



THE ARTIFACT

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Brief Notes

- We hope everyone in the SLOCAS family is doing well. Spring is in the forecast as well as COVID-19 shots for all.
- We are into March and it seems some have forgotten that dues are due annually at the beginning of the new year. Because the folks that get the hard copy of the “Artifact” are reminded on the address label the year they last paid, they are a more timely group. They have been extra generous this year. I’m not sure if some of them want to be recognized, but we are grateful.
- SLOCAS welcomes new member Ariel Ostroff from the Applied Earthworks crew in Lompoc. Her varied interests include lithic analysis and GIS.
- A part of SLOCAS past was remembered recently. Some years ago we had the annual meeting at the old Far Western Tavern in Guadalupe. Our special guest and presenter was Joe Talaugon. Joe and his wife Margie had opened the Guadalupe Cultural Arts and Education Center, in part to celebrate his Chumash heritage. Their granddaughter, Sabine Talaugon has written a piece in the latest issue of “News from Native California” about Joe finding his voice. The article mentions that Joe has written a memoir soon to be published. Stay tuned...
- For those of you dog fanciers, check out “A Prehistoric Dog’s Life” in the Winter 2020-21 issue of American Archaeology, the quarterly publication of The Archaeological Conservancy. The Conservancy also has a Virtual Lecture Series open to all. The lecture schedule and more is available on their web site.
- **SAVE THE DATE:** Join us on Friday, June 11 at 5:30pm PST for our very first installment of the **San Luis Obispo County Archaeological Society’s Online Lecture Series**. Tune in via Zoom as we talk to **Dr. Garrett Fesler**, city archaeologist with the Office of Historic Alexandria and the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, both based in Alexandria, VA.

Stay Safe and Healthy!

Archaeologist argues the Chumash Indians were using highly worked shell beads as currency 2,000 years ago

by Jim Logan , University of California - Santa Barbara

As one of the most experienced archaeologists studying California's Native Americans, Lynn Gamble knew the Chumash Indians had been using shell beads as money for at least 800 years.

But an exhaustive review of some of the shell bead record led the UC Santa Barbara professor emerita of anthropology to an astonishing conclusion: The hunter-gatherers centered on the Southcentral Coast of Santa Barbara were using highly worked shells as currency as long as 2,000 years ago.

"If the Chumash were using beads as money 2,000 years ago," Gamble said, "this changes our thinking of hunter-gatherers and sociopolitical and economic complexity. This may be the first example of the use of money anywhere in the Americas at this time."

Although Gamble has been studying California's indigenous people since the late 1970s, the inspiration for her research on shell bead money came from far afield: the University of Tübingen in Germany. At a symposium there some years ago, most of the presenters discussed coins and other non-shell forms of money. Some, she said, were surprised by the assumptions of California archaeologists about what constituted money.

Intrigued, she reviewed the definitions and identifications of money in California and questioned some of the long-held beliefs. Her research led to "The origin and use of shell bead money in California" in the *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*.

Gamble argues that archaeologists should use four criteria in assessing whether beads were used for currency versus adornment: Shell beads used as currency should be more labor-intensive than those for decorative purposes; highly standardized beads are likely currency; bigger, eye-catching beads were more likely used as decoration; and currency beads are widely distributed.

"I then compared the shell beads that had been accepted as a money bead for over 40 years by California archaeologists to another type that was widely distributed," she said. "For example, tens of thousands were found with just one individual up in the San Francisco Bay Area. This bead type, known as a saucer bead, was produced south of Point Conception and probably on the northern [Santa Barbara] Channel Islands, according to multiple sources of data, at least most, if not all of them.

"These earlier beads were just as standardized, if not more so, than those that came 1,000 years later," Gamble continued. "They also were traded throughout California and beyond. Through sleuthing, measurements and comparison of standardizations among the different bead types, it became clear that these were probably money beads and occurred much earlier than we previously thought."

As Gamble notes, shell beads have been used for over 10,000 years in California, and there is extensive evidence for the production of some of these beads, especially those common in the last 3,000 to 4,000 years, on the northern Channel Islands. The evidence includes shell bead-making tools, such as drills, and massive amounts of shell bits—detritus—that littered the surface of archaeological sites on the islands.

In addition, specialists have noted that the isotopic signature of the shell beads found in the San Francisco Bay Area indicate that the shells are from south of Point Conception.



*Chumash shell beads. Shell beads found in the Santa Barbara Channel region as well as elsewhere in California.
Credit: Stacy Kennedy/Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History*

"We know that right around early European contact," Gamble said, "the California Indians were trading for many types of goods, including perishable foods. The use of shell beads no doubt greatly facilitated this wide network of exchange."

Gamble's research not only resets the origins of money in the Americas, it calls into question what constitutes "sophisticated" societies in prehistory. Because the Chumash were non-agriculturists—hunter-gatherers—it was long held that they wouldn't need money, even though early Spanish colonizers marveled at extensive Chumash trading networks and commerce.

Recent research on money in Europe during the Bronze Age suggests it was used there some 3,500 years ago. For Gamble, that and the Chumash example are significant because they challenge a persistent perspective among economists and some archaeologists that so-called "primitive" societies could not have had "commercial" economies.

"Both the terms 'complex' and 'primitive' are highly charged, but it is difficult to address this subject without avoiding those terms," she said. "In the case of both the Chumash and the Bronze Age example, standardization is a key in terms of identifying money. My article on the origin of money in California is not only pushing the date for the use of money back 1,000 years in California, and possibly the Americas, it provides evidence that money was used by non-state level societies, commonly identified as 'civilizations.'"

More information: Lynn H. Gamble. The origin and use of shell bead money in California, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* (2020). DOI: [10.1016/j.jaa.2020.101237](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2020.101237)

Past to Present - Col. Willis "Bill" Sawyer (1917-2010)

Recently, a call came to SLOCAS from the Sawyer family. Colonel Sawyer's unfinished castle at the top of the mesa in Arroyo Grande was recently sold. His daughters, Gigi and Aenor were offering a large collection of files and archeological materials to SLOCAS that were acquired during the Colonel's work in the county many years ago.

Sawyer first came to Southern California at the age of three from Chicago. Graduating from Glendale Jr. College in paleontology, he started to apply to West Point. After two tries, he was accepted in 1937. He later graduated from the Army Air Corps flying school in 1942. His flying exploits in WWII in Europe brought him the distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, as well as the Croix de Guerre Aves Palme from the French government.



Colonel Sawyer

After WW II Colonel Sawyer ended up in China. His adventures in Beijing alone are well worth a movie. Later in the 1950s he was the commanding officer for the 6920th Security serving in Japan and Korea. He retired as an Air Force Colonel in 1969. Soon after retirement he acquired property in Arroyo Grande and began to built his castle, part of which was to include a museum to house his large collection of antique Chinese weaponry.

We first met Colonel Sawyer in the 1970s when he began to work locally as an archaeological consultant in 1974. He joined SLOCAS when we were working on the annual Hollister Adobe Museum exhibits. He arranged with his friend Frederick Dockstader, at the time Director of the Heye Foundation, for a loan of Native American cultural items that would represent different areas of the country. It was a big deal for a little adobe museum without funds or staff.

For a time, Sawyer served as chair for SLOCAS. Beginning in 1976 until 1992, he also spent many years working as Field Director for Bob Hoover's summer field school at Mission San Antonio. He is remembered by Bob; "What a remarkable life! Based on his earlier life

experiences, he knew how to forge cooperative teamwork and maintain high morale. Students were at first in silent awe of him, but through working together and good humor, he knew how to create a high quality outcome.”

Sawyer stopped working with Bob in 1991, but he remained a SLOCAS member until 1994. In poor health, he died in 2010. His castle is unfinished and his weaponry collection was donated to the Harvard Art Museum. After so many years it was a surprise to hear from his family and it brought back many memories from a time passed. Never able to quite call him Bill, he will always be “Colonel Sawyer” to me.

For information about his many interests, awards and service to the country google Colonel Willis B. Sawyer on the internet.

-Betsy Bertrando



View from Sawyer's Castle

San Luis Obispo County Archaeological Society's Online Lecture Series

Dr. Garrett Fesler

June 11, 2021 5:30 pm

Join us on Friday, June 11 at 5:30pm PST for our very first installment of the **San Luis Obispo County Archaeological Society's (SLOCAS) Online Lecture Series**. Tune in via Zoom as we talk to Dr. Garrett Fesler, city archaeologist with the Office of Historic Alexandria and the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, both based in Alexandria, VA.

In honor of our inaugural Online Lecture Series, we are taking a trip across the country to the historic town of Alexandria, VA. There, city archaeologists like Dr. Fesler, along with volunteers and students, work with residents and developers to study and manage archaeological resources important to their community's past.

From uncovering the remains of the hull of a fifty-foot vessel at the waterfront, a years-long excavation of a plantation occupied during the Civil War, to identifying over thirty archaeological sites containing Native American artifacts, some dating to over 15,000 years ago, the city of Alexandria keeps its archaeologists and its museum busy. Dr. Fesler will provide an overview of notable past excavations, as well as current projects he and his colleagues are working on. The end of the lecture will provide attendees with the opportunity to ask questions.

This online lecture will be hosted by SLOCAS, and is free to SLOCAS members and our community. Space is limited to 100 attendees on Zoom, so please register in advance by clicking this link: [https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJArfuyupzooHt2lnHdxLrT4En9bS3zNQm6](https://zoom.us/join/joinMeeting?meetingRef=1234567890).

To learn more about the Office of Historic Alexandria and the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, please visit www.alexandriava.gov/Historic.



Photo Courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE *ARTIFACT*

Do you have stories or news on local archaeology, history or cultural resources? Did you find an interesting feature or artifact during a recent excavation? Have you recently recorded a unique building? Did you have an opportunity to preserve a cultural resource?

The *Artifact* is a great venue to share information of interest to the SLOCAS community. If you have something to share please contact Erin Enright (erin.enright.parsick@gmail.com). We would love to share your stories and local news.

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SLOCAS members receive the bimonthly newsletter *The Artifact*. Please indicate how you would like to receive your copy:

Electronically (PDF) Paper copy via USPS

Please read and sign below indicating that you agree to abide by SLOCAS' Code of Ethics:

I agree to abide by the by-laws of the San Luis Obispo County Archaeological Society (SLOCAS). I understand that my membership will be canceled if I engage in the sale of archaeological materials or any other professionally unethical acts. I fully understand and agree that my participation in any of SLOCAS' activities is at my own risk, expense, and hazard.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Membership is subject to review by the Board of Directors

Our Mission

SLOCAS provides and operates a Research and Collections facility for the archival storage of archaeological collections. We support research conducted by the archaeological community through access to collections archived at the facility, a publications series, and outreach to the general public.

Membership Fees:

___ Regular: \$25.00	___ Student & Senior: \$15.00	___ Patron: \$100.00
___ Family: \$30.00	___ Friend: \$50.00	___ Business: \$150.00

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SLOCAS

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