

NOTE ON A SMALL BRASS OR BRONZE VESSEL FOUND IN ISLAY,
EXHIBITED BY MRS RAMSAY OF KILDALTON. BY ARTHUR
MITCHELL, M.D., LL.D., SECRETARY.

This rare and interesting object was presented to Mrs Ramsay in 1880 by Mr J. Macfadzean, Collector of Excise, Campbelton, who had obtained it from the finder, Mr John O'Gorman, a young gentleman also in the service of the Inland Revenue.

After Mrs Ramsay sent the vase for exhibition to the Society, Mr Macfadzean was good enough to put me into communication with Mr O'Gorman, from whom I have received, in a letter dated 23d February 1881, the following particulars as to the finding of the vase. Mr O'Gorman says:—"There is a small uninhabited island called Texa, about two miles by one in size, off the mainland, that is, off the island of Islay. There is an old ruin on the centre of the island, which much resembles some ruins I have seen in Ireland, and I make no doubt was at one time the habitation of some of the early Christian monks. There is a tradition in Islay that the little island belongs to Ireland, because no snakes are found in it, and it is said that St Patrick when he came over from Derry to visit some of his brother Christians, expelled the snakes at their request.

"Through curiosity I one day dug up part of the floor of the old ruin, and after removing about 18 inches of soil, the spade touched something hard, which I found was a skull. I got another skull some time after, and several bones, apparently shin bones. I visited the place after this with a small crow-bar, which enabled me to get up a slab about 2½ feet long, on which was rudely cut the image of a saint. I did not find the little brass article exactly in the old ruin, but about 50 yards from it. I was removing some stones in pursuit of an otter when I found it. I had removed a great number, and had dug down into the earth fully a yard when the article came up on my spade. It is scratched on one side by the spade, and it suffered also by being jammed by the spade

against the stones. Some gentlemen who saw it were of opinion that it might have been a lachrimatory."

The following woodcut (fig. 1) which is full size, shows the form and character of the little brass or bronze vessel, which weighs slightly over 4 ounces, and has been cast and roughly finished.

There is in the Museum a small metal vessel of the same character as the one exhibited by Mrs Ramsay, but all that can be said regarding it

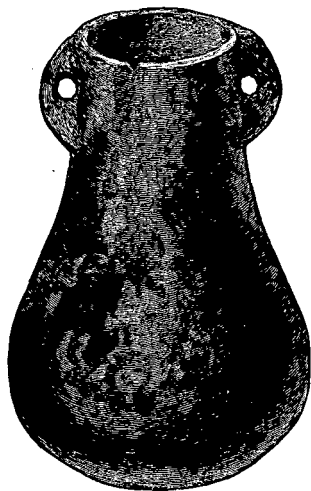


Fig. 1. Small Brass or Bronze Vessel found in the Island of Texa, off the Island of Islay. Full size. Now in the possession of Mrs Ramsay of Kildalton.

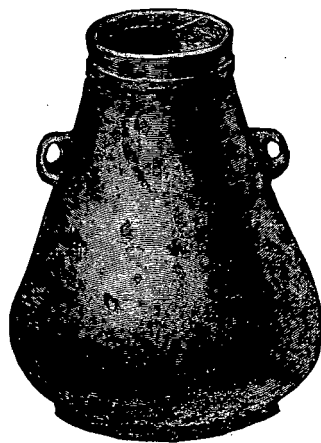


Fig. 2. Small Brass or Bronze Vessel, forming part of the Bell collection of Irish Antiquities purchased for the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1868. Full size.

is that it is believed to have been found in Ireland. It is shown in the full sized woodcut (fig. 2). It weighs slightly over 3 ounces, and has been cast like the Texa vase, but is somewhat more carefully finished than it is.

The first of these specimens (fig. 1) is globular below, and is apparently made to be suspended by the perforated lugs with which it is provided.

The second specimen (fig. 2) is flattened below, so as to admit of its standing securely on a level surface, but, like the first, it is provided with perforated lugs by which it can be suspended.

A third specimen is figured and described by Miss Stokes in vol. ii. of the "Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language,"¹ issued by the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland. This specimen is also flattened below, but it too is provided with perforated lugs. It is shown in the full-sized woodcut (fig. 3) which follows. Miss Stokes calls

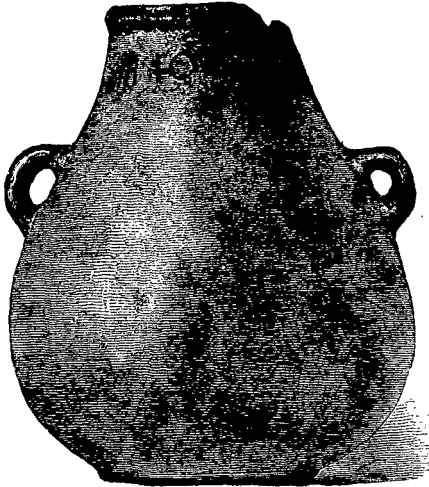


Fig. 3. Small Brass or Bronze Vessel, called by Miss Stokes an "Altar Vessel from Island Magee." Full size.

it an "Altar Vessel," and regards it as a relic of the old ecclesiastical establishment on "Island Magee," near Larne, county Antrim. This specimen is of special importance, because of the inscription which runs round the neck and which makes it almost certain that it is a church

¹ "Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language," chiefly collected and drawn by George Petrie, LL.D., and edited by M. Stokes, 4to, Dublin 1872, vol. ii. p. 119. The engraving is reproduced here by permission of Miss Stokes.

relic of some sort. The inscription, as given by Miss Stokes, runs thus :—

OR DO M[AC]JETAIN AU BROLCHAIN

which means—*Pray for MacEtain, descendant of Brolchán.*

With reference to the inscription and the vessel itself Miss Stokes writes :—

“*Etain* is the genitive singular of *Etan*; *au* (now *ó*) is the dative singular of the Old Irish *ae*, later *ua*; and *Brolchain* is the genitive singular of *Brolchán*.

“This name has not been identified with that of any person connected with Island Magee. There were two members of the family of O’Brolchain belonging to Armagh, and several of this name connected with the church of Kells.

“The vessel on which the inscription occurs is of bronze, and measures $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height and 7 inches in circumference. ‘Its workmanship,’ as Dr Petrie remarks, ‘is of great beauty, being not only of graceful proportion, but as round and smooth as if it had been turned by a lathe.’ It is believed to have been an altar vessel, and was found in the ruins of an ancient church on Island Magee, and fell into the possession of an old woman in the neighbourhood, who used it for many years to hold oil for her spinning-wheel. It is now in possession of Mr Bell, of Dungannon, who kindly lent it to the Editor for illustration.”¹

It was from Mr Bell that the Society obtained the specimen shown in fig. 2. The inscribed specimen, fig. 3, was no longer a part of his collection when it was purchased for the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1868.

It appears from what has been said—

(1.) That the brass or bronze vessel found in Texa by Mr O’Gorman is not a unique object, but is one of a *class* of relics—thus acquiring increased interest and importance.

¹ This vessel is also described and illustrated by Dr Petrie in the “Dublin Penny Journal,” vol. ii. p. 412.

(2.) That it is probably a vessel which was at one time used in the service of the church. The facts that two of the three specimens referred to were found in or near old ecclesiastical buildings, and that one of them has on it a christian inscription, give strong support to this opinion.