A New Runic Inscription From Viking Age Cleveland



Enclosed in a long, narrow loop of the River Tees sits the ruined church of All Saints at Sockburn. A remarkable assemblage of Viking Age sculpture found on the site is housed in the reconstructed Conyer's Chapel, including cross fragments and hogbacks. This runestone was found in the grounds of Conyer's Chapel.



Sockburn began as an 8th-century eccelsiastical site, important enough to host episcopal consecrations, re-emerged as the centre of a major Anglo-Scandinavian estate, before being granted to the Community of St Cuthbert at Durham in the late 10th or early 11th century. With an historic ford or *wath* over the Tees immediately to the east and a Roman route just to the north, Sockburn is both removed and well-connected.

Normalised representation of the inscription:

Transliteration:

A: ... i r: m o l: m u ...

B: ...i s t i : k r u s : (?) ...

Provisional reconstructed text:

A: ... (*eft*) *ir molmu* ...

B: ... (re)isti krus (?)...

The text has been reconstructed in comparison with a formula [X reisti kross þenna eft(ir) Y 'X raised this cross in memory of Y'] used in many Scandinavian runic inscriptions from the Isle of Man. In line B, we can see **k r u s** (*kross*) and the characters , **i s t i**, could be the end of reisti. The first visible characters of line A, i r, might be the end of eftir. The following characters are perhaps the beginning of the Goidelic personal name Máel-Muire or Máel-Maire. However, the fourth rune — usually /ã / (nasalised /a/) or /o/ — in Máel is problematic (possibly the Anglo-Saxon rune /æ/). If our interpretation is right, then the incomplete inscription means (reading line B then line A) 'raised cross ... in memory of Máel-Muire/ Máel-Maire' but the name of the patron — and other information besides — is lost.

The runestone is relatively small, approximately 22 cm long, 16 cm wide and 9 cm deep. The runes themselves are between 4-5 cm high. Scandinavian runic inscriptions in England are relatively rare, as seen in the map below. This makes this runestone a very important find. Also remarkable is the fact that the stone was found in an area with a high concentration of Norse place-names and unique hogback sculptures but little other archaeological and historical evidence. Even in folklore, the only memory of Vikings in the area appears in the tale of the Sockburn worm — a dragon that is sometimes suggested to be

representative of Viking invaders. It is also an area that has been relatively neglected in the study of the Viking Age. A lot more research is required into Viking Age Cleveland and, especially, this wonderful find.



Scotland and England (Barnes and Page. 2006.

The Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of Britain)