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CEREMONIAL STONES USED BY THE AUSTRALIAN  
ABORIGINES.

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(*Read January 1, 1909.*)

The following is a short description of some remarkable stones used by the aborigines in certain areas scattered over the north-western portion of New South Wales, which may be approximated roughly as lying north of 34 degrees south latitude and west of 148 degrees east longitude. The objects referred to have been observed by squatters and other residents of the bush in different places for many years past, but like most other matters connected with the aborigines, very little attention has been paid to them. They are occasionally found lying on the surface of the ground, or only partially exposed, on the flanks of sand-ridges, which may have been either old camps of the natives or places of their ceremonial gatherings. They have also been discovered below the surface, having probably been overlaid by drifting sand or soil, or were perhaps purposely hidden when not in use.

The scattered remnants of the tribes in the region indicated are all more or less civilized at the present time and have ceased to use these stones in their ceremonies, owing to the occupation of the district by Europeans for upwards of half a century. For this reason it is especially important that all available information should

be recorded and published as widely as possible, in order to bring these relics under the notice of every person who may have opportunities of obtaining further particulars regarding this interesting subject.

The stones in question vary in length from about six inches up to as much as two feet, but the more common lengths range from eight to fifteen inches. They are widest at the base, gradually decreasing in dimension towards the other end and terminating in a blunt point. They consist of different material, including sandstone, quartzite, clayslate, kaolin and such other kinds of stone as might be available.

For the present I shall describe only four of the specimens in my possession. One is a fine-grained piece of clayslate, which when found by the maker was probably very close to the requisite form and needed only a little trimming or grinding to bring it to its present shape. It is just a trifle under one foot in length by a maximum width at the base of two and four-fifth inches, by a thickness of one and a quarter inches. The weight is two pounds six ounces. It was found in the bush by Mr. E. J. Sutor, owner of Tankarooka Station, on the Darling River, near Tilpa, New South Wales.

I have prepared two diagrams exhibiting the two wide faces and the edge of the implement, together with a view of the extremity of the base and have numbered the figures from 1 to 12. One face of the stone is practically flat throughout its length, being rounded off towards the edges on either side. The opposite face is slightly convex.

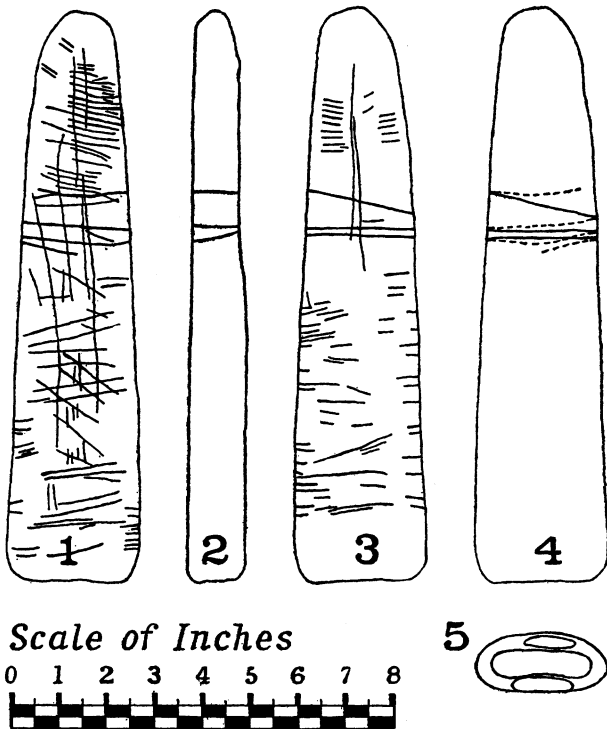
Fig. 1 delineates the flat face of the stone, which contains a large number of marks cut or scratched into the surface with some sharp instrument, such as a mussel shell, a sharp flake of hard stone, or a marsupial's tooth. Some of them are merely well-defined scratches, whilst others are cut into the stone about one-sixteenth of an inch. The marking extends from the base to the apex.

Fig. 2 shows one of the edges of the implement, the marks upon which are not reproduced, because they are continuations of those given on the two faces. I have, however, shown the position of three

principal incisions, which will be again referred to in dealing with Fig. 4.

Fig. 3 is the convex face of the stone, which contains about eighty marks similar in character to those of Fig. 1.

Fig. 4 has been introduced to exhibit the position of an irregular spiral incision which extends quite around the implement in a little over three folds. The firm black line on the diagram represents the cuts facing the observer; the dotted lines indicate their position on



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FIGS. 1-5. Views of a Ceremonial Stone used by the Australian Aborigines.

the other side, if the stone were transparent. The position of the spiral on one of the edges of the stone is shown in Fig. 2. The commencement and end of the spiral appears on Fig. 1. It begins at three and seven-eighths of an inch from the apex and terminates at five and one-eighth inches.

A spiral of this kind has not been observed by me before and consequently adds to the value of the present specimen. In a few other cases, however, I have seen a single, continuous incised line girdling the upper half or pointed end of the stone. In most of the specimens in my possession, as well as in those which have come under my notice elsewhere, a girdling incision of any sort is absent. It is on this account that I have drawn attention to the peculiar marking of the stone now described.

Fig. 5 is a view of the basal end of the stone. A characteristic of all the stones of this class which I have seen consists in their having a saucer- or dish-shaped depression chipped or ground into the larger end. In our example there are three such depressions ground into the end of it. (See Fig. 5.) The two smaller ones are very shallow, although easily discernible, but the larger has a depth of nearly one-tenth of an inch in the center. The present is the only instance in which I have observed three of these depressions—one only being the general rule.

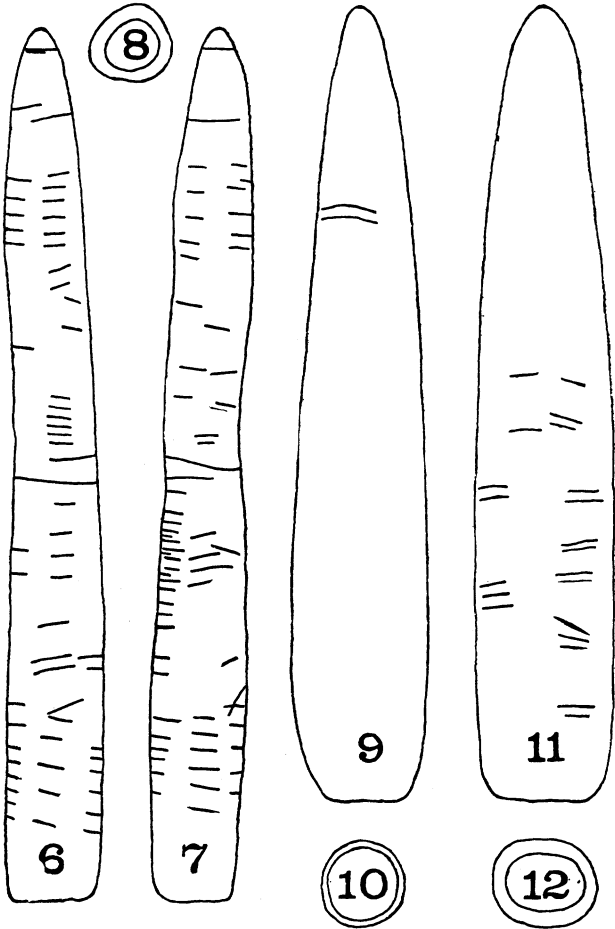
Another point to which attention may be invited is the very much elongated oval form of a section through the shaft. This is prominently seen in Fig. 5, where the diameter is more than twice as great in one direction as in the other. Most of the stones of this kind are nearly circular in section, whilst an elongated oval section is rarely met with. Again, very few of these stones are so profusely inscribed as the present example.

Fig. 6 is a long, thin, cylindrical spindle of a very hard clayslate, eighteen and a quarter inches long. At four inches from the base the greatest diameter is two inches, and at ten inches from the base (Fig. 7) the smallest diameter is one and eleven-twentieth inches. Fig. 7 represents the implement turned a quarter round.

A large amount of chipping and grinding has been done by the native artificer to bring this specimen into its present shape, especially at the pointed end and near the base. About the middle of the shaft the original surface of the stone is seen in a few patches some inches in length.

Commencing a little over an inch and a half from the base there are numerous incised marks, both horizontal and slightly oblique, all the way to the apex. About half an inch from the extreme point,

one of these incisions reaches all around the stone. At the middle of the shaft another line encircles it, but the two ends of the line, instead of meeting, overlap each other some two inches, and are from one-quarter to one-half inch apart. This encircling line is very faintly marked. There are about one hundred and forty well-



FIGS. 6-12. Three Ceremonial Stones used by the Australian Aborigines.

defined incisions on the entire surface of this stone, one hundred and twenty of which are accurately reproduced in Figs. 6 and 7.

In addition to this number there are many other marks which, although distinguishable, are mere scratches and have evidently never been anything more. They are of the same character as the well-defined cuts, but much shorter.

Fig. 8 gives a view of the base of the stone, in which there is a saucer-like depression, the average diameter of which is nearly an inch and a quarter. This concavity has been made by picking the surface with some sharp instrument, such as a pointed flake of hard stone, the punctures being still plainly discernible. After the picking out was done the surface was rubbed or ground fairly smooth. The depth of the hollow formed in this way is a little more than one-twentieth of an inch. The specimen was found on Buckanbee Run, Darling River, and its weight is three pounds twelve ounces.

Fig. 9 is a soft sandstone, sixteen and one-half inches long, with a practically circular shaft, the greatest diameter of which is two and sixteen-twentieth inches, from which it evenly diminishes to a well-defined point. At four and one-quarter inches from the point there are two slightly curved parallel lines cut well into the stone. On the opposite side of the specimen are two similar incisions, which are not of course visible in my drawing. These comprise all the marks on this stone.

From the thickest part of the shaft to the base the diameter slightly decreases, until it averages a little over an inch and three quarters (Fig. 10). The diameter of the depression in the base averages nearly two inches and its depth is one-eighth of an inch. The stone was found on Kallara Station, Darling River, and weighs three pounds fourteen ounces.

Fig. 11 is another specimen of decomposed sandstone, sixteen and five-eighth inches in length. At the thickest part the diameter measures two and eighteen-twentieth inches, and a section through any part of the shaft would give an almost circular outline. On the face selected for illustration there are twenty-one incised lines, comprising triplets, pairs and single marks.

Fig. 12 represents the base, whose diameter varies from one and three-quarter inches to two and a quarter inches. The usual saucer-shaped concavity has a mean diameter of nearly an inch and a half

and its depth is one-twentieth of an inch. This specimen was discovered on a sand ridge on Maira Plain Station, about fifty miles southeast of Wilcannia, and weighs four pounds and a half.

A few remarks will now be made respecting the uses of these stones, information on this point being now difficult to obtain for the reasons stated in the beginning of this brochure. "Harry Perry," an old aboriginal of the Darling River, who died at Bourke about a year and a half ago, informed me that although he had never seen the stones in actual use himself, his father and other old men of the tribe had told him that they were employed in ceremonial observances connected with assembling of the tribe at the time the *nardoo* seed was ripe. The people would be invited to meet at a place adjacent to some low-lying ground which had been moistened by showers during the early spring months, or over which water had flowed in flood time, and which was consequently expected to produce large quantities of the *nardoo* plant. When the natives from the hinterland, in whose country there was little or no *nardoo*, came to the gathering at the appointed time they brought with them articles as presents or for barter with the people who had allowed them the privilege of feasting on the *nardoo* seed. My native informant believed that the stones in question were used in incantations for producing an abundant supply of *nardoo* and other seed bearing plants, as well as for an increase in game and fish. He also said that the messengers who were sent to gather the different portions of the tribe for these festivals, generally carried one of the incised stones to show the purpose of his mission.

As soon as other duties will permit I shall take pleasure in submitting to this Society a further article for publication, describing the various forms and materials of the interesting aboriginal relics briefly touched upon in the foregoing pages.

PARRAMATTA,

NEW SOUTH WALES, October 31, 1908.