

## IV.

## NOTICE OF THE CARVED FIGURE FROM DUNSTAFFNAGE CASTLE.

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By the kind permission of A. J. H. Campbell, Esq. of Dunstaffnage, I am enabled to submit to the Society the well-known and interesting carving which has for some centuries been in the possession of the Campbells of Dunstaffnage.

When I asked permission to exhibit it, I was not aware of the fact that it had already been shown. In 1833 it was exhibited by the late Mr David Laing, but the antiquaries who then saw it have, I fancy, nearly all passed away, and a new generation now fills their places. So, in the circumstances, I concluded that it might not be uninteresting to you if it were again brought under your notice.

The account handed down from generation to generation of the family who possess it is, that it was found upwards of three hundred years ago near the ruins of an old chapel which stands close to the walls of Dunstaffnage Castle.

The earliest authentic notice of it occurs in Bishop Pococke's *Tours in Scotland* (in 1747, 1750, 1760). On June 8, 1760, that well-known traveller was entertained at Dunstaffnage Castle, and he records in his letters that Mr Campbell "showed us a very curious piece of antiquity, found not a great many years ago in the castle. It is a figure of ivory, sitting in a chair as supposed, of a king of Scotland, about four inches and a half long, with a crown on the head and a beard. The robes hang rather clumsily. . . . What is very particular, his hands are laid on his knees as in the statue of Memnon,<sup>1</sup> and as the Grand Signior sits at this day when any one goes to audience."

The next notice of it occurs in Pennant's *Second Tour in Scotland* in 1772. This tourist, in describing his visit to Dunstaffnage, after

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Pococke saw this statue during his Eastern travels. See Pococke's *Tours in Scotland*, edited by D. W. Kemp for the Scottish History Society, 1887, p. 74, where a facsimile of the Bishop's drawing of the figure is given.

stating that the castle had been the first seat of the Pictish and Scottish princes, and that the famous stone—the Palladium of North Britain—better known as the coronation stone, was long preserved at Dunstaffnage, says:—"Mr Campbell showed to me a very pretty ivory image, found in a ruinous part of the castle, that was certainly cut in memory of that chair, and appears to have been an inauguration sculpture. A crowned monarch is represented sitting in it, with a book in one hand, containing the laws of the land, which he was swearing to observe. They never took the oath by kissing the Bible, but by holding up the right hand" (vol. ii. p. 410).



Fig. 1. Chessman from Dunstaffnage.

Before examining the figure itself with reference to this theory, it might be well to inquire into the truth of the legend which asserts that the coronation stone was preserved at Dunstaffnage. An analysis of the legends connected with the coronation stone was submitted to the Society by Dr Skene in 1869. In it he states that the legend in all its naked improbability is still believed, and that it still stands a solitary waif from the sea of myth and fable, with which modern criticism has hardly ventured to meddle, and which modern scepticism has not cared to question. He further views it as a remarkable circumstance "that the two features of the legend, to which popular belief has clung with greatest tenacity, viz., that the stone was kept at Dunstaffnage, and that it was removed from thence to Scone by Kenneth MacAlpin in the ninth century, rest upon the statement of Hector Boece alone, and are totally unknown to the older authorities."

Modern criticism has demolished many of the mythical stories recorded in the pages of Boece, yet I would rather avoid pronouncing a definite opinion upon this one, although a perusal of these legends leaves considerable doubt as to the stone having ever been at Dunstaffnage at all.

The figure measures  $4\frac{5}{8}$  inches in height,  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches in breadth, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in thickness. It is carved from a tooth of the sperm whale, and represents a crowned monarch with a trefoil crown on his head and a book in his left hand, sitting on a chair of a square form, decorated on the back and sides with a simple bead and stripe pattern. If any reliance is to be placed upon the engraving in Pennant's work, it would appear that the figure has undergone some mutilation since Pennant saw it. Part of the beard and a portion of the back of the chair are broken off. I am afraid, however, that Pennant's engraving cannot be depended upon, for the artist has rendered most inaccurately some of the details—notably the crown, which appears more mutilated in the engraving than it even now is. The side of the chair represented in the engraving in his work is that which is broken, and I think that it can be easily demonstrated that, in completing it, the artist has followed his imagination, and that it has been very different originally.

The first point to which we naturally turn on inquiring as to the probable age of this carving is the costume. It is quite clearly defined in the carving, and, as far as I can judge, belongs to the period of Henry VIII. of England or James V. of Scotland. The king is clothed in a close-fitting doublet or jerkin, laced across the front, the skirt reaching a little below the girdle. The sleeves, which were at times worn with or without it, are puffed in the manner common at that period. The cloak or robe, which is unfastened at the neck, covers the back, and is gathered in folds over the knees, on which the hands rest, the right hand holding the corner of the robe. I have compared the costume with that on an engraving representing Henry VIII. delivering the Bible to Cranmer and Cromwell, and it presents a very striking similarity. If further evidence were desired in confirmation of this opinion, it is to be found in the shape of the beard and the cut of the hair. Although the beard is unfortunately broken, yet enough remains to identify it with "the great round beard, like a glover's paring-knife," by which Falstaff was known.

The hair is cut short, combed straight down, and turned in all round. This is precisely as it was in the reign of Henry VIII., although no further back than the previous reign it was worn long and in great

profusion. The crown is formed of nine fleurs-de-lis, equal in size. All the points are broken, and one of the fleurs-de-lis on the left side of the head is entirely broken away. I have been unable to find an example of a royal crown drawn exactly in this way. In the coins of the period and on all the engravings I examined, they are usually formed of four large fleurs-de-lis; in some instances four smaller fleurs-de-lis or points are inserted between the larger ones. I am of opinion that the crown has been treated in a conventional manner, and I do not think much weight could attach to any evidence as to the date of the carving founded on it.

The design of the chair, at a first glance, led me to suppose that it represented a period much earlier than that of the figure. One or two points in the ornament which is partially broken off seem, however, to link it with the Tudor period. As to its resemblance to the coronation chair, it may be said that it is very difficult to find out of what pattern that chair was. On the reverse of the seal of the Abbey of Scone there is represented a Scottish king seated in the chair, but the pattern of that chair in the lower portion is much more primitive than on this carving, and in the upper portion differs completely, for it has a circular back. There is also a representation of it in 1577 by Hollinshed, but it does not bear the remotest likeness to the chair of this figure, and differs from it both in form and ornamentation.

The difficulty in dealing with the chair arises from the mutilation it has undergone. Mr Laing came to the conclusion that the back had been surmounted by a fleur-de-lis pattern. But for one circumstance I might have endorsed that opinion, and that is the presence of two drilled holes in the back of the figure. It seems evident to me that an ornament, probably carved and pierced and extending to nearly the level of the neck and shoulders of the figure, has originally surmounted the back of the chair. Such an ornament, from its very construction, would necessarily be frail, and it is not surprising, therefore, that it should have been broken away. The centre of the ornament has been formed of a couple of holes with a chamfered edge, which in itself has a distinctly Tudor feeling.

The drill used in making these holes has been round pointed, and as a

consequence the artificer has required to drill them into the figure itself. Almost the whole of the ornament is broken off, but the holes remain. On the sinister side of the chair there remains a portion of a clawfoot ornament—probably that of a lion's claw—but what the ornament has been when complete it is impossible for me to conjecture. That it has extended to the height of the shoulders and neck of the figure seems evident from the marks of the carver's tools, which terminate close to the line of the shoulders.

All the authorities who have examined this figure differ from Pennant in the account he gives as to what it was intended to represent, and they are equally unanimous in suggesting what it is. Pennant describes it as "an inauguration sculpture." At the time this figure was previously exhibited there had recently been discovered the famous set of carved chessmen in the Lewis, eleven of which are now in the Museum,<sup>1</sup> and Mr Laing came to the conclusion that this figure had formed one of a similar set of chessmen made at a later period. Mr Frederick Madden, in an elaborate article which he wrote on these chessmen and submitted to the Society of Antiquaries in London, came to a similar conclusion, although he does not mention ever having seen the Dunstaffnage carving. I see no reason to differ from them.

The game of chess is of considerable antiquity, and was a favourite game of the Scandinavians from a remote period. The northern warriors considered a proficiency in chess one of the requisites of a liberal education, and ranked it with the art of engraving magic runes or composing Scaldic lays. We find an earl of the Orkneys, at the beginning of the twelfth century, thus boasting of his accomplishments:—

"At the game board I am skilful :  
Knowing in no less than nine arts ;  
Runic lore I well remember :  
Books I like : with tools I'm handy :  
Expert am I on the snow-shoes ;  
With the bow, and pull an oar well ;  
And, besides, I am an adept  
At the harp, and making verses."

<sup>1</sup> See the account of these chessmen in the present volume, pp. 9-15.

In the "Inventories and other records of the royal wardrobe and jewel house" made during the reign of James V. the following entries occur:—

Under the category of "Jowellis" in the inventory made on the 25th March 1539—"Item ane pair of tabillis of silvir ourgilt with gold indentit with jasp and cristallyne with table men and chess men of jasp and cristallyne." In another inventory of 1578 of jewels and plinishings in the Castle of Edinburgh "pertening to our soverane lord and his hienes derrest moder, Ane quhite polk of greit chas men of bane, Ane litle grene polk with sum chas men, Ane quhite buist with chas men in personages of woid, Ane polk with table men."

From these entries I infer that the chessmen in use during the reign of James V.—to which date this figure may be attributed—were frequently articles of considerable value, and were by no means small in size, which may be concluded from the adjective "greit" applied to some of them.

This figure differs in several important points from the Lewis chessmen, which leads me to conclude that it was made at a much later period, and probably in a different place from them.

The first peculiarity is the arrangement of the hair. In the kings of the Lewis chessmen the hair is plaited in long wreaths, and hangs over the shoulders. This is said to have been an old German custom. It was also prevalent in Norway. Olaus Magnus says expressly that the Danes and Norwegians let their hair flow over their shoulders, but confined it by bands when they went to battle. Moreover, it seems to have been the prerogative of royalty, and was not permissible among the inferior classes. In the Dunstaffnage figure the hair is cut short all round, and turned in. This form of hair-dressing may be seen in an engraving from the effigy of Sir John Peche, one of the most celebrated courtiers of Henry VIII. It would seem also to have been peculiarly confined to about this reign, at least in England.

The crowns also differ. In the Lewis chessmen the crown is composed of four fleurs-de-lis; in the Dunstaffnage figure of nine fleurs-de-lis, and the treatment of the individual fleur-de-lis in the former is decidedly more archaic than in the latter.

One remarkable feature in the Dunstaffnage figure is the absence of a sword. In the Lewis chessmen the kings have swords lying across their knees, but in this figure there is only a book in the left hand.

A misapprehension as to the material of which the figure is carved has prevailed till now. Both Bishop Pococke and Pennant stated it to be ivory; and Mr Laing and Mr Madden assumed it to be walrus ivory. I have submitted it to several experts, and they agree in stating it to be a tooth of the cacholot or sperm whale. These teeth are not commonly much used for carving. They are hard and brittle, and altogether unpleasant to work. When they are used for ornamental purposes they are most frequently covered with a surface decoration, incised with engraver's tools, rather than carved in the free style of this figure. The common cacholot has a very wide geographical range. It may almost be said to inhabit all seas, although it is most abundant in those of the southern hemisphere. Occasionally it is found on our own coasts. In 1769 it is recorded that one ran ashore on Cramond Island, in the Firth of Forth.

In conclusion, it may be said that the fact of this figure being carved of this material does not point to the north as its place of origin so exclusively as if it had been of walrus ivory, but there is nothing improbable in the supposition that it was made in Scotland. As to the date, the character of the carving, the free, realistic treatment of the drapery, as contrasted with the hard folds in the Lewis chessmen, and the costume, point to the first half of the sixteenth century as the probable date of its manufacture.