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Ecclesiology of

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by  
R. A. S. MacAlister

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TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

St. Paul's Ecclesiological  
Society.

[new ser.]

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VOL. IV.

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LONDON:  
*PUBLISHED FOR THE SOCIETY BY*  
HARRISON AND SONS, 59, PALL MALL.

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MCM.

1911

# THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF OGHAM INSCRIPTIONS

BY

R. A. S. MACALISTER, M.A.

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When the officers of the St Paul's Ecclesiological Society did me the honour, at a recent meeting, of asking me to read a paper on Ogham Inscriptions, I was confronted by a serious difficulty. The study of this most remarkable and fascinating branch of Epigraphy is attractive for its antiquarian and philological importance—antiquarian, because these inscriptions are the oldest “contemporary documents” of our islands: philological, because, jointly with the obscure Gaulish inscriptions of the continent, they present the oldest fragments of the Celtic family of languages, and illustrate a period in the history of that important group of tongues untouched by its great manuscript literature. But as monuments of Christianity, in which aspect principally they would appeal to this Society, their value is comparatively small; and we need not expect to find any light thrown by them upon the problems of the early Celtic church, its ritual or organization. In fact, as ecclesiastical documents, they stand in precisely the same position as do the tombstones in English country churchyards. It is true some have thought they found the Irish words for “priest” “bishop” “presbyter” upon some of them; but with the possible exception of the last the transcript has in each case proved erroneous, or the interpretation, to say the least, uncertain.

It seemed to me the best solution of the difficulty to preface my paper with a few preliminary remarks upon the subject in general, which may be useful in elucidating the inscriptions selected; and then cursorily to discuss the more important of those inscriptions which from internal or external evidence seem clearly to be Christian monuments. It may also be useful incidentally to touch upon monuments which seem to bear no definite marks of Christianity (not therefore necessarily non-Christian), and to point the contrast between the two.

The first question to consider is the nature and origin of the script. Respecting this there are two erroneous opinions popularly current: first, that it is a cryptic method of writing; and secondly that it is a variant of the Runic alphabet. The notion that Ogham inscriptions are cryptic received credence some time ago, partly because some vague speculations in Irish manuscripts seemed to favour the idea, and partly because the grammatical forms of Ogham inscriptions are not compatible, at first sight, with those of Celtic MSS. But chaos has been gradually settling into order, and though much relating to these inscriptions remains to be cleared up, nothing is plainer than that they were intended as straightforward documents. There is even less excuse for considering the Ogham as a variant of the Runic Alphabet, with which it has nothing to do. It has a superficial resemblance to the tree-runes or crypt-runes: these however are not runes at all, but arbitrary combinations of strokes (to which meanings are assigned on different principles, all however derived from the order of the letters in the Runic futhork, or alphabet) probably actually suggested by the general appearance of the Ogham alphabet.

The alphabet, or more strictly *beith-luis-nion* (from the names of some of its first letters), is as follows. For typographical convenience the stem-line, round which the letters are grouped, is here omitted. It is usually the arris or edge of the stone.

															.	..	...	....	.....
B	L	<u>F</u>	S	N	H	D	T	C	<u>Q</u>	M	G	NG	<u>ST(=Z)</u>	R	A	O	U	E	I
		<i>v</i>							<i>ch</i>				<i>f?</i>						

The capital letters represent the sounds assigned in the Manuscript keys to the various letters; but other values, represented in italics, are deduced from an examination of the monuments themselves. The third character is more often *v* than *f*; it is always rendered *v* in the bilingual inscriptions of Wales, even when initial: in Ireland it is only *f* when initial, and that only in late inscriptions—thus we have *Feqreq*, *Furuddrann*. Such equations as *Ivacattos = Ebicatos* confirm the secondary value, for a *b* could not represent an *f*. The inscription at Rathcroghan, co. Roscommon, *Fraicci maqi Medvvi*<sup>1</sup> gives us both values of this character. Sometimes, indeed, it represents the semivowel sound after *q*; as in *macv* (= *maq*) in a Welsh inscription, and *Qveci* and possibly *maqva* in Irish ones. The character *q* is always *qu*, probably *qv* when final; never *k*. As however it is convenient to have a single letter to represent a single character we transliterate it *q*, not *qu* or *qv*. In one inscription the common word *maqi* is written *macui*; which, coupled with the *macv* already quoted, demonstrates the proper pronunciation. In some late inscriptions it seems to stand for *ch*; as in *Feqreq*, which is identical with the *Fiachrach* of the Manuscripts: but it should be understood that the fact that *q*, ||||, has the same number of scores as *ch*, |||| |, is merely a coincidence. The fourth letter of the third group only once occurs in a Celtic Ogham, and that is a very difficult text: we must therefore wait for further discoveries before removing the query from the suggested value *f*, which has been assigned by Prof. Rhys on the strength of very ingenious arguments. It seems to fit very much better than the value assigned in the MSS into the Pictish inscriptions (where the letter occurs several times)—so far as we can understand anything about these texts. It is a curious coincidence that the arranger of the alphabet has hit on the order into which the vowels were classified by the later grammarians.

There is a fifth group of five characters to which diphthongal values are assigned in the MSS: but in the inscriptions, as they are more often than not found between vowels, they must be generally consonantal in value; these consonantal values can be assigned by induction only. When they occur in positions which do not require a consonantal value, they appear rather to be single vowels than diphthongs. The characters are—

(1) a saltire, intersection on the stem-line. *fa* in the MSS, *e* when vocalic in inscriptions. Occurs about 20 times in Celtic Oghams, only in Ireland; in the majority of cases consonantal. The true value is given us by an inscription at Dunloe, co. Kerry, where the name *Toicaxi* corresponds to *Toicaci* on a neighbouring stone. Hence this character = *c*, but to distinguish it from *c* it will be convenient to transliterate it *k*. This character has been confused with the fourth in the same group, and given its value *p*: but *p* will not work in satisfactorily in a single instance.

(2) an oval, like the letter O, crossing the stem-line. *oi* in the MSS, *o* on the stones; where, however, it only occurs two or three times.

<sup>1</sup> If this transcript be correct—I have as yet had no opportunity of verifying it. *Fraicci* corresponds to the Manuscript form *Fraech*, and *Medvvi* to *Medb*. Compare the oscillations between *g* and *k*, *t* and *d*, in transliterations of 11th century Runic inscriptions.

(3) a spiral, under or to the right of the stem-line. *ui* in the MSS, *u* probably on the stones; but does not certainly occur in any monument, though it is reported on an illegible stone at Rathcroghan, co. Roscommon, and may perhaps appear in a charm cut on a bead from co. Clare, now in the British Museum.

(4) a saltire, under or to the right of the stem-line. *ia* in the MSS: occurs twice in the monuments, once at Crickhowel in Brecon where an associated Latin inscription translates it *p*: it has the same value on a stone in co. Kerry, where it is found in the name *Erpenn*. In the MSS. it is drawn with double lines, but for convenience it is cut with single lines on the stones. Theoretical lapidary value *i*.

(5) Four upright and four horizontal strokes crossing one another—*a* in MS. keys: only used once, in a note in a MS.; there it has the sense of *sc* or *cc*. Theoretical lapidary value *a*.

When, where, or how this script originated is still a matter of speculation. The Bishop of Stepney's theory, that it is the development of a finger-alphabet invented for secret communication is the most reasonable and satisfactory yet put forward, but it tacitly presupposes the free use of *alphabetic* writing among its inventors previous to its invention. As we do not know the time of the invention, we cannot say whether such was the case or not.

That the character is an invention of the British Islands is probable: for nothing like it has been found elsewhere—not even in Celtic Brittany. It is not easy, however, to decide between the rival claims of Wales and Ireland; the following considerations, however, seem to favour the latter country:—

(I) The language of the Welsh inscriptions is Gaelic, not Cymric: suggesting that they may be the monuments of an Irish colony. Nothing Cymric has been found in Ireland.

(II) The Irish inscriptions preserve older grammatical forms than the Welsh. [These might however have survived later in Ireland than in Wales.]

(III) Had the script been invented in Wales and carried into Ireland we should have expected to find the majority of Irish inscriptions on the eastern side of the country. The exact contrary is, however, the case.

(IV) The Romano-British inscriptions found in Wales shew a considerable amount of Oghamic influence. Unlike inscriptions written in Roman and cognate characters elsewhere, they are inscribed vertically, not horizontally: and they mostly give little but the name and parentage of the person commemorated—such an inscription as VLCAGNI FILI SEVERI is typical. These are the characteristics of Oghams, and in that script are perfectly intelligible. The arris or edge of the stone served as a stem-line, and consequently the inscription was written vertically: and as arris-space is limited, there was generally little room to give more than the name and parentage of the individual. Moreover, the Romano-British inscriptions preserve the very remarkable and unique principle of Oghams, in putting *both* the man's name and his father's in the genitive—the first governed by "gravestone" or some such word, understood, the second governed of course by *maqi* (= *fili* of the Romano-British inscriptions), itself a genitive in apposition with the first name: compare the inscription just given with *Doveti maqi Cattini*, a Kerry Ogham inscription. As no other comparable class of inscriptions present these characteristics, we must regard Romano-British inscriptions as influenced in style by Oghamic traditions: *i.e.*, we must consider Ogham inscriptions as older, as a class, than Romano-British. In Wales, however, both classes are contemporary: in all but one or two exceptional cases the Ogham is interpreted by an associated Latin

inscription: in one instance the Ogham is cut on a cast-off Roman altar. Hence, to find the oldest Oghams we must look for inscriptions free from Roman influence: and we only find such in Ireland.

If then Ireland seems to be the cradle of the Ogham character, let us commence our Ogham tour in that ancient country. As we do not know for certain whereabouts in the country the invention took place, we shall simply start from the capital and proceed southwards. It is remarkable that most of the inscriptions are on the sea-board, so that by coasting round the country we shall pass on our way all of importance.

The East coast is, as already hinted, unproductive. Co. Dublin has yielded only one inscription, which is illegible: Wicklow contains two. One lies, or lay when I saw it, prostrate by the road-side at Castletimon: in the field behind are two gigantic menhirs or standing pillar-stones; a little distance in the opposite direction is a dilapidated dolmen. Paganism is stamped on the surroundings: and there is nothing in the inscribed stone to contradict it: there is no cross: and the inscription simply reads *Netacari Netacagn(i)*—(Stone) of Netacar son of Netaca. This is an extremely interesting and valuable monument, as it well illustrates the formation of Oghamic proper names. These are formed from a simple element—itsself a name—by prefixing or postfixing certain syllables, which probably were significant, though it would be rash to attempt to assign meanings to them in the majority of cases. The most frequent prefix is *Neta*: thus we have *Llominacca*, *Netta-l(a)minacca*: *Fraicci*, *Nuata-froqi*, *Niotta-frecc*.<sup>1</sup> Of postfixes we have (in the genitive) *-gni*, *-ini*, *-iti* (or *-eti*, later *-ett*), *-aidonas* (later *-aidona*), *-viccas* (later *-vicca* and *-viq*), and perhaps *-lo*; thus from the simple name *Erc*, we have *Eraqetai*, *Ercaidana*, *Ercavicca*. From *Bevv* we get *Biviti*, *Bivaidonas*, from *Dov-* (not yet found in a simple form) *Dovinia(s)*, *Doveti*, *Dovaidona*. That the suffix *-gni* had a patronymic value is shewn by the Monataggart (co. Cork) inscription *Dalagni maqi Dali*, and this value is required by such an inscription as this at Castletimon: *-ini*, which was probably cognate with this, was either patronymic or diminutive: compare the Romano-British SEVERINI FILI SEVERI at Llan Newydd. That these suffixes were not always intrinsic parts of the name is shewn by a bilingual inscription at Camp, co. Kerry, where *Conun-ett* answers to *Cununi*; and by one at Llanfechan, Cardigan, where *Trenacat-lo* answers to TRENECATUS. It is curious that couplets of names formed from the same simple name, with different suffixes, often occur in neighbouring situations. *Eraqetai* and *Ercaidana* are from two stones in the same group: so are *Doveti* and *Dovinia*. *Ercavicca* and *Erc* are not far off from one another, neither are *Cattini* and *Catwviqq*. On the other hand community of suffix often distinguishes names from the same locality. There is a little crop of *-viqs* at Drumloghan in Waterford: *Calunoviq*, *Laveac*, *Denaveq*. *Bivaidonas* and *Dovaidona* are both at Ballaqueeny, Isle of Man. VINNE-MAGLI FILI SENEMAGLI occurs at Gwytherin, Denbigh: and from Glannawillen, Cork, comes the nearest parallel I can find (with regard to the formation of the names) to this at Castletimon, *Dumanesco maqi Dovalosci*.<sup>2</sup>

The other Wicklow stone happens to be at Donard, one of the ecclesiastical foundations of St Patrick's great predecessor Palladius. There is nothing about the inscription to occupy

<sup>1</sup> Oghamic orthography is perfectly arbitrary.

<sup>2</sup> This is the nearest I can get to a transcript of this inscription, which I only know from a paper squeeze. There is another angle inscribed, but I can make nothing certain of it.

us at present, though it is of considerable interest. It may or may not be connected with the Palladian church, or else with the numerous megalithic and other prehistoric remains which add the charm of antiquity to that lovely spot. It is not associated by its position with either, and at present its date must remain ambiguous.

About four or five miles from Donard, just within the boundary of Kildare, lies the ancient cemetery of Killeen Cormaic, one of the most remarkable sites in Ireland. Its origin is wrapped in the mists of weird folklore. However old it may be originally, it was certainly used as a burial-place in early christian times and retains that use to this day—an almost unique circumstance, as the prehistoric cemeteries of Ireland are generally carefully reserved for the unbaptized or for suicides. There is not the slightest sign of a church ever having existed here.

There were four very remarkable monuments in the cemetery: three of these are at present intact, the fourth has within the last few years been destroyed in order to supply material for a boundary wall for the cemetery! This illfated stone bore a very interesting name *Macdeccedda*, genitive *Maqideccedda*, which also occurs, once in Cork, thrice in Kerry, once in Anglesea, and once in Devonshire. It was probably a name denoting some characteristic—"son of" (such a quality) being equivalent to "one who possesses or displays" (that quality).<sup>1</sup> It has commonly, though erroneously I think, been taken as a tribal name = *Mac Deccedda*, son of (one of the race of) Decced. There are three objections to this: first, the persons bearing the name are too much scattered to have belonged to one tribe<sup>2</sup>: secondly, *Macdeccedda* is always (with one exception) the personal name of the owner of the stone, never his ancestor's name: thirdly, *muco*, not *mac*, is the word to denote a tribesman.

Another Killeen Cormaic stone bears two inscriptions, one in Ogham the other in Latin. It is in memory of one Uvan: the Latin *seems* to give his father's name—IVVENE DRVVIDES, Iuvan son of Drui; the Ogham gives his grandfather's, *Uvanos avi Ivacattos*, of Uvan grandson of Ivacatt. Only three bilinguals exist in Ireland.

A third stone is interesting as bearing an extremely rude, and seemingly very ancient, bust of Our Lord, engraved at its head. There is an appearance of scoring on one angle, but nothing definite. The fourth inscription is now illegible.

Unimportant fragments alone await us in Carlow and Wexford. We shall therefore turn aside into Kilkenny, which stands at the threshold of the Ogham country.

Kilkenny is an excellent county for the ecclesiologist. The remains of no less than seven abbeys exist in the city of Kilkenny (though considerable remains of one or two alone exist) as well as St Canice's Cathedral, a perfect architectural gem, containing a marvellous collection of sepulchral effigies and incised slabs; there are also many quaint though dilapidated buildings in the same city. Jerpoint, Gowran, Freshford, Ullard, are, or ought to be, well known names in connection with interesting and beautiful architectural works of art: the doorway of Freshford church is perhaps as fine a small Romanesque composition as is to be seen anywhere. We must not, however, linger over these remarkable buildings at present; but in connection with

<sup>1</sup> A similar name is *Mactreni*, perhaps = "son of the strong one" or "son of strength." That it is not *Mac Treni* (filius Treni) is proved by the Cilgerran inscription TRENIGUSSI FILI MAQVITRENI. Compare the Buckland Monachorum SA<sup>R</sup>INI FILI MACCVDECHETI.

<sup>2</sup> Contrast the monuments of the races of Toicac at Dunloe and of Duibne in Corcaguiney.

three of the co. Kilkenny churches are found Ogham inscriptions, and as these three stones are useful types of well-marked classes, it will be important to pay some attention to them.

The first class to consider is that in which we have a presumably christian monument, standing in an ancient churchyard. An example of this we find at Tullaherin, some four or five miles from Kilkenny. The ancient church at this village is of high interest; the building as it stands may not be very old, but it is built on the site of a church the character of whose masonry brings us back perhaps to the earliest ages of Christianity in Ireland. Three feet or so of these venerable walls remain above ground, forming the substructure of the later building. Near the south-west corner of the church is the stump of a once superb round tower: and in the churchyard, on the south side of the church, is a fragment of an Ogham pillar. This is either *in situ*, marking the grave of some ancient Christian who was wont to worship here, or else has been appropriated from elsewhere as a convenient stone to mark the humble grave of some modern villager whose friends were too poor to afford a regular tombstone—such pathetic memorials are to be found in almost every country cemetery in Ireland. But what seems to negative the latter hypothesis is the fact that the stone is of sandstone, which is not the local stone; the whole neighbourhood is limestone, and it is in the highest degree unlikely that a sandstone block would be imported as a makeshift of poverty. The round tower is also sandstone: perhaps we may infer from this that the person commemorated was contemporary with that building—possibly was even concerned with its erection. Tullaherin Church was founded by St Ciaran in *circa* 520 A.D., but the tower is probably of a date three or four hundred years later. I am inclined to refer the ancient part of the church walls to St Ciaran's time.

Four miles from Tullaherin, in a north-easterly direction, we reach the little town of Gowran. It has always been a matter of surprise to me that the beautiful church which stands in its midst should be so little known: with the exception of an inferior cut and plan in Grose's Antiquities, I have failed to find any illustration of it. It is a very striking Lancet church, once apparently cruciform, with central tower; the west window is of exceptionally graceful design. The roofless nave is strewed with a large collection of monumental effigies and incised slabs, many of great interest.

Among the monuments in the church is to be found an Ogham inscribed stone, on which I will dwell for a little, as it presents some important features. I do not give a reading of the inscription here, for it is still a subject of dispute: let it suffice to say that the inscription is engraved on two angles, and runs over the head of the monument: at the opposite end a conspicuous cross is engraved.

Moreover, there is no question that the inscription contains the name *Eracias*, an archaic genitive form: we have therefore to explain the cross on the stone, for from grammatical considerations alone one would be almost inclined to regard this inscription as pre-christian. It should be explained that its connection with the church is apparent rather than real. It was found built into the chancel wall some fifty years ago when that part of the church was rebuilt for worship.

When the stone was placed erect either the cross or the upper part of the inscription must have been buried. There is a story in one of the MSS about a buried Ogham, but such an arrangement would have been so absolutely futile and absurd in real life that we can scarcely credit it: the object for which the inscription was cut at all would be by no means obvious. Yet such a theory has been put forward by scholars of high learning. Their



“explanation” is a gratuitous assumption that the persons commemorated by these monuments had some stain on birth or character, and that therefore their monuments were obscured by being inscribed in a cryptic character, which was then concealed underground. This ingenious trifling however defeats its own ends. There was an Ogham inscription found at Knockoran, co. Cork, which is read thus (I do not say whether correctly or not—I have had as yet no means of knowing)—

+ ANNACCANNI MARI AILITTAR  
(Stone) of Annaccann, Mary’s pilgrim

—and it is pointed to as an instance of a buried legend, for it would not be possible to erect the stone without concealing the cross or the end of the legend. It has escaped those who treat the inscription thus that the sinner’s *name* would remain in broad daylight, the redeeming fact that he was “Mary’s pilgrim” being the portion concealed! We may likewise reject the hypothesis of the burial of the cross; and are compelled to accept the view that the cross was cut subsequently to the inscription. Some early Irish Christians, who could not, or did not care to, read the inscription, annexed the stone as a convenient memorial of one of their own friends: they carved the symbol of their religion on the butt-end, where they had the widest space (they were probably illiterate, so added no epitaph), and stuck the inscribed portion in the earth, where it probably remained till seized by the Gothic builders for masonry material. The second class is thus the (conceivably) pre-Christian stone re-appropriated for a christian memorial.

The third class of Ogham with Christian associations is the stone used as material for a church building. In the little oratory at Claragh, between Gowran and Kilkenny, we have such a stone actually built into the church wall. This is a most interesting building: the nave is apparently of the 14th century, without any remarkable features; the chancel however displays the primitive Celtic masonry, and may be 7th or 8th century. A pretty little Romanesque window has been inserted in the east wall; and the masons who executed this work adapted an Ogham-inscribed stone as a sill for the window. When discovered the scores were so concealed by the masonry that they could not be read: the local antiquaries of Kilkenny have now brought the stone forward a little and it has been satisfactorily deciphered. Nothing can be clearer than the fact that it had lost all sentimental associations when the little early window was inserted, I suppose in the 11th century. The stone has been used much as even comparatively modern tombstones are often used—torn from their proper places to form grass-plot borders and (*horresco referens!*) paving stones.

As a late example of the use of Ogham may be mentioned a series of seven proper names engraved on a beautiful silver brooch of c. 11th century workmanship, found at Ballyspellan in this county and now in the National Museum at Dublin. The names are probably those of the owner and her ancestors, or else of successive owners—the fact that one name recurs favours the former hypothesis. One of the names *Maelmaire*, “tonsured servant of Mary” is of a sufficiently ecclesiastical type.

As we proceed westward from Kilkenny we find a rapid increase in the number of these inscriptions. Waterford has nearly 40 examples as yet known. These Waterford monuments present some points of interest. There seems to have been some provincialisms of pronunciation in this district in Oghamic times; two of its inscriptions, for instance, shew a tendency

to change *c* to *g*; these are at Drumloghan, where *magu Nogati* = *macu Nocati* (*macu* being dative of *maq* and *Nocati* a well-known name) and at Ardmore, where I think *Dolatibigais* would elsewhere be *Dolativiccas*: the termination *-vic* has already been commented upon. The latter name also illustrates the tendency displayed by the Waterford monuments to broaden vowels into diphthongs; with the primitive *-s* termination remaining we have *Rottais*, on a valuable inscription at Drumloghan: elsewhere we have, without the *s*, *Colinea*, *Cunee*, *Tonea*, *-enai*, *Cunalegea*, and, I believe, *Firiqorboi*; and in the middle of words *Nuata-froqi* and *Deagos*. Similar expansion is found elsewhere (especially in the neighbouring county of Cork); but it does not appear so persistently as in Waterford.

Of Waterford Oghams, even of those found on Christian sites, there are none that bear any definite marks of Christianity. They are mostly found in or near prehistoric cemeteries. Thus there is a group of 10 at Drumloghan which have been taken at some later time to form a curious subterranean chamber; another group of 3 at Stradbally; 4 at Kilgrovane; 7 at Seskinan; 2 at Old Island. The Seskinan stones have been nearly all built into the walls of a church now ruined: they have been shockingly maltreated by the masons, and in all probability fragments of others may yet be found in the building. There is a fair number of stones inscribed on three angles—everywhere a rarity; Waterford contains four such. One at Drumloghan reads *Cunalegea maqi Cetai deskadc Qveci*, where the fourth word remains unexplained. Another at Stradbally reads *Qrit . . . i maqi Lobaton avi Nia Gracolinea*, “stone of Qrit . . . son of Lobaton, grandson of Nia Gracolin.” Another at Ardmore, one of the longest we have, reads *Lugudeccas maqi Dolatibigais gob . . . (mu)coi Netasegamonas*—of Lugdach son of Dolatic the smith (?) son. [*i.e.*, of the race of] Netasegamain. The name *Lugudeccas* is interesting, as on various stones it illustrates all the changes through which the genitives of nouns passed during the Ogham period. At Kilgrovane we find the *s* gone, and get *Lugudeca*; at Kilcullen in Cork *Luguduc*, where the *a* has also gone. This stone and two others were found built into the walls of the famous ecclesiastical remains at Ardmore.

Cork has so far yielded nearly 80 inscriptions. In the early part of this paper we remarked on the general absence of Latin influence in the Irish Oghams. But one inscription in the eastern part of the county gives us a startling exception in the name *Drutiquili*, where the diminutive seems unquestionable.

Another, now lost, read *Sagittari*, which may or may not have had some reference to the Latin *sagittarius*.

At Coolineagh, in East Muskerry barony, were formerly six stones; only two are there now, the rest being deposited in public or private museums. One of these introduces us to a new word, and that a perplexing one, *annm*, which is obviously a contraction for something, though what it is is not certain. If it be a noun it must have the meaning of “resting-place” or something similar; if it be a verb it must be equivalent to *hic jacet*. There is something to be said for either of these possibilities. The inscription begins *Anm Corre . . .*, but the rest is obscure.<sup>1</sup> Some rough crosses have been scratched on this stone, and an ingenious person has cut a line across the last *t*, making a cross of it. Popular tradition calls this St Olan’s stone; but the name of St Olan appears neither in the inscription nor in hagiology.

<sup>1</sup> Various copyists, all of course anxious to get an accurate transcript, have made *maq(t) Guudgeatt*, *mac Suidd-aplt*, *mac Fuiddeguplt*, and *maq Fu(r)ddegeatt*: this illustrates the extreme difficulty of transcribing Ogham texts correctly, when the loss of, or carelessness in cutting, a single score may upset an entire reading.

At Monataggart, not very far from the last-named site, a most interesting and valuable collection of stones came to light some 20 years ago. As is often the case, they had been utilised in constructing an underground sepulchral chamber, and in consequence were in an unusually perfect state of preservation. The only one of the four stones which shews any considerable sign of weatherwear is a magnificent block nearly 8 ft. long. It bears a long but only partially intelligible inscription, displaying the *-s* genitives prominently throughout. The fact that this stone, from its condition, is manifestly the oldest of the four, and had evidently endured a much longer exposure than its fellows before they were reappropriated, is very strong corroborative evidence of the deductions drawn by philologists from the varying grammatical forms of these inscriptions. On the other hand another of these inscriptions is very late in date: perhaps it is even as late as the 10th century. The inscription is meant to read *Fegreq moqoi Glunlegget*; but the engraver has been foolish enough to interchange the side-scores, *i.e.* to write a *t* for an *f*, an *n* for a *q*, and so on throughout. Decadent eccentricities such as this are common in the latest period of an alphabetic system, as in that of an architectural style. Runic inscriptions offer some curious parallels. Again, the letter *q* has become practically *ch*; for *Fegreq* = *Fiachrach*. Thirdly, the words, at least the first two words, are divided by a well marked space: a feature unfortunately unknown in all the earlier Oghams. It is curious that such a late inscription as this bears no cross.

One or two other Cork inscriptions have been found in close connection with ecclesiastical sites, but those I have mentioned are the most important.

In Kerry we reach the culminating point; about 100 inscriptions are there to be found. Fully half of these are concentrated in Corcaguiney, the peninsula between Dingle and Tralee. It is strange that only one example has been found to the North and East of Tralee.

The Corcaguiney group is very interesting in many ways. Several of them bear the name of Duibne, in the Oghamic form *Dovinia*. She was the ancestress of the sept after which this barony was named—*Corco ui Dhuibhne*. These are all of early date and it would be beside the purpose of the present paper to discuss them. But there is one very remarkable little slab from Aglish, now in the Dublin Museum, about whose Christian origin there can be no question. The early Christian Irish form of standing tombstone is well-known: a flat slab, set upright in the ground, bearing a well-designed cross cut on one face. More often than not it is uninscribed: a few bear Irish inscriptions: only one is inscribed in Oghams—this Aglish example. A very neat "Maltese" cross inscribed in a circle is cut on one face; it seems to have had a stem, now much worn: on either side of the stem, curiously enough, is a swastica. The inscription, contrary to the usual custom, commences on the right angle of the main face and runs over down the left. The blank butt end, by which the stone was secured to the ground, is lost, and a few scores from the bottom end of each angle are lost too. The inscription runs—

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The loss of one or more scores from an *n*, for instance, will reduce it to *s, v, l, b, bv, bl, bb, ll, lb, vb, or bbb*; and this gives an idea of only one of the many difficulties with which the decipherer has to contend, the presence of accidental flaws being even more perplexing. I only know this stone from a paper squeeze and so will not commit myself to a reading: the end looks as though it might be *magva Moiddarett*.

. . || || . . || . . . . . X . (right angle.  
 (l u) G G O D I K A  
 / . ||||| . . . . . / . ||||| . . (left „  
 M A Q I M A Q - - - - -  
 (Stone) of Lugdach, son of Maq . . . . .<sup>1</sup>

In Ballintaggart, near Dingle, is a remarkable cemetery, containing no less than nine Ogham inscriptions, cut, not as usual, on angled pillar-stones, but on rounded boulders. Several of these bear crosses. In one the cross has evidently been added later; it is a rough cross of two lines, and the inscription relates to some Mac Erca (in the eccentric form *Maqiariki*) who was a descendant of Duibne. Another bears the strange name *Akevritti*, which at first sight resembles nothing so much as the Anglo-Saxon *Ecgfrith*; it is tempting to read the  $\chi$  as  $\phi$  here, and regard the monument as that of some wandering Pictish *Ipevoret*—this would throw welcome light on the stone at St Vigean's. But the name can be reconciled with Celtic forms.

This paper must be kept from running to an inordinate length: these few examples will suffice. If we leave Kerry and continue our itinerary we find the inscriptions suddenly cease. After finding about 170 stones in Cork and Kerry it is certainly singular to find only three in Limerick; three in Clare (one of them of doubtful authenticity); none in Tipperary; one in Mayo; two in Roscommon; and notwithstanding the county's great antiquarian wealth, none in Sligo. There may be some more in these counties yet undiscovered; but we can scarcely expect to make a sufficient number of discoveries to upset the enormous disproportion that exists in Oghamic distribution. The fact is unquestionable and for the present unexplained.

Another very late example of the use of Oghams occurs on a little leaden inkbottle, found many years ago at Kilmallock, in Limerick. This inscription attests the ownership of the bottle; as read by Prof. Rhys it runs *Niglas meiq Gillmocholmog, i.e.*, "Nicholas McGillmocholmog." Like the Maelmaire brooch, this name—"son of the servant of (St) Mocholmog"—suggests ecclesiastical associations.

Another late Ogham is the monument of "Colman the poor" formerly in the cemetery of Clonmacnoise, King's County. Whether appropriated in simple ignorance by the neighbouring peasantry, or stolen by Yankee curiosity-hunters, stone after stone, each bearing a beautiful incised cross and a humble request for prayer, has disappeared from this historic spot: the Ogham among them. The stone bore the name COLMAN in Irish letters of about the 11th-12th century, and the word *bocht* (poor) written backwards in Ogham. The loss of this touching epitaph is much to be regretted, as this was the only scrap of Ogham ever found in connection with an important ecclesiastical site.

The Northern counties are equally bare of Ogham writing. One each in Cavan, Meath,<sup>2</sup> Armagh and Tyrone, with three from Fermanagh, is as yet the total record. I need not

<sup>1</sup> The inscription on the right angle is usually read downwards making, with the erroneous value of  $\chi$  already alluded to, *apiloggo* or *apilogdo*. The many conjectures that have been made to explain this away shew that it does not strike scholars as satisfactory. Moreover, save for one strange, enigmatical inscription in far-off Cornwall, it is a thing unheard-of to read both angles of an inscribed stone downwards.

<sup>2</sup> The discovery of another Ogham in Meath is announced as the proofsheets of this paper go to press.

discuss any of these at present, as they are all (save in geographical position) comparatively unimportant.

The English and Welsh oghams are similar in style, language and character to the Irish, except for the Latin renderings with which they are nearly always accompanied. It will therefore be unnecessary to describe any of them at length. Several bear crosses; the *-s* genitive is very rare. So far as I can find, there are 3 Oghams in Brecon, 5 in Caermarthen, 3 in Cardigan, 1 in Denbigh, 3 in Glamorgan, 12 (and one more, doubtful) in Pembroke: notice again, as we noticed in Ireland, their extraordinary predominance in the South-western promontory. The English examples are few in number: 2 in Cornwall, 2 in Devon, and the famous stone whose discovery at Silchester took everyone by surprise, comprise the total record.

The British Museum contains two very interesting examples of the South British group, which afford ample materials for study. One is from Pant y Cadno in Brecon, and is worthy of the minutest examination. It bears evidence of having been used for different purposes at three periods. On one face is a single cup-marking. On the same face, running downward as usual, is the Latin (M)ACCVTRENI + SALICIDVNI, corresponding to the Ogham on the right angle running up, *Maqitreni Saliciduni* (M. (son) of S.).<sup>1</sup> On the other face is an extraordinary medley of iconography, which demands patient study and high scholarship to unravel: I shall not presume to make any suggestions here, and it would be beside my subject to do so. What however must be noticed is, that whichever is the older, the inscriptions and the figures are not contemporary. The former are *rubbed*, the latter *picked* out: when the stone was placed standing so as to display the inscription, the figures were partially buried, and *vice versa*; in the present position of the stone in the Museum, the inscriptions are the right way up, but the figures are upside down. The other British stone in the Museum is from Fardell in Devon. It also has been used three times. Besides the Ogham, it bears two inscriptions in Roman letters, one on either face; and, what is very unusual, if not unique, the three inscriptions have no mutual connection. The Ogham reads *Svaqquci maqi Qici*. Very interesting is the longer Roman inscription, in that it transliterates, but does not translate, the ordinary key-word of the Ogham stones—it reads FANDINI MAQVI RINI. The third inscription, whose existence, owing to the unfortunate position of the stone in the Museum, probably not one in ten thousand visitors suspects, is a simple name, SAGRANVI.

Five Oghams have been found in the Isle of Man. Four of these associate themselves in all respects with the Irish type. The fifth is a graffito; if anything, more of the character of the strange Scottish type.

The 14 Scottish inscriptions known are all in the *eastern* side or the northern islands. They are in an entirely different language from the Irish and South British stones; the language of the Picts, which was, as far as we can understand anything about it, not only non-Celtic, but non-Aryan. Eccentric forms of the characters are used; and one stone, at Newton in Aberdeen, is associated with an inscription in letters more difficult to classify and understand even than the Ogham. On the whole, the decipherment of these inscriptions is as yet in such a nebulous condition that it would be sheer waste of time to discuss them in a paper such as this. Many of them are accompanied by symbolical sculpture, and by those strange emblems

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<sup>1</sup> It has also been rendered "Stone of Mactreni of the Willow-Town."

which are distinctive of the Pictish stones. When all else about Ogham inscriptions has been found out, the Scottish inscriptions will probably remain the ultimate difficulty to overcome; and we are a long way off from that stage as yet.

I hope I have indicated in some measure the nature of the interest which these inscriptions possess. I fear it cannot be asserted that they advance ecclesiology: but I can bear testimony to their peculiar fascination; and as monuments of the ancient people and tongue of these islands their value passes all price.