

A Detachable Atlatl Hook from Travis County, Texas

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ABSTRACT

A detachable atlatl hook, made of antler, was found at the Collins site along Onion Creek in Travis County, central Texas. Like some other central Texas atlatl hooks, it has traits that indicate how it was attached to a spear-thrower. Some brief comparative notes are offered on similar specimens from central and lower Pecos Texas.

THE SITE

Reported here is an antler atlatl hook, or spur, found at the Collins Site, 41TV40 (Figure 1). The site is on the south side of Onion Creek, six miles south of Austin, Travis County, central Texas (Figure 1). Scientific excavations were carried out in 1953-1954 by students from the University of Texas, and a detailed report was published by Suhm (1955). This site at one time included a large rockshelter, which was destroyed during quarry operations. Materials from this shelter were then pushed over terrace edges

and into gullies bisecting the site, to construct flat working surfaces. Collectors began digging into these "secondary deposits" in search of artifacts. It is very likely that this detachable atlatl hook was originally amongst deposits which remained at, or came from, the destroyed rockshelter.

CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THIS FIND

The person who owns the artifact made it available for documentation. He describes the site and the context of the find as follows:

"The atlatl hook was found at the Collins site in Travis County. The camp has been dug up for years. The area was surrounded on the south side by an overhang ledge. A large number of bison bones and teeth came out of this area. We think it was a kill site. The ledge was destroyed (dynamited) by the landlord. A quarry is next to the camp. Then to make matters worse, huge boulders were bulldozed over the top of the debris. Then slurry was pumped on the top. I have seen this area bulldozed three times. Anything that we find is by hard work and luck. I was able to dig under about six feet of debris and got down to unexcavated tan layers.



Figure 1. Location of Travis County, Central Texas.

We have found Early Triangular points in this area. The soil is loaded with snail and flint but few worked pieces. The hook was found in the upper layers of this tan soil. There were no other artifacts found near it. There is no way to measure (no benchmark) but imagine a camp with all layers removed—Archaic and later. Only Early Archaic and older were left behind. The hook was 12 inches into this tan layer.”

THE ARTIFACT

This type of artifact is rare in excavated sites in the Texas area. This specimen (Figure 2), which can be described as a detachable atlatl hook (cf. Webb 1957: 43-44), is in an excellent state of preservation (Figure 2). Artifact attributes are documented in Table 1. Worth noting is a 20 degree difference in planes between the hook notch and the attachment notch of this artifact. The artifact does retain some original curvature from the antler tine. It is the author’s opinion that this atlatl hook was not attached to the end of a spear thrower, but rather, inserted into a carved receptacle towards the end of the atlatl.

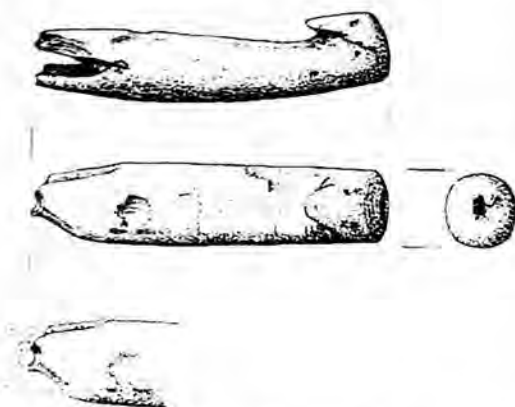


Figure 2. Atlatl Hook from the Collins Site, 41TV40, Travis County, Texas. Drawing by Richard McReynolds.

The specimen’s distal end is circular and tapered, allowing a tight, “seated” fit, when it is pushed back into place in the hypothesized atlatl hook receptacle. The attachment notch is cut into the detachable hook far enough to allow the hook plenty of room

to slide back into the ‘seat’ firmly before the drilled perforation is used to “pin” or toggle it into place. Since all force during initiation of a throw would be applied to the ‘seated’ end of the hook, this design allows for a very solid base from which a spear would be thrown.

Table 1. Measurements of the Detachable Atlatl Hook (in mm)

Length	57.88
Width	13.26
Hook Notch depth	1.22
Attachment Notch depth	8.27
Drilled Hole Radius	2.58
Distance - hole & hook tip	43.66
Proximal to hook tip	13.5
Distance - Top & bottom of pir	9.28
Distance - hole to back of attac	6.9
Distance - distal tip to pin hole	3.5
Proximal Thickness	11.93

An atlatl hook with a very similar hook notch was found in test excavations at 41WM71 (Figure 3). Provenience is described as “Test Pit E, level 3, lot 10.” Harry J. Shafer (personal communication 2009), who initially reported this site in 1963, says that the atlatl hook is associated with Darl or Fairland points in the terminal part of the Archaic.

Shafer (ibid.) also notes antler atlatl hooks, with the notch and perforation traits, have been documented from other sites in Bosque, Bell, and Williamson Counties. He considers these be very late in the Archaic, or as Shafer has termed it, the “Texas Woodland” era. Such atlatl hooks are quite similar to some found in the Eastern Archaic (see Figure 4; Webb 1957).

Finally, Martin (1934) published another similar atlatl hook, identified as a detachable spur, found at Shumla Cave No. 5 (Figure 5). The specimen is in the collections of the Witte Museum and is illustrated in photograph form by Shafer (1986:102). Jacob Bourbon (ms.) notes that the specimen is 54.5 mm long, 12.15 mm wide (average) and varies from 3.65 mm at the proximal end to 12.05 mm at the distal end.



Figure 3. An Atlatl Hook from 41WM71, Williamson County, Texas. Curated at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, The University of Texas at Austin. Side and top views shown.



Figure 4. Antler atlatl hook from the Perry Site, Tennessee River, Alabama. Adapted From Webb (1957: Fig. 12,B).

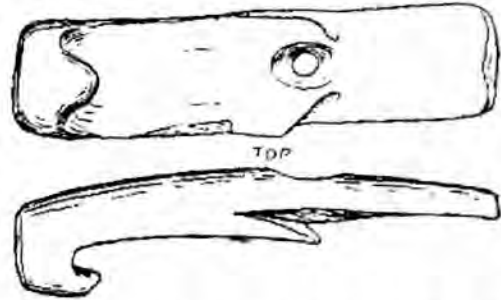


Figure 5. George C. Martin's detachable atlatl hook from Shumla Cave No. 5. (adapted from Martin 1933).

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