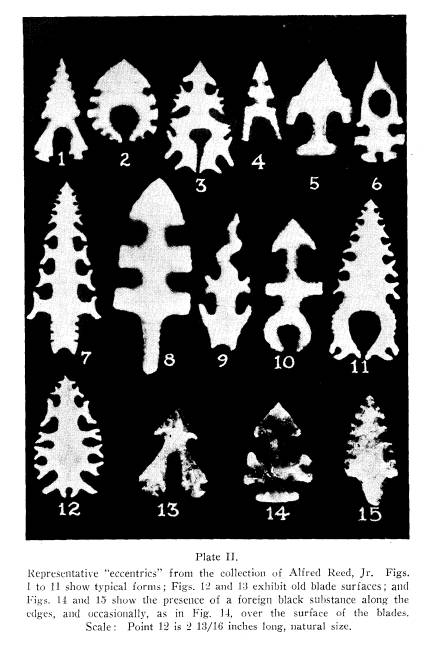
DIS-POINTS-Eccentric-OK

# Ohio History Journal

* [4](javascript:divdisplay(page4))  A STUDY OF THE OKLAHOMA ECCENTRIC FLINTS By H. HOLMES ELLIS\* Since March, 1936, when they were first called to the at- tention of the general public,7?? the Oklahoma eccentric flints have presented a puzzling archaeological phenomenon. Dr. Forrest E. Clements,1 collaborating with Mr. Alfred Reed, Jr., wrote the only satisfactory account of the find and the circumstances sur- rounding it, but due to lack of time and facilities he was unable to carry out a detailed analysis of the specimens themselves. In June, 1939, the Lithic Laboratory for the Eastern United States at the Museum of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, at the request of Dr. Clements, began this analysis, the results of which are embodied in the present paper. Before these results are presented, the history of the find itself should be reviewed briefly. In the summer of 1921, Mack Tussinger, a half-breed Indian, is said to have uncovered a cache of some 3,500 perfect and a number of broken, very intricately notched flint specimens. The cache was in a mound in the northern part of Delaware County, Oklahoma, on the north side of the Elk River about six miles above its junction with the Grand River. Tussinger claims to have sorted the specimens according to size and re-buried them in his yard. During the next few years about 800 of the smaller ones were sold to Dr. W. C. Barnard, a collector in Seneca, Missouri. Some were also sold by Tussinger to Tom Fleetwood of Wyandotte, Oklahoma. In 1931, Tussinger, seeking a wider market for his material, began to dispose of his remaining specimens through J. A. Robertson who operates a gasoline station and roadside stand near Baxter Springs, Kansas. After Robertson's appearance on the scene the \* The author is deeply indebted to H. C. Shetrone and R. G. Morgan for the assistance which they rendered during the course of this study. **??** The arabic numerals refer to corresponding numerals in **the** bibliography appended. (121) ***122*** OHIO ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL QUARTERLY   points, which were sold originally for as little as twenty-five cents apiece, jumped decidedly in price; some were reported to have brought as much as fifty dollars. Evidence seems to indicate that the first specimens sold were small, relatively simple, and all made from local material from the Peoria, Oklahoma, quarries. As has been mentioned the first points also sold for a low price. The later points were larger, more complex, of a wide variety of flint, and much higher in price. In the fall of 1936 the Oklahoma State Archaeological So- ciety became interested in the supposed find and members were taken to the site by Tussinger and Robertson. At this time a partial re-examination of the mound was undertaken and several eccentric points were found, but it could not be definitely ascer- tained that the artifacts were *in situ.* In 1937 the site was com- pletely excavated by the University of Oklahoma, Department of Anthropology, and six additional eccentrics were found. Projec- tile points and scrapers of recent Plains type were also present in the mound and "while the disturbed nature of the site made a definite conclusion impossible, it seemed likely that the Plains material underlaid the original level of the eccentrics."1 It is interesting and somewhat confusing to note that a single eccentric point of fine workmanship and striking similarity to those from the Tussinger cache was found by the University of Oklahoma field party while screening a pot-hunter's dump at the Spiro Mound on the Arkansas River in Le Flore County, Okla- homa, 150 miles south of the Delaware County find. To add to the confusion a collector from Fort Smith, Arkansas, claims to have found eleven such eccentrics accompanying a double burial in the Spiro Mound prior to the complete excavation by the University of Oklahoma. Two ear-spools and a stone pipe were also said to have been with the burials. While it is difficult to imagine how these twelve points arrived at Spiro, it is more diffi- cult to imagine that only twelve were buried in the great Temple Mound while 3,500 or more were apparently buried intrusively in an almost imperceptible mound far to the north. With this recounting of the circumstances connected with ELLIS: OKLAHOMA ECCENTRIC FLINTS 1**23**  the discovery of the eccentric cache, attention is turned to the Laboratory investigation of the actual specimens. Through Dr. Clements over two hundred of the eccentrics from the large col- lection of Alfred Reed, Jr., were placed at the disposal of the Laboratory. In addition the collections of Fred Ulrich of Galena, Kansas, and others were superficially examined. Over a thousand eccentrics were handled and an additional fifteen hundred scruti- nized by means of photographs. The two hundred representative specimens selected from the Reed collection were subjected to a detailed analysis, mega- scopically, microscopically, and chemically. In the study the fol- lowing factors were taken into consideration: the typological rela- tionship of the specimens to known aboriginal patterns; their similarity in flaking to a comparative series of artifacts of estab- lished antiquity; and the evidence of patination or discoloration attributable to age. The Oklahoma flints do not conform to any known pattern within the area of their occurrence. In fact, the only suggestion of an analogy inheres in the eccentric flint and obsidian objects from Central America reported by Thomas W. F. Gann,3 T. A. Joyce,5 J. Alden Mason,6 and others.4 The Central American specimens have been found in large quantities in the southern part of the Maya lowland region on sites of the Old Empire. They usually occur in pottery vessels buried beneath stele, altars, and the floors of temples. Through the courtesy of the University Museum, Philadelphia, the Laboratory was afforded the oppor- tunity of examining a number of flint eccentrics from Piedras Negras, Guatemala. Most of the Guatamalan flints were very heavily patinated with a crust of tripolite covering the entire specimen. The shape varies greatly and does not seem to follow any set pattern and, on the average, they appear to be larger than the Oklahoma eccentrics. As to pattern, the Oklahoma flints (Plate II.), with some exceptions, represent modifications of the typical pointed-oval and lanceolate blades and projectile points, the majority being bilaterally symmetrical. The Oklahoma speci- mens which do not conform to the general type may represent 124 OHIO ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL QUARTERLY   those accidentally broken in the process of manufacture, thus necessitating a modification of the form originally intended. On the whole, on the basis of conformity to pattern, the Oklahoma specimens suggest present-day ingenuity rather than primitive conception and execution. It must be obvious to all who are interested in archaeological frauds that, aside from actual copying, the perpetrator usually betrays himself by exaggeration and by failure to grasp the simplicity and restraint of the primi- tive artisan. The second consideration was the similarity in flaking of the Oklahoma eccentrics to a comparative series of known aboriginal artifacts. Aside from the intricate notching, the chipping ap- proximates in quality that of the average artifact of established antiquity. While the craftsman was skilled in removing minute chips from very thin edges without breaking the specimens, he was not faced with the necessity of removing long regular flakes across the face of the points. By the use of aboriginal blades, the difficult task of preliminary thinning and shaping also was avoided. Minute scale-like flakes loosely adhering to the surface were observed on 96.9% of the artifacts examined. These scales of flint are typical of freshly chipped blades, but ordinary handling, use or cache burial removes most or all of these tiny fragments. As a check, a comparison was made with several documented caches of typical Ohio flint blades. This study showed that while such scale-like flakes were present on the Ohio artifacts the fre- quency of their occurrence was extremely small. This fact tends to indicate that the Oklahoma eccentric points are of recent man- ufacture. The evidence also shows that the Oklahoma flints were re- chipped from aboriginal blades. 94.8% of the specimens ex- amined showed an old blade surface (Plate II, Figs. 12-13.); the remaining 5.2% had been completely re-chipped so that it was im- possible to tell with certainty that they were made from old blades. The fact that Tussinger, who is not an archaeological collector, has ELLIS: OKLAHOMA **ECCENTRIC** FLINTS 1**25**  been purchasing aboriginal flint blades in Illinois and Arkansas,?? makes the presence of old blade surfaces particularly significant.9 The third consideration is the evidence of patination or dis- coloration attributable to age. There are several factors to be considered in this category which furnish damaging evidence to the supposition that the specimens are prehistoric. Most signifi- cant, perhaps, is the fact that in most instances extreme edges or margins, where evidences of recent chipping would be most ob- vious, have been treated with a dark substance utterly distinct from anything pertaining to accredited specimens. (Plate II, Figs. 14-15.). The rapid loss of color with the application of a Bunsen flame and the partial dissolution in an acetone solvent leads to the conclusion that the material is organic, probably a glue, resin, or similar substance. Owing to the relatively small quanti- ties of this substance, precise chemical determinations are beyond the means of the Laboratory at the present time. In view of the admitted skill of the fabricators it is surprising that so obvious a blunder should have been made. In direct contrast to the discoloration mentioned above is the fact that there is an utter absence of the natural stain or dis- coloration within the minute fractures and beneath the flake stubs resulting from the re-chipping. Such stain or discoloration, its intensity depending on the type of soil in which the specimens have reposed, is characteristic of all old flint specimens. There are no patinated areas on the Oklahoma artifacts except on the previously mentioned old blade surfaces. During the course of this study an attempt was made to check up on the total number of eccentric points in the possession of collectors with the idea of comparing this figure with the num- ber supposed to have been found in the original cache. Approxi- mately three thousand points were located, distributed in private collections from Concord, California, to Newark, New Jersey. This figure does not include those points which still may be in Tussinger's hands. Since eccentric points have been sold to tourists for the past nine or more years it is reasonable to as- sume that several hundred are in the hands of small collectors ?? Notes in possession of the Lithic Laboratory. 126 OHIO ARCHEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL QUARTERLY   and dealers. With these facts in mind the opinion might be ventured that further search would reveal more specimens in the hands of collectors than were reported for the original cache. In this connection it may be noted that certain dealers in Kansas have been making eccentrics and Mr. Robertson took occasion to show the author two "faked" eccentrics which he claimed to have purchased from a dealer in Arkansas. Robertson, at this time, pointed out that the so-called "fakes" showed fresh chip- ping along the edges and did not have the dark stain "from age" along the margins of the points. However, it is not likely that any great numbers are being derived from other sources and it is difficult to believe that the intricate notching of the Tussinger specimens could be readily duplicated by other fabricators. In summary the evidence brought out in this paper may be briefly reviewed: The eccentric points do not conform to any known pattern; the flaking, aside from the intricate notching, is not exceptional; and loosely adhering flakes as well as the absence of stain ordinarily found under flake stubs indicate a recent origin. In view of the evidence presented and the very questionable cir- cumstances surrounding the find, the Lithic Laboratory con- cludes that the so-called "eccentric flints" of Oklahoma are of modern manufacture, re-chipped from blades of aboriginal origin, and intentionally discolored with some substance to give the edges an appearance of antiquity.

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