

A STONE ARTIFACT WITH POSSIBLE PHALLIC SYMBOLISM

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Mr Allan Cooke recently presented to the Western Australian Museum an unusual large stone artifact, first discovered on his property near Minnivale, W.A. in 1923. While clearing land, Mr Cooke uncovered the object during ploughing, and removed it to a nearby creek bed for use as part of the fill in a temporary dam. About ten years later, Mr Cooke was ploughing the then silted-over creek bed, and once again uncovered the same stone object. This time, he took it to the homestead, where it remained until being presented to the Museum in early 1973.

The stone itself, W.A.M. no. A 22189 (fig. 1), is 64.4 cm in length, 17.5 cm in diameter at its widest point, and weighs about 27.5 kg. It is torpedo-shaped, roughly circular in section, with its thickest section being about one third of its length from one end. The stone is granitic, and bears a number of scars, one or more of which may be the result of being struck by the blades of the plough. Other scars are probably associated with the natural weathering and fracturing features of this particular type of rock. There are no other notable features on its surface, and patination is uniform, except on the scars.

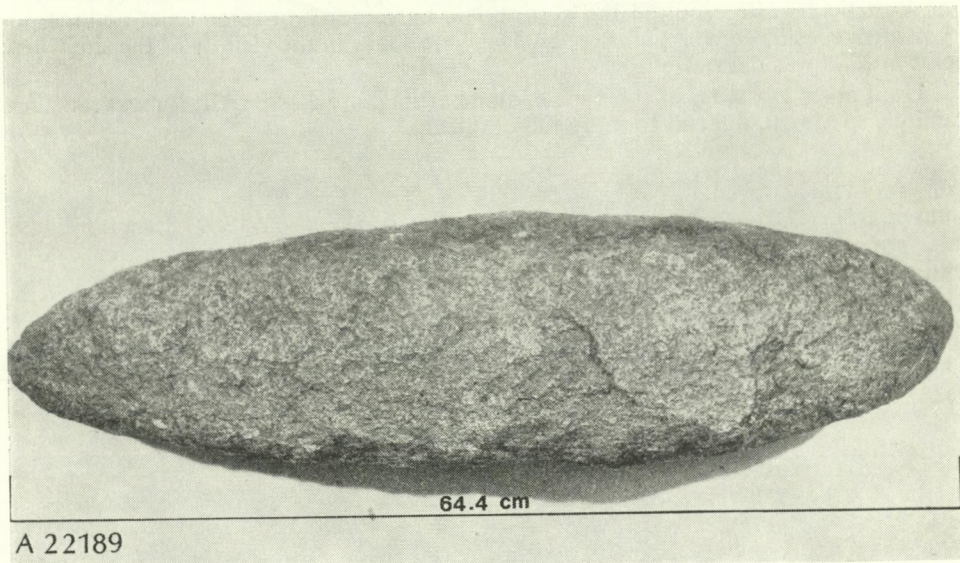


Fig. 1

The stone's general shape and overall regularity implies human workmanship. Its surface texture is irregularly pitted and suggests the possibility of a very rough hammer-dressing technique, but there is no clear-cut and definite surface evidence to confirm this impression. By itself, it would be difficult to clearly associate this stone with the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. However, Mr Cooke obtained an identification and description of usage from an Aboriginal informant, establishing the stone's Aboriginal associations.

Mr Cooke's informant told him that this artifact had both a ceremonial and a utilitarian use. No actual details of the ceremonial usage were related, but there are a number of reports of phallic objects, both artificial and natural. Black (1942), McCarthy (1939, 1967), and Mountford (1930, 1960) have all discussed various objects of a phallic nature. However, their material appears to be smaller than this particular artifact, and generally carefully worked. The natural specimens previously reported are also smaller than this artifact.

In addition, stone arrangements have been recorded which feature upright phallic stones (W.A.M.—Registrar of Aboriginal Sites Files). Current ceremonial usage also involves upright phallic stones on specially prepared ceremonial grounds, and this writer has seen one such ground early in 1973 in the Western Desert. Stones used in such a ceremonial context are often highly decorated with ochre, feathers, and various other substances, and occasionally have small sacred objects affixed during actual ceremonies. After ceremonies are completed, these stones may be taken down and stored until they are next used.

The second usage described to Mr Cooke involved employing this type of stone in obtaining water from soaks and gnamma holes. The heavy artifact was said to be repeatedly dropped on the appropriate spot, producing the required deepening depression with each successive blow. Such a heavy weight would be useful for breaking the hardened crust of a potential soak, and it is conceivable that such an implement might be used in reshaping an existing gnamma hole. However, an alternate possibility would have been a combination of these two functions, in that digging for water at a particular site required the appropriate corresponding ceremonial actions, involving a specific ceremonial object. There are soaks in the vicinity of the site where this artifact was discovered.

Until other examples of this type of stone artifact are discovered, it must remain a unique specimen, difficult to more fully evaluate.

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