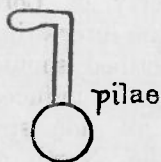


# NOTE ON THE ANCIENT PLAN OF THE MONASTERY OF ST. GALL, IN THE NINTH CENTURY.

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IN a former volume of the Archæological Journal the very curious ground-plan of the ancient conventual buildings at St. Gall, in the Swiss canton of that name, was reproduced from the facsimile of the original drawing there preserved, and first published by myself in 1844.<sup>1</sup> The copy on a reduced scale given in the Journal is accompanied by a dissertation from the pen of Professor Willis, of the University of Cambridge, whose investigations have thrown the most important light upon the history of Mediæval Architecture, and more particularly upon the disposition and constructive details of Cathedral and Conventual Establishments.

The learned Professor, in his observations on the various arrangements, indicated in that remarkable illustration of the household economy and internal management of an extensive monastery at so early a period as the ninth century, has pointed out in the plan of St. Gall near the bakehouse and brewhouse, and other offices, three buildings standing side by side, in one of which is indicated the *pistrinum* for drying grain ("*locus ad torrendas annonas*") ; in another, two hand-mills, "*mola*" ; in the third appear two large mortars, "*pilæ*," of the form here figured (see woodcut). A few remarks upon these last may not be without interest.



An appliance of some description for crushing or husking grain, especially barley and oats, must have been employed in every house in the Middle Ages, from a very early period. It is possible that the chief food of the lower orders consisted of certain kinds of potage, furmity, or pap, called in German "*Mus*."<sup>2</sup> In the monastery of St. Gall, it may deserve remark that the use of food of this description was

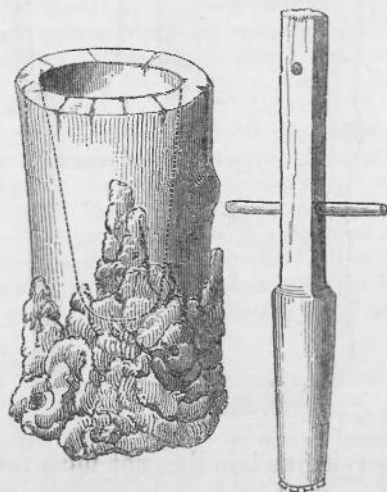
<sup>1</sup> Archæol. Journal, vol. v. p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Wachter, "*Mus, puls, cibus ex farina, &c.—massa rei decoctæ in similitudinem pultis.*"

very prevalent, since in the earlier times of its establishment the monk Kero, in his Vocabulary, renders the Latin *cibi* by the German word *Mus*, and *cænare* is translated *abend-müssen*, namely to sup on pap.

The use of mortars, however, for crushing grain was doubtless superseded through the construction of water-mills and other mechanical contrivances in towns and populous districts, where flour might be obtained, and where the improvements in baking bread were by degrees introduced. Handmills of the Middle Age period were to be found, until recent times, in Switzerland, for instance, at the Castle Valeria, near Sion in the Valais, and they were doubtless at one period in very general use.

The only ancient mortar, or *pila*, which I have seen of the same description as that indicated, as I apprehend, in the plan of the Monastery of St. Gall, was not long since existing at Betlis, near Wesen, on the lake of Wallenstatt. I found the relic at a house near the waterfall, in that little village, picturesquely situated on a projecting rock at the western extremity of the lake, and at the foot of an almost perpendicular cliff. The inhabitants of Betlis are poor; they are cut off from communication with the rest of the world; a few vines are there cultivated, and barley or oats,

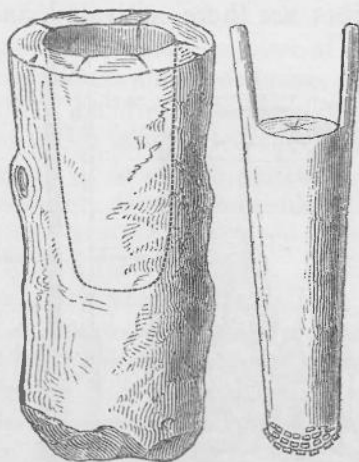


reduced to a kind of "Mus" or pap, was their chief food previously to the introduction of potatoes.

The ancient mortar, which I have mentioned, had possibly not been used for many years ; it consisted of part of the trunk of an oak, about three feet in height, with a pestle formed of a single piece of the same wood, and thickly set with nails at its lower extremity. Several centuries, as it seemed to me, may have elapsed, since these rude appliances of domestic economy among a simple pastoral race had been fashioned. The handle of the pestle is perforated for a cross-bar, and so contrived that it might be adjusted to suit persons of different station, the bar being placed through the upper or the lower hole in the handle, as most convenient.

I doubt not that in the more remote and mountainous districts of England, or in the Highlands of Scotland, mortars for husking or pounding barley and oats, similar possibly to that which I have described, may still be found.

There was formerly in the village of Betlis a second specimen of this kind of mortar, which I noticed in 1834, and sketched in my note-book ; it was at that time much decayed, and it has probably long since perished. It measured about 3 feet in height. (See woodcut.) The pestle was formed



with two ears, serving as handles, not inconveniently adapted for the intended uses of such rude appliances of a primitive age. No other example of the *pila* has come under my observation.