

FIGURE 6.2. Pointed tools from the eight extensively excavated structures of Aguateca, Late Classic period.

Many more medium-width “dart points” were actually used as dart or spear points and knives (65.6 percent) than as dart points (34.3 percent). Similarly, more of the wider “spear points and knives” were used exclusively as dart or spear points (65.4 percent) than as spear points and knives (34.6 percent). The bottom line is that the function of chipped stone artifacts cannot be determined without detailed microwear analysis.

We can more confidently distinguish between arrow points and dart or spear points by combining microwear analysis and attribute measurements. The difference in mean width between arrow points (1.18 cm, SD = 0.36 cm) and dart or spear points (3.60 cm, SD = 0.80 cm) has extremely high significance ($t = 12.56, p < .001$). The difference in mean width between dart or spear points and spear points and knives (3.31 cm, SD = 0.63 cm) is moderately significant, however ($t = 1.50, p = 0.14$). Leland Patterson (1985) proposes other criteria for distinguishing between arrow and spear points, such as point thickness and weight. These attributes work very well for the points of Aguateca. The difference observed in mean thickness between arrow points (0.27 cm, SD = 0.09 cm) and dart or spear points (0.75 cm, SD = 0.22 cm) is highly significant ($t = 9.85, p < .001$). Similarly, the difference in mean weight between arrow points (0.84 g, SD = 0.54 g) and dart or spear points (18.62 g, SD = 10.82 g) has high significance ($t = 7.00, p < .001$).

WARRIORS AND BROKEN DARTS AND SPEARS

The royal palace and the residences of the elite scribes/artists of Aguateca each contained some 30 to 40 chert bifacial points (Figure 6.2). Because many weapons were consumed in the last battle, each household must have originally possessed many more pointed tools. While some complete and nearly complete points appear to have been stored in the royal palace, elite residences, and other structures, most chert bifacial points were snapped or otherwise broken (Table 6.7). In fact, complete bifacial points are virtually absent in the excavated structures. For example, no complete bifacial points were recovered from Structure M8-13 at all. I was able to rejoin several fragments. All of them were found in and near the same structure except one. The exception is of a particular interest: a proximal fragment of a laurel leaf bifacial point recovered from an area in front of the south room of Structure M7-34 could be refitted to a distal fragment of the same point recovered from an area behind the south room of Structure M8-4. The distal tip of the latter clearly shows projectile impact damage (longitudinal macrofracture). Apparently, the point was used somewhere in or around Structure M7-34. Then the broken distal fragment, presumably left in the body of a resident of Aguateca or an attacker, appears to have fallen in the area behind Structure M8-4.

TABLE 6.7. Late Classic Chert Bifacial Points Collected by the Aguateca Archaeological Project First Phase.

LOCATION	COMPLETE	NEARLY COMPLETE	DISTAL	MEDIAL	PROXIMAL	TOTAL
Palace Group						
M7-22	2	4	4	16	13	39
M7-25	0	0	0	3	0	3
M7-32	0	0	3	3	2	8
Elite residential area along the Causeway						
M8-4	2	5	5	19	5	36
M8-8	2	2	7	11	6	28
M8-13	0	2	4	28	8	42
Midden (14B13)	0	0	0	2	2	4
M8-2	0	1	4	7	4	16
M8-3	1	2	2	7	1	13
Patio M8-1	0	0	0	0	1	1
M7-34	5	1	1	17	3	27
Main Plaza						
L8-5	0	0	1	0	0	1
L8-6	0	0	0	2	0	2
Granada Group						
L8-62	0	0	0	1	0	1
L8-70	0	0	0	0	1	1
Barranca Escondida	1	6	0	3	1	11
Total	13	23	31	119	47	233
%	5.6	9.9	13.3	51.1	20.2	100.0

The broken points were scattered more or less evenly across the burned structures, as one would expect if they had been shot in and around the structures, rather than being concentrated in a midden or other contexts. In fact, only 6 of the 235 chert bifacial points were recovered from midden contexts at Aguateca. I argue that the residents of Aguateca, including elite scribes/artists, shot most of the chert bifacial points during the final defense of the city. The attackers may have shot some of the points used exclusively as weapons, however. Without exception, every excavated structure in the epicenter of Aguateca burned to the ground at the time of abandonment. Together these data strongly suggest that many broken dart and spear points were deposited in battle.

Based on their spatial distribution, many pointed weapons were most likely used by the male members of the royal family and scribes/artists. An important implication is that the ruler and elite scribes/artists at Aguateca were also warriors. The Aguateca lithic evidence perfectly

matches Kevin Johnston's (2001) iconographic study of captured Classic Maya scribes and finger breaking during warfare. In other words, both the ruler and the elite scribes/artists/warriors of Aguateca who produced texts through which the ruler asserted and displayed power were targeted by the enemy. We know from Classic Maya art that Maya elites were involved in warfare with projectile points, especially spears and, to a smaller degree, atlatl darts (Miller 1996). The large number of bifacial points used as darts or spearheads by elite scribes/artists/warriors strongly indicates that they were not passive victims of their captors but fiercely engaged in warfare, including hand-to-hand combat, before they finally fled or were taken as captives.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, some quartzite pebbles may have been used as weapons, as sling or throwing stones. Figure 6.3 shows the estimated total number of quartzite pebbles from the eight extensively excavated structures in the epicenter of Aguateca. Although many pebbles may

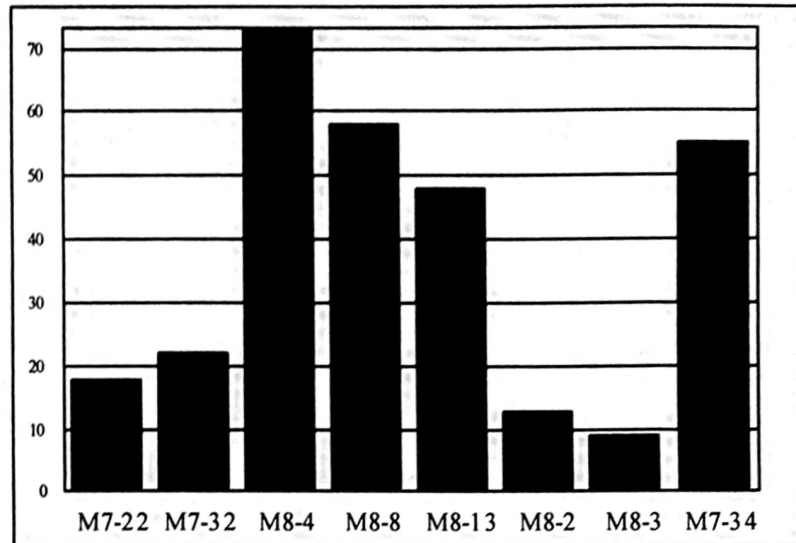


FIGURE 6.3. Estimated number of quartzite pebbles from the eight extensively excavated structures of Aguateca, Late Classic period.

have been used as pottery-burnishing stones, for lapidary work, and as stucco smoothers, the largest number of pebble smoothers was found in Structure M8-4, followed by Structure M8-8. If some pebbles were indeed used as weapons, the data may support the argument that elite scribes/artists at Aguateca were also warriors.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the female household member seems to have mainly used the north room of Structure M8-4 and engaged in bone or shell and wood carving and other craft production, in addition to food preparation and textile production. It is interesting to note that 11 of the 36 chert bifacial points, including a complete and two nearly complete specimens, recovered from this structure were found in this room. Microwear analysis indicates that at least the complete and two nearly complete bifacial points were used as darts or spears. The male scribe/artist may have used all of them. Alternatively, the larger number of bifacial points found in the north room suggests that the female household member may have used some bifacial points for defense of the city or other purposes. Although portraits of Maya warrior queens are rare in Classic Maya art, two stelae of Naranjo show Lady Six Sky (682–741) trampling captives in the manner

of a warrior-king. A similar depiction is also known from Calakmul (Martin and Grube 2008:74). Moreover, Mary Miller (1996:165) identifies at least two of the Maya figures on the stucco paintings at Cacaxtla in Central Mexico as elite women wearing upper-body garments. I believe that at least some elite women at Aguateca acted as warriors in the final battle.

Notably, the percentage of bifacial points among all chert chipped artifacts (both formal tools and irregular flakes) at Aguateca (3.8 percent) is considerably higher than for any other reported Maya Lowland center. The percentage is even higher for the artifacts from the final occupation layers of the eight extensively excavated structures (5.5 percent), likely a response to the stress of impending and actual attack. In the Valley of Copan, for example, this percentage is .5 percent (13/2,652 [Aoyama 1999:Table 8.1]), while in the region of La Entrada, Honduras, it is .6 percent (19/3,291 [Aoyama 1999:Table 8.3]). Although the higher ratio of bifacial points at Aguateca is partly due to its rapid abandonment, I believe it is another indication that Aguateca declined because of the intensification of warfare toward the end of the Late Classic period.