

The James W. Cambron and David C. Hulse Collections: An Avenue for Understanding Paleoindian Occupation in the Mid-South

*Meta G. Pike, Scott C. Meeks, David G. Anderson, and
Elijah C. Ellerbusch*

In late 2004 the University of Tennessee's McClung Museum received a donation of over 38,000 prehistoric chipped-stone artifacts that constituted the bulk of the private collection belonging to James W. Cambron (1920-1982), a well-known and accomplished avocational archaeologist working in the mid-South region of North America (Cambron 1955, 1956; Cambron and Hulse 1960a, 1960b, 1964, 1967, 1975; DeJarnette et al. 1962). In late 2005, the family of David C. Hulse, Cambron's longtime colleague and collaborator,

Meta G. Pike, Scott C. Meeks, David G. Anderson, and Elijah C. Ellerbusch, Department of Anthropology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 38996; e-mails: mpik@utk.edu; smeeks1@utk.edu; dander19@utk.edu; eellerbu@utk.edu

followed suit and donated several thousand artifacts from his collection to the McClung Museum. Although avocational collections are sometimes viewed by the professional community as having limited research potential, that is decidedly not the case in these instances. Cambron and Hulse employed high professional standards during their 30-plus years of artifact collecting, including the labeling of each artifact with a binomial catalog number tied to specific site maps, field notes, and/or other detailed locational information (Ellerbusch 2004). Research with the Cambron collection has been underway for about a year, while work with the Hulse collection is just beginning.

The Cambron collection, dating from the Paleoindian through Mississippian periods, contains a total of 404 collections distributed among eight states in the southeastern United States, including Alabama (n = 339), Georgia (n = 3), Florida (n = 1), Kentucky (n = 2), Louisiana (n = 1), Mississippi (n = 1), North Carolina (n = 13), and Tennessee (n = 44) (Figure 1). A total of 54 collections contain bifaces diagnostic of the Paleoindian period, including early (Clovis and Redstone), middle (Cumberland and Wheeler), and late (Beaver Lake, Quad, and Dalton) Paleoindian bifaces (Figure 1). The density of Paleoindian sites in northern Alabama has been well documented (Futato 1982; Meeks 2001) and is considered a core area for the initial colonization of eastern North America (Anderson 1990, 2004; Anderson and Faught 1998).

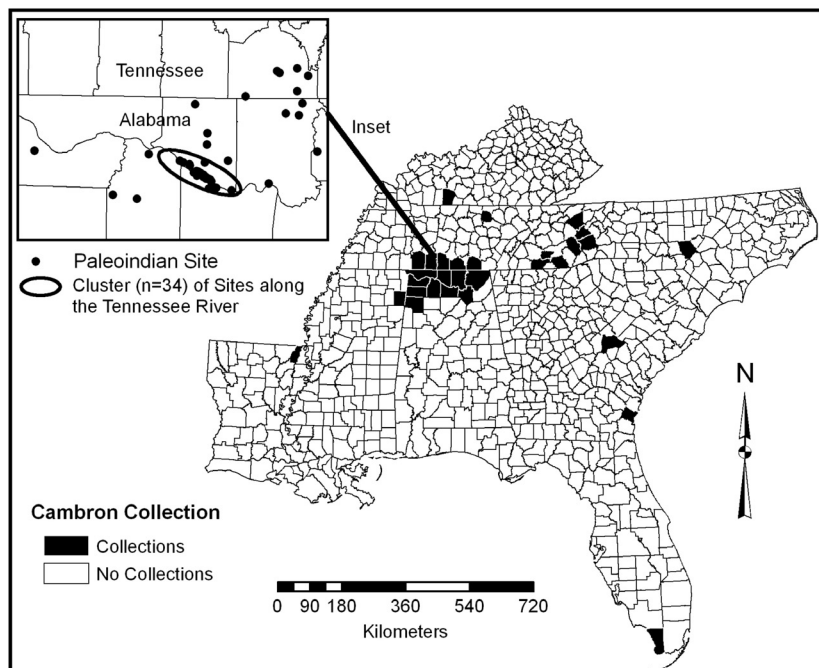


Figure 1. Map illustrating the distribution of the Cambron collections and the locations of collections containing Paleoindian diagnostics (Note: the spatial unevenness in the collections is due to the fact that Cambron concentrated his efforts in northern Alabama during an early survey of the state; adapted from Meeks [2006: Figures 2 and 4]).

Preliminary data for counts of unifaces and bifaces from 102 of the Cambron sites reveal an interesting pattern relating to the organization of lithic technology (Pike 2006). Sites containing Paleoindian diagnostics have much higher average uniface:biface ratios (1:6) compared with sites lacking Paleoindian diagnostics (1:23). These ratios suggest a major shift in the organization of lithic technology through time and are consistent with recent work at Dust Cave in northwestern Alabama, where well-dated shifts in uniface technology between late-Paleoindian and early-Archaic occupations have been documented (Meeks 1994; Randall 2001; Sherwood et al. 2004).

In sum, initial assessment of the Cambron and Hulse collections, with assemblage data encompassing hundreds of sites, verifies their integrity and utility for addressing numerous research questions, including diachronic changes in lithic technological organization, functional organization, land-use practices, and settlement patterning. These collections are particularly important, since Paleoindian assemblages from the mid-South are poorly documented, and unfortunately those in the hands of avocationalists are commonly sold or otherwise dispersed upon the death of their owners. This example offers a far better legacy for these materials and for their owners. Ongoing analysis of the collections will be integrated with the Paleoindian Database of the Americas (PIDBA; <http://pidba.tennessee.edu>) (Anderson et al. 2005), thereby providing a powerful analytical tool for exploring initial human colonization and settlement in the mid-South.

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