

V.

NOTES ON LULACH'S STONE, KILDRUMMY, ABERDEENSHIRE; A SYMBOL STONE RECENTLY FOUND IN MORTLACH CHURCH-YARD, BANFFSHIRE; AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES. BY W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, M.A., D.LITT., F.S.A.Scot.

Lulach's Stone, Kildrummy.—One of the most impressive of the solitary standing-stones in Aberdeenshire is Lulach's Stone, hidden in Drumnahive Wood, due west of Mossat Bridge, in the parish of Kildrummy (O.S. 6 inches, Aberdeenshire, sheet li.). It is a tall and shapely pillar of schist, 8 feet 9 inches in height above the present level of the ground, though older descriptions make the height 11 feet. At the shoulder the breadth of the stone is 2 feet 8 inches; the back is rounded and the thickness very irregular, at greatest about 2 feet. There seem to be no cup-marks and no indication of tooling, and the pillar stone stands in all the dignified simplicity of its natural rudeness, grey and lichen stained, hoary with the mute oblivion of its forgotten purpose. The name of the stone is of considerable interest. On Green Hill, in the parish of Tough (O.S. 6 inches, Aberdeenshire, sheet lxiii.), is a similar monolith, also called Lulach's

or Luath's Stone;¹ and the tradition attached to each pillar is that it marks the place where Lulach, stepson of Macbeth, was overtaken and killed after his father's defeat and death at Lumphanan (15th August 1057). The historical facts about Lulach the Fatuous² are briefly as follows. He was a son of Macbeth's wife, Gruoch, by her previous husband, Gillacomgain, of the ancient house of Moravia, and himself a cousin of Macbeth.³ After Macbeth was defeated and killed by Malcolm Canmore, Lulach carried on his stepfather's claims, but himself was killed at Essie, in Strathbogie, on 17th March 1058, and, like his stepfather, was buried in Iona. Two sources aver that Lulach was killed by Malcolm in battle, but another says that he died by treachery.⁴ Doubtless the two monoliths that bear his name are far anterior to his time in their origin; but we are probably not greatly wrong in regarding their subsequent popular association with Lulach's memory as a link in the chain of other evidence as to the large part which the province of Mar played in furthering the cause of the Macbeth dynasty against the rival and Normanising house of Canmore.

Symbol Stone found in Mortlach Churchyard, Banffshire.—On 18th September 1925, when opening a grave in the old churchyard of Mortlach, near Dufftown, Banffshire (O.S. 6 inches, Banffshire, sheet xxv.), the sexton came upon a large flat stone about 6 feet under the surface. It was lying face downwards and pointing to the south-east. Unfortunately, in order to take it out the stone was broken into five pieces, and it was only after it had been brought to the surface in fragments that the symbols were discovered on the under face. By a lucky chance the carved figures were almost unscathed by the breaking up of the stone, one of the fractures just passing through the scrolled hind feet of the "elephant." The place where it was found is within some 30 feet to the north-west of the well-known "Battle Stone" of Mortlach.

The upper of the two incised symbols found on the top part of the stone (fig. 1) is the familiar "elephant," wrought with great spirit. The lower symbol is hitherto unrecorded, and I am unable to hazard even a conjecture as to what it may purport to represent. The incised sculpturing is beautifully wrought and extremely well preserved. In height the stone measures about 5 feet 3 inches, and it is about 10 inches in greatest thickness. A small fragment, having become detached when it was taken up, was submitted to Professor A. W. Gibb, M.A., D.Sc.,

¹ See *New Statistical Account*, vol. xii. p. 613.

² *Lulach fatuus—Chronicle of the Picts and Scots* (ed. W. F. Skene), p. 152.

³ See genealogical table in A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, vol. i. p. 580.

⁴ Tigernach, *Annals*, ed. W. Stokes in *Revue Celtique*, vol. xvii. p. 398; *Annals of Ulster* (ed. W. M. Hennessy), vol. ii. p. 4; *Chronica de Mailros* (ed. J. Stevenson), p. 227.

of the Chair of Geology in Aberdeen University, who reports that the stone is a metamorphic rock, psammitic gneiss or impure quartzite, and is probably an erratic from the Moine area on Speyside.

The church of Mortlach is one of the most ancient Christian sites in the district between the Dee and the Spey. A monastery was planted here by St Moluag of Lismore, whom St Comgall the Great of Bangor, in the Ards of Ulster, dispatched on a mission into Pictland in 562.¹ It is a beautiful example of the *insita sibi species venustatis* of an Old Celtic religious site, occupying a lovely position on the west bank of the Dullan. The mediæval parish church stands on a terrace overlooking the haugh by the riverside where the two symbol stones are, and where it is therefore probable that St Moluag's community was placed. On the opposite side of the river the bank rises steeply and is clothed with fine timber. Though greatly modernised, the church still retains its mediæval proportions, and some beautiful lancet windows of the thirteenth century. Within it are preserved a number of interesting mediæval grave-slabs, and a good recumbent effigy of a mail-clad knight—said to represent Alexander Leslie of Kininvie, who died about 1549.

The "Battle Stone" has on one side a Celtic cross between two fish-like monsters facing each other on top and a grotesque beast at the base, while on the other side are a bird, a serpent, and an ox's skull, and a horseman with his hound. In the illustration of the back of this stone in the *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, part iii. p. 156, the bird is not shown. The cross has been carved with a simple scroll ornament. The sculpturing is incised, and the technique is not so spirited as on the other stone. The Battle Stone is 5 feet 9 inches in height above ground, and is 7 inches in greatest thickness. At least 2 feet of the pillar are below the surface, being wedged in among stones. The material appears to be similar to that of the other stone.

Round the Battle Stone "St Molloch's Fair" was formerly held. The church had anciently a Ronnach bell. Near it is the Priest's Well.²

¹ For St Moluag's work in the north-east, see my *Origins of Christianity in Aberdeenshire*, pp. 19-22.

² For these and other particulars about the church and churchyard of Mortlach, see A. Jervise *Epitaphs and Inscriptions of the North of Scotland*, vol. i. pp. 326-34.

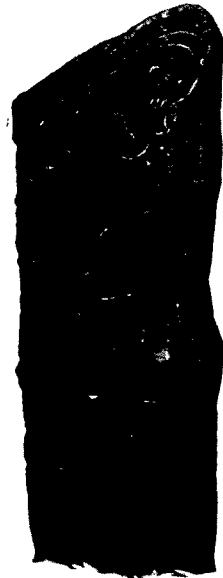


Fig. 1. Symbol Stone at Mortlach, Banffshire.

The stone recently discovered is of an earlier type than the Battle Stone, having the symbols without the distinctively Christian cross. Whether this class of stone is pagan is a much vexed question; but the presence of the monument at a definitely Early Christian site is a fact to be borne in mind. I know of fifteen ancient church sites between the Dee and the Spey with which are associated symbol stones of the oldest class. In many other cases where a symbol stone now stands unrelated with any known church site, all knowledge of an early wooden or wattled chapel or other religious centre on the spot may well have perished, and it is clear on the face of it that we cannot reject the possibility of the symbolism having been Christian from the outset.¹ At all events, it is certain that whether pagan in their origin or not, the symbols were capable in their entirety of bearing a Christian meaning, as their association with the cross on so many of the monuments shows.

The chronology of these symbols is equally obscure. Mr J. Graham Callander has drawn my attention to one fact that may have some bearing on this important problem. In the famous hoard of silver articles found at Norrie's Law, Largo, Fife, in 1817, occur two plates of silver and a silver pin (figs. 2 and 3) engraved with the double disc and Z-shaped rod symbol. Mr Callander points out that other fragments in this hoard are those of a silver vessel with a beaded rim similar to examples from the Traprain Law hoard, which is dated from numismatic and other evidence to *circa* A.D. 400. Also in the Norrie's Law hoard were found coins of Constantius II. (337-61) and Valens (364-78). These facts would thus afford some presumptive evidence as to the symbolism having been in use about the beginning of the fifth century: and in that case the symbols would almost certainly be pagan. On the other hand, it should be noted that the pin has a cross pattee in the central projecting stud of its head; though, of course, such a cross is not *necessarily* Christian. In any case, it is dangerous to infer dates from coins that may have been in circulation for a long period. For example, in a hoard of coins found immediately beside Norrie's Law in 1822, were included pieces ranging from Antonia, daughter of Mark Antony, a lady who died in A.D. 38, to a coin of the Byzantine period, dating apparently from the latter half of the seventh century—a total range of over six hundred years. And, as Sir Daniel Wilson pointed out,² if this find of coins can be associated with the silver hoard previously discovered in the Law, the date of the latter would

¹ For the probable connection of the symbolism with the Pictish Church, see my *Origins of Christianity in Aberdeenshire*, pp. 9-11.

² *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, 2nd ed., vol. ii. p. 260.

thus be brought down at least to the end of the seventh century—a period fully in accordance with the chronology of the symbols put forward by Romilly Allen and Anderson.¹

I am indebted to the Rev. John B. Cumming, M.A., B.D., minister of the parish, who at once appreciated the importance of the discovery, for furnishing me with full particulars and pointing me out the locality, which I visited on 2nd October last. Mr Cumming is to have the fragments of the stone put together and the whole securely built up against a wall in the church-

¹ *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, part i. p. cix.

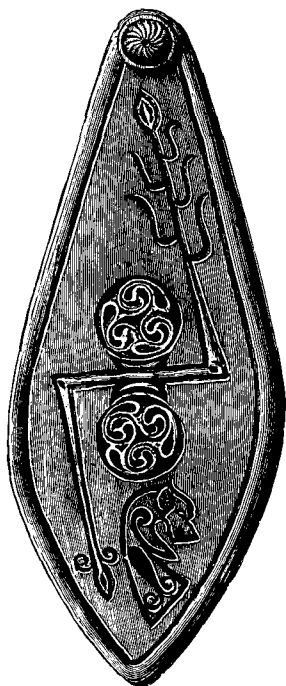


Fig. 2. Silver Plate from Norrie's Law, Fife.

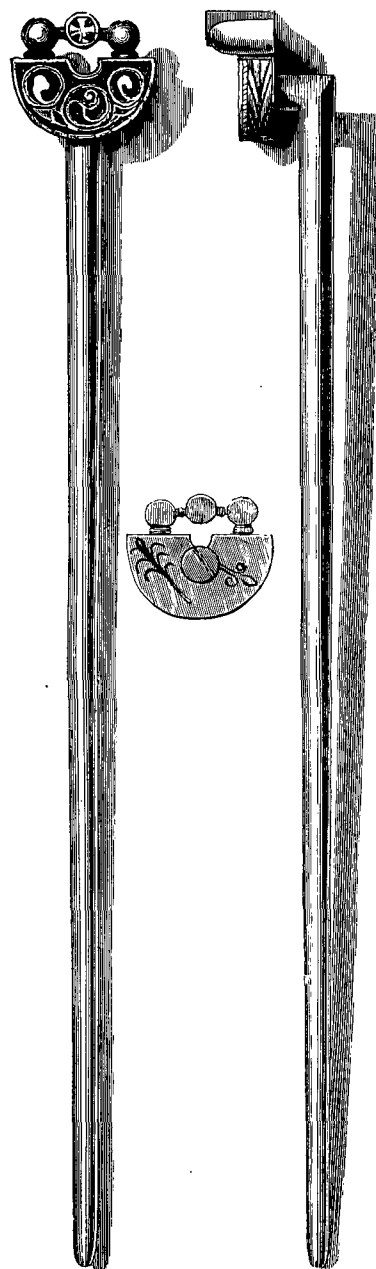


Fig. 3. Silver Pin from Norrie's Law, Fife.

yard,¹ where it will be perfectly safe, although unprotected from the weather.

Stone with Incised Cross in Botriphnie Churchyard, Banffshire.— Having been informed by the Rev. Alexander Mackay, M.A., minister of Botriphnie, that an undescribed stone with a Celtic cross exists in the parish churchyard, I visited the place on 8th March last. Mr Mackay informs me that the stone was found some years ago by Mr F. C. Eeles, F.S.A.Scot., lying prostrate in the south side of the churchyard (O.S. 6 inches, Banffshire, sheet xix.). It is now preserved in the ruined south aisle, which alone remains of the old church,² superseded in 1820 by the present building to the northward.



Fig. 4. Cross-slab at Botriphnie, Banffshire.

The stone (fig. 4) is a rough unheaven mass of hard schist showing a close foliation, and measures $25\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, 12 inches in breadth, and 3 or $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. At its upper end is rudely carved an equal armed, wheeled, and shafted cross, formed in single incised lines. The over-all diameter of the cross has been about 8 inches, and the length of the shaft is $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches. A small wedge-shaped piece of the stone at the top end has been split out, destroying the apex of the cross. The position of the cross at the upper end of a roughly pointed stone suggests that this monument was originally set upright, either as a headstone or as a sacred boundary mark.

Like Mortlach Church, the church of Botriphnie is a very ancient Christian centre. It bears the name of St Fumac, who is also associated with the church of Dinnet in Aberdeenshire. "Botriffnie or Fumac Kirk," we are told *circa* 1726, "hath for its patron Saint Fumac, quhose wooden image is washed yearly, with much formality, by an old woman (quho keeps it) at his Fair (on the third of May) in his own well here."³ Having outlived the storms of the Reformation and the Covenant,

¹ This has since been done, June 1926.

² In this aisle lies the pediment stone of the old bell cot, inscribed M for Master Alexander
A F
1617

Fraser, the then minister. Between the initials is a florette. The aisle contains some interesting heraldic stones with beautiful carving and lettering, and is well worthy of being put into proper repair.

³ *Antiquities of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. ii. p. 253.

the effigy was burned as a "monument of idolatry" early in the last century.¹

At Botriphnie, as at Mortlach, we see a typical Old Celtic religious site. Church and churchyard stand beautifully on a haugh overlooking the infant Isla, and backed by a steep slope on which is situated the manse. St Fumac's Well, enclosed by a paling, still flows, cold and abundant, on the haugh east of the church, at the foot of what was formerly the minister's garden.

Contents of a Midden from the Monastery on St Serf's Island, Lochleven.—In February 1921 Mr Walter G. Montgomery, O.B.E., F.S.A.Scot., Kinross House, sent me a boxful of remains found in the course of some chance digging within what are known as the monastic buildings of St Serf's Priory, Lochleven (O.S. 6 inches, Fife and Kinross, sheet xxii.). The remains included pottery; an iron nail about 2¾ inches long, with a large flat round head, much wasted; a piece of charred wood, identified as hazel by Mr Macgregor Skene, D.Sc., Botany Department, Aberdeen University; and an assortment of bones. Evidently we have to deal with a refuse-heap or midden, the pottery of which shows it to have been of late mediæval date. The site of the deposit lies outside the centre of the north wall of the south-eastern room.²

The pottery comprises 68 shards of ordinary mediæval types, mostly small in size and none of any importance. The largest piece is part of the neck and bulging shoulder of a pitcher in dirty-white ware, about ⅓ inch in thickness. The interior surface shows the usual horizontal striation; the exterior, coated with a thick, bright green glaze, has been decorated with a large chevron pattern in relief. Such ware is probably rather late, about the end of the fifteenth century. Other fragments show a thick ware in brick-red clay with a rich deep brown glaze. One small piece of grey ware shows a chevron pattern in bold relief. Another piece has a raised fillet with vertical incisions at frequent intervals. Pottery with a similar pattern, assignable to the early fourteenth century, was found at Dundarg Castle and at Coull Castle, both in Aberdeenshire.³

¹ An account of the destruction of the effigy is given by Jervise, *Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, vol. ii. p. 13, where also occurs the following note: "About fifty years ago a cross of rude picked stone, in low relief, and about 5½ feet high by about 3 feet broad, stood within the kirkyard of Botriphnie. Unfortunately, about the time indicated [*i.e.* about 1823] the stone was broken up by a blacksmith, who used it as a hearth for his smiddy! This had probably been the ancient cross of St Fumac's Fair." The Old Style date of the fair was 15th February.

² See plan by Andrew Kerr, F.S.A.Scot., in *History of Lochleven Castle*, by R. Burns-Begg, F.S.A.Scot., pl. i.; also *Proceedings*, vol. xvi. p. 167.

³ See *Proceedings*, vol. xlviii. p. 191, and vol. lviii. pp. 80-8. Dundarg Castle was destroyed by Andrew de Moray in 1334 (*Liber Pluscardensis*, ed. F. J. H. Skene, vol. i. pp. 280-1); and at Coull Castle also the evidence recovered during excavation pointed to total destruction during the Wars of Independence. I have a shard showing a similar notched pattern from the Bass of Inverurie.

There are also a number of fragments of the coarse, dark-coloured, unglazed pipkins or cooking vessels, with broad, flat bases. These are mostly darkened by fire.

The bones were submitted to Mr Robert M. Neill, M.C., M.A., of the Natural History Department, Aberdeen University, who reports as follows: "There are about two dozen small pieces of bones of ox, sheep, and fowl. One-half of these are split rib or long bones of oxen; the largest piece is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. The sheep bones are fragments of vertebrae, scapula, jaw, and rib. In addition there are pieces of the skull and upper wing-bone of a fowl, and a fragment of oyster-shell. Several of the bones show chop-marks."

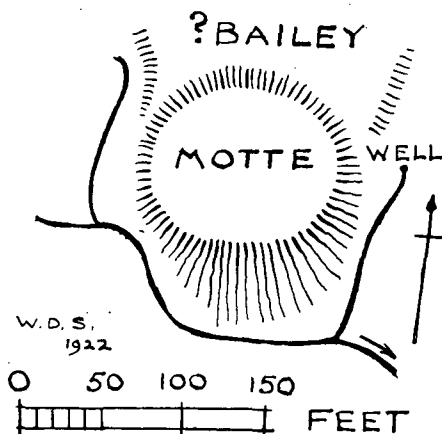


Fig. 5. Plan of Balcastle Mote, Kilsyth.

motte. These two burns unite immediately below the *motte* to the south. Northwards the ground rises to the bare, treeless ridges of the Kilsyth Hills. On this side the slopes of the *motte* terminate abruptly on a level area here, which would give room for a bailey between the two ravines. At the base of the *motte* here is a modern dry-built retaining wall. The *motte* is about 12 or 15 feet in height above the level area to the north, and about 50 feet above the ravine to the south. Its sides slope down with great regularity at an angle of 45° . From the summit a magnificent view is obtained southwards over the Kelvin Valley to the Roman fort on Bar Hill, which is directly opposite. The farm-steading of Balcastle lies a short distance north-east of the *motte*, to the north-east of which is a cottage known as Castlegray.