



THE SVASTIKA.



THE TRISKELE.




THUNDERBOLT ?

ART. III.—*Sculptured Stone at Isell Church, Cumberland, bearing the “Svastika,” “Triskele” and other Symbols.*

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THE stone is a small pyramid without its apex, of light coloured permian sandstone from the neighbouring district, height eleven inches; width at wider end six inches; at narrower end four and a half inches. Its form suggests the uppermost part of the shaft of a cross, but no trace exists of the place from which the arms should spring. In the upper end of the stone a cup-shaped hollow has been formed, and the smooth or worn edges may seem to indicate that the stone is complete in itself. Tradition finds this stone amongst the building material of the ancient bridge over the Derwent, near the little Norman church and the vicarage of Isell, at the time of the building of the present bridge in the early days of the last generation.

The four faces of the stone are sculptured in relief, in the manner of the earlier crosses, bearing marks of a pointed tool, such as a drill or a pick, and not of broad or narrow chisels. Each face has an upper and lower panel bearing a single design, the design in the upper panels varying, that in the lower one being always the same namely an  shaped design. (The “sun-snake” sign).

The sign in one of the upper panels is the “svastika” or “fylfot,” its arms turning in this case to the left or from the sun, instead of to the right or with the sun.


So far as I know this is the first example of work of this kind bearing this sacred symbol, with the exception of the Dearham shaft [figured vol. VII., p. 290], which has yet been revealed.

Many remains Roman, Trojan, Buddhistic, Scandinavian, bear the sign incised in stone or engraved in metal  
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on coins and ornaments, but none but these at Dearham and Isell, and a few sculptures belonging to the same era, and known to me here in old Strathclyde, have these devices worked in relief; at least my attention has not been drawn to any such.

In two of the other upper panels is the "triskele" sign, with this peculiarity that the curve of the two lower limbs of one of these symbols takes the opposite direction from the curve of the upper limb instead of all the three limbs turning round in the same direction—towards the right—with the sun. This figure is here shewn with a part of the "sun-snake" sign in the mutilated panel beneath.

It is to be noted that on the other face, which has not been figured, the "triskele" whirls round to the right, every limb moving in the same direction. This sign, in which one may discern the origin of the three legs of the Isle of Man, is also found engraved on Danish ornaments in metal, and on Scandinavian coins, and even knives and hatchets of the later bronze age which also bear the "sun-snake" and the "sun-ship," but this is (so far as I am aware) the first example of the same sign sculptured in stone in relief.

The fourth symbol is, I believe, either a form of Thor's sign, the thunderbolt, or Odin's sign. It is here shewn. All these signs appear to me to belong in this case to the Norse Faith, and a wonderful interest attaches to the sculpture which bears the fylfot—svastika or Thor's hammer—the triskele, the thunderbolt, and the  shaped sun-snake, altogether on one stone, carved in relief in panels and in the very style and fashion of the work of the early Christian monuments.

We are here I believe on the track of the earliest Christian sculpture after the retirement of the Roman Legions and before the advent of Roman Christian western art in any great force.

More, we are face to face with the Revelation of God  
and

and the foreshadowing of the Christ to the heathen themselves in their own faith.

This sculpture is in the best style of the very early work, it being wrought in regular panels, whereas many of the other designs known to me have been traced irregularly by a free-hand over the face of the stone used.

If the three symbols are Pagan and Scandinavian they may be the signs of Thor, Odin, and Frey, placed in an unlucky manner, the svastika turning from the sun instead of towards it, and the limbs of the other two signs turning in different directions, whilst the perfect triskele on the fourth side, not engraved here, shews the true Trinity of Christian faith stedfast amidst all changes even as the sun himself.

The engravings are by Prof. Magnus Petersen, of Copenhagen, from photographs of great beauty very kindly taken for me by the Rev. A. Watmore, of Maryport.

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\* For more concerning these marks see The South Kensington Art Handbook, "Industrial Arts of Denmark," part I., and part II., and The Industrial Arts of Scandinavia, also Archæologia vol. xlvi., paper on "The meaning and origin of the fylfot and svastika," by R. P. Gregg, Esq., F.S.A., F.G.S., 1884.

The "tau" is the mark referred to in Ezek. ix., 4, "set a tau upon their foreheads:" now the ancient Phœnician form of the tau was like unto the svastika, another old form was a cross with equal arms + and afterwards the T shaped tau. The true svastika or tau is the sign of Christ, the deformed one is made to represent Thor, and so with the other symbols.