

Preface

As the reader will discover, weapon components constructed from hard animal materials (bone, antler, ivory, horn, and shell) were ubiquitous in ancient hunter-gatherer-fisher communities across the globe. Furthermore, these tools were not only used to obtain food and raw materials essential to everyday life but often also played a role in the social landscape of the society which produced them. Additionally, projectile points (including those manufactured from antler, bone, and ivory) have long served as indicators for identifying archaeological cultures, and so, these artifacts have come to play a central role in archaeological research.

While a tremendous volume of literature concerning Pleistocene projectile technology has been generated over the course of the past century, at the beginning of 2011, a synthesis of those components manufactured from osseous materials was lacking. This situation existed in sharp contrast to their lithic counterparts, of which a great many reviews and syntheses were available to the intrepid PhD student beginning her study of Upper Paleolithic weaponry. Being new to this area of archaeological research, the lack of a good “first port of call” made grounding oneself in the idioms and idiosyncrasies of “bone” projectile point traditions an exhausting experience. On thinking that a volume which provided an outline of the various hard animal material weaponry thus far recovered from the Pleistocene archaeological record would be very useful for both students and advanced researchers alike, and with the encouragement of colleagues, the idea for this volume was born.

The importance and relevance of this volume was reinforced during its development, which coincided with a period in modern human origins research involving intense discussion concerning the viability of the search for “behavioral modernity” and a proposed redirection in research focus to the study of early “cultural variability.” With archaeologists now turning their focus onto exploring the range of adaptations practiced at various times in the deep past, discussions rarely mentioned the vast wealth of osseous weapons technology in any detail despite their enormous potential to contribute to a great many aspects of the issues being debated. A glimpse at the substantial datasets presented and range of archaeological issues discussed in this volume demonstrates this point entirely.

The temporal span covered in the volume is as expansive as the spatial territory covered. Osseous projectile technology from the five inhabited continents is presented herein, providing the reader with a comprehensive outline of the state of the art of Pleistocene osseous projectile weapons technology from the archaeological perspective.

The book is divided into five parts. The first part offers an introduction to osseous projectile weaponry, via, first, a discussion of the importance of this technology for our understanding of past cultural variability and, second, a brief overview of Late Pleistocene osseous projectile weaponry. Analyses of archaeological projectile technologies form the bases of the chapters which follow. These chapters make up the remaining four parts of the volume, organized by geographical region: Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia and Australia, and the Americas.

While each chapter stands on its own, this volume has been organized to provide a basic background to each of the archaeological osseous techno-complexes researchers will encounter in their study of Late Pleistocene cultural variability: moving from the earliest examples in the archaeological record (in Africa) to modern human population movement across Europe and Asia and their eventual appearance in North America. Understandings of the studied weaponry are provided from various perspectives, including everything from identification of micro-traces to ethnographic analogy. It is hoped that the data presented, the methods used, and the conclusions drawn by these studies will enable nonspecialist researchers to initiate the integration of osseous technologies into the many vibrant aspects of early hunter-gatherer-fisher life currently being debated in the literature.

It has been a pleasure working with all of the people who have contributed to this volume. Special thanks go to each of the contributors for sharing their research and, most of all, for their enthusiasm for this endeavor. I am also grateful to the many colleagues who reviewed each chapter manuscript. Thanks also go to the series editors, Eric Delson and Eric Sargis, for their advice, patience, and availability throughout the generation of this volume.

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