

III.

A CELTIC GOD ON A SCOTTISH SCULPTURED STONE.

BY DONALD A. MACKENZIE, F.S.A.Scot.

In our National Museum is a replica of a very remarkable sculptured stone from Meigle, on which are three figures in relief. The thoroughly pagan character of the group takes the eye at once. Mr Romilly Allen has suggested that the central figure is "a triton," but it is not usual to find tritons in arbitrary association with land animals. On one side of this figure is a mythological boar, and on the other a conventionalised wolf, the flattened head of which may suggest a leopard, but it

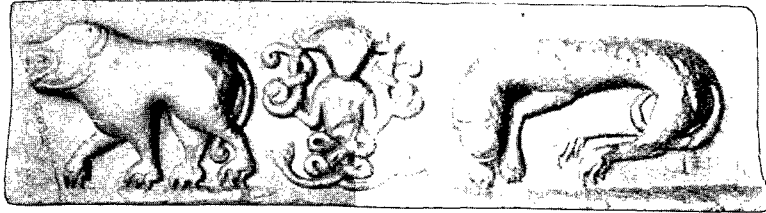


Fig. 1. The Meigle Stone, showing mythological figure between two animals.

must not be overlooked that animals with flattened heads are in folk-tales the reputed leaders of herds of supernatural animals (fig. 1).

It is evident that these animals on the Meigle stone had a symbolic relationship to the so-called "triton." The group, indeed, is strongly reminiscent of the Cernunnos group on one of the plaques of the Gundestrup cauldron which is preserved in the National Museum, Copenhagen. Cernunnos, the "squatting god," is there shown between a deer and wolf (or hyæna) grasping a horned and looping snake in his left hand. His name is believed to be derived from *cern*, horned, which had the secondary meaning of "victory."¹ In my recently published book *Buddhism in Pre-Christian Britain* I gave a good deal of evidence regarding the existence of the Cernunnos cult in ancient Britain and Ireland before my attention had been arrested by this unique Meigle stone. De Jubainville, it may be noted in passing, connects Cernunnos with the Irish god *Buar-ainech* ("cow-faced"), as well as with the "Tarvos Trigaranos" in the Cluny Museum, Paris.²

¹ *Rev. Celt.*, vol. xx. p. 375.

² *The Irish Mythological Cycle* (English trans.), London and Dublin, 1903, pp. 218-9.

The so-called "triton" from Meigle has the head of a horned bull; the body from neck to waist is human, and wriggling snakes are grasped in both hands; the legs are serpentine and entwined, suggesting the squatting posture, and they terminate in fish tails. Any resemblance it bears to a "triton" can be accounted for by the influence of Asia, for the fish-tailed supernatural beings of the Phœnicians, Greeks, etc., have undoubtedly a history rooted in Mesopotamia. The Babylonia fish-god Ea, one of whose names was Dagan, appears, for instance, to have been the prototype of the Dagon of the Philistines, as was his wife of the fish-tailed goddess Atergatis, the mermaid-like goddess. But the Meigle figure, which combines the bull-god, man-god, serpent-god, and fish-god, is much more complex than are the sea-beings of the Mediterranean area. It appears to have a closer relationship to the composite Celtic bull-god which became known to the Greeks as far back as the third century B.C., as we gather from a fragment of poetry. When Seleucus Nicator received from the Hindu monarch Chandragupta a number of Indian animals, he sent a tiger, etc., to Greece. Philemon, the Greek poet, in one of his lost comedies, wrote humorously of the wonderful tiger and suggested that in return they should present to Seleucus that even more remarkable beast, the "Trugeranos." M. J. Vendryes has shown that Philemon's reference is to the Celtic "Trigaranos," one of the names of the divine bull, Tarvos.¹ This bull-god had a connection with fertilising water. There is "a distinct mythological flavour," as Professor W. J. Watson shows, in some of the bull (*tarbh*) river, well, and other names in Scotland and Ireland.²

The mythological boar which figures on the Meigle stone seems all the more significant when we find the boar connected with Cernunnos and the serpent on a coin of the Gaulish Remi, boar symbols on the Late Celtic armour of the Iceni of south-eastern England, and a mythological boar with symbols on the "boar stone" near Inverness. Tacitus refers to the boar as a religious symbol of the Celtic-speaking Æsty, the only Baltic people who gathered amber. "They worship the mother of the gods," he says, "and wear figures of wild boars as an emblem of their superstition. This amulet supersedes arms and all other protections and carries the votary of the goddess safely even through his enemies."³ The Picts, whose organisation was dual, had an Orc (Boar) clan.

Of special interest is the treatment of the ears of the divine boars. On the Meigle stone they are clipped; on the Inverness stone they are represented by comma-shaped symbols, and those of the Iceni have ears

¹ *Rev. Celt.*, vol. xxviii. p. 124. Philemon quoted by Athenæus, xiii. 57.

² W. J. Watson, *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 453.

³ *Germania*, chap. 45.

distended, as if with solar-disc symbols. We know that in the East the ears of sacred pigs received special treatment.

Like the boar, the wolf is also a prominent animal in Celtic mythology. According to Camden, the Irish termed the wolf "Chari Christi," while Aubrey tells that the fang-tooth of a wolf was a talisman in Ireland. "Some of the Irish," wrote Spenser, "doe use to make the wolf their gossip." In the *Leabhar Breathnach* it is stated that "the descendants of the wolf are in Ossory"; this people, "the race of Laighne Faelaidh," were reported to assume the forms of wolves. In early Christian times in Ireland the explanation was proffered that these people had to assume wolf forms in consequence of a curse imposed by St Natalis, the abbot of Kilmanagh, Kilkenny.¹

Light may be thrown on the curious form of the Meigle wolf by the following extract from Dr George Henderson's *Survivals in Belief among the Celts*:—²

"The Irish *onchú*, 'leopard,' also standard, whence the Gaelic *onnchon*, 'standard,' from French *onceau*, *once*, 'a species of jaguar,' seems preserved in Wester Ross with the change of *n* to *r*, as *o'r chu*, written *odhar chu*, in the sense of wolf; the howl of the creature thus named inspired the natives of old with a fear and awe which had their origin in days when the wolf prowled of evenings among the flocks."

The Meigle figures appear to have survived into the Christian period from pagan times. Similar groups, no doubt, were depicted originally on a softer material than stone. Gildas refers to the "mouldering" figures of heathen deities which he himself had seen, and "mouldering" suggests wood. The treatment of the legs of the so-called "triton" indicates that the art had a long history in the Celtic area before it was transferred to stone—an art which is manifested in one of its phases on the now famous Battersea shield, in the British Museum, which is of La Tène date.

As I have indicated, the Meigle group is reminiscent of the Cernunnos group on the Gundestrup silver cauldron. This relic was found in pieces in a dried peat moss at Raevmose in the district of Aalborg, Jutland. The cauldron, which has been skilfully restored, is formed of riveted silver plaques and has an iron ring round the rim. Dr Sophus Muller has relegated it to the first century B.C.

Figures in repoussé work adorn the various plaques. On one is a procession of warriors of the La Tène epoch, four being on horseback, six being foot-soldiers armed with spears and long shields and a seventh evidently a commander, while three men, also on foot, blow long serpent-mouthed trumpets. Above the foot-soldiers are four warriors riding

¹ *Cóir Anmann*, edited by Whitley Stokes, p. 377.

² Glasgow, 1911, pp. 172-3.

horses. An interesting fact is that these warriors resemble closely the Celtic warriors described by Poseidonius of Apamea, who visited Western Europe before 78 B.C. and appears to have penetrated to Britain. His writings survive only in fragments, quoted chiefly by Diodorus Siculus and Strabo. The former (v. 30) represents Poseidonius as saying that the Celtic soldiers wore breeches and striped cloaks adorned with floral patterns, and that these were heavy for winter wear and lighter for summer. The defensive armour consisted of a shield the height of a man. On some shields were the figures of animals in bronze. Helmets were of bronze and had large projections. On some helmets horns were fixed and on others embossed figures of birds and quadrupeds. The trumpets are described as being of peculiar formation, and it is said that they emitted hoarse and warlike sounds which inspired terror. Some warriors carried swords, some had pikes, which they called "lances," and some had javelins either straight or twisted spirally (fig. 2).

On the warriors' plaque of the Gundestrup cauldron, the helmets of the mounted men are surmounted by emblems. On one is a bird, on another a boar, on another horns, and on another a crescent and star. The "officer" behind the foot-soldiers has a boar on his helmet. The long shields and lances resemble those described by Poseidonius, as do likewise the serpent-mouthed trumpets. A large figure in tight-fitting costume is apparently that of a god. He holds a human being, head downwards, over an urn, and at his feet is a dog in a "begging" posture. The god wears a tight-fitting Anatolian cap with pig-tail. The foot-soldiers are divided from the cavalry by a long "arrow" symbol adorned with lotus blooms. On the upper portion of the plaque, to the extreme right, is a wriggling horned snake.

This plaque serves to date and identify the civilisation of the Gundestrup cauldron. It is evidently Celtic, of the La Tène epoch and of the age of Poseidonius, if not earlier. The Cimbri of Jutland were a Celtic people, or a Germanic people incorporated in the Celtic civilisation (Diodorus Siculus, v. 32; Strabo, vii. c. 2, § 2).

On another plaque of the Gundestrup bowl appears the Celtic god Cernunnos, a figure which is associated with cult animals like the so-called "triton" of the Meigle slab. The latter, as we have seen, grasps snakes in both hands, has bull's horns, is apparently squatting, and has on one side the mythological wolf and on the other the mythological boar. This Gundestrup Cernunnos has on his head the horns of a stag; the god is attired in a close-fitting costume and is squatting in Buddhist fashion. Round the neck is a torque, and a torque is grasped in the right hand, while in the left hand is held a horned and looping serpent (fig. 3). This mythological reptile is shown by itself, as a ram-

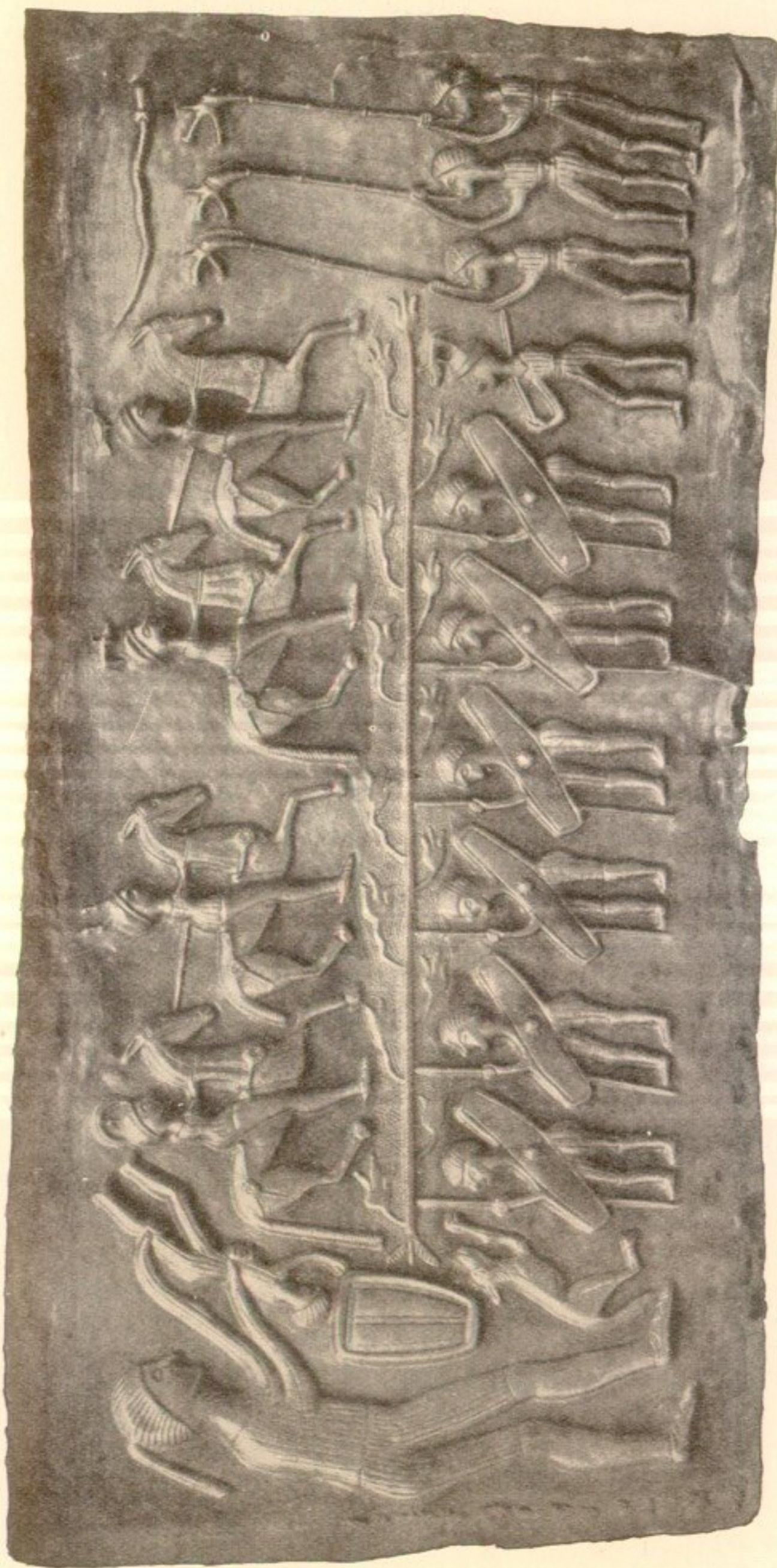


Fig. 2. The Warriors' Plaque on Gundestrup Cauldron.

By courtesy of the National Museum, Copenhagen.

(Block lent by Messrs Blackie & Son, Publishers.)



Fig. 3. Cernunnos grasping Horned Snake and Torque on Gundestrup Cauldron.

By courtesy of the National Museum, Copenhagen.

(Block lent by Messrs Blackie & Son, Publishers.)

headed wriggling serpent, on another plaque of the Gundestrup cauldron. It figures also on the Gaulish monuments. De Jubainville connects these Gaulish ram-headed reptiles with the Irish goat-headed monsters, the *goborchind*.¹

On the right side of the Gundestrup Cernunnos is a stag, and on the left a wolf or hyæna. As the hyæna was unknown in Western Europe, it was, no doubt, identified with the wolf, an animal which, as we have seen, had a rather complex character in Gaelic folk-lore, retaining, apparently, a memory of its history in ancient religious symbolism.

The fauna of the Cernunnos plaque of the Gundestrup cauldron may here be briefly considered. The stag is not a Mesopotamian one with palmated horns, but European or North African. Apparently the corner animals are gazelles. The lion is probably Anatolian. The two figures in heraldic opposition are either "dragon dogs" or they are sphinxes similar to those seen on the lid of the Hallstatt bucket in the British Museum, which "furnishes," as the writer of the guide says, "a good illustration of animal ornament under orientalising influence."²

This Cernunnos plaque of the Gundestrup bowl is also adorned with lotus-bloom symbols or art motifs. These appear to have been derived originally from India. Cernunnos, as I have elsewhere shown,³ displays on the Gundestrup cauldron the attributes of the Hindu-Buddhist god Virüpāksha, who, as Grundwedel explains,⁴ was one of the Heretical Buddhist "Guardians of the World," also designated the "Four Great Kings" (*Catur-mahārājas*). Grundwedel gives the attributes of Virüpāksha as "a caitya in the right hand and a serpent in the left hand." The serpent is invariably a horned one; a *caitya*, according to Kern,⁵ is a circular symbol—a sanctuary or a sacred stone, tree, image, etc.

On the same Cernunnos plaque a man is riding on a "sea beast," as do Buddhist gods and saints on the Hindu "sea beast" called the *makara*. Arion, the Greek poet, similarly rode on a dolphin. The Arion type of story is very common in Asia.

The archaeological, zoological, and mythological evidence afforded by the Gundestrup cauldron points to "culture drifting" from Asia into Western Europe through Asia Minor. In Central Asia the Parthians, Scythians, and others were nominally Buddhists, but their faith was what is known as "Heretical Buddhism." Like Mithraism at a later

¹ *The Irish Mythological Cycle*, p. 218.

² *British Museum Guide to the Antiquities of the Early Iron Age* (1905), pp. 15-16.

³ *Buddhism in Pre-Christian Britain* (1928), pp. 42 *et seq.*

⁴ *Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolie*, p. 181; and De Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan*, Amsterdam (1913), p. 3.

⁵ *Manual of Indian Buddhism* (1896), p. 91.

period, Buddhism mixed with various cults, imparting to them a more or less superficial colouring.¹ The four World Guardians of Heretical Buddhism in Central Asia were the four pre-Buddhist gods of the cardinal points. Virūpāksha was the god of the West and presided over the Western Earthly Paradise. Pilgrims set out on long journeys searching for this paradise.

Now these gods of the cardinal points were all *Nāga* gods—that is, they were “serpent deities.” The Buddhists of north-west India and Central Asia had taken over the *Nāga* deities, which were intimately connected with the Kingship and were weather-controllers, especially givers of the water supply. De Visser informs us that *Nāgas* had human as well as reptile forms, and what he says of them appears to throw light on the original significance of the central figure on the Meigle stone. He writes as follows:—

“Indian Buddhist art represents the *Nāgas* as serpents, or as men and women with snakes coming out of their necks and rising over their heads, or as snake-tailed beings with human upper bodies and snakes appearing above their heads.”²

The myth which explains Buddha’s connection with the *Nāgas* sets forth that he converted these serpent deities to Buddhism. He then became the *Nāga* King and the snake deities obeyed his commands when invoked to send rain, and to “make all grasses, bushes, herbs, and forest trees to grow” and to “produce corn and give rise to all juices whereby the men of *Jambud vīpa* (the earth) may become blessed.” The *Nāgas* symbolised among other things the rain-giving clouds, and that is why a Buddhist *Sūtra* says of Buddha (Virūpāksha), he “holds on his hands (and directs) the clouds and the rain.” Buddha, as *Nāga* King, utters spells which sends rain in time of drought and checks excessive rain.³ The god, therefore, who holds in a hand, or in both hands, the horned-serpent deities, called in India the *Nāgas*, is essentially a weather-controller and season-controller—a deity of fertility connected with the Kingship as all season-controlling deities were, including the Irish god the Dagda, who played on his “living harp” so that spring, summer, autumn, and winter might follow one another in their proper order. The god Cernunnos is, further, a “*Nāga* man” or “dragon man.” The *Nāga* (serpent deity) is a manifestation of the god who has also his animal manifestations. The three figures on the Meigle stone may therefore be forms of the complex deity Cernunnos.

It is certainly a “far cry” from Scotland to India, and to some the attempt to establish a cultural connection between such widely separated

¹ De Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 25 *et seq.*

areas may seem somewhat hazardous. We should not, however, overlook in this regard that it is similarly a "far cry" from Scotland to Persia, yet Mithraism drifted from Persia through Europe into ancient England and Scotland, the "carriers" being the soldiers of Rome. As Mithraic influence reached Asia Minor, so at an earlier period did Buddhist influence. Some of the Greeks who settled in Asia after the conquests of Alexander the Great became converts to Buddhism. Professor Arthur Lloyd has found that "among the apostles sent out (from India) after the Third (Buddhist) Council under Tishya-Maudgali-putra was Dharmarakshita 'the Greek,' who is said to have worked with considerable success among the nations of Western Asia."¹

Celts had settled in Galatia, Asia Minor, and sections of them became converts to the Phrygian cult of the god Attis. Pausanias (vii. 17) states that the Galatæ (Celts) who dwell in Pessinus refrained from eating swine because the god Attis had been slain by a boar. Apparently these Celts fused their own religious beliefs with those of the worshippers of the god Attis and the Great Mother goddess. The Æstyí, the Celtic-speaking amber-collectors on the Baltic, may therefore have been influenced by Anatolian religion, their sacred boar being a symbol of Attis. In Gaelic folk-lore, in both Scotland and Ireland, we appear to have a memory of Attis in the story of Diarmaid who was slain by a boar. The Celtic Druids may have similarly derived from Asia Minor, where Buddhism was fused with the Attis-Great-Mother cult, their ideas about the "Isles of the Blest," the "Transmigration of Souls," etc., as well as those doctrines which transformed Cernunnos into a "dragon man" or "dragon god" and imparted a new significance, as a result of culture mixing, to those cult animals, the bull, the boar, the wolf, the stag, etc.

Mithraism was, as has been indicated, fused in Asia Minor with the cult of Attis and the Great Mother. "We have every reason to believe," writes Cumont in this connection, "that the worship of the Iranian god and that of the Phrygian goddess were conducted in intimate communion with each other throughout the entire extent of the (Roman) empire. Despite the profound differences of their character, political reasons drew them together."²

A similar fusion of Heretical Buddhism and the Mother-and-Son cult appears, as I have indicated, to have occurred in Asia Minor. Indeed, direct proof of it is found on one of the plaques of the Gundestrup cauldron, which shows the upper part of the body of the Anatolian goddess—apparently the Magna Mater, or Great Mother of Pessinus.

¹ *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, vol. xxxv., pt. ii., pp. 227-8, and note 1.

² *The Mysteries of Mithra* (English translation), p. 179.

Her hands are touching her breasts, round her neck is a torque, and her hair hangs downward in triple pleats. On either side of her are elephants in heraldic opposition. These elephants are obviously Indian; had they been African elephants the large ears would have been indicated. Of special interest is the fact that they are spotted or "star spangled," like the sky elephant ridden by the Hindu god Indra. In the lower part of the plaque are two griffins, also in heraldic opposition, and between them an animal which resembles somewhat ancient representations of one of the types of the Asiatic rhinoceros. Wheel symbols, with leaf-shaped spokes, had probably a solar significance. There are references in Gaelic mythology to the symbolic wheel, as there are to a goddess known as the "Old Wife" who is followed by herds of wild animals.

Another plaque of the Gundestrup cauldron provides further evidence of the influence in the Celtic area of Asiatic art and symbolism. It shows three single-horned bovine animals. I take these to be rhinoceri. The earliest representation of the bovine rhinoceros in Asia is seen on the black obelisk of the Assyrian monarch Shalmaneser III., contemporary of Jehu, Joram, Jezebel, and Elisha (ninth century B.C.). On this Gundestrup plaque are three men attacking the single-horned animals with swords, and they are accompanied by dogs. We know that in India the rhinoceros, whose skin is soft during life, was hunted with sabre, lance, and arrows. Its flesh was eaten as a medicine; the horn was reputed to have magical virtues and drinking-vessels made from it were used to neutralise poison. On the upper part of this plaque are three small spotted or "star-spangled" animals which may also be rhinoceri. Two types of these appear in Chinese art—the *si* and the *se*, one swine-like and the other usually bovine.

On still another plaque of the Gundestrup cauldron is a bearded god, only the head, shoulders, and uplifted arms being shown. A "floating" or "flying" figure of a youth, wearing a La Tène horned helmet, thrusts a wheel (? solar) symbol behind the gigantic bearded one. On either side of the divine couple are single-horned and spotted animals of the smaller "rhinoceros" type, and below these are three prancing griffins and the wriggling ram-headed serpent already referred to. The bearded god appears to be a sky-god—the Celtic sky-propping Atlas. On other plaques he grasps the human beings and animals who were apparently sacrificed to him—stags on one plaque, human beings and boars on a second, and mythological animals on a third. This sky-propping god provides a clue to a mystery which puzzled Alexander the Great. When visited by Celts from the Danube Valley and Ionian Gulf, Alexander asked what they feared most, and their answer was "That

the sky should fall upon them." Alexander thought they were "braggarts,"¹ but possibly the Celts referred to their religious system in which the sky-god figured prominently. This god had to be sacrificed to so that he might be enabled to continue acting as a steadfast sky-supporter. We find mention of the belief that the sky might fall in the Irish epic, the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*. The head of the decapitated Sualtaim, father of Cuchulainn, is heard calling an alarm.

"'Some deal too great is that cry,' quoth Conchobar; for yet is the sky above us, the earth underneath and the sea round about us. And unless the heavens shall fall with their showers of stars on the man-like face of the world, or unless the ground bursts open in quakes beneath our feet, or unless the furrowed, blue-bordered ocean break over the tufted brow of the earth, will I restore to her byre and her stall, to her abode and her dwelling place, each and every cow and woman of them with victory of battle and contest and combat."

Another passage reads:

"Whate'er it be, this that I hear from afar, it is the sky that bursts, or the sea that ebbs, or the earth that quakes, or is it the distress of my son overmatched in the strife?"²

It is evident that the sky-propping god of the Gundestrup cauldron was imported into Ireland, and much else must have come with it.

There are several representations of Cernunnos in Gaul. On the altar in the museum at Rheims the god is seen squatting between Apollo and Mercury in association with the bull and the stag and a small animal usually referred to as a "mouse" or "rat," but apparently a North African ant-eater (fig. 4). On the head of this Cernunnos are the horns of a bull. Bull's horns are likewise worn by Cernunnos on the stone found in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris, and now preserved in the Musée de Cluny. On a coin of the Remi, a Gaulish tribe, is a squatting Cernunnos with attributes grasped in both hands, as on the Meigle stone, while the reverse shows a boar, the serpent, and the sun. Birds, which may be eagles or ravens, figure on the Gundestrup cauldron. We have thus associated with Cernunnos on the Continent all the animals of the non-Christian sculptured stones of Scotland with the exception of the horse. There was, however, in Gaul a goddess of horses named Epōna (from Gaulish *epos*, a horse). It may be that the horse cult was fused with that of Cernunnos either in Gaul or in Scotland. Of special interest is the "raven" or "eagle stone" at Strathpeffer, which appears to have a connection with the Meigle Cernunnos. On the "horse-shoe" (? sky) symbol under which the bird stands are solar

¹ Arrian, *Anabasis*, i. 4, sec. 6.

² Joseph Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale*, London, 1914, pp. 298 and 301-2.

and fish-tail symbols. The fish-tails of the Meigle Cernunnos therefore may indicate the god's connection with rain, as well as with rivers and lochs.

Cumont comments upon the "multiplicity of attributes" with which the statues of Mithra are "loaded," and says this "is in keeping with the kaleidoscopic nature of his character."¹ Cernunnos had similarly a "multiplicity of attributes," including the eagle or raven, the stag, the



Fig. 4. Altar in the Museum, Rheims. Cernunnos between Apollo and Mercury.

bull, the boar, the ram-headed serpent, etc., while he was connected with the sun, the sky, thunder, lightning, rain, and rivers. The Meigle figure, which affords proof of the existence of the cult of the god in Scotland, is eloquent of his complex character. The "fish-tail" feet connect him not only with the salmon, which figures on Scottish sculptured stones and is in folk-tales a form of the "sea-beast" or dragon, but also with those mythological monsters of our sculptured stones and caves, the "swimming elephant" and the dog-headed fish.

¹ Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

The "swimming elephant" closely resembles the Hindu-Buddhist *makara*, a form of the dragon and a "carrier" and manifestation of a god (fig. 5).

A Scythian bronze dragon here reproduced (fig. 6) has points⁷ of resemblance with the Scottish "swimming elephant" as well as with the *makaras* and dragons of India and the Far East.

The snake "motifs" of the Scottish sculptured stones seem also to be survivals of the Cernunnos cult.

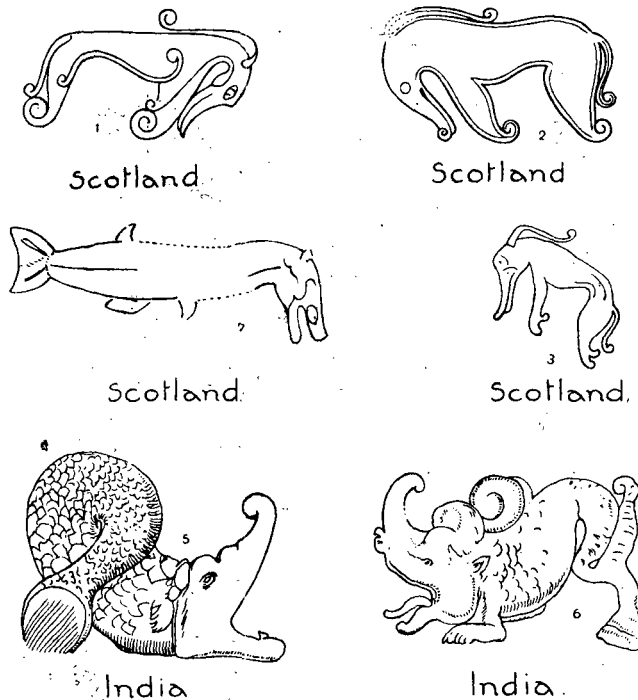


Fig. 5. Scottish and Hindu-Buddhist Symbols.

Some have urged the view that the horned Cernunnos is a survival from Palæolithic times, because in a cave at Arièges in France a Magdalenian man is depicted wearing a stag's antlers and skin. Professor Baldwin Brown suggests that we have here a Magdalenian hunter disguised as a stag to enable him to approach within striking distance of a herd of deer, and he refers to the stalkers in the Bushman cave paintings who are disguised as ostriches so that they may be undetected by these birds. It may be, however, that the Magdalenian figure is that of a magician and that the custom of performing magico-religious rites in the disguise of animals survived in France into Christian times. A

sermon attributed to St Augustine of Hippo, but possibly preached by Cæsarius of Arles in the sixth century, is of interest in this connection, because it condemns the heathen practice in southern Gaul of men assuming the heads and skins of animals, believing that by so doing they were transformed into animals. Stags and cattle are specially mentioned, and it is said that drunkenness and impious dancing were indulged in.¹ Cernunnos does not, however, wear the skin of an animal, and it is uncertain whether the habit of depicting him as a horned deity is a custom of Western European origin. Horned deities were common in ancient Asia and ancient Egypt. Alexander the Great was depicted wearing horns as a god—the son or incarnation of Jupiter-

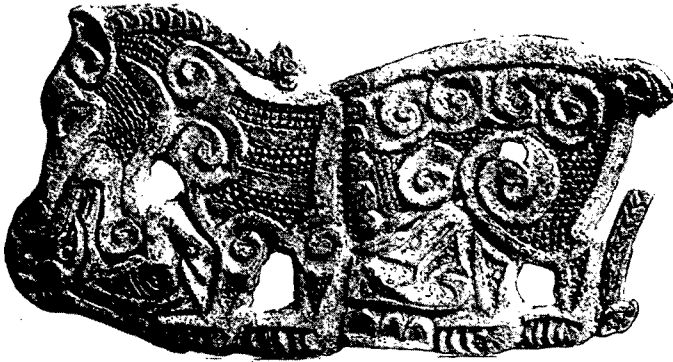


Fig. 6. Scythian Dragon from Asia.

Ammon. Withal, the horned Nāga-god, which was imported into China by the Buddhists of Central Asia, was known as “the celestial stag.”² This deity was depicted as a stag among the clouds and also in human form with horns on his head and feet with four claws.³ Cernunnos was similarly connected with the sky, although some writers identify him with the underworld Celtic god Dis referred to by Julius Cæsar. A Roman wax tablet at Pesht refers to him as “Jupiter Cernenus.” It is possible, however, that in Cernunnos we have an ancient god of Western Europe taken over by the Celts and transformed by those schools of their Druids which had been influenced by the cult of Virūpāksha-Buddha of Asia Minor. The horned snake, grasped by

¹ E. K. Chambers, *The Mediæval Saga*, Oxford, 1903, vol. ii. p. 290 *et seq.*

² De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. i. p. 1143.

³ D. A. Mackenzie, *Myths of China and Japan*, frontispiece reproducing Chinese picture in the John Rylands Library, Manchester.

Cernunnos on the Gundestrup bowl and shown on Gaulish monuments, certainly did not have origin in Western Europe. It was imported from the East during the La Tène epoch, as were the Gundestrup figures of the star-spangled Indian elephants and the conventionalised Asiatic hippopotamus. In dealing with the Meigle stone, therefore, it has to be recognised that the importation into Scotland of "wonder-beasts" and composite figures does not necessarily date from the early Christian period or that they are survivals of cult animals of Western European origin.

The horned Cernunnos was evidently the prototype of the devil of the mediæval Christians. "All the gods of the Gentiles are devils," wrote Pope Boniface IV. in a letter addressed to Edwin, King of the English. But before the gods of the heathen were openly denounced as "devils" attempts were made to Christianise them. The gods, or their incarnations the Druids, were connected with some of the early saints. St Kentigern (St Mungo), the patron saint of Glasgow, has, for instance, interesting associations with Cernunnos and his animals. In Joceline's *Life*, St Kentigern ploughs barren land in Glasgow and renders it fertile by yoking to the plough a stag or a wolf—the cult animals of Cernunnos on one of the Gundestrup cauldron plaques. Kentigern followed a wild boar to discover the site on which a monastery should be erected. When the boar began to tear up the soil on a little hill with his long tusks, "he clearly showed to all that that was the place designed and prepared by God." Kentigern discovered Glasgow by yoking to a wain "two untamed bulls" which carried him to the place "appointed by the Lord." The salmon (a form of the dragon) and the oracular bird figure as symbols on the seal of St Kentigern.¹ An excellent instance of a saint being identified with a god is afforded by St Maelrubha or Mourie whose name clings to Loch Maree. The seventeenth century records of Dingwall Presbytery refer to the sacrificing of bulls to St Mourie on the 25th August, apparently the day on which an ancient bull-god's festival was celebrated.

"Herne the Hunter" in English folk-lore, who is referred to by Shakespeare, and the Welsh god Bran are evidently memories of Cernunnos surviving from the pre-Christian period. Finds of Celtic deities in England include figures, built into the masonry of the gateways of Bath, of a female carrying two crested snakes and a youth grasping a snake. A bronze dug up at Devizes in 1714 was that of a man-god in Celtic breeches with a snake "twined round his arms and legs."²

¹ Dr A. P. Forbes, *Lives of St Ninian and St Kentigern*, Edinburgh, 1874, pp. 51, 67, 76.

² Hearne's *Leland Itin.*, vol. ii. pp. 62, 64, 65, and Camden's *Brittania* (Gibson), p. 88.

The "cult mixing" which took place during the early Christian period can be traced on the sculptured stones of Scotland as well as in the lives of the saints, etc. We are all familiar with the mysterious pagan symbols that figure in association with Christian symbols on many of our monuments. It is possible, therefore, that the Meigle Cernunnos stone originally formed part of a structure displaying Christian as well as pagan symbols, and that even in the pagan group there was a secondary Christian meaning. But it is unlikely that Cernunnos was imported into Scotland as a Christian symbol. I prefer the view that the early Christian missionaries found Cernunnos in Scotland and considered it necessary to accord to him such treatment as would tend to conciliate his worshippers. The necessity for adopting such a policy is emphasised in the famous letter addressed in 601 by Pope Gregory the Great to the Abbot Mellitus. "Nor let them (the converted pagans) now sacrifice animals to the Devil," we read, "but to the praise of God kill animals for their own eating, and render thanks to the Giver of all for their abundance; so that while some outward joys are retained for them, they may more readily respond to inward joys. For from obdurate minds it is undoubtedly impossible to cut off everything at once, because he who strives to ascend to the highest place rises by degrees or steps and not by leaps."¹

The policy revealed in this letter was applied not only to festivals, but also in other directions. Localities sacred to the pagans were appropriated and the pagan *nemed* (grove with shrine) gave its name to the Christian church. "In Irish literature," writes Professor W. J. Watson, *nemed* is not uncommon in the sense of holy place, sanctuary, church."²

It is well known that stones bearing pagan symbols were often built into the walls of early Christian churches. The psychological motive for the perpetuation into Christian times of the pagan group on the Meigle stone becomes apparent when we realise the difficulties experienced by the early missionaries in dealing with pagan practices deeply rooted in immemorial modes of thoughts, and in traditional folk customs some of which have survived until our own time.

The date of the Meigle stone is uncertain, but may well be earlier than the sixth century, to which it is usually assigned. It is manifestly a survival. What interests us chiefly is the prototype of the group formed by a complex deity and his cult animals. Some may detect non-Celtic art *motifs* in the central figure, but although to the sculptor it may have afforded an opportunity for decorative treatment, there is

¹ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book i., chap. 30.

² W. J. Watson, *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 244 *et seq.*

no parallel in early Christian or late Roman art for the arbitrary association of a fish-tailed deity with land animals. The history of the group takes us back to the La Tène epoch, during which, as is demonstrated by the symbolism of the Gundestrup cauldron and the Gaulish monuments and coins, Asiatic pagan influences were "drifting" into the Western Celtic areas. That these influences reached Scotland is made manifest by the evidence of its folk-lore and mythology. The Celtic peoples who reached our native land prior to the Roman period were apparently not only the "carriers" of La Tène chariots and weapons, but also of the religious myths, beliefs, practices, and gods of the La Tène civilisation illustrated on the Gundestrup cauldron. We find references to the gods of the pagans in early Christian writings. Gildas (ii. sec. 4) says that the idols in ancient England "almost surpassed in number those of Egypt," and in his day some were to be seen "mouldering away within or without the deserted temples, with stiff and deformed features." Joceline, in his *Life of St Kentigern*, refers to the shrines and images of demons. It was not until 1538 that a famous Welsh image, the object of pilgrims and offerings, was destroyed.¹

In dealing with the various cultural and racial "drifts" into early Scotland, it is not necessary to assume that they came by the same route. The Celts did not all reach Scotland by way of England. Apparently the Picts, who built the brochs, migrated by sea from western Gaul to northern Scotland. The Caledonians, whom Tacitus compared to the Germans, may have come across the North Sea from the northern Celtic area. Their tribal name was Celtic and they appear to have spoken a Celtic language, but they may have been one of those peoples referred to by Professor Eoin MacNeill who were, in the main, racially "Germanic," but had "become Celtic in language," having long been ruled by a minority of Celtic aristocrats.² Other Scottish east-coast Celtic tribes, the Vernicones, the Vacomagi, and Taexali, who were not represented in Celtic England, may have similarly migrated across the North Sea, which was certainly crossed long before the arrival of the Celts by the "Beaker folk" of the Bronze Age. The Celtic ships of the first century B.C., the period of the Gundestrup cauldron, were much superior to those of the "Beaker folk" and even to those of some contemporary Mediterranean peoples, including the Romans. In his description of the deep-sea vessels of the Celtic Veneti of Brittany, Julius Cæsar emphasises this fact, and he mentions that the Veneti had as allies the Osismi, the Lexovii, and Namnetes (of northern France), and the Ambiliati, the Morini, the Diablintes and

¹ Dr A. P. Forbes, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 349.

² *Phases of Irish History*, p. 19.

Menapii (of Belgium and Holland).¹ The Celts of Jutland were, like the other Celts on the sea-coast, therefore, in all probability, in possession of ships not unlike those of the Norsemen of the much later Viking Age. Keble Chatterton compares the Viking ships with those possessed during the first century B.C. by the Veneti and their allies.²

When we think of those wonderful Celtic ships which, as Cæsar says, "were admirably adapted to withstand the heavy seas of stormy weather" and "for riding out the heavy gales of the Atlantic" (*De Bell. Gall.*, iii. 13), it does not seem necessary to assume that a considerable period must have elapsed before the worshippers of the Cernunnos of the Gundestrup cauldron could have migrated to the east coast of Scotland, carrying with them the prototype of the complex dragon-god depicted on the Meigle stone. The Meigle Cernunnos bears a closer resemblance to the Gundestrup Cernunnos than to the figures of the god on the Gaulish monuments of the early Roman period. It is, however, as has been indicated, very like the Cernunnos on the coins of the Remi. It is quite evident that there were formerly on the Continent other forms of Cernunnos than those which have survived. The Meigle figure, which is a combination of bull, man-god, serpent, and fish, is of remarkably Asiatic aspect and may well be a survival of a form of the god which was of comparatively early introduction into Europe. It may well, too, have been the prototype of the water-bull, the *Tarbh Boidhre* of Highland tradition which haunted lochs and marshes and emitted a strange bird-like cry. Like the "water horse," this mythological bull was reputed to be able to assume human form. In folk-tales the *Tarbh Uisge* sometimes becomes the "carrier" of human beings, as the dolphin was to Arion and the *makara* to Hindu saints and gods. It is evident that the Meigle figures cannot be explained away as merely a decorative group devoid of symbolic significance. The sculptor had obviously something to say to a people who understood his meaning, and his concern must have therefore been with the pagan religious beliefs existing in the area in which his monument was erected.

¹ *De Bell. Gall.*, iii. 7 *et seq.*

² *Sailing Ships and their Story*, pp. 105 *et seq.*