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THE EOLITHIC PROBLEM: EVIDENCES  
OF A RUDE INDUSTRY ANTEDATING  
THE PALEOLITHIC, PP. 425-479**

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DATING THE PALEOLITHIC

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GEORGE GRANT MACCURDY



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*To the memory of*  
*Professor Edward Elbridge Salisbury*  
*and to*  
*Mrs Evelyn MacCurdy Salisbury*

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THE EOLITHIC PROBLEM—EVIDENCES OF A RUDE  
INDUSTRY ANTEDATING THE PALEOLITHIC

BY GEORGE GRANT MACCURDY

INTRODUCTION

Nature's processes may be likened to photography. She furnishes the sensitized film, and the finger of Time manipulates the camera. It remains for man to develop and interpret the exposures. The geological record is a film cartridge exposed and sealed again, bound up with which are the beginnings of man's own record on the earth. The process of development begins with the most recent exposure and works backward.

For a long time we had a picture of man's neolithic record only. In the early part of the last century, Boucher de Perthes, with the help of Sir Joseph Prestwich and others, clipped off another section of the film, which when developed revealed the long chapter of our paleolithic history. It took a good while for some of us to accept the interpretation put upon that picture. When finally and generally accepted, there was in many quarters a feeling of relief that we had at last reached the end, or rather the beginning, of the series of Father Time's snapshots at our primitive ancestors. Nevertheless, to some persistent investigators it seemed worth while to take another pull at this enigmatical film. They appear to have been rewarded by a bona fide negative; but, to say the least, there is a certain superficial indistinctness about it that has rendered the print rather unsatisfactory to some minds. Recently the negative has been so strengthened that we are now practically assured of a picture worthy of a frame, and a place on the walls of our prehistoric gallery.

In the order, then, of their taking, these three views may be labeled: (1) Eolithic, (2) Paleolithic, and (3) Neolithic. Sir John Lubbock, now Lord Avebury, furnished the names for the second and third. The first was christened as late as 1892 by another Englishman, Mr J. Allen Brown,<sup>1</sup> fellow of the Geological Society, and an enthusiastic student of the prehistoric. Two years later de Mortillet made use of the term "eolithic" for the first time by him, in his *Classification palethnologique*,<sup>2</sup> but did not refer to J. Allen Brown's article. The latter, in discussing the rude specimens found on the North Downs by Mr Benjamin Harrison, suggested that the term "eolithic" be applied to the "roughly hewn pebbles and nodules and naturally broken stones showing work, with thick, ochreous patina, found on the plateaux of chalk and other districts in beds unconnected with the present valley drainage." The de Mortillet classification was republished in 1900.<sup>3</sup> Leaving the paleolithic to represent the early Quaternary, he applied the term eolithic to all that has to do with the Tertiary. Dr Rutot of Brussels, to whom we are indebted more than to any one else for our knowledge of the eolithic period, and whose work will be discussed at length in this paper, does not limit it chronologically to the Tertiary. In his classification,<sup>4</sup> the early phases of the Quaternary, those connected with the first grand extension of the glaciers, are also eolithic, the well-known hache type (Chellean) of implement not appearing until the second advance of the ice.

When Thomsen published his relative chronology for prehistoric times in 1836, the only stone age known was that which is now called the neolithic period. Boucher de Perthes's first discovery of paleoliths came just two years later; but they were not accepted until after (Sir) Joseph Prestwich's visit to Abbeville in 1859. Eoliths have had a still longer and harder struggle for recognition. When first reported in 1867, they at once attracted considerable attention. After a lively discussion that lasted for

<sup>1</sup> On the continuity of the paleolithic and neolithic periods; *four. Anthr. Inst.*, March 8, 1892; XXII, pp. 93-94. Brown died Sept. 24, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *Bull. Soc. d'anthr. de Paris*, 1894, p. 616.

<sup>3</sup> *Le préhistorique*, 3<sup>e</sup> éd.

<sup>4</sup> L'état actuel de la question de l'antiquité de l'homme; *Bull. Soc. belge de géol., de paléont. et d'hydrol.*, Bruxelles, 1903, XVII, p. 425.

five or six years, the subject was relegated to the background. It might have passed into oblivion had it not been for the researches of Sir Joseph Prestwich in England, begun about fifteen years ago, and for the more recent work of Rutot in Belgium. Some of the details in its eventful history are worthy of record here.

#### EARLY DISCOVERIES

The discovery in Pliocene deposits of incised bones first served to awaken an interest in the question of Tertiary man, and led more or less directly to the later discovery of flints thought to have been chipped intentionally. In fact, Sir Charles Lyell would not formulate an opinion as to the nature of the incisions on bone found by Desnoyers<sup>1</sup> in the sand and gravel-pit of Saint-Prest, near Chartres, because the deposits had yielded no stone implements. But not long after (1867), the Abbé Bourgeois found in the same deposits what he considered to be stone implements. These were obtained at various depths in the high-level gravels (Pliocene) at Saint-Prest and did not include the amygdaloid (Chellean) type generally supposed at that time to represent the earliest industry in stone. The associated fauna consisted of: *Elephas meridionalis*, *Rhinoceros etruscus* (Falconer), *Hippopotamus major* (?), *Equus armensis*, *Trogontherium cuvieri*, three species of *Cervus* and one of *Bos*.

The Abbé Bourgeois's researches were soon extended to the Miocene at Thenay, and formed the subject of important communications to the International Anthropological Congresses of 1867 and 1872. At the latter, held in Brussels, a committee of fifteen was appointed to report on the chipped flints from Thenay, submitted by Bourgeois. Nine of the Committee — de Quatrefages, d'Omalius, Cartailhac, Capellini, Worsaae, Valdémair Schmidt, de Vibraye, Franks, and Engelhardt — pronounced in favor of certain specimens; five — Steenstrup, Virchow, Neyrinckx, Fraas, and Desor — found no evidence of intentional shaping; and one — Van Beneden — was unable to decide. De Mortillet remained to the last a champion of the Thenay specimens, some of which are preserved in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at Saint-Germain. On the

<sup>1</sup> Note sur des indices matériels de la coexistence de l'homme avec l'*Elephas meridionalis*, etc.; *C.-R. Acad. des sciences*, Paris, 1863, p. 1073.