

Ninety-Nine Fascinating Finds Revealed in 2021

The year's most exciting discoveries include a Viking "piggy bank," a lost Native American settlement and a secret passageway hidden behind a bookshelf



Finds unveiled in 2021 included a wooden falcon that originally belonged to doomed queen Anne Boleyn, an intact ancient chicken egg and a dress worn by Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*. Photo illustration by Meilan Solly

Meilan Solly

Associate Editor, History

In a year dominated by disheartening news, including the Covid-19 pandemic, threats to American democracy and reminders of systemic racism, archaeological and cultural discoveries offered a welcome distraction. 2021 yielded

an array of intriguing finds, particularly as lockdowns lifted and researchers returned to the field. Spanning disciplines, historical eras, geographic locations and cultures, some of the 99 items highlighted below were first unearthed years ago but only documented now, while others were identified more recently. From a forgotten work by Pablo Picasso to the site of Harriet Tubman's Maryland home to an Aztec altar, these were the most fascinating finds of 2021, as covered by *Smithsonian* magazine. Listings are bolded and organized by category.

Missing masterpieces

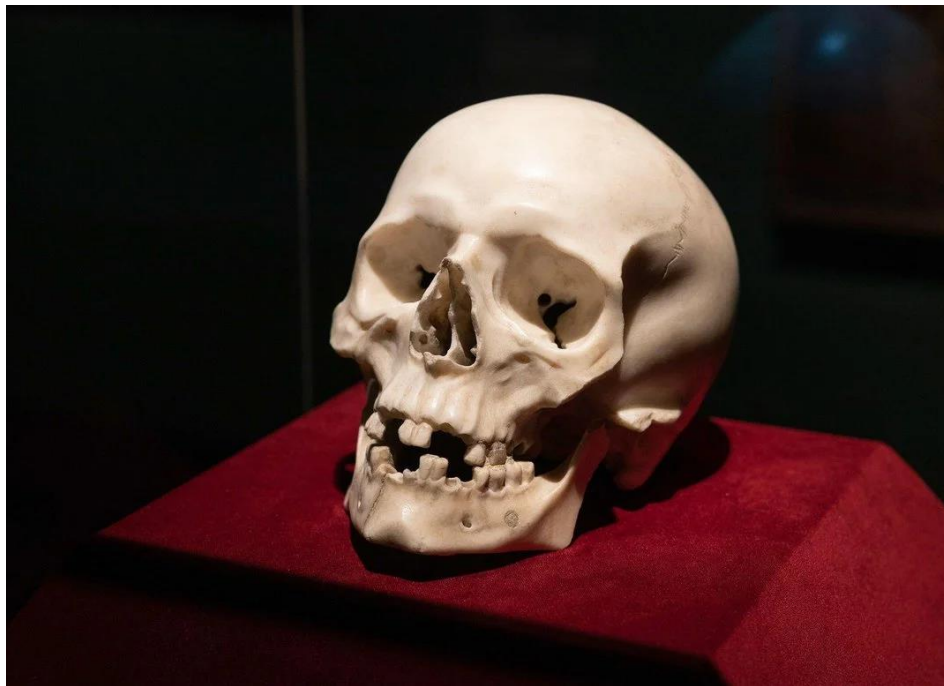
Over the course of human history, natural disasters, the ravages of time, theft and iconoclasm have destroyed countless masterpieces. But many others remain hidden, tucked away in attics and basements, awaiting the day that their genius will once again be recognized. A prime example of a rediscovered art historical treasure went on view in London earlier this month. Bought on a whim at a Massachusetts estate sale for \$30, the centuries-old sketch of a mother and child turned out to be an original **drawing by Renaissance master Albrecht Dürer**. Now valued at an estimated \$50 million, the previously unknown preparatory work had long been identified as a modern reproduction. Two telltale features identified by authenticators suggest otherwise: the artist's "A.D." monogram and the presence of a watermark seen on more than 200 sheets of paper used by Dürer.



Attributed to Albrecht Dürer, *The Virgin and Child With a Flower on a Grassy Bank*, circa 1503 Courtesy of Agnews Gallery

Other Renaissance-era works rediscovered in 2021 include a pair of 16th-century **portraits of Cosimo II de' Medici and Ferdinando I de' Medici**, found beneath plaster in a storeroom at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and a forgotten **painting of the Last Supper linked to Italian artist Titian**. Likely created in Titian's workshop, the work hung largely unnoticed on a church wall in Ledbury, England, for more than a century. The painting's owners only realized its significance after an art historian and conservator brought in to restore a separate work identified it as something "a bit special."

A similar scenario unfolded during Covid-19 lockdown, with art historian Tom Ruggio discovering a **long-lost work by 17th-century Baroque artist Cesare Dandini** during a chance visit to the Church of the Holy Family in New Rochelle, New York. Part of a series of four paintings depicting the Holy Family, the canvas had hung in the building in relative obscurity since 1962. "It's something you expect to find in Italy," Ruggio told Westchester magazine in September, "but it was really out of place in a church in New York." Another Baroque masterpiece, a **marble skull sculpted by Gian Lorenzo Bernini**, spent almost 200 years hidden in plain sight as an unattributed work in the Dresden State Art Collection's archaeology department. "[S]o realistically sculpted that it could almost be mistaken for a genuine human skull," according to the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, the sculpture once sat on the desk of Pope Alexander VII.



A curator's archival research identified a previously unattributed marble skull as a lost masterpiece by Bernini. © SKD / Photo by Oliver Killig

Family ties led to the rediscovery of two **oil paintings by Irish impressionist Paul Henry** and **a work on paper by Cubist Pablo Picasso**. An Ohio man preparing to sell his parents' art collection found the Henry landscapes in the back of an old storage unit. Both subsequently sold for more than \$200,000 each. The Picasso, meanwhile, sat in a Maine closet for 50 years and was likely passed down to the finder by his great-aunt, who studied art in Europe during the 1920s.

Several decades after the Picasso painting's creation, Armenian American artist Arshile Gorky pasted a work titled *The Limit* (1947) over another abstract creation now known as *Untitled (Virginia Summer)*. Gorky's daughter Maro Spender had long suspected that another composition was hidden beneath *The Limit*, and lockdown presented the perfect opportunity to investigate further. Separating the work on paper from its canvas, conservators spotted **a vibrant landscape rendered in shades of green and blue**. Gorky probably painted the scene in the summer of 1947 and reused its canvas as a cost-cutting measure.

Last but not least, a masterpiece of a different kind—a **blue-and-white dress worn by Judy Garland in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz***—turned up in a trash bag at the Catholic University of America in June, confirming long-standing rumors that the Washington, D.C. school's drama department housed the iconic costume.



In Paul Henry's own words, he hoped to capture "the very soul of Ireland" in his paintings. Courtesy of Caza Sikes

Ancient art

The missing masterpieces outlined above owe their significance to their famous creators. But scholars also value millennia-old artworks crafted by anonymous artists who inadvertently offered enduring glimpses into ancient cultures. Consider, for instance, a 3,500-year-old **Babylonian tablet that may contain the earliest known depiction of a ghost**. The drawing is only visible when viewed from above under a light, but when studied in the correct way, “those figures leap out at you across time in the most startling way,” Irving Finkel, the British Museum curator who spotted the image, told the Observer in October. The tablet’s written instructions offer advice on how to exorcise pesky ghosts, leading Finkel to posit that the drawing depicts a male spirit being led back to the afterlife.

Some 300 years after the tablet’s creation, people in what is now northwestern Peru painted a similarly eerie image on the wall of a shrine complex. Rendered in shades of ocher, yellow, gray and white, the **mural of a knife-wielding spider god** was likely made by members of the Cupisnique culture. The complex where it was found may have been built to honor water deities.



Archaeologists say the mosaic was probably part of a grand Byzantine-era home. Assaf Peretz / Israel Antiquities Authority

Other examples of ancient artwork unveiled this year include stunning mosaics. In Israel, archaeologists conducting excavations ahead of residential construction in the city of Yavne happened upon a **1,600-year-old mosaic that may have been part of a Byzantine-era mansion**. After cleaning the surface with special acid, the team was astonished to find a “colorful mosaic carpet ... ornamented with geometric motifs.” A more recent mosaic found in Rutland, England, formed the floor of a dining or entertainment room in a third- or fourth-century C.E. Roman villa. Measuring 36 by 23 feet, the artwork is the **first Roman mosaic depicting scenes from the *Iliad* ever found in the United Kingdom**. Per John Thomas, project manager at the University of Leicester Archaeological Services, the scene “gives us fresh perspectives on the attitudes of people at the time [and] their links to classical literature.”

Also dated to the days of Roman Britain (43 to 410 C.E.) was a **trio of statues** found during a dig at St. Mary’s Church, which was built in Buckinghamshire around 1080 C.E. and torn down in the mid-20th century. The team discovered two complete stone busts of an adult man and woman and what appears to be the stone head of a child. All three sculptures once stood in a Roman mausoleum built at the site.



Archaeologist Rachel Wood holds a Roman bust found at the site of a Norman church. HS2

Warfare

Physical evidence of long-ago clashes is plentiful in the archaeological record, running the gamut from an **iron dagger used by warriors during India's ancient Sangam period** to a **trove of Roman weapons buried in Spain around 100 B.C.E.** to the **remains of Nazi massacre victims in Poland.**

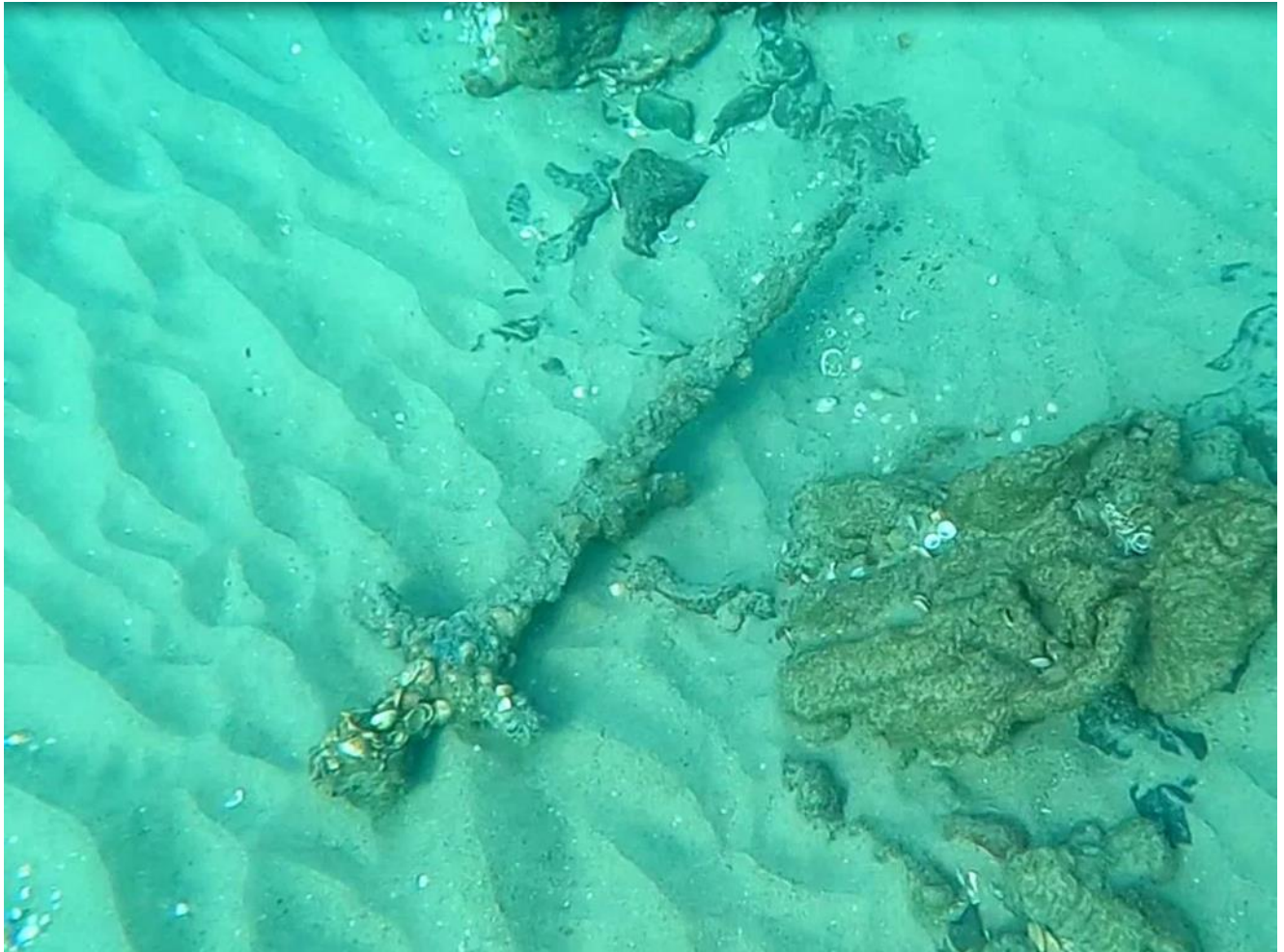
2021 also saw an array of finds linked to the Crusades, a series of religious wars fought by Muslim and Christian armies between 1095 and 1291. ("Crusader," for what it's worth, is an "anachronistic term [often used] to lump disparate medieval conflicts into an overarching battle between good and evil, Christianity and Islam, civilization and barbarism," as historians David M. Perry and Matthew Gabriele wrote for *Smithsonian* in November.) At the beginning of the year, archaeologists in Turkey discovered the **grave of Kilij Arslan I, second sultan of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rüm.** The Muslim ruler's forces won a decisive victory at the 1096 Battle of Civetot, killing thousands of Crusaders and bringing the so-called People's Crusade to an abrupt close. The team also found the grave of Kilij Arslan's daughter.



A Crusader coin found at the excavation site bears the name of Baldwin III, who served as king of Jerusalem from 1143 to 1163. Clara Amit / Israel Antiquities Authority

South of Turkey, in Lebanon, excavations revealed **two mass graves of 13th-century Crusaders**. The remains belonged to 25 young men and teenage boys whose bones bore signs of brutal fighting, including stabbing, slicing and blunt force trauma. Most of the injuries were confined to the soldiers' backs, suggesting they may have been killed while fleeing from their enemies. "So many thousands of people died on all sides during the Crusades, but it is incredibly rare for archaeologists to find the soldiers killed in these famous battles," said biological anthropologist Piers Mitchell. "The wounds that covered their bodies allow us to start to understand the horrific reality of medieval warfare."

Other medieval warfare discoveries made this year include the **remnants of an encampment where Frankish knights stayed** before their defeat by Saladin's Muslim armies at the 1187 Battle of Hattin and a **four-foot-long sword** perhaps misleadingly identified as the property of a Crusader.



A diver discovered the 900-year-old sword in a natural cove off the coast of northern Israel. Shlomi Katzin / Israel Antiquities Authority

Jumping ahead to the 19th century, archaeologists in Alaska recently identified the **fort where Indigenous Tlingit warriors faced off with Russian colonizers** in the fall of 1804. The Russians and their Aleut allies targeted the encampment in retaliation for an 1802 Tlingit attack on the Russian outpost of Redoubt Saint Michael. Though the Tlingit managed to defend the fort from an initial assault, they decided to retreat north after a six-day siege—a move that allowed the Russians to gain a foothold in the region and claim Alaska as a colony. In Virginia, meanwhile, researchers surveying a Civil War cemetery happened upon a **buried 19th-century road and a brick-lined culvert**. The pathway wound around the site of a planned monument that failed to come to fruition.

Numerous traces of history's deadliest conflict, World War II, emerged in 2021. Excavations on the Channel Island of Alderney unearthed a **Nazi bunker nestled in the ruins of a Roman fort**; in Scarborough, England, workers renovating the Esplanade Hotel found a series of handwritten **love letters exchanged by a soldier and his girlfriend** between 1941 and 1944. Across the North Sea, in Germany, a history teacher cleaning his aunt's house discovered a **cache of Nazi artifacts stashed in a wall**, including a portrait of Adolf Hitler, a revolver, gas masks, Nazi Party badges, brass knuckles, letters and documents. Members of the National Socialist People's Welfare organization, which once used the property as its local headquarters, probably hid the items toward the end of the war. In the German city of Lübeck, meanwhile, archaeologists recovered an **eerily preserved cake reduced to a crisp by a March 1942 British bombing raid**. "Although it is heavily charred and blackened with soot on the outside, the heat has shrunk [it] to only a third of its original height," said Lisa Renn, excavation manager for the city's archaeological team.



This summer's excavations revealed a Nazi bunker nestled in the ruins of the Nunnery, a former Roman fort on the Channel Island of Alderney. Dig Alderney via Facebook

Prehistoric peoples

Broadly defined as the period between humans' invention of stone tools and the development of writing systems, prehistory can be difficult to parse given the lack of documentation available. But physical evidence of people who lived many millennia ago helps illustrate the realities of prehistoric life, underscoring surprising parallels with modern society. **Perforated snail shells found in a cave in Morocco**, for instance, speak to early humans' use of jewelry and adornments to communicate information about themselves to others, while 200,000-year-old **handprints and footprints left in a cave by children in what is now Tibet**, **six lines inscribed on a bovine bone** some 120,000 years ago, 20,000-year-old **cave paintings in northwestern India**, and 4,000- to 5,000-year-old **carvings of deer in a tomb in Scotland** speak to humanity's enduring desire for creative expression.

Other tangible traces of prehistoric humans discovered this year include **fossilized footprints left by a group of Neanderthals** walking along the coast of what is

now southern Spain around 100,000 years ago, a **4,000-year-old tree trunk coffin used to bury an elite member of Bronze Age society** and the remains of a **baby buried with care in an Italian cave** some 10,000 years ago. The level of attention afforded to the interment suggests that early humans imbued female infants with personhood. “[T]he evidence implies there was equal treatment of males and females,” anthropologist Michael Petraglia told *National Geographic*. “This is consistent with [today’s] egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies.”

Royal treasures



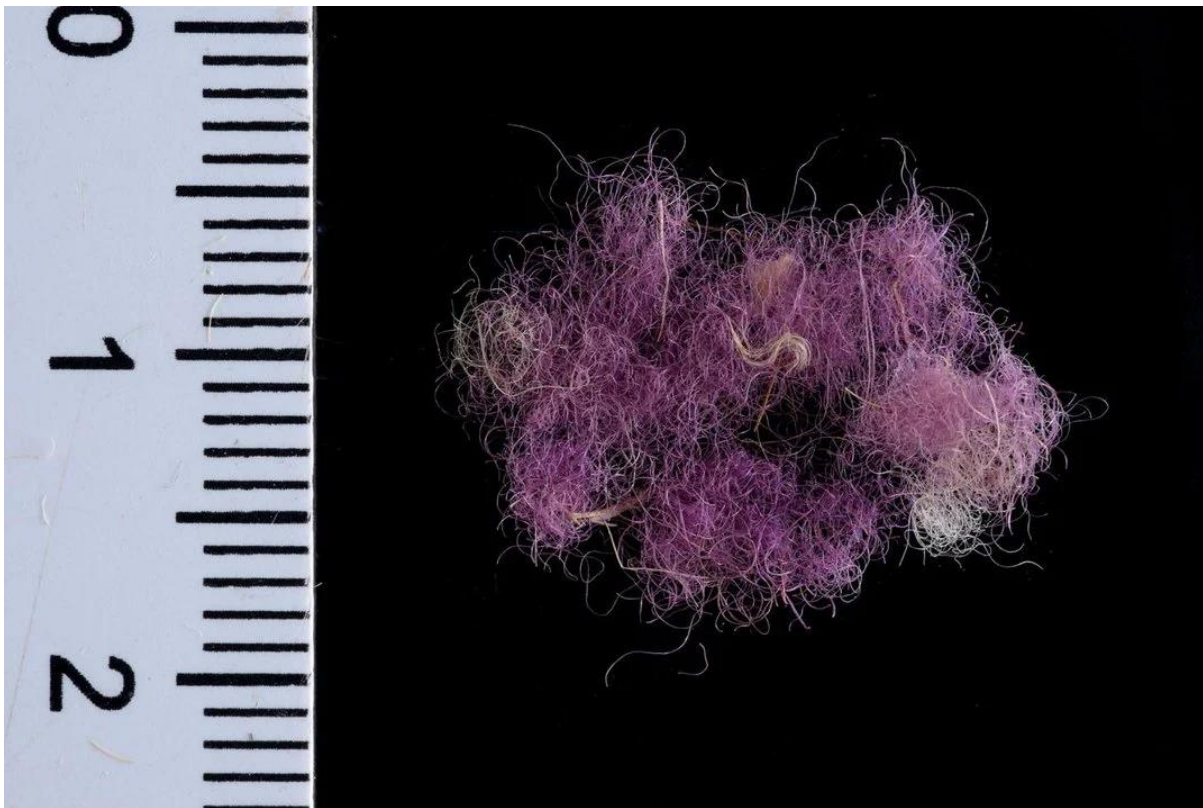
A 2012 replica of Henry VIII's crown © Historic Royal Palaces

The kings and queens who commanded such realms as ancient Egypt, the Roman Empire and medieval England wield much fascination for historians and the public alike. For proof of this trend, simply look to *Smithsonian's* ten most-read stories of the year: Number three centered on a **funerary temple dedicated to the Egyptian Old Kingdom queen Naert**, while number four detailed an amateur treasure hunter's discovery of the **missing centerpiece of Henry VIII's crown**, a gold figurine depicting Henry VI.

Other royal finds revealed in 2021 included **rich purple fabric dated to the time of the biblical King David and King Solomon**, the **ruins of Roman Emperor**

Hadrian's ornate breakfast chamber, a sandstone slab seemingly installed by the Egyptian pharaoh Apries 2,600 years ago, and a tiny gold book that may have belonged to a relative of English king Richard III.

In addition to the gold figurine once featured in Henry VIII's crown, experts discovered a range of treasures linked to the notorious Tudor dynasty: a **wooden falcon, sold at auction for \$101 in 2019, that originally belonged to doomed queen Anne Boleyn; hidden inscriptions in Anne's execution prayer book** that were likely added by women who preserved the devotional text for her daughter, the future Elizabeth I; and **well-preserved 16th-century wall paintings** at the estate of a prominent noble family.



The color purple has long been associated with royalty. This wool fabric found in Israel dates to around 1,000 B.C. Dafna Gazit / Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

Religious history

This year, statues found across the ancient world testified to the diverse religious beliefs of past civilizations. The Greek and Roman pantheons proved particularly popular, with **likenesses of Venus, Roman goddess of love, and her son, the love god Cupid**, turning up in Gloucestershire County, England. In Aizanoi, Turkey,

researchers discovered **depictions of a trio of Greek gods**: Aphrodite, Dionysus and **Hygieia**. Back on the British Isles, in the Irish townland of Gortnacranagh, excavations unearthed an **eight-foot-tall, 1,600-year-old wooden sculpture of a pagan deity**. One of 12 comparable statues found in Ireland to date, the artworks' "meaning is open to interpretation," according to scholar Cathy Moore, "but they may have marked special places in the landscape, have represented particular individuals or deities or perhaps have functioned as wooden bog bodies, sacrificed in lieu of humans."

Archaeologists also shed new light on events in Christian and Jewish history. Finds unveiled in Israel in 2021 include a **2,000-year-old synagogue in Mary Magdalene's supposed hometown**, a **Hellenistic fortress destroyed by Jewish forces in the second century B.C.E.** and **dozens of previously unknown Dead Sea Scroll fragments**. A study published in August seemingly offered **physical evidence of an earthquake chronicled in the Old Testament**, presenting damage to buildings and shattered pottery from the eighth century B.C.E.



The Iron Age sculpture is one of only a dozen of its kind found in Ireland to date. Archaeological Management Solutions

African American history

Overlooked chapters in African American history garnered attention in 2021 amid a renewed push for racial equality in the U.S. In March, Virginia's College of William

and Mary identified an unassuming cottage on its campus as **one of the first schools for Black children in the Americas**. Between 1760 and 1774, the building housed the Williamsburg Bray School, which was open to both enslaved and free African American students. Also in March, archaeologists in Delaware announced the discovery of the **likely graves of at least 25 people enslaved on a plantation owned by John Dickinson**, a colonial statesman who signed the Constitution. “Like many of his co-signers,” wrote *Smithsonian* contributing writer Nora McGreevy in March, “Dickinson wrote frequently about the ‘Blessings of Liberty’ while also enslaving humans.”

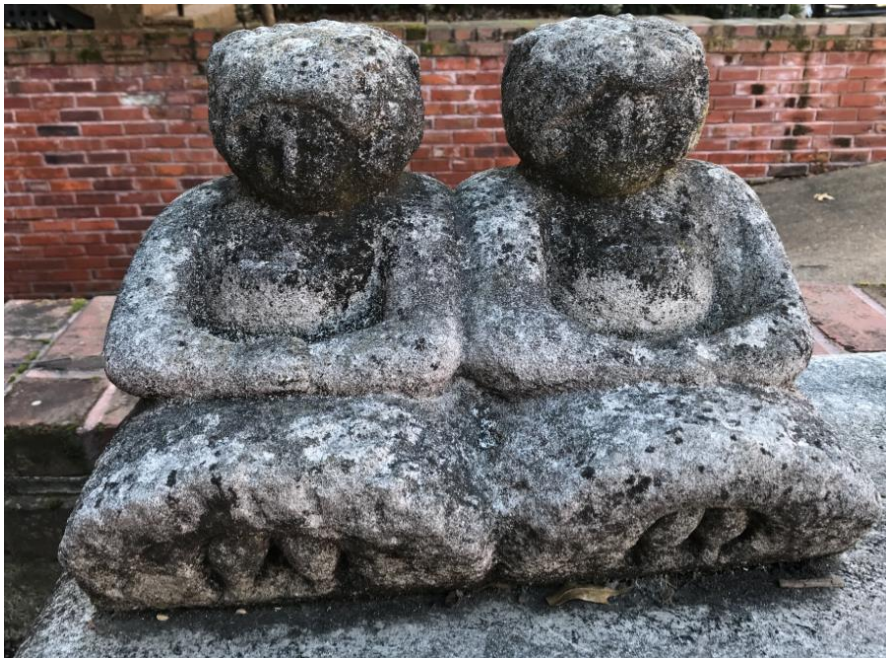


An early 20th-century photo of the building in its original location on Prince George Street in Williamsburg, Virginia Courtesy of John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library / Colonial Williamsburg

Another painful reminder of slavery surfaced in South Carolina, where students and faculty conducting excavations at the College of Charleston uncovered a **“slave badge” dated to 1853**. Issued to slaveholders by the city of Charleston between 1800 and 1865, the metal tags signaled that enslavers had given permission for enslaved people to work outside of their home plantation. Inscribed with the word “servant,” an occupation, a date and a registration number, the badges “evoke a personal history which is almost unfathomable: beatings, hardships, tears, pain, separation, loss, a terrible sense of abandonment,” James O. Horton, then a historian at George Washington University, told *Smithsonian* in 2003.

Discoveries linked to towering figures in Black history, including Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr. and artist Jacob Lawrence, also took place this year. Archaeologists in Maryland found the **site of Tubman's onetime home** after a 20-year search. The Underground Railroad conductor lived in the cabin between 1839 and 1844, when she was about 17 to 22 years old. **Jail logbook pages signed by King** while he was imprisoned in Birmingham in 1963, meanwhile, resurfaced at auction in February. An employee at the jail likely defied orders to throw the documents away, instead keeping them and handing them down across generations.

Two finds included in this section could also be classified as “missing masterpieces.” One, a **ten-inch-tall sculpture of two women sitting side by side**, was crafted by William Edmondson, the first Black artist to headline a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Titled *Martha and Mary*, the white stone statue spent years as a yard decoration, first in New York and then in Missouri. An eagle-eyed art collector realized its significance after driving by the house where it was displayed. The second, **a panel from Lawrence's Struggle: From the History of the American People series**, had hung in a New York City nurse's dining room for two decades. “It didn't look like anything special, honestly,” said the owner, who brought the artwork to curators after reading about the rediscovery of another lost panel from the series. “It was a little bit worn. I passed by it on my way to the kitchen a thousand times a day. ... I didn't know I had a masterpiece.”



Art collector John Foster spotted this sculpture, titled *Martha and Mary*, in the front yard of a St. Louis home in 2019. Courtesy of John Foster / American Folk Art Museum

Indigenous North American history

Experts from Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) unveiled a rich array of finds related to Indigenous culture this year. The list includes four **flower bouquets discovered in a tunnel beneath a Teotihuacán pyramid**, a **600-year-old golden eagle sculpture** found at the Aztec Templo Mayor in Mexico City, an **Aztec altar secretly erected after the Spanish conquest**, a **human-sized Maya mask** sculpted out of stucco, a **well-preserved Maya canoe** and **137 handprints left on the wall of a cave** in the Yucatán Peninsula by Maya children more than 1,200 years ago.

Elsewhere in North America, bison recently reintroduced to Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Canada's Saskatchewan province uncovered **four petroglyphs, or rock carvings, with their hooves**. As Wahpeton Dakota Elder Cy Standing told *Smithsonian* in November, the find seemingly fulfilled an Indigenous prophecy: "The elders used to tell us when the bison come back, that's when there'll be a good change in our history. We've been down a long time. But it feels like we are starting the way up." Farther south, in Wisconsin, archaeologists recovered the **oldest intact boat ever found in the state**—a 1,200-year-old dugout canoe likely built by the Effigy Moundbuilders, a group of Late Woodland people who lived in what is now Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa between 750 and 1200 C.E. Finally, on Florida's Big Talbot Island, researchers identified the probable location of Sarabay, a **long-lost Native American settlement** inhabited by the Mocama. Objects found at the site ranged from Spanish pottery to bone artifacts to charred corn cob remains.



Eagles are enduring symbols in Aztec lore. Mirsa Islas / INAH

Shipwrecks

Sunken ships open portals to the past, presenting eerily preserved glimpses of vessels at the moment they met their demise. A **Roman shipwreck dated to the second century B.C.E.**, for example, opened a window onto a period of peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean. Its sizable cargo of amphorae, or jars used for transporting wine and olive oil, offered insights on maritime trade networks in the region. A **similarly ancient vessel** used for a decidedly different purpose—military maneuvers—was found in the sunken city of Thônis-Heracleion, in the Egyptian bay of Abū Qīr. The 80-foot-long boat likely sank into the sea when the city's Temple of Amun collapsed around 140 B.C.E.

More recent wrecks publicized in 2021 included **two pre-18th-century ships uncovered by storms on England's Suffolk coast** and three **19th-century shipwrecks discovered in Lake Superior**. Researchers from the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society also found a substantial number of wrecks that have yet to be verified. “[W]e have never located so many new wrecks in one season,” said Bruce Lynn, executive director of the society, in a statement.



Wreckage uncovered in Thorpeness, along England's Suffolk coast, may belong to an 18th-century collier, or coal-carrying vessel. 4D Heritage

Amateur archaeologists

Every so often, amateur archaeologists—defined here as individuals without (or currently working toward) graduate degrees in the field—happen upon stunning historical treasures. Some of these burgeoning researchers are younger than others: In 2021, teenagers and preteens between the ages of 11 and 13 found such rare artifacts as a **Bronze Age ax hoard**, an **ancient fertility amulet** and a **rare silver coin minted during the Great Revolt against Rome**. “The other metal detectorists are really pleased for [Milly],” Claire Hardwick, mother of the 13-year-old girl who found the axes, told SWNS. Still, Hardwick added, “On a couple of digs, people have gone, ‘Oh, she’s here now so we might as well go home.’”

Other individuals made discoveries while searching fields with metal detectors and other tools. These treasure hunters’ finds include a **gold-and-garnet medieval sword pyramid**, a **cache of 22 gold artifacts dated to the Iron Age**, a **Viking “piggy bank” filled with silver coins**, a deposit of **80 rare Bronze Age objects**, and a **2,000-year-old Roman dagger**. In a slightly different vein, divers surveying Indonesia’s Musi River uncovered gold rings, beads and other **artifacts linked to the Srivijaya Empire’s enigmatic “Island of Gold.”**

Magic, the macabre and the mysterious

From the world’s **only known pregnant Egyptian mummy** to the **2,000-year-old grave of a child and puppy** to a **cemetery of 18th-century Polish plague victims**, the year was filled with unsettling finds. In the realm of ritual and superstition, researchers unveiled a **4,400-year-old staff carved in the shape of a snake** and wielded by a Neolithic shaman in what is now southwest Finland. “I have seen many extraordinary things in my work as a wetland archaeologist, but the discovery of this figurine made me utterly speechless and gave me the shivers,” archaeologist Satu Koivisto told Live Science.

Equally eerie was a **2,300-year-old ceramic jar filled with the remains of a dismembered chicken**. Text written on the ancient Athenian vessel indicates it was used to enact a curse on as many as 55 victims. On a lighter but still magic-related note, **13th-century manuscript fragments** discovered by chance at a library in England contained an alternate version of the legend of Merlin, wizard advisor to Camelot’s King Arthur. “With medieval texts there was no such thing as copyright,” Laura Chuhan Campbell, a medieval language expert at Durham

University, explained to *Atlas Obscura*. "So, if you were a scribe copying a manuscript, there was nothing to stop you from just changing things a bit."



The vessel was inscribed with the names of dozens of intended curse victims. Athenian Agora Excavations

Macabre reminders of mortality also proved plentiful in 2021, running the gamut from the **butchered bones of a 3,000-year-old shark attack victim** to the **remains of a Vesuvius victim who almost escaped the volcano's deadly eruption** to the **skeleton of an enslaved man who was buried in Roman Britain** while wearing heavy iron shackles and a padlock around his ankles. Other physical traces of Roman brutality included a **bronze key handle that depicts a condemned prisoner fending off a lion** and a **crucifixion victim who had a nail hammered through his heel bone**.

Some archaeological discoveries revealed this year raised more questions than answers. On the Mediterranean island of Corsica, the **remains of adults buried in giant amphorae** between the third and sixth centuries C.E. puzzled researchers, as the practice of interring the deceased in jars was more often reserved for infants and children. In Transylvania, **people buried with urns placed over their skulls or feet** similarly baffled scholars, who theorized that the vessels contained food or drink intended as nourishment for the afterlife.



Archaeologists say the skeletons are in an "average state" of preservation. © Pascal Druelle / INRAP

Everything else

Some fascinating finds revealed in 2021 didn't quite fit into the aforementioned categories but still ranked among the most intriguing of the year. In northern China, archaeologists excavating more than 600 tombs at a cemetery in Shanxi province unearthed the **skeletons of a man and a woman wrapped in an embrace**. Likely dated to the Northern Wei period (386 to 534 C.E.), the burial's "message was clear—husband and wife lay together, embracing each other for eternal love during the afterlife," as the team wrote in the *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*.

In Israel, meanwhile, researchers discovered an **intact, 1,000-year-old chicken egg** in a cesspit in the ancient city of Yavne. Despite taking extreme precaution when removing the egg, the experts inadvertently cracked it. Most of the egg's contents leaked out, but the team was able to preserve some of its yolk for DNA analysis.

The last two selections in this list played out much like C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, with unsuspecting property owners stumbling onto hidden passageways. In New York, lawyer [David J. Whitcomb](#) was removing damaged drywall from a newly purchased building's third-floor ceiling when he spotted a previously unknown, sealed-off attic. Inside was a **20th-century photography studio** filled with historic snapshots and equipment, including a portrait of suffragist Susan B. Anthony reading a book and an image of fellow suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The items probably belonged to photographer J.E. Hale, who owned a studio next door.

Equally unexpected was the discovery of a **network of tunnels beneath a 500-year-old estate in Sussex, England**. [Freddy Goodall](#), a 23-year-old property developer, detailed the find in a viral [TikTok video](#), explaining how he accessed a passageway tucked behind a bookshelf in his family home. Descending into the opening, Goodall found himself in a series of rooms and tunnels that may have been used by past staff to move around the stately property without bothering its owners. "The passageways run all the way from one end of the house to the other," Goodall told the [Zenger](#) wire service. "When the passageways were in use, I believe there were some running miles underground to nearby buildings and a church."

Meilan Solly |