

ART ANCIENT



FLINT HAND AXE

Homo heidelbergensis

Lower Palaeolithic, c.700,000 - 300,000 BC

Black-brown flint with a lustrous gloss patina.

Length: 13.7 cm

PROVENANCE

Oise, Northern France (by repute).

Collection of Jean-Claude Debenne (1936-2020).

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A remarkably fine and perfectly preserved example of the earliest human technology, knapped from a nodule of black-brown flint.

Dull when freshly knapped, flint can acquire an intense lustre over countless years of silica precipitation. Here, the glass-like surface and deep, black-purple patina is the result of silica precipitation from groundwater into tiny pores within the stone. An accidental embellishment, highlighting not just the hue of the flint, but the skilful knapping of its anonymous maker.





The Dawn of Human Technology

Around 1.7 million years ago, occurred the dawn of the first human technology: the Acheulean. Accompanying the evolution of a larger-brained form of the genus *Homo*, the leaf-shape or teardrop stone tool is an almost iconic representation of our early ancestors, *Homo heidelbergensis* and *Homo erectus*. Developing from the more primitive Oldowan technology, where a stone core had just one or two chips removed to create an edge, Acheulean hand axes constitute one of the major transitions in human evolution. The early hominin could now produce a beautiful geometric stone axe with edges of glass-like sharpness; a multi-purpose tool that provided the means for survival in a harsh environment. Lasting from c.1.7 million to c.100,000 years ago, the Acheulean industry remains the most widespread and enduring human technology ever created.

As an integral part of early human biological and psychological development, Acheulean axes are also known to the modern mind as the stone that 'shattered the time barrier'. The discovery of Acheulean hand axes alongside fossilised animal remains by 19th century archaeologists alerted them to the existence of humans in a time well before the Biblical Flood. By shifting temporal perceptions of the human race, these stone tools challenged the prevailing narrative of the Creation. Their discovery has significantly shaped our understanding of our ancestors, and today, they are also invaluable markers of early human distribution around the globe.