

III.

ARCHÆOLOGICAL NOTES ON DUNVEGAN CASTLE. BY LOCKHART BOGLE, F.S.A. SCOT.

The statement of Dr Johnson and others that "MacRailt, the Dane" had built a castle at Dunvegan in the 9th century is one upon which it will not be difficult to form an opinion. The earliest date that can be assigned to the original keep now existing on the top of the rock goes back to the 14th century. It is possible, however, that the summit may have been originally crowned by one of those mysterious brochs, of which there are the ruins of five in the neighbourhood, on the shores of Loch Dunvegan, viz., Duns Thotaig, Osdale, Colbost, Borreraig, and Corlorach.

In his description of the castle, Boswell (1773) says:—"There is a very large unfinished pile, four storeys high, which, we were told, was here when Leod, the first of this family, came from the Isle of Man, married the heiress of the MacRailts, the ancient possessors of Dunvegan, and afterwards acquired by conquest as much land as he had got by marriage."² The above-mentioned ruinous building is shown

¹ *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland*, sub voce Dunfillan.

² On the other hand, Skene, in his account of *Clan Leod* (Skene's *Highlanders*, vol. ii. p. 273), states that for the Norwegian origin of the Macleods there is not the vestige of authority, and, so far from this account of their origin being sanctioned

by Grose in his view of the castle (1790) (fig. 1), and is undoubtedly the oldest part of the castle as it stands. It was simply a massive oblong keep, with a small but lofty tower embedded in the north side. From its structure we know it to have been built in the 14th century, and it was restored to use again about the end of last century. The Macleods of Glenelg, otherwise styled of Harris and Dunvegan, had charters of David II. (1329-71) so this part of the castle which belongs to the 14th century must have been built by them. I give a drawing, founded on measurements and research, of the probable appearance of the castle about this time, with its sea-wall girdling the rock. All is suggestive of nothing but vast strength and isolation (fig. 2).

Any vestige of what might be supposed to have been Macraill's fortress (except, perhaps, what seems a curious elevation of the sea-wall to the north) does not exist. Secular building in stone and lime was introduced into England, and later into Scotland, by the advent of Norman influence; and the statement made by Dr Johnson and others that the present keep was built in the 9th century by the Danes is quite untenable.

In the sea-gate is presented an interesting study. A drawing, looking towards it from the sea, is given (fig. 3). The larger original arched gateway can easily be discerned, enclosing the smaller door-like entrance, which, from its appearance, I attribute to the time of Rory More (15th century). The dimensions of the original entrance are 7 feet 3 inches wide by 8 feet 6 inches high. Until the time of the 19th Macleod (about 1750) this entrance was the only means of access to the castle,

by the *Chronicle of Man*, that record is destitute of the slightest hint of any such origin, or even of any passage which could be assumed as a ground for such an idea. Nor does the tradition of Norwegian descent appear to be very old, for in a manuscript genealogy of the Macleods, written in the 16th century, there is not a trace of it. From the earliest period in which they are mentioned in history, they have been divided into two great families of Macleod of Glenelg or Harris, and Macleod of Lewis, the former being of old the proper chief of the clan. They are said to have acquired the extensive lands in Skye (which they still hold) by marriage with the daughter of Macraill or MacArailt, one of the Norwegian nobles of the Isles, and from this connection, and the succession which was obtained by it, arose probably the tradition of their being descended from the Norwegian Kings of the Isles.

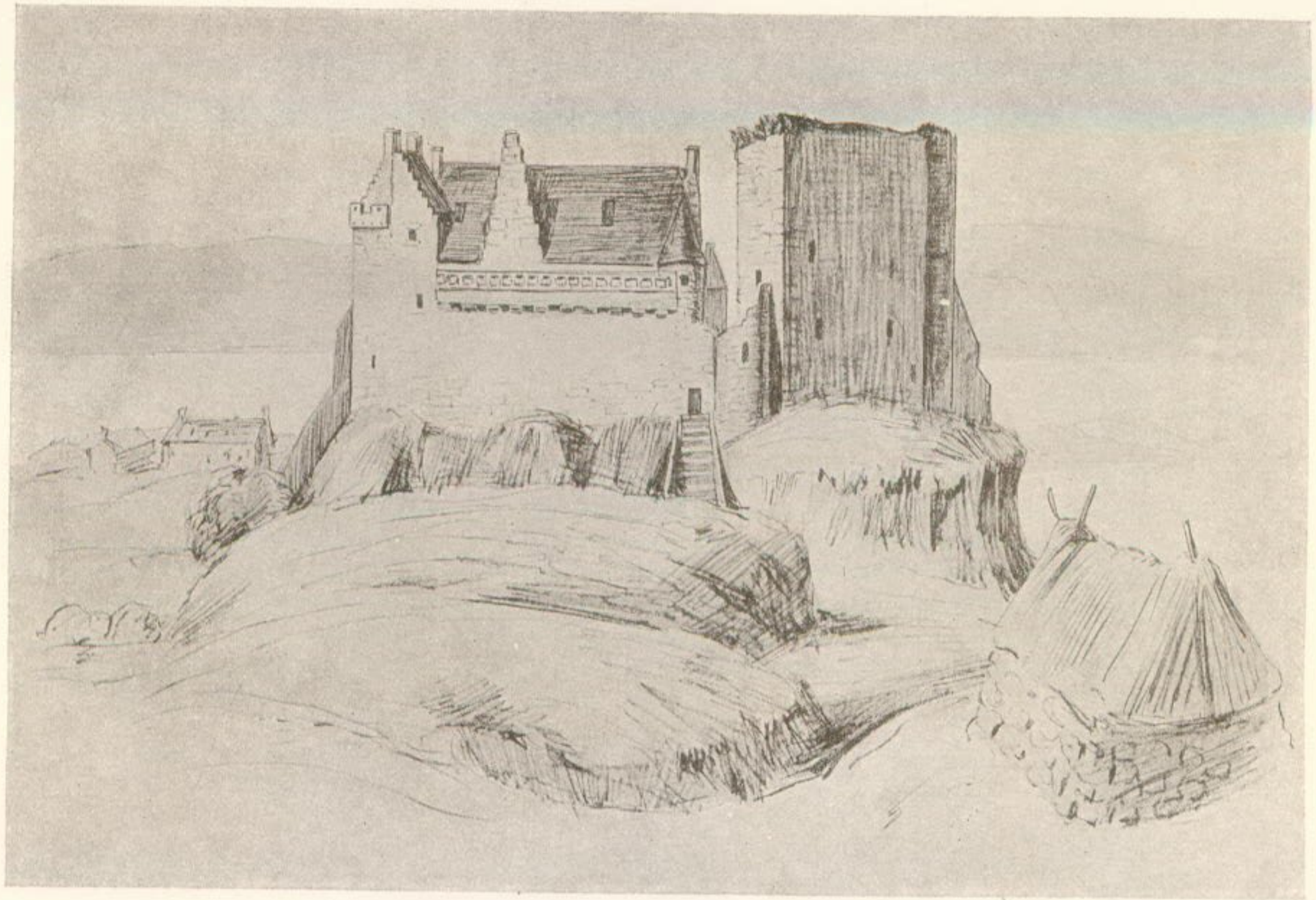


Fig. 1. Dunvegan, as shown by Grose (1790).

and to it a rude flight of steps led up from the edge of the sea. A somewhat similar arrangement existed at Eilan Donan Castle, in Kintail. Boswell says the only approach to the castle, before the opening of the land-gate, was by boat to the sea-gate.

In the drawing (fig. 3) can be easily seen the large triangular key-stone of the arch, the other stones of which radiate but little. At one side are two large vertical stones forming the cheeks; those on the

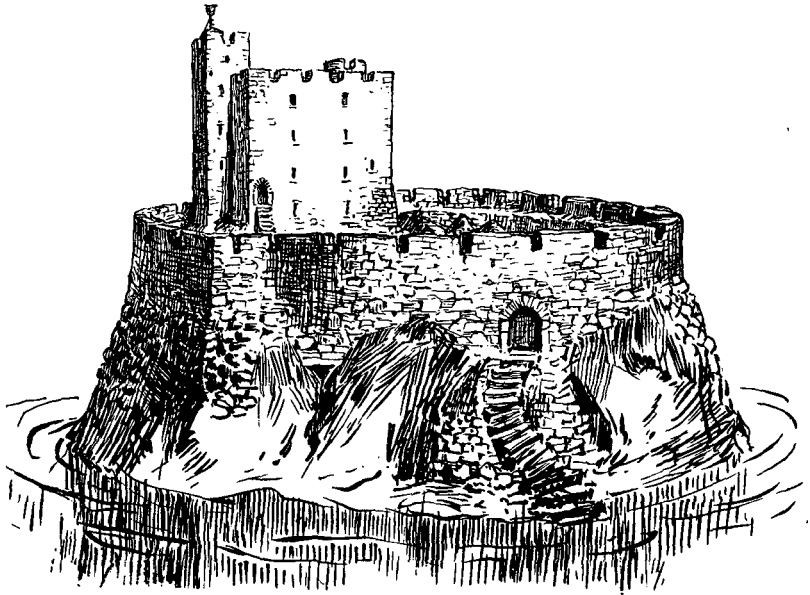


Fig. 2. Dunvegan in the 14th century.

other side have been removed in reducing the entrance to its present size, which is 6 feet 4 inches high by 3 feet 8 inches wide. The cheeks of the smaller entrance, though now so much worn, have been nicely carved, faced, and beaded.

Let us now look at another drawing, showing the same gate from the inside (fig. 4). Here is additional evidence of the gateway having been built up. On the right, part of a wedge-shaped mass of masonry

has fallen away, revealing a very large beam- or bolt-hole (9 inches square), which I sounded to the depth of 10 feet. This hole was intended for the bolt of the original wide arched entrance. During the hours of night, or whenever a surprise was possible, the massive beam would be drawn from its recess and the end inserted in a hole



Fig. 3. The Sea-gate, Dunvegan.

on the opposite side of the gateway, thus effectually securing a door which must have been of enormous size and strength. The present door and bolt are modern. Two sets of former hinges for this smaller door are still visible.

Above the door can be seen the lower fringe of the outer arch, and

between this and the horizontal lintel across the door stones have been loosely built. On the left side, the arch has been also built into the masonry brought to the portecullis grooves. I suggest that these alterations were carried out in the time of Sir Roderick Macleod, a



Fig. 4. The Sea-gate, Dunvegan, from the inside.

chief who flourished in Queen Mary's period. This old ponderous door may have been an iron "grille" or grating, such as is to be seen in Fyvie Castle and others.

I now give a plan of the ground-floor of the castle. What is black is of ancient date (fig. 5). The walls of what are now the cellars in the north and oldest part of the building are of the thickness of 11 feet, and originally they formed one large hall, presumably the servants' hall, with arched roof, and a beautifully arched fireplace (now bricked

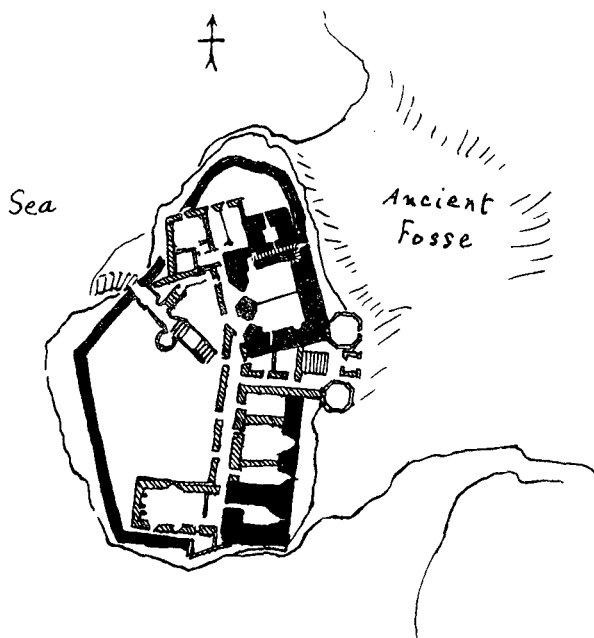


Fig. 5. Dunvegan Castle—plan of ground-floor.

up) at the south end. The modern cellar-doors would be windows to the hall. Immediately above it was another hall of the same size, which would be for the chief and his guests. The entrance to the keep itself was through the thickness of the north wall on a higher level than the ground-floor (as I have shown it in fig. 2). The passage

is a yard wide in a wall 9 feet thick, and is still used, leading into the chief's hall. On looking at the plan, a primitive stair will be seen passing through the thickness of the north wall, communicating on the way with the dungeon by a narrow slit in the wall (near which is a bricked-up aperture, which might repay exploration). This stair has a loop-hole at its angle, and communicates between the hall above and the lower hall.

The dungeon, as seen on the plan, is the ground-floor of the small tower. It is 4 feet 4 inches by 6 feet, and can only be entered through a square opening in the small chamber above, secured by a large stone with iron ring, and it extends into the gloom below, where it has been excavated out of the solid rock to the depth of 16 feet. It has a narrow loop-hole facing the north, but high up near the arched roof, so that the inmate of this horrible prison must have been enveloped in darkness or semi-twilight on the brightest day. Here it is known "*Ian Dubh*," one of the early chiefs, who waded through the blood of his nearest relatives to attain the chieftainship, had imprisoned some of his victims. The bottom of the dungeon was strewn with the bones of sheep, which may in bygone times have been thrown to the prisoners.

From the elevated entrance represented in fig. 2 there enters a flight of steps already mentioned through the thickness of the north wall to a high arched space, 5 feet wide, which enters the upper hall. Off this arched space, and as a continuation of the steps, is an opening only 21 inches wide entering a chamber above the dungeon 6 feet by 11 feet, furnished with two loop-holes, and the stone and iron ring before alluded to. Entering the upper hall again at the south-west corner is a curious chamber in the wall, 4 feet 6 inches by 3 feet 6 inches, which has finely dressed cheek-stones, hinges for a good door, and a small loop-hole, and recess opposite. This probably was a place for concealment of valuables in times of danger,—in fact, a kind of mediæval safe. The upper hall had, no doubt, the four windows it now has, but they must have been much smaller. The two storeys above it are now fitted up as bedrooms. Each chamber of the small turret above the dungeon has loop-holes, and communicates with the corresponding storey of the keep. In one chamber is a well-contrived latrine—

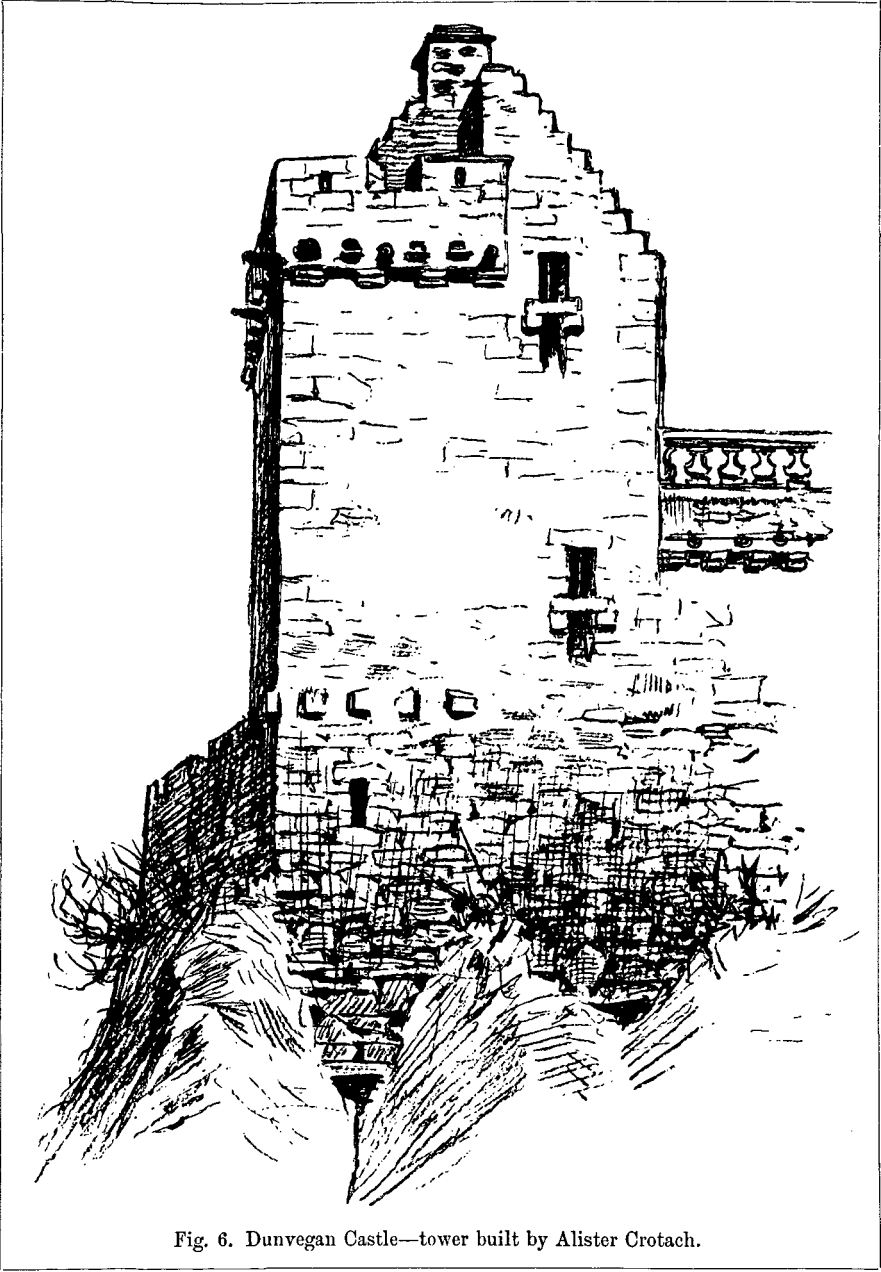


Fig. 6. Dunvegan Castle—tower built by Alister Crotach.

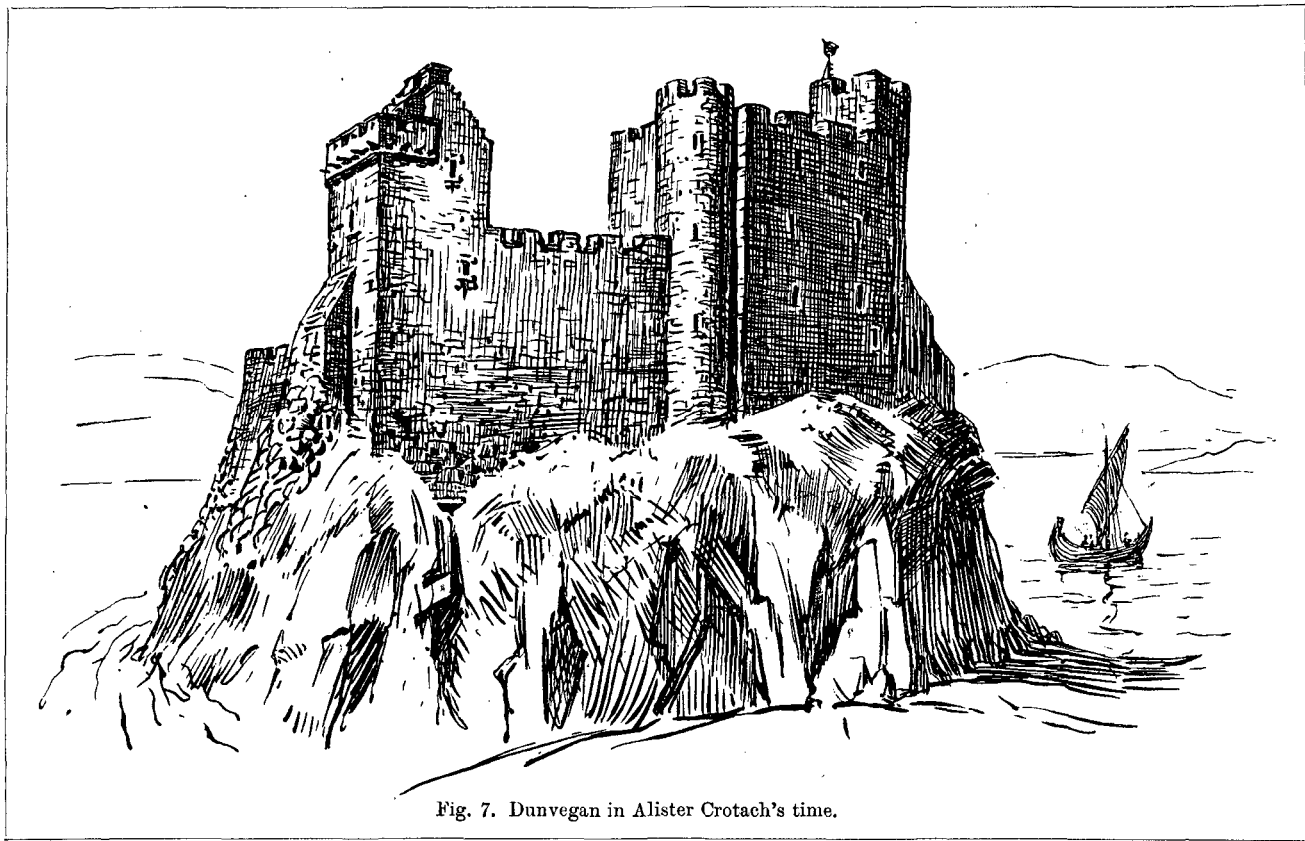


Fig. 7. Dunvegan in Alister Crotach's time.

this latter alone going far to determine the date of erection. It seems that an epidemic of building strong square keeps raged in the Isles in

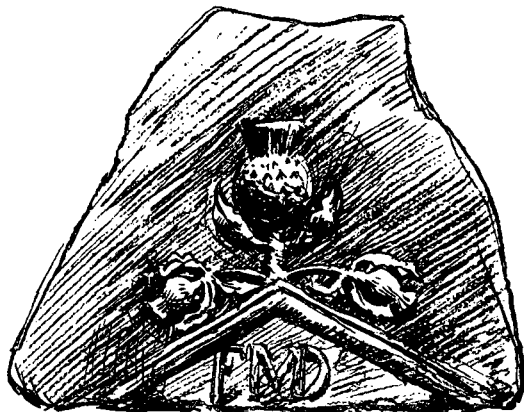


Fig. 8. Carved fragment, Dunvegan.

the 14th century, when the Scots began to raise their heads after the battle of Bannockburn.

"*Alister Crotach*," or *The Humpbacked*, built early in the 16th century



Fig. 9. Carved fragment, Dunvegan.

a very strong square tower, of which I give a drawing (fig. 6). It remains to-day outwardly as it was raised by this chief, a beautiful piece

of mediæval castle building. A very steep and narrow winding stair communicating with the three chambers of the tower ascends to the crow-stepped roof. There is a passage round the edge of the roof, within the raised outer wall of the tower. There are peep-holes to look through, and embrasures to fire through, if necessary ; the wall is high, and there is a sense of practical security from the enemy below, which does not pertain to the modern crenellations on the adjacent roof. Small stone cannon serve as gargoyles.



Fig. 10. Carved figure, Dunvegan.

Fig. 7 is a view from land of the castle as it would have appeared in *Alister Crotaich's* time ; a grand specimen of compact strength.

John Breac Macleod made many alterations and additions on the castle, as set forth on a slab of stone, of date 1686, now lying in the court-yard. He was the last to keep up the old feudal style of life in the Highlands, and retained his harper, jester, bard, and piper, who, with numerous retainers, thronged his halls, and contributed to foster among his people the fame and glory of their chief.

There is in the court-yard a fragment of stone, containing a carving of the early form of the thistle of Scotland (fig. 8), and another fragment containing a curious representation of what must be a bird (fig. 9).

In the court-yard, placed against the sea-wall, is a singular effigy in stone of a lady (fig. 10), which undoubtedly came originally from the chapel on the mainland at hand, of which building the mere shell now stands. The shoes, with pointed toes and high heels, belong to the time of James II. ; as also do the bunchy skirt, divided in front, and the high compressed bodice. The tight sleeves and head-dress are peculiar, perhaps Scottish in fashion, but belong to that period. I have little hesitation in putting her down as the wife of John Breac Macleod,

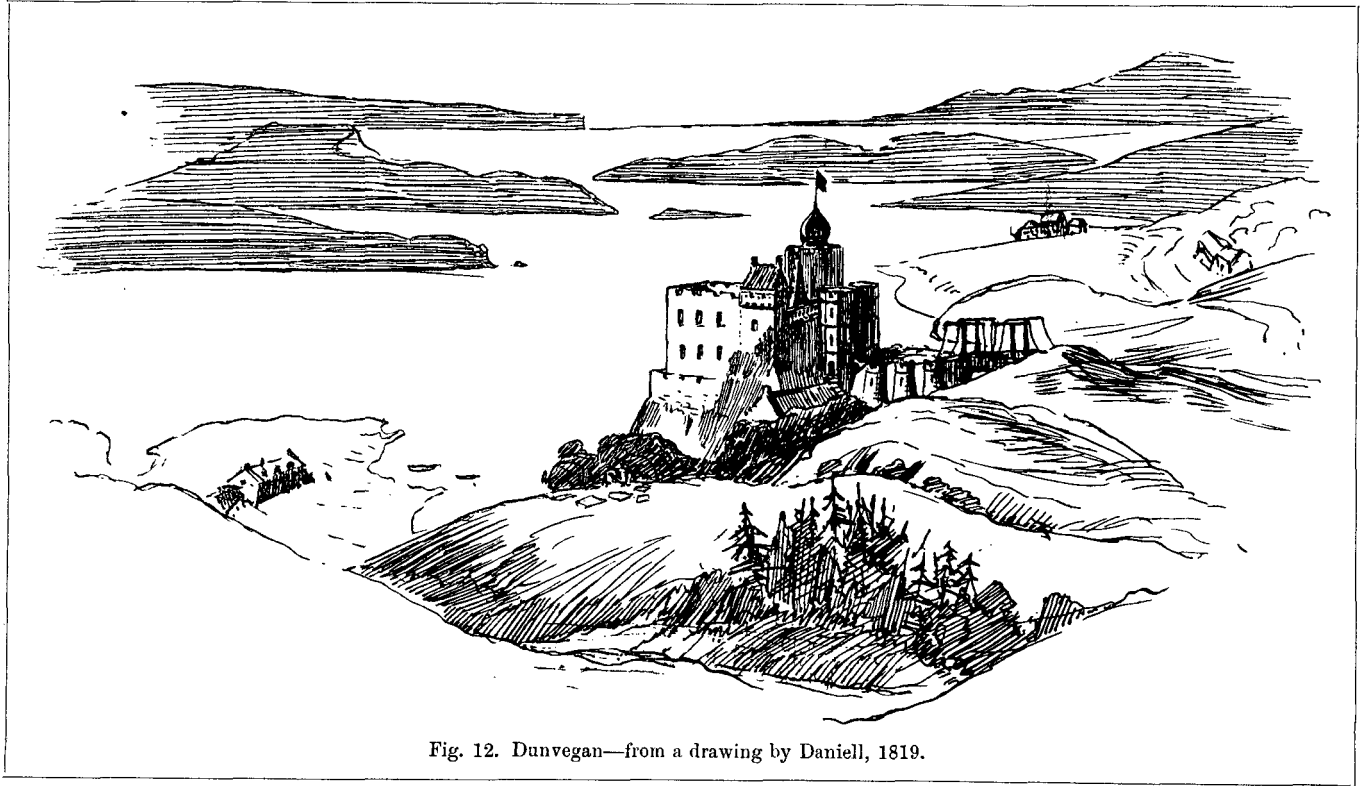


Fig. 12. Dunvegan—from a drawing by Daniell, 1819.



Fig. 11. Dunvegan—from an old water-colour drawing.

whose name was Flora, daughter of Sir James Macdonald of Sleat. The slab setting forth the restoration is of date 1686, and has a moulding carved on it, which shows it to be of a piece with the slabs (figs. 8 and 9), on one of which occur the initials F M D for Flora Macdonald, and on the other, J M L for John Macleod.

Norman Macleod, the 19th chief, Boswell says, opened out a doorway on the land side, probably about 1750, placing beneath it a flight of steps which reached to the bottom of the rock.

The next view (fig. 11) is taken from an old water-colour drawing in the castle. It represents the castle after Johnson's time, when some alterations had been made. The handsome stone balustrade, with stone cannon to correspond with those on the tower, is of considerably older date. In this drawing we see that the old keep has been renovated, and the small turret furnished with a dome-like roof. In all probability, General Macleod, 20th chief, carried out these alterations about the end of last century.

In the next drawing (by Daniell, 1819) there are great changes (fig. 12). The moat or ditch is filled up and bridged across, where two octagonal towers, with an arched doorway between them, form an imposing entrance. The stone steps leading down the rock from the former smaller door still exist in the entrance to the servants' portion of the building. There is also a pair of wooden drawbridges.

In fig. 13, I give a view of the present castle, which has had some alterations effected on it by the late Macleod of Macleod.

It is known that there once existed in Dunvegan Castle numerous priceless relics, which were long cherished by the Macleods. Though it is not within the scope of this article to enumerate those which are still preserved, I cannot refrain from mentioning some which have disappeared amongst them—the harp of Roderick Morrison, the blind harper of John Breac Macleod. Boswell speaks of Rory More's bow, "which hardly any man now can bend"; and of his oaken bed, with this inscription, "Sir Rorie Macleod of Dunvegan, Knight. God send good rest." He also mentions "some old pieces of iron armour, immensely heavy." Pennant speaks of a "round shield made of iron, that even in its decayed state weighs near twenty pounds."

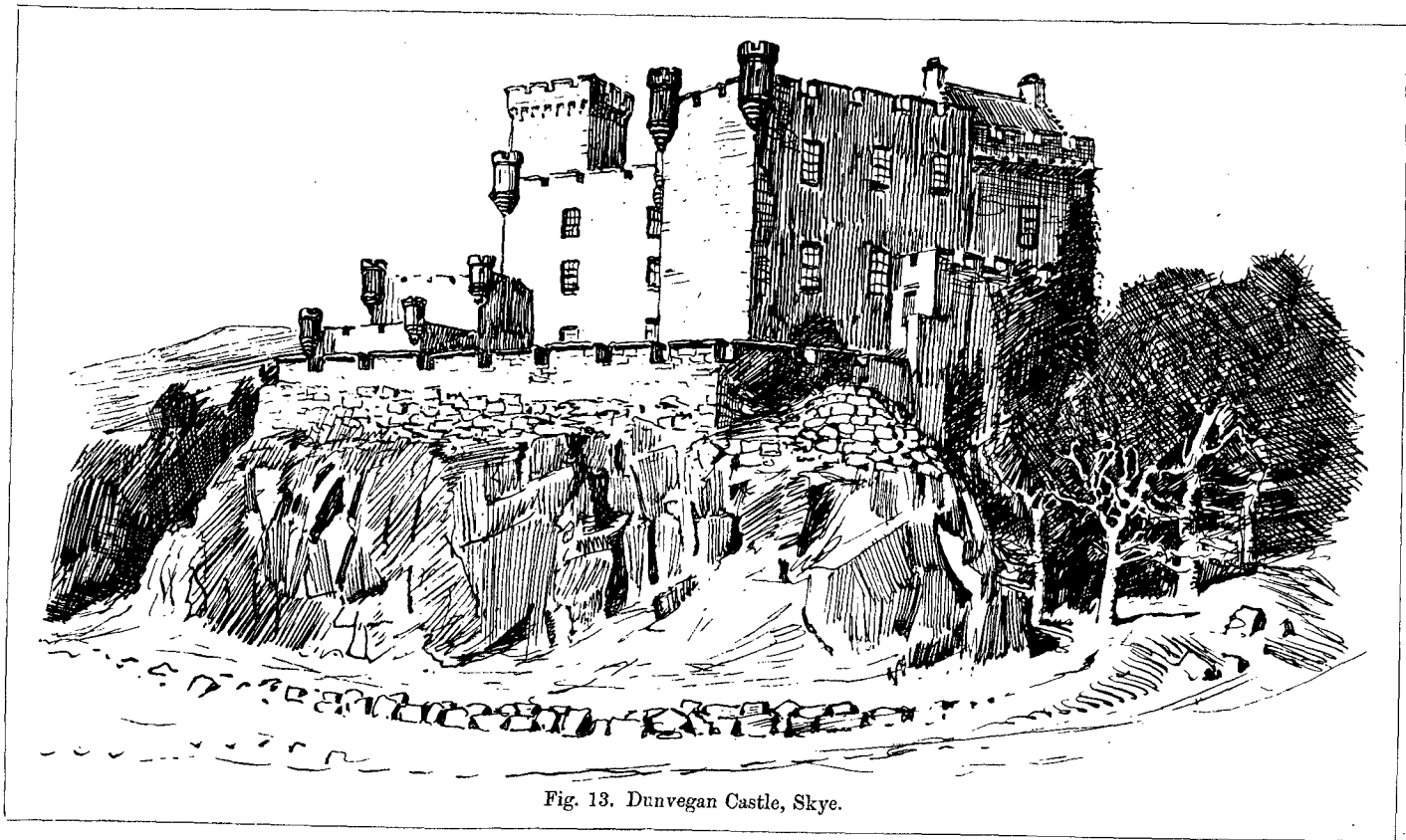


Fig. 13. Dunvegan Castle, Skye.

The late Macleod of Macleod most courteously afforded me every opportunity and facility for making the above notes on that interesting

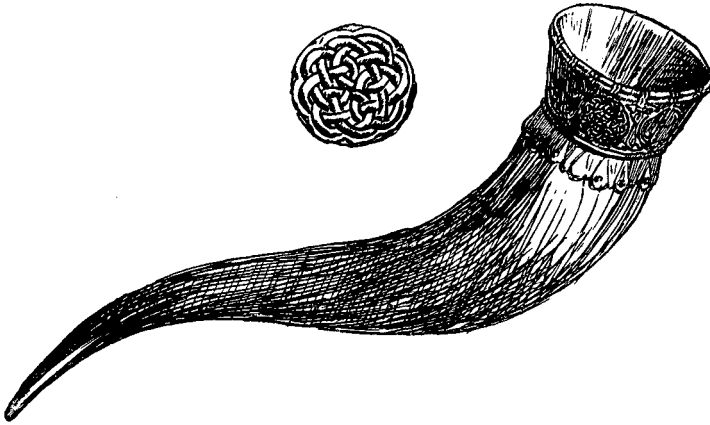


Fig. 14. Drinking-Horn, Dunvegan.

stone-and-lime record of feudal power in the Highlands—Dunvegan Castle.

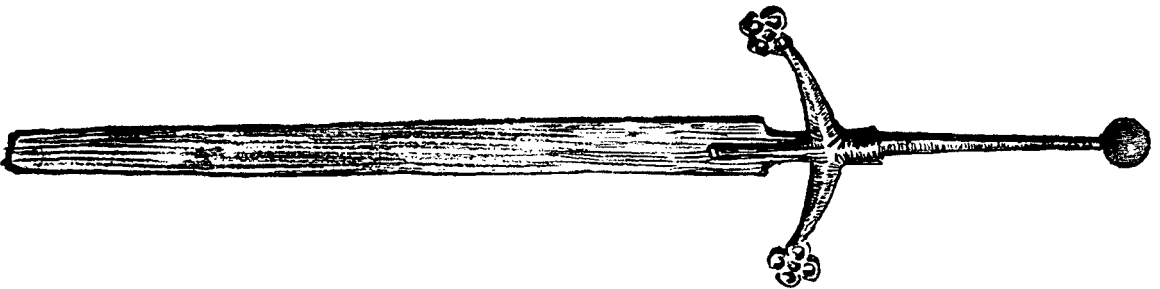


Fig. 15. Two-handed Sword at Dunvegan.