

3-1-1938

A Complete Atlatl Dart From Pershing County, Nevada

Robert Heizer

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nm_anthropologist

Recommended Citation

Heizer, Robert. "A Complete Atlatl Dart From Pershing County, Nevada." *New Mexico Anthropologist* 2, 4 (1937): 70-71.
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nm_anthropologist/vol2/iss4/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Anthropologist by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

A COMPLETE ATLATL DART FROM PERSHING COUNTY, NEVADA

ROBERT F. HEIZER

An unusually complete example of atlatl dart has recently come to light in Pershing County, Nevada, about eight miles northeast of the famous Lovelock Cave.¹ In view both of the rarity of complete specimens and the possibility that this one, despite its unusual features, might remain undescribed and unknown, it is presented here.

This dart is now in the University of California Museum of Anthropology as a loan piece, deposited there by its finders, Tom Derby and Tom Mackenzie, of Lovelock, Nevada, who excavated it from a commercial guano deposit. The accompanying diagram shows its stratigraphic occurrence. See Fig. 3, p. 68.

The dart is 129.5 cm. long and composed of three pieces, called here the butt, center section, and foreshaft or point. See Fig. 1, p. 68.

The *butt* is 38.0 cm. long, 12 mm. in diameter and made of cane (*Pragmites communis*). At both ends, to prevent splitting, is a red-stained sinew wrapping 10 mm. wide. At 41 mm. from the cup (or proximal) end starts a flat sinew wrapping 4 mm. wide which spirals down the butt section for 26.5 cm., making twenty-four revolutions. This sinew wrap is painted bright red and apparently served more as a decorative feature than for strengthening. Thirty mm. from the distal (not base or cup) end is a sinew seizing which holds the large bevelled end of an eagle (*Haliaeetus*) tail feather. On the opposite side is an identical feather held the same way. At four places along the midrib of the feathers are slender sinew seizings around the shaft looping around the feathers. Thus the feathers bound on after the spiralled sinew wrapping was applied. These eagle feathers are 23.5 cm. long and lie flat. They are not split or halved. The feathering is the so-called *tangential* type and not the common radial type. It is this feathering that is of interest.² At two places, held by the same lower wrapping as the main tangential feathering and between them, are tufts of four bluebird (probably *Sialia corrucooides*) feathers only 45 mm. long. They are unattached at the other end. These brilliant blue feathers were presumably a decora-

1. Loud, L. L. and Harrington, M. R., "Lovelock Cave." *Univ. of Calif. Publ. in Am. Arch. and Ethnol.*, vol. 25, pp. 1-183, 1929.

2. It is to be noted that the Gypsum Cave darts described by Harrington (*Southwest Museum Papers* 8, p. 91) have radial feathering. Kidder and Guernsey ("Archaeological Explorations in Northeastern Arizona." *BAE-B* 65, 1919, pp. 181-82, Fig. 89) note tangential feathering. Guernsey and Kidder ("Basketmaker Caves of Northeastern Arizona." *Peabody Museum Papers*, vol. 8, 1921, p. 84, pl. 34 a, b) illustrate complete atlatl darts with tangential feathering.

tive feature. The butt end is merely cut off and left open to engage the atlatl spur.

The *central section* is formed of a slender cane (*Phragmites communis*) 45 cm. long and 9 mm. in diameter. It is telescoped into the butt section and held here by the sinew wrapping mentioned above. There is no decoration.

The *foreshaft or point* is made of greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) which has been scraped and polished until its uniform diameter is 7 mm. It telescopes into the end of the cane center section. It is 57 cm. long, of which 10.5 cm. are hidden inside the cane shaftment. This inserted end has a long fine cylindrical taper. Although the tip is somewhat shattered it is too slender to conceive of as having had a stone point attached. It is merely a simple wood foreshaft with a sharpened conical point. It is unornamented.

The occurrence of cane and greasewood arrow fragments in the upper levels of other parts of the shelter would argue for the validity of the atlatl-bow sequence first proposed for this region by Harrington ("Lovelock Cave," pp. 24-28). The occurrence is definitely post-Lahonton in time; Harrington's remarks ("Lovelock Cave," p. 120) would seem to apply here in searching for the time of first occupation.

Of much interest is the occurrence of pecked petroglyphs on the smooth tufa-surfaced cliff. Various forms are shown in Fig. 2, p. 68. It is of interest to note that these petroglyphs do not extend below the level of the present deposit surface. In other words, they are post-atlatl in time and may be presumably linked with the bow culture, perhaps identifiable (although not proven as yet) in its latest phase as that of the Northern Paiute. The petroglyphs are from 8 to 15 feet above the level of the guano layer in which the atlatl dart was found.

The associated occurrence in the guano layer of a string of about 50 *Olivella biplicata* shells with the spires ground off argues for a Californian, trans-Sierran, contact at this early date.



THE KIVAS OF PAAKO AND KUAUA

Religion, which has always played a major part in the lives of the Pueblo Indians, still seems to provide an endless source for investigation in Southwestern anthropology. The kiva, which for centuries has been associated so closely with the ceremonial and religious practices of the Pueblos of the Southwest, is treated with especial care when uncovered. Until fairly recently little was known about Rio Grande kivas, since most of the previous investigations have been centered in the Jemez, Pajarito Plateau and Chama areas. The excavations of the Museum of New Mexico and the University of New Mexico at Paako