

# First Sex- The Natufian Statue and Professor Dorothy Garrod

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**Introduction:** Our knowledge of the social structure of pre-historic peoples is limited by the scant physical record, largely limited to archeological fragments of biological materials, tools, and funereal art. The Natufian, who lived near present day Jerusalem around 9000 BCE, was a culture first identified by Dorothy Garrod, a British paleo-archeologist. The Natufian produced what may be the world's first expression of sexuality in art in the Ain-Sakhri statue, depicting two figures intertwined in a coital embrace. Our aim was to better illustrate Garrod's seminal work, and the significance of the Ain Sakhri statue in our understanding of pre-historical concepts of sexual self-awareness.

**Sources and Methods:** Archives of the British Museum (London), the Pitts River Museum and the Dorothy Garrod Photographic Archive (Oxford), the Mathurin collection at the Musée des Antiquités Nationales (St Germain-en-Laye, France), and digital humanities.ox.ac.uk were consulted to identify biographical information on Dorothy Garrod and her archeological work. Secondary sources on the Natufian peoples and their art were identified through PubMed, digital archive sources, and the Garrod archives as cited.

**Results:** Dorothy Garrod (1892-1968) was a prolific early 20th century scientist in paleo archeology and a pioneer for women in a male-dominated field, the first prehistorian, and first woman, to be elected to a professorship at Cambridge University (1939-1952). She established comprehensive excavations in the Levant in the Middle East on Mount Carmel near Jerusalem where she identified the ancient Natufian cultures. There, her mentor, AH Breuil, had found a 10 cm stone figure, now known as the 'Ain Sakhri' figurine, from 9,000 BCE and identified by him to be a product of Garrod's Natufian culture. Unlike other contemporary Natufian sculptures found in the Wadi Khareitoun region, which were worked in bone or antler, the Ain Sakhri was chiseled from calcite. The Ain Sakhri, depicting two intertwined figures and with a phallic shape, is regarded as the world's oldest known sculpture of people making love.

**Conclusions:** Dorothy Garrod was a ground-breaking pioneer in paleo archeology and the 1st female professor at Cambridge from 1939-1952. Her early 20th century work on the Natufian people revealed a complex, sophisticated pre-historic culture which produced the Ain Sakhri, the first sculpted depiction of coitus, predating the historical record of sexual self-awareness by thousands of years.

**Keywords:** Natufian people, Ain-Sakhri, Dorothy Garrod, the Levant, Paleolithic archeology

Self-awareness and the origin of human sexuality is linked to the development of mankind itself, well documented by modern genetic paleoanthropological investigations into mitochondrial Eve and Y-chromosome Adam.(1) The hominid lineage has recently experienced a modern Renaissance with rapid expansion in our genetic knowledge about its evolution within Africa, first hypothesized by Charles Darwin.(2) Descendants of *Homo neanderthalis* and *Homo erectus*, the two surviving species of the Lake Toba supereruption of 74,000 BCE, migrated to settle in the fertile lands of the Mid Eastern 'Levant' region in present day Israel.(3) The archeological evidence of cultures in the Fertile Crescent before 3000 BCE is scant,

largely derived from analyses of bones, shards, funereal garments, and artwork. How these people lived, and how they thought of themselves in the world, is similarly vague having existed thousands of years before the earliest hieroglyphic or Sumerian writings.

The earliest archeological excavations in the region were undertaken by western historians including Dorothy Garrod and her mentor Abbe H Breuil, a wily spelunker and Cambridge don who was said to "explore impossible caves in a Roman collar and bathing dress".(Figure 1)"(4) Garrod was the daughter of a physician and a family of scientists, traveling early in life to the Mediterranean, and being amongst the first in Britain to study paleo-lithology, the study of ancient

rocks and rock sculpture. Garrod excavated many sites in the Middle East and discovered the Natufian culture, peoples who had settled in an area outside present day Jerusalem about 15,000 BCE- 11,500 BCE. Garrod's comprehensive efforts led to the preservation of many tools, objects, and skeletal remains that greatly advanced the understanding of Natufian social structures. Breuil found in the area a small statuette sculpted out of calcite, correctly identified as Natufian in origin, and named 'Ain Sakhri' after the cave in which it was found.(4) The small object depicts two intertwined, human figures engaged in an embrace. "The faces are featureless, the heads being distinguished by a groove both in the outline of the sculpture and on the broad surfaces."(6) The stone, and many of Garrod's photographs and findings, were eventually donated to museums in Britain and France but the Ain Sakhri retained a special significance. Our aim was to explore the seminal work of Dorothy Garrod and how the Ain Sakhri statuette portrays a self-awareness of sexuality at the dawn of human kind.

## SOURCES

We accessed all available secondary source readings on Dorothy Garrod, her work, the Natufian cultures, and the Ain Sakhri stone. We also accessed the digital archives of the Pitts River Museum (Oxford), which contains the Dorothy Garrod Photographic Archive, the Mathurin collection at the Musée des Antiquités Nationales (St Germain-en-Laye, France), the British Museum (London), and [digital.humanities.ox.ac.uk](http://digital.humanities.ox.ac.uk).

## RESULTS

### The Professor

Dorothy Anne Elizabeth Garrod (1892-1968) was the fourth child and only daughter of Sir Archibald and Lady Laura Garrod (Figure 2). Her father was the then Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford following the death of Osler. Her paternal grandfather, Sir Alfred Baring Garrod (1819-1907) was known for his research work on arthritis and was Physician Extraordinary to Queen Victoria.(7) There is evidence Dorothy was exposed to archeology and anthropology at an early age, spending part of her youth with her father stationed



**Figure 1. (Left)** Dorothy Garrod (1892-1968), born into a household of scholars, became one of the great early 20th century paleo-archeologists, becoming the first female Professor at Cambridge in 1952. Her discovery of the Natufian people rewrote the age of sophisticated human cultures.(Public Domain) (Right) Abbé Henri Breuil (1877-1961), Garrod's mentor, who discovered the Ain Sakhri statute and in correctly identified the artwork as Natufian in origin (Photo by Garrod, 1931, Pitts River Museum, University of Oxford).



**Figure 2.** "Picnic near Nablus"(Israel). Archibald Edward Garrod (left) ad Laura Elizabeth Garrod (right) photographed by DAE Garrod, 1928. (Pitts River Museum, University of Oxford)

on Malta during World War I (the war which claimed all three of her older brothers). She worked with famed anthropologist Sir Themistocles Zammit (1864-1935) and entered Newnham College to study history and classics in 1913 since there was no current degree in archeology at that time. She then volunteered with the Ministry of Munitions in the War effort. When her father was appointed Regius Professor at Oxford, Dorothy promptly registered for the university diploma course in anthropology with Robert Ranulph Marett (1866-1943). She became proficient in early human technologies, such as in flint-work in Lower Paleolithic and Middle Paleolithic societies. She worked with the great paleo-archeologist Abbé Henri Breuil (1877-1961) and was introduced to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and converted to Roman Catholicism.(8) She wrote her first book, *The Upper Paleolithic Age in Britain*, in 1926.(9) Garrod draws our attention, however, for her discovery and identification of the Natufian culture (c.15,000 BCE- 11,500 BCE), first suspected in the Shukbah and el-Wad caves and terraces, her finds placed the Natufian peoples in the 500,000 year archeological arc of humanity transitioning from nomadic hunter-gatherers to the agrarian societies of the early Iron Age. (10-14).

In 1928, Garrod began to investigate several caves in Palestine, including the Shukbah cave where she identified Mousterian and sterile deposits containing Mesolithic industry that she named 'Natufian'. "Field conditions were harsh," wrote the Garrod scholar PJ Smith in 2000. "The crew endured uncomfortable, primitive living conditions, terrible heat, sticky humidity, limited and contaminated water, faulty equipment, dust, hot 'Khamseen' winds, violent electrical storms, torrential rains and exposure to serious disease." (4) Garrod carefully logged and photographed assemblages of stone tools included sickle blades for harvesting, heretofore unknown, lunates (hunting tools) and perforators for drilling holes, as well as mortars and pestles for food preparation. She next turned her attention to her first discovery, the Zarzi cave, and then became interested in the Mount Carmel area of cliffs where her colleague Charles Lambert had asked her to excavate three caves that led to her finding the Natufian deposits. It was there that her mentor, Abbé Henri Breuil, discovered a small calcite statue, known as the 'Ain Sakhri' figurine, that dated roughly to 9,000 BCE and identified by Breuil to be from Garrod's Natufian culture (Figure 4).(6)



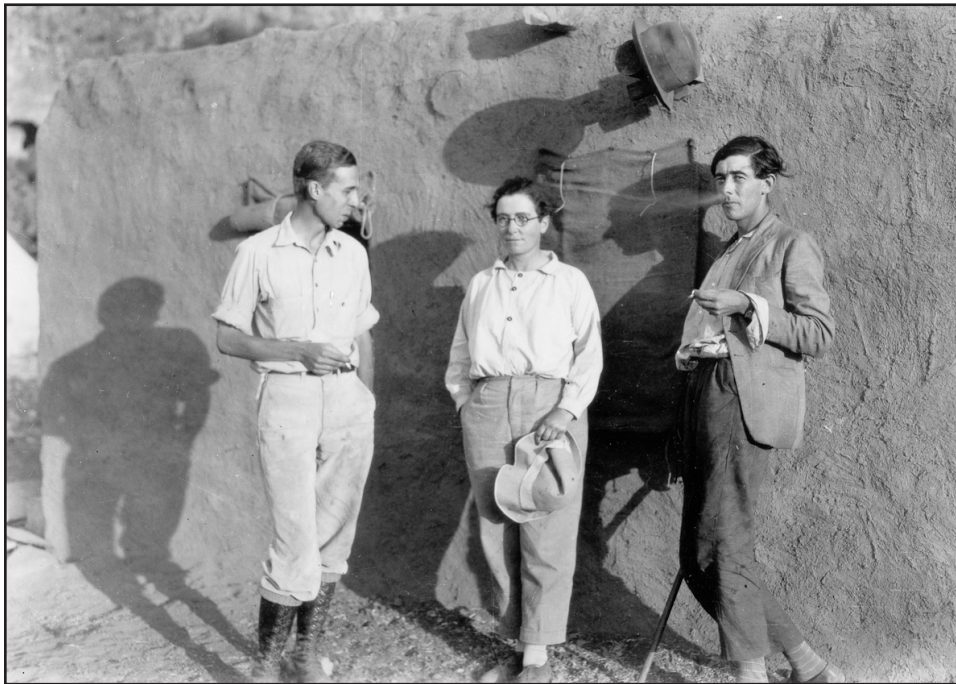
**Figure 3. The Ain Sakhri statue (Left and Middle)** Two views of a Natufian calcite stone showing entwined sexual figures, thought to be the first known depiction of human sexuality, c 9000 BCE. ( British Museum, London) **(Right)** Drawing illustrating possible body postures of the two figures modeled in the Ain Sakhri statue. (Drawing by the Australian anthropologist, Herbert Basedow (1881-1933), 1927, as cited in Boyd and Cook.(6))

Garrod was the first pre-historian, and the first woman, to be elected to a professorship (Disney Professor of Archaeology) at Cambridge University, a post which she held from 1939 until 1952. "Garrod was a modest, shy person and appears to have been uncomfortable with the attention her election elicited," wrote PJ Smith (4). Her appointment was groundbreaking but Cambridge appeared to be unprepared. Women were not included in strategic meetings of college governance or even to socialize in the dining hall with other, male professors. (4) Garrod was also ground-breaking in her modern social views. Unlike many British and western peers, she viewed with great value the knowledge and experiences of local denizens around her digs. Her Mount Carmel work, for example, was composed, almost entirely, of Arabian women; she made it a point to include an important colleague, Francis R Petre, who was openly gay (Figure 4). Garrod was a prolific, and gifted, photographer and used the medium to document her many archeological sites, and the men and women she engaged in that work. Dorothy Garrod died in 1968, in Cambridge, bequeathing her library to Newnham College. It seemed that her private and unpublished papers had not survived. A widely believed myth arose that they had been destroyed, perhaps burnt even by Professor Garrod herself (15). In 1986, her original black and white negatives were donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum

by her prehistorian colleague and executor Suzanne Cassou de Saint Mathurin. It was in 1996, however, that PJ Smith discovered Garrod's original handwritten field notes, notebooks, site plans, and section drawings from excavations that had been unknowingly kept at the Musée des Antiquités Nationales in suburban Paris. In 2019, the Dorothy Garrod building was dedicated at her alma mater, Newnham College, where a previously unknown recording of her voice was played nearly 50 years after her death.(16) Garrod's work raised awareness of the origins of humankind while breaking many of the boundaries of modern society. As said by Professor Mina Weinstein (University of Haifa), Garrod was among the first who showed that "Europe was not the center of the world."(17)

### The Ain Sakhri Lovers

The Ain Sakhri figurine is currently archived in the British Museum, entitled "the Ain Sakhri lovers", purchased via Sotheby's from the estate of the French diplomat and prehistorian Rene V Neuville (1899-1952) in 1958 (object # 1958,1007.1). At more than 10,000 years of age, the statuette is remarkably well preserved. Its discoverers conjectured that it had "never been above ground, where it would have faded and worn away; on the contrary it bore ash marks, evidence of an existing undisturbed level, but not of clay as it would have been



**Figure 4.** DAEG at Wady el Mughara with (left to right) the British anthropologist Theodore McCown, Garrod, and Francis Turville-Petre (1901-1942), discoverer of the *Homo heidelbergensis* fossil in 1926. (Pitts River Museum, University of Oxford)

the case if in a cave.”(6) The sculpture measures 102 mm in height, 63 mm wide, with a depth of 39 mm and weighs 343 grams. The piece fits comfortably in the palm. It was sculptured to show a couple in coitus as well as being a phallic illustration when viewed from above or *en face*. The artist utilized a pointed, probable stone chisel to remove pieces and make the delicate, copulating figures. “The surviving natural surface on the cobble is bruised with chattermarks indicating that it came from the bed of a stream where it had bumped together with other stones. The sculptor utilised (sic) the natural heart-shaped outline of the stone to pick out the outline of a couple making love face to face in a sitting position. This was done using a ‘picking’ technique using a stone chisel with the stone or antler hammer to reduce the calcite surface by percussion so that the outlines of the figures appear in low relief. When first made the picked line would appear lighter than (the) natural surface of the cobble enhancing the visual impact of the sculpture.”(18)

The two entwined figures are locked in an intimate coital scene, presumably a female and a male, arms and legs wrapped around one another in a sitting position.

Although no facial features are shown, the lips are presumably touching and the arms of one figure bend up at the elbows embracing the other figure with the wrists touching just below its shoulders. The buttocks of the embraced figure are above the feet of the other and the knees are raised suggesting genital contact. The Natufian were one of the first cultures to begin herding sheep and goats, suggesting that this figure could represent an interest in fertility. Furthermore, Hebert Basedow (1881-1933) and Rene Neuville (1889-1952) hypothesized that the figure is similar to the sexual acts depicted in an ancient Australian Aboriginal seated copulation position in 1927.(6)

Ultimately, Garrod and her mentors illustrated the global significance of the Natufian culture and their unique depictions of sex and fertility. “(The Ain Sakhri) is the oldest known sculpture of people making love,” wrote its curator. “It is easy to recognize the timeless thrill and comfort of human intimacy.” (18) No faces are discernible to depict this as a heterosexual couple so its symbolic applicability to all human relationships has a particular modern day relevance. The figurine, in fact, has been part of the “Desire, Love, Identity:

exploring LGBTQ histories" exhibitions that toured England throughout 2018-2019 as well as the BBC's programming on the "History of the World in 100 objects". As the British museum curator observed, "(the Ain Sakhri lovers have) always been popular with visitors and acquired a new modern symbolism during the period of lockdown against Corona Virus in 2020, when it epitomized the simple but essential need for the reassurance of a hug that had to be avoided at that time."(18)

## CONCLUSIONS:

In 1928, Dorothy Garrod provided compelling evidence to the early field of paleoanthropology of a new era of humanity existing between 12,000-9000 BCE that she named Natufian. She would go on to document numerous aspects of this prehistoric culture, transitioning from a primary hunter-gatherer nomadic society to the agrarian, domesticated societies of the early Iron Age. Garrod's work made it possible to identify the Natufian origin of the Ain Sakhri figurine. Social anthropologists hypothesize that sexuality may be best understood through its social and political setting and that such modern concepts may be applicable to pre-historic, paleolithic cultures as well.(19) The Ain Sakhri figurine may be one of the few surviving artefacts of the Natufian people but demonstrates that the human awareness of the social power of sexuality existed more than 10,000 years ago.(20). Garrod retired in 1952 and her colleagues presented her with this fitting scroll: "To Dorothy Annie Elizabeth Garrod ... indefatigable explorer of antiquity, who for thirteen years professed the science of archaeology in Cambridge with such great learning, such great splendour, such great friendliness and humanity..." The scroll ended with the epistle by Horace '*caelum non animus mutant, qui trans [mare] currunt*' - 'those who hasten across the sea, change their horizon, not their soul.'"(4)

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