

## Obituary of Arthur J. Jelinek (July 19, 1928 – January 10, 2022)

JOHN D. SPETH

*Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1107, USA; [jdspeth@umich.edu](mailto:jdspeth@umich.edu)*

### OBITUARY



*Arthur Jelinek at Tabun, Israel, in 1967 (photograph by J.D. Speth).*

Arthur J. Jelinek, a remarkable scholar and world-renowned Paleolithic archaeologist, passed away on January 10, 2022, at the age of 93. As teacher, field archaeologist, and researcher, he touched the lives of a great many people, student and professional alike, over the many decades of his distinguished career. And he is widely known for his important multi-year excavations at two of the most famous Middle Paleolithic or Neanderthal sites in the Old World—Tabun in Israel and La Quina in France.

Jelinek grew up in La Grange Park, Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago, Illinois. He attended Lyons Township (LT) High School, which, curiously, produced a remarkable number of graduates who went on to become professional anthropologists and archaeologists. In addition to Jelinek, others included Patricia Anderson-Gerfaud, a pioneer in the study of stone tool function by means of microwear analysis; Wilfred C. Bailey, a participant in one of Emil Haury's first field schools in the Mogollon region of Arizona and an anthropologist for many years at the University of Georgia; Elaine (Bluhm) Herold, one of Illinois's

earliest professional female archaeologists and in 1956 the sole female founding member of the Illinois Archaeological Survey; James Sackett, a Paleolithic archaeologist for many years at UCLA and best known for his spatial analyses of the French Upper Paleolithic open-air site at Solvieux; and Lisa Young, a Southwestern archaeologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Arizona and known for her ongoing work at ancestral Hopi sites in north-central Arizona.

In 1946, fresh out of high school and very shortly after the end of WW II, Jelinek joined the U.S. Marine Corps. At the completion of his service in the military, he was eligible for Veterans support to help defray the costs of attending college. Initially, he thought he would pursue a career in metallurgy and, with that goal in mind, went to the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado. However, he soon became disillusioned with metallurgy and turned instead to an interest he had always had since childhood—archaeology. With this new goal in mind, he transferred to the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque, graduating in 1952 with a bachelor's degree in anthropology.

While at New Mexico, he spent two summers (1950, 1951) as a participant in a UNM field school run by Paul Reiter surveying and excavating in the Sierra Blanca-Sacramento region of Southeastern New Mexico. That experience led to his first publication (1952), a study of the prehistoric pottery encountered by the field school, and cemented his love for archaeology generally, for field work, and for the American Southwest.

Jelinek took a year off after graduating from New Mexico and then, in 1953, enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. During his years as a student at Michigan, his two closest and most influential mentors were James B. Griffin, a leader in the archaeology of eastern North America, and Albert Spaulding, an archaeologist with extensive experience in the North American Great Plains, but perhaps best known for his use of quantitative methods in archaeological analysis. Jelinek completed his Ph.D. at Michigan in 1960.

Jelinek had originally hoped to do a dissertation dealing with the Paleoindian period in western North America, focusing on the materials that had been uncovered at Blackwater Draw, a famous site of the Clovis period (ca. 13,050–12,750 calendar years BP) in eastern New Mexico. However, for a variety of reasons beyond his control, that plan never materialized. Instead, he undertook an ambitious project of regional survey, testing, and limited excavation involving a series of late prehistoric (ca. AD 900–1500) campsites and small villages scattered along the Pecos River valley in southeastern New Mexico. The Pecos Valley is a vast stretch of sun-scorched semi-arid grasslands that—archaeologically speaking—was *terra incognita* when Jelinek began working there. It was a difficult area to tackle, especially for a small crew and a very limited budget. Though southeastern New Mexico gets relatively little rain, what precipitation it does get comes mainly in the summer. And as fate would have it, during one of Jelinek's field seasons it was so rainy that the dirt roads crisscrossing the many cattle ranches in his survey area turned into seas of mud and became impassible. As a result, he and his crew had to get to their sites by raft. One of the rafters that summer was Leslie Freeman, a University of Chicago student who went on to become a Paleolithic archaeologist, well known for his work in Spain.

The results of Jelinek's Pecos Valley work were published as a monograph in 1967 by the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Michigan. That volume has become a classic, and for scholars interested in the interaction between prehistoric Southwestern Pueblo farmers and nomadic Southern Plains bison hunters, Jelinek's study remains essential reading. In it he used his Pecos Valley data to offer a novel hypothesis for the origin of the Kiowa, a nomadic Plains bison-hunting group that traditionally spoke a language closely related to certain Puebloan languages. He suggested that the Kiowa began as settled farmers in the Pecos Valley but, with climate change and the expansion of bison into the region, they abandoned a farming way of life and moved onto the Plains, gradually becoming full-fledged bison hunters. He arrived at a key part of this

argument by looking at patterns of covariation between the quantities of sherds, bison bones, and lithics that he recovered from his chronologically ordered Pecos Valley sites and the frequency of grass and cheno-am pollen extracted from associated sediments. This analysis, published in *Science* in 1966, is an early and classic example of the sort of quantitative analysis and targeted pattern recognition that Jelinek particularly enjoyed and continued to emphasize throughout his career.

In 1957–1958, prior to completing his doctorate, Jelinek took a temporary position at Beloit College in Wisconsin. In addition to gaining valuable teaching experience and broadening his professional network, he hoped while there to complete his dissertation. Unfortunately, his teaching and other responsibilities took up more time than he had anticipated and finishing the thesis would have to wait. In 1958 he accepted a position as assistant professor at the University of Chicago, a position that he held until 1961, when he moved to Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan. While at Chicago he completed his Ph.D.

Like the other archaeologists at Michigan, Jelinek's position was split between a curatorship in the Museum of Anthropology and a normal professorial position in the Department of Anthropology. He remained at Michigan until 1967, when he accepted a position in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Arizona in Tucson, a position he then held until his retirement in 1993. Following his retirement, he continued to live in Tucson and, right up to his death, he remained an active participant in the life of the department, interacting with students and colleagues, hosting scholars from many parts of the globe, and attending not only department and university talks and functions, but also occasional conferences. Despite failing health toward the end, his mind remained razor sharp, his memory of people, places, and things undiminished, and his signature dry humor always there and right on target.

Looking at Jelinek the archaeologist, and trying where possible to phrase things as he himself might have said them, he always was especially interested in the artifacts, the actual objects, the stone tools, the pottery, the bones—to him these were the real substance of archaeology. He was less enamored of the more esoteric theoretical debates that many archaeologists often engaged in. He enjoyed quantitative methods, an interest no doubt fostered by his early days with Al Spaulding at Michigan. However, he always stuck with the relatively straightforward kinds, like ratios, correlation coefficients, t-tests, and chi-squares. He eschewed complex multivariate techniques like factor analysis and principal component analysis, approaches that had become quite fashionable in the “New Archaeology” of the day. To Jelinek, it was important to be able to visualize exactly how one got from the data to the results, connections that he felt were often lost when dealing with multivariate techniques like factor analysis.

Jelinek also enjoyed being in the field, although the logistics of actually running a large excavation project often proved exhausting and sometimes very difficult. He learned that right from the beginning. While still an under-

graduate at New Mexico, though fortunately with military experience already under his belt, Jelinek found that the individual who supposedly was directing the field school was actually “indisposed” much of the time. As a result, he and the other field school participants had to run the project more or less on their own. And the first major internationally visible project that he directed on his own, the excavation of Tabun Cave in Israel, was slated to begin on 05 June 1967. As many readers may well recall, that was also the first day of the “Six-Day War” in the Near East. Not an easy way for a young archaeologist to launch his career!

Jelinek greatly enjoyed analyzing artifacts in the lab and especially the stage when the basic cataloguing, counting, and measuring were done. That was the point when he could begin the really interesting part—manipulating the data to see how it behaved in quantifiable terms across both time and space. With perseverance and a bit of luck, the patterns that emerged at that stage excited him almost as much as the field work itself.

Jelinek’s grasp of basic archaeological data, whether Old World or New World, was truly phenomenal. He knew the sites, who excavated them, the assemblages they produced, the complexities of their stratigraphy, and the controversies that surrounded their dating and interpretation. And he remembered that staggering wealth of information right into his nineties! In the days before the Internet, if you ran into an anthropology faculty member in the main library at Arizona catching up on the latest publications from just about any corner of the globe, be it North Africa or North Carolina, it was very likely to be Jelinek. Truly amazing.

Perhaps more than any other class of archaeological material, Jelinek devoted much of his energy to the study of stone tools. Already in his early work in the Pecos Valley, he developed a novel way to seriate the region’s late prehistoric projectile points. Then in 1963, while at the University of Michigan, he spent a summer excavating with François Bordes at Combe Grenal and Mme. D. de Sonneville-Bordes at Caminade, both in France. That experience began a life-long friendship with the Bordes, and his immersion in Paleolithic archaeology and stone tool typology. The next year (1964) he participated in a Lithic Technology Conference held in Les Eyzies which brought together Bordes, an expert in hard-hammer percussion, and Don Crabtree, a specialist in pressure flaking. One of their goals was to compare the products that resulted from the two methods of flintknapping and develop criteria by which archaeologists could reliably distinguish them in the prehistoric record. Those experiences cemented Jelinek’s interest in Paleolithic stone tools, their manufacture, their function, and the way archaeologists assign them to types. Shortly after returning from France, he organized a seminar for Michigan graduate students in which the participants learned the basics of Bordian typology, and then used that knowledge to analyze and type the University’s large collection of Mousterian stone tools from Tabun, material that had been donated decades earlier by Dorothy Garrod.

In that same period (1966) Jean Perrot, a leading French

prehistorian with a long and distinguished track record of archaeological research in Israel, came to Michigan as a visiting professor. While there he was instrumental in encouraging Jelinek to excavate Tabun. While still at Michigan, Jelinek applied for and received funds through the Foreign Currency Program of the Smithsonian Institution to launch the project, but very shortly thereafter (1967) he accepted a position at the University of Arizona and moved both himself and the Tabun project to Tucson. Jelinek’s work at Tabun was the first major Paleolithic excavation that he designed and directed himself, and it marked a significant turning point in his career. While he never abandoned his love for the American Southwest, from that moment forward most of his time and energy shifted to the Old World and especially to the Middle Paleolithic. He worked at Tabun for six long field seasons (1967–1972), providing invaluable experience and training for a great many students, many from the University of Arizona, many from other institutions. The author of this obituary was part of the very first group, the team that reopened Tabun just days after the Six-Day War ended. We cut down the famous fig tree that had grown up at the base of the 60ft (18m) high sequence, hung in safety belts bolted to the cave walls to clean the encrusted profiles, and began the detailed sampling of Garrod’s finely stratified Layer C. Many of Tabun’s participants, too many to name here, went on to become professionals in their own right. While Jelinek never completed a final monograph on his work at the site, he and his colleagues and former students authored many detailed reports, dissertations, and peer-reviewed publications over the years, synthesizing the results of the work and placing them within the wider debates about the Middle Paleolithic in the Levant and beyond.

His career in the Old World culminated in eight full seasons of excavation (1986–1994) at the famous Middle Paleolithic site of La Quina in western France, as well as several additional seasons devoted to analysis of the wealth of lithic, faunal, and other material that resulted from the work. As at Tabun, the La Quina excavations provided experience and training for many students, and the basis for publications by Jelinek himself, including a major synthetic work on the lithic industries that appeared in 2013 through the University of Arizona Press, as well as by many of the project’s other participants. And during the work at La Quina, Harold Dibble, one of Jelinek’s assistants in the field and a former graduate student of his, introduced pieceplotting using a total station, standard fare on excavations nowadays, but something completely new in the 1980s.

Arthur Jelinek was a remarkable person—as a scholar, as a field archaeologist, as a researcher, and as a friend to many people around the world. He will be dearly missed by many, myself very much included. For those who would like to see and hear Arthur Jelinek describe, in his own words, his life, his career, and some of his views on archaeology generally, the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society has generously made available a two-part video interview with him that can be viewed at these URLs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMMdKw3qMZw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23yQIPGfDiU>

Arthur Jelinek's CV and complete list of publications will be forthcoming on the University of Arizona School of Anthropology's website.