

UC Merced

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

Plainview: The Enigmatic
Paleoindian Artifact Style
of the Great Plains

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7mt5b08w>

Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 39(2)

ISSN

0191-3557

Authors

Holliday, Vance T.
Johnson, Eileen
Knudson, Ruthann
et al.

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed

REVIEWS

Plainview: The Enigmatic Paleoindian Artifact Style of the Great Plains

Vance T. Holliday, Eileen Johnson, and Ruthann Knudson (eds.)
Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2017,
Preface, 292 pp., 172 figures, 63 tables, references, index,
ISBN 9781607815747, \$70.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Richard L. Rosencrance

University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History,
University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403

Projectile point typology remains a central theme of Great Plains Paleoindian research. This 13-chapter edited volume displays this quite vividly with its focus on one of the most perplexing styles in the region—Plainview. Contributors to this work provide a comprehensive look at Plainview point morphology, its variance, and how each translates into important questions regarding Plainview people's lifeways and the cultural landscape in which they lived. Authors use a variety of datasets drawn from legacy collections, avocational surface collections, and professional excavations. This book is a great example of how envisioning and testing a techno-complex in the archaeological record is accomplished.

Chapter 1 provides the historical context of the Plainview discovery, subsequent research at the site, and new interpretations of the site's stratigraphy and bison bone-bed. Originally interpreted as a single kill event containing 100 individual bison, the authors conclude that the site is made up of at least two primary kill events, one in the spring and one in the fall, involving no less than 84 individual bison. This chapter is a wonderful introduction to the book, with an historical account of the site and the debates that have arisen from it.

Chapter 2 by Ruthann Knudson provides a detailed, technologically oriented characterization of Plainview. Using the whole of the type site lithic assemblage including finished and discarded points, bifaces in various stages of production, and flake tools, she presents a flow-chart of the Plainview production sequence. She then compares this record and her model with other projectile point assemblages that researchers have called Plainview

to assess the reliability of those assertions. This chapter is especially important to the volume for its attention to technology rather than simple morphology, unlike many of the chapters that follow.

In Chapter 3, Holliday and colleagues review the archaeological, stratigraphic, and chronometric context of all known Plainview sites. It concludes with a discussion about the morphometric similarities and differences of the Plainview, Milnesand, and San Patrice point styles, ultimately concluding they are morphologically and geographically different. The authors highlight the lack of technological studies that may ultimately connect or disconnect these cultural adaptations.

Chapter 4 provides the last foundational chapter to the book, presenting new paleoecological information from the Plainview heartland in the Llano Estacado. Placing Plainview in an ecological context, Johnson finds that this portion of the Plains saw little change in plant and animal community composition during the Younger Dryas and into the Holocene, when Plainview appears to have existed. This undermines the hypothesis that the shift from fluted to unfluted lanceolates (e.g., Plainview) was an ecological adaptation, as proposed by other authors.

The next two chapters, Chapters 5 and 6, are site-level reports and analyses of the Bull Creek and St. Mary's Hall sites, respectively. The Bull Creek site contains a small lithic assemblage that may or may not be Plainview. Based on fetal bison remains, the authors suggest the site represents a fall/winter campsite, a rarity in the southern Plains Late Paleoindian record. They propose that smaller faunal remains at the site suggests a broad diet for Plainview people, although they do not acknowledge other potential non-cultural causes for the small-bodied animals at the site. Chapter 6 provides an account of the excavation at the St. Mary's Hall type site, followed by brief descriptions of other sites in southern and central Texas containing the type. Hester concludes that the St. Mary's Hall site is indeed a geographic variant of Plainview in south Texas.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine the validity of the Belen type, another proposed Plainview geographic variant.

The first is written by a non-archaeologist who is the son of the avocationalist that named the Belen type. This chapter provides useful metric information on the primary Belen assemblages from central New Mexico, transitions into statistical definitions of Belen point metrics, and finishes with an opinion stating Plainview, Belen, and Black Rock Concave Base (BRCB) points are the same “type.” Chapter 8 resembles 7 in that it reports a large dataset of Plainview surface collections recovered by artifact collectors, but differs as it provides a concise summary of the sites and their geomorphology. As such, Chapter 8 provides significant information concerning the distribution of Plainview/Belen in its more western range at a landscape scale. The metric comparisons of Plainview and Belen show great similarity between the types, and the authors concur with Chapter 7 that Belen is a Plainview regional variant.

Chapter 9 reports excavations from the Reynolds-Truesdell site in east-central Arizona. It then compares metrics from the site and assemblages from the immediate region to others in both the southern and northern Great Plains to assess the validity of using the Plainview name. While they agree Plainview as a name fits this regional projectile point record most closely, they also show that there is a drift in the consistency of the metric data the farther away a site is from Arizona. The authors conclude the chapter with a brilliant discussion on the utility and limitations of projectile point type-names, how we should conceptualize the Plainview cultural and technological landscape, and provides insightful thoughts on the broader Late Paleoindian world of the Plains and Southwest.

Chapter 10 examines the long-proposed hypothesis that the BRCB points found throughout the Far West are Plainview variants. The authors present a reexamination of the BRCB type specimens from northwestern Nevada, the nearby Parman Localities, and various surface collections from southeastern Nevada and eastern California. Using a suite of metric data and detailed technological assessments, they conclude that BRCB (and Far Western concave base points as a whole) appear to be both morphologically and technologically different from Plainview.

Haynes and Hill (Chapter 12) use 2D metric data from their newly designed Morphometry Protocol to assess whether Plainview and Goshen types are different.

Their analyses primarily focus on a comparison of the Plainview type site and the Goshen assemblage from the Mill Iron Site. They fail to find any significant differences visually, qualitatively, or statistically between the two assemblages and ultimately argue for the abandonment of the Goshen type. Overall, this chapter is a good perspective on the affinity of Plainview and Goshen, although their strong stance on similarities is lacking technological considerations. This chapter provides a good dataset and methods to be tested and expanded in the future with more sites.

The last analysis chapter, Chapter 11, is a 2D geometric, morphometric analysis of unfluted lanceolate projectile points from the southern High Plains aimed at assessing the similarities and differences between the Plainview, Milnesand, and Lubbock point styles. The results suggest two distinct groups within their sample: Lubbock points and the group containing the Plainview and Milnesand types. As such, the authors suggest that the Milnesand type name be discarded for use of Plainview and that the use of Plainview for most unfluted lanceolate projectile forms on the southern Plains may be the best practice for lack of morphometric variation. The final chapter by the book’s editors provides a state-of-the-knowledge overview of Plainview, one that touches on important conclusions in the volume and raises questions to be addressed with future research.

My main quibble with the book is that not enough attention is given to the age of Plainview and too much attention is paid to the 2D form of the type. While the lack of reliable dates is not the fault of the contributors, the accepted age of Plainview is not the same in several chapters and limits the validity of a meaningful techno-complex and consequent archaeological interpretations. Chapter 2 provides a very thorough and useful account of Plainview technology, but most chapters ignore technological aspects in lieu of 2D morphometrics. Still, this volume sets a standard for attempting to define, understand, and explore projectile point forms as meaningful index-fossils and techno-cultural markers. It provides a much-needed view of one of the most elusive, but important, Paleoindian projectile point types in the region. *Plainview: The Enigmatic Paleoindian Artifact Style of the Great Plains* is foundational literature for Paleoindian archaeologists, especially those working in the Great Plains and neighboring regions.