

Freemasonry and Mithraic Mysteries - is Pictish-Mithraism a prospective link?

Elements of Mithraic Mysteries (aka Mithraism) are seemingly apparent in Freemasonry. Mithraic iconography can be seen, for example, in Rosslyn Chapel, near Edinburgh - it is well known for Masonic allegory. What is unsure is the start point and route of any link to Freemasonry from Mithraic beliefs.

In the web site, www.pictish-mithraism.com, there are proposed decodes for many of the objects on the Pictish Symbol Stones concluding that the Stones were used to pursue a belief I have called Pictish-Mithraism®.

Could Pictish-Mithraism be the “link” between Mithraic Mysteries and Freemasonry?

There are three interleaving key areas of reasoning to support this possibility - the fundamental concepts and beliefs of Mithraism, the precepts of Freemasonry and the decoding of the Symbols on the Pictish Stones leading to my proposal for Pictish-Mithraism. With these key areas being interleaved, the following paragraphs are not individually titled.

Key precepts in Freemasonry - specifically called Landmarks - include the belief in a Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. In the original forms of Mithraism the immortality of the soul was to be “enjoyed by the faithful” - an incentive for the followers of Mithraism and an inducement to become a Mithraist in the first place. In Pictish-Mithraism the decode for the V-Rod and Crescent symbol is proposed as the V-Rod not being a rod but two arrows. The Crescent is the view to the Celestial Sphere. The downward facing arrow is the travel of the soul, on birth, into mortality; the upward facing arrow is the travel of the soul, after death, into immortality. Souls reside in the intangible “heaven” – beyond the Celestial Sphere. This is a start point for similarities in beliefs.

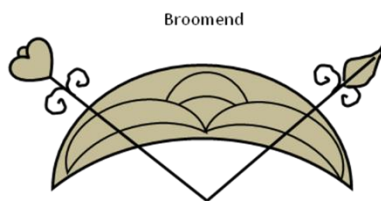
Both the Mysteries of Mithras (as practiced in the original Persian version and as Roman Mithraism) and Freemasonry are mystery (or mysterious) and secret organisations. From the lack of written record and the extreme difficulty in decoding the Pictish Symbols, Pictish-Mithraism could be considered to be the same. It is known that Roman Mithraism accepted only male initiates – likewise Freemasonry. A transparent link between Roman Mithraism and Pictish-Mithraism is not visible and linkages between Roman Mithraism and its predecessor(s) is arguably more arrived at by deduction than historic “fact”. Likewise a link between Freemasonry and its predecessor(s) is equally obscure. None of this is surprising considering the nature of the organisations.

In Roman Mithraism the temple where those who practiced the religious belief – the Mithraeum – was created in the style of a cave (typically underground) and housed statuary of the “key players” in the Mystery i.e. the god Mithras himself with the torchbearers Cautes and Cautopates as his companions. There was astronomic (probably more precisely astrologic) adornment on the ceiling and elsewhere together with paintings representing the initiation grades. I am not a Mason but am aware of the iconography and decoration in a typical Lodge, initiation, modes of recognition and grades. The Lodge acts as a temple. At many levels there are similarities with Roman Mithraism.

Several other aspects derived from the Symbols on the Pictish Stones may have similarities to Freemasonry – Masons themselves will need to decide what may and may not be relevant. The following are my “**decode**” **proposals** for a selection of Pictish Symbols from my web site © Norman J Penny.

MYSTERY / BELIEF ASPECTS:-

V-Rod & Crescent -



The V-Rod is not a rod but two arrows (left down, right up) and the crescent portrays the skyward view to the sphere of fixed stars. Together these represent the soul travelling from beyond but via this Celestial Sphere at birth and returning on death, in effect into mortality and later into immortality. The symbolism is structured so that the observer can consider himself to be at the focal point of the arrows looking out to the fixed stars and imaging the soul's travel.

Perhaps the outer curve of the Crescent can be made more specific than “Celestial Sphere” and be considered to represent the Milky Way – astrologically and in Mithraism towards the home of the soul.

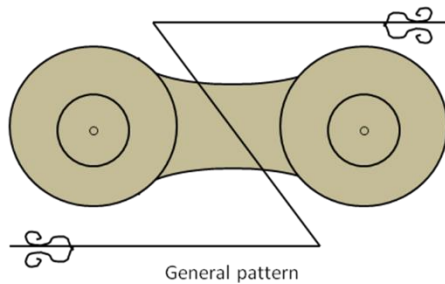
Astrologically souls descend on birth through the Gate of Cancer and ascend after death through the Gate of Capricorn – these gates being where the Milky Way and Zodiac intersect. The inner curve is the earth's horizon.

The decode for the V-Rod in Pictish-Mithraism as directional arrows aligns with this astrological concept.

The suggestion of elapsing time is made by the distance between the “V” lines passing across the crescent shape.

Broomend Stone example above.

Z-Rod and Double Disc -



The Z-Rod is not a rod but two inter-connected arrows representing the torches of Cautes and Cautopates (Mithras's companions in the classical Tauroctony). Cautes is the symbol of life, light and day; Cautopates is the symbol of death, darkness and night. One faces east towards the

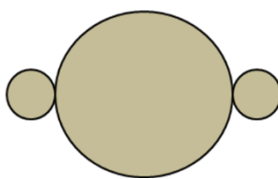
morning star the other west towards the evening star – one's torch is alight the other extinguishing signifying the beginning and end of the day; they further depict the spring and autumn equinoxes. The connecting part of the reversed “Z” is firstly the day, secondly the months between the equinoxes, thirdly time itself – the start is connected to the finish.

Artistically, a three-dimensional aspect is suggested by the “waste” effect of the lines between the discs. With the Earth being the dot in the middle of each disc and the two concentric circles being the planets then the Celestial Sphere a cross-section of a dough-ring shape is formed representing a contained universe. Beyond this contained universe is the intangible heaven.

The line connecting the torches could also represent Mithras beyond the tangible universe and in earlier beliefs able to rotate it.

Example above is a general pattern.

Triple Disc -



The Triple Disc could represent a handled vessel used for carrying water in some Roman Mithraic ritual and may have been shown on the Pictish Stones to refer to a previous practice. Alternatively, the large circle could portray the Zodiac with the small circles being Cancer and Capricorn 180° apart – the points where the soul comes from and returns to heaven.

Example is a general pattern.

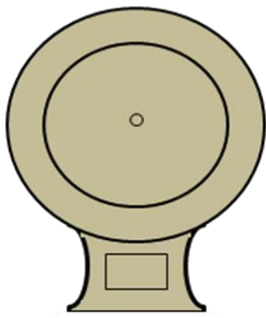
Mirror -



Mirror circles depict relationships between the Zodiac, Planets and the Earth. In each case the large circle is the Zodiac and the smaller ones are in some instances the Sun and in others the Earth and Planets.

Example is of the “solid” pattern seen on several Stones.

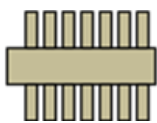
Mirror Case -



The Mirror Case components can be seen in Roman Mithraic sculpture and show a combination of the rock birth of Mithras and his supporting the universe by holding the Zodiac – potentially to rotate the universe.

Inverurie Stone example.

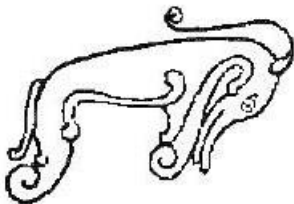
Comb -



The Comb symbol is not a comb nor is it always associated with the Mirror symbol (as is often suggested). It alludes to the Mithraic belief that the soul takes 7 steps (via the planets) between the Cosmos and the Earth at one's birth (into mortality) and the 7 steps back the way to immortality on one's death. Included in its multiple meaning would be the 7 Mithraic grades and 7 Planets. Note – many stones do not have 7 “teeth”, some have multiples of 7.

Inveravon Stone example.

Pictish Beast -



As the Pictish Beast is often associated with the V-Rod & Crescent (the soul travelling from and to heaven via the Celestial Sphere) there are two plausible interpretations. As a lion formation to represent the Leontocephalous which in turn represents Mithraic Kronos or endless time.

Alternatively, the Pictish Beast may represent the sea goat which is the astrological sign of Capricorn. The Capricorn constellation is intersected by the Milky Way and is astrologically the Gate of the Gods through which the soul travels on its return following death and into immortality. This is consistent with Mithraic beliefs of the soul travel at birth and death. Therefore, the Pictish Beast could signify Capricorn and, on a Stone, could function as a “pointer” to that constellation, or at least a reminder. This second interpretation is a stronger contender not least because of the prospect of the Crescent in the V-Rod & Crescent symbol representing the Milky Way.

More numerous right-facing example.

Serpent / Snake -



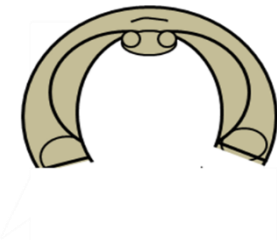
The Serpent has several meanings in Pictish-Mithraism as derived from Roman Mithraism. When crossed by a Z-rod it reflects the constellations connecting Cautes and Cautopates who represent the equinoxes. In the context of the ladder with seven steps or gates the goal when the soul returns on mortal death to gain immortality is, in fact, the eighth gate which is the head of the snake beyond the spheres of the seven planets and in the Celestial Sphere. A snake is wrapped round a lion-headed figure know as a Leontocephalous. The Mithraic Corax grade could also be alluded to by the serpent – that first grade has Mercury as its associated planet and Mercury is often depicted holding a Caduceus in his role as the messenger of the gods.

Newton House Stone example.

MITHRAEUM / TEMPLE ASPECTS:-

These decodes relate to the layout of the Roman Mithraic temple or Mithraeum.

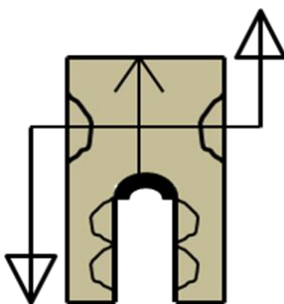
Arch / Horseshoe -



The horseshoe or arch shapes are representations of and from the indoor Mithraeum. “Of” the Mithraeum in the sense of its arched shape; “from” in the sense that within the Mithraeum there are representations of the Celestial Sphere etc.

Crosskirk Stone example.

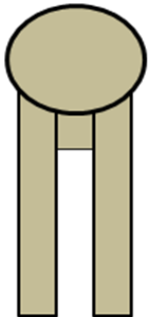
Notched Rectangle -



The Notched Rectangle shapes represent the shape and layout of a Roman Mithraeum (complete with side benches), in some cases with indentations which represent niches which would have housed statues – typically Cautes and Cautopates. The addition of the Z-Rod in over half of these Objects reinforces the presence of the statues of the torch bearers and could have been used to explain their importance in the mysteries of Mithras.

Tillypronie Stone example.

Tuning Fork -

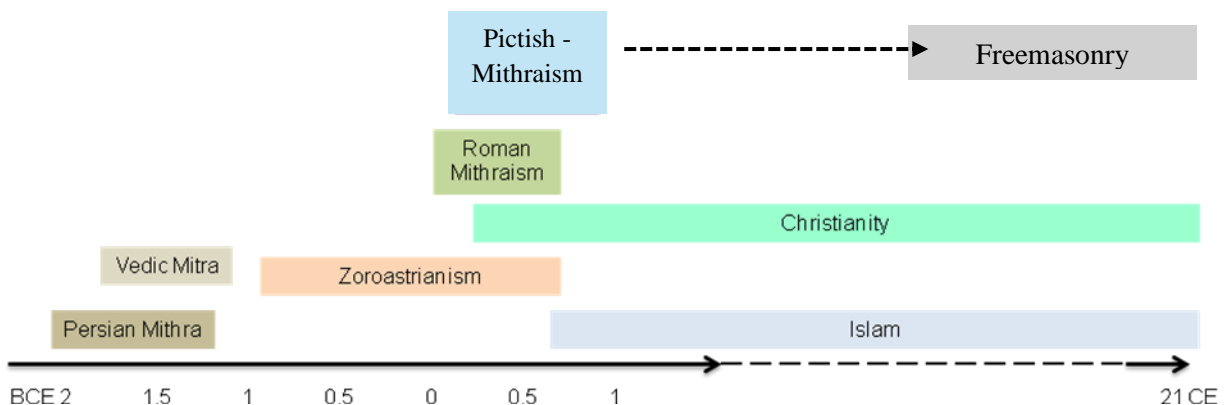


The Tuning Fork symbolises a view into a Roman Mithraeum with parallel side benches leading towards the Tauroctony scene whilst alluding to the curved roof of an Indoor Mithraeum. This symbol would have enabled a teacher to describe the inside of a Mithraeum and is a simplified version of the Notched Rectangle in that it does not contain any iconography of the Mysteries of Mithras as such.

Craigmyle & Strathmiglo Stones example.

Prospective Timeline –

The timeline originally used to show the progression of Mithraic beliefs is extended here to show a possible link from Pictish-Mithraism to Freemasonry.



This timeline prompts the question of “root and route” with respect to the start period of Freemasonry, whether there was a gap from the apparent end point of Pictish-Mithraism and the start of Freemasonry or if there was prospectively continuity without a break.

Debate and Feedback:-

To further test and develop this theme, I would very much appreciate any feedback on the prospect (or not) that a link between the Mysteries of Mithras and Freemasonry could be via Pictish-Mithraism®.

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References include:

[From Mithraism to Freemasonry. A history of ideas — The New Mithraeum](#)

[Mithraism: Freemasonry and the Ancient Mysteries](#)