

Mithraic Symbols Decoded - Mirror

This is one of the best objects for stylistically analysing and grouping but is one of the more difficult to interpret. Of the 62 “mirror” objects visible on Symbol Stones 8 are indistinct with those that have been drawn having two broad patterns – “ring” (in fact an open circle on a type of base) and “solid”. In both patterns the significant objects are a large circle typically with two

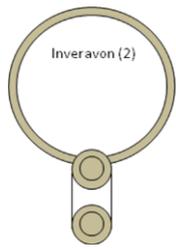


interconnected circles at the base. In total 21 designs emerged which have been arranged into 5 groups. The illustration on the left is of the “ring” pattern from Group 1 and can be seen on 7 Stones. The illustration on the right is of the “solid” pattern from Group 2 and can be seen on 6 Stones. With such similarity the meaning of the Symbol is probably the same. Those designs in Group 3 – Meigle, Maiden Stone and Collace – follow the general “solid” pattern but the base is different being more like a Mirror Case design with a different or dual interpretation – see later. Handle shapes are apparent in Group 4, and Group 5 is a miscellany with some cross-overs into Mirror Case designs.

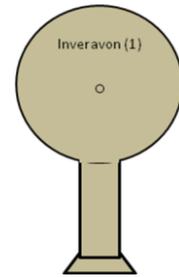
In an ancient Persian context, the “ring” shape itself is like the ring held by Ahura-Mazda and is held by the king whereby the king is invested with the royal power by the god and is Ahura-Mazda’s proxy on Earth (there is an example of this on a wall panel in the British Museum of Darius’s investiture). Perhaps the Group 1 designs could be the Double Disc as the concentric arrangements of Earth / Planets / Celestial Sphere linked to the Ring as a form of contract between the people on Earth and God. Group 2 has the Double Disc but linked to a solid circle – maybe this is a less clear version of Group 1 or it could have another meaning. Group 3, however, is more like a depiction of the birth of Mithra from the rock and maybe Group 4 is a simpler version of Group 3. To add to the wide selection, Group 5 has variants of the other Groups – each can have an individual explanation such as Picardy has a suggestion of the Double Disc but to a clearly boundaried solid circle with a central concentric.

Often in Standing Stone books the Mirror and Mirror Case are described as complementary – hence their names. However, for a Pictish-Mithraism interpretation this is inapplicable – they are neither mirror, nor mirror case but it is convenient to use these terms. The “mirror” in Pictish-Mithraism decoding could comprise one or both sides of the double disc part of the Z-Rod & Double Disc design with the larger circle being the Zodiac. A Knockando / Pulvrenan Stone has a similar layout except the centre is dominated by a rather weathered flower type Symbol. The Tillytarmont example also has the three concentric circles in the “double disc” part – these are considered to represent the Earth, Planets and Celestial Sphere.

At Inveravon there is one of each Mirror pattern (a “ring” and a “solid”), the solid example being on the Stone with the eagle and the Comb with the double



row of teeth. For Inveravon Stone 2 the Symbol could be a Double Disc (representing the Earth, Planets and Celestial Sphere) either extending out to a larger portrayal of the Celestial Sphere or to the Zodiac. If the latter then there is a symbolic link between Mithras and the Zodiac which the author considers is the general decode for the Mirror Case object.



Inveravon Stone 1 is a one- off for a Mirror design and is more like a Mirror Case. However, for this Stone it does reflect the style of the Mirror Case suggesting some artistic licence.

On the assumption that these shapes are mirror-like the conclusion by many authors has tended to be that they have a female association – not least with the supposition of matrilineal succession for Pictish kings. This has been reinforced by these Symbols often being accompanied by a “Comb”. Combs are never seen without associated Mirrors - this association of Mirrors and Combs could simplify their interpretation but maybe incorrectly (see the Section on Combs below). Undoubtedly the shapes accord with Roman style mirrors in use not only in the first millennium CE but centuries before.



Although it might be difficult to understand that in Mithraism there is a grade that has female attributes in an all-male cult, it would be easy to sustain the “traditional” Mirror / Comb association and propose that the mirror, mirror case and comb represent the Nymphus Grade which is the second Grade in the seven step ladder whereby the initiate becomes the bride of Mithras. With the Planet associated with the Nymphus grade being Venus, which is the second Planet from the Sun, perhaps there is some significance in the circles. The Planet Venus is known as the morning star and relates in Mithraism to Cautes. This prompts further thought on the interpretation of the circles of the Mirror as astronomical bodies and their revolution – particularly applicable to Groups 1 and 2. Astrologically the mirror is a portal to the soul or, more generally, into another dimension – again very applicable to Mithraism.

According to Allen and Anderson the Mirror is almost always placed in the “last or lowermost” position when in combination with other Symbols on Class 1 Stones. This could be seen as a “southernmost” connection; arguably a Capricorn link could be implied (see more about Capricorn under Pictish Beast).

Whilst not dismissing the prospect of a link with the Nymphus grade, especially after stating that the Symbols might have multiple meanings, **in the Pictish-Mithraism bigger picture, the Mirror circles can be considered to depict relationships between the Zodiac, Planets and the Earth.**

In each case the large circle is the Zodiac – more obvious in the “ring” pattern as that is how the Zodiac is shown in Mithras group statuary.

The smaller circles, especially where there are concentric ones, are very similar to the circles on the Z-Rod & Double Disc objects. Where there are circles connected by “waist” effect lines such as in Group 1, item 3 (Clatt, Daviot, Keith Hall etc.) and Group 2, item 3 (Rhynie Old Church 1, Dunrobin Dairy Park etc.) the impression is of a solid ring that has been cut through (as with the Double Disc in the Z-Rod & Double Disc Symbol) – this similarity is even greater in Group 1, Item 1(Tillytarmont).

Where the Double Disc meets or overlaps the Zodiac circle this point can be considered to be Capricorn – consistent with Capricorn in the south (versus Cancer in the north as the point where the soul comes from the Celestial Sphere). Additionally, this shape combination could represent a form of contract between Mithras and the universe and all it contains.

Whether “ring” or “solid” it is still the “Zodiac circle” being depicted and not just the Sun and Moon as suggested by some.

Group 3 has design features similar to the Mirror Case. They are in the Mirror Section here and in Appendix A because that is how they are labelled in popular texts. Perhaps there is a dual meaning for the Meigle, Maiden Stone and Collace examples. This “duality” will be explored in the Mirror Case Section.