

To the Point

Thebes

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This large thick point type was named for the town of Thebes, Illinois. Originally called Cache Diagonal Notched and included in a Thebes Cluster (Winters 1967:Figure 3a–b), the name Thebes was adopted for the type soon after (Luchterhand 1970; Perino 1971).

Description

Thebes is a medium (resharpened) to large (unresharpened) side-to-corner-notched point. It ranges in length from 59 to 98 mm with a mean of 78.5 mm (Luchterhand 1970:Table 5). Notches are generally oriented slightly diagonal to the midline, although some qualify as side notches. The notches are typically wide (7–12 mm) and deep (8–14 mm). The end of the notch is generally the widest part. The notch terminus typically is rounded or squared, but sometimes it bifurcates into a unique shape that has been characterized as a “keyhole,” “Figure 3,” or “E” shape (Justice 1987:Figure 12a; O’Brien and Wood 1998:133; Perino 1971:96). The stem (range: 32–43 mm; mean: 37.5 mm) is typically massive and expands rapidly. The edges of the stem vary from slightly squared to rounded. The base is often straight but may be slightly concave or slightly convex. The edges of the stem and base are usually moderately to heavily ground. Multiple vertical pressure flakes were typically removed from the base prior to grinding.

Blades are wide and massive. Blade edges vary from excurvate on unresharpened specimens, to straight on resharpended specimens, and slightly recurved on extensively resharpended specimens. Thebes points that are corner notched have long or short barbs that are rounded (unresharpened) to pointed (resharpened), whereas those that are side notched have straight prominent shoulders. Maximum width (range: 40–54 mm; mean: 47.3 mm) on unresharpened points is typically at the end of the barbs, shoulders, or the proximal portion of the blade. The stem may be slightly wider than the blade only on extensively resharpended specimens. Cross section is flattened or tabular with alternate bevels. Maximum thickness (range: 8.4–10.6 mm; mean: 9.5 mm) (Luchterhand 1970:Table 5) is generally at the blade-stem juncture or along the proximal portion of the blade. The middle portions of the blade exhibit large percussion scars that often extend two-thirds or more of the width of the blade, whereas the blade edges were finished by controlled pressure flaking. Resharpened Thebes points

invariably have steep bevels on the left side of the blade. The blade edges also are occasionally serrated.

Heat Treatment

Heat treatment was not part of the technology of manufacturing Thebes points (Morrow 1984:70).

Distribution

Thebes points are found in southeast Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Missouri. In Missouri, they are found primarily in the greater St. Louis area and the northeast, especially along the Mississippi River. They are very rare in the Ozarks portion of southern Missouri.

Age

Thebes points were associated with a horizon dated ca. 9400–9100 rcybp (7450–7150 B.C.) at the Twin Ditch site in western Illinois (Morrow 1996:347). One Thebes point (Klippel 1971:Figure 13f) was recovered from Zone IV of Graham Cave, which yielded three radiocarbon ages

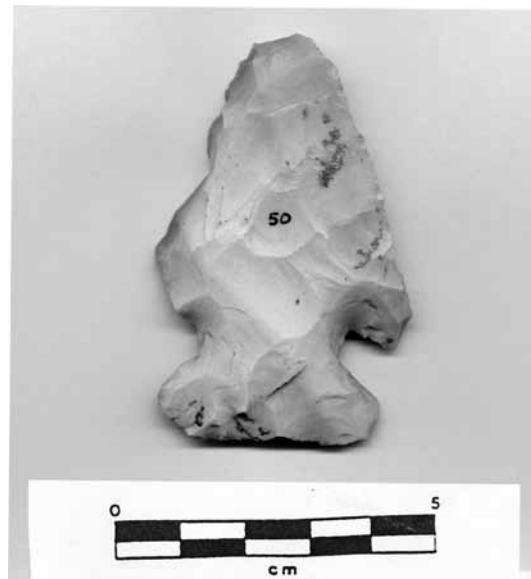


Figure 1. Thebes point from 23SCI011. Photo courtesy of Richard Martens.



Figure 2. Thebes points from Indiana (l to r): 12LR400, 23LR401, Orange County, and 23LRI134. Drawings by Linda Ellis, artifacts from the collection of Bill Meadows.

between 9700 ± 500 rcybp (7750 ± 500 B.C.) and 9290 ± 300 rcybp (7340 ± 300 B.C.) (Klippel 1971:27, Figure 9). We suggest an age range of approximately 9500–9000 rcybp (7500–7000 B.C.) for Thebes points.

Comments

Thebes points, St. Charles points, and Lost Lake points (Cambron and Hulse 1975:83; Perino 1968:50) share attributes that are similar technologically, and at least Thebes and St. Charles points appear to be contemporaneous (Klippel 1971:27, Figure 9; Morrow 1996:347). Therefore, all three point types are often included in a Thebes Cluster (Justice 1987:54–59). Lost Lake points differ from Thebes points in that the notches always emanate from the corners of an oval preform and arc upward toward the distal end. As a result, barbs are longer and the sides of the stem are incurvate on Lost Lake points. St. Charles points differ from Thebes in that the base is less massive, narrower, never squared, and strongly convex, giving it an anchor-like shape. St. Charles points appear to have the widest distribution of the three points in the Thebes Cluster (Justice 1987:Maps 19–21), whereas Thebes points appear to be restricted to the northern portion of that range and Lost Lake points are more common south of the Ohio River valley.

The massive size of Thebes points and reworking aspects have led some to suggest that Thebes points were used primarily as cutting tools or knives (Morrow 1984:70; Perino 1971:96). It is possible that Thebes and Lost Lake are regional knife forms, whereas St. Charles served primarily as projectile points. Detailed micro-wear studies could help clarify the matter.

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