Metal Projectile Point Survey of the Interior West: Preliminary Numbers and Directions for Future Research

Metal projectile points of the Protohistoric and early Historic periods are a somewhat rare, yet ubiquitous artifact type that has received little attention regarding prehistoric research. Their brief period of use across the interior west coincides with perhaps the most profound and rapid cultural changed experienced by native groups during the entire North American prehistory and history. A survey of 14 states across the interior west is currently underway to gather data on all available metal projectile points in an effort to better articulate their changes over time and space. Preliminary numbers from this ongoing data collection effort are presented and goals of the research are introduced.

THE SAMPLE:
- 435 points summarized in this presentation
- 590 additional points are currently being analyzed
- Not all states have been exhaustively sampled
- Large sample of burred arrows also to be incorporated

SAMPLE ACQUISITION:
- Over 600 specimens sent to museums, academic departments/preferring, failed out, others refused, sold, and returned
- 74% of these completed in response to the e-mail survey
- 24% of those contacted respond
- 37% of those who responded had metal points
- 40% of those with metal points contributed images and/or data

CONTEXT:
- A significant challenge in addressing the primary research questions is to determine the relative importance of naturally occurring phenomena versus intentional cultural modification. While metal projectile points are found in all 14 states with varying frequencies, their primary utility is to identify the possible use of metal projectile points in the region.

QUALITY:
- It is unclear at present what drives these relationships and could influence the evolution of what are now points shaped like hawks, the prowess of a point that allows for greater variety in the point itself, or the availability of both metal and tools to make them. Blacksmith trade may be more than simply along particular trails or trade routes, or some combination of these factors.

Most Common Groups of Birds and Shark-like Shapes:
- The common form of a bird is the most common category of projectile points found in the Interior West.
- The second most common shape is similar, but more common in the western states.

QUALITY TESTS:
- Classes of points:
  - Cves = classic v-shaped points
  - Cves 2 = classic v-shaped points with a pointed tip

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:
- Primary Research Questions:
  - Does morphology change over time?
  - Does morphology change over space?
- Secondary Research Questions:
  - Are there general trends in the evolution of projectile points?
  - Are there regional relationships between tool morphology and the environment?

It is felt that these secondary research questions remain open despite the existing inventory of data.

Preliminary Patterns of Spatial Distribution:
- Sample size is currently based on the center half of the study area
- Oblate ellipsoidal distribution appears to be widespread
- Differences in distribution between Pennsylvania, Montana, and the Dakotas
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