

The Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses

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THE RUTHWELL AND BEWCASTLE CROSSES.

Perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to solve the vexed question of the date of the two famous Northumbrian Crosses of Ruthwell and Bewcastle is that recently made by Prof. A. S. Cook in his monograph entitled 'The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses' (*Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Yale University Press, 1912). As a result of his investigation, Prof. Cook has come to the somewhat remarkable conclusion that these monuments do not date from the seventh or eighth century, as has generally been supposed, but from the time of King David I. of Scotland (1124–1153). His views have been examined in the *Burlington Magazine* by Prof. G. Baldwin Brown¹ and by Prof. W. R. Lethaby¹, who have expressed the opinion that Prof. Cook's conclusions are incompatible with what we know of the history of early mediaeval art in this country. Professor Lethaby, who is 'entirely convinced that the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses are works of the high day of the Northumbrian school of art at the end of the seventh century,' has also shown that Prof. Cook's views are open to serious objection from the point of view of Latin epigraphy. Finally, in an article entitled 'A Dangerous Archaeological Method²,' Sir Martin Conway effectually exposes the weakness inherent in Prof. Cook's method of piecemeal archaeological analogy.

In the same publication³ we have endeavoured to show that the character of the Runic writing—to the history of which, we regret to see, Professor Cook has scarcely paid sufficient attention—presents difficulties still more serious. Our conclusion there was, that there is no evidence that the use of the English Runic alphabet survived

¹ Vol. xxiii, April, 1913. We may refer also to articles on the same subject by Prof. Lethaby in Vol. xxi of the *Burlington Magazine*, June, 1912; and by Sir Martin Conway, Vol. xxi, July, 1912. The last named adduces a number of seventh century art parallels to the two great Crosses, and declares 'it may well be that many of these dates rest upon disputable foundations, but their concurrence is an important fact, and it is not easy to dispose of all of them whilst unity of style holds them together, and one substantial date will suffice for all.'

² The *Burlington Magazine*, Part I, Vol. xxiii, Sept. 1913, p. 339. Part II, Vol. xxiv, Nov. 1913, p. 85.

³ *Burlington Magazine*, April, 1914.

the great Danish invasion of the latter half of the ninth century¹, whilst the Runic inscriptions of the twelfth century in this district are in a totally different form (i.e., Norwegian) of the Runic alphabet. Beyond this we found it difficult to say anything more definite, because after 700 the Northumbrian Runic alphabet changed but little. From the standpoint of orthography, however, we are inclined to favour the eighth rather than the ninth century for the origin of the inscriptions. We propose here to examine and discuss the linguistic arguments which Prof. Cook has adduced in favour of the singularly late date which he ascribes to the two monuments.

The language of the inscriptions has generally been regarded as of an archaic character.

In regard to the Ruthwell Cross it has been remarked that unaccented syllables usually show *æ* and *i* in forms where O.E. texts as a rule have uniform *e*. This phenomenon is elsewhere met with only in the very earliest texts, e.g., the Epinal Glossary. In his paper entitled 'Notes on the Ruthwell Cross,' which appeared in the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. XVII (1902), Prof. Cook points out on p. 385 that both *æ* and *i* occur sporadically in Northumbrian texts of the tenth century, although they are not always correctly used. He also urges the occurrence of *e* for *i* in *geredæ*² and for *æ* in *fore*, *sare*, *walde*³. In the last three cases, however, the letter *e* is marked as doubtful by Viëtor. Moreover, it is to be remarked that the change from *i* to *e* in unaccented syllables, at least in the South, where alone we have contemporary evidence, must have begun before the close of the seventh century. It appears, e.g., in an (original) East Saxon Charter⁴ of 692-3, which shows the change in three forms—*oedel*, *stede*, *hædde*—and which also shows at least three instances of *e* for *æ*. Both phenomena also occur in (original) Mercian Charters of 736 and 742. In Northumbrian, unaccented *i* and *æ* seem to have been preserved in writing later than elsewhere. Thus *i* is usually written in the *Liber Vitæ*, although *e* does occur—e.g., *Dene*, *Hiodde*, *Baede*, *-here*, *Boesel*. In the *Nomina Reginarum et Abbatissarum*⁵ *æ* alone is written in the earlier part of the list, *e* alone (two examples) in the later part,

¹ It is true that the Runic letters (apart from *wynn* and *þorn*) frequently occur in MSS. of the tenth and eleventh centuries, especially in *Abcdaria* and *Riddles*. But these are without doubt usually derived from earlier MSS, and appear to contain very many mistakes. It is likely enough, however, that in the South of England an antiquarian interest was maintained in this form of writing down to the eleventh century.

² *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 386.

³ *Ib.*, p. 388.

⁴ Sweet, *O.E.T.*, No. 1; Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, I, 115, No. 81.

⁵ Sweet, *O.E.T.*, p. 154 f.

which shows that the change goes back to the eighth century. This is proved also by the occurrence of *e* for *æ* in the text of Caedmon's Hymn in the Moore MS. of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and in Bede's Death-song. It is therefore important to observe that apparently no certain example of *e* for *æ* occurs in the Ruthwell inscription, where *æ*¹ is written at least seventeen times. *E* for *i* does occur once, perhaps twice (*uncet*, cf. p. 30). On the other hand there are four cases of unaccented *i*, in addition to the form *ni*, and four instances of the prefix *-gi*. It is true that the latter may be found in the second part of the Rushworth text and in the Ritual, but the former is extremely rare except in the earliest texts.

As proofs of the late date of the inscriptions under review, Prof. Cook urges the following forms:

(1) *æppilæ*², which he regards as a later form of the common O.E. *æðel*.

This is a most erroneous explanation. The facts are:

(a) That in the second syllable of this word *i* is universal in the Moore MS. of Bede's *History* (737), and in the *Liber Vitæ*, while in non-Northumbrian texts it is almost, if not quite, universal down to about 740. Attention is particularly deserved by the several letters quoted by Bede in his *History*, which appear to represent faithfully the orthography of documents of the early part of the seventh century.

(b) That, from about 740 on, *e* becomes decidedly more common than *i*, except in the *Liber Vitæ*.

(c) That the first syllable in the *Liber Vitæ* has usually *e*, several instances of which occur also in the Moore MS. of Bede's *History*.

From these facts it is clear

(i) That the earliest known form of the word in English is *æpil*.

(ii) That in Northumbrian this had changed to *epil*- before 737.

The fact that four instances of *æðil*- occur in the *Liber Vitæ* against about ninety of *æðil*- is no evidence to the contrary. One, at least, of these is evidently the name of a Mercian.

(iii) That in the other dialects the original word changed to *æpel*- about the same period. This latter form does not occur in Northumbrian where *epel*- represents the later development.

The evidence of the form *æppilæ* therefore, if it is to be trusted³, is

¹ It is to be remarked that in Runic inscriptions *æ* is represented by a single letter.

² *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 384.

³ The first letter is marked as uncertain by Viëtor, but from Prof. Cook's photograph it appears to be an *æ*. At all events it is clear that there is no room here for *e* (a broader letter), which is the only possible alternative.

strongly in favour of a date not later than about 750 for the inscription on the Ruthwell Cross.

(2) *heafun, heafunæs.*

(a) It is scarcely correct to say¹ that the *-un* of *heafun* represents a later form than the *e* of *heben* or the *æ* of *hefæn* (*hefænricæs*) in Caedmon's Hymn. *heþun* and *heþæn* are rather to be regarded as parallel stems arising through different accentual conditions, the former being probably regular in the oblique cases.

(b) With reference to the first syllable Prof. Cook says² 'the normal *eo*, by *u*-umlaut from this earlier *e*, has here been replaced by *ea*, which properly should occur only as the product of *o*-umlaut.' But surely the true form of the statement is that the same letter is used for both *ea* and *eo*, owing to the similarity of these diphthongs in Northumbrian. In the Moore MS. of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (dating from about 737) *eu* is not infrequently written for *eo*—e.g., *Earconualdum*, IV. 6; *Earcongotam*, III. 8; *Earconberct*, III. 8, IV. 17, V. 24; *Earpualdo*, II. 15, and perhaps also *Streanæshalch*, III. 24, IV. 24, V. 24. Conversely, on coins of the Northumbrian king Eadberht (737–758) the king's name is written *Eotberhet(us)* in eight cases out of nine. It is clear, then, that the difference of pronunciation between these two diphthongs was very slight in Northumbrian of the early eighth century.

(3) *gistiga, hælda.*

Prof. Cook says³ 'The loss of final *n* in the infinitive is one of the most distinctive marks of late North., but so far as I know there is only one instance of it in early North. and that is the *cnyssa* of the "Leiden Riddle."' There appear, however, to be only three instances of the infinitive preserved in early Northumbrian.

For the loss of *n* after *a* in cases other than the infinitive, the proper names preserved in the earliest MS. (Moore) of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* afford a number of instances.—*Ceadda* (Genitive), Praef. and IV. 3; *Ceadda* (Dative), III. 23, IV. 3; *in fluvio Treanta, Treanta, Sualua*, II. 16, II. 14, III. 24; *fluvium Treanta*, IV. 21; *Penda regem*, II. 20; *Anna regis*, III. 22, 24, IV. 19; *Grantacaestir, Tunnacaestir*, IV. 19, 22 (cf. *Uintancaestir*, III. 7), etc.

(4) *galgu.*

For the form *galgu*, whatever may be its true explanation, we have early Northumbrian parallels in the forms *fold(u)* of Caedmon's Hymn and *eorðu* (Leiden Riddle), as noted by Prof. Cook himself⁴.

¹ *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 384.

² *Ib.*, p. 384.

³ *Ib.*, p. 388.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 384.

(5) *cwomu*, *bismærædu*.

The forms which present real difficulty are the Pret. Plurals *cwomu* and *bismærædu*¹—as against *alegdun*, *gistoddun*, and probably *healdun*, where *n* is preserved.

In late Northumbrian texts the *n* is regularly preserved in such forms, with the few exceptions noted by Prof. Cook. But it cannot fairly be inferred from this that the Ruthwell forms are later than those of Lindisfarne, Ritual, etc., for the latter usually have *-on*², with the change of unaccented *u* to *o*, which took place apparently in all Anglo-Saxon dialects in the course of the ninth century, whereas the Ruthwell forms invariably have *-u*.

The explanation of the *n*-less forms is possibly to be found in the original existence of sandhi doublets, the retention or loss of *n* being later regularised by analogy. The Ruthwell forms cannot, however, be explained as being in true sandhi positions, as *n* is wanting before vowels.

That the loss of *n* took place regularly after *u*, as after other vowels, at least in certain positions in early Northumbrian is shown by the form *sifu* which occurs twice in Napier's *Vatican Glosses*³.

(6) *un̄gget*.

This is the form which appears in Stephens, but Viëtor, after careful examination, came to the conclusion that the third letter was probably a *k* (*c*).

It may be that *uncet* is a later form than *incit*, as Prof. Cook thinks⁴, in which case it will be parallel to *geredæ*, but the change of unaccented *i* to *e* goes back, as we have already seen, p. 29, to the seventh century.

Cook also states that the substitution of the Rune *ng*, a single letter, for *n*, is sufficiently remarkable, but in this, we think, few students of epigraphy will be inclined to agree with him. The phenomenon can be paralleled in one of the earliest inscriptions in the North (Opedal).

(7) *dorstæ*.

Prof. Cook declares⁵, '*dorstæ* is not Northumbrian at all; we should have *darstæ*. Yet *dorstæ* is certified by Viëtor, and we must therefore assume that our inscription mixes dialects as well as periods.' Later⁶, he is still more explicit: 'at least one word, *dorstæ*, is, in its radical

¹ *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 389.

² Cf. Sievers' *Ags. Gramm.* 3, § 364, Anm. 4. In St Mark's Gospel (Lind.) the proportion of *-on* : *-un* seems to be about 20 : 3; cf. E. L. Lea, *The Language of the Northumbrian Gloss to the Gospel of St Mark*, in *Anglia*, xvi, p. 147.

³ Napier, *Old English Glosses*, p. 220 (*Glossae in Psalmos*. Ps. 74. 14).

⁴ *The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses* (Yale, 1912), pp. 245-247.

⁵ *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 385.

⁶ *Ib.*, p. 390.

vowel, not Northumbrian at all, while it is of the dialect of the Rood'..., and in 1912 the same words are repeated¹.

But Prof. Cook seems to have overlooked the fact that the vowel *o* is the original vowel, as is shown by Gothic *gadaursta*, O.H.G. *gitorsta*. The late Northumbrian form *gedarste* takes its vowel from the analogy of the present, *darr*, and the Ruthwell inscription must date from a time *before* this analogy had operated. This form, therefore, is a strong argument for an early date (how early we cannot say), and not for a mixture of dialects.

(8) The use of *f*, finally and medially, for original *þ*² (*of*, *heafun*, *hlafard*, *gidroefid*, *heafdum*).

In such cases the Moore MS. of Bede has *f* in most cases—e.g., *aelf*-, III. 1, 24; IV. 21; V. 24; *suef*-, IV. 11; *gefrin*, II. 14; *eafa*, III. 24³. Other instances are—*Recuulf*⁴, in an original Kentish charter of 679, and *Ricuulfi*⁵ in another of 770; *wylif* (Franks Casket); *hefuen*- (Caedmon's Hymn); and *sifu*⁶ (twice) in the *Vatican Gloss*.

(9) *kyningc*.

It is not easy to see how the *-gc* at the end of this word can indicate palatalisation, as Prof. Cook declares⁷, considering the fact that the Runic character stands for *ng*, and not for the single letter *g*. The writing of *c* for *g* (explosive) is not unusual in the earliest texts—e.g., *Centinces*⁸, in the East Saxon charter of 692; *Duningland*⁹, in an original Mercian charter of 788. A somewhat closer parallel is *Theodningc*¹⁰, the name of a stream, which occurs in an original Mercian charter of 779.

(10) *almehttig*.

Prof. Cook seems to think *-ht* is a later form than *-ct*¹¹.

In the Runic alphabet *-ht* is regularly written for the phonetic combination χt from the earliest times (e.g., on the Tune inscription, *ðohtriz* and *worahto*), a usage faithfully preserved, doubtless through Runic influence, in the Gothic alphabet.

But as a matter of fact the letter used here is, quite exceptionally, not the ordinary letter H, but the mysterious thirteenth letter which occurs elsewhere with the value *i* (Dover). As the value of this letter

¹ *The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses*, p. 245.

² *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 386.

³ Chadwick, *Studies in Old English*. (*Transactions of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 1899.)

⁴ Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, I, 70, No. 45; Sweet, *O.E.T.*, No. 4. ⁵ *O.E.T.*, No. 8.

⁶ Napier, *O.E. Gloss*, 220.

⁷ *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 386.

⁸ Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, I, 115, No. 81; Sweet, *O.E.T.*, No. 1.

⁹ Birch, *ib.*, I, 353, No. 254; Sweet, *ib.*, No. 18.

¹⁰ Birch, *ib.*, I, 320, No. 230; Sweet, *ib.*, No. 14.

¹¹ *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 387.

is given as *h* and *i* in Codex Salzburgensis 140, we are not entitled to say that the usage in either case is incorrect.

(11) The non-occurrence on the Ruthwell Cross of *d* and *t* for þ.

Prof. Cook draws attention to this phenomenon¹. Such a usage, however, would be a mistake, and a mistake which actually occurs in one or two later inscriptions (e.g., Falstone, which is cited by Prof. Cook), and which obviously arises from the use by the engraver of a copy in Roman lettering. In earlier days, when the Runic alphabet was in more general use, such an error would naturally not occur.

The use of *d* and *th* for the dental voiceless spirant and that of *c* (before *t*) and *ch* for the guttural voiceless spirant, are due, of course, to the inadequacy of the Latin alphabet for representing Teutonic sounds which did not occur in the Latin language.

Turning now to the Bewcastle column, we cannot but think that Prof. Cook has given insufficient weight to the statements made by Prof. Viëtor in his book *Die Northumbrischen Runensteine*. It is there pointed out that many of the letters, which may appear (p. 14) to be comparatively clear in the photographs, cannot be said to have been engraved on the stone at all, since they were painted over, apparently largely from conjecture, by Maughan, a former vicar of Bewcastle, in 1856.

(1) *Gessus*².

The use of initial *g* is perfectly regular in the Runic alphabet. A character³ which is probably the form for *j* does occur twice in Runic inscriptions (i.e., Thornhill and Dover), both times in the word *gisl*, *gil(s)*, which originally had initial *g*. It is clear that the letters *g* and *j* were wholly confused, because the palatalised spirant *g* had become *j* by the middle of the seventh century, and, so far as we can judge, the result on the alphabet was that *j* was very rarely used.

For the age of the change of spirant *g* to *j*, we may note the consistent spelling *Iaruman* (for *Gearu-*) in early Bede MSS.—which at least suggests that that was the spelling used by the Bishop himself (who died before 670).

(2) *æft alcfrīþu*⁴.

If Viëtor is right in saying that the sixth letter is really *c*, and in reading the whole name as *Alcfrīþu*, we have here a distinct mistake in the use of the Runic letters which could only be accounted for on the

¹ *Notes on the Ruthwell Cross*, p. 387.

² *The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses*, p. 249.

³ It is identical with the letter regularly used (in its later value, *a*) on certain Northern inscriptions of the transition period—e.g., Stentofta and Björketorp.

⁴ *The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses*, pp. 249 f.

supposition that the engraver was following a copy in Roman letters, and consequently writing *c* for *h* (= χ). From Viëtor's words, however, it appears that the first five letters² are by no means certain ('alle beschädigt, aber, wie ich glaube, vorhanden'). If so, we have no need to assume that the engraver has been guilty of any such error. The first element in the name may have been a word which really had final *-c*¹.

As regards the form *æft* to which Prof. Cook attaches so much importance, it is surely more likely that the two have been accidentally omitted³, than that the engraver should have made use of a Scandinavian preposition for which there is, as far as we know, no evidence elsewhere in English. In view, however, of Viëtor's phrase 'alle beschädigt' we are inclined to regard this reading also with a good deal of scepticism.

(3) *cynnburug*³.

With regard to the Svarabhakti in this word, this usage is common in Runic writing between *r* or *l* and voiceless spirants from the earliest times—e.g., *worahto* (Tune inscription), *worohtæ* (Kirkheaton inscription), *wylif* (Franks Casket).

There is no doubt that before the end of the seventh century final *g*, not palatalised, was already voiceless (χ), though usually preserved in writing. We may refer to such forms as *maerh* (Epinal 588; *mærh*, Erf., Corp.), *duerh* (Erf. 1176), *haehtis*, *haehtisse* (Corp. 759, 945). Further evidence is afforded by the erroneous use of *g* for (original) *h*, e.g., *sceptog* for *sceptlog* (Corp. 145), *unneg*, *fegtaþ* (Franks Casket), *aerigfaerae* (Leid. Rid.), *Ealghard* for *Ealh-* (Chart. 18 in Sweet's *O.E.T.*), *-leag* (frequently in charters).

It might be well to note that with regard to the first part of the name *cynnburug*, Viëtor declares that the fourth letter is really *i*.

The conclusion, therefore, to which we are led is that the language of the inscriptions points to the same period as that indicated by their orthographical characteristics. Certain features, e.g., the regular use of *f* for \mathfrak{f} , the occasional appearance of *e* for *i* (and *æ*?) in unaccented syllables, and the frequent loss of final *n*, seem to us—like the form of the letter *d*—to militate somewhat against a date much earlier than the seventh century. On the other hand the form *æþpilæ*⁴, which seems to be

¹ *Ecfriþu* (for *Ecgrfriþu*) would scarcely be impossible. We must note that, if the form *Alcfriþu* or *Ecfriþu* is really correct, the final *u* is an argument for great antiquity. It is universally lost in names in Bede's *History* (except, of course, when those are Latinised). But the letter *u* really appears to be doubtful.

² Cf. the form *æfte* in one of the Thornhill inscriptions.

³ *Ib.* pp. 255–6.

⁴ Cf. p. 29.

reasonably safe, and the usual retention of *æ* and *i* decidedly favour the eighth century rather than the ninth. Under no circumstances, however, can we credit the supposition that the inscriptions were written later than the ninth century, which on historical grounds practically means that they must date from before 867.

The linguistic evidence which we have just summarised comes almost wholly from the Ruthwell Cross; but we are by no means satisfied that the Bewcastle inscription really contains any forms which point to a different date¹.

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¹ Since this article was sent to press, a further monograph on the subject of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses has come to our notice. In *The Runic Roods of Ruthwell and Bewcastle* (John Smith and Son, Glasgow, 1914) Dr King Hewison ascribes the two monuments to the tenth century and to St Dunstan in particular. We have examined his arguments, but see no reason to modify the views expressed above.