

## A further fragment of early Christian sculpture from St Mary of the Rock, St Andrews, Fife

J B Kenworthy\*

When consolidation of the foundations of the Culdee church of St Mary of the Rock, St Andrews, Fife, was undertaken by the Ancient Monuments Department of the Ministry of Works in 1953, two fragmentary cross-slabs were recovered from the masonry near the NW corner. Another was found just outside the N doorway into the sanctuary (Robertson 1956). This was the result of a careful watch kept during the work. Despite this, however, one small fragment appears to have escaped notice; it was used by the MOW masons as part of the rubble core of the N wall at the NW corner (fig 1). Although it was set face up beside the Ancient Monument notice, it seems not to have been recognised until 1977, when it was located by Miss D O'Sullivan and Mr N Q Bogdan. It was subsequently removed to the Cathedral Museum.

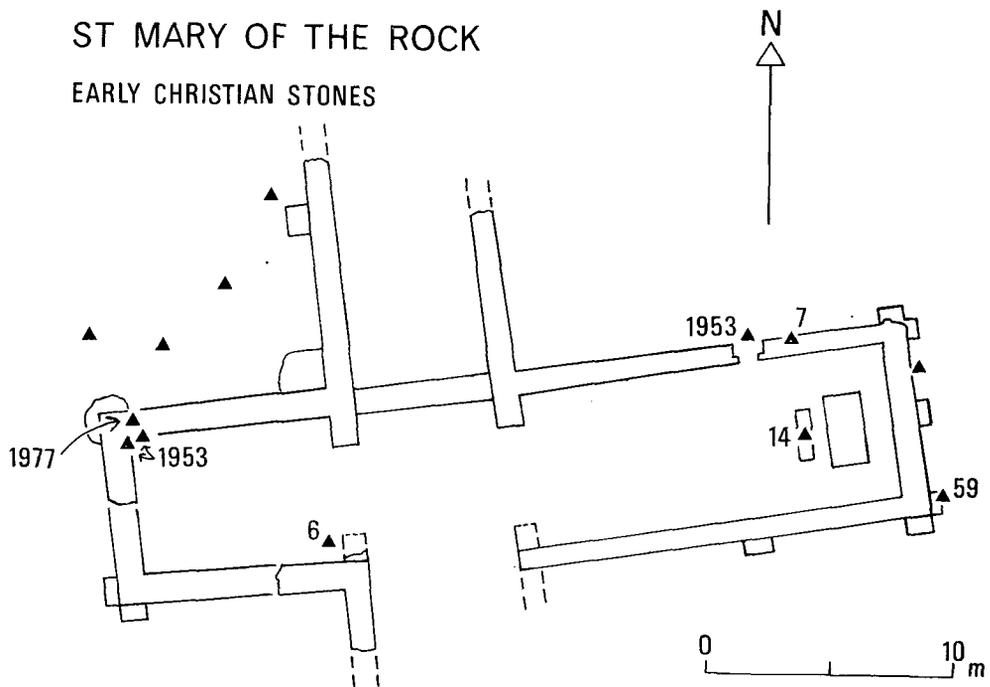


FIG 1 Sketch plan showing approximate findspots of Early Christian stones (partly after Walker and Hay-Fleming). Hay-Fleming's (1931) numbers are given where known for earlier finds, dates for later ones

\* Department of Archaeology, St Salvator's College, University of St Andrews

Despite its small size, this piece is of considerable interest. It is marginally possible that the fragment was brought in from elsewhere by the MOW masons, but in all probability it was previously built into the fabric of the church.

### DESCRIPTION

The fragment (fig 2 and pl 19) has a sub-triangular upper surface, and is slightly wedge-shaped in cross-section. It measures 290 mm in maximum length by 170 mm transversely, and is 100 mm thick at maximum. The carved face is somewhat eroded, but despite the loss of some detail, the sculpture is reasonably well preserved. The stone is a hard yellow sandstone, similar to that used for other pieces from the Cathedral area. Although part of the longest side of the piece has been flaked away, it is clearly an original edge. This edge is plain and flattened, lying at a slightly acute angle to the face. The edge-angle is rounded, and there is no edge-moulding.

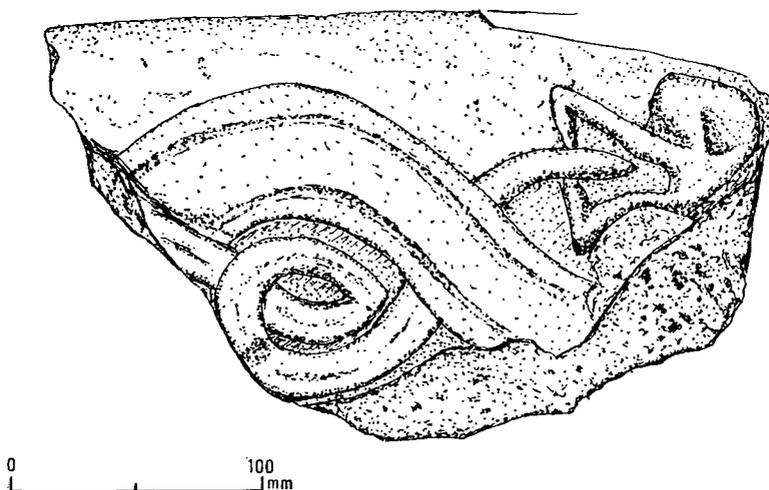


FIG 2 Sculptural fragment from St Mary of the Rock, St Andrews (Scale 1/3)

The two other edges are both ancient breaks, while the rough back shows both ancient and more modern flaking. The piece thickens slightly in section away from the original side.

The carving is in relief, up to 5 mm high, and shows a stylised animal head, apparently without ear or lappet (despite the proximity of the break, the curve of the head is preserved, and seems to be unbroken), and a sinuous ribbon body in flattened relief which bears two marginal grooves ('outlining'). The head and body seem to belong to the same beast. The head looks back, and between the jaws is the tip of a 'tail'. This passes under the body, loops, and then passes back over the body. There are signs that the tail originally bore a medial groove, now much weathered. The quality of the execution is good, and the edges of the relief are sharp-cut.

### DISCUSSION

Despite the apparently local nature of the stone, this piece stands apart from all other pieces of early Christian sculpture from St Andrews in most respects. It is clearly unrelated to any of the pieces previously recovered from the fabric of St Mary of the Rock. These include Hay-Fleming's (1931) nos 6, 7, 14, ?37, 40, 42 and 59, and the three cross-slabs found in 1953.

Known findspots are shown in fig 1. Finds included parts of a free-standing cross, of which the shaft lay in front of the altar, a recumbent slab, and several typical St Andrews 'compass-and-rule slabs'. Even if all the St Andrews stones are considered – slab-and-panel shrines, free-standing crosses, recumbent slabs and grave-makers as well as the cross slabs (Hay-Fleming 1931, 1-52; Robertson 1956) – the fragment remains without parallel. All possess some form of marginal moulding, which this piece lacks. Of the pieces with animal ornament, the slab shrines (nos 1, 28 & 29) and fragments 44A and 32 lack outlining, and are not in the ribbon style, having a greater rounding of contour. Only the free-standing cross-shaft no 19 (found in the E wall of the Cathedral) has some similarity. Its left hand side bears a flattened, sinuous, but not outlined, ribbon-like 'body', probably vegetable, the hoops of the body leaving spaces filled by discs of interlace derived from vine-scrolls. Plain crosses with outlining occur at St Andrews on some twenty-four compass-and-rule slabs, and on two recumbent slabs (nos 43, 47): but these are not a close parallel for the St Mary's fragment. Because of the singularity of our piece, the type of monument it comes from is not immediately apparent: the lack of an edge moulding does not help in this respect, although occasionally elsewhere cross-slabs and recumbent slabs lack this feature.

In suggesting a background for the fragment, the form of the animal and the use of outlining must be considered. The first step must be to put these into their Pictish context, before turning to related art elsewhere to see what help it can give us.

*'Outlining'*. Although the use of the double margin, here referred to as 'outlining', is frequent on metalwork and in manuscript art of the Hiberno-Saxon style from the 7th century on, its occurrence in sculpture is more restricted. Leaving aside the beasts on the Elgin, Morayshire, slab with their metalwork-derived pellet-infilled bodies and southern affinities (Allen 1903 III, 134), two groups of stones may be distinguished:

*Early series.* To this group belong the Papil stone (Allen 1903 III, 11) with its manuscript-related 'lion', St Vigeans 7 (the bull being pole-axed) (Allen 1903 III, fig 278), Meigle 5, Perthshire and Strathmartine 6, Angus (Allen 1903 III, 300-301; 233-34) (where the Pictish beast occurs with double outline), while the Class II slab from Rossie Priory, Perthshire has outlining on both the Crescent-and-V-Rod and Pictish beast symbols, and bears on its other face 'an animal which it will be argued is ancestral to the St Andrews animal (Allen 1903 III, 307). This animal occurs, with outlining, on the recumbent slab from St Vigeans, Angus (no 14) (Cruden 1964, pl 51). These may all belong to the 8th and 9th centuries, and could be seen as relating to coloured borders in manuscript art. The chronological position of the fragment from Rosemarkie, Ross, no 3 (Allen 1903 III, 87), again with an animal ancestral to ours, not outlined, but with an apparently outlined human-headed animal and a feline with outlined jaws and throat, is less certain. The only Class II slab to have an outlined animal of stylised (again manuscript-derived?) form is the fragment no 5 from Strathmartine, Angus (Allen 1903 III, fig 247A). Here, to the right of the cross-shaft is a back-biting beast, with outlined neck and body. This beast may be related to that above the left-hand arm of the cross on Meigle 5.

*Later series.* Outlining is also found on another group of monuments. Outlined back-biting beasts are found at the base of panels of interlace on the right-hand side and back of the free-standing cross Monifieth 4, Angus (Allen 1903 III, fig 275). The front of this monument bears a group of four full-frontal ecclesiastics, and three of these recur on the slab from Invergowrie, Angus (no 1). Below the figures here is a pair of crossed beasts, partly outlined (Allen 1903 III, fig 266). On the other face of the slab is a cross which Stevenson (1955, 126) noted was close to the St Andrews compass-and-rule type. The peculiar form of infill used on the beasts here recurs on two pairs of twined felines on the cross-slab from Benvie, Angus (Allen 1903 III, fig 260),

and between them, in the panel of the cross-shaft, is an interlaced tail-biting lacertine with an outlined body, which will appear again later. Simple outlined plait occurs on the slab from Farnell, Angus (Allen 1903 III, 219–20), and in a flattened form similar in execution to the St Mary's stone on the late cross-slab from Ardchattan, Argyll (Allen 1903 III, 378). Some features of this last stone link it to the eastern group we are dealing with. It will be seen that in the later phase outlining is relatively restricted geographically N of the Forth to S Angus. In the area between the Forth and the Tay, there is only one other example, the outlined pair of interlaced beasts, one fish-tailed, on the cross fragment from Carpow, Perthshire (Allen 1903 III, 313). S of the Forth there are another three monuments, and these serve to link the group with Anglo-Saxon sculpture.

From Coldingham, Berwickshire, comes part of a cross-shaft ornamented with a pair of biting animals apparently interlaced head-to-tail; the bodies are outlined. More Anglo-Saxon in form are the cross-shaft from Aberlady (Allen 1903 III, 428), on the back of which are four outlined intertwined birds of manuscript derivation, and the cross fragment from Tynninghame, East Lothian (Stevenson 1959, 46–7), on the right hand side of which is a pair of affronted birds with outlined necks.

It will have become clear that the monuments possessing 'later series' outlining fall mainly into the groups (late 9th and 10th century) proposed by Stevenson (1955; 1959, 55). In discussing Monifieth 4, he noted the 'curling animals at the bottom double-outlined in the Anglo-Danish style of 10th-century Northumbria' (1955, 128), and it is indeed to the S, to Northumbria and Mercia, that we should look for the origins of the style. If we accept that the double outline owes something to the Scandinavian Jellinge style, we may attribute it to the end of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century (Wilson & Klindt-Jensen 1966, 105–6). In her recent reviews of Anglian sculpture in the 9th century, however, Cramp would see it as being a native development, present in the 9th century at a time before she would recognise any Scandinavian influence on Anglian sculpture, although the technique carries on into her period VII (first half of the 10th century) and later (Cramp 1977, 230; 1978, 10–14). Beyond allowing us to assume a fairly late date for our fragment, however, this does not help us to narrow down its context or date.

*The Animal.* It is here that we must turn to the details of the animal design and the type of animal represented on the St Mary's piece. Although it is impossible to discuss the matter in detail in the present article, it is clear from the work of Dr Henderson (1978, for example), that much useful information may be gained from a closer study of the typology and relationships of the animals on the later stones. Thus Professor Cramp (1977, 230 & figs 62–3; 1978, 13 & fig 1.1, 1.2) has shown that in Anglian art there is a development from the fantastic oriental beast, in the form of a feline or griffin-like creature, treated as an independent, natural beast, into more schematised and flattened forms of feline/canine, long-necked beasts and lacertines, used singly or in pairs as formal compositions; these finally become enmeshed in tails which grow from their tongues or have their bodies intertwined in various ways. It is possible to see the St Mary's beast as forming part of such a sequence in Pictland (fig 3, some of Cramp's animals are given for comparison). No attempt is made to give all relevant animals or complete series: this awaits further work.

We shall confine our attention to one animal-type only. In origin it is probably a lion, derived from Eastern prototypes, but other ancestors may be found in earlier Germanic metal-work. It is related to the paired animals found, for example, in the Canterbury Psalter (BL MS Cotton Vespasian A.1) at the feet of the vertical supports of the arcade round the depiction of David composing the Psalms (fol 30v), where already the lions have become more generalised feline/canine forms. The right-hand pair, though affronted, seize their tails in their mouths as



FIG 3 Comparative animal types: 1. Gilt bronze object, Ireland (after Henry); 2. Rossie Priory, Perthshire; 3. St Vigeans 14, Angus; 4. Woodray, Angus; 5. Monifieth 3, Angus; 6. Benvie, Angus; 7. Invergowrie 1, Angus; 8. Gloucester 2; 9, 10, 11. Elstow, Bedfordshire; 12, 13. Crieff, Perthshire; 14. Aycliffe, Co. Durham. (2-6, 12-13 after Allen, 8-11 after Cramp). Not to scale

they look back. These two features are to be of importance later. Henderson has pointed out (1967, 152-3) that a similar illustration to fol 30v must have been known to the sculptors of the Hilton of Cadboll and Aberlemno Roadside crosses, and has further drawn attention to the strong Mercian affinities of the Nigg cross, the Hilton of Cadboll cross, and the St Andrews sarcophagus. These Boss Style monuments should date to around the middle of the 8th century; this would accord with the c AD 730-740 date of the Canterbury Psalter, itself possibly with Mercian influence. This is the background we might expect for our later monuments, with their Anglian affinities. In Pictland, our beast seems initially to be the 'lion-derived' feline/canine, having a bulbous forehead and biting jaws with prominent canine teeth, as on the probably 8th-century slabs from Rossie (fig 3.2) and Woodray, Angus (fig 3.4). Further developments are prefigured in the Durham *Cassiodorus* (first third of the 8th century; Durham Cathedral Library B.II.30) on fol 81v, where our beasts occur in the upper panels of the side border in a mesh of fine interlace, and in the lacertine form already developed on the probably 8th-century gilt bronze object from Ireland, now in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at St-Germain (fig 3.1; Henry 1965, 215, fig 28). On this latter piece the beasts, themselves lacertine, are gripping bovine- and human-headed lacertines in their jaws. This feature may be compared with the example cited from Rossie, and with the creature from Woodray (Allen 1903, III, fig 258c), with its bovine-

derived tail. The feline gripping the twisted head of a bovine is also found on the Woodway slab, and also occurs in more naturalistic forms in Pictish art. The scene must have a symbolic meaning. Henderson has compared the St-Germain piece with the Pictish Boss Style monuments quoted above, while the bovine with unified eye, ear, and horn occurs already in lacertine form in the Book of Kells (for example in the upper right-hand corner frame of the portrait of St John (fol 291v). This serves to give us a *terminus post quem* in the middle to later 8th century for later developments. Our beast next occurs, in slightly more stylised form and with outlining, on the St Vigean 14 recumbent slab (fig 3.3) performing as one of the lions in a Daniel scene, and the next stage of development may be seen, perhaps, in the fragmentary beasts in a 'head-only' Daniel scene on the Monifieth cross-slab no 3 (fig 3.5; Allen 1903 III, fig 243). These seem to have longer necks and more exaggeration of forehead and jaws. The incised carving of the back of this slab might, however, be used as an argument for an earlier place in the sequence. In the phase represented by the Invergowrie 1 cross-slab (fig 3.7), the beasts are paired, but unlike the Canterbury Psalter beasts, they are crossed, and grip each other's tails in hooked jaws. These jaws and the bulbous foreheads lead to the even more stylised beasts of the Benvie slab (fig 3.6), with their bodies turned into ribbon interlace (in the lower example with outlining), who are biting their own tails. The affinities of the St Mary's piece with the last two slabs, and especially Benvie, should be clear. The ribbon form of the Benvie beasts suggests analogies to the S. We have already noted the relation of the Invergowrie slab with the St Andrews cross-slabs. An even later stage, typologically, than the last-mentioned pieces, may be represented by the sinuous-bodied 'zoöomorphic' vine-scrolls on the sides of the clearly late cross-slab at Crieff (fig 3.12–13, Allen 1903 III, 313). Here the snout has disintegrated, the canine teeth have been reduced to mere ornament, and the body has been disintegrated into vine-scroll derived forms. Fig 3.12 shows a 'head-to-tail' pair of our beasts in a form related to the Northumbrian 'medallion' vine-scrolls, while fig 3.13 shows a clear kinship with the free-standing cross at St Andrews, no 19, a piece which, as we have already seen, bears some relationship to the St Mary's fragment. The left-hand side of St Andrews 19 (Hay-Fleming 1931, fig 29) has a similar sinuous band, from which tendrils, which seem not to be able to decide whether they are geometric interlace or vegetable, emerge. The state of this cross makes it hard to see whether the ends of the band have any traces of our animal or not. While a similar disintegration into hook-jawed, stylised beasts can already be seen on the Insular-inspired first cover of the Lindau Gospels (c AD 800; Hubert *et al* 1970, 211–13, pl 192), the general parallel between the Pictish and Anglian sequences suggests that the process continues through the 9th and 10th centuries, according well enough with the traditional dating of most of the stones in the later phases.

A consideration of the pattern in which the beast from St Mary's is caught up may help us further. The size of the fragment does not allow us to decide whether we are dealing with a single animal eating itself, or with a double animal pattern. We are certainly not dealing with two affronted or crossed animals; although the simple loop in the tail, rather than a more elaborate knot as in the stylistically earlier affronted animals on the Gloucester 2 cross (fig 3.8; Cramp 1978, fig 1.1t), links the St Mary's and the Invergowrie slabs. The combination of outlining and interlaced tails with a medial line (itself a 'late' feature) may be seen in the beasts from Elstow, Bedfordshire (fig 3.9 (Cramp 1978, fig 1.1s) for the double animal; fig 3.10 (Cramp 1978, fig 1.2k) for the single version, which should be compared with the Benvie example (fig 3.6)). If our fragment represents two beasts, they must be in the elongated 'head-to-tail' position which is not uncommon on later Pictish slabs, occurring for example on the Drosten stone at St Vigean, on the cross-slab no 1 at Kingoldrum, Angus, on a fragment from Jedburgh (Henderson 1978, 95 & pl 3.10) and possibly on the Crieff slab (fig 3.12). A further example may be seen in the

outlined fish-tailed beasts from Carpow, mentioned above. The same general form occurs further S, and we may again refer to the Elstow cross (fig 3.11; Cramp 1978, fig 1.2q). None of the patterns mentioned, however, presents the sinuous form of the St Mary's piece, though we cannot rule out a two-animal form. When we consider the group of single animals, however, we find a closer parallel. Among the group of sculpture from the church of St Andrew, Aycliffe, Co Durham, apart from finding a parallel for our outlined ribbon animal on cross 4 (even if a different type of animal, and a pair) (Morris 1978, 108 & pl 6.4d), we find on cross 3, side 1, a downward-biting beast with a sinuous body enmeshed in its tail, the end of which it holds in its mouth (fig 3.14; Morris 1978, 107 & pl 6.3c). This is very close indeed to the St Mary of the Rock beast, although the head differs, and at Aycliffe the tail first passes over the body, not under it, and fills the spaces left by the undulation of the body with a Stafford knot instead of a simple loop.

This is important for two reasons. The identification of the pattern allows us to say slightly more about the nature of our fragment. Whether we have a single sinuous beast as at Aycliffe, or a double one as at Crieff, the pattern will be symmetrical; as we have seen, the Aycliffe beast and the allied forms at Crieff and St Andrews cross 19 occur on the sides of crosses. If we are dealing with the side of a monument, and not, as first appears, the face, we can proceed to estimate the axis of the design, and hence roughly the centre-line of the side. Having one edge, the thickness of the original monument at this point can then be estimated. The result is c 180 mm, somewhat thinner than the two free-standing crosses at St Andrews, and thicker than the recumbents or most of the cross-slabs. It corresponds with the thickness of the upper part of the Crieff slab, however, and accords reasonably with that of the relevant crosses at Aycliffe. If, as an hypothesis we assume for the St Mary's beast the proportions of the Aycliffe design, then the minimum length required to fit it in would be of the order of 1 m. On the other hand the fragment might be part of a recumbent slab or grave-cover. No further implications may be drawn as to the form of the original monument. It is now time to turn to the chronological implications of the Aycliffe beast.

Aycliffe crosses 3 and 4 are crucial for dating. While the animals could easily be seen as being in the Jellinge style (*v supra* p 359), giving a date between AD 875 and the second half of the 10th century, Professor Cramp, in her consideration of the cross from St Oswald's Church, Durham, has adduced good reasons for seeing the animals as part of a 'Lindisfarne Revival' following the arrival of the Lindisfarne community at Durham c AD 995 (Cramp 1966). This view would see the Aycliffe crosses as part of a Durham school of the 11th century. Analysis of the interlace and of the Aycliffe Crucifixion scenes also suggests a late 10th- to early 11th-century date (Morris 1978, 103). While realising the dangers of extrapolation with so little evidence, and over such a distance, it seems attractive tentatively to suggest a similar date for the St Mary of the Rock fragment and with it the other members of the Sinuous Style: St Andrews cross no 19 and the Crieff cross-slab. This allows us to tie in the later end of the sequence of development sketched in fig 3, and to take another small step toward an understanding of the sequence and chronology of later early Christian sculpture in Scotland. So late a date need not be a surprise, if the quality of the sculpture of the doorway of the Round Tower at Brechin Cathedral (Allen 1903 III, 252) which should be of the same date, be remembered (even if this does point to links in a westerly and not a southerly direction). The connection implied between Durham and St Andrews at this time should equally cause no surprise, given evidence of links with Northumbria since the foundation of St Andrews, the ecclesiastical importance of the two centres in the 11th century, the later links evidenced by the Saxo-Norman form of St Rule's tower (built perhaps within a century of the sculpting of our piece), and even later those with Durham shown by the builders of the Cathedral itself.

It has been suggested that this stone was imported from Northumbria. To check this, Dr A R MacGregor kindly examined the stone. With such a homogeneous rock as sandstone, precise conclusions are difficult to make, but it is superficially similar in fabric to some of the local 'compass-and-rule' slabs. Examination in thin section shows that it lacks features common in N English sandstones, and is most likely to be of local E Fife origin.

This chance discovery, then allows us to take a few tentative steps forward, but the situation will remain unsatisfactory until more detailed work is published on the later Pictish stones, their animal ornament and their interlace. St Andrews may well prove to be a key to our understanding, but it is important not only that the stones already known be adequately published, but also that archaeological work be undertaken within the area of the early Christian sites, so that we have a better understanding of the context of the sculpture, and hopefully so that we might recover more sculpture, with luck from contexts which will allow advances in the relative or absolute chronologies of these stones.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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