

### 3. CARVED STONE AT BLACKHILLS, MORAY.

The stone to be described stands in the grounds of Blackhills, Moray, the property of Sylvester Christie, Esq., who has kindly given facilities for examination and photography. No detailed description or photograph has been published, though notes and line drawings of two sides of the stone are given by Breuil in *Proc. Prehist. Soc. E. Anglia*, VII (1934), 314-15, fig. 39, Nos. 1 and 2. In this notice the location is wrongly given as "Strypes, Ireland."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, Paisley, 1880, s.v.

<sup>2</sup> There had been previous publications with outline drawings in *The Reliquary and Illustrated Archæologist*, 1897, pp. 41-47, and in *I.P.E.K.*, 1926, p. 255, with an interpretation of the designs by R. A. S. Macalister. There is also a note in *P.S.A.S.*, XLI, 172.

The stone is a block of quartzite 4 ft. 9 ins. long and about 16 ins. broad by 12 ins. in thickness. There is a tradition that it was longer, several feet having been broken off what is now the lower end. What is at present the north face (Pl. LXIV, 2) is almost entirely covered with cup marks arranged in very irregular diagonal rows and varying in breadth from 3 ins. downwards.<sup>1</sup> On the east face an area 30 ins. long has been hollowed out into a shallow concave surface dressed to a rough level by pocking. On it a double spiral of three convolutions is traced by a pocked groove (Pl. LXIV, 3). The two parts of the spiral are joined by a single line and form an S-shaped figure. Outside one set of convolutions and concentric with it is another curve, defective at each end, but so placed that it can never have been part of the spiral.<sup>2</sup> The pocked marks forming the spiral differ from those on the field only in being placed rather closer together: the whitish appearance of all the marks is owing to the crushing or "stunning" of the stone by the artist's tool and is not due to chalking or to any means used to bring out the design for purposes of reproduction. The grooves are shallow in proportion to their depth (fig. 5) and there has been no attempt to rub them smooth.



Fig. 5. Blackhills.

The whole of the south face (Pl. LXIV, 4) is similarly dressed and on it appears a crescent, the horns being 14 ins. apart. On this face there are also five cup marks apparently executed by the same hand. Above the crescent a short diagonal line has been begun but never continued and below it, in a position now obscured by cement, there used to be visible two short lines forming an acute angle. These can be seen in their proper position in fig. 6.

The remaining side of the stone is rougher and narrower and there is no prepared surface. A single diagonal groove 10 ins. long and much deeper than those described so far is worked in it.

The corner of the stone between the north and east faces has been broken away thus destroying any evidence from broken cup marks which might have proved them earlier than the dressed surfaces and designs on the other faces. That they are of earlier date is, however, not only inherently probable, but sufficiently proved by a shallow pocked ring round one of the cup marks. This can be seen in Pl. LXIV, 2, toward the top of the stone and has been added by the sculptor of the spiral and crescent in his characteristic technique. All the other cup marks are simple and it would be wrong to argue any connection of the Blackhills stone with the distinctive cup and ring culture on this slight indication.

The spiral on the east face is remarkable for its symmetry, contrasting in that respect with most of the few spirals known in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> The merits of the Lamancha spiral<sup>4</sup> suggested Irish influence to Childe and the Blackhills example points strongly in the same direction. The double spiral at New Grange<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The diagonal line shown in Breuil's illustration of the cup-marked side is a natural fissure in the stone. On the side with the crescent (see below) there are four cup marks at the top, not three as shown by Breuil, as well as one just above the crescent.

<sup>2</sup> The spiral at Eday presents the same peculiarity.

<sup>3</sup> Childe, *Prehist. Scot.*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, 1938-39, 317.

<sup>5</sup> Coffey, *New Grange*, fig. 24.

differs only in having a greater number of convolutions and in reversing the S pattern found at Blackhills.

The crescent on the south face is worked in the same technique and appears

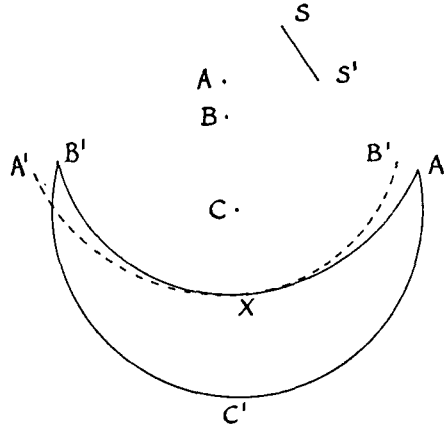
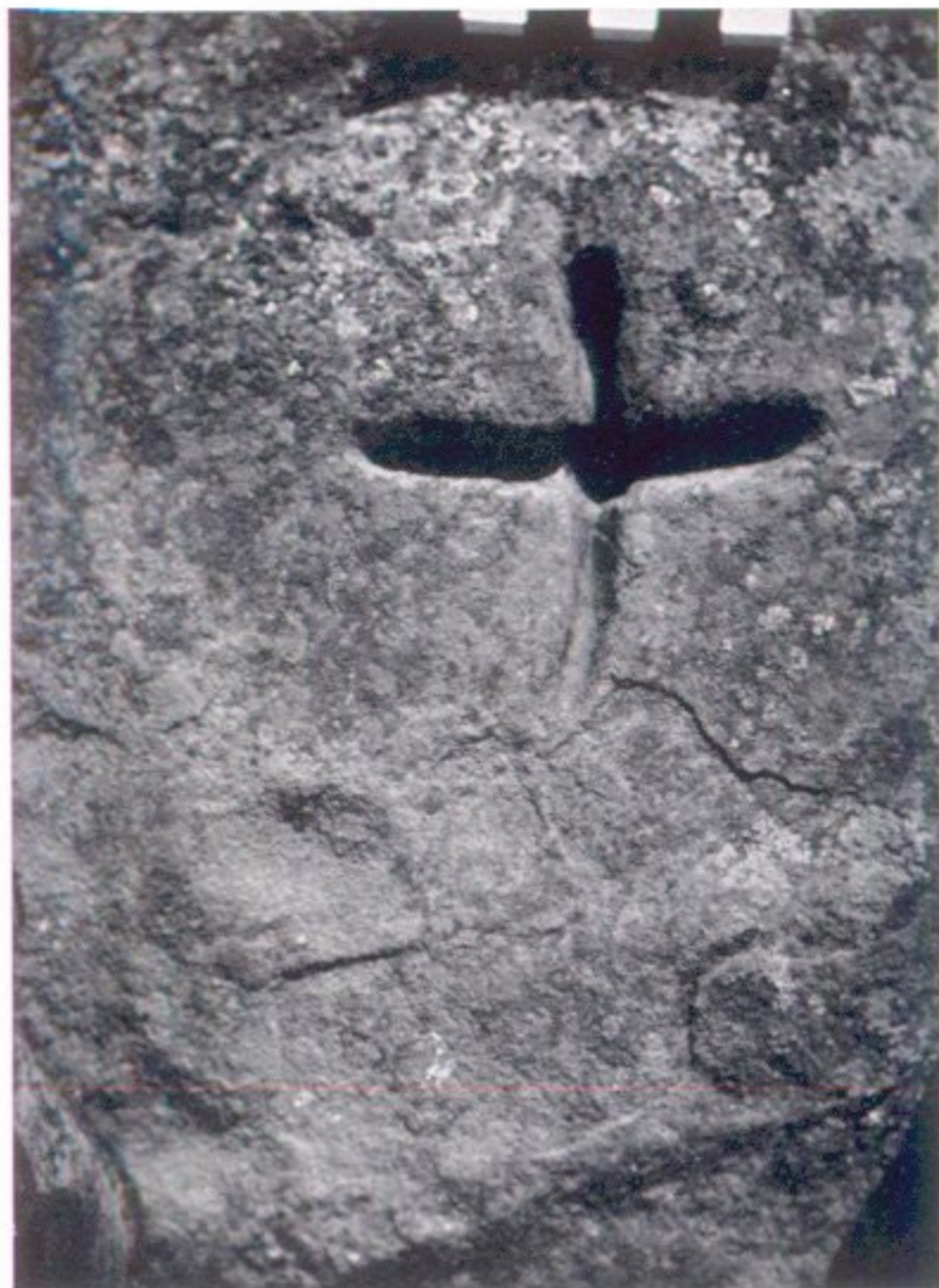


Fig. 6. Blackhills.

to be of the same period as the spiral. Professor Piggott kindly informs me that here, too, there is an Irish parallel, a megalithic carving embodying a large crescent, in the Fourknocks chambered tomb, Co. Meath (not yet published).

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1. Cross-stone, Ellon.



2. Blackhills, N.



3. Blackhills, E.



4. Blackhills, S.