

RESEARCH ADVANCE

AN ARCHAIC PERIOD STEMMED AND BARBED POINT FROM TENAM PUENTE, CHIAPAS, MEXICO

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Figure 1. Map showing the location of Tenam Puente and selected sites mentioned in the text. Drafted by Elizabeth Paris from base map by Wikimedia Commons (commons.wikimedia.org).

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ABSTRACT. Here we report the discovery of an Archaic period stemmed and barbed point from the site of Tenam Puente, Chiapas, Mexico. The point was discovered in the rubble fill used to modify a large Late Classic to Early Postclassic period plaza. The point bears a strong resemblance to Lowe points (12000–9300 CalBP) recovered from Belize, and Pedernales-style points discovered elsewhere in Mesoamerica (8700 CalBP). It is the second point of this style identified from highland Chiapas to date.

KEYWORDS. Mesoamerica; Archaic; projectile point; lithic; Chiapas.

RESUMEN. El artículo reporta el hallazgo de una punta de proyectil del periodo Arcaico, con pedúnculo y aletas, del sitio arqueológico Tenam Puente, Chiapas, México. La punta se ubicó en el relleno de cantos de piedra caliza utilizados para modificar una gran plaza del periodo de transición entre el Clásico Tardío y el Posclásico Temprano. La forma de la punta de proyectil es muy parecida a las puntas Lowe (12000–9300 CalBP) halladas en Belice y a las puntas de estilo Pedernales localizadas en otras partes de Mesoamérica (8700 CalBP). Es la segunda punta de este estilo encontrada en los Altos de Chiapas hasta la fecha.

PALABRAS CLAVE. Mesoamérica; Arcaico; punta de proyectil; lítica; Chiapas.

TO DATE, ONLY ONE ARCHAIC PERIOD STEMMED AND barbed point has been reported from Chiapas. Here, we report a second example from the site of Tenam Puente, a Late Classic to Early Postclassic period monumental center on the southeast edge of the Comitán Plateau in the eastern Chiapas highlands (Figure 1). The point was recovered in secondary context, from within the top layers of a cobble fill used to create a broad, flat, open plaza space at the end of the Late Classic period (Plaza F), excavated by the *Redes Económicas de Tenam Puente* project, directed by the authors, during the 2019 field season. The point was recovered from the plaza fill immediately adjacent to the balustrade of the central staircase of the site's Acropolis. Due to the presence of round river cobbles in the deposit, we hypothesize that the cobbles from the fill were mined by the Late Classic occupants from one of the seasonal streambeds and exposed bedrock outcrops near the monumental zone, and that the primary context of the point was in close proximity to the monumental zone's location.

The point is characterized by a triangular form, square shoulders, and a short, broad, expanding stem with rounded ears and a concave stem base (Figure 2). It is broken in several locations, in antiquity (across the midsection and at the tip of one ear) and recently (across one shoulder). The point is very heavily patinated, although the original material, dark gray chert, is visible in one, small, recently broken section.

The Tenam Puente point resembles Lowe points from Belize. To date, 85 stemmed and barbed Archaic period points have been identified at sites across Belize

(Beach and Luzzadder-Beach 2004; Iceland 1997; McAnany *et al.* 2004; Kelly 1993; Prufer *et al.* 2019; Pohl *et al.* 1996; Stemp and Awe 2013; Stemp *et al.* 2016a, b; Valdez and Aylesworth 2005). The Lowe complex includes Lowe points (N=57) and Sawmill points (N=22), in addition to Allspice (N=4) and Ya'axche' (N=2) points (Prufer *et al.* 2019). The Tenam Puente point is stylistically more similar to Lowe points, which are "characterized by broad shoulders, often with sharply defined barbs; wide stems that are square or slightly expanding; and, occasionally, sub-parallel oblique flaking on their blades" (Lohse *et al.* 2006:217), with barb angles between 45 and 65 degrees and alternate-opposite bevel flaking on left edges (Kelly 1993: 210; Stemp and Awe 2013:20). The point style contrasts with those from later periods such as Sawmill and Allspice (Stemp *et al.* 2016b), which are generally more narrow with thinner stems. However, the Tenam Puente point has more deliberately rounded ears, an expanding stem, and a well-defined basal concavity compared to many of the Lowe points and Ya'axche' points from Belize (Prufer *et al.* 2019: Figure 2; Stemp *et al.* 2016b: Figure 2). Lowe points were originally dated to the Paleoindian period (11000–8000 BP; MacNeish and Nelken-Terner 1983), then to the Late Archaic (4500–3900 BP; Kelly 1993), and most recently to the Late Pleistocene-Early Holocene transition (12000–9300 CalBP; Prufer *et al.* 2019).

In highland Chiapas, a small number of Archaic period sites have been identified in association with some of the larger intermountain valleys. At least one Archaic period site has been identified in the Jovel Val-

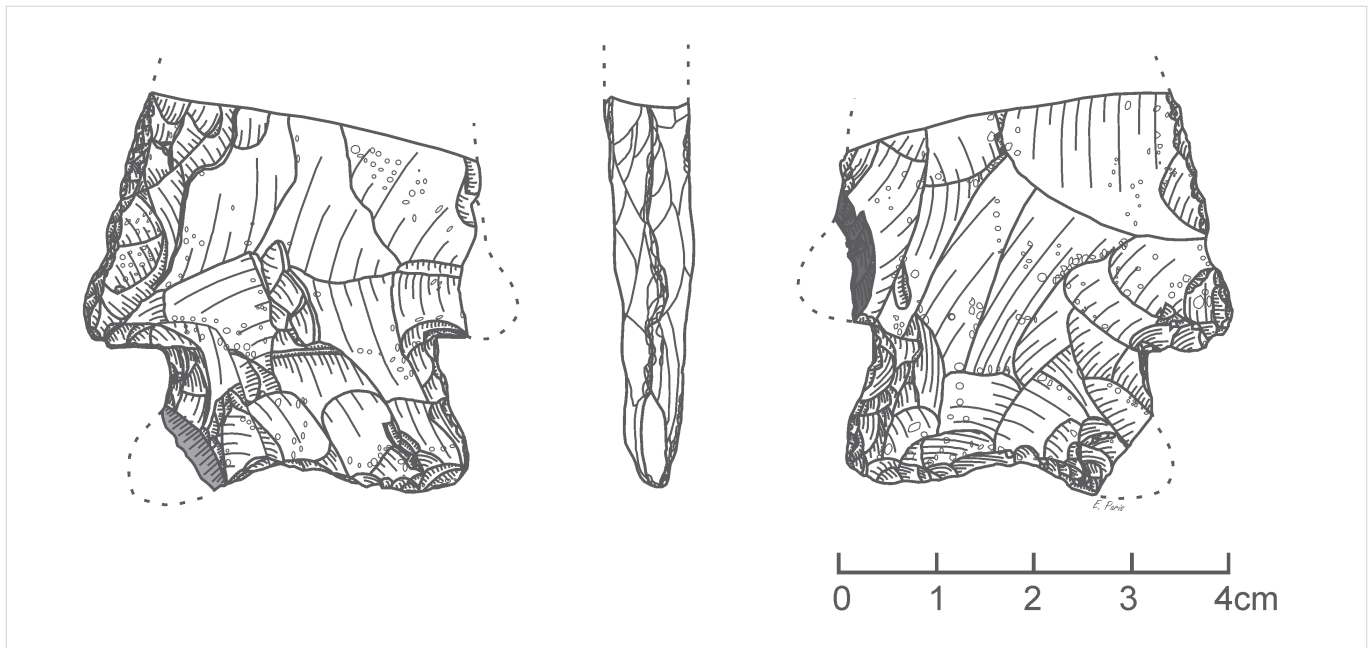


Figure 2. Archaic period stemmed and barbed point from Tenam Puente. Light gray indicates a break in antiquity, while dark gray indicates a modern break. Illustrated by Elizabeth Paris for the *Redes Económicas de Tenam Puente* project.

ley (Lee 1985), with others documented in the Teopisca Valley, and Aguacatenango (Lorenzo 1977). A projectile point bearing a strong similarity to the Tenam Puente example was recovered in the urban center of San Cristóbal de las Casas; it was found on the ground surface near the corner of Calle Niños Héroe and Calle Miguel Hidalgo, near the *Teléfonos de México* building (Sc-12; Lee 1985). Although the two points can be considered the same type, some small differences exist in the width and angle of the stem and its basal concavity; additionally, the left lateral margin of the Jovel Valley example appears to have been steeply retouched, similar to the Lowe points from Belize (e.g. Kelly 1993; Stemp *et al.* 2016b). Lee (1985) also reports three other Archaic period projectile points from this surface collection, each representing a different style: a lanceolate, Clovis-like point; a smaller stemmed and barbed point with a narrow, tapering stem; and a small stemmed and barbed point with a square stem, which resembles a smaller version of some Lowe complex points. A possible stemmed and barbed point from Toniná could represent an additional example; it was recovered from a mixed Late Classic–Early Postclassic context, and was classified by the study authors as an Early Postclassic point (Becquelin and Baudez 1982:940, Figure 205c).

The Tenam Puente point is part of a growing corpus of Archaic period stemmed and barbed points in southern Mesoamerica that show broad stylistic connections

across multiple regions. Outside of Belize, where projectile point typologies have been revised (Iceland 1997; Kelly 1993; Lohse *et al.* 2006; Stemp *et al.* 2016b), triangular points with eared stems are generally reported as “Pedernales-style”, referencing a similar point style from central Texas that was adopted for the Tehuacan Valley (MacNeish *et al.* 1967; cf. Pertulla 2009). Pedernales-style points have also been identified at sites in Oaxaca, including Guila Naquitz Cave (Flannery 1986) and Cueva Blanca (Flannery and Spores 1983) in the Valley of Oaxaca, and the sites of Barrio Tepelcate in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and Xaagá near Mitla (Winter 2007:196). Other Pedernales-style points have been reported as far west as Cueva de los Portales in Michoacan (Faugère 2006), and as far east as El Gigante Rockshelter in Honduras (Scheffler *et al.* 2012:603). An example from the Xihuatotla Rockshelter in the Central Balsas region of Guerrero, found in well-dated stratigraphic context, dates to 8700 CalBP (Ranere *et al.* 2009: Figure 5a). Radiocarbon dates from the Santa Marta Cave and the Los Grifos Rockshelter in the Central Depression of Chiapas, mark the Late Pleistocene–Early Holocene between 10460 ± 50 and 8800 ± 100 CalBP (Acosta 2010; Pérez and Acosta 2018); the Tenam Puente stemmed and barbed point likely also dates to this transition period.

Similarities in Archaic period point styles in southern Mesoamerica may reflect the demands of flexible

and mobile hunting strategies in highland valleys. Previous studies associate this period with significant climatological and ecological changes, with accompanying shifts in the hunting and foraging strategies of ancient populations in conjunction with a transition to agricultural subsistence (Flannery 1986; Kennett *et al.* 2010; MacNeish *et al.* 1967; MacNeish and Nelken-Turner 1983; Ranere *et al.* 2009; Voorhies 2004). Stemp *et al.* (2016b) have recently argued that Lowe points from Belize may represent multipurpose dart point/knives, where the removable foreshafts doubled as knives for cutting and sawing tasks, minimizing the number of formal tools needed in mobile hunting toolkits (Stemp *et al.* 2016b:294). The discovery of Archaic period points at sites in highland Chiapas suggests this region was not necessarily marginal, and may have been occupied and exploited more intensively than previously thought. These sites may have proved

archaeologically elusive partly due to mining of previous campsite areas for architectural fill materials by later populations, the scarce number of research projects dedicated to the Archaic period, and the recent destruction of possible Archaic sites due to population and urban growth.

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