



## ON MUSEUMS—by Dr. Lucy Turnbull

The Museum of Classical Archaeology in Bondurant Hall has been open to students and the public on a regular daily schedule for nearly ten years now, and in the course of that time we must have had at least ten thousand visitors.

No matter who the visitors may be, I have come to expect one or all of three questions to be asked. First of all, "How in the world did all this come to Mississippi?" In 1948 the famous archaeologist David Moore Robinson retired from teaching at Johns Hopkins University and came to the University of Mississippi, where he spent another ten productive years of teaching and writing. He brought with him one of the world's finest private collections of antiquities, and when he died in 1958 he left his Roman sculpture to the University of Mississippi, with the rest of the collection being divided between his widow and Harvard University. Mrs.

Robinson gave and bequeathed part of the collection to the University, and after her death Mr. and Mrs. Frank S. Peddle, Jr. of Oxford very generously purchased the rest of her share and gave it to the University. This forms the major part of the present Museum collection. In addition, the medical alumni of the University a few years ago presented a fine collection of Roman surgical instruments, the Panhellenic Council recently gave us a charming small vase, and we have been able to buy a group of Egyptian objects, a few ancient textiles, some Roman glass and a number of coins and small objects.

The second question, "What is it all worth?" is impossible to answer accurately. Some of the things are literally priceless, while others, though of great educational value, would not fetch much money on the market. A comparable collection today could hardly be put together for less

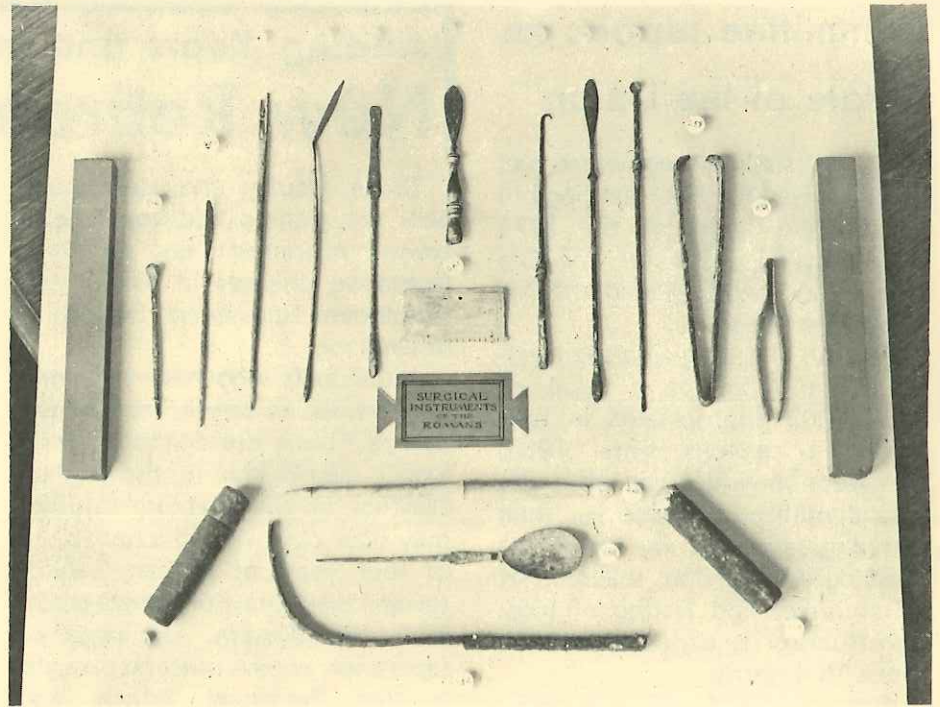
than a quarter of a million dollars, at current prices, and prices in the art market continue to rise no matter what happens in the stock market.

The third question I find most interesting of all. A surprising number of people ask, "Is all this stuff *real*?" It seems very difficult for a person brought up in a world of waste and planned obsolescence to believe that man-made objects can live longer than the man himself. After all, the average American expects to wear out a dozen automobiles in the course of his life, and to throw away several tons of bottles, cans and worn-out appliances. When I assure people that these things really are two or three or four thousand years old, and let them hold a Roman coin or Greek fish hook in their own hands, there is always a strong reaction. A few people become really nervous and uneasy, as if they refused to believe that so many things happened in the world before they themselves were born; but the great majority seem to be delighted at the thought of



Oil bottle from Athens donated by the Panhellenic Council in 1969, was made in about the 6th century B.C. The bronze fishhook was used at Olynthus in the 4th century B.C. and is part of the Robinson Collection.





This "little black bag" of surgical instruments was used by a Roman physician who practiced medicine about 1,800 years ago. The instruments were donated to the Classical Museum by the University of Mississippi Medical School Alumni. The perfume bottle (upper left) is part of the Robinson Collection. It is about 2,421 years old, and pictures Boreas, god of the North Wind.

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such a tangible link between their own lives and those of people long gone. The thumbprint of the sculptor on the forehead of a clay portrait head; a perfume bottle painted with the picture of a pretty girl running for dear life to escape a lustful wind god (promise or warning to the user of perfume?); a magnificent vase proudly signed, "Polygnotos painted this;" in such things the people of the past gain a reality that words alone could never give them. When my class in Greek literature begins reading the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, and I show them a handsomely decorated drinking cup made in Homer's lifetime and explain to them that Homer himself handled and drank from such things every day of his life, the barriers of time and translation start to crumble, and Homer may become for them a flesh-and-blood person, almost a contemporary, instead of just a collection of printed words on a page.

This, I think, is one reason why

there are so many archaeology buffs and amateur archaeologists in America today, and why the Archaeological Institute of America, one of the major professional archaeological associations, has as many amateur as professional members. Whether you are a trained professional archaeologist or just like to read about digging, archaeology combines the fascination of the detective story and the jigsaw puzzle with the excitement of the grab-bag, for nobody knows what will come out of the ground next. History may need to be rewritten because Greek pottery is found in an Egyptian royal tomb, or a city thought to have perished by fire reveals, when excavated, no trace of such destruction. Looked at with attention and imagination, a broken clay drinking cup can be more valuable for what it tells about the people who used it than the gaudiest gold necklace ever found.

In recent years most of us in America have been forced to learn

again what perhaps we should never have allowed ourselves to forget: that man does not exist "above" or outside the great fabric of nature, but is inescapably a part of it. The garbage we burn on the city dump we breathe in our own back yards; the smog that forms over Houston on Monday will be falling on Mississippi by the end of the week; if we want our grandchildren to have timber we must replant the forests today. Nothing we do is without an effect in the world around us, though that effect may be delayed for years or generations. One of the great benefits of the study of archaeology, it seems to me, is that it puts into our hands concrete evidence of where we belong in the fabric of time as well as in that of nature, and shows us how we are linked as firmly and inescapably to the past and future as we are to the earth and air. The more clearly we see how we got to where we are, the more confidence we have in learning where to go next.