

Notes on Cup & Ring-marked
Stones, with description of a
specimen recently found in the
Dunrobin Woods by the President

In March 1864 the late Sir James Simpson read a paper on this subject before the Socy. of Antiquaries of Scotland. This paper, as information increased, at length expanded into an Imperial Octavo vol. of 200 pages with 36 illustrative plates and numerous woodcuts, published in 1867.

In that interesting & valuable monograph Sir James describes 7 varieties of such markings from simple cups to those surrounded by many concentric rings. He ~~describes~~^{notifies} the occurrence of different varieties on the same stone or rock surface, then the chief deviations from the generic types and afterwards their mode of production. In the specimen recently found near the upper path in the Dunrobin Wood & about a mile N.E. from the Castle, some of the markings are different from any known to him although simple cups are most common. The mode of production, which is evidently by picking out & not grinding is of interest in as much as this is rare in Scottish examples. Sir James (p. 13) says "I have not seen on our Scottish stones any decisive specimen of these sculptures that gave the idea of their occasional execution by that process of picking or punching that has long been used in some forms of Stone Carving. . . . In some Irish stones the circles are cut out in the form of dots or by punched work."

Specimens of several common types & some of rare & indeed unique design have been found by my brother in the neighbourhood of Dingwall. Some ^{of these} are on stones widely distant from each other, but at Mountgrace occurs a group of 13 large masses of mica schist on the side of a hill all of which are more or less Cup-marked. I have had the good fortune to find specimens in the Chamberlain at Clava, Nairnshire, in a similar Cairn at Eddentoun, in a large stone Circle near Beaupark & on Slabs connected with two of the Pictish Towers in this County. Dr. Lawson Fair discovered Cups on the lid of a Stone Coffin near Emsay. Mr. Fowler on an earth-fast stone near Keirloch, & Mrs. Mitchell, Ribblesdale on a rock close to the interesting Lochan Hacan, or his farm, said to have been the locality of a hunting residence of King Haco the Dane, and also the rock into which fugitives from the Spanish Armada threw their treasure when pursued by the natives. A gold coin of the period was certainly taken from thence in the cleft of a Cow's hoof, & is now in our Collection.

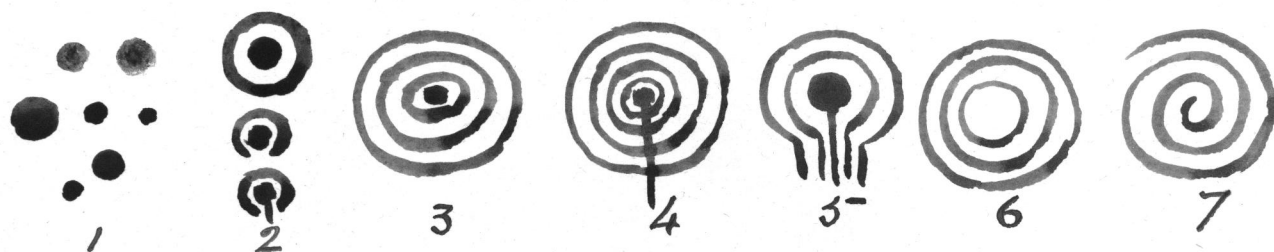
The localities in which such stones have elsewhere been found are places connected with sepulture, with archaic habitations, or isolated rocks & stones & in Cairns. They occur in Ireland, in Brittany & in Scandinavia. Much has been written about them meaning but it is still a mystery.

Cann Greenwell, Sir Gardiner Wilkinson &
Dr. Graves believe them to have been plans
of ancient villages. They have also been
called Dials & a sort of Gambling Tables. but
their occasional occurrence on vertical rock
surfaces disposes of this latter hypothesis.
They have been regarded as relics of Sabæan
worship & as representing the sun, moon
& stars, also as Tribal records, & sometimes
as emblems of Druidical philosophy.
Phallic worship has also been suggested
but Sir James repudiates this explanation,
while Mr. Jolly who has lately been one
of the most active & successful explorers
in this field is decidedly inclining towards
~~that explanation~~. It. This theory is supported
by Prof. Nilsson of Sweden who ascribes them to a
Phoenician origin & Prof. Saxe of Oxford, in his
Ethnological notes to the 'Teacher's Bible' has shown
that the Cultures of the Phoenician Race was but
a form of Nature-worship. Eleven Centuries
before the beginning of our era there extending
& skilful navigators traded for Tin with Cornwall
& with the Baltic for Ambers. On the supposition
that the rock-sculptures in question are
connected with them we have a suggestion
of their date, but it would be unwise to decide
upon their age merely from a knowledge of the
early ^{period} date at which they might have been
introduced. One argument bearing upon this
part of the subject is that they are found in
connection with burials of the 'Stone period'.

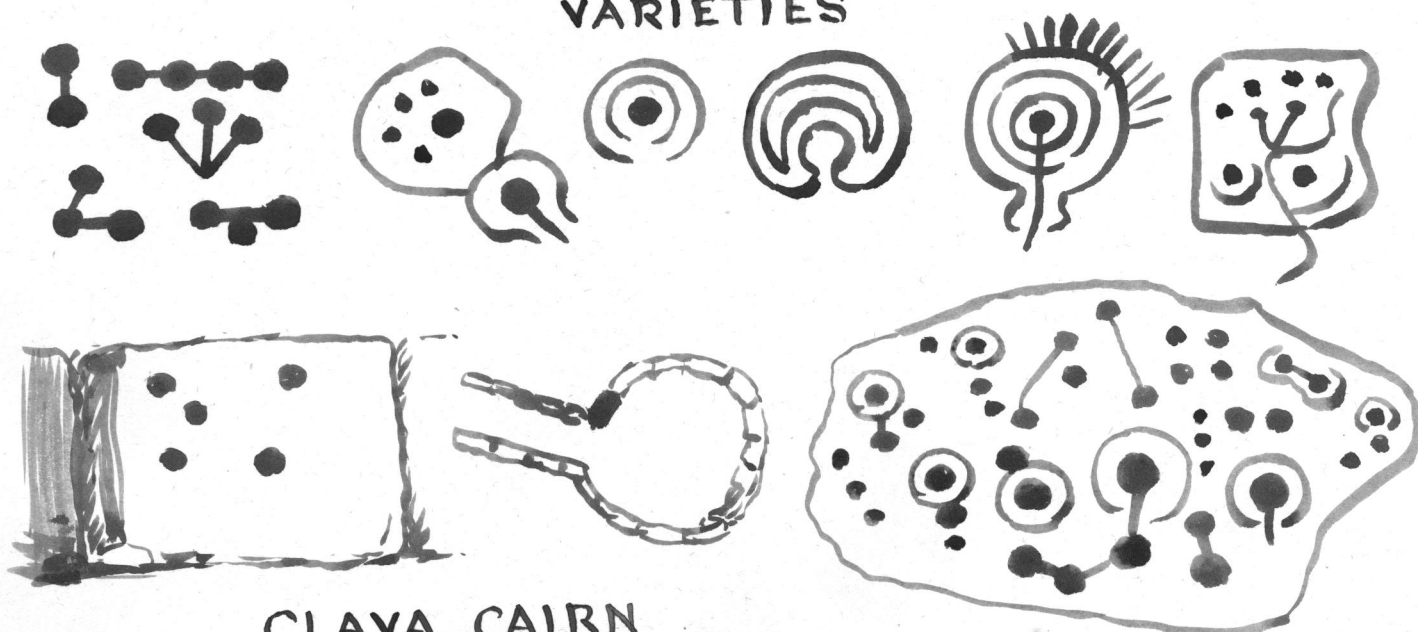
The Embos Cist contained a flint arrow head.
 The specimens found at the Pictish towers here
 were on detached stones which may have been
 removed from earlier sites. Their remote date
 is suggested by their precedence of letters and
 traditions, no case being known where they are
 associated with letter-cutting in any form.
 or where tradition has a word to say as to their
^{origin or} meaning. The most suggestive argument
 as to their antiquity, however, seems to be
 offered by their geographical distribution.
^{scattered all the way from the far west of Scotland to the east of England}
 They occur throughout the whole length of
 the British Isles from Cornwall to Orkney.
 & also across their whole breadth from Kerry
 to Northumberland. Everywhere they present
 a similarity of type & like a peculiar language
 suggest similarity or consanguinity of race.
 They express a common thought of a common
 people. But how long is it since a common
 race inhabited simultaneously or successively
 the distant parts of Britain now named also
 also the intervening districts? During the
 first 10 or 12 centuries our country was overrun
 by 4 races - the Romans, Saxons, Danes & Normans.
 At the date of the earliest Roman invasion, half
 a century before Christ. the population may
 indeed have been mainly Celtic, but in the
 year 81 they had passed through their bronze age
 for weapons & fought at the battle of Merton Hampden
 with iron swords. We have seen however
 that the Cup-cuttings belong to the stone period
 which preceded the Bronze - How far back
 this may & indeed must carry us we cannot
 venture to say. The ^{generally} ~~same~~ style of sculpture
 points in the same direction, & the ^{chief} ~~pieces~~ ^{shards} of Chert
 found near ~~the~~ ^{perhaps} our Cup-marked Stone
 was ~~probably~~ the tool with which its cups
 were carved.

Apr. 5th 1881.

TYPES



VARIETIES



CLAVA CAIRN

DINGWALL



IRELAND



BRITTANY



DENMARK

CUP AND RING MARKS ON
ROCKS & STONES.