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“L’Affaire Glozel”

by O. G. S. CRAWFORD

ON 27 September 1926 the learned world was startled by a letter from Monsieur Salomon Reinach, published in *The Times*. The writer expressed the opinion that the Palaeolithic period (the last phase of which is represented in France by La Madelaine) might have lasted up to 5000 B.C. M. Reinach is Director of the National Museum of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, near Paris; his reputation as a savant stands very high, and he is listened to with respect. The discoveries which prompted him to express this unorthodox opinion were, he says “ascertained last summer at Glozel near Vichy. In the same stratum, no doubt a deposit of a religious character, have been found—(1) objects akin to the Neolithic culture of the Aegean, one of them being an idol in the shape of a violin; (2) inscriptions closely related to those found in 1894 in an early Portuguese dolmen; (3) numerous engravings of animals on pebbles, the style of which is degenerate Magdalenian. As the objects classified under (1) and (2) date from about 4000–3500, degenerate Magdalenian outlines (3) cannot possibly be earlier, and we thus have a proof, which I think is conclusive, that the Magdalenian should be dated about 5000 B.C.” Thus from the outset the discussion of the issues has been confused by questionable fact and faulty inference.

The most surprising objects from Glozel are the inscribed clay tablets. If genuine, and if they belonged to any of the various remote pre-Roman periods claimed for them, they would revolutionize our conception of those periods. I determined therefore to go and see them for myself. I inspected the site of their discovery under the guidance of M. Emile Fradin, who, it may be noted, was a boy at the time of their first discovery in 1924. I was shown his own collection at the farm, and later visited Dr Morlet at Vichy and saw the remainder of the objects. I came to the conclusion that the majority of the objects were quite certainly forgeries. That being, in my opinion, so, it becomes unnecessary to waste time discussing the remainder, whose character was not so immediately apparent. These

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other objects might or might not be genuine, but the point is not worth discussion ; for when once a site has been salted, any objects previously found there cease to have any scientific value.

The clay tablets resemble dog-biscuits. They may be divided into two classes—the rough and the smooth. The rough tablets are made of clay mixed with a good deal of grit ; the smooth ones are made of clay unmixed with grit and are apparently harder. It was stated by Dr Morlet (in conversation with me) that this difference was due to the smooth tablets having been washed by the finders ; but no amount of washing can turn a tablet of gritty clay into a smooth one. The smooth tablets are the best in every way ; the writing on them is clearer than on the others ; there are more perfectly formed signs ; and some of the tablets are of great size. None of the smooth tablets are, if I remember right, fragmentary. The same difference of texture is observable in the other clay objects—the pots and phallic objects, for example. As many as fifty had been found up to the time of my visit.

A large, well-preserved, inscribed clay tablet of the smooth kind was pointed out to me by M. Fradin. There is a jagged hole through the middle of it, yet the tablet is not cracked. Through this hole passes a root about as thick as one's little finger. (This is the one which attracted M. Reinach's attention, as no doubt was intended). Now the hole must, by hypothesis, have been there before the tablet was discovered. How was it made ? I can think of no reasonable explanation, for any natural force, exerted strongly enough to pierce a buried tablet of baked clay more than an inch in thickness, must most certainly have fractured it ; and the ragged edges of the hole exclude the possibility of long-continued friction. On the other hand, the device is just such as a clumsy forger would adopt to bolster up his case.

The pots are extraordinarily thick-sided, and the bases are solid ; in fact the so-called pots are really no more than lumps of clay with a hollow in the upper part. They are unlike any pottery, prehistoric or other, that I am acquainted with, except that of the mud-pie variety made by children.

The so-called flint arrow head (III, fig. 2, centre)* is a natural shape, slightly improved to make it more convincing. Dr Morlet has stated (III, p. 8) in words emphasized by special type—that not one of the flints has been polished (“aucun silex n'est poli”). That is incorrect.

* See Bibliography, p. 188.

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Amongst the flint débris—one cannot call it more—amassed by M. Fradin, I observed several tiny fragments of polished flint. It was gratifying to me to find that neither had escaped the lynx-eyed Professor Breuil, whose description of the flints is illuminating. “ L’examen des silex recueillis temoigne de leur faible nombre, et, bien qu’ils soient éclatés par l’homme, d’un état si fragmentaire et esquillé, que la plupart ne sont que des débris sans importance morphologique. Plusieurs sont cependant faiblement retouchés, mais aussi atypiques. . . . Il n’y a ni grattoir, ni burin, ni morceau de lame bien venue, ni aucun type. Rien absolument ne rappelle le Paléolithique, ni l’Azilien, ni le Tardenoisien, ni notre Néolithique normal. . . . En revanche, j’ai observé qu’ environ un tiers des petits fragments de silex sont des menues parcelles de haches polies en silex, bien que, jusqu’à présent, aucun autre fragment plus important ou hache complète de cette nature n’ait été rencontré ” (*L’Anthr.* xxxvi, 546, 547). Against M. Breuil’s verdict it is instructive to set Dr Morlet’s conclusion (III, p. 9) : that the flint industry is a direct inheritance from the industry of La Madelaine (“ il est à noter que leur industrie du silex est un héritage direct de l’industrie Magdalénienne ”).

Harpoons were found, and three were claimed by Dr Morlet to be of stag’s horn and of Magdalenian type. Two of them had ‘ letters ’ engraved on them. But they are not of stag’s horn at all, but of bone, and fresh ‘ green ’ bone at that ! No trace of stag’s horn, or of objects made from it, has been found at Glozel. (Stag’s horn is not easy to obtain nowadays on a farm). And as for the Magdalenian character of the workmanship—in the opinion of Professor Breuil, the technique of the bone workmanship has no connexion with that of palaeolithic sites (actual or derived), where the graver was the implement used for cutting this material. (“ La technique du travaille de l’os n’a aucun rapport avec celle des milieux paléolithiques ou dérivés, où le burin était l’instrument usité dans le débitage de cette matière,” *L’Anthr.* xxxvi, 548). According to the same writer the material used was the cannon-bone of a large animal (ox or horse ?) which had been laboriously carved with a knife and then rasped, the points of the barbs being however left blunt ! He concludes by stating that he does not know of any harpoon of any age which has been so badly made. (“ Je ne connais actuellement aucun harpon d’aucun âge qui soit aussi mal réussi ”).

The thing, indeed, is an obvious forgery, and it struck me as such the moment I saw it and before I knew of M. Breuil’s opinion.

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It is also obvious that it is made of bone, and one is at a loss to understand how Dr Morlet could have failed to recognize this most patent fact: for the bone is smooth, white and hard.

The presence of these ugly but well-conditioned bone harpoons needs explaining for another reason. In his first pamphlet Dr Morlet argued that the trench where the original discoveries were made was a grave (I, fig. 1, opp. p. 10), and that the bones it contained had been destroyed by humic acids dissolved in rain-water. ("L'absence d'ossements s'explique par. . . la facilité avec laquelle les eaux pluviales arrivent à dissoudre les matières osseuses"). Such action undoubtedly does take place and there are good reasons for supposing the site in question to be favourable for it. Dr Morlet refers to the subject again later but meanwhile (presumably, for no dates of discovery are given) the bone harpoons and a few other bone objects had turned up, all in splendid preservation! So we are told that it is very probably due to the combined action of the chemical agents described that we find at Glozel only *rare remains of bones* ("que de rares débris d'ossements"). Chemical action might well explain the *absence* of bone but how can it possibly explain its *rarity*? And the rare specimens are themselves in perfect condition!

There are a number of objects of slate and other easily worked stones; they include a harpoon and a barbed "arrowhead"—a palpable forgery,—and pebbles from a river-bed with ground edges, obvious imitations of axes. (I have made such "axes" myself from the same materials and nothing is easier). Several of these objects have "letters" engraved upon them. All are of course "votive." None are serviceable, though some are less clumsily made than the bone harpoons and the flint "arrowhead." But slate is easier to work than flint; it is a material that has always been beloved of the forger. Hence we get good objects of slate but very poor flint ones—indeed the "arrowhead" is the only flint object that might be called an implement or weapon.

I was shown some animal teeth, sharpened to a fine and delicate needle-point, the socket-end being left thick and unworked. I have seen nothing like them elsewhere. They are the only objects which did not necessarily appear to be "votive," but in such bad company they need all the more explanation for that!

In addition to all these spurious finds there are some which are genuine antiquities though not prehistoric. I refer to the débris of a glass factory. The remains consist of many glass 'drops'; fragments

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of glass vessels with very thin sides ; pieces of large vessels made of hard light-grey vitreous paste (not sandstone, as M. Reinach states, p. 2) ; and possible remains of a kiln. The sides of the vessels are an inch in thickness, and the whole of the base of one has been found, containing a thick layer of glass. This had been poured into it in a molten state. Many fragments of these thick-sided vitreous pots are to be found lying about upon the site. I brought away some that I picked up myself. Dr Morlet declared in his first brochure that this glass-factory was Neolithic, and claimed it as providing evidence that glass was known during the Neolithic period in Central Europe. (“ Les découvertes de la station de Ferrières (*i.e.* Glozel) apportent, semble-t-il, une nouvelle preuve que le verre existait dès le néolithique dans l’Europe occidentale,” I, p. 42). Even so recently as in the third brochure, Dr Morlet claimed that the site was homogeneous. (“ Nous avons toujours insisté sur le fait que la station de Glozel ne présente qu’une seule couche archéologique, sans distinction stratigraphique possible. Les divers objets que nous recueillons se trouvent aussi bien au fond qu’à la surface de la couche fertile, qui a, en moyenne, une épaisseur de trente centimètres environ. Toutes nos trouvailles sont mélangées les unes avec les autres. . . .” III, p. 47). Now, however, it is claimed that this glass débris is only found on the surface. Dr Morlet himself stated this to me in conversation, and M. Reinach seems to confirm it by his remarks on p. 2 of the *Antiquaries’ Journal*.

The original “ trench ” however, the starting-point of all the discoveries, contained vitrified bricks, of the same shape and size as the inscribed tablets ; indeed, “ une véritable couche de verre s’était formée sous l’action du feu.” I was shown a fragment of an inscribed brick tablet which was said to have been found in the trench. It is thus quite impossible to dissociate the glass factory from the inscriptions. M. Reinach, however, cannot accept this conclusion ; degenerate Magdalenians might be able to write, but they could hardly run a glass-factory ! Describing the discovery of this “ trench ” M. Reinach says : “ Meanwhile Fradin pursued his work and found an oval building the soil of which was paved with bricks, *one bearing an inscription* (italics ours). The inner walls of that small structure were entirely vitrified by fire. It may have been a (medieval ?) kiln, but that is now difficult to decide, because the visitors almost destroyed the walls before they had been examined by a competent person. As no bones were discovered, it cannot be considered as a tomb ” (*Ant. Journ.* VII, Jan, 1927, p. 1). Does M. Reinach really ask us to believe that

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these fragile brick tablets, which have to be worked delicately out of the soil with a penknife, were used in the Middle Ages to pave the floor of a kiln?—that they would have been suitable for this purpose after lying (*ex hypothesi*) for about 4000 years in the soil?—or that even granting all these absurdities, the inscription on one of them would have survived to the present day? He admits that one of the “inscribed” tablets was used to pave the floor of a (medieval?) glass factory, but asks us to regard the inscription as Neolithic! And Dr Morlet, the excavator, tells us that he has always insisted that all the finds belong to one deposit,—and are therefore contemporary.

Finally, there are the engravings of animals. None of these represent extinct species; but some represent species that have not yet evolved, such as the dog-headed goat and the kangaroo-tailed deer, or which have never set foot in France, such as the buffalo. Professor Breuil remarks again and again that there is nothing Magdalenian about the engravings; and there is no greater authority on the period and its art (so much of which he has discovered himself). For me the engravings are the work of the man who laboriously carved the bone harpoon and who added the “letters” to it and the slate objects.

We see then upon what ground is based M. Reinach’s “conclusive proof” that the “true Magdalenian should be dated about 5000 B.C.”! Not a single trace of Magdalenian workmanship or even influence can be found by Professor Breuil, whose opinion is humbly shared by the present writer. But, it may be said, even granted this, the objects must be genuine since they are vouched for by eminent authorities who have actually dug on the site at spots selected by themselves and found objects. I will examine an instance of such a test excavation; but before so doing I must explain the existing conditions there. The site lies at the foot of a steep slope. The area dug over up to the present is quite small. Digging has been carried out there at many different points and upon no system. So far as I am aware, no plans or sections have been made—no records kept of the date of the discovery of the objects nor their depth—at any rate this information has not been methodically tabulated and published. The soil excavated has been piled up by the side of the holes made. The consequent chaos may easily be pictured by any scientific excavator. The excavations have been carried out not by workmen but by Dr Morlet and M. Fradin working with their own hands. As a reason for this procedure, and what appears to be the haphazard selection of points to dig, Dr. Morlet

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alleges the necessity of preserving “ islands ” of virgin soil where sceptics may resolve their doubts.

On the great day when M. Reinach himself visited Glozel, numerous objects were found with remarkable ease and rapidity—by digging at a point selected by M. Seymour de Ricci and approved by M. Reinach ; but M. Reinach is not content, “ C’est une tablette à inscriptions que je voudrais bien voir trouver ! ” Now note very carefully the procedure adopted. (Dr Morlet is speaking). “ Je demande à M. Emile Fradin où il a recueilli celle qui est en train de sécher. ‘ Car il y a généralement plusieurs ensemble ’ dis-je à M. Reinach. On abat, sur un côté du trou indiqué, une portion de terre végétale, recouverte d’herbes. J’explore au-dessous la couche archéologique. Tout à coup, une parcelle de terre à brique de couleur rouge est enlevée par la pointe du couteau. Sans savoir encore s’il s’agit d’une tablette, d’une poterie ou d’une idole, je dégage avec précaution l’argile environnante où se voient de nombreuses racines. Bientôt je recueille sous les yeux de M. Reinach et de M. de Ricci une tablette assez malléable, non revêtue de ‘ bouillie d’argile.’ La terre de la couche archéologique qui adhère à ses parois laisse entrevoir plusieurs signes alphabétiques.” (*Mercur de France*, 1 November 1926, p. 14).

M. Fradin points to the spot ; Dr Morlet digs ; and M. Reinach is convinced ! Such was the actuality that lay behind the “ memorable days ” when “ scientific control of the excavations ” at Glozel was exercised. “ On my return,” says M. Reinach, “ I immediately declared to the Academy that all the finds (as partly photographed in three brochures issued by Dr Morlet) were undoubtedly genuine and neolithic.” But we search in vain for any tangible evidence of neolithic date ; and indeed we note a certain hesitation in M. Reinach himself. For in his letter to *The Times* he assigns the objects found at Glozel to 4000–3500 B.C., whereas in the *Antiquaries’ Journal* this date is lowered to 3500–3000 ! The one thing he is quite consistently dogmatic about is the Magdalenian character of the engravings—“ decadent, but incontrovertible ”—and this opinion is repudiated by the greatest authority on palaeolithic art, M. Breuil.

We conclude by repeating our opinion that the inscriptions, the engravings and the majority of the other finds are forgeries ; and that those who believe in their authenticity have been the victims of a hoax.

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- II. L'Alphabet de Glozel : 1926. pp. 24.
- III. Le Glozélien : 1926. pp. 54.
- IV. [In preparation].

The above are printed and sold by the Imprimerie Belin, 26 rue Pasteur, Vichy, Allier.

The following articles by Dr Morlet have appeared in the *Mercure de France* (26 rue de Condé, Paris).

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- 19 September 1926. Idoles phalliques et bisexuées.
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- I November } 1926. Les Journées mémorables de Glozel.
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- 19 November 1926. Lettre ouverte à Monsieur Elliot Smith.

Monsieur Breuil's criticism is published in the current number of *L'Anthropologie*, xxxvi, 1926, pp. 543-558. Monsieur Reinach's article appeared in the January number of the *Antiquaries' Journal* (vii, 1-5). References to Glozel will also be found in :—

The Illustrated London News, 23 October 1926.

Observer, 31 October 1926.

La Vie Catholique (Fleurus, Belgium) 22 April 1927.

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Those who like a little quiet harmless fun should read Dr Morlet's "Lettre ouverte à M. O. G. S. Crawford" in the *Mercure de France*, 1 May, 1927.