Journal of Anthropological Archaeology 34 (2014) 120–132

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Anthropological Archaeology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jaa

# An analysis of non-utilitarian stone point function in the US Southwest

Jakob W. Sedig

*Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309, United States*

ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*
Received 18 September 2013
Revision received 15 March 2014
Available online 18 April 2014

*Keywords:*
Stone points
U.S. Southwest
Ethnography
Use-wear
Non-utilitarian

ABSTRACT

In this article, data from the ethnographic and archaeological records are correlated to examine the proposal that some projectile points had social and symbolic functions. Although archaeologists have long recognized that projectile points could have multiple functions, few have examined the social and symbolic functions these objects had. This article discusses the thorough examination of ethnographic documents primarily from the US Southwest written during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which reveal that stone projectile points had multiple social and symbolic functions. After a discussion of the compiled ethnographic data, data from the analysis of over 600 stone points from the northern U.S. Southwest dating to AD 900–1300 is presented. The stone projectile point data reveals that while the majority of projectile points were used as tips to arrows, some did serve social and symbolic functions similar to those observed in the ethnographic record. With this data in hand, I argue that archaeologists must approach projectile points as more than just weapons, and that analysis of these objects can reveal much more about the past than simply chronology and cultural boundaries.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

ABSTRACT

En este articulo, combinará información arqueológica y etnografica para examinar la noción de que las puntas de proyectiles tenían usos sociales y simbólicos. Por mucho tiempo arqueólogos han reconocido que las puntas de proyectiles pudieron haber tenido múltiples usos, sin embargo muy pocos han examinado los usos sociales y simbólicos que estos objetos tuvieron. Este articulo incluye una examinación de documentos etnográficos principalmente del Suroeste Americano y escritos durante los siglos 19 y 20 que revelan que las puntas de proyectiles tenían una variedad de usos simbólicos y sociales. Después de una discusión de estos documentos etnográficos, presentaré datos de un análisis de más de 600 puntas de proyectiles de la región norte del suroeste Americano. Estas puntas fechan entre los años AD 900–1300. Estos datos revelan que mientras que la mayoría de puntas de proyectil fueron usadas como flechas, otras tenían usos sociales y simbólicos similares a los que se pueden ver en los documentos etnográficos. Con estos datos, deseo sostener que arqueólogos deben de percibir a las puntas de proyectil como algo más que una arma, y que un análisis de estos objetos puede revelar mas que simple cronología y fronteras culturales.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

In this article, data from the ethnographic and archaeological records are correlated to examine the proposal that some projectile points had social and symbolic functions. The idea that some projectile points had multiple functions is not new to archaeology. Archaeologists have recognized that projectile points could be used as knives while still hafted as weapon points (Irwin and Wormington, 1970; Odell and Cowan, 1986). Additionally, particular sets of projectile points have been identified as unique (some as early as the Clovis period, Wilke et al., 1991), and postulated to have ritual or ceremonial functions; projectile points that accompany burials have previously provided the best evidence of social and symbolic use (Crabtree, 1973; Fewkes, 1898; Haury, 1976; Lekson, 1997; Sassaman, 2010; Whittaker, 1987).

The ethnographic record of North America, particularly in the US Southwest, demonstrates that projectile points did indeed have multiple functions. However, archaeologists cannot simply assume that the activities documented ethnographically were practiced in the past. Therefore, over 600 stone projectile points from nine sites in the northern US Southwest, dating to the Pueblo II (PII, AD 900–1150) and Pueblo III (PIII, AD 1150–1300) time periods, were

*E-mail address:* sedig@colorado.edu

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2014.03.003
0278-4165/© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

analyzed to explore the possibility that prehistoric projectile points had functions similar to those described in the ethnographic record. Through the analysis of stone point metrics, use-life damage, provenience, and raw material, two classes of projectile points were identified: those that were used to tip arrows, and those that likely served other social or symbolic functions. Although the exact use of this second class of stone projectile points cannot be directly linked to those observed in the ethnographic record, I will present cases that suggest prehistoric projectile points were involved in activities similar to those described ethnographically, and that the use of stone points as arrow tips may be overemphasized.

## Archaeology and the study of projectile points

The term "projectile point" has been redefined by archaeologists countless times (Knecht, 1997a: 5). Most often, archaeologists classify the triangular, stone points found at sites as projectile points, functionally limited to use as spear or arrow tips (Ellis, 1997: 37; Whittaker, 1987: 467). Taken literally, "projectile point" means the point of any projectile, and can include organic or bone tips to arrows or darts, or even sharpened shafts with no attached points. This article focuses particularly on stone points. The term "stone point" will refer to objects attached to the foreshafts of arrows or darts. "Non-utilitarian points" refers to points used in symbolic, ceremonial, or ritual activities. Certainly, other types of stone tools normatively viewed as utilitarian also had symbolic, ceremonial, or ritual functions (Kaldahl, 2000), such as three large bifaces from Pueblo Bonito (Cameron, 2001; Mills, 2008), or caches of Clovis material (Lahren and Bonnichsen, 1974; Wilke et al., 1991). Such examples demonstrate that stone tools could be used is a wide variety of activities, not simply the quotidian. However, here I concentrate on the life history of stone points, so that consistent analytical methods (discussed below) could be applied to a particular type of object.

Most often, archaeologists use chronologically and regionally restricted stone point types in order to track changes in prehistoric cultures throughout time. More recently, archaeologists have explored a number of technological aspects of stone points that relate to their assumed use as arrow tips, which has included analysis of use-wear, raw material, hafting, manufacture, how often stone points break and need to be replaced, and how performance characteristics affect the discard and deposition of stone points into the archaeological record (Bleed, 1986; Ellis, 1997; Hitchcock and Bleed, 1997; Odell, 2009; Odell and Cowan, 1986; Thomas, 1978).

Little controversy exists over whether stone points were used as arrow tips (Ellis, 1997; Grinnell, 1972 [1920]; Kluckhohn et al., 1971; Whittaker, 1994). However, recent studies have revealed that archaeologists may be overemphasizing the importance of stone points as arrow tips, and underemphasizing the range of other uses these objects had. Waguespack et al. (2009) conducted an ethnographic literature survey of 59 social groups across the globe, and found that tapered arrows with no attached tips were common and, in fact, used more often than arrows with a stone tip (Waguespack et al., 2009). Waguespack et al. (2009) also performed an experiment testing the effectiveness of sharpened-shaft arrows to stone-tipped arrows, and discovered that stone-tipped arrows only penetrate 10% deeper than sharpened-shaft arrows. With such little improvement in effectiveness, along with ethnographic data, Waguespack et al. (2009: 797) stated that projectile points might have served other "social or symbolic" purposes, although they did not postulate what these purposes could be. Because of its rich ethnographic history and substantial archaeological record, the US Southwest serves as one of the best regions to examine the social or symbolic use of stone arrow tips. Below, ethnographic examples of non-utilitarian uses of stone points will be provided.

## Projectile points and the ethnographic record

Much has been written about the benefits and problems of using ethnographic data to elucidate archaeological phenomena (Ascher, 1961; Brumfiel, 2003; Galloway, 2006; Gould, 1980; Simmons, 1988; Stahl, 1993; Wunder, 2007; Wylie, 1985). Analogical inference was an important tool used during the early days of American anthropology and archaeology (Wylie, 1985). Early researchers such as Fewkes (1898, discussed below) often used ethnography and interviews with native workers to inform excavations. Such practices fell out of vogue during the twentieth century, especially during the period of New Archaeology, when "constructive suggestions were rejected out of hand on the ground that no amount of reformulation or restriction of analogical inference could establish its conclusions with the security appropriate to properly scientific research" (Wylie, 1985: 64). It is clear that archaeologists should not use ethnography uncritically. Yet, when applied appropriately, it can be a useful tool. Biased or incomplete, ethnographic documents are in some cases the only records left of native lifeways, and as Galloway (2006: 9) states, researchers must do a better job of trying to understand at least what the ethnographers saw. For this study, numerous stone point variables are examined in order to assess whether objects found in the archaeological record had similar functions to those described ethnographically.

### *Ethnographic methods*

The majority of the ethnographic information discussed below was derived from Southwest Pueblo groups (Acoma, Hopi, Isleta, Laguna, San Juan, Zia, Zuni; Table 1). Prominent anthropologists from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Table 1) produced most of the works used in this research. It was difficult to judge objectivity and accuracy because modern ethnographic methods were often not used. Thus, the ethnographic search was expanded to other groups in the US Southwest (the Navajo, Apache, O'odam), and native groups across North America. Exploring such a wide variety of ethnographic material revealed that the non-utilitarian use of stone points was not limited to Pueblo people.

Ethnographic data on stone point use was gathered from the cultural and archaeological electronic Human Relation Area Files (eHRAF), Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) reports, and scholarly databases such as JSTOR. Although thousands of ethnographies exist, very few made mention of the specific uses of stone points, especially in non-utilitarian activities. Because examples of the non-utilitarian use of projectile points are so limited, the non-Southwest ethnographies cited below appear to be randomly selected. However, this was not the case, and the examples discussed below are the best available after an exhaustive literature search.

A brief mention of object life history is warranted before a discussion of non-utilitarian use of projectile points in the ethnographic record. Most often, the ethnographic and archaeological records provide only a snapshot of a particular period of time. However, an object's exchangeability, importance, and meaning can (and often do) change throughout the object's life history (Skibo and Schiffer, 2008: 9). The social, symbolic, and utilitarian meanings and functions of an object are defined by its use in particular activities, and at particular points in time, during the object's life history (Skibo and Schiffer, 2008). The ethnographic examples below provide only a glimpse of a stone point's function at a particular time in its life history. Yet through the ethnographic record, it is possible to see the many functions a stone point might have had. In fact, several heuristic categories of stone point function were derived from the ethnographic reports examined. These categories, discussed below, include stone points used as hunting/war ritual items, in death rituals, as medicinal objects/safeguards

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1034922

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/1034922

Daneshyari.com