

FOREWORD

Many years have passed and much new information has been recovered since 1952 when I first encountered microblade technology. I was part of a group of students working for the University of British Columbia under the direction of Dr. Charles E. Borden in the soon to be flooded reservoir for the Alcan power plant in the remote wilderness of Tweedsmuir Park in central British Columbia. We were excavating a house site (FaSu-19) on Natalkuz Lake and found a number of small obsidian blades that we called lamellar flakes. Upon further excavation we found a conical obsidian core in the central firepit of the house that was later radiocarbon dated to about 2400 BP. Borden, who had worked on Hamburgian sites in Germany as a high school student, and had excavated similar blades but no cores from sites near the mouth of the Fraser River, recognized these flakes and the core as products of a prepared core and blade technology now referred to universally as a microblade industry. This experience enabled me, while analyzing artifact assemblages from sites in the San Juan Islands in adjacent Washington State a year later, to recognize not only obsidian microblades, but microblades and cores of quartz crystal like those, as I learned later, are also found in the Dorset culture far away in the eastern Arctic. Microblades soon began to show up in many coastal and interior sites in British Columbia and Washington.

For many years following N.C. Nelson's 1937 initial identification of a microblade industry in Alaska and his comparison with similar artifacts from the Gobi Desert, there remained great gaps

in the known occurrence of this technology. The main reason was that little archaeology had been undertaken in intermediate regions. These gaps have gradually been filled. Several years ago Yuri A. Mochanov, while showing me his field notebook, relived the great excitement he experienced when he discovered the first "Gobi" core in the Soviet Far East that eventually led to his formulation of the Dyuktai culture that occupies much of the region between the Gobi Desert and Alaska. The archaeology explosion throughout the north in both Asia and America in the 1960s and 1970s soon revealed the microblade industry as the dominant lithic technology at or near the bottom of the cultural sequence in previously glaciated regions from Norway through Siberia, Alaska, and the Canadian Arctic, and even earlier in Japan, Korea, and northern China. It was clearly part of the microlithic revolution that began in the late Palaeolithic and typifies the Mesolithic in much of the world. J. Louis Giddings' 1967 *Ancient Men of the Arctic* brought together much of the Arctic material, and in 1969 Charles Borden in *Early Population movements from Asia into western North America* worked out the time transgressive distribution of microblade technology from Healy Lake in Alaska south to the Fraser delta in British Columbia. Richard E. Morlan's studies of microblade technology in both Japan and Canada and Chester E. Chard's 1974 *North-east Asia in Prehistory* brought the Japanese and Siberian data to the attention of North American archaeologists, and various formulations of a microblade tradition stretching from Siberia

to Alaska and thence south as far as the lower Columbia River in Washington were published. Attempts at correlation with ethnic and environmental variables were also attempted of which Donald E. Dumond's suggested introduction of microblade technology into North America by the ancestors of the Na-Dene speakers remains the most widely accepted. The use of microblades as inserts in slotted bone points is well attested to in both Alaska and Siberia, and their use as knives in wooden hafts is demonstrated by Dale Croes' discoveries at the Hoko River waterlogged site on the coast of Washington. Attempts at correlation of microblade distributions with environmental variables such as temperature or ranges of certain animal species have been tried, but none have proven particularly convincing.

It is gratifying to see the continued interest in microblade technology in all its aspects by the

younger generation of scholars who have authored most of the papers in this volume. Knowledge of microblade industries in both Northeast Asia and northwestern North America is brought up to date and questions regarding origins, ethnic identification, production techniques, use, and other issues of interest to the cultural historian are highlighted. Archaeology Press is very pleased to make these studies available. The decision of the volume editors to dedicate this monograph to the late Dick Morlan of the Archaeological Survey of Canada is very appropriate in view of his pioneering influential classification and study of microblade technology.

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