

5. ROCK-CUT SYMBOLS IN CAIPLIE CAVES

CAIPLIE caves are situated above high-water mark, in the parish of Kilrenny, Fife (Nat. Grid reference NO 599058). A description of the caves, with an account of their associations with St Adrian, is given in Stuart's *Sculptured Stones*.¹ It is remarkable that Dr Stuart, who himself visited the site, should have overlooked the two incised symbols there.

In the small cave immediately E. of the Chapel Cave, near its far end, there is a clearly visible symbol (fig. 1). The form of this is closely paralleled by one on the slab from

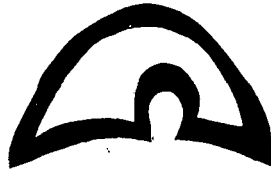


FIG. 1. Symbol in East Cave, Caiplie (1/4, from a rubbing)

Easterton of Roseisle, Elgin, 'which may either be a crescent with a circular indentation in the middle of its lower or concave side, or the semicircular arch symbol'.² Little Ferry Links (No. 2)³ is also similar. In our case, it is possible that the asymmetrical position of the circular indentation was due to an unexpectedly hard part of the rock, as the centre of this indentation projects somewhat beyond the general surface. There has presumably been a little weathering of the rock since the symbol was cut, although it is in better condition here than in some parts of the caves.

After observing this symbol, two of us searched carefully for more, finding only one other, a Z-rod in the Chapel Cave (Pl. XXXII). This could easily be overlooked, as the rock is fissured and inclined to crumble; moreover, the symbol crossed by the Z-rod cannot be made out, because of the superimposed crosses. The two verticals of the Z-rod are clear, with the rounded tail starting about 6 in. below the bottom of the footrule, and the trefoil of the head about 1 ft. to the right of the top of the rule. There are also two smaller circles below the trefoil, about 1 in. down. The Greek cross with surrounding line interrupts the diagonal of the Z-rod.

If the symbols in these caves are of the same period as the symbol stones (Class I monuments), then they are much earlier than St Adrian's arrival in Fife, for which the date 848 is given. We cannot use, as evidence of a Christian character for the Pictish

¹ Stuart, J., *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, II (1866), lxxxviii-xc, Pl. 29.

² Allen, J. R., *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903), Part III, 126, fig. 130.

³ *op. cit.*, Part III, 46, fig. 45.

symbols, this example of their occurrence in a cave which was probably later used as a chapel. As the people who cut the crosses disregarded the symbol in the Chapel Cave, it presumably had no Christian significance to them: perhaps the meaning, whatever it was, had already been forgotten.

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Z-rod and crosses, Chapel Cave, Caiplie
(Scale marked in inches)

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