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Bateman, Meg

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The image of the tree in Gaelic culture

Meg Bateman

THIS PAPER comes out of my involvement with the AHRC-funded project, 'Window to the West', 2005–10, a collaboration between the University of Dundee and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig that has looked at visual responses to the Highlands from prehistoric times to the present. My involvement has been principally with the Gaelic side of things, with artefacts and with visual schemes embedded in the language. Probably the most pervasive of images in Gaelic culture is the tree. John MacInnes explored the connection between the tree's place in Gaelic cosmology and its being the predominant metaphor for the chieftain in praise poetry in his essay 'Samhla na Craoibhe' (MacInnes [1986]). My paper pursues the subject a little further into archaeology, manuscript illumination and monumental stone-carving, learned texts and ogham.

MacInnes points out how it is not by chance that a sacred tree, central point, Iron Age fort and church are in close proximity at Fortingall. The ancient yew tree at Fortingall is estimated to be at least 3,000 years old. To the south is Kyltirie, reputed, along with Tigh nan Teud, to be the central point of Scotland. It is likely that this yew tree marked the centre of Scotland (as the ashes at Uisneach marked the centre of Ireland), and that other religious sites accrued around it – the *nemeton*, the fort and its association with the euhemerised god Finn, and later the Christian church of Fortingall founded from Iona by Coeddi about 700.¹ This yew tree is a typical *axis mundi*, set in the middle of a people's territory, through which the earth is connected with the underworld and the heavens.

There is nothing unique about the importance of the tree to Gaelic culture, but it is striking how much and how tenaciously its imagery pervades the whole culture. In every continent in the world, trees have been venerated by different peoples as vectors of regeneration, healing and fertility. The Norse had the ash tree, Yggdrasil, as such an axis with its roots in the earth and the crown in the sky. The Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The Chinese venerated the pomelo tree; the ancient Egyptians the acacia; the Vedic texts, the banyan and peepal; the Herero people of southern Africa, the Omumborumbonga tree. The Waramunga people of Australia believed a child's spirit entered its mother from a tree, and in Islam, Mohammad's grandfather sees in a dream a tree which lights up the world.² Man-made structures are seen in many cultures doing the same job as the tree: the seven-tiered ziggurats of Mesopotamia, the Egyptian pyramids aligned perhaps with the stars of Orion's Belt, and Jacob's Ladder reaching to heaven.

Among the Gauls, the tree gods Fagus, Robur and Esus are attested by votive offerings and stone carvings. It is not known whether the Gauls had the concept of a world tree, but this concept develops in Gaelic cosmology with the belief in the five trees at Uisneach, the three ash trees, Uisneach, Tortu and Dathí, the yew of Ross and the oak of Mugna. These noble trees grew at the source of the Boyne, the mother-water of all the rivers of Ireland. The trees represent a connection to the source of all knowledge and the powers of life and regeneration. The knowledge of Fionn is intimately connected to the tree because he acquired it, as is told in *Macgnímartha Find*, after burning his thumb on oil from the salmon of wisdom that had eaten hazel nuts from a tree whose roots had absorbed water from the spring of the Boyne at the centre of all Ireland. Lucan, Pliny the Elder and Tacitus mention the sacred groves of the Celts where assemblies were held and believed that the Latin ‘druides’ was derived from the Greek word *drus* for “oak”.³ Professor Bernhard Maier tells me that it is more likely that the word was derived from the Gaulish *dru-wid-s ‘druid’, representing an Old Celtic compound *dru- “tree” (especially oak) and *wid- “to know”, hence, druids are “they who know the oak”.⁴

The evidence of archaeology gives some support to the significance of trees to the prehistoric Celts. The Gundestrup Cauldron, found in 1891 in Denmark, is thought to date from the first century BC. Though the workmanship may be Thracian, the imagery appears to be Celtic. The plate of the warriors, tree and vat (generally referred to as Plate E) has been interpreted in different ways, some saying the procession of foot soldiers is approaching the cauldron of rebirth and they are resurrected as horsemen; others say it represents a ritual drowning. But the foot soldiers appear to be carrying a tree, perhaps for deposition as a votive offering in a sacred shaft, or for erection as a totem of the tribe. Excavations give evidence of both these kinds of ritual. Offering shafts, often in the middle of *Viereckschanzen*, have been excavated in Europe and Britain, for example, at Holzhausen in Bavaria and at Findon in Sussex, where the pit was 250 feet deep. At Eamhain Macha near Armagh, five concentric rings of oak post-holes have been found dating from around 100 BC, surrounding a huge post-hole for a trunk that must have been about 36 feet high. The remains of similar poles, which may well have been decorated, have been found on Pilsdon Pen, the highest hill in Dorset, and in Golring in Germany (Ross 1970: 106–10).

MacInnes pointed out the significance of placenames in indicating the sites of such sacred trees, of which the yew tree at Fortingall is a rare survival. Crieff and Balencrieff contain the element *craobh*, ‘tree’. Dalavil in Sleat in Skye, Coshieville, three miles from the yew tree at Fortingall, and Movice in Co. Down contain the element *bile*, a ‘sacred tree’. Tomnahurich, *Tom na h-iùbhraich*, near Inverness, denotes ‘the mound of the yew’ where Fionn Mac Cumhaill or Thomas the Rhymer are supposed to rise some day from their sleep. At least two of Colum Cille’s monastic foundations, *Doire*, Derry, and *Eilean Idhe*, Iona, have associations with

an oak grove and yew trees respectively. The P-Celtic word, *pren* (tree), gives Pirm (near Innerleithen), Pirnie (near Maxton), Primside (Berwickshire) and Primrose in Midlothian, Berwick and Fife (Watson 1986).

A millennium and a half later than this archaeological evidence, we find trees and foliage are the dominant motif on most of the six hundred or so examples of late medieval monumental sculpture in the West Highlands. In their book of the same name, Steer and Bannerman do not entertain the possibility of a *thematic* connection between this motif and Gaelic culture. I would like to argue that the pervasiveness of foliaceous imagery forms a clear continuum with the Celtic past. Steer and Bannerman (1977: 4–5) write:

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that late medieval West Highland art is Celtic only in the sense that it was produced by Celtic craftsmen and displays certain inherited qualities, such as a fondness for interlacing and the elaborate use of ornament to produce a rich spread of decoration. ... the main source of inspiration was undoubtedly Romanesque art ...

Whatever the sources of the carved plant images, it would be strange if the motif were purely decorative, considering the significance of the tree to the Celts in prehistory, and its continuing significance as a symbol in panegyric poetry of the same period as the sculpture. As all other elements of the stone carvers' iconography (swords, spears and battle-axes, shields, tools, shears, caskets, combs, ecclesiastical objects, galleys, castles, musical instruments and hunting scenes (*ibid.*: vi)) make reference to the society that produced them, it would be wise not to dismiss the foliage as being purely decorative.

Steer and Bannerman say that the only identifiable plant is the oak, the others being formalised (*ibid.*: 16). This may be due to the oak leaf's natural decorative potential, but the oak's significance to the Gaels in pre-Christian times should not be overlooked. I will argue below that the mistletoe, ivy, honeysuckle and convolvulus may also be identified.

As an element of design, foliage can be made to fit any space, and it is often used as a background (see, for example, Steer & Bannerman, plates 8A and C), but foliage often constitutes the major element in a design, placed centrally on a grave slab or, in a bipartite design, placed opposite a sword (*ibid.* plate 3C).

In Gaelic religious poetry, much play was made of the dual meaning of *crann* as tree and cross, that gave an etymological validation of the theological connection between the tree by which mankind was lost and the tree by which mankind was saved, between the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Calvary on which Christ was crucified. As the apple caused Adam's fall, so did the fruit on the Crucifixion tree, *i.e.* Christ, give man eternal life.

<p>Trom an toradh tháinig dhe crann saortha na sé líne</p>	<p>Heavy the fruit that came from the tree of salvation of the six generations.</p>
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(McKenna 1939, no. 76, v.21; see also no. 77, v.11; no. 88, v.1)

It is no surprise then in the sculpture to see geometric crosses incised on grave slabs, and free-standing crosses such as that of Colinus MacDuffie in Oronsay become tree-like, their arms growing leaves and their Calvary mounts growing roots (see Steer & Bannerman 1977: plates 11–16).

What plant then best symbolises the tree of life? In the Book of Kells, the design of a winding plant in a pot appears beside the figure of Christ (see especially the plates of the arrest and the portrait of Christ, folios 114r and 32v), representing the life everlasting. Bernard Meehan suggests the plant is the olive or the vine from their Biblical connotations. George Bain (1977: 121) suggests the plant here and on Pictish stones such as that at Hilton of Cadboll is mistletoe. Pliny describes the importance of mistletoe, *viscum*, to the druids:

They call the mistletoe by a name meaning the all-healing. Having made preparation for sacrifice and a banquet beneath the trees, they bring thither two white bulls, whose horns are bound then for the first time. Clad in a white robe, the priest ascends the tree and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, and it is received by others in a white cloak ...⁵

As an evergreen, it had associations with renewal and fertility and he said it was used in treating barrenness in animals. Indeed, with its climbing character, its pairs of long oval leaves on either side of clusters of three white berries, and small six-petalled flowers growing directly on the main stem, mistletoe bears a closer resemblance to these ‘trees of life’ than any other plant. That it is always pictured intertwined and cut in a pot supports this identification, as mistletoe is semi-parasitic and grows out of another tree. Birds are often incorporated in the design eating the white berries, just as the seed of mistletoe is eaten and spread by mistlethrushes – hence the bird’s name in English. Pliny says the name the druids used for mistletoe meant all-healing, *omnia sanantem*;⁶ its name in Gaelic, *uil’-ioc*, means exactly that, and so it is an appropriate symbol for Christ vanquishing death. I suggest that the mistletoe, revered by the druids as a symbol of continuing life and fertility, came to represent the Christian life everlasting in the Book of Kells, and that it is this plant, along with the ivy and occasionally the vine, that appears on the grave slabs of West Highland monumental sculpture. The iconographic scheme of sword and plant might indicate how a life as a warrior, perhaps lost on the battlefield, gives way to the eternal life. However, the sword appears on the graves of ecclesiastics too, so it is more likely to symbolise Christ’s vanquishing of death, followed by the eternal life, symbolised by the foliage.

Mistletoe does not grow commonly in Ireland and Scotland,⁷ and so the mistletoe motif of the Book of Kells and of Pictish stones may have come to encompass other winding plants such as honeysuckle, ivy and convolvulus, which I think can also be identified among the stone carvings.

A distinctive three-berry design is used by the sculptors of the Iona and Kintyre schools, and may be seen on cross slabs and on the priory cross in Oronsay which includes two birds at the bottom (see Steer & Bannerman 1977: plates 6, 13 and 18). The design can also be seen on the Guthrie bell Shrine (plate 39). A tri-partite palmate leaf, very much like ivy, is one of the commonest foliage designs in use by the Iona school. The leaves are often placed back to back as can be seen in the Campbeltown Cross (Steer & Bannerman 1977: plate 11). I suggest the large flower that appears in Iona school carvings at Borline in Skye and in the Lochsween school grave slabs in Kilmory, Knapdale (see *ibid.*: plates 15F and 23B) could be that of convolvulus or bindweed. It is the only flower to appear in West Highland stone carving, and its climbing nature is clear from its Gaelic name *iadh-lus*. If so, bindweed would appear to have taken the place of honeysuckle, which is widely discussed in the literature.

Honeysuckle is not evergreen and ivy's leaves do not grow from the stem in pairs, but both have clusters of berries and attract birds and it seems that these plants, both known as *feithlenn*, were accorded a special status in learned texts. The herbal, *Rosa Anglica*, refers to *sugh Iosa na feithlinne*, 'the juice of Jesus of the *Feithleann*', and in the thirteenth-century *Aidedh Ferghusa*, the fairy king Iubhdán warns against burning *feithlenn*:

A fhir fhadós teine . ac Fergus na fled
ar muir ná ar tír . na loisc ríog na fed
Airdrí feda Fáil . im nach gnáth sreth sluaigí
ní fann in feidm ríog . sníom im gach crann cruaid
Dá loisce in fid fann . bud mana gréch glonní ro sia gábad renn.

O man that for Fergus of the feasts doth kindle fire,
whether afloat or ashore, never burn the king of the woods.
Monarch of Inisfail's forests, whom none may hold captive;
no feeble sovereign's effort is it to hug all tough trees in his embrace.
The pliant woodbine if thou burn, wailings for misfortune will abound...

(O'Grady 1892: i.245; ii.278)

Other early texts point to the survival of a tree lore and a peculiarly reciprocal relationship between man and trees. *Auraicept na n-Éces* (*The Scholars' Primer*), 7th–12th century, makes a fourfold division between chieftain, peasant, shrub and herb trees:

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Air atat ceithri hernaile for crandaib .i. airigh fedha 7 athaig fedha 7 lossa fedha 7 fodhla fedha; 7 is uaithibh sin a ceathrur ainmnighter fedha in oghaim. Airigh fedha *quidem* .i. dur, coll, cuileand, abhull, uindsin, ibur, gius. Athaig fedha.i. fern, sail, bethi, lemh, sce, crithach, caerthand. Fodhla fedha andso .i. draighen, trom, feorus, crand fir, fedlend, fidhat, finnholl. Lossa fedha .i.aitean, fraech, gilcach, raid, lecla .i. luachair 7rl.

For there are four classes of trees, to wit, chieftain trees, peasant trees, herb trees, and shrub trees; and it is from these four that the Ogham vowels are named. Chieftain trees, *quidem*, to wit, oak, hazel, holly, apple, ash, yew, fir. Peasant trees, to wit, alder, willow, birch, elm, white-thorn, aspen, mountain ash. The shrub trees, here, to wit, black-thorn, elder, spindle-tree, test-tree, honeysuckle, bird-cherry, white-hazel. Herb trees, to wit, furze, heather, broom, bog-myrtle, lecla to wit, rushes, etc. (Calder 1917: 89–91).

The divisions, if not this source, were used by Sileas na Ceapaich in the 18th century in her elegy to Alasdair of Glengarry:

Bu tu 'n t-iubhar thar gach coillidh,
Bu tu 'n darach daingean làidir,
Bu tu 'n cuileann 's bu tu 'n draigheann,
Bu tu 'n t-abhall molach blàthmhor;
Cha robh do dhàimh ris a' chritheann,
Na do dhligheadh ris an fheàrna;
Cha robh bheag ionnad den leamhan;
Bu tu leannan nam ban àlainn.

You were the yew above the wood,
you were the strong, steadfast oak,
you were the holly, the blackthorn,
you were the lichen-covered apple in bloom.
You had no kinship with the aspen,
you had no obligation to the alder,
you had no kinship with the elm/lime,
you were the darling of beautiful women.

(Ó Baoill 1972: 72)

Tree lore and a sensibility to trees is also evident in *Buile Shuibhne*. Suibhne was known in Scotland too, in *Vita Merlin Sylvestris*, where he is associated with Ailsa Craig and Eigg. Cursed by St Rónán for abusing his clerics, the king, Suibhne, goes mad, loses office, and lives naked and feathered in the woods. Though excommunicated, deranged, filthy, and abhorrent to his wife, Suibhne is

celebrated in poetry as a man in special communion with nature, who is comforted by the speech of the river and the company of trees and animals. That society valued these insights is proven by poets being drawn to the theme repeatedly between the ninth and twelfth centuries. In the 12th-century poem, ‘Suibhne in the Woods’ (Murphy 1961, no. 47, vv3–12), each of ‘the trees of Ireland’ is affectionately addressed and its characteristics praised: the oak for its height over every other tree, the hazel for its nuts, the alder for its shine, the blackthorn for its sloes, the apple and rowan for blossom and berries, the yew and the ivy for growing in churchyards and dark woods, the holly for affording shelter, the ash for its use in weapons, the birch for being proud and musical (an image George Campbell Hay returns to in the 20th century) and the poplar for its leaves that rush noisily as if engaged in a foray. Suibhne sleeps in trees, flies over them, and enjoys the music the wind makes in them. He says he should be named Fer Benn, which makes an immediate link with Derg Corra and the god Cernunnos, all of which mean ‘the horned one’, and a wider link with other ‘green men’, gods of vegetation which survive in architectural details of leafy faces. Derg Corra is the man Finn finds in the top of a tree sharing a meal with a stag, a blackbird and a trout.⁸ Suibhne says, ‘Rónán Finn’s curse has brought me into your company, antlered one, belling one, you of the musical cry’. The deer represents the wilderness, and the message is clear: that living in a wild state has its compensations.

There are hundreds of examples of trees representing both men and women in Gaelic poetry from medieval times to the present, which must derive ultimately from druid lore. Words such as *fiùran*, *bile*, *geug*, *gallan* and *slat* (‘sapling’, ‘sacred tree’, ‘branch’, ‘scion’ and ‘shoot’) are used interchangeably of both people and trees. The qualities the trees embody are both natural and supernatural by dint of their connection through the roots to regeneration and the otherworld. The chieftain as a great tree possesses those abstract qualities that constitute fitness for rule and were pleasing to the earth goddess: he is of noble lineage, generous, brave, physically perfect, and right-judging. If he is, the land is sheltered and blessed with happiness and fruitfulness.

Iain Molach, 2nd Mackenzie laird of Applecross, who died about 1684, is praised thus:

A’ chraobh thu b’ àirde sa choille,
thar gach preas bha thu soilleir,
a’ cumail dìon air an doire
le do sgèimh ghuirme fo bhlàth dhuilleag...

You were the highest tree in the forest,
over every thicket you stood distinctive,

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affording shelter to the oak-grove
with your shining green beauty under heavy foliage.

(Ó Baoill & Bateman 1992, no. XXXVI)

Muireadhach Albanach in the 13th century likens his wife to a supporting branch of the house, a fruitful, long-limbed tree:

Do tógbhadh sgath aobhdha fhionn
a-mach ar an bhfaongha bhfann:
laogh mo chridhise do chrom,
craobh throm an tighise thall.

A beautiful white bloom plucked
from the tender, bending stem:
my heart's darling has drooped,
the laden branch of yonder house.

(McLeod & Bateman 2007, no. 27)

Neil Macleod laments the death of John Stuart Blackie, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University, in 1895. The subject of his elegy, an academic and a tireless campaigner for a chair of Celtic, for crofters' rights and for the vindication of MacPherson's *Ossian*, may have been a new sort of warrior, but his likeness to a tree is entirely traditional:

Ghearradh a' chraobh bu torach blàth,
'S a dh'àraich iomadh meanglan òg,
Bu taitneach leam a bhith fo sgàil,
'S mo chàil a' faotainn brìgh a lòin.

(Meek 2003: 218)

The tree of fruitful blossom has been felled,
which nurtured many a young shoot,
it was my delight to be in its shade,
my appetite nourished from its fruit.

Just as fruitfulness of trees reflects fitness for rule, the converse is also true. In the eighteenth-century poem 'Cumha Coire a' Cheathaich', Donnchadh Bàn, returning to the Corrie where he had been a forester in his youth, expresses shock at how the land has suffered under the mismanagement of the gamekeeper, MacEwan. He ascribes the reduction in biodiversity to fallen timber in the woodlands, a lack of bushes and saplings and stagnant waterways. What might be seen as a literary convention is also the experience of the forester.

In Gaelic culture trees also represent sound. We saw in the quotation above from *Auraicept na n-Éces* how tree names gave the names of the vowels in ogham. Old Irish *fid* can mean ‘tree’, ‘wood’, ‘sound’ and ‘vowel’.⁹ The *Auraicept* compares the structure of ogham to climbing a tree:

It e a n-airdi: deasdrum, tuathdrum, leasdrum, tredrum, imdrum. Is amlaid imdreangair crand .i. saltrad for feim in croind ar tus ocus do lam dess reut ocus du lam cle fo deoid. Is iarsin is leis ocus is fris ocus as trit ocus as immi.

These are their signs: right of stem, left of stem, athwart of stem, through stem, about stem. Thus is a tree climbed, to wit, treading on the root of the tree first with thy right hand first and thy left hand after. Then with the stem, and against it, and through it, and about it (Calder 1917: 70–73).

We also saw how Suibhne in the 12th century describes the birch as melodious, and loved the sound the wind made in the trees. The by-name for the harp is *craobh nan teud*, ‘the tree of strings’. This name retains the integrity of the tree from which the harp was made, and the image of the harp moves back and forth between being a man-made object and a living tree. The motif is known in Keating’s tale of Labhraidh Loingseach, when a harp made of a willow sings out the secret that had been disclosed to the tree, suggesting that the dead wood, sawn and seasoned, still has the spirit of the living tree (Bergin 1930: 1-2). This animism is retained in terms for boats such as *giuthas*, *darach* or *iùbhrach*, and, as we have seen, in the symbol of the Cross.

It should be no surprise that foliage decorates the fore-pillar of the Queen Mary harp (see Steer & Bannerman, plates 37, A and B). The word *crann* also means ‘mast’, and if they survived, I think we might have found foliaceous decoration on the masts of ships. Certainly in literature, the mast of a boat is often given tree-like attributes, with birds or sailors in its branches.¹⁰

At the end of the 19th century, Neil Macleod’s brother, Iain Dubh, satirises a neighbour for cutting some branches from a tree in the graveyard of Kilchoan to protect his stackyard from sheep. Satire notwithstanding, the poet’s reaction is far stronger than the pilfering of Church property alone would merit. Donald Grant is decried as a beast and an abomination who has committed an incomparable felony, *meàirle gun choimeas*, and the people of Glendale will be shocked at the butchering of the beautiful tree:

Nuair thig boillsgeadh le soills’ air a’ mhadainn,
Bidh muinntir Ghleann Dail gu ro-bhrònach,
A’ caoidh mun a’ chraoibh a bha maiseach,
Fo bhlàth ann an cladh Chille-Chòmhghain.

(‘Aoir Dhòmhnaill Ghrannda’, *Gairm* 82 (An t-Earrach 1973), 115-17)

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When daylight breaks in the morning,
the people of Glendale will be lamenting,
weeping for the tree that was lovely,
that bloomed in Kilchoan graveyard.

It is clear that the poet understood the significance of the tree in terms of its relationship to a particular people and saint, and its power to comfort through representing growth from decay, and resurrection from death. These ideas are still current in the Gaelic imagination, from Sorley Maclean's 'Hallaig' to Runrig's 'An Ubhal as Àirde'.¹¹ In a Gaelic context, Donald MacAulay's opening lines to 'A' Chraobh' are not surprising:

'S dòcha gur h-e craobh/ as coltaiche ris eil an duine...

Perhaps a tree/is what a man most resembles... (MacAmhlaigh 2008: 220)

The tree forms the dominant image in his existentialist poem 'A' Cheiste', which defends the individual's right to choice:

Ghineadh dhomh faillean
à spàirn dhiomhair;
dh'fhàs e tromham craobhach;
chuir mi romham gum fàsadh e dìreach

gus buil a thoirt air slatan fiara.

(A tree was for me engendered
from some mysterious striving;
its branches spread through me:
I decided it should grow undeformed

to combat deviant yardsticks) (*ibid.*: 22)

It is no accident that MacAulay specifies in 'Mar chuimhneachan air mo sheanair' the devastation he feels on the death of his grandfather with the image of trampled vineyards from the Bible, and of a plundered ash, the tree that grows at the centre of the Gaelic world (*ibid.*: 198).

Aonghas MacNeacail (b.1942), writing in memory of his mother in 'chunnaic mi am measg nan ubhal thu', juxtaposes the apple-tree of his childhood which was nurtured by his mother to provide food for the family, with the apple-tree of Eden which condemns woman by association with Eve as man's tempter. While she is

diminished by the Judeo-Christian apple-tree for her sex, there is the implication that she should be ennobled by her association with the noble apple-tree of the pagans (MacNeacail 2007).

The survival of ‘cloutie trees’ is another survival of Gaelic tree culture. A tree at Munloch on the Black Isle stands beside a well associated with St Curadan or St Boniface who worked in the area around 620. To this day the clothing of an ill person is washed in the well and tied to the trees nearby. Doon Hill near Aberfoyle is the site into which the Rev. Robert Kirk was said to have disappeared in 17th century, and rags have been tied to some of the coppiced oaks growing at the site. In Gairloch on Isle Ma’ Ruibhe in Loch Maree the remains of an oak tree can be seen, poisoned by the offerings of pins and copper coins driven sideways into its bark. The tree stands beside a well dedicated to the saint and the remains of his chapel.

Many different points could be made in concluding this paper: about the art of Charles Rennie MacIntosh or Alasdair Gray or of modern Gaelic poets who continue to use the image of the tree. But I will make a wider claim to which my work with John Purser on the ‘Window to the West’ has led us: that we see in the abiding interest of Gaelic culture in the tree an understanding of man’s involvement in nature that helped to spawn the Romantic Movement, and which thrives in the present day as the ecological movement, but that is for another paper.

Notes

- ¹ We see the Christianising of this pagan site, in the keeping of Fèill Mo-Choid there on 9 August, a fair in honour of Coeddi, bishop of Iona, d. 712 (Watson 1926: 314).
- ² The Qur'an Al-Baqara 128.
- ³ Bernhard Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, Boydell and Brewer Ltd, Suffolk, 1997 and Pliny: Of itself the robur is selected by them to form whole groves, and they perform none of their religious rites without employing branches of it; so much so, that it is very probable that the priests themselves may have received their name from the Greek name for that tree. (Book xvi; 95).
- ⁴ Andreas Hofeneder, *Die Religion der Kelten in den antiken literarischen Zeugnissen*, volume II, Vienna 2008, pp. 365-379 (especially p. 376).
- ⁵ Pliny, *Natural History*; Book xvi; 95 available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0137%3Abook%3D16%3Achapter%3D95> (accessed 3/3/12).
- ⁶ http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/L/Roman/Texts/Pliny_the_Elder/16*.html
omnia sanantem appellant suo vocabulo. sacrificio epulisque rite sub arbore comparatis duos admovent candidi coloris tauros, quorum cornua tum primum vinciantur. sacerdos candida veste cultus arborem scandit, falce aurea demetit, candido id excipitur sago.
- ⁷ <http://www.waterfordcoco.ie/en/services/conservationandheritage/naturalheritage/wildlifehabitats/hollymistletoe/>.

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- ⁸ *Revue Celtique*, vol. xv, 1904; <http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/f04.html>.
- ⁹ Mac Aongusa 2004: 5, 12-13. The point is also made in McManus 1991: 35.
- ¹⁰ for example ‘Gilleán Ghleann-dail’ (Gillies 2006: 71):
gun dirich thu na crainn aice
cho aotrom ris na h-eòin
- ¹¹ <http://www.elyrics.net/read/r/runrig-lyrics/an-ubhal-as-airde-lyrics.html> (27:10:09)

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