

THE RINEHART TABLET: A REDISCOVERED, ENGRAVED ADENA TABLET FROM ROSS COUNTY, OHIO

by
John C. Rummel
6197 Shelba Drive
Galloway, OH 43119-8933

Engraved tablets crafted during the Early Woodland period (500 BCE - 100 BCE) are considered one of the rarest objects of the Adena Culture. With the inclusion of the tablet in this article, a total of 14 engraved tablets have been found within the tri-state area of Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia (Fig. 1). The tablets are typically made of fine-grained sandstone, although two examples are of limestone and clay. The engraving appears on one side with the reverse usually having grooves that are believed to be the result of sharpening bone awls and grinding hematite for pigment (Penney, 1980:21-23 ; Webb and Baby 1957: 96-97 ; Solecki, 1953: 364-365; Dragoo, 1959: 99). It is suspected the images were printed on skin, leather and other mediums, however the most plausible theory comes from Otto (1975:32-33) who provides ethnohistoric evidence for imagery being tattooed on human skin. This idea would support the sharpening of bone awls that would have been used to put the ink under the skin providing a permanent image and grinding the hematite to be applied to the engraved surface.

The Rinehart Tablet

I discovered this tablet on February 26, 2010 among the objects donated to the Ohio Historical Society by William B. Mills, of Chillicothe, Ohio on October 12, 1917. The objects are cataloged with Accession number 203 and represent artifacts from all time periods collected primarily in Ross and Pickaway counties. The tablet (Fig. 2) is 203/189 and recorded as "Part of a sandstone tablet, finely engraved; David Moorefarm, Ross County, presented by E.C. Rinehart." I conducted additional research and located information on David Moore and his farm in the Illustrated Atlas of Ross County and Chillicothe, Ohio (Gould, 1875). David Moore was a prominent citizen in Twin Township, and his farm was located seven miles west of Chillicothe on State Route 50 just south of the junction of Cattail Road. According to the records, E.C. Rinehart found several objects on the farm in 1886, and although Mills (1914) does not record a mound on the property (Fig. 3), all of the other engraved tablets were discovered in mounds, lending credence to the possibility of this example being from a mound. It is unfortunate the proceedings of this tablet's initial discovery were not recorded to determine placement of the tablet, associated artifacts and any other information that could be used to aid in its study.

The Rinehart tablet is, unfortunately, broken, so it is difficult to ascertain its exact dimensions. As it is now, the tablet is 80mm long, 55mm wide and 7mm thick. The edges are rounded over, and a line is etched halfway on the sides. There are no indications of grooves on the underside of the tablet, but they could have been on the unrecovered portion. While it is difficult to determine the full engraving on the tablet, enough remains to show that it exhibits a classic raptorial avian motif found on the majority of Adena tablets. The straight lines with rounded scallops represent bird wings and tails, the ovals to the side are the head, and the curvilinear lines represent the body and talons.

I would like to thank the Archaeology Collections staff (Dr. Bradley Lepper, Bill Pickard, and Linda Pansing) at the Ohio Historical Society for allowing me access to the collection, photographing the tablet, and giving me permission to publish it and make it known to the archaeological community.

References

Dragoo, Don W.
1959 An Unusual Cache of Adena Tablets. *Pennsylvania Archaeologist* 29:134-144.

Gould, Hueston T.
1875 *Illustrated Atlas of Ross County and Chillicothe, Ohio*. Columbus, OH: H.T. Gould & Co.

Mills, William C.
1914 *Archaeological Atlas of Ohio*. Published for the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society by Fred. J. Heer.

Otto, Martha Potter
1975 A New Engraved Adena Tablet. *Ohio Archaeologist* 25(2):31-36. Spring, 1975.

Penney, David W.
1980 The Adena Engraved Tablets: A Study of Art Prehistory. *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology*. 5(1): 3-38.

Solecki, Ralph S.
1953 Adena Mound at Natrium. *Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin* 151, pp. 313-395.

Webb, William S., and Raymond Baby
1957 *The Adena People* No. 2. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press.



Figure 1. Locations of extant engraved Adena tablets (after Penney, 1980).



Figure 2. Rinehart Tablet. Accession # 203/189. Courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.

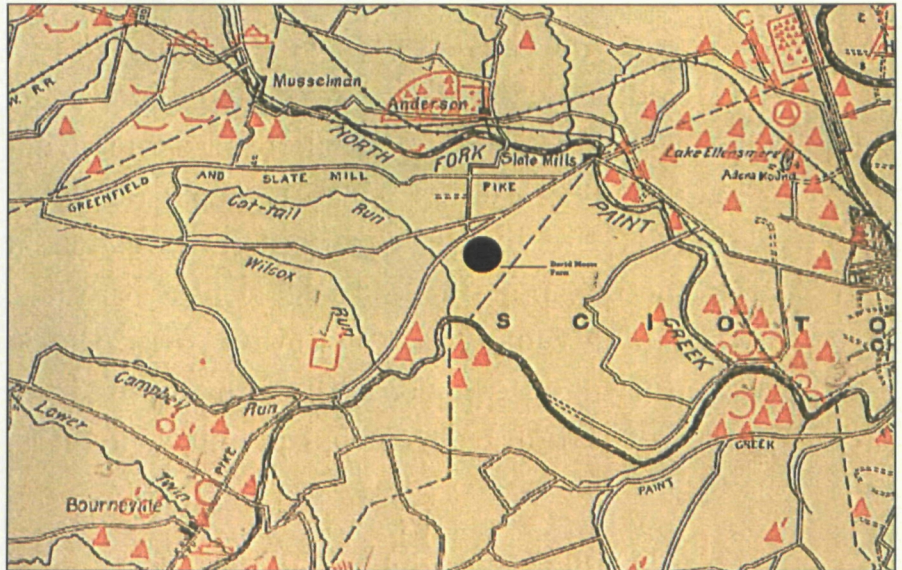


Figure 3. Location of the David Moore farm superimposed on Mill's Atlas (1914).

**ARCHAEOLOGY OF WESTERN OHIO SYMPOSIUM
GARST MUSEUM, GREENVILLE, OHIO
SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 2010*
FREE - NOON TO 5:00**

****Rescheduled from February 6th, 2010***

SPEAKERS:

- Robert N. Converse - Paleo Period
Tony Deregnacourt - Archaic Period
Chris Rummel - Hopewell
Greg Shipley - Historic Indian and Trading Post Period***

***SEVERAL PROMINENT WEST-CENTRAL OHIO ARTIFACT COLLECTIONS
WILL BE ON DISPLAY, INCLUDING MUSEUM DISPLAYS.***

***EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO BRING ARTIFACTS FOR DISPLAY
OR FOR IDENTIFICATION BY EXPERTS!***

Back Cover:

ARCHAIC CORNER NOTCHED POINT

A fine Archaic Corner Notched Point shown in obverse and reverse. This 3 1/2 inch Archaic point was found by Sam Hamilton in Johnson Township, Champaign County on Mother's Day, 1985. It is made of yellow jasper and is exceptionally thin.