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978-1-107-00698-0 - Stone Tools in the Paleolithic and Neolithic Near East: A Guide

John J. Shea

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STONE TOOLS IN THE PALEOLITHIC AND NEOLITHIC NEAR EAST

Stone Tools in the Paleolithic and Neolithic Near East: A Guide surveys the lithic record for the East Mediterranean Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan, and adjacent territories) from the earliest times to 6,500 years ago. It is intended both as an introduction to the lithic evidence for students and as a resource for researchers working with Paleolithic and Neolithic stone tool evidence. Written by a lithic analyst and flintknapper, this book systematically examines variation in technology, typology, and industries for the Lower, Middle, and Upper Paleolithic; the Epipaleolithic; and the Neolithic periods in the Near East. It is extensively illustrated with drawings of stone tools. In addition to surveying the lithic evidence, the book also considers ways in which the archaeological treatment of this evidence could be changed to make it more relevant to major issues in human origins research. A final chapter shows how changes in stone tool designs point to increasing human dependence on stone tools across the long sweep of Stone Age prehistory.

John J. Shea is Professor of Anthropology at Stony Brook University. He has conducted archaeological research at Stone Age sites in the Near East (Israel, Jordan, and Egypt) as well as in Eastern Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania). Shea is also a professional flintknapper (one who makes replicas of stone tools) and has demonstrated these and other skills involving Stone Age technologies in numerous television documentaries. He is the co-author and co-editor of several books, most recently *Out of Africa 1: The First Hominin Colonization of Eurasia* (2010). His papers have been published in *American Scientist*, *Current Anthropology*, *The Journal of Human Evolution*, *Evolutionary Anthropology*, *Paléorient*, and *The Journal of the Israel Prehistoric Society*.

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*For Glynn Isaac, Ofer Bar-Yosef, and George H. Odell, but most of all,
for Pat.*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----------------|
| <i>List of Tables, Figures, and Box</i> | <i>page</i> ix |
| <i>Preface</i> | xv |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| 2 Lithics Basics | 17 |
| 3 The Lower Paleolithic | 47 |
| 4 The Middle Paleolithic | 81 |
| 5 The Upper Paleolithic | 117 |
| 6 The Epipaleolithic | 161 |
| 7 The Neolithic | 213 |
| 8 Conclusion | 289 |
| Appendix 1. Artifact-Type Lists | 317 |
| Appendix 2. Measuring Lithic Artifacts | 334 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 347 |
| <i>Index</i> | 393 |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00698-0 - Stone Tools in the Paleolithic and Neolithic Near East: A Guide

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, AND BOX

TABLES

| | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 1.1 | Major periods of Levantine Stone Age prehistory. | <i>page</i> 7 |
| 2.1 | Essential concepts in fracture mechanics, flintknapping, and lithic analysis. | 18 |
| 2.2 | A simplified core taxonomy. | 30 |
| 3.1 | Geochronology of the Levantine Lower Paleolithic. | 49 |
| 3.2 | Criteria for identifying human agency in the production of stone artifact assemblages. | 56 |
| 3.3 | Bordes's terminology for bifaces. | 61 |
| 3.4 | Levantine Lower Paleolithic industries and representative assemblages. | 71 |
| 4.1 | Key Middle Paleolithic sites discussed in this chapter. | 83 |
| 4.2 | Geneste's typology of Middle Paleolithic débitage products. | 92 |
| 4.3 | Retouched artifact types from Bordes typology. | 96 |
| 4.4 | Concordance among various frameworks for Levantine Middle Paleolithic assemblage-groups. | 106 |
| 4.5 | Selected representative assemblages for Levantine Mousterian assemblage-groups. | 107 |
| 4.6 | Relationship between resource structure and stone tool retouch/curation. | 114 |
| 5.1 | Important Upper Paleolithic sites together with key bibliographic references. | 119 |
| 5.2 | Definitions of Upper Paleolithic endscraper types. | 132 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 5.3 | Upper Paleolithic burin types. | 134 |
| 5.4 | Upper Paleolithic chamfered pieces (<i>chanfreins</i>). | 138 |
| 5.5 | Common Upper Paleolithic retouched tools. | 143 |
| 5.6 | Chronostratigraphic frameworks for the Levantine Upper Paleolithic based on the stratigraphy of Ksar Akil. | 149 |
| 5.7 | Levantine Upper Paleolithic assemblage-groups and selected representative assemblages. | 150 |
| 6.1 | Chronostratigraphic summary of the Levantine Epipaleolithic. | 162 |
| 6.2 | Important Epipaleolithic sites and site complexes by Epipaleolithic phases. | 165 |
| 6.3 | Types of Epipaleolithic retouch/backing. | 170 |
| 6.4 | Byproducts of the microburin technique. | 174 |
| 6.5 | Epipaleolithic microliths. | 176 |
| 6.6 | Epipaleolithic geometric microliths. | 178 |
| 6.7 | Epipaleolithic projectile points. | 180 |
| 6.8 | Epipaleolithic retouched/backed blades and sickle inserts. | 181 |
| 6.9 | Occurrence of groundstone tools in Epipaleolithic assemblages. | 192 |
| 6.10 | Levantine Epipaleolithic assemblage-groups by period. | 193 |
| 6.11 | Selected archaeological contexts representing named Epipaleolithic assemblage-groups. | 194 |
| 6.12 | Occurrence of retouched tool types commonly used to differentiate Levantine Epipaleolithic assemblages. | 199 |
| 7.1 | Major Neolithic sites and sub-periods represented at them. | 217 |
| 7.2 | Chronostratigraphy for the Neolithic Period. | 220 |
| 7.3 | Neolithic core types. | 223 |
| 7.4 | Neolithic projectile point types. | 240 |
| 7.5 | Chronology of Neolithic projectile point types. | 249 |
| 7.6 | Neolithic sickle insert types. | 253 |
| 7.7 | Chronological variation among sickle inserts. | 256 |
| 7.8 | Major categories and types of Neolithic groundstone tools. | 261 |
| 7.9 | Occurrences of Neolithic groundstone tools. | 271 |
| 7.10 | Neolithic assemblage-groups and selected representative contexts. | 272 |

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, AND BOX xi

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 7.11 | Variants of Big Arrowhead Industries. | 281 |
| 7.12 | Loss of lithic diversity in late Neolithic and Post-Neolithic times. | 285 |
| 8.1 | Mean length values for bifaces from Acheulian and Acheulo-Yabrudian assemblages. | 298 |
| 8.2 | Summary statistics for variation in mean biface length for Early, Middle, and Late Acheulian, and Acheulo-Yabrudian assemblages. | 300 |
| 8.3 | Variation in width/thickness ratios for whole flakes in Tabun Cave and other sites. | 302 |
| 8.4 | Metric variation among blades from selected Levantine Late Pleistocene contexts. | 307 |
| 8.5 | Occurrences of groundstone tools in Later Pleistocene and Early Holocene contexts. | 312 |
| A1.1 | Artifact-types found in multiple periods. | 318 |
| A1.2 | Lower and Middle Paleolithic artifact-types. | 319 |
| A1.3 | Type-list for the Upper Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic Periods | 321 |
| A1.4 | Type-list for the Neolithic Period. | 328 |
| A2.1 | Indices used in LCT typology | 336 |

FIGURES

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 1.1 | Topographic features of the East Mediterranean Levant. | 9 |
| 1.2 | Ecozones of the East Mediterranean Levant. | 11 |
| 2.1 | Conchoidal fracture initiation, termination, and abrasion mechanics (bottom). | 19 |
| 2.2 | Knapping techniques. | 23 |
| 2.3 | Knapping basics. | 24 |
| 2.4 | Conventions for illustrating flaked stone artifacts. | 27 |
| 2.5 | Core landmarks. | 29 |
| 2.6 | Working edges of major core types viewed in cross section. | 31 |
| 2.7 | Flake landmarks. | 31 |
| 2.8 | Major flake types. | 33 |
| 2.9 | Retouch types. | 34 |
| 2.10 | Retouched tool types and problematical pieces. | 35 |
| 3.1 | Map showing important Lower Paleolithic sites. | 51 |

xii LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, AND BOX

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 3.2 | Major categories of Lower Paleolithic pebble-cores. | 52 |
| 3.3 | Lower Paleolithic pebble-cores. | 53 |
| 3.4 | Major categories of Lower Paleolithic large cutting tools (LCTs). | 58 |
| 3.5 | Large cutting tools. | 59 |
| 3.6 | Major biface types recognized in Bordes's typology. | 62 |
| 3.7 | Major categories of débitage related to production and curation of bifacial LCTs. | 63 |
| 3.8 | Biface resharpening flakes. | 65 |
| 3.9 | Lower Paleolithic retouched flake tools. | 67 |
| 3.10 | Pounded pieces and pounded pieces reduction model. | 69 |
| 3.11 | Chronological variation in Acheulian bifaces. | 75 |
| 3.12 | Characteristic Tayacian and Acheulo-Yabrudian retouched tools. | 77 |
| 4.1 | Map showing important Middle Paleolithic sites. | 85 |
| 4.2 | Key features of Levallois cores. | 87 |
| 4.3 | Technological variability in Levallois core technology. | 88 |
| 4.4 | Levallois points, blades, flakes, and prismatic blades. | 89 |
| 4.5 | Retouched points from Middle Paleolithic contexts. | 101 |
| 4.6 | Middle Paleolithic retouched tools. | 103 |
| 4.7 | Early Levantine Mousterian artifacts. | 109 |
| 4.8 | Interglacial Levantine Mousterian artifacts. | 111 |
| 4.9 | Later Levantine Mousterian artifacts. | 113 |
| 5.1 | Map showing important Upper Paleolithic sites. | 121 |
| 5.2 | Schematic diagram of prismatic blade core reduction. | 123 |
| 5.3 | Upper Paleolithic prismatic blade cores. | 125 |
| 5.4 | Upper Paleolithic blades and bladelets. | 127 |
| 5.5 | Upper Paleolithic blade core preparation and rejuvenation flakes. | 129 |
| 5.6 | Upper Paleolithic endscrapers. | 136 |
| 5.7 | Upper Paleolithic burins and chamfered pieces. | 137 |
| 5.8 | Upper Paleolithic retouched blades. | 139 |
| 5.9 | Upper Paleolithic points. | 141 |
| 5.10 | Miscellaneous Upper Paleolithic retouched tools. | 146 |
| 5.11 | Upper Paleolithic hammerstones and groundstone tools. | 147 |
| 5.12 | Earlier Upper Paleolithic artifacts. | 153 |
| 5.13 | Later Upper Paleolithic artifacts. | 155 |
| 6.1 | Map showing important Epipaleolithic sites. | 167 |

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, AND BOX xiii

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 6.2 | Epipaleolithic cores. | 168 |
| 6.3 | Schematic of Early Epipaleolithic narrow fronted core reduction. | 169 |
| 6.4 | Modes of retouch recognized in Epipaleolithic typology. | 171 |
| 6.5 | The microburin technique. | 173 |
| 6.6 | Epipaleolithic microliths and projectile points. | 179 |
| 6.7 | Epipaleolithic retouched tools (1 of 2). | 182 |
| 6.8 | Epipaleolithic retouched tools (2 of 2). | 183 |
| 6.9 | Epipaleolithic celts (picks, adzes, chisels, gouges). | 185 |
| 6.10 | Epipaleolithic grinding stones, handstones, mortars, and pestles. | 187 |
| 6.11 | Epipaleolithic mortars and stone bowls. | 188 |
| 6.12 | Epipaleolithic grooved stones, stone bowls, pitted stones. | 189 |
| 6.13 | Early Epipaleolithic artifacts. | 201 |
| 6.14 | Middle Epipaleolithic artifacts. | 205 |
| 6.15 | Late Epipaleolithic artifacts. | 207 |
| 7.1 | Map showing important Neolithic sites. | 219 |
| 7.2 | Neolithic cores. | 225 |
| 7.3 | Schematic of bidirectional blade core reduction. | 227 |
| 7.4 | Neolithic celt tranchet flakes. | 229 |
| 7.5 | Neolithic retouchers and pounded pieces. | 231 |
| 7.6 | Neolithic picks. | 235 |
| 7.7 | Neolithic axes. | 236 |
| 7.8 | Neolithic adzes. | 237 |
| 7.9 | Neolithic chisels. | 239 |
| 7.10 | Harifian and South Levantine Early Neolithic points. | 241 |
| 7.11 | North Levant Neolithic points. | 243 |
| 7.12 | Helwan points. | 245 |
| 7.13 | Elongated points. | 246 |
| 7.14 | Later Neolithic points and transverse arrowheads. | 247 |
| 7.15 | Neolithic knives/large projectile points. | 250 |
| 7.16 | Neolithic knives on blades. | 251 |
| 7.17 | Neolithic knives on cortical pieces, knife fragments. | 254 |
| 7.18 | Neolithic sickle inserts on blades. | 255 |
| 7.19 | Neolithic sickle inserts on flakes/flake fragments. | 257 |
| 7.20 | Neolithic retouched flake tools. | 259 |
| 7.21 | Neolithic groundstone celts/axes. | 263 |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00698-0 - Stone Tools in the Paleolithic and Neolithic Near East: A Guide

John J. Shea

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, AND BOX

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 7.22 | Neolithic pulverizing tools (1 of 2). | 264 |
| 7.23 | Neolithic pulverizing tools (2 of 2). | 265 |
| 7.24 | Neolithic polishing stones and carved stone tools. | 267 |
| 7.25 | Neolithic stone vessels. | 269 |
| 7.26 | Early Neolithic artifacts. | 275 |
| 7.27 | Middle Neolithic artifacts. | 279 |
| 7.28 | Late Neolithic artifacts. | 282 |
| 8.1. | Time chart showing lithic assemblage-groups/ industries. | 293 |
| 8.2 | Pebble-cores scaled up into large cutting tools. | 297 |
| 8.3 | Large cutting tool “split” and “sliced” into Levallois centripetal and recurrent flakes. | 301 |
| 8.4 | Platform versus inclined and parallel core reduction. | 303 |
| 8.5 | Estimates of the amounts of time needed to reproduce functionally analogous Epipaleolithic and Neolithic stone tools. | 309 |
| A2.1 | Artifact attributes template 1. | 335 |
| A2.2 | Measurements for LCTs. | 337 |
| A2.3 | Dorsal surface morphology for cortical flakes, core-trimming elements, and non-cortical flakes. | 339 |
| A2.4 | Artifact attributes template 2. | 340 |
| A2.5 | Flake morphological and technological measurements. | 341 |
| A2.6 | Measuring retouch. | 344 |

BOX

| | | |
|-----|----------------------|----|
| 2.1 | Lithic Illustration. | 25 |
|-----|----------------------|----|

PREFACE

My main goal in writing this book is to create the kind of resource that I wish had been available when I began my studies of Near Eastern prehistory. Many of those who study the prehistory of the East Mediterranean Levant (a term I use in preference to “Near East”) come to the subject because they are either from that region and/or because they harbor a specific interest in some topic to which the Levantine archaeological record is particularly germane. This was not how I ended up in Levantine prehistory.

In 1984, I arrived in graduate school planning to study the earlier phases of African prehistory with Glynn Isaac. It was a head-spinning first year because Glynn had invited a veritable pantheon of prehistorians to be scholars in residence. Among them was the Israeli archaeologist, Ofer Bar-Yosef. As a good host, Glynn insisted his students read up on Ofer’s recent research on the Middle-Upper Paleolithic Transition. After I had read one of these papers (not one by Ofer), Glynn asked me what I thought. I opined that it was the most boring paper I had read all year, and I implored him not to make me do my dissertation on the Middle-Upper Paleolithic Transition or the prehistory of the Levant.

Looking back, I recognize the value of that paper. The problem was that I had plunged into a complex debate about lithic variability without any guide to the terminology or the major interpretive issues. I knew a lot about stone tools before I started graduate school. I knew how to make them. I knew how to use them. And I knew a lot about allied aspects of “primitive” (i.e., ancestral) technology. Thanks

to Barbara Isaac, I had also learned how to draw them. The problem was that the archaeological literature about stone tools was written in a jargon that I did not understand. Glynn recognized this gap in my education and promised that we would go over formal typology the following Fall. Meanwhile, he had arranged for me to excavate at a Middle Paleolithic site in Israel and to study stone tools at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Glynn died that Fall, and so we were never able to do that lithic typology tutorial. Instead, Ofer Bar-Yosef oversaw my continued education in Paleolithic archaeology and the completion of my doctoral research at Harvard. Over the course of my studies with Ofer, I realized that there was no single, comprehensive guide to the lithic record of the Near East. Instead, the lithic evidence for each prehistoric period was organized idiosyncratically. Sometimes systematics followed European models, in other cases African ones, or ones of indigenous Levantine origins. Making sense of the lithic record for this relatively small region required me to delve deeply into the prehistory of North and East Africa, and Europe as well. This was, for me, kind of an odd errand. On the one hand, it was transparently clear that the artifact-types and industries archaeologists were using to describe the lithic record had no clear middle-range theoretical basis linking them to the important “big questions” in human origins research. That particular named stone tool types correspond to mental templates of prehistoric toolmakers or that differences among named lithic industries reflect differences among prehistoric societies would be hilarious were it not that so much of what archaeologists have written about stone tools assumes these things are true. On the other hand, if one wants to use the lithic record to answer questions of larger anthropological interest, one has to know how that evidence was organized in the archaeological literature. Thus, in the course of writing this book, I would often find myself writing about traditional lithic typology and industrial systematics in the morning and railing against them in afternoon lectures. In the end, what helped me square this particular circle was the realization that this book is as much an ethnography of what archaeologists have done with Paleolithic and Neolithic stone tools of the Near East as it is a guide to the tools themselves. If it achieves its best-hoped-for purpose, this book will be a stepping-stone. It will help students and other scholars get “up

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

to speed” on the lithic record of the prehistoric Levant so that they can make that record more relevant to major issues in prehistory and human origins research.

A preface is an opportunity to thank those who contributed to the scholarship on display in this work. For guiding my unfocused undergraduate interest toward lithic technology and the archaeology of human origins, I thank Creighton Gabel, Misia Landau, Ed Wilmsen, and James Wiseman of Boston University. Dr. Wiseman and Barbara Luedtke bent the rules a bit to allow me, then a senior, to attend a graduate-level seminar on lithic analysis at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (I am doubly grateful for this rule-bending, because I met my future wife, Patricia, at that seminar.) I thank Richard “Scotty” MacNeish and George Odell for teaching me how to do archaeology in the field and in the lab and for encouraging me to continue my education. For taking a chance on a graduate student with more than a few rough edges, I thank Glynn Isaac and Barbara Isaac. For continuing the job they started at Harvard, I thank Ofer Bar-Yosef. I also thank David Pilbeam, K. C. Chang, and Irv DeVore. I learned more from them than they thought I did at the time.

The writing of this book has profited from fruitful discussions (and arguments) with many colleagues. I thank Daniel Adler, Daniella Bar-Yosef Mayer, Anna Belfer-Cohen, Jennifer Everhart, John Fleagle, Naama Goren-Inbar, Nigel Goring-Morris, Erella Hovers, Dan Kaufman, Ian Kuijt, Dan Lieberman, Lilliane Meignen, Paul Mellars, Danny Nadel, James L. Phillips, Avraham Ronen, Steven Rosen, Alan Simmons, Mathew Sisk, and Katheryn Twiss. In naming them, I hasten to add that in no way are they responsible for any of the opinions expressed herein or any errors.

For general encouragement along the way I thank Nancy Franklin. Above all, I thank my wife, Patricia Crawford.

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