



Figure 1 (Converse) Fragment of an engraved Adena Tablet from Washington County, Ohio.

A NEWLY-FOUND FRAGMENT OF AN ADENA TABLET

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Adena engraved tablets have been subjects of a great deal of study. The recent lawsuit by the now deceased Ed Low of Columbus, Ohio, whose widow is suing the Ohio Historical Society for retrieval of an engraved tablet Mr. Low found when a boy, has heightened interest in these rare objects. Low loaned the piece to the Ohio Historical Society but the OHS claims he donated it. They have no records of donation.

There are only a dozen or so of these enigmatic tablets and they are intriguing artifacts of much speculation. It has been postulated that they are portrayals of birds depicted by stylized elements of head, body, tail, wings, and talons. They have been found over a wide area from the southern half of Ohio to northern West Virginia. Although some, such as the Cincinnati Tablet, are highly stylized, they were apparently readily recognizable by the Adena people. It is interesting to realize that no matter where these, to us incomprehensible tablets occurred, their meaning to the Adena people was no mystery. Their strange designs portrayed elements of the Adena culture we can only guess at. Because of their rarity, newly found frag-

ments of such tablets — the subject of this article — are important to the understanding of these unique objects.

This small piece of an Adena tablet came from a farm auction in Washington County, Ohio, along the Muskingum River (Fig. 1). It is made of compact sandstone — as are most of the tablets — and portrays what has been interpreted as a bird's head enclosing a relatively non-elaborate design of a human head with eyes and mouth. It is nearly an exact duplicate of a similar design on the upper right hand side of the Wilmington Tablet (Figure 2). The only difference — and an important one — is that all the engraved tablets with such birds' heads are arranged with the bills turned inwards toward the center of the tablet. The design on this fragment has the bill pointing toward a finished outside edge of the tablet. Although small — less than three inches long — it provides a new and important clue to the study of these unique Adena artifacts.

For an in-depth study of engraved Adena tablets see *The Archaeology of Ohio* — pages 188 thru 191 — Converse 2003.

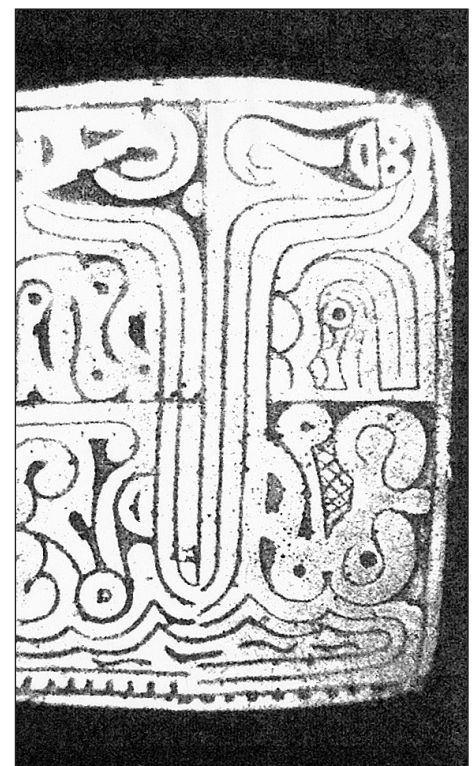


Figure 2 (Converse)
The Wilmington Tablet. Compare design on fragment with that on upper right of tablet.