

NOTICE OF A FRAGMENT OF A MONUMENTAL SCULPTURED STONE  
 FOUND AT MEIGLE, 1888. BY JOHN J. REID, F.S.A. SCOT., CURATOR OF  
 THE MUSEUM.

Being in the neighbourhood of Meigle during the autumn of 1888, I took the opportunity afforded me by Sir John Kinloch, Bart., F.S.A. Scot., of visiting with him the interesting group of early monuments there, to which reference is made by Dr Anderson in his Rhind Lectures on *Scotland in Early Christian Times* (second series, pp. 67-72). It will interest the Society to learn that this remarkable collection of sculptured stones is safely and carefully housed in immediate proximity to the churchyard, where they have all been unearthed. Indeed, so well are they looked after, that I must, with all deference to the opinion of our Assistant Secretary, express a doubt whether they could elsewhere, even in the National Collection, find so appropriate a resting-place.

As we approached the old school-house, now converted into a local museum for these memorials of ancient art, I observed lying outside among some broken pieces of ordinary tombs the fragment of stone which, by the kindness of my host, I am enabled to exhibit on the table this evening. It has obviously formed the upper part of a small upright slab, bearing a cross on the obverse and symbols on the reverse, which must have stood in a socket at the head of a recumbent stone, like others of which examples may be seen at Meigle, or like one from St Vigean's figured in the *Proceedings*, vol. xvi. p. 411. The cross is of distinctly Celtic character, with four circular sunk spaces at the intersection of the arms with the shaft and summit. In the centre there is a circle filled apparently with spirals, whilst the arms and summit have been filled with fretwork.

On the reverse the sculpture is remarkable, and in some respects unique, so much so as to render it well worthy of the engraving which accompanies this notice.

Struck by the peculiar character of the ornamentation, I took a rough rubbing on the spot, and subsequently made a more careful examination of the carving, with the following result:—

The fragment recovered is 8 inches from the highest point to the base,  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, with a thickness of  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches. At the highest part there has been some kind of scroll ornament, too indistinct, however, to be made out, and the carvings are in bas-relief on a sunk panel surrounded by a narrow raised border.

The lower portion of the sculpture represents the heads of two conventional animals, somewhat like horses, from whose extended jaws project interlacing tusks, or tongues it may be, giving the effect of a fierce encounter. This kind of imaginary animal, sometimes lacer-tine at others canine or bear-like in form, is a common feature of this class of monument. Such examples as that figured in Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (plate lxxv.), from the lower panel of a

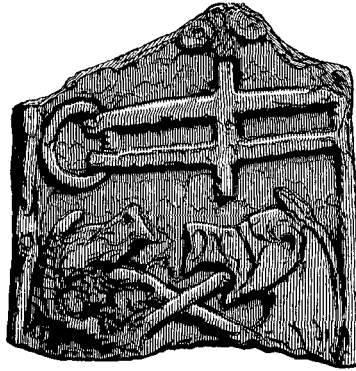


Fig. 1. Fragment of Sculptured Slab found at Meigle, Reverse (8 inches high).

stone at Kirriemuir, or again on the Dupplin Castle Cross, or on a stone at Kettins, Forfarshire, are so similar in their general character, as to place this part of the carving in the same category.

Above these nondescript animals is an object which I can only refer to that curious, almost mysterious, set of symbols found on early Christian work of the Celtic period, as well as upon objects of remote antiquity, having no indication of a Christian character upon them. No doubt these symbols were used by the skilled artificers, alike on their stone and their metal work, for decorative purposes in later days, but surely, I think, as emblematical also of mysteries, now never to be

revealed, connected with the earlier faith, as it was replaced by the forms of an absorbing yet accommodating Christianity. This design may be described as two parallel bars secured at the centre by a cross bar, and at one end only by a ring over which they appear to run. It is a striking looking object in itself, but of its symbolism I dare not venture to offer a solution. No such form has yet been seen on any carved stone or metal work, at least within the range of my knowledge and inquiry, but its character and position on the fragment of the Meigle monument entitle this symbolical object to be recorded and added to our list of these mysterious signs of a past of which so little is known.

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