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SOME AUSTRALIAN INCISED STONES.

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(Plate iii.)

In the last few years some unusual stone objects have been added to the Australian Museum collection. They are of two main types—stones bearing longitudinal and criss-cross incisions, and stones, generally waterworn pebbles, upon which is engraved a design or figure.

Four (Pl. iii, figs. 1 to 4) are pieces of sandstone of varied colouring, and scored across with parallel or converging incisions, such as might be made in sharpening pointed implements. They were found upon a coastal midden at Boat Harbour, near Sydney, by Mr. J. Ashley. Photographs were taken and coloured replicas made of the specimens, as the original pieces remain in the possession of the finder.

A yellow sandstone artifact (Pl. iii, fig. 1), scored on three surfaces by 10, 5 and 15 lines respectively. The dimensions are 13·8 cm. long, 10·2 cm. wide, and 4·5 cm. at the thickest part. A light grey sandstone (Pl. iii, fig. 2) with roughly parallel scorings, 7 on one surface and 6 on the other. It is 13·2 cm. long, 9·2 cm. wide, and 3·75 cm. thick, and appears to be portion of a larger specimen. Pale yellow sandstone (Pl. iii, fig. 3) with 2 deep incisions on one surface only. The length is 14 cm., width 13 cm., and thickness 2·7 cm. A reddish ferruginous sandstone (Pl. iii, fig. 4), irregular in shape, and marked on one surface only by 7 grooves. It is 14·9 cm. long, 11·8 cm. wide, and 3·2 cm. thick.

A piece of sandstone (E 35254) 15·2 cm. long, 7·6 cm. wide, and 2·5 cm. thick, showing 2 converging incisions, said to be portion of a circular slab, was found at Tonkley Point, Tuggerah Lake, N.S.W., by Mr. Roy Mackenzie. This type of grooving is reminiscent of that found over wide surfaces of rock engravings on a large scale, such as those at Delamere, Northern Territory.

A piece of stone (E 45302, Pl. iii, fig. 5) from Dubbo, presented by Mr. John Baird, measures 13·35 cm. by 5·1 cm. by 1·3 cm. The grooves number 10 on one surface, and 5 on the other. These latter grooves are shallow, broad depressions, and are considered by geological opinion to be of natural origin. It is most likely that the more numerous grooves on the opposite surface have been added by human hands, because it was picked up on an abandoned camp site, and was said by a native to have been used for sharpening bone points; one end of the stone has been worn smooth.

In the Cairns district of Queensland slabs of slate crossed with many incisions are used as grindstones, called "*morah*". The function of the grooves is said to be to drain away the poisonous juices from the seeds; these are crushed with the aid of a pestle or topstone and water into a paste, which is then dried and rubbed into flour. One of these *morah* and its accompanying topstone were described and figured by Dr. R. Hamlyn-Harris (1916, pl. vi, figs. 1-2) together with notes on three specimens in the Australian Museum. A pestle collected with one of the latter specimens (E 10100-1) appears to have been part only of the original slab; it is scored on both surfaces, which, in addition, are hollowed with use. Dr. Hamlyn-Harris declares that their distribution was limited to the district round Cairns. Rubbings of three additional *morah* in the Queensland Museum are now in our possession and indicate the range of size of these grindstones. One measures approximately 17·75 by 10 cm., another

13 by 6.5 cm., and the third 42 by 34 cm., the number of incisions varying according to the size of the stone. Again, Mr. H. O. Fletcher, a member of the 1939 Expedition to the Simpson Desert, reports that a large grindstone bearing incised lines over one surface was collected on the Mulligan River, south-west Queensland, and is now in the South Australian Museum.

It would appear, then, that the Cairns district is not the sole area where incised stones are used, for they have been found in several parts of New South Wales and elsewhere. Though no record of their particular function has come down to us, the fact that the latter were collected on middens would point to their having served some useful purpose, such as sharpening stones for shaping the bone and wooden spear points used along the coast. Mr. C. P. Mountford (1938) has published a description of eight stones engraved with straight transverse lines, the significance of which is not known, but he thinks it likely that they may have served the same purpose as message sticks.

In the ethnographical collection of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra, is an unlocalized aboriginal stone (Pl. iii, fig. 6) incised with lunate, criss-cross and parallel sets of lines, and several sets of "emu tracks"; an encircling groove at one end could indicate a connection with initiation ceremonies. The markings are strongly reminiscent of those on cylindro-conical stones or on wooden message sticks. This particular specimen is a smooth piece of grey slate.

A brief account of a waterworn pebble (E 38254) found in the Liverpool district, upon which is engraved a stingray, was published by Mr. F. D. McCarthy (1936). It was presented to the Museum by Mr. K. E. Jones. Several others similarly inscribed with naturalistic figures have since been received. One pebble (E 43909, Pl. iii, fig. 7), 8.5 by 5.1 cm., has cut upon it the outline of a tortoise with outspread legs. Another (E 43910, Pl. iii, fig. 8), 7.6 by 4.3 cm., bears the profile of an oval-shaped creature with four legs—perhaps a small mammal or an enlarged slater—it is impossible to say which. These two stones were presented by Mr. Keith Jones, who found them at Holdsworth, New South Wales. Thirdly, a ground-edge axe of the flaked type (E 44181, Pl. iii, fig. 9) was picked up at Tingha, near Inverell, and given to the Museum by Mr. Philip Trentz. It was found to have engraved on one surface a fish, and on the other a boomerang or throwing stick; it is 9.5 cm. long and 7 cm. wide.

A small polished oval waterworn pebble from Maroubra, near Sydney (Pl. iii, fig. 10), measuring 4.8 by 2.8 cm., has scratched rather than engraved upon one surface an oval concentric spiral, and on the other a 20-rayed circle or "sun" figure. The stone is red.

These stones that are engraved with naturalistic or geometric designs might be placed in the category of "magic stone" on account of their resemblance to objects carried about by tribal elders or sorcerers.

References.

- Hamlyn-Harris, R., 1916.—Queensland Ethnological Notes, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, Vol. xxviii, pp. 104-106, pl. iv.
 McCarthy, F. D., 1936.—A Carved Stone, *Mankind*, Vol. ii, p. 23, figure.
 Mountford, C. P., 1938.—Engraved Pebbles from South Australia of Unknown Significance. *Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. lv, pp. 144-146, figures.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE III.

INCISED STONES.

- Figs. 1-4.—Boat Harbour, south of Sydney, New South Wales.
 Fig. 5.—Dubbo, New South Wales.
 Fig. 6.—No locality.
 Figs. 7-8.—Liverpool district, near Sydney, New South Wales.
 Fig. 9.—Tingha, near Inverell, New South Wales.
 Fig. 10.—Maroubra, near Sydney, New South Wales.

Photographs by G. C. Clutton.

