

CHAP. VII.—LAPIDARY SCULPTURINGS IN BRITTANY.

In Brittany, the lapidary carvings upon the stones of some of the ancient tumuli and cromlechs must perhaps be considered—from their distinct representation of various actual objects—as still more advanced than those of Ireland.

But the simplest sculpturings also are sometimes seen on the Brittany sepulchral stones; as, for example, six cups upon the inner surface of one of the roofing-stones of the elongated chambered tumulus of Mount St Michael at Carnac, and which,—sketched by the kind assistance of Mr Barnwell,—are copied into Plate XI. fig. 6, from an interesting essay of his in the “Cambrian Archæologia” for January 1864. My friend, Captain Thomas, informs me, that on a propstone of the dolmen of Mené-Lud at Locmariaker, he found eighteen small cups arranged in the form of “an irregular circle and a short straight avenue leading from it;” and I could not quote a more accurate and careful observer.

I have seen no account of any separate concentric ring cuttings having been observed on the Brittany stones, except the statement by Baron Bonstetten, that on the interior surface of the capstone in the dolmen or cromlech called “Pierres Plates,” at Locmariaker, there are cut-out circles or concentric discs, along with arched lines, leaves of fern, &c. Mr Barnwell tells me he has seen, on the “Pierres Plates,” central dots or cups and annulets cut out, similar in appearance to the figures given as the symbol of the sun in astronomical works and almanacs. Captain Thomas has shown me rubbings which he made of cups and rings arranged upon these “Pierres Plates” in rows, which are again inclosed in

surrounding settings of elongated lines. He did not find in Brittany a single example of any concentric rings with a radial duct.

But many of the Brittany stones are cut much more elaborately. Thus the blocks used in the construction of the gallery and chamber of the great sepulchral mound at Gavr Inis, in the *Morbihan*, are everywhere densely covered over with continuous circular, spiral, zig-zag, looped, and various other types of carving, as represented in sketches of three of the stones forming a portion of the entrance gallery copied into Plate XXX. fig. 1. The other stones forming the gallery, &c., of this magnificent monument are all carved in analogous styles,—except where the quartz blocks have apparently proved too hard for the tools of the sculptors. These Gavr Inis sculptures represent a still more elaborate type of carving than that seen at New Grange, &c. in Ireland;—and besides, they display on several stones the important addition of the outlines of actual objects, namely, triangular-shaped celts¹ and well-drawn snakes placed among the ornamental lines.²

In other large Brittany tumuli more perfect, though still rude, representations of various other objects have now been detected upon the component granite stones by M. Galles, and by the remarkable researches of Mr Samuel Ferguson, of Dublin.³ These gentlemen have lately discovered, upon the stones of the tumuli and cromlechs at Locmariaker, Isle Longul, &c., figures of various military weapons and arms, as battle-axes or hatchets (see Plate XXX. fig. 3), handled, and sometimes

¹ Dr Jameson has sent me a note of the figure of a celt or triangular “dagger,” cut out upon a tall monolith at Auchonear, in the Scottish island of Arran. The figure, he states, is about 9 inches long, and 3 inches broad, at its base, and points upwards. There are no other markings on the stone. This is the only celt figure in Scotland of which I have heard. Dr Jameson has kindly inspected for me all the other standing-stones and circles in Arran, without discovering any markings or toolings upon one of them. I found none on those which I examined in the adjoining island of Bute.

² One of the stones in the gallery at Gavr Inis is “holed” or perforated obliquely on its face, the entrance and exit of the artificial perforation—which admits the hand—being about fifteen inches apart. Each opening has a semicircle or half ring in relief surrounding it. I am indebted to Miss Young for an excellent sketch of this stone.

³ See the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy for 1864.

plumed,—bows, semi-circular and cross,—and oblong shields (see figs. 3 and 4); with some imperfect figures of animals. Many of these remarkable sculptures, it is to be remembered, were, as we shall see subsequently, found in sepulchres where abundance of stone weapons and objects were discovered,—but unaccompanied by any metallic instruments or ornaments.

In addition to these few remarks on the Brittany catacomb sculptures, let me add, that carvings also exist upon the stones of the open cromlechs in that country. In a celebrated cromlech at Locmariaker, called the Merchant's Table, the head stone is cut with a succession of rows of long parallel vertical lines, straight in their middle, and curved at their extremities; and besides there are carved out on the inferior surface of the capstone,—and before it was placed *in situ*,—various lines, and specially the figure of an axe, with a long looped handle and a floreated head, as represented in Plate XXX. fig. 2.

Some of these Brittany sculpturings are raised, and not incised, like those which I have described on the Scottish and English sculptured stones; and hence in this respect, as well as from the objective character of the sculptures, they seemingly indicate a higher type of art.

The surfaces of the megalithic structures in other parts of France do not appear to have been yet examined with any great accuracy. M. Alex. Bertrand, in his “*Monuments Primitives de la Gaule*,” states, that above two thousand “dolmens” (megalithic tumuli and cromlechs) still exist on the soil of France; 500 of them being in the department of Lot alone, and 500 in that of Finisterre. New discoveries in prehistoric sculptures are almost certain to be attained in this extensive archæological field.¹

¹ Lately, in his work upon the Antiquities of Poitou (*Epoques Antediluvienne et Celtique du Poitou*), M. Brouillet describes and figures some roundish and irregular excavations upon the capstones of several cromlechs in that neighbourhood, which he believes to be probably artificial; but they seem to me to be much more like the corrosions and destruction produced by weather and time. His observations upon the contents of various French cromlechs are more important. In the interior of several he found successive layers of human bones, separated by layers of flat stones. These bones were apparently all more or less bruised and often gnawed, and lay in regular anatomical order. No objects of metal were found along with them; but some pottery, bone weapons, and implements of flint and stone, were occasionally discovered within these cromlech sepulchres. In a preceding note at p. 24 I am

PLATE XI.

FROM YORKSHIRE AND BRITTANY TUMULI.

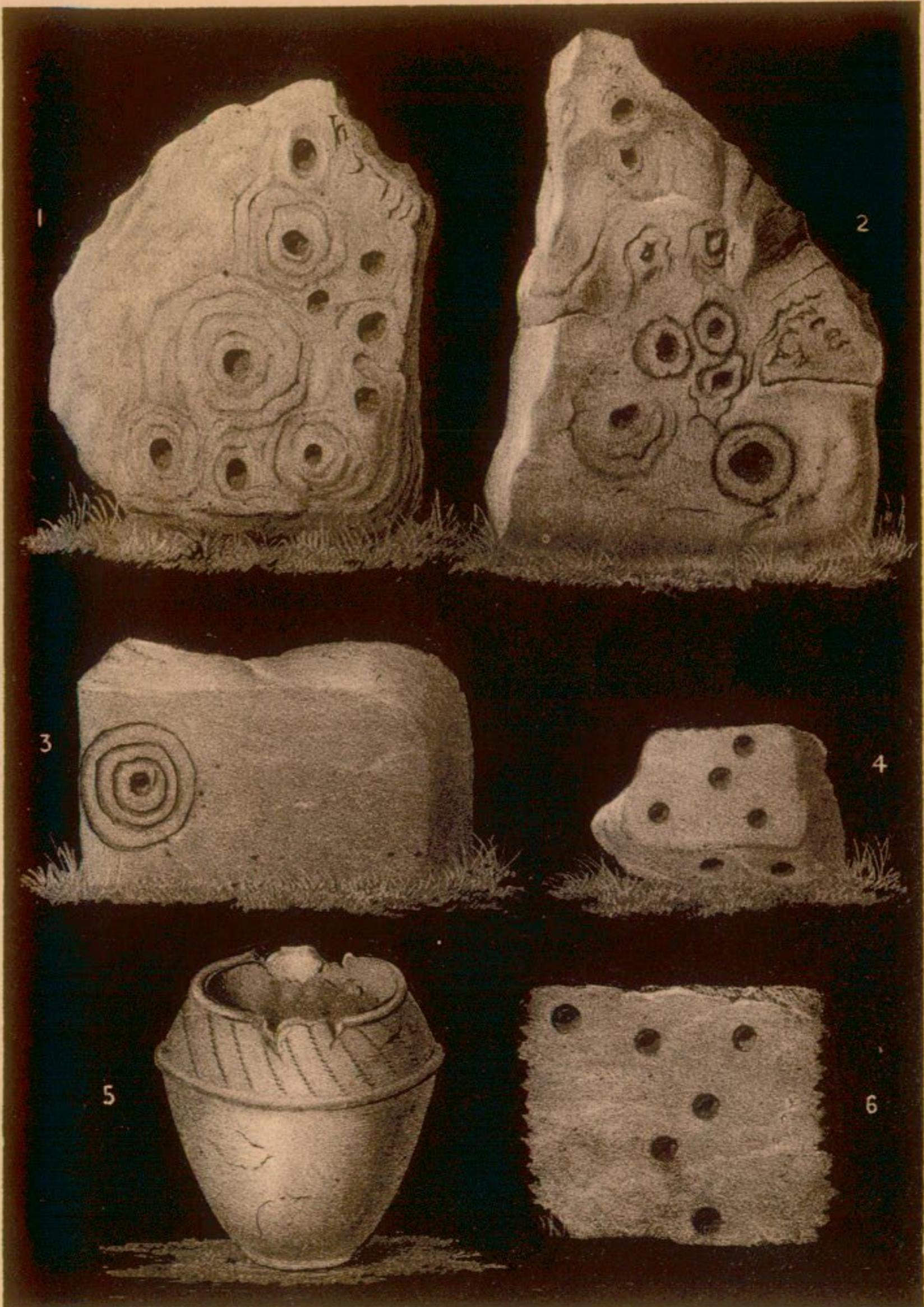


PLATE XXX

FROM SEPULCHRAL TUMULI AND CROMLECH OF BRITTANY.

