

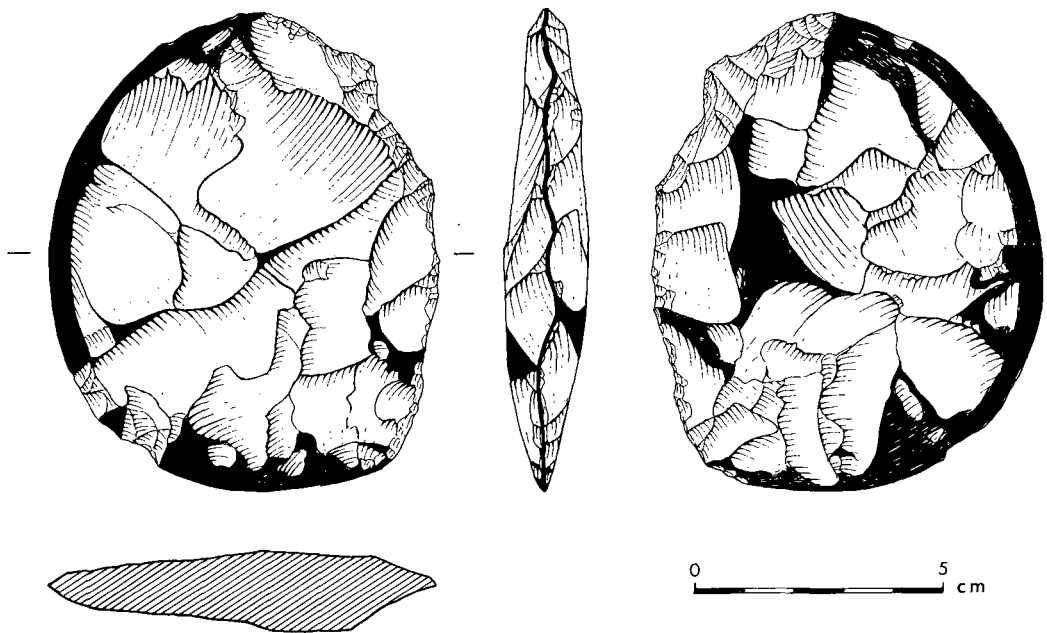
A discoidal flint knife from near Huntly, Aberdeenshire

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The exact findspot of this artefact is unknown but it is presumed to have come from near Huntly, Aberdeenshire (now Gordon District) as it was passed to the present owner, Mr G Sutherland, from a collection in that area.

This is a fine discoidal knife of grey-brown flint. It measures 97 mm by 78 mm by 17 mm (illus 1). It has been carefully made: first a suitable flake was selected and then shaped with the use of soft hammer percussion. Flakes were removed across both surfaces, serving to thin the piece. The semi-circular edge was then finely ground and grinding was also used to remove the higher ridges between the flake scars on both faces. The 'straight' edge has been deliberately roughened by the removal of short deep flakes from alternate faces. The irregular edge so produced contrasts greatly with the smooth ground edge and it seems likely that it was used to facilitate the hafting of the implement. With the exception of a small area of damage to the ground edge, probably post-depositional, the knife is complete.

Artefacts of this type are well known from prehistoric Britain. In Scotland, fragments have been recovered from both domestic and funerary contexts (Piggott 1954, 251-2). In addition, several complete examples, very similar to that described here, exist from surface collections. In 1929 Clark catalogued existing specimens and defined the type. He distinguished four morphological sub-types, the present example falling into Type I (Clark 1929, 41-2). Functionally, he raised doubts about the use of the term 'knife'. Although further examples



ILLUS 1 Discoidal flint knife from near Huntly

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have since been recorded, little is known today about any actual uses of these artefacts in prehistory, though the term 'knife' has stuck. Chronologically, Clark associates the type with beaker pottery. More recently Manby, amongst others, has suggested Grooved-ware associations (1974, 86). The finer meanings of such pottery-based cultures have yet to be refined but a late Neolithic date for these artefacts does seem likely.

There is increasing evidence for the specialist manufacture of prestige artefacts in the later Neolithic (Clarke *et al* 1985) and existing discoidal knives fall into this pattern. The present example is no exception. In manufacture it exhibits a high degree of craftwork which sets it aside from the majority of artefacts found amongst domestic assemblages. Moreover, the rarity of sizeable flint nodules in Scotland (Wickham-Jones & Collins 1978) makes it likely that the raw material was either specifically collected or else imported. The abundant deposits of pebble flint in Buchan, only 55 km from Huntly, are well known but at the moment the exact derivation of flint for this piece must remain open to question.

High quality, specialist artefacts such as this have been recovered from a wide variety of contexts reflecting, no doubt, the great diversity of prehistoric life into which we can barely delve today. Sadly, we have no further information upon the specific context of this piece but it should clearly be considered as one of the 'Symbols of Power' of prehistory.

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