

Chapter X  
Golden Chalice of Iona  
and Macleans of Duart



*The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland; 1851.*

Wilson, Sir Daniel, 1816-1892.

**THE GOLDEN CHALICE of IONA – Once in the Possession of  
LORD (AENEAS) MACDONELL and AROS – GLENGARRY (1645–1680).**

**(and Macleans of Duart)**

The chalice is figured on various early Scottish ecclesiastical seals, as well as on sepulchral slabs and other medieval sculptures. But an original Scottish chalice, a relic of the venerable abbey of St. Columba, preserved till a very few years since an older example of the sacred vessels of the altar than is indicated in any existing memorial of the medieval Church. The later history of this venerable relic is replete with interest. It was of fine gold, of a very simple form, and ornamented in a style that gave evidence of its belonging to a very early period. It was transferred from the possession of Sir Lauchlan MacLean to the Glengarry family, in the time of Æneas, afterwards created by Charles II. Lord Macdonell and Arross, under the circumstances narrated in the following letter from a cousin of the celebrated Marshal Macdonald, Duke of Tarentum, and communicated to me by a clergyman,<sup>1</sup> who obtained it from the family of the gentleman to whom it was originally addressed:—

“ The following anecdote I heard from the late bishop, John Chisholm, and from Mr. John M’Eachan, uncle to the Duke of Tarentum, who died at my house at Irin Moidart, aged upwards of one hundred years:—

“ Maclean of Duart expecting an invasion of his lands in Mull, by his powerful neighbour the Earl of Argyll, applied to Glengarry for assistance. Æneas of Glengarry marched at the head of five hundred men to Ardtornish, nearly opposite Duart Castle, and crossing with a few of his officers to arrange the passage of the men across the Sound of Mull, Maclean, rejoicing at the arrival of such a friend, offered some choice wine in a golden chalice, part of the plunder of Iona. Glengarry was struck with horror, and said, folding his handkerchief about the chalice,

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Æneas M’Donell Dawson.

' Maclean, I came here to defend you against mortal enemies, but since by sacrilege and profanation you have made God your enemy, no human means can serve you.' Glengarry returned to his men, and Maclean sent the chalice and some other pieces of plate belonging to the service of the altar, with a deputation of his friends, to persuade him to join him; but he marched home. His example was followed by several other chiefs, and poor Maclean was left to compete single-handed with his powerful enemy."

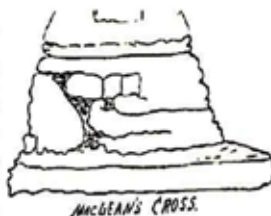
Such was the last historical incident connected with the golden chalice of Iona, perhaps without exception the most interesting ecclesiastical relic which Scotland possessed. Unfortunately its later history only finds a parallel in that of the celebrated Danish golden horns. It was preserved in the charter-chest of Glengarry, until it was presented by the late Chief to Bishop Ronald M'Donald, on whose demise it came into the possession of his successor, Dr. Scott, Bishop of Glasgow. Only five years since the sacristy of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in that city, where it was preserved, was broken into, and before the police could obtain a clue to the depre-dators, the golden relic of Iona was no longer a chalice. Thus perished by the hands of a common felon a memorial of the spot consecrated by the labours of some of the earliest Christian missionaries to the Pagan Caledonians, and which had probably survived the vicissitudes of upwards of ten centuries. In reply to inquiries made as to the existence of any drawing of the chalice, or even the possibility of a trustworthy sketch being executed from memory, a gentleman in Glasgow writes:—" I have no means of getting even a sketch from which to make a drawing. Were I a good hand myself I could easily furnish one, having often examined it. It was a chalice that no one could look on without being convinced of its very great antiquity. The workmanship was rude, the ornamental drawings or engravings even more hard than medieval ones in their outlines, and the cup bore mark of the original hammering which had beaten it into shape."

ABOVE : The McLeans also had some of the library books and MS from Iona. They took them to the castle on Treshnish Isles "belonging to the chief of the McLeans" (had been MacDonald's). Cairn Burgh was thought impregnable. However, most were destroyed by fire after an attack in the time of Cromwell (*Hebrides*; MacDonald, James; p.702 – as told by Dr Walker, c.1764.)

MACLEAN CHIEFS "MOLESTING THE CONVENT"

& "VIOLENTLY INTRUDE IN POSSESSION OF IONA"

In January, 1508, king James IV. granted a letter of protection to his religious and oratrices the Lady Agnes, daughter of Donald Makgillane, Prioress of the monastery of nuns of the most blessed virgin Mary in the island of St. Columba, and specifically charges Lauehlan McGillane of Dowart, Ranold, son of Alan Makrory, and John McGillane of Lochboy not to trouble the said Prioress and convent.\* The evidence shows that these chiefs had been molesting the convent in regard to its "lands, revenues, possessions, officers, tenants, families, servitors, and their movable goods." \* Reg.Soc.Vol. III, Vol. 209.



On March 14, 1635, king Charles I. writes to Sir Lachlan MacLean of Duard, desiring him to restore the island of Iona to the bishop of the Isles. "Trustie, etc. Whereas we wer informed that of late yow and your umquhile brother Hectour McCleane did without ourlour or anie right violentlie intrude yourself in the possession of the Yle of Yeolmekill which belongeth to the Bischop of the Yles for the tyme; whairof thay have bene in peacible possession those many yeirs bypast and that yow still doe deteyne the same from the present Bischop thereof:—We holding such a violent and indirect a cours as a contempt done unto the church and consequentlie unto us; and withall taking to our princelie consideratioun the detriment thereby arising to the patrimonie of that Bischope the absolute possession of the said Yland without further hearing or delay." \* Collectanea, p.185.

1508, James IV.

(MacLean JP, *History of Clan MacLean*; pps.325 and 329; 1899)

1635, Charles I.