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THE CLYDE
MYSTERY

Andrew Lang
The Clyde Mystery

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The Clyde Mystery a Study in Forgeries and Folklore:*

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The Clyde Mystery a Study in Forgeries and Folklore

PREFACE

The author would scarcely have penned this little specimen of what Scott called “antiquarian old womanries,” but for the interest which he takes in the universally diffused archaic patterns on rocks and stones, which offer a singular proof of the identity of the working of the human mind. Anthropology and folklore are the natural companions and aids of prehistoric and proto-historic archaeology, and suggest remarks which may not be valueless, whatever view we may take of the disputed objects from the Clyde sites.

While only an open verdict on these objects is at present within the competence of science, the author, speaking for himself, must record his private opinion that, as a rule, they are ancient though anomalous. He cannot pretend to certainty as to whether the upper parts of the marine structures were throughout built of stone, as in Dr. Munro’s theory, which is used as the fundamental assumption in this book; or whether they were of wood, as in the hypothesis of Mr. Donnelly, illustrated by him in the Glasgow

Evening Times (Sept. 11, 1905). The point seems unessential. The author learns from Mr. Donnelly that experiments in shaping piles with an ancient stone axe have been made by Mr. Joseph Downes, of Irvine, as by Monsieur Hippolyte Müller in France, with similar results, a fact which should have been mentioned in the book. It appears too, that a fragment of fallow deer horn at Dumbuck, mentioned by Dr. Munro, turned out to be “a decayed *humerus* of the *Bos Longifrons*,” and therefore no evidence as to date, as post-Roman.

Mr. Donnelly also protests that his records of his excavations “were exceptionally complete,” and that he “took daily notes and sketches of all features and finds with measurements.” I must mention these facts, as, in the book, I say that Mr. Donnelly “kept no minute and hourly dated log book of his explorations, with full details as to the precise positions of the objects discovered.”

If in any respect I have misconceived the facts and arguments, I trust that the fault will be ascribed to nothing worse than human fallibility.

I have to thank Mr. Donnelly for permission to photograph some objects from Dumbuck and for much information.

To Dr. Munro, apart from his most valuable books of crannog lore, I owe his kind attention to my private inquiries, and hope that I successfully represent his position and arguments. It is quite undeniable that the disputed objects are most anomalous as far as our present knowledge goes, and I do not think that science can give more than all I plead for, an open verdict. Dr.

Ricardo Severe generously permitted me to reproduce a few (by no means the most singular) of his designs and photographs of the disputed Portuguese objects. A serious illness has prevented him from making a visit recently to the scene of the discoveries (see his paper in *Portugalia*, vol. ii., part 1). I trust that Dr. de Vasconcellos, from whom I have not yet heard, will pardon the reproduction of three or four figures from his *Religiões*, an important work on prehistoric Portugal.

To Dr. Joseph Anderson, of the National Museum, I owe much gratitude for information, and for his great kindness in superintending the photographing of some objects now in that Museum.

Dr. David Murray obliged me by much information as to the early navigation of the Clyde, and the alterations made in the bed of the river. To Mr. David Boyle, Ontario, I owe the knowledge of Red Indian magic stones parallel to the perforated and inscribed stone from Tappock.

As I have quoted from Dr. Munro the humorous tale of the palaeolithic designs which deceived M. Lartet and Mr. Christie, I ought to observe that, in *L'Anthropologie*, August, 1905, a reviewer of Dr. Munro's book, Prof. Boule, expresses some doubt as to the authenticity of the *historiette*.

I – THE CLYDE MYSTERY

The reader who desires to be hopelessly perplexed, may desert the contemplation of the Fiscal Question, and turn his eyes upon *The Mystery of the Clyde*. “Popular” this puzzle cannot be, for there is no “demmed demp disagreeable body” in the Mystery. No such object was found in Clyde, near Dumbarton, but a set of odd and inexpensive looking, yet profoundly enigmatic scraps of stone, bone, slate, horn and so forth, were discovered and now repose in a glass case at the National Museum in Queen Street, Edinburgh.

There, as in the Morgue, lies awaiting explanation the *corpus delicti* of the Clyde Mystery. We stare at it and ask what are these slate spear heads engraved with rude ornament, and certainly never meant to be used as “lethal weapons”? What are these many-shaped perforated plaques of slate, shale, and schist, scratched with some of the old mysterious patterns that, in almost every part of the world, remain inscribed on slabs and faces of rock? Who incised similar patterns on the oyster-shells, some old and local, some fresh —*and American!* Why did any one scratch them? What is the meaning, if meaning there be, of the broken figurines or stone “dolls”? They have been styled “totems” by persons who do not know the meaning of the word “totem,” which merely denotes the *natural* object, – usually a plant or animal, – after which sets of kinsfolk are named among certain

savage tribes. Let us call the little figures “figurines,” for that commits us to nothing.

Then there are grotesque human heads, carved in stone; bits of sandstone, marked with patterns, and so forth. Mixed with these are the common rude appliances, quern stones for grinding grain, stone hammers, stone polishers, cut antlers of deer, pointed bones, such as rude peoples did actually use, in early Britain, and may have retained into the early middle ages, say 400-700 a. d.

This mixed set of objects, *plus* the sites in which they were found, and a huge canoe, 35 feet long, is the material part of the Clyde Mystery. The querns and canoe and stone-polishers, and bones, and horns are commonly found, we say, in dwellings of about 400-700 a. d. The peculiar and enigmatic things are *not* elsewhere known to Scottish antiquaries. How did the two sets of objects come to be all mixed up together, in an old hill fort, at Dunbuie on Clyde; and among the wooden foundations of two mysterious structures, excavated in the mud of the Clyde estuary at Dumbuck and Langbank, near Dumbarton? They were dug up between 1896 and 1902.

This is the question which has been debated, mainly in newspaper controversy, for nearly ten years. A most rambling controversy it has been, casting its feelers as far as central Australia, in space, and as far back as, say, 1200 b. c. in time.

Either the disputed objects at the Museum are actual relics of life lived in the Clyde basin many centuries ago; or the discoverers and excavators of the old sites are dogged by a forger

who “dumps down” false relics of kinds unknown to Scottish antiquaries; or some of the unfamiliar objects are really old, while others are jocose imitations of these, or – there is some other explanation!

The modern “Clyde artists” are credited by Dr. Robert Munro with “some practical artistic skill,” and some acquaintance with the very old and mysterious designs on great rocks among the neighbouring hills. ¹ What man of artistic skill, no conscience, and a knowledge of archaic patterns is associated with the Clyde?

The “faker” is not the mere mischievous wag of the farm-house or the country shop. It is possible that a few “interpolations” of false objects have been made by another and less expert hand, but the weight of the problem rests on these alternatives, – the disputed relics which were found are mainly genuine, though unfamiliar; or a forger not destitute of skill and knowledge has invented and executed them – or – there is some other explanation.

Three paths, as usual, are open to science, in the present state of our knowledge of the question. We may pronounce the unfamiliar relics genuine, and prove it if we can. We may declare them to be false objects, manufactured within the last ten years. We may possess our souls in patience, and “put the objects to a suspense account,” awaiting the results of future researches and of new information.

¹ *Archaeology and False Antiquities*, pp. 259-261. By Robert Munro, M.A., M.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E., F.S.A.Scot. Methuen & Co., London, 1905.

This attitude of suspense is not without precedent in archaeology. “Antiquarian lore,” as Dr. Munro remarks by implication, *can* “distinguish between true and false antiquities.”² But time is needed for the verdict, as we see when Dr. Munro describes “the Breonio Controversy” about disputed stone objects, a controversy which began in 1885, and appears to be undecided in 1905.³ I propose to advocate the third course; the waiting game, and I am to analyse Dr. Munro’s very able arguments for adopting the second course, and deciding that the unfamiliar relics are assuredly impostures of yesterday’s manufacture.

² Munro, p. xii.

³ Munro, pp. 56-80. Cf. *L’Homme Préhistorique*, No. 7, pp. 214-218. (1905.)

II – DR. MUNRO’S BOOK ON THE MYSTERY

Dr. Munro’s acute and interesting book, *Archaeology and False Antiquities*,⁴ does not cover the whole of its amusing subject. False gems, coins, inscriptions, statues, and pictures are scarcely touched upon; the author is concerned chiefly with false objects of the pre-historic and “proto-historic” periods, and with these as bearing on the Clyde controversy of 1896-1905. Out of 292 pages, at least 130 treat directly of that local dispute: others bear on it indirectly.

I have taken great interest in this subject since I first heard of it by accident, in the October or November of 1898. As against Dr. Munro, from whose opinions I provisionally dissent, I may be said to have no *locus standi*. He is an eminent and experienced archaeologist in matters of European pre-historic and proto-historic times. Any one is at liberty to say of me what another celebrated archaeologist, Mr. Charles Hercules Read, said, in a letter to Dr. Munro, on December 7, 1901, about some one else: a person designated as “–,” and described as “a merely literary man, who cannot understand that to practised people the antiquities are as readable as print, and a good deal more

⁴ Methuen, London, 1904, pp. 292.

accurate.”⁵ But though “merely literary,” like Mr. “–,” I have spent much time in the study of comparative anthropology; of the manners, ideas, customs, implements, and sacred objects of uncivilised and peasant peoples. Mr. “–” may not have done so, whoever he is. Again, as “practised people” often vary widely in their estimates of antique objects, or objects professing to be antique, I cannot agree with Mr. Read that “the antiquities” are “as readable as print,” – if by “antiquities” he means antiquities in general. At the British Museum I can show Mr. Read several admirable specimens of the art of faking, standing, like the Abomination of Desolation, where they ought not. It was not by unpractised persons that they were purchased at the national expense. We are all fallible, even the oldest of us. I conceive Mr. Read, however, to mean the alleged and disputed “antiquities” of the Clyde sites, and in that case, his opinion that they are a “curious swindle” is of the most momentous weight.

But, as to practised opinion on antiquities in general, Dr. Munro and I agree that it is really very fallible, now and again. The best authorities, he proves, may read antiquities differently. He is not certain that he has not himself, on occasion, taken “fakes” for true antiques.⁶ The *savants* of the Louvre were lately caught by the notorious “tiara of Saitaphernes,” to the pecuniary

⁵ Munro, p. 178.

⁶ Munro, p. 55; cf. his *Lake Dwellings in Europe*, Fig. 13, Nos. 17, 18, 19. See *Arch. and False Antiquities*, pp. 21, 22, where Dr. Munro acknowledges that he had been taken in.

loss of France; were caught on April 1, 1896, and were made *poissons d'Avril*, to the golden tune of 200,000 francs (£8000).

Again, M. Lartet and Mr. Christy betted a friend that he could not hoax them with a forged palaeolithic drawing. They lost their bet, and, after M. Lartet's death, the forged object was published, as genuine, in the scientific journal, *Matériaux* (1874).⁷ As M. Reinach says of another affair, it was "a *fumisterie*."⁸ Every archaeologist may be the victim of a *fumisterie*, few have wholly escaped, and we find Dr. Furtwangler and Mr. Cecil Smith at odds as to whether a head of Zeus in terra-cotta be of the fifth century b. c. or, quite the contrary, of the nineteenth or twentieth century a. d.

Verily all "practised people" do not find "antiquities as readable as print." On the other hand, my late friend, Dr. A. S. Murray, Keeper of Classical Antiquities in the British Museum, "read" the Mycenaean antiquities erroneously, placing them many centuries too late. M. de Mortillet reckoned them forgeries, and wrote of the discoverer, Dr. Schliemann, and even of Mrs. Schliemann, in a tone unusual in men of science and gentlemen.

The great palaeolithic discoveries of M. Boucher de Perthes, the very bases of our study of the most ancient men, were "read" as impostures by many "practised people." M. Cartailhac, again, has lately, in the most candid and honourable way, recanted his own original disbelief in certain wall-paintings in Spanish caves,

⁷ Munro, pp. 41, 42.

⁸ Munro, pp. 275-279.

of the period called “palaeolithic,” for long suspected by him of being “clerical” impostures.⁹

Thus even the most “practised people,” like General Councils, “may err and have erred,” when confronted either with forgeries, or with objects old in fact, but new to them. They have *not* always found antiquities “as readable as print.” Dr. Munro touches but faintly on these “follies of the wise,” but they are not unusual follies. This must never be forgotten.

Where “practised people” may be mistaken through a too confirmed scepticism, the “merely literary man” may, once in an azure moon, happen to be right, or not demonstrably wrong; that is my excuse for differing, provisionally, from “practised people.” It is only provisionally that I dissent from Dr. Munro as to some of the points at issue in the Clyde controversy. I entered on it with very insufficient knowledge: I remain, we all remain, imperfectly informed: and like people rich in practice, – Dr. Joseph Anderson, and Sir Arthur Mitchell, – I “suspend my judgement” for the present.¹⁰

This appears to me the most scientific attitude. Time is the great revealer. But Dr. Munro, as we saw, prefers not to suspend his judgment, and says plainly and pluckily that the disputed objects in the Clyde controversy are “spurious”; are what the world calls “fakes,” though from a delicate sense of the proprieties of language, he will not call them “forgeries.” They

⁹ *L'Anthropologie*, 1902, pp. 348-354.

¹⁰ Munro, pp. 175-176.

are reckoned by him among “false antiquities,” while, for my part, I know not of what age they are, but incline I believe that many of them are not of the nineteenth century. This is the extent of our difference. On the other hand I heartily concur with Dr. Munro in regretting that his advice, – to subject the disputed objects at the earliest possible stage of the proceedings, to a jury of experts, – was not accepted.¹¹

One observation must be made on Dr. Munro’s logical method, as announced by himself. “My role, on the present occasion, is to advocate the correctness of my own views on purely archaeological grounds, without any special effort to refute those of my opponents.”¹² As my view is that the methods of Dr. Munro are perhaps, – and I say it with due deference, and with doubt, – capable of modification, I shall defend my opinions as best I may. Moreover, my views, in the course of seven long years (1898-1905) have necessarily undergone some change, partly in deference to the arguments of Dr. Munro, partly because much new information has come to my knowledge since 1898-99. Moreover, on one occasion, I misstated my own view, and, though I later made my real opinion perfectly dear, some confusion was generated.

¹¹ Munro, p. 152.

¹² Munro, pp. 28, 29.

III – THE CLYDE CONTROVERSY

It is necessary, after these prefatory remarks, to give an account of the rise of the Clyde controversy, and I may be pardoned for following the example of Dr. Munro, who adds, and cannot but add, a pretty copious narrative of his own share in the discussion. In 1896, the hill fort of Dunbuie, “about a mile-and-a-half to the east of Dumbarton Castle, and three miles to the west of the Roman Wall,”¹³ was discovered by Mr. W. A. Donnelly: that is to say, Mr. Donnelly suggested that the turf might conceal something worth excavating, and the work was undertaken, under his auspices, by the Helensburgh Antiquarian Society.

As Mr. Donnelly’s name constantly occurs in the discussion, it may be as well to state that, by profession, he is an artist, – a painter and designer in black and white, – and that, while keenly interested in the pre-historic or proto-historic relics of Clydesdale, he makes no claim to be regarded as a trained archaeologist, or widely-read student. Thus, after Mr. Donnelly found a submarine structure at Dumbuck in the estuary of the Clyde, Dr. Munro writes: “I sent Mr. Donnelly some literature on crannogs.”¹⁴ So Mr. Donnelly, it appears, had little book

¹³ Munro, p. 130.

¹⁴ Munro, p. 155. Letter of January 7, 1899.

lore as to crannogs. He is, in fact, a field worker in archaeology, rather than an archaeologist of the study and of books. He is a member of a local archaeological Society at Helensburgh on the Clyde, and, before he found the hill fort of Dunbuie, he had discovered an interesting set of “cup and ring” marked rocks at Auchentorlie, “only a short distance from Dunbuie.”¹⁵

Mr. Donnelly’s position, then, as regards archaeological research, was, in 1896-1898, very like that of Dr. Schliemann when he explored Troy. Like Dr. Schliemann he was no erudite savant, but an enthusiast with an eye for likely sites. Like Dr. Schliemann he discovered certain objects hitherto unknown to Science, (at least to Scottish science,) and, like Dr. Schliemann, he has had to take “the consequences of being found in such a situation.”

It must be added that, again like Dr. Schliemann he was not an excavator of trained experience. I gather that he kept no minute and hourly-dated log-book of his explorations, with full details as to the precise positions of the objects discovered, while, again like Dr. Schliemann, he had theories of his own, with some of which I do not concur.

Dr. Munro justly insists on “the absolute necessity of correctly recording the facts and relics brought to light by excavations.”¹⁶ An excavator should be an engineer, or be accompanied by a specialist who can assign exact measurements for the position

¹⁵ Munro, p. 260.

¹⁶ Munro, p. 270.

of every object discovered. Thus Dr. Munro mentions the case of a man who, while digging a drain in his garden in Scotland, found an adze of jade and a pre-historic urn. Dr. Munro declares, with another expert, that the jade adze is “a modern Australian implement,” which is the more amazing as I am not aware that the Australians possess any jade. The point is that the modern Australian adze was *not*, as falsely reported, in the pre-historic urn.¹⁷

Here I cannot but remark that while Dr. Munro justly regrets the absence of record as to precise place of certain finds, he is not more hospitable to other finds of which the precise locality is indicated. Things are found by Mr. Bruce as he clears out the interior of a canoe, or imbedded in the dock on the removal of the canoe,¹⁸ or in the “kitchen midden” – the refuse heap – but Dr. Munro does not esteem the objects more highly because we have a distinct record as to the precise place of their finding.

¹⁷ Munro, p. 270.

¹⁸ Bruce, *Proceedings of the Scots Society of Antiquaries*, vol. xxxiv. pp. 439, 448, 449.

IV – DUNBUIE

To return to the site first found, the hill fort of Dunbuie, excavated in 1896. Dr. Munro writes:

“There is no peculiarity about the position or structure of this fort which differentiates it from many other forts in North Britain. Before excavation there were few indications that structural remains lay beneath the débris, but when this was accomplished there were exposed to view the foundations of a circular wall, 13½ feet thick, enclosing a space 30 to 32 feet in diameter. Through this wall there was one entrance passage on a level with its base, 3 feet 2 inches in width, protected by two guard chambers, one on each side, analogous to those so frequently met with in the Brochs. The height of the remaining part of the wall varied from 18 inches to 3 feet 6 inches. The interior contained no dividing walls nor any indications of secondary occupation.”

Thus writes Dr. Munro (pp. 130, 131), repeating his remarks on p. 181 with this addition,

“Had any remains of intra-mural chambers or of a stone stair been detected it would unhesitatingly be pronounced a broch; nor, in the absence of such evidence, can it be definitely dissociated from that peculiar class of Scottish buildings, because the portion of wall then remaining was not sufficiently high to exclude the possibility of these broch characteristics having been present at a higher level – a

structural deviation which has occasionally been met with.”

“All the brochs,” Dr. Munro goes on, “hitherto investigated have shown more or less precise evidence of a post-Roman civilisation, their range, according to Dr. Joseph Anderson, being “not earlier than the fifth and not later than the ninth century.”¹⁹ “Although from more recent discoveries, as, for example, the broch of Torwodlee, Selkirkshire, there is good reason to believe that their range might legitimately be brought nearer to Roman times, it makes no difference in the correctness of the statement that they all belong to the Iron Age.”

So far the “broch,” or hill fort, was not unlike other hill forts and brochs, of which there are hundreds in Scotland. But many of the relics alleged to have been found in the soil of Dunbuie were unfamiliar in character in these islands. There was not a shard of pottery, there was not a trace of metal, but absence of such things is no proof that they were unknown to the inhabitants of the fort. I may go further, and say that if any person were capable of interpolating false antiquities, they were equally capable of concealing such real antiquities in metal or pottery as they might find; to support their theories, or to serve other private and obscure ends.

Thus, at Langbank, were found a bronze brooch, and a “Late Celtic” (200 b. c.? – a. d.) comb. These, of course, upset the theory held by some inquirers, that the site was Neolithic, that is, was very much earlier than the Christian era. If the excavators

¹⁹ *Archaeologia Scotica*, vol. v. p. 146.

held that theory, and were unscrupulous, was it not as easy for them to conceal the objects which disproved the hypothesis, as to insert the disputed objects – which do not prove it?

Of course Dr. Munro nowhere suggests that any excavator is the guilty “faker.”

I now quote Dr. Munro’s account of the *unfamiliar* objects alleged to have been found in Dunbuie. He begins by citing the late Mr. Adam Millar, F.S.A.Scot., who described Dunbuie in the *Proceedings S. A. Scot.* (vol. xxx. pp. 291-308.)

“The fort,” writes Mr. Millar, “has been examined very thoroughly by picking out the stones in the interior one by one, and riddling the fine soil and small stones. The same treatment has been applied to the refuse heap which was found on the outside, and the result of the search is a very remarkable collection of weapons, implements, ornaments, and figured stones.” There is no description of the precise position of any of these relics in the ruins, with the exception of two upper stones of querns and a limpet shell having on its inner surface the presentation of a human face, which are stated to have been found in the interior of the fort. No objects of metal or fragments of pottery were discovered in course of the excavations, and of bone there were only two small pointed objects and an awl having a perforation at one end. The majority of the following worked objects of stone, bone, and shell are so remarkable and archaic in character that their presence in a fort, which cannot be placed earlier than the Broch period, and probably long after the departure of the Romans from North Britain, has led

some archaeologists to question their genuineness as relics of any phase of Scottish civilisation.

Objects of Stone. – Nine spear-heads, like arrow-points, of slate, six of which have linear patterns scratched on them. Some are perforated with round holes, and all were made by grinding and polishing. One object of slate, shaped like a knife, was made by chipping. “This knife,” says Mr. Millar, “has a feature common to all these slate weapons – they seem to have been saturated with oil or fat, as water does not adhere to them, but runs off as from a greasy surface.” Another highly ornamental piece of cannel coal is in the form of a short spear-head with a thickish stem. The stem is adorned with a series of hollows and ridges running across it; radiating lines running from the stem to the margin. Another group of these remarkable objects shows markings of the cup-and-ring order, circles, linear incisions, and perforations. Some of these ornamentations are deeply cut on the naturally rough surfaces of flat pieces of sandstone, whilst others are on smooth stones artificially prepared for the purpose. A small piece of flint was supposed to have been inserted into a partially burnt handle. There are several examples of hammer-stones of the ordinary crannog type, rubbing-stones, whetstones, as well as a large number of water-worn stones which might have been used as hand-missiles or sling-stones. These latter were not native to the hill, and must have been transported from burns in the neighbourhood. There are also two upper quern stones.

Miscellaneous Objects. – A number of splintered pieces of bone, without showing any other evidence of

workmanship, have linear incisions, like those on some of the stones, which suggest some kind of cryptic writing like ogams. There are also a few water-worn shells, like those seen on a sandy beach, having round holes bored through them and sharply-cut scratches on their pearly inner surface. But on the whole the edible molluscs are but feebly represented, as only five oyster, one cockle, three limpet, and two mussel shells were found, nearly all of which bore marks of some kind of ornamentation. But perhaps the most grotesque object in the whole collection is the limpet shell with a human face sculptured on its inner surface.

“The eyes,” writes Mr. Millar, “are represented by two holes, the nose by sharply-cut lines, and the mouth by a well-drawn waved line, the curves which we call Cupid’s bow being faithfully followed. There is nothing at all of an archaic character, however, in this example of shell-carving. We found it in the interior of the fort; it was one of the early finds – nothing like it has been found since; at the same time we have no reason for assuming that this shell was placed in the fort on purpose that we might find it. The fact that it was taken out of the fort is all that we say about it.”

Mr. Millar’s opinion of these novel handicraft remains was that they were the products of a pre-Celtic civilisation. “The articles found,” he writes, “are strongly indicative of a much earlier period than post-Roman; they point to an occupation of a tribe in their Stone Age.”

“We have no knowledge of the precise position in which the ‘queer things’ of Dunbuie were found, with the exception of the limpet shell showing the carved human face which,

according to a recent statement in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, September, 1901, “was excavated from a crevice in the living rock, over which tons of debris had rested. When taken out, the incrustations of dirt prevented any carving from being seen; it was only after being dried and cleaned that the ‘face’ appeared, as well as the suspension holes on each side.”

So, this unique piece of art was in the fort before it became a ruin and otherwise presented evidence of great antiquity; but yet it is stated in Mr. Millar’s report that there was “nothing at all of an archaic character in this example of shell-carving.”²⁰

I have nothing to do with statements made in *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association* about “a carved oyster shell.” I stick to the limpet shell of Mr. Millar, which, to my eyes looks anything but archaic.

²⁰ See pages 133, 166.

V – HOW I CAME INTO THE CONTROVERSY

Thus far, I was so much to be sympathised with as never to have heard of the names of Dunbuie and of Mr. Donnelly. In this ignorance I remained till late in October or early in November 1898. On an afternoon of that date I was reading the proof sheets, kindly lent to me by Messrs. Macmillan, of *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen, a work, now justly celebrated, which was published early in 1899. I was much interested on finding, in this book, that certain tribes of Central Australia, – the Arunta “nation” and the Kaitish, —*paint* on sacred and other rocks the very same sorts of archaic designs as Mr. Donnelly found *incised* at Auchentorlie (of which I had not then heard). These designs are familiar in many other parts of Scotland and of the world. They play a great part in the initiations and magic of Central Australia. Designs of the same class are incised, by the same Australian tribes, on stones of various shapes and sizes, usually portable, and variously shaped which are styled *churinga nanja*. (*Churinga* merely means anything “sacred,” that is, with a superstitious sense attached to it). They also occur on wooden slats, (*churinga irula*,) commonly styled “Bull roarers” by Europeans. The tribes are now in a “siderolithic” stage, using steel when they can get it, stone when

they cannot. If ever they come to abandon stone implements, while retaining their magic or religion, they will keep on using their stone *churinga nanja*.

While I was studying these novel Australian facts, in the autumn of 1898, a friend, a distinguished member of Clan Diarmaid, passing by my window, in London, saw me, and came in. He at once began to tell me that, in the estuary of the Clyde, and at Dunbuie, some one had found small stones, marked with the same archaic kinds of patterns, “cup-and-ring,” half circles, and so forth, as exist on our inscribed rocks, cists, and other large objects. I then showed him the illustrations of portable stones in Australia, with archaic patterns, not then published, but figured in the proof sheets of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen’s work. My friend told me, later, that he had seen small stone incised with concentric circles, found in the excavation of a hill fort near Tarbert, in Kintyre. He made a sketch of this object, from memory: if found in Central Australia it would have been reckoned a *churinga nanja*.

I was naturally much interested in my friend’s account of objects found in the Clyde estuary, which, *as far as his description went*, resembled in being archaically decorated the *churinga nanja* discovered by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen in Central Australia. I wrote an article on the subject of the archaic decorative designs, as found all over the world, for the *Contemporary Review*.²¹ I had then seen only pen and ink

²¹ March 1899, “Cup and Ring”; cf. the same article in my *Magic and Religion*,

sketches of the objects, sent to me by Mr. Donnelly, and a few casts, which I passed on to an eminent authority. One of the casts showed a round stone with concentric circles. I know not what became of the original or of the casts.

While correcting proofs of this article, I read in the *Glasgow Herald* (January 7, 1899) a letter by Dr. Munro, impugning the authenticity of one set of finds by Mr. Donnelly, in a pile-structure at Dumbuck, on the Clyde, near Dumbarton. I wrote to the *Glasgow Herald*, adducing the Australian *churinga nanja* as parallel to Mr. Donnelly's inscribed stones, and thus my share in the controversy began. What Dr. Munro and I then wrote may be passed over in this place.

VI – DUMBUCK

It was in July 1898, that Mr. Donnelly, who had been prospecting during two years for antiquities in the Clyde estuary, found at low tide, certain wooden stumps, projecting out of the mud at low water. On August 16, 1898, Dr. Munro, with Mr. Donnelly, inspected these stumps, “before excavations were made.”²² It is not easy to describe concisely the results of their inspection, and of the excavations which followed. “So far the facts” (of the site, not of the alleged relics), “though highly interesting as evidence of the hand of man in the early navigation of the Clyde basin present nothing very remarkable or important,” says Dr. Munro.²³

I shall here quote Dr. Munro’s descriptions of what he himself observed at two visits, of August 16, October 12, 1898, to Dumbuck. For the present I omit some speculative passages as to the original purpose of the structure.

“The so-called Dumbuck ‘crannog,’ that being the most convenient name under which to describe the submarine wooden structures lately discovered by Mr. W. A. Donnelly in the estuary of the Clyde, lies about a mile to the east of the rock of Dumbarton, and about 250 yards within high-water mark. At every tide its site is covered with water to a

²² Munro, 133, 134, 150-151.

²³ Munro, pp. 139, 140.

depth of three to eight feet, but at low tide it is left high and dry for a few hours, so that it was only during these tidal intervals that the excavations could be conducted.

On the occasion of my first visit to Dumbuck, before excavations were begun, Mr. Donnelly and I counted twenty-seven piles of oak, some 5 or 8 inches in diameter, cropping up for a few inches through the mud, in the form of a circle 56 feet in diameter. The area thus enclosed was occupied with the trunks of small trees laid horizontally close to each other and directed towards the centre, and so superficial that portions of them were exposed above the surrounding mud, but all hollows and interstices were levelled up with sand or mud. The tops of the piles which projected above the surface of the log-pavement were considerably worn by the continuous action of the muddy waters during the ebb and flow of the tides, a fact which suggested the following remarkable hypothesis: 'Their tops are shaped in an oval, conical form, meant to make a joint in a socket to erect the superstructure on.' These words are quoted from a 'Report of a Conjoint Visit of the Geological and Philosophical Societies to the Dumbuck Crannog, 8th April, 1899.'²⁴

The result of the excavations, so far as I can gather from observations made during my second visit to the 'crannog,' and the descriptions and plans published by various societies, may be briefly stated as follows.

The log-pavement within the circle of piles was the upper of three similar layers of timbers placed one

²⁴ See *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow*, xxx. 268, and fig. 4.

above the other, the middle layer having its beams lying transversely to that immediately above and below it. One of the piles (about 4 feet long) when freshly drawn up, clearly showed that it had been pointed by a sharp metal implement, the cutting marks being like those produced by an ordinary axe. The central portion (about 6 feet in diameter) had no woodwork, and the circular cavity thus formed, when cleared of fallen stones, showed indications of having been walled with stones and clay. Surrounding this walled cavity – the so-called ‘well’ of the explorers, there was a kind of coping, in the form of five or six ‘raised mounds,’ arranged ‘rosette fashion,’ in regard to which Mr. Donnelly thus writes:

‘One feature that strikes me very much in the configuration of the structure in the centre is those places marked X, fig. 20, around which I have discovered the presence of soft wood piles 5 inches in diameter driven into the ground, and bounding the raised stone arrangement; the stones in these rude circular pavements or cairns are laid slightly slanting inwards.’²⁵

From this description, and especially the ‘slanting inwards’ of these ‘circular pavements’ or ‘cairns,’ it would appear that they formed the bases for wooden stays to support a great central pole, a suggestion which, on different grounds, has already been made by Dr. David Murray.

The surrounding piles were also attached to the horizontal logs by various ingenious contrivances, such as a fork, a natural bend, an artificial check, or a mortised

²⁵ *Journal of the British Archaeological Society*, December 1898.

hole; and some of the beams were pinned together by tree-nails, the perforations of which were unmistakable. This binding together of the wooden structures is a well-known feature in crannogs, as was demonstrated by my investigations at Lochlee and elsewhere. ²⁶ It would be still more necessary in a substratum of timbers that was intended (as will be afterwards explained) to bear the weight of a superincumbent cairn. Underneath the layers of horizontal woodwork some portions of heather, bracken, and brushwood were detected, and below this came a succession of thin beds of mud, loam, sand, gravel, and finally the blue clay which forms the solum of the river valley. ²⁷ The piles penetrated this latter, but not deeply, owing to its consistency; and so the blue clay formed an excellent foundation for a structure whose main object was resistance to superincumbent pressure.

Outside the circle of piles there was, at a distance of 12 to 14 feet, another wooden structure in the shape of a broad ring of horizontal beams and piles which surrounded the central area. The breadth of this outer ring was 7 feet, and it consisted of some nine rows of beams running circumferentially. Beyond this lay scattered about some rough cobble stones, as if they had fallen down from a stone structure which had been raised over the woodwork. The space intervening between these wooden structures was filled up in its eastern third with a refuse heap, consisting of broken and partially burnt bones of various animals,

²⁶ *Prehistoric Scotland*, p. 431.

²⁷ See *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow*, xxx. fig. 4.

the shells of edible molluscs, and a quantity of ashes and charcoal, evidently the débris of human occupancy. On the north, or landward side, the outer and inner basements of woodwork appeared to coalesce for 5 or 6 yards, leaving an open space having stones embedded in the mud and decayed wood, a condition of things which suggested a rude causeway. When Mr. Donnelly drew my attention to this, I demurred to its being so characterised owing to its indefiniteness. At the outer limit of this so-called causeway, and about 25 feet north-east of the circle of piles, a canoe was discovered lying in a kind of dock, rudely constructed of side stones and wooden piling. The canoe measures 35½ feet long, 4 feet broad, and 1½ foot deep. It has a square stern with a movable board, two grasping holes near the stem, and three round perforations (2 inches in diameter) in its bottom. On the north-west border of the log-pavement a massive ladder of oak was found, one end resting on the margin of the log-pavement and the other projecting obliquely into the timberless zone between the former and the outer woodwork. It is thus described in the *Proceedings of the Glasgow Philosophical Society*:²⁸

‘Made of a slab of oak which has been split from the tree by wedges (on one side little has been done to dress the work), it is 15 feet 3 inches long, 2 feet broad, and 3½ inches thick. Six holes are cut for steps, 12 inches by 10 inches; the bottom of each is bevelled to an angle of 60 degrees to make the footing level when the ladder is in position. On one side those holes show signs of wear by long use.’

²⁸ Vol. xxx. 270.

An under quern stone, 19 inches in diameter, was found about halfway between the canoe and the margin of the circle of piles, and immediately to the east of the so-called causeway already described.

I carefully examined the surface of the log-pavement with the view of finding evidence as to the possibility of its having been at any time the habitable area of this strange dwelling-place; but the result was absolutely negative, as not a single particle of bone or ash was discovered in any of its chinks. This fact, together with the impossibility of living on a surface that is submerged every twelve hours, and the improbability of any land subsidence having taken place since prehistoric times, or any adequate depression from the shrinkage of the under-structures themselves, compels me to summarily reject the theory that the Dumbuck structure in its present form was an ordinary crannog. The most probable hypothesis, and that which supplies a reasonable explanation of all the facts, is that the woodwork was the foundation of a superstructure of stones built sufficiently high to be above the action of the tides and waves, over which there had been some kind of dwelling-place. The unique arrangement of the wooden substructures suggests that the central building was in the form of a round tower with very thick walls, like the brochs and other forts of North Britain. The central space was probably occupied with a pole, firmly fixed at its base in the 'well,' and kept in position by suitable stays, resting partly on the stone 'cairns' already described, partly in wooden sockets fixed into the log-pavement, and partly on the inner wall of the tower.

This suggestion seems to me to be greatly strengthened by the following description of some holed tree-roots in Mr. Bruce's paper to the Scottish Antiquaries: ²⁹

²⁹ Vol. xxxiv. p. 438.

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