

The Functionality of weaponry: a comparison between the indigenous Tongva from the west coast of North America and the Mayan peoples of the Yucatan Peninsula Southern Mexico.

Aims.

- Develop an understanding of what a weapon is from a non-Eurocentric perspective
- Identify the most common types of weapons for each indigenous group.
- Ascertain the uses of a weapon (i.e Warring; Rituals; Status Symbols; sport)
- Comparing and contrasting of the similarities of the weapons such as: materials, design, and types of weapons (i.e. bows; clubs; axes; spears; etc)
- Evaluate the similarities and differences between the two indigenous groups

Anticipated results

The likely anticipated outcome for this research is that both groups will use weapons for symbolism and conflict, that these weapons will greatly vary within their own cultures, and the materials for this weapon vary also. The Materials, type of weapons, use of the weapons, and relationship with their weapons will be very different. It is also anticipated that there will be some similarities, as trade networks across modern day Mexico and the West coast of North America must have been affluent.

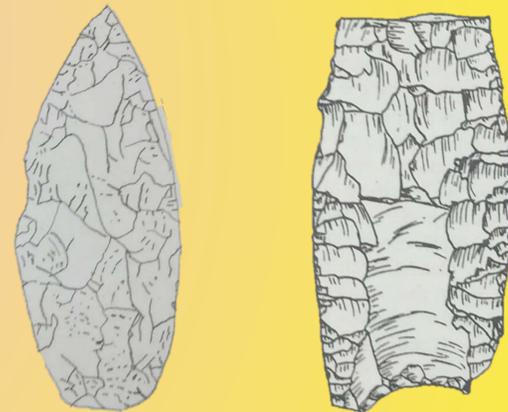
Context

The Indigenous Tongva peoples originally resided on the West Coast of North America where Los Angeles precedes today. The Tongva formed part of a greater community of Indigenous peoples running down the entire California coast. These groups have a relatively long record of occupation extending back 9000 – 11000 years (Erlandson 1994, 41).

The Maya's origins also lay as Hunter-gatherers. Field sketch 2 shows the San Rafael projectile point believed to be the earliest artefact of the maya (Coe 1999, 43). The first signs of complex Mayan settlements first occur from 3000 to 2000 BC with the first agricultural villages. These would develop into great city states and kingdoms by the classical period in 250 AD (Traxler 2016, 4).



Map showing the locations the two indigenous peoples inhabited and where the proposed research will be undertaken. Edited map taken from The University of Texas at Austin, 2018.



Field Sketch 1. Obsidian Uniface, Los Tapiales, Tontonicapan.(By Author)



Field Sketch 2. San Rafael projectile point. Fluting shows where it was originally attached to the shaft, remarkably similar to points from United States and Guatemala. Site excavations show butchering marks for both mastodons and horses in relation to these blades. (5.7cm) (By Author)



Figure 6. Vase, with figure of an eagle knight holding a spear and shield. AD 1000 – 1500, taken from (Anton 1970).

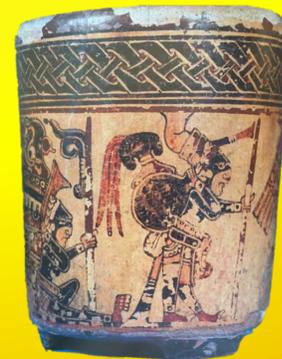


Figure 7. Polychrome vase. A group of travellers, priests on a pilgrimage or merchants, AD 600-1000. Taken from (Anton 1970)

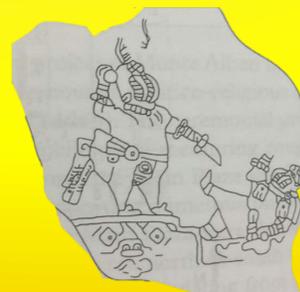


Figure 8. Dainzu ballplayers shows blade use. Taken from (Henton 2004)

What is a weapon?

According to the Oxford Dictionary a weapon is 'a thing designed or used for inflicting bodily harm or physical damage'. This research revealed that this definition fails to encompass items that, although we today might class as a weapon, were used within their own civilisations for very different purposes. This is shown in the Mayan ball player (figure 1) and Gaan dancer (figure 2).

What were the most common types of weapon?

Both the Maya and Tongva Indians used similar weapons. For instance Figure 3 from the Tongva region of North America shows a similar fluted point style as the Maya example (Field Sketch 2). Both societies use spears; bows and blades for both hunting and warring, but also for rituals; sports; and status symbols. This is especially true for ritual killing by the Maya, shown in figure 4. The Maya also used a greater host of weapons, such as sling shots (figure 5) and atlatl spear thrower.

What were these weapons made from?

Both the Tongva and Maya used flint extensively to construct their arrowheads and spearheads, although the type of wood they were attached to varies through regions. Maya also extensively used obsidian. Shaped stone obsidian tipped weapons were often seen as status symbols, as shown in field sketch 1 and figure 6 of an elite eagle knight. Obsidian blades are still found on Indigenous North American sites, however they are far less frequent.

Evaluation of similarities and differences between the two indigenous groups use of weapons.

While looking at these two groups many similarities have arisen in their respective use of weapons, such as use of spears as a status symbol as well as in religion, war and hunting. Bows and daggers also had spiritual use, such as how the Tongva greatly ornate many of their daggers. The differences however between the two groups is stark and apparent, as shown in figure 8. The Maya used daggers and axes in sport and for ceremonial use, as well as certain spears reserved for elite priests (figure 7).

Conclusion

In a modern world it is very easy to label an item as a weapon and assume their use and function lays solely in killing and maiming other people and animals. However this research has come to understand that the use of a weapon solely for the act of harm is not reflected in these societies. Both the Maya and Tongva approach weapons very differently, using them for a range of activities. While the Tongva may seem to have a less varied use of weapons, this may be solely down to the limitations of the archaeological record, as the Maya recorded far more details about their daily lives.



Figure 1. Standing Ball player, solid clay. Carrying The *yugo* (yoke) and *hacha* (ceremonial axe) believed to refer to his manhood. AD 700 – 1000, taken from (Anton 1970).



Figure 2. Western North American Gaan dancer displaying his ceremonial outfit and weapons. Taken from (Johnson 2013,29).



Figure 5. Standing figure of a young soldier. Solid clay, traces of original paint. The figure has the scars of tattooing on cheeks and forehead, the fashionable deformed skull and artificially extended nose, and carries a rectangular shield and a slingshot. From (Anton 1970)



Figure 4 Priest wearing death mask, in the act of beheading a prisoner. AD 700- 1000, taken from (Anton 1970)

Select Bibliography

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