

IV.

NOTICE OF A DRAWING OF A BRONZE CRESCENT-SHAPED PLATE,
WHICH WAS DUG UP AT LAWS, PARISH OF MONIFIETH, IN 1796.
By JAMES CRUIKSHANK ROGER, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

[This communication was sent in the form of a letter to Mr Anderson, and is now printed as it was read to the meeting.]

ALDBOROUGH HATCH, *February 21st*, 1880.

DEAR SIR,—I regret that after considerable search I am unable to lay my hand on the notes made some years ago in regard to the drawing sent you the other day. I must therefore trust to my memory for such facts as I can recall. My attention was first directed to the subject of the sculptured stones by the discovery of the Govan Sarcophagus, an account of which was communicated by me to the Society in 1856. Subsequently to this date, my father, Mr Charles Roger of Dundee, mentioned to me incidentally that, when a very young man residing on his father's farm of Laws, in the parish of Monifieth, he had made a drawing of a bronze ornament found in a large mound which had been intersected by a newly-formed drain. Within this tumulus, as I understood him to say, surrounded with a cist formed of stone slabs, was a complete skeleton, but how placed I do not recollect, also some implements of bone, the form and character of which I do not remember, although I distinctly recollect his description of the ornament. This he represented as formed in the likeness of a crescent, and engraved on both sides with other symbols frequently met with on the Scottish sculptured stones. One side of the ornament contained a *Celtic inscription in Runic letters!* a combination in regard to which, although Dr Wilson has maintained the contrary, I have always felt exceedingly sceptical. This drawing had been mislaid for years, but my father had no doubt of its existence, and promised to search for it on his return home, which he did, but without effect. In searching through his papers after his death in 1865, I found the drawing inside an old

letter into which, I presume, it had been accidentally folded. My father stated to me that the original ornament (which was accidentally broken by the spade of one of the farm labourers who was excavating the drain) passed into the hands of the late Sir Alexander Ramsay Irvine of Balmain, who owned the farm of Laws, of which my grandfather, Peter Roger, was the tenant. On one side, as will be seen from the accompanying woodcut (fig. 1), is the spectacle and Z symbol, with the head and neck of some animal, to which I shall not give a name. The reverse side

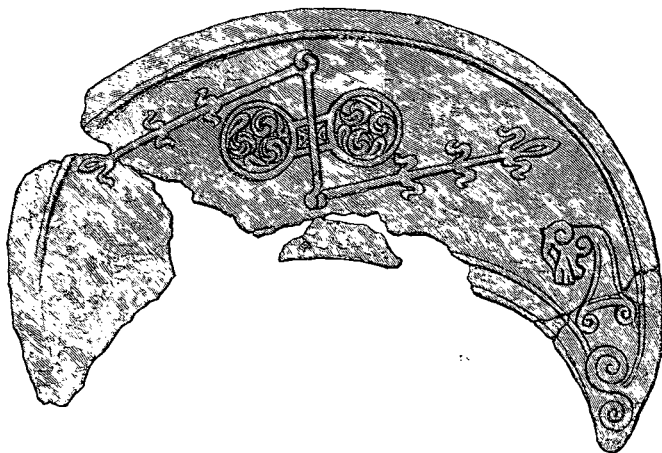


Fig 1. Obverse of Bronze Plate.

which is shown in the woodcut (fig. 2) is engraved with a species of ornament similar in character to that met with on a seal of Holyrood Abbey, appended to a charter of the year 1141. Dr Wilson supposes the figure on this seal to be a representation of "the original wooden church, reared by the brethren of the Holyrood Abbey, on their first clearance in the forest of Drumselch." It seems to me with greater probability to represent a structure of the 12th century, clumsily executed and drawn in bad perspective. This seal is described by Mr H. Laing in his first volume of "Ancient Scottish Seals." He considers it to represent "the style of

building of the period," that is the period indicated by the charter to which it is pendant. Placed on this ornamentation, as exhibited in the drawing, is an emblem consisting of an expanded form of the letter V with terminal foliage. The characters engraved on the ornament, so many as remain, are plainly of the northern runic type, and read **YFIMIL:Þ** being with much probability, as I think, the remains of a very ordinary form of Norse inscription [GR]MKITIL : THA[NA : RAIST], Grimkitil engraved this. It is similar in kind to an inscription in St Molio's cave, at Arran, NIKULOS : THANE : RAIST., Nicholas carved or engraved this, but in regard to which

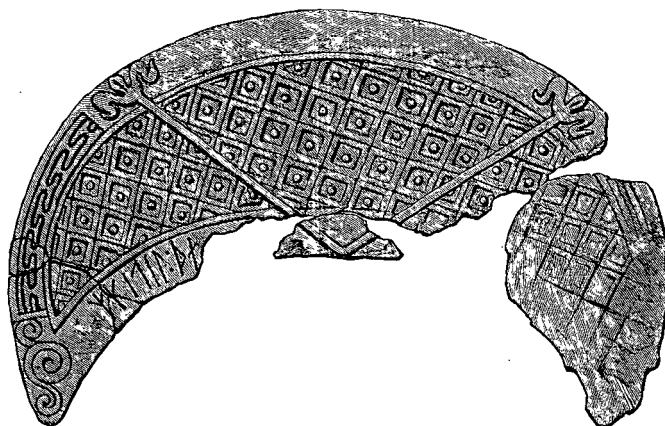


Fig. 2. Reverse of Bronze Plate.

Dr Wilson, confounding a carelessly-formed *t* with the letter *a*, renders the intermediate word *Celtic*, which he calls *ahane!* The drawing, which measures about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches at its greatest length, it was stated to me, is of the same size as the original. It was executed in 1796. My father was born in 1780.

My late father made drawings and sketches of the whole, or nearly all, of the sculptured stones of Angus, at a time when very few persons were giving much attention to the subject. Of these, at a later period, he contemplated the publication. His industry was, however, rendered abortive

through the more important labours of the late Mr Patrick Chalmers of Aldbar. A few of the drawings are in my possession, but most of them are scattered. One of them, that of the Strathmartine stone, was with his permission reproduced in the first volume of the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland" by the Spalding Club. Dr Stuart, in allusion to myself as the medium of communication, remarks: "This gentleman's father made sketches of *several sculptured stones of Angus* in his youth, and among others those at Strathmartin," &c.,—a statement which falls very far short of what he actually accomplished. With reference to the *form* of the ornament represented by the drawing there is a curious notice of a negative kind to be found in "A New History of Ethiopia," published in London in 1682. The author, in allusion to a custom among the ancients of placing sacred symbols on altars within churchyards says, "We shall produce a marble monument digged up in one of the Christian churchyards, who (*sic*) if you observe it, is like a trunk or arched bier covered with a linen cloth in folds, *not a half moon table* like a C, as Aringhus imagined."

I need hardly remind you of the silver ornaments of the Norries Law tumulus first described in 1839 by Mr George Buist, in a "Report" to the *Fifeshire Literary and Antiquarian Society*. A discovery similar in kind is related by Ferguson in his "Northmen in Cumberland and Westmoreland," of which he gives the following account:—"The most interesting barrow that has been opened in this district is one at a place called Beacon Hill, near Aspatria, which was explored, in 1790, by its proprietor, Mr Rigg. From its name and its commanding situation has arisen the very natural belief that this hill must have been the site of a beacon. But there is no other evidence of this fact; and as *Bekan* is a Scandinavian proper name found also in other instances in the district, and as this was evidently a Scandinavian grave, there can hardly be a doubt that the place takes its name from the mighty chief whose grave it was. On levelling the artificial mound, which was about 90 feet in circumference at the base, the workmen removed 6 feet of earth before they came to the natural soil, 3 feet below which they found a vault, formed with two large round stones at each side, and one

at each end. In this lay the skeleton of a man measuring 7 feet from the head to the ankle bone—the feet having decayed away. By his side lay a straight two-edged sword corresponding with the gigantic proportions of its owner, being about 5 feet in length, and having a guard elegantly ornamented with inlaid silver flowers. The tomb also contained a dagger, the hilt of which appeared to have been studded with silver, a two-edged Danish battle-axe, part of a gold brooch of semi-circular form, an ornament apparently of a belt, part of a spur, and a bit shaped like a modern snaffle. Fragments of a shield were also picked up, but in a state too much decayed to admit of its shape being made out. Upon the stones composing the sides of the vault were carved some curious figures which were probably magical runes.”¹ On the supposition that the symbols are Scandinavian, or at least that they originated among a people of Scandinavian ancestry, let me draw your attention to the fact that many of the Scottish standing stones and sepulchral mounds are associated with personal names of the northmen, for example such names as Bruce’s Howe, near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire; the Cat stanes found in various parts of Scotland; Clach stein, island of Lewis; Corrieknows, near Annan, Dumfriesshire; St Orland’s stone, at Cossins (plate xv of the *Sculptured Monuments of Angus*); Hawkstane, at St Madoes, Perthshire; Hirdmane stein, in Orkney; Mar’s Hill, on the line of the old road from Stirling to Queensferry; Stone of Odin, near the loch of Stennis in Orkney, and the like, in which, as I think, are found the Icelandic personal names Bresi, Kött-r, Klak, Kóri, Erland, Hauk-r, Herd-mani, Már, Odin, &c. It is not doubted that these stone monuments were at one time ascribed to the Danes, Mr Buist says, without sufficient authority—*quod erat demonstrandum*. Other facts might be adduced, as the inverted boat formed monuments of Meigle and Govan.

¹ The original account, which Mr Ferguson follows to some extent, was communicated to the Society of Antiquaries in 1790, and is printed in the “*Archæologia*,” vol. x. p. 112. It says nothing about “magical runes,” but the markings themselves are figured. They have no resemblance to runes. It is evident that the account is not strictly accurate as to the dimensions and character of the sword, the skeleton, and vault, &c.—EDS.

Not the least important is the circumstance noted by Baring-Gould that while on a visit to Iceland he was shown a large stone which contained a modified form of the figure Z. Here are the facts as related by himself: "The priest informed me of the existence of a large stone lying on its side, and curiously carved, in the *tún* of Thor-father on the opposite side of the river. I at once crossed the river with Grimr, and visited the farm. We were shown the stone in question, which is about 12 feet long. The only marks on it are these

The larger of the two is certainly intended for Thor's hammer, a magical character. Whether this stone were used in heathen times for sacrificial purposes, or at a later period for the incantations of witchcraft, I cannot say."



Dr Stuart's statement that Christian crosses were frequently carved upon previously existing pagan monuments is evidently an idea derived mediately through the pages of Dr Conyers Middleton. The learned librarian of Cambridge University, in a paper printed in London in 1729, entitled "A Letter from Rome showing an exact conformity between Popery and Paganism," &c., says, at page 33, "'Tis certain that in the earlier ages of Christianity, the *Christians* often made free with the *sepulchral stones of heathen monuments*, which being ready cut to their hands, they converted to their own use." For this Dr Middleton cites the authority of Mabillon, *Iter. Ital.*, p. 225, and Aringhus, "Account of Subterraneous Rome," lib. 13 c. 22. I confess I fail to perceive the application to the Scottish sculptured stones although some may think otherwise.

Before concluding, it occurs to me to place upon record the fact that the Govan sarcophagus, to which I have referred, with one or two others similar in kind, were originally placed within semi-circular arches formed within the substance of the wall of the ancient parish church of Govan, a structure of the Norman period, which was removed in 1762. My informant, an octogenarian, was the grandson of the contractor who carted away the original building. He had a perfect recollection of all the facts as related by his progenitor. I stated in my paper to the Antiquaries in de-

ference to the opinion of the late Dr Leishman, but contrary to my own judgment, that a mark on the hind quarter of the horse sculptured on the sarcophagus was probably an indication of a caparison. I have no doubt that the mark in question is that of the mason who sculptured this remain. I am disposed to believe that the sarcophagus found at Govan is not older than the beginning of the 12th century.—I remain, yours truly,

J. C. ROGER.

[Sir Alexander Ramsay of Balmain has stated, in answer to an inquiry addressed to him by Mr Anderson, that he has no knowledge of the existence of such a bronze plate, and had never heard of its discovery].
