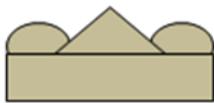


## Mithraic Symbols Decoded - Comb

Of the 40 Comb objects identified 6 are indistinct. So 34 have been drawn resulting in 22 distinct designs emerging which have been arranged into 4 groups. Several Combs do not have recognisable “teeth” as such so look more like Decorated Rectangles. In keeping with not re-classifying objects from how they are generally recorded in readily available texts, there has been no re-allocation between the Comb and Decorated Rectangle in the lists of “Objects By Location” in Appendix F of this website). That said it is worth covering these differences and similarities now by considering how the four groups in Appendix A (Combs) have been created. Group D is very straightforward – all examples are double-sided “combs” i.e. teeth on opposing surfaces, and Group C single-sided i.e. teeth on only one surface. Group B has as a common feature curved shapes on the top of the design with three of the seven having several parallel lines beneath which look like “teeth”; the remaining four have rectangle shapes in the lower portion so look somewhat like Decorated Rectangles. Finally, in Group A all the shapes are rectangle based, four with what one might call “contained teeth” in other words kept within rectangular outers then two designs which are on Keith Hall, Drimmies, Drumbuie and Sandside Stones which are just rectangular boxes with no “teeth”. These latter do not really fall into the Decorated Rectangle category at all so are the odd ones out but nonetheless are recorded in texts as Combs.

Having noted the traditional Mirror / Comb combination and concluded a symbolic Mithraic context for the Mirror, it is now necessary to see what the research into Mithraism might suggest for the Comb. The complication arises with so many objects being referred to as “comb” but without the attributes of such an item. 6 of the 22 designs are not comb-like but maybe have other meanings – so far not apparent. For example, Nether Corskie (alongside) is in this category.



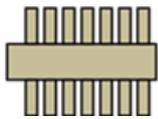
Nether Corskie

Combs with “teeth” on one side are Clach Ard with 5, Tillytarmont with 7, Inveravon Stone 2 with 8 and Collace with 7. Those with “teeth” on both sides are Cullaird with 5, Inveravon Stone 1 with 7, Meigle Stone 1 with 13, Birse with 7 and a Symbol design that has “ends” beyond the “teeth” with a varying number of “teeth”. This last item ranges from The Maiden Stone example with 21 teeth to Kinnedar with 9 and Wester Denoon with 7 and some others.

The significance of the number 7 in Roman Mithraism – Planets, grades etc. – and the representation of Planets in other Symbols, for example, on the Double Discs with Z-Rods, leads to wondering whether the Combs have a hidden “7” meaning. If there is then the Combs that do not have an exact “7” need also to be explained.

Perhaps sculptors in some instances were not always given an exact specification to use a specific number so may have improvised. Alternatively a requirement could have been to use a comb type design but to obscure the number of “teeth”. For those that do have 7 teeth – Tillytarmont, Collace, Inveravon Stone 1, Wester Denoon and Birse or multiple of 7 such as The Maiden Stone with 21 and Monifieth with 14 then an explanation can be given.

**On Pictish Stones the Comb can allude to the Mithraic belief that the soul takes several steps, in fact 7, via the Planets between the Celestial Sphere and the Earth at one’s birth (into mortality) and the 7 steps back the way to immortality on one’s death. There are 7 Mithraic grades and there are 7 Planets (at the time including the Sun and Moon). The “teeth” could be a used as a counter to assist the explanation in talking an initiate through the levels – those Symbols with teeth on one side for the two-way journey, with teeth on both sides on a central bar explaining, separately, the two journeys.**



↑ Inveravon Stone 1

**Combs are seen with associated Mirrors perhaps reinforcing a meaning, such as the concept of the steps via the Planets from the Comb and the Planets as part of the lower concentric rings from the Mirror. When a V-Rod is adjacent the principle of soul travel then has an inter-Symbol reinforcement across three Symbols – V-Rod, Comb and Mirror.**

**Whilst authors have given the names Comb and Mirror to these Symbols maybe the original carvers used these shapes to obscure their meaning.**