

# On an Apparently Palaeolithic Engraving on a Bone from Sherborne (Dorset)

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By Arthur Smith Woodward, (Read March 11th, 1914.)

Thirty-seven years ago Prof. Boyd Dawkins described to the Society the incised figure of a horse on a piece of bone found with Palaeolithic implements and remains of Pleistocene mammals in the Robin Hood Cave, Creswell Crags. Until the present time, this has remained the sole example of the pictorial art of Palaeolithic Man met with in Britain. It is, therefore, of interest to record the discovery of a second specimen, which appears to date back to the same period, and is especially remarkable as being almost identical with the first, both in subject and in style.

The new specimen was found by two boys of Sherborne School, A. S. Cortesi and P. C. Grove, and was submitted to me by Mr. R. Elliot Steel, to whom I am indebted for the opportunity of making this communication. It was picked up, with fragments of calcspar and miscellaneous Inferior Oolite fossils, in an old heap of quarry-debris near the Bristol road, on the outskirts of Sherborne (Dorset); and there can be no doubt that it was originally obtained from one of the small dry valleys with steep sides which furrow the dip-slope of the Inferior Oolite north of the town.

A careful consideration of all the circumstances suggests that it may have occurred in a rock-shelter, which was destroyed by quarrying: for the heap of debris which yielded the specimen was most probably derived from a sheltered spot with a south-western aspect, which would serve admirably for human habitation. Unfortunately, the only noteworthy associated specimens are a few flints, which are not clearly chipped by man, although they must have been brought from a distance of several miles. It may, however, be added that at a spot a quarter of a mile farther down the dry valley, where it joins the next valley, Mr. Steel has recognized a Pleistocene deposit, from which he has collected teeth of the mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros.

The bone is a piece of rib, 8.5 cm. in length, from which the greater part of the flat inner face and the thin anterior border have been flaked away. A remnant of the flat inner face is pierced by a small vascular foramen near the posterior border. The specimen cannot be identified with certainty, but it agrees well in shape with part of an anterior rib of the existing Mongolian wild horse (*Equus pezewalskii*). It terminates at one end in a sharp oblique cut, while the other end is irregularly broken. The engraving represents only the head and forequarters of a horse in side view, but it covers the greater part of the outer convex face of the bone, which has not been artificially smoothed. The head points towards the cut end, while the mane fringes the broken thin anterior border. The outline is bold, and executed in short strokes, mostly about 5 or 6 mm. in length, by an instrument which has left a groove with a V-shaped cross-section.

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The head is well-shaped, with an indication of the mouth in one stroke, but no clear mark of the nostrils. The eye is represented by two nearly parallel strokes, of which the upper is stronger than the lower; and its anterior border is completed by two slight indentations. Two thick strokes, of which the upper is stronger than the lower; and its anterior border is completed by two slight indentations. Two thick strokes in front of the mane are evidently intended for the ears. The mane is indicated by a close series of finer vertical lines: these are nearly parallel; but sometimes they cut each other, and sometimes merge together by the accidental flaking of the intervening surface of the bone.

The longest of these fine lines are on the top of the head, where they extend farthest downwards. A coarse groove marking the line of the back begins just below the hinder part of the mane, and ends posteriorly in some engraving of an uncertain nature. An equally coarse antero-posteriorly directed groove below this on the flank cannot be interpreted; while another shorter groove on the neck, close to its lower margin immediately behind the head, is also curious.

As already mentioned, this new specimen is remarkably similar in design to that previously discovered in the Creswell Caves; but in the latter the incised lines are much finer and more numerous, and the flat surface on which they are engraved has been first carefully rubbed smooth. Both agree with the majority of the engravings on bone from the French caves, in representing a hog-maned horse with a relatively large head.

### Discussion.

The Chairman (Dr. H. H. Bemrose) said that the communication was of great interest to all. He was familiar with all the Derbyshire caves, including the celebrated Creswell Cave, in which the original engraved bone had been discovered by Prof. W. Boyd Dawkins.

Sir Henry Howorth believed that the engraved bone was of Palaeolithic age. The artistic faculty was characteristic only of Palaeolithic Man, and appeared to be greatly debased in the later or Neolithic type. Certainly the workmanship did not resemble that of the still later Bronze Age. The hog-maned horse again, of which he believed the existing Japanese pony to be a survival, apparently did not exist in Europe in Neolithic times.

Mr. W. Dale said that he was present when the incised bone from Creswell Cags was first shown, and recollected the fine series of mammalian teeth and bones associated with it, which were shown at the same time. The fauna was Pleistocene, and the implements undoubtedly Palaeolithic.

Mr. A.S. Kennard wished to congratulate the Author on the importance of the find. Hitherto the only known relic of Late Palaeolithic art from these islands was the well-known example from the Robin Hood Cave, and doubts had been expressed whether it

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really was in situ in that cavern, hence this additional find was of the utmost importance. It was noteworthy that, while such relics were common in France, they were extremely scarce in England.

Mr. C.D. Sherborn explained that the cuts on the bone were not those of a knife, but rather of a graving-tool like the burin of the line-engraver.

Dr. A.P. Young asked whether the set of lines, prolonged so as to reach below the level of the roots of the hairs of the mane in front, might not have been intended to represent a forelock.

Mr. S.H. Warren said that the evidence for the dating of the specimen rested largely upon its artistic style. He had given a good deal of attention to the Later Palaeolithic art, and especially to the comparison of its style with that of the artistic productions of modern savages, and with the later prehistoric art of Europe. In the case of the Bushmen and some other modern savages, there was a certain general resemblance to Palaeolithic art, but in his opinion this had often been exaggerated. In its essential qualities the Later Palaeolithic art stood out as something different from the art of any other people.

The Neolithic art bore no comparison with that of the Magdalenian age. The only Neolithic animal engravings known to the speaker that were reminiscent of the earlier style, were some found in the dolmens of Portugal; but even this was exceedingly debased art.

After examining the specimen on the table, one could have no hesitation in stating that its artistic style was characteristically Palaeolithic, and there could be no doubt of its Palaeolithic age.

During recent years evidence had accumulated upon the Continent, which showed that some kind of halter was placed upon the heads of horses in the Magdalenian age, and there could be little doubt that the wild horse was habitually tamed, although it had probably not been domesticated. It was, therefore, very probable that certain designs seen on the flanks of the animals in the Palaeolithic engravings were intended to represent a pack. The speaker wondered whether the more indefinite lines upon the flank of the engraving exhibited might not also have a similar significance.

The Author, in reply, expressed his gratification that there appeared to be general agreement as to the Palaeolithic age of the engraving. Although the long anterior strokes of the mane might have the intention suggested by Dr. Young, he thought that an artist of such skill would have made a more exact drawing if he had attempted to represent a forelock. He could not recognize any suggestion of harness or trappings in the marks on the flank. The specimen belonged to the Sherborne School Museum, and he thanked Mr. Elliot Steel for the opportunity of exhibiting it to the Society.