

## II.

NOTES ON A CROSS-SLAB AT CLANAMACRIE AND DIARMAID'S PILLAR IN GLEN LONAIN, ARGYLL, AND ON A SCULPTURED STONE IN GLEN BUCKIE, PERTHSHIRE. By WILLIAM THOMSON, F.S.A.Scot.

## CROSS-SLAB AT CLANAMACRIE.

The old road from Taynuilt to Oban lies for a considerable part through fair Glen Lonain. Seven miles west it winds between a jutting headland, on which the foundations of a hill-fort are visible, and the slopes of Cruach Clanamacrie. Immediately beyond this point the glen expands to a wide amphitheatre of grassy and tree-clad hills, encircling fertile meadows, where the river Lonan runs.

This is Cladh na Macraidh (the burial-place of the youths), a quietly beautiful, secluded vale, fit resting-place for the unknown dead, whose burial mounds break the level contour of the plain. On the crest of one stands the small but extremely interesting Clanamacrie Cross-slab, hitherto but cursorily examined, and holding till now the secret of the interlaced Celtic ornament adorning the cross-shaft and possibly other parts of its surface.

This is the only remaining wayside cross in Muckairn parish, Argyll. One other crowned a knoll—Tom na Croise (knoll of the cross)—in a field on the south side of the main road to Oban, about a quarter mile west of Taynuilt. It bears a rudely carved representation of the Crucifixion, and has for many years found a place in our National Museum of Antiquities. The style and character of these two crosses have nothing in common; they have no resemblance one to the other.

Clanamacrie Cross-slab is situated close by the old public road referred to above, on a made-up mound of earth and stones, elliptical in shape, some 9 feet high, 180 feet in circumference, 71 feet from west to east, and 54 feet from north to south, measured over the rise. Parts of several large, rounded boulders, probably base stones of the cairn, are exposed on the south side, next the road.

The farm of the same name stands about 100 yards to the south-east, with the Lonan flowing beyond. Here the slab is said formerly to have been placed, in an ancient burying-ground now occupied by the farm-yard. From this it was carried to its present site by a young man named Macfadyen, a farm servant at the place. From the field on the opposite side of the river rise two other artificial knolls, one rather larger than

that just described, the other smaller, and named respectively Cnoc an t-Sagairt (the knoll of the priest) and Cnoc an t-Seomair (the knoll of the chamber). All three are apparently burial cairns and do not seem to have been disturbed. Two hundred yards east of the cross mound are two standing stones, 3 feet 3 inches and 4 feet 6 inches high respectively, and 8 feet in girth. A third stone, fallen, lies half buried in the long grass beside the smaller and most western. The name the locality bears appears therefore to be amply justified.

In view of the way it was brought to its present position, the orienta-



Fig. 1. Cross-slab at Clanamaerie (front).

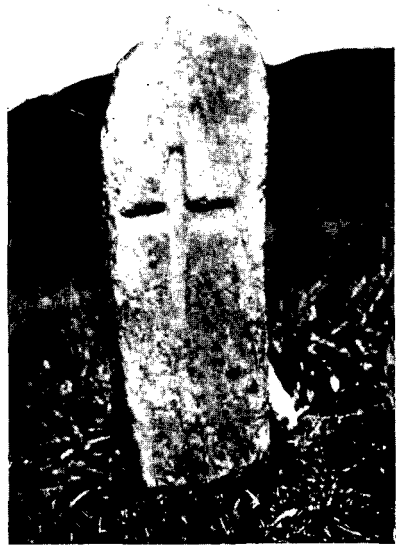


Fig. 2. Cross-slab at Clanamaerie (back).

tion of the slab is of no importance, but for the past fifty or sixty years it has faced due south. Inserted in a hole in the turf and wedged into an upright position, the stone has repeatedly fallen. It is a block of laminated, fine-grained freestone, varying from 10 inches at the base to 1 foot in width, and 6 inches thick. The length or height is 3 feet 1 inch.

The obverse (figs. 1 and 3) shows, from the base, a shaft 15 inches long by 4 inches broad, cut in relief, and bearing an incised pattern of interlaced work. The sloping sides or borders also seem to bear a repeating design. The lower end of this shaft is semicircular with the border fret continued round, and from here the interlaced motif springs. Above the shaft is a round boss carved in high relief,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch in height,

of floral design. From the central circle,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches in diameter, spring twelve radiating petals or divisions curving down to the outer circumference. These are not of equal size, and on the rubbing (fig. 3) give the effect of vesicas. The diameter of this boss is  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches over the curve, and its position above the shaft, and below the deeply cut Latin cross above it near the top of the slab, is very unusual.

In their pristine state the limbs of the cross have been cut to a depth of 1 inch; even now they are  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch deep. The rectangular edges have been worn and rounded, so that on the surface-level the width is 2 inches. But the square ends, still visible, prove that the shaft was 8 inches long and the arms 7 inches across, with a uniform original width of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch. Under the boss and between the shaft and outer edge of slab the rubbing yields a very strong suggestion of more ornamentation. Excessive weathering has seriously affected this beautiful relic.

Dr Angus Smith, in *Loch Etive and the Sons of Usnach* (p. 263), says: "The late Dr Charlton, Newcastle-on-Tyne, to whom a drawing (of the cross) was shown, thought it of the eleventh century at the earliest." Since, however, the drawing in his book is extremely inaccurate—it dates from 1885—and Dr Smith was unaware of the ornament on the stone, this estimate falls to be revised.

The reverse side of the slab (fig. 2) bears a simple, deeply cut cross beginning 10 inches above the base. Here again weathering has widened, worn, and rounded the shaft and arms out of all proportion to their original dimensions. The depth (1 inch) and width ( $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch) are similar to the cross on the obverse, but the shaft is  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches long and the arms 8 inches all over. There is no evidence of ornament on this side.

This monument is on the estate of Mr H. L. Macdonald, of Dunach, Oban.

#### DIARMAID'S PILLAR.

Westward from Clanamacrie the sides of the valley converge rapidly, and the way leads along a picturesque, narrow, wooded ravine, the river rushing swiftly alongside. Then, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  mile further on, the hills recede, the glen expands, and just beyond Strontoiller

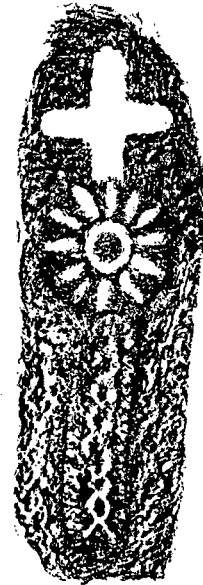


Fig. 3. Cross-slab at Clanamacrie, from a rubbing.

schoolhouse the splendid monolith known as Clach Dhiarmaid, or Carragh Dhiarmaid, that is Diarmaid's Pillar (fig. 4), comes in sight.

It sentinels the west end of Glen Lonain, and looks over the fields and meadows extending southward to Loch Nell,  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile away. The rugged dignity of this mass of Durinish granite is very striking, and its height of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet and girth of over 13 feet add to its massive appearance. In plan irregularly rhomboidal, the four faces measure 4 feet, 3 feet 6 inches, 2 feet 10 inches, and 3 feet near ground-level, with a slight tapering towards the top. It has been thought by some

that the artificer has had a part in shaping the stone, but of this there are no indications.

Some 45 feet behind the pillar, to the east, is a roughly circular series of earthfast stones, thirteen in number, marking the reputed burial-place of the Fenian hero, Diarmaid. They are to be seen in the illustration to the right of the standing stone. Those to the south, next the road, are the largest. Two are 3 feet 6 inches long by 2 feet broad, and four rise from 15 inches to 2 feet 6 inches clear of the ground. The greatest diameter from stone to stone is 15 feet. They occur on a slightly elevated platform, sloping to the general level all round, but more sharply where



Fig. 4. Diarmaid's Pillar, Glen Lonain, Argyll.

the arc adjoins the road. Five stones project above earth-level, the others merely show through the turf. A shallow depression extends from the stones to Diarmaid's Pillar, round which the ground is again slightly raised. The boulders forming the circle are iceworn and smooth.

Diarmaid was the Achilles of Celtic legend, and the tale of his adventures is told at great length in Irish literature. Briefly, he won the heart of Grainne, daughter of Cormac Mac Airt, the king, judge, warrior, and philosopher who reigned at Tara, and who was the son of Conn of the hundred battles. With her he fled to Scotland, pursued by Fionn, her betrothed lover, who overtook them in the vicinity of the obelisk. A boar hunt was planned in the forests close by, and the quarry fell to Diarmaid's prowess at Torr an Tuirc, a little beyond the

bank of the Lonan. With subtle cunning Fionn begged the hero to measure the hide by treading over it, insisting that this should be done from tail to snout or against the bristles, one of which penetrated Diarmaid's heel and caused his death. They buried him where he fell, and "raised this rib of rock" to mark the spot.

Carragh Dhiarmaid is on Strontoiller Farm, which belongs to the M'Caig trustees.

#### SCULPTURED STONE, LEAC NAN SAIGHEAD.

Leac nan Saighead (the flat rock of the arrows, fig. 5), lies among the heather close by the old track from Balquhidder through Gleann Màin to Brig o' Turk, a natural route probably followed by man from the date of his first entry into these wilds.

The stone is remarkable, not for the elaboration of its markings, but for their characteristics, which appear to be well-nigh unique among cup- and ring-marked stones in Scotland. Distant from Bailemore Farm, Glen Buckie, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile to the west, it occurs at an elevation of 900 feet, on the surface of the immense field of glacial detritus which fills the glen, and through which the Allt Fànghlinne cuts a deep gorge some three hundred paces to the south.

Moss and heather had grown up and about and over the stone to a considerable extent when I first saw it; since then I have cleaned it carefully and dug away the mossy soil, to show the eastern (lower) end and the interesting outlet of the circular groove.

Leac nan Saighead is roughly rhomboidal in shape when viewed from the east. It is a mass of hard schistose rock, measuring at its greatest length from east to west 6 feet 4 inches, with a breadth of 5 feet 6 inches from north to south, varying slightly in parts. The magnetic north makes a line across the stone at right angles to its



Fig. 5. Sculptured Stone, Leac nan Saighead, Glen Buckie, Perthshire.

length. The east end varies in thickness from 8 inches to 12 inches, tapering to thin, sharp, broken edges at the western edge. The contour of the surface of the stone is well shown in the illustration.

Portions of two circles are graven on the surface. The inner of these has a radius of 2 feet 1 inch to the inner edge of the channel, which is  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches broad. The circle is not quite perfect. The channel of this and the other circle is  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch deep. This circle, though not complete, shows a perimeter enclosing about 225 degrees or  $\frac{5}{8}$ ths of a circle.

Distant  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches from the outer edge of the channel of this inner circle is a portion of another, which at first glance seems concentric. But this is not so. The radius of the outer circle is 1 foot 11 inches to the inner edge of the sunk channel, and it is thus really smaller than the first, and only an arc of 45 degrees remains.

At the highest point of the main circle and close to the inner lip of the flat-bottomed channel, a narrow groove begins, and continues round, gradually deepening, until, close to the south side of the stone, it takes the place of the shallow channel, and eventually runs out, as the illustration shows, on the eastern edge. As it approaches the latter point, it reveals a clean-cut, perpendicular face on the inner side  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch deep from the rock-surface to the bottom of the groove. Its outer lip is 1 inch lower than the inner and its greatest width is  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch. The arc is continued some distance further without this groove-like and very unusual feature. At the centre of the main circle is a small depression, and near it are traces of probable cup-marks, with one quite definite  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch diameter and  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch deep.

The only tradition associated with the stone is, that the man who carved the circles was killed at the stone by an arrow discharged from Bealach a' Chonnaidh, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile, as the crow flies, south-west across the gorge of the Allt Fànghlinne. In front of this bealach (pass) is a very prominent dun, which may have been the site of an ancient encampment. It is a strong position strategically, and commands the ford over the stream, used by all who travelled north or south, from or to Glean Màin. The summit is covered with grass, but no remains of buildings of any kind are visible above the surface.

A new road has quite recently been made close by Leac nan Saighead, which was in some danger while the operations were in progress, and it was even suggested to raise it to a vertical position. Fortunately it was not interfered with.