

CHAPTER VI.--LAPIDARY SCULPTURINGS IN IRELAND.

In Ireland, stones, sculptured with cups and concentric rings exactly like those we have described in the preceding pages, have been found, I believe, in different parts of the island. For example, in Plate XXVII. is a rough sketch of a large slab cut with cups and rings, and groups of circles apparently with radial grooves similar to those of Scotland and England, which was found in the western county of Kerry. A

cast of it has been for many years in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy.¹

I have been furnished by Dr Wise with a sketch and note of a flag sandstone found by him at a place called Aghnacerribb, near Dingle, in Kerry, partially carved in a similar style to the preceding stone from the same county. The stone at Aghnacerrib is about five feet three inches square, flat on its surface, and probably *in situ*. Upon it are four cups of different sizes, surrounded by two or three concentric circles, made with almost geometrical precision. No radial ducts or grooves traverse the circles. In the neighbourhood of the stone are other interesting archæological remains, as stone circles, a circular fort, and many clog-hauns, or ancient stone dwellings.

As specimens of apparently similar sculptures found existing on the eastern side of the island, I may refer to two slabs of granite, discovered and sketched by Mr Du Noyer, from two localities in the county of Dublin. The first, a slab lying close to the base of the round tower of Rathmichael Old Church, in the county of Dublin, has cut upon it two groups of four concentric circles, each connected by three lines. The second slab was used as a tombstone in the churchyard of Tullow, and has an ornamentation. In both these specimens the circles are, I believe, formed by intermittent dots or pits, and not, as in the British specimens, by continuous incised lines. But these sculptures are peculiar from another circumstance, namely, that outside the circles, and intermediately between them, are marked out straight lines running in different directions, an appearance never seen around the cup and ring cuttings of Scotland and England. Mr Du Noyer suggests that those two stones under discussion were "carved in Pagan times, and the stones subsequently adapted to Christian uses."²

I have in a previous page (p. 24) referred to a cromlech at Rathkenny

¹ Dr Graves has, I am informed, made an important collection of analagous sculptures from stones and rocks in various parts of Ireland, and we may soon expect a full account of them from his able pen.

² Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. viii. p. 61. I have seen sketches of stones found in Ireland at East Goulane and Banoge with rings and cups, and with the same exterior straight lines; but the circles in these stones are also, I am informed by Mr Stuart, made up of pits, and not of lines.

in Ireland, sculptured with cups and rings, and apparently, from the sketch sent to me, scratched over with many straight lines.

A series of most interesting sepulchral sculptures has lately been discovered by Mr Conwell, of Trim, upon the stones of an extensive group of ancient chambered cairns, reared upon the summits of a ridge of hills known as Sleive-na-Callighe, in the county of Meath. The cairns are circular externally; and internally the largest consist for the most part of small chambers and cists arranged in a cruciform shape, the narrow entrance passage representing the shaft of the cross. The chambers are formed by large flags set on edge, and rough pillar stones, while the roofs are made of overlapping and converging slabs. Many of the stones forming the walls of the chambers and cists are carved, most frequently by punched or picked work, and sometimes by scraping and the chisel; and so varied is the sculpturing, that no two stones are exactly alike. I am indebted to the courtesy of Mr Conwell for some sketches of them. Among the figures are numerous cup excavations, groups of concentric circles, with and without central depressions, the rings being sometimes complete, sometimes incomplete, and interspersed with volutes or spirals. But in addition to these figures, and freely commixed with them, are much more elaborate sculptures in the form of lunet-shaped, zig-zag, and straight lines; loops, arches, lozenges, and diamond or cone-shaped figures; dots, stars, and circles, with radiating rays; some quadrangular, triangular, and reticulated forms, devices like the stalk and fibre system of a leaf, &c. In the "Meath Herald" for 21st October 1865, Mr Du Noyer, an excellent Irish antiquary, compares some of these carvings at Sleive-na-Callighe to the figures of a wooden shield, of a gold torque, a two-wheeled chariot, a boat with high poop and stern, &c.

Within these ancient graves, the walls of which are so curiously carved, Mr Conwell has found many portions of burned human bones; with various relics and implements, as pieces of broken and very rude pottery; several round stone balls¹ of syenite and ironstone, &c.; the beads of a stone necklace; a white flint arrowhead, and some flint flakes; two or three hundred sea-shells, and rounded white sea-pebbles: an

¹ The late Dr Petrie had in his collection one of these balls, which he told me had been found within the sepulchral chambers of New Grange.

enormous collection of bone implements, as portions of bone pins, numerous broken pieces of bone tools and combs, many of them carved with figures, curved lines, and circles,—one of them containing the representation of a stag in crosshatch lines; besides hundreds of broken pieces of bone, levelled or smoothed apparently with cross lines, as if intended for carving; an ornamented bronze pin; one or two pieces of jet; and in the southern side crypt of one of the largest cairns, and near the entrance of the crypt, a few small amber beads, with portions of several small bronze rings, five or six fragments of glass and glass beads, a ring of iron about half an inch in diameter, an iron punch five inches long, with a chisel-shaped point and broadened head, and five or six other small corroded pieces of the same metal. The drawings in Plate XXVIII. are copies of the figures cut on some of the cysts or chambers; the last and lowest drawing being much more finished by the artist than the first, and giving a general view of the most elaborate crypt yet detected in this most interesting necropolis. A large stone basin was placed on the floor of the crypt.

I do not know whether the remarkable sculptures within the chambered cairns or tumuli of Sleive-na-Callighe should be regarded as earlier, or later, or contemporaneous with the diversified and decorative carvings which exist in Ireland on some of the stones of the gigantic old barrows that stand on the lower banks of the Boyne, a few miles above Drogheda. Several years ago I had an opportunity of visiting the great old necropolis there, and of seeing the megalithic interior of New Grange along with my friend, Sir William Wilde. From his admirable work on the Boyne and Blackwater, there is copied into Plate XXIX. a series of specimens of the sculptures cut on the stones of the tumuli of New Grange and Dowth.

Figure 1 shows the double spirals, &c., carved on the enormous curbstone that stands at the entrance to the passage or gallery of New Grange. This gallery, which is sixty-three feet long, leads into the high dome-roofed chamber which forms the centre. These volutes, like others in the interior of this vast sepulchral mound, are formed of a double coil, commencing with a loop. On this curbstone the lines are said to differ from those on our lapidary cuttings in Scotland and England by being apparently raised in relief, rather than incised. In

fig. 6 is represented a small portion of the edge of a lintel, which projects horizontally a short distance above and within the line of the present entrance of the gallery—carefully carved in lozenge and sandglass patterns—and with the lozenges partially dotted or pitted with minute pick work. The great interior chamber has three crypts or recesses leading off from it; and fig. 2 gives a view of the eastern crypt, which is slightly narrowed at its entrance, and has the stones composing its roof carved over with circles, volutes, and chevrons. These carvings have been executed after the stones were built into their present places, as the patterns pass from one stone to another. In the bottom of the crypt is seen—what existed in all the three recesses—an oval, slightly concave, stone basin. A similar stone basin of still larger size is represented in Plate XXVIII. as having been found in one of the crypts at Sleive-na-Callighe. In fig. 3 we have a more enlarged view of some of the markings in the eastern crypt,—the double spirals, in most instances, having seven turns. Fig. 7 shows another variation in the type of the cuttings, as seen on one of the blocks forming the roof of the same or eastern crypt. A leaf-like or fern pattern, cut upon the surface of one of the stones of the western crypt, is shown in fig. 4. A peculiar linear and angulated scroll, like a broken gridiron, is cut upon a stone facing the western crypt, and is reproduced in fig. 5. Several of the stones in this pyramid-like tomb have round cuttings upon them, which Sir William Wilde speaks of as small sockets or mortises (cups?), made “for the insertion of wedges, either to split the stones or lift them.”

When describing the sculptures of New Grange, Sir William Wilde states, that in Ireland, tomb-sculpturing or tomb-writing of similar characters “have been found in analogous megalithic tombs in the counties of Down and Donegal,” and in the great sepulchral mound at Dowth, about half a mile from New Grange. Several of the blocks forming an interior chamber at Dowth are carved like those at New Grange, and present no small beauty of design; but some of the patterns are different—as, for example, two selected in figs. 8 and 9, showing concentric circles around a central cup; a double ring with a crucial pattern in its centre—such as is not unfrequent in Scandinavian lapidary sculptures; another ring, with numerous straight star-like radii diverging from its outer surface (a common device upon the sepulchral stones at

Sleive-na-Callighe), and another double circle with straight lines cut below it, and straight lines and zig-zags placed over it.

The two Plates XXVIII. and XXIX. are given with the view of showing the highly decorative and ornamental style of some of these Irish lapidary sculpturings, as compared with the comparatively ruder and simpler, and hence in all probability earlier, cup and ring cuttings which are found on the archaic carved stones of Scotland and England.

PLATE XXVII

SLAB FROM KERRY, IRELAND.

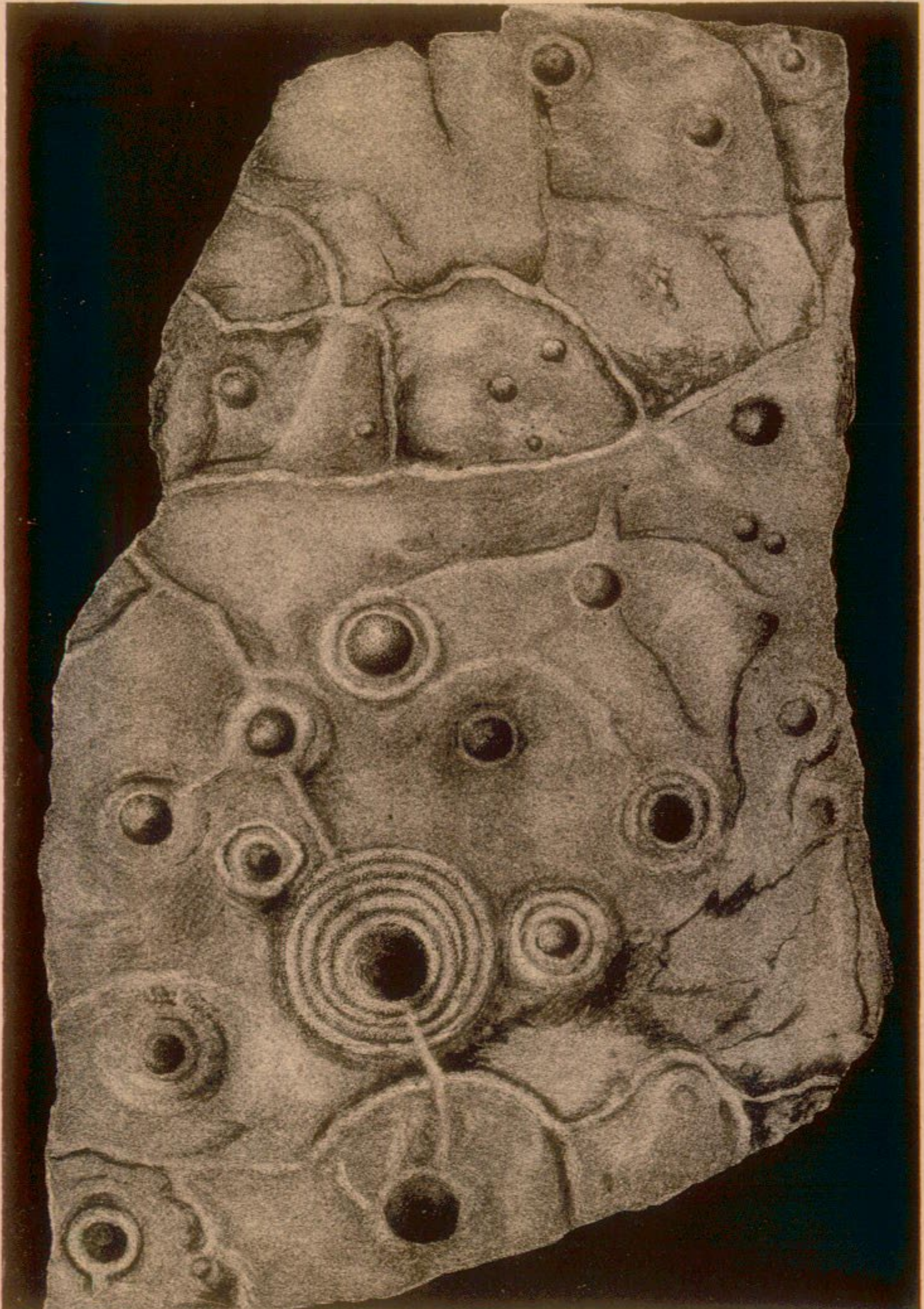


PLATE XXVIII.

FROM CHAMBERED TUMULI AT SLEIVE-NA-CALLIGHA, IRELAND.



FROM TUMULI OF NEW GRANGE AND DOWTH, IRELAND.

