

### III.

NOTICE OF A SCULPTURED STONE RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT MURTLY, AND NOW PRESENTED TO THE MUSEUM BY SIR DOUGLAS STEWART, BART., OF GRANTULLY. BY ALEXANDER HUTCHESON, F.S.A. SCOT., ARCHITECT, BROUGHTY-FERRY.

A very interesting example of the early Sculptured Stones of Celtic Scotland was discovered on 8th April last by Mr James Pennycook, while ploughing one of his fields at Gellyburn Farina Works, Murtly.

The plough struck twice upon the stone, which lay only some 6 or 8 inches from the surface, and Mr Pennycook fortunately resolved to have the obstruction removed, the result being the discovery of the stone which is the subject of this notice. When raised and cleaned from the earth which encrusted it, the stone was found to bear upon its upper surface, as it lay in the ground, a number of curious figures. Before proceeding to describe these, I must mention that the site of the discovery is a little plateau on the left bank of the stream, called the Gellyburn, at about 200 yards from where it flows into the Tay, and about 50 feet above the river at that point; and there is a tradition that a chapel formerly stood there, although not a trace of any building can now be discerned, and I have not been able to connect the site with

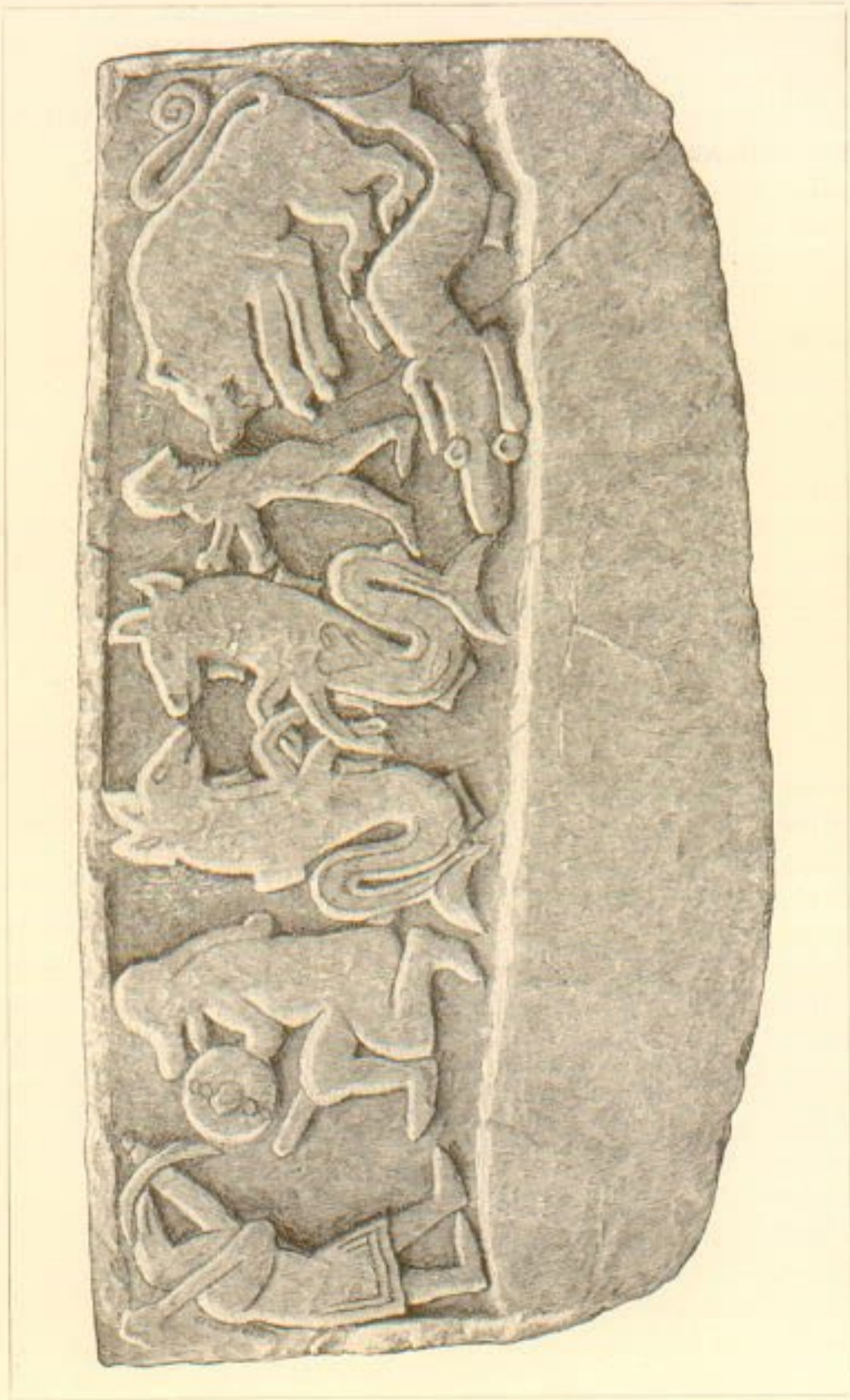


Fig. 1. Sculptured Stone from Gellyburn, Murtly, Perthshire (3 feet 8 inches in length).

any religious foundation. The following details of the discovery were related to me by Mr Pennycook :—The sculptured slab lay with its longer axis in a direction about east and west. To the south of it, closely adjoining and at the same distance from the surface, lay another slab of almost similar dimensions, and of the same kind of rock, but unsculptured, although one edge exhibits a roundness which may be artificial. When these slabs were lifted, the earth underneath was dug out, in expectation that some relics of burial would be discovered, but nothing was found beyond several whitish lumps, which crumbled into dust on being lifted. It was, however, seen that the slabs had rested all round on stones set on edge in the soil. When the space which these enclosed was cleared out, it was found to be surrounded by the original subsoil, which is of a tough, yellowish sandy clay with boulders, and lies at a depth of 6 or 8 inches below the surface, a deposit quite distinct from the soft black mould which Mr Pennycook stated filled the space below the slabs. From a review of these observations, it is possible that this was the site of a human interment; but if the stone really covered a grave, as has been suggested, it is probable that such a use for it had been a secondary one. It is to be regretted that no person of experience was present when the soil was cleared out, as some fact of importance might have been revealed. The other stones were wholly unsculptured.

The sculptured stone (fig. 1) is of a hard, close-grained, brownish sandstone, and measures 3 feet 8 inches long by 2 feet broad at the widest part, and is from 3 to 5 inches thick. It is tolerably smooth on the figured side, but on the other presents a rough unequal surface. The sculpturings stand out in relief from a  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch, a projection which has been attained by sinking the spaces between the figures; thus forming a sort of panel sunk in the stone with the edges at the sides and top of the panel coincident with the edges of the stone, and forming along these edges a ridge about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide.

I photographed the stone and took rubbings of it, which are now exhibited to the meeting. The central figures represent two composite marine monsters,—the conventional form in which Jonah's whale is represented in the Sculptured Stones,—placed face to face, having the

upper parts of their bodies resembling a hare with fore paws intertwined, and long snaky, fish-like lower parts, terminating in bifurcate tails, closely resembling the figures on a stone at Meigle, described and figured in the *Proceedings*, vol. xii. p. 427, and pl. xxv., the only difference being that the Murtly animals possess each two extra "fins." To the left of the centre, also facing each other, and evidently engaged in combat, appear two composite human creatures, the one having the head of a bird, the other the head of a dog or other animal, with a long projecting snout and a scroll-like dependence from the back of the head. The bird-headed figure stands with one foot advanced, and is dressed in a garment reaching to the knees, and having a border indicated by two parallel incised lines, which, at back and front turn sharp off, and run up to the waist. In its left hand it holds either a crossbow or a shield seen in profile. In the right hand is a sword or other weapon raised to smite, or it may be a quiver hung on the shoulder. The dog-headed creature appears to be naked, and bends on the left knee, either in token of partial vanquishment or as a stratagem of war. On his left arm, to avert the impending blow of his adversary, he raises a shield having a large central boss and smaller side bosses. In his right hand he also holds a weapon of offence. These figures, in this form, do not exist anywhere else on the Scottish Sculptured Stones, so far as these have been recorded, although two bird-headed figures, supposed to represent angels, are depicted on the Kirriemuir Cross, on the sculptured slab from St Ninian's, Shetland, now in the Museum, and more obscurely elsewhere.

On the other side of the centre appear three figures; the upper two representing an ape-like figure, with largely developed nose and chin, who looks backwards over his shoulder in the act of retreating from a huge boar-like animal, supposed to represent the conventional lion of the Sculptured Stones, which with open mouth and horrid fangs threatens to devour him. His hands are extended as in the act of flight, and are remarkable for their size, indicating either that they are clenched in anger, or that he holds something in each. The figure corresponds so closely with one turned the reverse way upon the Meigle stone already referred to, that, taken in conjunction with the striking similarity of the central figures to those in the Meigle

stone, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, either that the one stone must have been before the artist of the other, or that the subjects depicted in both are taken from a common source.

Below the right-hand figure stretches a marine animal, having a lacertine head, with huge snout, two large saucer-like eyes, and fore paws extending forward, the long wavy fish-like body with three "fins" ending in a bifurcate tail. No other figure like this exists in the Sculptured Stones.

The stone is in good preservation, but an incised ornamentation, which probably covered the surface of the figures, only exists now in a few indications. The lines in the garment of the bird-headed figure have been already referred to. The tails of the two central animals are similarly outlined, and the body of one of these shows faint traces of incised ornamentation. The eyes of the lacertine animal exhibit a central depression which intensifies the effect on the spectator, and conveys the idea of a pupil.

On the three sides of the stone immediately adjacent to the figures it has been roughly squared, but in the lower edge there has been no attempt at squaring. This seems to indicate that the stone in its original position had been inserted upright in the ground, either by itself or as forming a panel in some larger monument. I probed the adjacent ground, and uncovered several stones, but they proved to be only boulders embedded in the yellowish clay already referred to.

There can be no doubt that this stone belongs to that class of sculptured stones which are peculiar to Scotland, and of which the Meigle stones show some of the best examples. That they are symbolical and not grotesques is now allowed by the best authorities, and it is probable that, when they can be interpreted, they will show that a system of spiritualised natural history entered into the teaching of the early Church, and for the elucidation of this subject, every example of these most interesting sculptures ought to be carefully described and preserved. It is gratifying to be able to add that this latest and valuable addition to their number has been deposited for preservation in the National Museum, through the enlightened liberality of Sir Douglas Stewart, Bart., of Grantully, on whose estate of Murtly it was discovered.