

III.

NOTICE OF SEVERAL SCULPTURED STONES AT MEIGLE, PERTHSHIRE, STILL UNDESCRIBED. BY WILLIAM GALLOWAY, Esq., ARCHITECT, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT. (PLATES XXV.—XXVII.)

The sculptured stones which form the subject of this notice were first brought to light on the destruction of the old church of Meigle by fire, March 28, 1869, and too late, therefore, to be included by Dr Stuart in either of the volumes of the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland." They seem to have been used without scruple, at various periods, as ordinary building material, and, with exception of the first, are all in a more or less fragmentary state.

This disregard paid to the relics of a remote past, has been only too prevalent in every age. Even the new church of Meigle, erected on the site of that so recently destroyed, is not innocent of the charge. I am credibly informed that, during its progress, a mason having unwittingly broken up a cross-sculptured stone, built the fragments into the wall rather than let the misadventure become known. Other relics may have perished in a like manner; and, doubtless, had a thorough exploration of the site been made prior to the erection of the new edifice, many things of permanent value to the archaeologist would have been revealed. The recovery even of the large and interesting stone No. 1 was entirely accidental, nor can the slight acquisitions from the demolished structure be considered a fair equivalent for what was probably lost. Into the walls of the church, as a place of supposed security, were built several of the stones illustrated by Dr Stuart in the first volume of the work referred to.¹ These are now irrevocably gone, so that, always

¹ The following is an exact list of the stones represented, but of which, apparently, no remains now exist. They are all stated by Dr Stuart to have been "built into the walls of the church."

Plate lxxvi. No. 6.

Plate xciii. No. 8, figs. 1, 2; Nos. 9, 10, and 12.

Plate cxxvii. Nos. 13 and 14.

Plate cxxxii. No. 18.—Of this stone, happily, there exists a cast in the Museum.

Eight stones in all—two of them important, the rest of smaller size, but still exceedingly interesting—appear thus to have been lost.

excepting the sculptured stone to be first noticed, such fragments as have come to light are a very poor compensation for what the mischances of time and untoward accident have swept away.

I will now proceed to describe the stones *seriatim*, as they are illustrated in the accompanying plates.

No. 1 (figs. *a, b, c*, Plate XXV., and figs. *d, e, f*, Plate XXVI.).—This has evidently been a recumbent gravestone, the Pictish equivalent of an earlier date, of the sculptured slabs so extensively prevalent in other parts of the country, and especially in the West Highlands. So far as I am aware, this idea has not been hitherto entertained with regard to any of the Meikle stones; but there can be, I think, little doubt of its applicability, not only to the stone in question, but also to that at present in the Manse garden, illustrated by Dr Stuart in the “Sculptured Stones of Scotland” (vol. i. pl. lxxvii., No. 1, figs. 1, 2, and 3), and also to the two stones placed one above the other on a basement of modern masonry, in the churchyard¹ (*ibid.* pl. lxxii., No. 1, figs. 1 and 2; and pl. lxxvi., No. 2, figs. 1 and 2). The stone in question is in a remarkably complete state of preservation, and, beyond some chipping on the edges, and the more worn character of the upper surface, it is almost as perfect as when it was laid down to cover the last resting-place, it may be, of some great noble of Fortren. The material is the free-stone common in the district, of a very hard, close-grained, and enduring quality, and the entire mass must weigh over 7 cwt. Elaborately carved and tooled as the stone is, the sculptor has evidently been very much guided by the original form of the block. It measures about 5 feet in length by 19 inches in breadth, at the top and bottom, slightly expanding in the middle to about 20 inches. Including the carved work in relief, it is about 12 inches thick in the upper part, diminishing toward the foot to about 4 inches. This variation results from a considerable bend on the lower part of the stone, and to which it is possible the carver may have accommodated himself in its

¹ To the uninitiated eye this erection is very deceptive. It stands on a slight elevation, which might easily be mistaken for some ancient tumulus. I believe, however, that it is merely composed of the soil dislodged in excavating the Drumkilbo vault.

original working. The principal face is boldly carved, with all the leading parts of the design in high relief.

The leading feature in the upper part is three interlaced serpents occupying a circle about 14 inches in average diameter, and rising $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches above the rest of the surface. The heads of the three animals are laid across each other in the centre of the circle, and each has its neighbour's tail firmly secured in its mouth.

Below this is a beaded square, divided saltire-wise, each of the triangular spaces so formed being filled in with three hemispherical balls, connected together with attachments both between themselves and the marginal beads. If any of the usual spiral ornamentation ever existed on these balls, it is now quite defaced. Traces of it, however, may be seen on the symmetrically-disposed balls decorating one side of the large ridged stone in the churchyard.¹ This mode of decoration forms a prominent characteristic of many of the earlier crosses and carved stones, not only on the east coast of Scotland, but also in Ireland and the West Highlands.

The principal feature on the under part of the stone is two curious nondescript animals placed *vis-a-vis*, and with no further connection save what results from the crossing of their paws. They are evidently a combination of the fish and some large-eared quadruped like the hare, the latter providing to each the head, ears, and two fore legs. All the rest is fish, with the dorsal, pectoral, and ventral fins complete, and a very long tail, with a terminal bifurcation—the salmon apparently being the type which the carver had in view.

The three pieces of sculpture described are all enclosed within an elaborate border of interlaced knot-work, changing in the centre of the stone from a scroll to a triangulated pattern. This border is zoomorphic, in so far as both at top and bottom it has animal terminations. Those at the bottom represent the winding neck, rounded head, and straight elongated bill of some stork-like bird. At the top, the terminal heads are evidently those of dogs, with ears laid back, huge fangs, and distended jaws. Between these gaping mouths there extends a socket about $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches broad, and the same in depth, contracting towards

¹ "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," vol. i. plate lxxvi. No. 2.

the bottom. This socket may possibly have been intended for the insertion of an upright stone cross, there being otherwise an entire absence of distinctively Christian emblems on the stone itself. This peculiar arrangement has evidently been of very frequent occurrence in the monuments at Meigle. The stone in the Manse garden, already referred to as being in all probability a recumbent grave-stone, has a socket of precisely the same character, and in the same position.¹ The uppermost of the two stones, also referred to as being in the churchyard, has the same feature— $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in breadth at the middle, and 2 and $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in breadth at the ends respectively. It would be interesting to know whether the undermost of these two stones is also socketed. It is a much deeper stone—ranging from 2 feet $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the head, to 20 inches at the foot,—and, being ridged and coped, may be regarded as forming a connecting link between the sow-backed monument in the Temple Hall collection and the three recumbent stones mentioned. Unfortunately, the superimposition of the one stone upon the other prevents this interesting point from being ascertained. The only other instance in which, so far as I am aware, this peculiar arrangement occurs, is the stone at St Vigean's, figured in the "Proceedings," vol. ix. Plate XXXI., in connection with which a small tenoned cross-graven slab is represented, which may have been inserted in the orifice.

The sculptures on the two sides and top-end are very curious. Those on the sides are carved in low relief, those on the end are only incised, and are comparatively sharp, fresh, and well preserved—contrasting favourably with the more delicate ornamentation on the upper surface, which is considerably worn, as if the stone had been trodden upon for a lengthened period. On the two sides the arrangement is to a certain extent symmetrical, the centre in each being distinguished by a quadrangular device.

¹ Without being recognised as such, this socket is partially indicated in the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland" (vol. i. plate lxxvii. No. 2). It appears simply as a line terminating the peculiar ornament on the upper surface of the stone, and from which two bevelled lines run off on either side. The representation is too formal, and gives an erroneous idea of the actual appearance. The truth is, the upper part of the stone or head—if we view it as a recumbent gravestone—has been so far fractured as to carry away one side of the socket; but still I think there can be no doubt that this was the object of the incision.

That on the right side is formed by four nude interlaced human figures, in their mode of arrangement strongly suggestive of the Indian Swastika. Whether such intention was present to the mind of the carver or not, the combination is certainly very curious, and, so far as I am aware, on Scottish stones, unique.¹ In the compartment next the head of the stone, two animals are represented devouring a human body. The destruction is evidently considerably advanced, a remanent leg only being in dispute between the two ferocious brutes, while the dis severed head lies apart. In the corresponding compartment on the other side, a bear, very well and characteristically carved, is represented as quitting a horse which it has just slaughtered.

On the left side of the stone the centre square is composed of a fret or grill-like ornament,² the major compartment towards the head being filled in with a very well carved representation either of a travelling or a hunting scene. Five men, all clothed and bearded, mounted on horseback³—three riding abreast, with one ahead and another in the rear—are advancing at a good pace, the action of the horses being extremely spirited. By their side courses a hound, which has started a fox. It might at first sight be supposed that this chase was the main object of the cavalcade; but it seems rather to be an episode or by-play got up by the hound itself, while the riders have some more serious purpose in view. In the corresponding compartment, towards the foot of the stone, there are two figures—one evidently intended for a lion, the other a composite creature, winged, and with the head of a bird, surmounted by a comb, while the barbed tail forms a curious piece of interlaced knot-work over its back.

¹ On one side of the stone coffin at Govan there is a similar arrangement of four animals,—stags apparently,—which seems a pretty near approximation to this device; but they are not interlocked in any way (see the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," vol. i. plate cxxxv. fig. 2).

² A device based on exactly the same principle—with this difference, that the little terminal parts which enter so largely into the composition of the ornament are spiral, instead of being rectangular—occurs in the centre of the cross in the Temple Hall collection (see the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," vol. ii. plate iii.).

³ There is a similar progress of three horsemen riding one after the other, and accompanied by a little dog, represented on one side of the large ridged stone in the churchyard already mentioned (see the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," vol. i. plate lxxvi.).

At the top end of the stone another of these composite figures is represented. In this case, however, the head is human, with an exaggerated nose. From before it a nude human figure is preparing to beat a retreat, and, with uplifted hands, turns round in an attitude of surprise.

Where not injured, all the upper edges of this stone, both vertical and horizontal,—including also the basal edges at the sides in the upper half,—have a bead, varying from half an inch to an inch in breadth, wrought upon them. In the lower half the basal edges are quite rough and irregular; but the sculptured subjects being still intact, and in so far accommodating themselves to the irregular conformation, it is a question whether this absence of beading is due to subsequent accident or not. The under side of the stone is quite rough and undressed, and has apparently never received any tooling, but still exists in very much the same state as when first taken from the quarry. The upper third of the surface is tolerably flat, but the remainder is very rough, extensively scaled, and, as just stated, without any regular edging at the sides.

With exception of this under side, and also the upper surface, which, as we have seen, is considerably worn, all the other surfaces, viz., the two sides, with the top and bottom ends, where not carved, have been carefully and regularly tooled, and present a pitted or dabbled appearance, as if the dressing had been due to a pointed tool, and blows delivered vertically, as in the arched stone from Forteviot in the Museum, and others.

Before concluding my notice of this stone, I will only mention that its recovery forms of itself a curious item in the chapter of accidents. To the north of the old church there was an extension attached, about 15 feet square. The space beneath was occupied as a burial vault for the Nairnes of Drumkilbo, the entry being from the interior of the church by a short flight of stairs in front of the pulpit. In consequence of the passing of the Act of Parliament against intramural interments, and the decease of the last member of the Nairne family, this vault was understood to be finally closed, and but for the accidental destruction of the building, the stone in question would in all probability have never come to light. Even then it ran a strong chance of being buried under accumulated rubbish, and covered over by the flooring of the new church. I believe the merit of its first recognition is due to Mr Alexander Guild, merchant in Meikle. The stone formed the lintel of the

opening or doorway which, at the foot of the flight of steps mentioned, gave access to the Drunkilbo vault. Mr Guild first noticed over the doorway the fret or grill-like ornament carved in the centre of the left side of the stone, and, judging that it might be of some importance, got it rescued from its precarious position.

Another fact may be mentioned, as showing at how recent a date the utilisation of this ancient relic for its modern purpose must have taken place. The stone used to form a levelling bed for it at one of its extremities still exists in the churchyard. It is part of an ordinary tombstone of the last century, about 2 feet by 18 inches, having a shield, with various initials, and a sock and coultter, carved upon it. It is inscribed on both sides, a few lines of verse being on the one side, on the other an inscription bearing the date 1722.¹ It is reasonable to suppose that a considerable period must have elapsed before this stone could have been so broken up and utilised,—time enough, at least, to admit of the family it refers to having become extinct or forgotten.

No. 2 (figs. *a* and *b*, Plate XXVII.).—This is evidently part of an upright stone, carved on both sides, and, although fractured at either end, and partially defaced on one edge, is otherwise quite perfect and complete. It measures 22 inches in length by 16 inches in breadth at the top, and 14 inches at the bottom, and is $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness.

It has two peculiarities, both of them rather difficult to account for. One is that while it diminishes in breadth at the rate of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches to the foot, this diminution, instead of being upwards as usual, is downwards, so that the narrowest part of the stone must really have been the foot. The other is that the sides or edges, instead of being as usual at right angles to the principal faces, are considerably bevelled, so that in

¹ "Erected by John Henderson
& Elizabeth Small his spouse
in Newbigging of Newtyld in
Memory of his parents who
departed this life February
17 . . & 1722 and of His"
* * *

"Here parents and their daughter ly
And grandchildren seven
As their Bodies unite we hope
Their Souls unite in heaven
To raise aloud the praises high
Of their Almighty King
And Saviour who from sin to them.
Did great Redemption bring
Memento Mori"

section the stone is not a rectangle but a rhomb. So much is this the case that in using this stone for building purposes, the mason, finding this bevel on one side in his way, has actually hewn it off, so as to secure a square edge, and to this extent defaced the stone by cutting away so much of the border ornament. On one side it exhibits part of the shaft of a cross, about 7 inches in breadth, with a slight tendency to diminish upwards as usual, and therefore the reverse of the general diminution of the stone. This shaft is filled in with a very good example of the key pattern. It contracts at the top, evidently for connection with the other limbs, the stone having been broken just below the transverse arms. At this point the decoration changes from the key to an interlaced pattern. A boldly raised margin, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth, is the only other feature on this side.

On the reverse, or what from the large amount of decoration it carries might be considered the principal face, the leading object is a man on horseback, armed with the round shield and sword occasionally to be met with on these early stones. The head is unfortunately gone. Immediately below this figure are the spectacle and crescent ornaments, and beneath these again the well carved figure of a hound going at full speed, as if accompanying the rider above.

On both sides of this face there is an ornamental border, diminishing from $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the top to $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the bottom, this diminution being therefore downwards, and in harmony with the general diminution of the stone. This border is formed by two beads on either side, which diminish like the border itself, and the space between them is filled in with a triangulated key pattern, which does *not* diminish. It is part of this border which has been hewn away on one side to adapt the stone to its later purpose.

There is only one reason I can suggest for the peculiar form of this stone, but it must be taken for what it is worth, and that is, it might possibly be one of the upright crosses affixed into the sockets of the recumbent gravestones already mentioned; but this still leaves the beveling of the edges unaccounted for.

No. 3 (figs. *a* and *b*, Plate XXVI.).—This is evidently the top part of a large, circular-headed, cross-graven stone. It is of dark-red sandstone, and

measures 20 inches in breadth by $16\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth and 3 inches thick. Both sides have been carved in very bold relief, but it is now very much worn and rounded, especially on the side bearing the symbols.

On one side, part of the head of a cross still remains, with square centre and natched arms, filled in with an irregular example of the key pattern. The circular head is finished with a bold bead, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in breadth. The side spaces or spandrels are sunk $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch, and filled in with the figures of a man and a dog. The other side is quite flat, but bears in very low, rounded, and much worn relief the well known symbols, the sceptre and spectacle ornament, interlaced, and with indications of some further carving below them, but the stone is at this point unfortunately broken.

No. 4 (figs. *c* and *d*, Plate XXVII.).—This stone is an irregular fragment, 22 inches in extreme length by 19 inches in breadth and 3 inches thick. It is carved upon both sides, and about 8 inches of the original tooled and dressed edging on one side still remains. By measuring from this edge to the centre of the cross-shaft, the original breadth of the stone appears to have been about 21 inches. It has evidently been a very fine stone of early character.

On one side there is the shaft of a cross, elaborately decorated with a very fine example of the crescentic ornament, and in the side spaces various detached devices of interlaced knot-work are introduced. The lines here, both of the shaft of the cross and the original edging, are all quite parallel, and we must assume that they follow the direction lengthwise of the original stone, and if it were set upright all these lines would, of course, be vertical.

When we turn to the other side of the stone, however, a very curious discrepancy appears. The subject of the carving is a scene very similar to that represented on the stone at Dunfallandy, and partially also on the stones from Kingoldrum, now in the Museum.¹ On a chair of state is seated a personage, presumably of high rank, robed to the

¹ "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," vol. i. pl. xlvi., xlix., lxxxix. See also the "Proceedings," vol. viii. p. 103.

feet. The head is unfortunately gone, but the figure is otherwise complete. In front of him, but of smaller dimensions, there has been another figure similarly robed and seated, the greater part being, however, broken away. Seated on the ground immediately behind the principal figure is an attendant. In so far this scene harmonises with those just mentioned. The peculiarity in this case is, that taking the 8 inches of original edging as a test of verticality¹—and this test we find to agree with the leading lines on the other side—all the lines of the sculpture on this side, and especially those of the main figure, run at an angle with it, and are, in fact, diagonals to it, so that if the stone had been set upright the seated figures must have appeared as being tilted backwards at a considerable angle. In the sculpture itself this discrepancy seems to be recognised in so far that the ground line crosses the stone at a much less angle than it would do if the other lines were at right angles to it, but even with the correction it is by no means horizontal. Even in relation to this line, the chair on which the central figure is seated is tilted up, as are also the feet of the attendant. This peculiarity is just as difficult to account for as the fact is certain.

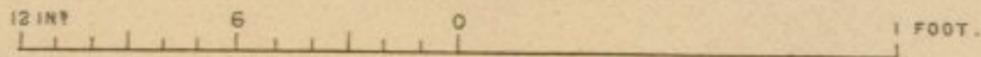
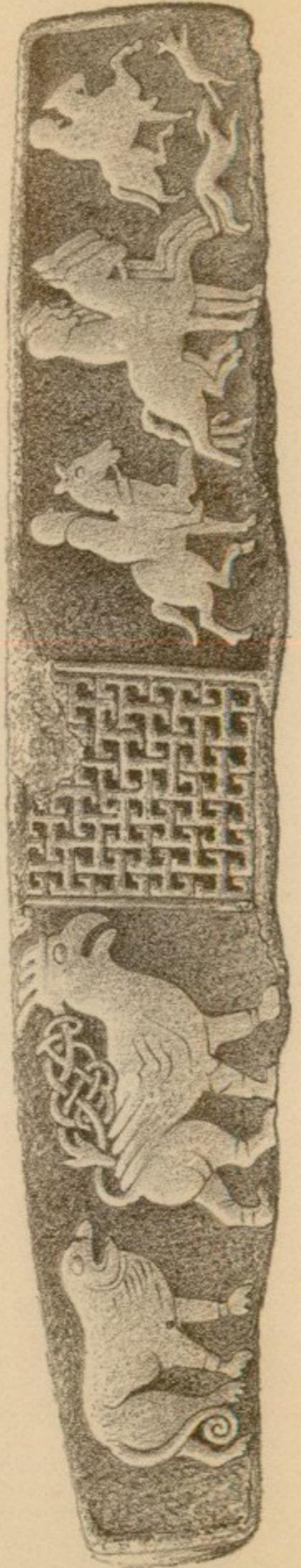
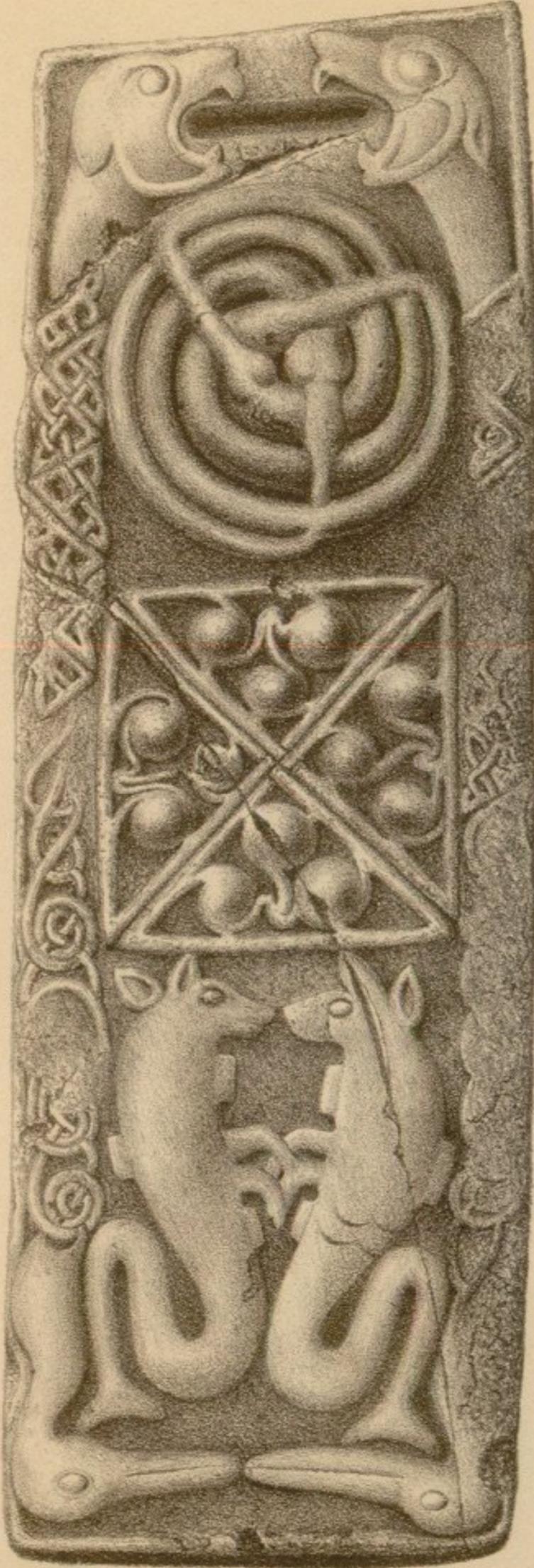
¹ Even if this portion of the original edging did not exist, the discrepancy between the main lines of the sculpture on either side could, of course, be easily ascertained, only it would not be so certain which of them was likeliest to be in accordance with the general direction of the stone while still intact. In the drawing I have assumed that the edging and the lines parallel to it determine the verticality of the intact stone.

N^o 1.

b.

a.

c.

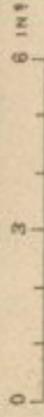


W. Galloway, ad Nat. lith.

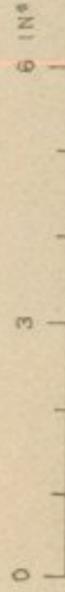
SCULPTURED STONE AT MEIGLE.

Nº 1.

d.

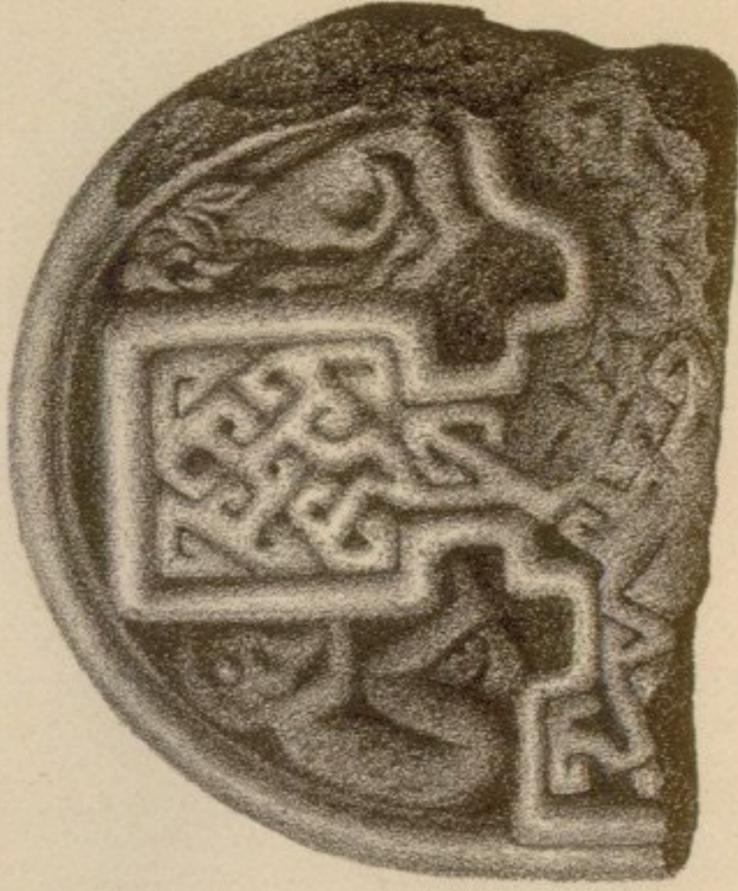


e.

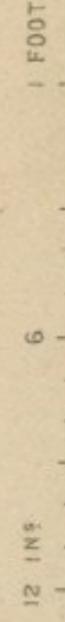
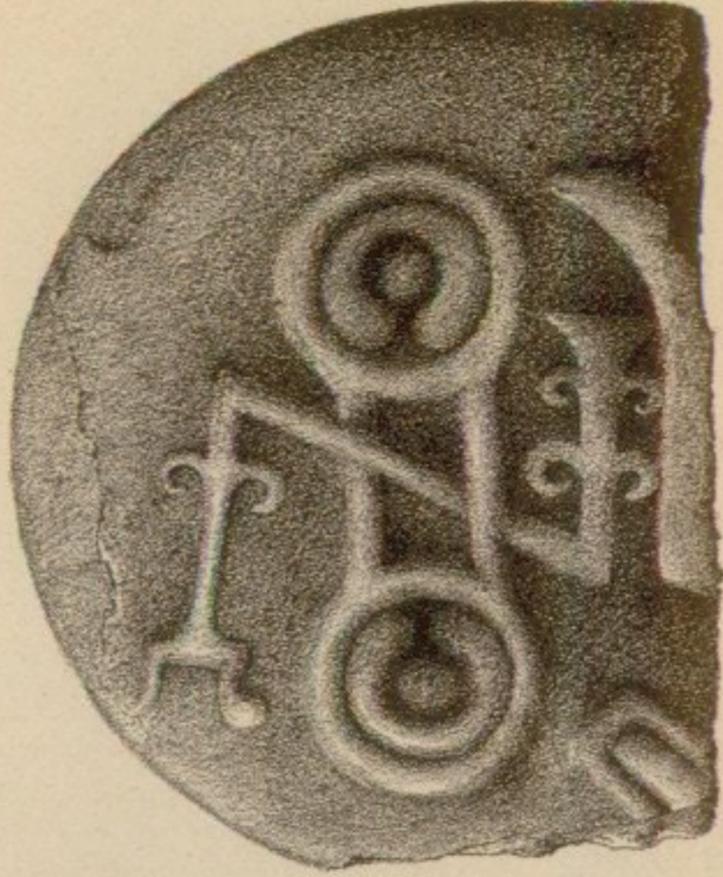


Nº 3.

a.



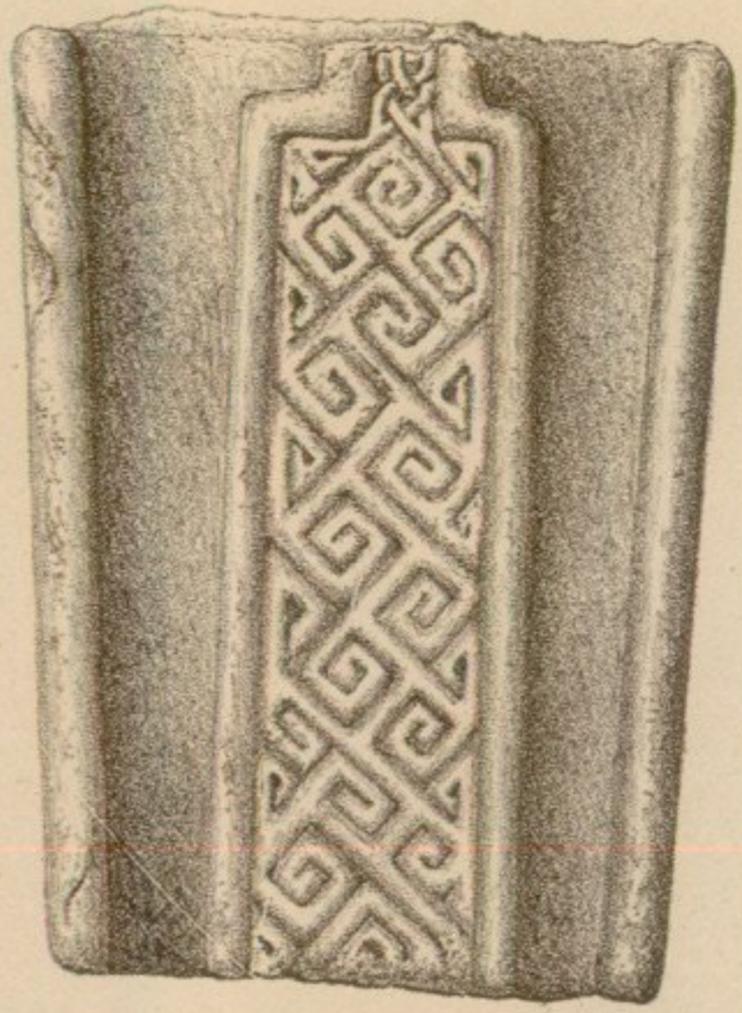
b.



a.

Nº 2.

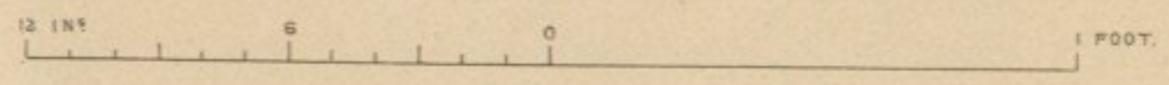
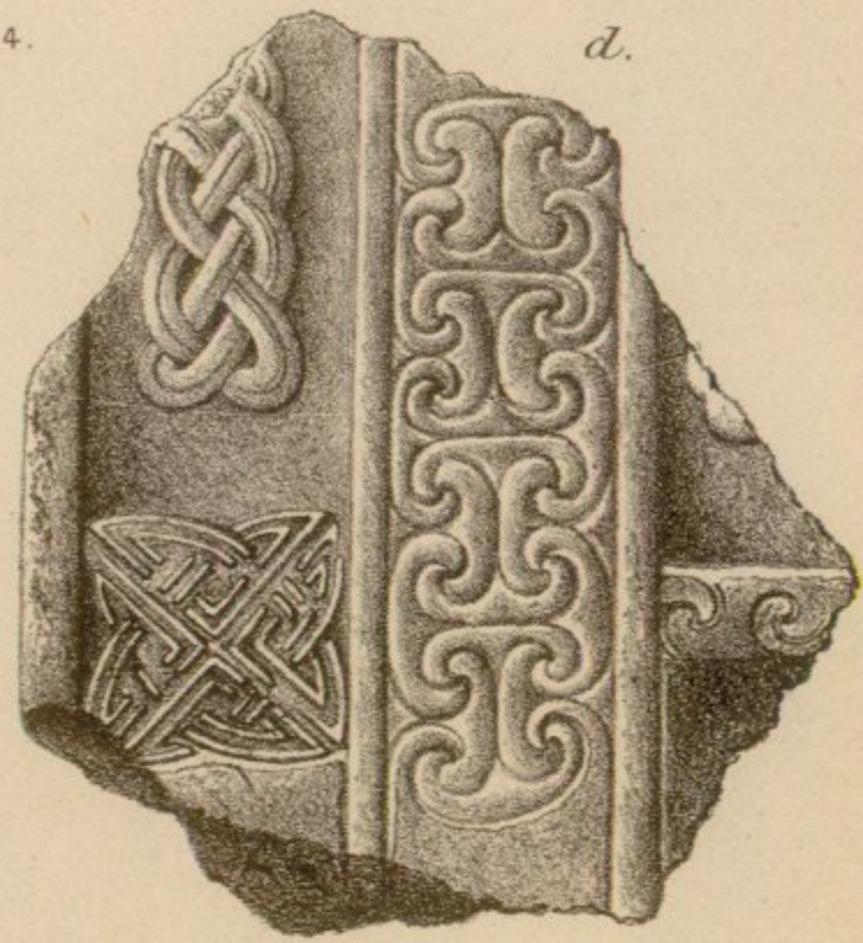
b.



c.

Nº 4.

d.



W. Galloway, ad Nat. lith.

SCULPTURED STONES, MEIGLE.