

#### XIV.—A NOTE ON CUP-MARKED ROCKS.

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The hollows and pittings known as "cup-markings" or "cups and saucers" occur in many forms over a wide area, and in a wide range of archæological associations. They range in time from megalithic burial chambers to German churches of the tenth century, and in form from hollows the size of a finger-tip to basins a foot or more in diameter. Some are plain, some surrounded by one or more rings, some connected by a channel to other cups, while many occur as part of more intricate patterns. In view of this variety it is unlikely that any one explanation fits the whole, and the purpose of this note is to give a short account of some of the more important types, without necessarily implying any connection between them.

Cup-markings are found on megalithic tombs in the British Isles, France, Spain, Scandinavia, Palestine and North Africa. In Wales there are two dolmens with cup-markings on the upper surface of the capstones, at Trelyfiant in Pembrokeshire, and at Clynnog Fawr in Carnarvonshire, the latter having some of the cups joined by channels. These cups are mostly shallow and about three inches in diameter and without rings.<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that cups on dolmens were intended to contain offerings to the dead, but this explanation could hardly hold good where cup-marks are found on the under side of cist-lids. Another suggested explanation, and one which undoubtedly holds true for some parts of the world, is that they were regarded as symbols of life and fertility, and as

<sup>1</sup> R. E. M. Wheeler, *Prehistoric and Roman Wales*, p. 82.

such helped to assure the future life of the dead man. Rivett-Carnac found that they were still so regarded in his day (1877) in some parts of Central India,<sup>2</sup> and sir J. Y. Simpson records the survival of such beliefs in parts of the Highlands, where childless couples used to make offerings to the stones in the hope of having a child. In this case the use of cup-marks in burial chambers would be somewhat analogous to that of ochre in palæolithic and mesolithic burials, where the ochre probably represents blood and therefore an aid to immortality.

Whatever the explanation of cup-markings on neolithic chambered tombs, it is by no means certain whether these have any connection with our cup-marks, or with those of the next group we must consider—the elaborate carvings in the later megalithic tombs of Ireland, Brittany, the Channel Islands and Anglesey. The great tumuli of New Grange and Dowth in Ireland, Gavrinis in Brittany and Bryn Celli Ddu in Anglesey are apparently a continuation of the megalithic tradition into the Bronze Age, being in fact chambered round barrows. In them are complicated rock carvings including incised spirals, concentric circles, simple cups, and long wavy lines. Four stages have been detected at New Grange, marked by differing techniques of pocking and smoothing the rock, the earlier stages being older than the construction of the tumuli.<sup>3</sup>

Another group of marked rocks has been found in round barrows, mostly with cremations, and sometimes associated with pottery. The cups occur both on the under side of cist covers and on rough boulders which form part of the body of the cairn. There are four fine cup-marked cist covers in Alnwick Castle Museum,<sup>4</sup> two of which are from Beanley Moor, one from Inghoe, and one from Doddington, a district where cup-marks on the live rock are also common. All four show the multiple rings which seem to be characteristic of this district, and one of the Beanley

<sup>2</sup> Rivett-Carnac, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1877.

<sup>3</sup> M. C. Burkitt, *Our Early Ancestors*, p. 228.

<sup>4</sup> Catalogue of Antiquities in Alnwick Castle, pp. 40-41.

slabs has interrupted rings, leaving a causeway of plain rock in place of the more usual channel. This type of marking occurs fairly often in Northumberland, as at Dod Law,<sup>5</sup> Harelaw,<sup>6</sup> Old Bewick,<sup>7</sup> Chatton Law,<sup>8</sup> and on a cist lid from Ford West field.<sup>9</sup> A cist cover from Black Heddon<sup>10</sup> has concentric circles and no duct. The Pike Hill stone now in the museum of this society was apparently part of the cover stone of a cist. In a barrow at Kirkwhelpington was found a cup-marked slab on which rested an inverted urn containing the burnt bones of a child.<sup>11</sup> The "reniform" markings found on the wall slab of a cist at Harbottle Peels, along with a food vessel,<sup>12</sup> may be a variant of the markings we are considering. Outside Northumberland cup-markings on cist lids with cremations are fairly common, e.g. Came Down, Dorsetshire, and Dornoch Links.<sup>13</sup>

Irregular lumps of stone with cup-markings, forming part of the mound of a cairn, occur widely and appear to belong to the same period. In the barrow at Hinderwell Beacon in north-east Yorkshire over 150 marked stones were found, each stone having as a rule one cup. In this barrow were seven cremated interments, two with food vessels and one with an urn. Mr. Elgee found a cup-marked stone with a food vessel interment in the fosse of Eston Nab Camp, which appears to have been built in the late Bronze Age.<sup>14</sup> Elgee<sup>15</sup> and Greenwell<sup>16</sup> give further lists of these cup-marked stones in barrows from Yorkshire, Northumberland and Aberdeenshire.

Cup-markings occur frequently on isolated standing stones and on stone circles, as at Long Meg, on the Calder

<sup>5</sup> Tate, *Sculptured Rocks of Northumberland*, plate III, fig. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Tate, *op. cit.*, plate IV, figs. 1 and 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, plate VIII, fig. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, plate IX, fig. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, plate XI, fig. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, plate X, fig. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Greenwell, *British Barrows*, p. 433.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>14</sup> Elgee, *Early Man in N.E. Yorkshire*, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>16</sup> Greenwell, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

Stones in Lancashire, and on the Swinburne and Matten standing stones,<sup>17</sup> but we should have to know more than we do about the dates of these circles and stones, and to map the distribution of cup-marks occurring on them, before any deductions could be drawn from this.

The elaborate carvings on live rock, such as occur at Routin Lynn, Dod Law, Old Bewick, Lordenshaws, etc., are naturally difficult to date, as there are of course no associated finds. All these four, however, are closely associated with earthworks, at Lordenshaws (west side) a hollow way leads to the rocks from the camp and the connection can hardly be fortuitous.

Markings on live rock have a wide distribution, in the Highlands of Scotland, Kerry in Ireland, Northumberland, Yorkshire and Derbyshire,<sup>18</sup> to mention only some of them. In Northumberland and Yorkshire they are almost always on the hard sandstones and grits of the carboniferous series. They are most frequent on sloping slabs of smooth rock almost flush with the ground, on high land, but not as a rule on the very top of a hill. The spur to the north of Lordenshaws, and the outcrop of rock on the shoulder of Gled Law, below Dod Law, are characteristic situations. Often these spurs command a wider view than the hill-tops, and a striking position, visible from afar, seems to have been one of the aims of the ancient sculptors.

From this very cursory sketch of the various associations in which cup-markings are found it seems that in the north of England, at any rate, the only datable evidence connects them with the food vessel and urn peoples. Whether they extend earlier or later than this is a matter very difficult to determine in the case of the live rocks. Perhaps more detailed study of their distribution and associations and of the various types of carving may throw more light on their date. What their purpose was seems likely long to remain an unsolved problem.

<sup>17</sup> For a Northumbrian example, cf. the cups on the small stone circle at Goatstones, near Simonburn. *Proc.*, 4th ser., V, p. 305.

<sup>18</sup> Kendrick and Hawkes, *Archæology in England and Wales*, 1914-30, p. 98. Tate, plate xi, fig. 9.