

## II.

## REMARKS ON THE OGHAM INSCRIPTION OF THE NEWTON PILLAR-STONE. BY RICHARD ROLT BRASH, M.R.I.A., F.S.A. Scot.

As the inscriptions on this remarkable monument have engaged the attention of philologists, not only of our own country, but also of the continent, I have been led to give some attention to that particular one which lies within the range of my own investigations for some years past; I allude to the lines of Ogham characters cut on this stone. The original locality and discovery of this monument having been already described in the "Proceedings" of our Society, I shall not here repeat them. The stone is an irregular monolith of boulder formation, being 6 feet in height, and 2 feet in its greatest breadth; its material is of hard, close-grained quartzose gneiss, many specimens of which are to be found in the vicinity. On the upper part of one of its faces it bears an inscription, boldly and deeply incised, occupying six lines, and consisting of forty-four characters; these are of so remarkable a type as to have puzzled every philologist and palæographer who have taken it in hand. The late Alexander Thompson, Esq., of Banchory, circulated a description of this monument, accompanied by photograms, among all antiquaries of repute, many of whom have responded by submitting their renderings of the principal legend. Yet none appear to have hit the truth. Readings of the inscription have been given in Hebrew, Phœnician, Greek, Latin, Arian, Irish, and Anglo-Saxon. Though unable to decipher this inscription, I am of opinion that it is inscribed in debased Roman letters, of a type frequently found in ancient inscriptions, its peculiarities being much influenced by the hardness of the stone at the time of cutting, and the subsequent weather wear of ages.

The inscription alluded to contains one remarkable character, known as the Filfot, Thors Hammer, and the Budhist Cross. It has been found in the cave temples of India, on Bactrian coins, on Byzantine coins, on Gnostic gems, and, finally, on an Ogham-inscribed stone found at Aglish, and now in the museum of the Royal Irish Academy; in the light of this latter fact, its appearance on an Ogham monument in Scotland will not create much surprise.

The Ogham inscription occupies nearly the entire of the left hand angle of the stone, reading from the top downwards—contrary, no doubt, to the almost universal rule, yet not without one or two precedents; and commencing again at the bottom, on a natural ridge, and a little to the right of and parallel with the principal line of characters. The angles upon which the inscription appears are exceedingly rough and irregular, and in many parts so ill-defined that it is exceedingly difficult to ascertain the relations of the groups of scores to them, which greatly embarrass the reading of the legend. Another difficulty is, that, as in all Scottish examples, the vowels are long scores, similar to the consonants, and not being sufficiently distinguished from them in formation, much uncertainty is created as to which are vowels and which are consonants. Dr Moore's description of the legend is as follows:—"It will be immediately seen that to represent the inscription on the stone by merely drawing the strokes which form the letters on a straight line or stem, as in the alphabet, would be really to misrepresent it. The line is, in fact, very irregular, and as nearly as possible like the drawing, which is from a tracing of the line formed by the edge of the stone, as it appeared to the writer when examining the stone with a view to determine for himself the places of the letters previous to any attempt to decipher them. Probably, as in other instances, there was originally a shallow line cut on the stone as the stem-line of the letters; but time and exposure have so far obliterated it that it cannot be distinctly traced in any part of the inscription. It is evident, therefore, that the inscription cannot be truly represented on paper by mere straight lines. Of course, the apparent uprightness, or the obliquity of the letters in respect to the stem-line, must depend on the bend of this line, in relation to the irregularities and unevenness of the stone itself. With the aid of a magnifying lens, however, the photographs pretty faithfully represent the inscription as it appears *in situ*. By this means it will be seen that some of the letter-lines are not in reality so oblique as they seem. Though there is no stem-line, it is not difficult to determine the relative position of the letters in relation to its supposed place, since the letters in general are unmistakably situated as respects their relation to the mesial line. There are longer spaces between the words than between the letters. . . . Of course, the reading of Oghams must depend on the side on which the

reader is supposed to stand. The Ogham before us is inscribed on the left-hand angle of the stone; therefore the lines on the left of the stem-line could not be seen while standing to the right of that line. Hence it is evidently intended that the inscription is in both its lines to be read as if seen from the left. It follows that the letters on the right of the stem-line must be regarded as above the line, supposing it placed horizontally." (Ancient Pillar-Stones of Scotland, p. 60.)

Dr Moore having established to his satisfaction that the main inscription is in Arian characters, expressing Hebrew words, gives the following rendering:—

“ In the tomb  
With the dead (is) Aittie—

The light of the darkness of a perverted people,  
Who shall be consecrated pure priest  
To God? Like the vessel  
Of Prayer my glory covered me.” (*Ibid*, p. 48.)

Dr Moore goes into an elaborate argument to establish the correctness of his reading, and detects in the phraseology Boodhistic allusions.

The Ogham he subjects to a similar process, and in his particular mode of reading, endeavours to connect it with the main inscription, as follows:—

“ Ioddie ueai n’ nggedd’ Ka Kadun Baal Neka Iaddi.”  
(When Baal ruled Jutland, and the coast before thee, Iatti was smitten.)  
(*Ibid*, p. 67.)

I find a difficulty in reconciling to my mind the probability of Boodhist priests coming from the far east to the far west, to the cold and then almost uninhabited wastes of the north of Scotland, and inscribing Hebrew words in the Ogham character of the Gaedhil of Erin. Dr Moore’s copy of the inscription is not correct, and I fear that a foregone conclusion has influenced the position of the scores in the legend.

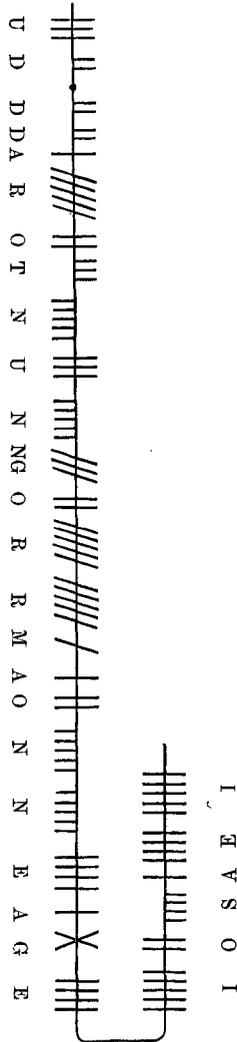
W. F. Skene, LL.D., in an interesting paper contributed to the “Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,” vol. v., has given a rendering of the Ogham legend. His view of the mode of reading it is, that on account of the return line of characters of foot of the stone, it

should be read from the top downwards, and then follow the second upwards. If his view be correct, it would be the only instance of its kind, as all other known Ogham inscriptions read from the bottom upwards, without an exception; nevertheless, I must admit that it has a more readable aspect when taken in this sequence, and as I have no doubt that this legend is much later than the Irish and Welsh examples, it may be that the scribe who carved it knew nothing of the ancient rule, or may have thought fit to depart from it. Dr Skene considers the inscription to be bi-lingual, the main one being in debased Roman letters, and both expressing Gaelic and Roman forms; he, however, states his inability to translate it. He gives the following copy of the Ogham legend:—

These letters he places in the following form (see woodcut):—

UD DDAROT NUN NGORRMAONN EAGE JOSAEI.

The main inscription he conceives to be, to a great extent, identical with the Ogham, but declines the responsibility of a translation; he, however, appears to think that GORRMAON is a proper name, and may have a reference to a certain Gormund mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth as living in the sixth century, or to a Guthrun, a Danish chief, mentioned by Lœppen-berg and other writers as having lived in the ninth century, and who is variously named Gudrun, Gormont, Gurmond. These ingenious speculations, however, must fall to the ground, from the fact that there is no such combination of letters as would form GORMAON, upon the stone, and that Dr Skene's rendering of the Ogham inscription is founded upon an unfaithful copy



of the legend. For this I do not blame the learned Doctor; the inscription is of such a complex and difficult character that the most experienced Oghamist may fail in even making a correct copy, or rather in ascribing to the existing characters the values originally intended.

The following copy of the Ogham has been arrived at by me after several examinations of the plaster and type-metal casts in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, and after repeated studies of a paper cast presented to me by Dr Ferguson of Dublin, as well as of several photographs and drawings. I, however, rely entirely on the casts for the accuracy of my copy. The irregular surface of that part of the stone which bears the Ogham is the main source of difficulty, as it is in ridges and hollows, the scores not following any defined ridge or angle. A careful scrutiny, however, by the experienced Oghamist, and a study of the characters one by one, comparing their relative positions, will enable him to arrive at the original values of most, if not all, of the characters. The copy which I have made is entirely independent of any theory respecting the stone,—in fact I have none, neither do I pretend to give a rendering of either of the inscriptions; my sole anxiety has been to arrive at the accurate values of the letters. In the following page I show the inscription, reading from the top downwards, as I consider that Dr Skene has hit on its true sequence.

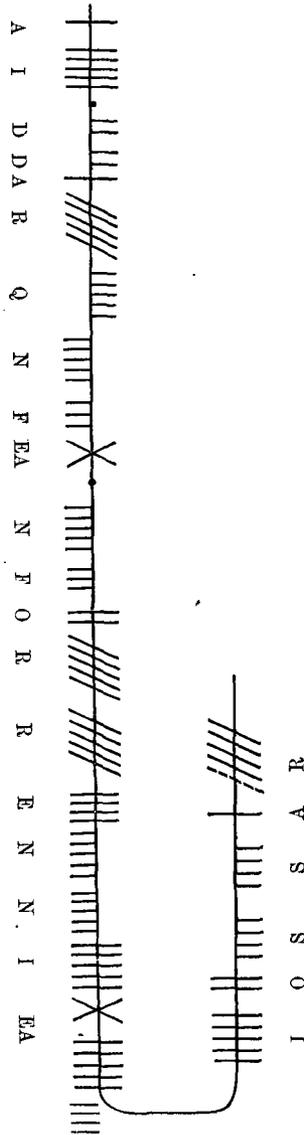
The scores towards the top are short, being from an inch and a quarter to two inches in length. Towards the bottom their dimensions increase to two and three inches. The first and second characters are well defined and distinctly grouped; we have then a distinct dot on the low ridge, here used as a stem-line; the third and fourth are distinctly marked, and above the ridge; the fifth, sixth, and seventh are also well defined,—under these the ridge runs into a rounded surface, but their relative positions to the medial line is well preserved and beyond dispute; again the surface runs into a small ridge, under which are placed the eighth and ninth, also well marked; then we have strong indications of the cross character which stands for the diphthong EA, in the scale found in the Book of Ballymote. The character is not well defined, it is true, but an examination of the cast in certain lights reveals it. We have then a point upon the angle; letters eleven and twelve are below the ridge, and are distinctly marked and grouped; after this the ridge is lost in a hollow, the thirteenth and fourteenth are well defined and drawn across the

hollow, which rises again into an irregular ridge, running nearly to the end of the inscription; the characters following, to the twentieth, are all well-marked and grouped; the two following are faint and difficult to determine; there are some indications of scores below these, but nothing reliable. The return line of letters stand on a rude stem-line,—they are coarsely and carelessly formed, but distinctly grouped; the last four characters are faint, being much worn; one score of the last letter is doubtful. I have been uncertain as to the value of the twenty-first character, whether an I or R, as the scores are slightly oblique, and it may be a consonant. I have thus endeavoured to give an accurate copy of this inscription; as I before stated, I have no translation to offer of it,—I will leave that to others:—

AIDDARCUN FEAN FORRENNI EA(I OF R)S IOSSAR.

I would, however, make one suggestion: there is a combination of letters, FORRENNI, identical with a recognised Gaedhelic name, Fereni, mentioned in the Ann. 4, Mas. A.D. 432, as being an ancestor of St Patrick. Names of a similar type, as Fearon, Foran, and Forannan, are common in our annals and hagiologies.

The last six letters form a proper name of a very peculiar type, *Iossar*; its presence depends upon the true value of the last character; a careful study of the cast gave me five scores oblique to the stem-line, one



of them being faint and much worn. Dr Skene's copy gives five scores vertical across the line, which would be an *ı*. If there are but four scores vertical, it would read *Iossae*, the name of Jesus in a Gaedhelic form. If, on the contrary, it should be found to be an *ı*, as I have presented it to be, it would give us the name of an old Gaedhelic and Phœnician divinity, found also in Ogham on a gold double-cupped patera formerly in the possession of Mr Burton Conyngham, and engraved by Vallancy in the fifth vol. of his "Collectanea," p. 90. In this instance the form is *Uoser*. The above-named writer states that Aesar and Aosar frequently occur in ancient Irish MSS., and are always translated *God*. We certainly find Easar in most Irish dictionaries so translated. There is strong evidence that Easar was a Phœnician divinity. A base of a marble candelabrum was exhumed some time since in Malta, and is now deposited in the museum at Paris; it bears a bi-lingual inscription in Greek and Punic, a translation of which is given in Kenrick's "Phœnicia," p. 172, as follows:—

"To our Lord, to Melkarth, Lord of Tyre. The man offering is  
Thy servant Obed-Asir and my brother,  
Both a son of Asir-Shamar, the son of Obed-Asir; when he hears  
Their voice, may he bless them!"

According to Kenrick, Obed is a very usual prefix to Punic names, and signifies a *slave, servant, &c.*, being identical with the same word in the Hebrew, as Obadiah, the servant of Jah (Jehovah). It is also cognate with the Gaedhelic prefix *Gilla*, as *Gilla-Da*, servant of God; *Gilla-Iosa*, servant of Jesus; *Gilla-Muire*, servant of Mary. This custom of individuals and families adopting the names of favourite deities was very general in the east, of which we have many examples upon Egyptian and Syrian monuments. Obed-Asir will therefore be the servant of Asir, who, according to Kenrick, is Osiris. There is nothing unlikely in this; the leading Egyptian deities were received and adopted by other ancient nations, and we may therefore presume that Easar, Asar, Uoser, Iossar, are forms of Osiris, which Hellanius states was pronounced Usiris by the Egyptian priests. It is curious that this name was also adopted by the ancient Gaedhil as a personal or family one. By reference to a quotation from the "Annals of Tighernach," translated by the late Dr O'Donovan,

and published in the "Dublin Penny Journal," vol. i. p. 109, we find as follows:—"A.D. 651. The two sons of Blathmac, son of Hugh Slaine, viz., Donchad and Conall, were mortally wounded by the Lagenians in Maelodrans Mill. *Oisir*, the son of Oiserge, was mortally wounded by Maelodron." Here we have most undoubtedly the name of the Egyptian deity; its appearance as a proper name among the Gaedhil, at a remote period, will not surprise us if we can give credence to the bardic accounts of the sojourn of that people in the land of the Pharaohs, in their migration towards Spain and Western Europe.