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#### **Title**

Hester, Mildner, and Spencer: *Great Basin Atlatl Studies*

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broad results indicated by the authors about social change and demography. It is unquestionable that there was nucleation of settlements in the late period, and a population increase of unknown magnitude is also present. However, such changes were general throughout the state, taking place in many regions far removed from any possible effects of Lake LeConte.

There is an unusually thorough treatment of faunal and floral remains. Over 5000 of some 21,000 bone fragments were identified, with rabbits by far the most common animals (75%), so dominant as to suggest rabbit hunting as a principal use of the Perris region. A surprisingly large amount and variety of plant seeds was recovered using flotation techniques, indicating such techniques to be a very important and under-utilized source of data for desert sites. Over a dozen plant resources are represented in the material recovered.

Linkage to the ethnographic record is quite detailed, particularly for subsistence practices. Although Perris Reservoir was not the "heartland" of any known tribe, and indeed its tribal affiliation is not clear, comparisons to Cahuilla ethnography are appropriate. The general interpretations of land use and subsistence are no doubt correct, and the overall report provides the only substantial body of data for this part of California.



*Great Basin Atlatl Studies.* T. R. Hester, M. P. Mildner, and L. Spencer. Ramona, California: Ballena Press Publications in Archaeology, Ethnology, and History No. 2,

1974. 60 pp., 5 tables, 2 pls., 19 figs. \$4.95 (paper).

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It is generally assumed that the atlatl, or spearthrower, had a wide distribution during a major portion of the prehistoric period in the New World. However, except for its persistence among widely scattered historic groups, direct evidence for its use is confined to a few regions where dry contexts contribute to the preservation of the wood from which the implement was customarily made, or where recognizable parts were made of durable materials. The Great Basin is one such area, and this publication is directed towards updating the information concerning the atlatl there.

*Great Basin Atlatl Studies* is comprised of four papers, two of which are brief notes concerning specimens which had been only briefly described previously. One of these, described by Hester, was recovered from an unidentified cave near Winnemucca Lake in Nevada. The other, described by Hester and Mildner, is also from Nevada and is proposed to have been the model for a supposed replica, reported in 1941-1942, called the Susanville (California) Atlatl. The other two papers are more extensive.

Mildner provides a summary of most if not all of the available information concerning the atlatl in the Great Basin. Included are basic descriptions of 17 known specimens, a consideration of "charmstones, pendants, and fishing weights" as possible atlatl weights, and a brief comment on the types of spurs, either integral or attached, used to engage the dart. Mildner concludes that the atlatl was probably in use prior to 6,000 B.C., but that its replacement by the bow might be dated from as early as 1,250 B.C. to as late as A.D. 1,000.

As part of a discussion concerning the evolution of the atlatl in the Great Basin, Webb's (1950:351-352) hypothesis that the

implement evolved from a wooden device with an integral hook to one with a hook which is attached is cited. Mildner concludes that this sequence does not apply to his area. There is no necessary reason to suppose that it would, since Webb was explicitly dealing with the evidence for the development of a compound atlatl form unique to the southeastern Archaic, the antecedents for which are still unrecognized. It should be noted that page reference (353 *sic*) to the Webb paper is in error.

It would be helpful if a consistent dating nomenclature were employed. For example, one paragraph (p. 20) uses "years ago," "B.P.," "B.C.," and "A.D."

Spencer describes in substantial detail an experiment in which native materials and tools were employed to duplicate a "weighted" atlatl (the original for which was dated to about 6,030 B.C.), darts, and points. In excess of 38 hours were devoted to the several tasks, though the actual time spent is of little relevance because the writer had only limited prior experience with most of the operations involved. What is of consequence are the insights gained into the properties of raw materials and the functional qualities of the flint and obsidian tools best suited to accom-

plish particular tasks. Experiments with the finished specimen, while producing useful information regarding dart breakage, would have been more meaningful had greater proficiency been gained before the actual tests were undertaken. A typographical error (p. 52) produced astounding test results when "years" was substituted for "yards." Howard (1974) might profitably be added to the experimental bibliography.

These four papers provide no substantial new insights regarding the development of the atlatl in the Great Basin, but perhaps such should not be expected given the limited corpus available for study. However, they do bring together much scattered information and in a single publication make readily available much of what can presently be stated about the atlatl in the Great Basin.

#### REFERENCES

- Howard, Calvin D.  
1974 The Atlatl: Function and Performance. *American Antiquity* 39:102-104.
- Webb, William S.  
1950 The Carlson Annis Mound. University of Kentucky Reports in Anthropology. VII (4).

