

making which permitted the initial positive Surrealist judgements about North-west Coast Amerindian, Easter Island, Bismarck Archipelago and New Guinea work to be made in the years after the First World War and has led to other developments in understanding such as Henry Moore's prolonged study of the Mayan *Chacmool*. He does, however, appear also to share in what I would consider a mistake made by the early Surrealists. Their emphasis on the intuitive analogic response and the importance of immediacy, which he seems to accept, is evidenced by his characterisation of all art as essentially 'noumenal' rather than phenomenal. Even if — particularly if — late Pleistocene human consciousness and visual perception was the same as ours, this seems an unlikely explanation of their image making anywhere where remnants of it have survived the effects of weathering. Picture making can only have supported the degree of apparent stylistic coherence which it seems to have maintained over a wide geographical distribution throughout most if not all of three millennia if it was the result of consistent effort to communicate an insistent, continuing and common purpose rather than a product of individual intuitive adventures.

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Comment on
A UNIQUE ENGRAVED OBJECT FROM THE
EPIPALAEOLITHIC OF ISRAEL
By Daniel Kaufman
In *Rock Art Research* 1999, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp 109-112.

Hand grip or art: tribal or individual? By DAVID M. WELCH

In a recent edition of *Rock Art Research*, Daniel Kaufman described an Israeli elongated flint nodule with transverse bands located towards each end. He wonders whether the markings represent artistic, symbolic, or notational expressions and suggest 'there is a possibility that the markings were ... intended to signify group identity'.

It is worth mentioning two very real possibilities for these transverse markings, not mentioned in his article, and based on a knowledge of Australian Aboriginal artefacts and Aborigines' way of thinking.

The first possibility was that these transverse striations might represent a *hand grip*, to prevent the hands slipping down the nodule if it were, indeed, used as a

cutting or pressure tool. Knowing how smooth flint nodules can be, and how slippery they become when wet, it makes sense that one would roughen a tool in this way. Similar marks are common on Australian Aboriginal wooden tools to prevent the hand slipping on held objects. Such hand grip cuts vary from a few lines to multiple cuts and sometimes they encircle the object or consist of criss-crossed lines.

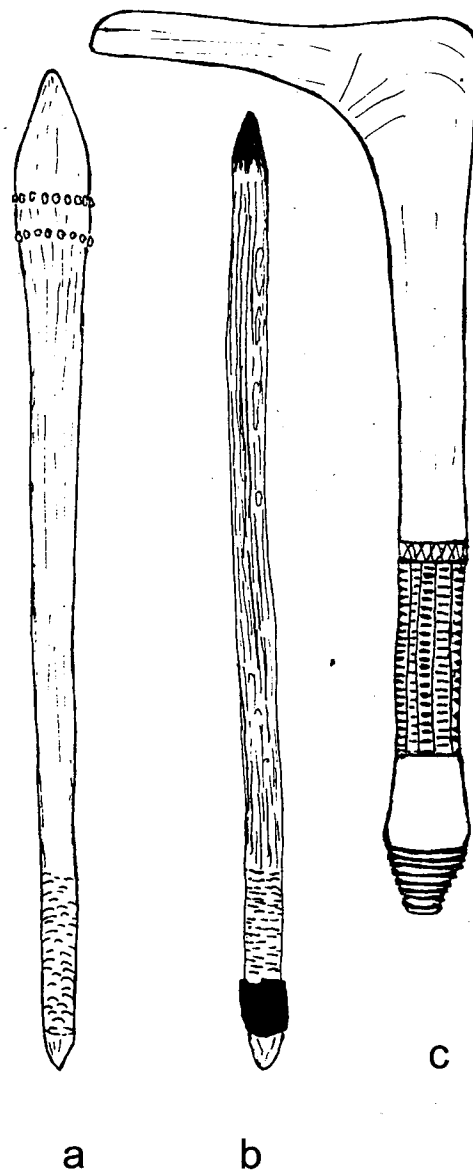


Figure 1. Australian clubs with handgrip markings.

Figure 1 shows three examples of Australian clubs with handgrips. Figure 1(a) is a pre-1900 Queensland club with irregular cuts made in the handle end to prevent slipping. This club has a bulbous head with two rows of iron studs (incorporated into a traditional design) and a tapering, lightly fluted and heavily weathered shaft. Short cuts are randomly arranged on the handle end.

Figure 1(b) is a multi-purpose item from central

Australia. It is a fluted club with roughened hand grip, but has a pointed, fire-blackened end where it has been used as both a digging stick and for tending fires. Added to the roughened handle is black resin from spinifex (*triodia* sp.), used as a binding agent for a quartz flake which serves as an adze.

Figure 1(c) is a south-east Australian *leangle* club with a deeply incised hand grip. This club has a sharp inner curve used for cutting into one's opponent. In this case, the simple handgrip has evolved into a truly decorative art form, often described as a 'beehive' style, and many elaborate and beautiful types are found.

As for Aborigines handling stone tools, often plant resin or native beeswax was added as a handle grip, and sometimes a wooden handle was further added to stone knives (examples in my own collection, and McCarthy 1976: 33, 46).

The second possibility for the striations on Kaufman's nodule is as a *personal mark*, rather than as a group mark. Again, looking at the item from the point of view of the hunter-gatherer, there are parallels in Aboriginal Australia. For example, some Australian spears have small notches or rings cut into the end, or various painted bands around them. Aborigines have told me these are personal markings used by the maker to prove ownership in such situations where several spears might have been thrown during a fight or hunt, and each person has later gone to collect up his spears. On the other hand, group (tribal) markings are likely to be more elaborate and precise than some of these cruder markings.

It might be worth listing here what I consider to be the *general characteristics of tribal (or group) art/decoration/markings*. In order to arrive at these conclusions, one should consider the evidence from known, surviving indigenous art. For example, there are Australian Aboriginal bark paintings from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, where fine parallel lines, cross-hatched lines, or zigzag lines, known as *rarrk*, represent different tribal designs.

Following extensive research in the area of study, there are likely to be at least several examples of the design in question.

1. Line work is likely to be precise and show a degree of artistic skill.
2. Designs are likely to contain linear, geometric or other features having distinguishing characteristics, enabling them to be recognised by members of the tribe.
3. One should not confuse the item or artefact, which may have a general, tribal usage, with markings upon it which may have significance only to the individual.
4. One needs to consider the age of the object in question. As we know from the study of rock art, humans were certainly as artistic 20 000 years ago as they are today. They are likely to have been just as artistic 40 000 years ago, and possibly even earlier.

In my opinion it is unlikely the maker of the marks on

the Israeli nodule would have considered these an art form, otherwise they would have been made with more precision.

There are several miscellaneous Australian examples where stone items have grooved lines or striations, but generally more finely executed, with straighter lines, than the Israeli nodule. One is on message stones (e.g. McCarthy 1976: 78). Another is on some cylindro-conical stones ('cylcons') found in south-eastern Australia (e.g. McCarthy 1976: 66-7, 79). These are often shaped from soft sedimentary rock and only some contain striations. They may have transverse or longitudinal lines, circles, animal tracks or other designs. Unfortunately, they pre-dated Aboriginal knowledge of the 1800s when European anthropologists tried to learn their significance. The earliest researchers concluded that cylcons might have been grave markers because some were associated with burials, and another possibility is that they were sacred stones used in ritual or ceremony. The wide variety of differing markings leads me to suspect that individuality, not tribal markings, was the intention of the markings. The tribal or group nature of these artefacts is their overall shape, seen by the fact that so many stones with this cylindrical base and conical form have been made in the first place. Similarly, in the case of the Israeli nodule, the group nature of its existence is the lithic assemblage with other nodules. The markings are that of one individual.

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REPLY

Reply to David M. Welch

By DANIEL KAUFMAN

I wish to thank David Welch for his insightful comments concerning the Epipaleolithic engraved nodule from Neve David. Unfortunately, we in the Levant are at a disadvantage when trying to interpret pre-Historic art since, unlike in Australia, there are no ethno-historic links between the present and the archaeological past. For this reason, Welch's remarks and suggestions for understanding the object are most helpful.

Welch's first suggestion, that the striations might have functioned as a hand grip to eliminate slipping, does not seem likely for two reasons. First, it is to be recalled that the nodule is completely covered with cortex, the texture of which provides a sufficient grip. Second, as the striations are very shallow and narrow they do not create any significant relief on the surfaces of the nodule.

As noted in my paper, similar engravings have not

been found at Neve David or other contemporaneous sites. Welch also makes this point and, in addition, notes the lack of precision and elaboration of the striations on the Neve David nodule. We agree, then, that the engravings most likely can not be interpreted as signifying group or tribal identity.

My conclusion that the markings are simply decorative in nature does not vary greatly from Welch's suggestion. Assuming that the implement was used as a percussor or retoucher as suggested, then it was probably part of an individual's personal tool kit. Therefore, there is good reason to view the engravings as personal

decoration which, in turn, may have served to show ownership of the object.

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REFERENCE

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