

Jerpoint Cloister Fragment at Sheepstown

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BUILT into the ruined North Wall of Sheepstown Church (Nat. Mon. No. 73 B) near Knocktopher is a fragmentary dumb-bell sectioned cloister column with a carving in relief of the lower half of a two-bodied grotesque with wings and claws, and tails spiralling inwards towards each other (Plate 1).



Canon Carrigan¹ mentions the existence in Sheepstown graveyard of "a fragment of an ancient stone with a carving of two animals in relief." This undoubtedly refers to the stone under discussion, which was probably cemented into its present position during repair works carried out at the site in 1951.

The stone must have been removed from Jerpoint sometime prior to the beginning of this century, maybe to serve as a gravemarker just as other cloister columns were removed for that purpose to Thomastown and Knocktopher.²

The lower half of one of the reconstructed cloister columns at Jerpoint³ is missing and the Sheepstown fragment seems to be the missing piece.

This column fragment at Jerpoint has the head and broken-off bust of what Rae mistakenly describes as a cherub,⁴ but which is in fact the upper part of the two-bodied grotesque on the Sheepstown fragment. The carving matches perfectly and the two pieces if placed together would form a complete column. There is no carving on the back of this column fragment at Jerpoint, so presumably the Sheepstown fragment is also plain on the back. A fragment with a similar two-bodied grotesque from the Jerpoint cloister is illustrated by Rae in his article.⁵

¹Rev. W. Carrigan, "The History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory," Vol. IV, p8.

²E. C. Rae, "The Sculptures of the Cloister of Jerpoint Abbey" — JRSAL 1966, No. 96, p64.

³IBID, Plate 8(a).

⁴IBID, p69.

⁵IBID, Plate 7(d).



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