

IV.

NOTICE OF AN ANCIENT CELTIC RELIQUARY ORNAMENTED WITH INTERLACED WORK. BY PROFESSOR DUNS, D.D., *Vice-President*.

The Reliquary (fig. 1) which I have now the pleasure of presenting to the Society is from Ireland. It was found some years ago associated with bronze implements of various shapes in the Shannon, in a bed of silt about a foot thick, lying above gravel, underneath which many stone im-

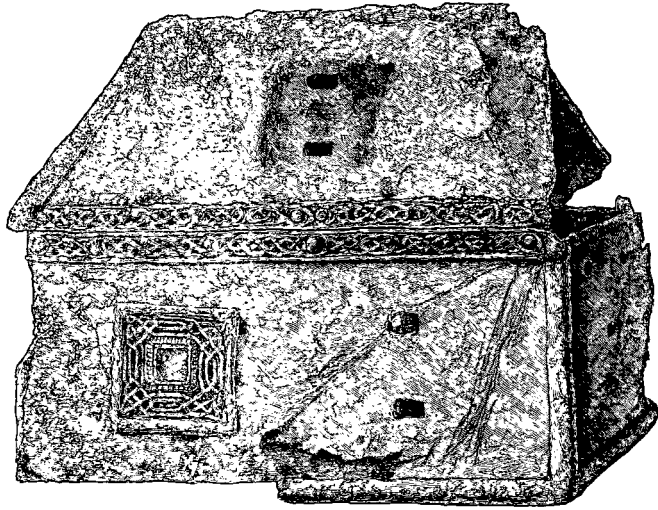


Fig. 1. Bronze Reliquary found in the Shannon (4 inches long).

plements were discovered. Its shape is one frequently followed in tombs—a rectangular chest with a gable-ended cover and sides sloped both at the back and in front. It is 4 inches long, 2 broad, $1\frac{2}{3}$ ths of an inch deep, the height of the gable-end being the same as the depth of the box. The measurement thus corresponds with that of the Monymusk reliquary

recently described by Mr Joseph Anderson. The bronze occurs in two distinct layers, the outer layer being very thin, the inner comparatively strong. The interior was, no doubt, as in the Monymusk specimen, lined with wood. Only one plate of bronze has been used for the inner layer both of the body and the sloping part of the lid severally. When put in shape and brought together the different parts were strengthened by narrow bands of metal being firmly riveted along the edges. This was the skeleton, so to speak, on which the outer layer, consisting of eight pieces and destined to bear the ornament, was placed. These were securely fastened at their edges by a beading, rounded on one side and having a flute below into which the edges fitted. The ornamentation of this beading is very indistinct, but, so far as it can be made out, it seems to have consisted of alternate open and filled-in loops, the latter suggesting a row of tiny knobs. On the upper edges of the body of the reliquary, and between the beading on the ends, are flat bands of bronze, a little thicker than the flat bands on the edges of the first layer, but of the same breadth. These are fastened by three strong rivets whose knobs externally form part of the ornament. These bands have plain edges, and between them the beautiful characteristic interlaced work occurs. The bar along the top of the lid, and the provision on the ends of the chest for the strap by which the reliquary was hung round the neck of the wearer, have disappeared, but we can form a fair guess at what they may have been by a glance at the Monymusk reliquary. The provision for the jewellery is simple but effective—consisting of three equal sized squares of ornamented bronze whose edges are corner-clubbed, two on the front of the box and one in the centre of the front bevel of the lid. One only of these remains, but the marks of the other two are distinct. From the one preserved we see the substantial way in which they had been fastened. Two rings from the square reached inside the box, where they were held by passing through them a closely-fitting metal pin. In the centre of these squares was a smaller one for the reception of a comparatively large stud or jewel. The ornamentation which surrounds the nest for the jewel is very pretty, and of a sort fitted to give an appearance of depth to the large square

itself, and of prominence to the centre stud. On the end of the reliquary where a portion of the thin outer plate still remains, traces of ornament may be seen, but these are doubtful.

So far as I am aware the literature bearing on Irish reliquaries is neither extensive nor important. In the course of a conversation which followed the reading of a paper, at a meeting of the Royal Irish Academy in 1838, by Sir William Betham, on two remarkable pieces of antiquity at Cong, in the county of Mayo, "Mr Petrie made some remarks in which he pointed out the original uses of ancient reliquaries, and it was resolved that Mr Petrie be requested to prepare a paper for the Transactions of the Academy on the history of these reliquaries, in order that the valuable material he had collected respecting them might be preserved and made more generally known." (Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, 1838, p. 211.) It does not appear that this was ever done, but in his elaborate and exhaustive inquiry into the origin and uses of the Round Towers of Ireland, he notices certain shrines of the 8th and 9th centuries, in gold and silver. These, no doubt, may have been larger than those worn on the breast, but it is to be remembered that the term shrine-temple (or place of worship) was anciently used for the mere model of the temple, made to be carried on the person, or from place to place, as a reliquary. This, indeed, is countenanced by the well-known passage, Acts xix. 24; though some hold the "silver shrines" were only images of the goddess. But the use of the words *ναός* and *ἱερόν*, in this connection, is opposed to this view. Had the image alone been referred to we might have expected to have the term *ἀφιδρῦμα*, the equivalent of the Latin *statua*, employed here, as it is by some writers, in the sense of *statuette*—*Ἀρτίμιδος ἀφιδρῦματα*. Moreover, there is proof that a diminutive image of the Roman legionary eagle was carried about in a small model temple. The "silver shrines" may thus have been either models of the temple alone, or models enclosing the image, or portable statuettēs. Coins of Ephesus are extant having the likeness of Nero on the obverse, and a representation of the temple of Diana on the reverse.¹

¹ It would lead us away from our present purpose to illustrate these statements,

There are other two reliquaries which might be compared with that now under notice with the view of bringing out its shape and ornamentation, but I merely mention them here. These are the Monymusk specimen already referred to, and a specimen (fig. 2), evidently Irish, figured by Worsaae, on which there is some fine Celtic ornamentation ("Nordiske Oldsager i det Kongelige Museum, Kjobenhaven," p. 211). Some questions of considerable interest, as to Celtic ornamentation are referred to by

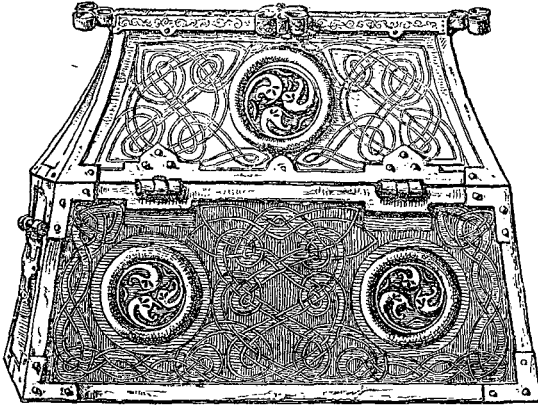


Fig. 2. Reliquary in Copenhagen Museum, $\frac{1}{2}$.

Dr Reeves ("Ulster Journal of Archæology," vol. viii. p. 210), in a short paper on "Early Irish Calligraphy," introductory to a translation of Dr Ferdinand Keller's monograph on "Illuminations and Fac-similes." (*Bilder und Schriftzüge*) from "Irish Manuscripts in Swiss Libraries."

"The principles of Irish ornamentation, says Keller, consist—(1.) In a single band or a number of bands, interlaced diagonally and symmetrically; so as to form by their crossings a great variety of different patterns. In common parlance, ornaments known as "pseudo-bands" (*Zweifelstrike*).

though this might be done very fully. (See Montfaucon's "L'Antiquité Expliquée," vol. i. p. 147; and also the reference notes, chapter xvi. of "The Life and Epistles of Paul," by Conyb. and Hows., 1856,—references which I have verified. These, out of others, are given as authorities easily accessible).

(2.) In one or two exceedingly fine spiral lines, which wind round each other, and meet in the centre (*Mittelpunkte zusammentressen*), while their ends run off again, and form new spirals. (3.) In various bird, lizard, serpent, and dog-like animals, of a fantastic kind, often in a repulsive way stretched out lengthwise, and interlaced with each other, their tails and tongues being drawn out into bands. (4.) In a row of broken diagonal strokes (*gebrochenen diagonalstriefen*), which form different systems of lattice-work (*gitterwerk*), like to a kind of Chinese ornament. (5.) In panelling (*täfel-werk*) for the most part of triangular pieces (*dreieckigen feldern*), or other geometric figures as if to represent a draught-board (*brettspiel*), or a mosaic of parti-coloured stones."

Though these principles of ornamentation are drawn from a comparison of many examples in Irish MSS., they are equally applicable to the ornamentation met with on Irish bronzes. That Dr Reeves accepts Keller's principles without criticism, or hesitation, adds to their value. I have quoted them mainly with the view of supplying another illustration from the ornamentation on this reliquary. Keller,¹ G. F. Waagen, and other continental archaeologists trace this style to an eastern type. Herzog, referring to its presence on certain reliquaries sets it down as Byzantine ("Real Encyclopedia," Bd. xix. 5, 4). Were we to give any great weight to this theory of an eastern prototype for Celtic ornamentation some suggestive instances of, what might be held, its persistency under wide modifications might be adduced from the ornamentation of the "Codex Alexandrinus," one of the oldest and best uncial MSS. of the Sacred text. The date of this codex is about the middle of the 5th century. A fac-simile of the manuscript is being published by the Trustees of the British Museum, where it is deposited. From the parts already published the illustrations on the table have been selected. The

¹ "Alle diese Ornamente sind gewöhnlich in bestimmt abgegränzte Felder vertheilt. . . . Die schwierigste Aufgabe in diesen Gebilden sind ohne Zweifel die Spiralen. Es sind diess eigentliche Bravour-Stüoche, die von der ausserordentlichen Sicherheit der hand des Künstlers einen glänzenden Bieweis liefern. . . . Sie muss aus dem Oriente herkommen, oder wenigstens dort ihr Vorbild haben."—*Mittheilungen der Antiquarischen Gesellschaft in Zurich*, Band vii. pp. 73, 74.

resemblance of some of these to the ornamentation represented on the illustrative figures given by Keller is curious. I refer to such instances as the representation of dotted panelling on the border of the portrait of "St Matthew," and of interlaced work on the same (Taf. i.); of what one might almost venture to call forms of Greek frieze in triangular spaces (Taf. iii.); trellis-like work in compartments (Taf. iv.); ornamentation by diagonal strokes (Taf. v. vi. viii.); and of interlaced work (Taf. viii.) nearly, if not altogether, the same as that shown in the Codex. I am quite aware of the temptation to make too much of such resemblances, and to find in mere accidental varieties modifications of type. In art there is constant, though not continuous, growth. But with all growth there is change. I do not say progress, because the change might be in the direction of degradation. Besides, progress depends on the prevalence of forces not always self-recording. And even when they are, they are often too complex to be easily estimated and defined. You may not be able to hold such forces responsible for individual characteristics, and yet they may give that tone to an age out of which these characteristics spring. It is, however, a mistake to suppose that change may be measured, or is determined, by mere lapse of time. The modern deviation from the ancient may bear no proportion to the interval of time which separates them.

There are many collateral topics suggested by the examination of this reliquary, which, though full of interest and of material for varied exposition and illustration, still await exhaustive discussion in the literature of Christian antiquities and Christian art. Such, for example, as the definite signification of the terms *θήκη*, *ιεροθήκη*, *ἐγκολπιον*, *pyxis*, *pyxidula*, *capsa*, *capsula*, *capsella*, *scrinium*, *scriniolum*, &c.; the origin of relic worship, with the various forms of reliquaries; its widespread practice in heathen times, and the influence of the pagan practice on the early church; the periods at which it was most in vogue and the character of contemporary Christian thought and art; its power in begetting and furthering practices seldom supposed to have any connection with it and the like.