



On an Ancient Runic Casket Now Preserved in the Ducal Museum, Brunswick

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to the west bounds of the parish of Callan, upwards of twelve miles.¹ In the reign of Edward II., when Kilkenny became a separate "Liberty," the entire kingdom of Ossory was included in that district, as also in the subsequently formed "county" of Kilkenny; and so continued until the reign of Philip and Mary, when the present Queen's County was being established, and on which occasion the portion of it till then included in Kilkenny was erected into the barony of Upper Ossory, which comprised about one-third of the present Queen's County. The Ordnance Survey in 1840 ignored this ancient barony altogether, and constructed out of it the present baronies of Clandonagh and Clarmallagh, thus civilly obliterating the last trace of the primitive title of the valley of the Nore. The illustration of the history or topography of Upper Ossory does not come within the design of the present essay. Our future inquiries shall be principally confined to the elucidation of the history and antiquities of the lower valley of the Nore, or Ossory proper.

(To be continued.)

ON AN ANCIENT RUNIC CASKET NOW PRESERVED IN THE DUCAL MUSEUM, BRUNSWICK.

BY GEORGE STEPHENS, ESQ., F. S. A., PROFESSOR OF OLD ENGLISH,
AND OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, IN THE UNIVERSITY OF
COPENHAGEN.

IF not absolutely the oldest, this coffer,² still in fine preservation, is certainly the most elaborate and most precious specimen of this kind of western art now known. It is made up of thin plates of the ivory or tusk of the walrus, with settings of a sort of yellowish bronze, all whose ornaments are still quite sharp and clear. The bottom plate is also of walrus, or morse ivory, in a similar manner fixt in slips of bronze, on which are carved the Runic letters. These repeat the inscription twice over, the two long lines and the two short ones answering to each other. The shrine now holds a couple of unimportant relics, but Senator Culemann pronounces these to be, as it was natural to expect, of far later date, perhaps

¹ Ware's Bishops, at Ossory.

² The plates which illustrate this paper are engraved full size from photographs of every side, and from a photograph, a rubbing, and a cast of the bottom plate, all taken from the original in the Ducal Museum, Brunswick. For these favours I am indebted to His Excellency, Mr. Gordon, British Minis-

ter, Stuttgart, and to the Senator Friedrich Culemann, of Hanover, who has personally controlled the execution of every piece, and who kindly took the rubbing with his own hand. I also beg to thank the Geheime-Hofrath Eigner, curator of this museum, for the exceeding courtesy he has shown me on this occasion.

from the 13th century. He also informs me that no memorandum exists in the Ducal Museum as to *whence* this remarkable box came, or *when* it was obtained, but he thinks it might possibly have been acquired by the Duchess Gertrud, mother of Henry the Lion, who when in France purchast relics to the value of one hundred pounds of silver. We are, therefore, entirely in the dark. Would that we could have followed it in its wanderings from Northumbria to Gallia, and thence far away into Germany!

The small holes at the corner of the ivory plates were bored for the better fastening of the bronze framing-slips. The staves are plainly and correctly cut, and any doubt which might arise from slight accidental peculiarities of form is at once dissipated by comparison with the parallel line, as the two inscriptions exactly agree.

Before attempting to "uncipher" the characters, we must examine the object on which they stand. This strikes us at once as of high antiquity and of undeniable Old-Western workmanship. This Old-Western style is often difficult to discriminate—the Keltic, the English, the Gallic, and their subdivisions or crosses, running into each other in a way not to be too narrowly or pedantically fixt. Paucity of monuments renders everything uncertain, besides which the style is often to a certain extent modified by the material; parchment, and stone, and metal, and bone, being very different things and producing very different results. We see this in Runes and letters, but we can also trace it in carved ornaments.

Still less can we sometimes determine with absolute certainty the date of a particular piece. Excellent judges occasionally differ even by two or three centuries. In art as in language there may be local or personal retardations or anticipations, archaisms long kept up, or new tendencies developed at a bound, and elsewhere long and slowly struggling upward.

Anything absolutely similar to the thoroly harmonious and richly composed and delicately rounded and softly modelled, and minutely finisht work in this casket, I have not met with before. We might call it Gallo-Frankic, or Gallo-Irish, or Gallo-English; but for all we know it may be pure Gallic, or pure Keltic, or pure English. Every new "find" modifies our science of "classification," which is yet in its infancy.

Nor are we more fortunate as to the date. It *may* have been executed in the 7th century. At first blush we might guess at the 9th. *Later* than the 8th or 9th I think no inscription on so costly a piece (intended for some member of the very highest, and very richest, and most "civilized" classes) would have been carved in Runes. *Roman characters* would have been employed.

But these Runes are not Keltic. They are in no variety of the Keltic Oghams. They are in the usual Old-Northern staves, and, still more distinctly classified, they are Old-English, not Old-Scandinavian.



COFFER PRESERVED IN THE DUCAL MUSEUM, BRUNSWICK.

[Front view—full size.]



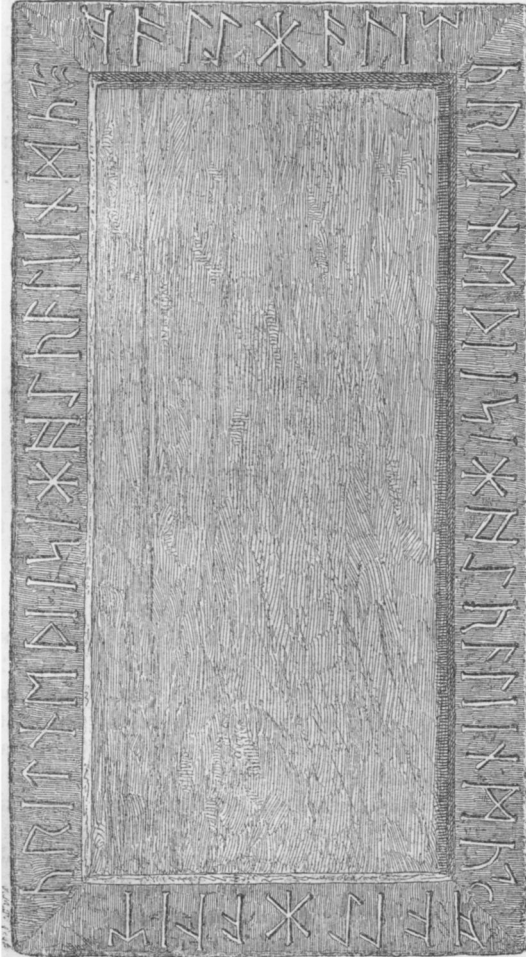
COFFER PRESERVED IN THE DUCAL MUSEUM, BRUNSWICK.

[Back view—full size.]

If we now turn to their contents, we shall perceive that the language is Northumbrian, Old North English, announcing that the casket was made for a certain Lord Æli in Gaul.

We have, then, a remarkable and apparently contradictory combination, a rich and beautiful coffer made by a *Gallic*, or *Irish*, or *English* artist in *North England* for a *Gallic* personage.

But before we go farther, we must “rede the Runes.”



Bottom of Casket.

The first practical hint I obtained in this direction was from the Rev. D. H. Haigh, who obligingly forwarded me the late J. M.

Kemble's own copy of the bottom plate, size of the original, on which he had made the memorandum that the runes were "in the Irish language." In spite of my veneration for that great scholar, I could not but doubt this statement, especially when the rubbing with which Senator Culemann favoured me showed that Mr. Kemble's transcript was far from correct. To obtain certainty at once on so vital a point, I requested the assistance of the Rev. J. Graves, A. B., Secretary of the Kilkenny Archæological Society. Thro his kind mediation I was fortunate enough to obtain the authoritative opinion of the three greatest Irish scholars then living. They all declared, that the line of letters I had forwarded was neither in Irish nor in any other to them known Keltic dialect. So my way was now clear, and I returned to my task.

As I said, I take the carving to be in the same language as the Runes, English. And as the letters are so plain, the only difficulty is in grouping them. I read, and divide as follow :—

URIT NEÞII
SIGHyOR ÆLI,
IN MUNGPÆLyO GÆLIeA.
WROTE (*carved-this*) NETHII
for-the-SIG-HERRA (victory-lord, most noble) ÆLI,
IN MUNGPÆLyO (Montpellier) of-GAUL.

Now we will take first the makee and the maker.

Do we know of any man in Gaul named Æli, in the 7th or 8th century, likely to have procured from North England this costly box ?

We do.

To avoid other and more recondite sources—which of my readers is unacquainted with that charming book of Dr. Maitland "The Dark Ages?" Let him turn to chapter 6, pp. 81–122, "The Goldsmith."¹ He will there find a noble vindication, as well as a true and popular account, of one of the really "great" men of France, one of the best men that ever adorned the Christian Church, the first art-workman of his day in all Europe, the Benvenuto Cellini of the 7th age, the illustrious Eligius, born near Limoges towards the close of the 6th year-hundred. After serving his apprenticeship to Abbo, mint-master in Lemovicina, and wandering, as journeymen did, far and wide thro the land, he became master of the mint to Clotaire II. His surprising talents as a worker in the precious metals have made him the hero of many a popular half-

¹ I use the first edition of Dr. Maitland's book, London, 1844, having no

other at hand. The paging may be different in the second.

mythical tale. But he was also distinguished for humility, zeal, truthfulness, helpfulness, endless generosity, and devotion to Christ and His poor. At last he gave up all to become a lowly priest, was eventually consecrated Bishop of Noyon and Tournay, and was indefatigable in building churches and monasteries, in ransoming prisoners, in evangelizing the heathen, in preaching the Word, and in serving and glorifying God. He died shortly after the middle of the 7th century.¹

What his name may have been in his own Frankic² mother tongue, we do not know. The less, as he was born in a southern province, which may have given a dialectic colour to the word.³ In its Latin form it was Æligius, Eligius, in popular French Eloy or Eloi. As the patron saint of the goldsmiths he is known by this latter name in every land. Un-Latinized, his name may well have been Æli, or something very like it.

But this cunning artificer had an English foreman in his shop, a man of great skill and parts. He had been sold as a slave into Gaul, and Eligius bought, and freed, and taught him. He soon converted him from Paganism, and he became a wondrous artist, thanks to his master's lessons. But at last he turned monk and eventually became a Saint. He was called Tillo (or Tillon, Tilonius, Tilmennus, in France commonly St. Théau). His day is the 7th of January, while St. Eloy's was the 1st of December, and under these dates we must look for their biographies in the various *Acta Sanctorum*.

Now, if we put these things together,—that the age of the casket is given somewhere about the 7th century,—that no other Æli is known at this time in Gaul at all likely to have wisht for a specimen of Northumbrian workmanship, and that he had a foreman who was an Englishman, and who may have described to him the excellence of the masterpieces he had seen in his native land, it seems very probable indeed that this Æli in Gaul was Eligius, the master of the mint. If so, he had perhaps not yet become a priest, at least not a bishop. At all events, the epithet applied to him is not ecclesiastical, and there is nothing distinctively religious in the ornamentation employed.

¹ See his life, "Vita S. Eligii Episcopi et Confessoris, scripta a S. Audoeo Archiepiscopo Rotomagensi," in L. D'Achery, "Spicilegium," folio, vol. ii., Parisii, 1723, pp. 76 and following.

² "Patria et parentibus Francorum." *Id.* p. 78.

³ "Igitur Eligius Lemovicæ Galliarum urbe, quæ ab Oceano Britannico ferè ducentorum millium spatio sejungitur,

in villâ Catalanense quæ a prædictâ urbe sex circiter millibus ad Septentrionalem plagam vertit, oriundus fuit pater Eucherius, mater verò Terrigia vocitata est."—*Id.* p. 78. It is mentioned, p. 82, that he was sent by Dagobert as ambassador to a prince "in partibus Britanniae;" but we must not be misled; this was Brittany, not insular Britain.

It is true that the casket says he was IN MUNPÆLYO, and I am not aware that any record connects Eligius with Montpellier.¹ But what know we of the thousand and one details of these old times? What we *do* know is, that his biographer oft-times informs us that he repeatedly wandered over Gaul, both in the land and to the sea-ports, and that it was in this way he became acquainted with Bobbo, the Royal Treasurer. Even while yet a layman he went from village to village, from harbor to harbor, relieving the poor, and freeing the captives—Romans, Gauls, Britons, Moors, but particularly English and Saxons—landed and sold by the sea-rovers. As ecclesiastic his labors were still more incessant in every part of France, and nothing is more likely than that in one of his artist or missionary expeditions he may have spent some time in Montpellier. It was then a small place, perhaps a mere hamlet; but, however small, *it existed*, and from its happy situation it rapidly increased on its gift to the Bishop of Maguelone in the 13th century, and its creation by him into a fief under the Knight Guido.

There was a *Welsh* Saint Elli, probably about contemporary with Eligius, whose day was the 23rd of February. See about him the Rev. W. J. Rees' "Lives of the Cambro-British Saints," Llandovery, 1853, 8vo., under the life of St. Cadoc. But there is no mention of his ever having been in Gaul.

So much then for the orderer, or buyer, or receiver of this chest.

But I think that I have also identified its *maker*.

In the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, is preserved a MS. copy of the Latin Gospels, said to have belonged to, or to have been written by the great Irish saint Colum Cille, usually called St. Columba, who was born A. D. 513, and died in 592. This codex is now known as "The Book of Durrow." A facsimile of the writing, three several specimens, is given by Professor Eugene O'Curry in his valuable and learned "Lectures on the MS. Materials of Ancient Irish History," Dublin, 1861, 8vo., plate 3, pages 650, 651. The second of these, a mere loose scribble or memorandum or passing remark of a kind common in ancient manuscripts, is:—

† miserere dñe næniani †
† fñi neth †

As this is all in Latin, the contractions must be extended in the usual way in that language. We must therefore fill in with Latin, not with Gaelic. Premising that 'næniani' may also be read 'næ-

¹ Mons Pessuli, Mons Pessulus, Mons Pessulanus, Mons Pelium, Mons Pelerius—for all these, and yet other forms, does its early Latin name assume. The

French spelling differs as widely. The above Runic mention of this place, if it be allowed that I have correctly fixt it, is perhaps the oldest known!



COFFER PRESERVED IN THE DUCAL MUSEUM, BRUNSWICK.

[End view—full size.]

máni,' as it has been by Prof. O'Curry, I would resolve the above into:—

† miserere domine næniani †
 † filii nethii †
 (Have mercy, O Lord, on Nænian, the son of Nethii.)

Now here the name Nethii (or Nethi), *one of the very rarest in all Europe*, is plain. It is doubtless the Old Irish proper name Néidhé, which in very ancient times sometimes occurs, but which disappeared at an early period. So uncommon is it, that Prof. O'Curry says at p. 650: "Nor has any name yet been found of which Neth could be the first part."

The exact date of the above entry we cannot ascertain; but as the whole codex and every thing in and about it savors of the earliest times, we cannot be far wrong in assuming that it may have been inscribed not later than a hundred years after the date of St. Columba in 592. But this will exactly harmonize with the date of this kist. For,

If we remember that Nethii is not an Old English name, nor Scandinavian, nor German, nor Romance, but only *Old Irish*;

That it is so scarce in Ireland as only to have been *once* met with in the early Christian period;

That this once it is entered in a book connected with St. Colum Cillé, the founder and Abbot of the great mission-cloister at Hii (Iona), whence he and his disciples spread Christianity and a high civilization through various parts of Scotland, and assisted in evangelizing the great kingdom of Northumberland, whose dialect this casket bears;

That nothing was more common than for art-workmen, lay and clerical, to pass from place to place on their errands in the service of religion;

That this shrine is evidently and strikingly *Early Western*, may be from about the 7th century;

That the short inscription in the codex is also, as far as we can see, from a date as early;

The conclusion will be almost irresistible, that the Nethii, the father of Nænian, in St. Columba's Gospel-book and the Nethii in ancient Northumberland, who made this master piece, is *one and the same person*, who possibly received the pattern of the work from Æli himself.

But this argument is strengthened by another coincidence; for I think this same artist occurs, at about the same time, in another Irish codex, the famous "*Book of Dimma*," an illuminated MS. of the Latin Gospels (O'Curry, id. p. 335, facsimile No. 4, pp. 651-2). This volume is usually supposed to have been written "circa 620" by a scribe of that name for St. Cronan of Roscrea, who died in the

beginning of the 7th century. It was preserved in that neighbourhood till the early part of the present century, when it passed into the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, "which also possesses another shrine and book, those, namely, of St. Moling, now St. Mullins, in the county Carlow" (O'Curry, p. 336). Now the writer of this book signs himself Dimma Macc Nathi. From the facsimile, this Nathi may possibly be read Næthi. But the difference is of little moment.¹ In either case I think he was the same person as the Nethii mentioned in the "Book of Durrow." If so, the "Book of Dimma" is a few years later than the time generally supposed, or Næthii must have married early and died late. If Nænian and Dimma were both his sons, and the latter wrote "the Book of Dimma" "about 620"—say when he was about twenty-five—Nethii must have been born about 575. If he carved the casket about 630, he would then have been about fifty-five. The difficulty is very small either way. The codex may have been copied "circa" 630-40, or Nethii may still have been an able artist at the age of sixty or seventy.

I do not know when Eligius was born. The usual tradition would seem to point to something like the date 590-600. His consecration as bishop is assigned to some year between 635 and 646. His death is fixt at 640, 646, 659, 663, 665, &c. Say born 593, made bishop 640, died 660. He was still young when he became Goldsmith, and afterwards Master of the Mint, to the King of the Franks, a time when he may well have ordered the coffer to be made. If he were then forty years of age, this would be in 630. But we have thirty years to fall back upon. At all events, the shrine cannot be later than about 650.

It is evident that this costly piece was, in the language of its Irish maker, a "Cumdach," in Northumbrian a "cist" or "tige." But for what were these early Keltic shrines or caskets intended? Scarcely for relics. The age of relics was not yet come, compared with after-developments. These *earliest* shrines were all of them made, as far as we know, to contain *holy writings*, some book or books of *the Old or New Testament*. There is a striking example of this in the

¹ The learned Professor O'Curry, alas, now no more!—a blow to Ireland only less than the decease of that mighty scholar and amiable gentleman, Dr. O'Donovan—has confirmed my opinion on the probable identity of these names. I stated the case to him; and in a reply, which I received from him, dated at the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, March 24, 1862, he says:—

"As for Neth itself, it may or may not be intended for Neidhe, Nethii or Nathi. The nominative and genitive of proper names of men, beginning with

a non-aspirate consonant, and ending with a vowel, are the same. It is certain that *D* and *T* are often written indiscriminately; but the genitive does not take an additional syllable, but merely a final liquid vowel *i*, as *beneit*, &c. The name Neidhé appears to have been little used for many ages—indeed, at any time—but it was revived by poetic fancy in Connaught in the twelfth and fifteenth centuries by the bardic family of O'Maelchonairé. It is true that *A* and *E* are sometimes written the one for the other."



COFFER PRESERVED IN THE DUCAL MUSEUM, BRUNSWICK.

[End view—full size.]

Domhnach Airgid, the shrine or box containing a MS. of the Four Gospels in Latin, now preserved in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. But this casket has *gradually* become three-fold. First, we have the original chest, of wood, probably of the fifth century; the second, made some two or three centuries later to honor and preserve the first, is of copper silver-plated; the third, of silver gold-plated, is of the fourteenth century. This last, among other words, bears the inscription:—

JOHANNES : O BARRDAN : FABRICAVIT.
(*JOHN O'BARRDAN MADE-me*).

There is little doubt of the correctness of Dr. Petrie's supposition, that the original wooden casket, with its MS., was the identical *Domnach* presented by St. Patrick to St. Mac Carthainn, who died in 506 after having founded the see of Clogher.¹

Yet another instance occurs in the *Cathach*, or "Book of Battles,"² a box or casket from about the middle of the sixth century, enclosing a fragment of the Psalms on vellum, doubtless written by St. Colum Cillé. This shrine is the property of Sir Richard O'Donnell, but is deposited by him for public inspection in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. It also has more than one case, the one within the other, the last and richest dating from the close of the eleventh century, and bearing among other words the name of the maker, Sittriuc (= Sitric), Mac Aedha. This is a remarkable proof how little we can depend on mere names. The artist was undoubtedly an Irishman, the son of Aedh (Hugh). Yet he bears a Scandinavian name, Sitric, given him perhaps to commemorate kindredship with that nation thro some marriage tie in the family or thro connexions on the mother's side.

Several other such shrines or caskets exist, but none approaching the above in antiquity. They are usually flat and square, like the *Domhnach Airgid*; but one of them, that of Mr. W. Monsell, M.P., now deposited in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, where the two others may also be seen, is more in the shape of a church, something like that now preserved in the Brunswick Ducal Museum. They are mostly small. The MSS. enshrined for more than 1000 years in the *Domnach* and the *Cathach*, and facsimilied in O'Curry, p. 664, are not too large to be deposited in the Brunswick casket.

To sum up—My opinion is, that this coffer was made by Nethii, an Irish artist then settled in Northumbria, for Æli, or St. Eligius, or Eloy, Bishop of Noyon and Tournay, in Gaul, in the first half of the seventh century; and that it was made, not as a reliquary in the

¹ See O'Curry, "Lectures," pp. 322–327, and the authorities there cited, especially Dr. Petrie.

² See O'Curry, "Lectures," pp. 327–532. The Gaelic inscription is given at page 399.

vulgar sense, or as a common jewel-box, but as a *Gospel-casket*, a precious receptacle for a precious portion of the Word of God. Besides the well-known import of certain articles from Gaul, even from the Roman period, there were two streams of Christianization and civilization at this time flowing into England, especially into Northern England, the one—perhaps the fullest and mightiest—from the Gaelic missions of Ireland, both direct and over Scotland, and this Irish civilization was then the highest in Europe, the Roman only excepted; the other Italian, directly or indirectly from Rome chiefly. Both met in the seventh century in Northumberland Nethii's casket is a specimen of Gallic or Gaelic culture; the fine Runic pillars at Bewcastle and Ruthwell, are instances of the Roman, for their ornamentation is evidently Roman and Roman-ara-besque. But the Bewcastle cross is also richly decorated in the style of the Kelts and the Northmen, the king over whom it was raised being a Northman on the father's side, but a Kelt on the mother's.

Of course all this depends on the interpretation of the runes. If this be correct, there can be little doubt that Æli was Eligius, and the shrine is then of the seventh century—at which time there was still a Gaul. But if a better reading can be found, and Æli and Montpellier and Gaul disappear, then of course the casket may have a much later date, and all my “ingenious combinations” will disappear, and “leave not a rack behind.”

ANONYMOUS ACCOUNT OF THE EARLY LIFE AND MARRIAGE OF JAMES, FIRST DUKE OF ORMONDE.

EDITED BY THE REV. JAMES GRAVES, A. B., M. R. I. A.

AT the head of the transcript from which the following relation is printed, I find a memorandum made by myself at the time. The note given below¹ contains all that I had then, or since, been able to discover concerning the MS., now for the first time published. That there is, or was, an authentic original in existence cannot be fairly questioned, and I think it probable that it may yet be found

¹ The memorandum referred to above is as follows:—“Copied by Lord James W. Butler, from a manuscript, author unknown, given to the Marquess of Ormonde (Lord James' father), by the Earl of Clancarty, at Bruxelles, in the year

1822. This manuscript is not now forthcoming; and the following transcript is made from the copy above alluded to. August, 1850, J. Graves.” At the end of my transcript I find, “Copia vera fact' et exaīat' per me, J. G., October 1, 1850.”