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An Ancient Bronze Figure from Aust

by F. Ellis
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AN ANCIENT BRONZE FIGURE FROM AUST CLIFF, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

By FREDERICK ELLIS.

Mr. F. Ellis, of Egerton Road, Bishopston, has forwarded to Mr. A. E. Hudd, the Honorary Secretary of the Clifton Antiquarian Club, the following communication, accompanied by a photograph, which he has kindly allowed us to reproduce here:—

“This little bronze figure, which measures $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height and 1 inch across the shoulders, was found on the foreshore at Aust, in the month of August, 1900, by Mr. James Spratt, of Bristol, a relative of the writer. It is of rude workmanship, and has been shaped apparently out of a cylindrical piece of bronze, by the aid of some cutting tool, the surface presenting a fairly smooth appearance, as if it had been finished with a file.

“The general form of the figure presents those flattened outlines usually seen in primitive attempts at sculpture, and is suggestive on the one hand of the small bronze deities of ancient Egypt, and on the other of the more recent barbaric productions of African natives. The head is adorned with a kind of nimbus or semi-lunar ornament, resembling the female head-dresses depicted on Roman coins. The mouth and ears are represented by shallow incisions, the nose being prominent and well shaped, and the chin somewhat pointed. For eyes, two roughly rounded granules of a semi-transparent substance, probably quartz, had been fixed in two deep sockets cut into the metal. One of these eyes still remains in position, the other is missing. The arms are not detached from the body, and the hands are not represented; the chest

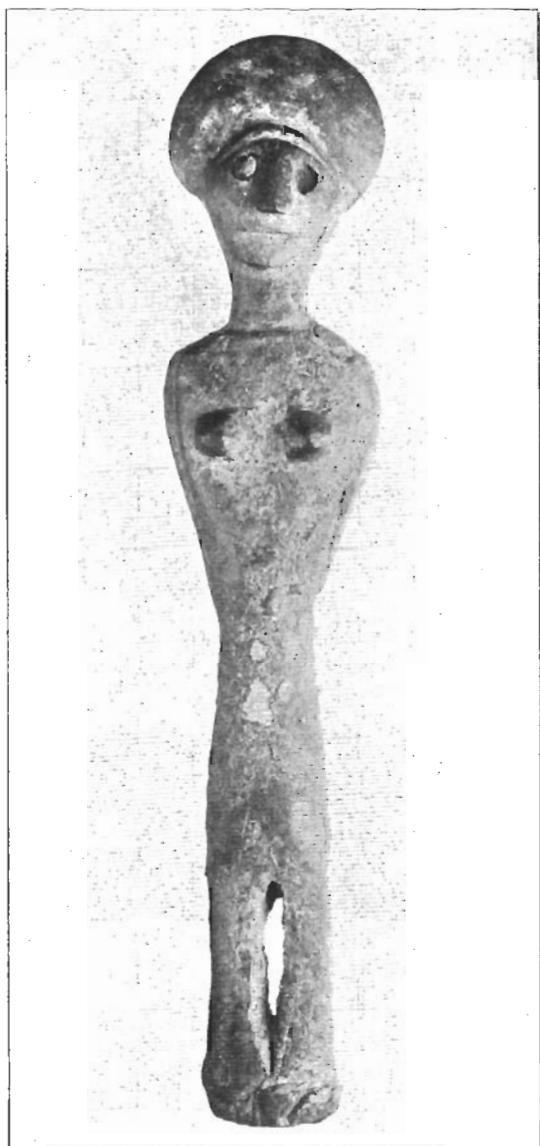


PLATE VII.—BRONZE FIGURE
FROM AUST CLIFF GLOS.

is flattened, but the breasts stand out prominently; the haunches are well developed behind, and the legs are only partially separated, each showing at its extremity a shallow aperture, as if for attachment to feet or a block stand.

“This interesting relic of antiquity was picked up close to the base of Aust Cliff, in a position indicating its recent fall with a heap of débris which lay near, from the ever-crumbling rock above it. The highly patinated condition of the figure shows earth burial, and is incompatible with the idea of its being cast up by the tidal waters of the estuary; moreover, objects thrown up by the tide at this spot are invariably those which float in water, and not heavy metallic bodies, such as the specimen under consideration.

“The little figure has passed by purchase into the National Collection at the British Museum, where it will doubtless receive due attention from archæologists. Mr. C. H. Read, F.S.A., writing from the museum, describes it as ‘a barbarous production of unknown date, probably representing some goddess.’ Half a century ago archæologists would unhesitatingly have pronounced it to be of Phœnician origin; and it is quite possible, from its near proximity to the Channel, that it may have been brought from some distant land in early British times by traders for it is well known that Aust was a great place of crossing both for merchandise and travellers in the very earliest times, and that it continued to be so through the succeeding Roman and mediæval periods down to our own day. If the figure is not of pre-Roman date, we cannot assign a later date to it than that of the Roman period, when it might possibly have been the much valued production or possession of some slave or Celtic barbarian. Indeed, other discoveries at the same place lend support to the latter theory; for some Samian ware and other Roman pottery, now in the Bristol Museum, were found in the cliff, and Roman coins are reported to have been picked up on the beach, close to the spot where this latest discovery was made.”

“Since the above was written, Mr. Alfred Selley, of Southville, has discovered in the top soil of the Cliff, immediately above the spot where the figure was found, a large fragment of a Samian dish and some pieces of Upchurch pottery; thus furnishing additional evidence of the Romano-British occupation of the site.”