

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRENCH WARFARE AT GLOZEL

**When artefacts  
unearthed at  
Glozel, France, in  
the mid-1920s  
didn't fit the  
accepted scholarly  
explanation of  
human prehistory  
in that region,  
archaeologists  
engaged in a bitter  
battle that has still  
not seen a clear  
winner.**

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*The excavations near the French village of Glozel, a hamlet located 17 kilometres from the French spa town of Vichy, are among the most controversial of archaeological endeavours. These excavations lasted between 1924 and 1938, but the vast majority of finds—more than 3,000 artefacts—were unearthed in the first two years. The artefacts were variously dated to Neolithic, Iron Age and Mediaeval times. What transpired is a textbook case of archaeological feuding and fraud versus truth.*

## Glozel 101: How to get ahead in archaeology

If one word could be used to describe the Glozel affair, it should be "controversial". It has been described as the "Dreyfus affair" of French archaeology, and the Dreyfus equivalent was Emile Fradin, a seventeen-year-old, who together with his grandfather Claude Fradin stepped into history on 1 March 1924.

Working in a field known as Duranthon, Emile was holding the handles of a plough when one of the cows pulling it stuck a foot in a cavity. Freeing the cow, the Fradins uncovered a cavity containing human bones and ceramic fragments. So far, this could have been just any usual archaeological discovery, of which some are made every week. That soon changed...

It is said that the first to arrive the following day were the neighbours. They not only found but also took some of the objects. That same month, Adrienne Picandet, a local teacher, visited the Fradins' farm and decided to inform the minister of education. On 9 July, Benoît Clément, another teacher, this time from the neighbouring village and representing La Société d'Emulation du Bourbonnais, visited the site and later returned with a man called Viple. Clément and Viple used pickaxes to break down the remaining walls, which they took away with them. Some weeks later, Emile Fradin received a letter from Viple, identifying the site as Gallo-Roman. He added that he felt it to be of little interest. His advice was to recommence cultivation of the field—which is what the Fradin family did. And this might perhaps have been the end of the saga...but not so.

The January 1925 *Bulletin de la Société d'Emulation du Bourbonnais* reported on the findings. It brought the story to the attention of Antonin Morlet, a Vichy physician and amateur archaeologist. Morlet visited Clément and was intrigued by the findings. Morlet was an "amateur specialist" in the Gallo-Roman period (first to fourth centuries AD) and believed that the objects from Glozel were older. He thought that some might even date from the Magdalenian period (12,000–9500 BC). Both Morlet and Clément visited the farm and the field on 26 April 1925, and Morlet offered the Fradins 200 francs per year to be allowed to complete the excavation. Morlet began his excavations on 24 May, discovering tablets, idols, bone and flint tools, and engraved stones. He identified the site as Neolithic and published his "Nouvelle Station Néolithique" in September 1925, listing Emile Fradin as co-author. He argued that the site was, as the title of the article states, Neolithic in nature.

Though Morlet dated it as Neolithic, he was not blind to see that the site contained objects from various epochs. He still upheld his belief that some artefacts appeared to be older, belonging to the Magdalenian period, but added that the techniques that had been used appeared to be Neolithic. As such, he identified Glozel as a transition site between both eras, even though it was known that the two eras were separated by several millennia. Certain objects were indeed anachronistic: one stone showed a reindeer, accompanied by letters that appeared to be an alphabet. The reindeer vanished from that region around 10,000 BC, yet the earliest known form of writing was established around

3300 BC, and that was in the Middle East. The general consensus was that, locally, one would have to wait a further three millennia before the introduction of writing. Worse, the script appeared to be comparable with the Phoenician alphabet, dated to c. 1000 BC, or to the Iberian script, which was derived from it. But, of course, it was "known" that no Phoenician colony could have been located in Glazel.

From a site that seemed to have little or no importance, Glazel had become a site that could upset the world of archaeology.

### Incontestable evidence—or not?

No wonder that French archaeological academics were dismissive of Dr Morlet's report—after all, it was published by an amateur (a medical doctor) and a peasant boy (who perhaps could not even write properly). In their opinion, the amateurism dripped off their conclusion, for it challenged their carefully established and vociferously defended dogma on several levels. Prehistoric writing? A crossover between a Palaeolithic and a Neolithic civilisation? Nonsense! And hence, the criticism continued.

One person claimed that the artefacts had to be fakes, as some of the tablets were discovered at a depth of 10 centimetres. Indeed, if that were the case they would indeed be fakes, but the problem is that all the tablets were found at substantial depths—clear evidence of manipulation of the facts

when the facts don't fit the dogma. It should be noted that the "10 centimetre" argument continues to be used by several sceptics, who falsely continue to assume it is true. Unfortunately for French academic circles, Morlet was not one to lie down easily, and today his ghost continues to hang—if not watch—over Glazel.

Morlet invited a number of archaeologists to visit the site during 1926; they included Salomon Reinach, curator of the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, who spent three days excavating. Reinach confirmed the authenticity of the site in a communication to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Even higher academic circles descended on the site: the famous archaeologist Abbé Breuil excavated with Morlet and was impressed with the site. In late 1926, he wrote two articles, in which Breuil stated that the authenticity of the Glazel site was "incontestable". It seemed too good to be true, and it was...

Breuil worked together with prehistorian André Vayson de Pradenne, who had visited the site under an assumed name and attempted to buy the artefacts from Fradin. When Fradin refused, Vayson became angry and threatened to destroy the site. Under his own name, he obtained permission to excavate from Dr Morlet, but then claimed to have detected Fradin spreading salt in the excavation trench. Was Vayson de Pradenne keeping his promise? Again Morlet chose to attack, and he challenged Vayson to duplicate what Fradin had allegedly done. When he

was unable to do so, or find where Fradin had supposedly salted the trench, Morlet felt he had successfully dealt with that imposter. He was wrong: Vayson de Pradenne's allegation made it into print.

But it would be a reindeer that soured the relationship between Breuil and Morlet, as Breuil had identified an engraved animal on a tablet as a cervid, neither reindeer nor elk.

Morlet had received confirmation from Professor August Brinkmann, director of the Zoology Department at Bergen Museum, Norway, and informed Breuil of his mistake. It was the moment when Breuil changed his attitude. Morlet had begun to make powerful enemies...

### More controversy over site excavations

Rather than talk, Morlet dug, unearthing 3,000 objects over a

period of two years, all of varied forms and shape, including 100 tablets carrying signs and approximately 15 tablets carrying the imprints of human hands.

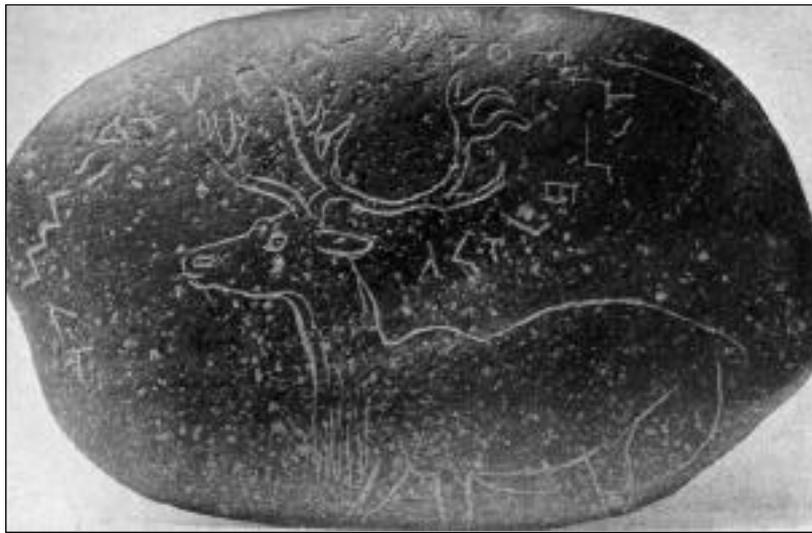
Other discoveries included two tombs, sexual idols, polished stones, dressed stones, ceramics, glass, bones, etc. Surely, these could not be fakes?

On 2 August 1927, Breuil reiterated that he wanted to stay away from the site. On 2 October, he wrote that "everything is false except the stoneware pottery".

Just before that, at the meeting of the International Institute of Anthropology in Amsterdam held in September 1927, the Glazel site was the subject of heated controversy. A commission was appointed to conduct further investigation. Its membership was largely comprised of people who had already decided the Glazel finds were fraudulent. Among the group was Dorothy Garrod, who had studied with Breuil.

The commissioners arrived at Glazel on 5 November 1927. During their excavations, several members found artefacts. But on the third day, Morlet saw commission members Dorothy Garrod, Abbé Favret and Mr Hamil-Nandrin slip under the barbed wire and set off towards the open trench before he had opened the gate. Morlet followed her and saw that she had stuck one of her fingers into the plaster pattern on the side of the trench, making a hole. He shouted out, reprimanding her for what she had just done. Caught in the act, she at first denied it, but in the presence of her two colleagues as well as the attorney, Mallat, and a scientific journalist, Tricot-Royer, she had to admit that she had made the hole.

Though it was agreed they would not speak about the incident (underlining the fact that some people have more privileges than others), Morlet did speak about it after the commission had published its unfavourable report. This might be seen as mudslinging, trying to get back at the commission, but, unfortunately for those willing to adhere to this theory, a



One of the more notorious carved stones at the centre of controversy. For some, the animal has been extinct since prehistoric times, resulting in the argument that the Glazel site was thousands of years old.

photograph attested to the incident. In it, Garrod is hiding behind the four men, who are in heated discussion about what she had just done. Most importantly, Tricot-Royer and Mallat also gave written testimony confirming Morlet's account.

What was Garrod trying to do? Some have claimed it was merely an accident, but it is remarkable that she was part of a posse that entered the site before the "official start" of the day and had an accident that could have been interpreted as interfering with the excavation. If others had found that the excavation had been tampered with, fingers would not have been pointed at Garrod but, instead, at Fradin—whom the archaeologists suspected of being the forger, burying artefacts in the ground only to have amateur archaeologists like Morlet, who did not know "better", discover them. If this suggestion that Fradin had entered the site at night had been made, it would have resulted in a "case closed" and the Glozel artefacts would have been qualified as fraudulent.

The incident did not cause any harm to Dorothy Garrod, who then went on to teach a generation of British archaeologists at Cambridge. Perhaps unremarkably, she made sure to tell all of them that the Glozel artefacts were fakes. And several of her students echoed her "informed opinion"; the list included Glyn Daniel and Colin Renfrew, both fervent critics of the Glozel finds. We can only wonder whether the "finger incident" is known to these pillars of archaeology.

Remarkably, when challenged with evidence that thermoluminescence and carbon dating had shown that the Glozel artefacts could not be forgeries created by Fradin, Renfrew wrote in 1975:

"The three papers, taken together, suggest strongly that the pottery and terracotta objects from Glozel, including the inscribed tablets, should be regarded as genuine, and with them, presumably, the remainder of the material... I still find it beyond my powers of imagination to take Glozel entirely seriously."

Though all the archaeological evidence suggested the site was genuine, Renfrew's emotions prevented him from taking it seriously. Whoever said men of science let the facts rule over emotions?

But back to the past. Morlet sent a letter to *Mercur de France* (published on 15 November 1927), still upset with Breuil's qualification of the site as a fake and having spotted one of his students sticking an unwanted finger into an archaeological trench:

"From the time your article appeared I declared to anyone who wanted to listen, especially to your friends so that you would hear about it, that I would not allow you to present a site already studied at length as a discovery which had not been described before you wrote about it. I know that in a note you quoted the titles of our articles; that you thank me for having led you to Glozel; and that finally you give thanks to our 'kindness' in having allowed you to examine our collections. You acknowledge that I am a good chauffeur. I have perceived, a little, that I have also been a dupe... Your report on Glozel is conceived as if you were the first to study the site...so much so that several foreign scholars are misinformed about it... Your first master, Dr Capitan, suggested to me forthrightly that we republish our leaflet with the engravings at the end and his name before mine. With you, the system has evolved: you take no more than the ideas."

Morlet was highlighting one of the main goals of archaeologists: to have their name on top of a report and be identified as the discoverer. It is standard practice, in which amateurs specifically are supposed to stand aside and let the "professionals" deal with it—and take the credit for the discovery. Again, Morlet did not want to have any of it.

### Peasant boy versus Louvre curator

The commission's report of December 1927 declared that everything found at the Glozel site, with the exception of a few pieces of flint axes and stoneware, was fake. Still, members of the commission, like Professor Mendes Corrêa, argued that the conclusions were incorrect and misrepresentative. In fact, he argued that the results of his analyses, when completed, would be opposite of what had been claimed by Count Bégouen, the principal author of the report. Bégouen had to confess that he had made up an alleged dispatch from Mendes Corrêa!

René Dussaud, curator at the Louvre and a famous epigrapher, had written a dissertation that argued that our alphabet is of Phoenician origin. If Morlet was correct, Dussaud's life's work

would be discredited. Dussaud made sure that would not happen, and thus he told everyone that Fradin was a forger and even sent an anonymous letter about Fradin to one of the Parisian newspapers. But when similar finds to those at Glozel were unearthed in Alvão in Portugal, Dussaud stated that they, too, had to be fraudulent—even though the artefacts were discovered beneath a dolmen, leaving little doubt they were of Neolithic origin.

When similar artefacts were found in the immediate vicinity of Glozel, at

two sites at Chez Guerrier and Puyravel, Dussaud wrote:

"If, as they claim, the stones discovered in the Mercier field and in the cave of Puyravel bear the writing of Glozel, there can be no doubt the engravings on the stones are false."

What could Fradin do? In a move that seems to have been a few decades ahead of his time, on 10 January 1928 Fradin filed suit for defamation against Dussaud. Indeed, a peasant boy of twenty was suing the curator of the Louvre for defamation!

Dussaud had no intention of appearing in court and must have realised that, if he did, he could lose the case. He needed help, fast, for the first hearing was set for 28 February and Fradin had already received the free assistance of a lawyer who was greatly intrigued by a case of "peasant boy versus Louvre curator". Dussaud engineered the help of the president of the Société Préhistorique Française, Dr Félix Régnauld, who visited Glozel on 24 February and, after the briefest of visits to the small museum, filed a complaint against "X".

That the entire incident was engineered is clear, as Régnauld had come with his attorney, Maurice Garçon, who immediately travelled from Glozel to Moulins to file the complaint. The accusation was that the admission charge of four francs was excessive to see objects which in his opinion were fakes. The police identified "X" as Emile Fradin. The next day, the police searched the museum, destroyed glass display cases and confiscated three cases of artefacts. Emile was beaten when he protested against the taking of his little brother's schoolbooks as evidence. Saucepans filled with dirt by his little brother were assumed to be artefacts in the making. Despite all of this, the raid

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produced no evidence of forgery. However, the suit for defamation could not proceed because a criminal investigation was underway. It meant that the defamation hearing set for 28 February would not happen for as long as the criminal investigation continued.

Dussaud, it seemed, had won. Meanwhile, a new group of neutral archaeologists, the Committee of Studies, was appointed by scholars who, since the November conference in Amsterdam and specifically since the report's publication in December, were uncomfortable with how the archaeological world was handling Glozel. They excavated from 12 to 14 April 1928 and continued to find more artefacts. Their report spoke out for the authenticity of the site, which they identified as Neolithic. It seemed that Morlet had been vindicated.

### Police distort truth, but Fradin is vindicated

Any vindication was soon outdone when Gaston-Edmond Bayle, chief of the Criminal Records Office in Paris, analysed the artefacts seized in the raid and in May 1929 identified them as recent forgeries. Originally, Bayle had said that it would take only eight or nine days to prepare a report, but a year passed without anything being set down on paper. This, of course, was excellent news for Dussaud, as it delayed his defamation hearing. To pave the way, on 5 October 1928 information was leaked to the papers, which played their part by faithfully stating that the report would conclude that the Glozel artefacts are forgeries. In May 1929, Bayle completed a 500-page report, just in time to postpone once again the Dussaud case, which was scheduled for hearing on 5 June.

Bayle argued that he could detect fragments of what might have been grass and an apple stem in some of the Glozel clay tablets. As grass obviously could not have been preserved for thousands of years, it was obviously a recent forgery, he reasoned. The argument is very unconvincing, for the excavations were obviously not handled as a forensic crime scene would be treated. Most likely, the vast majority of these artefacts were placed on grass or elsewhere after they were dug up from the pit—a practice that continues on most of today's archaeological excavations; archaeology, at this level, is not a forensic science. Later, it would emerge that some of the objects had also been placed in an oven to dry them—which in due course would interfere with carbon-dating efforts on the artefacts.

Bizarrely, in September 1930, Bayle was assassinated in an unrelated event; his assassin accused him of having made a fraudulent report that had placed him in jail! After his death, it was found that Bayle had lived an extravagant lifestyle that was inconsistent with his salary.

Most interestingly, Bayle was close to Vayson de Pradennes, who was the son-in-law of his former superior at the Criminal Records Office.

And it seems the Breuil–Vayson de Pradennes–Dussaud axis was not only powerful in archaeological circles: it could also dictate to the wheels of the law.

The court accepted Bayle's findings, and on 4 June 1929 Fradin was formally indicted for fraud. For the next few months, Fradin was interrogated every week in Moulins. Eventually, the verdict was overturned by an appeal court in April 1931.

For three years, Dussaud had been able to terrorise Fradin for his "insolence" in filing a suit against him. Unfortunately, though the wheels of the law had largely played to the advantage of the "axis of archaeology", in the final analysis righteousness had won. The defamation charge against Dussaud came to trial in March 1932, and Dussaud was found guilty of defamation, with all costs of the trial to be paid by him.

Eight years after the first discovery, the leading archaeologists continued to claim the Glozel artefacts were fraudulent, though all

the evidence—including a lengthy legal cause—had shown that was absolutely not the case. But why bother with facts when there are pet theories and reputations to be defended?

Morlet ended his excavations in 1938, and after 1942 a new law outlawed private excavations. The Glozel site remained untouched until the Ministry of Culture re-opened excavations in 1983. A full report was never published, but a 13-page summary did appear in 1995.

This "official report" infuriated many, for the authors suggested that the site was mediaeval, possibly containing some Iron Age objects, but was likely to have been enriched by forgeries. It therefore reinforced the earlier position of the

leading French archaeologists. But on 16 June 1990, Emile Fradin received the *Ordre des Palmes Académiques*, suggesting that the French academic circles had accepted him for making a legitimate discovery—and that he was not a forger. The Glozel excavation site, however, continues to be seen as a giant hoax.

Emile Fradin was honoured that the British Museum requested some of his artefacts to go on display in 1990 in the "holy of holies" of archaeology. What he did not know (because of a language barrier) was that the exhibit was highlighting some of the greatest archaeological hoaxes and forgeries in history...

### About the Author:

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Caught in the act! When it was learned that one of the archaeologists had entered the site and tried to pretend Fradin had interfered with the digs, Dr Morlet confronted the archaeologists. At first, they denied the incident happened... until this photograph was produced and entered as evidence. Yet another lie of the archaeological establishment.