

NEWLY DISCOVERED SCULPTURED STONES FROM PAPIL,
SHETLAND. BY PETER MOAR, CORRESPONDING MEMBER, and
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At Papil, Burra Isle, Shetland, where Goudie, in 1877, brought to light the famous Papil Stone, now in the National Museum, there have been discovered, in April 1943, the three ornamented and sculptured stones whose photographs and drawings are appended. The stones, which were found during grave-digging operations, were underground, the main slab being found 22 feet from the west end and 6 feet from the north side of the Church of Papil. It was standing upright in the soil, supported by two socket stones, and facing south, the top being buried to a depth of 20 inches. There was no sign of other slabs which might have formed the sides and ends of a cist, but three other socket stones, besides the two supporters, have at various times been found in the vicinity. About 4 feet away was found the second slab depicted, the broken top of a round-headed stone with an interlaced cross in relief.

The present church at Papil, which has not been in use since 1920, only dates from about 1815, according to the *New Statistical Survey*. It was built from the material of an older towered church known as St Lawrence's. The tower is described as a "steeple" by ministers of Burra in 1654 and in 1794, and from the statement that it was "five or six stories high" it is assumed to have been a round tower like that of Egilsey, Orkney, or perhaps Abernethy and Brechin on the mainland of Scotland. It is said to have been one of three "steepled kirks" in Shetland, the other two being situated at Tingwall, the centre of the Norse archdeaconry, and Ireland, Dunrossness. Edmondston, writing in 1809, laments that it has been pulled down to build the parish church. This older church of St Lawrence stood north and west of the present building, and a third primitive building is traditionally reputed to have been situated on the north side of St

Lawrence's Church. The only trace of the towered building consists of small bits of lime and mortar, not a stone being left. There is no reason to believe that the 1943 slab was found in its original position any more than the 1877 stone, which when first noticed by Goudié was lying south of the church, decorated side uppermost, and had been used past living memory to mark the family burial place of the Baptist missionary.

THE STONES. 1. PAPIL CROSS SLAB. (Pls. V. and VI.)

Pl. V, 2, with the supporting socket stones shows this stone as it is stated to have been discovered, though there is some doubt about the actual position of the raised socket stone on the right. The propped-up position, however, is the only way in which it will fit the socket, and the top of this socket stone, unlike the rest, is heavily weathered. The slab is rectangular, of close-grained sandstone, 3 feet 4 inches long at the top, an inch less at the bottom, 1 foot 10½ inches high, 2 to 2½ inches thick, and weighs about 1¼ hundredweight. The front of the stone has been dressed smooth, the back roughly so, and the top edge has been carefully rounded. Each end has been chipped for a distance of 10 inches from the foot of the slab, to a depth of an inch or a little less, leaving two projecting shoulders or tenons above of approximately 13 inches long, which fit the sockets of the supporters. These tenons have been ground away, back and front, to the form of a blunt wedge, in order to fit better. The stone, the material of which is not found in Burra, but can be obtained on the Mainland a few miles away, is in a good state of preservation, the only flaked portions being part of the top edge, and the only figured part damaged being the head of the third monk. The decoration in the centre of the cross is somewhat weathered, and could only be followed by feeling with the finger-tips. The bulk of the design is in double relief, many parts being raised above the others, as, for example, the hoods, hands of clerics, leg of monk riding, hind leg of horse, hems of robes, and decoration in the centre of the cross. The only parts incised are the satchel and straps, the reins and bridle, and the eyes and fingers. The background has been pecked away to an average depth of one-eighth of an inch. Although a photograph gives that impression, the cross is in no way raised at the edges, but is perfectly level on the whole surface. The space between the central boss on the cross and the surrounding ornament is recessed, but much worn. The spiral is entirely in relief.

STONE NO. 2. PAPIL INTERLACED CROSS. (Pl. V.)

This important fragment, which sheds more light on the nature of the Papil settlement than any other find there, was discovered by Mr Peter Moar while making investigations about the Cross Slab. The design is in the

nature of Irish recumbent monuments and the stone has evidently formed part of a cross-slab with an ovally rounded top. The cross is in low relief. The greatest length is $16\frac{3}{4}$ inches, breadth $12\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and the thickness varies from $\frac{3}{4}$ inch on the left to $1\frac{1}{4}$ on the right. The material is brown sandstone, and the carving is much better than the photograph indicates. The stone had been found at the same time as the Monks' Slab, about 4 feet away, but little attention had been paid to it.

STONE NO. 3. PAPIL CROSS STONE (SOCKETED). (Fig. 1.)

This stone, which is shown in position on the right-hand side of the Cross Slab, in Pl. V, 2, has two sockets at right angles to each other, one fitting into the slab and one behind the cross. These two sockets are centrally placed with regard to the ends of the stone, unlike the other socket stone, where it can be seen that the mortise is nearer the narrow end. It must be emphasized that the photograph is intended to reconstruct the nature of the stones and slab when found, and is not an attempt to build up whatever the original may have been. On the right edge of the Cross Socket Stone, at a point 7 inches from the bottom centre, the side had been ground away to a depth of approximately half an inch all the way to the top, except at a point 17 inches from the bottom centre, where a flat-topped circle or boss of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter and half an inch high had been left. The stone is approximately 5 inches thick here and the boss is centrally placed. The cross is incised to a depth of one-eighth of an inch, and the dagger-like appearance is due to the incision "tailing out." The spiral decoration above the cross extends to the curvature at the narrow end of the stone, and is lightly incised and almost indecipherable. The stone, like its neighbour, is $24\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, is of sandstone, and, with the exception of the circular side boss, the decoration is incised.

The left socket stone had originally been longer, but had been reduced to the required length by chipping at the broader end. On this stone one socket is filled by the tenon of the slab, the second, which is in front in Pl. V, demonstrates the nature of the



Fig. 1. Rubbing of cross on socket stone.

sockets, and there is another shallow unfinished socket on the side farthest away from the slab. The socket in front in the photograph does not fit the tenon of the slab, leaving the one at present engaged there for a hypothetical side slab. The unfinished socket does not seem to have been the beginning of a cross, but this side had been tooled to some extent, as if to alter the outline to the shoulder and boss effect achieved on the extreme right side of the decorated socket stone.

The other three socket stones are similar in nature, with three sides socketed and one plain. One of them was found some years ago, about 10 feet north of the present find, with a skull at its foot. Fitting into its three sockets in signpost fashion were rectangular flat slabs. One of these is still in the churchyard, a square of about 14 inches side and 2 inches thick. Two corners have been chipped away, leaving a tenon of about 1 foot by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch, which can be fitted into some of the sockets. Evidently these stones have been used at the same time and for the same purpose. The difficulty is the unusual number discovered—five.

Some minor points which will be apparent from the illustrations may be remarked upon. At the foot of the Cross Socket Stone are some marks resembling an Ogam letter. These are apparently accidental and made by some tool in the nature of a narrow chisel. While all that is certain of the design above the cross on this stone is shown in the plate, it must be noted that the latter is incomplete, as reference to fig. 1 will show. The design cannot be followed by feeling with the finger-tips. Although there appears in the photographs to be some design on the book satchel on the Monks' Slab, there is definitely nothing to be seen on the actual stone.

Sculptured stones now found in Shetland can be listed as follows:—

- 3 complete slabs—Burra or Papil Stone; Bressay Stone; Papil, 1943.
- 1 ornamented Socket Stone (Papil, 1943).
- 2. Interlaced Cross Stones—Papil, 1943; South Whiteness (see *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxi. p. 369).
- 1 incised cross on slab (early type). Papil Churchyard (see Goudie's *Antiquities of Shetland*, p. 49).
- 2 Ogam slabs—Lunnasting; St Ninian's Isle (both in National Museum).
- 2 Ogam fragments—St Ninian's Isle. Discovered by Goudie, but lost.
- 2 Ogam fragments—Cunningsburgh (in Museum).
- 3 Runic Stones¹—At Cunningsburgh (in Museum).
- 1 "Pictish" Symbol Stone—Sandness (figured by Low in 1774).
- 2 pairs of fragments with spiral ornament—Uyea; Lerwick Museum (locality unknown). Now in National Museum.

¹ A stone Low records at Eshaness, Northmaven, seems to have been a seventeenth-century memorial (Ancient Monuments Inventory).

The finding of the present stones probably raises more problems than it solves, for to discover parallels we have to go far afield. Only three Scottish rectangular upright slabs are known, at Murthly, Meigle, and Dull, all in Perthshire, and two of these appear to have had the sculpturing in relief in a recessed panel in the upper half of the stone, as at Papil. There is, however, no resemblance in topic or style of treatment. A known example of a sarcophagus from St Andrews, and a supposed one from Flotta, Orkney, had grooves to receive the sides, after the style of a window-sash or easel, and were radically different in artistic style both from each other and from the Papil stone. There is no parallel for the socket stones, and these so far add something to our knowledge. Figures of monks with the same kind of peaked hoods appear in a fragment at St Vigean's (Romilly Allen, *E.C.M.S.*, p. 240), in the Bressay and former Papil stone, at Maughold, Isle of Man (Kermode, *Manx Crosses*, pl. 67), and, more imperfectly, or with a difference, on a few other Scottish stones. The crooked crosier, which according to Coffey only became common in Ireland after the seventh century, is found at Bressay, Papil, Brechin, Meigle, and on the afore-mentioned St Vigean's stone, but book satchels, though a common enough piece of monkish equipment, are confined to the Shetland examples.

It is in general design, however, that the stone stands out on its own. The long-shafted Latin cross, with its flared arms and almost square base, is unique. There is no Scottish parallel, and the nearest approach to a resemblance is presented by Irish recumbent slabs from Inishcealtra, Galway, of twelfth century date. These, however, lack the slightly flared ends, and the base is in each case a trapeze, with the narrower end at the shaft. It seems, however, that it is to Ireland that we have to look for parallels. The re-entrant C-spiral on the Papil slab is painstakingly made by rule-of-thumb methods. The sculptor makes the first five volutes with the same number of turns; then he seems to realise that he will not have room for the nine which he apparently aims at, and the result is three imperfect volutes and a last one with a turn too many. There is no similar spiral in Scottish examples, but it is paralleled at Castledermot, Kildare, where the monastery was founded in the ninth century (Crawford, *Carved Ornament from Irish Monuments*, pl. xvi). Modified C-curves, like those used in the centre design of the cross, can be seen in the Irish examples, both as borders (Crawford, *ibid.*, Durrow Abbey Cross), and as terminals to the arms in cross slabs; but their use to offset a central boss is a *tour-de-force* of the Shetland sculptor. The style of the horse (which, with due respect to a national journal, is not an "Iceland pony," for Iceland, if discovered, had had scant time to evolve a breed) is the best of its kind on sculptured stones, the nearest Scottish approaches being at Aberlemno, Angus (*E.C.M.S.*, pl. xxxv), and Meigle, Perthshire. The two odd wedge-shaped insertions and imperfect spiral, the pictorial accuracy and perfection

of the design, the skilful work in relief at three levels all indicate an original genius who owed more to his own native skill than to technical training.

There is the same accuracy and restfulness which is found in the earlier Papil stone, and in mentioning this a hypothesis may be put forward on artistic grounds alone. It is that the two bird-headed figures with axes, picking at a skull, in the bottom section of the latter are not contemporary with the rest of the sculpture, but have been added after the stone had been set up, and by an inferior artist. If this is the case, the stone, before becoming a museum piece in the capital (like the Stone of Destiny), may have in turn marked the graves of Christian Celt, heathen Norse, and Baptist!

The simple incised cross with wedge-shaped ends which is found on the socket stone seems to be without parallels on the mainland of Scotland, though there is something similar in Iona (*E.C.M.S.*, p. 400) and again in Eilean na Naoimh (*ibid.*, p. 402). But it is old in Ireland, and appears on the Kilnasaggart Stone (Armagh), which also has the modified C-spirals in the centre design of the cross on the Monks' Slab. Petrie gives an example from Clonmacnois, doubtfully dated to the ninth century (*Christian Inscriptions*, vol. 1, pp. 27-8), and further examples from Aran, Limerick, Inishmurray and Inishcealtra. The spiral on the socket stone appears to be completely paralleled, if we accept what the rubbing seems to indicate, in a more elaborate form at Tihilly, County Offaly, not far from Clonmacnois (Crawford, *Carved Ornament*, pl. xvi, 5). It is also found on the ninth century cross of Bealin, Westmeath. It may be added that Kermodé, among his Manx crosses, figures a stone with the wedge-ended incised cross, with Anglian seventh to eighth century runes. This cross has a diminutive Chi-Rho appendage, but it is probable that the spiral above the Papil Cross also marks it as of reasonably early type.

With regard to the Papil Interlaced Cross, there is no great difficulty in finding almost exact parallels, not in Scotland, where the only cross of the type is at Iona (*E.C.M.S.*, p. 386), but again in Ireland. Practically the same cross is found at Clonmacnois, County Offaly, and is figured in Crawford's *Irish Ornament*, pl. xiii, and in Petrie, vol. i, p. 44, where from the inscription a date of 916 is thought possible. In vol. ii, p. 43, Petrie gives another example from Inishcealtra, Galway, and he has a third from Lemnaghan, Offaly. Irish antiquaries, who have inscriptions and records to go upon, regard this fairly common type of cross as tenth century. It may be noted that the Whiteness fragment (*Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxi, p. 369) gives us another Shetland cross of this Irish type.

The conclusion must be that a community of Irish monks had established itself in Shetland at least a thousand years ago, and that this community could have few links with the mainland of Scotland. But this is not surprising. The historical trend of communications has in general been south and west, as evidenced by Stone Age collective tombs, which in many cases must



1. Interlaced Cross.



2. The Cross Slab with Supporters.



The Cross Slab.

be derived from the Boyne culture of Ireland, by the distribution of brochs and by the Norse settlements. Ogam writing, of which there are but 9 examples in all the eastern counties of Scotland south of the Moray Firth, 2 each in Caithness and Orkney, 1 in Sutherland, and 3 in south-west Scotland, is represented by 7 examples in Shetland. There are 300 examples in Ireland, mainly in Cork, Kerry, Waterford, and Kilkenny, 26 in Wales, 5 in Devon and Cornwall, and 7 in the Isle of Man. No arguments can be advanced for either Pictish or Columban missions from this, for Ogams were prior in general to monkish communities; least of all can one argue any reasonable insular inscription in any language, Pictish, Gaelic, or otherwise, but the relatively numerous inscriptions in both early and late Ogams in the Isles afford another example of the historic sea-routes along which ideas and people moved.

The evidence of dedications in Shetland cannot lead us far with regard to the early church there. Though Orkney is sometimes mentioned in the monkish records as the scene of the labours of Servanus, Moluoc, Kentigern, Drostan, Colm, Brendan, Dotto, Bathan, Caemhan or Conranus, Cormac, and other half-mythical personages, and Ninian is credited with having sent a preacher to "the islands that are afar off," Shetland is nowhere mentioned, nor have the various references been put to that critical examination without which they are valueless. The dedication of Papil to St Lawrence does not help us at all. Goudie, in reporting the previous Papil stone, mentions a Lawrence *born* in 619, whose name he says is associated with Laurencekirk. As St Lawrence's Day was celebrated in Shetland of old on August 10th, Old Style, this cannot be the Lawrence given by Goudie, if he ever existed, and is not merely a garbled version of Laurence of Canterbury, Augustine's successor, who *died* in 619. It is indeed the Spanish martyr, who was roasted on a gridiron in 258, in the reign of the Emperor Valerian; the man for whom the Escorial ("gridiron") is named, who became a popular Norse saint.

Known Shetland dedications are as follows: Holy Rood 6, St John 6, St Mary 6, St Paul 3, St Matthew 1. Saints: Olaf (King Olaf Haraldsson of Norway) 7, Magnus (Earl Magnus Erlendsson of Orkney) 5, Margaret 2, Bartholomew 2, Nicholas, Gregorius, Sunniva, Hilary, Barnaby, and Lawrence 1 each. Of Celtic saints St Ninian is commemorated in St Ninian's Isle (locally until recently St Ringan's Isle), and a St Ninian's Chapel at Norby, Sandness, which seems to rest on nothing more definite than the evidence of the Ordnance Survey map. St Colme is given in a sixteenth century reference to Cunningsburgh, and St Columba seems a *later* tradition for the church of St Olaf at Hillswick. Two suggestions of Goudie, St Columba for Clumlie and St Levan for Levenwick, must be rejected outright, as they rest on no securer basis than their resemblance to place names. It will be seen that the evidence of dedications for a Celtic church is practically negative.

Pre-Norse historical references are invariably to Orkney, with the exception of a nebulous Thule, which appears to vary from Iceland and Shetland to Norway. In 449 the Saxon chiefs Ochtha and Ebissa are said to have laid waste the Orkneys, and in 565 the ruler of Orkney is said to be at Inverness and giving hostages to the Pictish king. In 579-80, 682, and 709 the isles are alternately attacked by the Scots and Picts. These, with well-enough attested references to great plagues, are the historical sources apart from monkish records of saints, until the thirteenth century "Heimskringla" refers simply to "a great going to Shetland" in 872. Viking raids on Britain appear to have begun as early as 784, and Brøgger and Finnur Jonsson, on evidence slight in itself but both linguistic and archaeological, would postulate a peaceful Norse emigration in this century, a theme well-developed in Brøgger's *Ancient Emigrants*.

If this is granted, there is no difficulty in a late dating for our stones. For evidence of a religious community living under what is likely to have been more troubled conditions in Norse times we can take Clonmacnois in Ireland. It was founded in 548. In the ninth and tenth centuries it was sacked three times by the Irish, twice by the Danes, and once by the two combined, yet this was the period of its greatest artistic magnificence. It survived eight other plunderings by Irish and Norman before its final destruction in 1552. Iona was first sacked in 795; it was three times destroyed in the ninth century, when among other eventful things King Kenneth MacAlpin was buried there, the shrine of Columba was removed for safety, and at one time the island was temporarily abandoned. But in the tenth century it was producing crosses in peaceful obscurity. Forty-five out of 117 Manx crosses listed by Kermodé are Scandinavian, and the Bressay Stone in Shetland almost certainly is. Many of the Norse settlers in Ireland and Scotland embraced Christianity very early, certainly much earlier than 995, the date of the official conversion of Earl Sigurd Hlodverson of Orkney by the Norwegian king, Olaf Tryggvason, who adopted the simple expedient of seizing and threatening to kill the Earl's son, and then carrying the boy off as a hostage lest his father should waver in faith.

There is no reason to cast doubt, as Brøgger does (*Ancient Emigrants*, p. 61), on the "papa" names in Shetland ("papa" in Old Norse signified an Irish priest), nor on Dicuil and the twelfth century *Historia Norvegiae* in their references to their voyages, their white robes and their books. The name "Papil," which may be translated as "priest's dwelling," occurs in the islands of Yell, Unst, Burra, and Fetlar, in all cases in the immediate vicinity of, or at no great distance from, church ruins or sites. Papa Stour, Papa Little, and Papa are the names of three islands, and in addition there are some shore names and one or two field names beginning with the word or its variation "pobi." Each name has to be examined on its merits, as some names, especially hill names, are derived from Norwegian "pappe"—

a breast (*cp.* Paps of Jura). But Brøgger's wholesale stricture is quite unjustified, for we have a large residue of names which do commemorate early priests, and Pabil is one of these.

With regard to the Norse use of "Pettr" (Pict) he is almost certainly correct. Pict names were always given in Shetland by the Norse to pre-historic ruins, or lonely places where no human ever dwelt. Pettigersfield in Whalsay, for example, a hill slope with one or two "rickles" of stones, investigated in 1938, provided a piece of Neolithic pottery, a certain collective tomb, and a probable Neolithic dwelling. Jakobsen's so-called Celtic place-names (*Place Names of Shetland*, pp. 175-207) prove almost invariably on investigation on the spot in particular instances to be disguised Old Norse or Norwegian words, for Shetland maintained a close contact with Norway, with individuals holding land in and migrating to and from both countries, up to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Shetland dialect, rich in thousands of Norse words, has no Celtic, if one omits a certain common Norse-Gaelic vocabulary, exemplified in Henderson's *Norse Influence in Celtic Scotland*, and a few borrowings through Scotch. Certainly the linguistic argument supports Brøgger's theory that the Norse settlers came into an almost empty land. In these days, far removed from pestilence and folk-wandering, we can only surmise at what became of the numerous and well-organised people who built the brochs. But we can now do more than surmise about those early fathers who sought lone isles where they could worship their Lord in peace.

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