

III.

CUP- AND RING-MARKINGS ON CRAIG RUENSHIN, WITH SOME COMPARATIVE NOTES. BY ALISON YOUNG, F.S.A.Scot.

These preliminary notes make no pretence of offering a complete classification or chronology of carvings, but are in the main a record. On an outcrop of schistose rock running north-east and south-west, just above the 800-foot contour at Craig Ruenshin above Birnam, are two sets of cup-markings associated with concentric rings and channels. I have been enabled to study these through the courtesy of Mr Donald Stewart Fotheringham of Murthly Castle. The site commands an extensive prospect. Across the Tay to the north rises the Deuchry and the wide sweep of the Grampians. On the east there is an uninterrupted view to the Sidlaws, in fact, "Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill." The steep slope of Craig Ruenshin rises a few hundred yards to the west, and to the south the ground falls away to Birnam Burn.

The larger group of carvings (fig. 1) is on a flat piece of living rock measuring $9\frac{1}{2}$ by $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet. There is a slight rise to the south, where the smaller group is found on a tilted rock face. The larger group comprises twenty cups, nine surrounded by circles. One cup is encircled by two concentric rings, a second by three rings, and a third by three rings and a fourth ring only partly discernible. In the last case there is a cup in the third ring and another in the remains of the fourth. There are some vestiges of channels from the cups through the circle, but the whole is badly weathered.

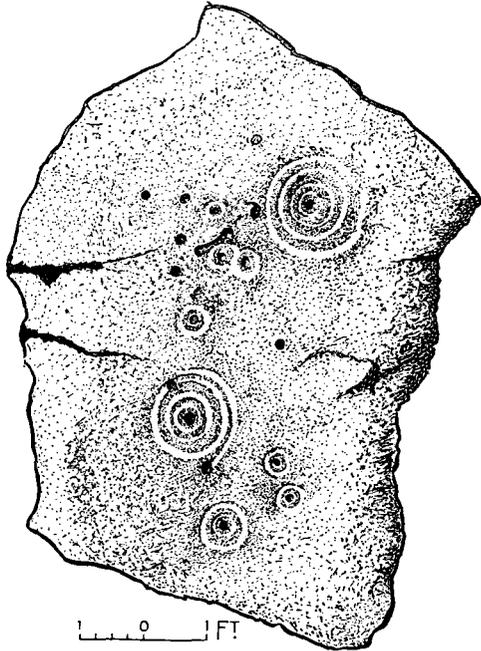


Fig. 1. Carved Rock Surface at Craig Ruenshin.

The smaller group (fig. 2) consists of eight cups, twice associated with circle and channel, twice with a circle only, and twice with two circles and a channel which in one instance ends in a cup. These markings are also weathered, but less than in the first group, perhaps because of the slope of the rock which faces south and drains freely. Between the two groups there are a few cup-marks at one point; these have been covered with earth and are well preserved.



Fig. 2. Carved Rock at Craig Ruenshin.

The cups are unequal in size and depth, and none of those that I have found are ringed. On the same ridge of rock, 340 yards to the north, is the group of markings described by Mr Thomas MacLaren in the *Proceedings*, vol. liv. p. 207. These cups are very much deeper and some are surrounded by a single ring.

Cup-marks combined with concentric rings are not peculiar to the northern part of Great Britain, though more numerous here and in Ireland than in the South. The patterns include one or more rings round a central cup, with or without channels from the centre to the edge of the rings or beyond in straight or curved lines, joining another cup or cup-and-ring group and are usually associated with

unringed cups of various sizes. As there are so few methods of classifying groups of markings such as those at Craig Ruenshin, it may be of interest to note some other associations of these symbols, particularly in the counties of Perth and Angus.

As the first group we may take the carved rocks. Many are known throughout Scotland, and probably many more are covered by turf or so weathered as to pass unnoticed. Whatever their symbolism may imply, these are valuable evidence; for on them alone can we be certain that the carvings are in their original context.

In Perthshire there is a series on the rock at Duncroisk in Glen Lochy¹ consisting of cups surrounded by one or two concentric rings. Associated with them are many deep cups arranged in rows. The whole complex is on a rocky outcrop in a field by the river. There are other

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxix. p. 92.

sites along the north shore of Loch Tay and an interesting carved boulder at Braes of Balloch. Another natural rock covered with cups and concentric rings is exposed at Urlar (above Aberfeldy), where there are also rows of very deep cups as at Duncroisk.

In addition to natural rock-surfaces some cist-covers are carved with analogous symbols. Examples have been found at Craigie Hill (Midlothian),¹ Carlowrie (West Lothian),² Coilsfield (Ayrshire),³ and Tillicoutry (Clackmannan),⁴ and elsewhere. The slabs are reported to

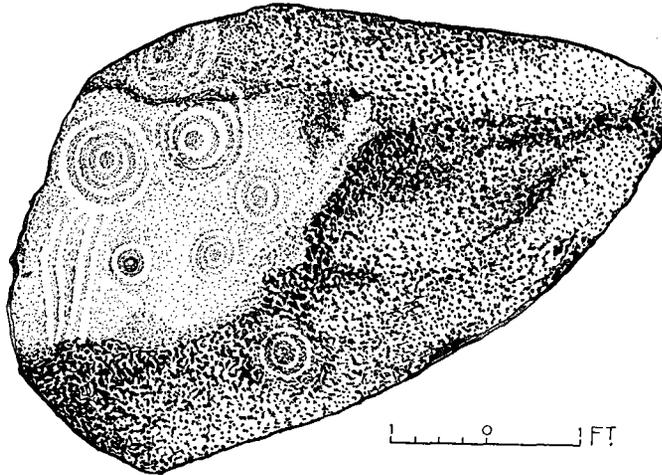


Fig. 3. Cover-stone of Cist at Tillicoutry.

have been carved on the side facing inwards. In two cases the associated funerary vases were early Food Vessels. The carvings are cups and rings combined with long channels running from the cups in some cases, *e.g.* at Tillicoutry (fig. 3). Here the carved slab (now removed to the grounds of Tillicoutry House) formed the capstone of a burial cist set at the centre of a stone circle at the Cuninghar. The burial was accompanied by a food-vessel (fig. 4) of early type with pierced lugs. Unfortunately the sandy hillock on which the monument stood was dug away, the burial circle and the embankment demolished, and the carved granite slab (fig. 3) is all that remains. The drawing made by Col. Montgomery in 1785 of the Coilsfield Stone shows wavy lines reminiscent of those from the burial mounds on the plain of the Boyne;

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. vi., Appendix, p. 28.

² *Ibid.*

³ Munro, *Prehistoric Scotland*, p. 221.

⁴ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxix. p. 192.

to these there is another Scottish parallel on a slab forming part of the roof of an earth-house at Barns of Airlie, Angus. In connection with cist-covers it should be noted that the position of the carved stones was the same in each case, so that their use was not haphazard, though it is not proved that the artist originally carved them as grave-covers.

Other cup- and ring-marked stones, now known only as isolated boulders lying with a broad inscribed surface upward, may well be cist-covers moved from their original positions in field work or in digging



Fig. 4. Food-vessel Urn from Cist at Tillicoultry.

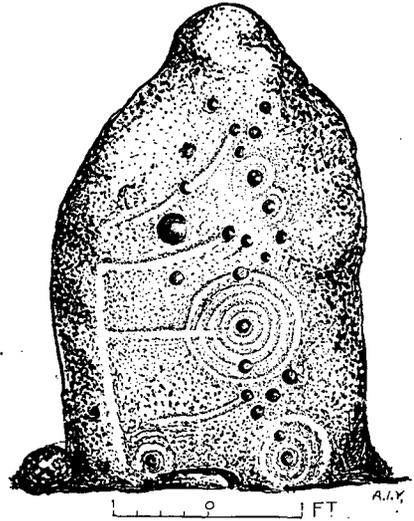


Fig. 5. Standing-stone, Gladsfield.

sand-pits. One such slab at Malling on the Lake of Menteith is called the Peace Stone, and it may be significant that many of these isolated stones are named or have preposterous legends attaching to them. On the Malling stone a double cup is surrounded by one set of rings and long channels run over the edge. At Braes of Cultullich (near Aberfeldy) another carved stone lies on a small hill among some boulders; one of these too is inscribed with deep cups, and a hundred yards away is a rock marked with one cup of unusual size together with various more normal ones.

A third group appears to be formed of single standing-stones ornamented with cups, rings and channels. These too may be the remains of more complicated monuments. An interesting example is the so-called Gladsfield Stone (fig. 5) on Newbiggin Farm (Cargill, Perthshire).

One face of this roughly pointed monolith is covered with cups and

a series of concentric rings, many joined to a main stem or channel (fig. 5). An owl-like or rude anthropomorphic figure can be very plainly seen on this stone and can also be discerned on stones at Braes of Cultullich (near Aberfeldy) and Monzie (near Crieff). Among several analogies on pottery I should like to draw attention to vases illustrated in the *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvi. pls. 1 and 4. This pattern is discussed by M. l'Abbé H. Breuil in his Presidential Address to the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia for 1934, where he deduces a close affinity between

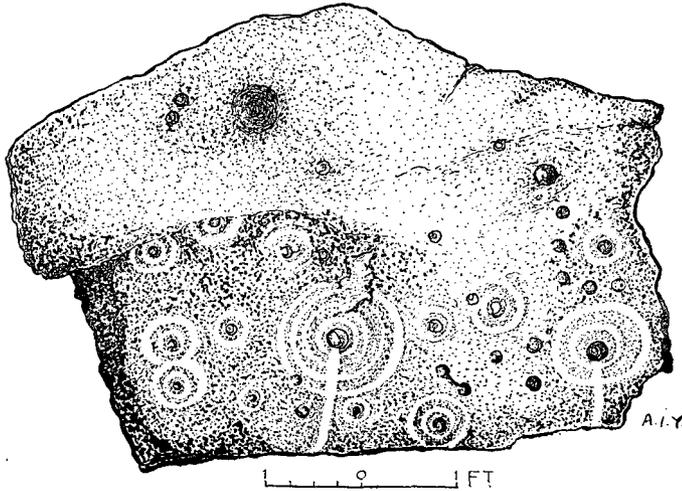


Fig. 6. Stone outside Circle at Monzie.

the Iberian art and the Irish and in a lesser degree the English and Scottish. The Gladsfield Stone has probably been moved and stands close to the field of Moonshade Butts, to which is attached the legend of a stone circle buried in the interests of agriculture and where a rock outcrop bears cup-marks.

Another Perthshire stone at South Friarton (Scone parish) is known to have been moved from the centre of the field on the verge of which it now stands. Mr MacLaren brought this stone to my notice and told me that a former proprietor had moved it. Now broken across some of the cups, it was once certainly longer than it is now and may have stood upright though its position cannot be determined with any certainty. Solitary boulders are unsatisfactory evidence; being easily moved, there can be little proof of their original site or association.

A fourth group comprises cup- and ring-marked stones near a circle,
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but not forming part of it. A good specimen is seen at Monzie,¹ with the double ring or owl face showing clearly (fig. 6). The finest example of such stones is at Salkeld in Cumberland where Long Meg, a sandstone monolith about 16 feet high, is covered with cups and circles on the lower part of one face. A few yards away is a circle of sixty-seven huge stones, the whole forming an imposing monument in wonderful upland surroundings. But though these carvings appear to be connected with the circle near which they are found, it is difficult to decide whether they are contemporary with the original setting; excavation might prove this.

Fifthly, carved stones appear in connection with underground

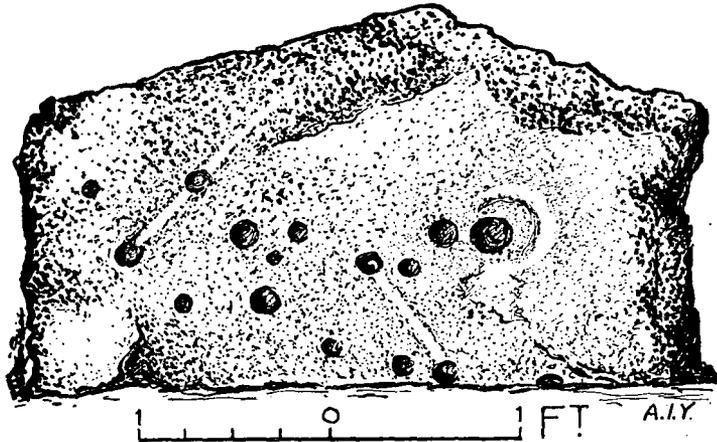


Fig. 7. Stone in Passage of Earth-house, Pitcur.

dwellings or weems. Here they have their appointed places as integral parts of the structures at the doorways or in passages. At Tealing (Angus)² an example of a cup with circles and channel is to be seen on the ground stone at the side of the entrance. Whether owing to the nature of the rock or to degenerate workmanship, it has a slipshod appearance. A heavily cupped slab devoid of rings lies beside the earth-house. The records of the excavations at the site give a varied assortment of finds which indicate occupation dating over a considerable period. The relics include stone cups, bronze rings, querns of mica-schist and free-stone spindle-whorls, and a fragment of Samian ware. The fact that the ringed stone appears to be part of the original structure would indicate that, whatever motive prompted its use as part of the building, it had importance at the earliest associable date.

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xvi. p. 91.

² *Ibid.*, vol. x. p. 287.

At Pitcur earth-house¹ two stones bear concentric circles while two others are cup-marked, one, heavily cupped, being built into the doorway of the inner room. A ring-marked stone (fig. 7) is in the passage between two galleries of this complicated building, while a great slab covered with engravings is supposed to have formed part of the roof and now lies face upward on the top of the weem.

These symbols of cup, ring and channel would appear to be of significance on rock-faces possibly in a serial connection, on downward facing cist-covers, therefore in association with the dead, and near stone circles in a funerary or other ritual connection. They are carved on stones used in a particular manner in structures wherein we find such evidences of domestic use as the stone cups, querns and whorls from Tealing Weem. Monuments found in varied sites and at varied contour lines, they represent a desire to record something worth exact and patient labour, show persistent ideas despite differences of presentation and workmanship, and appear to be a recognized form of thought transmission.

Apart from such conjectures, may they prove guides to the movement of a people who, in this country of contrasts, left their monuments alike on the seashore of Galloway and the Perthshire hill-face, on the bleak uplands and in the fertile straths?

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxiv, p. 202.