XXXIX. The Runic Inscription on the Font at Bridekirk considered, and a new Interpretation proposed; by William Hamper, Esq. F.S.A. in a Letter addressed to Nicholas Carlisle, Esq. F.R.S. Secretary.

Read 9th November, 1820.

Deritend House, Birmingham, 17th July, 1820.

DEAR SIR,

The Runic Inscription on the Font at Bridekirk, in Cumberland, has long attracted the attention of our Antiquaries, though not very successfully; owing in some degree, no doubt, to the unfamiliar aspect of its characters. "What they mean, and to what nation they belong, let the learned determine, for it is all mystery to me," exclaims Camden, A.D. 1607.

Olaus Wormius, in a letter to Spelman, A.D. 1634, thus translates the inscription:

"Haraldus cumulum fecit, et lapides erexit in memoriam matris et Mabroki."


A version which, even allowing that eminent scholar to have been somewhat misled by Camden’s faulty copy, may be termed most extraordinary.

Gibson, in his excellent edition of the Britannia, col. 1007, introduces an epistle from Bishop Nicolson to Sir William Dugdale, dated Carlisle, Nov. 23d, 1685, in which the subject is elaborately investigated, and its reading conceived to be as follows:

"Er Ekard han men egrocten, and to dis men red wer Taner men brogten."

i.e. "Here Ekard was converted, and to this man’s example were the Danes brought."
This interpretation, having been adopted by Hickes, in 1705, (Thesaurus, Tabella II. p. 4, Gram. Isl.) and Bishop Lyttelton, in 1767, (Archaeologia, Vol. II. p. 131,) has maintained its ground to the present day; though confessedly replete with verbal and historical difficulties. It was, however, reserved for the zeal and industry of Henry Howard, Esq. of Corby Castle, in a paper read before your learned Society, May 14th, 1801, to present to the lovers of antiquity a full and satisfactory account of this venerable Font, though without any attempt to controvert the bishop's opinion, in general. To that communication, published with four engravings in the Archaeologia, Vol. XIV. p. 113, I beg to refer all who wish for a clear idea of the whole, my present Observations being confined to a review of the inscription only. It must, nevertheless, be premised, that the west side of the font bears the sacred symbol of our faith; its north side what may, or may not be the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, for there is some dispute about it; its east side, the baptism of our Saviour by St. John; all without accompanying verbal explanation: whilst the Sculptor himself, in propriâ personâ, working with his mallet and chisel, (like Archidamos in the cave of Pan,) is seen on the south side, with the subject of enquiry on a scroll immediately above him.

This is "as perfect and distinct as it could have been the day when it came from the workman's hand;" the only difference of opinion that can arise, being (to continue the words of Mr. Howard) "whether some of the marks in the stone were originally intended for stops, or whether they were only inequalities on the surface of the stone itself."

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* Bishop Nicolson himself, on a re-examination of the subject in 1703, acknowledges that he found it, in some little particulars, different from what he had at first observed it to be. (Nicolson and Burn, vol. II. p. 102.)

b Mr. Howard very judiciously suggested that the word Taner was more likely to be Nor: the letters in fact being NR.

c Dodwell's Tour through Greece, vol. I. p. 553.
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These marks certainly contributed to mislead Bishop Nicolson, who also set out with a wrong impression as to the first character in the inscription, which is evidently a cross, the accustomed prefix, and not the letter E, or any other letter. *A reduced fac-simile, from one of Mr. Howard’s plates, (see Pl. XXXV.) will best exhibit the legend, and is now annexed for that purpose. After the most careful consideration, I venture to read it thus; as forming a sort of jingling couplet:

\[\text{RICARD . HE . ME . IGRUCTE.} \]
\[\text{AND . TO . DIS . MERTH . GERNR . ME . BROCTE.} \]

Ricardus ille me coëlavit,
Et ad hanc formam sedulè me adduxit.

Richard he me wrought,
And to this form me diligently brought.

Three words, and three only, seem to require elucidation. The first of these is \[\text{URNY} \] i.e. IGRUCTE; and in that truly-named Treasury of Northern learning, Hickes’s Thesaurus, I find a gold ring, inscribed, \[\text{ÆRED MÉLA HEANRED MÉL AGROFT, i.e. Æthredus conjux Heanreda me céelavit:} \] a reading confirmed, as the author observes, by a clause in the will of Wynfloda, whereby she bequeaths to her daughter Æthelfleda—hýpe ægþapenam beah—annumulum, sive armillam, suum cælatum.

* The same is also apparent from the engraving in Lysons’s Cumberland, p. exciii. where those accomplished antiquaries give it as their opinion that the style of the sculptures "would clearly indicate the font to be the work of an earlier age than that of the Norman conquest, if it had not the Dano-Saxon inscription. The scroll on which this inscription is cut, rests on two pillars, one of which is evidently clustered, and of a lighter style than that which prevailed a short time before the conquest." The marks in the stone above alluded to, are of themselves so insignificant, that those intermixed with the first word are not given by Messrs. Lysons, in their fac-simile; whilst they notice some after the second word which are not in Mr. Howard’s.
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The second is ᵐ情况进行 MERTH; which I presume to be μερψ, μορφη, or forma: the third is ᵐ情况进行 GERΝΡ, obviously the same with ζεωνη, diligenter, sedule.

It may be further observed that the character ᵐ情况进行 i.e. ME, is a monogram of Ψ M, and ᵐ情况进行 E; that ᵐ情况进行 i.e. TE, is a monogram of ᵐ情况进行 T, and ᵐ情况进行 E; and that there is no authority whatever for the N final, which Bishop Nicolson attaches to six of the words.

In conclusion, unless I am greatly deceived, I think it will be acknowledged that this far-famed Inscription, instead of commemorating the conversion of Ekard and the Danes, has been strangely misunderstood, and that it merely records the name of the ingenious Sculptor; who, from the masterly style of his performance, must have held no inconsiderable professional rank at the period of his labours. To his memory, therefore, thus retrieved from oblivion, I dedicate these Remarks; and, in humble imitation of a superior writer, who thus honours a superior artist,* shall close them with the name of—RICHARD.

I remain, with great esteem, dear Sir,

Your's sincerely,

WILLIAM HAMPER.

* Sir Joshua Reynolds and Michael Angelo.