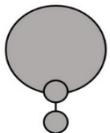
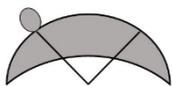
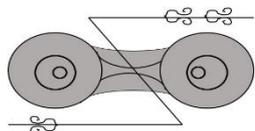


# TILLYTARMONT STONES



## Pictish Symbols Decoded



Norman J Penny

At the confluence of the rivers Isla and Deveron near Rothiemay, 5 Stones were discovered, mainly through ploughing activity, from the 1860s to the 1970s. All of the “top five” incised Pictish Symbol Stone figures across what is now Scotland are represented here – the V-rod & Crescent (twice), Mirror (twice), the Z-Rod & Double Disc (twice), Pictish Beast and Comb. Additionally there is an example of a Mirror Case, a Horseshoe / Arch, an Eagle and a Goose – giving the name “Goose Stone” to one of the first Stones discovered here – and an unusual Z-Rod with Serpent.

The author has made a connection between these Symbols and a form of Roman Mithraism. At the time of the Roman Empire this mystery cult, derived from an older Persian religious belief, was practised across the Empire. There are remains of temples to this God – Mithras - by Hadrian’s Wall with statues and inscribed stones in museums e.g. in Newcastle.



Remains of the Mithras temple (Mithraeum) at Carrawburgh, Hadrian's Wall.

The entire discovery, with Symbols decoded, is in the book “Pictish Mithraism – the Religious Purpose of the Pictish Symbol Stones” published by Austin Macauley and available on Amazon. More detail is at [www.pictish-mithraism.com](http://www.pictish-mithraism.com)

The Tillytarmont Stones have played a very significant part in determining who created the Symbols and when. All of the Symbols on these Stones are shown on Page 1.

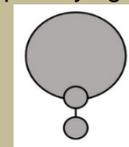
Fundamental to the Mithraism cult is the belief that the soul travels from beyond the Celestial Sphere at birth so into mortality then back at death into immortality. This belief would have been spiritually comforting – which partly explains its popularity amongst soldiers – and an enticement to join the cult.

Looking at Pictish Stones there is a Symbol which shows the travel of the soul - if the “V” of the so-called **V-Rod and Crescent** is seen not as a V but two arrows with the Crescent representing the skywards view.



The downward arrow represents the arrival of the soul at birth, the upward arrow its return on death and the Crescent the view from Earth, across the horizon to the Celestial Sphere. Two Tillytarmont Stones have this symbol – at the top of the Stones.

Maybe the apparent difference between the two **Mirrors** (shown below) is due to incising tools and techniques rather than portraying a different meaning.



In the Pictish-Mithraism context, the Mirror circles can be considered to depict relationships between the Zodiac, Planets and the Earth. In each case the larger circle is the Zodiac – where it overlaps the smaller circles is Capricorn.

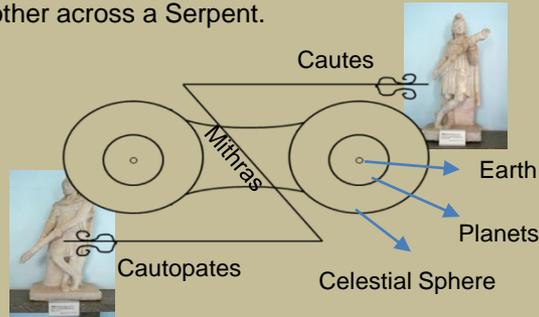
Contents of a tri-fold pamphlet produced by the author – January 2017. Pages 4 to 6.

The non-geometric, basically zoomorphic, **Pictish Beast** has been the most difficult to decode. It looks like the sea goat which is the sign of Capricorn making the linkage between the V-Rod & Crescent and Mirror.

This is the point in the zodiac where the soul travels on death equating with the upward arrow of the V-Rod.

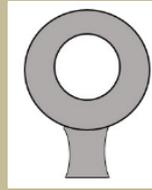


Tillytarmont Stones have two Z-Rod instances – one, as usually seen, with the Double Disc the other across a Serpent.



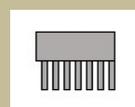
General example - Z-Rod & Double Disc.

Of the Z-Rod and Double Disc Symbols the one discovered in 1944 (known as Stone 2) has the usual three concentric circles compared with the indistinct Stone 3 discovered in 1867 and refound in 1954 with only two concentric circles. Both provide the same message of Cautes and Cautopates linked together by Mithras with the associated Symbolism of morning and evening, spring and autumn plus the Double Discs having several meanings such as the Earth in the centre with the Planets then the Celestial Sphere; the Sun and Moon paired in harmony and/or the Sun and Mithras in balance.



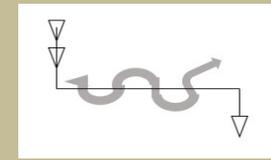
Two elements of Mithraic belief are in the **Mirror Case** on the so-called Goose Stone. One is Mithras Born from The Rock and holding the Celestial Sphere (alongside is a statue from Hadrian's Wall in the Great North Museum, Newcastle – with constellations suggesting Mithras rotating the universe) the other the concentric circles representing the earth, planets and Celestial Sphere.

The key physical difference when practising the Roman and Pictish forms of Mithraism was the gathering place, with the fundamental shift from indoors (the temple or Mithraeum) to outdoors - the Symbol Stone and skywards view. The people who created the first Stones would have known what the earlier, indoor version looked like. It would have been recollected, then described to future initiates through different Symbols such as the **Horseshoe / Arch** on the Tillytarmont Stone found in 1974.



The Tillytarmont design of the **Comb** has seven "teeth". The number seven has important significance in Roman Mithraism.

The Planets known at the time were Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury and Saturn. Combined with the Sun and Moon the seven "Planets" are associated with the seven steps in the ladder of initiation grades in the Roman Mithraic cult.



**Z-Rods with Serpents** are unusual - there are only six of the type of design as at Tillytarmont. Taking the Z-Rod to represent Cautes and Cautopates connected together by Mithras the Double Discs are replaced by the Serpent which can be interpreted as a single constellation, a set of constellations which stretch across about half of the Zodiac, time itself, eternal life etc. In Pictish-Mithraism terms this arguably reinforces the connectivity and all-embracing position of Mithras.

In his book and website the author concludes that the initial Symbol Stones in Pictland were created by Roman Army "stayers" following the 212 CE withdrawal.



Location of Muiryfold  
← Roman camp



Tillytarmont Stones are near three Roman Army sites – Burnfield, Auchinhove and Muiryfold; the current B 9022 road (Portsoy to Huntly) passes close to these sites – perhaps on the route of a Roman road.

**Tillytarmont** is, therefore, put forward as the geographic start point for that successor to Roman Mithraism – Pictish-Mithraism.