

Oldest handmade art-1.6 MYR

Glenn Morton (grmorton@gnn.com)
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I ran across the following a few weeks ago. It is the oldest reported possible artwork from the anthropological literature that I am aware of. It would have had to have been made by Homo erectus. Considering that Homo erectus probably made the Golan venus from circa 300,000 years ago, this second piece would not be as unexpected. (for the Golan Venus see, Desmond Morris, *The Human Animal*, (New York: Crown Publishing, 1994), p. 186-188.)

Mary Leakey writes:

"In concluding this review of the lithic material from Oldowan and Developed Oldowan Sites the grooved and pecked phonolite cobble found in Upper Bed I at FLK North must be mentioned. This stone has unquestionably been artificially shaped. But it seems unlikely that it could have served as a tool or for any practical purpose. It is conceivable that a parallel exists in the quartzite cobble found at Makapansgat in which natural weathering has simulated the carving of two sets of hominid-or mre strictly primate- features on parts of the surface. The resemblance to primate faces is immediately obvious in this specimen, although it is entirely natural, whereas in the case of the Olduvai stone a great deal of imagination is required in order to see any pattern or significance in the form. With oblique lighting, however, there is a suggestion of an elongate, baboon-like muzzle with faint indications of a mouth and nostrils. By what is probably no more than a coincidence, the pecked groove on the Olduvai stone is reproduced on the Makapansgat specimen by a similar but natural groove and in both specimens the positions of the grooves correspond to what would be the base of the hair line if an anthropomorphic interpretation is considered. This is open to question, but nevertheless the occurrence of such stones at hominid sites in such remote periods is of considerable interest."~M.D. Leakey, *Olduvai Gorge 3 Excavations in Beds I and II, 1960-1693*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 269

The reference to the Makapansgat pebble is to an amazing piece of stone which was apparently collected by an Australopithecus 3 million years ago and carried 4.8 kilometers to his rock shelter. (~K. P. Oakley, "Emergence of Higher Thought 3.0-0.2 Ma B.P.", *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. B*, 292, 205-211 (1981), p. 205-206) This distance of transport is much farther than Chimpanzees ever carry rocks. The farthest I have been able to find that chimps carry objects is half a kilometer. (~C. Boesch and H. Boesch, "Mental Map in Wild Chimpanzees: An Analysis of Hammer Transports for Nut Cracking", *Primates* 25(2):160-170, p. 162)

While the human archaeologists noticed the pebble because of its red color and its naturally weathered "human" face carved on it, when the object is turned upside down, an australopithecine face appears. Raymond Dart writes:

"A complete perceptual transformation had taken place. The two little rounded 'eyes' retained their visual status though their contours looked more square and adult. The huge 'brain' and ridiculously pinched infantile 'mouth' that had involuntarily prevented us sapient observers from orientating it otherwise, were now replaced by a dwarfed, flattened, and indented 'skull-cap', above a broadly-grinning, robust and typical australopithecine 'face'. Its broad 'cheeks' and gaping 'mouth' have become so wide that even the total absence of nostril openings would have been incapable of preventing any perceptive Australopithecus from recognizing it as anything other than a caricature of one or another of his extremely flat-faced male or female relatives in a positively hilarious mood.

"The 'facial proportions' from this new aspect are thus in excellent general agreement with those that reconstructual efforts have caused each modern artist, with minor variations, to produce for Australopithecus. This concordance of itself is sufficient justification of the inference that conceptual processes of a similar nature caused an australopithecine to transport the pebble to the cave at Makapansgat. In addition, the curious and to some extent corroborative fact is that once one admits the possibility that an Australopithecus had the intellectual ability to detect the presence of a face on this alien natural stone, then the social responses that capacity evoked, follow. The pebble would have had no point without an ability on his associate's part to comprehend and share the emotional reactions, the puzzlement and amusement, that the discoverer had had. And from this it may also be deduced that he and his fellows at the australopithecine phase of human evolution had already reached a humanoid level of self-realisation and self-awareness."~R.A. Dart, "The Waterworn Australopithecine Pebble of Many Faces from Makapansgat," South African Journal of Science, 70(June 1974), pp 167-169, p. 168

While the Makapansgat pebble was not manufactured, the phonolite pebble reported by Leakey was manufactured. Its poor quality can be ascribed to the extreme hardness of phonolite and the difficulty chipping it.

glenn

Foundation, Fall and Flood

<http://members.gnn.com/GRMorton/dmd.htm>

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