

# AMERICAN ANTIQUITY

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VOL. I

JANUARY, 1936

No. 3

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## EDITORIALS

**CORRESPONDENCE** . . . Starting with this issue and continuing, we trust, through future issues, we find the "Correspondence" division of this journal assuming more the character of a true vehicle for miscellaneous short discussions on a variety of subjects limited only by the boundaries defining the field of American archaeology and by the student's range of interests. Your editor hopes that our readers will continue to so express their pet opinions, and reactions to the opinions of others.

But in exercising our freedom to assume a critical attitude towards another's ideas, let us remember that our own position is likewise subject to analysis and criticism. No proposition is worthy of survival that can not endure the white light of critical examination, and since the true student is a seeker after truth, rather than the support of his own theories, he should invite every constructive effort to eliminate error, and thank his critics for their coöperation.

**FOLSOM POINTS** . . . The discoveries at Folsom and elsewhere of examples of a peculiar type of projectile point associated with the remains of species of animals not known to have survived the Pleistocene period, supported by Roberts' more recent discovery of an entire complex of implements and materials, including the Folsom type of point, at a habitation site in Colorado, are of interest to every student of American archaeology and establish a position for early man in America that can not be lightly disposed of or disregarded.

However, we are not at the moment interested in the controversy stirred up by these finds. Rather, we are specifically concerned with the discovery of points of this type unassociated with any evidence of culture or age. These are now described and featured as "Folsom points" in newspapers, dealers' advertisements and pawnshop windows throughout the country, and classified as of exceptional value because

of this type shape. We feel that the amateur student should be informed that a specimen of the Folsom type, lacking other data that would indicate a cultural origin similar to that postulated for the discoveries mentioned above, may or may not have been the handiwork of the same or similar early inhabitants of our continent. Consequently, they are of doubtful origin and value.

It should be remembered that such specific forms of implements as the best type of Acheulian hand ax, the Aurignacian end-scraper, the Solutrean laurel-leaf blade, and the Magdalenian unilaterally barbed antler harpoon, to select but a few instances of implements anciently employed by early man in Europe, are known, characteristic implements as well for various pottery-making, horticultural American Indian groups in the late prehistoric to historic periods. The possibility of common origin for these artifact types is not denied, but any proposed relationship must essentially be indirect and long-distant.

To be sure, the distribution of the Folsom type, and of each of its sub-types, is of interest and may prove to have some bearing upon the main problem; but for any man to place a special value upon a so-called "Folsom" point found, let us say, in the course of plowing a field in Michigan, is, in the humble opinion of your Editor, utterly silly, and should not be regarded seriously by any student-collector.

**THE VALUE OF SPECIMENS . . .** Speaking of the value of a specimen brings to mind the fact that there are violently opposed attitudes regarding the true value of archaeological materials. Many collectors value a specimen according to its rarity as a type, the craftsmanship it illustrates, its degree of unblemished perfection, or its esthetic beauty. For the most part, these are emotional rather than scientific values. To the true student of archaeology, the value of a specimen depends entirely upon the nature of cultural and historical information it contributes towards a knowledge of the men who made and used it. This value can not very well be expressed in dollars and cents. There is also, for certain selected kinds of artifacts, a monetary value determined by supply and demand on the market. This supply and demand is essentially controlled by such emotional values as those just mentioned, and is absolutely unrelated to true scientific values. The enlightened student is not greatly concerned with these commercial values, since they are foreign to true values as he sees them, and have no bearing upon his scientific interests.

Does this imply that a museum or private collector should never buy archaeological materials? This is a moot question with interested students. Your Editor firmly believes that the purchase of materials, the exact origin of which is positively known to the purchaser, and the placement of such specimens in a well catalogued collection, renders a valuable direct service to all students who may have occasion to examine these materials in the course of research. It is important that such materials should be removed from the market, or from careless ownership, and, with the known associated data, placed where they will be preserved and rendered available for study.

On the other hand, I fail to see how the purchase of materials of questionable or unknown origin can possibly be defended on a scientific basis, no matter how beautiful or unique they may be. One who buys such lost artifacts, whether an individual or an institution, definitely encourages commerce in unidentified relics and the ravishing of sites by commercially minded relic hunters motivated by a lively market demand.

What are your reactions to this subject? We should be glad to have you express them in our "Correspondence" division. One's understanding of a subject is never hurt by a knowledge of the other man's position.

**UNWISE COLLECTING . . .** During the past several months, one of the largest collections of American archaeological materials ever assembled by a single person has been in the hands of the receiver and offered piecemeal to the highest bidder. It is reported that the collector paid an enormous, almost unbelievable amount for this huge accumulation of artifacts. We hear that on numerous occasions he was urged to collect the available data with the specimens, but that he professed to be interested only in the "rocks", and in instances actually destroyed the accompanying catalogues of information relative to the specimens. Finally, we are told, he employed an "expert" to catalogue the materials by the simple expedient of deducing the origin of any given specimen from its appearance. Naturally, not a few spurious pieces are present in the collection.

Consequently, we are not surprised at the report that the present owners entertain hopes of realizing from the present sale, less than half of the purchase value and that there is considerable doubt that even these hopes will be fulfilled. This gigantic private collection, contain-

ing many extraordinary specimens of the most impressive aboriginal workmanship, goes begging for buyers. Not only is there no offer for the entire collection, but apparently no offer to purchase any appreciable portion thereof. The principal buyers appear to be commercially minded dealers, who are after "fine" specimens only.

Why this lack of interest on the part of museums and other large collectors? Much of the collection is practically worthless to the student of archaeology because of the small amount of accurate information on source of materials, and associations, and because much of the available data were obtained from unreliable dealers and untrained "experts". Instead of a storehouse of culture- and history-indicative archaeological materials, the collection falls into the category of a mass of miscellaneous, culturally unidentifiable relics.

The primary reactions of the true student of archaeology to this situation are: (1) What a loss to science is represented in the separating of all these materials from associated information, involving a destruction of valuable data that promises to materially delay, in instances probably frustrate permanently the advance of knowledge; (2) What a poor investment this collector made, following his misguided ambition to build up the most valuable collection of materials illustrating American antiquity ever assembled under one roof.

What of that collection now, in consideration of the time and wealth wasted in bringing it together, and the present financial sacrifice sustained by its owners as it is again scattered to the four winds? We leave the reader with this pertinent, practical question: does it pay?

**WELCOME . . .** AMERICAN ANTIQUITY welcomes to the growing number of publications relating to American archaeology the *Missouri Archaeologist*, official organ of the newly formed Missouri Archaeological Society (Columbia), and the *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Brevard College* (Brevard, N. C.), the journal of a junior college archaeological group. Our sincere hope is that these organizations, and their journals, may grow not only in size and effort, but in scientific accomplishment, in the interests of which we offer our unstinted co-operation.