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SOME CURIOUS STONES USED BY THE ABORIGINES.

By R. H. MATHEWS, L.S.

[With Plate XV.]

[Read before the Royal Society of N. S. Wales, December 6, 1911.]

IN the report of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Vol. XII, pp. 495-498, I described some remarkable stones, chipped and ground into shape by the aborigines, discovered over a large area of the north-western part of New South Wales, but which have not been reported from any other part of Australia. 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. For this reason it is especially important that all available information should be collected 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.

These prepared stones vary in length from less than half a foot to more than two feet, in exceptional cases, but the more common lengths range from 9 to 15 inches. They are of different material, including sandstone, clayslate, kaolin, quartzite and such other kinds of stone as might be available. In the majority of specimens the longitudinal axis is practically straight, as in Nos. 1, 2, 8, of Fig. 1. There are others which have a crescent or horn shaped shaft, of which No. 3 is an example. The shaft is generally round in section, but examples are not infrequent where the breadth of the stone is two or three times greater than the thickness. Some are long and slender, as Nos. 2 and 8, whilst others are short and squat like Nos. 4 and 9.

They are thickest at the base and taper gradually upwards to an obtusely pointed apex. Some of them have a large

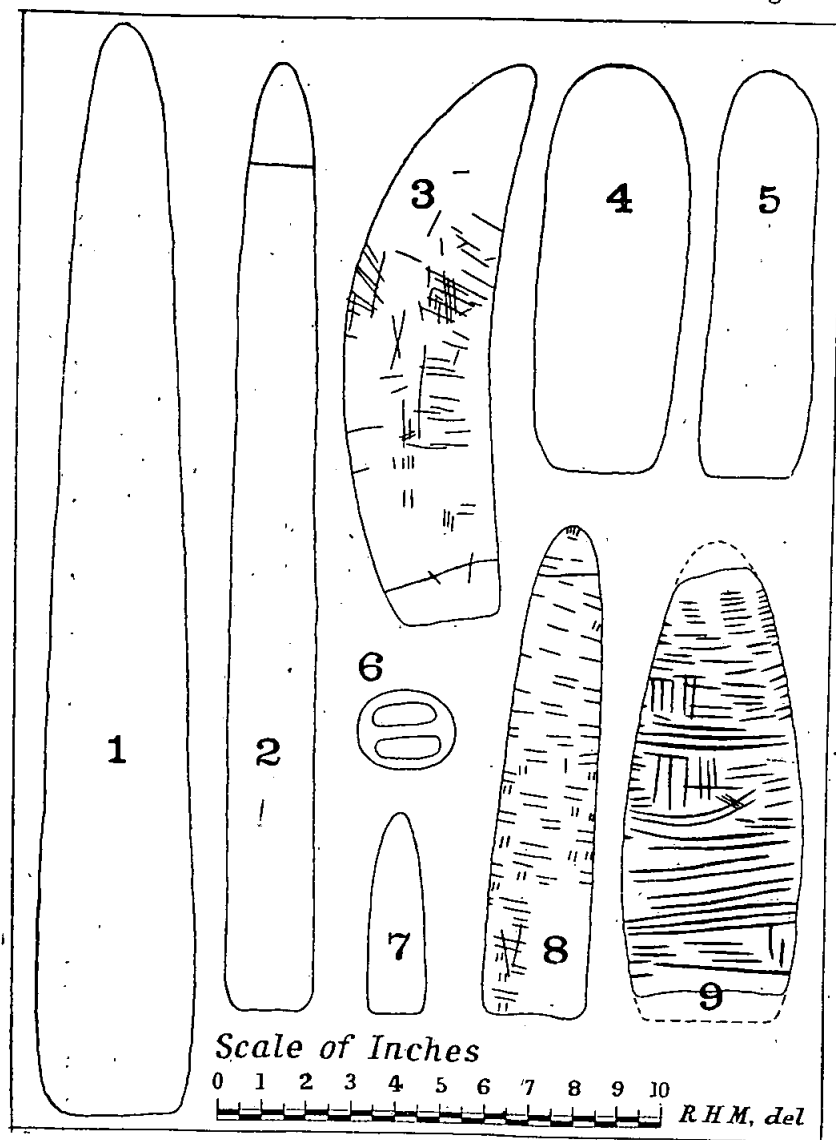


Fig. 1.—Seven Magical Stones.

number of marks cut into the surface, apparently with a sharp stone, shell, or piece of bone, as Nos. 8 and 9; others have but a few incisions, whilst some are quite plain. A characteristic of this type of native implement consists of a depression worked into the base; in nearly all the specimens, instead of the large end being flat, the central part has been picked out and afterwards ground fairly smooth, forming a concavity resembling a shallow saucer or trough—the shape of the concavity depending upon whether the base is round, or is longer in one direction than in the other. In some specimens, instead of a single hollow, there are two trough-shaped depressions, as in No. 6, and specimens with three troughs in the base are occasionally found. In a few examples, the base is flat or nearly so, with a number of grooved lines reaching right across the diameter; or else starting at the centre and radiating in every direction to the margin. There may be only a few of these lines or there may be a score or more on the base.

It has been supposed that some of the softer specimens of these articles, kaolin for example, are not natural stones but have been artificially manufactured from burnt gypsum by the natives. Mr. R. Hall, curator of the Tasmanian Museum, speaking of a specimen in the museum, says in a letter to me:—"According to Dr. Noething here, it (the specimen) is sulphate of lime, roasted and then wetted to form the required shape. That is also my opinion." I am quite certain that none of the numerous specimens which I have met with have been made in that way, but that all of them, whether kaolin or not, are natural products cut into their present shape by human labour.

No. 1. A decomposed sandstone, $24\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, with a circumference of 11 inches round the thickest part of the shaft. There are no marks on the surface, nor has it the

usual depression in the base. It was found on Murtie Run, Darling River, and weighs a little over 10 lbs.

No. 2. A slender, cylindrical clay slate, $21\frac{1}{8}$ inches long, with a maximum circumference of $6\frac{3}{8}$ inches. At a distance of $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches from the apex, a well defined groove extends completely round the shaft. There is a slight depression in the base, and a number of marks all along the shaft, but not shown in the drawing. It was found near Wilcannia.

No. 3, a compact grained kaolin, is interesting on account of its very pronounced crescent shape, on the convex side especially. The native workman had perhaps to accommodate the design of the implement to the form of the block from which he obtained it, or the shape may have been intentional. The total length is 12 and $\frac{1}{10}$ of an inch. A section through the shaft about midway would have an elliptical shape, the longer diameter of which would be $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches and the shorter $2\frac{1}{16}$ inches. There are several marks cut into the surface, one of which, near the base, reaches quite round the stone, and there is a well defined hollow an eighth of an inch deep in the base or large end. The specimen was found on the Darling River above Wilcannia, and weighs 3 lbs. 13 ozs.

Nos. 4, 5, 6. A quartzite pebble, 9 inches long and $3\frac{1}{4}$ broad. No. 5 is a side view showing the thickness of the stone to be $2\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The specimen is evidently just in the condition it was in when picked up by the native artist, with the exception that the basal end was first beaten flat, and then a couple of trough shaped hollows worked into it. No. 6 exhibits the outline of these hollows which lie in the direction of the longer diameter of the base. One of the hollows has been ground into a depth of a thirtieth of an inch, and the other is slightly shallower. This specimen is interesting from the fact that the only labour bestowed upon it consists of the formation of the cavities in the

base. Moreover, two concavities in the base are of unusual occurrence, a single depression being the normal condition. The stone was found on Wilcannia Common, and weighs 4 lbs. 3 ozs., which is a great weight for its bulk.

No. 7, a whitish argillaceous sandstone, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and 4 inches in circumference at the larger end. It is uninscribed and is without the characteristic hollow in the base. Found on Murtie Run, Darling River, and weighs 8 ounces.

No. 8 represents a conical shaft of hard clay-slate, 11 inches long by a maximum diameter of $2\frac{1}{16}$ inches. A section through the shaft at right angles to the longitudinal axis would be almost circular. An oval shaped concavity has been ground into the base to a depth of $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch in the deepest part. The weight of the implement is 2 lbs. 7 ozs. On the side represented in the illustration there are 99 incised marks, many of which are horizontal or nearly so, and are in pairs. About an inch from the pointed end, one of the lines is cut completely round the stone. Attention is also invited to 14 pairs of short, almost vertical incisions, a form of marking which is somewhat uncommon. The regular and symmetrical outline of this specimen, as well as the extensive marking, show that considerable labour has been expended upon it. Found on Tankarooka Run.

No. 9. This profusely incised specimen is a reddish coloured rock, probably derived from basalt, rich in iron, and may be described as a sandy laterite. A small portion has been broken off the base and also off the apex, the supposed extent of the missing parts being indicated by dotted lines. The present length of the stone is $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches, but was probably about $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches originally. The circumference round the thickest part is 11 inches, and a section through the stone at that place would give an elliptical

figure, with a longer diameter of 4 inches and a shorter of $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches. There are numerous horizontal lines of exceptional length, as well as some vertical and oblique ones, cut conspicuously into the surface; the total number being 111. All the markings are straight or nearly so, with the exception of two near the middle of the specimen, which have a graceful curve. Found near the southern end of Poopelloe Lake, and about 20 miles south from the Darling River, and weighs 4 lbs. 2 ozs.

The uses of the stones above described are not fully known, but sufficient evidence has been gathered by me to show that they were employed in magical incantations connected with causing the food supply to increase, making rain, injuring an enemy, and other occult functions. The object of the present article is to promote and encourage inquiry by station owners, managers, and others residing in the north-western districts of New South Wales, where there are still a few old aborigines who could perhaps increase our knowledge respecting these curious native productions.

For the purpose of enabling the reader to obtain a more realistic conception of what the stones look like, I have added a photograph of six specimens (Plate XV, Fig. 2). The crescent or horn shaped stone, No. 5 in the photograph is identical with No. 3 in the diagrammatic drawing. Another stone, No. 1, also has a crescent form outline, especially on one side. In all of the specimens the shaft is practically round and would give an almost circular section. The material in these specimens is kaolin, sandstone and clay-slate, and each of them has a shallow hollow in the base.

The six specimens in the photograph are different from those shown in the diagrammatic drawing, with the exception of No. 5 as stated above. On the floor of the photograph are six stone hatchets of different sizes, three of

which have a very distinct deep groove around them, for the purpose of attaching the handle. They are not numbered.

Another photograph (Plate XV, Fig. 3), shows six magical stones, all of which are different from those described, excepting No. 3, which is the same stone depicted as No. 9 in Fig. 1. Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4, are of the same material as No. 9 in Fig. 1. Nos. 8 and 10 are clay-slate, while the rest are grey sandstone. The three small articles on the floor of the picture are stone hatchets used by the aborigines, and are without numbers.

ON THE AUSTRALIAN MELALEUCAS AND THEIR ESSENTIAL OILS, Part IV.

By RICHARD T. BAKER, F.L.S. and HENRY G. SMITH, F.C.S.,
Technological Museum, Sydney.

With Plates XVI - XXIV.

[Read before the Royal Society of N. S. Wales, December 6, 1911.]

Melaleuca genistifolia, Sm.

Historical.—This species was described as far back as 1796, by Dr. Smith, in Trans. Linn. Soc., London, III, 277.

Bentham in his *Flora Australiensis*, Vol. III, p. 144, (1843, 1858) synonymises *M. lanceolata*, Otto. and *M. bracteata*, F.v.M. under it.

In our third paper on the Melaleucas published in this Journal, Vol. XLIV, it is shown both botanically and chemically that *M. bracteata* is quite distinct from *M. genistifolia*, and further it will be demonstrated in a later paper that *M. lanceolata* is all that is claimed for it as a species.