

FACTS AND COMMENTS

THE CLAY FIGURINES OF ACAMBARO, GUANAJUATO, MEXICO

For the past eight years, stories have appeared concerning a vast collection of animal and human figurines of great antiquity, gathered in the vicinity of Acambaro in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico. Senor Waldemar Julsrud possesses some 32,000 of these artifacts in his private collection. These ceramic figures consist of such forms as Brontosaurus, Tyrannosaurus Rex, Stegosaurus, Trachodon, Dimetrodon and other Mesozoic reptilian life-forms. Also included in the collection are a number of modern life-forms such as cow, horse, hippopotamus, elephant, rabbit, and dog. Even more fabulous is the number of miniature Egyptian sarcophagi found in the collection.

Such popular articles as have appeared in the Los Angeles Times (Mexico Finds Give Hint of Lost World, by Lowell Harmer, Los Angeles Times, March 25, 1951, pt. 2, pp. 1-2), Fortnight (Archaeological Quandary by William N. Russell, Fortnight Nov. 12, 1951, pp. 38-39) and Fate Magazine (Did Man Tame the Dinosaur? by William N. Russell, Fate Magazine Feb.-March, 1952, pp. 20-27.) all emphasize the thought that man possessing the knowledge of ceramics lived contemporaneously with the Mesozoic reptiles. This, if true, would have thrown either the archaeological prehistory time-scale out of line or would have seriously shifted the paleontologists' concept of sequence dating. Senor Julsrud in his paper "Enigmas Del Pasado," (Acambaro, Gto., 1947), indicated that the archaeologists were mistaken in their estimates of time.

The Amerind Foundation, Inc., was prevailed upon to make an investigation of the materials. To imply falsification merely on the strength of the life-forms represented was not sufficient, for there was always the bare possibility that the figurines were chance similarities to Mesozoic forms as defined by modern scientists in the last two hundred years. It was within the realm of chance that they were the work of some imaginative prehistoric artist who may have taken his inspiration from the smaller reptiles still in existence today. A number of sherds were sent to the Amerind Museum and were tested in the laboratory. Chemical tests were made of the soils composing the figurines. Sherds were crushed and the contents were inspected for any inclusions that might give a clue as to the date of manufacture. Laboratory tests proved nothing. It was therefore decided that a representative should be sent into the field to witness the actual excavation of these figurines.

The author arrived in Acambaro in June and examined the collection owned by Senor Julsrud. The examination raised grave doubts as to the antiquity of the materials. Both the great variability of form and the volume of material were disturbing. Further, none of the specimens were marred by patination nor did they possess the surface coating of soluble salts characteristic of objects of more certain antiquity coming from the

same area. Upon the word of the owner none of the figures had been washed in acid. Examination showed the edges of the depressions forming eyes, mouths, or scales to be sharp and new. No dirt was packed into any of the crevices.

The figures were broken, in most cases, where the appendages attached themselves to the body of the figurines; it appeared that the manufacturers willfully broke legs, necks, tails, etc., to suggest age. No parts were missing. Further, none of the broken surfaces were worn smooth. In the entire collection of 32,000 specimens no shovel, mattock, or pick marks were noted. This would indicate that the excavators possessed a digging technique exceeding anything known to professional archaeologists or that they knew precisely where to dig. Their field technique when witnessed on the site, however, indicated that they were neither skillful nor careful nor experienced.

The excavators, consisting of a father and his son, invited the author to their site, an actual prehistoric Tarascan ruin. To make the test-find, they chose the northwest corner of a room approximately nine meters long and four meters wide. The author spent two days watching the excavators burrow and dig; during the course of their search they managed to break a number of authentic prehistoric objects. On the second day the two struck the cache and the author examined the material *in situ*. The cache had been very recently buried by digging a down sloping tunnel into the black fill dirt of the prehistoric room. This fill ran to a depth of approximately 1.30 m. Within this stratum were authentic Tarascan sherds, obsidian blades, tripod metates, manos, etc., but these objects held no concern for the excavators. In burying the cache of figurines the natives had unwittingly cut some 15 cms. below the black fill into the sterile red earth floor of the prehistoric room. In back-filling the tunnel they mixed this sterile red earth with the black earth; the tracing of their original excavation was, as a result, a simple task.

In their attempt to disguise the figurines they had packed the bowls and crevices with dirt, the same mixed dirt as characterized the backfill of their new-cut tunnel. Not only was the dirt thus mixed but small chips of limestone, chipped from the boulder walls of the prehistoric room during excavation of the tunnel, were also in evidence.

As if to cap the case, finger prints were visible on the freshly packed earth which filled a small bowl. This bit of evidence, plus the presence of some fresh animal manure in the tunnel fill, offered proof enough that the material had been recently planted.

Further investigation revealed that a family living in the vicinity of Acambaro make these figurines during the winter months when their fields lie idle. Their ideas of form could have come from the local cinema in Acambaro as well as from the multitude of comic books and newspapers sold on the streets. Or from the library as well as the school, which are available in the town, which has a population of some 20,000 persons. Three

trains a day carry natives to Mexico City where the Museo Nacional, among others, is available and where, incidentally, there is a fine collection of prehistoric Egyptian art. Certain forms in the Julsrud collection strongly suggest that some of the native manufacturers have visited this Egyptian exhibit.

Apparently these objects have been made and sold since 1944, when the first cache was opened for Senor Julsrud's inspection. Intrigued by the wierd forms he began his collecting and paid a peso for each item brought to his home. Since the above mentioned date the material has all come from three small fields in mass concentrations, and Sr. Julsrud has continued to buy.

Thus the investigation ended; it seems almost superfluous to state that Acambaro figurines are not prehistoric nor were they made by a prehistoric race who lived in association with Mesozoic reptiles.

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COPPER SPECIMENS FROM YADKIN RIVER IN PIEDMONT, NORTH CAROLINA

In the upper Piedmont region of North Carolina, along the Yadkin River, specimens of copper have been found at three village sites.

As illustrated, the largest specimen appears to be a copper breast plate. Five tubular beads are represented. Seven pieces are roughly cone-shaped and could be classified as decorative bangles, although those which are more proportional and smoothly finished could have been used as arrow tips. The two triangular pierced pendants were found at sites forty miles apart. The copper hawk's bell, a trader's piece evidently of English origin, still rings merrily when shaken. A broken half of the same design was found forty miles away at an-

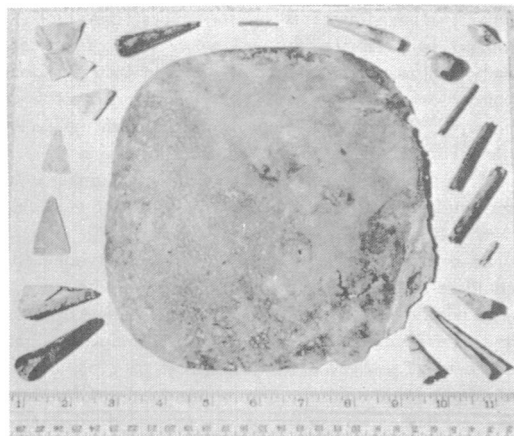


Fig. 135.

other site. Two fragments of unfinished copper are illustrated (Fig. 135).

There is no deposit of copper in this region of the Yadkin River. There is a possibility that some outcrops of copper were available in the mountains of North Carolina or in the Tennessee region beyond, but the material illustrated probably came from much farther away.

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FIRST NOTE ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MOHAWK TOWN OF OSSERNENON

The grounds of the shrine dedicated to three of the canonized North American Martyrs, in the township of Auriesville, N.Y., have long been believed to embrace the site of the Mohawk town of Ossernenon. The two reasons for such an opinion have been principally: the topography, and the surface finds. To this evidence may be added the sundry post-contact Indian graves found nearby. In order to locate and study the town accurately, excavations were made on the shrine grounds, during the summer of 1952, under the direction of the writer.

The site is situated on a terrace, some 400 feet above sea level, on the south side of the Mohawk River, 40 miles up the river from its confluence with the Hudson, and a mile upstream from the juncture of the Schoharie River with the Mohawk. The area is represented on the Fonda Quadrangle of the U.S. Geological Survey maps, and on the map accompanying the monograph of Brigham (1929, p. 60), who calls this terrace the Schoharie Wash Plain, and identifies it to be a lacustrine formation dating from the closing phase of the last glaciation.

Attention was first drawn to the site by the investigations of General John S. Clark, in 1877. His reasoning, based on his excellent knowledge of the terrain and on careful reading of the *Jesuit Relations*, impressed such of his contemporaries as the historian, John Gilmary Shea,* and it impresses the modern scholar no less. The chief source in the *Relations* is the account given by St. Isaac Jogues (Thwaites, 1896, Vols. 25, 31, 39), after his first visit to, and captivity in, Ossernenon.

Ossernenon was the town of the Turtle clan, the foremost of the three Mohawk clans. The time of its occupancy was the first part of the period of Mohawk Ascendency — 1634-1666 (Carse, 1949, p. 7). Before the expeditions of de Courcelles and De Tracy against the tribe (in 1666), all three towns were south of the Mohawk River, between the mouth of the Schoharie and the present town of Canajoharie. Ossernenon was moved to Gandawague, about a mile west of our site, in 1659; after the De Tracy expedition, the new Turtle clan town was Caughnawaga, on the north of the river, in the present town of Fonda (Grassmann, 1952, p. 33).

* Copies of Clark to Shea letters are on file at the Auriesville Shrine.