NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The next meeting will be held in the MUSEUM EDUCATION BUILDING (Behind the main Museum Bldg.)
8.00 P.M. MONDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER, 1971

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of Meeting held on 23 August, 1971
3. Tabling of papers and journals received from other societies.
4. Announcement of New Members
5. SLIDE EVENING

Dr. J. Hardy and various members of the Society will show slides of rock engravings and paintings taken in areas of South Australia and Northern Territory.


R.D.J. Weathersbee,
Honorary Secretary,
C/- South Australian Museum,
North Terrace,
ADELAIDE. S.A. 5000.
CYLCONS

By Owen Broughton

PART VI: HYPOTHESES & THEORIES OF CYLCONS

The function of cylcons is not known for certain, none of these artifacts have been seen in use and they were not observed by such explorers as Mitchell who was a keen recorder and travelled through the region which has yielded the greater number of specimens. Early enquiries amongst aborigines usually elicited a statement that their use was not known, of else replies that are conflicting from area to area. It is to be remembered, however, that they may be archaeological and when found by the aborigines were used for other purposes, either utilitarian or ceremonial, just as they would use any stone of unusual or applicable shape.

The following hypotheses and theories are some of those that have at one time or another been made regarding the possible significance of cylcons. These have been divided into (a). Utilitarian and (b). Ceremonial and comments will be made on each. Some of these hypotheses were commented on by Etheridge, 1916, and these comments were later summarised by Lindsay Black, 1942. The latter considers cylcons to be of a ceremonial nature but says: "In the lack of positive knowledge, it now appears certain that the meaning of the stones will always remain a mystery." (p.20).

A. UTILITARIAN

1. Seed grinder
2. Grave marker
3. Record of the dead or tally stones
4. Challenge stone
5. Bora message stone
6. Calendar stone
7. Gynaecological instrument
8. Instrument for the defloration of virgins

B. CEREMONIAL

1. Rain making stone
2. Tooth avulsion instrument
3. Sacred stone to procure a good supply of snakes
4. Sacred stone representing yams
CYLCONS (Cont'd.)

B. CEREMONIAL:

5. Symbol of the death-bone pointer
6. Stones representing the Moora
7. A form of tjuringa
8. Stones of phallic significance.

A1. SEED GRINDER

This was the suggestion made when the first cyloncon was exhibited, vide. Macleay, 1884, and Broughton, 1970. Against this theory it must be pointed out that:

(a) A large proportion of the known number of cyloncons are made of a very soft argillaceous sandstone or else of a soft mudstone, both materials being unsuitable for use as upper grinders.

(b) Many cyloncons have concave bases, it seems unlikely that this end could have been used as a grinder. A rolling action using the side of the cyloncon has been suggested but this would have worn and obliterated the incising which is found on many specimens.

Some specimens which have, in the past, been classified as cyloncons, may in fact be elongated grinders or pounders. These seem to occur especially in the southern portion of the cyloncon distribution area from the vicinity of Menindee southward to Lake Victoria and beyond. A so-called cyloncon from Tarwin in Victoria is most certainly a pounder as is also the specimen described by H. Stuart-Dove, 1933, from Tasmania.

There are a number of specimens which appear to have had a secondary use as grinders or pounders and almost certainly this was not their primary function. The most remarkable of these are cyloncons which have been used as anvils or lower mill-stones of which several are known. One, of these, is a phacoid specimen 17 x 12 cms., incised, which has two ground depressions, one on either side, measuring 12 x 9 cms. and 10 x 7 cms. respectively, these have partly obliterated some of the incised lines.
A2. GRAVE MARKER

This is a recurring suggestion and Etheridge, op. cit. considered at length the relationship, if any, between clycons and kopi grave markers. As recently as 1943, G.K. Dunbar, writing in Mankind of his experiences fifty years previously said:

"Because these mystery stones were called 'grave stones' locally, and associated with the oval kopi grave-markers manufactured by the women and placed on graves by them, I had the impression then, and still retain it, that the cylindro-conical stones were a variation of the latter and denoted a male grave."

There has been no scientific excavation of a grave with an associated clycon and at this stage it can only be stated that a large number of clycons have been picked up where there is no evidence of an associated skeleton and also that wind erosion has uncovered many hundreds of skeletons without associated clycons.

A3. RECORDS OF THE DEAD OR TALLY STONES

The former hypothesis is based on a remark by W. Freeman, 1902, when he exhibited a "horn record stone" found by a Mr. McInerney on Budda Station. This stone was "stated to be a record of burials of 49 adults and 12 children" but no other evidence is given. Kenyon, et al. 1924, expressed the view that "tallys" would be the only utilitarian use of clycons but that a magical significance seems probable.

A4. CHALLENGE STONES

This was mentioned by a Mr. Goddard in a letter to Etheridge and refers only to those stone with a double concavity which are rare. Etheridge does not place much reliance on this theory.

A5. BORA MESSAGE STONES

This was another hypothesis discussed by Etheridge who points out that it is applicable only to incised specimens and gives no reason or use for the many unincised stones. He also points out that the number of stones that have been found seems to be disproportionate for this function.
A6. CALENDAR STONE

A cyloncon exhibited in a National Trust Museum in a New South Wales country town has this label attached to it but there seems no evidence to support this supposition and no explanation of a use for unincised specimens.

A7. GYNAECOLOGICAL INSTRUMENT

This and the following are both common hypotheses in the West Darling area of New South Wales. The great variation in shape, size and surface texture seem to preclude this explanation and also does not give any consideration to other characteristics such as concave bases or the presence of flaking around the base.

A8. AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE DEFLORATION OF VIRGINS

The same remarks made of the above hypothesis seem also to apply to this one. Cylcons are known as long as 75.5 cms. and as short as 8 cms. and some are of considerable weight.

B. CEREMONIAL

B1. RAIN MAKING STONES

This was mentioned by an old resident of the Darling River area who said that cylcons were struck in the sandhills, pointing downwards, to bring rain. There seems to be no corroborating evidence for this hypothesis.

B2. TOOTH AVULSION INSTRUMENT

The same informant who gave the above information, at a later date, heard of this possible use from an old aboriginal. The method and practice of tooth avulsion is well documented for this region and no mention of cylcons is made in these accounts. The weight and clumsiness of the artifact seems to make this use impossible.

B3. SACRED STONE TO PROCURE A GOOD SUPPLY OF SNAKES

This is a specific explanation referring to a specific cyloncon that was given to Professor J.W. Gregory in 1901 or 1902 near Coopers Creek on the eastern side of Lake Eyre. This is on the western fringe of the area of cyloncon distribution and it is likely that this could have been the meaning attached to a picked-up or traded object by that particular sub-tribe, the Tirari, without it being the significance of all cylcons.
B4. SYMBOL OF THE DEATH-BONE POINTER

This explanation was first communicated by a half-caste member of the Myro or Mulga tribe. He stated that the "broad-arrow marks indicated the pointing of the death-bone and the rings represented the bora ground." This does not explain why only some of the incised clylcons include broad arrows and also does not explain the function of the unincised type. The explanation is possible but would require further collaborative evidence.

B6. STONES REPRESENTING THE MOORA

This is a theory propounded by George Aiston, 1928, who had an intimate knowledge of the aborigines living in the vicinity of Lake Eyre, South Australia. He states that clylcons were the emblem of the Moora who, according to his information, was anyone who did or discovered anything for the benefit of the tribe. The descendant of the Moora kept them, for they were usually in pairs, one stout one representing the male element and one thin one for the female element, and they were buried in the sand, the holder of the Moora having a power over the tribe. The explanation is an attractive one but we must remember that the region referred to is a long way from the main centre of distribution and that the clylcons in the Lake Eyre district vary in both material and average shape from those on the Darling River. Although clylcons have been found in pairs this is a fairly rare occurrence compared with the finding of single specimens.

B7. A FORM OF TJURINGA

This is possible but it should be pointed out that the form of the incised motifs on clylcons in no way resembles those on tjuringas. A cylindrically shaped stone tjuringa described by Mountford and Walsh, 1943, has incisings similar to those on the normal flat tjuringas. Most clylcons appear to have been buried on camp sites and are found along with other artifacts whereas tjuringas are traditionally hidden away from regular camping places out of sight of women and the uninitiated.

B8. STONES OF PHALIC SIGNIFICANCE

When the shape of clylcons is considered, this seems the most likely explanation. Those incised clylcons with distal rings, the "preputial rings" of Etheridge, give, very strongly, the appearance of a phallic symbol.
CONCLUSION

The significance of clycons may, in fact, be a combination of several of the above theories, the fact is that with our present knowledge their true function is unknown.

WORKS CITED

Aiston, George: Chipped stone tools of the Aboriginal tribes east and north east of Lake Eyre, South Australia. In Royal Soc. of Tasmania. Proc. 1928: 130.

Black, Lindsay: Cylcons: the mystery stones of the Darling River Valley, 1942.


WORKS CITED (Cont'd.)

Macleay, W. L. (Exhibition of and remarks on conical stone implement)
In Linnean Soc. of N.S.W. Proc. v. 9, pt 3. 1884: 507-508.
