

ART. XI.—*On a Cup-marked Stone found at Redhills, near Penrith.* By MICHAEL W. TAYLOR, M.D., F.S.A. (Scot).

Read at Kendal, July 7th, 1881.

THE attention of archæologists has been specially directed during recent years to a species of rude sculpturing of stones and of rock-markings which from time to time have been discovered in different localities. These markings are incised or cut into the surface of the stone or rock, and assume usually the form of hollow cups or pits, oftentimes associated with incised concentric rings, and longitudinal or curved lines furrowed on the surface of the stone. The sculpturings are invariably of rude primitive workmanship, and evidently pertain to a very early age antecedent to the period of lettering. The hilly country of North Northumberland was the district in which they were observed in greatest numbers. They were first explored by the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club, and they were very fully described and illustrated by Mr. George Tate, F.G.S., Alnwick, in 1865, in a monograph "On the Sculptured Rocks of Northumberland." A description of these peculiar sculpturings was given also by the Rev. Canon Greenwell at the meeting of the Archæological Institute,* at Newcastle, in 1852. Professor James Y. Simpson entered ardently in pursuit of cup-marked stones in Scotland and elsewhere, and produced the fruits of his labours in 1867, in an exhaustive and beautifully illustrated essay "On the Sculpturing of Cups and Concentric Rings on Stones and Rocks in various parts of Scotland, &c." As recently as May, 1881, Mr. William Jolly, H.M. Inspector of Schools, Inverness, brought before

* The paper containing the result of the Rev. Canon Greenwell's observations was, I believe, lost, or was never published.

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the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, notices of a number of other undescribed stones with similar markings, which have since been found in the North Highlands.

These lapidary inscriptions are not unknown in Cumberland and Westmorland. Several years ago (in 1835) Sir Gardner Wilkinson discovered a concentric circle with four rings around a cupped centre on the face of "Long Meg," in the Salkeld circle.† I accompanied Sir James Simpson in one of his visits to Long Meg, when he examined the stone, and he found not one but several concentric circles carved upon it, which he has described and figured in his book from a photograph. Three or four of them are low down on the stone and much faded; they consist of circles of three and four rings with radial grooves.

About the same time, the Rev. Canon Simpson found some ring cuttings on two boulders forming part of a circle of eleven stones around a short cist in a large cairn, situated a few hundred yards to the east of Long Meg. On two of the stones still standing, which formed part of the long avenue which formerly existed at Shap, ring cuttings are observed, and have been figured by Sir James Simpson. One of them, a massive block, partly prostrate in Asper's field, presents two cuttings. One cup, six and a-half inches broad, and one inch and a-half deep, and a second cup, nearly three inches in breadth, three-quarters of an inch deep, with a single circle nine inches in diameter cut round it. On the "Goggleby Stone," standing about 150 yards south of the above-mentioned monolith, there is carved a circular disc, five inches broad.

At the meeting of this Society at Kendal during the present year a visit was made to the site of an ancient British camp, or fortified village, on the high ground of Hugill, in the Staveley district. Within the walled enclosure, and not far from the remains of the hut circles and

† See Journal of the British Archaeological Association, 1864.

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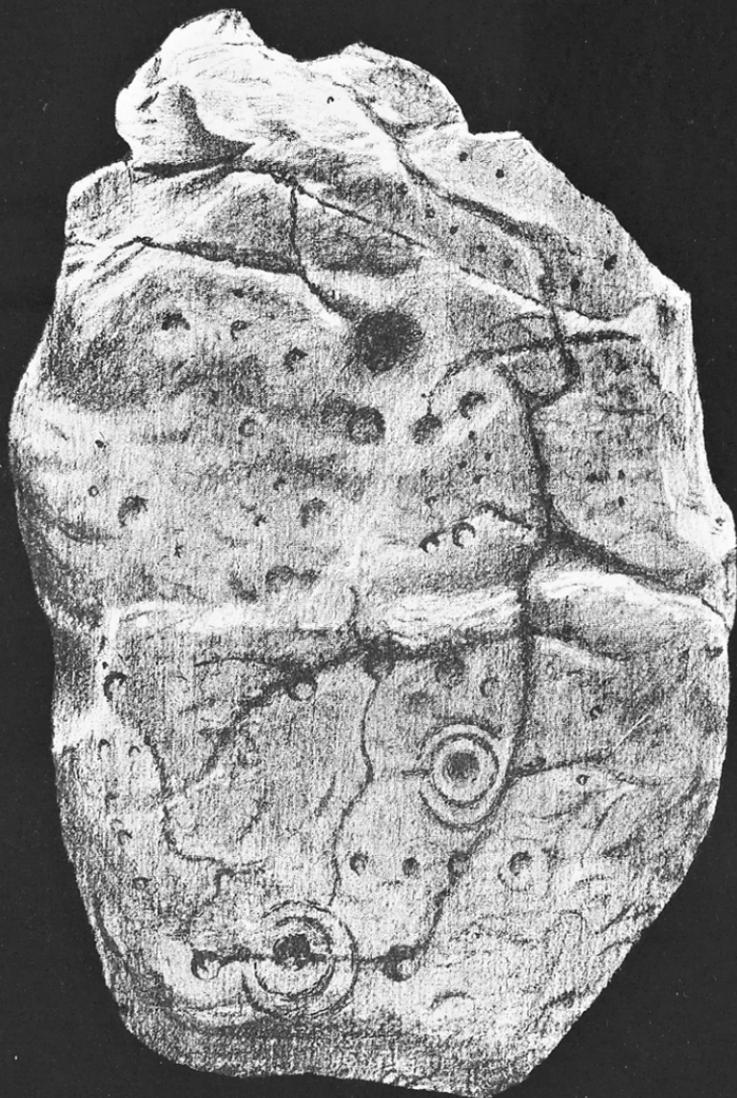
hollowed out excavations of the olden inhabitants, there are several boulders to be seen of considerable dimensions. It is possible that these may have been concerned in marking the place of burial of the ancient dead. On the face of one of these stones which is overthrown and laying prostrate, and partially buried, I noted the presence of an isolated cup-excavation, which appears to me to have been distinctly tooled by the hand of man, and not the product of natural disintegration or weathering. This cutting is of a regular rounded form, about an inch and a quarter in diameter, smooth on its surface, and excavated to nearly an inch in depth. It is not encircled by any ring cutting.

It is mentioned by Hutchinson* that during the last century an example of lapidary circles was found on two cobble stones, which formed the west end of a cist, which was discovered in opening a barrow near Aspatria. The sculptures consisted of single and double rings, some with cups and others with crosses in their centres. The cist contained a skeleton and the remains of a long iron sword and battle-axe, and a number of other articles in silver and gold. The find, however, was apochryphal in relation to Keltic forms of inscription, for, in the lapidary rings, according to the description, the "rims and crosses within them are cut in relief"—raised and not incised. This has probably been a Scandinavian grave.

The most remarkable cup-marked stone in Cumberland was discovered in the spring of this year at Redhills, in the Township of Stainton, about two miles from Penrith. As I was concerned in the disinterment of this stone, I feel it my duty to give a notice of it to this Society. On April 27th, some men in the employment of Mr. Jacques, the farmer at Redhills, were employed in sinking holes for a line of posts or wire fencing. This was for the purpose of fencing off from the arable land a portion of rocky pastoral

* Hutchinson's History of Cumberland, vol. ii., p. 288.

ground,



CUP-MARKED SLAB, REDHILLS, PENRITH.

ground, which forms the hill called Stainton Banks, which courses along the left bank of the River Eamont. In carrying out this line of fencing, the men struck a large slab of freestone, lying about ten inches under the surface. When this stone was uncovered and tilted back, it was found that the under surface was sculptured with curious markings, and underneath it appeared a quantity of bones and charcoal. I visited it the same afternoon, and with the assistance of Mr. Jaques and his men, a further exploration of the place was made. The grave had been sunk by quarrying in the limestone rock, which over this area is very near the natural surface; the space so excavated in the rock is about four feet by three feet six inches, with a depth of three feet, and the axis lies N.E. by E., and S.W. by W. Cobble stones have been used partially to line this cavity, but there is no flagging at the sides or bottom. The space is filled with loose soil, much of it of a blackish colour, amid which were detected some small pieces of burnt wood, and a quantity of calcined bones, all in a very fragmentary state. The corpse had not been cremated in or over the grave apparently, as neither the stones nor soil shewed evidence of fire, and the amount of charcoal was very limited, and had probably been introduced along with the cremated remains. No urn, nor remains of pottery, nor of implements were discovered. No barrow nor mound of earth covered this grave, although there were the remains of what seems to have been a round cairn to be traced on the slope of the hill, three hundred yards to the south. I found also near the top of the hill, not very far distant, what might be the remains of a small sepulchral circle, with some of the stones partially buried. There are excavated lines, possibly of old habitations, along the side of this hill towards the river, and the place is known in the neighbourhood under the name of Little Stainton. The principal interest in the discovery lay in the remarkable sculpture exhibited by the under surface of the cover stone. The

The stone consists of a block of white freestone. It has not been quarried, and many such slabs are found projecting on this hill of Stainton Banks, which is of the limestone formation. It is of a broadly ovoid form, and pretty regular shape. From end to end it measures 5 feet 4 inches, and from side to side at the centre 3 feet 6 inches, and tapering towards each end; it varies from 8 inches to 13 inches in thickness. The upper surface is rough and irregular, and scored longitudinally in many places with the marks of the plough-share and harrows, which have passed over it in frequent cultivation. The inferior surface which was presented towards the earth, shows a fairly smooth cleavage, and on it were carved the sculptural markings which I shall describe.

The tooling of these excavations may be said to display four types. First, Cup-shaped hollows of various sizes and depths. Second, Central hollowed cones surrounded by two concentric circles, not complete, but bisected by a radial groove. Third, Hollowed out channels, like gutters, running in various directions. Fourth, Little pits or depressions picked out in the stone. As I have said, the stone was broken in several pieces, but I have adjusted these and joined them as carefully as possible, and placed the stone upright, and now tolerably entire, against a north wall, so that it may be fairly photographed. In viewing it with a proper light, the sculpturings may be well made out, and appear to be arranged as follows:—Near the bottom, there is a central cup deeply carved, about 3 inches in diameter, from which proceed on each side two grooves, 6 inches long, which join two similar cups lying transversely in a straight line. Round the central cup are described two concentric rings, somewhat faintly incised. From this lowest line of cups, three gutters meander upwards over the surface of the slab; the main one takes a curved direction upwards on the right side of the stone, and receives a number of branches like the tributaries of a river from each side, and terminates on the free margin of the upper part of the stone. On the lower quarter of the stone, to the right, there is a large hollow cup, 3 inches in diameter, round which there are two well-executed concentric rings, the outermost of which has a diameter of 6 inches; these are cut by a radial groove, which joins the central gutter, and, in the opposite direction, at a point in their circumference, the circles fall into, and are subtended by, the side channel. There are only two cuttings with this annular arrangement on the slab; on the other hand, the simple cup cuttings are numerous, in fact, twenty-four may be counted. One of these cups is greatly larger than any of the rest; it is situated in the centre of the upper half of the stone, and on the first view it forms the most strikingly characteristic feature of the
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tablet. This cup is 6 inches in diameter, and it is carved out into a regular conical cavity, to the depth of 3 inches. The chisel marks are distinct and fresh, as if done yesterday, and there is a smoothness and regularity about it which shew that it has been executed with greater care than some of the other incised parts. The other cup-markings vary from 1 inch to 3 inches in measurement. A number of them (about twelve of them may be counted) are associated with the furrowed lines, either forming the beginning of a gutter, or joining or being included in the line of the channel itself. These form the series of the larger cup markings, and are an inch or more in depth. On the other hand, other of these cups are isolated, and scattered singly, and apparently without regular order, over the surface, and unconnected with the branch-like lines; these, for the most part, are more shallow depressions, and with less defined margins. Again, there is another class of markings on the stone; these are little pits or peck-marks, small irregular holes picked in the stone; they are very numerous, and are dispersed apparently irregularly over all the surface. I believe that these markings have been chipped or picked out, and are not, as some might suppose, the result of natural weathering, or from the solution or erosion of little spheroidal nodules in the sandstone of a more perishable mineral material.

It would be interesting to be able to define the kind of tool wherewith these incisions were made, whether of stone or metal? The determination of this point would assist us in estimating the antiquity of this peculiar practice of cup-marking. Judging from the tool-marks quite patent on the large hollowed cone on this stone, I am of opinion that they have been made by a flat-edged chisel, driven with a mallet. The indentations succeed each other so regularly, and in successive lines, as to indicate hewing, or chipping, with the tool applied to the place, and not by the irregular stroke of a pointed pick. The hollow certainly has not been excavated by any rubbing process by a flint or harder stone. But I believe it is quite possible that the instrument used may have been a flint chisel. Sir James Simpson set a man to work with a flint celt and a wooden mallet, and he executed in about two hours, and without difficulty, a circle, even on hard Aberdeen granite. So that it by no means follows, that the presence of ring and cup sculpturing, even on the harder and more primitive rocks, implies a knowledge of metallic tools on the part of the people who inscribed them. This stone is a moderately soft sandstone, and would be by no means difficult to cut with a flint instrument, so that so far as the evidence goes in this respect, it is as likely as not, that these archaic cuttings may have been fashioned during the stone age. Nevertheless there is nothing in the appearance of these incisions,
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might not have been achievable by the use of a metallic tool. So that really in this respect the evidence is negative.

This stone, as has been stated, was connected with a place of human sepulture; it was the cover of a kistvaen: but here also the digging out the contents of the grave afforded only negative results, any further than a knowledge that it was an interment by cremation, as was shown by the charcoal and fragments of burnt bones. No cranium, no urn, no implement was there, to afford a clue towards the determination of the ethnological type of the individual, or of the age in which he lived. I am inclined to believe that the people who carved out the rock markings and lapidary sculptures belonged to an earlier race than the brachy-cephalic or round-headed folk, to whom appertained the majority of the round barrows, and circular cairns; for during the last forty years multitudes of such tumuli have been diligently examined, and it is comparatively rare to find cup and ring markings associated with this particular kind of sepulture. Speaking of Cumberland and Westmorland, I am aware at the present moment of only one other example besides this Stainton stone, in which cup-markings have been found in concurrence with a round barrow and a kist-vaen. This exception occurred in two of the stones bounding the Maughanby cairn before alluded to, which contained a semi-ovoid cist with an urn and burnt bones. One of these stones is in my possession.

There is, perhaps, not a more numerous or more important series of diggings amongst British interments than those in which the Rev. Canon Greenwell has been engaged for several years, the results of which are faithfully given in his important work, "British Barrows." In a cursory examination of that production, I do not find out of 234 barrows, about which the details are recorded, more than four or five in which the presence of cup-marked stones have been noted. One of these occurred in Yorkshire, in
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the parish of Kilburn, and the remainder in Northumberland, and these always in connection with urn burial.

Again, North Northumberland is the sphere ground in Great Britain, most fertile in these sculptured stones, whilst at the same time it is a district in which sepulchral remains occur in great profusion. Tate states, that from his survey, fifty-three sculptured stones were found in that district, all of them more or less associated with ancient British occupancy. But out of this number, four of them only formed covers of cists, and four were *probably* covers of cists, the rest were in or near British camps; and he observes, that the relation of these carved stones to camps, hut-circles, and occupied places, is more apparent than to the sepulchres of these races.

Again, Sir James Simpson, in his monograph on the subject of sculptured stones, has collected accounts of lapidary inscriptions in about forty-three different localities in Great Britain, yet in only seven were these carvings found associated with the round-shaped tumulus, or appearing on the covers of kist-vaens; the rest were observed inscribed on standing stones, monoliths, megalithic circles and cromlechs, and on the rocks in the neighbourhood of ancient camps and towns.

The opinion prevails amongst Archæologists that the builders of the megalithic circles, and the passage graves, and chambered tumuli, and those who erected the cyclopean cromlechs and monolithic monuments, were an early race of people, who preceded the Celts in this country, and that it is probable that the dolicho-cephalic or long-headed type of skull, associated with a moderate or inferior stature, pertained to this early people, who are supposed to have been of Semitic descent.

Now, it certainly is in connection with these archaic and cyclopean monuments in Great Britain, and particularly in Ireland, Brittany and Scandinavia, that these forms of sculpturings are more frequently found. The people who
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disposed of their dead in the round barrows or cairns do not seem to have been given to the practice of carving out these mysterious symbols, the significance of which yet remains an enigma to the Archæologist. At least, I have endeavoured to shew the proportionate unfrequency of these cuttings amid the particular forms of sepulchral tumuli which are supposed to appertain to the epoch of the late Celts.

Hence, we presume then that these remarkable products of primitive handicraft have been the works of an earlier race—of that population to whom belonged the giant catacombs and archaic structures—of the patient workers with hammers and chisels fashioned from flint, jade, serpentine and other hard stones—of men, whose light hands and nimble fingers may have possessed the deftness and cunning of their Eastern prototypes, and on whose minds may still have lingered the traditions of an Eastern symbolism, of which the key is lost to us.
