

THE ALABAMA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

affiliates

BIRMINGHAM ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

MORGAN-LIMESTONE CHAPTER

MADISON-HUNTSVILLE CHAPTER

MUSCLE SHOALS CHAPTER

GODS, DUES AND SCHOLARS

Genesis, Chapter Three, provides an interesting text at this season of Christmas festival, and the plate to be passed for your offerings.

In Chapter Two we see that in planting the Garden of Eden, God included a "tree of knowledge" - the forbidden tree. The serpent, in the process of persuading "the woman whom thou gavest" to eat this forbidden fruit, explained that "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good from evil".

After Adam and Eve had succumbed to the tempting tidbit of knowledge, "the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever", they were driven from the Garden and the gate guarded by a flaming sword. (Perhaps the usage "one of us" in reference to gods merits some explanation. This was several thousand years before Jeremiah decided that the Jewish God was the one and only.)

Whatever our religious, or non-religious, persuasions may be, perhaps we can all agree (if even religion can achieve such miracles as agreement) that knowledge is the surest way to godliness. And now that we have partaken of this admittedly controversial fruit, with all its problems and perversions, responsibilities and obligations, it would seem that the best solution is to become as godly as possible. As has often been noted, "a little knowledge" is the most dangerous part of this fruit.

We see it - oh, just occasionally, of course - in archaeological societies. Like the fellow who learns that archaeologists dig. So he gets a shovel, as big as possible, and makes the dirt (and assorted artifacts and evidence) simply fly. Presently he comes up with a "whole pot!" - just the pot - all the evidence destroyed - a chapter of history permanently erased. And the pot thereafter decorates his mantle - uncatalogued, unmarked, as useless and worthless as an old coin with all identifying marks obliterated - a proud, but empty, boast. "Not many of the guys get a whole pot - but some buy them." Yes, we have even known of buying them - encouraging the dealers in their wholesale destruction of history - history, our most valuable commodity if we are ever to understand Homo sap. (The period is intentional.)

Yes, we are often confronted by the fact that a little knowledge is indeed, a dangerous thing. Sometimes we begin to wonder if our total influence in amateur archaeology is more destructive than it

is constructive; if we are encouraging amateur "collectors" more than what could excusably be called amateur archaeologists.

The answer lies, of course, in greater archaeological education - a greater measure of "godliness". The first bit of the fruit is quite toxic, but with enough bites we build up an immunity to the obsession for "whole pots". The story of history told by surface collections of otherwise miserable little fragments (properly marked, mapped and reported) becomes the obsession. And the transformation is complete: the collecting worm becomes a radiant archaeological butterfly.

And how immeasurably richer is wisdom, the budding of a real scientist, than is a "whole pot". It is our sincere hope that the new year will see more of our members graduate into this far greater phase of enjoyment of their hobby -through knowledge.

We therefore recommend that you pay your dues promptly at your Jan. meeting -for certainly in numbers there is greater opportunity for the dissemination of knowledge. And we recommend that you further widen your circle of information by joining other and larger archaeological societies. Why not give yourself a new-year present with an investment, for once, in education, knowledge - godliness, if you will. We recommend as a minimum the following memberships:

Birmingham Anthropological Society (or your local).....	\$3.00
(Includes membership in Ala. Archaeological Soc.)	
Family.....	4.00
Sustaining.....	5.00
Junior.....	1.00

Tennessee Archaeological Society.....	3.00
The Society for American Archaeology.....	8.00
Council for Old World Archaeology.....	4.00

Why not let your society Secretary send all of your checks in one letter and save you a lot of trouble?

In addition, there are publications of local Societies all over the country (listed in American Antiquity, Jan. 1958 - though neither our Ala. Journal nor Newsletter is listed - President and/or Secy. please note). Paleo students would be interested in Dr. George F. Carter's "Artifacts from Glacial Gravels", and John Witthoft's "Art of Flint Chipping", both published recently in Ohio Archaeologist", for example. There is a list of some 700 such recent articles, and sources, in the July 1957 American Antiquity. Thus one can select publications of interest, and subscribe to those he finds most interesting and informative. Are you interested in tripods in the lower Amazon, the Tree-Ring quarterly, navegacion prehispanica en la Costa Sur del Pacifico, Indian spinning methods, the stone bowl industry, nomenclature, origin and occurrence of flint, pottery modeling tools - or what have you? It is available.

In short, your archaeological dues return to you -transformed into information, stimulation, fun and friends. (And we personally have far more than "value received" in friendships alone!)

In case you may have lost your way (in the long preamble)
The News that's new, we've tried to say,
Is DUES ARE DUE; please promptly pay.

And let us pledge to make the coming year so pleasant, profitable,
and educational that we shall feel amply repaid. At 25¢ per meeting,
with publications extra free premiums, we challenge all other
recreational-educational institutions.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHRISTMAS

The season being what it is - absorbing, carefree, and hectic too -
we can't blame our member societies for lack of news. And since
we have been discussing knowledge, we might as a filler examine the
archaeology of Christmas and note how in error are most of our "well-
known facts" - and the crying need for archaeology to enlighten us.

This "birth day of Christ" is somewhat misleading, in that there are
no clues at all to the day of his birth - on which sects are still
widely divided. As to the year of Christ's birth, scholars say it
probably was several years B. C. - another miracle.

The winter solstice season had long been celebrated by dozens of
other religions with widely differing beliefs. In Rome the pretty
"hot" Saturnalia festival (for Roman god Saturn) was giving young
Christianity rough competition. "When you can't lick 'em, jine 'em",
the Christians no doubt perceived, and set up a rival festival.

The exact date, December 25, is said by some authorities to have
been borrowed from the Persian worship of Mithras (from the still
older Mitra of India), the sun-god. This religion so resembled the
later Christian concepts (it also had baptism, consecrated bread
and wine, a "second coming", immortality of the soul, resurrection
of the dead) that it was the chief religious opponent of Christian-
ity - oddly enough, their very similarity making them bitter rivals.

This was several centuries A. D. and of course there was no Biblical
nor Christian precedents, so Christmas simply borrowed from the
older or "pagan" religions, and retained its "pagan" nature for a
long time - if, indeed, it has entirely lost this flavor today.
The Feast of the Ass was so popular in England it could not be
prohibited until 1435: "an ass dressed in sacerdotal garments deiven
into the choir of the church and sung to with ribald gestures
burlesquing ecclesiastical ceremonies". Henry VIII, for all his
questionable reputation, did try to stop the bull-baiting, wild
masquerades of masked "mummers", and like Christmas celebrations
to no avail.

Since, as we said, most "pagan" religions have had a winter solstice
celebrations, as Christianity absorbed (or simply conquered) them
it proved easy to institute Christmas instead of the older festival.
That is, in name at least - but the old ceremonies and traditions
were attached to Christmas. Thus Christmas of today has become a
vericolored hybrid of many pagan religious winter festivals.

The "yule log" we burn to Thor, from the Norse "Yuletide" festival. Mistletoe is a legacy from Druid religions, and we retain somewhat even of its association with fertility. The Christmas Tree was adopted from the Germanic religions quite late. In 1850 Dickens wrote of the Christmas Tree as a "new German toy". No country or creed seems to have had a monopoly on the "drinking Christmas", but from England comes the "wassail" or "warm ale."

Jolly Kris Kringle was a German contribution. St Nicholas was quite another religious-folk figure, from the Dutch, who came on Dec. 5.

Our Puritan forefathers would have nothing to do with this motley assemblage of pagan ceremonies, and in 1659 enacted a law against it. Any observance of Christmas whatsoever brought a fine of 5-shillings for each offense. Many of the sects opposed it for a long time, an editorial in "Brother Jonathan" against the "Saturnalia for children" appearing as late as 1842.

But advertisements of Christmas gifts appeared in New York City papers as early as 1820, and of course, commercialization has been highly promotional. Louis Prang of Boston introduced Christmas cards on the American market in 1875 - used in England 10 or 15 years earlier. Thomas Nast, cartoonist, began a series of drawings of Santa in 1863 and by 1886 had standardized the portrayal of the round, jolly, white-bearded figure of today.

Alabama was the first state to give Christmas legal sanction, 1836, and Oklahoma the last, 1890.

There is still much grumbling that Christmas is more like one of its parents, the Roman Saturnalia, than its adoptive Christianity. We often hear it complained that commercialization has taken over. In 1954 a psychiatrist, Dr. Brock Chisholm, attacked Santa as a "flight from reality" encouraging children to develop passive attitudes toward life. And the churches struggle to make it represent the Nativity - decked in all the pagan decorations and rituals. And still we seek new Christmas customs - we were unable to discover when we adopted firecrackers from Chinese New Year - and still we enjoy it if we survive.

But it is a good example, at this season, of how quickly we lost the trail of the past - and how much we need archaeology to show us where we came from, and in so doing to help us know where we are going. As long as we "fly blind" we might be going in almost any direction. Archaeology and history are the laboratory of human behaviour, not at all a "dead language".

ALABAMA RECAPTURED BY WILD INDIANS?

Reach down from the shelf your new book, Fundaburk's "SOUTHEASTERN INDIANS, LIFE PORTRAITS". Turn to the portrait number 323, of the Choctaw Indian one David Folsom. Several people have remarked a resemblance.

BIRMINGHAM ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Meeting: first Friday each Month, 7:30PM, Birmingham Public Library. Vistors always welcome. Falls on January 2, this year, right in the middle of the holiday season. So don't take a long trip - stay home, rest up, keep off the dangerous holiday (not exactly a holy day) highways, and come to the meeting.

Dr. Albert Gessmann spoke on the marks that the Celtic language left on later European languages, at our Dec. meeting. He gave us a very good foundation for understanding "what it was all about" by making his preface longer than his talk. That is to say, he gave us the fundamental principles of language change as influenced by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Then it was a brief and easy matter to show by illustration how the Celtic language had influenced succeeding languages in varying amounts. We left the meeting feeling like authorities.

Our Jan. meeting will speedily dispose of the election of officers. The Nominating Committee suggests that we return the entire slate to office this year: Emile Dahlen, President; Ed Green, Vice-President; Mrs. Martin Hullender, Secretary-Treasurer. A little arm-twisting seems to have been necessary to get them to accept the honor. But not only have they brought us through an exceptionally progressive and interesting year - our new status of affiliation makes it wise to have experienced officers. But maybe someone else will volunteer to do the work, and it is quite up to the voters.

Other than that brief business, last we heard, this may be one of those delightful open meetings with nothing heavy on the docket - when we can speak our own piece, show our own artifacts, have a time to visit with our friends, and in general relax and have a good time.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

We take this opportunity to broadcast a Happy New Year to all, and may your wishes escape the scythe of Father Time and come true. And if we may express a personal wish, we wish this Newsletter might convince you of the undesirability of giving an editor a lot of blank paper, and remind you to send in some script. Or is anybody out there in the audience? We don't even hear a beef!
