

## A CLASSIFICATION OF WEST YORKSHIRE 'CUP AND RING' STONES

By E. T. COWLING

The name 'cup and ring' stone is used locally to define a series of carved rocks which are to be found in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Their most common feature is a small cup-like hollow, surrounded by a circular groove; hence the name, 'cup and ring.' The cup seldom exceeds two inches in breadth and an inch in depth, whilst the groove is usually half an inch deep and one inch wide.

Cup and ring markings are not confined to West Yorkshire; groups of similar markings are to be found in the Peak District, Northumberland, Ireland and the West of Scotland. Spain, Portugal, Southern France, Brittany, Norway, Sweden and Italy all have markings of generically similar type.

The West Riding carvings are widely known and some have been reproduced.<sup>1</sup> The main group is centred on Rombalds Moor, the heather-covered watershed of the rivers Aire and Wharfe. The greater number are to be found above the towns of Ilkley and Burley. Another group lies above the town of Baildon on the Aire side of the watershed.

Recent finds have greatly increased this area. An out-lying group on Snowdon Moor, the watershed of the Wharfe and Washburn, has been described.<sup>2</sup> We have a fine but battered marking from the Chevin, the hill ridge to the south of Otley (No. 2). Another simple example comes from Middleton Moor (No. 22). To the west we have a fresh find (No. 36), near Counter Hill, Addingham Moor, whilst cup markings have been noticed on the bed stone of the rocking stone at Rogan Hall, near the source of the river Washburn.

No. 24, the only 'cup and ring' stone recorded from Nidderdale, again greatly increases our area.<sup>3</sup> All

<sup>1</sup> See list of authorities at the end.

<sup>2</sup> Cowling, 'Cup and Ring Markings to the North of Otley,' *Y.A.J.*, Part 131, vol. xxxiii, 1937, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> This stone is now in the Leeds Museum.

these markings are worked on the surfaces of living rock or large boulders. There is no record of any association with datable remains. I have long been curious as to the origin, meaning and age of rock carvings in the neighbourhood and have examined all available evidence and theories which have been offered in explanation of these problems. The evidence gathered locally, together with knowledge gained of markings in other areas, justifies an attempt to classify the West Yorkshire markings.

Prof. Raistrick in a survey of the 'cup and ring' markings of Rombalds and Baildon Moors<sup>1</sup> points out that the most elaborate markings are grouped above Ilkley. A second group of less intricate design is centred above Burley, whilst a third group, comprised of even more simple markings is situated near Baildon. From these facts he suggests that the practice of carving 'cup and ring' markings arrived in this area as a developed cult and that its subsequent history was one of degeneration. The cult was first practised in the Ilkley area but became centred near Burley at a later date and was moved to Baildon when in the latest stage of degeneration.

Whilst agreeing that the carving of 'cup and ring' stones appears to have been first practised locally in the neighbourhood of Ilkley, I suggest that, as markings of all types are found in close association in that area, the custom was continuous there during the whole time they were used in the district. The Burley group points to a wider spread of the practice. Many of the simple markings of the Ilkley and Burley groups are repeated among the Baildon carvings, pointing to spread to that area when the other two groups had been in the making for some time. The Snowdon Moor markings appear to be largely due to a similar culture-spread.

A glance at a series of drawings of West Riding 'cup and ring' markings will show that many of them are related and that the symbols of which they are composed are to be found in varying forms both well

<sup>1</sup> Raistrick, A., 'Cup and Ring Marked Rocks of West Yorkshire,' *Y.A.Y.*, Part 125, Vol. xxxii, p. 33.

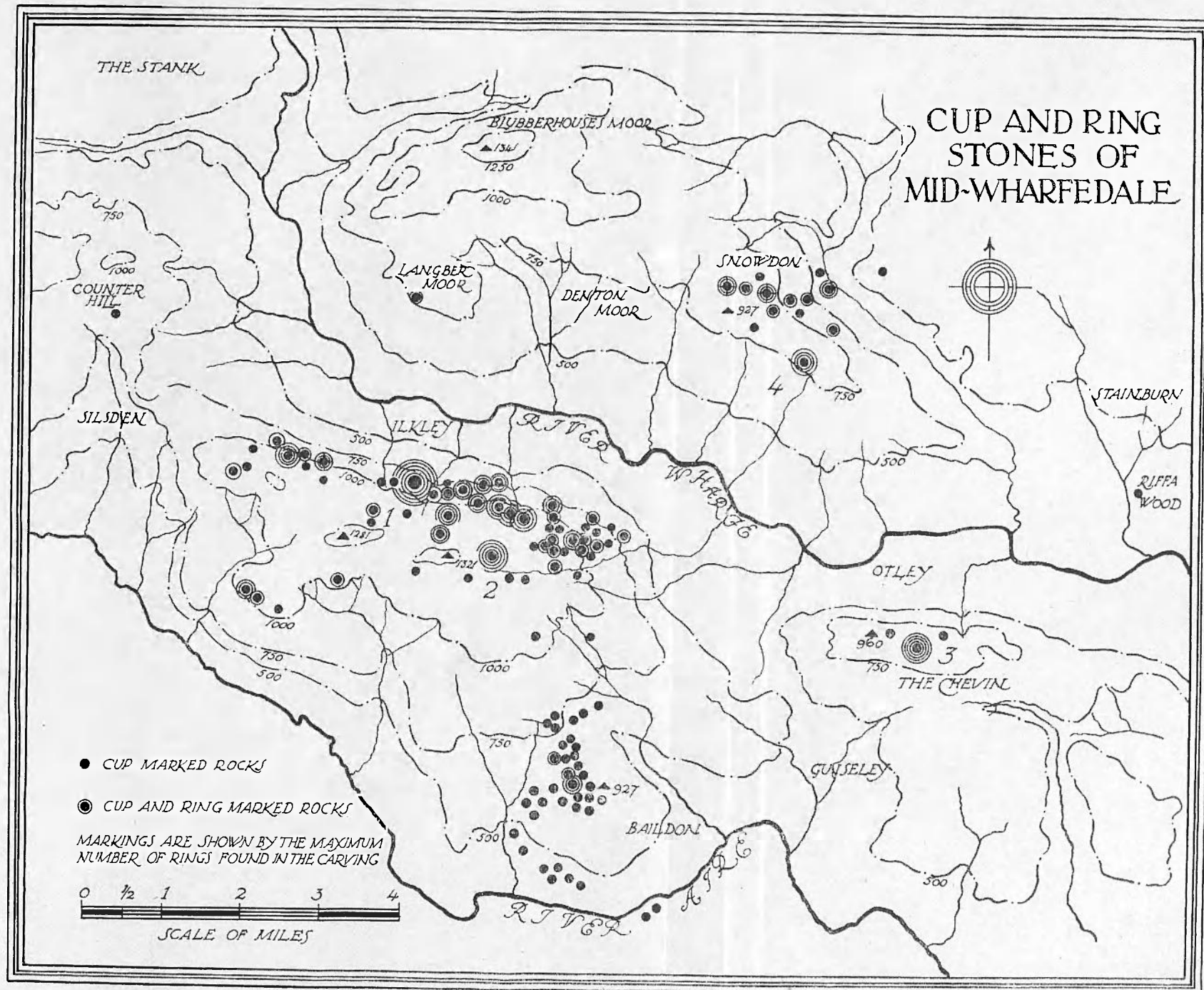


FIG. 1.

executed and definite, or badly defined and crude. An attempt to classify these symbols according to the idea that the simplest were the first has always resulted in failure ; a reversal of this theory yields immediate results.

Taking no. 1 as our first example, we find in the various ring systems we have two grooves rising in the central cup and cutting through the concentric rings to become a ladder-like marking, found in varying forms in No. 1 and seen in different stages of degeneration in Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 17, 18.

The ' tree ' marking of No. 10 is seen in similar stages of simplification in Nos. 26, 30, 31, 34 and 35.

The broken concentric rings of Nos. 5 and 6 are again seen in Nos. 14 and 19.

No. 9, the swastika marking,<sup>1</sup> is copied, complete with whorl, in Nos. 12 and 19.

Such examples show that the more elaborate figures were copied and that the copies themselves were reproduced, as in Nos. 9, 12 and 19. This reproduction led to divergence and degeneration and in the more simple examples it is difficult to find the source of some features.

As the markings become simpler the number of concentric rings in any ring system decreases until we reach the stage when we have the cup with one ring. By grouping markings according to the maximum number of rings we have an easy means of local classification. Thus the ' Panorama ' marking, No. 1, is a five-ring figure, Nos. 2 and 3 are four-ring markings, whilst two-ring markings are numerous. Markings which have related symbols will show a decrease in the number of rings as the symbols become more simple. The ' ladder ' marking may be traced from the five-ring of No. 1 to the four-ring of No. 2 and through the succeeding class to the two-ring stage of No. 18.

This classification can be confirmed and amplified by examining the technique of the markings themselves. Prof. Breuil, in a wonderfully documented survey of European ' cup and ring ' symbols, centred on those of the megalithic chamber-tombs of Ireland,

<sup>1</sup> Note on date of this marking is at the end.

has been able to arrange them in four different groups according to the method of carving the rock surface.<sup>1</sup>

These groups follow each other in order of time.

The local markings may be classified according to the headings used by Prof. Breuil for the Irish carvings, with the exception of his Class I, the earliest series. By using Breuil's grouping along with the classification by the number of rings we get a more detailed arrangement which embraces all the West Yorkshire markings known to the writer.<sup>2</sup>

**BREUIL'S CLASS I.** Those in which the engravings are composed of scratched lines.

Although no markings of this class appear to be found locally, this type must be noted for possible finds. Markings of this kind would be particularly liable to weathering, but a naturally protected marking may await discovery.

A recently reported find in Littondale some twenty miles away is described as of this class. The carving consists of winding serpent-like lines; as the stone is very water-worn, no definite design is visible.<sup>3</sup>

**LOCAL CLASS 2.** 5 and 4 rings.

**BREUIL'S CLASS II.** Those inscribed with thin pecked lines.

No. 1 is by far the most elaborate local example showing this method of working. Nos. 2 and 3 have only one ring system with four concentric rings, but the figures are very similar in appearance to the carvings of No. 1. No. 4 has only three rings but it is the only other carving which shows this method of working. All these markings have complete rings and show the first stage of 'ladder' marking.

<sup>1</sup> Breuil, 'Presidential Address for 1934,' *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia for 1934*, Vol. vii, Part III, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> I forwarded the drawings used in this article to Prof. Breuil, pointing out the resemblance to Irish carvings and the similar methods of working. I am indebted to him for a long letter

in reply. He points out parallel examples in Ireland and comments: 'It is an important lot of new types or variations of older types, which, I believe, confirm my tentative interpretations.'

<sup>3</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, 'A Prehistoric Carved Stone in Littondale,' *Man*, Vol. xxxiv, nos. 210-229.



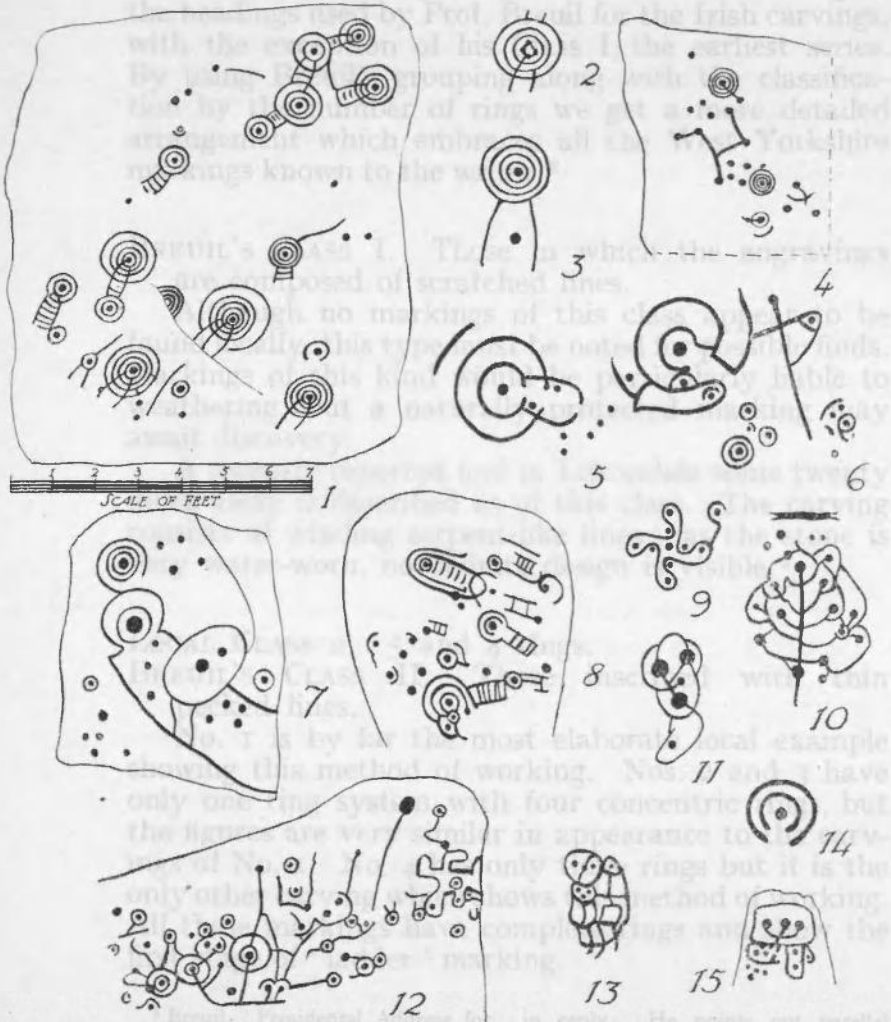


FIG. 2. CUP AND RING MARKED STONES IN WEST YORKSHIRE.

I forwarded the drawings used in this article to Prof. Bredt, pointing out the resemblance to Irish carvings and the similar methods of working. I am indebted to him for a long letter

in reply. He points out parallels in Prehistoric examples in Ireland and comments on new types or variations of older types, which, I believe, confirm my tentative interpretations.  
*Jacqueline Hawkes, 'A Prehistoric Carved Stone in Litchfield,' Man, Vol. xxxv, nos. 210-229.*

LOCAL CLASS 3A. 3 rings.

BREUIL'S CLASS IIIA. Those with deeply cut grooves.

Nos. 5 and 6 are very definite examples of this class, No. 7 is very similar, No. 8 is much weathered but does not appear to have been as boldly cut. The concentric rings of Class 2 become concentric curves and we have variations of developed 'ladder' markings.

LOCAL CLASS 3B. 2-1 rings. Cups, often linked, within enclosures.

BREUIL'S CLASS IIIB. Those which appear to show carving in relief, defined by a shallow groove.

No. 9, the 'swastika' or 'four-leg,' fulfils Breuil's classification. No. 11 appears to be a less successful rendering of a 'three-leg' symbol. No. 10 is an elaborate design with cups linked in a similar manner. Nos. 13 and 15 appear to belong to this class. Complete cup and rings have disappeared and there appears to be a desire to show linked cups within an enclosure.

LOCAL CLASS 3C. 2-1 rings. This class appears to be a local development. Many markings combine features of the earlier classes.

No. 12 has the broad grooves of Class 3a, but incorporates the swastika of Class 3b. No. 19 is probably a copy of No. 12 for we have the swastika complete with the whorl of the original. Nos. 16, 17 and 18 have variations of the 'ladder' markings of 3a but have lost the deep-cut grooves. No. 18 has three cups within an enclosure, a Class 3a feature, but again the surrounding grooves are shallow. No. 14 has very broad grooves but shallow. The carver appears to have copied the middle portions of Nos. 5 and 6.

Nos. 21, 22, 23 and 24 are all markings which afford similar features, but appear to be of later date having lost one ring.

No. 20 has the deep groove of Class 3a but the panel effect of many 3b markings. The isolating of a portion of rock surface in No. 29 and the complete filling of the area in No. 30 may be due to a similar striving after a panel effect.

Nos. 30, 31, 34 and 35 all show 'tree' markings after the style of No. 10.

No. 37 shows the final stages of degeneration, where instead of ring systems linked by double lines we have cups joined by a single groove. Three closely grouped cups, as in No. 36, show the final form of the 'three-leg' symbol, whilst the swastika is represented by four cups closely grouped.

The markings which have groups, often only consisting of four or five cups, with no definite arrangement, seem to be the final form of local rock carvings. These markings form the greater number of local markings and are widely spread.

CLASS 4. Those with 'pecked' areas.

BREUIL'S CLASS IV embraces a series of markings which are composed of small square or triangular panels cut in the rock surface to form continuous patterns. The surfaces of these figures show continuous 'pecking.'

There are no identical local carvings but some markings have small pecked areas, all of which are circular in shape, as in Nos. 25, 26 and 28. Markings of this kind may be contemporary with the later ones of Class 3c for they are usually 'single' ring markings.

No. 27 has two circular pecked areas which appear to have been imposed on an earlier marking so as to obliterate the ring systems; traces of a cup are to be seen in one area. The imposing of 'pecked' markings on earlier carvings is a feature noted in the Irish series.<sup>1</sup> Markings of this kind may be more plentiful locally as 'pecking' is hard to detect when weathered.

There is evidence that many markings were not completed at one time. No. 4 has the slender pecked lines of Class 2 and the wide grooves of Class 3a. In No. 1 we have a group of ring systems all linked together in one corner of the rock surface. Only one figure shows this linking, whilst the remaining markings show resemblance to those of Nos. 2 and 3 or the

<sup>1</sup> Breuil, 'Presidential Address for *Anglia*, 1934, Vol. vii, Part III, p. 304. 1934,' *Proc. Prehist. Soc. of East*



exaggerated ' ladder ' markings which appear to be a later development.

Similarly, markings found in groups carved on adjacent rocks often belong to different classes, Nos. 10, 14, 23 and 35 are all near to rocks which have simple cup markings. These features show a wish to use the same area at different times.

#### DISTRIBUTION

The four markings which constitute our local Class 2, show the arrival of the practice of making cup and ring markings in the Ilkley area and the spread to the ridge of Rombalds Moor, Otley Chevin and Snowdon Moor, an area embracing the middle portion of the valley of the Wharfe. The advent of the broad deep groove of Class 3a introduces a later method of working which appears to have been adopted by the resident population, for examples of this class retain the ' ladder ' of earlier markings and are confined to the same area. The swastika type of marking of Class 3b indicates local changes for not only is it copied and incorporated amongst the markings of the Ilkley group but forms the main kind of the carvings in the Snowdon Moor area. The presence of one earlier marking, No. 4, in this vicinity suggests an expansion of population rather than conquest.

Class III shows the reproduction and amalgamation of the features of earlier classes, the ' ladder ' and ' tree-like ' markings being persistent. The Burley Group is composed of markings of this class with two exceptions, Nos. 25 and 28. The close proximity of this group with that of Ilkley suggests a spread of population rather than culture. The simple examples of Baildon Moor must be due to an even later spread.

The prevalence of the ' ladder ' marking in the West Riding, often commented upon, appears to be due to the fact that it was the most prominent part of the first marking and was extensively copied. The prevalence of the ' cup and ring ' symbol itself may be due to the same reason of local adoption and copying during times of comparative isolation.

It appears that the local population received and practised the cult of making 'cup and ring' stones during a period of settlement and expansion. Outside influence must be responsible for the appearance of new methods of working, but there appear to have been long periods when development was entirely local. The 'pecked' markings of Class III must have arrived when the custom was declining and, if datable elsewhere, would mark the approximate conclusion locally.

These local happenings can only be due to greater causes. If we can align the two, our 'cup and ring' carvings will become valuable milestones in West Yorkshire prehistory.

#### NOTE ON THE AGE OF THE SWASTIKA MARKING

As several authorities quote the Swastika marking as an example of Iron Age art mention must be made of any evidence for dating this carving to be found locally.<sup>1</sup>

The carving is not in association with any recognizable remains of Iron Age date, although such remains are plentiful in the district. The position on the edge of the escarpment is similar to that of several carvings close at hand. The appearance of the rock surface and the method of carving are identical with other markings; the rock surface has two large rock basins, a feature of other carvings.

Locally, a marking of intricate pattern is often surrounded by carvings of simpler type on the same or adjacent rock surfaces, this holds good in the case of the Swastika carving. Swastikas, apparently copies, were incorporated in other markings, showing that this symbol is a feature of the whole group of carvings. If this carving is one of the group then the question becomes that of the date of the group itself. This would afford scope for a long article but it is sufficient to point out that the related carvings of Ireland, Brittany and North-west Spain all afford evidence of a Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. Swastikas are found in Denmark and Sweden surrounded by symbols of Bronze Age type.<sup>2</sup> The Italian carvings of Iron Age date are accompanied by carvings of human beings, a feature not to be found on any Yorkshire carvings.

<sup>1</sup> Leeds, *Celtic Art*, 59; Jacobsthal, *Journal of Roman Studies*, xxviii, 1938, 65, 67; Glyca, *Yorkshire*, 112.

<sup>2</sup> Holmberg, A. E., *Skandinaviens Hölhristningar*, Stockholm, 1848: (1) Swastika with cups, as at Ilkley but

without the loop, at Lose, Holmberg, Fig. 102. (2) Swastika without cups on rock at Sotinas, Fig. 107. (3) A version of the swastika with a loop, Fig. 29.

LIST OF 'CUP AND RING' MARKED STONES

Group 2. Those with thin pecked lines and four or more rings.

Marked 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the map.

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Fawcraus Rock | Hilley Moor.      |
| 2. Gosses Ridge  | Rensdale Moor.    |
| 3. Kingley       | The Churn, Otley. |
| 4. Gosses Ridge  | Wether Moor.      |

Group 3. Those with small, dark, lines shown on the map as

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 5. Gosses Ridge | Hilley Moor.      |
| 6. Gosses Ridge | Rensdale Moor.    |
| 7. Gosses Ridge | The Churn, Otley. |
| 8. Gosses Ridge | Wether Moor.      |

Group 1b. Those with groups of rings, marked with

numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37.

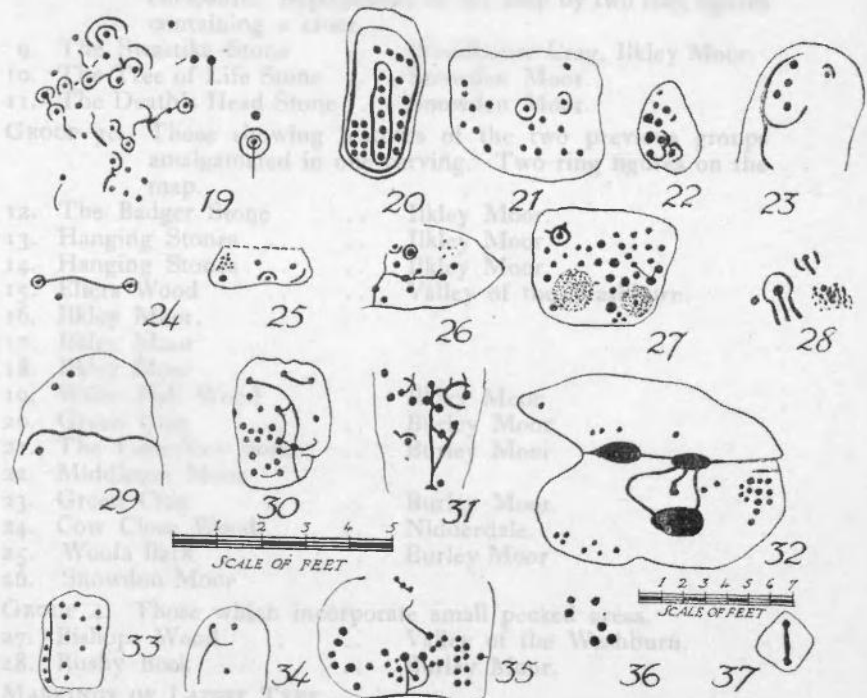


FIG. 3. CUP AND RING MARKED STONES IN WEST YORKSHIRE.

- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 19. Green Crag Enclosures | Burley Moor.            |
| 20. Baildon Moor          |                         |
| 21. Doubler Stones        | Addingham Moorside.     |
| 22. Baildon Moor          |                         |
| 23. Baildon Moor          |                         |
| 24. Ellers Wood           | Valley of the Washburn. |
| 25. Counter Hill          | Addingham.              |
| 26. Baildon Moor.         |                         |

It appears that the local population received and practised the cult of making 'cup and ring' stones during a period of settlement and expansion. Outside influence must be responsible for the appearance of new methods of working, but there is no reason to have been long periods when development of the local The 'pecked' markings of Class III must have arrived when the system was declining, if it came elsewhere. The 'cup and ring' markings could be the result of a local conclusion.

These local happenings can only be due to greater causes. If we can align the two, our 'cup and ring' carvings will become valuable milestones in West Yorkshire prehistory.



#### NOTE ON THE AGE OF THE SWASTIKA MARKING

As an example of the swastika marking is an example of local evidence for dating this marking.

The swastika marking with its cognate remains of local evidence, although it remains as a plain marking on the district. The position on the edge of the escarpment is similar to that of several carvings close at hand. The appearance of the rock surface and the method of carving is identical with other markings; the rock surface has two large rock basins, a feature of other carvings.

Locally, marking of swastika pattern is often surrounded by carvings of a simpler type on the same or adjacent rock surfaces, this holds true in the case of the Swastika carving. Swastikas apparently copied were incorporated in other markings, showing that this symbol is a feature of the whole group of carvings.

If this carving is a feature of the whole group then the question becomes that of the date of the group. This would afford scope for a long article but it is sufficient to point out that the related carvings of Ireland, Brittany and North-west Spain are evidence of a Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. Swastikas are found in Denmark and Sweden surrounded by symbols of Bronze Age type.<sup>1</sup> The Italian carvings of Iron Age date are accompanied by carvings of human beings, a feature not to be found on any Yorkshire carvings.

<sup>1</sup> *Leeds Celtic Art*, 29; Jacobsthal, *Journal of Roman Studies*, xxviii, 1928, 63, 67; Glynn, *Yorkshire*, 112.

<sup>2</sup> Holmberg, A. E., *Skandinaviens Hällristningar*, Stockholm, 1848: (1) Swastika with cups, as at Ilkley but

without the loop, at Lox, Holmberg, Fig. 102. (2) Swastika without cups on rock at Sotina, Fig. 107. (3) A version of the swastika with a loop, Fig. 29.

## LIST OF ' CUP AND RING ' MARKED STONES

GROUP 2. Those with thin pecked lines and four or more rings.  
Marked 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the map.

1. Panorama Rock .. .. Ilkley Moor.
2. Grubstones Ridge .. .. Rombalds Moor.
3. Knottie's Stone .. .. The Chevin, Otley.
4. Greystone Allotment .. .. Weston Moor.

GROUP 3a. Those with smooth, deep lines, shown on the map as three ring figures.

5. Hanging Stones .. .. Ilkley Moor.
6. Hanging Stones .. .. Ilkley Moor.
7. Piper Stone .. .. Addingham Moorside.
8. Barnishaw Stone .. .. Ilkley Moor.

GROUP 3b. Those with groups of cups, usually linked, within an enclosure. Represented on the map by two ring figures containing a cross.

9. The Swastika Stone .. .. Woodhouse Crag, Ilkley Moor.
10. The Tree of Life Stone .. .. Snowden Moor.
11. The Death's Head Stone .. .. Snowden Moor.

GROUP 3c. Those showing features of the two previous groups amalgamated in one carving. Two ring figures on the map.

12. The Badger Stone .. .. Ilkley Moor.
13. Hanging Stones .. .. Ilkley Moor.
14. Hanging Stones .. .. Ilkley Moor.
15. Ellers Wood .. .. Valley of the Washburn.
16. Ilkley Moor.
17. Ilkley Moor
18. Ilkley Moor
19. Willie Hall Wood .. .. Ilkley Moor
20. Green Crag .. .. Burley Moor.
21. The Langshaw Stone .. .. Burley Moor.
22. Middleton Moor
23. Green Crag .. .. Burley Moor.
24. Cow Close Wood .. .. Nidderdale.
25. Woofa Bark .. .. Burley Moor
26. Snowdon Moor

GROUP 4. Those which incorporate small pecked areas.

27. Bishops Wood .. .. Valley of the Washburn.
28. Rushy Beck .. .. Burley Moor.

## MARKINGS OF LATEST TYPE

29. Green Crag Enclosures .. .. Burley Moor
30. Baildon Moor
31. Baildon Moor
32. Doubler Stones .. .. Addingham Moorside.
33. Baildon Moor
34. Baildon Moor
35. Ellers Wood .. .. Valley of the Washburn.
36. Counter Hill .. .. Addingham.
37. Baildon Moor.



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