

## The Santa Claus Paradigm

Tony Baker March 15, 2011

*A number of readers of my web pages have referred to some of them as rants and this one definitely meets this definition.*

This paper is written for the initiate to archaeology. It is about the personal paradigm one develops overtime by pursuing studies and research in the discipline. I define *personal paradigm* as the understanding and beliefs, held by a single individual, about a specific subject. In different words, it is the individual's bias. Following from this definition, a single individual has numerous personal paradigms arising from their interests and life history. Finally this personal paradigm is not the same as Thomas Kuhn's paradigm (1962) that belongs to a large group of people working in the natural sciences.



An early and excellent example of a personal paradigm is a child's understanding of Santa Claus. So how does it develop, as a child is obviously not born with it? Development begins with the parents talking about Santa Claus and Christmas long before the child can speak. Slowly over time each child learns their version of this personal paradigm depending on the stories their parents provide. Often they are exposed to Santa Claus stories in children's books and shows on the television. On Christmas Day they find gifts under the tree as the Santa Claus paradigm predicts. They obtain first-hand, undigested data about Santa Claus when they see, smell, touch, and talk to him at a mall or department store. So, by the time the child is seven or eight years old, they have done considerable research into their Santa Claus paradigm and it is now rigidly rooted in the minds. If told that Santa Claus doesn't exist, they will refuse to believe it. Unfortunately, Santa Claus is a myth and the child's personal paradigm is ultimately annihilated.

The tooth fairy and the Easter bunny are very similar to the Santa Claus paradigm. All three are total myths, which are destroyed long before a child becomes a teenager. That said, let's now consider two diametrically opposed personal paradigms, which mean at least one, possibly both, is a myth.

## Creation/Evolution Debates

The creation/evolution debates stem from personal paradigms. My personal paradigm on the subject has evolution as correct and I remember first being introduced to the concept. It was in biology class in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. After school I asked my father about the concept and I learned that he too was an advocate. His support of the concept had a large influence on me as I believed he was a wise man. So initially I accepted the concept. Since I attended public schools and our family didn't attend church, I had little exposure to the opposing view of creation. In fact, I don't remember encountering any opposition to the theory of evolution until I started paying attention to politics as an adult.

I often say that a person doesn't have a (personal) paradigm if they believe the last thing they read or heard.<sup>1</sup> When a new concept is introduced to an individual, they obviously have no basis to disagree with it, so they accept it. This newly

<p><b>Note 1</b> – This expression is not my creation and, unfortunately, I have no idea where I acquired it.</p>
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introduced concept can be considered a seed of a personal paradigm and if nourished by research it can germinate into a seedling or a very pliable personal paradigm. When my father told me he agreed with the theory of evolution, the seed in my head, which had been put there by my biology teacher, became a seedling. Additional research, exposure to evolution ideas, grew the seedling into a sapling. Now at the age of 66 years, the evolution tree, my rigid personal paradigm, is large and strong and most likely can only be destroyed by my death.

To conclude this section, I have often wondered what my position might have been if my father had told me that the theory of evolution was nonsense. Coupled with this negative opinion, suppose I had gone to church schools and my family regularly attended church. Would I have developed a personal paradigm that favored creation? Would I have studied archaeology? Is a personal paradigm that embraces evolution a prerequisite to the study of archaeology?

## Handaxe vs. Flake Core

In contrast to the previous creation/evolution personal paradigms, the ones concerning the Acheulean handaxe belong only to archaeology. One group of archaeologists, by far the larger of the two, holds that the handaxe was the desired product and was constructed to a mental template. The other, smaller group argues the handaxe was not the desired product but the by-product of flake extraction or only a flake core. So how is it possible that within a scientific discipline these different personal paradigms exist? The simple answer is the original makers of the handaxe are not around to be asked. Therefore, the handaxe can only be interpreted by modern researchers who have different life experiences and therefore different personal paradigms.

The experiences associated with my personal paradigm began as a teenager in the 1960s. At that time my father was teaching me to hunt arrowheads in central New Mexico, which was a lithic-poor environment. As we hunted arrowheads we would also find other tools, flakes and an occasional biface. My experiences remained much the same for the next 35 years as I continued to hunt lithic-poor environments and only find an occasional biface.

Then in 1999 I found myself in southwest Texas hunting in a lithic-rich environment for the first time, and guess what? There were bifaces everywhere and in all stages of reduction. Since this locale was not that far removed from the lithic-poor environments I had previously hunted and the cultural diagnostics were the same between the two, I realized that I was seeing behavioral differences as a result of the environment. During the summer of 2000, one year after my first encounter with a lithic-rich environment, I got the opportunity to observe another. I got to do archaeological survey work on the North Slope of the Brooks Mountain Range in Alaska. The environment there was lithic-rich and many times larger in size than the area I had worked in southwest Texas. Again the bifaces were abundant and everywhere. I returned to the North Slope each summer for the next seven years. In 2003, I also got the chance to participate in an excavation of a lithic-rich site in France. It was the Solutrean site of Les Maitreaux. This site supported what I had observed at the other two lithic-rich areas I had worked. With data from three lithic-rich areas, located at various locations around the world, I concluded that with material everywhere the knappers could afford to be wasteful. However, they became very parsimonious when away from any lithic sources. Therefore, the explanation for only finding an occasional biface in the lithic-poor environments was that a large chunk of material, such as a biface, was rarely abandoned until it had been totally reduced to small flakes. In 2004, I wrote “The Lithic Containers of the Archaeological Record” ([www.ele.net/containers/lithic\\_containers.htm](http://www.ele.net/containers/lithic_containers.htm)), which was precipitated by my observations in lithic-rich environments.

Another significant event in my archaeological studies occurred in 2005 while on a field trip with Nick Ashton and Alan Slade of the British Museum. We found a biface at the Warren Hill Site in Suffolk, England. This was the first time I had ever given the Acheulean handaxe a thought. I hadn’t heard about it in the US because there is nothing there that is as old. I hadn’t even studied about it in the 1980s when I returned to college to get a MA in anthropology (archaeology). So after 45 years of finding and studying bifaces, I now was holding a biface in my hands that Aston and Slade were calling a handaxe. But, to me, it looked just like any other “bloody” biface from a lithic-rich environment. My personal paradigm would not permit me to believe that this biface was the desired product and was made to a mental template. To me, it was just a flake core. As a result of this single piece of rock, I ultimately wrote “The Acheulean Handaxe” ([www.ele.net/acheulean/handaxe.htm](http://www.ele.net/acheulean/handaxe.htm)) in 2006 and a follow up paper in 2007 titled “The Acheulean Handaxe at Boxgrove” ([www.ele.net/acheulean/boxgrove/bg\\_handaxe.htm](http://www.ele.net/acheulean/boxgrove/bg_handaxe.htm)).

Now in 2011 my personal paradigm is still as strong as ever, and as I write this, the Acheulean handaxe is still just a flake core to me. But, let’s consider how this might have been different. Suppose I had been raised in Europe. Assuming I had the same archaeological parents, but with the exception of them being European, I would have been made aware of the Acheulean handaxe and that it was made by a primitive man. If I encountered modern European knappers they would be replicating handaxes and telling their observers that these handaxes were the desired tool of the Acheulean people. If I studied archaeology in college, I would have taken more than one class that dealt with the handaxe in some manner. Chances are very slim that within all this learning that I would have encountered the concept that it was just a flake core. If and when I finally did encounter the flake core concept, my European personal paradigm, which I had nourished and pruned for so many years, would not permit me to even entertain it or much less accept it.

## Peopling the New World

This section does not contrast two diametrically opposing personal paradigms, but instead it details the development of one of my own. My father first introduced me to the *peopling the new world* in the 1960s. He told me that Clovis people were the first and that they came across the Bering Land Bridge. This concept was not new and had been around, at least, since the 1930s (Bliss 1939:4). Archaeological work continued in Alaska, but by the 1960s it had not yielded any indication of Pleistocene people. My father was also aware of this, but it didn't disturb his personal paradigm. He would defend it by saying that if we (he and I) could go to Alaska, we could find the Clovis points the other archaeologists couldn't. He was implying that the other archaeologists weren't looking in the right places or that they didn't know what they were doing. In 1978 the Mesa Site was discovered on the North Slope of Alaska and excavations began shortly thereafter. The Mesa Site proved there were Paleoindians in Alaska, but the projectile points from there gave no indication of a connection to Clovis or any other fluted technology. By the early 1990s the Clovis-first and the Bering land bridge had become my personal paradigm. This was the result of being ignorantly unaware of the Mesa site and just repeating to myself and other people over the years the same stories my father had told me.

In 1992 my world changed. I accepted an invitation to travel to Russia with approximately 30 archaeologists from the Society for American Archaeology. We interfaced with Russian archaeologists on many archaeological subjects. My focus was on the Paleolithic as I was looking for Clovis origins. To my surprise and bewilderment I learned that Clovis points or any fluted points had never been found in Siberia or any other part of Russia. This fact really shook my personal paradigm. Around this time, I learned from Bruce Bradley ([www.primtech.net](http://www.primtech.net)) that the lithic technologies of Clovis and the Solutrean in France had similar aspects. I immediately went to the Solutrean literature, but was not satisfied. The reality is that I, and I suspect most lithic researchers, have to handle the rocks to really appreciate the technology. So, I planned and made a trip to France in the Fall of 1993. I saw numerous museum exhibits on the Solutrean along with other parts of the Paleolithic in the Dordogne and Paris regions. However, my greatest enlightenment occurred when I got to see and hold the Solutrean material from the Fressignes site. This opportunity was given to me by Professor Vialou of the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine. On October 19, 1993 after viewing the Fressignes material, I wrote the following in my diary:

*“My conclusions are that the Paleo-Indian lithic technology was developed in the USA. It looks as if it had its roots in the Mousterian. It was not a blade technology. It was a Mousterian technology.”*

What I was saying was that the lithic technology of the Paleoindians was a biface technology and not a blade technology. I built on this idea and in 1997 I wrote my first webpage on this subject, “The Clovis First / Pre-Clovis Problem” ([www.ele.net/art\\_folsom/preclvis.htm](http://www.ele.net/art_folsom/preclvis.htm)). Here, I had a pre-Clovis population of modern humans crossing the Bering land bridge between 20-30,000 years ago, with a lithic technology similar to the Mousterian (biface) technology of the Old World. I argued that somehow, some way the technique of soft hammer percussion made its way from the Solutrean to the New World pre-Clovis people and Clovis was born.

The logic was weak in this 1997 webpage and it left the reader asking three questions. Why did these modern humans have only a biface technology and not the blade/microblade technology of the Upper Paleolithic of Europe and Asia? Why did they not have projectile points? And, how did the soft hammer, Solutrean technology arrive in the New World. My personal paradigm had no answers to these questions. That said this was the best I could do at that time based on my limited knowledge of flake mechanics and of human behavior in different lithic environments.

Over the next seven years my archaeological pursuits changed and as a result I learned more during this time than I had learned in the previous 45 years. Essentially three things happened. First, I performed engineering research and taught myself flake mechanics and “A Theory for Flake Creation” ([http://www.ele.net/algor/flake\\_creation/SD\\_setup.htm](http://www.ele.net/algor/flake_creation/SD_setup.htm)) was my final webpage on this subject. Second, I had the opportunities to see lithic material from a number of lithic-rich environments from around the world, which I have already mentioned. Last, I got to do archaeological survey work on the North Slope, which I have also already mentioned. These three things caused me to hone my personal paradigm about the peopling of the New World. I still believed much of what I had written in my 1997 webpage, but I now had answers to the three questions it raised. Blade/microblade technologies are associated with lithic-rich environments and much of the New World Paleoindian culture is located in lithic-poor environments. The answer to why did they not have projectile points is that, in fact, they did and these were thick-bodied points. Finally, soft hammer percussion is not that large a technology leap and therefore it can easily be the result of reinvention. So in September 2004 I wrote a revision to my 1977 webpage entitled “The Clovis First/ Pre-Clovis Problem -- Revisited 2004” ([http://www.ele.net/art\\_folsom/pre-clovis\\_2004/preclovis2004.htm](http://www.ele.net/art_folsom/pre-clovis_2004/preclovis2004.htm)). This was followed by a 2009 webpage “I Forgot to Remember to Forget: 1st Peoples in the New World” (<http://www.ele.net/forgot/forgotten.htm>), which argued for much the same thing or that thick-bodied point people were the first in the New World.

## **The Rant**

The personal paradigms or biases one has are used to evaluate the information one receives from the world. Unfortunately, it takes years of experience, i.e. reading, lectures, other people’s stories, personal experiences, etc, to develop a strong personal paradigm. When I say years, I mean numerous years of different experiences and not one year of experience repeated over numerous years. However, a weak one can be adopted after reading only one article and it is likely to change when the next article is read, or more data is provided by a different experience. So, how does the initiate evaluate the validity of stuff they read before they develop a personal paradigm? The usual answer is that good stuff is published in a quality journal or by a quality publisher. In different words, it has been “peer reviewed.” Another answer is that it was written by a renowned scholar who doesn’t write poor quality stuff. I argue that these tests don’t assure validity. For example, both sides of the Creation/Evolution debate have quality publishers and renowned scholars, so which camp is correct? This same argument applies to the Handaxe/Flake Core and Clovis/Pre-Clovis camps, so how does the initiate without a personal paradigm judge what to believe? They can’t, so they end up believing the last thing they read.

All writers consciously or subconsciously embed their personal paradigms in their writings. Many writers will not admit this, however some do. As an example, I would like to share a few sentences from the Preface of David Hurst Thomas' "Archaeology: Down to Earth" (1999). As the reader can see, Thomas is admitting to his biases (personal paradigms).

*"This book departs, in a few ways, from the standard textbook. In most archaeology texts, the approach is fairly encyclopedic and dispassionate. The author usually assumes an all-knowing voice of authority and attempts to maintain an objective, impersonal, detached style."*

*"But I can't do it that way. Little about archaeology is impersonal to me, and my biases are clearly reflected here."*

*"You'll find that this book will reflect something of my own personality (and you should be aware of these biases)."*

*"You'll also find that the text proceeds largely by example, several of which are drawn from my own archaeological experience."*

*"So now you're forewarned: This is not an encyclopedia. It's a personalized and admittedly idiosyncratic interpretation of what's up in contemporary Americanist archaeology."*

Like Thomas, I am forewarning the initiate to archaeology to take all you read, hear, and smell with a "grain of salt." I know this is difficult because the initiate usually has a mentor who believes his personal paradigm is correct and he wants to teach it to you. Don't be quick to assume the world is his way. Try to get as much diverse information and experience as possible before attempting to write like Thomas' "all-knowing voice of authority." Otherwise, one day you may discover that Santa Claus is a myth.

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