

# PROCEEDINGS

of the

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## VIII.

NOTICE OF AN ANCIENT CELTIC RELIQUARY EXHIBITED TO THE SOCIETY BY SIR ARCHIBALD GRANT, BART., OF MONYMUSK. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, ASSISTANT-SECRETARY AND KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The Reliquary now exhibited to the Society by the kindness of Sir Archibald Grant is a small oblong box, the lid of which is in the form of a high-pitched roof with sloping gables. It measures  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches in length,  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches in height, to the opening of the lid, and 2 inches in width across the end. The lid measures  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches in height, and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches along the ridge of the roof, the projecting ornamental terminations being each half an inch in diameter. The gable-shaped ends of the roof form equilateral triangles of  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches of a side.

The box itself is of wood, hollowed out of a single piece, the lower part rectangular, the upper triangular lengthwise with sloping ends corresponding to the external form of the lid of the casket. It is cased outside with thin plates of bronze, which are enclosed in a framework of the same material, formed like a hollow circular moulding carried round the edges of the box, and squared at the corners. This framework is

attached to the wood by rivets, and covers the edges of the thin plates in which the box is encased. The covering plates of bronze on the back and ends of the box and its lid are plain, but those on the front

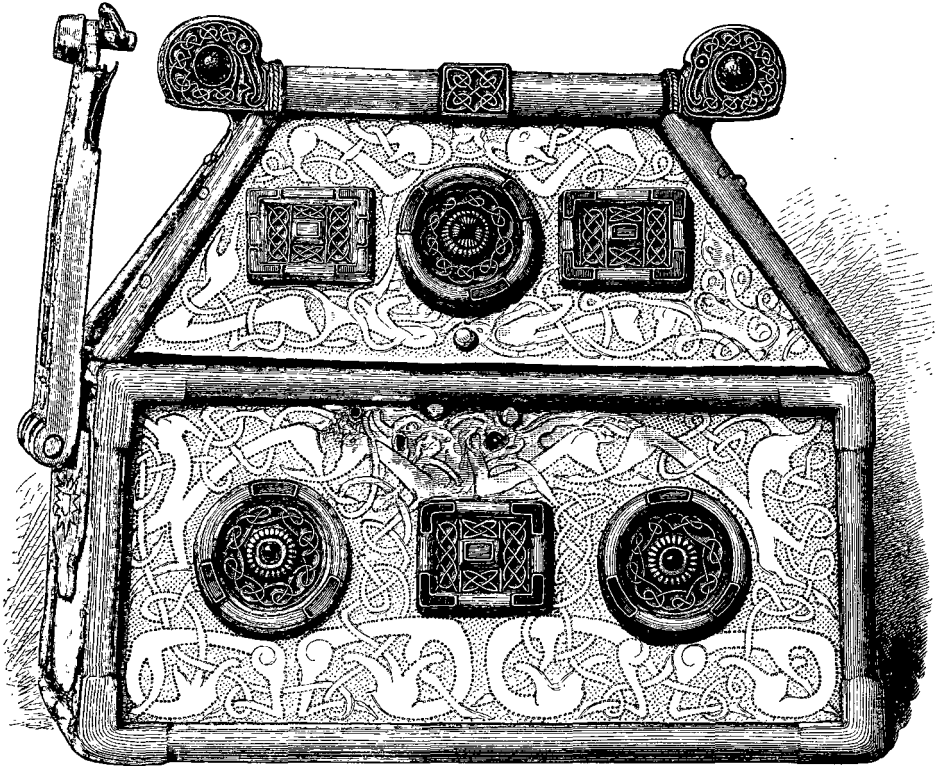


Fig. 1. The Monymusk Reliquary, Front View (actual size).

of the casket are of silver, and highly ornamented. (See fig. 1.) The ornamentation consists of a series of patterns of engraved, zoomorphic, interlaced work; the spaces between the parts of the ornament being stippled or filled with dots so as to form a ground for the patterns. On these silver

plates covering the front of the lower part and lid of the casket, are placed three projecting ornaments enclosing plates of metal chased with interlacing designs. The middle ornament on the lid or upper part of

the casket is circular, and those on either side oblong. This arrangement is reversed on the lower part of the casket. The centre ornament of this row and the one to the right have been lost, and their sockets are empty, but they have been supplied in the drawing by the repetition of the corresponding ones which are left. The frame of the circular ornaments consists of a moulding of bronze, rather more than  $\frac{1}{8}$ th of an inch in diameter and projection, bearing three segmental settings of red enamel, each of the width of the ring, which encloses a space of about  $\frac{5}{8}$ ths of an inch in diameter. Within this space is the circular plate of gilt metal, chased with a pattern of plain interlacing knot-work arranged round a central boss also of gilt metal.

The oblong ornaments have settings filled with red enamel at the four corners, which are clubbed, and the enclosed interlacing pattern is arranged round a central setting of the same

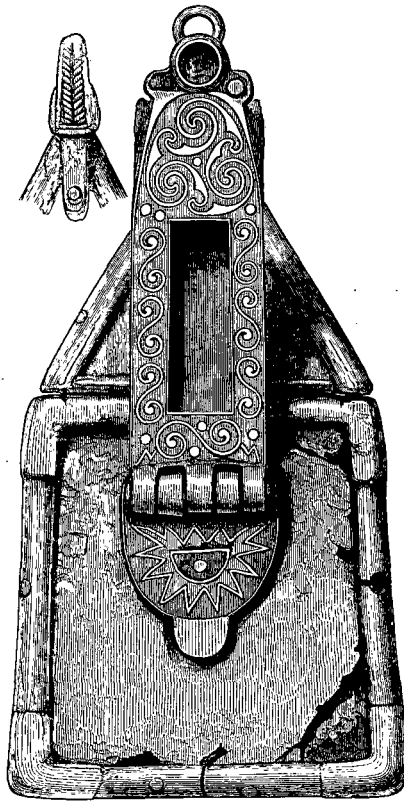


Fig. 2. The Monymusk Reliquary, end view (actual size).

enamel. The central part of the ridge of the roof has also on its face an interlaced pattern, chased on a projecting panel, the top of which is filled with red enamel. The expanded projecting ends of the ridge of the roof are ornamented with a panel of interlaced work of zoomorphic character, arranged round a central setting of lapis lazuli.

Each end of the casket has been furnished with a hinged socket for a strap, probably of leather, by which the casket could be conveniently suspended round the neck when carried on the breast of the bearer, as was the Celtic custom. One of these hinged appendages is gone, but the other remains, and is shown in the end view of the casket given in the woodcut, fig. 2. It is  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches in length, by nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of an inch in width, and highly ornamented with coloured enamels. The lower part below the hinge is furnished with two projecting loops, which pass through holes in the wood to receive an interior fastening. The upper part is hollow to receive the end of the strap, and there are three holes for pins or rivets to fasten the strap in its place. The ornament of the semicircular part below the hinge consists of a central semicircular panel, surrounded by a zigzag border of bright yellow enamel, enclosed in a similar border of red. The upper part has a central panel of oblong rectangular form, surrounded by a border of red enamel, in which are patterns of double reversing, and diverging spirals, in a style which is specially Celtic.

The Reliquary is preserved at Monymusk House, and nothing whatever is known of its previous history. The Priory of Monymusk was an establishment of Culdees in the 12th century, when it first appears in record in the Chartulary of St Andrews, to which it was affiliated. Its foundation by Malcolm Canmore, says Reeves, "rests upon the doubtful authority of a boundary Charter, and the more questionable assertion of Hector Boece." The probability is, that Malcolm Canmore was the restorer of a decayed establishment, and not its first founder. In 1245 the Culdees were converted into Canons of the order of St Augustin, and the monastery subsisted until after the middle of the 16th century, when its lands and endowments fell into possession of a younger branch of

the family of William, Lord Forbes, whose fourth son Robert was the last Prior. William Forbes of Monymusk, whose father Duncan had received a grant of the manor of Monymusk in 1549 from the Prior, subsequently received a grant of the whole houses and buildings of the monastery, which were then ruined and without residents, the members of the convent being all dead except Robert, the commendator by whom the grant was made. In 1712 Sir Francis Grant, Lord Cullen, one of the Senators of the College of Justice, purchased the whole lands of Monymusk from Sir William Forbes.

But there was an older family of Monymusk than either of these. The first notice of them is contained in a curious deed by which, in 1315, the Abbot and Convent of Aberbrothock, grant to Malcolm de Monimusk, the whole lands of Forglen, with the custody of the Brebennoch of St Columba, which King William the Lion had given to them on the foundation of their monastery. The Brebennoch was one of the sacred *vevilla* or battle-ensigns of the Scots, and though it has been usually assumed that it was a consecrated banner, there is reason to believe that, like all the other Celtic *vevilla* that are known, it must have been a reliquary enclosing some relic of the saint. If this reliquary, which is still preserved at Monymusk, be not the missing Brebennoch which was thus given into the custody of Malcolm de Monimusk in 1315, it can at least be said of it that its form is that of a *vevillum*, and that it is one of a class of Celtic reliquaries, of which the Breac Moedoc is a well-known example, all possessing the same typical form. It is, moreover, the only example of its class now remaining in Scotland, and the beauty and specially Celtic character of its ornamentation invest it with an interest of no ordinary kind, independent of all such questions of historic association.

[This paper, which should have appeared in the last volume, has been delayed on account of the woodcuts, which have been drawn and engraved by Mr John Adam, in a style that leaves nothing to be desired.]