

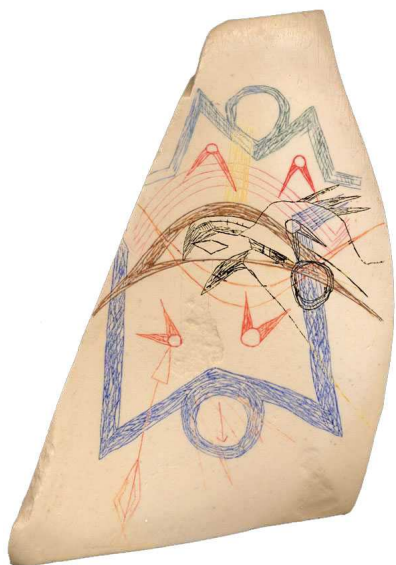
American Indian Rock Art: The Utz tablet

In 1936, Jim Utz unearthed an engraved catlinite tablet while plowing his fields near Annie and Abel Van Meter State Park, which had just been established four years earlier. The tablet measured approximately 9 inches long, 6 inches wide and a ½ inch thick.

The location of this discovery, on the south side of the Missouri River in Saline County, later understood to be a former Missouri Indian village and now designated the Utz Site, a National Historic Landmark. The ancestral people preceding the Missouri tribe, who also lived on the Utz site, are defined as Oneota. Other Oneota materials found at the Utz site include incised shell-tempered pottery, snub-nosed scrapers, triangular projectile points, and catlinite pipes and tablets. J. Allen Eichenburger of the Missouri Archaeological Society studied the Utz tablet in 1961 and made castings, then outlined each design in a different color (see images). The original catlinite tablet etchings had no color or at least no color survived; so the coloring is really an interpretive device added in the study of the tablet.

Dr. Robert Bray, the principal archaeologist who excavated the Utz site through the 1960s, published this tablet, along with other tablets found in central Missouri and elsewhere, see [The Missouri Archaeologist](#), Volume 25 (1963).

On the main surface (obverse side) of the tablet is a series of scratches or etchings that form several designs superimposed on one another. Eichenburger colored sets of inscribed lines on his cast of the tablet, which he felt were associated with one another. A bird of prey, either an eagle or hawk, is the main recognizable design and is highlighted in black. The forked-eye design consists of a circle with two adjacent triangles. Inside the open beak is a diamond with a dot in the center. Representing perhaps speech symbol are concentric circles originating in the larynx and extending toward the beak with curved lines. The final characteristic of the bird design consists of three triangles that form a crest of feathers.



Other designs on this side of the tablet:

- small "M" with circles in the valley (blue-green)
- large "M" with circles in the valley (blue)
- crescent (brown)
- second crescent (orange)
- forked eyes (red)
- arrow and lines (orange)

The reverse side of the tablet has fewer and less complicated designs. The main motif is another bird, possibly a woodpecker (blue). It almost covers the entire surface of the tablet, and its borders are filled. The forked eye (red) is well defined as well as the crest of feathers. The speech symbol can also be seen on this design, as with the bird of prey on the tablet's other side. The design superimposed over this bird resembles a mace or baton (brown) of the Middle Mississippi art and Southern Cult. Near the lower left corner of the tablet are minor motifs made up of rectangles and converging lines (orange).

