

NOTES ON AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL STONE WEAPONS AND IMPLEMENTS.

BY R. ETHERIDGE, JUN., &C.

(PALÆONTOLOGIST TO THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM, AND GEOLOGICAL
SURVEY OF N. S. WALES.)

ii.—*Additional Remarks on Mika-Knives.*

(Plates XI.-XII., figs. 8, 9, 10.)

At the last meeting of the Society I described a stone knife from the Mulligan River, believed to be that used in the Mika operation, and furnished to me by Mr. H. S. W. Crummer, of the Lands Department. Since then my colleague, Mr. J. Brazier, has recalled to my notice a very complete set of these knives in the Australian Museum from North Queensland, presented by Mr. Dunlops. The chief points of interest about these knives lie in their closer resemblance to the figure given by Lumholtz*, to which reference was made in my last paper, than the knife therein described by me. This resemblance consists in the presence of bark sheaths, a wooden handle to one, and an apical ornament of bird's feathers to another.

The knives are five in number, the stone heads being all of the same type, angular in the middle line of one face, or sometimes faceted, flat on the other, and composed of a dense fine altered siliceous rock. In one instance the angular ridge is replaced by a long central facet, but in the other four the angularity is strongly marked, whilst considerable difference also exists in the proportions of the knives. One is very short and rather thick, one

* "Among Cannibals," 1890, p. 48.

and one-eighth inches in breadth by two inches long, but the two largest are respectively one and five-eighths, and one and two-eighths in breadth by three and four-eighths, and three and one-eighth in length. A fourth is more lanceolate, one and one-eighth inches broad, by three and two-eighths in length. The fifth knife departs from the general type of the others to some extent in that it is more truly scalpriform, thicker along the back than at the cutting edge, and the surface gradually sloping off from the former to the latter without being angular.

The whole of the knives are mounted in black gum, in four instances coated with red pigment. In three instances the gum hafting is gradually rounded off at the base to an obtuse point, and clearly was never continued by a wooden handle. In the fourth the mounting is broken short off against the posterior margin of the knife, but the fifth possesses a wooden extension to the gum base as previously described. In three instances the gum mounting or hafting bears small quadrangular impressions, on one or both sides, as if it had been bound with coarse canvas. The entire length of the most complete knife is about eight and one-eighth inches, made up as follows—blade three and four-eighths inches; gum mounting two and seven-eighths inches; and wooden handle one and seven-eighths approximately.

The bark sheaths all appear to be made of the inner layers of the stringy-bark, two pieces laid together as described by Lumholtz in each case, and bound loosely with string. In three cases the string is of native manufacture, composed of a kind of flax, but in the fourth some manufactured string has been used with it. Three of the sheaths are very roughly made, but the fourth and longest, six and a half inches, is very neatly put together, and tightly and regularly bound round with string, the interspaces between the successive coils being filled in with a white clay, or pigment. It is the apex of this sheath which bears the tuft of bird's feathers.

Whether or no these knives are restricted in their use to the Mika operation, or as Mr. E. M. Curr terms it the "terrible

operation,"* and Sir John Lubbock† the "incredible ceremonial," it is difficult to say, but I am inclined to think they may have been used for other purposes.

The note accompanying the specimens simply states that they are "instruments for splitting the urethra."

A very interesting figure is given by Sir John Lubbock of an "Australian Flake," † but I take it to be a knife, from the appearance of its base, which even in the drawing shows traces of the gum used to hold it, and closely corresponds with one of those now before me. A similar knife is figured by Mr. R. B. Smyth, from the Paroo, but in place of any wooden handle the base is wrapt round with opossum fur.§

iii.—*An abnormal form of Tomahawk from Port Stephens.*

(Plate XIII., figs. 11-12.)

I am again indebted to Mr. Crummer for this interesting weapon from Swan Bay, Port Stephens. Its abnormal form is at once apparent, indeed I have never seen an aboriginal stone weapon figured like it, but in a grave examined by T. W. Edgeworth David and myself, we found an implement of a somewhat similar nature, and like it formed of a hard sandy shale.

The general form of this weapon is that of an elongated parallelogram, the longer sides quite parallel, and one end ground to a small cutting edge on both faces. It is nine and a quarter inches long, two and a half inches wide, only three-eighths of an inch in thickness, and its weight is eight ounces. If its conjectured use as a tomahawk be correct, it was probably held directly in the hand, without the intervention of a handle, although it must be confessed there is no trace of hollows

* "The Australian Race," 1886, I. p. 74. In my former paper I omitted to mention that Mr. Curr has figured a rude example of one of these knives with its handle and sheath. (*Loc. cit.* pl. opp. p. 148.)

† "Pre-Historic Times," 4th edition, 1878, p. 460.

‡ "Pre-Historic Times," 4th edit., 1878, p. 92, f. 93.

§ "Aborigines of Victoria," 1878, I. p. 380, f. 201.

for affording a grasp of the weapon such as are seen on those axes known to have been used in this way. Or, it may have been used for skinning, and other similar purposes, as its obvious weakness would ill fit it for the heavy work to which the blacks put their tomahawks. The implement to which I above compared the present specimen, is but little thicker in its substance than the latter. It is much shorter, being five inches in length, but slightly wider, having a width of three inches. Instead of being ground to a cutting edge at one end, it is so along one of the longer sides. It clearly afforded a better grip to the hand than the Port Stephens weapon, and in all probability was used for skinning. It is composed of micaceous sandy shale. Of whatever use these implements may have been, there can be no doubt as to their wide deviation from the generality of stone axes met with in eastern New South Wales.

iv.—*A well-finished Tomahawk of ordinary form from Brisbane Water.*

In contradistinction to the foregoing "tomahawks" is the exceedingly well finished implement from near Gosford, Brisbane Water, and forwarded to me by the same careful collector, Mr. Crummer. It is of the ordinary wedge-shaped type, and is made from a pebble of a dense greenish-black, fragmental, altered, and basic rock. As is usually the case with our aborigines, the shape of the pebble has been taken advantage of, and it has been ground down to a cutting edge on both sides for quite a third of its length. The cutting edge describes a segment of a circle, the diameter of which would be at least seven inches, but it is rather unequally rounded at one extremity. On the other hand it has been most carefully kept in the middle transverse line of the pebble. The bevelled faces show distinct evidence of several successively ground surfaces, the final one on both faces resulting in a perfectly clean sweep from top to bottom. The dimensions are as follows—length, four and three-quarter inches; greatest breadth, two and six-eighths; thickness, one and six-eighths inches,

and weight, one pound two ounces. The sides of the pebbles are flattened, but unground, retaining the natural polish of the stone. Altogether this axe forms a very compact weapon.

EXPLANATION OF PLATES.

Fig. 8.—Mika-Knife with wooden handle; North Central Queensland.
Australian Mus. Somewhat reduced.

Fig. 9.—Edge view of same.

Fig. 10.—Ornamented bark sheath of another example, the interstices between the string filled with pigment; ditto.

Fig. 11.—Abnormal Stone Tomahawk made of a hardened shale, bevelled at one end; Port Stephens. Mining and Geol. Mus.

Fig. 12.—Another abnormal form from a grave at Long Bay, near Botany, ground along one of the longer edges. Mining and Geol. Mus.



Etheridge, Robert and Melo-Costa, Wanessa de. 1890. "Notes on Australian aboriginal stone weapons and implements." *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* 5, 289–293. <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.part.18639>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/22899>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.part.18639>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/18639>

Holding Institution

MBLWHOI Library

Sponsored by

MBLWHOI Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.