

# NOTES ON MIDDLE ACHEULIAN SPIRITUALITY: STONE TOOL LOGIC STRUCTURES AND ANALOGIES OF THE SOUL

**Hypothesis.** Since the evolution from Early Acheulian to Middle Acheulian bifaces involves a major shift from a 2-dimensions shaping strategy to one of 3-dimensions, this will result in a major shift in symbolism, adding a new layer of signification upon that of the earlier period.

## **Brief summary of prior spiritual analogues of prior stages of technological innovation.**

Omo Oldowan/Classic Oldowan: *'obtaining the sustaining core-seed essence'*  
(Harrod 1992)

Evolved Oldowan/Developed Oldowan A: *'obtaining the sustaining core-seed essence and establishing within it and through it the vertical orientation, hierarchy and providence of powerful vis a vis powerless'*

Early Acheulian A/Early Acheulian B: *'renewal, re-presencing, restoration, and reparation of the core, of its wholeness as an orientatio of the core, upright and balanced, with an internal, inward reference point, arrived at through establishing symmetry, both mirror and opposites and acknowledging and working with the residue of the irreparable.'* (Harrod 2002)

What is the next step in technological and spiritual evolution?

## **Middle Acheulian Technological Innovation**

Metrical analysis of Acheulian bifaces (Leakey and Roe 1994; Isaac 1977) strongly indicates that there are three distinctive chronological phases in their development. There are three successive groups of Acheulian tool kits at Olduvai Gorge, those of Upper Middle Bed II (EF-HR, MLK, TK Lower), those of Bed IV (PDK IV, WK, HEB group), and those of post-Bed IV (FLK Masek, HK, TK FG). These three phases I choose to designate with the terms Early Acheulian, Middle Acheulian and Later Acheulian. There is a distinct step in technological evolution that occurs during the Early Paleolithic Middle Acheulian: Abbevillian A (c. 800,000 to 1 MYA)/Abbevillian B (c. 600,000-800,000).

See Derek Roe 'Metrical Analysis of Handaxes and Cleavers' (Leakey and Roe 1994:204). Roe's Table 8.4 on ratio of biface thickness to breadth shows a trend toward thinner bifaces between Bed II and Bed IV. Bed II Acheulian sites have mean ratios ranging from 0.5 to 0.7, average 0.6; Bed IV, 0.51 to 0.56, average 0.53; post-Bed IV, 0.54 to 0.61, average 0.58. At Olorgesailie, Glynn Isaac's (1977: table 16) analysis of the thickness/breadth ratios shows an even more striking progression of thinning from the Early to Middle Acheulian. Early Acheulian bifaces from sites at Olduvai Gorge and Peninj have mean ratios ranging from 0.55 to 0.66, or around 0.6, similar to Roe's tally. Those at Olorgesailie I3 (974,000-992,000 BP) have a mean ratio of 0.51; the Catwalk (c. 747,000-974,000 BP), 0.53 which are comparable to Olduvai Gorge HEB West 2b and 3 and WK; and the various Olorgesailie sites as a whole (Members 1-11, c. 600,000 to 1 MYA) have a range from 0.44 to 0.54, with an average mean of 0.48. Isaac lists several Later Acheulian sites with mean thickness/breadth ratios: Swanscombe Upper

Loam, c. 400,000, 0.46, Kalambo Falls, Zambia, c. 200,000, 0.46; and Oldbury (M.A.T.), 0.41. However, other sites have bifaces with thickness ratios that do not necessarily follow the 'ideal' progression. For instance, Isaac observes that the ratios for one cluster of sites which has the highest ratios of all, ratios even 'plumper' than that of Olduvai Early Acheulian bifaces, includes Latamne and Fordwich at 0.69 and Abbeville at 0.80. These I take to be paradigmatic Middle Acheulian sites, so something peculiar happened at these sites and this needs to be explained. The semiotic hypothesis I am proposing, I think, provides an explanation for this seeming regression in thickness. It also helps explain a fact from Isaac's list that Later Acheulian biface assemblages don't seem to get predominantly thinner but are, on the whole, of a range similar to that of Olorgesailie Middle Acheulian assemblages.

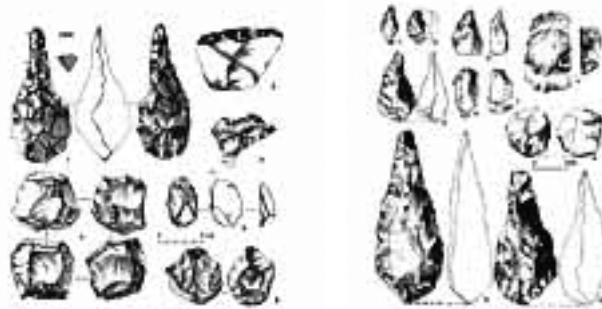
In comparison to the Early Acheulian, the Middle Acheulian is marked by several major new operative trends.

- First, there is a movement from 2-dimensional application of mirror symmetry to 3-dimensional. The Middle Acheulian 3-dimensionally symmetric bifaces reflect an Euclidean, projective sense of space as positional. Wynn (1989) brilliantly analyzes this transition. Wynn compares Early Acheulian bifaces to Late Acheulian bifaces c. 300,000 years ago, though I believe the evidence indicates that the 3-dimensional competence arises much earlier, specifically during the Middle Acheulian. Wynn observes with respect to the 3-dimensional sense (61-65):

Perhaps the most critical new spatial concept is the understanding and coordination of multiple points of view. The intentionally straight edges and parallels on some of the Isimila bifaces require attention to a stable point of view, which is a projective notion. More complex still are the regular cross sections of many of these bifaces . . . Unlike the spatial concepts used for earlier tools, these projective notions allow the internal frame of the artifact to be controlled by the external relation of perspective. A second spatial concept to appear by 300,000 years ago is that of a "Euclidean" space, that is, a space definable by a three-dimensional coordinate grid. . . . The acquisition of this constellation appears to have hinged on a single breakthrough in spatial thinking, the invention or discovery of perspective. . . . The evolution of these concepts of space reflects, I think, the development of a very distinct concept of self as an actor in an independently existing world. Such an awareness is at the heart of human understanding.

- Second, there appears for the first time a standardized, canonical classification of tool types, and there is a pairing of tool types of contrasting differential features. Thus Wynn (1989:88) notes:

Corroborating this assessment is the presence, for the first time, of what can legitimately be called "classes" of artifacts. It is relatively easy for an archaeologist to recognize the handaxes and cleavers in these early biface assemblages. This suggests some kind of a standard that was shared, which in turn suggests that stone knappers attended to shapes produced by others. [By analogy] by the end of the pre-operational stage children can produce rudimentary classes defined by single qualities . . . The single distinction of "pointed" vs. "bitted" (the transverse, untrimmed end of a cleaver) would be sufficient to encompass the handaxe-cleaver distinction that we do see in the early biface industries.



I would add the following comments on this trend. In contrast to the playful diversity of mirror symmetry patterns in the Early Acheulian, in the Middle Acheulian two paired, distinctive differential shapes of bifaces appear to characterize a given culture area. For instance, at Near Eastern sites such as Joub Jannine II (*Figure 1*) and Latamne (*Figure 2*) lanceolate handaxes and trihedral picks are frequent. At Joub Jannine handaxes have very globular bases and triangular necks. At Latamne, which has 30% bifaces in its overall tool assemblage, lanceolate handaxes are most frequent and there are several trihedral picks (Bar-Yosef 1994: fig 11, 8.12).



In East African sites such as Olorgesailie and Olduvai Gorge cordiform handaxes and cleavers characterize the assemblages (*Figure 2 and 3 respectively Isaac 1977:fig 72, Leakey and Roe 1994:pl. 8, HEB3 site*). Of larger tool forms at Olorgesailie, picks and pick-like handaxes are rare, 4%; classic, mostly cordiform, handaxes are 39% and cleavers 23%, and an additional 15% of bifaces are an in-between shape, chisel-ended handaxes (Isaac 1977. fig. 40). The Israeli site of Geshen Benot Ya'akov is characterized by cleavers and handaxes as well as the African Kombewe method of flaking, suggesting that Geshen tools were made by knappers from the African tradition. In all these Middle Acheulian sites there appears to be a curious oscillation between two predominate complementary bifacial shapes. (For whatever reasons, across sites it appears that within a particular biface pairing, the 'handaxe' is more frequent than its counterpart, pick or cleaver.)

The special Middle Acheulian emphasis on a restricted set of paired large biface shapes is exemplified in the cleaver. At Early Acheulian Olduvai Gorge TK Lower, 0.0%, MLK 3.4% and at EF-HR 16% of bifaces are cleavers. In contrast, in Bed IV Middle Acheulian three HEB sites range from 16.7 to 34.9% cleavers and at WK the percentage peaks the entire Olduvai sequence at 41.9% cleavers. In contrast in the Later Acheulian sites of FLK Masek (400-600,000 BP) and post-Masek TK FG and HK the percentage of cleavers declines dramatically, 8.7%, 0.0% and 9.6% respectively. In effect, the sample cycles back to Early Acheulian percentages. Picks do not seem to be given the same intense analysis in the literature; it would be interesting to see if their percentage among bifaces follows a similar arc. The thick lanceolate bifaces might be similarly examined. In the data available the cleaver and more importantly the pairing of cleaver-handaxe

has paramount importance in the African Middle Acheulian. If cleavers and the cleaver-handaxe pairing play an especially prominent role in the Middle Acheulian this needs to be explained.

- Third, during this period the percentage of bifaces (cleavers, handaxes, picks) in a given tool assemblage increases.
- Fourth, there are sometimes great numbers at a single location. For instance at Olorgesailie Main Site excavation DE/89 B in a concentrated area of only 12-15 meters in diameter, M. and L. Leakey and Glynn Isaac found 504 large cutting tools, including 304 handaxes, 182 cleavers, and 10 picks. Isaac interprets the site as an aggregate of “a series of initially more scattered occupation assemblages . . . accumulated during a limited time span . . . stylistically homogenous, and that repeated pursuit of [gelada] baboons was involved” but notes that some geologists surmised that it was not an aggregation but a single assemblage (Isaac 1977:57). Wymer (1982:103) suggests that the great numbers at some sites cannot be reconciled with the small size of hunter-gatherer bands and thus remains inexplicable.
- Fifth, weight range is variable and some bifaces are quite heavy, others tiny, seemingly beyond any utilitarian function. Wymer (1982:103) observes that the most common form of handaxe in many [Later] Acheulian industries is “a very small (less than 10 cm long) poorly made tool that does not look useful for anything. At the other end of the scale are large, magnificently made handaxes which seem too good or too heavy to use [such as the giant handaxe from Shrub Hill, 29 cm = 12 in long, dated c. 300,000 BP; giant handaxe from Furze Platt, 7.5 lbs.; finely made large Wolvercote handaxe.]”

There is some evidence for specialization in the use of bifaces. A microwear study of Early Acheulian Peninj flakes and bifaces indicates that two of three bifaces studied were used for cutting woody acacia plants, possibly for digging sticks, spears, or huts; the other was not so used (Dominguez-Rodrigo, M. et al. 2001).

Potts (1989) describes new excavations at Middle Acheulian Olorgesailie Member 1 (dated between 974±39 ka to 992±39ka). They show that lake-margin sites, including at least one elephant butchery site, have predominantly sharp flakes, flake scrapers and Oldowan-style cores with handaxes less than 5% in stark contrast to stream-channel sites that have 62% handaxes. Chips on flakes indicate that the flakes were removed from handaxes (bifacial cores), which thus served as ‘flake dispensers’ presumably carried away from kill-sites. Potts notes that this raises a big question about handaxe function. He suggests that the large numbers of handaxes at channel sites reflects either “proximity to their place of manufacture, a focus on other activities that required hominids to deposit the handaxes, or the use of handaxes as implements for some other activity in this zone of the landscape” (481). He leaves the question unanswered.

Thus, while during the Early Acheulian, at least at the site of Peninj, handaxes were used solely for cutting acacia plants, possibly for digging sticks, spears or huts, during the Middle Acheulian, at least at Olorgesailie, they appear to have either a new or added function as ‘flake dispensers’ with a reverse association to butchery or kill-sites. They are a source of flakes for butchery, but not used or at least abandoned at those sites. Inexplicably from the utilitarian point of view, since we find an inordinate frequency of handaxes in symmetrical shape without being marred in appearance by flake removals, one might assume that ‘flake dispenser’ was not the primary role of handaxes. Instead the pattern of manufacture would be something like ‘boulder core yields flake blank yields biface as reparation of the core-status which, secondarily, yields sharp flakes that were used for butchery.’ This suggests a continuation of an underlying Early Acheulian thematics: *‘renewal, re-presenting, restoration, and reparation of the core.’*

- At Gesher Benot Ya'aqov, Goren-Inbar reports that two contemporaneous manufacturing modes appeared to exist, one for flakes from cores and one for bifaces. Different materials from different sources were used for flakes and for bifaces. Unlike flakes, bifaces were made from blanks obtained from lava outcrops more than one kilometer from the site (Light, Verosub, and Goren-Inbar 2001). This fact confounds two popular hypotheses about the function of handaxes—one that they were used as a portable source of flakes, the other that flakes and bifaces are often found at non-contiguous sites because the bifaces were carried off for use at 'heavy-duty butchery sites'. Here they are at the same site and were not used for flakes.

### **Semiotic Competence**

Were these bifaces just tools, with no non-utilitarian function? Is their pairedness a mere coincidence of instrumental function? This is highly unlikely. Why would there be just two standardized types, rather than a great variety of shapes as in the Early Acheulian? Has the subsistence mode changed? The Middle Acheulians are scavenger-gatherer-hunters like their Early Acheulian forebears. Are their fewer tasks involved in the Middle Acheulian subsistence strategy? No evidence has been presented to indicate that this was the case. Why would the Near Eastern sites have a type pair different from that in East Africa? Both areas are in similar rift valley environments and assemblages imply similar subsistence strategies. Why the great number, in the thousands, at some sites? Fluvial action cannot account for it. What about the size variance, with sizes too large and heavy or too tiny to be of any functional use?

The operative trends noted in the section above suggest that the Middle Acheulians innovated some new semiotic competence in addition to a new kind of spatial competence. This is my view and it accords with Wynn's (1989:93) comment:

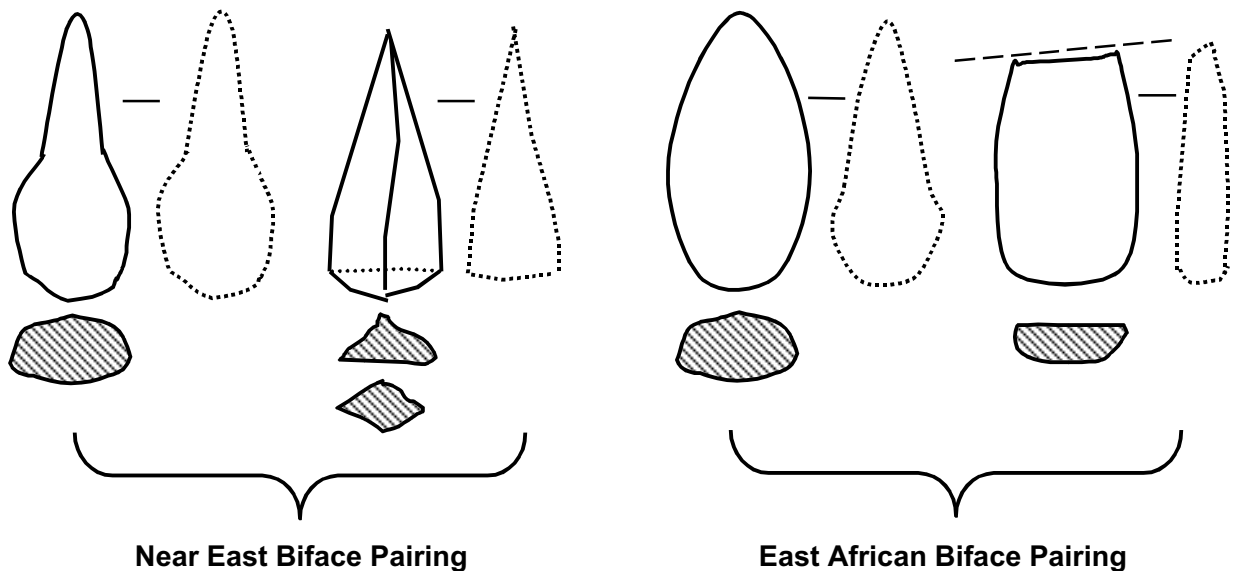
When we compare the spatial concepts required for [early and later Acheulian tools], there is a dramatic difference that indicates that the later hominids were significantly more intelligent. If there was no correlation between a change in technology, in the guise of a change in tasks performed, and change in intelligence, it is difficult to argue that one drives the other. There is always the chance that we are missing some important invisible component of technology, but as the evidence stands we cannot argue for a central role of technology in the evolution of intelligence between 1.5 million years ago and 300,000 years ago. If not tools, what? The most likely candidates appear to be complex social organizations and semiotic behavior, especially language. Neither is likely to be clearly manifested in tools.

I propose that there is an 'invisible component of technology' but we need not necessarily turn to language for this; rather the tools themselves in their operative design and constitutive structure are analogues for symbolic meaning. I have developed a method to decode this. This semiotic behavior most likely does function with respect to social organization and, I would add, religious ritual and spirituality.

If one were to attempt a decoding of the Middle Acheulian symbolic system, one could begin with the two basic operative characteristics of that tool kit, namely 3-dimensionality and a standardized pair of complementary biface shapes. The knapper, who has made the discovery of, and could now work in, three-dimensional Euclidean space, seems drawn to the novelty of this new power. The knapper emphasizes the sphericity, substantiality, and gravity of this new sense of space and its multiple perspectives and contrasts this with the rising, aspiring, verticality of the column. It is as though the

stone-worker senses both the substantiality of this space and the gesture-movements—upward, outward, downward, and inward—that one can make in this space. There is evident delight in this new creative ability and a sense of awe. Perhaps the space appears as a revelation, an opening into another world, a world of creative and tactile visualization, a space that is alive with potential forms and potential gesture-movements of these forms.

Based on stone working techniques and stylistic aspects of bifaces, archaeologists generally consider that there are several Middle Acheulian cultural traditions, which may be referred to as African, Near Eastern and Abbevillian. Reviewing some key African, Near Eastern and Abbevillian sites, I propose that there appears to be a preference for pairs of distinctive biface shapes and these pairings vary by cultural tradition. Considering some key sites of the African and Near Eastern culture areas, there appears to be a paradigmatic spectrum of biface pairs something like this:



To the left is a plan view, side view and cross section of a prototypical lanceolate biface with thick globular base and elongated neck; the neck may be lenticular or triangular. A type-site is Joub Jannine II; similar globular lanceolates occur at Latamne. Trihedral picks occur at both sites, with their triangular cross-sections with a propensity for a heavy globular base; picks at some sites may have quadrangular cross section. To the right is a plan view, side view and cross-section to a prototypical cordiform biface as found at Olorgesailie. Its cross-section and side view also has a propensity for a globular base. To the far right is a cleaver form. Its side view tends toward a thinner columnar rectangularity; its cross section at the bitted section tends toward rectilinear angularity. Not shown are two secondary pattern possibilities. One is the Abbevillian style 'handaxe' found at such sites as Abbeville, Fordwich and Kent's Cavern; it is somewhere between a trihedral and a lanceolate, a kind of form fusion, with an exaggerated extremely thick globular base. Symmetrical to the Abbevillian is the other possibility, found at Olorgesailie, the 'chisel-ended handaxe', which, is thus, also a kind of form fusion, in this case between handaxe and cleaver.

In this mosaic spectrum the differential features constituting the shape types appear in each of the three dimensional perspectives. In frontal or plan view, artifact types in each pair contrast rounded with angular (rectangle, triangle, rectilinear) shapes. In side view there is a similar contrast between thick, globularity of the base (lower half) of the 'handaxe' versus thin, vertical columnarity of the 'cleaver' or 'pick'. In cross-section, there is again a contrast between globularity and angularity (triangle,

rectangle, rectilinear cut). Thus, the shape types are overdetermined; they are iterated in three perspectives. The continuum as a whole is a set of complementary shapes.

**Thesis. The standardization of biface shapes to two paired biface types, the spectrum of differential features between the types, and their iterations in multiple perspectives gives the biface pairs the structural capacity to encode significations and serve as symbols. That Middle Acheulian stone tool assemblages as a whole are characterized by these standardized pairings is reinforces the inference that the biface pairs actually were used in some symbolic way and this symbolic role served an important function in Middle Acheulian culture and adaptation. If so, then the symbolic meanings of the biface pair apparently varied from one culture area to another, specifically, East African, Near Eastern, and Abbevillian.**

### **Decipherment of the Biface Pairings**

If the structural oppositions between the typical biface pairs suggest a semiotic competence, what then did these biface pairs symbolize? Interpreting from our contemporary cultural situation and stage of evolution I find hardly any spiritual or psychological symbol systems capable of grasping what these Middle Acheulian peoples knew in all its primordial immediacy. However, hewing close to the operative design and constitutive nature of the biface pairings themselves, I suggest the following tentative decoding of their significations, overall meaning, and meaning-function.

It is in the structural opposition of the extreme pair lanceolate/cleaver that the differential features of the whole set are most evident. (Here we are looking at a cross-cultural set of significations of these bifaces.) In this contrast, a key differential feature is, on the one hand, the egg-like globularity of the lanceolate and the columnarity and rectilinear angularity of the cleaver.

At first glance it might appear that the Middle Acheulian biface pairing was intended to symbolize gender difference, the ‘lanceolate-cordiform handaxe’ signifying female genderedness and the ‘cleaver-pick’ male. On closer examination, the differential features appear to be intricate and more complex. The lanceolate actually combines in itself two shapes: the globular center or core, which is spherical, egg-like, substantial, solid, heavy with gravity, swelling, and in a sense, gravid or pregnant, and the upper phallic, penetrating neck or cone. If the lanceolate signified genderedness, it appears to have had both female and male aspects, with phallic-like neck and swelling womb-like lower body. Rather than a distinct gender difference, it actually would have signified androgyny. The same reasoning can be applied to the cordiform handaxe. If so, a prevalent macho interpretation that these artifacts are ‘handaxes’ associated with heavy-duty butchery, i.e., ‘men’s work’, goes out the window. Some may have been used for ‘men’s work’ but as microwear studies have shown such ‘men’s work’ could as well have been performed using a simple sharp stone flake. As for the cleaver (or pick) it may have carried an androgynous or even a non-gendered set of significations. Personally, I tend to think that each member of a pair appears to have been structured to signify an androgynous combination of both male and female aspects.

To avoid wild speculation it is crucial to focus in on the inherent differential features of the shape pair complementarities. In other words, it is necessary to stay closely attuned to the precise, nuanced sets of complementary differences that provides the semiotic competence inherent in the biface pairings. These differential features can then be interpreted semantically and as analogues or metaphors for the self (spirit, life-spirit). Here’s one attempt at such a ‘close reading’.

Lanceolate biface. To repeat, the lanceolate actually combines in itself two shapes: the globular center or core, which is spherical, egg-like, substantial, solid, heavy with gravity, swelling, and in a sense,

gravid or pregnant, and the upper phallic, penetrating neck or cone. Thus the lanceolate could have signified *womb-and-phallus, intercourse, conception, pregnancy, life giving and giving birth*. It could have symbolized *intercourse in the context of some sort of affinity, marital or committed relationship*. If so, it would have symbolized intercourse as the mixing of fluid shapes into one shape. (Compare Amazonian and New Guinea tribes that view intercourse as exchange of bodily fluids and intimate marital intercourse over time as bringing about a fusion into one body, a physical, psychological and spiritual oneness. Compare Grk. *mignumi* = to mix, mingle, join, have intercourse with.) It may have symbolized *food-sharing between affines and perhaps the cooking fire* (as in the structuralist contrast between raw/cooked and by implication the analogy: raw is to cooked as infidelity is to fidelity). (We know that the use of fire and probably fire-making at habitation sites became distinctly more frequent during the Acheulian.)

The lanceolate is a symbol of combination of difference into one overall shape, the space in which *the two become one, while remaining two*. On the spiritual level the lanceolate would be capable of signifying *androgyny*, the androgynous nature of the self (spirit, life-spirit) as well as '*intercourse*' as *intimate dialogue*, the 'I-thou' (M. Buber) of the ego-Self axis (C. Jung). This '*intercourse*' has both everyday interpersonal connotation and a spiritual connotation, as in the Biblical term for 'knowing'. Further, the internal differential features of globular womb and elongated phallic neck might have signified *the union, in conception and in metaphysics, of spirit and flesh* (possibly as 'bone' = seed source of spirit that combined with 'flesh' yields individual life, a ubiquitous theme found of shamanic religious traditions around the world). Finally, the lanceolate could have symbolized not only the reciprocity of intercourse but also a spirit power that presides over this as well as over all aspects of love, affection, friendship, fertility, conception, life-giving and birthgiving.

The converse of '*intercourse*' and its associated features is perhaps something like infidelity, or *coitus interruptus*, or an asexuality that triggers, or is presided over by, a spirit of incensed animosity. The spirit is incensed because the spirit of '*intercourse*', with its flow and exchange (of sexual fluids, of intimacy and dialogue, of life giving) is dishonored, disrespected, not given its due awe as a sacred power. (Compare Freud: *coitus interruptus* is the primary cause of anxiety disorders. Compare the myth of Hippolytos. Compare Nietzsche on Christian asceticism as a hidden will to power. )

Pick biface. In complementarity to the lanceolate, the trihedral or quadrahedral pick has its own distinctive internal contrast between a heavy, substantial, globular base and a rising upward to a point or acme. This opposition has the structural capacity to signify (a) *sturdy groundedness and (b) aspiring (upthrust, soaring)*. The pick evokes both a *sturdy, healthy, strong groundedness and an upright, aspiring, soaring spirit*. Two opposing shape gesture-movements are put into one tension, which yields a third, a dynamic double movement, which is satisfying and arouses a novel feeling-tone.

For a sculptor certain shapes arouse certain feelings. How was this shape-tension experienced 800,000 years ago by *Homo erectus*? Recent *Homo sapiens sapiens* have often grasped the human spirit as just this tension between a movement of earthing and grounding a movement that is aspiring, thrusting upward toward the unknown above and beyond. One then may speak of the strength of that soaring spirit and the degree of gravity of its grounding movement or of the sturdiness and 'soaring-ness' of the spirit in its tensive wholeness. Was this concept of the human spirit born in the intuition of the Middle Acheulian? Archaeology has not produced sufficient knowledge of Middle Acheulian lifeways to verify or rule out such a hypothesis, but it appears to me likely. I propose that the Middle Acheulian 'pick' was used to symbolize (present, presence, be a reminder of) the human spirit and thereby activate it and promote its strengthening.



The decoding can be deepened. There is a double movement upward and downward, but more than this seems to be symbolized. It is the upward gesture-movement of the free spirit that must be grounded in its dwelling on this earth. Otherwise there may be an intoxication of the pure spirit. What carries or conveys this homecoming of the upward moving free spirit? It is the vehicle of the spirit. This conveyance can only be characterized at this point as perhaps the gesture-movement itself. A kind of ritual movement, a mimesis. Of what? Perhaps of riding some spirit animal or climbing and descending some kind of Tree of Life, rope, or other ladder-like entity as in later shamanic traditions. But we have no evidence of this yet. We have evidence only of the gesture-movement of the stoneworker, the artist, in the work itself, the creative shaping movement. It is a double movement times two. On the one hand, there is a grounding of the upward movement of the free spirit. On the other hand, there would also be a movement that carries or conveys the grounding movement to its place of departure, of its conveyance into soaring flight upward. This would be something like leaving home, individuation as separation, departing from one's childhood role and consanguine kin, for a freer, life of the spirit. This is would be constant tension throughout life. Here too we have only the gesture-movement in the artifact. In any event, the grounding movement of spirit in the everyday social nexus has its upward turn and the upward movement of the free spirit has its need for grounding in the dwelling of the everyday. This is a doubled double movement, a doubled tension between above and below in the human spirit. There would be then a double conveyance or carrier of the spirit, as in later shamanic traditions, the animal, like an eagle, that descends from above, and the animal, like an ibex, that rises from below, that are ridden in the shamanic trance or in the dream. (Compare Michael Harner's notion of 'core shamanism' with its power animals from the realm below and spirit guides from the realm above. These spirit animals are then the vehicles, the conveyances of the spirit. Also compare the contrasting alchemical operations of *coagulatio* and *sublimatio*.)

The doubled double gesture-movement of the human spirit may have been viewed as having a quality of being strong or weak, free or constrained. (If it did not have such a quality, such a measure, what would be the point in symbolizing it?) *A healthy, strong spirit would have the double state of 'sturdiness/free soaring aspiration'*. This notion can be elaborated through an etymology. For instance, in Indo-European the closest-in-meaning root might be *\*segh-* to hold, Grm. *\*sigiz-* victory; Grk. *\*echein-* hold, possess, dwell in, inhabit, be pregnant with child, have a wife, guard, defend, steadfastness, bear up under, stand one's ground, resist, have power or be able to. Compare Grk. *hexis*= habit, condition, cathexis, from *kathego*= check, restrain, stop, cease [i.e., limit], dwell in [i.e., region, space], possess, encompass, come to pass, happen; Grk. *schema*= a holding, form, shape, appearance, bearing, dignity, stateliness, state or nature of a thing, pl. gesture, figures dancing; reduplicative, *\*si-sgh-* as in *ischuo*= be healthy and strong, have one's full strength; *ischus*= strength, force, might, esp. bodily strength. The converse of 'sturdiness/free soaring aspiration' would be a state of witheredness, weak, feeble, bent over or back upon itself, not manifesting or displaying itself in its full power, perhaps therefore full of self-loathing, and thus easily placed under the spell of the scapegoat or *pharmakon* complex. As a converse to weakness of spirit, even self-loathing and scapegoating, the pick has the characteristics to symbolize not only *everyday sturdiness and strength of spirit to stand one's ground and ground oneself in one's source, but also the differentiation of the individual from the group—the self-formation of the individual as a free spirit, an individual that can stand against the forces of scapegoating and shaming of difference.*

While we today do not think of the human spirit as gendered, we acknowledge that it may be experienced differently by female and male. It may arouse different feelings and be given different interpretations. We know that in some sexist eras the human spirit was interpreted as gendered. For instance, a 'pick-like' sculpture might be intended to represent the male spirit, while females do not have such a spirit. The Middle Acheulian sculpture does not appear to give any clear indications of a gendered interpretation of the human spirit. There is simply one contrasting feature of the human spirit involving both a groundedness and an aspiring, soaring spirit. If this tension were interpreted by

different gender perspectives, it might have been that the pick signified for a female that the human spirit involved both a soaring and a connection or reparative reconnection back to a core source of life; for a male, both an erect, standing one's ground plus a deep sense of gravity and seriousness with respect to life. [Compare the concept of dual energies of matrilineal 'vital flow from the source of life' and patrilineal 'life force, vital strength' among West African people documented in Devisch (1993).]

Cordiform biface. The cordiform biface may have held a similar symbolic value to the lanceolate, though presenting that value more abstractly, thus suggesting this value as an 'abstract', i.e., 'divine' power. In the cordiform the artist has shaped a swelling, heavy, gravid, globular egg-like basal shape tapering upwards and has also flaked the object all around its edges to make an overall shape like an ovoid, almond, or teardrop. There is a circumambulating of the egg-within. (Compare the alchemical notions of the circumambulatio and the circulatio. The circuit and circulation of the egg-within is like the heart as source of circulation of the blood and thus of life. If this were intended then we have a surprising synchronicity: today archaeologists call this a 'cordiform.')

So in this shape as with the lanceolate two shapes are combined into one, in this case, a sort of egg-within-an-egg shape or core-within-a-core. (An egg within a teardrop?) Thus the cordiform would signify: *shaping the egg-within-an-egg shape, the core-within-a-core . . . and this is an abstract (divine, supernatural, in another world) virtue or power which, like the artwork itself, is in potentiality for emergence.* In relation to or as supplementing the lanceolate, did the cordiform symbolize *the spirit (power, being, divinity) that presided over intercourse, the kiss, or other bodily intimacy, the exchange of life-fluids that effects becoming of one body.* More specifically did it symbolize *the shaping and strengthening-around of the egg that contains the egg-within, that is the sheath (shell, amniotic sac, amniotic fluid) of the egg-within.* And did the Middle Acheulian now view what the Oldowan presented as the 'sustaining core essence' as something like an embryo, a source of life that lives (expands, grows, unfolds) out of itself, alive.

(Compare this notion of 'egg-within-an-egg' to the 'primordial egg' in world mythology; which symbolizes the three-tiered microcosmic egg of the self or 'heart', the mesocosmic egg of nurturing and protecting familial and creative social relations, and the macrocosmic egg of the cosmos. In grasping for the first time a Euclidean sense of space, did the Middle Acheulian stone knappers—and presumably the artists, healers and prophets—make conceivable the very concept of a cosmos and a cosmos of concentric circles, of cosmic realms within realms.)

Was this symbolic egg-within-an-egg sheath a symbol for *respecting and revering all those 'sheath-like' things (mind-heart-intention, body, creative group, biosphere), both nurturing and protecting of the core-seed potentiality for new life as well as for the 'becoming one body' of the two?* Did they include in such sheath-like (net-like, an interweaving of life giving exchanges) things, the human mind (now conceivable as Euclidean space of positions); the body as a region of reciprocity; the consort relationship of one's deepest affinity, nurturance and protection; the biosphere of all living things that nurture us. Were they promoting in this way *a reparation or healing (making whole) of what may have been a torn (traumatized) sheath of the mind, body, affinity group, biosphere?* Such a healing would bring about the nurturing and protecting of the core essence of what it means to be human.

Cleaver biface. Like the pick, the cleaver with its columnar side view and tendency to roundness and globularity in the base and its sharper edge at the top also evokes the contrasting themes of (a) *sturdiness and (b) aspiring upthrust, soaring.* It evokes the same tension of opposites and the same doubled double movement encoded in the pick. In addition, the bitted top *connotes (c) cutting power and (d) incompleteness and limit in the 'cut off' top edge.*

The vertical, upthrusting, soaring aspiration is combined with a limit. The cleaver suggests that the soaring energy of the human spirit meets with something greater and more powerful beyond,

something above and beyond egocentricity and anthropocentricity. (Compare Freud on fantasy-wish versus the reality principle, i.e., the natural limit. The grandiosity of fantasy-wish is especially exacerbated in those who have been marginalized, abused, traumatized or suffer creative or spiritual afflictions and correspondingly have the most soaring aspirations.) In this symbolism, the experience of the divine contains within itself an experience of a limit factor. The cleaver evokes both the *limit of aspiration and that which is beyond aspiration*.

The cleaver's 'cutting power' can *connote the foraging instinct and the release of that instinct, though in a way that ineluctably runs up against conspecific competition, the limit of others competing for the same resources for survival*, and thus ultimately the cleaver symbolizes *the necessity for cooperation and reciprocity in the midst of competition*. Thus while the cleaver symbolizes the power to compete it also symbolizes *the power to compete cooperatively and within limits*. (Compare Nietzsche on the Homeric contest, the competition that serves for the mutual display of power or excellence for its own sake as the contest spurs the contestants on to their mutual greater glory and renown.)

Further, the cleaver could have symbolized *establishing cooperation in competition ('peaceful coexistence') among fighting or competing groups*. It could symbolize *the cutting off of conflict, acknowledgement of its natural limit*. In other words, the cleaver could symbolize (presence) the forming of the peacemaker and the performance of the peacemakers function; a role and function that requires the utmost uprightness and standing in one's source to achieve a healthy, cooperative separation of sides.

Since the Acheulian subsistence mode innovated hunting to add to the Oldowan scavenging mode, did the cleaver also connote the fact that life and survival necessarily involves interspecific competition, that humans must become predators and find themselves likewise the victim of predation. In the Acheulian worldview—as in the case of contemporary hunter-gatherer tribes--there may have been a constant reciprocity and role switching between predator and prey, hunter and hunted. Was the cleaver a way of symbolizing and acknowledging this fact of life and promoting the strengthening of the spirit needed to effectively live the hunting mode of living? Did the cleaver symbolize: *the spirit of the human ineluctably must cut into life, a life acknowledged as offering itself up to nourish us as we are offered up to nourish life*. (Compare Nietzsche: "spirit is that which cuts into life.")

(Again as in the case of the pick, there is nothing gendered here, although this force may be experienced differently depending upon the society's gender constructs.)

If the converse of the pick's 'sturdiness/free soaring aspiration' was a state of witheredness, weak, feeble, bent over or back upon itself, not manifesting or displaying itself in its full power, perhaps therefore full of self-loathing, and thus easily placed under the spell of the scapegoat or pharmakon complex, then the converse of the cleaver would include all this plus a failing or unsuccessfulness at foraging and especially at hunting. The converse would imply injury or damage to the 'vehicle' of the spirit. (Compare the crashed chariot vehicle in the myth of Hippolytos, and so many dreams of car crashes and plane crashes or their opposites in grandiose speed or flight.) The converse would also imply something like the cutting off of spirit (departure of the spirit as in unconsciousness or death) and corresponding collapse and de-animation of the physical body. If so, then the cleaver as symbolic power might have been used to return spirit to body, so to speak, to reincarnate it so that the person lives again or lives in the full consciousness of health.

The cleaver as 'cutting power' divides, separates and differentiates; it is a force of division—and a natural one (the rectilinear edge is usually natural, not intentionally flaked). In contrast to the lanceolate which symbolizes the two becoming one, the cleaver symbolizes the one become two. If the lanceolate symbolizes the two-becomes-one, through intercourse, building the 'sheath' of the

oneness of body (as well as mind, tribe, biosphere or Gaia), does the cleaver symbolize that the one-becomes-two through separation made possible by the 'vehicle' of a mimetic or ritualized gesture-movement? And in the hunting culture context, would there have been a Middle Acheulian concept of sacrifice as a gesture-movement of the spirit that separates above and below (perhaps 'heaven and earth')? If so, was the Middle Acheulian mode of sacrifice—the sacrifice type of the protohunters—one that involved distinguishing a radical difference between flesh and bone, with the latter as the mediator of spirit, and a double gesture-movement of, on the one hand, carving up and distributing meat (flesh of the game animal) and offering up the bones in tribute to the higher spirit—perhaps to something like more recent hunter-gatherers belief in a master or mistress of animals—so that, in turn, the spirit of the slain animal may be reincarnated in an endless cycle of killing and bringing back to life? If so, then the 'cleaver' does signify 'butchery', as actualist archaeologists propose, though in this domesticated non-macho context of the distribution of meat, the generosity of the hunter. While in everyday use, 'handaxe' and 'cleaver' like any number of other types of sharp-edged tools may have actually been used for heavy duty butchery and meat-cutting, in the role of symbolism, was the 'cleaver' the symbol par excellence for the distribution and sharing of meat? And also for the vertical offering of thankfulness and respect that enables the return to life of the game animal that human life can be sustained? Was it through just such a double division and separating that the verticality and groundedness of spirit was established? Was there a Middle Acheulian teaching transmitted through the cleaver symbol: spirit belongs to the world of the spirits, flesh belongs to us; and as we offer up the bones to spirit, we receive as a gift this, our mortal flesh, which sustains our spirit and paradoxically is our vulnerability to death, to being ourselves prey to carnivores, foremost the lion and leopard, the spirit cats, and perhaps also to the diseases sent by them that can weaken us, and kill us, and for which we seek spiritual healing? (Compare the ubiquitous hunter religious beliefs distinguishing flesh from bone, the latter as the source of life, or at least the mediator through which spirit is reincarnated. Compare associated beliefs about certain game animals and/or predators causing disease and illness, and the role of the shaman to find their healing.)

Finally, if the cleaver shape is considered *vis a vis* its extreme opposite on the continuum, the lanceolate, a further differential feature and its semantics becomes evident. If the lanceolate speaks of birthgiving, the passageway into this world (and into the realm of intercourse), then its opposite, the cleaver, by mirror symmetry, could have signified *the passageway into the other world, both into the spirit world—a world that can now be conceived for the first time since an imaginal 3-dimensional space is now conceivable—and into death, the region of the dead, and by inference the ancestors.* Indeed, the cleaver shape contains both a rising gesture—spirit moving toward Spirit—and a striking blow that terminates like death, the striking of 'the final blow'. The natural quality of this rectilinear edge is fitting, for the blow that terminates life is the natural limit of death. Thus the cleaver connotes *the ultimate incompleteness of life, of being cut off by the final blow, of openness toward death as toward the divine that presides over life.* The cleaver also has an overall shape like a valley or canyon passageway. It has the feel that one might *move through it into that other space, into the realm of the high divinity as into the realm of the dead.*

\* \* \* \*

*Intercourse and the sheath, the human spirit and its vehicle, the egg-within-the-egg, the finitude of the spirit and sacrifice, and all of these as modes of reparation and restoration of the core essence, now duplex—this is my tentative hypotheses for the semantic meanings encoded in Middle Acheulian bifaces. With time and new discoveries these themes can be further amplified and elaborated.*

What can we make of all this? While in the Early Acheulian the 'biface' shapes were but a play of aesthetically pleasing symmetries, in a semantic system that appears to revolve around the theme of

reparation of the core essence, now there are standardized forms within complementary pairs and the generative semantic capacity becomes greatly enriched. The Oldowan thematic of the ‘sustaining core-essence’ and the Early Acheulian thematic of its ‘reparation and renewal’ has now split in two. One of the most primordial symbols has bifurcated. In the Middle Acheulian there are two kinds of core-essence.

While seeking to decipher the Middle Acheulian symbol system, I had a dream that simply said: “Empedocles, the egg contains the two opposites.” As I discovered the paired structure of Middle Acheulian bifaces and worked on decoding their innate symbolic capacity, I read up on the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles and began to see how his thinking was like a reflection upon the thematic pairings of the Middle Acheulian. In the view of Empedocles, the world was constituted by two forces, which he named Love (*Philia*) and Strife (*Neikos*). As I read him, Love presides over processes of transformation such as the movement into birth or into death. Love embraces, holds and contains diversity, disconnection, and dismemberment and also produces synthesis, connection, cooperation, harmony, oneness and remembrance. Conversely, Strife presides over processes of genesis and degeneration, maturation and withering, waxing and waning. Strife produces discord-making and brings about the resolve, self-assertion and strength which enable one to stand one’s ground in the face of adversaries and not be scattered in flight (and, perhaps, even to stand up for and enforce peace-making). Like Empedocles, the Middle Acheulian symbol-makers appear to have grasped and presented a paired typology consisting of two basic energies or forces in the universe and ‘in us’. These forces were perhaps conceived of as gesture-movements of nature that could be mimed in ritual action as well as symbolic tools. They were two aspects of a core-essence now conceived as a double force mimed or presented in a gesture-movement. Each was a source of movement that set itself in motion and moved itself through its own source of self-movement. (Compare the Platonic and Aristotelian notions of the soul as that which moves itself, *autokinesis*.) Through these symbolizations the Middle Acheulians sought to honor, appreciate, and promote these two forces in the universe and ‘in us’ (in their own inwardness, spirit, character, heart, however it was conceived).

One of these forces—one of the two aspects of the ‘core-essence’ and an aspect which was a gesture-movement—was like a sheath and like the gesture-movements that sustain and strengthen that sheath, that is, a porous membrane permitting and sustained by exchange and reciprocity of ‘fluids’. This sheath-like substance was exemplified by the ‘body of oneness’ sustained by sexual intercourse; the ‘body’ of symbolic discourse and exchange of mind (heart) thoughts-intentions (the ‘noosphere’); the bonds of creative individuals, exchanging objects of creation and innovation; and perhaps also ‘body’ of the biosphere sustained by the exchange of fluids between sky and earth (rain, clouds, mists, dew, the grace of moisture and life giving waters). They discovered that they could symbolize (presence through the gesture of stone-knapping) this core gesture-movement through 3-dimensional biface shapes such as the lanceolate and cordiform ‘handaxe’.

The other of the two forces—the other ‘core-essence’ that was a gesture-movement—was a kind of invisible force of aliveness, an animating force or spirit, the strength of which could wax or wane, mature or wither. This spirit involved both itself and the vehicle that conveyed or carried it. It was conceived of as a doubled double gesture-movement that included its own limit in a greater gesture-movement that lived beyond that movement.

(Note: These two basic energies might be viewed as having their neural substrates in the two basic sets of human instincts that are regulated by the hypothalamus: on the one hand, sexuality (including sexual behavior, dominance-submission, competitive behavior, prey defense, nurturance behavior and separation distress); on the other, foraging (including exploratory behavior, compensatory behavior, pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance, affective rage attack, predatory aggression, rough-and-tumble play and grooming behavior). The lanceolate/cordiform could be construed as expressing the sexual

instinct and its associated instincts; the pick/cleaver, foraging and its associated instincts. As the human brain evolved this duplex of energies became more and more embedded and integrated within the higher amygdalar, pre-cortical, and cortical hierarchies).

What was the overall purpose or function of this dualistic Middle Acheulian symbol system? In what way did they enhance adaptation? Contribute to human evolution? It is not easy to say.

Were the paired biface types signifiers or emblems of bilateral descent and/or dual moieties?

Was the symbolic purpose of the 'handaxe' (lanceolate and cordiform bifaces) to promote fertility or reproduction? Did it encourage harmony in sexual or other intimate relationships and affinities? Did it counteract infertility, marital conflict or other disruptions of 'the sheath'?

As symbolizing reparative renewal and birthing, did the 'handaxe' (lanceolate and cordiform bifaces) symbolize the process of being reborn, and thus did it encode the first conception of the death-and-rebirth theme ubiquitous in the religions of *Homo sapiens sapiens*? Did the Middle Acheulian handaxe presence an invisible spirit, an 'abstract'—because geometric—transcendent being, 'the One Who Presides over the Birthing or Rebirthing Process', or, in short, 'the Birthgiver'? Did the handaxe further symbolize 'rebirth of the self through intercourse with one greater than the self', the latter being the visualized, projective space 'Self'?

What was the symbolic purpose of the pick or cleaver biface to promote hunting and gathering success? Establish conflict resolution among conspecific or interspecific groups? Did it presence physical strength, prowess and spirit-power and counteract weakness, neurasthenia, spirit loss or other debilitations of 'the vehicle' of the spirit?

Was the biface pair a pair of gesture-forms presenting two complementary spiritual (metaphysical) principles? Did these bifaces provide a spiritual vision or metaphysic for its own sake or so that a people could be linked back (*religio*) to their spiritual values?

I would suggest that some or all of this is a likely hypothesis. But then why would this be necessary? Here we come an ultimate question: why symbols at all? Primates and other mammals do not seem to need systems of symbolic representation to enhance their fertility or foraging success. They do not seem to need symbol systems to ensure the survival of the fittest. Does this not happen naturally for them?

Are these functions—fertility and foraging success—(and in a sense religion *per se* in its public modality) perhaps the by products of and secondary to a deeper purpose? And what might that be?

I would wager that it is something like survival of the unfittest, the misfit. And here I do not mean solely the crippled one, the disfigured or marginalized one, the stranger, but more so the artist, healer, and prophet as a crippled, marginalized or mistreated misfit. (Compare the Greek cult of Hephaistos, the paradigmatic artist, with his lame foot. Or Oedipus—for Freud the paradigmatic knower—with his lame foot. Compare so many myths of the 'wounded healer' archetype, the one struck with a mysterious or spirit-induced illness who, in finding the way to her or his healing, becomes a healer of others. Compare the shamanic initiation process, which begins with a calling often in the form of an illness. Finally, consider the problematic of the scapegoat or *pharmakon* as in the Scapegoat Complex delineated by the Jungian analyst, Sylvia Perera.) These are scapegoats precisely because they are different in being creative or innovative. These are the creative ones as distinct from the reproducers and consumers (compare William Blake on 'the prolific and the devourers'. This is the source of their self-loathing in the other's loathing, the mirror symmetry of envy and ensorcelment.

Survival of the unfittest. I am suggesting that ultimately this is the source of and function of religious symbol systems. This may also be called 'consciousness' for its own sake.

It is for their fertility, foraging success, harmony, peacemaking; it is for their \**segh-*, for the strengthening of the sheaths of their conceptions and the vehicles of their spirit.

And why? Is it not to move forward the deeper evolution of the species and of its biosphere, thus, of life itself? Is not the leading principle of evolution the budding off of daughter species? Is it not the survival of the unfittest?

Is this not the secret meaning of the Middle Acheulian bifaces? (These memes.) In addition to their possible public meanings, do they not have a secret meaning?

Beyond sexuality for the purpose of reproduction, do lanceolate and cordiform bifaces promote consortship, that is sexuality without reproduction? (This is the converse of celibacy or asceticism.) The dyads of the creative ones, the free spirits? Versus the collective. (Consortship, that advancing edge of evolution that Jane Goodall observed among the chimpanzees of Gombe.) This would be the Sheath of Sheaths. The Two-Become-One.

Beyond foraging for the purpose of consumption, do pick and cleaver promote what might be called foraging-for-being-consumed, that is, by a spirit animal, thereby becoming both the consumed and the consumer, predator and prey, a theme fundamental to shamanic traditions around the world? And in this nexus, this nuclear catastrophe, does not the healer find her or his power of self-healing and healing? To heal the modes of suffering, the afflictions of deprivation and marginalization, abuse and trauma, creative and spiritual suffering. (This is the converse of scapegoating and self-mutilation or self-cutting.) Here one finds compassion for the unfit one; one finds release of creative powers. Here one finds the separateness of the individual free spirit, soaring and grounded; one finds the 'single one' (Kierkegaard). Neither hyper-attacking nor hyper-defensive, but \**segh-*, riding one's vehicle. This would be the Vehicle of Vehicles. The One-Become-Two.

Beyond even affinal conflict mediation, an even more paradoxical behavior induced by these Middle Acheulian symbols: promoting cross-group fertility, alliances, and peace-making?

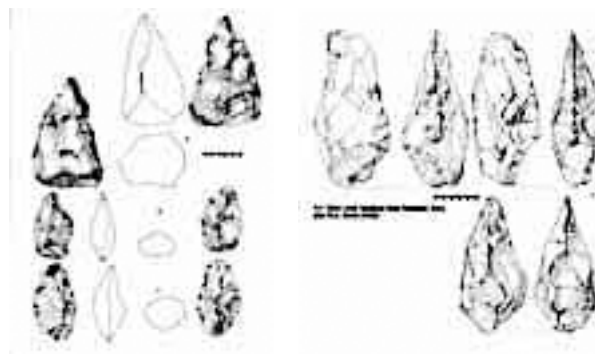
Is all of this part of the secret meaning of the Middle Acheulian bifaces?

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Concluding Hypothesis. From the Early Acheulian biface function as a token of 'reparation and restoration of the nurturing, core-seed essence' and mutuality in relationships, the Middle Acheulians seem to have used biface pairings to symbolize and presence (I intentionally try to avoid the term 'representation') the reparation and restoration of two kinds of core-essence conceived as gesture-movements. One was embodied and 'sheath-like', transformative like birthgiving and dying. It was energized through intercourse, sexual intercourse, symbolic exchange, creative intercourse, and intercourse with the living beings of the biosphere. The other was spirit and 'vehicle-like', an invisible force of aliveness, an animating force or spirit, the strength of which could wax or wane, mature or wither. It was the source of health and well being. These two kinds of transcendent spiritual forces were presented through the stone knappers artistic visualization and shaping in three-dimensional space.

Residing in this new three-dimensional Euclidean space, these two energies may have been viewed as a kind of otherworldly being 'in another dimension'. One was a transcendent spirit-power, perhaps called 'the One Who Presides Over the Processes of Birth and Death and Rebirth.' The other was a transcendent spirit-power, perhaps called 'the One Who Gives Us Spirit Power.' Thus, it would have been possible to visualize the world (cosmos) as comprising two transcendent creative forces that renewed and restored oneness of body and balance of spirit to all living things and the cosmos itself. This would have been the first visualization of 'spiritual' or 'supernatural' beings—'spiritual' also implying 'abstract' since these spirits were symbolized in geometric shaped gesture-movements. Thus, the Middle Acheulians would have been the initiators of two of the most fundamental characteristics found in every *Homo sapiens sapiens* religion, belief in 'supernatural beings' and belief in a process of death and rebirth (after Spiro and Eliade). If such revelations were encoded in bifaces over 800,000 years ago, we must radically rethink the origins of religion, mind and psyche.

### A NOTE ON ABBEVILLIAN BIFACES



What about the so-called 'Abbevillian' bifaces found at European sites such as Abbeville (Somme, Nord-Ouest) and Sablé (Sarthe, Loire) in France or Kent's Cavern (Devonshire) (*Figure 5, Roe 1981:fig. 4:4*) and Fordwich (Kent) (*Figure 6, Roe 1981:fig. 4:5*) in England, which may date to OIS 15 (c. 600,000)? What are the characteristic shape-patterns of these bifaces?

A cursory review of the literature suggests that there are three characteristics constitutive of the 'Abbevillian' type. Derek Roe (1981:99-102) commenting on the Kent's Cavern bifaces characterizes them as "crude", "thick and heavy" "handaxes" having few flake scars, asymmetrical shapes, and no clear evidence for use of 'soft hammer' in their manufacture. He illustrates 8 of 14 handaxes, including a possible cleaver; "the rest are all classifiable as crude handaxes or *pick-like* bifaces" (italics added). Similarly, Roe (104-105) categorizes bifaces from Fordwich as "thick, narrow and crudely made" with few flake scars, lack of soft hammer flake removals, and "meandering nature of the cutting edges in the section view". Roe (107) notes that R.A. Smith referred to the Fordwich bifaces as "*pear-shaped* handaxes of rough workmanship" (italics added). In their handbook on Paleolithic tool typology, Debénath and Dibble (1994:150) define 'Abbevillian bifaces' as "thick, with sinuous or S-shaped (as viewed from the side), and they have tips that are markedly triangular or rectangular in section. In general they appear to have been manufactured with direct, hard-hammer percussion. Their overall form is *highly-patterned*, and often a significant area of the base is left cortical or only summarily modified. They are very *core-like* and often grade into core-like bifaces, or even cores." Curiously, these three expert analysts characterize the Abbevillian bifaces in three different ways as pick-like, pear-shaped, and core-like. Is this a contradiction? Are all three traits characteristic? Or only two or one?



Consider also the issue of thickness. As noted earlier Glynn Isaac in analyzing the thickness ratios of Middle and Later Acheulian sites quantified a seemingly progressive thinning of handaxe side views from the Early Acheulian through the Middle and Later Acheulian. However, there was a remarkable exception to this rule. One cluster of sites has the highest ratios of all, ratios even ‘plumper’ than that of Olduvai Early Acheulian bifaces. This cluster includes Latamne and Fordwich at 0.69 and Abbeville at 0.80.

Examining 15 Kent’s Cavern Breccia bifaces, Cook and Jacobi (1998) observe that only one is made on a flake; the bulk are made on “globular, elongated and spherical cobbles of flint” (83) and they are flaked by bifacial and occasionally trihedral reduction sequences. Comparing them to similar bifaces from the Somme terraces of northern France, they note that if the Somme ‘Abbevillian’ bifaces were made on the same quality raw material as ovates or limandes, then the Abbevillian type “could not be put down to the quality of the raw material”.

What is going on here? Certainly something interesting and at first guess it is not a matter of ‘crudity’. What is it then?

If we take the experts as face value, then it would appear that the typical Abbevillian biface is intentionally pick-like, pear-shaped, and core-like and its heavy, globular thickness is not crudity but part and parcel of the knapper’s intentional selection of raw material.

Consider the typical characteristics of the Kent Cavern and Fordwich bifaces (Roe 1981:fig. 4:4 and 4:5) more closely.

- The typical plan view shape is *core-like*. Sometimes edges have a rough mirror symmetry; sometimes not. There appears to be no predominant categorizable plan view shape.
- In contradistinction to the plan view, there does appear to be a predominant and standardized side view shape. From a narrow rounded or pointed base the biface expands to a maximum width about a third of the way up, which gives the biface its *pear-like* overall shape with ‘thick, heavy’ globular lower half. Then with fairly straight edges the biface tapers for about two-thirds of its length toward a point. Invariably, archaeologists have considered the plan view as the primary worked face, the side view as secondary. This is apparently not the case for the Abbevillians. As would be fitting for those Middle Acheulians who were the first to discover how to shape objects in a 3-dimensional Euclidean space, it is the ‘thickness’ aspect of the object that is the most fascinating and numinous. The Abbevillians therefore standardized the shaping of ‘thickness’, i.e., the side view.
- The typical cross-section is triangular or rectangular and this—along with the tapering to a point in side view—yields the *pick-like* upper aspect of the biface. [A ‘pick’ is defined as a very elongated biface, with a thick section this is more or less quadrangular or sometimes triangular, and it is the cross-section form that is most characteristic of these pieces (Debénath and Dibble 1994:151).

Thus, we see that each of the three characteristics of the Abbevillian identified respectively by Debénath and Dibble, Smith and Roe actually characterizes one of the three perspectives. The plan view is core-like; the side-view, pear-like; and the cross-section, pick-like.

Further, if the side perspective appears standardized, then may we not consider the plan view—since all objects in plan view are ‘core-like’—as standardized? If so, the rough and asymmetrical ‘core-like’

shape is not a regression or crudity of workmanship—though of course hard hammer technique is by nature rougher than soft hammer—the ‘core-like’ shape is intentional.

Far from being crude, the Abbevillian biface is surprisingly sophisticated and its level of sophistication is a match for its Middle Acheulian counterparts in Africa and the Near East.

So, if all this is intentional, why? Again, as in the case of the African and Near Eastern Middle Acheulian biface pairings, I propose that the intent is symbolic meaning. What then is this meaning? What does the Abbevillian biface symbolize?

My proposed analysis and decoding of the Near Eastern and African biface pairings suggests how to begin to decode the Abbevillian symbolic intent. For an initial hypothesis it appears that the typical Abbevillian biface shaping is meant to combine into one object the thematics of the pick, the globular lanceolate, and the core. In other words, it symbolizes *the aspiring freedom of spirit and the pear-like (ripening fruit-like) womb fertility of the birth-giver, the giver of life, that the former is grounded in and supported by the latter, and that both of these are aspects of one core, one ‘reparation of the nurturing core-seed-essence’*. This is a symbolism of the Two-in-One. While the theme of reparation of the core-essence was implicit in the Near Eastern and African biface pairings, it is explicit in the Abbevillian. The ‘core like’ plan view is not a regression or crudity but an intentional reminder that the Acheulian biface throughout its million year trajectory presences and represents in its very mode of production, the ‘reparation of the core-essence’

But this hypothesis did not yet seem satisfactory. Something else seemed to speak from the core of the typical Abbevillian biface. The night after developing this hypothesis I had a dream that sought to instruct me in the bifaces’ deeper level of meaning. (While in the world of empirical science, dreams are often treated as if they were some sort of superstition, in the task of listening to the deep strata of the human psyche they may provide insights not otherwise available.) The dream had two parts. First, I dreamed that I am listening, waiting patiently for a long stretch of time, for a woman to speak. It is like the therapeutic notion of ‘holding.’ And then she begins to cry, sobbing with grief. This is the grief of a mother over the children she has lost. She is remembering and mourning. The dream changes. I hear these words like an instruction. “There are two tests for handaxes. The first test is how it (as if it were a person) relates to other people, especially those of lesser power or status. This is the quality of the ‘for itself’. The second test is the smell of rosewater. This is the quality of the ‘in itself.’” Waking this thought occurred to me: “a truth that remains unspoken is like an orphan who has lost its mother.”

Of course, in the second part the dream is using the paired, philosophical terms of Hegel and Sartre. This fits well with the dualistic thematics of the Middle Acheulian, and especially of the Abbevillian biface. The core-essence of what it means to be human has this double quality. *On the one hand, there is the aspiring, ascending spirit, the free spirit, soaring free. This is the ‘for itself’—for the spirit is for-itself.* (Compare Hillel commenting on the commandment ‘thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’: ‘If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I’.) And it is for-itself because it is for its own sake. (Not a utilitarian value; not a means to an end.) *On the other hand, the spirit is grounded in and supported by the generative life force that moves through sexuality, through intercourse, through giving birth and nurturing new life, the gift of life, that, in turn, is the ground of human spirit and its freedom to soar. This is the ‘in-itself’—for the life-force needs be rooted in the depths of the self that it is empowered to be generative and creative, creating out of itself, out of its depths, its heart-core-essence, giving life to life. Together these two gesture-movements constitute the essential thing, the heart, the pith, the seed-core that nurtures us.* We know it by its smell, like rosewater. It is not something merely sentimental. It is at the heart of life. For it involves *a remembrance of death, of those loved ones who have died, especially and most poignantly the*

*children. May our spirit be for itself in the face of death and in the face of such losses. May our life force be in itself generative, may it be creative in the face of death and in the face of such losses. May our orphaned truths be spoken and find a witness and compassion.*

After this dream, I wondered if the Abbevillian biface could have carried such a weighty meaning so very long ago in the mind of *Homo erectus*, so long before the appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. I viewed again the illustrations of the bifaces from Kent's Cavern. I felt a chill. Do they not really appear to be memorial stones in remembrance of the dead, of lost loved ones, and of the ancestors? And thus reminders of the heart of life?

Is not the Abbevillian biface a way of presencing the spirit of remembrance? Of sensing the numinous divinity: *the One who presides over being-born into life and passing over to the other side? The One who shapes us in the creative process of our own self-shaping? From blank amorphousness (the 'crude, asymmetric, rough core') to the living shaping gesture-movement of emergent form (the 'mirror symmetry of the side view')*? *The One who has in her or his holding the emergence of true feelings, the restoration of the core essence of who we are?*

Call it a dream, if you will. I call it the dream, the healing dream of the Abbevillian people.

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