

*Published in Current Anthropology, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 619-21 (1979). This contribution reflects my long standing interest in archaeological terminology. The term "Lithic," originally introduced by Willey, was not established in the literature as I thought would be and did not replace "Paleo-Indian."*

## **On Terminology and Eastern United States Prehistory**

**By B. K. Swartz, Jr. from [selected writings](#)**

After reading Stoltman's article and the comments on it (CA 1978:19:703-46), I believe that a crucial point has not been considered. It is unfortunate that only 9 of 50 solicited scholars responded, perhaps narrowing the range of comment.

Eastern United States archaeology is blessed by not having over elaborated developmental terms. This is what Stoltman is now proposing. Such terminology has two serious drawbacks: (1) it presupposes that the archaeological variation of a region is completely known, and (2) it implies evolutionary value judgments on the units named. What if a pre-projectile-point horizon (Krieger 1964:42-51) is demonstrated? Shall we place it in the "Eo-Indian" era? What do we call something transitional between Transition II and Neo-Indian Developmental--"Transitional A-Transitional II"? Is it fair to say that Hopewell ceremonialism "developed" rather than "flowered"? These things happen; for example, we have Aurignacian "0" (de Sonneville-Bordes 1960). I am also amused at the "search" for Basketmaker I in the Southwest and the Lower Mississippian phase in the Lower Mississippi Valley (one we didn't avoid even though it was to be a formal taxon).

It must be confessed that I am not totally innocent of developmental terms. The term "Intermediate" stage (quotes originally mine) is proposed from Indiana data for 1500 to 800 B.C. (Swartz 1966; 1973:13-16). However, it is *provisional*, and it coincides with Stoltman's late Transitional II.

It is interesting that neither Stoltman, though he uses Old World evidence, nor the commentators mention where the greatest abuse of formal terminology occurs. This is in Africa. The Goodwin (1928) sequence of Earlier Stone Age, Middle Stone Age, and Later Stone Age is in full use at the present time. I was asked to remove the quotation marks from the term "Age" in the title of an article that was published in an African archaeological journal.

I used to agree with Brew (1946:65) that more--not fewer--classifications of archaeological data are needed, but I would now say that we should better use and adapt existing classifications. The major contribution of Stoltman's study, excluding the useful synthesis of data, is the well-stated and well-analyzed distinction between formal and

chronological classification. Griffin's traditional terms can be used, however, for both formal and chronological types of classification. If an archaeologist wishes to use arbitrary temporal units, they can be rendered as, for example, "8000-6000 B.C."; if he wishes to use natural temporal units, they should be formulated by paleoclimatologists, not archaeologists--for example, "Hypsithermal"; and if he wishes to use cultural temporal units he can specify them, for example, "Early Archaic period." If he wishes to use a culturally identified formal unit with spatiotemporal limits, it can be called the "Early Archaic (stage)."

Table 1 illustrates the adaptability of Griffin's terms. There is one violation; Willey's (Willey and Phillips 1958:79-103) term "Lithic" displaces "Paleo-Indian." The latter differs from the other terms in that (1) it refers to a population and (2) it includes temporal judgments. The substituted term "Lithic" also has problems; for example, Archaic is lithic too, in the sense of being aceramic. However, Lithic is well established in the literature and generally understood by North American archaeologists. In turn, the Lithic era can be subdivided into three periods. The Early Lithic period is conjectural, as no satisfactorily dated finds have been established. Many direct flaked stone objects, including most of Krieger's pre-projectile-point horizon materials, are attributed by some to this early period, which would extend at least into the Sangamon Inter-glacial. The Middle Lithic period is still "pre-'projectile'-point" ("pre-point" is a better term, since the Late Lithic may include lance, rather than javelin, points), but indirect and prepared-core flaked tools occur. In the Late Lithic, ca. 12,000 B.C. in the Plains and Southwest, fluted points become widespread.

No specific comments were made on Stoltman's historical summary of archaeological classification. I am inclined to agree with Brown that the history of archaeological classification in the Old World is but slightly related to current Eastern North American problems. A history of archaeological classification in North America would have been more appropriate, and such a survey is needed. A comparison of the McKern system with the 1927 Pecos Conference and Central California classifications (Heizer and Fenenga 1939) would be illuminating.

Daniel (1943) has intimately identified Christian J. Thomsen with the Three Age system in the development of European archaeology. I think this is simplistic. There is nothing extraordinary about such a concept; for example, the Roman Lucretius (93-53 B.C.) proposes the idea in *De Rerum Natura*. Thomsen probably got the idea for Denmark from L. S. Vedel Simonsen, a Swedish-born Danish historian, who proposed it in 1813 (Lowie 1937:21). Though he did arrange displays at the Danish National Museum into the three "age rooms," these were only the basic divisions; within them, he grouped material by style and other criteria. Thomsen's intellectual accomplishment was that he may have established the first effectively ordered prehistoric archaeological regional sequence. Stoltman states (p. 704), "To Childe goes the credit for forcefully pointing out these limitations of the Three Age system." As can be seen in Stoltman's following quotation,

Childe is describing the post-Lubbock Four Age system. The specific ages are located on the last line of the paragraph in Childe (1935:7), not quoted. Also, it should be added that de Mortillet's "industrial" epoch terms were derived not from faunal periods he devised, but from ones proposed by Edouard Lartet in 1863.

"Era," "period," "epoch," and "age" do not exhaust the repertoire of geological time terms. "Eon" is another. De Mortillet used the term "Time." I suppose it would not be over illuminating, however, to speak of Stoltman's temporal sequence as occurring in the Phanerartic eon of Prehistoric time.

It is unfortunate that the editors did not see fit to list citations by sites shown on the maps. Stoltman makes no pretense that his survey of the Eastern United States is comprehensive, but viewing things from Indiana, certainly New Castle (Swartz 1976) and, though only cursorily published at present, the extraordinary Mann site (Kellar 1978) should have been included in figure 6 if the multicomponent Goodall mishmash is.

TABLE 1

## EASTERN UNITED STATES CULTURE HISTORY BASED ON ADAPTED TRADITIONAL TERMINOLOGY

CULTURAL TEMPORAL UNITS <sup>a</sup>		CULTURAL FORMAL UNITS		CULTURE CONTENT TAXA
Woodland-Mississippian era 1000 B.C.-contact	Final period A. D. 900-contact	Middle Woodland and Mississippian traditions	Late Woodland/ Mississippian stage <sup>b</sup> Middle Woodland	Upper Mississippian
	Late period A.D. 400-900			Upper Woodland
Archaic era 8000-4000 B.C.	Middle Woodland stage 200 B.C.-A.D. 400	Archaic tradition	Late Archaic stage Middle Archaic stage Early Archaic stage	Middle Mississippian
	Early period 1000-200 B.C.			Upper?
	Late Archaic period 4000-1000 B.C.			Archaic Middle?
Lithic era -8000 B.C.	Middle Archaic period 6000-4000 B.C.	Lithic tradition	Plano stage Llano stage	Lower?
	Early Archaic period 8000-6000 B.C.			
	Late Lithic period 12,000-8000 B.C.			
	Middle Lithic period 25,000?-12,000 B.C.			
	Early Lithic period (conjectural)			

a Griffin's chronometry (as in Stoltman's table 1) with additions.

b Appropriate word (Woodland, Mississippian, Woodland-Mississippian, Mississippian-Woodland) should be applied on the basis of the culture content of materials in question; Mississippian orientation would be in the western subregion, Woodland in the northeast.

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