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CUP- AND RING-MARKINGS: THEIR ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE.

BY H. J. DUKINFELD ASTLEY, M.A., LITT.D., ETC.

[Read before the British Association (Section H), Dublin, 1908, and revised 1910.]

FOR a great many years now the prevalence of what are known as "Cup- and Ring-Markings" on rocks, stones, and objects of domestic use, whether as amulets or ornaments, or rather of both combined, for among primitive races the ornament is an amulet, has been a subject of common knowledge to archæologists and anthropologists. The former were the first to notice and describe them; it is only within the last few years that the labours of the latter, on the assumption that primitive man is everywhere and always the same at similar stages of culture, have caused light to be thrown on their probable origin and significance.

Forty years ago Sir James Simpson first called the attention of the archæological world to the subject in his book entitled, *Archaic Sculpturings of Cups, Circles, etc., on Rocks*, published in 1867.¹ There he described all those that were then known in Scotland, Northumberland, and Yorkshire, and in a series of beautiful plates he illustrated every variety of form which they exhibit. In all instances there is the central cup or depression surrounded by one or more concentric circles or rings. But these rings take varying forms. Sometimes they are complete; sometimes only semi-circles; sometimes they take the form of spirals. Again at times one or more sets of cup- and ring-markings are united by lines or ducts making a variety of figures; and again at times the outermost circle has a series of rings issuing from it, and converging towards the central depression or cup. Along with the cup- and ring-markings Sir James Simpson also noticed representations of the soles of human feet, and curiously enough similar representations are found on the rock-drawings of the Arunta in Australia. After mentioning, only to reject, the Swedish archæologist Nillson's conjecture that these markings were Phœnician in their origin, the learned Scotch writer came to the conclusion that they are "archæological enigmas," but he went on to make the luminous suggestion that they were "probably ornamental and possibly religious," adding that "though in the first instance

¹ It may be noted here that in the year 1859 the learned Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson, F.R.S., read an elaborate paper before the British Archæological Association, which was published in the *Journal* of the Association in the following year, entitled "On the Rock-basins of Dartmoor, and some British remains in England."

In the course of this paper he refers to cup- and ring-markings on the rocks in Northumberland, and claims to have been the first discoverer of such markings as far back as 1835, in which case the honour due to a discoverer must be accorded him.

probably decorative, they were also emblems or symbols, connected in some way with the religious thoughts or doctrines of those who carved them.”¹ In this he was only anticipating the modern anthropological conclusion that “the savage is extremely practical. His arts, music, and drawing” (and sculpture, and we may add his ornaments) “exist not *pour l'art*, but for a definite purpose—a method of getting something that the artist wants.”

What this “way” was, and that it was connected with the magic, sympathetic and otherwise, which was the inseparable concomitant of early religious ideas, and with the establishment of society on a totemistic basis, we shall endeavour to prove from the analogy of existing primitive races in the course of this study.

Before proceeding further, however, we will state first the localities where archaic cup- and ring-markings have been proved to exist, both in Sir James Simpson’s day and since; we will then refer to certain theories as to their significance put forward by writers subsequent to that great authority; and finally on the basis of present-day usage among primitive peoples we will propose what may be considered the solution of the problem of their origin and significance in the light of present-day knowledge.

The first, as we have seen, to call attention to these curious rock-markings was Sir James Simpson in Scotland, and he enumerated all the localities in which they were then known to occur, which all came under the designation of “archaic.”

It is unnecessary to recapitulate the list given by him, which may be found by any student in his book. They comprise localities situated in almost all parts of Scotland, besides Northumberland, Cumberland, and Yorkshire. Archaic cup- and ring-markings are now known to occur in all parts of our own country, not only on scarps of rock, but on the stones of Druid circles, from Inverness-shire to Lancashire, Cumberland, and the Isle of Man. They also occur on great stones arranged in avenues; on cromlechs; on the stones of chambered *tumuli* in Yorkshire; on stone “kists” or coffins in Scotland, Ireland, and in Dorset; on prehistoric obelisks or solitary “standing-stones” in Argyll; on walls in underground Picts’ houses in the Orkneys and Forfarshire; in prehistoric Scottish forts; near old camps, as well as on isolated rocks, scarps, and stones. They are found in the Cheviot Hills, on the moor near Chatton Park, in Northumberland; there, engraved on the boulders, may be seen central cup-like depressions, surrounded by incised concentric circles. Some of the finest examples in the British Islands are to be seen near Ilkley in Yorkshire. Similar ornamentation is to be seen at Locmariaquer, and on the Island of Gavr’ Innis, in the Morbihan, Brittany, in the district renowned for the magnificent “French Stonehenge” at Carnac, as it may also be seen in the neighbourhood of Avebury and our own Stonehenge.

In Ireland precisely analogous markings, or “rock-scribings,” as Mr. Wakeman calls them, are found, as at Mevagh, co. Donegal, on the sides of Knockmore Cave,

¹ App. to vol. vi, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, pp. 104–5.

near Derrygonnelly, co. Fermanagh, as well as the magnificent series of double spirals at Newgrange, Dowth, and Loughcrew, co. Meath, which belong to a somewhat later stage of culture. "Until recently," says Mr. Wakeman, "these antiquarian puzzles have received but little attention from Irish archæologists. Petrie does not seem to have noticed their existence; O'Donovan and O'Curry make no mention of them, nor do the older writers, except in one or two instances where a single stone or so is referred to, as bearing work of a mystic or barbarous character." The forms of these markings to be met with in Ireland are precisely the same as in every other locality in which they occur, viz., cups, cups and rings, the same with radial channel, concentric rings, penannular rings, spirals, stars, triangles and wheels, zig-zag and other lines. "Considerable attention," continues Mr. Wakeman, "has been given in recent years to the elaborate scorings on the rocks forming the great chambers at Newgrange and Loughcrew," and he quotes Col. Wood-Martin as saying, "In these Ireland possesses a collection of this species of prehistoric ornamentation which, in singularity, number, and quaintness of design is approached in point of interest only by some of the great stone chambers of the district of Morbihan."¹

Other archaic examples may be mentioned, such as those which are to be found on the rock on which the great cathedral at Seville is built; on the steps of the Forum at Rome; on the pedestal of a statue from Athens; in Scandinavia, in China, in India, and in North and South America.² Other instances of present-day

¹ *Wakeman's Handbook*, p. 24.

² Some ten years ago a considerable amount of turmoil was occasioned in the archæological world by the alleged discovery of similar designs in a locality where they had not been hitherto noticed, by an artist named Mr. W. A. Donnelly, and subsequently by Mr. W. Bruce, F.S.A. Scot.

I refer, it need hardly be said, to the famous controversy aroused by the announcement made by Mr. Donnelly of his discoveries at Auchintorlie, Dumbaie, and Dumbuck, and by Mr. Bruce of his discovery at Langbank, all in the neighbourhood of Dumbarton on the Clyde, *cujus pars non minima fuit*.

These discoveries consisted of a number of rocks inscribed with cup- and ring-markings, and with representations of the soles of human feet (these only possessed four toes), at Cochno and Auchintorlie, which in themselves only fall into line with discoveries previously made, and which, from the condition of the rocks, it seems hardly possible to regard as anything but "archaic." Unfortunately, the case is not so simple in respect of the hill-fort at Dumbaie, where among the "finds" said to have been discovered there figured inscribed oyster shells, which Prof. Boyd-Dawkins found to belong to the American species, and which must therefore have been introduced by some visitor, who was either a deliberate forger or a wag; nor in respect of the Crannogs at Dumbuck and Langbank, which Dr. Munro asserted to be mere "mediaeval" erections, but which Mr. A. Lang and I held—he with perhaps too much reserve; I with perhaps too much confidence—to be relics of prehistoric times. Among the "finds" in these latter were numerous objects, inscribed with cup- and ring-marks, ducts and lines, which it seems hardly possible to imagine anyone would be at the pains to forge.

A full account of the controversy, in which the present writer received some very unkind handling, will be found in Dr. Munro's book on *False Antiquities*, and in an article by him in *The Reliquary* entitled "Is the Dumbuck Crannog Neolithic?" in Mr. A. Lang's book, *The Clyde Mystery*, and in a series of four articles by myself in the *Journal of the British Archæological Association* from 1900 to 1904. It is only mentioned here because it led to an independent

usage may be noted in Fiji, in Easter Island, and other parts of the far Pacific, as well as in certain parts of Africa.

Moreover, among races who tattoo, particularly the Maories in New Zealand a very similar set of designs may be observed.¹

Coming now to the various theories which have been propounded as to the origin and significance of these mysterious signs, we note that these are all

study of the subject by Mr. A. Lang and myself, the result of which will be found in Mr. Lang's article, "Cup and Ring: an old puzzle solved," in *The Contemporary Review*, 1900 (subsequently published in *Magic and Religion*, 1901), and in my articles on "Some resemblances between the Religious and Magical Ideas of Modern Savage Peoples, and those of the pre-historic non-Celtic races of Europe," which was published in the same year, and was the result of an entirely independent study—for, at that time, I was quite unaware that Mr. Lang was taking the subject up—and in "Portuguese Parallels to the Clydeside Discoveries." Apart altogether from the immediate occasion of the controversy, I shall hope to carry the study to a further and more positive conclusion on this occasion than was attained previously by Mr. Lang or myself. In justice to Mr. Donnelly's memory, it may be stated that he consistently repudiated the idea of forgery, and maintained the genuineness of his "finds" to the day of his lamented death in the early part of 1906.

At the very height of the controversy came the publication of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen's book on *The Native Races of Central Australia*, followed subsequently by the same writers' *Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, where the present-day usage of the same method of ornamentation by the savages of the great island continent was described, both in the form of "rock-scribings"—in this case in the shape of paintings, not incised marks—and upon certain objects known as *Churinga*, which are the sacred and secret possession of the initiated among the tribes, which will be referred to more fully later on.

As I said in 1899: "There can be no possible question of 'forgery' in regard to the rock-markings at Cochno and Auchintorlie, for, fortunately, the discoveries were made and the drawings executed in 1895, while the Australian drawings were not published till 1899." Moreover, there is no reason why these Scottish markings, even to the representations of human feet, should not be as genuine as those previously described by Sir James Simpson.

We may remark here that on pp. 463-4 of his book, *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Cæsar*, Mr. Rice Holmes makes a brief reference to the subject of "Dumbuck, Langbank, and Dumbaie," and airily dismisses it by saying that "Everything worth reading that has been written on the subject is included in two recent books, Dr. Munro's *Archæology and False Antiquities*, and Mr. Lang's *The Clyde Mystery*," thus ignoring the careful monographs which were contributed by the present writer to the *Journal of the British Archæological Association*.

Of all three he says that "it is admitted that they belong to a period *several centuries later than the Roman conquest of Britain*." (The italics are ours.) Notwithstanding this, however, he also says, with regard to the alleged resemblance between some of the "questionable" finds on the Clyde and certain other equally disputed "antiquities that recently startled the explorers of a Portuguese dolmen," which resemblance Dr. Munro states that he cannot see: "the reader, as Mr. Lang says, must decide for himself, *and I doubt whether he will see eye to eye with Dr. Munro*." (The italics again are ours.)

He would find it a difficult matter to reconcile these two statements, and indeed his note on the subject is somewhat confused throughout.

Apart from the question of the age of the Dumbaie Fort and the Crannogs at Dumbuck and Langbank, and of the undisputed objects found in them, in which I include the dug-out canoe and the Churinga-like objects found in it at Dumbuck, and elsewhere on the sites, I must hold to my opinion as to the rock-markings in the neighbourhood, which fall into line with those universally found, and point to totemism and the neolithic stage of culture.

¹ See p. 96 and note thereon.

founded on the assumption that they were executed with some definite meaning ; for, as I have said elsewhere, "it is an axiom in anthropology that primitive man does not give himself trouble merely for an æsthetic purpose, but always with some practical object in view." This object might be religious, as in the case of the wonderful drawings on the walls in the dark recesses of caverns, and on pieces of mammoth ivory, etc., which were executed by the palæolithic dwellers in the grotto of Thayngen, the cave of La Madeleine, and the Robin Hood Cave in Derbyshire, and elsewhere, the religious motive being probably connected with what is known as "sympathetic magic" ; the primitive cave-dweller, when he drew representations of the reindeer or the mammoth or the horse, or represented himself as hunting, with snakes escaping in the grass, or fishes filling up the borders and vacant spaces in the drawings, intended thereby to render the animals more subservient to his prowess, for the souls that were in them would be transferred by sympathetic magic to his picture of them, and their life would become his, and they themselves would then fall an easy prey to his spear.¹

Or the object might be of social, family, or tribal, *i.e.*, of totemistic significance, and the signs be recognized as badges of the clan or phratry. This would be most useful under the system of exogamous marriages, which usually accompanies totemism² wherever it exists, though independent of it, and later in origin, as Dr. Frazer shows. That this is the true meaning of the cup- and ring-markings, in all their various forms and developments, which are the subject of this study, is what we shall endeavour to prove, but before doing so it is necessary to give a passing reference to the theories put forward by previous students of the subject. Questions of space forbid our doing more than making mention of the various theories propounded by the learned Dr. Phené, the late Mr. Romilly Allen, Mr. Dymond, Miss Russell, Colonel Rivett-Carnac, Lord Avebury, Dr. Robert Munro and others, with regard to the origin and significance of these bewildering signs. The reader is referred to their articles as described in the bibliography attached to this study. We note that Mr. Romilly Allen concludes with the following pregnant remarks, exactly foreshadowing the line that has been pursued in subsequent research :—"If the enigma of the import of these mysterious cup- and ring-marks is ever to be solved it must be by careful research into the relics of pagan superstition, still lingering in out-of-the-way districts, and even found mixed up with Christian ceremonies, and lastly, by making careful

¹ A very remarkable series of drawings executed by the Bushmen in South Africa, some of which may be 500 years old, and others more recent, was exhibited in 1908 in the rooms of the Royal Anthropological Institute, by Miss Tongue.

Like their palæolithic prototypes, the drawings are found on the walls and inner recesses of caves, and they manifest the same freedom and skill and life as those which evoked the enthusiasm of M. Salomon Reinach. Cattle, sheep, and human figures are all portrayed with an artistic power and vraisemblance which are truly remarkable. See *Illustrated News*, June 21st, 1908 ; *Man*, 1909, 98.

The Esquimaux are also skilled draughtsmen, and many scholars hold that in them we have the representatives, if not the descendants, of the palæolithic race in Europe.

² See Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv, pp. 9, 287. (1910.)

drawings of the sculptures, topographical notes of the sites, and then instituting a comparative inquiry into similar remains found in other countries.”¹

As regards the meaning to be attached to the symbols, Dr. Munro says : “ Although much has been written on the subject, none of the theories advanced to explain their meaning has met with general acceptance. That they had a symbolic meaning in the religious conceptions of the people is evident from the frequency with which they are found on sepulchral monuments, but any interpretation hitherto advanced on the subject, beyond the general *religious* idea, seems to me to be pure conjecture.” (*Prehist. Scotland*, p. 218.)

This was the state of the matter when Dr. Munro wrote in 1899 ; it is hoped that this paper will show that by 1908 we had advanced a little further, and that a solution more probable than any hitherto proposed, may be found, which will hold good unless and until some further light dawns from some at present unexpected quarter.²

¹ See Bibliography.

² In his recent book, *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar*, Mr. Rice Holmes ranges himself with those who would see in these markings some religious significance. Writing of the *Bronze Age* he says : “ We may perhaps hope to find other clues to the religious ideas of the Bronze Age in megalithic circles, and in the engraved stones which have been already mentioned ! . . . The most common devices are small circular depressions, called cup-markings and concentric circles ; while occasionally groups of concentric circles are united by grooves.” He then proceeds to describe the markings and the localities in which they occur, much as we have done, and as every writer must do, and continues : “ The rings may, perhaps, in some instances be symbolical of sun-worship, for, on the cairn of Lough Crew in Ireland, and in Scandinavia, a few have rays ” (apart altogether from the supposed meaning, the *rays* are, as a matter of fact, found in very many instances, from widely scattered localities) ; “ and since we find them on the covering stones of cists, while in Australia similar designs drawn on rocks are magical or sacred, it would seem probable that they had some religious meaning.”

He then refers to evidences of sun-worship in the British Isles, to the spirals, and to the swastika on a rock near Ilkley, all of which have been duly noted by us, and quotes Mr. Lang as saying that “ similar markings on rocks, etc., in different countries may have different meanings.” This latter remark is perfectly true as far as it goes, *i.e.*, in different countries, among different peoples, in different ages, the same marks might have a totally different definite meaning, *e.g.*, designate an entirely distinct totem or heraldic badge. But that they were all totemistic, and therefore of social not religious significance, this study will, we hope, make sufficiently probable. Again, in referring all such marks to the Bronze Age, Mr. Rice Holmes does not show sufficient discrimination.

In their *origin* cup- and ring-markings, or marks of similar design, have been shown to ascend to the Palæolithic Age, and, in Europe and the British Isles, to be peculiarly characteristic of the Neolithic Age. The natives of Australia know, or knew, nothing of bronze or any other metal. They may, therefore, be said to be characteristic of peoples in the neolithic stage of culture.

But they *survived* into the Bronze Age, and in combination with other designs became a characteristic of this age. And whereas spirals seem to have preceded circles among the Arunta, the reverse would appear to be true in Europe, so that where spirals are found, as at New Grange, etc., it is a sure sign that we are no longer in the early or primitive stage, but at a stage of later development—in other words, in the Bronze Age. Thus the way is prepared for the magnificent subsequent development of the spiral, simple and divergent, in late Celtic art, and in the Christian art of Ireland, both on stone and in manuscripts.*

* Rice Holmes' *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar*, pp. 205–207, and see pp. 177 and 183.

Passing by the theories which connect these markings with planetary or stellar maps, sundials and such like, which could by any possibility only apply to a very few cases in which they may seem to be arranged in some sort of definite order having some resemblance to the position of the constellations in the sky, or some distinct instance in which the cup and circle with the duct leading from the cup to the circumference of the circle and beyond might seem to be like a dial-plate and its gnomon, we remark the theory propounded by Bishop Graves, of Limerick, that they were intended for maps of the locality marking the position of the neighbouring raths or oppida for the benefit of wayfarers, whether the inhabitants themselves or strangers. Both Mr. Wood-Martin and Mr. Wakeman quote Bishop Graves at large. But the map-theory, as Mr. Wood-Martin says, "appeared to be a fanciful one, and the drawings were laid for many years on one side; finally, however, Bishop Graves, having re-examined his subject, came to the conclusion that his original theory was correct." In this, however, he has not been followed by any subsequent investigator.

Mr. Wakeman ranks himself among those who regard the signs as purely ornamental, forgetting the fundamental axiom as to primitive ornament quoted above.

Mr. Wood-Martin makes the pregnant observation: "The 'dot and circle' pattern is stated to be almost identical in Hittite, Cypriote, Cuneiform, and Egyptian. To solve the enigma of these scribings we must go afield. *What does this style of ornamentation represent to the minds of the aborigines of Australia?*" (The italics are ours.)¹

From the year 1899 onwards the solution of the problem has been sought, and, as we shall endeavour to demonstrate, found in the answer to this question, but before arriving at this point, it is necessary to note a further theory put forward by Col. Rivett-Carnac as late as 1903. In that year he read a paper before the Royal Asiatic Society, entitled "Cup-marks as an archaic form of inscription," in which he suggested that they were "a very ancient form of writing." At an earlier date Col. Rivett-Carnac had been inclined to associate the signs with the Lingam cult, and he refers to this theory again in the course of this paper; we shall see in the sequel how the two ideas may be combined by a reference not only to the evidence from Australia, but also to the "painted pebbles" containing alphabetiform signs which M. Piette discovered in the cave of Mas d'Azil, and which belong to the Palæolithic Age, and to the similar signs found on certain dolmens in

On p. 205 the author gives in a note a useful bibliography of the subject, including many references to the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, to which I have not thought it necessary to refer. This, with the bibliography given in this study, makes up a complete list of the literature bearing on the subject.

In the note Mr. Holmes remarks, "It would seem that certain cup-markings, at all events in the British Isles, France, Spain, and Scandinavia, belong to the Neolithic Age," and refers to Simpson and Cartailhac. He might have added Montelius. Thus he admits the point for which I contend, and gives the larger part of his case away.

¹ *Pagan Ireland*, pp. 47, 49; Wakeman, p. 36.

Portugal in 1903, down to the signs and symbols which distinguish the work turned out by modern potteries in civilized lands. It may be noted here, in passing, that Mr. Wood-Martin had already suggested that "cup- and ring-markings" might be "the first step made by primitive man towards writing."¹ And M. Cartailhac, writing in 1899 in *La France préhistorique d'après les sépultures et les monuments*, p. 247, had said: "Il est donc positif que les pierres à écuelles avaient une signification pour les hommes de l'âge de la pierre, et pour leurs descendants ou successeurs immédiats. Leur sens mystérieux était compris dans une grande partie de l'Europe." And he added: "Après l'âge de bronze elles disparaissaient en Europe."

Col. Rivett-Carnac notes what we have already stated, that these markings are "neither recent nor accidental, and that there is now hardly any rocky country in the explored world in which they may not be found," and, he continues, "but little importance has been attached to them, and the general verdict apparently is that, even admitting them to be ancient and artificial, they are at best but a rough form of ornamentation possessed of no significance, and therefore of just as little scientific interest." It is to dissipate this notion that this paper has been written. Col. Rivett-Carnac endeavours to do so by bringing forward a wealth of argument to prove his thesis that they are a primitive form of writing. He sees in the cup- and ring-markings the earliest efforts of primitive man to convey ideas to his fellows—a method which in some cases became at once alphabetiform, as in the early Ægean alphabets, whence our modern alphabets are now considered to have arisen, and in others passed through painful ages of hieroglyphic or cuneiform ideogrammatic forms to an alphabetiform system, whereby all ideas could be conveyed.

We come now to consider cup- and ring-markings in the light which has been thrown upon them by recent research among the aborigines of Australia.

It was in the year 1899 that Messrs. Spencer and Gillen's epoch-making book on *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* was published. This was followed in 1904 by the same authors' *Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, and in the same year the late Dr. Howitt's *Native Tribes of South-East Australia* was published. These, with Mrs. Langloh-Parker's *The Euahlayi Tribe*, 1905, form the classical authorities on the tribal and social arrangements and customs of the Australian aborigines.

Now the outstanding feature of all these tribes is that they are organized on a totemistic basis. It will be unnecessary in this article to define totemism,² or to point out wherein totemism in Australia differs from totemism in North America, whence the name is originally derived, as described by Mr. Hill Tout and others. Nor will it be necessary to enter into the question of the origin of totemism, as to "which there is much difference of opinion, and a number of hypotheses have been framed to account for it," and the subject was fully dealt with before the British Association by Professor Haddon in 1902. Dr. Howitt says:

¹ *Pagan Ireland*, pp. 43, 44.

² See Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv, p. 3. (1910.)

"It has always seemed to me that the origin of totems and totemism must have been in so early a stage of man's social development that traces of its original structure cannot be expected in tribes which have long passed out of the early conditions of matriarchal times. Yet if anywhere in the still savage regions of the world there are any living survivals of early totemism surely it must be in Australia that they are to be sought for" (p. 151). He then goes on to discuss the only three hypotheses of which he considers it needful to take account. These are (1) Messrs. Spencer and Gillen's theory that in Australian tribes the primary function of a totemistic group is to ensure by magic a supply of the object which gives its name to the totemistic group; (2) Dr. J. G. Frazer's views, that the Intichiuma ceremonies¹ appear to indicate that each totem group was charged with the superintendence of some department of nature, from which it took its name; (3) Mr. Herbert Spencer's theory, which has since been developed by Lang in his book, *The Secret of the Totem*, that plant and animal names were impressed upon each group from without, and some of them would stick, would be stereotyped, and each group would come to answer to its "nickname." Notwithstanding the wealth of argument and illustration with which Mr. Lang has advanced this theory, I must confess that to my mind Dr. Howitt seems justified in saying: "To me, judging of the possible feelings of the pristine ancestors of the Australians by their descendants of the present time, it seems most improbable that any such nicknames would have been adopted, and have given rise to totemism, nor do I know of a single instance in which such nicknames have been adopted" (p. 154).

Professor Haddon's hypothesis is that groups of people, at a very early period, by reason of their local environment would have special varieties of food, but, "taking all things into consideration, I feel," says Dr. Howitt, "that the most probable conclusion to arrive at is, that the Intichiuma ceremonies represent a very early form of totemistic belief, but beyond that there are not sufficient data to allow of a safe hypothesis as to the origin of the totemic names" (p. 155).²

¹ Sacred ceremonies performed by a local totemic group with the object of increasing the numbers of the totemic animal or plant.

² In Australia, as among all primitive races, names imply a mystic *rapport* between themselves and the persons who bear them, and, this being so, when the members of human groups found themselves, as groups, all in possession of animal group-names, and *had forgotten how they got the names* (all known groups having long been named), men, always speculative, naturally asked themselves, "What is the nature of this connection between us and the animals whose names we bear?"

Thus I agree with Dr. Pikler, *Der Ursprung des Totemismus*, when he says, "The germ of totemism is the *naming*," and further that "totemism has its original germ not in religion, but in the practical every-day needs of man." So Mr. Lang had written, *Social Origins*, "Totems, probably, in origin, had nothing really religious about them." Each man's name was originally *secret* to himself, and the idea of *sacredness* is a later development.

Yet another theory as to the origin of totemism has been propounded by Mr. Gomme in his most suggestive and fascinating book, *Folklore as an Historical Science*, viz., that it emanates from "the industrialism of early woman from which originated the domestication of animals, the cultivation of fruits and cereals, and the appropriation of such trees and shrubs as were necessary to primitive economies. The close and intimate relationship with human life which

Be that as it may, the fact is that throughout Australia the social organization of the tribes is based on totemism, and that a gradual advance may be observed from a comparatively simple to a most complex and intricate system. Thus the Dieri tribe of South-east Australia have only two exogamous intermarrying classes and have preserved female descent, *i.e.*, the child belongs to the totem of its mother. The Kamilaroi, Wiradjuri, and others have four sub-classes and male descent. The tribes round Lake Eyre, in the centre of the continent, have developed eight sub-classes. Among these the Urabunna reckon by female descent; the Arunta, whose story, as told by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen, is a veritable romance, reckon by male descent; but there is this peculiarity about them, that totemism is reckoned by locality rather than by group, and the child belongs to the totem of the district in which it may happen to be born. How this is contrived will appear presently. Curiously enough, in spite of their possessing this complex and intricate system, *i.e.*, matrimonial classes which he himself acknowledges as later than the mere phratries of many south-eastern tribes, more advanced ceremonial, system of inheritance, and local magistracies, heredity in the male line, and in contravention of every principle which compels one under every phase of evolution to view the complex as a development from the simple, Dr. Frazer holds that the tribes of Central Australia, including the Arunta, "are the more backward, and the coastal tribes the more progressive." This opinion seems to proceed from a consideration of the possession or otherwise by the tribes of a belief in the "All-Father," with which we are not concerned here. The coast tribes for the most part possess this belief; the Arunta and other central tribes do not. The most probable theory to explain this is that these tribes once possessed it and have lost it. Having developed a highly complicated and, indeed, philosophical system, the belief in the All-Father became of no practical importance and was dropped. But in any case, with regard to Dr. Frazer's statement I echo Mr. Lang's words: "This is a hard saying!"¹

such animals, plants and trees would assume under the social conditions belonging to the earliest stage of evolution, and the aid which these friendly and always present companions would render at all times and under most circumstances, would generate and develop many of those savage conceptions which have become known to research"—"In short," as Mr. Sidney Hartland says, in his criticism of the book in *Man*, 1908, 68, "totemism would arise from the connection imagined between a woman's children and the friendly animal, plant or tree."

There are many things that might be said in answer to this attractive but delusive theory. For one thing, as may be at once discovered by a reference to modern examples of totemism in Australia and elsewhere, the totem is by no means universally, if even generally, a "friendly," *i.e.*, domesticated animal, or a cultivated plant.

But Mr. Hartland has said sufficient to expose its fallacy, and with his criticisms I entirely concur—and Dr. Frazer does not refer to it at all. (1910.)

¹ Of course this is no contradiction of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen's statement that the Central tribes, including the Arunta, "have retained the most primitive beliefs and customs."

. This may be perfectly true, and yet we must acknowledge that their social organization is the most advanced, and as regards the Arunta nescience of the facts of generation it is no

The Arunta system is based on the following beliefs: They hold that every living Arunta is descended, or rather, is the re-incarnation of an ancestor, who lived in what is known as the "Alcheringa" times. These are times beyond which thought cannot go, the far distant past, with which the earliest traditions of the tribe deal. Every Arunta thinks that his ancestor in the Alcheringa was the descendant of the animal or plant, or at least was intimately associated with the objects the name of which he bears as his totemic name. In most cases when the social arrangements are totemistic the totem animal or plant is sacred and tabu as food to the members of the totem group. This is the case in many Australian tribes, where it is a general custom that a man must not eat or injure his totem, but among the Arunta there are special occasions when the totem is eaten, and there is no rule against eating it at other times, though it must be partaken of sparingly. In this respect, as in many others, the Arunta are a law unto themselves. Returning to the Alcheringa ancestors, each of them is represented as carrying about with him or her one or more of the sacred stones which are called by the Arunta natives Churinga (the equivalent of the bull-roarer or whirler of other natives, but of such special significance that the local name is now well known and universally employed), and each of these Churinga is closely associated with the spirit part of some individual. Where they originated and stayed, as in the case of certain of the witchetty grub people, or where they camped in their wanderings, there were formed what the natives call *Oknanikilla*, i.e., local totem centres. At each of these spots a certain number of the Alcheringa ancestors went into the ground, each carrying his Churinga with him. His body died, but some natural feature, such as a rock or a tree, arose to mark the spot, while his spirit part remained in the Churinga. At the same time many of the Churinga which they carried with them, and each one of which had associated with it a spirit individual, were placed in the ground, some natural object again marking the spot. Thus the country is dotted over with these *Oknanikilla*, each one connected with one totem. The rock or tree marking the spirit's abode is known as the spirit's *Nanja*, and it is this idea of spirit individuals associated with the Churinga and resident in certain definite spots, which lies at the root of the present totemic system of the Arunta tribe. Now these spirits are ever waiting to be re-born, and consequently they are ever on the look out for likely women through whom they may receive re-incarnation. Here comes in a curious factor of Arunta life. Alone, or nearly

proof of primitiveness, but rather the fruit of their system of philosophy—"As each child is, in Arunta opinion, a being who has existed from the beginning of things, he is not, he cannot be, a creature of man's begetting."* Dr. Frazer still (1910) holds to this opinion as to the relatively greater primitiveness of the Central tribes. He may possibly, later on, see cause to modify this opinion (Preface, xiii). For the whole subject consult his magnificent monograph on *Totemism and Exogamy*, recently published.

* Spencer and Gillen, *Central Tribes*, pp. 124 (112-166); *Northern Tribes*, pp. 145, 150, 174, 330, 606. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, pp. 96, 242. Lang, *Secret of the Totem*, p. 197.

so,¹ among the human race, whether savage or civilized, they are totally ignorant of the meaning and effect of sexual intercourse.² According to their belief it has nothing to do with the natural production of offspring; at best it only prepares the woman for the entry of the spirit-child. Consequently, a woman never knows when a spirit-child may enter, and, as a result, whenever she may become aware that she has conceived a child it belongs to the totem of that locality irrespective of the totem to which she or her husband may belong. Hence, among the Arunta the exogamous classes are totally distinct from the totemic clans. The child inherits the Churinga Nanja of his ancestral spirit, and consequently belongs to his own ancestral totem. In some localities the spirits are specially active, *e.g.*, at Alice Springs there is a stone, known as the *Erathipa* stone, which a woman has merely to visit to cause conception. Accordingly if a girl has to pass by this stone and does not wish to have a child, she will carefully disguise her youth, and try to make herself look like a very old woman.

When the spirit-child enters a woman, according to the tradition of the natives, the Churinga is dropped. When the child is born the mother tells the father the position of the tree or rock near to which she supposes the child to have entered her, and he and his friends thereupon search for the dropped Churinga. The latter is usually, but not always, supposed to be a stone one *marked with a device peculiar to the totem* of the spirit-child, and therefore of the newly born one. Sometimes it is found—having been, of course, provided by the *Arunga*, or paternal grandfather, for the purpose—sometimes it is not. In that case a wooden one is made from the tree nearest to the *Nanja*, and the device or brand peculiar to the totem is carved on it.

In each *Oknanikilla*, or local totem centre, there is a spot called the *Ertnatulunga*. This is the sacred storehouse, usually a small cave or crevice in some unfrequented spot among the rough hills, carefully concealed. In it are numbers of the Churinga often carefully tied up in bundles.³ It may be noted that the name Churinga itself means a sacred and secret emblem. Though men and women are both alike in that each possesses his or her *Churinga Nanja*, yet whilst there comes a time when each man is allowed to see and handle his, *i.e.*, after the ceremonies of initiation, when the boy becomes a man, not only may no

¹ See Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. ii, pp. 94 *seq.*; vol. iv, pp. 9, 287.

² At the meeting at which this paper was read the Chairman of the Section (H), Professor Ridgway, threw doubts on this alleged nescience on the part of the Arunta of these plain facts of physiology on the authority of certain "German Lutheran missionaries." The chief of these is the Rev. C. Strehlow, for the value of whose authority see Frazer, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 186, note 2. But there is no disputing the fact of this ignorance. How to account for it is another question. Messrs. Spencer and Gillen are quite clear on the point. Dr. Andrew Lang and Dr. Frazer equally admit it, though interpreting it differently, and there is the further evidence of the Bishop of North Queensland (Dr. Frodsham) as to the same nescience on the part of the natives of that district. *Man*, 1909, 86. See Lang, *Secret of the Totem*, 81, 189 *seq.* Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, pp. 93, 191.

³ 1 Sam. xxv, 29. (Dr. Frazer refers to this passage in his paper on *Folklore in the Old Testament* in the volume of *Anthropological Essays* presented to Dr. Tylor on his 75th birthday.)

woman ever see them, but they are even unaware of the existence of such objects. No woman dare pry into the mysteries of the *Ertnatulunga* and its contents at risk of death. Moreover the *Ertnatulunga* may be considered as the early rudiment of a city or house of refuge. Even wild animals once they come close to one become tabu and safe from the spear of the pursuing native, and the plants in the vicinity are never touched or interfered with in any way. When the boy has passed successfully through the ceremonies of initiation, and is considered worthy of the honour, he is painted on face and body with the peculiar device belonging to his totem, and taken to the *Ertnatulunga*. The old women are aware that he has been there, though they know nothing of the nature of the ceremonies, but to the younger women it is a matter of the deepest mystery, for no women dare even approach the gap in which is the sacred rock-painting and near to which lies the *Ertnatulunga*.

Thus we are brought to the subject of the rock-paintings. These are not peculiar to the Arunta and other tribes of Central Australia, being found all over the Continent, and having been often described by former investigators. But those previously described are not of the special type of which we are in search, and which we find among the Arunta. These rock-paintings may be divided into two groups: (a) those which may be spoken of as ordinary rock-drawings, and which fall into line with those already known, and (b) certain other drawings which belong to a class of designs all of which are spoken of as *Churinga Ilkinia*, and are regarded as sacred because they are associated with the totems. Each local totemic group has certain of these, specially belonging to the group, and in very many cases preserved on rock surfaces which are strictly tabu to the women, children, and uninitiated men. The designs on these *Churinga Ilkinia*, as on the *Churinga Nanja*, are each distinctive of some special totem, and are so understood by the initiated natives, so that they have only to look at them to know of what special totem they are the sign or badge. Now the remarkable thing about these special totemistic designs of the Arunta, both on the rock-paintings, the *Churinga Ilkinia*, and the *Churinga Nanja*, is this, that they consist of the very same patterns as the rock-sculpturings which we have been studying from all parts of the world.¹ There is the central dot, corresponding to the cup, surrounded by concentric circles or semi-circles, and arranged in varying patterns, sometimes joined by lines which run through and connect them, just as the ducts do in the sculpturings, and each varying pattern has its distinctive meaning, which the native at once recognizes as belonging to the witchetty grub, emu, plum-tree, or other totem as the case may be. The feet which accompany the designs in many cases, and of which we have so many examples in Scotland, are said to be the

¹ The same marks occur on small plaques of slate or schist in Portuguese neolithic sites, in palæolithic sites, and in Scotland, where, however, Dr. Munro considers them not of genuine antiquity; and the marvellous thing is that although Dr. Munro also denies the genuineness of the Portuguese "finds," he professes to be unable to see the resemblance between them and the Scottish ones, which, to the unprejudiced observer, *saute aux yeux*.

prints left by Alcheringa ancestors. There are also many examples of spirals in Australia, and in Australia Messrs. Spencer and Gillen consider the circles to be debased spirals. They may be right as regards Australia, but there is reason to believe that the opposite holds good elsewhere; *i.e.*, that the circle is older than the spiral.

Considering then that primitive man may be held to have everywhere, though with local modifications, passed through the same or similar steps in his evolution from the lower to the higher plane of social organization, is it too bold an hypothesis to propose that in these Arunta drawings with their well-known and recognized signification we have, as Mr. Wood-Martin suggested, the solution of our problem, and to say that, subject to modifications suggested by others of the theories mentioned in the works of the authors we have named above, the basal meaning of cup- and ring-marks is not religious but social, and that wherever found they are totemistic in their origin, and point to the potent influence of magic, rather than of what is more specially comprehended under the name of religion?

Thus these mysterious signs may with justice be said to constitute as I have said elsewhere the heraldry of primitive man, and they would be known and understood by all whom it might concern, even as the Arunta understand them to-day, and as the followers of a knight in medieval times, his squires and men-at-arms, recognized the shield of their lord, wherever it was borne in the battle or the joust, or fluttered from the summit of his castle keep, and just as the flag is recognized among civilized races at the present time.¹

This discovery of what is in all probability the true solution of a problem which has baffled so many learned writers among the savages of Central Australia, is one of the romances of latter-day research, and is itself the justification of the

¹ In 1897 Mr. A. H. Keane (*The Import of the Totem*) wrote on the origin of Totemism:—

"Thus the family, the initial unit, segments into a number of clans, each distinguished by its totem, its name, *its heraldic badge*—which badge, becoming more and more venerated from age to age, acquires inherited privileges, becomes the object of endless superstitious practices, and is ultimately almost deified. . . . Its origin lies behind all strictly religious notions, and it was at first a mere device for distinguishing one individual from another, one family or clan group from another"—and in 1899, in *Man, Past and Present*, he formulated a theory of the origin of totemism on this basis. About the same period the present writer was developing his theory of totemism as "the heraldry of primitive man," an expression which he afterwards employed in 1903, and for which he claims originality, inasmuch as Mr. Keane's works have only become known to him in preparing this study.

Compare also the late Professor Robertson Smith on the subject of the Semitic *wasm*, or rock-scorings, and tattooing in early Arabia, in *Marriage and Kinship in Arabia*, pp. 245-251, and *cf.* p. 218. The important point to notice is that Professor R. Smith associates the "scorings on the rocks" with the "tattooing of the person," and connects both with totemism, and the distinguishing of tribe or clan, that is to say, both may well be called "the heraldry of primitive man," to use the term I have adopted. Nothing is said as to these "scorings on the rocks" being "cup- and ring-marks," but apart from that they may well be considered to come under the same category, and to be a further argument for the views advanced in this paper.

attention which is being given by all students of anthropology to the hitherto neglected, but often despised and fast-perishing representatives of primitive man still existent on the globe.¹

Taking into account every known ingredient of the problem, I ask: have we not here, as nowhere else, the solution of it? We cannot say positively that such markings have absolutely the same meaning wherever they are found, but are justified in saying that that meaning is totemistic, for primitive man is everywhere and always the same, *et plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*.

Further, as showing how at a later stage ideas of nature worship may be grafted on to the original stock, we note the primitive phase of the idea in the Arunta theory of the spirit-child conceived beside some sacred rock or tree. A similar notion meets us, as Colonel Rivett-Carnac points out, in Switzerland and Italy, and probably research would prove its existence elsewhere. The spirit-child belongs to the totem of the locality in which it is conceived, and the *Churinga*, both the *Nanja*, the portable stone or stick, and the *Ilkinia*, the rock-drawing, each sacred and secret, is the totem badge bearing the special pattern peculiar to that totem. Here we have the living and present meaning.

In treating of the Lingam cult we are touching, as Colonel Rivett-Carnac says, upon a delicate or rather, it should be said, *indelicate* subject, but the perfected cult as it existed in Phœnicia and elsewhere in the East in historic times, and as it exists in India to-day, is adumbrated in the ideas of primitive man, as they survive among present-day superstitions in Europe, and the germs are to be found in the peculiar notions of the Arunta. Ancient stones and rocks inscribed with cups and rings are in many parts of Europe even still associated with ideas bearing a relationship to this primitive cult. Monoliths not only bear these marks, but are themselves symbolic of the mystery of the reproduction of life. In Switzerland such rocks are still known as "the babies' stone," and where they remain undisturbed the ordinary idea of the stork as the purveyor of a new brother will be accepted by no self-respecting child of the locality. All new-born babies are believed to be brought from the mysterious stone of the vicinity. So on Lake Como a "child's stone," as it was called, was recently destroyed near Schloss Rothburg in the Canton Vaud. So in Brittany and other Celtic districts childless women will bring offerings to the menhir, and many a great stone has been adorned on its summit with a cross.² The objection will be made, says Colonel

¹ Here also we have the answer to Dr. Frazer's doubt as to whether totemism ever existed in those parts of the world where it is no longer found. Whether or not it was ever a part of the social system of the primitive Aryans and Semites, it certainly existed, to judge by analogy, among the primitive inhabitants of Asia and Europe in the neolithic age, and during the prevalence of the neolithic stage of culture, *i.e.*, among the ancestors of the Iberian races, now represented by the Basques, and the short, squat, dark-skinned and dark-haired people who form the pre-Celtic substratum of the present population of Wales. The animal, reptile, and insect cults of Egypt also point to the prevalence of totemism in that country in prehistoric times. See Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, 86; iv, 13.

² This Christianization of the objects of pagan worship, and of pagan superstition, was a characteristic feature of the means whereby the Christian Church secured her hold in early

Rivett-Carnac, how could such an idea survive the ages that have passed between then and now? But they do survive. Superstitions, as we call them, are handed down in a manner which if marvellous is yet true. They belong to no particular race or clime, but are the *débris* of faiths which are alive at a certain stage in the evolution of culture in every race and clime, viz., the animistic as regards the outlook upon nature, the totemistic as regards the organization of society, and these *débris* are found more abundantly among certain races, *e.g.*, the Celtic, than others. Thus we refer the superstitions connected with *The Babies' Stone* and the menhir, and with sacred tree and rock, with their cup- and ring-markings in patterns of varying and intricate detail, to what may be called the "Arunta stage of culture," which stage no doubt developed in certain districts among certain peoples into a more definitely pronounced Lingam worship. Here we have only the preliminary stage—the germ of a world-wide cult, not the cult itself—totemism on an animistic basis, not religion.

Finally, there is no reason why we should deny the possibility that in cup- and ring-markings we behold one of the earliest efforts of our race to convey ideas by means of signs, and therefore that it is in this sense a form of writing. The Arunta read their meaning—both on rocks and on Churinga, and indeed they are known to employ Churinga on occasion, as "message sticks or stones," although in their case the Churinga is more in the nature of a safe-conduct, rendering the bearer tabu, than an actual means of conveying ideas. Other tribes, as the Itchimundi, do employ real message-sticks. These, however, are "merely a kind of tally, to keep record of the various heads of the message, and the markings have no special meaning as conventional signs conveying some meaning."¹ No Australian has developed anything that may at all be called writing. The alphabetiform signs on the pebbles discovered by M. Piette at Mas d'Azil belong to a still earlier stage of culture, for the caves in which they were found are palæolithic. Similar signs are found among neolithic dolmens in Portugal, in connection with cup- and ring-markings, and these also occur in certain localities in Scotland; and through the wanderings of the neolithic folk they may even lie at the root of the alphabets of the Egean, and form the germ of our European alphabets, as was said above. But if cup- and ring-markings are to be taken at all as a method of conveying ideas, *i.e.*, as a method of writing, it can only be of the very rudest, compared with which oghams and runes are finished alphabets. It is better to take them simply as totemistic signs, having regard to their Arunta affinity, and to affiliate them with heraldic tokens, and modern potters' marks, as being tribal and family badges, and marks of ownership.

Thus we bring our study to a close, and if we have succeeded in showing with any degree of probability that the true solution of the problem as to the significance of these mysterious signs is to be found in the still existent habits and

times upon the races both within and without the Roman Empire, and is a mark of the wisdom which led her, like St. Paul, to become "all things to all men."

¹ Howitt, pp. 691-710.

customs of the Arunta and other native tribes in the far-away Continent of Australia, we shall be more than satisfied. Severed as they were for untold ages from all intercourse with the rest of mankind they have preserved intact ideas which were common to the race in its early infancy, and like their own fauna and flora, they exhibit to peoples who have passed on to a later and more complex stage in the progress of evolution precious examples of the process of development in its earlier phases, and, as regards themselves, a means whereby the civilized races may arrive at a proximate understanding of the superstitions which are still rife among their own less cultured members.

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In this latter book, p. 138, may be seen an illustration of an engraved bone belonging to the *Palæolithic* Age, from Moravia, bearing precisely the same markings, and of almost the same shape as the Australian *Churinga*, and the similar objects found at Dumbuck and Dumbaie, showing the persistency of type in the ornamentation of primitive man, whether the meaning was magical, religious, or totemistic. Lang, *Secret of the Totem*, p. 77, says : "The things were probably talismans of one sort or another," and compares them with the similar objects from the Portuguese dolmens as I had already done. But though talismans or amulets of uncertain import in *Palæolithic* times, this paper has, I hope, shown the inherent probability that in later times and amid every variety of race, they would have a *similar*, if not identical, meaning with that which they possess among the Arunta of to-day.

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For a full discussion of "totemism" in its latest aspects, I would refer to Dr. A. C. Haddon's Presidential Address to Section H of the British Association at Belfast, 1902, and for the relationship between "Religion" and "Magic" to Mr. E. Sidney Hartland's Presidential Address at York, 1906, in which special mention is made of the Arunta customs and beliefs.

[The above was written in 1908 ; now, 1910, Dr. Frazer's great book stands forth as *the* unchallenged authority on the subject, although one may assign the "Origin of Totemism" to other causes, besides those postulated in his present theory of its "conceptional" origin, based on the ideas of the Arunta.]