

TWO PICTISH SYMBOL STONES

(i) FLEMINGTON FARM, ABERLEMNO, ANGUS

by ISABEL HENDERSON, M.A., PH.D.

IN April 1962 a Pictish symbol stone was found during ploughing at Aberlemno, and is now put on record through the kindness of Mr J. D. Boyd, D.A., F.M.A., F.S.A. SCOT., Director of Dundee Museums and Art Galleries, to which it has been presented by Mr David Grant, who farms Flemington. The site (NO 524556) was some 30 yds. E. of the Church and its cross-slab, and on the lower part of the slope that runs down from the ridge on which stand the other two of the three sculptured stones for which Aberlemno is famous. Like one of them the new stone is of the simple, early, type; a block of Old Red Sandstone 5 ft. 8 in. high, varying in width from 1 ft. 2¼ in. at the top to 1 ft. 9½ in. at the widest, near the base, and in thickness from 11½ in. at the top to 14 in. at the base. It has two symbols incised on it, a Horseshoe and an 'Elephant' (Pl. XIII: 1).

Horseshoe

The horseshoe-shaped symbol is found on other eleven Pictish incised monuments of this type. With one exception these horseshoe-bearing stones are found north of the Grampians and the occurrence here of a second southern horseshoe, taken with the somewhat exceptional examples incised on the caves at East Wemyss, demonstrates once more that there is little hope of interpreting individual Pictish symbols as some kind of localised tribal badge.

The general proportions of the horseshoe on the new stone are similar to those on the other stones (see for comparison the horseshoe at Clynemilton) (*E.C.M.S.*, fig. 36). The decorative infilling of the horseshoe symbols varies, but symmetrical curves running the length of the sides are a constant element. Here the curves meet at the top of the arch in simple spirals, in a manner typical of the minor variants found elsewhere.

The simplicity of the treatment of the infilling is reminiscent of the horseshoes at Clatt (*P.S.A.S.*, XLIV (1909-10), 207, fig. 2) and Congash (*E.C.M.S.*, fig. 98). This common simplicity of treatment gains interest from the fact that all these stones have the same combination of symbols incised on them, the horseshoe and the 'elephant'. The only other stone to have this combination is at Bruceton (*E.C.M.S.*, fig. 300), the original southern exception to the otherwise northern distribution of the horseshoe symbol. At Bruceton simplicity is taken a stage further, for the horseshoe is left blank. The horseshoes on the East Wemyss caves are similarly undecorated (Diack, F. C., *The Inscriptions of Pictland*, ill. 6).

'Elephant'

It is an observable fact that the numerous 'elephant' symbols incised on Pictish

stones differ widely in the quality of their design. The best of them are masterly in execution, having a fleeting balanced quality, each element in the design contributing to a harmonious well-proportioned whole. The poorer examples are clumsy in execution, the elements being ill-proportioned and ill-positioned (see *P.S.A.S.*, xci (1957-8), 51-2). Compare for example, the greyhound quality of the elephants at Golspie (*P.S.A.S.*, LXXVII (1942-3), Pl. VII: 2) and Crichtie (*E.C.M.S.*, fig. 169) with the mongrel distortion of the forms at Fyvie and Logie Elphinstone (*E.C.M.S.*, fig. 174 and fig. 191).

The design at Aberlemno is of relatively high quality: it faces to the right; the back line is incised with confidence at a sweeping angle to the face of the stone; it is streamlined, the long elegant head being tucked in and running backwards parallel to the limbs and tail and the lappet lying close to the body; the inner spiral articulates the body sensitively; the legs have the extra spur found for the most part only on the better examples of the elephant symbol. There are, however, less pleasing features of the design; the spiral at the end of the over-short lappet is somewhat overexuberant; the essentially formal convention of the articulating scroll on the body has been contaminated with an inappropriately natural joint on the back of the foreleg where it meets the body; the scroll running from the chin down the foreleg, which is found on the best elephants, is missing; the back leg is unnecessarily heavy, giving the impression that the animal is kneeling and so inhibiting the free flow of the rest of the design.

The most accurate version of the elephant symbol S. of the Grampians is probably that at Strathmartine (*E.C.M.S.*, fig. 226) for here all the elements in the elephant design appear, although the head is less elegant than the Aberlemno one and the scroll articulation of the chin and foreleg is faultily applied. The Strathmartine elephant type appears again at Linlathen (*E.C.M.S.*, fig. 225), but there is nothing to link it particularly closely with the elephant on the new find.

In contrast, the elephant at Kinblethmont (*P.S.A.S.*, LXXXV (1950-1), Pl. XIX: 2) has a definite link with the Aberlemno stone in the appearance of a natural joint on the foreleg (compare the appropriate use of this feature in the design of the Ardross wolf, *E.C.M.S.*, fig. 54). Otherwise, however, the Kinblethmont Elephant is much inferior to Aberlemno, suggesting if anything a debased Strathmartine type. If the treatment of the foreleg implies a relationship, then the inspiration must have passed from Aberlemno to Kinblethmont and not the other way.

The most significant link with other southern types is the heavy back leg of the elephant at Bruceton, the stone with blank horseshoe. This characteristic heavy back leg appears on the East Wemyss caves where, as we have seen, blank horseshoes of the Bruceton type also appear. The somewhat baroque quality of the elephant at Bruceton suggests, however, that typologically the Aberlemno elephant design is the earlier.

From this we see that both the horseshoe symbol and the elephant symbol on the Bruceton stone have certain similarities with the Aberlemno versions of the same symbols. When we look at the Congash stone, a stone which also has a very simply decorated horseshoe, it is clear that the elephant here is close in type to the Bruceton

elephant, with the important exception of the heavy back leg. Is horseshoe-elephant an intended combination? Since R. B. K. Stevenson drew attention to the fact, the existence of prototype designs for individual symbols seems a certainty but to suggest that there were prototypes for combinations would be a considerably more ambitious initial hypothesis. It would, for example, definitely lend support to the view that the combinations of the symbols on the stones were fixed and intentional and, therefore, presumably meaningful rather than arbitrary and perhaps merely accidentally selective. On the basis of this isolated example of the horseshoe and elephant combination one cannot justify even a tentative conclusion on this point, but the relationships stand, a heavy back legged elephant and a simply decorated or plain horseshoe at Aberlemno, Bruceton and East Wemyss, and a generally similar type elephant and a simple and plain horseshoe at Congash and Bruceton, and their existence might justify an investigation of the Class I symbol stones to determine whether or not fixed combinations involved regularly or occasionally the use of archetypal combination designs.

It may be said in this connection that Clatt, the fourth stone to bear this particular combination is more difficult to relate to the group. The decoration of the horseshoe is very close indeed to Aberlemno but the important back leg of the elephant is missing and the head is different in type from all the others. It shares, however, the general high quality of all the elephants associated alone with the horseshoe.

(ii) FAIRYGREEN, COLLACE, PERTSHIRE

WITH A NOTE OF A STONE CUP FROM THE SAME FARM

by ALAN SMALL, M.A.

THE Collace Stone (Pl. XIII: 2) was discovered by Mr David Alexander the farmer of Fairygren in 1948 but its significance was not realised until recently. Fortunately while in use in the intervening years as a paving stone and barrow ramp it was turned face down and no serious damage has resulted. Mr J. Lake drew my attention to the stone in 1962 and it has since been recovered and will be displayed in the museum of the University of Aberdeen.

Due to this time-lag it was difficult to pinpoint accurately the location of the find. Mr Alexander could only take me to a point approximately where the stone was found (approx. N.G.R. NO 212328). The slab is of grey sandstone which has undergone low grade metamorphism. It has been dressed on the carved face and on the sides. The back has been roughly prepared but not nearly to the high standard of the other faces. When the stone was turned up by the plough, Mr Alexander noted other fragments of similar stone which presumably belonged to the broken ends. He assured me that there had been no carvings on any of these pieces and as the exact location of the stone was uncertain, no excavation was undertaken to recover the pieces. The maximum dimensions of the fragment are now 24 by 16 by 3 in.

The symbols are incised and consist of the mirror and comb, the 'elephant' symbol and part of an ornamental rectangle. This stone must be assigned to the earliest of the three classes into which these stones are traditionally divided. The 'elephant' and

mirror and comb symbols are among the most common and are often found on the same stone. Examples of rectangular designs incorporating almond shapes are rare. A comparable design, but on a stepped symbol is seen on the Monymusk Stone,¹ a later example.

The general appearance of the stone, particularly the marked lack of weathering and the firmness of line suggest that the stone had lain beneath the soil for some considerable time.

On the grounds of the same farm a small stone cup (Pl. XIII: 3) was recovered while ploughing (N.G.R. NO 207333). The cup is hollowed out of a water rounded dolerite pebble measuring 4 by 3 by 2 in. external dimensions. The maximum interior dimensions are 2.1 by 2.3 in. and depth 0.9 in.

I gratefully acknowledge the co-operation of Mr Fleming-Bernard of Dunsinnan House over the recovery of these objects.

¹ *E.C.M.S.*, part 3, 192-4.



1. Flemington Farm, Aberlemno



2. Fairygreen, Collace



3. Stone cup found while ploughing at Fairygreen

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