

a θῶκος—Celtic Fire-ritual—Beltane—Altar of Zeus at Olympia—The Pelopeum at Olympia—The Pyraethi of Strabo—Stone Circles of Inverness-shire—The ἱερὸς κύκλος of Pendine.

A considerable number of British stone-circles have been explored, and the outcome is that, some of the number—for the most part of small size only—having been proved to be sepulchral,¹ it has been sweepingly asserted that all were constructed to serve as burial-places. If this were so, one would expect the evidence of such purpose to be abundant and indubitable, and especially so in the case of such great works as Avebury and Stonehenge, Arbor Low, and the great circles of Swinside and Salkeld. But the facts are these: the Swinside circle disclosed no burial at all; none has been proven at Salkeld; the whole area of Arbor Low yielded but one interment, and certain high authorities hold that to be intrusive; no burial has ever been found within Stonehenge, none at Avebury, and none in any of the great Cornish circles.² And the list might easily be extended. It is a just statement of the facts to say that, while small circles, *i.e.* of 50 ft. diameter or less, have frequently been found to contain interments which warrant us in believing that such circles were built as grave-monuments, there have been no such discoveries in the larger circles, where, if interments of any kind have come to light, they bear no proportion either in dignity or in number to the size of the circles. It is quite true that these greater circles are commonly associated with barrows in greater or less numbers, and that Avebury and Stonehenge in particular are, or were, surrounded

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CIRCLES OF ABERDEENSHIRE.

Stone Circles not all sepulchral—Various theories as to their purpose—The Aberdeenshire type—King Bridius of the Picts—Details of Aberdeenshire Circles—Hector Boece's account—Theories and difficulties—The Central Fires—The βοθρός at Old Rayne, etc.—The Circle at Garrol Wood—Intrusive Burials—Tullynessle—Analogy with the Greek Theatre—The Horizontal Stone

¹ *E.g.*, the circles enclosing cist-burials at Addington in Kent, and in Devonshire those at Hartford Tor near Ivybridge, Hound Tor near Shavercombe, and elsewhere. But not by any means all the smaller circles have yielded traces of interments, *e.g.* four on Rumbald's Moor, Yorks. (the diameter of which were respectively 40, 43, 80, and 93 ft.) were all drawn blank.

² Yet one is told for example, that 'with hardly an exception every primary interment that has been found within a megalithic circle in Britain was made in the Bronze

Age' (Rice Holmes, *Ancient Britain*, p. 215). Of the circles which have yielded remains which may be held to prove their sepulchral purpose only the smallest fraction are megalithic as that word is commonly understood, *e.g.* Duloe in Cornwall, and as a rule, wherever such evidences of burial have been found, if the stones be big, the circles themselves are very small. That of Duloe itself is but 30 ft. in diameter. As for the assertion that the burials there found were 'made in the Bronze Age,' this is quite unwarranted.

¹ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxi (1887), p. 382.

with barrows in vast numbers; but it is equally true that the circles themselves are not crowded with the interments which we should expect to find within them if their purpose was in any sense sepulchral.¹

It is a remarkable fact that, with the possible exception of Arbor Low, there have not been found within the great circles traces of even intrusive interments; and the inference is first, that while these circles enjoyed a certain sanctity, it was not sepulchral, and secondly that their sanctity was so great, and so well remembered, as to safeguard them from intrusive burials through centuries of time when, whether their real purpose was or was not forgotten, their use at any rate was discontinued. And this points to the conclusion that their real purpose, and possibly even their use, may have been recognised at a date far later than is usually supposed.² The lesser sanctity of lesser circles, erected originally for the very same purpose, may have failed in some cases so to safeguard them, and of the burials found in these some at any rate may quite well be intrusive and no part of their original design.

The theory that the larger circles had a different purpose from the smaller was suggested long ago.³ It is endorsed by Déchelette.⁴ But while all are agreed that the smaller circles, the true cromlechs, were usually sepulchral, about the purpose of the great circles there is no agreement, nor even any well-supported theory. They are written down, according to the preference of the individual, as temples, as astronomical observatories or sun-dials, as burial-places, as a British equivalent for the Zoroastrian 'tower of silence,'⁵ and as moots. It is

¹ E. Gibson remarked the fact as long ago as 1772, *à propos* of the great circle of Rollright (100 ft.) in Oxfordshire, which had been vainly searched, he says, by Ralph Sheldon for bones or other relics (Camden, i, 293). Nothing has transpired since to upset his conclusion.

² A. L. Lewis, arguing from different data, arrives at the same conclusion: *Arch. Journ.* xlix (1892) p. 140. He thinks the evidence 'tends to shew that, however old these monuments may be, ceremonies of some kind were carried on in them up to the introduction of Christianity.' 'Tradition . . . connects them with a period which cannot be considered distantly prehistoric' (*ibid.* p. 147).

³ E.g., by Llewelyn Jewitt, *Grave Mounds and their Contents*, p. 71.

⁴ *Manuel d'Archéologie préhistorique* (Paris, 1908), vol. i, p. 446. This writer found himself quite unable to pronounce upon the purpose of the great circles, and shared the general assumption that they are of vast antiquity (*ibid.* i, p. 447).

⁵ Dr. H. Colley March in *Proc. Dorset N.H. and Antiq. Field Club*, xxix (1908) p. 225; *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Ant. Soc.*, 1889. He sought to make good the theory (first mooted perhaps by Blight in 1868 and approved by F. C. Lukis in *Proc. S.A.*, 1885) that the interspaces of the peristaliths had originally been filled in with dry-walling or with wattles, so as to form enclosures,

possible that there were individual circles subserving almost every one of these various purposes, and that some of the circles may have combined several of these purposes; there is no reason to think that all the circles were built with any one purpose only. Some of them served as moots. 'This and no more than this, is the point to be established here.' The evidence that stone circles were built and used for this purpose by a Celtic people domiciled in Greece, and by Danes and Northmen in many lands, has been stated. It remains next to enquire whether there is anything in the case of the British circles to suggest that these also were used as moots.

Stone circles are especially abundant in Aberdeenshire and the adjoining counties of Scotland. They are of various types, but of those in Aberdeenshire the larger number are of one peculiar type, viz., circles of free-standing stones in variable numbers, of which the distinguishing feature is the presence, usually close to the south-western or southern point of the circle, of a great monolith placed horizontally in such a way as to block the interspace between two of the standing stones. These 'flankers' are usually the tallest pair in the whole peristalith. Notable examples of the type are or were to be seen at Candle Hill of Old Rayne (diam. 60 ft.), Sinhinny¹ (87 ft. by 81½ ft.), Hatton of Ardoyne (81 ft.), Ardlair (35 ft.), Castle Fraser² (65 ft.), Auchquhorthies³ in Banchory-Devenick (97 ft. by 74½ ft.), Aquhorthies in Inverurie (120 ft.), Fiddes Hill (46 ft.), Old Keig (66 ft.),⁴ Balquhain (70 by 60 ft.), and Tyre-baggar in Dyce (61 by 56 ft.).⁵

within which were exposed the bodies of the dead until the flesh had disappeared. The theory has found little favour with archaeologists, and is wholly unsupported by evidence. The few examples forthcoming of stone-circles apparently thus built-in with dry-walling appear to be later attempts to make use of the circles by converting them into enclosures. An example is the circle at Tredinnick in Gulval, Cornwall. Homer is conclusive evidence that, at any rate when constructed for moots, the peristaliths were designedly left open.

¹ Otherwise Sinheany or Sunhoney.

² Otherwise Balgorkar, but now known as West Mains.

³ There are two circles here, one shewing

the horizontal stone, the other too much damaged to be determinable.

⁴ MacLagan, *Hill Forts*, p. 74.

⁵ See the series of articles by F. R. Coles, who has systematically surveyed them all, in *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv-xli; others *ibid.* i, 141; v, 130; xiv, 295; xviii, 319; xix, 370. Also A. L. Lewis in *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.* 1900, p. 67; Anderson, *Scotland in Pagan Times (Bronze Age)*; Stuart, *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*; MacLagan, *Hill Forts and Stone Circles of Scotland*; Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments*; Robt. Munro, *Prehistoric Scotland*; *Archæologia*, v. 246; xxii, 202, 410; *Proc. Brit. Assoc.* 1871; *Proc. S.A.*, 2d ser., x, 302; Bp. Browne, *Antiquities in the Neighbourhood of Dunecbt* (fine plates).

The part of Scotland where is found this type of circle was close to the headquarters of Pictish sovereignty in the sixth century, when King Brude (the *Bridius* of Bede¹) had his seat of government near Inverness. In the seventh century, the royal seat was moved southward to Fortrenn in Strathearn, Perthshire. King Brude is a historical figure.² He was, says Bede, 'very powerful.' He represents the last period of Pictish paganism, for though he died a Christian, he had been bred up in Druidism. The old belief that the Romans penetrated even to this part of Scotland has been proved correct by the recent exploration of two of their fortified stations, at Raedykes near Stonehaven in Kincardineshire, 16 miles south-west of Aberdeen, and at Mailen, Ythan Wells, in the heart of Aberdeenshire, nine miles east of Huntly.

The type is strictly local, replaced in the shires of Nairn and Inverness and the adjacent areas by a different type of complex and concentric circles, commonly triple, shewing nothing analogous to the horizontal stone of the Aberdeenshire type.³ From this fact A. L. Lewis would infer a racial difference in the builders.⁴ Perhaps it was rather a local difference. The difference in the two types of circle has possibly a close parallel in that which is often to be seen between the typical churches of two adjacent English counties. There are undoubtedly cases where this corresponds to a racial difference in the builders, as for example in Cornwall by contrast with Somerset, but it would be difficult to establish any such racial difference in the majority of cases.

The circles of the Aberdeenshire type, though varying considerably in size, are in no case large. The smallest (Ardlair and Esslie no. 2) have a diameter of 35 ft. only; the largest (Aquhorthies in Inverurie) has a diameter of 120 ft.⁵; the majority would seem to be somewhere between 60 ft. and 80 ft. Of 20 circles taken as they come, 11 (55 %) are of this size, 14 (70 %) have diameters

¹ *Bridio filio Meilochon, rege potentissimo*, H.E. III, iv, § 159. He died in 565, immediately after his conversion by St. Columba. His Scottish name is Brude Mac-Mailhon, and MacBride and Macmillan are good Scottish names to this day.

² Stokes, *Ireland in Early Christian Times*, p. 120.

³ *Proc. S.A.S.* xviii, pp. 328, *sqq.*

⁴ *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.* 1900, p. 67.

⁵ The circle at Wester Echt also had a diameter of 120 ft., but there is no trace of any recumbent stone (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, 187).

between 50 ft. and 80 ft., while four (20 %) are bigger and only two (10 %) are smaller. Some few are perfect circles, while others are not; and F. R. Coles emphatically declares¹ that they shew no regard for any systematic orientation.

The number of standing stones seems commonly to have been from 10 to 12, and they are of no very great size. The circles usually stand upon rising ground commanding an extensive view, and are mostly set upon a southward slope, but not invariably.² The largest pillar-stones are commonly found at the lower side of the circle, the smallest at the upper side. At the lower side, adjacent to the tallest stones, is found the horizontal stone, which is the characteristic of the whole series.³ This is usually bigger than any other of the monoliths employed. At Sinhinny it measures 16 ft. in length and 4½ ft. in breadth, and is calculated to weigh some 18 tons; that at Old Keig F. R. Coles calculates to weigh as much as 30 tons. Not infrequently the horizontal stone is of a different kind from the pillar-stones: at Sinhinny it is of grey granite, whereas all the other stones of the circle are of red granite⁴; at Ardoyne the horizontal stone and the two contiguous pillar-stones are alike 'foreign,' brought at vast labour from Bennachie, some miles away.⁵ Other cases are at Raes of Clune and at Garrol Wood.⁶ At Loanheid in Daviot there is a second recumbent stone set close behind the first and parallel with it,⁷ seemingly an unique arrangement. This circle had eight stones besides the horizontal blocks and the two contiguous pillars, and was not large (65 ft. by 60 ft.).

The horizontal stones seem to have been set upon their edges rather than upon their faces, and the smaller stones which adjoin them may have served to hold them in that position. Dr. John Milne would see in the whole arrangement a 'ghost-door,' the smaller stones representing bars

¹ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, 197.

² *Archaeologia*, v, 246.

³ It is therefore usually at or near the south point of the circle, but not invariably. That of the Tomnaverie circle is much nearer west than south (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxix, 211), and that of Ardlair (fig. 9) is due south. That of Strichen, on N. side of the circle,

is not original (Bp. Browne, *Antiqs. of Dunecbt*, p. 90).

⁴ Stuart, *Sculp. Stones of Scotland*, i, p. xxxi.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, 154.

⁷ *Ibid.* xxxvi, 517. It is possible that these are merely the two parts of a single original stone which has split in two.

to keep the door closed. He believes the circles to be without exception sepulchral, and finds a parallel for their construction in those peculiar circles, open with the exception of one bay, which Dr. Greenwell observed within the mass of certain barrows.¹

In some instances there are distinct remains of a kind

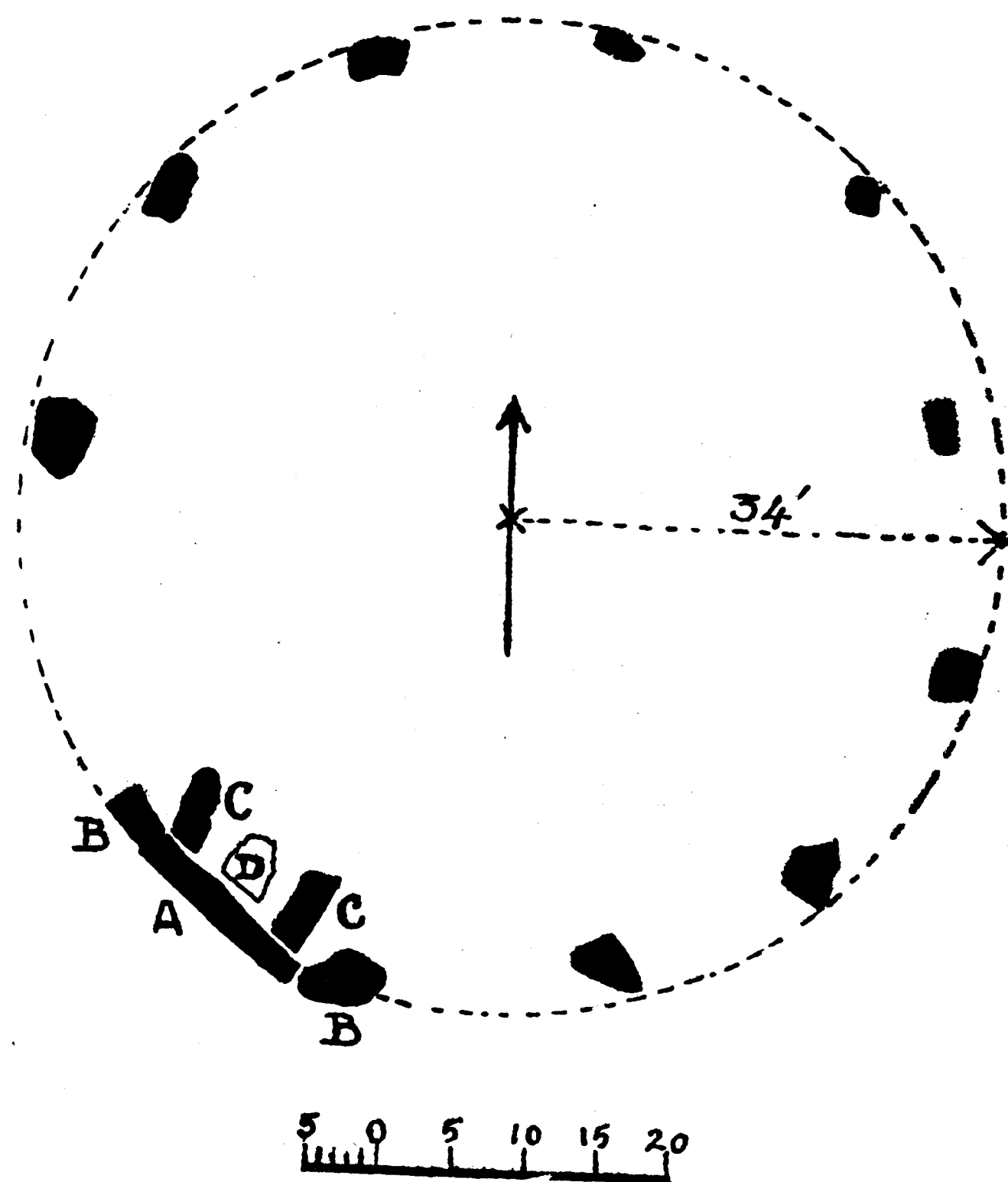


FIG. 8. AUCHQUHORTHIES IN MANAR.

A, Horizontal stone; BB, Flankers; CC, 'Arms'; D, Level with ground.

of paved dais in front of the horizontal stone, as at Fiddes Hill, Castle Fraser and Tomnagorn, five miles north of the railway station of Torphins; and at Fiddes Hill are found also, besides the two main pillar-stones of the peristalith at either end of the horizontal stone, two

¹ Above, ch. iii.

smaller stones at what may be described as the front corners of this dais.

Dalrymple's sketch of the circle at Ardlair¹ shews the dais as veritably a long seat with monolithic back and arms. A second example of the same kind was at Tomnagorn,² and yet a third is at Auchquhorthies in Manar (fig. 8.)

At Auchquhorthies in Banchory³-Devenick the dais is set slightly forward, so as to be quite independent of the peristalith, and had horizontal retaining stones at either end.⁴

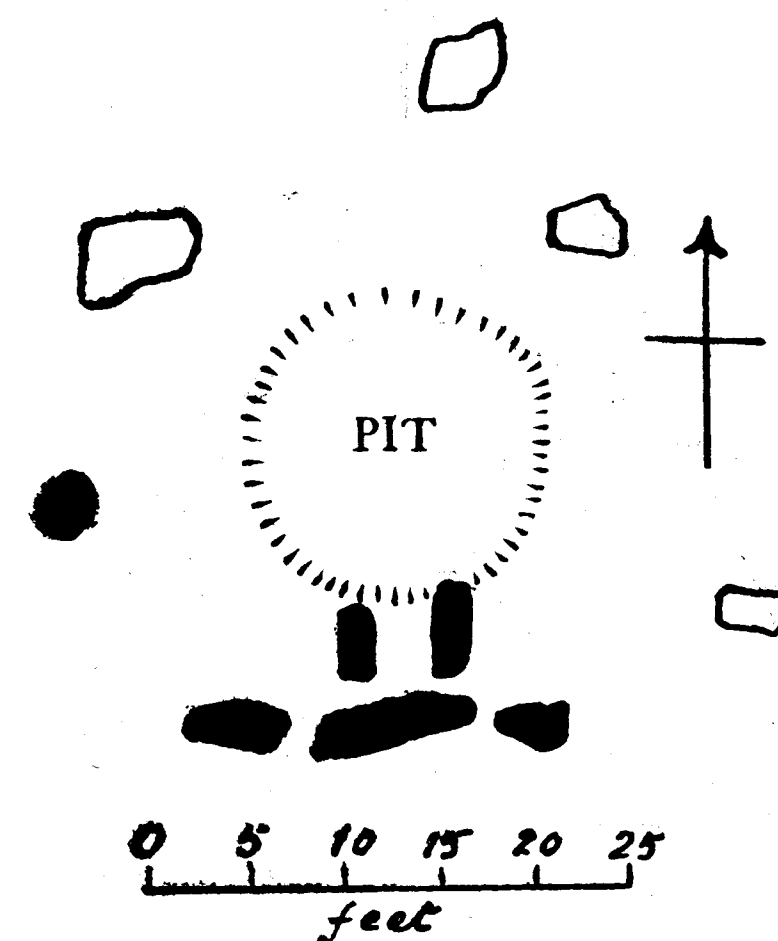


FIG. 9. ARDLAIR IN KENNETHMONT
(After F. R. Coles in *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxvi, 557).

¹ Reproduced in Anderson, *Scot. in Pagan Times (Bronze Age)* p. 110.

² *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, p. 174; xxxvi, p. 556.

³ Auchquhorthies, a common name in this part of Scotland, has been explained as 'Field of Prayer' (*Arch.* xxii, p. 103), or 'Field of the Pillar Stones' (Bp. Browne, *Antiqs. of Dunelm*, p. 69). The name of Banchory (cf. Welsh Bangor) is suggestive: there are two fine circles in the parish. In Kincardineshire is Banchory-Ternan, where are three circles, with diameters of 75 ft. and 45 ft. Both Ternan and Devenick are names of saints, and St. Devenick is said to have been buried at the Banchory named after him, 'where a church was founded in his honour,' says Mackinlay, who explains Banchory as *ban coire*, 'white cauldron (i.e.

hollow).' In Welsh and Irish mythology there is a good deal of curious confusion between *coir* 'a cauldron,' and *côr* 'a circle'; see Herbert, *Cyclops Christianus*, ch. vii. A double concentric circle (diam. 57 ft. by 36 ft.) on Machrie Moor, Arran, is called 'Fingal's Cauldron Seat' (Bryce, *Book of Arran*; cf. Martin, *Description of Western Isles*). Johnston (*Place-Names of Scotland*) would interpret Banchory as 'Pointed Hill.' 'Cauldron' seems in fact to have been used in the sense of 'circle.' Herbert quotes from the *Sons of Llyr*: 'Is there not protection in the *catbedra* of Ceridwen's cauldron?' and concludes that 'cauldron,' in the language of Bardism, actually meant 'stone circle.' If so, the *catbedra* referred to is clearly the *θῶκος*.

⁴ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, p. 145.

The central area is usually flat, but occasionally raised. The rise as a rule is slight, but at Candle Hill of Insch the centre rises to a pronounced cairn. At Ardlair, Auchquhorthies, Tomnagorn, and in many other examples, there is a sort of kerb or ring of small stones within the peristalith, set closely side by side and rising but a few inches above the turf. Stuart records,¹ after Dalrymple, a more elaborate variation at Ardoyne, where he says

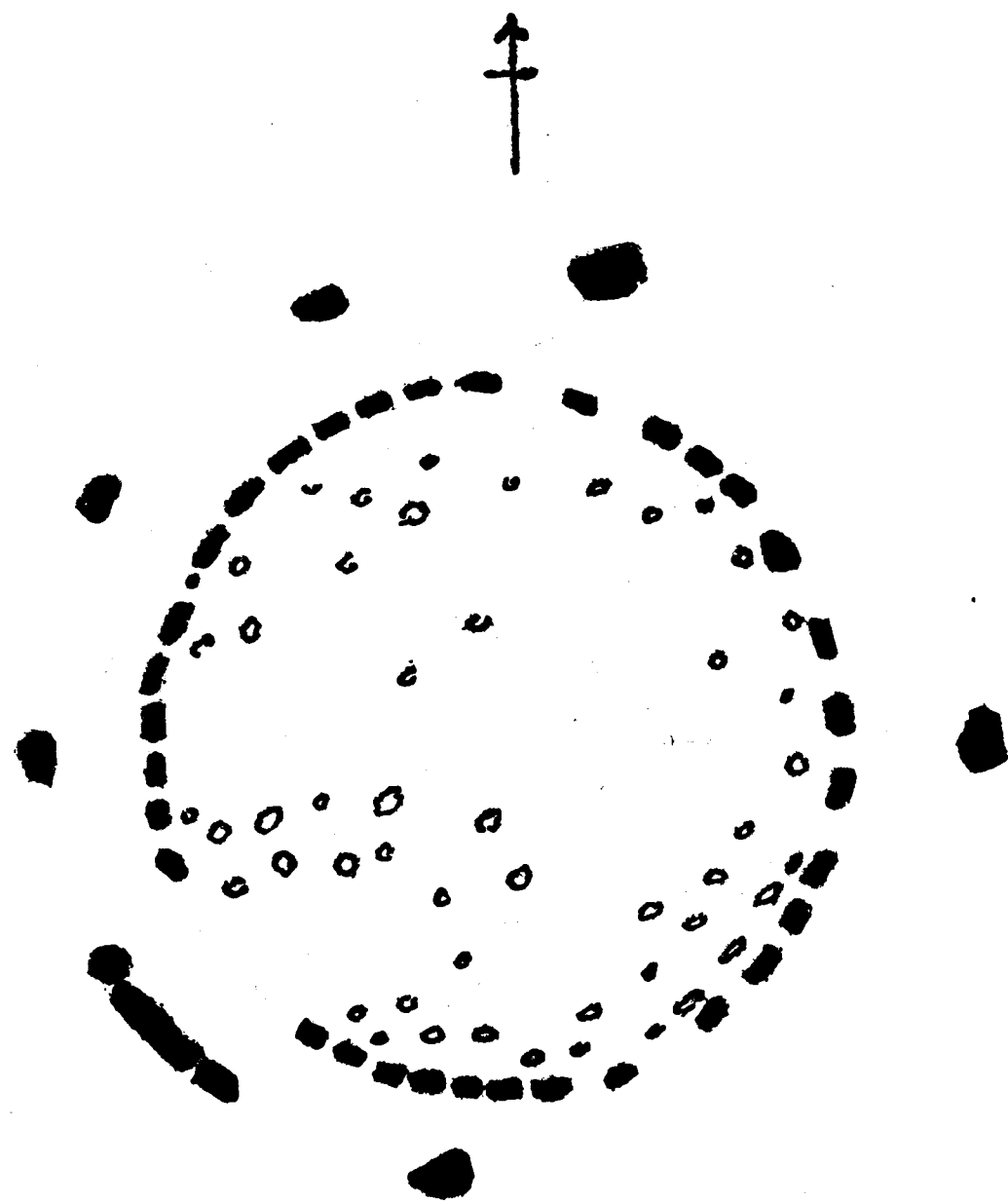


FIG. 10. HATTON OF ARDOYNE
(After Miss C. Maclagan, 1875).

¹ *Sculp. Stones of Scotland*, i, p. xxiii; *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxv, 246. In Maclagan's *Hill Forts* (1875) the outer kerb is shewn (pl. xxx) as a continuous ring of blocks, save for an opening opposite to the horizontal stone, as wide as the stone is long. As Miss Maclagan had a theory to establish, viz. that all these circles were but the ruins of *brochs*, too much weight must not be attached to her plan; but on the other hand she would not have selected this particular circle to illustrate her theory, had there not been visible something which seemed to support her case, i.e., an inner ring of blocks with dressed faces,

resembling the inner footing of the great ring-wall which she postulated. She gives the diameter of the peristalith as 81 ft., that of the kerb as 61 ft., and took the two to represent the remains of a wall 10 ft. in thickness.

A curious analogy to these circular pavements is to be seen in the *intibuatanus* of Peru, described and figured in Squier's *Peru*, where a circle of standing stones is surrounded on the outer side by a 'massive paved platform.' In Peru, as in Britain, small cromlechs were used as burial-places, but the purpose of the larger *intibuatanus* is not determined.

there were two such rings or kerbs, one within the other, concentric with the main circle: the interspace between the inmost and the medial ring was $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft.; that between the medial ring and the peristalith was 6 ft.; and the diameter of the last-named was 81 ft. In section this work strikingly resembled the typical *ting* of the Shetlands, for the area of the medial circle was raised about a foot above the outermost, that of the central area again about a foot above the medial circle. This latter was 'faced all round with stones having the outer sides in most cases flat, and most of them rising several inches above the surface, some of them 18 in. or more, while they extend 2 ft. underground. The stones round the edge of the inmost circle were very much smaller, and not so deeply sunk into the ground.' Within the circle of standing stones at Whitehill, Monymusk, was also a second 'circle or kerb formed of flat slabs rising from 10-14 inches to 2 ft. above the surface, all set with great solidity and firmness.'¹ At Tomnaverie the plan was the same. The peristalith stands upon a true circle of 56 ft., and concentric with this is an inner circle of exactly half the radius (diam. 28 ft.), while the floor is littered with the remains of a medial ring too much damaged to be measurable.² At Sinhenny and elsewhere some observers fancied they saw the remains of central cairns, but excavation established the fact that there was as a rule no cairn. On the other hand it showed that the entire floor of the circle at Castle Fraser had been paved with small 'setts' laid some six inches below the present surface,³ and the same is recorded of the circle called North Stone, Alford.⁴ A circle in Clatt (diam. about 75 ft.) was 'entirely paved with stones to the depth of about 3 ft.'⁵

There are other local variations. The circle at Whitehill, Monymusk, has the appearance of a raised circular barrow, the top rising as high as the peristalith which encircles it, and the centre of the mound sunk to form a shallow pit of 9 ft. in diameter. The annular mound thus produced is described as being supported

¹ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxv, 206.

² *Ibid.* xxxix, 211.

³ Precisely the same thing has been found on Moor Divock, parish of Askham,

Westmorland (Greenwell, *British Barrows*, p. 400).

⁴ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxvi, 494.

⁵ Bp. Browne, *Antiqs. of Dunecbt*, p. 147, citing *New Statistical Account* (1840).

without and within by retaining stones set kerb-fashion.¹ At Castle Fraser this central pit is represented by a circular area (diam. 13 ft.) similarly ringed by a kerb.² The circle called Greystone, in Alford, has a flat floor ringed about by a pronounced earthen vallum in which the stones of the peristalith are set (diam. 33 ft.).³ The same was the case with the circles at Tullynessle,⁴ and those of Loanheid, Ardlair and Tyrebaggar had sunken basin-like floors.⁵ Similarly in the circle of Auchquhorthies 'the space included by the stones is hollowed out in the form of a shallow saucer. The stones are set on a raised bank or ring,'⁶ and the whole area of the circle has been built up to a level⁷ against a sharp slope.

At the present day the characteristic horizontal monolith is commonly spoken of as the 'altar-stone.'⁸ The name is not new, for it was apparently in use when Hector Boece was writing in the first years of the sixteenth century, who would seem to have inferred from the name something of what he says of the origin and use of these circles. His own language makes it perfectly clear that he was talking of the veritable 'Aberdeenshire type,' but most writers, taking their matter not from Boece's Latin—and he was one of the best Latinists of his time—but from John Bellenden's loose paraphrase, have entirely missed this point, and a good deal more. What he actually said is as follows⁹ :—

'To promote religion amongst his people King Mainus instituted certain new and customary ceremonies in honour of the gods, over and above the older ritual. In various

localities of his territories, according as the circumstances required, huge stones were assembled in a ring, and the biggest of them was stretched out on the south side (of the ring) to serve for an altar, whereon were burnt the victims in sacrifice to the gods. In proof of the fact to this day there stand these mighty stones gathered together into circles (*circos*)—"the old temples of the gods" they are commonly called—and whoso sees them will assuredly marvel by what mechanical craft or by what bodily strength stones of such bulk have been collected to one spot. The "victim" of those days was that portion of grain or of cattle¹ which was by heathen custom due to the gods, or so much of it as was not required for the maintenance of the priests, who were in those times very few.'

The new ritual, he adds, included a monthly sacrifice to Diana,² and 'that is why the new moon was hailed with certain words of prayer, a custom which lingered very late.'

Boece's *Chronicles* were first printed in 1527. Their author (1465–1536), born in Dundee, and for many years principal of the university of Aberdeen, was in the best of positions for becoming acquainted with the local type of circle, and his language shews that he had noticed its characteristic features. He explicitly says that the biggest stone in the circle was the horizontal stone, and that its usual position was on the south. Among all the circles of this type and district there is but one, and that a doubtful case, in which the horizontal stone occupies another position. Boece, it will be noticed, calls the circles *circi*. He felt them to be pagan, but Bellenden with fine prolepsis speaks of their priests as 'Kirkmen.'³

James Anderson could write in 1777 that circles of this peculiar type abounded in Aberdeenshire. He had seen, he says, 'some hundreds' in Scotland, but had 'never seen or heard of any in Scotland to the south of the Grampians or to the north of Inverness.'⁴ He speaks of the characteristic dais as 'the stage,' and suggests that

¹ *Proc.S.A.S.* xxxv, 203.

² *Ibid.* xxxv, 199.

³ *Ibid.* xxxv, 208.

⁴ *Ibid.* xxxv, 211; *N.S.A. Aberdeenshire*. This, a characteristic feature of the Roman *circus* (p. 108), is suggestive of Roman influence, but cp. the circle on Pwll Mountain (ch. x.).

⁵ *Archaeologia* xxii, 410.

⁶ Bp. Browne, *op. cit.* p. 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ A. L. Lewis in *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, loc. cit. F. R. Coles prefers to call it the recumbent stone.

⁹ *Ut populum ad religionem moveret, priscis sacris novas quasdam solemnesque ceremonias superaddidit diis immortalibus*

peragendas, ut immensis saxis variis in regionum locis (ut res exposcebat) in coronam admotis, eorumque maximo ad meridiem porrecto, cuius pro ara foret usus, victimae ibi diis immortalibus sacrificium cremarentur. Extant in rei fidem vel hoc nostro aevo ingentia ea saxa ducta in circos; prisca deorum fana vulgus appellat. Mirabitur profecto quisquis ea spectaverit, qua arte, quibus corporis viribus, lapides tanta mole in unum locum fuerint congesti. Erat ea aetate gentis victima rei frumentariae pecuniariaeque diis immortalibus gentili debitae instituto portio, quae sacerdotum (bi tum rarissimi erant) victui superfuera. Hist. lib. ii (Bellenden's Version, ii, 3), Parisiis, 1575.

¹ The text has *pecuniariae*. Boece undoubtedly meant, if he did not actually write, *pecuariae*.

² In Sophocles (*Oed. Tyr.* 161) Artemis the moon-goddess is addressed as tutelary of the *agora*. Tacitus (*Germ.* 2) says the

German tribes held their moots at new and full moon.

³ 'The offerings,' he says, were 'Gevin to Kirkmen for their sustentatioun.'

⁴ *Archaeologia*, v. 246.

it was intended for the officiating priest, the huge recumbent stone serving as an altar. It is not needful to endorse the latter suggestion. What is of interest is that Anderson was struck by the resemblance of the dais in such circles to the stage of a theatre; and the resemblance must strike every observant archaeologist. Fergusson, who reproduces¹ Anderson's plan of the circle on Fiddes Hill, puzzled by the admitted fact that no interment had been found elsewhere in the circle, surmised that 'the sepulchral deposit here is no doubt in the raised part in front of the great stone'; but nothing has transpired to confirm this arbitrary guess.

Ingenuity has exhausted itself in suggesting the purpose of these peculiar circles of Aberdeenshire. Miss MacLagan would have them all to be the remains of *brochs*, the horizontal stones being the lintels of the supposed doorways. Lukis imagined them to be the rim-stones of cairns which have been destroyed. Many present-day writers argue them to have been sun-temples or observatories. A great number of earlier antiquaries, led away by the characteristic horizontal stone, spoke of them as either Viking temples of Odin and Norse courts of justice (Macculloch, Hibbert, Barry and Sir Walter Scott) or Druid altars of sacrifice (Aubrey and Stukeley). F. R. Coles,² while rejecting each of these views, writes down all the circles as sepulchral, and this is the current view to-day.

Even Dr. Anderson was satisfied, mainly upon the evidence from Crichtie and similar cases, to conclude that all the Aberdeenshire circles were sepulchral. 'We have so many circles which upon proper investigation have proved themselves burying-places that it is impossible for us to conclude that those which are still investigated will disclose a different purpose for this type of structure.'³

¹ *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 263.

² *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, 197: 'We have no record,' he writes, summarising fifteen cases in the south of Aberdeenshire, 'of any excavation having been made in seven of the sites above described, but in regard to eight other sites in which excavation was rightly conducted, we possess distinct descriptions of remains found; and these remains indicate burnt burials, sometimes in cists, at other times without cists.'

³ *Scotland in Pagan Times (Bronze Age)*, p. 118. So late as 1917 James Ritchie ventures to say (*Proc. S.A.S.* lii, 120) that it is 'abundantly proved' that Scottish stone-circles, whatever other purpose they may have served, were undoubtedly used for the burial of the dead. Macbain (*Celtic Mythology and Religion*) takes the same view, and like the rest ignores the dais. After specifying other groups of circles in Badenoch and about the river Ness, with

If this comment is intended—and it seems to be intended—to include the circles of the dais-type, it begs the question, for these are emphatically of different type from those like Crichtie and Tuack, which have 'proved themselves burying-places.' He seems to have attached no significance either to the absence of a fosse or to the presence of the dais. But is it reasonable to hold that this very special type of circle, found so frequently over a comparatively small area and bespeaking such very peculiar care in the provision of the dais, should yet have had no special purpose? Why then was the dais made at all? Why is it found constantly at the same point in the circle, and that exactly the position which would be chosen for the platform of a theatre as commanding the whole arena? Why was so much labour expended in procuring the immense monolith which invariably backs it, and why were there provided as it were arms for the seat? Why was stone of 'foreign' kind sometimes used for this part, and for only this part, of the whole circle? To ignore such points is to ignore the essentials which distinguish these circles from all others.

Again, if circles of this type were constructed only to be burial-places, whether of one person or of many, how is it that the results of excavation accord so ill with that purpose? Interments of various degrees of dignity, and relics apparently sepulchral, have been found *near* the circles,¹ but not within them. In not one single case is there recorded anything in the way of the solitary but imposing burial which is the proof of the purpose of the funereal monument of an individual; there is no central grave, no dolmen or menhir, no grave-furniture. Just as little is there any such crowd of minor interments as was to be expected if the circles were the burial-places of families or clans. The two outstanding conclusions to be drawn from the excavations made by C. Elphinstone Dalrymple—which Dr. Anderson admitted to be 'one of

average diameter of 96 ft., he admits that, the Clava mounds excepted, no burial deposits have been found in them 'excepting in the doubtful instances of Druid Temple and Gask. An urn was found in a gravel-pit near the former, and bits of bone have been found in the *débris* which lies

in the interior of the latter' (*op. cit.* p. 193).

¹ For example at Cairn Riv circle (80 ft. diam.): 'In the near vicinity a stone axe-hammer, bronze armlets, flint chips and a button of jet' (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxvii, 122).

the most important contributions to the materials of Scottish archaeology ever made'¹—and by various others are, that firstly, in no case is there discoverable any single conspicuous burial within these circles, and secondly, rarely is there any trace of a plurality of deposits of any kind. Under this head the one common feature is the presence in and about the centre of the circle of a deposit, larger or smaller, of burnt earth mingled with scraps of bone and very occasional fragments of pottery. These have been repeatedly labelled as the proofs of sepulchral interments, but they are nothing of the kind. They are the *vestigia* not of one solemn burning, but of many; and there is no evidence whatever that those burnings were sepulchral.² In certain well-authenticated cases the ashes fill or conceal a carefully constructed pit, which has no resemblance to any known form of ancient grave.

At Old Rayne the central pit is described as being

¹ *Scotland in Pagan Times (Bronze Age)*, p. 101.

² In the great circle at Esslie (diam. 89 ft. by 73½ ft.) were found in 1873 certain 'dark marks . . . about the length of a not tall human being.' These were assumed to be the graves in which had been laid three or four bodies to form a circle round the central point, where was found 'a cist, if we may call it so, built of common boulder-stones, little more than ½-ft., i.e. from 8 to 10 inches in diameter. In the grave were found black marks and pieces of bone, but no more.' There does not seem to be anything here to justify the name of a 'grave,' and certainly nothing to suggest that in that central spot was buried some great person (*Proc. S.A.S.* xiv, 302; xxxiv, 165). In the second and smaller circle at Esslie (diam. 35 ft.) the same explorer found at the centre 'apparently the remains of some structure broken and tossed into a hole . . . probably a large stone cist' (*Proc. S.A.S.* xiv, 303; xxxiv, 167). The language shows that nothing in the way of an indisputable grave was found. It is the same in all cases: wherever the recumbent stone is present, the proof of anything in the way of an interment having any due proportion to the scale of the circle is wholly lacking; and such small traces of anything of the sort as are forthcoming even their discoverers can only describe with hesitation as proving the presence of an interment. In the circle of North Stone, Alford, were

found 'seven ancient graves lying east and west . . . one contained some bones and part of a clay urn with incised decorations; another had several pieces of bone and tooth, and two bits of flint; and in the rest only the outlines of the skeletons could be traced' (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, 494; *Scot. Notes and Queries*, May, 1897, p. 178). This circle has a diameter of 67 ft. by 62 ft., and the typical recumbent stone. Moreover it was paved throughout 'with rough stones set close together.' The graves were probably intrusive, a conclusion with which the scanty furniture and the east-to-west position very well agree.

At Castle Fraser (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxv, 199) there was black mould and charcoal under the paving of the circle right down to the subsoil; while at Sinhinny Dalrymple remarked that 'all the soil, a deep black loam, appeared to have been brought into the circle and seemed to differ from that outside the circle.' Compare the local tradition quoted in connexion with the circle at Auchincorthie (*Arch.* i, 339). Such facts seem to suggest that in the building of some of these circles there was formed a level floor of fine soil upon which were burnt certain ceremonial fires, possibly by way of consecration, the whole being finally covered over with a rough paving, save for the *βοθρός* in the centre. Or possibly in such cases the whole of the paving is a later addition. Similar pavements, or their analogues, will be cited later from Wales and England.

regularly steined 'like a draw-well,' 2½ ft. deep, and 2 ft. wide at the mouth.¹ The similarity of this structure to the *βοθρός* of the palace in Tiryns (fig. 1) admits of no question: excepting for the difference in size they are identical, and it were to be expected that that of the palace of one of the most powerful sovereignties of ancient Greece would be the bigger. The pit at Old Rayne was filled with the usual accumulation of burnt earth, bones, and shards, and the same material was found scattered over the adjoining floor of the circle to a distance of 2 ft. or so all round the pit. At Cothie Muir² in Keig also there was a central *βοθρός*, and another at Ardlair.³ At Bognie, Aberdeenshire, was a double concentric circle. When dug out it 'shewed traces of pavement, under which were layers of bones in a pulverized state, and burnt matter.'⁴ The 'traces of pavement' were perhaps the remains of something like that found at Tiryns, and the burnt matter found 'under' it was probably the filling of the *bothros* below.

F. R. Coles thoroughly excavated the circle in Garrol Wood, in Durris, Kincardineshire (figs. 11-14).⁵ It consists of ten pillar-stones so set as to form a figure curiously like the plan of a Greek theatre, save that its base is slightly convex instead of straight.⁶ At the middle point of this base, that is, at the southernmost point of the whole figure, is the recumbent stone, set as usual between two pillars. Two other pillars mark the respective ends of the base, and the remaining six are set with fair regularity round the circumference.⁷ The extreme east-to-west diameter is 63½ ft., and that from north to south is 51 ft. The

¹ *Sculp. Stones of Scotland*, i. p. xxi. From this pit came one of the very few finds which this type of circle has produced, viz. a portion of a bracer (wrist-guard) of polished stone (*Proc. S.A.S.*, xxxvi, 530).

² Wrongly called Old Keig in *Statistical Account*. See Bp. Browne, p. 78. There must have been something equivalent however at Old Keig, for 'some persons who are yet alive declare that, many years since, they did see ashes of some burnt matter dug out of the bottom of a little circle, set about with stones standing close together in the centre' of the circle at Old Keig; *Archæologia*, i (1779), p. 320.

³ *Sculp. Stones of Scotland* i, xxii.

⁴ John Stuart in *Proc. S.A.S.* iv (1863), p. 448. The account avers 'that in the centre of the innermost circle was found an urn, the fragments of which were sent to the Museum.' It remains uncertain then whether the excavation disclosed a complete urn, or merely some fragments of one.

⁵ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxix (1905), 190 sqq.

⁶ In Dodwell, *Views and Descript. of Cyclopean or Pelasgic Remains in Greece and Italy* (1834), pl. 29, are shewn the ruins, on an unnamed site near Missolonghi, of a theatre, 'one of the smallest in Greece,' which was apparently of this precise plan.

⁷ Not one of these standing stones was bedded more than 16 in. in the soil.

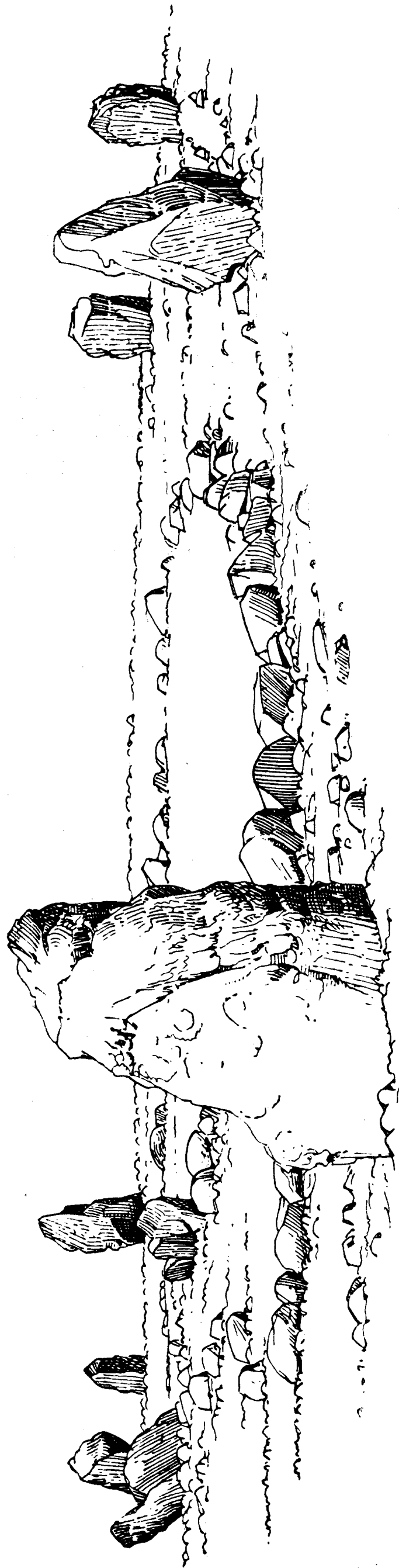


FIG. 11. GARROL WOOD CIRCLE IN DURRIS: GENERAL VIEW FROM THE EAST
(By permission of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries).

excavator, thinking that originally the figure was a perfect circle described on a radius of 31 ft. 9 in., failed to find any evidence to support this theory. At the central point he found a small pit, and on its floor 'small slabs of granite, rudely wedge-shaped, set round a cavity scooped out of the subsoil, with their edges contiguous so as to form a funnel-shaped pit, which measured 2 ft. 2 in. in diameter across the mouth, 10 in. in depth, and 4 in. across the base.'¹ Of these peculiar slabs six were *in situ*,

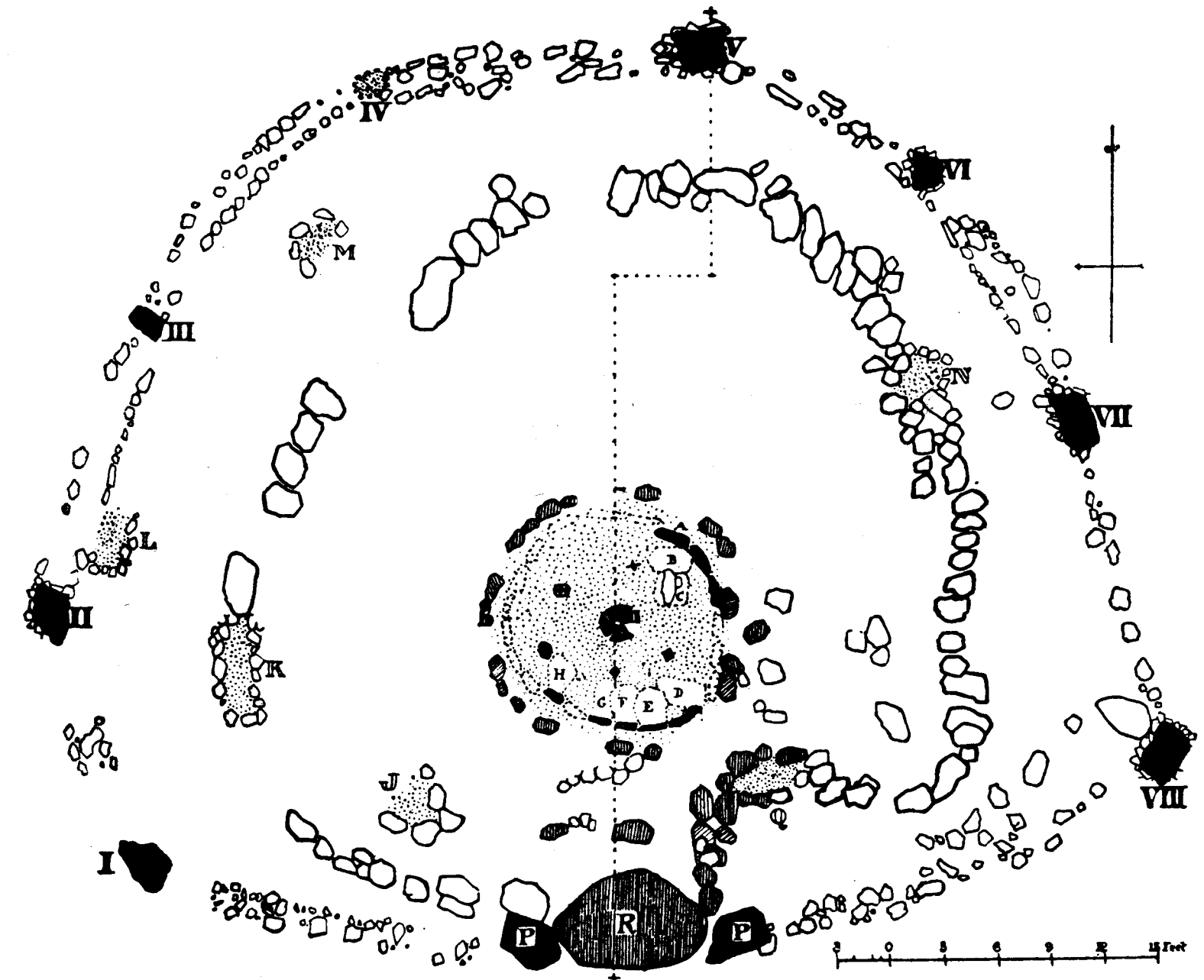


FIG. 12. GARROL WOOD CIRCLE: PLAN
(By permission of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries).

and a seventh had disappeared. The pit 'was full to the brim of comminuted burnt bones and fragments of charcoal.' Its upper edge was 'flush with the surface of the subsoil.' It formed the central feature of a circular area 12½ ft. in diameter, which was ringed by 'thick squat

¹ Each slab was therefore approximately 14 in. long and 11 in. wide at the broader end, tapering to 2 in. at the narrower end.

This, it will be noticed, proves the use of tooled and untooled stones in one and the same circle.

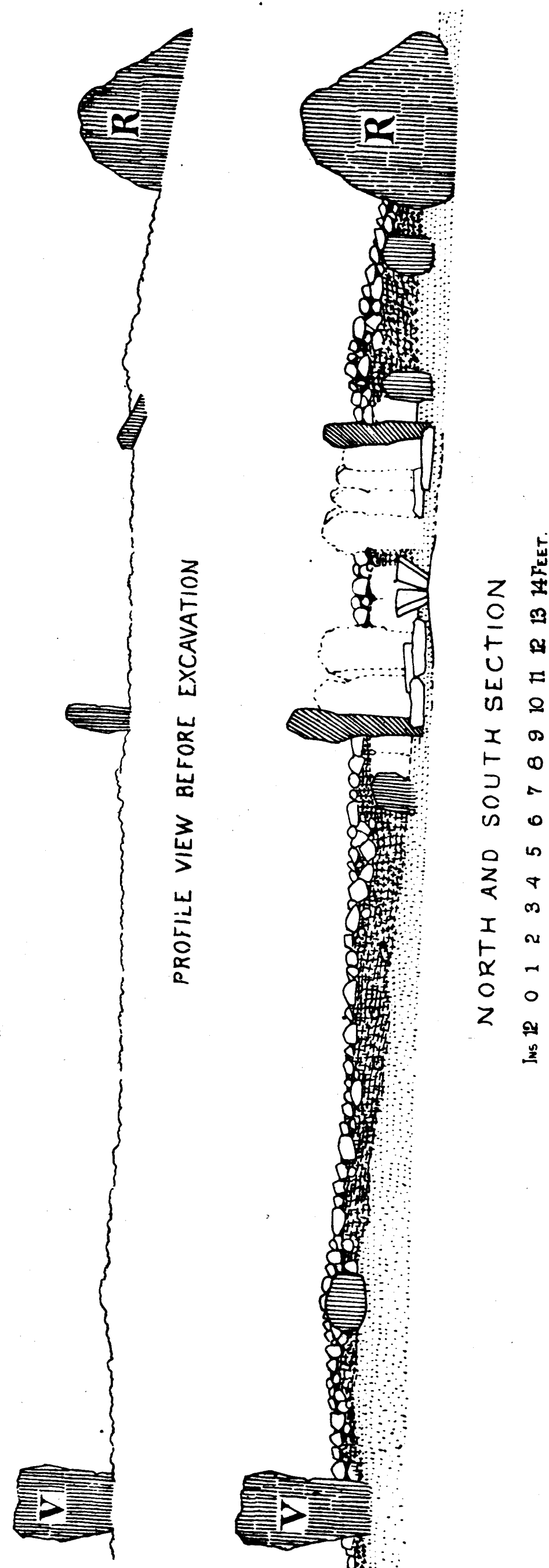


FIG. 13. GARROL WOOD CIRCLE: SECTIONS BEFORE AND AFTER EXCAVATION
(By permission of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries).

stones' rising some 13 in. above the subsoil. At five points within this area were found deposits of charcoal, incinerated bones, and fragments of 'rather coarse pottery, too small to be identified as of any special type of sepulchral vessel, and without ornament.' For the most part they were laid in shallow holes a few inches deep, scooped out of the surface of the subsoil. The burnt bones, which were pronounced to be indubitably human and adult, were found resting on a piece of granite.

At 12 to 15 ft. outside this central circular area was 'a broad ring of stones' of an average width of 2 ft. 'The majority were flattish,' but a few were 'bulky and rounded boulders,' and 'none was over 14 in. high.'¹ As the plan shows, this ring was penannular: one end turned sharply outward in line with the eastern 'flanker' of the recumbent stone; the other had presumably turned in the same fashion towards the western 'flanker.' This at any rate was the arrangement of the medial ring at Hatton of Ardoyne, at Loanheid, at Tomnagorn and elsewhere, but the ground had been too much disturbed by planting to allow of positive assertion that it was so at Garrol Wood.

Six particular points in the circle, where there appeared to be likelihood of finding interments, were 'carefully searched, every spadeful of earth sifted, but without the discovery of any substances indicating deposits of a sepulchral nature.' So with several of the stones of the boulder-ring. So also with the pillar-stones: 'the ground on all four sides' of each 'was dug into down to the subsoil, but in all cases with the same negative result.' There was nothing, not even charcoal, in the ground immediately in front of the recumbent stone. Yet the excavator believed that he had established the sepulchral character of this circle, and inferentially of all circles of this type. The central hole with its extraordinary features he calls a 'grave,' and regards as an 'interment' the heap of ash which filled it. His own account, as quoted above, cannot possibly be accepted as proof of the presence of any grave, nor is there any sufficient evidence to shew

¹ There were several gaps in the boulder-ring on the western side, to be accounted for by the removal of the stones in recent

years to build the dry dyke of which were found the remains between every two pillar-stones of the peristalith.

that this circle had been constructed to be a place of burial.

Only in one or two cases has there been found an unmistakeable sepulchral deposit within any circle of the Aberdeenshire type, as at Ardoyne and Sinhinny, and these were but mean deposits. It was not, so far as we know, the practice of any ancient people of these islands to burn their dead indiscriminately at one common *bustum* and to leave the ashes lying in one promiscuous heap. Rather the ashes of each individual were most carefully collected into an urn and as carefully laid in earth. Of this the 61 circles of the Aberdeenshire type show but the rarest and most doubtful traces. When he wrote his *Prehistoric Scotland* (1899) Dr. Robert Munro was definitely in favour of the current view that all Scottish circles alike were sepulchral¹; but when he wrote the article on 'Stone Monuments' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1909) he was evidently less confident, for he said, 'that most of the smaller circles have been used as sepulchres has been repeatedly proved by actual excavations, which shewed that interments had taken place within their areas.' This is very different from his earlier assertion. Nothing is more likely than that circles originally intended for no such purpose should have been 'used as sepulchres,' for, when once their peculiar purpose was forgotten, the sacred symbol of their circular *limes* would inevitably lead other generations, or even other races, to use them as burial-places, as Stukeley explicitly declares to have occurred even in the eighteenth century.² Very much more accordant with the evidence is Dr. Rice Holmes' verdict that 'the one statement that can be positively made about the object of stone circles is, that very many of them were erected in honour of the dead'³; but these 'very many' are mostly also very small.

Very much of the difficulty attending a true determination of their purpose may very well arise from the presence within them of burials which are in reality intrusive, but which have been accepted as original. When Dr. Munro

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 317: 'the sepulchral character of the Scottish stone circles has been established beyond a doubt.'

The tenant of the land about Ardlair

told F. R. Coles that he remembered having seen the headstone of a grave 10 or 12 yards to SW. of that circle (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxvi, 559).

³ *Ancient Britain*, p. 211.

goes on to say¹ that it is difficult to believe that large circles such as Mayburgh (372 ft. by 363 ft.) near Penrith, and the Giant's Ring (580 ft. diam.) near Belfast, were likewise mainly sepulchral, and that 'it is more probable that such enclosures were used, like many of our modern churches, for the double purpose of burying the dead and addressing the living,' he hints at a line of thought which is very different and very much nearer the truth.

The author of *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, after citing the fact that the bishop of Aberdeen held a court at the Fiddes Hill circle in 1349, remarks oddly that this 'clearly proves not only the sepulchral nature of the circles, but the use that was subsequently made of them.'² It is not explained why he regarded it as proof of their 'sepulchral nature,' but the fact that the circle served as a court so late as the fourteenth century is of very great importance.³

Taking barrows of every kind and in all localities, it is a rare thing to fail to find within them indisputable traces of purposed interments, whether primary or secondary; and as a general rule, the more imposing the monument, the more indisputable are the finds in that kind. Here however in Aberdeenshire is a series of sixty-one monuments which on the face of them represent immense toil on the builders' part, yet out of the whole series there is not one which has so far yielded conclusive evidence of anything that may be called an imposing burial, and (unless we except the case of North Stone, Alford) not a single one which can be thought to have been used as a general burial-ground. Is it conceivable that this should be the case if these were verily the burial-places of the dead? It is not. It would be almost as much in accord with the evidence to write down the whole series as 'cenotaphs.'

Here and there, scattered amongst the circles of 'Aberdeenshire' type, are found others which have yielded definite evidence of their sepulchral purpose. Thus at Rappla Wood, Burreldales⁴ (diam. 50 ft.), were several cists, scraps of an urn with peculiar ornamentation, and

¹ *Encycl. Britann.* s.v. 'Stone Monuments.'

² *Op. cit.* II, p. xli.

³ See further below, ch. xi.

⁴ This name is suggestive, one derivation of Burrel being from A.-S. *byrgels*, 'burial-place.'

fragments of a bronze dagger of so-called 'Bronze Age' type. But there is no recumbent stone here and the circle is obviously a peristalithic barrow. So again at Crichtie and Tuack¹: both have been proved sepulchral, but neither shews the recumbent stone. Moreover both of these are formidably fossed, whereas circles which have the recumbent stone are uniformly unfossed.² The tiny monument at Glassel (diam. 21 ft. by 10 ft.) has no recumbent stone, and to judge from its small size was probably sepulchral.³ A 30-ft. circle at Cairnwall was of peculiar plan: an outer peristalith surrounded a continuous ring of small stones, and this again enclosed a similar but smaller ring of 9 ft. in diameter. Within this last were found five several interments, arranged quincunx-fashion and each accompanied by its own urn. But again there was no horizontal stone.⁴ From yet another such circle without horizontal stone, at Waulkmill near Tarland, were taken a number of beads and roundels of coloured glass, a silver buckle, and 'two or three pieces of steel or wrought iron, apparently the remains of a weapon.'⁵ If this record be reliable it suggests that the circle may have been erected in the Iron Age.

Not merely do these circles of the Aberdeenshire type fail to reveal anything to justify their being called generally sepulchral, but, like their congeners elsewhere, they for the most part fail to yield anything at all to the excavator. Their sterility, be they searched never so carefully, is as uniform as it is exasperating. There is, however, record of one or two finds, and if there be no means of deciding the true date of those finds, it is scarcely possible to argue them of definitely sepulchral character.

The 50-ft. circle at Tullynessle, specifically known as Crookmore, was found to be approached by a roadway, paved with unsquared stones neatly fitted together, which

¹ *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxvii, 103.

² F. R. Coles concerned himself to find traces of any fosse about circles of this particular type, and he failed. He thinks there may 'probably' have been fosses at Old Keig and Cothiemuir Wood (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxv, 247). It is quite clear from his own language that in no case whatever is there anything like an unquestionable, not to say formidable, fosse, though there may very

well have been now and again a superficial drainage-trench, like that at the Stripple Stones (ch. x.).

³ F. R. Coles excavated it and found nothing conclusive, but it had been opened before (*Proc. S.A.S.* xxxv, 203).

⁴ *Ibid.* v, 131-2, xxxiv, 147.

⁵ *Ibid.* xxxviii, 215, where the finds are illustrated.

could be traced for a distance of 500 yards.¹ It left the circle at the south-east, and was 12 ft. wide. Its surface near the circle was covered with ashes. The arena had been partly levelled out of the side of the hill, which sloped towards the east.² The observer who records these facts says nothing of any human remains or other traces of interments, those things which would be most certain to attract the attention of a labourer who was demolishing the circle, or of an onlooker; so there is no ground for writing down the circle as sepulchral. On the other hand the presence and the character of the road of approach mark it as a place of resort, a moot of some kind, and the name of Crookmore—'the Great Moot'—says the same. Underneath the paved causeway were found (1828) two of the peculiar stone bowls with handles perforated vertically, of which several have been discovered in Scotland 'usually associated with monolithic structures or other works of contemporary date.' One was dug up within the area of the stone circle on the farm of Whiteside, Aberdeenshire; another (1832) in the circle at Loanheid, and a third within a now destroyed ring-work on the hill called the Damil in Alford,³ a century ago. Such vessels are said to be almost peculiar to Scotland, but their purpose is quite unknown.⁴ There is at any rate little to suggest that their purpose was in any way sepulchral. Within a circle at Leys, Inverness-shire, was found another anomalous relic, 'a sceptre or rod of office . . . It consisted of a rod of pure gold, bent at the top like an episcopal crosier or a Roman *lituus*.'⁵ There is no record that it was associated with any interment. From the description it seems to have closely resembled a Scotie

¹ Cp. *Mabinogion*, *Story of Pwyll Prince of Dyfed*, 'a highway led from the Gorsedd' of Yn Arberth.

² *Proc. S.A.S.* i, 116; xxxv, 211; Wilson, *Prehist. Ann. Scotland* (1851), p. 111, from MS. letter of John Stuart, 1838. It is not stated whether the circle showed the horizontal stone or not. Like others in the locality, it has been entirely destroyed in the name of agriculture.

³ *Proc. S.A.S.* iv, 1863, p. 385.

⁴ Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, p. 148. In his time they were called 'Druidical paterae.' The author of *Ancient Stone Implements* said (2nd ed., p. 444) that similar utensils were at that date still in use

in the Faroë Isles, either as lamps or as chafing-dishes for carrying embers, and thought that the Scottish examples 'probably belong to no very great antiquity.' In *Proc. S.A.S.* for 1916, J. Graham Callander, describing three that were found in an Aberdeenshire cairn, mentions those from Tullynessle and Whiteside, and another found within the area at Callernish. He doubts their attribution to the Bronze Age, but believes they may go back to the early Iron Age. He scouts any connexion with Druidism, or even with the stone circles, to which he appears to assign a Bronze Age date.

⁵ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

pastoral staff, and it at once recalls the 'sceptre' of the Homeric ceremonial (p. 90).¹

The dais-circles in fact cannot be called sepulchral except in the sense that each probably has or had, somewhere within its periphery, the necessary consecration-burial. The central deposits of burnt matter, scraps of bone and pottery, represent nothing sepulchral, but a long series of ceremonial fires; and if in exceptional cases there has been found within the circles anything more in the way of interment than the consecration-grave, the sufficient explanation is that these are intrusive interments, made when the proper purpose of the circles was

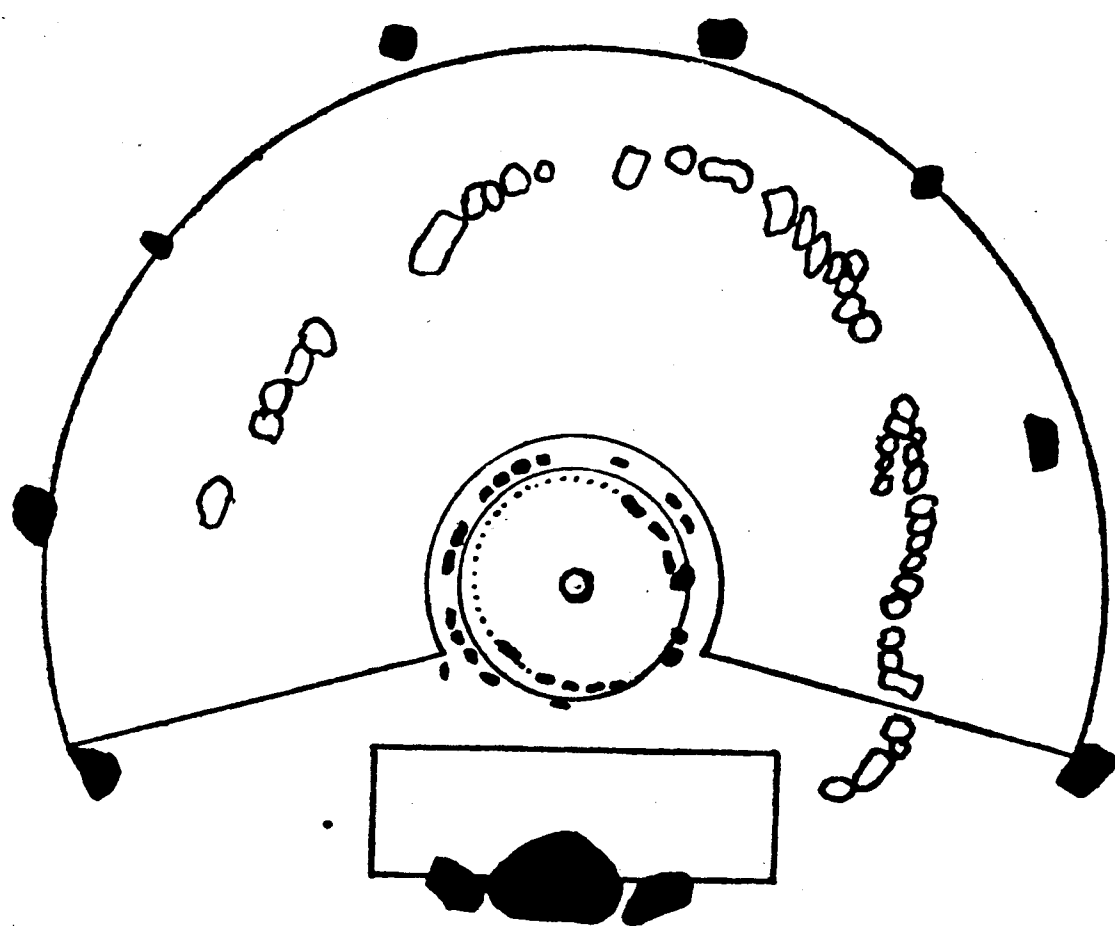


FIG. 14. THE STONE CIRCLE (GARROL WOOD) SUPERPOSED UPON THE GREEK THEATRE.

forgotten. A generation that knew not what that purpose was, might naturally see in them sepulchral precincts and nothing more, even as modern opinion has mostly seen nothing more.

The analogy between the circles of this type and the

¹ One of these staves, the Bachul More (*Baculus magnus*), traditionally reputed to be the pastoral staff of St. Moluag, bishop of Lismore, is in the possession of the Duke of Argyll. It is 'probably the actual black-thorn carried by the bishop 1300 years ago,' says James Dowden (*Celtic Church in Scotland*, p. 313, where it is figured). It

is 2 ft. 10 in. long, and has at one time been covered over with metal plates secured by studs of metal. The head is slightly curved like that of a Roman augur's *lituus*, from which it has been suggested that the Christian pastoral staff was derived (Smith, *Dict. Christ. Antiqs.*). But possibly it has a yet older pedigree.

ancient Greek theatre is so close as scarcely to be explained by mere coincidence. For *scena* take the horizontal stone which James Anderson termed a stage; for *orchestra* take the circular floor within the ring of smaller stones as seen at Garrol Wood; take for *θυμέλη* the central hearth or pit; and in lieu of such a construction as the Dionysiac theatre in Athens we have at once such a circle as that of Ardoyne or Fiddes Hill. There are further points of analogy; the theatres, like the circles, were normally constructed in and upon the gentle slope of a hill, and the circle of Tullynessle was excavated in the hill-side precisely like a Greek theatre; the stage of the one and the horizontal stone of the other are invariably upon the lower side; and as the only means of access to the orchestra of the Greek theatre was by the passages on right and left of the stage, so the only access to the *ἱερὸς κύκλος*, the medial ring of seats, in the Aberdeenshire circles was by passages on either hand of the horizontal stone.

But the Greek theatre was itself merely a later development from the communal moot as described in Homer. Of that moot the essential feature, the *ἱερὸς κύκλος*, itself again developed from an actual barrow, was a circle of seats about a central sacrificial pit; one of the seats was somehow distinguished as the president's chair (*θῶκος*), and in exceptional cases the whole might be surrounded by a number of standing stones. The Aberdeenshire circles are precisely what Homer describes as the moot of the Phaeacians: the medial ring is the ruined remnant of the circle of *ξεστοὶ λίθοι*, the central pit is the *βοθρός*, the horizontal stone marks the *θῶκος*, and the standing stones are Homer's *ῥυτοὶ λᾶες*. Parallelism could scarcely go further. They are the moots of those 'Warrior Cimmerians' who dwelt in the land of mist and fog at the edge of the river of Ocean.¹

It is an inference from Homer that the peristalith of untooled stones was not essential, and those of Aberdeenshire bear out the inference. Rarely is the peristalith truly circular or truly concentric with the medial ring, whereas this and the central *βοθρός* are uniformly

¹ Homer, *Od.* xi, 14.

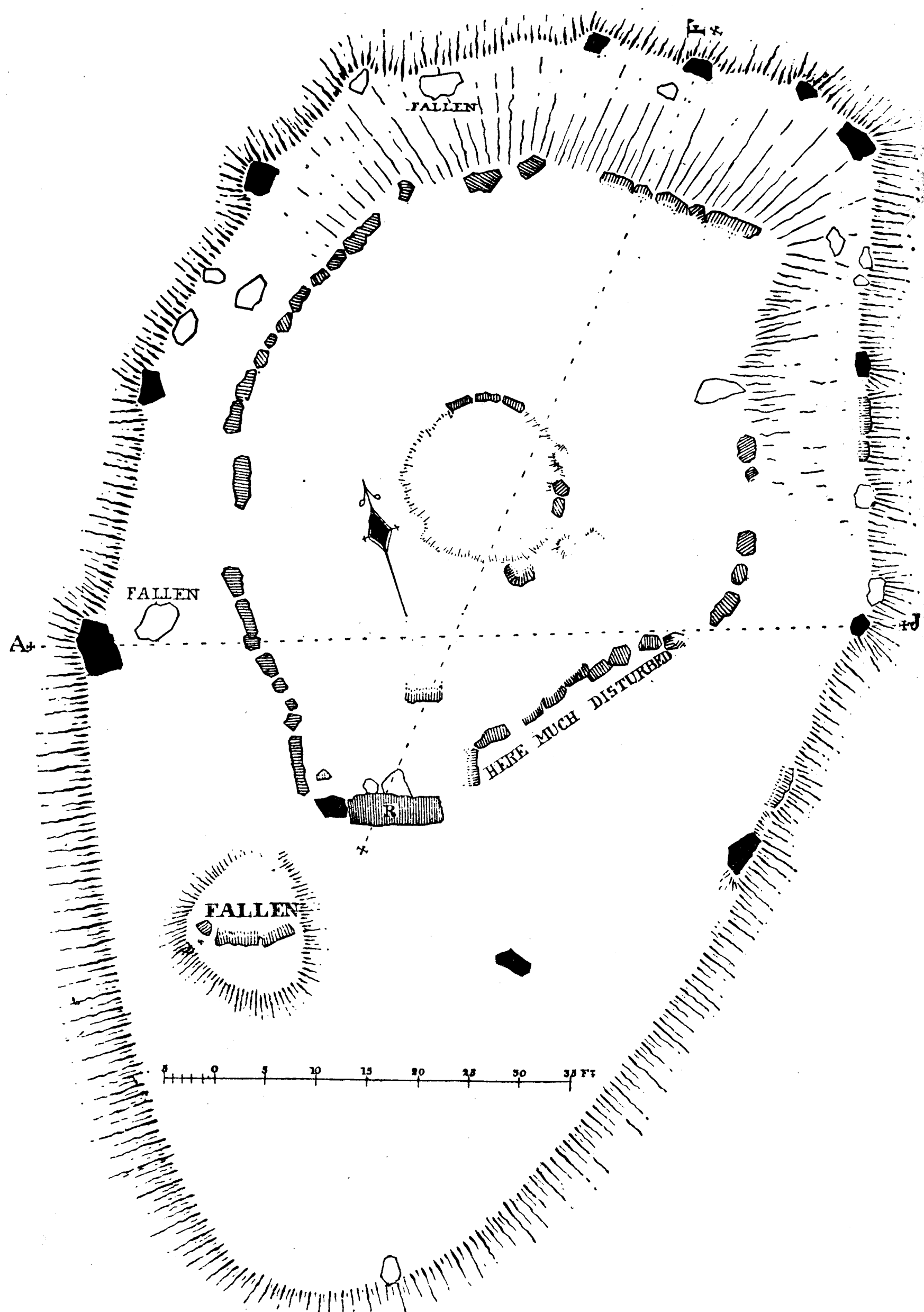


FIG. 15. AUCHQUHORTHIES IN BANCHORY-DEVENICK
(By permission of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries.)

concentric. The fact is proof that the peristalith was of less importance than the rest of the plan. In the whole design it is dependent upon the $\theta\omega\kappa\omicron\varsigma$, and therefore in point of importance subsidiary thereto. In at least one instance, at Auchquhorthies (p. 162), it is a continuous ring entirely separate from the rest of the structure, so that, if it were bodily removed, the essentials of the moot would still remain intact. In this case also the circle is so constructed that, while the $\text{ιε\rho\omicron\varsigma \kappa\acute{\upsilon}\kappa\lambda\omicron\varsigma}$ is in full view of and from the $\theta\omega\kappa\omicron\varsigma$, the stones composing the northern portion of the peristalith are not visible to an observer standing at the southern end¹; and this again implies that the peristalith was adventitious only. And the disposition of the peristalith being thus a matter of indifference, it becomes difficult to believe that there can have been any occult astronomical significance either in the number or in the position of the component stones.

As for the much debated horizontal stone, it is not an altar, a 'table of offerings' or a stage. It is simply what Dalrymple's drawing of Ardlair suggests—the back of the place reserved for the person addressing the moot. The $\xi\epsilon\sigma\tau\omicron\iota \lambda\acute{\iota}\theta\omicron\iota$ belong to a state of society in which a seat of any sort, even a naked stone, was a mark of distinction. To a later stage belongs the seat with a tall back to betoken a yet higher degree of honour. The horizontal stone of the Aberdeenshire type is something between the two; it is something more than the unbacked stone stool of the elders, something less than an actual high-backed chair; and it is just as much an accidental feature as is the peristalith. It is in fact that *cathedra* which was also the prime feature in the 'cauldron of Ceridwen.'² 'Altar' there was no other than the central pit, which, however the details of its construction might vary, was in effect a mere hole in the ground, like that which Ulysses was bidden to dig in the ghost-land; and the burnt matter and ashes which are commonly found in and around it are the remains, not of any ghastly 'Druidical' sacrifices, but of recurrent ceremonial fires.

One of the annual solemnities of Celtic paganism was the formal extinction of all fires and their rekindling from

¹ See the section in *Proc. S.A.S.* xxxiv, p. 146.

² Above, p. 143, note 3.

a special flame lit by the priests.¹ Now as fire is not an easy thing to carry about,² the sacred flame must have been kindled at some spot not very remote from the community whose hearth-fires had been extinguished, and probably in a place where it could easily be seen by all. As a solemn act of ritual it required a *locus consecratus*, and this, we have learnt, was a circular precinct. The stone circles of Britain, lying upon sites always open and usually elevated, were admirably suited for such ceremonies, and the remains of fires so frequently to be found at their central points may be in part the result thereof.³ If so, each such circle must have been the *locus consecratus* of a distinct community, or at any rate of a definite area; and for the performance of the ritual there must have been a priest of the proper degree to each such circle and its appurtenant community. Celtic paganism in fact must have developed something curiously similar to the parish, the parish-church, and the parish-priest.⁴ No impartial

¹ Apparently the rite occurred twice a year, in November and in May, the latter surviving in the Easter fire of the Roman Catholic Church. It survived also in the 'need-fires' of Scotland, the virtues whereof depended upon their being produced by the friction of wood, or from flint and steel. Dr. Borlase suggested that these were a relic of Druidism (*Antiqs. of Cornwall*, p. 135); they were certainly survivals from the pre-historic time.

² This suggests a probable explanation for the perforated 'incense cups' found in so many barrows (Greenwell, *Brit. Barrows*, p. 78, and references there collected). They were thuribles, and vessels precisely similar were used in classical Roman ritual for the identical purpose in Vesta's temple on March 1st, the old-style New Year's Day at Rome. They would be buried with their owners precisely as later a chalice was buried with a priest and a crosier with a bishop. It was long ago suggested (by Hon. A. Stanley and Albert Way) that they were used for carrying to the required spot the fire needed for the funeral pyre, in which case they should be one of the commonest, rather than the rarest forms, of sepulchral potters' ware.

³ Does this throw light upon the curious name of Candle Hill? F. R. Coles (*Proc.S.A.S.* xxxvi, p. 536) asserted that there are 'four Candle Hills, each with a stone circle, in the central portion of the northern division

of Aberdeenshire,' viz., those of Old Rayne, Insch, Ellon and Hatton of Ardoyne. He hazards no explanation of the name. Bishop Browne (*Antiqs. of Dunecbt*, p. 92) declares that there is no such name in Ellon. In the remaining three cases of its occurrence he suggests that it refers to Druidical fires, from the Gaelic *coinneal* (pronounced *cannel*). In Lincs. is a hundred of Candle-shoe, in Leic. another of Sparkenhoe. Dr. Grundy cites (*Wilts. Arch. and N.S. Mag.* 1921, p. 341) a Spirt-Hill in Bremhill which he would explain as 'Spark Hill.'

⁴ For survivals of this practice in Ireland, see Wood-Martin, *Traces of Elder Faiths*, i, 261. It is there associated now only with the coming of May, and the peasants take the signal for relighting their fires from the smoke ascending from the chimney of the parish-priest's dwelling. In some districts the new fire is kindled by the priest in the porch of the church by means of flint and steel; 'to use a match would be considered improper.' Wood Hill, Athboy, co. Meath, used to be the scene of an annual *Aenach* or fair on November 1, which was notified to the country around by the lighting of the 'fire of Tlachta' on the previous evening. Two miles SSW. of Raphoe, co. Donegal, is a circle of stones (150 ft. diam.), 67 in number, with a pronounced entrance to the east. It stands upon the summit of a hill and bears the name of Beltany. In Lancashire, the Celtic Strath-

judge will hesitate to admit that the evidence for these fires is vastly more positive than is the evidence of any sepulchral purpose in these circles.

One may cite in illustration certain known facts in the ritual of ancient Greece. In the whole Greek world was no more holy spot than Olympia. Here was the great altar of Zeus Olympius. It was nothing but a gigantic pile of accumulated ashes, standing like a barrow upon a circular platform known as the *πρόθυσις*. The 'altar' itself was 22 ft. in circumference, i.e. presumably at the top. The platform had a circumference of 125 ft. Platform and altar together rose to a height of 22 ft. Steps of stone led up to the platform, but to reach the summit of the 'altar' one had to climb a path trodden in the ashes which had fallen from it; yet we are told that only the thigh-pieces of the victims were offered upon the altar. Masonry was there none about it.¹ There were similar mounds of ashes serving as altars of the Samian Hera and at Didyma of Miletus; and Pausanias remarks that the blood of the sacrifices of ages 'had not swelled the altar to any excessive size.'²

Almost in the centre of the gathered temples and altars of the Hellenic Pantheon at Olympia stood the Pelopeum. Later ages had greatly altered its form, and had surrounded it with a pentagonal concrete wall. This

clyde, 'up to a generation ago the Teanla fires were still burnt . . . on All Saints' night, and the old pits for them, with ashes and calcined stones, may be found in every township' (Murray's *Guide to Lancashire*). This was written of the parish and neighbourhood of Kirkham near Lytham. The neighbourhood abounds in remains Roman and earlier, and the name of Kirkham is significant. So too is the provision of pits for the fires. See Brand's *Popular Antiquities* for the 'Tingles' or 'Tindley' fires. In Scotland similar customs prevailed in the Beltane fires lit on Midsummer (St. John's) Eve, i.e. at the summer solstice; but, as in Ireland, the dates varied in different parts of the country, from May-day (old style) to June 29 (St. Peter's day). The essentials of the celebration were a fire and a feast and games, ('at Beltane, when ilk body bownes To Peeblis to the play'). The derivation of Beltane is still *sub judice*: most writers

believe the second syllable to signify 'fire,' but Macbain would divide *Beallt-ain*, and find a connexion with *Balder*. He gives (*Celtic Mythology and Religion*) some curious details: at Callander the rite entailed the construction of a circular trench; in other cases the ashes must be arranged in a circle marked with stones, one for each person participating. The fire must be kindled with a flint, and he who kindled it must have no metal about him. Ridgeway (*Early Age of Greece*, i, p. 428) says that the St. John's fire is still lit in Carniola on tumuli associated with prehistoric sites. Fifty years ago both the Easter fires and the Midsummer fires were regularly lit in Sardinia, but in the piazza of each town, (Forester, *Rambles in Corsica and Sardinia*, pp. 334, 342) or at crossroads (*compita*).

¹ Pausanias v. xiii, 8.

² *Ibid.* He tells us that there was a sacrifice offered upon this altar daily throughout the year.

wall was found to have been built over a soil made up of the ashes of immemorial years, and the Pelopeum itself, the traditional *heroön* of Pelops, was nothing but a depressed oval barrow, towards the south-east of which was a *βοθρός*, a pit filled with blackened soil and ashes.¹

If one will but rid one's mind of any adventitious ideas of 'altars' and similar matters, realising that down to the latest times of Hellenic freedom, and indeed even later,² the temple of Olympia's greatest hero and the altar of the greatest god of all the Hellenes were nothing but the mounds which Pausanias describes, it will hardly be reasonable to look for anything more elaborate amongst the Celts of pagan Britain, or to deny that some at least of the British circles bear a remarkable resemblance to such *al fresco* ashen altars as those of Zeus Olympius and Pelops.

Strabo³ interrupts his account of the ritual of the Persians and of their priests the Magi to mention that 'in Cappadocia too is a swarm of the class of Magi called the Pyraethi, and numerous temples of the Persian gods.' He has previously specified among these gods the Sun (Mithras), Moon, Aphrodite, fire, earth, water, and the winds. Here, too, 'are some notable *σηκοί*, called *pyraetheia*, having in the midst an altar (*βωμός*) heaped with ashes, and a perpetual fire.' Fosbroke asked⁴ whether these *σηκοί* were stone circles. No certain answer can be given. Part of Cappadocia was in Strabo's time included in Galatia, and peopled by Gauls who had entered the country in the third century B.C. They were Brythonic Gauls, and Thierry believed them to be Belgae⁵; and Strabo's 'swarm of Magi' in Cappadocia might very well be their priests, known to the Romans as Galli, to the western world as Druids. The Galatae of Strabo's time were rapidly losing their nationality, but not their religious fervour. He gives us no further details of the *pyraetheia*, whence one infers that they were not what a Greek or a

¹ *Ibid.*

² Pausanias, *loc. cit.*, says that in his time there was still offered a yearly sacrifice of a black ram to Pelops. The fact, as Sir John Frazer remarks, proves that Pelops was regarded, not as a god, but as a departed mortal.

³ Strabo § 732, *fin.*

⁴ *Inq. of Antiqs.* (1825) ii, 922. Strabo

(*loc. cit.*) says there were similar things to be seen in south-eastern Arabia, the modern 'Oman.

⁵ St. Jerome (fourth cent.) says the Galatae still kept their own language in his time, and it was 'almost the same as that of the Treviri.' As he had himself lived at Trèves he ought to know (*Epist. ad Galatas*, bk. ii, preface).

Latin would call temples. He had indeed already said that the Persian Magi had no temples.¹ The word *σηκος*, literally a 'sheep-fold,' is curious.² It at once recalls the Welsh and Cornish *corlan* meaning either 'fold' or 'churchyard,' and suggests not so much a free-standing circle as a ringwork. Here, however, the point of interest is that the only thing worth remarking within these 'notable' *σηκοί* was the altar, apparently a mere pile of ashes, with its perpetual fire. Again there is a curious analogy between these *al fresco* altars of the Pyraethi in Gallo-Graecia and the circles of Brythonic Aberdeenshire with their central hearths and their piles of ashes.³

The central *βοθρός* representing the altar, the 'holy of holies' of the pagan moot, it is no matter of surprise that in many cases it appears to have been purposely and violently destroyed.⁴ As on the other hand the peristalith and the *θῶκος*, albeit far more conspicuous objects in the whole structure, and because of the slight emplacement of the stones, easily destructible, seem frequently to have escaped any such purposed demolition, one infers that these were not regarded as embodying to the same extent any *religio loci*. This fact alone should have given pause to those who would interpret the horizontal stone as an 'altar' or a *blötstein*. The destruction of these larger features is due, not to any purposed campaign against them as symbols of paganism, but simply to the incidental requirements of the farmer anxious to clear the ground or to find building-stone; and naturally he first attacked the small stones which formed the medial ring of seats. Of handy size and of serviceable form, these were the first to go; but it is probably safe to believe that wherever there remains to-day a non-sepulchral

¹ Similarly Pausanias (above, p. 96, n. 2) when speaking of the open-air enclosures in Greece, some of which were certainly *loca consecrata* (e.g., that at Hermion), never calls them 'temples.' At the most he says that he 'understood them to be temples' of Apollo (ii. xxxvi, 1).

² It is used by Aristotle for the nest of a partridge (*H.A.* vi, viii, 4), which certainly is round. It is also used of 'sacred enclosures,' 'chapels,' 'shrines,' 'sepulchres'; see Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*. The grammarian Ammonius (390 A.D.) says it meant a *heroön*, whereas *ναός* was the

temple of a god. The normal shape of the Greek *heroön* was round.

³ Something analogous is recorded from yet further east: 'Sir John Chardin relates that nearly two days' journey from Tauris in Media, towards Sultania, he saw large circles of hewn stones; and the Persians affirmed that certain giants called the *Caous*, waging war in Media, held their council in that place, each bringing with him a stone to serve as a chair' (Herbert, *Cyclops Christianus*, p. 239). The modern Welsh for 'giant' is *cawr*.

⁴ So Bp. Browne, *Antiqs. of Dunecbt*, p. 76.

peristalith of untooled stones, there was originally within it a circle of ξεστοὶ λίθοι and a central βοθρός.

The arrangement of the circle at Hatton of Ardoyne (p. 144) is precisely that of an Orcadian *ting*, with the solitary difference that it also shews a θῶκος of the Aberdeenshire type. The circles of Strathnairn and Inverness-shire,¹ of which there are more than thirty, are of a type intermediate between the two: they resemble the Aberdeenshire type in being commonly *flat*, the Orcadian type in having no horizontal stone; but they resemble both in having three rings, the only differences being that the outer ring is here a fully developed peristalith, and the central ring, which represents the βοθρός, is larger in proportion to the whole structure. At Tordarroch for example the peristalith has a diameter of 115 ft., the medial ring is 70 ft. in diameter, the inner circle (now destroyed) was 24 ft. over²; and at Gask, the largest circle of the whole series, the peristalith measures 126 ft. across, the medial ring 88 ft., while the inner circle is 32 ft. over.³ If these circles have so far revealed no such elaborate βοθρός as those of Old Rayne and Garrol Wood, it is probably for lack of seeking; they shew at any rate the familiar traces of fire—ashes and black soil—in and about the central ring.⁴ Like the Aberdeenshire circles they show also considerable minor variations, and in particular at Culdoich the whole annular area between the inner and the medial rings has been paved with small stones.⁵ James Frazer remarks that 'in those cases in which three different rings are clearly defined, about one third are decidedly eccentric—that is to say, the outer and interior rings are not drawn from one fixed centre.'⁶ Here therefore, as in Aberdeenshire, the outer ring (peristalith) is subsidiary to the rest of the structure. It may be added that the work at Tordarroch lies in a hollow, and that one of the stones of the medial ring at Midlairgs bears what may be interpreted as a rude cross.⁷

Where it is traceable, the entrance to circles of this type seems to have been towards the south, and it is on

¹ *Proc. S.A.S.* xviii, pp. 328 *sqq.*

² *Ibid.* p. 331.

³ *Ibid.* p. 334.

⁴ As at Gask, *Proc. S.A.S.* xviii, p. 334.

⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 340.

⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 356.

⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 337.

this side that the largest stones of the peristalith are usually found. James Frazer particularly notes that there is no discoverable means of access to the inner ring, and when the true character of this as a βοθρός is realised, one understands why there was none. The same writer gives the average diameter of the type as 93 ft., which is a little larger than that of the Aberdeenshire type.

Here then in North Britain is a series of circles all closely related one to another, of which the most elaborate variety, that of Aberdeenshire, is, so far as the evidence goes, the exact replica of that described by Homer as the moot of the mighty Phaeacians in Scheria. But Homer suggests that the moot of Scheria was not the type of its time; it was an exceptional structure which drew the wonderment of even the far-travelled Ulysses.¹ The normal type was rather the humbler thing pictured on the shield of Achilles, a mere ring of stone seats surrounding—so we may suppose—an 'altar' of very perfunctory fashion. The parallelism between the circles of Aberdeenshire and of Scheria will be greatly strengthened if there can be adduced from the British Isles a like parallel to the typical circle of the shield. The parallel is forthcoming, albeit not at present from Aberdeenshire.

On the craggy summit of Pendine Head, Carmarthenshire, excavation has shewn that there was once a settlement of a culture, though not necessarily of a date, extremely early, the hut-circles examined having produced nothing but scraps of the rudest pottery, spindle-whorls of stone, stone mullers, antlers of red-deer, and rude implements of bone. On the northern side of the position, by which alone it is accessible, still remains the major part of a rudely circular ring of limestone blocks enclosing an area of 150 ft. by 140 ft. (p. 170).² This area, which seems to be the natural surface of the soil, has a very slight slope upwards from north to south. The limestone blocks, from 3 ft. to 3½ ft. long, and from 14 in. to 24 in. above the turf,³ have been obviously chosen with

¹ *Od.* vii, 44.

² In *Inventory, Carmarthenshire*, no. 701, the circle is named Napps Circle, the settlement Gilman Camp. The *Inventory* misleadingly speaks of the stones as 'boulders.'

³ The vertical measurements are almost precisely those of the so-called 'kerb' stones within the Aberdeenshire circle of Whitehill, Monymusk (above p. 145), and if ever a circle of stones was constructed to be sat upon, it is this.

care, and laid flat upon the ground so as to be almost contiguous. At the north-east of the circle is an unmistakable entrance, which opens direct upon the only roadway leading to the settlement; and at the point on the south-west immediately opposite, just within the

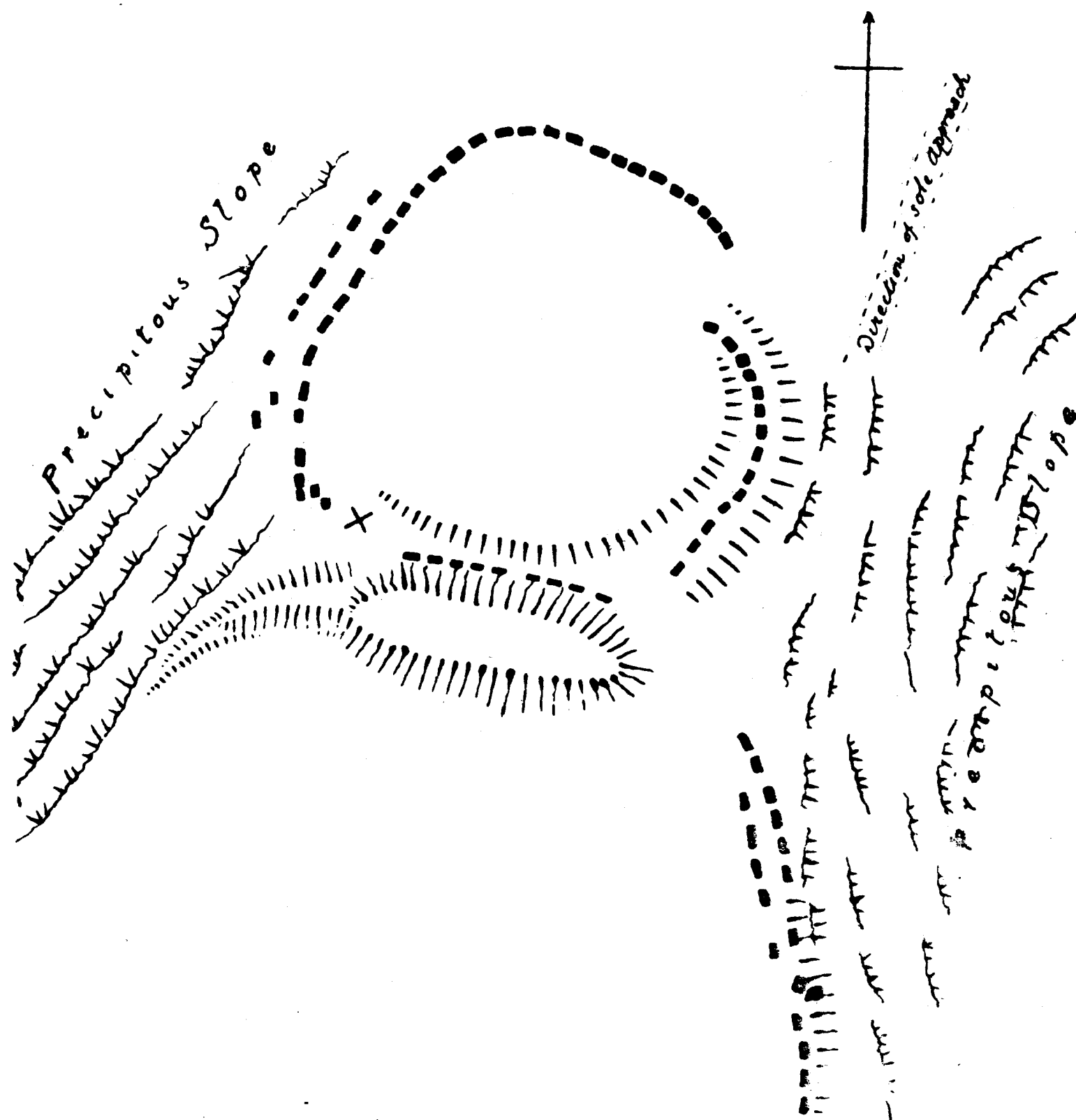


FIG. 16. MOOT CIRCLE, PENDINE HEAD.

From survey by Guy Clarke, April, 1907: scale 1/2000. X=site of cup-stone (destroyed).

circle, used to lie a larger recumbent block (4 ft. 10 in. long by 2 ft. wide), having upon its upper surface two saucer-shaped hollows¹ respectively six and eight inches in diameter.² The circle is incomplete on the southern

¹ Toland, *Hist. of Druids*, (1704), p. 304, says that a trough or laver was an adjunct of every religious circle, and compares

the περιβάλλον of Greek ritual. Cp. Bishop Browne, *Antiqs. of Dunecbt*, p. 55.

² See a rubbing in *Trans. Carmarth.*

(higher) side, where a considerable vallum (9 ft. high) with an external fosse has been constructed at a later date.¹ A few of the missing stones were found to have been bedded into the vallum's face. The number of stones remaining is 72, which means that the circle, when complete, consisted of about 100 stones, the interspaces averaging less than 18 inches. The spot has certainly yielded nothing that betrays the smallest Roman influence.

This then would appear to be an indubitable case of the occurrence of the circle as an integral part of a native Celtic settlement which owed nothing to Rome. The circle is placed immediately at the entrance to the settlement, beside the only road of approach. From its construction and its situation it cannot have been intended for purposes of defence, nor does it appear explicable as the retaining wall of a cairn or barrow. The curved entry, the level area, the position close beside the road of approach and the gate of the settlement, and above all the careful choice of blocks of stone of such uniform shape and size, each providing a very comfortable seat, all point to the circle's having been the moot of those who occupied the 'camp.' All the evidence suggests that this was a very poor community, not in the least likely to go to the extravagance of any peristalith, for which indeed there was no room.

'It would be curious,' wrote Cosmo Innes,² 'if it should turn out that those monuments which our antiquaries of last century named Druid's Circles were places where the old Celtic people met for deliberation and for administering their common affairs, for legislation, for judgment-giving, as well as for burial, for religious

Antiq. Soc., 1916-17. The stone was wantonly destroyed in 1908. For particulars of the excavations here I am indebted to the late G. G. T. Treherne, who personally made them (1906-9) with the collaboration of John Ward, F.S.A., W. Clarke and others. Trenches cut across the vallum exposed a number of the missing blocks of the circle. Unhappily no investigation was made in the centre of the area, the crucial spot, and no report of the work has yet appeared.

¹ It bears a decided analogy to the much finer vallum and fosse forming the main

defence of the analogous position of Castell Lloyd, 2 miles further east, works which, from the few finds made and the tradition of the locality, appear to be due to the Norman Milo de Cogan. There is no question that the vallum and fosse at Pendine are no part of the original settlement's defences, which are wholly different in character and in condition. According to Fenton, the Norman Arnulf de Montgomery fortified many of the headlands of this coast, albeit he fails to give his authority for the assertion.

² *Scottish Legal Antiquities* (1872), p. 98.

rites and ceremonies, and solemn contracts—in short fulfilling the idea and the original purpose of the Church.’ The sentence might stand, with but little alteration,¹ as the argument of the present pages.