

3- Block measuring 7.5 x 6.5 m with a height of 5 m. Sericite schist. The northwestern part is buried under the ore embankment. The large, steeply sloping face of the block is covered with recent graffiti (letters, names, numbers, dates) and has two large blast holes.

4- Pirra Martera (Martyrs' Stone) in the center of the "Chlasche" meadow. A gigantic block measuring 8.5 x 7.5 x 9.5 m, leaning against another smaller one (no. 5). The block dominates the meadow and has a dubious cup mark at the top. The notches on the west side are probably natural.

5- Block downstream from Pirra Martera with two deep holes (cup marks) measuring 8-10 cm in diameter and a group of engravings (three very small cup marks, a triangle, and an "I").

6- Very interesting cup-marked stone. Chlorite-sericite schist. Trapezoidal block measuring 1 x 0.8 m, barely protruding from the ground. It has two large oval-shaped cup marks, often described as two feet. The left foot is 30 cm long and 18 cm wide, with a depth of 6 cm. The right foot is 32-33 cm long, 17 cm wide and 7 cm deep; both feet face north and are separated by a space of 4 cm.

All around, there are about ten ordinary cup marks, small and shallow, the largest measuring 8 cm in diameter and 5 cm deep.

To the northeast of the "foot" stone, about ten centimeters away, is a 2.5 x 1 m block without cup marks.

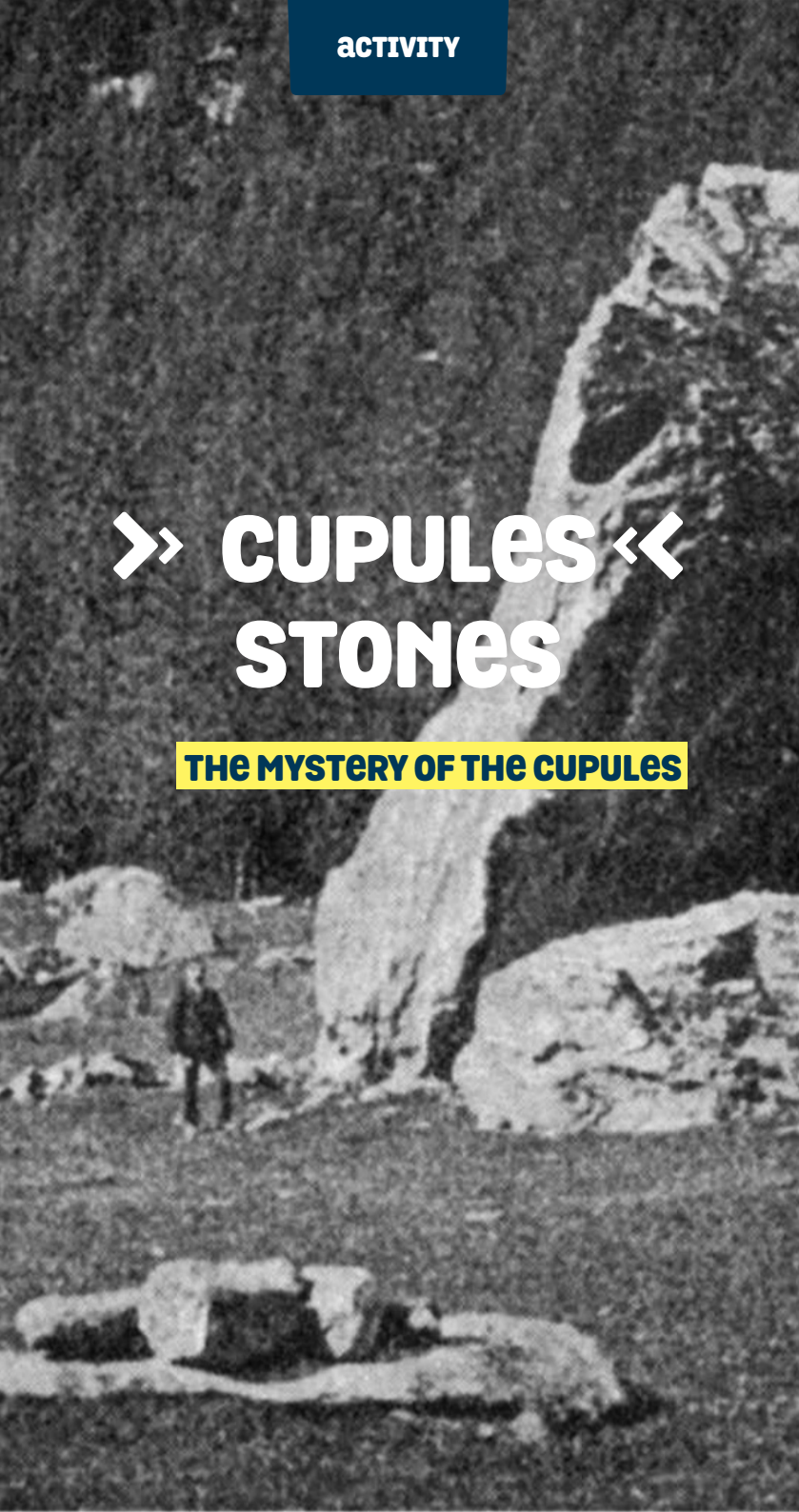
7- Floor slab, 4.3 x 2.75 m, slightly sloping from northwest to southeast and following the slope of the terrain. It features a beautiful cup mark 5 cm in diameter and only 1 cm deep, other questionable cavities, two mine holes; a cross, mentioned by Reber, has not been found.

8- Stone measuring 6.8 x 4 m, 3 m high on the south side and 1.6 m high on the north side. Chlorite-sericite schist. Destroyed in 1949. A fragment with four cup marks is visible next to the path, opposite slab no. 7.

The top of the stone consisted of three tiers. Each tier had cup marks. There were 20 cup marks on the top tier, some of which were connected by channels. There were five on the middle tier and eight on the bottom tier. Not far from the bottom tier were the initials (C. I. L.) and some fairly deep hollows.

9- Block measuring 3.5 x 1.9 m at the southeast corner of the meadow, at the edge of the road. Destroyed in 1938. At the top of the block, a flat surface revealed 21 cup marks, the largest measuring 7 cm in diameter and 2.5 cm deep. Near the north edge of the stone, a cup mark was half broken.

Since 1988, all of the cup-marked stones in Grimentz have been classified as "monuments of national importance" in the Swiss Inventory of Cultural Heritage Protection.



>> CUPULES << STONES

THE MYSTERY OF THE CUPULES

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REMAINS OF A EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION

The collections of the Cantonal Museum of Archaeology in Sion document the history of settlement in Valais from the Paleolithic era to the 4th century AD. From the end of the 6th millennium BC, groups of herders and farmers began to colonize Valais. From the Middle Neolithic to the early Bronze Age (4000-2000 BC), several stages in the evolution of prehistoric societies can be observed. These changes are well represented in the Petit-Chasseur necropolis in Sion, which reveals one of the most complete cultural sequences of prehistory in the Alps. During systematic excavations carried out between 1961 and 1973, rows of standing stones (menhirs) and tombs (dolmens, collective burials) were found, accompanied by 28 imposing, carefully engraved anthropomorphic steles. These menhir statues represent deities or high-ranking figures, priests, ancestors, or clan founders.

The prehistoric communities that traditionally built these stone monuments are known as megalithic cultures; they are found throughout Europe, from Spain to the Black Sea. In western Switzerland, impressive traces of these practices can be found in the Rhone Valley (in Sion and upstream), along Lake Neuchâtel (Bevaix, Corcelles, Yverdon-les-Bains) and on the northern shore of Lake Geneva, near Lausanne (Vidy, Lutry). Around these prehistoric sites, engraved stones and rocks dating from the Neolithic period can be found, for example in St-Léonard near Sion.

One of the most well-known engraved motifs is a simple schematic human figure in a praying position, known as an orant. The most common sign is a hemispherical cavity measuring between two and twenty centimeters in diameter, called a cupule. In St-Léonard, there are more than 200 of these cavities on a rock, accompanied by several orants; a menhir in Bevaix (on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel) has around fifty. The stones, erratic blocks, and rocks bearing this type of engraving are known as cup-marked stones, or simply cup stones.

In Valais, Neolithic culture probably arrived from the south, across the Alpine passes. One of the traditional Alpine routes is the one that reaches Valais from the Aosta Valley via the Théodule Pass and the Hérens Pass; another route passes through the Collon Pass. The two routes leading to central Valais meet south of Evolène; from there, the Torrent Pass also provided access to Grimentz and the Anniviers Valley.

Along these paths, several isolated or grouped cup-marked stones have been found. The largest stone in Switzerland is the famous Pirra Servagios (Stone of the Savages, 350 cup marks); it is located above St-Luc in the Val d'Anniviers. Three of the most impressive groups of cup-marked stones are located at Hubelwäng above Zermatt, on the Cotter mountain pasture above Evolène, and near Grimentz. There are over a thousand cup-marked stones in Switzerland.

A small number of them can be attributed with certainty to the Neolithic period; others are definitely from ancient times, the cup marks having been made during the last millennia before our era; unfortunately, however, the vast majority cannot be dated. Furthermore, almost nothing is known about the significance of the cup marks, but it seems plausible to link them to cult practices.

THE CUPULES STONES OF GRIMENTZ

In 1890, Burkhard Reber, an archaeologist from Geneva, conducted research on cup-marked stones in the Val d'Anniviers. The inhabitants of the Grimentz region told him the legend of a large rock standing in the middle of several stones bearing cup marks and symbols. This rock, known as Pirra Martera (Martyrs' Stone), is an immense boulder almost ten meters high, located in a meadow alongside other boulders of various sizes. The site, formerly known as Chlasche (Hchlaches), is located just before the bridge over the Gouggra stream, south of Grimentz.

Behind Pirra Martera, Reber noticed the remains of a square formed by a low dry stone wall without mortar; this square is now buried under a huge embankment built between 1938 and 1945. On the plain east of Pirra Martera, Reber found a dozen engraved stones among the fallen blocks. Unfortunately, two of these stones have since been destroyed.

The cup marks on the stones of Grimentz have often been attributed to the Stone Age, the Neolithic period, or the Bronze Age. However, there is no evidence for this; what is certain is that some of the marks are modern and date from the 19th or 20th century. The fact that there are no longer any traces of the cup marks being carved means that time has done its work and that they are quite old. As for the meaning of the cup marks, it is thought that the engraved stones and the Pirra Martera may well have served as a place of worship, isolated in the middle of a magnificent landscape, surrounded on three sides by the amphitheater of mountains, opening downstream into a delightful view of the Anniviers valley.

THE LEGENDS OF LA PIRRA MARTERA

The Martyrs' Stone

One day, bandits from Aosta came and ravaged the Torrent mountain pasture. They took everything they found and killed the shepherds in the following manner. The master was put under the cheese press. The handle of his crook was thrust into the cowherd's throat. The shepherd was thrown into the boiling cauldron. The young cowherd was thrown into a pond that bears his name (a small lake on the Torrent mountain pasture called "Le Louché"). The viget (another servant, responsible for butter and cheese) pretended to be crazy and to agree with the others. He was saved and brought the news of the disaster to Grimentz.

The villagers hurried after the kidnappers, caught up with them before the third bridge, and recovered everything they had stolen. The next day, they returned with the bodies of the shepherds and laid them on a flat rock south of the village of Grimentz, which has since been called the Martyrs' Stone.

(based on Johannes Jegerlehner, 1909)

The Pagans and the Stone

In pagan times, people gathered near stones and made sacrifices to implore the gods' mercy. If the cause was not serious, a lamb was sacrificed; otherwise, a human being was sacrificed. The victim was placed with their feet in notches and their head was cut off. The blood was then collected and poured from cup to cup, while the prayers of the people grew in intensity. One year, following serious disasters, they wanted to sacrifice the most beautiful girl in the valley.

But this young woman sang beautifully and delighted the mountain gnomes. They caused enormous rocks to tumble down the mountain. The largest one—the Pirra Martera—magically stopped just in front of the tormentors, who were struck dumb with amazement. The pagans realized that they should not kill the beautiful woman, and the chief even gave her in marriage to his son. It is also said that, according to the rite, all men who reached the age of 20 had to climb the famous rock. If they were unable to do so, their heads were cut off.

(based on the account of Robert Rouvinez, in the mid-20th century)

THE COPPER MINES

On the eastern slope, 400 m above Chlasche, lies the Baicolliou copper mine (in local dialect: Becollio). According to documents, this mine was operated during the years 1836-1838, 1852-53, 1872-73, then again between 1911 and 1913, and finally from 1939 to 1945.

The ore was transported from the mine to the Chlasche meadow; the 19th-century ore processing facilities were located south of the cup-marked stones; the ruins of one of the factory buildings can still be seen today.

In 1911, the ore was processed in a hammer mill on the banks of the Gouggra river; the hammer mill was used to crush the ore and recover the metal. Since that time, the area northeast of the Chlasche meadow has been called Le Boccard. In 1939, a proper ore processing plant was built on a huge embankment west of Pirra Martera. During the war, more than ten tons of electrolytic copper were produced there from 800 tons of raw ore.

In July 1961, the Grimentz Development Corporation developed the Chlasche meadow and the neighboring area to the south and installed tables and benches for picnickers. This wood is called Ilot Bosquet.

In Austria, Italy, and Cyprus, it has been noted that in prehistoric times there was a connection between the processing of copper ore and cup-marked stones, the latter being used as a support for crushing (pounding) the ore by hand.

It is possible that the cup stones in Grimentz had the same function. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to find traces of prehistoric mining in Grimentz, industrial exploitation since 1836 having destroyed everything.

1- Stone shaped like a truncated pyramid, 2 m high. Muscovite gneiss. At the top, 5 clear cupules (Ø 12-20 cm, depth 4-6 cm) and several (4-5) other questionable ones.

2- Slab measuring 2.8 x 2 m, slightly sloping towards the southeast. Chlorite-sericite schist. The slab reveals 55 round and oval cup marks and deep grooves that bear witness to skilled workmanship. Initials (I. L. H.) can still be seen, reminiscent in their arrangement and the way they were engraved of those on stone no. 5 and stone no. 8, which has been destroyed. Twenty years ago, a group of tourists seriously damaged the surface bearing the cupules and deep grooves by lighting a large fire on the stone. Next to it, another slab has a mine hole.