Anthropologie et Préhistoire, 111, 2000, 152–155

Making throw-sticks

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Boomerangs, boomerang, and throw-sticks don't.

Introduction

When thrown, both boomerangs and throw-sticks spin-rotate in the air. Boomerangs then return to, or close to, the thrower, throw-sticks do not. They fly away in a more or less straight and horizontal path over a considerable distance.

Boomerangs were used for hunting birds (being used rather like a shot-gun), bird-scaring, play, ritual and social purposes. They only constitute a very small percentage of "boomerang-like" objects found. Most are throw-sticks, which were used for hunting and fighting, striking prey or an enemy with a substantial force. In general, boomerangs are smaller, thinner and more curved than throw-sticks, which are larger, heavier and less curved.

It would seem that boomerangs are likely to be found where birds are common, for example in marsh areas and river banks, and also where standing seed crops are grown. When harvested, flocks of birds will come to gather the scattered seeds and may be killed using the boomerang directly or as a means to drive flocks of birds into nets.

Throw-sticks seem to have been used after larger prey. Their use seems common in lightly vegetated, scrub-like regions. There, individuals, or groups of people, could organise the hunt using the throw-stick as a distance weapon, no doubt supplementing the use of the bow, spear, "*propulseur*" or bolas.

A clear distinction should be made between the throw-stick and the throwing-stick or "*propulseur*", and between the throw-stick and boomerang. The literature is confused by a misuse of these words.

Intention

Throw-sticks which fly straight and level.

Production

(a) *Materials*: dense, hard wood (density > 0.8 g/cm^3), tight grain, easy to work. Grain to follow shape if possible. Elm, hickory, holly, American oak, sycamore, tamarisk, yew, Australian mulga. Modern materials: medium density fibreboard, paxolin, tufnol.

(b) *Shaping*: cut outline with jig-saw. Shape section with Surform and rasps. Finish with abrasives and scraper? wing section.

(c) *Finish*: Linseed oil.

(d) *Size*: Wingspan 500–700 mm. Chord ± 50 mm. Weight 150–350 g.

Throwing

Thrown horizontally. Spin important. Throws cross wind generally best. Flights into the wind often result in a change of the axis of rotation. Tuning by altering the shape and angle of incidence of the tips. Distance surprising!

Results

Intention rarely achieved! Flights usually shaped; height often increases at the end.

Future

More development work needed—please help! What are the best materials and shapes? How can the intention be achieved?

What was the distribution of the throw-stick in prehistory? How were they used?

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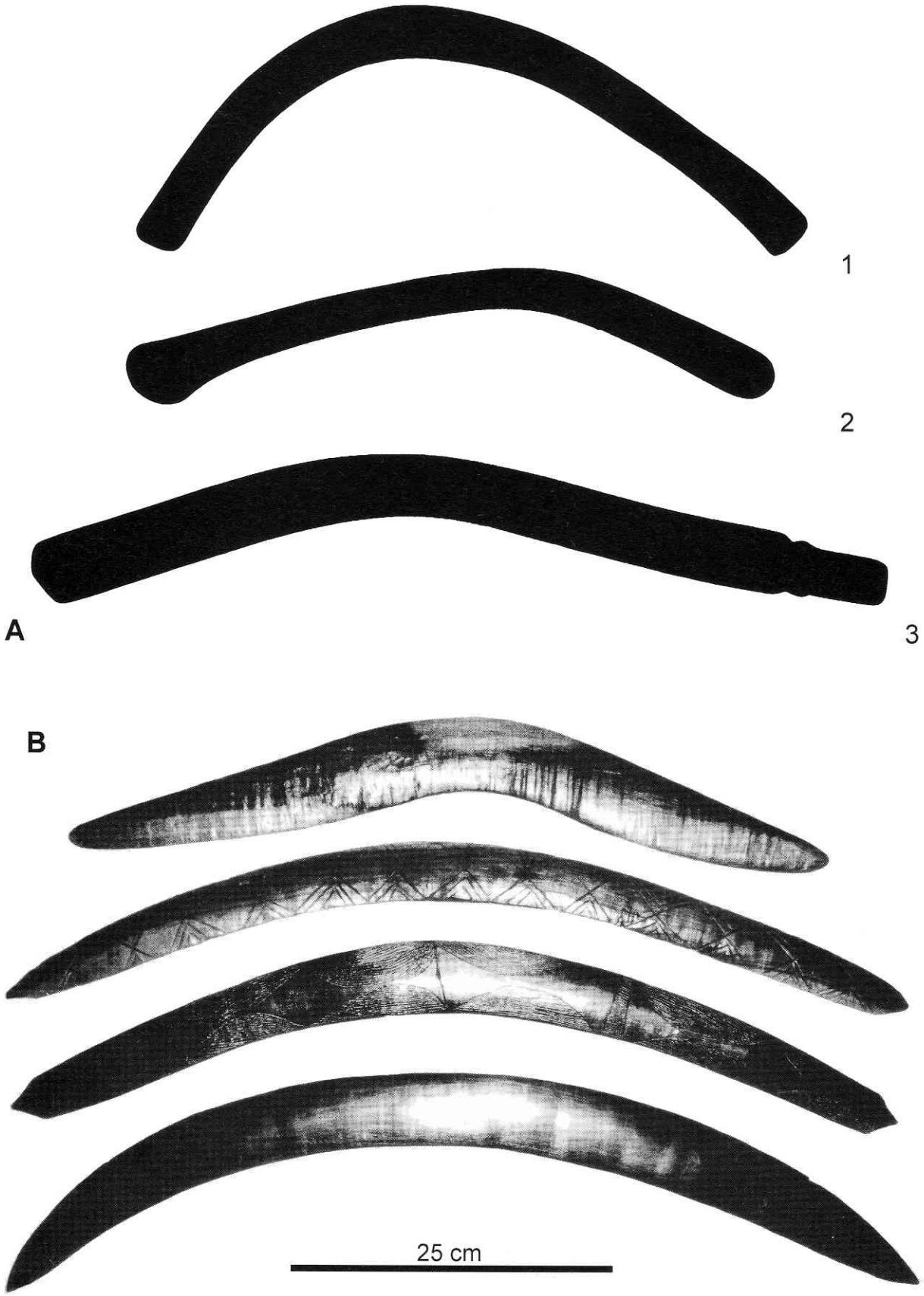

Fig. 1 — A. Outline of boomerang/throw-stick shapes; **1**: Egyptian, Tutankhamun; **2**: Egyptian, original in the Louvre; **3**: Hopi Indian. **B**. Original Australian throw-sticks. Mulga wood.

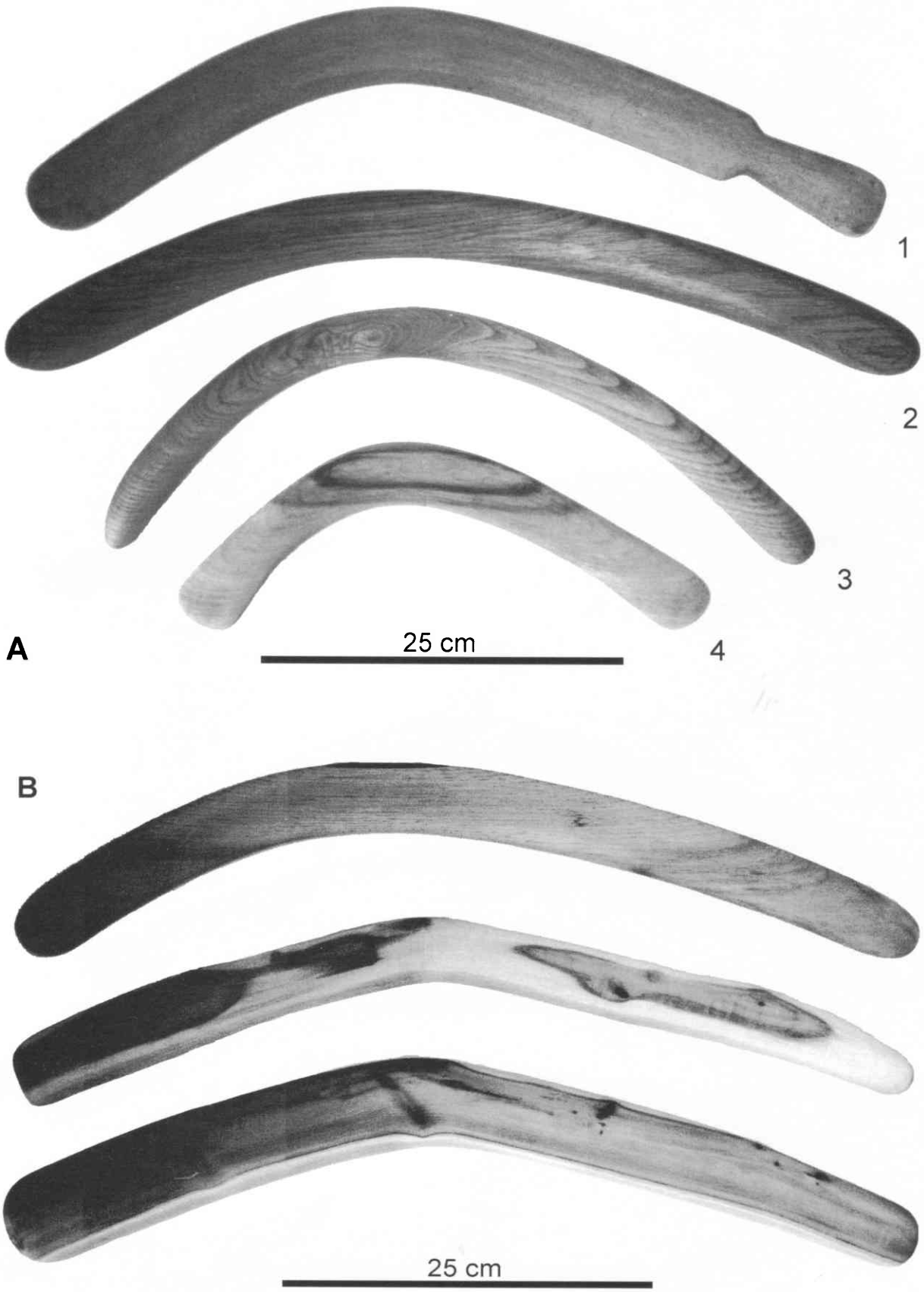

Fig. 2 — A. Modern throw-sticks; **1**: Hopi Indian type; **2**: Australian type; **3–4**: Ancient Egyptian types. **B**. Three modern throw-sticks.

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