

## Design & Construction of Individual Objects

For the 10 Symbol objects highlighted above in blue some can be considered together where there is commonality of design and meaning:-

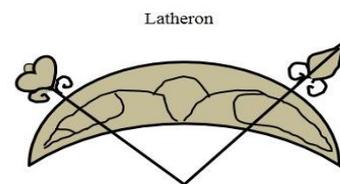
- with the **Double Disc Alone** having the same derivation and meaning as the item in the **Z-Rod and Double Disc** these two items are grouped together.
- having similar decodes in Pictish-Mithraic terms and with artistically analogous construction the **Notched Rectangle**, **Horseshoe / Arch** and **Tuning Fork** are grouped together.

The symbols, with decode summaries, are explored in order by number of instances.

**V-Rod & Crescent** - having a general pattern but with no two examples exactly the same, this is the most numerous Pictish Symbol. Rather than a "V" the lines can be seen as directional arrows. Basically the object can be deconstructed into a downward arrow and an upward arrow joined at an angle and laid over a crescent shape. Placed in a Pictish-Mithraic context these are allusions to the travel of the soul from and to Heaven on birth and death with the angle between the arrows representing the time between birth and death.

[Click here for detail of the construction of the V-Rod & Crescent.](#)

What are often referred to as decorative "finials" on the so-called rods there is an artistic design alluding to arrow feathers further giving the rods direction by making them look like arrows. By imagining a panoramic view from the land, across the sea and upwards to the sky a crescent shape results - its ends are the extremities of the panorama to the left and right. The *Latheron* V-Rod & Crescent is alongside.



So the Crescent is the sky-ward view from Earth, across the horizon to the moving Planets and to the fixed stars of the Celestial Sphere – beyond is Heaven. The symbolism should, therefore, be spiritually comforting as the upward facing, returning arrow is suggesting there is not absolute finality on death.

**Mirror** - this is one of the best objects for stylistically analysing and grouping but is one of the more difficult to interpret. Two broad patterns both give the same message – an open circle on a type of base referred to as "ring" style (left below) and "solid" (right). Drawings are at



In both patterns the significant objects are a large circle typically with two interconnected circles at the base. In Pictish-Mithraism decoding these represent the design of the Double Disc part of the Z-Rod & Double Disc as the base with the larger circle above being the Zodiac.

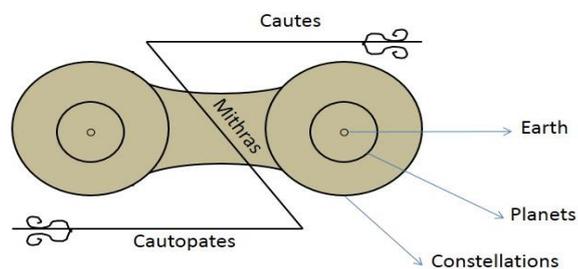


Mirror construction maps across to the Z-Rod & Double Disc where the lines between the two smaller circles are generally "waisted" to give a 3D effect - less clear in the Mirror designs but maybe there is an assumption that the viewer will relate to the Z-Rod & Double Disc explanation. It seems that, artistically, the designer of the Mirror has taken a brief to retain the principle of a contained universe (Earth, Planets and Celestial Sphere) as depicted in the Double Disc and to add scale to the Zodiac (the Celestial Sphere component) by expanding it into the large circle.

**Z-Rod & Double Disc and Double Disc Alone** - with the Z-Rod and the Double Disc elements appearing in and with other Symbols some key principles of the Mithraic beliefs are given widespread coverage. Deconstruction identifies three components - looking sideways across from the left, a floriated arrow pointing upwards and another downwards, two sets of concentric circles and "waisted" lines joining them.

[Click here for detail of the construction of the Z-Rod & Double Disc.](#)

The key turning point in trying to decode the Symbols on the Pictish Stones came from the author seeing a piece of Mithraic statuary in the Museum of London - a roundel discovered in 1954 that would have been the centre piece of a 3rd century Mithraic temple (known as a Mithraeum).



Mithras is accompanied by his supporters (to his right and left) – the torchbearers, Cautes and Cautopates. Together a reversed Z is formed by the interconnected torches.

Taking the Mithraic context of the Museum of London roundel a stage further, Cautes holds his torch up representing sunrise and the spring equinox whilst Cautopates holds his torch down representing sunset and the autumn equinox. These are artistically translated into the horizontally opposing floriated arrows of the Pictish-Mithraic Z-Rod but a viewer would need to know about the context - so the meaning is obscured in the carving and known only to the leaders and initiates of the religious belief.

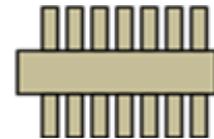
Several proposals have been made for the Double Disc ranging from the depiction of a Constellation to a Druidic association but generally, as with the other Symbols, it has often been considered to be enigmatic and undecoded. Taking more of an artistic technique approach the two sets of symmetrical concentric circles can be achieved by cutting through a dough-ring giving a 2D representation. By horizontally connecting the outermost of these circles with lines then making the lines convex to their centre the look of a ring that has been cut can be created - in other words a 3D illusion to depict a tangible "contained" universe with Heaven beyond.

The specific artistic technique of "perspective" is nowadays considered to have been developed during the Italian Renaissance period. Perhaps the 3D illusion technique used for the Double Disc over a thousand years before is actually the "first" example of perspective drawing - further adding to the unique nature of the carvings on the Pictish Symbol Stones.

**Comb** - of the 40 so-called Comb objects identified in "The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland" edited by Iain Fraser (RCAHMS 2008 publication) 6 are indistinct, 34 have been drawn by this author with 22 distinct designs emerging. Although listed as "combs" only 16 of the carvings are truly recognisable as combs with teeth - they have varying numbers of "teeth" and layouts. Assuming the context of these objects is Pictish-Mithraic then a purpose for them is needed. This can be seen with the number "7" as the Mithraic Grades and Planets so amongst the steps the soul would take on death back to Heaven. End-to-end that would be ten points - first the start on Earth, 7 across the Planets, 1 for going through the Capricorn Constellation and the final point being Heaven.

Particularly relevant Combs are those with teeth on one side - Clach Ard, Tillytarmont 5, Inveravon 2 and Collace - and teeth on both sides (representing soul travel from and to Heaven) - Cullaird, Inveravon 1, Meigle 1, Maiden Stone, Kingoldrum, Kinnedar, Kirriemuir 1, Monifeith, St Vigean's 1 & 2, Wester Denoon and Birse.

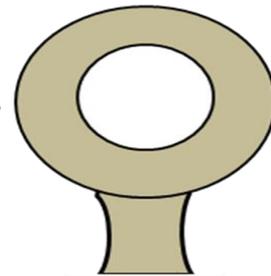
An artistic technique is specifically apparent in the Combs with 7 teeth as a metaphor for the 7 steps via the Planets from and to the Celestial Sphere disguised as a form of comb - such as Inveravon 1 alongside.



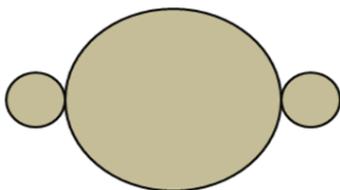
**Mirror Case** - perhaps partly due to a similarity with the Mirror, the name was given over a hundred years ago to an object that has been decoded with a strong linkage back to the origins of Mithraism. In the Great North Museum in Newcastle there is a sculpture (from Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall – picture below courtesy of GNM) of Mithras being born from the cosmic egg from the rock and holding the Zodiac in his hands. The rock birth would have been a fundamental point to make to an initiate – the start of Mithras' life on Earth. The grip on the Zodiac would have enabled his connection with the cosmos.



Although they are geographically well separated the carving to the right is the same design for *Tillytarmont 1* and *North Ronaldsay*. Similarity with the sculpture from a Mithraeum on Hadrian's Wall seems quite clear. The carving of these objects onto the Symbol Stones shows a straightforward translation into Pictish-Mithraism.



**Triple Disc** - referred to as a "cauldron" in some texts due to its shape and therefore its prospective use. Although there is a general pattern there are Groups with distinct combinations of smaller circles (4 arranged vertically, 9 horizontally) adjacent to a larger, central one. Design variants include concentric circles, solid and ring smaller circles and in 5 of the instances of horizontally arranged circles there is a horizontal line.

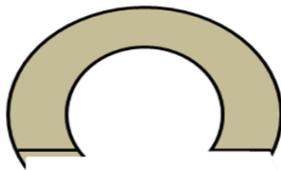


Triple Disc general pattern

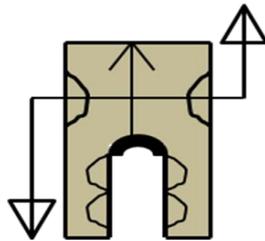
Whilst cauldron, libation bowl, water container, plus rings and rods as means of carrying could be contenders in this decode, the greater likelihood is perhaps something more esoteric than obvious. Complementing other key Mithraic Symbols on the Pictish Stones, the Triple Disc arguably represents the Zodiac with Cancer and Capricorn Constellations (the gates from and to Heaven) 180° apart.

With its Triple Disc name a basically flat object is described. However, the alternative of “cauldron” suggests not only a three-dimensional depth but a practical function but artistically this is not readily seen as having been artistically represented. As a stand alone object a prospective Pictish-Mithraic meaning is not obvious but the possibility of it representing the Zodiac, Cancer and Capricorn becomes more tenable when considered with other Symbols (as in Associated Meanings and Relative Positioning).

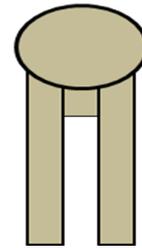
**Horseshoe / Arch, Notched Rectangle** and **Tuning Fork** - these are considered together as they have similar structure and meaning. Of the 3, the Notched Rectangle (with several elements) has the most readily explicable use of an artistic technique.



Horseshoe / Arch  
*Sandness*



Notched Rectangle  
*Tillypronie*



Tuning Fork  
*Craigmyle & Strathmiglo*

The examples above reflect the general structure of each of these Symbols.

Of the 18 Horseshoe / Arch carvings 6 are indistinct, of the 12 that have been drawn all except Rothiebrisbane (a distorted shape) have similar arch patterns. There is a wide range of detail within the general pattern from the simplicity of Sandness to the highly decorated style of Crosskirk and the inclusion of concentric circles (as in the Z-Rod & Double Disc) at Strathpeffer. By taking the shape as an arc this object could represent a Planet’s orbit, the entrance to a cave, the general shape of the inside of a Roman Mithraeum or the Celestial Sphere. In the context of the Mithraic theme for the Pictish Symbols, the horseshoe and arch shape may be a portrayal “of” the Mithraeum in the sense of its arched shape and “from” in the sense that within the Mithraeum there are representations of the Celestial Sphere etc.

There are 16 objects with the Notched Rectangle label of which 9 are superimposed with Z-Rods. They appear to represent the layout of an indoor Mithraeum typically having circle shaped cut outs into the longitudinal sides. On the *Raven Stone* (Tyrie, Aberdeenshire) and *Birnie* stone (near Elgin) the overall rectangular footprint has what could be construed as the “side benches” of a Roman Mithraeum with statue niches (one on each side of the Mithraeum and near the Tauroctony end – most likely for Cautes and Cautopates). The interpretation of the Z-Rod shapes on Notched Rectangles is arguably the same as that for Z-Rods & Double Discs. This Object is the only one on Pictish Stones that requires minimal decoding as it basically records the layout of the Roman Mithraeum. Although artistically it is not constructed to enable a 3D view into the Mithraeum it is an excellent example of a 2D plan view.

Although there are similarities, Tuning Forks are categorised as a separate design to Notched Rectangles. There are 11 of these objects, 1 is indistinct and 9 designs emerged which have been arranged into 3 Groups, the third of which has partially intact examples with only the parallel line parts of the object visible. The other two Groups follow a broad, general pattern with elements which can be interpreted as the curved roof of a Mithraeum and its side benches.