

**An Incised Mortuary Head Rest Stone from  
Madison County, Indiana.**

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In response to a call received by the Department of Anthropology, Ball State University, on October 24, 1975, a team of archaeology graduate students was dispatched to the Gillespie farm, eight miles north of Chesterfield, Madison County, Indiana, to record the exposure of a disturbed human skeleton. The site of this recovery was designated M-65 (IAS-BSU). When the bones (many relocated by local resident youths) were collected the cranium was removed, revealing *in situ* a stone with inscribed lines (Figures 1 and 2) directly below. The idea of a mortuary head rest recurs in this area. There is a questionable report of a head rest stone from Delaware County (D1-2? IAS-BSU) about 1889 by "Bunt" Swearington. "The head resting on a piece of material about the size of a saucer" (3). At the Middle Woodland New Castle site, Henry County, Indiana, a skull may have been placed on a sheet of untrimmed mica (4, p. 5).



FIGURE 1.

It should be noted that lineal depressions on soft stone surfaces can easily be formed by natural processes such as differential weathering of alterations made by root growth, water erosion, soil movement, etc. Though the find is on the glacial Tipton till plain the marks are not glacial striations, nor are they made from earth altering devices such as plows. To the writer the rock is unusual. It could be a manuport (i.e. also unusual to a prehistoric observer, hence suitable as an offering

to the dead). Though no specific tool markings are detectable, due to the soft rock surface, prehistoric inscribing seem likely.

The stone was oriented so that the incised design was against the cranium, with the lines radiating in a posterior direction. On June 8, 1976 Mr. LaVan Martineau, who was visiting the writer, examined the stone and interpreted the incised design on the basis of ideas expressed in (5). He termed the central line a "bird track" with a slight off-set at the point of bifurcation. Such a marking refers to a person of importance; inversion of the element to dying or death; the off-setting of the line to failure, i.e. *an important person who failed has died*. This idea is compatible with the archaeological context, though the author realizes that the relating of accounts from prehistoric pictography is a controversial activity.

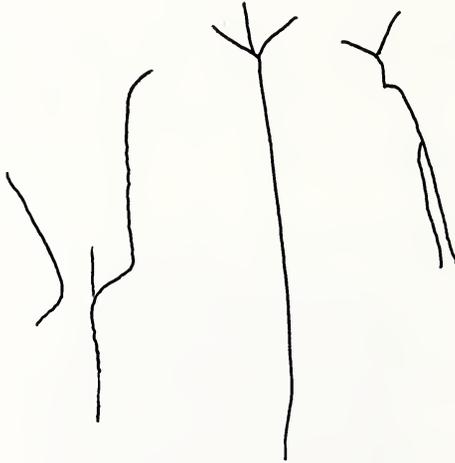


FIGURE 2.

The Madison County stone was composed of dense solidified silt. Due to the context of the discovery and the density of the stone it was thought that possibly the stone might have been aboriginally "manufactured" by coating a heavy rock with hardened silt. Radiography (Figure 3) disproved this idea.

No parietal rock markings, i.e. *petroglyphs*, have been professionally recorded from Indiana (2, pp. 17). There was a cave at Mounds State Park, Madison County (1) in which persistent local rumors of aboriginal habitational evidence (smoke blackened ceilings) and occasional mention of "wall markings" were recounted. Former rock markings representing three turtles, have been reported at Totem Rock or Salt Peter Cave, DuBois County (6).

The markings on the Gillespie stone, especially because of its context, can possibly be regarded as an example of "*inscription mobilier*" from Indiana.

### Acknowledgements

The Ball State University graduate students who conducted the salvage operation were Raphael L. Schwartz, E. Joseph Fabyan and Daniel L. Plamann. Radiography (Figure 3) was done by Betty Allen, Ball Memorial Hospital.

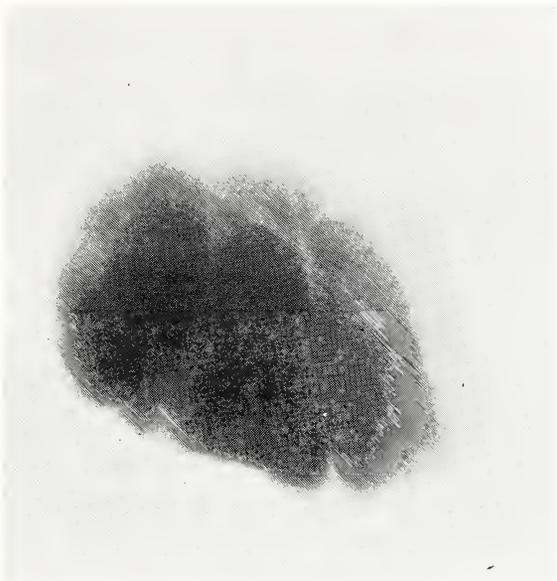


FIGURE 3.

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