

# ASM Ink



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Newsletter of the Archeological Society of Maryland, Inc.

[www.marylandarcheology.org](http://www.marylandarcheology.org)



*June was not busting out all over on this day, but this ASM crew ignore the chill and carry on.—S. Sperling*

## ASM goes back to the field at Billingsley

ASM declared victory and returned to the field May 28 for the (usually) annual Tyler Bastian field session. Fewer than normal number of volunteers turned up, they didn't have a lot of notice, and some staples (such as lectures and the end-of-session barbecue) were missing, but intrepidly ASMers soldiered on.

The location was the Billingsley Site (18PR9) in southern Prince George's County, where ASM's last pre-covid dig had been held. The results of that dig led investigators to want to return and see what else they could find.

Billingsley had both prehistoric and historic elements, but the focus this year was looking for the first signs of the Contact Period. A 1670 map indicates the presence of both Indians and colonists on the property at that time.

Under the direction of Matt McKnight of the Maryland Historical Trust and Stephanie Sperling of the Maryland - National Capital Park and Planning Commission, squares were marked out, screens set up and finds were found. After being briefed on the mission by Charlie Hall, participants became either trowelers or screeners and went to work.

**LOOKING FOR:** A nationwide search is on for a new coordinator for the CAT program. Preference given for Marylanders and ASM members. For information on the job and to apply contact Claude Bowen (contact info on back page of this newsletter).

# Upcoming events

## Volunteer opportunities (non-covid)

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](mailto:charles.hall@maryland.gov) or Louise Akerson at [lakerson1@verizon.net](mailto: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](mailto:jamesggibb@verizon.net)

**Montgomery County** for lab and field work volunteers, contact Heather Bouslog at 301 563 7530 or [Heather.Bouslog@montgomeryparks.org](mailto: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. For diggers, the Linniston site on Gibson Island Fridays from 8 to 3. The lab will be open some weekdays at the Anne Arundel collection facility at 7409 Baltimore-Annapolis Blvd. in Glen Burnie. For more information email Drew Webster at [volunteers@losttownsproject.org](mailto: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 410 586 8554.

**The Archaeological Institute of America** provides an online listing of fieldwork opportunities worldwide. Call up [www.archaeological.org/fieldwork](http://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](mailto:Kpalich@howardcountymd.gov) or 410-313-0423.

**CAT corner:** For information on the CAT program, contact chair Kelly Palich at [Kpalich@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:Kpalich@howardcountymd.gov) or 410-313-0423. See note on Page 1.

## It's time to think of nominees for Marye Award

Egypt and China aren't the only places where advancements are being made in archeology. There also is Maryland, and while we can't boast elaborate tombs or statuary, archeologists are constantly making discoveries about the secrets our state holds.

Each year, ASM honors one of the people who keeps Maryland archeology advancing, with the Society's highest honor, the William B. Marye Award.

Nominations for the award are made by ASM members. Winners need not be Marylanders or even archeologists, just someone who in the course of his/her work has made significant contribution to archeology in our state.

The award is usually presented at ASM's fall meeting. The deadline for nominations this year is August 17, to leave enough time to get a plaque made. A form accompanies this newsletter.

Nominations are not held over from year to year, nor is not winning the award one year a handicap to winning it the next.

Think about who you think deserves this honor and then make the nomination. Be specific in stating why you think your candidate deserves the award: Specificity is more valuable to the committee than just generalizations.

# 1634 coin helps validate St. Mary's site

By Michael E. Ruane

*Condensed from the Washington Post, May 2, 2021*

It was an elegant coin, showing the crowned king in profile with goatee and lace collar. It was probably missed by its owner and probably searched for, in vain.

Last week, archeologists announced that, about 380 years after it was lost, it turned up during the historic dig that recently uncovered the outlines of the fort at the first permanent English settlement in Maryland. The shilling had been struck in the royal mint in the Tower of London about 1633 or 1634, chief project archeologist Travis Parno said Friday.

And it may have been carried by one of the original 150 colonists who arrived at St. Mary's on two ships, the Ark and the Dove, in March 1634.

The discovery is rare, Parno said, and further proof that the archeologists have correctly pinpointed the fort's location.

"It nailed our site date exactly," he said. The shilling has a mint mark — a tiny image of a castle portcullis — that dates it. We don't find a lot of coinage," he said. "We don't have any shilling that matches this one exactly. To find one that's that early is a unique thing for us. ... It was quite a revelation."

The coin's owner might have been a person of means: "To have currency with you, particularly a full silver shilling, it's not like someone carrying around a few copper farthings. ... But it's really impossible to know."

A shilling in those days was valuable, but not that valuable, Parno said. It might buy some pottery. Five shillings or so might buy a tool.

"It's not like carrying around a gold doubloon," he said.

On March 22, Historic St. Mary's City announced that Parno and archeological geophysicist Tim Horsley had found the remnants of the post holes for the fort's palisade, which marked one of the earliest settlements in what would become the United States.

The shilling may predate the later use of tobacco as currency in Maryland, which happened after the colony established tobacco as a cash crop, Parno said.

And it is a connection between the frontier world of early Maryland and the political turbulence in 1600s England.

The shilling was found in November by archeologist crew chief Stephanie Stevens, Parno said. She texted him a picture of the coin, adding the expression "OMG!," he said.

He texted back with an expletive and then, "Sorry. Wow."

The discovery was kept under wraps for safekeeping while the coin was studied. It was unveiled Wednesday when Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R) visited the site.

The reverse side of the coin shows a coat of arms and the Latin motto "Christo Auspice Regno" — I Reign Under the Auspices of Christ.

Also unveiled then was an old Catholic religious medal depicting five saints and a "tinkling cone," a small copper alloy decoration probably made by Europeans for trade with Native Americans. Those items were unearthed about two weeks ago.

"We find stuff that gets lost, broken or thrown away," Parno said. "That's the job of the archeologist. Sometimes it's the stuff that gets lost that we get really excited about."

## Why focus on Egypt and exclude China?

By Rowan K. Flad

*Condensed from the Washington Post, May 11, 2021*

Early in April, news broke that a 3,000-year-old "lost golden city" had been uncovered in Luxor, Egypt. Described in some articles as the most important find since the 1922 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen, the city of Aten, founded between 1391 and 1353 B.C. appears to have been the largest settlement of that era.

The discovery was prominently covered by such outlets as ABC, NPR, The Washington Post and the New

*Continued on next page*

York Times, which noted that it comes as "Egyptology is having a big moment."

But the lavish coverage contrasted with the quiet reception in the United States, two weeks before, for a stunning set of discoveries, dating to about 1,200 B.C., at the site of Sanxingdui in China's Sichuan province.

There archeologists unearthed more than 500 objects, including a large gold mask, ivory, bronzes and remnants of silk, with more coming. The finds include whole tusks of Asian elephants — evidence of tribute brought to the Sanxingdui leaders from across the Sichuan region.

New, highly meticulous archeological work is providing unprecedented detail about this important site, a crucial window into an early state in East Asia. In China, media interest was intense, with multiday, prime-time coverage, including a live broadcast of the excavations. And the attention was warranted: Discoveries at Sanxingdui have totally transformed our understanding of how multiple, regionally distinct yet interrelated early cultures intertwined to produce what came to be understood as "Chinese" civilization.

Why do we pay so much more attention in the West to Egyptian archeology than to Chinese archeology — even though each is important to our understanding of human history? Egypt strikes a chord partly because of a kind of romanticism that is a legacy of colonialism: Stories of Western archeologists competing to find tombs in the 19th Century riveted Western Europeans and today's news coverage is a product of that tradition.

And the focus on discoveries in the Mediterranean world reflects a persistent bias situating the United States as a lineal descendant, via Europe, of Mediterranean civilizations. Links among ancient Egypt and Greece and Rome — and Egypt's appearance in the Christian Bible — allowed ancient Egypt to be appropriated and incorporated into European heritage and therefore into the story of American identity.

So we treat high-profile finds in Egyptian archeology as a thread of the story of *us*, while we see Chinese archeology as unrelated to American civilization. But that view is mistaken. Roughly 6 percent of Americans identify as ethnically Asia: That population is part of the American story.

Chinese archeology has a very different history. It has largely been done by local, Chinese archeologists; it was not an imperialist project. It was also tied, early on, to nationalist claims of identity.

Chinese aristocrats collected and catalogued artifacts for centuries, but only in the early 20th Century did people start to consider the excavation of artifacts a scientific endeavor.

Under Chinese scholars such as Li Ji, however, archeology quickly became a discipline closely intertwined with traditional history and attached to a particular story. The dominant narrative has presented the origins of Chinese civilization as rooted in a singular source — the Three Dynasties (the Xia, Shang and Zhou), situated in the Central Plains of the Yellow River valley in Henan province, Shaanxi province and surrounding areas.

These dynasties lasted from roughly 2,000 B.C. to the unification of China, in 221 B.C.

In the late 1920s, Chinese archeologists began to unearth what turned out to be the last capital of the Shang Dynasty, a city dating to circa 1250 to 1050 B.C. near Anyang, in Henan province, in the heart of the Central Plains. These excavations revealed an urban center with a large population fed by millet agriculture and domesticated animals. The sophistication of the society that was revealed in these digs helped to solidify the belief that there was a single main source of subsequent Chinese culture: This was its epicenter.

A second major discovery contributing to this theory was the uncovering in 1974 in Xi'an of the terra-cotta soldiers of the tomb of the first emperor of Qin (who died in 210 B.C.). The location of those artifacts helped reinforce the notion that Chinese culture followed one line of succession, with roots in this region.

But finds at Sanxingdui and other sites since the 1980s have upended this monolithic notion of Chinese cultural development. The Sanxingdui discoveries, which are contemporary with the Shang remains, are located in Sichuan, hundreds of miles southwest of the Central Plains and separated from them by the Qinling Mountains. The site is similarly spectacular.

These discoveries seem to make clear that Chinese civilization did not simply emerge from the Central Plains and grow to subsume and assimilate the cultures of surrounding regions. Instead, it is a result of a process whereby various traditions, people, languages and ethnicities have been woven together in a tapestry that is historically complex and multifaceted.

The monument-constructing civilization of ancient Egypt doesn't have any closer relationship to the heterogeneous bases of American culture than do the cultures of various other regions, including Asia. To say so is not to denigrate the study of Egypt but to widen the lens so that it encompasses more of the story.

# Sorry, a computer can analyze as well as you

By Heather Murphy

*Condensed from the New York Times, May 25, 2021*

A key piece of an archeologist's job involves the tedious process of categorizing shards of pottery into subtypes. Ask archeologists why they have put a fragment into a particular category and it's often difficult for them to say what exactly had led them to that conclusion.

"It's kind of like looking at a photograph of Elvis Presley and looking at a photo of an impersonator," said Christian Downum, an anthropology professor at Northern Arizona University. "You know something is off with the impersonator, but it's hard to specify why it's not Elvis."

But archeologists have now demonstrated that it's possible to program a computer to do this critical part of their job as well as they can. In a study published in the June issue of *The Journal of Archaeological Science*, researchers reported that a deep-learning model sorted images of decorated shards as accurately as — and occasionally more precisely than — four expert archeologists did.

"It doesn't hurt my feelings," Downum, one of the study's authors, said. Rather, he said, it should improve the field by freeing up time and replacing "the subjective and difficult-to-describe process of classification with a system that gives the same result every time."

The study focused on Tusayan White Ware, a type of pottery used in northeastern Arizona between 825 and 1300. In the 1920s, archeologists figured out that Tusayan White Ware pieces have consistent patterns depending on the time period in which they were created.

The researchers recruited four of the most experienced analysts of this particular type of pottery. Each had spent 30 or more years analyzing ceramics and had previously classified tens of thousands of Tusayan White Ware fragments.

They also spent about four hours training a neural network, a complex mathematical system that can learn specific tasks by analyzing vast amounts of data, to sort photographs of Tusayan White Ware.

Human and machine were each tasked with categorizing thousands of images into one of nine known types and evaluated on the accuracy of their answers. The neural network tied two of the human analysts for accuracy and beat the other two, the researchers found.

The machine was also far more efficient. Because the task was dull, none of the analysts wanted to go through all 3,000 photographs without stopping, Pawlowicz said. So even though they probably could have completed the task in three hours, each conducted the analysis through several sessions over three to four months.

The neural network whipped through thousands of images in a few minutes.

Not only was the computer program more efficient and as accurate as the archeologists, it was also able to better articulate why it had categorized shards a certain way compared with its living, breathing competitors. In one case, the computer offered up a smart sorting observation that was new to the researchers.

Machine also outshined humans in offering only one answer for each classification; the participating archeologists often disagreed on how items were categorized, a known issue that often slows archeological projects, the authors said.

Phillip Isola, a computer science professor at M.I.T. who was not involved in the study, said he was not surprised that the neural network performed as well as — or sometimes better than — the archeologists.

"It's the same story we've heard a few times now," Isola said. In the field of medical imaging, for example, researchers have found that neural networks rival radiologists at identifying tumors. Academics are also using similar tools to categorize plant and bird types.

This is also far from the first time archeologists have turned to artificial intelligence. In 2015, researchers in France applied machine learning to classifying medieval French ceramics. A group of archeologists and computer scientists from five countries is also developing a digital tool to categorize pottery shards. Neither of these projects explicitly pits human against machine, however.

Since the study began to circulate, some archeologists have shared concerns with the authors that they will be replaced by machines. Downum said he was not worried about such a thing happening.

"We're the ones that decide what's important to study," Downum said.

## Book review:

# A new look at the Susquehannocks

**The Susquehannocks; New Perspectives on Settlement and Cultural Identity**, edited by Paul Raber, 177 pages, The State University of Pennsylvania Press

In 1984, the late Barry Kent published what has become the definitive work concerning the Susquehannocks, "Susquehanna's Indians." In 2001, a revised and updated edition was published. The editor of this book is clear that this volume is intended to supplement Kent's work; not to replace it. In support of this intention, Raber dedicates this book to Kent.

I must admit that I am wary when I see books consisting of essays from a variety of scholars. Often these books have inviting titles that the contents rarely "live up to." I am happy to say that this book is an exception.

Raber has brought together a formidable group of scholars including friends of ASM such as April Beisaw, Bob Wall and Marshall Becker. Although there is the fashionable (almost obligatory) bashing of culture history in some of the essays in this book (one must wonder if some of these scholars ever look down to see whose shoulders they stand on), the essays deliver on the promise of the book's subtitle in a readable and, dare I say it, educational manner.

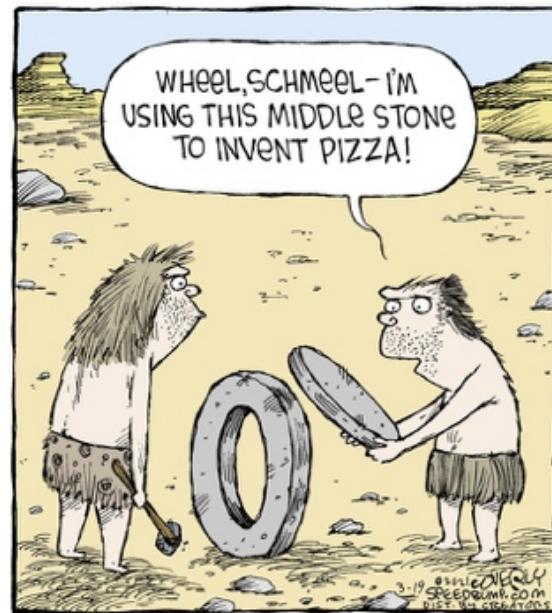
Even those essays by scholars exhibiting a penchant for the post-processual argument remain anchored in their imaginings by the material culture; making their thoughts and conclusions both cogent and reasonable.

Apart from the very interesting topics of these essays, there are lessons concerning how the archeology of Donald A. Cadzow, Kent and many others as well as more recent research (such as the work on the Lemoyne Site) can be utilized to form new theories as to identity formation, the diverse roles of women in making and decorating pottery, the utilization of ceramic attributes over time, the very early expansion of the Susquehannocks to the northern and southern branches of the Potomac River, e.g. the Barton Site.

In addition, there is a use of ceramic seriation as a chronometric tool throughout the book which is necessary because the subject population's existence as tribal entity lasts less than 200 years, making other forms of dating difficult if not impossible to use.

This book will not only increase your knowledge of the enigmatic Susquehannock Tribe but will also serve as a fascinating series of lessons concerning how the archeological record can be read and interpreted from a modern perspective. I recommend the book to any reader interested in the very Late Woodland and Contact Periods in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

-- Claude Bowen



# 180-foot-tall hill sculpture finally gets dated

By William Booth

Condensed from the Washington Post, May 19, 2021

LONDON — There's nothing especially subtle about the Cerne Abbas Giant. He's a big fellow, 180 feet tall, wielding a huge club. And he's naked. Very.

Carved into a hillside in rural Dorset in south England, the giant is an ancient cartoon character of sorts, outlined in white chalk. For centuries, he has been a source of mystery and fascination, alongside religious and political intrigue.

Who created him? When? And why?

Did the Romans make him 2,000 years ago? He does resemble the virile lion-slayer Hercules. Or is he an older, more obscure Bronze Age Celtic deity? Or maybe he was a later creation, designed to mock the 17th-Century Lord Protector of England, the admired/loathed Oliver Cromwell, as the Victorians speculated.

Now, a respected team of archeologists — examining bits of ancient snail shell and the radiation emitted from single grains of sand — think they've definitively nailed down his age. It's a big surprise, if you're into this kind of thing, which the English are.

The giant was hewed into the hill in the late Saxon period, between the years A.D. 700 and A.D. 1110 — with the highest probability of A.D. 908, the scientists say.

"Every archeologist I know, including me, had it wrong," said Michael Allen, an independent geoarcheologist and leading expert on ancient mollusks, who participated in the dig. The professionals thought the giant would be far older or younger than he is.

"That's exciting, isn't it? We're brilliant! But it turns out we don't know everything," Allen told The Washington Post.

The first documented mention of the giant doesn't appear until 1694, in a church warden's account of payment of three shillings to restore the site.

If the new date range of his creation is correct, that means the giant may have disappeared from history for 600 or 700 years — into the weeds and wildflowers, as it were.

These days, the giant can be seen and admired clearly from the nearby road and village.

He is one of the most visited of the "hill figures" in England

The giant is not notable only for his tall size, but his nakedness, specifically his phallus. He's been a kind of (crumbly) rock star since his rediscovery 300 years ago — and featured prominently in gentlemen's magazines of the 18th Century (not kidding).

"He's a great conversation piece, that's for certain," said Martin Papworth, an archeologist who has led the research for the National Trust, which owns and protects the site.

The figure was originally created by people digging a trench through the turf on the hillside and then filling the outline with pounded chalk — a soft, white, porous limestone, like the famous White Cliffs of Dover.

Dating the site has been hard. First of all, it's protected by the secretary of state as a monument of extraordinary significance. Also, there are no animal bones, no camp fire chars, no middens or other sorts of trash heaps to help.

The new date estimate was established with the help of Allen's analysis of snail artifacts. He knows which ones arrived when in England; it's complicated.

His colleague Phillip Toms, a professor of physical geography at the University of Gloucestershire, also examined quartz taken from the deepest sediment layer — around three feet deep at the giant's elbows and soles. Toms is an expert in optically stimulated luminescence, which shows when individual grains of quartz were last exposed to a ray of sunshine. The technique has been compared to radiocarbon dating but with light.

But solving the mystery of the giant's age leads to more questions: What or who does he represent?

## Chapter News

Check with your local chapter to see what activities will take place.

### Central Chapter

All Meetings will be held on Zoom the third Tuesday of the Month. For more information and to be added to the Zoom list contact: Katharine Fernstrom at [kwfappraising@gmail.com](mailto:kwfappraising@gmail.com)

### Charles County

Meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the second Thursday (September-May). The next few will be virtual. Contact President Carol Cowherd at [ccasm2010@gmail.com](mailto:ccasm2010@gmail.com) for Zoom access information. Website [ccarchsoc.blogspot.com](http://ccarchsoc.blogspot.com) and Facebook @ccasm2010

### Mid-Potomac

Until further notice, all Mid-Potomac Chapter Meetings will be by Zoom starting at 7 p.m., the talk at 7:30, the third Thursday of the month. Contact Don Housley at [donhou704@earthlink.net](mailto:donhou704@earthlink.net) or 301-424-8526. Chapter website: [www.asmmidpotomac.org](http://www.asmmidpotomac.org) Email: [asmmidpotomac@gmail.com](mailto:asmmidpotomac@gmail.com)

### 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](http://digfrederick.com) or call 301-378-0212.

### Northern Chesapeake

A business meeting at 7 is followed by the presentation at 7:30. Contact Dan Coates at 410- 273-9619 or [dancoates@comcast.net](mailto: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 [Clicoogan@smcm.edu](mailto:Clicoogan@smcm.edu)

### Upper Patuxent

Meetings the second Saturday or Sunday of the month, virtual or at the Heritage Program Office, 9944 Route 108, Ellicott City, unless otherwise noted. [www.facebook.com/pages/Upper-Patuxent-Archaeology-Group/464236446964358](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Upper-Patuxent-Archaeology-Group/464236446964358) or [www.upperpatuxentarchaeology.com](http://www.upperpatuxentarchaeology.com) or call Kelly Palich, 410 313 0423.

### 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](mailto:wmdasm@yahoo.com) Website: <http://sites.google.com/site/wmdasm>

**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, 765-716-5282 or [beans32@comcast.net](mailto:beans32@comcast.net) 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 20178-2104 or 410-273-9619 or [dancoates@comcast.net](mailto:dancoates@comcast.net)

Submissions: Please send to Myron Beckenstein, 3126 Gracefield Rd., Apt 106, Silver Spring, MD. 20905 or 240-867-3662 or [myronbeck@verizon.net](mailto:myronbeck@verizon.net)

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