

## 51. An Incised Pebble from Lassen County, California

Arnold R. Pilling

The only archaeological specimen from California presented to the British Museum<sup>1</sup> within the last half century is a single incised pebble collected by Mr. H. F. Smart, near Doyle, Lassen County, California, about 1931. As similar specimens from this region of Northeastern California are not reported in the literature, a brief description is warranted.

The pebble, of gray, slightly porous basalt, is 5.9 cm. long, 4.1 cm. wide, and 2.7 cm. thick. The specimen may be only half of an aboriginal piece; however, the unfinished surface shows no sign of recent fracture, so a complete specimen may as likely be represented. The incising is V-shaped, clear and relatively deep.

The design on Face 2 (Fig. 1c) is reminiscent of the human motif present on the pecked petroglyphs of Northeastern California.<sup>2</sup> The representation of a human head by four vertical lines extending from a horizontal bar may be unique. The presence of a similar design on Face 1 (Fig. 1a) suggests that this side is unfinished.

The use of this incised stone is unknown. The parallelism of its motif with the adjacent pecked petroglyphs suggests some relationship with the latter. The possibility that this is an artist's sketch for some petroglyph seems unlikely as such a petroglyph would represent little more labor than the incising of the stone. Possibly this stone is a portable petroglyph, sharing social function with other petroglyphs of this region. A third suggestion is that this specimen represents a charm or fetish, unrelated to petroglyphs except by similar motif. Until pieces of this type are uncovered in excavation, further conjecture seems useless.

Incised tablets are known elsewhere in California, especially on the Southern and Central Coast. However, none of these occurrences show zoomorphic forms. Until research in Northeastern California and adjacent areas of Nevada has been carried further, the cultural significance of this specimen may not be determined.

### Notes and References

1. The archaeological and ethnographic material from California in the Department of Ethnography of the British Museum was graciously made available for description by Mr. Adrian Digby, keeper of the collections. The specimen here described is catalogue number 1932, 1-2, 1.

2. Steward, Julian H. *Petroglyphs of California and Adjoining States*. U.C. Pubs. in *American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1929. (See p. 62 and pl. 23.)