

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS OF IONA ; WITH SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THEIR BETTER PRESERVATION. BY J. ROMILLY ALLEN, Hon. F.S.A. Scot.

In the month of July 1891 I visited Iona for the purpose of making a survey of such sculptured stones as it would be necessary to include in the *Descriptive Catalogue of the Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, now in the press for the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

The sculptured stones on Iona may be roughly divided into two groups : namely (1) the group with Celtic ornament, of date anterior to the twelfth century ; and (2) the group with foliaceous scrollwork of West Highland type, belonging to a period considerably later than the Norman Conquest.

Illustrations of the stones belonging to the first group will be found in Dr J. Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, and of the second group in Graham's *Antiquities of Iona* and Drummond's *Sculptured Monuments in Iona*.

The stones (a few of which are still *in situ*, but the majority of which have been moved from their original positions at some time or other) are scattered about the Cathedral and the adjoining buildings. Some are inside the Cathedral, others outside it at the west end ; two inside St Oran's Chapel ; one at the Nunnery ; and by far the greater number in the burial-ground of St Oran's. None of the tombstones are protected in any way from the destructive effects of the weather.

The sculptured stones of the pre-Norman period consist of the following classes :—

(1.) Recumbent slabs with crosses either incised or in relief, but without ornament.

(2.) Recumbent cross-slabs with inscriptions, but without ornament.

(3.) Recumbent cross-slabs with Celtic ornament.

(4.) Erect free-standing crosses or portions of crosses with Celtic ornament.

The cross-slabs without ornament or inscriptions are of no special interest, with the exception of the oval granite boulder found at Cladh an Disear, a quarter of a mile north of the Cathedral near the supposed burial-place of St Columba. It has been suggested that this is the stone which according to Adamnan was used by St Columba as a pillow, and was after his death placed over his grave (Sir Arthur Mitchell in *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. x. p. 615; Dr J. Anderson's *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, second series, p. 86; and J. Drummond's *Sculptured Monuments in Iona*, pl. 2).

There were four cross-slabs with inscriptions in Irish minuscules at Iona, but one of them has been removed by the late Duke of Argyll to Inveraray. The remaining three are lying flat within the small enclosure outside the south-west corner of the cloisters (Drummond, pl. 3). The inscriptions are as follows:—

(1.) $\overline{\text{or}}$ do mailfataric

“Pray for (the soul of) Mailpatrick.”

(Graham's *Antiquities of Iona*, pl. 25.)

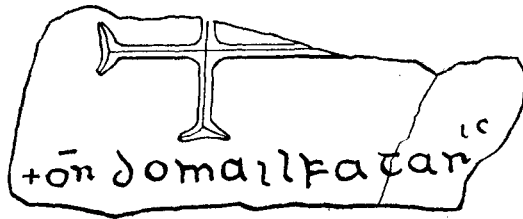
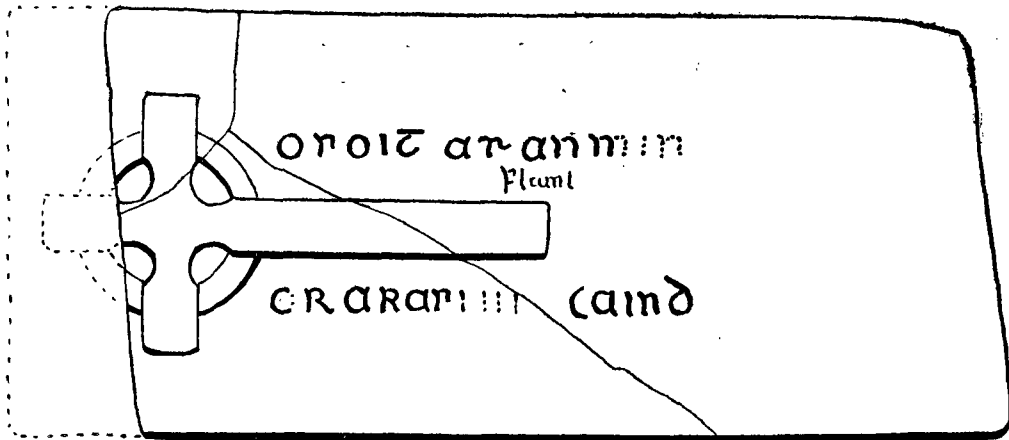
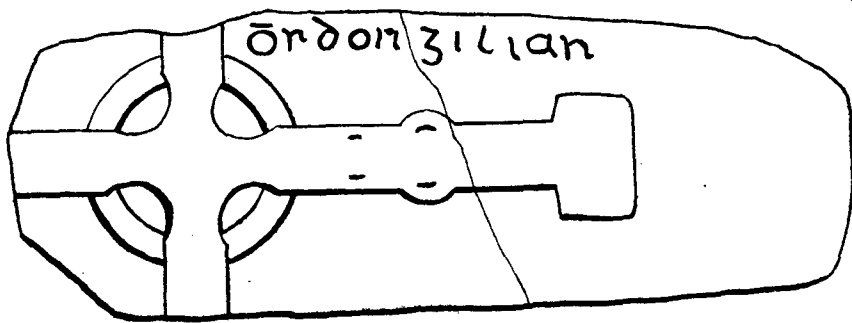


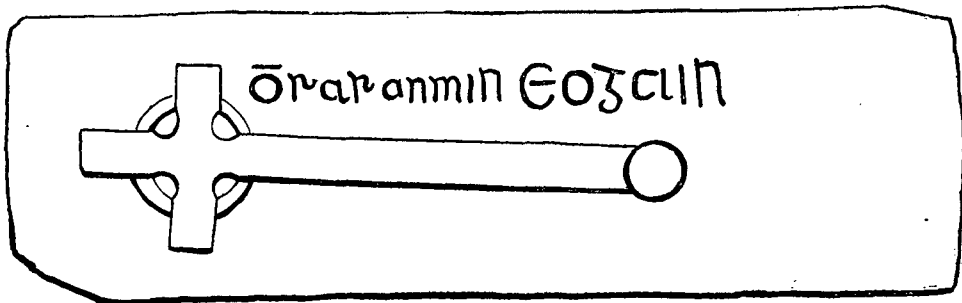
Fig. 1. Inscribed Cross-slab at Iona. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)



4



3



2

Figs. 2, 3, and 4. Inscribed Cross-slabs. No. 2 at Inveraray. Nos. 3 and 4 at Iona. ($\frac{1}{12}$.)

(2.) $\overline{\text{or}}$ ar an min eogain

“Pray for the soul of Eogan.”

(Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. ii. pl. 65; Drummond, pl. 6; Graham, pl. 20).

(3.) $\overline{\text{or}}$ do gilian (?)

“Pray for (the soul) of

(Sir Henry Dryden's drawings in the Society's Library).

(4.) o'roit ar aumin

fla ind

$\overline{\text{or}}$ ar an min ca ind (?)

“Pray for the soul of Fland.”

“Pray for the soul of Cand.” (?)

(Sir H. Dryden's drawings).

The inscriptions on the last two are now so much weathered as to be quite illegible.

There are two recumbent slabs with ornamental crosses and fragments of two others at Iona.

(1.) Slab with cross having arms terminating in Stafford knots (fig. 5); inside St Oran's Chapel (Stuart, vol. ii. pl. 63; Drummond, pl. 9; Graham, pl. 25).

(2.) Slab with cross ornamented with Stafford knots in double rows (fig. 6); at the Nunnery (Drummond, pl. 10).

(3.) Fragment of slab (fig. 7), with cross similar to that on No. 1; at the Cathedral (?) (Sir H. Dryden's drawings).

(4.) Fragment of slab with cross having the bottom arm terminating in a Stafford knot (fig. 8); at the Cathedral (?) (Sir H. Dryden's drawings).

One complete cross of the pre-Norman period and the mutilated shafts of two others are still *in situ* at Iona, namely:—

(1.) St Martin's Cross, standing in its original granite base outside



Fig. 5. Incised Cross-slab at St Oran's. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

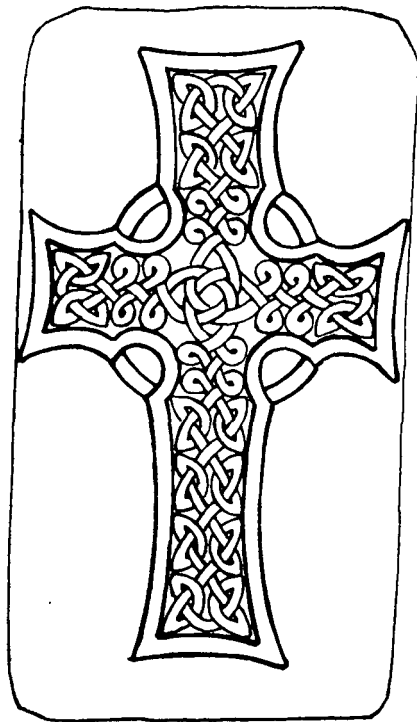


Fig. 6. Slab at the Nunnery, Iona. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

the Cathedral to the south-west of the western doorway of the nave. This cross is so thickly covered with lichen that the photographs which have been taken are not of much use for archæological purposes. It would be well worth while to have a cast taken of such a perfect and beautiful monument. If this is too expensive the next best thing would be to have the cross thoroughly cleaned and then photographed. Sir

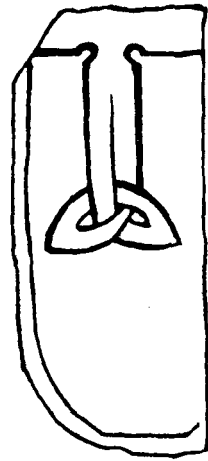
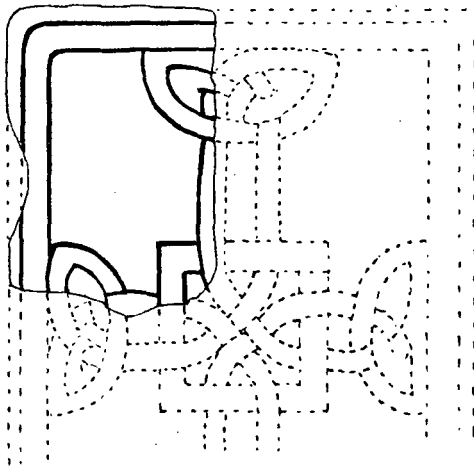


Fig. 7. Fragment of Incised Cross-slab at Iona. ($\frac{1}{2}$.) Fig. 8. Fragment of Incised Slab. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

Henry Dryden's drawings are the best that have yet been made (Stuart, vol. ii. pl. 40; Graham, pl. 39).

(2.) Cross-shaft, with the temptation of Adam and Eve sculptured upon it in the same manner as upon the high crosses of Ireland, and as on one of the capitals of the arcade which separates the choir of the Cathedral from the south aisle. This monument is called St John's Cross by the Rev. Dr J. F. S. Gordon in his *Iona*, p. 38, and by H. D. Graham in his *Antiquities of Iona*. It stands in its original stepped granite base (similar to the base of St Martin's Cross),

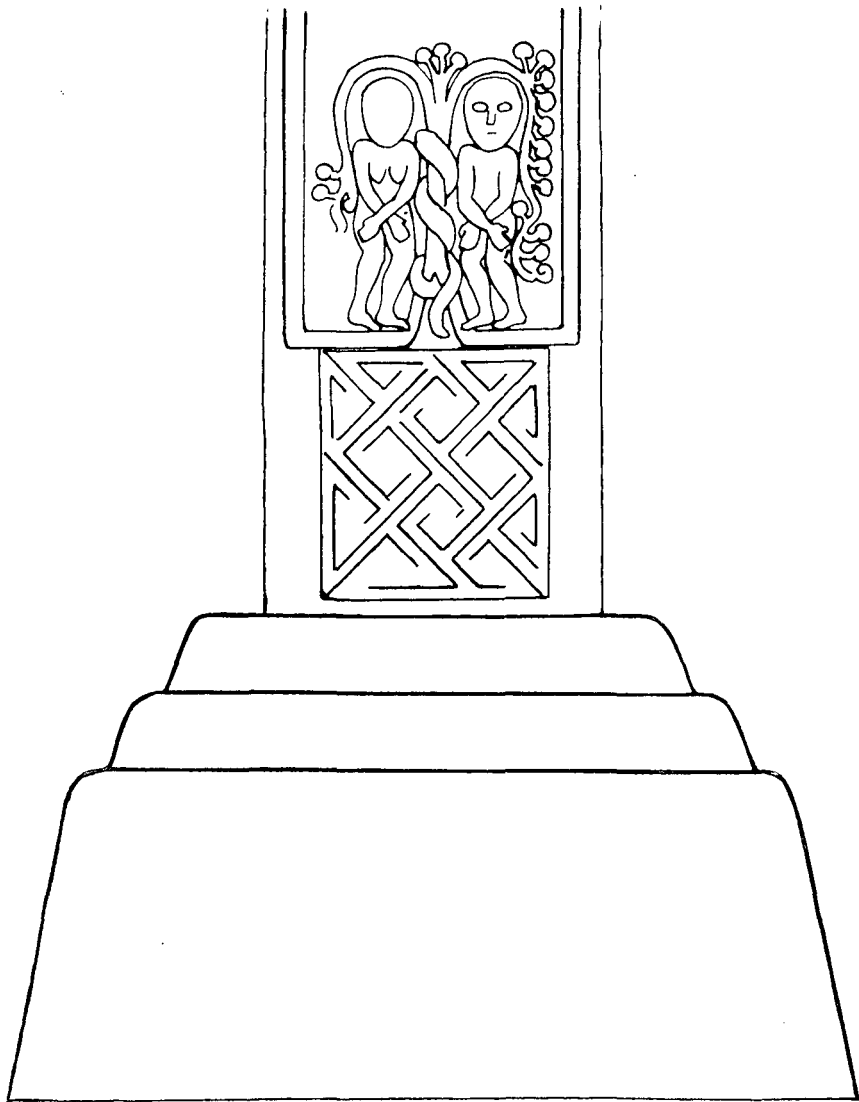


Fig. 9. Obverse of broken Cross-shaft, Iona. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

outside the western doorway of the Cathedral, a little to the southward of the central axis of the building and between St Martin's Cross and the west wall of the nave. This monument has suffered greatly from exposure to the weather, and except near the bottom the sculpture has entirely disappeared. The details of the key-pattern below the figures of Adam and Eve cannot now be made out. The left side of the Tree of Knowledge appears to be less perfect than when Stuart's drawing was made. The beading of the bands of the interlaced work on the west face (fig. 10) does not come out in the rubbing (Graham, pl. 40; Stuart, vol. ii. pl. 44, No. 1).

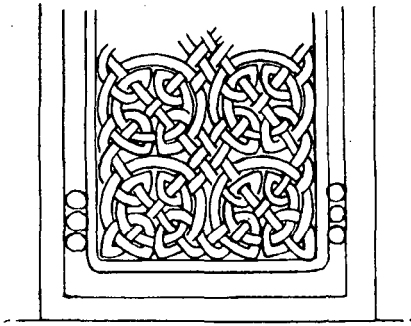


Fig. 10. Interlaced work on west face of Cross. ($\frac{1}{15}$.)

(3.) Mutilated cross-shaft with raised bosses and serpents (fig. 11), standing apparently in its original position on a rectangular altar constructed of four upright stones at the corners, four slabs forming panels between the corner posts, and one horizontal slab at the top. Crosses standing on altars of the same kind but built entirely of dry rubble walling are to be seen on Inismurray and St MacDara's Island off the W. coast of Ireland. Pennant tells us that the altar at Iona had upon it in 1772 certain stones called *clach-a-brath* which were turned thrice round sun-wise in the hollow of the stone below, exactly in the same way as is still done with similar stones at Inismurray. The cross-shaft on

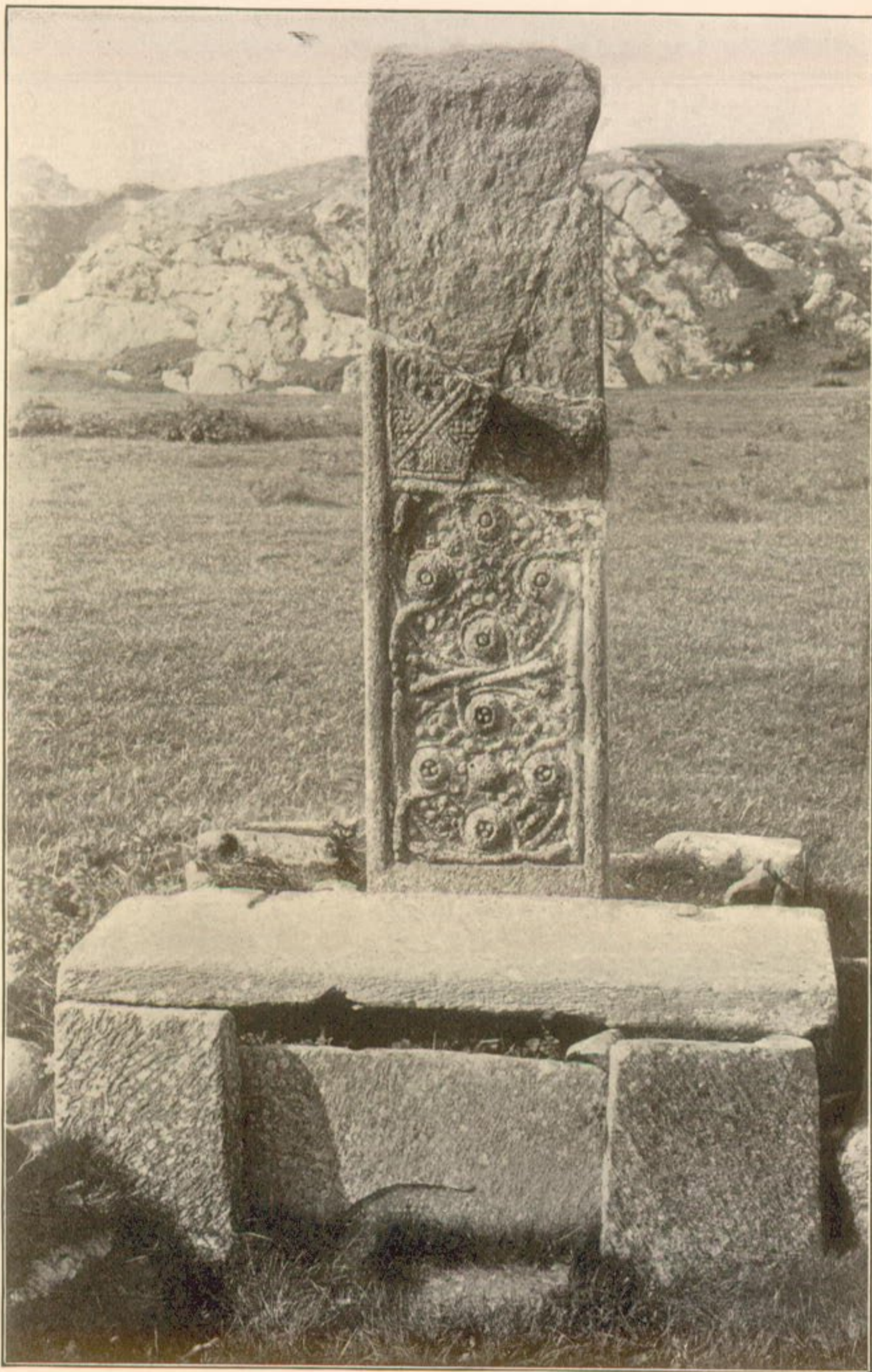


Fig. 11. Mutilated Cross-shaft with Sculpture in Relief at Iona (No. 3). From a photograph by Erskine Beveridge, F.S.A. Scot.

the altar at Iona is of slate and has a crack running diagonally across it which has been the cause of its falling to pieces. Two large fragments have scaled away from the west face of the shaft and were, when I visited Iona, lying beside the shaft on the top of the altar. When Mr Gibb made his drawing for Dr Stuart these fragments do not appear to have been broken off. The upper part of the east face is also damaged, but I was fortunate enough to discover the missing piece within the railing at St Oran's. The angle made by the diagonal crack and the pattern enabled me to prove that the fragment (Stuart, vol. ii. pl. 46, No. 4) really belongs to the cross-shaft (Stuart, vol. ii. pl. 45, No. 2). Mr Erskine Beveridge's photograph (fig. 11) shows what remains of the east face of this beautiful monument.

The cross-shafts, or portions of cross-shafts, of pre-Norman date at Iona which are not now in their original positions are as follows:—

(1.) Complete cross-shaft, ornamented with raised bosses, serpents, and a pair of beasts, having a tenon at the top for joining the shaft to the head; inside St Oran's Chapel. It is very much weathered, but a good photograph would bring out the details which remain (Stuart, vol. ii. pl. 46, No. 3).

(2 and 2A.) The upper and lower portions of a complete cross-shaft, ornamented with raised bosses, serpents, and a representation of the Virgin and Child within an aureole supported by two angels (as on the cross at Kildalton in Islay), having a tenon at the top for fixing on the head; within the railing outside St Oran's Chapel. These seem to be parts of the cross so closely resembling the Kildalton cross, of which the six fragments of the head are described below. (Undescribed.)

(3.) Fragment of the end of a cross-shaft, ornamented with large bosses on a background of smaller bosses and serpents, having a tenon either for fixing it in a socket stone, or for joining it to the head; within the railing outside St Oran's Chapel. Mr Erskine Beveridge's photograph and my rubbing give the general appearance of this, but a cast would be required to bring out the details. It is in good preservation. (Undescribed.)

(4.) Very much weathered and mutilated fragment of a cross-shaft with several figures of men upon it ; within the railing outside St Oran's Chapel. (Undescribed.)

The fragments of cross-heads of pre-Norman date at Iona, although eight in number, seem to have formed parts of two crosses only. They are as follows :—

(1 and 1A.) Two cross arms of similar shape and nearly the same dimensions, ornamented with raised bosses, serpents, and the figure of a man and a beast (perhaps intended to represent Daniel in the Den of Lions). Both of the arms have hollows on each side, and tenons at the end like the complete cross-shaft inside St Oran's Chapel, to which they may possibly have belonged. These two cross arms are within the railing outside St Oran's Chapel. The sculpture is very much weathered. (Undescribed.)

(2, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E.) Six fragments of a cross-head exactly similar in shape and style of decoration to the cross at Kildalton in Islay ; within the railing outside St Oran's Chapel.

I have, after a considerable amount of trouble, been able to reconstruct this most beautiful monument (fig. 12), from the fragments now remaining, and find that it must have measured 7 feet across the arms. In the centre of the head is a circular recess intended apparently to receive a large raised boss, perhaps of some superior material to the rest of the cross. Surrounding the central boss is a wreath or ring of exquisitely designed spiral work. The narrow parts of the arms are ornamented with curious little figures of beasts in relief on a background of very fine interlaced work ; and the ends of the arms have patterns upon them composed of raised bosses on a background of serpents or spiral work. The four quadrants of the ring connecting the arms were formed of separate pieces of stone, as is shown by the mortices in the arms into which they must have fitted. Mr Erskine Beveridge's photographs show the details where the surface is not covered with lichen. The fragments are in a fairly good state of preservation. (Undescribed.)

The sculptured stones of the post-Norman period at Iona consist of the following classes :—

- (1.) Recumbent sepulchral slabs ornamented with scrolls of foliage of West Highland type, galleys, swords, and other symbolic devices.
- (2.) Recumbent sepulchral effigies of ecclesiastics, both male and female, and of knights or chiefs in military costume.

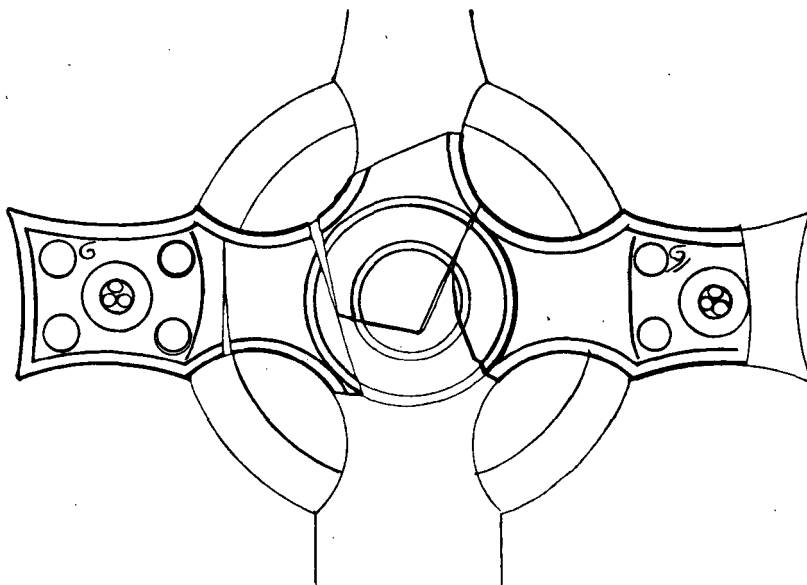


Fig. 12. Outline of Reconstructed Cross at Iona.

- (3.) Erect, free-standing crosses, or fragments of crosses, exhibiting the same style of decoration as the West Highland slabs.

The sepulchral slabs of West Highland type are far more numerous than any other class of sculptured monuments at Iona. They are always profusely ornamented with foliage, in many cases forming a background for symbolic representations. They are rarely inscribed. Perhaps the most interesting of the figure subjects on these slabs is one

which represents a priest celebrating the Mass, there being a cross of the Celtic shape on the altar (Graham, pl. 23).

Some of the sepulchral effigies have inscriptions by which they can be identified and dated, the best examples being that of Abbot Makinnon on the north side of the altar in the Cathedral (A.D. 1500) (Graham, pls. 34 and 35), and that of Anna, prioress of Iona, and daughter of Donald M'Tearlach, in St Oran's Chapel (A.D. 1543) (Graham, pl. 45). The latter is deserving of notice as giving a possible clue to the meaning of the abstruse symbolism of the Pictish monuments of the East of Scotland. Only half the slab is now to be seen, but when Pennant visited Iona in 1772 it was complete. On the half now remaining is an effigy of the prioress Anna with the symbols of the mirror and comb above her head, and we learn from Pennant that on the other half there was a representation of the Virgin and Child, with the symbols of the sun and moon to denote that she was Queen of Heaven. This suggests that the double-disc and crescent symbols of the Pictish stones may be connected with the worship of the Blessed Virgin, the **Z** and **V**-shaped rods being her floriated sceptre, which in later times takes the form of the lily.

Of erect, free-standing crosses of the post-Norman period, there are only two at Iona, namely:—

(1.) Maclean's Cross (so called) standing nearly in front of the Established Kirk (Stuart, vol. ii. pls. 42 and 43; Graham, pl. 43).

(2.) The shaft of the cross of Lachlan Mackinnon and his son John, Abbot of Hy, made in 1489; in St Oran's Chapel (Stuart, vol. ii. pl. 47; Drummond, pl. 36; Graham, pl. 8).

The John Mackinnon here commemorated is the abbot of Iona, who died in A.D. 1500, and whose sepulchral effigy is near the altar of the Cathedral (Graham, pls. 34 and 35). This monument is therefore an important landmark in the history of West Highland art, and shows also that Lombardic letters had not been superseded by black letters in this part of Scotland at the end of the fifteenth century.

The following is a summary showing the approximate number of the monuments belonging to the different classes at Iona, arranged in chronological order.

Pre-Norman Period.

- Recumbent cross-slabs without ornament, 24. (?)
- Recumbent cross-slabs with inscriptions, 4.
- Recumbent cross-slabs with ornament, 4.
- Erect free-standing crosses or portions of crosses, 9.

Post-Norman Period.

- Recumbent sepulchral slabs, 48. (?)
- Recumbent sepulchral effigies, 13. (?)
- Erect free-standing crosses or portions of crosses, 2.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE SCULPTURED MONUMENTS
AT IONA.

Having enumerated the different classes of sculptured monuments at Iona and shown their chronological sequence, I will now proceed to make a few suggestions with regard to their better preservation.

Probably everyone will agree that it is undesirable to interfere in any way with the monuments which still occupy their original positions. I would recommend that all the sculptural stones which are not *in situ* should be protected from the destructive effects of the weather by being placed under cover in a lapidary museum specially provided for their reception, as has been done in the case of the stones at Meigle, in Perthshire. It is desirable also, I think, that the collection should be arranged chronologically and that every specimen should have a number and descriptive label attached to it. It would be well worth while having casts taken of all the stones and getting the casts photographed so that an illustrated catalogue of the whole series could be published, as Sir John Stirling Maxwell has done with the stones at Govan, near Glasgow.

A little money judiciously spent in excavating the mounds of accumu-

lated earth near St Oran's Chapel and in other likely spots would, no doubt, be the means of bringing other monuments to light.

The fragments of the great cross of the Kildalton type lying within the railing outside St Oran's Chapel should at once be rescued from their present position and placed under cover. It is possible that the remaining fragments may be recovered by careful search, so as to enable the whole to be restored. It would then be seen that this was by far the finest cross at Iona and (with the exception of the Kildalton, which it so nearly resembles) in the whole of Scotland.

The Secretary stated that having sent a copy of the foregoing Report to the Rev. Dr Scott for the information of the Trustees, he had received from their agent the following letter conveying the gratifying assurance that the matters referred to by Mr Romilly Allen were receiving due attention:—

123 GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH,
28th Nov. 1900.

DEAR SIR,—Dr Scott handed me your letter with Mr Romilly Allen's Report upon the Stones and Monuments. I took it with me to Iona, went over it there with the Superintendent, and we found that most if not all the matters referred to in the Report were being attended to, or are kept in view to be attended to when the Trustees have funds for that purpose.—Yours faithfully,

WM. JOHN MENZIES.