

## THE ECCLESIASTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ST NINIAN'S ISLE TREASURE

by THE VERY REV. MONSIGNOR DAVID McROBERTS, S.T.L., F.S.A.SCOT.

THE discovery, in 1958, of the St Ninian's Isle Treasure has raised many questions which will, no doubt, be discussed for a very long time before any definitive answers are found. In particular, the fundamental question of the precise nature of the hoard has been discussed right from the start. Is the treasure a collection of ecclesiastical silver, perhaps the church plate of some pre-Norse Celtic monastery? Or, is it the treasure of some secular household? Or again, is it a mixed lot of silver, partly ecclesiastical, partly secular, perhaps loot buried by some raider?<sup>1</sup> So far, the general verdict seems to have been to reject the exclusively ecclesiastical character of the treasure, both because of items included among the silver (such as the pommel and the three cones, which are regarded as attachments of a sword, and the penannular brooches, which are regarded as quite definitely secular ornaments) and because of items which are lacking (such as chalice and paten) if the hoard is ecclesiastical plate.<sup>2</sup>

The circumstances in which the hoard was found, within the area of a pre-Norse church and concealed under a cross-marked stone, seem to indicate *a priori* that we are dealing with an ecclesiastical treasure. The approximate date of the hoard, about the year 800, would fit in with the assumption that the hoard is ecclesiastical plate, concealed during the Viking raids, which were being carried out, about that time, against the island monasteries of the Celtic church. My purpose in this article is to suggest that a careful investigation of the possible uses of the several categories of items found in the hoard (bowls, brooches, cones, etc.) would go far to establish the case for accepting the ecclesiastical character of the entire hoard. Taking each group of items separately one can show that there is a possible interpretation which makes each group fit quite easily into an ecclesiastical context for the whole hoard.

### THE SIX DRINKING BOWLS

The most prominent part of the hoard is undoubtedly the collection of eight silver bowls. Six of these are similar in form and can be discussed as a group: the other two must be treated separately, because they are distinct in shape and presumably in use: one is of hemispherical shape, the other is a hanging bowl.

The six silver bowls which are similar in shape differ slightly from one another in size and decoration. They are each about six inches in diameter, with a base formed by the indentation of the bottom of the bowl, and they are all decorated with patterns of punched dots. Quite clearly these are six drinking bowls: but, are they ecclesiastical or secular? Theoretically it is, of course, possible that some secular household

<sup>1</sup> This article is an abstract of a paper read before a meeting of the Society on 11th December 1961. For a full description of the St Ninian's Isle Treasure, see *Antiquity*, xxxiii, 1959, pp. 241-68, and also the magnificent photographs of the various objects in Aberdeen University Studies, No. 141, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion in *Antiquity*, loc. cit.

sent these bowls to be buried in the church in the face of a threatened attack by the sea-raiders. In such an assumption, however, one would look for other unmistakably secular gear in the hoard, such as silver mountings for drinking horns, like the Burghead or Trewhiddle examples, or harness mountings or coins, but these are quite absent from the hoard and, when we remember that a cross forms part of the decoration of some of the bowls and also that these bowls are only one group of objects in a collection where everything else is, as we shall see, capable of an ecclesiastical interpretation, then it becomes clear that the secular interpretation of these six

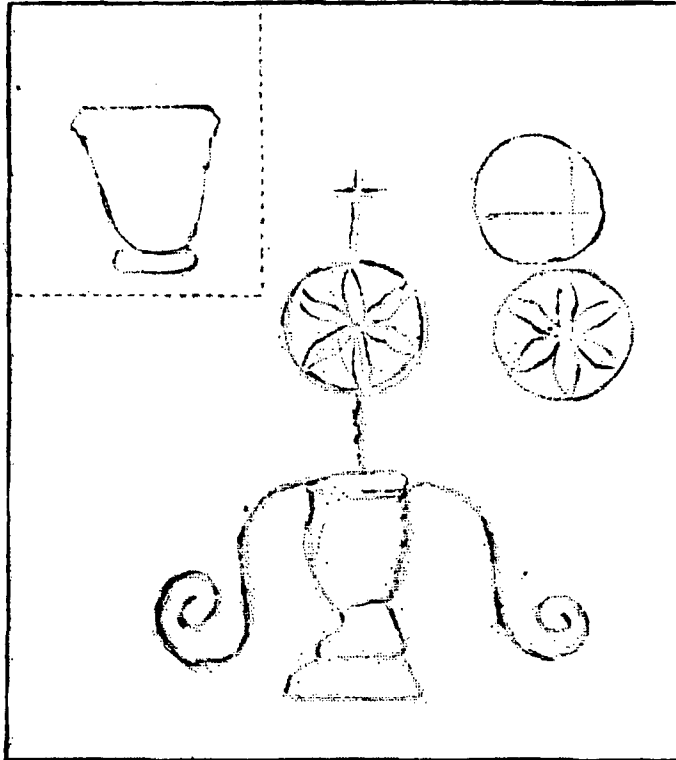


FIG. 1. Graffito on wall of *Mater Matuta* temple, Rome, showing types of chalice, after Cabrol-Leclercq II (ii), fig. 1894 (copyright Letouzey & Ané)

drinking vessels raises more problems than it solves. On the other hand, the difficulties are all largely solved if we accept that these bowls were buried here because they were part of the equipment of the monastic community of St Ninian's Isle. But if the bowls are ecclesiastical, what was their precise use? It is very unlikely that they were drinking bowls from the monastic refectory: they are obviously much more important than that. Made of silver and skilfully decorated; their design including, in some instances, the cross; and buried here with other silverware that has a liturgical connection; it seems difficult to escape the conclusion that these six silver bowls were six chalices used by the clerics of the St Ninian's Isle monastery for the euchar-

istic liturgy. It is true that these bowls do not have the normal shape that chalices assumed during the Middle Ages but that is not an insuperable difficulty since it is known that, in the early centuries, two types of chalices were in use, the *calix* shape, with cup, stem and base (which became the universal type in medieval Europe) and the *poculum* shape, the design of which was based on that of the ordinary drinking cup and had only bowl and base. The two types of chalice are to be seen in the sixth-century eucharistic graffito (fig. 1) discovered by Father Hartmann Grisar, in 1894, on the wall of the *Mater matuta* temple in Rome.<sup>1</sup> The *poculum* type of chalice became obsolete in the early Middle Ages, but it did exist and these six silver bowls from St Ninian's Isle, decorated with crosses and buried among other liturgical equipment, are almost certainly eighth-century examples of this type of chalice. The fact that no patens were discovered with these six bowls in no way invalidates the conclusion that they are chalices because, up to about the ninth century, patens were not in general use with ordinary chalices. The small number of elaborate patens that have survived from the Dark Ages (or which are mentioned in documents) are all of them *patenae ministeriales* or patens used in conjunction with the large and elaborate ministerial chalices, which were used at Easter and other great festivals to communicate a large number of the faithful.

#### THE HEMISPHERICAL BOWL

The next bowl to be considered is also of silver but it differs from the others by being completely hemispherical and by having no base. Since it has no base, it cannot have been used as a chalice and, having no escutcheons for cords or chains, it cannot be regarded as a hanging bowl.

Two points emerge in any consideration of this hemispherical bowl. Firstly, since it has neither base nor arrangements for hanging, it must have been placed in some kind of stand or held in the hands of an attendant when in use. In the second place, its design of intersecting circles deliberately emphasises an equal-armed cross patée in the bottom of the bowl, which clearly indicates that the bowl had some liturgical or ecclesiastical use.

A bowl, similar in shape to the hemispherical bowl from St Ninian's Isle, was found in a Viking grave at Nordre Kaupang in Norway, in 1951, and is described by Aslak Liestøl in *Acta Archaeologica*.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the fact that Liestøl speaks of the Nordre Kaupang bowl as a hanging bowl, it is simply a hemispherical bowl with no traces of any escutcheons. The remarkable feature of the Nordre Kaupang bowl is the runic inscription which some owner has scratched on its side: 'I MUNT LAUKU . . .' – 'In [the] hand-basin . . .' This inscription is presumably incomplete but it does indicate the use of this type of bowl. The similar St Ninian's Isle bowl would then be a hand-basin but would be intended for use in the liturgy and it would be used in conjunction with a ewer (perhaps of earthenware): the basin and the ewer would be held by some assistant, perhaps a deacon, when they were used for the washing of the hands in the liturgy. The miracle-story of St Columba, acting as

<sup>1</sup> Illustrated and described in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 16 ser. ix (1897), pp. 721–31.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta Archaeologica*, xxiv (1953), pp. 163–70.

deacon to St Finnbar in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, bringing a jug (*urceus*) of water from the spring and setting it beside the altar (with its contents changed into wine), probably refers to the ewer of water, which would be used in conjunction with a bowl such as this hemispherical bowl from St Ninian's Isle.

#### THE HANGING BOWL

The last of the series of bowls, discovered in the St Ninian's Isle hoard, is the important silver hanging bowl: it is the first complete hanging bowl to be discovered in Scotland and the very first probably to be found in its original place of use. Though most hanging bowls have been discovered in pagan Viking and Saxon burials, archaeologists are agreed that these bowls originate in the Christian Celtic area from about the fifth to the ninth century. All agree that these bowls had some ecclesiastical significance but what their precise function was is quite unknown.

Aslak Liestøl, in the article referred to above, takes up the suggestion that hanging bowls were water containers for the washing of hands in the liturgy or for holy water. The fish in the Sutton Hoo bowl lends some colour to this theory. Liestøl's arguments are inconclusive and certainly the arguments based on the Nordre Kaupang bowl prove nothing, for that example is not a hanging bowl.

Dr Françoise Henry, on the other hand, adopts the opinion that hanging bowls were used as lamps, or as reflectors of lamps, in Celtic churches.<sup>1</sup> This opinion leans heavily on the identification as a lamp of the curiously-shaped tenth-century hanging bowl from Ballinderry crannog. The Ballinderry 'lamp' seems to be some kind of sieve for straining and pouring liquid and not everyone would agree that it is a lamp. But, apart from such evidence as the Ballinderry 'lamp' might provide, there is no evidence for the use of permanent lamps in the churches of the Celtic provinces of Christendom. What evidence there is suggests that these churches were lit only during services by lamps carried by those taking part in the functions. There is the quaint story of the cleric Lugidius, falling asleep during St Comgall's mass on Easter night and letting the lamp, which he carried, fall into the newly consecrated Easter water, to St Comgall's great annoyance.<sup>2</sup> That the important monastery church of Iona was without a lamp in the time of St Columba, must be deduced from the account of the saint's death as given by Adamnan. After Columba collapsed before the altar, Diarmait had to grope in the darkness to find him, 'because the brethren had not yet come in with their lamps'. Unlike the descriptions of Continental churches by Venantius Fortunatus or Paulinus of Nola, Cogitosus, in his description of the church of Kildare, has nothing to say about lamps illuminating the building.

Speaking in general, there is no evidence whatsoever for hanging bowls having been used in the churches of the Celtic lands as liturgical water-vessels or as lamps. A third possible explanation might be advanced: Celtic churches were influenced by ecclesiastical customs prevailing on the Continent and, during the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, it was fashionable to present votive chalices to be hung up in churches: the Roman basilicas had great numbers of these votive chalices (the gifts of successive popes) and the palatine churches of Carolingian princes also led

<sup>1</sup> *J.R.S.A.I.*, LXVI (1936), pp. 209-46.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, August., t. I, die IV, p. 345.

in this fashion. There is no doubt that reports of these rich votive gifts were duly brought back, by pilgrims and travellers, to the Celtic lands, and manuscripts, like those emanating from the court of Charles the Bald (Pl. XXIV, 1), or carved ivories, like the panels of the Pola Casket (Pl. XXIV, 2), showing the interiors of churches, with hanging chalices and vases, would help to spread the fashion. The hanging bowls of Celtic churches may simply have been votive gifts, presented to these churches in accordance with the popular Continental fashion. In such a theory, hanging bowls would have, generally speaking, no utilitarian purpose, but would simply express the piety and generosity of the donor. Such a supposition would, however, give some explanation of the enrichment of the insides of these bowls (as in the Sutton Hoo example or the Lincoln example from the River Witham), which makes the bowls more elaborate and costly as votive offerings, but which rendered the bowls much less useful for any practical purpose.

But, no matter what theory one accepts as to its function, there is general agreement that the purpose of the St Ninian's Isle hanging bowl was ecclesiastical and accordingly its presence here in no way invalidates the claim that the hoard is ecclesiastical in character

#### THE BROOCHES

The next important group of objects found in the St Ninian's Isle hoard are the penannular brooches, one large brooch and eleven smaller ones. These brooches are generally regarded as purely secular ornaments, but this assumption is not valid because, while the surviving Celtic brooches give no clue as to their real character, whether purely secular or ecclesiastical, there is sufficient literary and monumental evidence to prove that, at least in some instances, these brooches were ecclesiastical ornaments.

A legend, preserved in the Book of Lecan, purports to give the story of how the *Delg Aidechta*, the testamentary brooch, of the abbots of Iona originated. According to the legend, Columba acquired the brooch from Pope Gregory the Great and it was worn ever after by the coarbs of Columcille at Iona as part of their official insignia as heirs of the founder-saint. One of the bas-reliefs on the tenth-century Cross of Muiredach at Monasterboice shows the 'Arrest of Christ' (Pl. XXV, 1). Like the other sculptures on that cross, it depicts contemporary costume: the two soldiers wear tenth-century dress and the figure of Christ is dressed as an ecclesiastic of the period (no doubt as an abbot, the most important figure in the Celtic ecclesiastical world), he wears the tunic and the cloak, or *amphibalus*, and the cloak is fastened on the breast by a large penannular brooch of antique form. This conceivably represents a contemporary abbot, wearing the testamentary brooch of his monastery, just as the coarb of Columcille at Iona wore the *Delg Aidechta*.

The *Delg Aidechta* of the abbots of Iona is sufficient to show that penannular brooches are not necessarily and exclusively secular. In fact, without straining the evidence unduly, one might suggest that some of the important brooches, like the Tara Brooch or the Hunterston Brooch, may have survived simply because they were ecclesiastical relics of monastic founders. Giraldus Cambrensis, writing his *Itinerarium*

*Kambriae* in the twelfth century, is almost certainly referring to such a brooch, preserved as a relic of a fifth-century saint: 'Further, I must not omit mention of the cirlet (*torquis*), which they say belonged to St Cynawg, which is indeed like gold in weight, in quality and in colour. It extends in four sections, of pierced work (*ex rimulis*), all set out in the form of a circle and skilfully linked together. It is fastened across the middle by a kind of dog's head with snarling teeth protruding outward from its open jaws. The people regard this as one of the most potent of relics; so much so that no one would dare to commit perjury with his hand on this.'<sup>1</sup> It is certainly not impossible that the large penannular brooch in the St Ninian's Isle treasure is the official brooch, the *Delg Aidechta*, of the abbots of St Ninian's Isle.

In the case of the eleven smaller penannular brooches of the St Ninian's Isle treasure, there is also sufficient manuscript and monumental evidence to suggest that these brooches were accessories of the liturgical vestments worn by the clerics of the St Ninian's Isle monastery. A well known Dark Age monument from Invergowrie shows three clerics in the liturgical vesture of the period. The group probably represents an important cleric, bishop or abbot, visiting the *parochia* of his diocese or monastery, bearing some relic of the patron saint (it might even be a brooch-relic), and supported by two lesser clerics, presumably deacons. In accordance with the custom of the time, all three wear chasubles, but the deacons' chasubles are fastened at the shoulder by cross-marked disks. These disks appear on other monuments; we see them, for example, on the reliquary called the *Corp Naomh*, in the National Museum of Ireland, or on Stone No. 29 at Meigle. The fact that these disks are stylised brooches becomes clear when we examine closely the vestments worn by the angels depicted on the Chi-Rho page of the Book of Kells (Pl. XXV, 2): these angels are dressed as deacons and wear chasubles, the conventionalised folds of which are transformed into wings and the colouring of the disks, fastening the garment at the shoulders, shows quite unmistakably that these round objects are really circular brooches with a transverse pin.

In view of this evidence from the monuments, one can readily accept that these smaller penannular brooches of the St Ninian's Isle treasure were accessories of the vestments used by the deacons of the monastic community when they assisted at the liturgy. However, since we do not have the complete treasure of the St Ninian's Isle community, we cannot argue from the number of these brooches to the number of deacons that might assist at the liturgy of the monastery. But this theory does explain why there are so many of these smaller brooches and also why they are hidden away with the liturgical equipment of the monastery.

#### THE CHAPES

The two chapes discovered in the St Ninian's Isle hoard have been fashioned so as to be mounted on some thin material and this fact rules out the possibility that

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Dr W. Douglas Simpson for this interesting reference. It may be useful to give the Latin description of the brooch, which is somewhat involved and obscure: '*Praeterea de torque quam Sancti Kanauci dicunt tacendum non censui. Est etenim auro tam pondere et natura quam colore simillima ex quattuor frustris sicut ex rimulis patet orbiculariter in invicem insitis artificiose conserta et capite quasi canino rictuosis hinc inde dentibus extante per medium complexa.*' (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (Rolls Series), vi, pp. 25-26.)

they may have been intended as mountings for a leather scabbard. The suggestion has therefore been made that the chapes were stole-ends and this interpretation is certainly reasonable in view of the probable liturgical character of the other items in the hoard. It is to be noted, however, that the two chapes differ, to some extent, in size and design and, while one is somewhat worn, the other is in mint condition, being a replacement, presumably, of a worn-out older piece. That being so, we cannot envisage these two chapes as stole-ends for a stole of the usual type, such as the early example from St Cuthbert's tomb. It remains possible, of course, that such asymmetrical chapes may have decorated the ends of a pallium-shaped stole, where the two ends are not seen together. However, considering the strap-ends, or girdle-ends, which occur in other hoards, such as the somewhat later Trewhiddle hoard, it seems much more likely that the two chapes of the St Ninian's Isle treasure are ornamental ends for the girdles that would be used, to fasten at the waist, those albs or tunics, with richly embroidered hems, which are depicted on such Pictish monuments as Rosemarkie No. 4 or Meikle No. 24 and No. 29.

#### THE COMMUNION SPOON AND THE KNIFE

The spoon and pronged instrument discovered in the St Ninian's Isle treasure have been identified as a communion spoon for the administration of the Eucharist under both kinds and as a knife for the elaborate *Fractio panis*, which the Celtic liturgy shared with the other Gallican liturgies of Western Europe. No other examples survive of such eucharistic knives or spoons from the Celtic liturgy but, even without such comparative material, the identification seems reasonable because a spoon for the administering of the intincted host would be a normal part of the church plate of any church which administered communion under both species in pre-medieval times. Also, some kind of knife would be necessary for the complicated *Fractio panis* envisaged in the Stowe Missal tract. In the general liturgical context of this collection of silverware, the identification of these two articles as communion spoon and as the knife for the *Fractio panis* is highly probable.

One particular aspect of the communion spoon claims attention: the curious eucharistic symbol of the dog's head licking the spoon which is incorporated in the design. The origin and significance of the symbol are easily guessed: the symbol surely derives from the gospel-incident, where the Syrophenician woman claims that 'the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs' and it suggests the humility with which the Christian should approach the Holy Eucharist. While this is evident, it has to be stated further that this particular eucharistic symbol is quite unknown in the rest of Christendom and, that being so, it is of great interest to find that this extremely unusual eucharistic symbol occurs in yet another instance in the iconography of Dark Age Scotland.

The other instance of the eucharistic dog-symbol is to be found on the splendid cross-slab at Nigg, in Ross-shire (Pl. XXVI), which is roughly contemporary with the St Ninian's Isle treasure. The carved group in the triangular pediment of the Nigg monument looks, at first sight, just like one more occurrence of the Paul and Anthony legend, so familiar in the Dark Age monuments of the Celtic provinces of

Christendom, but on closer examination, it proves to be something quite different. All the elements of the Paul and Anthony story are there but they are transformed into something new, a symbolic representation of the concelebration of mass. The Holy Dove bears the Eucharistic Bread, bowing low on either side are two priests, with their missals, concelebrating mass. It might almost be a sculptured representation of that incident in Adamnan's life of Columba, where Columba invited Cronan, the bishop, '*ut simul quasi duo presbyteri dominicum panem frangerent*' – that together, as two priests, they should break the bread of the Lord. And the two animals, which appear in the composition, are no longer the two lions of the Paul and Anthony legend, but two dogs, for 'the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs'. It is quite clearly a repetition of the same dog-symbol that occurs on the St Ninian's Isle communion spoon.

#### THE POMMEL AND THE CONE-SHAPED OBJECTS

The exact nature of the remaining four objects in the St Ninian's Isle treasure has been something of a mystery. The suggestion that the silver pommel is that of a sword and that the three silver cones are ornaments of a baldric, has not received unanimous approval, but the mere possibility that these objects might be related to military accoutrements has been a stumbling-block to the acceptance of the whole



FIG. 2. Representation of *flabellum* in the Catacombs of Sant' Agnese, after Cabrol-Leclercq v (ii), fig. 4467 (copyright Letouzey & Ané)

hoard as a collection of ecclesiastical plate. However, there is another interpretation of these objects which explains satisfactorily their peculiarities and also their presence here in this hoard of liturgical plate. Basing our investigations on representations in the contemporary Book of Kells, it is possible to demonstrate, with reasonable probability, that these silver objects are some fittings of a liturgical fan or *flabellum*.

The two great ostrich feather fans which nowadays are carried when the pope goes in solemn procession to the Vatican Basilica, are the sole modern survivors of the liturgical fans, which were in universal use throughout Western Christendom prior to the Middle Ages. To protect the elements of the Eucharist on the altar, it was the normal custom, in early centuries, for a cleric to stand by, during mass, waving a fan to drive off flies and other insects. Representations of these fans, or *flabella*, occur regularly in the Christian monuments of Europe. An example in the Catacombs of Sant' Agnese (fig. 2) shows the normal form of an ancient fan: it has a long handle with a disk at the end, presumably a piece of parchment stretched on a circular frame and painted with some design, which in liturgical examples is fre-



quently the Chi-Rho or a cross. A ninth-century example, carved on the baldacchino of an altar in Perugia (fig. 3), illustrates a smaller type with a short handle: and we can point to a particularly barbarous representation, carved in 725 on the altar of the abbey-church of Ferentillo, in Umbria (fig. 4); this shows three *flabella* with long handles and what appear to be bases on which they can stand upright.

The church in Dark Age Scotland and Ireland used the same liturgical equipment as elsewhere and we can identify some representations of these eucharistic

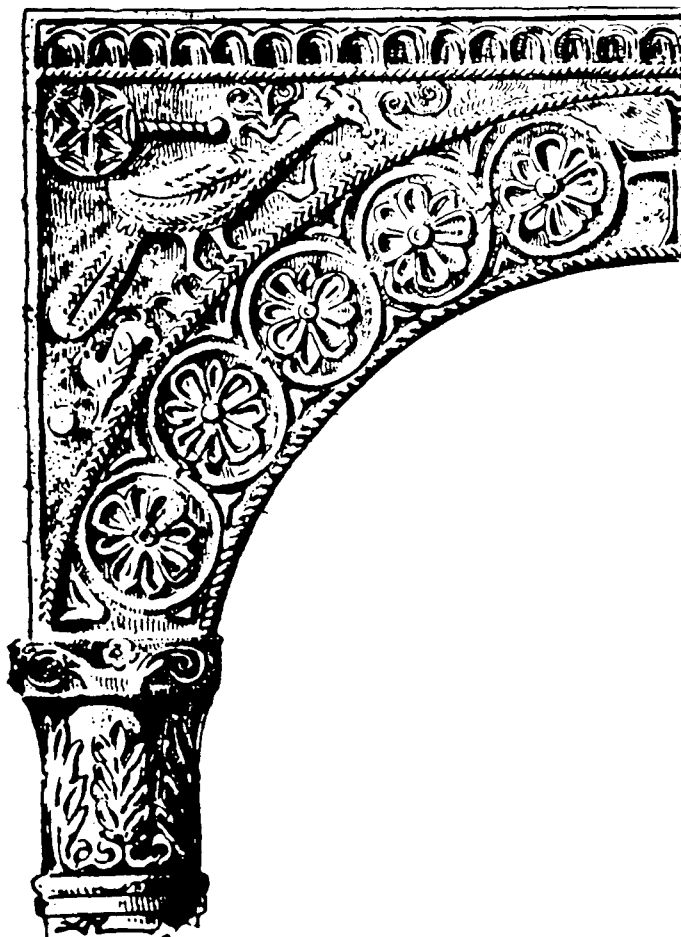


FIG. 3. Representation of *flabellum* on baldacchino of altar, Perugia, after Cabrol-Leclercq v (ii), fig. 4468 (copyright Letouzey & Ané).

*flabella* on some of our own monuments. The well-known St Peter Stone at Whithorn, dating from the seventh century (Pl. XXVII) displays a *flabellum* the disk of which is decorated with the Chi-Rho and it has a handle and base not unlike the almost contemporary examples from Ferentillo. Square *flabella*, also decorated with the Chi-Rho but with a different type of handle, occur on two carvings on the Isle of Raasay

(Pl. XXVII); and Irish examples are to be seen at Inishkea North, Co. Mayo, and at Reask, Co. Kerry. Other monumental examples might be cited, but we turn to the manuscript evidence which is even clearer.

It has been suggested that the Book of Kells was written, or at least begun, in Iona, but whether it was written in Iona or at Kells, it shows the ideas current in the Celtic church at a period fairly close to the time of the St Ninian's Isle treasure

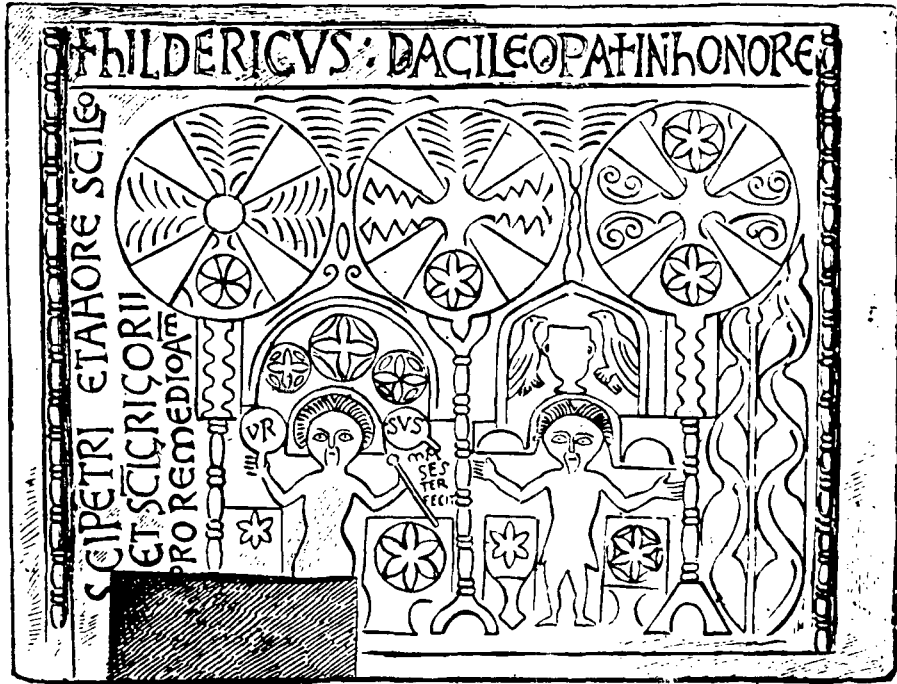


FIG. 4. Three *flabella* represented on altar of the abbey-church of Ferentillo, Umbria, after Cabrol-Leclercq v (ii) fig. 4470 (copyright Letouzey & Ané).

and one thing that the Book of Kells does show very clearly indeed is the prominent place occupied in liturgical ceremonial by the *flabellum*.

In the Madonna and Child page of the Book of Kells, for example (Pl. XXVIII), the four attendant angels hold *flabella* in their hands.<sup>1</sup> These *flabella* are coloured yellow and grey, with designs indicated on the disks in green and pink, which probably means that the artist had in mind *flabella* whose handles and frames would be of gilded wood or metal or of silver, with painted parchment stretched on the circular framework of the disks. The bottom right hand angel on that same page carries a floriated *flabellum*, coloured yellow to represent gilded wood or metal. This latter type of *flabellum*, made up of real or conventional leaves or feathers, occurs regularly in Celtic art: St Peter, in the eleventh-century *Breac Maodhóg*, and the cleric, on the book-shrine of St Molaise, or the two ecclesiastics, on Cross-slab No. 11 from St

<sup>1</sup> These objects are usually described, by commentators on the iconography of Celtic manuscripts and Pictish stones, as 'sceptres' but they are quite certainly liturgical *flabella*.

Vigeans (fig. 5), all carry these floriated *flabella*. Other shapes of *flabella* occur: in the Temptation page of the Book of Kells, the ecclesiastic who stands in the door of the temple carries crosswise two *flabella* with heads formed like marigolds. The angel-symbol of St Matthew, on fol. 5r of the Book of Kells (Pl. XXIX), carries a *flabellum*,

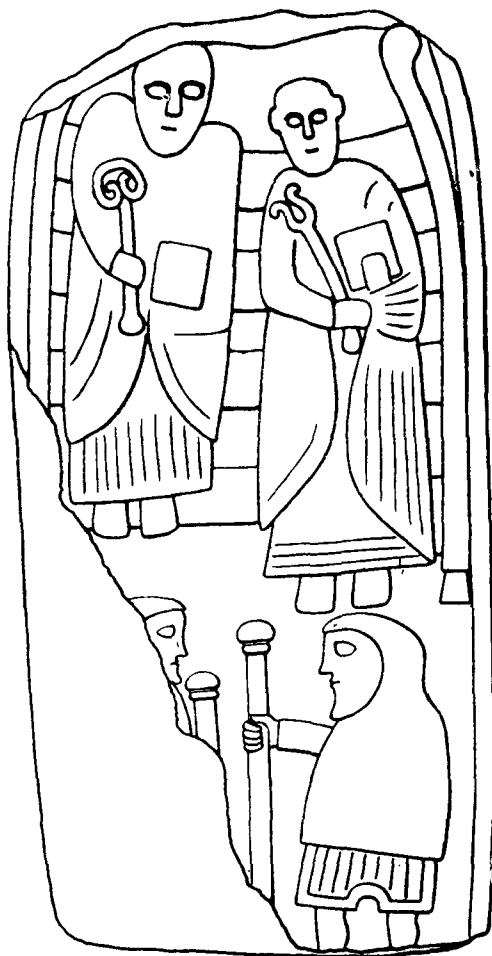


FIG. 5. Cross-slab, St Vigean's; ecclesiastics holding floriated *flabella*

which has a green disk (presumably representing enamelled metal or coloured parchment), with gold balls fixed to the frame of the disk.

This last type of *flabellum* reappears on fol. 129v of the Book of Kells (Pl. XXX), where two *flabella* of this design, arranged crosswise, form the background to each of the symbols of the four evangelists. These pictures of *flabella* in the Book of Kells are contemporary with the St Ninian's Isle treasure and they provide us with the clue we

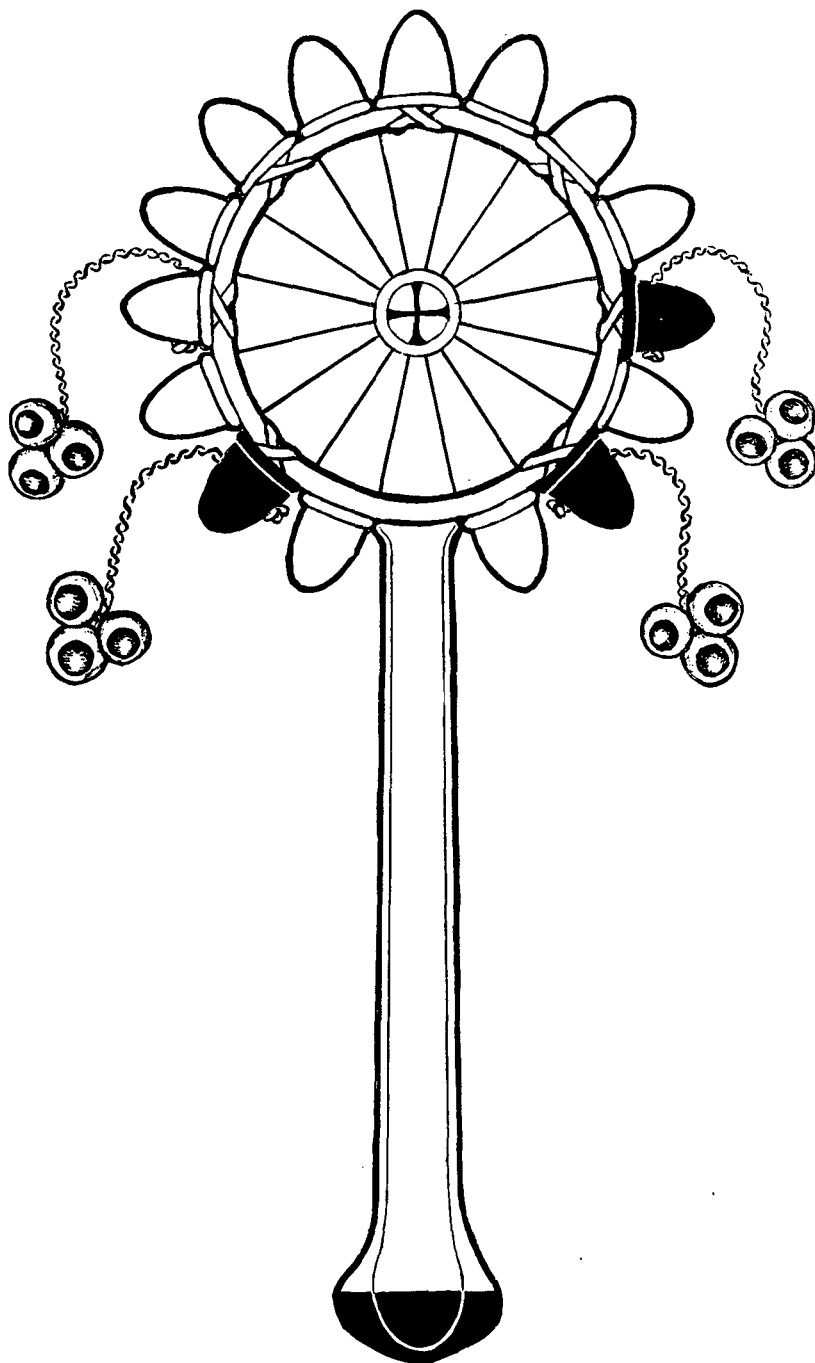


FIG. 6. Reconstruction of *flabellum*, St Ninian's Isle; surviving fragments (cones and pommel) shown in black

require to explain the three cones, found in the treasure. The Celtic *flabella* depicted on fol. 129v of the Book of Kells have a series of cones fixed to the circular frame of the disk and, attached by cords or chains to some of these cones, there hang bells or tassels. It will be seen at once just how easily the cones found in the St Ninian's Isle treasure fit into place in the make-up of one of these *flabella* and it seems evident that they are simply three of a series of cones that once adorned the circular frame of one of these eighth-century liturgical fans. The cones have each a base with two slots through which they could be fastened by a strap or thong onto the frame of the disk. Each cone has also holes perforated in its sides by which the chain or cord carrying the bells or tassels, seen on fol. 129v of the Book of Kells, could be attached to the cones. The pommel too fits into such a theory: it is legitimate to assume that it was used in conjunction with the cones since it was found in association with them, like them it is of silver gilt, it has similar decoration and shows the same amount of wear. It is reasonable to suppose that an attachment such as this silver pommel would be added to the end of the long gilded wooden handle of the *flabellum* to ornament it and protect it from wear.

In the accompanying reconstruction of a Celtic *flabellum* (fig. 6), based on the examples shown in the Book of Kells, the pommel and three of the cones have been shaded black to emphasise just how little of the fittings of the *flabellum* have actually survived in the St Ninian's Isle treasure. Several possible reasons might be adduced to explain why so little survived. It may be that, in the crisis of an imminent raid, some fittings were hurriedly and not very systematically torn off a *flabellum*, which was in regular use, and concealed with the other silver. Or perhaps these fittings were in a workshop, as part of a *flabellum* that was being repaired, and being conveniently to hand, were put into the box with the other silver. Or again, the pommel and the three cones may have been all that remained of a *flabellum* that was preserved as a relic of an early saint, perhaps the founder of the monastery, for *flabella* were preserved as relics in the Celtic church just in the same way as books and bells and bachuls and brooches.<sup>1</sup>

In conclusion, I would sum up by saying that the only adequate explanation which provides a coherent picture of the contents of this larchwood box unearthed on St Ninian's Isle is that it contains the church plate (or, more probably, part of the church plate) used by some eighth-century community of Celtic clerics for the eucharistic liturgy. In the alarm of an impending Viking raid, these clerics hurriedly gathered together and concealed six bowl-shaped silver chalices, a liturgical hand-basin, a hanging bowl or votive chalice, the abbot's brooch, eleven smaller brooches which were accessories of deacons' vestments, two ornamental girdle-ends, a communion spoon, a knife for the *Fractio panis* and a silver pommel and three other silver fittings from a eucharistic *flabellum*. This theory gives a coherent explanation of the whole hoard, with all its peculiarities, and there is sufficient evidence to make out a reasonably convincing case for such an interpretation.

<sup>1</sup> The *flabellum* of Columcille was preserved among the saint's relics at Iona down to the year 1034, when the Annals of Ulster tell of how it was lost at sea. There are other references to the *flabella* of other Celtic saints, such as that of St Patrick at Armagh, which was still in existence, according to the Annals of the Four Masters, in the year 1128.

*The Society is indebted to the University of Aberdeen for providing the blocks for figures 1 to 4 and 6 and for Plates XXIV, XXV and XXVIII to XXX, and to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material: The Board of Trinity College, Dublin (Plates XXV, 2 and XXVIII to XXX); Messrs Letouzey et Ané (figures 1 to 4 and Plate XXIV, 1); and The Mansell Collection (Plate XXIV, 2).*



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1. Part of page from the Bible of Charles the Bald, showing hanging chalices, after Cabrol-Leclercq III, fig. 2643



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2. Panel of the Pola Casket, showing hanging chalices



1. Cross of Muiredach, Monasterboice; the 'Arrest of Christ' showing penannular brooch



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2. Part of the Chi-Rho page, Book of Kells; angels dressed as deacons, wearing circular brooches





Cross-slab at Nigg, Ross-shire, with two dogs in the pediment

McROBERTS: ST NINIAN'S ISLE TREASURE.



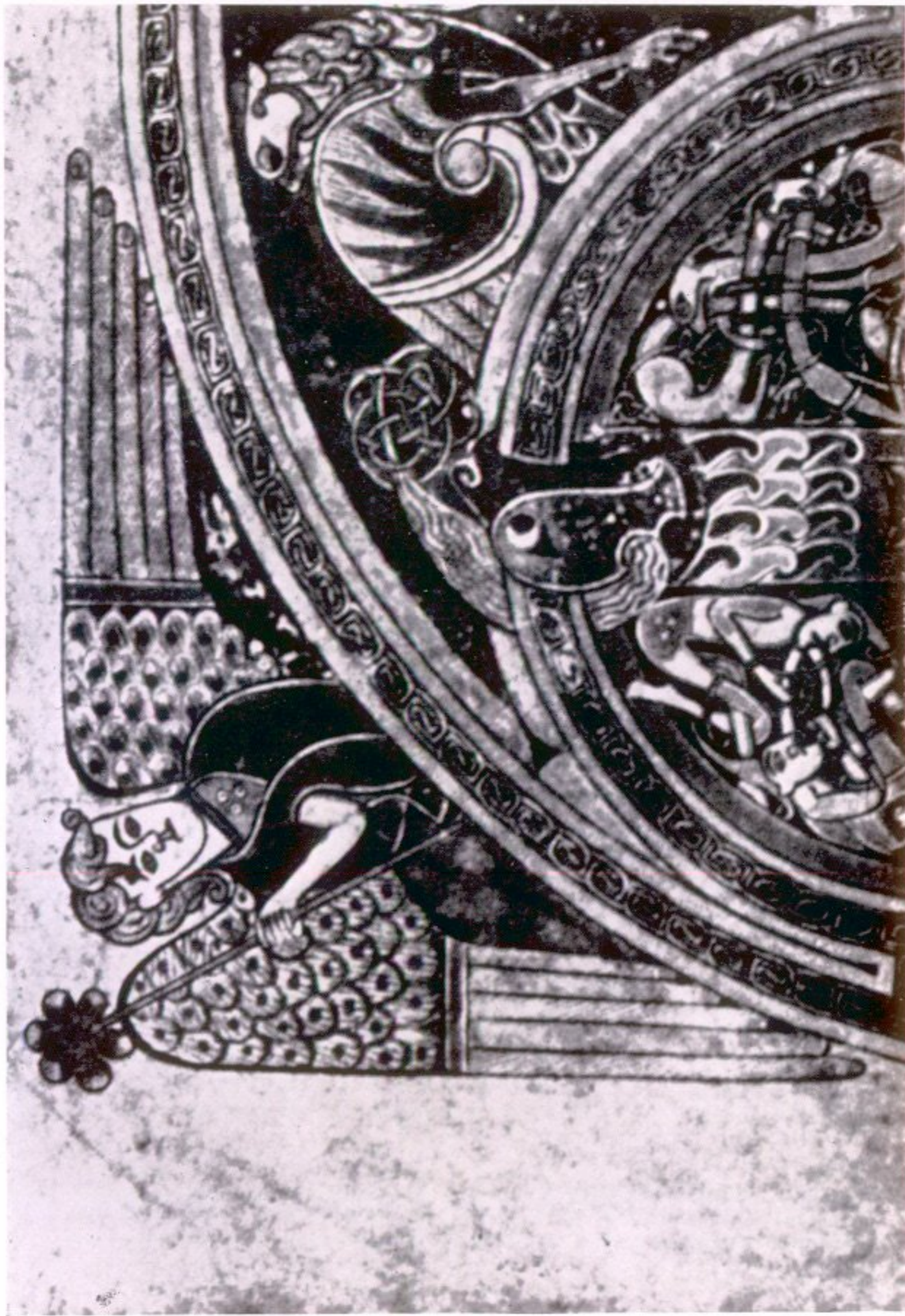
Representations of *flabella* on stones in Scotland; left, Whithorn (St Peter Stone), right, Raasay



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Madonna and Child Page, Book of Kells; angels holding *flabella*



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Fol. 5r, Book of Kells; angel-symbol of St Matthew holding *flabellum*

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Fol. 129v, Book of Kells, showing *flabella* in background of each panel