

## Fragments of a fifth crosier from Scotland

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### ABSTRACT

*An unpublished drop and crest in the British Museum are examined here and it is suggested that they come from a crosier made in Scotland in the second half of the 12th century. Two further lost crosiers are noted.*

### A FIFTH CROSIER FROM SCOTLAND

In 1986 I published the surviving fragments of four early medieval Scottish crosiers (the crosier of St Moluagh, or *Bachul Mor*, the inner and outer crooks of the crosier of St Fillan, and two disembodied drops, found independently in the ruins of a church in Hoddum, Dumfriesshire). I believed at the time that this was all that survived of the early medieval Scottish crosiers. Having become more familiar with the subtle differences between the Scottish and Irish traditions, I feel that two further fragments should be added to those already published, as it seems likely that these, too, were originally part of a Scottish crosier. The fragments have not been published. They consist of a disembodied drop and part of a crest (illus 1–6). They were transferred from the Museum of Practical Geology to the British Museum in 1863 (Ref nos 63. 1–22. 139 & 63. 1–22. 140), and they are recorded as having been ‘found in Ireland’. In view of this provenance, it was assumed that the fragments came from an Irish crosier. However, their structure and decoration suggest that they probably belonged to a Scottish one.

The differences between the Scottish and Irish traditions are subtle, and it is difficult to come to precise conclusions about the Scottish crosiers because so few survive. The evidence of the four fragments previously considered tended to suggest, however, that developments made in the structure of the Irish crosiers took some 50 years to appear in Scotland, while decorative traditions in Scotland could be a combination of quite up-to-date developments and archaic ideas which had been abandoned in Ireland for as long as a century.

The structure of the British Museum drop shows that it was cut from a horseshoe-shaped crook which was cast in a single piece. This structure belongs to the 11th century and later in Ireland (the typology of the crosiers is discussed in Michelli 1989, chap 5). In Ireland the face of the drop was always embellished with a raised and pierced trim of alternating triangles. A particularly clear example of this feature is found on the drop of the crosier of Condúilig in the British Museum (Michelli 1986, illus 12). On the surviving Scottish drops this feature is never found. The drop in the British Museum has no trace of the Irish trim, and this tends to suggest that it has a Scottish origin. Another structural feature of the drop may point in the same direction. Its profile and sides are

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ILLUS 1 Unidentified drop, British Museum 63. 1–22.  
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ILLUS 2 Unidentified drop, British Museum 63. 1–22.  
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ILLUS 3 Unidentified drop, British Museum 63. 1–22.  
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ILLUS 4 Unidentified drop, British Museum 63. 1–22.  
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slightly concave, as on the cast drop from Hoddom in the Royal Museum of Scotland (*ibid*, illus 7). In Ireland this is a rare feature.

The drop and what remains of the crook-section are decorated with a pattern of large squares, whose L-shaped panels are embellished with lines of punched dots. This pattern divides the drop horizontally in half, as on the drop of the inner crook of the crosier of St Fillan (*ibid*, illus 4). In Ireland, two patterns became common on the crooks and drops of the crosiers, appearing to the exclusion of any others until they gave way to inlaid decoration in the 12th century. These patterns consisted of a running ‘Celtic’ cross (as on the Lismore crosier, for example: Raftery & Mahr 1976, pl 94) and a lattice-like network of lozenge-shaped panels (as on the crosier of St Tola (*ibid*, pl 92)). Squares did not appear on any drop or crook. It is possible, therefore, that squares on the drop are a Scottish feature.

The pattern on the drop appears to have been incised or engraved and stippled. This technique was common in Ireland in the 10th century, when it appeared on many objects of a mundane nature (large quantities of engraved and stippled stick pins and utility ware were excavated from Dublin (see Dublin 1973)). The technique also appeared on several crosiers, such as the Prosperous and Bann crosiers, a 10th-century knop now on the crosier of St Dymphna, and the crosier-fragment from the John Bell collection now in the Royal Museum of Scotland (Raftery & Mahr 1976, pls 74, 75.2, 27 & 71.1; MacDermott 1957, pl 54.a; Henry 1970, II, pl 52). But once crooks were cast in a single piece, from the beginning of the 11th century, engraved decoration was abandoned. However, in Scotland it appears to have continued in use, as it appears on the engraved drop from Hoddom in the British Museum (Michelli 1986, illus 9–11).

In summary, the evidence for Scottish practices in the structure and decoration of early medieval crosiers is meagre, but it consistently suggests that the British Museum drop has a Scottish structure, and a Scottish decoration which has been executed in a Scottish manner. I suggest,



ILLUS 5 Unidentified drop,  
British Museum 63.  
1–22. 139



ILLUS 6 Crest belonging to unidentified drop, British Museum 63. 1–22. 140

therefore, that despite their Irish provenance, the drop and its associated crest should be added to the corpus of known early medieval Scottish crosiers.

Like the other Scottish crosiers, these fragments are difficult to date. Their various features seem to have been imported from Ireland, and therefore one way of arriving at an approximate dating is to compare them with the most similar Irish crosiers, most of which can be dated. These particular fragments are best compared with Petrie's crosier of St Mura (National Museum of Ireland, P 1015; illus 7). Although the concave profile is rare in Ireland, it is found on Petrie's crosier, whose drop is also comparatively long like the British Museum drop and has a similar slightly polygonal base. Another important feature of Petrie's crosier is that its decoration is broken up at the angle of the drop to accommodate a large circular stud whose setting is designed to make it look like an eye. The British Museum drop is badly corroded, but a similar arrangement seems to be found on it. At any rate, a lonely circular stud seems to have been set at the angle of the drop as if it, too, was meant to suggest an eye (illus 1 & 2).

Petrie's crosier of St Mura seems to have been made by a craftsman trained by Mael Sechnaill Ua Cellacháin, who made the shrine of St Lachtin's arm between 1118 and 1121 (the date and craftsman's name are furnished by the inscription, Mael Sechnaill's relationship to the maker of Petrie's crosier is discussed in Michelli 1989). Petrie's crosier is therefore unlikely to be earlier than this, and I have dated it to the second quarter of the 12th century. If the structural experiments made in Ireland indeed took about 50 years to appear in Scotland, it seems that the fragments of the Scottish crosier in the British Museum cannot be much earlier than the second half of the 12th century. The fragments therefore seem to be the latest surviving examples of the early medieval type of Scottish crosier.

#### A LOST EARLY MEDIEVAL SCOTTISH CROSIER

In an appendix to the surviving crosiers discussed in Michelli 1986, 10 lost crosiers were listed, together with references in chronological order. One, or perhaps two, further crosiers should be added to that list.



ILLUS 7 Petrie's Crosier of St Mura, National Museum of Ireland, P. 1015

#### THE CROSIER OF ST KESSOG

Last recorded in 1221, the crozier was kept by the Colquhouns of Luss in the Lennox, Dunbartonshire. This crozier was described as covered with gems.

Moncrieffe & Hicks 1967, 106 & 205.

#### UNIDENTIFIED CROSIER

This crozier was returned to its hereditary keeper not long before 1982. It is described as covered with gems. It may, or may not, be identified with the crozier of St Kessog listed above.

McCall 1982, 71–2.

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