

## III.

NOTE ON AN INCISED STONE CROSS AT STRATHY, SUTHERLANDSHIRE.  
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About a quarter of a mile west of the Established Church at Strathy, Sutherlandshire, resting in the moorland beside the old march dyke, there has lain for centuries, neglected and unnoticed, a rude stone slab (fig. 1) bearing an incised cross of a type which, if not altogether rare, is



Fig. 1. Rude Stone Cross at Strathy.

yet absolutely unique among Scottish crosses. The slab, a rough, undressed sandstone—of the same kind as exists in the neighbourhood—is broken at certain points, but the central surface is intact. It is 54

inches in length, 8 inches in thickness, and the broadest part, from arm to arm of the cross, is 21 inches. In appearance it is somewhat coffin-shaped; but this resemblance is clearly accidental—the result of recent breakage—and not intended in the original design.

The cross from summit to base is 34 inches, and from arm to arm  $18\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

The summit and the base, as well as the two arms, end in circles formed by the outer lines of the cross—the lines being 2 inches broad and nearly 1 inch in depth. Inside these again are hollows or cups; the one at the bottom slightly oval, the rest more or less round. The circles and cups at the top and foot are of the same dimensions—the circles 6 inches and the cups 3 inches in diameter. Those in the arms are  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch less than these. In the centre of the cross are traces of a small and almost obliterated cup. On the vacant spaces in the cross—on the shaft, arms and summit—are slight lines as indicated in the drawing.

As to the origin and age of this curious cross, tradition and topography are alike silent. All that we have therefore to guide us in this direction is the cross itself and its distinctive features. At first sight the work would seem, from the rudeness of its art, and the depth and clearness of the incised lines, to be of mediæval or late Christian date. On the other hand, the cups and rings at the four extremities, and the central cup, evidently point to a much earlier period. Cup-marked stones have occasionally been found in connection with early Christian burials, and a cross, though not unquestionably the cross of Christianity, appears in conjunction with these symbols in the Lough Crew group of stones, and occasionally in Norway on the rock surfaces—both of which are usually assigned to the Bronze Age. If, then, the circles and hollows on the Strathy Cross could be supposed to have been intended to represent the ‘cups and rings’ of pagan times, we might, perhaps, be justified in assigning to it a very early age—an age of transition between Christianity and paganism—when the old forms were still current and exercised an influence on the rude art of the time. In any case, whether it be old or comparatively recent, whether it belongs to the 7th century or to the

13th, the cross is of much archæological interest as indicating in the Christian period the existence and use of a type of art that is peculiarly associated with paganism.