in a precarious state, so as to arrest the process of decay. The work has been carried on under the superintendence of Mr Robert Anderson, and has been done in a most thorough manner, and with excellent judgment and good taste. I think every one who takes an interest in these ruins owes a debt of gratitude to the Duke of Argyll for the munificent spirit and sound judgment which have characterised this great work of restoration, and we are now in a position to judge better of the precise nature and extent of those ecclesiastical buildings of which the remains still exist. In the notes I laid before the Society I dealt exclusively with the ruins in their historical aspect; but I trust that the

Society will ere long be favoured by Mr Anderson with an accurate account of the work he has accomplished, and with the architectural history of the ruins. The object of this paper is to lay before the Society some inquiries I have been making into the history and probable situation of the earlier establishments during a few weeks which I spent in the island this summer.

For the history of the earliest establishment—that founded by St Columba himself—we must look mainly to the two lives of the saint, the earlier one written by Cummin the White, who was abbot of Iona from 657 to 669; and the second by Adomnan, who was abbot from 679 to 704. The earlier, therefore, was written between sixty and seventy years, and the later written a hundred years, after St Columba's death. From these lives it appears that the monastery, or monasterium, constructed by St Columba contained a small court or plateola, on one side of which was the church, ecclesia or oratorium, with a small side chamber or exedra communicating with it; on another, the guest chamber or hospitium; on a third, the refectory, having in it a fireplace or focus; and the fourth having the dwellings or domus of the monks. Separated from it, and at a little distance, was the cell of St Columba, called his domus, tuguriolum, or hospitium, in which he sat during the day when engaged in writing, and slept at night. The whole was enclosed within a rampart or fence, called the vallum.

Now the first observation I have to make is, that it seems quite clear that the whole of these buildings were made of wood. Adomnan tells us of twelve currachs or hide boats which, in his own time, came from Sheil, in Lorne, loaded with oaken timber—roboreæ materiæ—for repairing the monastery—ad nostrum renovandum monasterium (B. ii. c. 46). He also tells us that St Columba sent some of his monks to procure bundles of rods—virgarum fasciculos—to build the guest chamber—ad hospitium construendum—and that they returned with a vessel—navis—loaded with rods (B. ii. c. 3). Again, in mentioning St Columba's cell, on one occasion, he adds that it was built of boards or planks—tuguriolo tabulis suffulto. (B. i. c. 19.)

Then as to the church, Bede tells us that the church at Lindisfarne, founded by monks from Iona in the seventh century, was entirely built of oak wood, and covered with reeds, after the manner of the Scots

—quam tamen (ecclesiam) more Scottorum, non de lapide, sed de robore secto totam composuit, atque harundine textit (B. iii. c. 25). It is therefore a fair inference that the parent church in Iona was constructed in the same manner. These wooden churches were common at the time in Ireland. Cogitosus, in his life of St Brigid, written in the ninth century, gives us an elaborate description of the wooden church at Kildare. They also existed in England, and are frequently mentioned in Domesday Book. The church at Greenstead in Essex was one of these, and has preserved their structure. It is composed of the half trunks of oaks, split through the centre, and roughly hewn at each end, so as to let them into a sill at the bottom, and into a plank at the top, to which they are secured by wooden pegs. Adomnan calls the church at Iona "Oratorium," and this term, as Petrie shews (*Round Towers*, pp. 147, 340), was applied to the *Duirtheach* or oak building, in contradistinction to the *Daimhliag* or stone church.

We are not, therefore, to expect that any remains of the monastery founded by St Columba should be found in the Island, and, in order to ascertain its site, we must refer to such indications as these lives afford us of its relative situation to other fixed localities. It has generally been assumed that St Columba's monastery must have been in the same situation as the existing ruins, but this by no means follows. These ruins are the remains of the Benedictine monastery founded in the end of the twelfth century, and we shall find that such indications as we can derive from the old lines point to a different locality. Besides the monasterium, or monastery, and the buildings composing it, Adomnan mentions some other localities connected with it which appear to have been without the vallum. These are the cowhouse or bocetum, the granary or horreum, and the kiln or canaba; and though he does not mention specifically the mill, yet he implies there was one, as he talks of the grinding of the corn—frugum trituration; he also tells us of a cross, the base of which had been inserted in a millstone—in molari lapide; and the mill is mentioned as existing in St Columba's day in the preface to the old poem called the "Altus Prosator," published by Dr Todd in his "Liber Hymnorum," part ii.

Now, there is in Iona, a little way north-west of the present ruins, and on the west side of the road leading from the landing-place to the north

end of the island, a bog called the Lochan Mor, which was once a small sheet of water, but is now drained, and which is separated from the road by an embankment on the east side. From the south-east corner of this Lochan or small lake flows a stream, small now, but which must have been larger before the lake was drained, towards the south east, crossing the road till it reaches the present ruins, which it passes on the north side, and continues an eastward course till it falls into the sound of Iona at a small bay. This stream is called Sruth-a-Mhuilinn, or the Mill Stream; and the small bay at its mouth Port-a-Mhuilinn, or the Mill Port. Pennant, who visited the island in 1772, after describing the existing ruins, and the small rising ground on the west of them called the Abbot's Mount, says, "Beyond the mount are the ruins of a kiln and a granary, and near it was the mill. The lake or pool that served it lay behind; is now drained, and is the turbery, the fuel of the natives. It appears to have been once divided, for along the middle runs a raised way pointing to the hills. North from the granary extends a narrow flat, with a double dike and foss on one side, and a single dike on the other" (Pennant's "Scotland," vol. iii. p. 295). Dr John Walker, who describes the island about the same time, says, "On a plain adjoining the gardens of the Abbey, and surrounded by small hills, there are vestiges of a large piece of artificial water, which has consisted of several acres, and been contrived both for pleasure and utility. Its banks have been formed by art into walks; and though now a bog, you may perceive the remains of a broad green terrace passing through the middle of it, which has been raised considerably above the water. At the place where it has been dammed up, and where are the marks of a sluice, the ruins of a mill are still to be seen" (Walker's "Essays," p. 115). The foundations of the granary and kiln can still be traced on the north side of the stream, where it issues from the Lochan, and between it and the road.

I think the existence of the small lake and mill-stream, the only place suitable for the purpose, fixes the situation of these buildings at all times, with whatever materials they were constructed in St Columba's days, and afford us an important means of ascertaining the relative position of his monastery. Now, Adomnan tells us that Ernan the priest, who was the uncle of St Columba, and presided over the monastery he had founded in the island of Hinba, now identified with

Eilean na Naomh, one of the Garveloch islands, feeling himself seriously ill, desired to be taken back to St Columba, who set out for the landing-place in Iona to meet him, while Ernan, though feeble, attempted to walk without assistance from the landing-place to meet Columba; and when there was only twenty-four paces between them, Ernan suddenly died before Columba could see his face, and breathed his last as he fell to the ground (B. i. c. 35). It is obvious that the place where they so nearly met, and where Ernan died, must have been somewhere on the road between the landing-place and St Columba's cell and monastery, and not far from a point about half-way between them. But Adomnan adds, "that on that spot a cross was raised before the door of the kiln—ante januam canabæ, and another where St Columba stood when he (Ernan) expired, which remain unto this day." The landing-place and the kiln may be held as fixed points; and if the kiln was about half-way between the present landing-place and St Columba's cell, the latter must have been situated nearly as far to the north of the point where the mill-stream crosses the road as the landing-place was south of it, and equally far to the north of the present ruins. I think another passage assists us in fixing pretty nearly where the cell must have been situated. The ground ascends after the road leading to the north end of the island leaves the mill-stream till it reaches a point about a quarter of a mile to the north of it, when it again descends, and here the ground over which the road passes reaches its highest elevation. Now, Adomnan tells us that St Columba's cell or tuguriolum was built on the higher ground—quod in eminentiore loco erat fabricatum (B. iii. c. 23)—which I think places it on this highest point. Another passage points to the monastery being at the same distance from the granary on the mill-stream. On the day of his death, Columba goes with his attendant, Diormit, to the granary or horreum, which was nearest, which he enters and blesses, and finds two heaps of winnowed corn in it. He then leaves the granary and goes back to the monastery, and in going "rests at a place half-way—media via—where a cross, which was afterwards erected, and is standing to this day, may be observed on the roadside—in margine viæ—where he sat to rest a while" (B. iii. c. 24). This description is quite inapplicable to the present ruins, which are close to the granary; but on the west side of the road, exactly half-way between the

ruins of the granary and the highest part of the ground, is a place called Na Crossan Mor, or the great crosses, which Dr Reeves says is spoken of as the site of two large crosses long since removed. From this place he ascends the hill that overlooks the monastery—*monticulum monasterio supereminet* (B. iv. c. 24). In another place he calls it “*mons qui nostro monasterio supereminet*” (B. i. c. 24). The only rising ground near the present ruins that this could apply to is the little eminence called Torabb; but Adomnan’s name for such a small eminence is *Colliculus* or little hill; and in another passage he plainly means the hill called Dun-i by the term *monticulus*—*sedens in monticulo qui Latine Munitio magna dicitur* (B. ii. c. 4); and Dr Reeves rightly says, *Munitio* is Adomnan’s equivalent for the Gaelic *Dun*, and he sees from it in the north a dense rainy cloud rising from the sea, which he could only see from the top of Dun-i, which intercepts the view of the sea on the north. Moreover, the older life from which the passage is taken has “*montem monasterio supereminet*” (c. xix.), and the term “*mons*,” could never be applied to a mere rock like Torabb. From this hill he returns to the monastery and sits in his cell—*descendens monticulo et ad monasterium revertens sedebat in tugurio*,—or as the older life has it—*de illo descendens monte et ad monasterium reversus, sedebat in cella* (c. xx.) The expression “*reversus*” shows that this eminence was not on his direct way from where he sat to the monastery, and it was at some little distance from it, as in another passage he tells us that the saint sat on the top of the mount which overhangs the monastery at a little distance from it—in *cacumine sedens montis qui nostro huic monasterio eminens supereminet* (B. i. c. 24). It can only have been the hill called Dun-i, which could not be said to overhang the present ruins, but is quite appropriate when applied to a position nearly a quarter of a mile to the north of them. From the point where the road attains its highest elevation, the ground slopes down with a considerable gradient to the sea, where there is a little sandy bay called Port-an-diseart,—the harbour of the *desertum*, and above it, not very far from the shore, an old burying-ground,—now called Cladh-an-diseart, the cemetery of the *desertum*. The above passages indicate the highest point where the road passes as the site of St Columba’s dwelling or cell, and the monastery which it overlooked was probably situated between it and the burying-ground. I may

further illustrate this by two passages which are not in Adomnan. The one is in the preface to the "Altus Prosator," which I have already alluded to:—"On a certain day Columcille was in Hi or Iona, and no one was with him except Boithin, and they had no food except a sieve full of oats. Then said Columcille to Boithin, 'Illustrious guests are coming to us to-day, O Boithin,' and he said, to Boithin, 'Remain thou here ministering to the guests, whilst I go to the Muilinn [or mill].' He took upon him his burden from off a certain stone that was in the Reclès (or monastery), Blathnat was its name, and it exists still, and it is upon it that division is made in the Prointig (or refectory, literally dinner-house.) However, his burden was heavy to him, so that he made this hymn in alphabetical order, from that place until he arrived at the mill" (Lib. Hymn. ii. p. 220). The hymn consists of sixteen stanzas, in alphabetical order. This shows that the mill was at some distance from the monastery. The other passage is from the "Martyrology of Donegal," and is taken from the Introduction to an equally old poem, the Amra Columcille. "It was after this that he (Columcille) resolved upon the celebrated abstinence, viz., to take nettle pottage as food for the future without dripping, so that the impression of his ribs through his woollen tunic was seen in the sandy bay which is by the side of I or Iona, when he used to lie on it at night" ("Mart. Don." p. 165). This seems to refer to the little sandy bay called Port-an-diseart, immediately below where I place the monastery. Assuming, then, that the position of the landing-place, and that of the mill, kiln, and granary are fixed points, the direct inference from these passages is, that St Columba's cell and wooden monastery were situated a quarter of a mile to the north of the present ruins, and between the hill called Dun-i on the west, and the old burying-ground, called Cladh-an-Diseart, on the east.

Before I leave the times of St Columba I wish to notice another locality which appears to me connected with his history. That part of the island which lies to the west of the monastic establishments, and extends from Duni- on the north to the Machar or plain, where it appears from Adomnan the arable or cultivated ground was, is called Sliabh Meanach, and is a sort of prairie ground, consisting of rocky hillocks with boggy ground and grassy hollows between them. In one of these hollows, due east from the Lochan Mor, or lake that fed the mill-stream, surrounded on

the north east and south with small hillocks which shut off all view in these quarters, while there is an uninterrupted view towards the west extending over the sea to the island of Tiree in the distance, is the foundation of what seems to have been a small oval building termed Cabhan Cuildeach, about 21 feet long by 15 broad outside measure. This is usually translated the Culdee's Cell, but allow me to say at once that there is no such word in the Gaelic language as Cuildeach, signifying a Culdee. It is a modern introduction into our Gaelic dictionaries, emanating from the nonsense about Culdees. The word is, in fact, an adjective formed from *Cuil*, a corner, and signifies angular, sequestered, remote, and in this sense it correctly appears in the Highland Society's dictionary. Neither is *Cabhan* correctly translated. Caban is a small hut or cell, and is merely the English word cabin, but *Cabhan* is a small hollow plain, in which sense it is opposed to hillock as glen is to mountain, *e.g.*, Cnoc no cabhan, Binn no glenn (O'R. Dict. *voce* Cabhan). Cabhan Cuildeach means simply the sequestered hollow. Now Adomnan tells us that St Columba sought in the wilds of Iona a place more remote from men for prayer, and that when he began to pray he suddenly beheld a very black host of demons fighting against him with iron darts. The contest was maintained throughout the entire day, and he could not drive them from the island until the angels of God came to his aid, when the enemy in terror gave way and fled to Tiree (B. iii. c. 9). It is not difficult to understand how, if the saint passed an entire day fasting and in prayer in this remote place, a black thunder-cloud with its occasional flashes of forked lightning might have appeared to him like a host of demons shooting iron darts, who fled to Tiree when the cloud passed to the west, but the term which Adomnan applies to the place, "remotior locus," is almost a translation of Cabhan Cuildeach. He states it was in "saltibus," which I have translated "in the wilds," by which probably the Sliabh Meanach, or uncultivated and rough ground is meant, and the flight to Tiree, when the demons were driven from the island, indicates the very situation. It no doubt was simply a place for solitary prayer, with some protection from the weather.

After Columba's death, which took place in 597, the monastery founded by him appears to have been repaired, during the time of Adomnan, as he himself tells us in a passage I have already referred to, with oak

timber brought from Lorne; and Hector Boece seems for once to report a real event in our early history, when he tells us that Malduin, King of Scots, repaired the church in Iona dedicated to St Columba, which had become ruinous (lib. ix.), for Malduin was king of Dalriada, from whence the wood was brought, from 673 to 690, while Adamnan became Abbot in 679. Twenty-four years after his death we find Cilline, surnamed Droichteach, abbot from 726 to 752. This epithet Droichteach is an adjective formed from Drochaid, a bridge, and signifies Bridge-builder—literally Bridger; and I am inclined to think that to him we may attribute the construction of the old causeway which traverses the Lochan Mor. He is also termed by Tighernach “Ancorita” or anchorite, and his object may have been to give more easy access to Cabhan Cuildeach for solitary life or prayer.

The beginning of the next century seems to have brought this earliest establishment to an end. In the year 802 it was burnt by the Northmen—a gentibus combusta est,—by which the entire destruction of the wooden buildings seems to have taken place; and four years after, in 806, the whole community, 68 in number, was destroyed. [Familia Iae occisa est gentibus, i. lx. octo]. So complete was the destruction, and so exposed had the island become to the ravages of the Northmen, that the abbot appears to have resolved to remove the chief seat of the Columban Order from Iona to Kells in Meath, of which he had obtained a grant two years previously. The Irish annals record in 807 the building of the new Columban house at Kells—constructio novæ civitatis Columcilli in Cenannus, and in 814 we are told that “Ceallach, abbot of Iona, having finished the building of the church at Kells, resigns the abbacy, and Diarmicius, disciple of Daigri, is ordained in his place.” Ceallach died the following year, and the monastery of Iona appears to have been reconstructed, as in 818 Diarmicius goes to Alban with the shrine of St Columba, no doubt for the dedication of a new church to him. We have also an almost contemporary notice of the monastery at this time in the metrical life of St Blathmaic, slain by the Danes in Iona in 825, written by Walafrid Strabo, who died in 849. We here find Blathmaic superintending a community of monks, whose dwellings or “tecta” are mentioned, and celebrating mass before the altar, which implies the existence of a church. Now the new church which Ceallach erected at Kells was built of stone

and not of wood ; for we find that when it was destroyed by the Danes in 920 it is expressly said in the Irish annals to have been a *daimhliag* or stone church, and I think it is a fair inference that the new church with its monastic buildings erected at Iona about the same time was likewise of stone. This monastery appears to have remained entire till the year 986, when it met a fate similar to that of the earlier wooden one. In that year, we are told, Hy Columcilli was laid waste by the Danes on Christmas Eve, and the abbot and 15 of the religious of the church were slain. The Western Isles passed at this time under the rule of the Norwegian Earls of Orkney, who possessed them till the year 1064, when by the death of Thorfinn, Earl of Orkney, they fell to the Crown, and we then find that the "Huense cenobium" or monastery of Iona, which had long lain waste, was rebuilt by Margaret, the queen of Malcolm Cannmor ; and in the following century the Benedictine monastery was founded, of which the ruins still remain.

The stone monasteries which succeeded that built of wood seem, therefore, always to have been in the same place ; and the question arises, were they situated where the wooden monastery had been, or where the subsequent Benedictine monastery was built? Now, in examining the existing ruins of the monastery there is a peculiarity which at once strikes one. On the north side of the Abbey Church there is at a little distance from it a chapel about 33 feet long by 16 broad. This chapel, however, is not parallel to the Abbey Church, but has an entirely different orientation. It points more to the north than the Abbey Church, and the deflection amounts to no less than fourteen degrees. If the chapel was connected with the Abbey Church it is impossible to account for this variation, but if it existed before the Abbey Church was built, we can quite understand that the orientation of the latter may have been made quite irrespective of the former. Alongside of this chapel, the foundations of a building have also been disclosed, which have the same orientation. Then, on the west of the ruins, is a building which goes by the name of Columba's house, and it also has nearly the same orientation. On the south side of the present ruins, there is, at a little distance, another chapel called St Mary's chapel, and it also has the same orientation. I cannot doubt, therefore, that these buildings formed part of the establishment, which preceded the Bene-

dictine monastery, and that their different orientation enables us to discriminate what are the remains of the older monastery from the ruins of the Benedictine foundation. What confirms this conclusion is, that the recent excavations have laid bare the foundations of what seem to have been cells on the west side of the wall enclosing the present cloisters, and likewise an enclosure projecting beyond, and, in fact, enclosing the cell usually considered to be the sepulchre of Saint Columba. These are obviously parts of one set of buildings, and the former contains two monumental stones, bearing each an Irish inscription of the same character as the two oldest in the Relic Orain, and belonging to a period certainly anterior to the foundation of the Benedictine monastery. I consider, therefore, that the stone buildings, which succeeded the wooden monastery in the beginning of the ninth century, were erected on the south side of the mill stream, and very nearly on the site of the present ruins, but having a somewhat different aspect to the east.

After the stone monastery was laid waste by the Danes in 986, we find that the establishments at Kells and Iona were almost uniformly under one head, who was called the Coarb of Columcille, and who governed both monasteries till the year 1156, when the Coarbship of Columcille was transferred to the Abbot of Derry. During this period Kells was no fewer than eight times burnt, and as often restored, till it appears to have been almost entirely destroyed in 1156, so that both monasteries must have remained during this time in a very dilapidated condition. Now, at the period that Queen Margaret restored the monastery at Iona, Domnaill ua Robhartaigh was the Coarb of Coluimcille from 1062 to 1098, and we find, from the charters of Kells, that some time prior to 1084, Masechnall, King of Ireland and Domnall the Coarb of Columcille, with all the religious of Kells, both priest, bishop, and confessor, granted for ever Disert Columcille in Kells, with its garden, to God and devout pilgrims; that is the old Columban foundation at Kells was probably converted into a *desertum* or hermitage for pilgrims, and after this grant a new functionary appears at Kells, called, between 1098 and 1114, the Coarb of Disert Columcille, and between 1138 and 1150 Cenn na Disert or the head of the *Desertum*; but at the same time a new functionary likewise appears at Iona, who is called, in 1164, the Disertach, rendered by Dr Reeves, president of the *Desertum*; and, I think, there

fore, we may reasonably conclude, that at the same time, the Coarb of Columcille, in conjunction with the King of Ireland, converted the older Columban establishment at Kells into a Desertum, he likewise, in conjunction with Queen Margaret, converted what had been the wooden monastery, or oldest establishment at Iona, into a Desertum for pious pilgrims, which henceforth bore that name.

It only remains for us now to consider a point which has perhaps as great, if not greater interest, than the preceding—that of the true situation of the sepulchre of Saint Columba. The old lives throw no light upon its exact position. Columba, they tell us, died on the steps of the altar in the church, and his body was carried to his own cell, where the obsequies were observed three days and nights; when these were finished, Cummin merely tells us that the body, wrapped in clean fine linen, was buried with due reverence, to which Adomnan adds that, it was placed in the sepulchre prepared for it. The word used by Adomnan, which I have translated sepulchre, is “*ratabusta*,” which is unknown, either in classical or mediæval Latin, and there is obviously some corruption, as it has puzzled the transcribers of the MSS., but *Bustum* is used for a sepulchre, and Ducange has *Busticeta*, which he defines “*sepulchra antiqua*,” “*sepulchra in agro*.” Cummin, however, gives us another indication. He says that Saint Columba was wont to sleep on the bare ground, having for his pillow a stone which is placed to this day at his sepulchre as a monument; and Adomnan, who alters the expression “*nudam terram*” to “*nudam petram*,” repeats verbatim the expression regarding the stone pillow,—the words are, “*titulus monumenti*.” Adomnan adds, at the end of his memoir, that “while he (Columba) was yet abiding in the flesh he was often surrounded by a halo of heavenly light, and even after the departure of his soul from the tabernacle of the body. Until the present day the place where his sacred bones repose—*locus in quo ipsius sancta pausant ossa*—as has been clearly shown to certain chosen persons, doth not cease to be frequently visited by holy angels and illumined by the same heavenly light” (lib. iii. c. 24).

Adomnan died in 704, and the only additional statement we have as to the place where Columba was buried, is by Bede, twenty-seven years after, who, in talking of the island, adds, “where he, Columba is buried;” and

again, when he mentions the insular monastery "in which he reposes in the body" (Lib. iii. c. iv.).

The tradition in the island as to the position of his sepulchre is thus given by Martin in 1716. "Near to the west end of the church, in a little cell, lies Columbus his tomb, but without inscription; this gave me occasion to cite the distich, asserting that Columbus was buried in Ireland, at which the natives of Iona seemed very much displeased, and affirmed that the Irish who said so were impudent liars; that Columbus was once buried in the place, and that none ever came from Ireland since to carry away his corpse, which, had they attempted, would have proved equally vain and presumptuous." This cell still exists. It projects from the west wall of the cloister close to the west end of the church, and is about $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet long by $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad. The walls are about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, but it has been partly excavated, as the interior floor is somewhat below the surface level of the surrounding ground, and it contains two stone cists alongside each other, and exactly alike, with a space of a few feet between them. Now, undoubtedly the existence of this tradition, connecting the burial of Saint Columba with the cell, would have great weight, if we had reason to suppose that the sepulchre of Saint Columba had never been disturbed, and that his body had always remained in the same place, but we know for certain that the contrary was the case, and that there was a break in the continuity of the tradition as to his last resting place; for in the beginning of the ninth century we find that his bones had been taken out of his grave and enshrined. This custom of enshrining the remains of saints appears in the Saxon church as early as the end of the seventh century, and in the eighth century it became very frequent in Ireland. Between the year 726 and 800 the Irish annals record fifteen instances. The words used for the process of enshrining are—*Commutatio*, *Conductio*, and *Positio*. The shrines were of two kinds. They were either chests made of stone, or they were of wood sheathed with plates of silver and gold, so as to be more easily carried about, and were always placed above the pavement of the church, and in the sanctuary near the altar. As an instance of a stone shrine, I may mention that of St Cuthbert. He died in 687, and was buried in a stone coffin in the church of Lindisfarne; and in 698 his bones were taken up and deposited in a light chest or sarcophagus—in *levi arca*—and placed in the same spot, but above the pavement—

sed supra pavementum. The other kind of shrine is thus mentioned in the Irish Annals:—799, Positio reliquiarum Conlaid (Bishop of Kildare) in Scrin oir ocus airgid; 800, Positio reliquiarum Ronain filii Berich in Arca auri et argenti. The place where these shrines were deposited was always on the floor or pavement of the church near the altar. Cogitosus, who wrote the life of St Bridget between 799 and 835, tells us that the shrines containing the relics of Conlaid, Bishop of Kildare, and St Bridget, were on the right and left sides of the altar in the church of Kildare—In qua gloriosa amborum, hoc est, Episcopi Conlaed et hujus virginis S. Brigidæ corpora, a dextris et a sinistris altaris decorati, in monumentis posita ornatis vario cultu auri et argenti et gemmarum et pretiosi lapidis, atque coronis aureis et argenteis desuper pendentibus, requiescunt (Messing, p. 99). Now we find that when the wooden monastery was destroyed in 802, and Cellach the abbot transferred the headship of the community of Columcille to Kells, the bones of Saint Columba seem to have been taken up from his sepulchre and enshrined at the church of Sabhal Patrick on the shore of Loch Strangford; for in the Book of Armagh, written in 807, we have, “Sabhal Patricii ubi est conductio martirum id est ossuum Columbeille de Britannia;” and, in 818, Diarmaid, the abbot of Iona, who was appointed in room of Cellach, goes to Alban or Scotland with the shrine of Columcille, no doubt for the consecration of the new stone church. Dr Reeves has pointed out that there are two words in Irish used for the relics of a saint. The one is *martra*, which always means the bones, and is in the above notice Latinized *martirum*. The other is *minna*, which is used for objects associated with the saint and sanctified by his use. Dr Reeves gives us a list of them, eighteen in number. The chief were his Cross, his Psalter called the Cathach, and the cowl or Culebadh; and the white tunic he wore was still preserved in Iona in Adomnan’s time, and considered sacred (ii. 45). This word *minna* is usually translated reliquaries. Thus when Diarmaid goes to Alban in 818 with the shrine, the Annals tell us that he followed in 829 with the *minna* or reliquaries of Columcille.

Now we have some very valuable information as to the fate of the shrine of Saint Columba in the metrical life of St Blathmaic, who was martyred by the Danes in Iona in the year 825. It was written by Walafrid Strabo, who died in 849, and is therefore a contemporary account.

He tells us that the brethren, fearing an invasion of the Danes, and knowing that the shrine would be an object of desire to them from the rich metals in which it was sheathed—*pretiosa metalla queis Sancti sancta Columbæ ossa jacent*, took the shrine—*arca*—from its place—*de suis sedibus*—which was no doubt on the pavement of the sanctuary near the altar, and placed it on the ground in a hollowed tumulus under thick sod—*arcam tollentes tumulo terra posuere cavato cespite sub denso*. Martin, as we have seen, describes the supposed sepulchre in 703 as a cell; but it had a different appearance fifteen years earlier, when Sacheverell visited the island in 1688. He says, "On the west end stands the monument of Columbus, the apostle of these parts, and founder of the abbey, at present nothing but a ruinous heap of stones, and gives us no idea of what it was originally." In his time, therefore, the cell, with its stone cists, was hidden under a cairn, and it only requires to have been covered with turf to answer perfectly to the description given in the life of St Blathmaic of the "tumulus" in which the shrine was hidden. It would thus present the appearance of a small natural hillock outside the church, and might well baffle the search of the Danes. What adds to the probability of this being the place is, that the recent operations show the appearance of there having been a communication from the interior to this cell at its east end, and that there is sufficient space between the two cists for a person to pass between them. Sacheverell goes on to say—"At the end of this monument stands a little chapel, in which it is probable, in those ignorant and devout ages, they offered their prayers to God for the blessings of the gospel conveyed to them by this holy person." The recent excavations have disclosed the foundations of an oblong building, about 15 feet long by 11 feet broad, projecting from the west end of the cell and partly enclosing it. It is paved with stones, and among them are the two with Irish inscriptions already mentioned. The Irish Annals tell us that in 829, four years after the martyrdom of St Blathmaic, while the shrine appears to have been still in Iona, the Abbot Dairmiad went to Scotland with the *minna* or reliquaries of Collumcille, and took them back to Ireland in 831. In 849 his successor, Innrechtach, is mentioned as taking the *minna* or reliquaries to Ireland. Whether the Annals omit to notice the intermediate return of the reliquaries to Iona, or whether a part only was taken each time, it is difficult to say; but in 878 they tell us that the

Scrin, or shrine of Columcille, and all his *minna* or reliquaries, were brought to Ireland to escape the foreigners or Northmen. The shrine, therefore, had remained for fifty-three years in its concealment; and I am inclined to think that the two stone cists which are not sunk in the earth but placed on the level of the ground, were intended to conceal, the one the shrine with the bones, the other the *minna* or reliquaries. It is true that the Pictish Chronicle tells us that, in his seventh year, Kenneth M'Alpin removed the relics to the church he had built at Dunkeld, that is, about 850; but this was probably only a small part of the bones taken for the purpose of consecrating the church, for Dunkeld claimed the possession of only one bone, as appears from an incident in 1500, told by Mylne in his Lives of the Bishops.

The shrine does not appear to have remained long in Ireland, as in the life of St Cadroë his parents are said before his birth to have prayed at the shrine of St Columba. The scene of this life is undoubtedly in Scotland; and as Cadroë died in 976, this must have been about the beginning of the century. They may have knelt and prayed before the shrine in the little chapel, the foundations of which have just been discovered. The last mention of the chapel appears to be in the Magnus Barefoot's saga. It is said that he came in 1098 with his army to the Holy island, that is, Iona, "and gave quarter and peace to all men that were there, and to the property of every one. It has been said that King Magnus opened the little church of Columba, but did not go into it. He immediately locked the door, and said that no man should be so bold as to go in there, and that church has never been opened since." It is difficult to understand this of an ordinary church; but the expression is "the little kirk of Columba"—Kolumba kyrku hinni liotlu—and if the chapel enclosing the shrine is meant, the awe and reverence with which King Magnus regarded it is natural enough. The Saga was written about the year 1221, and if it remained closed for a hundred years after, and for nearly twenty subsequent to the founding of the Benedictine monastery, the entrance was probably filled up, and this will account for their being no appearance of an entrance from the outside in the foundations of the enclosing walls which have been uncovered.

How long the shrine and the reliquaries remained in the island we do not know; but we find that the reliquaries were in Ireland in 1090; and

the testimony of all who mention the shrine in the following century is, that it was then in Downpatrick in Ireland.

In the old tract called the "The Amra Coluimcille," we find the following statement. "In Dun or Downpatrick, again, some say the resurrection of Columcille will be, as the poet has said—

Hi (or Iona) with the multitude of its martra (or relics),
Of which was Colum, beauteous disciple :
He went out of it at last,
So that Dun is his blessed church."

St Berchan, writing in the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century, repeats, as a saying of St Columba—

My grace on Hy without crime,
And my soul in Derry,
And my body under the stone
Under which are Bridget and Patrick.

The story told by O'Donnel, in his life, on the same authority, as to how it came there, is this:—"Manderus, son of the King of Denmark, and leader of a fleet of Northmen, wasting the northern parts of Britain with fire and sword, came to Iona, and began searching for treasure. They found the shrine in which the relics of St Columba were, took it on board shut, and on their way to Ireland opened it, but finding nothing but bones and ashes, shut it and threw it into the sea. It was cast by the waves on the shore at Downpatrick, and the Abbot having found it, and, being instructed by a divine revelation that it contained the relics of St Columba, placed it along with those of St Patrick and St Bridget." But who Manderus was, or when this is supposed to have happened, there is nothing to show. The first part of the story is natural enough, and may contain the real fate of the shrine, and it may refer to the destruction of the stone monastery by the Danes in 986.

If, then, the small cell was the place where the shrine containing the bones of Columba was placed in 825, it will sufficiently account for the tradition that he was buried there, and for the veneration paid to his supposed sepulchre; but the question still remains, Where was the grave in which Saint Columba was buried before his remains were taken up and enshrined? Dr Reeves seems to think that it ought to be looked for in

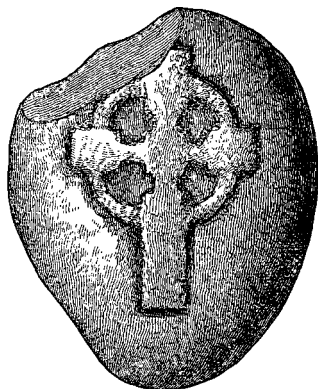
the Relic Orain, which he considers was the cemetery of the monastery; but I doubt very much whether it ought to be so regarded. It is situated at a considerable distance to the south even of the present ruins, and is entirely unconnected with them. I am inclined to think it was rather one of those ancient regal cemeteries similar to those which existed in Ireland, and eight of which are enumerated in the tract on ancient royal cemeteries contained in the "Lebar na h'Uidhri." It seems to have been principally devoted to the burial of kings and great chiefs, and to strangers of distinction who visited the island, while the members of the community appear to have been usually interred within the precincts of the monastery. The oldest traditions regarding it seem to view it as existing in the island before the establishment of this monastery by St Columba. Thus, our old chronicles, in stating that Kenneth M'Alpin, who died in 860, was buried in Iona, add, "where the three sons of Erc, Fergus, Loarn, and Angus, were buried." These were the founders of the Dalriadic Colony upwards of sixty years before the arrival of St Columba, and the annals of Ulster add confirmation to it when they tell us that in 784 the relics of the sons of Erc were removed to the royal cemetery of Tälten in Ireland. Fordun also tells us that Gabhran, King of Dalriada, who died in 560, was buried in Relic Orain, which shows the belief in his day. It may be said that the name of the cemetery, "Relic Orain," and the well-known legend of St Oran, which gave rise to it, is against this idea; but I would remark that this story makes its first appearance in the Irish life of St Columba, which is not older than the tenth century, if so old. It was not only entirely unknown to Adomnan, but is opposed to his narrative. According to the legend, St Oran was one of the twelve companions of Saint Columba, and sacrificed himself to remove a difficulty when the church of Iona was founded, and was the first person buried in the island. Now Adomnan, in describing the death of one of Saint Columba's monks, termed Brito, adds this expression, as having been used by Saint Columba—"who is the first of our fraternity that has died in this island;"—*qui primus apud nos in hac insula mortuus est* (lib. iii. c. 7), and Adomnan never once mentions the name of Oran or connects it with the cemetery. Further, in the old list of the twelve companions of Saint Columba appended to a MS. of Adamnan's life the name of Oran does not appear. The first mention of Relic Oran is in a gloss on the

metrical calendar of Angus the Culdee. In it Odhran or Oran, appears on 27th October, and the gloss states that he was "either Odhran, the priest of Tigh-Aireran in Meath, or Odhran of Letracha-Odhran in Muskerry, and of Icolumkille, that is, of Relic Odhrain" in Iona. This identifies the Oran of Relic Orain with Odhran of Letracha-Odhran in Ireland, and his death is recorded in the Irish annals as having taken place in October 548, fifteen years before Saint Columba landed in Iona. He was of the race of Dalriada, and churches in Dalriada may well have been dedicated to him. How the legend of Saint Oran first arose it is impossible now to tell; but I am inclined to think that when a Christian chapel was erected in the cemetery, it was after this legend had gained ground, and was therefore dedicated to him, and that hence his name became connected with the royal cemetery.

Archdeacon Munro, in the elaborate description he gives of Relic Oran in the year 1549, never once hints at any tradition of Saint Columba being buried in it.

If, then, we are to look for his grave within the precincts of his monastery, as indeed is implied in Bede's statement that "his body lay in the insular monastery," we must go to the situation of the original wooden monastery, which I consider to have been about a quarter of a mile north of the present ruins, and here I think we shall find some trace of it. At the old burying-ground there, now called Cladh an Discart, there are two pillar stones about five feet high and three feet apart, and at one time a third stone lay across the top, forming a cromleac-like structure, though probably it more resembled a rude entrance gate than a true cromleac; and in this burying-ground was found, some years ago, a very remarkable stone, now placed in the Abbey Church. It is figured below and shaped somewhat like a heart, about 1 foot 7 inches long by 1 foot 3 inches broad and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and having incised upon it an Irish cross of the oldest type. I think my friend, Mr James Drummond, was the first to suggest that Saint Columba may have been buried here, and that this stone may have been the pillow stone which was placed as a "titulus monumenti." I own that when I examined this stone last summer I was greatly impressed with the idea that it corresponded wonderfully in shape, size, and appearance with what one might expect the pillow stone to have been, when used as a monument, and the result of my examination of the whole

subject is to persuade me that Saint Columba's original monastery was situated here, that the pillar stone marked the position of his grave, and that this stone was in all probability the stone he used as a pillow, and which was after his death placed at his grave. I may add that there seems to have been some connection between this burying-ground and the cell where I consider his shrine was kept, for the former is also called Cladh Iain, or the burying-ground of Saint John, and at the west end of the building which projects from the cell, and which Sacheverell calls a chapel, is the remains of a cross which is known by the name of the Cross of Saint John.



Stone found at Cladh an Discart (1 foot 7 inches long).