

Alabama Archaeological Society

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STONES & BONES NEWSLETTER

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FABULOUS TREASURES THE CULTURE VULTURES FIND

NOTE: This article is a continuation of our series on vandalism and looting of archaeological sites throughout the world.

Today the world is experiencing a great culture ripoff from which professional treasure hunters, who know exactly what they're looking for and where to go to find it, have become multi-millionaires in their quest for price-less ancient treasures.

Many of them are Americans, experts in their fields, who live permanently in such countries as Italy, Greece, Egypt, Israel, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala. They have spent their time in the most fertile areas where ancient artifacts are readily located, getting acquainted with land owners and peasant laborers and offering them an excellent opportunity of striking it rich if and when they can deliver art treasures that have a ready resale to museums and private collectors in Europe and the United States.

Neal McDermott (a pseudonym) is a 42-year-old Englishman who has lived in Egypt for the past 15 years and has a reputation of being one of the best art dealers in the business. He is a graduate of Oxford and holds a degree in Egyptology, making him exceptionally well qualified in his field. During the summer months he lives in a villa in Alexandria, but come winter, he hightails it to Luxor and the "Valley of the Kings", where tombs of ancient Egyptian royalty are being unearthed with great regularity.

According to McDermott, whenever a peasant laborer uncovers a tomb, he steals from it everything of value and hides it in his home until he can dispose of it. He knows very well that if he takes his artifacts to the Department of Antiquities he will receive nothing in return, so quite naturally he eventually contacts an art dealer living in the vicinity and the two of them strike a bargain.

This is how McDermott has made a fortune over the years. Based upon his experience, he knows exactly where his collection of Pharaonic objects of art can be sold and the approximate price he will receive.

With all the safeguards that have been instituted, the fact remains that a wave of archaeological lootings is spreading across the Land of the

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Pharaohs. It is believed that an international network of antique dealers from both the United States and Europe is financing the operation. During the past year or so, thousands of tombs have been illegally plundered, resulting in a loss of treasures estimated to be worth millions.

"It was heartbreaking to find that a graveyard of over 400 acres had been systematically robbed, and that millions of dollars worth of valuable antiques had been spirited out of the country", said Fathy Wasif, chief inspector of the Antiquities Department in Cairo.

Last year, well-organized groups of illegal archaeologists or "educated crooks", as Wasif called them, plundered more than 200 Pharaonic tombs near Fayoum, 60 miles from Cairo, and hit two other sites while escaping with their loot. In Aswan, site of the dam built by the Russians, four priceless colored slabs, depicting the kings of the Old Kingdom, mysteriously vanished.

"Somehow or other", said Wasif, "they put them on a boat during the night and sailed off toward the Sudan, where undoubtedly they were transferred to a plane and shipped to Europe or America - whichever was willing to pay the highest price".

There is still another group, numbering in the hundreds or even thousands, which makes a good living collecting and selling antiquities. They are the army of treasure hunters, amateur and professional, who will go anywhere and suffer any hardship in their quest to strike it rich. Many of these adventurers are lured to such places as Peru and Ecuador, where they hope to discover the lost gold of the Incas. The gold, according to history, was buried in various inaccessible locales to keep religious objects from falling into the hands of the greedy Spanish Conquistadors who, in the 16th century, invaded and conquered the Incan Empire.

Many archaeologists state that Mexico and Guatemala form one solid museum from end to end, encompassing burial sites of such former civilizations as the Mayas and Aztecs. In Mexico alone, over 11,000 ancient burial sites have been formally registered with the government, and there are hundreds if not thousands of others still to be discovered. Years ago, while an eight-mile stretch of the Mexico City subway was being excavated, over 60 tons of ancient pottery were unearthed.

A few years ago an American archaeologist was in Guatemala on an expedition to record monuments of the Mayan civilization. At an excavation site near Tikal in the Peten jungle, the party surprised a gang of pillagers. The thieves shot one of the guides, and the rest of the party fled back to their camp in terror. By the next morning, the looters had vanished, leaving gaping holes in the ground where the Mayan monuments had been. In Peru valuable gold Incan artifacts were stolen from ancient burial mounds near the ancient ruins of Pachacamac. The theft provoked a national outcry, but the priceless objects, which included gold ceremonial knives, breastplates, and ornaments, were successfully spirited out of the country.

These are just a few examples from local police files of the wave of looting incurred at archaeological sites around the world. Since most of these culture-rich countries are financially poor, bribery is an easy matter. Few officials can refuse under-the-counter payoffs that exceed their annual salaries. But corrupt officials represent only one phase of the international thievery network that transports relics from digging sites to wealthy dealers and collectors. At the grass-roots level are the peasants and farmers who dig for treasures to make money.

According to a professional treasure hunter, 1 percent of the labor force in Costa Rica is involved in some way in what is called "commercial archaeology". The diggers sell their finds to local art dealers, generally Americans or Europeans who take the best artifacts to the major markets in their own countries. There, the pieces are purchased by representatives of international art dealers who export them illegally to leading Western markets, often by way of Israel, West Germany, or Switzerland.

As governments become more aware of the value of their national treasures, they are promulgating new laws to make it more difficult for the art dealers, smugglers and treasure hunters to operate. The result has been a sharp increase in demand, causing prices for artifacts to spiral upward. A pre-Columbian ceremonial gold mask will bring as much as \$250,000. A Guatemalan stela, one of hundreds of massive stone monuments erected by the Mayas to mark ceremonial events, commands upwards of \$300,000 on the black market. A silver vessel shaped like a teapot and taken from the tomb of King Abishemu in the Royal Necropolis at Byblos in Lebanon (1700-1800 B.C.) was recently sold to a museum in England for \$500,000.

According to Klaus Spiller, a noted Swiss economist, there was a time when speculators bought diamonds as a hedge against inflation. Today, however, corporations, museums, private collectors and a large segment of our ever-growing affluent society have switched to investing in paintings and price-less antiquities. And as far as they are concerned, the sky is the limit.

Little wonder then that treasure hunting has become a billion-dollar bonanza.

(From an article by Jane Dolinger in "The World & I", November 1986)

The Editors

TRIP TO MEMPHIS

There will be a group bus trip to see the Ramesses the Great exhibit in Memphis, Tennessee, on Saturday, April 18. This exhibit is supposed to be even more impressive than the King Tut display. Time for leaving Huntsville will be early; bring a sack lunch. The bus has a rest room and is air conditioned. No children without parents. Reservations can be made by sending

\$32.50 for each person to: Nancy Rohr
10012 Louis Drive
Huntsville, Alabama 35803

before April 1. This includes the bus fee and fee to the exhibit. All reservations will be on a first-come basis. Please include your phone number with your check. If for some reason the trip is cancelled, your money will be refunded.

Nancy Rohr
Huntsville

CHAPTER NEWS

Birmingham Chapter

At our December 1986 meeting, Tom and Evelyn Hutto made a slide/talk presentation on "The Echota Indians of Alabama". Both were beautifully dressed in the traditional clothing of the Creek Indians. Artifacts of that time period were exhibited and the original utilizations were demonstrated by Mr. Hutto, such as the blowgun, different methods of fire making, etc. This was a colorful, fascinating presentation. (Tom Hutto has been named Chief of the Echota Tribe of Alabama.)

At our January meeting, we enjoyed a most excellent talk/slide presentation by Carey Oakley of the Office of Archaeological Research in Moundville. Carey is our new president of the Alabama Archaeological Society, and his subject was "Archaeological Research in the Huntsville Area". Carey described various archaeological work done in the past and gave us an overview of his plans for the coming year.

The new president of the Birmingham Chapter is Mr. M. H. (Heard) Floyd, Jr. Heard has been involved in the Birmingham Chapter since the early sixties, along with Joselyn, Wimberly, Britt Thompson and others. He is most knowledgeable and cooperative and will lend a big hand to the world of Alabama archaeology. I'm sure that he will be more than happy to help you in any way. His address and phone number are:

Mr. M. H. Floyd, Jr.
104 Lake Drive, Mountain Brook
Birmingham, Alabama 35223
Tel. 871-7944

Annette Weeks Otts
Birmingham

The February meeting was held on Thursday the 12th at the Red Mountain Museum Auditorium. Douglas Jones of the Alabama Museum of Natural History presented a talk/slide show on "DeSoto's Path through Alabama", a subject which brought forth much interest at the close of our last meeting.

Heard Floyd
Birmingham

Cullman Chapter

The Cullman County Archaeological Society meeting for January was held at the County Courthouse. Artifacts were brought and discussed by members. The February meeting was held on February 15 at the Courthouse.

Howard King

Fayette Chapter

The speaker at the November chapter meeting was Ms. Lauren Michaels, who gave a talk on the Mississippi Indian. Chapter officers for 1987 are as follows:

President	Joe P. Sanford
1st Vice President	Carl Porter
2nd Vice President	Danny West
Secretary	Shirley Porter

The December meeting was a show-and-tell session. The highlight of the meeting was a greenstone celt over 13 inches long, found by a chapter member.

Dr. Kenneth Turner from The University of Alabama was the speaker at the January 1987 chapter meeting. Dr. Turner's topic, illustrated by a film strip, was "Bones". The film strip covered dating bones and determining the sex of the individual from a study of the bones.

Joe P. Sanford

Huntsville Chapter

The Huntsville Chapter meets the third Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. Dr. Harry Holstein of Jacksonville State University was the speaker at the February chapter meeting. Dr. Holstein gave a most interesting presentation on archaeological investigations in the vicinity of Morgan Mountain. The next chapter meeting will be March 17 at 7 p.m. in the conference room of the United Way office on Traylor Island. Eugene Futato from the Office of Archaeological Research at Moundville will speak on biblical archaeology. Eugene and his wife Polly spent some time on a dig in Israel last summer and brought back a number of slides and a fascinating account of their experiences.

Dorothy Luke

Muscle Shoals Chapter

The chapter met on January 12 at the Indian Mound Museum in Florence. Twenty members and guests attended. The new slate of officers for 1987 is as follows:

President	Mary-Eliza Moore
1st Vice President	Carl Rielmann
2nd Vice President	Charles E. Moore
Secretary/Treasurer	Fred Johnson
Librarian	Alice Ray

Charles Moore presented the program, which was a slide narration of some sites in the Four Corners area.

Charles E. Moore

Tuscaloosa Chapter

The Tuscaloosa Chapter's February meeting was held at the town library. Our guest speaker was Dr. Bruce Bizzoco, anthropology instructor at Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa. Dr. Bizzoco spoke on state and federal laws concerning archaeology.

The Tuscaloosa Chapter meetings are held on the first Monday of each month at the town library at 7 p.m.

Bill Adkison

INDIAN APPRECIATION DAY - RUSSELL CAVE

The public is invited to attend Indian Appreciation Day on Saturday, April 18, 1987 at Russell Cave National Monument. We are planning to have Indian crafts and speakers on Indians and archaeology from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Picnic tables are available on a first-come basis. Soft drinks will also be available. No cooking will be allowed in the park.

We are planning to have Indian pottery making by Patsy Hanvey and TaMara Hanvey Beane. The State Archaeologist Carey Oakley will identify artifacts, assisted by park archaeologist Larry Beane. Jacksonville State University archaeologist Harry Holstein will present a program on Coosa Valley Archaeology at 1:00. We have two expert hide tanners coming to show old methods of tanning hides. We will have the Natural History Curator of Burritt Museum, Susan Weber, giving guided nature and herb walks. Stuart Daw and Van King, last year's star flintchippers, will return to chip Indian tools from flint. Basketmaking, Indian storytelling and archaeology movies round out the program.

Indian Day is one of the few special events scheduled at Russell Cave National Monument. Last year's special event was called "Indian Artifact Understanding Day" and resulted in the second highest single day attendance in the park's 25-year history. We have added to the programs and hope for a more successful day this year.

If you have questions, you may contact Larry Beane, coordinator for the event, or any staff member at 205/495-2672, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central Time.

Larry Beane
Russell Cave

DIGGING FOR BIBLICAL ROOTS

Those of you who read last summer's newsletters or were able to attend the A.A.S. Winter Meeting at Moundville last December, know that Polly and I are now associated with the Lahav Research Project, Israel. Each spring the Lahav Project holds a consultation of the research and publication staff to review research status and to make final plans for the coming field season. The University of Alabama, Alabama State Museum of Natural History is proud to be the host institution for the 1987 meeting.

As a part of the meeting, the project offers several public events. The first of these is "Digging for Biblical Roots", an exhibit of Middle Eastern antiquities and educational modules. The exhibit describes the archaeology of the site, what life at Tell Halif was like for the past inhabitants, discusses the Biblical identity of the town, explains field methods, etc. This exhibit will be at the Smith Hall gallery at the University from March 16 through April 30, 1987. Along with the archaeological exhibit will be a photographic exhibit "Images of Israel", photographs taken by Polly, not only of the dig, but of the entire summer.

On April 8 at 7 p.m. there will be a public presentation, "Biblical Archaeology in the 1980's, a Case Study". Eight of the Lahav staff members will give brief presentations describing the Lahav Research Project, discussing the identification of the site as the Biblical town Rimmon, summarizing the archaeology of the Canaanite period occupation, the Israelite period occupation, and other topics. There will be a panel of four people, and questions will be sought from the audience. A reception will be held in the exhibit gallery immediately after the presentation so that people will have an opportunity to meet with the Lahav staff and discuss the exhibits and any other questions on a one-to-one basis.

Opportunities to see Middle Eastern artifacts, hear such a presentation by scholars from all over the Eastern U.S., and meet with them face-to-face are not common in our area. We are pleased to offer you this opportunity and hope each of you can make plans to join us April 8.

Eugene Futato
Moundville

OHIO VALLEY

The 5th Annual Symposium on Ohio Valley Urban and Historic Archaeology will convene at the Executive Inn Riverfront, Paducah, Kentucky, on Friday and Saturday, March 20 and 21, 1987. This year's meeting is being hosted by Dr. Kit Wesler, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky. The program will be formatted by topic, and papers dealing with the Lower Ohio/Central Mississippi region are encouraged. A limited amount of display and publications sales space will be available. For further information, contact: Philip J. DiBlasi; ARCHAEOLOGY; University of Louisville; Louisville, Kentucky 40292. Telephone: 502/588-6724.

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Available issues of <i>Journal of Alabama Archaeology</i> Vol. 20-29 each issue	(\$2.50 to Members) \$5.00 pp
<i>Stanfield-Worley Bluff Shelter Excavations</i> (Journal of Alabama Archaeology) Vol. VIII Nos. 1 & 2 - Reprint, each issue	\$5.00 pp
Special Publication 1 — Fort Mitchell	\$2.00 pp
Special Publication 2 — <i>The Archaeological Sequence at Durant Bend, Dallas County Alabama</i>	\$4.50 pp
Special Publication 3 — <i>Archaeological Investigations at Horseshoe Bend</i>	\$6.50 pp
<i>Handbook of Alabama Archaeology Part 1, Point Types</i>	\$10.00 pp
Lively, Long, Josselyn - <i>Pebble Tool Paper</i>	\$3.00 pp
<i>Investigations in Russell Cave</i> , published by the National Park Service	\$7.50 pp
<i>Exploring Prehistoric Alabama through Archaeology</i> (Juvenile)	\$7.00 pp

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SEND CHECKS TO: **MR. EUGENE FUTATO, Office of Archaeological Research**

1 Mound State Monument, Moundville, Alabama 35474

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