

Pictish Symbol Stones – Case Study Maiden Stone (aka Drumdurno Stone)

Features – possibly standing only a few yards from its original location, this Stone has a mix of Mithraic and Christian era carvings.

Often referred to in Standing Stone books as monsters or fish monsters the objects above the Cross look like Hippocamps except that correctly drawn Hippocamps have horse heads. Several of these objects on Pictish Symbol Stones are difficult to decode due to design variations. Skinnet Chapel at Halkirk and Ulbster creatures have the curled tail, no fore legs and soft features to the head. Meigle number 1 has four carvings counted in this publication as Hippocamps – three are of the type with a fish like tail, one has a curled tail, the two that are shown opposing both have fish type tails, horse heads and fore legs as does one other object but the example with curled tail has the same soft features in the head design as Halkirk and Ulbster and no forelegs. Brodie and Logierait Stones are similar to the Maiden Stone with opposing, menacing looking creatures with curled tails and no forelegs. Rather confusing but categorised here as Hippocamps in the absence of any alternative classifications. In this instance there is probably a Christian story attached to the Hippocamps with the man standing in between.

Although the top of the Stone is weather worn it looks as if the uppermost



figures are centaurs as is the figure full-width lower down. Allegories could explain the use of these Symbols ranging from the explanation of a Christian story – St Anthony’s encounter with a centaur – to more Mithraic interpretations involving the constellation Centaurus, a bull slayer etymology or a pun on bull.

Mirror, Comb and Pictish Beast decodes are outlined in Case Studies above.

Turning to the Z-Rod with Notched Rectangle here is an unusual object. Eleven “notched rectangle” objects have been found so far nine of which are with Z-Rods. Six not only have the notch at the bottom of the rectangle but cut outs on the left and right verticals. The Z-Rod can be interpreted as those with Double Discs i.e. the torches, albeit

rotated ninety degrees, of Cautes and Cautopates representing, respectively, the morning and spring equinox and the evening and autumn equinox.

The Notched Rectangle represents the Roman Mithraeum with side benches and end wall which typically housed the Tauroctony. The side cut outs represent what are referred to as the cult niches and in an underground Mithraeum would have accommodated statues of Cautes and Cautopates. So this composite object is a reminder of the Roman Mithraeum and could have been used instructionally.