

III.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DATES OF FOUR SCOTTISH MONUMENTS. BY Miss MARY E. BOYLE, F.S.A.Scot.

The age of the sculptured stones of Scotland so ably catalogued and described by J. Romilly Allen and other experts is a subject which has engrossed my attention for some years. Vague dating deduced from similarity of ornamental design had been tried, but years of study of the recurrence and limitation of ornament in prehistoric and protohistoric art had made me chary of confining in time what was more probably due to the limitations of human fancy, the rhythm of the hand, or a subtle subconscious memory.

In certain parts of Scotland, Irish ecclesiastical influence seemed to me to be lacking, though the Irish mirage still lures many to extend the artistic riches of that country over all art in her nearest neighbour. I felt that an intense search in local history might lead to a clue, a search notoriously difficult in a land where documents are few, and, till lately, carelessly kept.

My search has so far produced results regarding four monuments.

Fowlis Wester.—Some few miles on the road from Crieff to Perth a road striking uphill on the left leads to the hamlet of Fowlis Wester. The church was restored after the War as a memorial to those fallen, and in so doing a long stone was removed from a wall (fig. 1). It was then seen to be carved, though the stone had flaked off before the carving was finished. A cross of plaitwork occupies the centre, to the left, a man seated in a carved chair ending in a hound's head at the back, has a plant with seven leaves and a double bud in front of him. He is faced on the far side of the cross by an ecclesiastic in robes and cowl whose chair ends in a bishop's crook, and above whose



Fig. 1. Carved Stone at Fowlis Wester.

head is an angel. Two ecclesiastics walk below the layman's chair. The base of the cross looks like a book satchel.

The two top panels are occupied by a sword, a targe, and what is known in Scandinavia as a "dragon-stick" above the layman; there is a monster seizing a young human in its jaws above the ecclesiastic.

Now the Abbey of Inchaffray was founded by Gilbert, third Earl of Strathearn and his wife Matilda, daughter of the Earl of Albemarle, at a time when they had seven sons living (the double bud and seven leaves), and one son dead (the angel) in A.D. 1200. The dead son, Gilchrist, was interred in the Abbey. The charter was found in the papers of the Earl of Kinnoull. The first signature is that of Robert, Bishop of St Andrews (the figure seated facing the Earl), John, Bishop of Dunkeld, and Jonathan, Bishop of Dunblane assenting (the two ecclesiastics below the Earl's chair). A duplicate of the "dragon-stick" above the Earl's head with his targe and sword can be seen in the Museum of Oslo. It seems to have been placed in the front of the chariot or sledge of a person of quality. At the time Earl Gilbert lived, much of Scotland was under Scandinavian rule and some of their customs would prevail. Above the seated ecclesiastic is a dragon or monster from whose open jaws a young human figure is trying to escape; perhaps the unlucky Gilchrist, dead in 1198. Behind the Earl is a tree with fruits or leaves perhaps referring to the eleven great and small churches whose benefices were given to the Abbey of Inchaffray.

How much one regrets the scaling off of the stone before the monument was finished, for if the other witnesses had been portrayed the reading would have been clear! Who were to face the Bishops? The three Abbots of Arbroath, Scone, and Dunfermline? Or was it "Constantine the butler" who was too much for the stone?

I suggest it is a page of local history.

St Vigean's.—In the church of St Vigean's near Arbroath is a partially broken cross placed against a wall (fig. 2). The cross, of which the ends of both arms and the top are broken, shows a variety of patterns, broken Greek keys, knots, plaitwork, triskeles, and what is known as the La Tene shield pattern. The two side panels are occupied by figures. On the right, two seated people are dividing a round object between them; below their chairs is a horned beast and a very emaciated man who is naked and kneeling on one knee in front of the beast with a sword or stick in his hand. Something like a curled tongue projects near his mouth. On the other side panel is the lower part of a robed figure with a kilted edge to the garment, and boots; three-quarters of a man standing on his head on a block with arms pressed in to the body as if tied, facing him a figure in robes with a kilted edge, boots, and a peaked hood like a domino covering

the face. Below, two priests with cowls pushed back, one with a book satchel on his shoulder, carrying staves or candles.



Fig. 2. In the church of St Vigean's, near Arbroath.

For long I thought the right hand panel was a famine scene, saints with a miraculous loaf, and the method of stabbing cattle in the neck to give the starving a draught of blood, which I was assured was a local

custom in the famine times of the Middle Ages. I was also told that beheading was done with a sword, the victim having been stood on his head on a block. It seemed to me that was an untenable position.

I wish to suggest another reading.

William the Lion founded only one Abbey, that of Aberbrothock in A.D. 1212. He dedicated it to St Thomas à Becket, influenced by the fact that his capture by the King of England took place just after that monarch had done penance at Becket's tomb in Canterbury. This saint was not popular in the district, the church of St Vigean or St Fechin having stood on the site where the church containing this cross still stands, since the sixth century. In spite of this William gave the church to his Abbey. The feud with the MacWilliams, his cousins who equally claimed the throne of Scotland, had continued for the whole of William's reign, and in his old age Godfrey MacWilliam conducted fairly successful raids and campaigns against the King, endangering the succession of young Prince Alexander.

The Earls of Buchan and Fife were entrusted with the task of engaging him while the King marched from the south with a large army. The size of this army induced Godfrey's followers to surrender their leader; once a prisoner he refused to eat and it was feared would die of starvation before reaching the King. The Earl of Buchan, the Justiciary, hurried him southwards and had reached Kincardine when a message came from William that he did not wish to see his enemy, so the Earl hung Godfrey up by the feet and beheaded him. Hung by the feet his head could touch the block in that position. Can this be another page of history standing near the one Abbey of William the Lion? It is not so clear as Fowlis Wester but I submit it is possible.

Invergowrie.—In the walls of a roofless ruined chapel at Invergowrie is a stone (fig. 3) on which are three ecclesiastics above two entwined dragons. Invergowrie was the favourite place of residence of Alexander I, 1107–1124. His reign was distinguished by a struggle about his right as hereditary Abbot of St Andrews to invest the Bishop of that see with ring and crozier. He first chose Turgot, once confessor to his mother Queen Margaret, but the discussion as to whether or not the King had the right of investiture, and opposing views on the remodelling of the Scottish Church raised a fierce storm and Alexander refused permission for Turgot to go to Rome and lay his case before the Pope. Turgot was allowed to retire to his monastery of Durham, and died there in 1115.

The King's next choice was Eadmer of the see of Canterbury, but he, wishing to reduce the Bishopric of St Andrews to a subordinate position under Canterbury, disputes broke out again and Eadmer resigned, sent

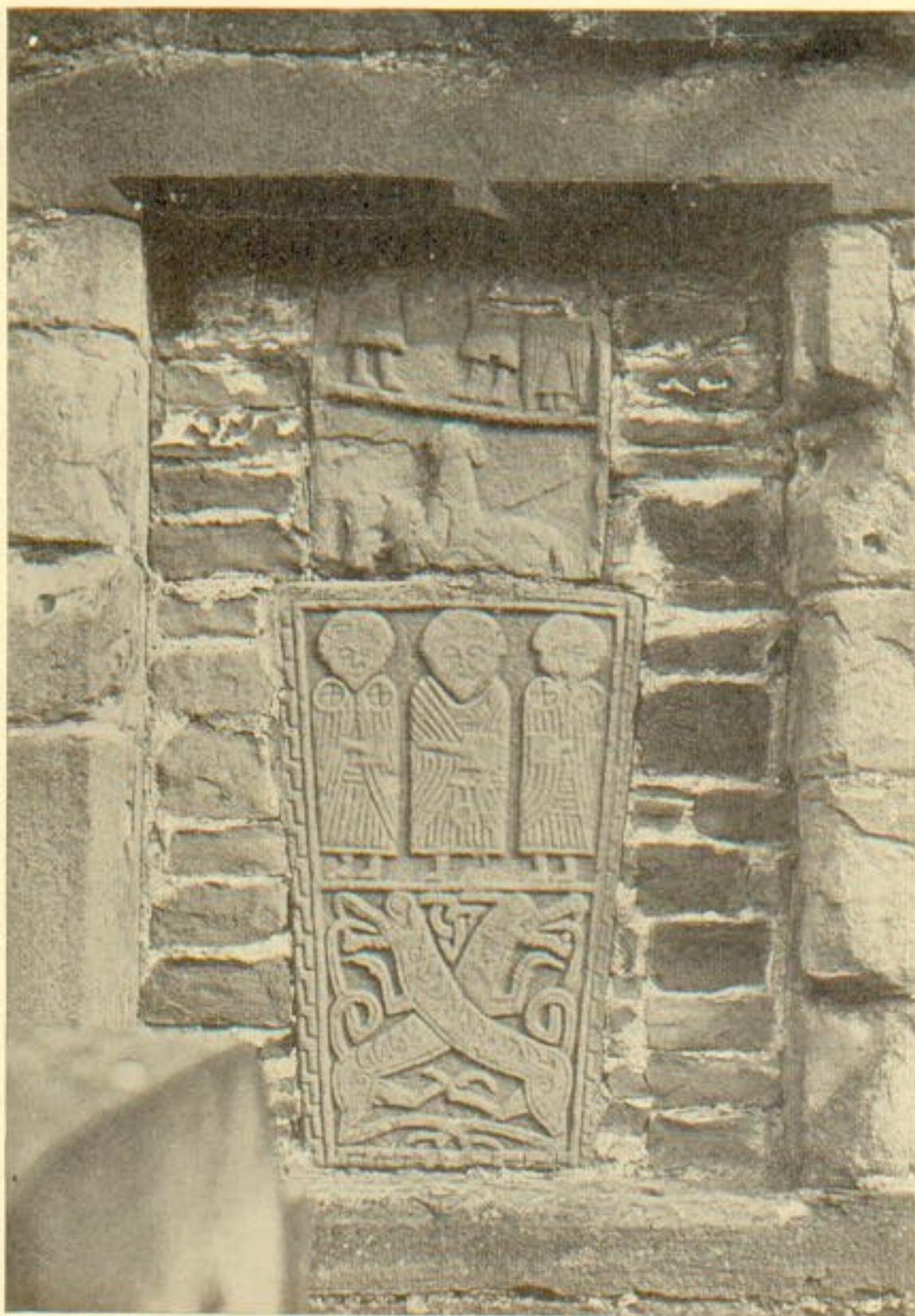


Fig. 3. Carved Stone at Invergowrie.

back the ring which he had received from the King, and returned to Canterbury. Later he wished to retract and made submission to Alexander, but the King appointed Robert, Abbot of Scone, to the post and himself died before he could invest Robert.

The stone at Invergowrie shows three ecclesiastics holding books; the two outside figures have shoulder brooches on which are crosses and the central figure none, but he dangles a ring on a string. Turgot was Prior of Durham, Robert was Abbot of Scone, Eadmer who sent back the ring was a simple monk. I suggest it is once more a page of history.

As for the interlaced dragons below, Alexander fought under the battle flag of his mother, the dragon of Wessex, sometimes erroneously called the White Horse, and Scottish Cumbria being left to his brother David, there was a dual sovereignty.

Benvie.—A few miles from Invergowrie on the borders of Perthshire and Angus in the little churchyard of Benvie is a tombstone on which

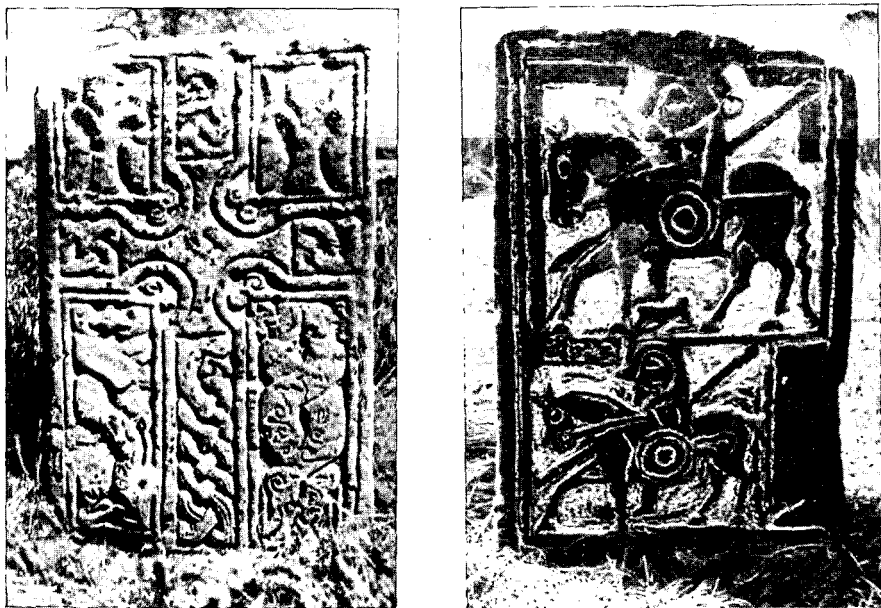


Fig. 4. In the Churchyard of Benvie, Perthshire.

are two riders. The helmet of the lower one with a nasal piece distinctly seen, is a type said to have been in use in this country only during the first half of the thirteenth century, a date bringing it near those of the other stones. The front is interesting for the cross is formed as regards

the main shaft, of writhing dragons, the left lower panel shows two bear-headed monsters interlocked, muzzle to muzzle; on the right, twined dragons with tongues out have the backs of their heads touching. The two angels in the top panels seem to be clutching the lower half of their wings as well they may with all this seething monstrous life below them. I know no monument so uneccelesiastically ecclesiastical.

In the course of the discussion which followed, Mr James S. Richardson, H.M. Inspector of Ancient Monuments, put forward certain considerations which ran counter to the views expressed in the paper. His points were:—

- (1) The closeness of the artistic relationship existing between these stones and monuments of admittedly Celtic origin, some of which bear symbols.
- (2) The fact that, by the period to which these stones were assigned by the writer of the paper, Scotland, and particularly the district in which the stones were found, had been permeated by Romanesque and early Gothic influences, introduced by the mediæval Church, which had revolutionised building construction and architectural design.
- (3) The difficulty of believing, in view of this last consideration, that the type of art represented on the Fowlis Wester and St Vigean's stones, which had reached its highest development between the seventh and tenth centuries, still existed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries without any signs of decadence or of influence by contemporary ideas of design.