BOOK REVIEWS


This informative book presents the essentials of the scientific method employed in professional archaeological work and explains how archaeology differs from revelations and irresponsible creations. It is a compact, eminently readable book with many examples, including a review of the Cardiff Giant of central New York, a fraud of the later 1800's; and the Piltdown, England Hoax, or why "The First Englishman" has the lower jaw of an ape.

A large part of the book refutes various wild ideas about the original peopling of America. They were not from Europe, the Near East, China, outer space, or North, South and Southern Africa. Subsequent to the original penetration of North Asiatic Mongoloids about 15,000 B.C., neither the high cultures of South America, Middle America, nor North America were the result of the intrusion of people with high culture from Europe, Africa, or Asia. The interpretation that "The Mound Builders" were a superior group of people from the later "savage" Indians is false. Feder however makes the mistake of thinking that the Smithsonian Mound Survey of the 1880's was the major force in certifying that the Indians were the Mound Builders. Rational thinkers had thought that for decades.

The book also relates such famous sites and artifacts as Mystery Hill and Newport Tower in New England, the Grave Creek engraved disc, and the Davenport, Iowa, tablets. Other fallacious concepts such as Atlantis, psychic archaeology, the ideas of Barry Fell, scientific creationism, the Turin Shroud, and Noah's Ark and the Flood are all discussed and dismissed as preposterous as serious archaeological explanations.


This volume by Stephen Williams, a distinguished archaeologist at Harvard University's Peabody Museum, is one result of some 45 years' concentration on the study of American archaeology from the first migrant invaders into the North American continent. It has the broadest coverage and is the most intensively researched study of the multitude of demonstrably false interpretations and contrived fakes made in the recent past for money, fame, or notoriety or to form an insecure, sandy foundation for an ethnic group or sect.

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Williams emphasizes how responsible professional archaeologists investigate new sites or artifacts to test the validity of statements about them by innocent finders or manipulative quacks, rogue professors, and downright scoundrels. Fakes or frauds have been found in at least thirteen states; in some of them their manufacture almost seemed to be an industry. In Canada, perhaps the most famous misinterpreted find was the Beardmore relics, which were genuine Norse items but not evidence of Norse presence in 11th century America, a view which the uncritical curator of archaeology in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto had accepted. Williams also comments on many well-known and lesser known artifacts of non-Indian manufacture and on misinterpretations by laymen and professionals about the antiquity of humans in the New World, or on intrusions of civilized groups from the Old World bringing real "culture" to the "savage" natives.

Williams is particularly critical of some former Harvard professors, including Leo Wiener who was one of the early instigators of the idea that Africans had an important influence on prehistoric American cultures. This is simply not true. Non-Harvard professors from North Carolina and California are included in his presentation of individuals incapable of evaluating evidence.

This is a book to cherish and enjoy. The book demonstrates once again how many ways there are for people to mislead other people, particularly in areas where emotions become involved in objective assessments of scientific evidence.

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