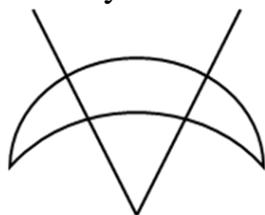


## Mithraic Symbols Decoded - V-Rod & Crescent

This is the popular, descriptive name for what historically has been determined as two Symbols that look like a bent rod and a crescent (particularly influenced, seemingly, by the shape of the crescent Moon). This is the most prolifically used Symbol on Class 1 and Class 2 Stones and is not restricted to any specific



geographic area. The shape is undoubtedly like a crescent Moon but is never seen in a correct “sky” orientation. Some commentators have thought the V-Rod element looks like bulls’ horns.



Invereen Stone

These are examples of Stones with both V- Rod & Crescent and Z-Rod with Double Disc (both courtesy of NMS, Edinburgh):-



Fiscavaig Stone

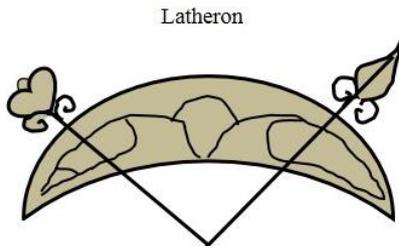
In the analysis at Table A there is an Object Category labelled V-Rod / Crescent bringing together the V-Rod & Crescent with similar objects – the Crescent Alone, Double Crescent, V-Rod & Horseshoe and Notched Crescent. The geometric shape of the Crescent is “standard” and the V-Rods only vary slightly around a 90° angle with the exception of Dyce which is more like 30°.

However, the decoration within the crescents and the “flame style”, arrow or finial on the rods varies so much that each design is unique. So, starting from a very general pattern (above) there then is no consistency in any detail where a number of Stones are to the same design or, indeed, are any sufficiently similar to produce any groups of designs. This tends to suggest the carver only needed to comply with the basic pattern and had a rather broad artistic licence.

Conversely maybe the commissioner of the slab or individual object on it expressed a wish for a particular style of adornment. Either way this has resulted in our seeing 90 objects following the general pattern of which 27 are indistinct. 63 separate designs have emerged.

The V-Rod shape is never seen on its own; there is only one instance of it being combined with a Symbol other than a Crescent (a Horseshoe/Arch at Migvie).

20 instances of the V-Rod & Crescent are at the top of Class 1 Stones. At Advie, Ballintomb, Bourtie, Cairnton, Clach Ard, Daviot, Fyvie, Inveravon (x2), Invereen, Inverurie, Kinblethmont, Kintore Churchyard, Logie Elphinstone (x2), Pabbay, Poolewe, Strathmartine Castle and Tillytarmont (x2).



When the crescent shape is with the V-Rod & Crescent it is always orientated as in the Latheron example alongside – except for Deer (the other way round) for which there is an 1800s sketch recording of the Stone which has been lost for over 100 years. Maybe the sketching is incorrect. Even the smaller crescent adornments within the main crescent follow the same orientation apart from Bourtie

where the inner crescents are positioned in parallel with the rods and Kintradwell where the infill is like two back-to-back commas.

Maybe the V-Rod is not a rod at all! As with the Z-Rod there have been suggestions that it is a broken spear signifying death and/or burial. The “rod” has also been referred to as a sceptre (carried by people in authority – monarchs, for example) so this might lead to the V-Rod and Crescent being somehow linked to a King (but why a broken sceptre?). If the V-Rod is not a single rod at all but two items then an alternative view emerges. Perhaps these are two lines representing something coming to a focal point. Many of the “lines” on the Stones have finials; taken with the line these add direction (in other words directional arrows).

In decoding Symbols used in Mithraism there reasonably would be identification of a bull – the crescent shape looks like bull horns. The bull was slain by Mithras – maybe the V-Rod shape is a sword or Persian harpe. The two (bull horns and sword) would amply fit as a Tauroctony Symbol.

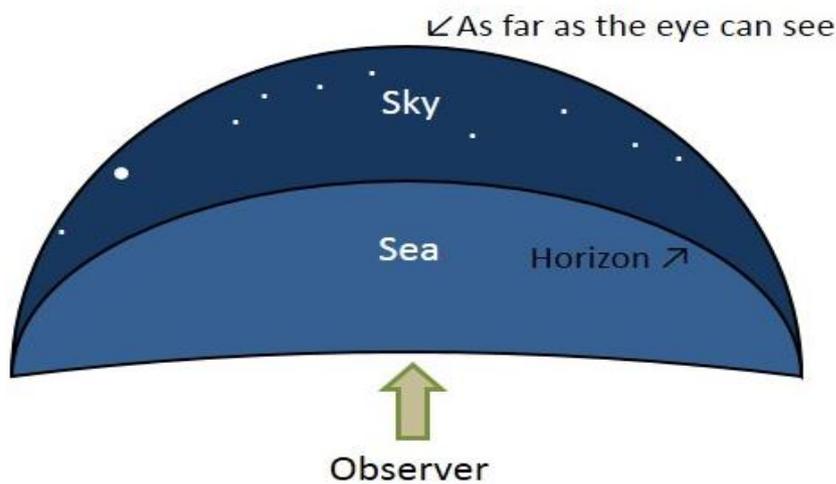
However, in the overall analysis there are few carvings of bulls. In fact 8, of which 6 are associated with Burghead the other two being at Woodwrae with other animals and beasts on a Cross slab and Kingsmills, Inverness as a single object on what looks like a Class 1 fragment. Having decided the bull analogy for the crescent was most likely over-emphasised and that Pictish-Mithraism did not perhaps fully use the mystery of the Roman Mithraism Tauroctony then some other alternatives surfaced.

The general crescent style is the same as a crescent Moon except for orientation; turn it clockwise and we see the waxing crescent of the first quarter phase; turning it counter-clockwise and we see the waning crescent of the last quarter. Maybe the carvings are Moon phases – but there is not a range of orientations.

As part of the Mysteries of Mithras the Moon figures prominently, not least as an initiation grade (Perses) which has the Moon as its Planet with the harpe (sickle and scythe) and a crescent Moon with star as associated Symbols.

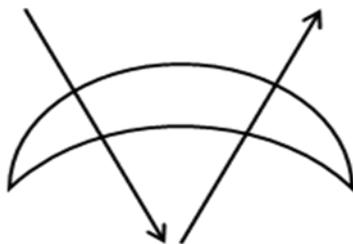
A suggestion is that the crescent shape looks like a view of the sky and beyond. The infill on some crescents looks like stylised clouds such as the Stone at Kinblethmont, near Arbroath.

This would be the “skyward” view across the sea:-



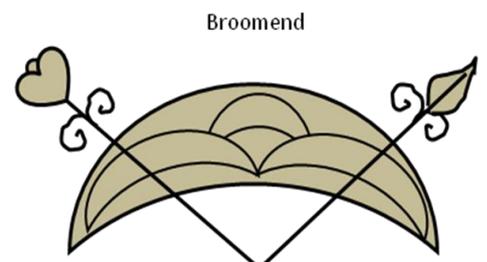
The view across land would be less well defined at the horizon.

Whilst multiple explanations including depictions of the Moon and the Roman Mithraic Tauroctony might be given for the V-Rod and Crescent, [in the context of the migration from Roman Mithraism to Pictish-Mithraism there is a composite explanation for this, the most numerous, Symbol.](#)



**The V-Rod is not a rod but two arrows (left down, right up).**

**These arrows are stylistically given direction, sometimes with “flames” as used for Z-Rods or with equivalent devices.**



**If the outer curve of the crescent equates to the furthest skyward view – the firmament / vault of Heaven / sphere of the fixed stars / Celestial Sphere - then the inner curve is the horizon.**

**In Mithraism, taking a skyward view, the directional arrows would have suggested the soul travelling from the direction of the fixed Celestial Sphere via the moving Planets at birth and returning via those Planets and the Celestial Sphere on death; in effect into mortality and later into immortality. The symbolism is structured in such a way that the observer can consider himself to be at the focal point looking out to the skyward view (Planets and Celestial Sphere) and imaging the soul's travel.**

**Taking the analysis a stage further, perhaps the outer curve of the Crescent can be made more specific than “Celestial Sphere” and be considered to represent the Milky Way – astrologically the home of the soul.**

**Astrologically souls descend on birth through the Gate of Cancer and ascend after death through the Gate of Capricorn – these gates (described by Porphyry as two holes in the sphere of fixed stars) being where the Milky Way and Zodiac intersect. The decode for the V-Rod in Pictish-Mithraism as directional arrows aligns with this astrological concept. This is explored in detail in Appendix B.**

**“Gates” as holes in the sphere of fixed stars opens up another possibility. Heaven is considered not to be tangible so is beyond what we can see. We can see the Planets and the Celestial Sphere (the home of Constellations, therefore, including the Zodiac). In theology in general, maybe Heaven as the home, or realm, of God or the Gods (depending on religious belief) is beyond the Celestial Sphere. Maybe Heaven is reached via gates, or holes in the “sphere of fixed stars” into a place that is not tangible so is undefined. In terms of Pictish-Mithraism and its Symbols, the arrows which represent the travel of the soul are carved such that they neither start nor finish at the edge of the sky-ward view. If deliberately drawn over the sky-ward view (without pictorial licence or error) the carver was showing that the soul resides beyond the Celestial Sphere – in intangible Heaven; it travels across (or through) that sphere to the observer on Earth.**

**In summary, consistent with the principles of Mithraism, the V-Rods are directional arrows, the angle between them represents the passage of time between the arrival of the soul on birth, into mortality, and its departure on death, into immortality. The Crescent is the sky-ward view from Earth to the Planets and the fixed stars of the Celestial Sphere – beyond is Heaven. This intangible Heaven – the home of the soul - is beyond the Celestial Sphere; it is where the directional arrows start and finish.**

There is infill on many of the Stones - maybe more artistic licence than further symbolism although a recurring theme is sets of arcs like the crescent itself. These arcs and other shapes could represent clouds.

The 14 additional objects in this Object Group have not been separately drawn as 13 have similarities with the general crescent plus one example of a V-Rod with a Horseshoe / Arch:-

There are 7 **Crescent Alone** objects. Daviot is similar to Tobar na Maor and Clynekirkton (1) V-rod & Crescent designs. Kingoldrum has internal scroll patterns as have St Vigeans (1) and Meigle (6) – all similar to Meigle (4) V-rod & Crescent design. Rosskeen, Little Ferry Links (2) and Breck of Hillwell are indistinct.

In each case of the 4 **Double Crescent** objects (Kintore, Castle Hill (2), Newton of Lewesk, Ulbster and Dunrobin, Dairy Park) the double crescent is achieved by mirror-imaging between the upper and lower crescents.

The **V-rod & Horseshoe / Arch** at Migvie mixes two Symbols which are decoded and discussed in this web page. The style of carving used on this Symbol Stone is different from all others.

The **Notched Crescent** at Easterton of Roseisle is a plain, filled crescent with a notch in the lower central portion which alternatively could be a horseshoe design.