

III.

NOTES ON THE SCULPTURED CAVES NEAR DYSART, IN FIFE.
ILLUSTRATED BY DRAWINGS OF THE SCULPTURES. BY Miss C.
MACLAGAN, LADY ASSOCIATE, S.A. SCOT. COMMUNICATED BY JOHN
STUART, LL.D., SECRETARY.

The two villages situated on the sea-shore to the east of Dysart were, not very long ago, called The Wemyss, and it is natural to suppose that they derived this name from the remarkable series of caves among which they are built—Weem (*Uamha*), being the Gaelic for cave.

Some of the weems of this neighbourhood, of which tradition tells, are now fallen down; others, whose entrances have long been thoroughly hidden by landslips from the cliffs above, have very recently been brought to our knowledge. One of these, which is the most easterly of this group, is the Gaswork Cave, whose existence was discovered in the sinking of a tank for a gasometer. There are eight or nine of these caves at present open. We shall now notice these in succession, beginning with the most westerly, which is situated between the villages of East and West Wemyss. It is called the Glasswork Cave, and is a truly magnificent one; having three entrances, west, south, and east. Its roof is about 100 feet in height. The span of its noble natural arches is often very grand, sustaining this loftiness far into the depth of the cave, and its innermost rocky wall is so smooth of surface as to suggest the idea that, in the times when the place was used for the manufacture of glass, the hand of man might have dressed it; but, on close examination, proof is found that this rock is in its natural, or at least its ancient, state, for just on the most artificial-looking portion of its surface we observed that there were graven two of those mystic configurations which belong to the class of our most ancient sculpturings. Each of these bridge-like figures is about 2 feet in length, and they are placed at an elevation above the floor of about 15 feet. These are the only gravings on its vast rock walls, and the cave is so dry that it is improbable that any others have been obliterated. Here there is ample room for the dwelling of man; it may be that "the rude forefathers of the hamlets" (The Wemyss) once abode in them. We visited this place at the noontide of a day, hot with a midsummer's sunshine. Under

its cool shade the cows of the two neighbouring villages assembled; by-and-by the village-maidens also came to milk them. Here and there long lines of sunbeams, bursting into the gloom through the lofty archways, lighted up a singular scene of pastoral beauty.

This cave and its fellows now stand about 15 feet above tide-mark, showing that a recession of the sea is going on here, while at the short distance of St Andrews there is an evident encroachment taking place.

The second, called the Court Cave, is immediately on the east side of the village of East Wemyss. It is a goodly cave, with three entrances. Though smaller than the Glasswork Cave it has many more sculpturings on its sides; these, however, are more wasted by damp than those of the other caves.

The third cave on which we observed sculpturings is called The Doo or Doocot Cave. It is almost as lofty in the roof as the first mentioned, but its entrances are low browed. The interior is consequently dark, and the area is much encumbered by high walls lined with pigeon-holes, once the nests of the "Doo" whose cot was this mighty cave.

The groups of figures delineated on its rocks are detached and distant from each other. In our drawing we have marked this separation by lines of demarcation; but they, as far as possible, are drawn on the same scale. The lines are, generally speaking, very sharply cut. Some of those which have a place on the plates given by the late lamented Sir J. Y. Simpson, in his notes on these caves, we did not observe. The crosses, however, we did see, but they are executed in so very different a style of engraving that they seem to have no right to appear among the others. The group in which the "elephant" occurs, covers *in line* 11 feet of the rock.

The fourth cave with sculpturings is called Jonathan's Cave. From its seaward front it runs in under the site of two ancient baronial towers, called "Macduff's Castle." From the entrance to the furthest depth of the cavern is upwards of 50 feet, and *in line* the sculpturings extend over 40 feet of its western side. We found none on its eastern side. We had the carvings carefully brushed free from the lichens which obscured them, and on our drawing have arranged the whole with due attention to proportional size. We think we added some to the number of figures formerly observed. Among these there is one brought to light, which we suppose to be intended to represent *the wife* of the man discovered by

Dr John Stuart; and the figure which stands between the supposed man and wife may perhaps be meant for that of a child. Along the west side of the inner half of this cave is a projection of the rock resembling a bench or seat, and through the edge of the so-called bench there are holes pierced at regular intervals. These holes are from 2 to 3 inches in diameter, and their distance from each other is about 3 feet. They suggest the idea of their having been intended for the passage of a rope. The entrance to this cave is very low, the sand of the sea-shore having drifted up against it, and over that sand now waves the yellow corn. The roof of this cave is also low, perhaps nowhere attaining to more than 20 feet in height.

The fifth, or Gaswork Cave, has nothing graven on its rock surface, but possesses other features of interest. It is surrounded by the same bench-like projecting seam of rock, and the edge of it is perforated as in Jonathan's Cave, only here the holes are more numerous and in better preservation. At the end of this bench, which is next to the entrance, there is also a mortar hewn out in it. It is not of the usual flower-pot shape of these articles, but is of a somewhat globular form, and, strange to say, there are traces of grain remaining in it. It may have been in use at no very distant day, but as the entrance to this cave has for a long time been deeply covered up with soil, the greater probability is that the mortar and its contents are ancient, and owe their preservation to having been sealed up from the action of the air. This cave is narrow and low-browed, but is very dry. Its floor has been paved with large boulders of a limestone evidently gathered from the sea-worn stones on the neighbouring beach. Unfortunately they are now all tumbled about by people who had hoped to find some treasure under them. May not the fact that this cave had been paved suggest to our minds the probability that all of them had once been so? and again, that many other elements of human comfort which once were there may have perished and left no trace behind?

[As the sculptures on these interesting caves have not been previously described in detail in our Proceedings, and as the style of Miss MacLagan's drawings cannot be easily reduced, it has been thought desirable to reproduce here many of the same figures, and the account of them by the late Professor Sir J. Y. Simpson, their discoverer, taken from the Appendix

to his "Archaic Sculpturings of Cups and Circles, &c.," Edinburgh (Edmonston & Douglas), 4to, 1867. These details were read to the Royal Society in January 1866, and only a condensed abstract, without the figures, was given in the Appendix to vol. vi. of our Proceedings, pp. 135-140.—Eds.]

[“Eastward of the village of Easter Wemyss there are eight or nine known caves at the base of the sandstone cliffs.

The cave nearest the village of Easter Wemyss is termed the Court Cave—the name being, according to local story, derived from the tradition that King James IV., benighted near this spot, spent an evening of jollity within the cave amid a company of gipsies whom he found lodging there, and who, ere the hour of parting, discovered the character of their royal visitor.¹

This Court Cave has its walls much disintegrated and abraded; but some figures are still indistinctly traceable, especially upon its eastern walls; and amongst them several small circles, about 2 inches in diameter, and with a central dot. There is also a distinct spectacle ornament, with one of its ends made of a single, and the other of a double circle, with figures of an unusual type cut on either side of it, as seen figured in fig. 1. A cutting like the head of one of the sceptres on the Sculptured Stones appears in one place, with small circles, having central dots placed on each side of its stalk as in fig. 2. Three figures, now much destroyed, like those of animals, and possibly cut originally as examples of the so-called elephants² of the Sculptured Stones exist at different points in the same wall, and are sketched in figs. 3, 4, and 5. The last is followed by a figure like a monogram (fig. 6); and within the cave is also the figure of a cut arch or horse-shoe.

The cave placed next and east of the Court Cave passes under the name of the “Doo Cave” or Dovecot Cave—having been built up at its double entrance, and fitted up within as a pigeon-house; but the birds have now deserted it. This cave is one of the most magnificent in the series, being

¹ The story has been made the subject of a Scottish cantata, entitled “The Court Cave; or, the Hospitable Gipsies,” published at Edinburgh in 1816.

² Above thirty of these so-called “elephant” figures have been found on the Sculptured Stones of Scotland.

high in the roof, nearly 100 feet in length, and about 60 or 70 in breadth. In some lights the cryptogams on its high walls and dome-like

Fig. 1.

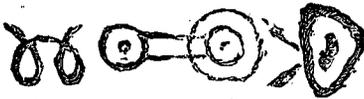


Fig. 2.

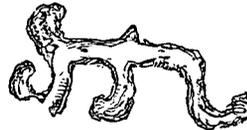


ceiling show masses of beautiful and changing colours. This cave is very dry, and a visitor's name, written in chalk, thirty-nine years ago—

Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



as the attached date testifies—looks as fresh as if it had been scribbled

Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



yesterday. There are many figures cut out on its interior,—generally upon the naturally smooth surfaces and ledges of stone a few feet above

the ground, but occasionally also so low down as to require the accumulated earth to be swept off in order to see them.

In the Doo Cave a few animal forms are sculptured. There is a quadruped of the shape shown in Plate III. fig. 1, and nearly two feet in length. The limbs, as in most of the cave and stone or monolith cuttings, are the most imperfect part—the fore feet ending in a curve, and the hind feet being altogether wanting.

At the further extremity of the Doo Cave are figures of two birds—one of them remarkable from the length and form of its tail, as represented in the group in Plate III. fig. 2. Over the bird is carved and excavated out an elongated, somewhat curved figure, dilated at either extremity into a rounded trumpet form. Above these, to the left, are two equal limbed crosses, one of them having a second upright limb, and to the right is a figure of an antiquated h-like form. There are in

Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



this cave two or three serpentine figures, one of which is copied in fig. 7.

The various groups of emblems and figures sketched in Plate III. are all of them cut on the walls of the Doo Cave. The remarkable series in group 5, arranged like a string of hieroglyphics, are carved out prominently upon a projecting lintel-like ledge, and required to be looked up to; while the series in group 4 are placed very low down, or as the wall curves round to form the floor. In this last group are two examples of the spectacle ornament so common on the Sculptured Stones; and another example exists in the remarkable group marked fig. 5. On the edge of the ledge in the Doo Cave my friend, Dr Paterson of Leith, discovered the figure of a jar, represented above in fig. 8.

On one of the smooth portions of the walls of the Doo Cave a large

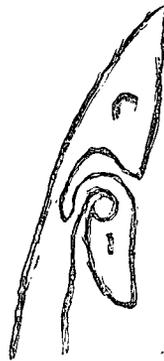
anomalous figure is cut, two feet nine inches long, consisting of a large excavated irregular head—if we may term it so—an elongated body, and six limbs stretching downwards from it to the length of from 6 to 9 inches each. This forms the largest individual sculpture, but its shape and contour are most indeterminate. Perhaps it is intended as the figure of a boat; or possibly it is meant to represent some of those anomalous serpents and monsters which are occasionally found on the Sculptured Stones, as on those of Strathmartin and Meikle.

Other figures exist on the walls of the Doo Cave. There is a good example of the usual form of the mirror on the Sculptured Stones, as copied in fig. 9; and near to that mirror is a flower-like object (fig. 10)

Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.



analogous to figures on the Sculptured Stones of Ulbster, Dunnichen, Gask, &c.; while the small crescent, represented in fig. 11, is the only instance of that emblem among the cave sculptures, though the emblem is a very common one on the Sculptured Stones of Scotland.

Fig. 12 is a specimen from the same cave of a monogram-like cutting, three or four examples of which exist on the walls of the different caves, as in Plate III., groups 3 and 5.

But one remaining figure in the Doo Cave is specially interesting, from the fact that it is the exact counterpart of the only carving ana-

logous to those on the "Sculptured Stones" of Scotland that has been hitherto found on aught except a monolith, viz., on a scale of silver armour presented to the Antiquarian Museum of Scotland by Mrs Durham of Largo, and whose history is this:—A man still living in Fife—a huckster—acting, it is said, upon an old tradition, that a knight

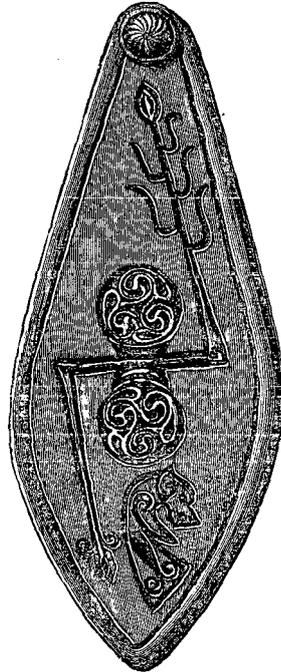
Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



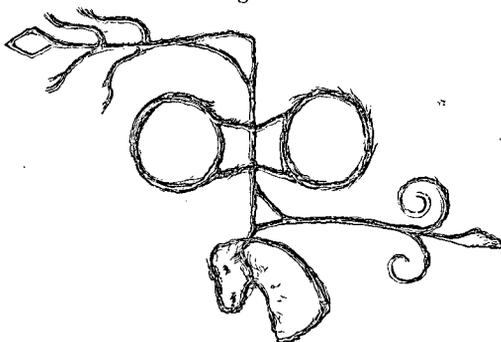
Fig. 13.



lay buried in silver armour in a small barrow called Norrie's Law, stealthily dug into it, found in reality the silver armour, and removed and sold it in pieces to the amount, it is alleged, of 400 ounces. By the time this spoliation was discovered, the silver armour was all melted, except a few fragments. One of these fragments is a scale, having cut

upon it a spectacle ornament traversed by the Z sceptre, and having appended to one end of it the head and shoulders of a dog, as in some modern orders of European knighthood. It is represented of its natural size in woodcut fig. 13. A similar figure, with the appended animal's head, is carved upon the interior of one of the Wemyss caves, as seen in woodcut fig. 14. In the original sculpture this carving is above 10 inches in depth, and 13 inches across.

Fig. 14.



“Jonathan’s Cave” lies eastward of the Doo Cave, and contains more figures than all the others. It is said to have obtained its name from a

Fig. 15.



man of the name of Jonathan and his family having used it as their residence. The cave is about 70 feet long, and nearly 20 in breadth; and it is much less in height than the Doo Cave.

Numerous animal forms are cut upon the walls of Jonathan’s Cave.

One of these quadrupeds has rather a wolf-like configuration (fig. 15); others of them consist apparently of the deer and dog, as seen in Plate IV., groups 1 and 3, and fig. 9. The so-called "elephant," such as it is, carved out on our Scottish Sculptured Stones with curved legs and feet,

Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.



and its trunk thrown upwards over its head, is twice represented in Jonathan's Cave,—the trunk of the animal being carried, however, more erect and elevated than usual, as sketched in group 2, Plate IV. There are also three or four different birds; one (in group 2) being a good sketch of the swimming swan. This figure of the swan and that of the head and forepart of a deer in group fig. 3 are executed with much spirit in a few simple lines. The fish so common on our Sculptured Stones is represented also in this cave (Plate IV. fig. 6).

Fig. 18.



Fig. 19.



There are also engraved on the walls of Jonathan's Cave several examples of the spectacle ornament, as seen in Plate IV., groups 1, 3, and 4; a group very much like a line of letters (group 5); and anomalous-looking, square and trident-like figures (see Plate IV., 4, 8, 10, 11, 12).

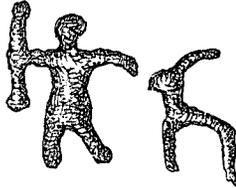
On a ledge at the upper end of the cave are cut a string of several crosses. The phototype, fig. 16, represents the form of two of them, one having six limbs. The crosses, and the trident-like figures, 11 and 12,

Plate IV., which are mixed up with them, are cut in a rougher form than most of the other sculptures, the tools used having splintered off portions of the stone on each side of the lines; while the lines in most of the other figures in this cave are single, narrow, and cleanly cut; but they vary in some instances in breadth and depth.

In Jonathan's Cave the crosses and tridents are cut on a ledge at the deepest end of the cave. The other figures are cut in series and groups upon the western walls of the cave.

In the remaining Wemyss caves few sculptures on the walls have

Fig. 20.



been found. The spectacle ornament, copied into fig. 18, with the book-case-like figure, fig. 19, are carved within the entrance of the Sloping Cave. At the mouth of the Well Cave the figure shown in the phototype, fig. 17, appears like an old cutting. This cave (the Well Cave) is large and dark. For long it was a favourite place of pilgrimage, feasting, and frolic to the neighbouring inhabitants of Fife on New Year's Day, old style, when its interior was duly lighted up. Its walls are in consequence densely cut and covered with modern names and hieroglyphics.

Among the ancient figures cut on the Wemyss cave walls there are two of the human subject. The first of them is deeply cut upon the side of the passage or tunnel which leads out of the Court Cave westward to the village of Easter Wemyss. It is copied in cut fig. 20. He is provided with a club in the right hand, and a deer-like figure stands on the left. The figure is 6 inches in height. The other human sculpture is about 25 inches in height, and was discovered by Mr

Stuart on the west side of Jonathan's Cave, low down, and near the floor. The carving is much faded (see fig. 21). Mr Stuart has represented this human figure as apparently broadly tailed,—as if he formed one of the provokingly missing links which some enthusiastic ethnologists have been lately so anxiously and vainly searching after. But on revisiting the caves lately with my friend Mr Drummond, we both failed entirely in either seeing with the eye or feeling with the finger that there

Fig. 21.



was any tailed appendage conjoined to the figure. He is followed by an animal, probably a dog; and there are faded circles of figures placed immediately behind him.

Some of the Fife caves, as those of the Caiplie and Pittenweem, contain upon their walls many more crosses than the caves of Wemyss, and several of them are provided with roundish seats cut out of the solid rock.

The caves of Fife, both those that have sculptures and those without them, have almost all occasional complete perforations or holes cut in the course of their angled or projecting ledges, as well as in their flat floors and roof. These perforations or "holdfasts," one of which is represented in cut fig. 22, seem fitted for a thong or rope to be passed through them, as if they were intended to suspend or to affix objects. The middle portion or pulley of the holdfast is often worn quite smooth, as if by the friction of the rope or thong. Very often it is quite worn through and broken off. In the cave at the gas-work, and in others, the number of these "holdfasts" is very great.

The age of these cave sculptures can only be fixed by approaching the age of the analogous figures upon the Sculptured Stones. The earliest of the Sculptured Stones are perhaps very old. In opening, last year, a cairn at Linlethan in Forfarshire, a figure of the elephant was found,—exactly similar to those existing on our Sculptured Stones,—on a piece of slab lying upon the covering of the stone-enclosed cist. This cist contained a bronze weapon; and an urn, rude, and hence probably early. The elephant carving seemed as old, therefore, as the era of urn burial and bronze weapons—*except* the carved fragment of stone had got by pure accident into its present position when the barrow and cist were opened twenty years ago; or still earlier, at a secondary interment. Mr Stuart considers that it had occupied originally this place in the cairn, but Professor Innes and Dr Joseph Robertson, who, with Mr Stuart, were present at the opening of the barrow, have both stated to me their doubts and disbelief of its being coeval with the cist and its contents. The urn was of the rudest type, very sparsely and roughly ornamented, and hence probably earlier than the era of the men who could cut the figure of the elephant. We must also recollect that the ancients sometimes buried both stone and bronze relics with their dead, after apparently they had iron instruments and weapons. If the bronze dagger at Linlethan was a weapon used by the person buried under the cairn, the date is probably very ancient,—as old as the era of bronze implements, and the age of urn-interments.

Fig. 22.

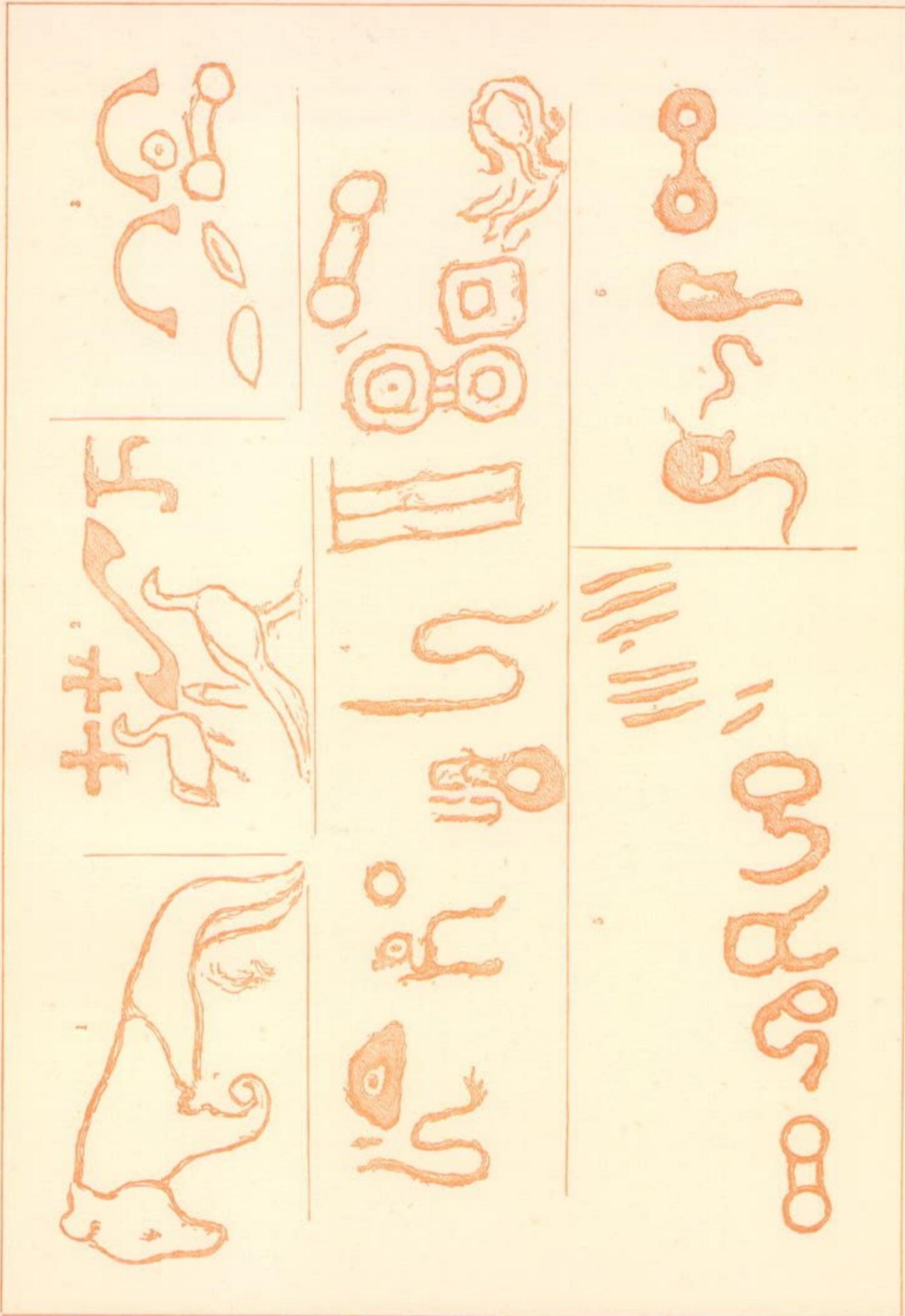


But most of the Sculptured Stones, particularly the more elaborate varieties of them, are of comparatively later date, and were probably erected as late as the eighth or tenth century. An elaborate specimen, found buried in the old churchyard of St Vigeans, having upon its surface the spectacle ornament, the crescent, the mirror, the comb, several animals, a hunter attacking a boar with bow and arrow, &c., all in raised figures, has an inscription on it, which is probably the only Pictish inscription and sentence now remaining. It speaks of the stone as the monument of "*Drost, son of Voret, of the race of Forcus;*" and a Pictish king Drost was killed in the battle of Blathmig or Blethmont—a mile or two distant—in the year 729, as we learn from the Annals of Tighearnach.

The crosses found among the Fife cave sculptures at Wemyss show that they were cut after the introduction of Christianity; and are generally equal-limbed, like those used in the east, and by many early Christians in the west, but some have the upright limb prolonged downwards, as in the form of the Latin cross.

Within St Adrian's Cave at Caplawchy, near Elie, there are many crosses, generally of the eastern form, on the walls; stone seats cut out, &c.; but no animals or symbols. Crosses are cut on the walls of Constantine's Cave, Fifeness, with figures of two deer-like animals. In the caves at Dysart there are various seats cut out; but no sculptures appear on their interior.

The meaning of the mysterious symbols on the caves and sculptured stones, and the purposes for which they were cut, are archæological enigmata that no one has yet exactly solved. As long as they were found on sepulchral monoliths only, they were supposed to be hieroglyphic or heraldic *funeral* inscriptions or emblems, or sacred symbols of some description, and of some unknown form and meaning. For around his tombs and upon his grave-stones man has always been in the habit of cutting emblems of his religious creed whenever he has cut anything at all. But this doctrine of the origin of these sculptures is so far gainsaid by this late discovery of them on the walls of caves. Some of the sculptures and symbols seem to consist of the representation of articles of the toilet, and probably of dress ornaments. But why they should be found alike on sepulchral stones and on the walls of caves is a problem not apparently admitting of any easy solution."]



SCULPTURES FROM THE WALLS OF THE DOO CAVE, FIFE.



SCULPTURES FROM THE WALLS OF JONATHAN'S CAVE, FIFE.