

ASM Ink

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Newsletter of the Archeological Society of Maryland, Inc.



www.marylandarcheology.org

Y2K + 19 = 18PR9 (Billingsley Site)



Grab your Munsell, ASM's annual field session is about to get under way. Page 3

Upcoming events

May 23 – June 5: Annual ASM field school. Billingsley Site, 18PR9.

October 5: ASM Annual Meeting, Veterans Park, Charles County. All day.

Volunteer opportunities

The following volunteer opportunities are open to CAT participants and other ASM members:

ASM Volunteer Lab, most Tuesdays: The lab in Crownsville. Contact Charlie Hall at charles.hall@maryland.gov or Louise Akerson at lakerson1@verizon.net. It is currently working on cataloging artifacts from the Levering Coffee House Site, Baltimore (a mostly late 18th/early 19th Century site).

The Smithsonian Environmental Research Center seeks participants in its Citizen-Scientist Program in archeology and other environmental research programs in Edgewater. Field and lab work are conducted Wednesdays and on occasional Saturdays. Contact Jim Gibb at jamesggibb@verizon.net

Montgomery County for lab and field work volunteers, contact Heather Bouslag at 301 563 7530 or Heather.Bouslog@montgomeryparks.org

The Anne Arundel County Archaeology Program and the Lost Towns Project welcome volunteers in both field and lab at numerous sites. Weekdays only. Email volunteers@losttownsproject.org or call 410 222 1318.

Mount Calvert. Lab work and field work. 301 627 1286.

Jefferson Patterson Park invites volunteers to take part in its activities, including archeology, historical research and conservation. Contact Ed Chaney at ed.chaney@maryland.gov or 410 586 8554.

The Archaeological Institute of America provides an online listing of fieldwork opportunities worldwide. Call up www.archaeological.org/fieldwork to get started.

UPAG/Howard County Recs and Parks invites volunteers interested in processing collections and conducting historical research to contact Kelly Palich at Kpalich@howardcountymd.gov or 410-313-0423.

CAT corner: For information on the CAT program, contact Sarah Grady at sarahgrady11@gmail.com

‘I’m gonna be stinking rich!’ cries happy archeologist

Condensed from The Onion

NIMRUD, IRAQ — Popping open a bottle of champagne and dancing with a mummified corpse in celebration, Smithsonian Institution archeologist Dr. Kathleen Roberts confessed she was “excited as all hell” Thursday after “hitting the mass grave jackpot” in northern Iraq.

“Booyah! I mean, seriously, yeah—we’re rolling in bones, baby,” said Roberts, throwing handfuls of Holocene-era rib bones into the air and standing under the confetti-like cascade of osseous chips. “Rang-a-dang, suckers! This is why I got into the business.

“I mean, you hear about people hitting the burial site lottery like this, but you never think it’s going to happen to you. There must be a 10-foot layer of bones down there! We got warrior bones, kids’ bones, skeletons of virgins tied to stakes. It must have been an absolute bloodbath. Truly horrific. I’m gonna be stinking rich! No more trying to get excited about a body here or a possible sacrifice there. Just goes to show, you gotta keep playing to win though.”

Roberts then lustily rubbed her hands together and dove headfirst into the staggering assemblage of scientifically significant ancient remains.

(Editor's note: The Onion is a satirical newspaper, in case you didn't guess.)

Looking for last Patuxent home in Maryland

This year's ASM field session takes place in Prince George's County, a search for a Contact Era site believed to be the last home of the Patuxent Indians in Maryland.

A 1673 map marks the presence of two 17th Century Indian villages on the Billingsley parcel: one named "Wighkawameck" and the other "Coppahan." In addition, the *Proceedings of the Maryland Assembly* on May 23, 1674 make it clear that Major John Billingsley purchased his 700 acres from the "Mattapany and Patuxon Indians," at least some of whom "...doe Continue upon the Land."

Last fall, Matt McKnight, Charlie Hall and Troy Nowak, all with the Maryland Historical Trust, walked the site (now owned by the State of Maryland) to test a recently acquired magnetic susceptibility meter. Soils in one of the surveyed fields were significantly altered beyond normal background magnetic susceptibility levels.

Ergo this field session, May 23 to June 3.

On Saturday, 1 June: Rico Newman, a member of the Choptico Band of the Piscataway Conoy tribe, will talk about humanizing the things we find on American Indian sites: "Artifacts Are Not Wild Onions."

The Spencer O. Geasey Memorial Lecture will be held Thursday, May 30 from 6 to 8 p.m. Stephanie Sperling will provide an archeological overview of the Patuxent River's Jug Bay area from the comfort of a pontoon boat. Since the capacity of the boat is limited, Kristin Montaperto will be on land to provide for the others a behind-the-scenes tour of the Mount Calvert grounds and museum exhibits.

No other evening or lunch-time lectures are planned, as of this time, but the traditional end-it-all party will take place Saturday, June 1. For updated information on field session activities, check the ASM website.

Teaching youngsters how to be archeologists

By Tom Cuthbertson

Archaeology in the Community (from CRAB, SHA cultural resources bulletin)

Archaeology in the Community (AITC) is a Mid-Atlantic organization based in Washington, D.C. that promotes and facilitates the study and public understanding of archeology through formal and informal educational programs, hands-on learning, professional development and community events.

AITC's Young Archaeologist Club is one of a series of youth education programs, which serves children ages 7-11. During this six-week program participants are introduced to archeology as a field and to the methods archeologists use to learn about the past. Classes are taught in an informal classroom setting.

Each week students learn about a new topic, beginning with a short introductory talk about the topic followed by an interactive lesson. In addition to the regular weekly lessons, twice during the six-week session, participants and their parents are taken on fieldtrips to a museum or active archeological excavation.

Though in the past, participants were required to pay a fee to cover venue costs, supplies, etc., this project is currently fully funded through the Jack and Jill Foundation STEM Grant. For the 2018-2019 session, AITC was able to educate 80 students from the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. The program, like many of AITC's programs, is staffed by volunteer archeologists who donate their time, experience and expertise.

Each session features a different archeological lesson so students are constantly being exposed to new facets of archeology. For example, this spring's session covered; rock art, Egyptology and funerary practices. Club members went on fieldtrips to the National Geographic Museum's exhibit on Egyptian Queens and to George Washington's Mount Vernon where they got a chance to help with the excavations.

For the rock art lesson, the students were given the chance to document reproduction rock art with the help of donated materials from Nova Stone Center in Manassas, Virginia. For the lesson on Egyptology, Heba Abdel Salam of the American Research Center in Egypt was the guest teacher.

Programs like this are vitally important. Exposure to interdisciplinary fields, like archeology, help to instill critical thinking skills. In order to broaden the base of people who pay attention and care about historic preservation, we have to make the field more accessible.

AITC is working toward this goal by creating and running programs to make it clear that archeologists come from, and work in, your community. To learn more or volunteer visit www.archaeologyincommunity.com.

Estimating the cost of Isis' looting in Syria

Condensed from The Conversation, May 15, 2019

The Islamic State surrendered its last scrap of territory, in Baghouz, Syria, this past March. While some argue that celebrations of IS's demise are premature, there's no question that the terrorist group left a trail of destruction in its wake.

Many lives were lost, of course. But a looming issue is the group's legacy of looting. Looted artifacts were said to be a significant source of income for the group. Value estimates ranged from a few million to several billion dollars. We still don't know exactly what's missing, or their value. Until now.

With two Near Eastern archeologists and two art market researchers on our team, we recently published a paper in the *International Journal of Cultural Property* that offers the first attempt to quantify the market value of artifacts at the level of a site.

The excavated objects' total value was larger than we had expected. We found that just a small portion of a site can yield thousands of objects, adding up to millions of dollars.

We examined two sites from different time periods that housed two different types of settlements. The first, Dura Europos, was a Roman garrison town on the Euphrates with a multi-ethnic population. Four years ago satellite images from Dura Europos showed a Swiss-cheese landscape of pits.

The second town, Tell Bi'a, in northern Syria, was a major Bronze Age capital in the second millennium B.C.

In the early decades of the 20th Century, archeologists excavated roughly 40 percent of Dura Europos. About 10 percent of Tell Bi'a was studied in the 1980s and 1990s. Records at these two sites list over 13,000 objects, excluding coins.

Using a machine learning model, we compared archeological records and sales records of over 40,000 antiquities from auction houses, galleries and dealers to predict what these objects would sell for.

Based on our model, the total estimated value of all artifacts, not including coins, excavated from Dura Europos is \$18 million. At Tell Bi'a, the estimate is \$4 million. This range is partly explained by the different sizes of the two cities and the area that was excavated.

It's important to keep in mind that these dollar figures represent just slices of two sites. The most comprehensive database of Syrian archeological sites, assembled by archeologist Jesse Casana and collaborators at Dartmouth College, has identified roughly 15,000 major sites in the country. Data examined by Casana's team suggest that 3,000 of those sites experienced some looting from April 2011 to mid-2015.

Not every site has the artifactual density or richness of Dura Europos. But if a small portion of a single site like Tell Bi'a is capable of generating \$4 million in sales - and there are 15,000 major sites - it doesn't take much imagination to see just how much of an archeological gold mine the country is.

Again, these dollar figures do not tell us what IS - or other looters - actually pocketed. We may never know the full extent of the loss.

What should we do with these estimates?

First, any policy that hopes to tackle archeological looting needs reliable market estimates that highlight the scope and scale of the issue. Our findings get us closer to a point where everyone's on the same page.

Second, our data show that small objects account for the majority of market share. At Dura Europos, 50 percent of the total market value was generated by objects under 5 inches long, and at Tell Bi'a by objects under 3 inches long.

Our data indicate that policies to address the black market - at least for Syrian antiquities - should focus on objects that can fit in looters' pockets. Our study also indicates that much of the final price may be going to middlemen or dealers.

However this isn't a story solely about IS. We know that multiple groups participated in archeological looting during the war, including the Syrian government's own army. IS did not invent looting; the group tapped into an existing looting infrastructure and intensified its scale and productivity. Archeological looting is a global problem, and Syria will continue to be of interest to hobby diggers, renegade excavators and thieves.

Of course, the legacy of Syrian wartime looting can't just be measured in dollars. It's a loss of culture and of historical knowledge.

Man eats snake, venom and all, and lives

By Matthew Taub

Condensed from Gastro Obscura, April 24, 2019

About 1,500 years ago, a hunter-gatherer in present-day Texas ate an entire venomous snake. This isn't presumptive, an inference based on the knowledge that our ancestors' painful trials and errors have informed our modern dietary preferences and precautions. It comes straight from the source: the individual's fossilized poop, replete with one of the snake's preserved, poison-pumping fangs.

The fossilized poop, or coprolite—discussed in a recent study in the *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*—was mined by the researchers while they were working on a group project in graduate school. The final project for the semester, explains Crystal Dozier, now an assistant professor of anthropology at Wichita State University, was simply to analyze a coprolite; neither the researchers nor their professor had any idea that this one would be so special.

It certainly didn't look like much, after all: just "like a really skinny cow patty," says Morgan Smith, an incoming assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

After the team chemically reconstituted the specimen and revealed the snake's bones, scales and fang, however, the researchers realized they didn't have their hands on just any really old poop. Smith compared the fang to others in Texas A&M University's biodiversity collection, and concluded that it likely belonged to a rattlesnake.

That makes this coprolite the first known fecal record of a human eating an entire venomous snake.

We can't know with total certainty why this person went for the serpentine snack. Maybe it was just the munchies: Dozier, after all, says that she has eaten a snake, too, even if she didn't particularly enjoy it. But there's some circumstantial evidence to suggest that the snake was eaten in a ritual act.

First, explains Smith, some contemporary cultures viewed snakes as water carriers, and it seems that this snake was eaten during a drought—in possible hopes of restoring some rainfall. Moreover, Dozier says that the coprolite contained traces of a pollen associated with religious traditions (not to mention an entire rodent, even if that has less spiritual significance).

The evidence also suggests that the individual did okay during the meal's direct aftermath. "We know," at the very least, "that the person must have lived to the point of defecation," which can take up to 48 hours, according to Dozier. Plus, she says, the poop seems to have been sufficiently solid to appear normal and healthy.

That doesn't mean we should now feel free to eat venomous snakes like they're candy bars. "All we have is the poop," says Dozier, "so it's hard to say what happened before or after."

For her, the most exciting aspect of this discovery is that it gives us "a view of a particular person at a particular time"—a time that predates, by roughly 1,000 years, other records of people in the Americas eating snakes. Smith, meanwhile, says that the find attests to the importance of investigating samples just sitting in existing archeological collections and not only searching for undiscovered items out in the field.

Chapter News

Most chapters are now in summer recess.

In addition to the listed chapters, ASM has chapters at Hood College and the Community College of Baltimore County and a club at Huntingtown High School in Calvert County, run by Jeff Cunningham; visit its website, <http://hhsarchaeology.weebly.com/>

Anne Arundel

Anne Arundel Chapter will be meeting at the Schmidt Center at SERC, the second Tuesday of each month, 7 to 9 p.m. Parking in front of the venue. For information, contact Jim Gibb at JamesGGibb@verizon.net

Central Chapter

Meets the third Friday every other month at the Natural History Society of Maryland at 6908 Belair Road in Baltimore. Business meeting begins at 7, talk at 7:30. For information contact centralchapterasm@yahoo.com or stephenisrael2701@comcast.net or 410-945-5514. Or www.facebook.com/asmcentralchapter or <http://asmcentralchapter.weebly.com> or Twitter [@asmcentral](https://twitter.com/asmcentral)

Charles County

Meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the second Thursday (September-May) at the LaPlata Police Department. Contact President Carol Cowherd at ccasm2010@gmail.com. Website ccarchsoc.blogspot.com and Facebook [@ccasm2010](https://www.facebook.com/ccasm2010)

Mid-Potomac

The chapter meets the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at Needwood Mansion in Derwood. Dinner at a local restaurant at 5:30 p.m. Contact Don Housley at donhou704@earthlink.net or 301-424-8526. Chapter website: <http://www.asmmidpotomac.org> Email: asmmidpotomac@gmail.com Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Mid-Potomac-Archaeology/182856471768

Monocacy

The chapter meets in the C. Burr Artz Library in Frederick the second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. For more information, visit the chapter's web page at digfrederick.com or call 301-378-0212. The chapter does not meet in July or August.

Northern Chesapeake

Members and guests assemble at 6:30 for light refreshments. A business meeting at 7 is followed by the presentation at 7:30. Contact Dan Coates at 410- 273-9619 or dancoates@comcast.net Website: <http://sites.google.com/site/northernchesapeake>

St. Mary's County

Meetings are the third Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the Joseph D. Carter State Office Building in the Russell Conference Room, Leonardtown. For information contact Chris Coogan at Cicoogan@smcm.edu

Upper Patuxent

Meets the second Monday at 7 p.m. at 9944 Route 108 in Ellicott City. Labs are the second and fourth Saturdays. On Facebook, www.facebook.com/pages/Upper-Patuxent-Archaeology-Group/464236446964358 or www.upperpatuxentarchaeology.com or try uparchaeologygroup@gmail.com

June 10: The Search for Camp Johnson Civil War Encampment. B&O Ellicott City Station Museum.

Western Maryland

Programs are the fourth Friday of the month, at 7:30 p.m. in the LaVale Library, unless noted. Contact Roy Brown, 301-724-7769. Email: wmdasm@yahoo.com Website: <http://sites.google.com/site/wmdasm>

June 28: Artifact Analysis Workshop conducted by Suzanne Trussell.

The Archeological Society of Maryland Inc. is a statewide nonprofit organization devoted to the study and conservation of Maryland archeology.

ASM members receive the monthly newsletter, ASM Ink; the biannual journal, MARYLAND ARCHEOLOGY, reduced admission to ASM events and a 10-percent discount on items sold by the Society. Contact Membership Secretary Ethan Bean, 609 N. Paca Street, Apt. 3, Baltimore, MD 21201 for membership rates. For publication sales, not including newsletter or Journal, contact Dan Coates at ASM Publications, 716 Country Club Rd.,

Havre de Grace, MD 21078-2104 or 410-273-9619 or dancoates@comcast.net

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