

## II.

## INSCRIPTION ON A CROSS FROM KILCHOMAN, ISLAY.

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Amongst the large collection of sculptured stones in the ruined church and churchyard of Kilchoman, Islay, were two fine crosses, each bearing an inscription. For many years the smaller of these two lay broken on a grave.<sup>1</sup> This cross had been scheduled under the Ancient Monuments Act, 1913. In 1930, on a visit the Inspector of Monuments for Scotland found that the shaft of the cross had again been broken across. To preserve the monument it was purchased by our National Museum and removed from the island under the personal supervision of the Inspector. It has now been set up in the Museum, the pieces being kept in position by a light metal frame (fig. 1). The inscription is carved on the edges, starting below the left arm and being completed on the opposite side. It runs: HEC EST CRUX FAC(TA) PRO ANIMABUS DONCANI MEC INNIRLEGIN ET MARI ET MICHAELIS. The Gaelic part stands for Middle Gaelic, MEIC IND FHIR LEGINN, and the translation of the inscription is: "This is a cross made for the souls of Duncan, son of the Lector, and Mary and Michael."

The proper name Doncanus is a Scottish latinisation of the Middle Gaelic Donchad, now Donnchadh, Duncan. The Irish latinised form appears in the note of a charter of David I. (1124-53) in the *Book of Deer*: "Doncado comite de Fib," "Duncan, earl of Fife." On the other hand, "Dunecano filio Malis," "Duncan, son of Malis," occurs in 1199 in a charter of Inchaffray, and the *Chronicon Elegiacum*, ascribed by Skene to 1270, has Duncanum (accusative) as the name of the king slain by Macbeth.<sup>2</sup> The spelling of the inscription occurs in a document of 1443 referred to later: "Donald Doncani," "Donald, son of Duncan."

The title *fer légin*, or in modern spelling *fear léighinn*, means literally "man of reading," "man who reads," lector, reader, and it was the regular designation of the head or principal of a monastic school both in Scotland and in Ireland. The *Book of Deer* mentions the *fear léighinn* of Turriff (1131-2). In 1164 Dubh-sídhe (Black of Peace) was *fear léighinn* of Iona.<sup>3</sup> About 1211, Lawrence, Archdeacon and Ferleyn, or head of the schools, of St Andrews, appears in connection with a dispute with the Prior and Canons; his title is latinised Ferlanus.<sup>4</sup> In 1316, "magister Felanus," Rector of the schools of Inverness, is probably for Ferlanus. Part of the possessions of St Peter's Church, Aberdeen,

<sup>1</sup> Graham, *Carved Stones of Islay*, p. 56, No. 50, Pl. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ann. Ulst.*

<sup>3</sup> *Chron. P. and S.*, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> *Register of St Andrews.*

was Petenderleyn (*i.e.* Peit ind Fhir léighinn), the Reader's Croft.<sup>1</sup> In addition may be noted "Macbeth Rex Scholarum" of Dunblane, and

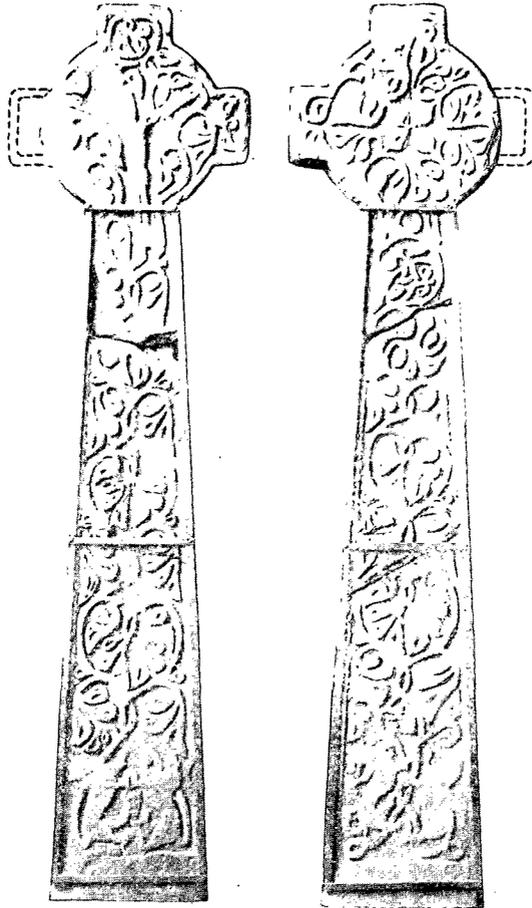


Fig. 1. Cross from Kilchoman Kirkyard, Islay.

"Maldueny Rex Scholarum" of Muthil (1214-23),<sup>2</sup> in connection with the revenues of a half davach of land which had been designed for the use of the "macleins and scoloccs"<sup>3</sup> of the church of Dunkeld.

<sup>1</sup> *History of Celtic Place-names of Scotland.*

<sup>2</sup> *Charters of Lindores.*

<sup>3</sup> "Maclein" is for *mac léighinn*, "a lad of reading," a student, under the *Fear léighinn*. *Scoloc* means "scholar," or younger monk, who took a large share of the manual work; now in Sc. Gaelic *sgalag*, a farm labourer.

Though there is no direct evidence as to the particular school over which the *fear léighinn* of our inscription presided, it may be naturally conjectured to have been that of Iona.

Certain entries in the *Calendar of Papal Registers* (Bliss and Twemlow, "Letters") are of interest as bearing directly on the terms and possibly on the date of the inscription. The first is under date December 1427:

"The Pope writes to Donald son of Dominic Macanere legu' (*i.e.* 'mac in fhir léighinn,' 'son of the Reader'), perpetual vicar of St Cathanus's in Gigha (*i.e.* Kilchattan), in the diocese of Sodor, granting that the letters whereby the Pope lately ordered certain executors to collate and assign to him the perpetual vicarage of St Comanus's (Kilchoman) in the said diocese . . . shall hold good from the date of these presents, as if they did not contain an assertion by Donald that he was by both parents of noble birth, his present petition stating that although he is so, he does not hope to be able to prove it judicially."

In May 1436 the Pope writes to the Prior of Orwansay (Oransay) with regard to Donald, son of Morice Macinnerlegyn, who had obtained the perpetual vicarage of St Comanus's in Islay. Here "son of Morice" is evidently in error for "son of Dominic." The spelling "Macinnerlegyn" approximates to that on the inscription.

In July 1436 the Pope gives instructions to collate and assign to Donald, son of Dominic, a canonry and the prebend in the church of St Columba in Kintyre, notwithstanding that he holds the two vicarages of St Cathanus in Gigha and St Comanus in Islay.

In June 1443 the Pope writes in regard to a serious charge of immorality brought against Donald, son of Dominic Mac an Firlegind (*sic*), perpetual vicar of St Comanus's in Islay. The charge was made by Donald Doncani (Donald, son of Duncan), a clerk in holy orders.

Finally, in May 1463 the Pope writes to Dominic, son of Donald, perpetual vicar of Kilchoman, agreeing to his becoming Rector of Kilchoman, though he is illegitimate.

There can, I think, be no question that the Donald, son of Dominic, son of the Reader, referred to in these letters was of the same family as the Duncan, son of the Reader, of the inscription; the connection of both with Kilchoman proves this. The question is, What exactly is to be understood by the designation "son of the Reader"; in other words, is "mac in fhir léighinn" to be taken literally in the sense that Dominic and Duncan were sons of the Reader and therefore brothers, or is it to be understood as a general family designation like a surname, as it has become in Ireland—MacNerlin, McErlean, etc.? It is difficult to be certain on this point, but my own opinion would be in favour of regarding Duncan of the inscription as actual son of the Reader, otherwise his father would be left unnamed. As to Dominic, it is to be noted that

his grandson Dominic is designated simply "son of Donald," without suggestion of a surname.<sup>1</sup> If, therefore, the former interpretation is to be accepted, as I think it reasonably may, the date of the inscription would be fixed approximately as about thirty years before the death of Donald, son of Dominic, who appears to have died in or about 1463.