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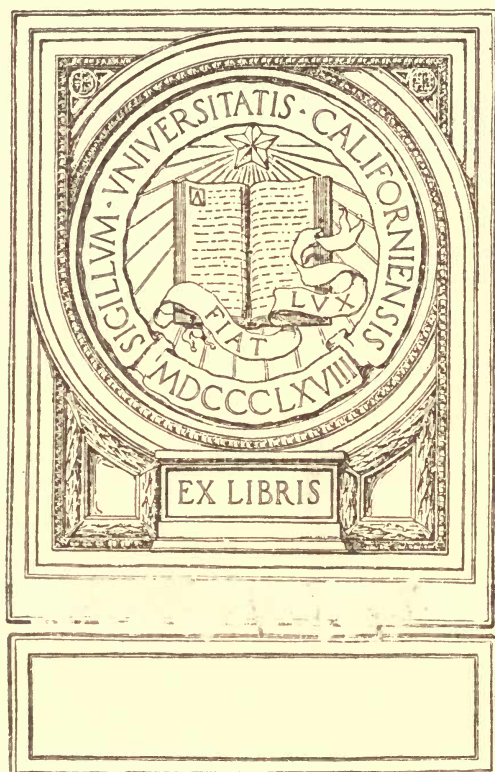


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Urn-burial in the United States

By Clarence B. Moore

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By CLARENCE B. MOORE

So little exploration of places of aboriginal burial has been conducted in this country, compared with what remains to be accomplished, that nothing final can be written as to the methods and extent of aboriginal urn-burial within the limits of what is now the United States. Nevertheless, certain data on the subject may be of interest to some.

We shall take up the record of urn-burial, beginning with the Pacific coast, and shall follow the custom eastward.

Near Santa Barbara, southern California, Doctor Yarrow¹ found, among ordinary inhumations, urn-burials in vessels of stone, some of which, at least, were with articles of iron, showing that the custom of urn-burial in this region extended into post-Columbian times.²

The form of urn-burial varied. Doctor Yarrow describes, among other instances, the finding of an olla with parts of the cranium of a child; a large olla containing bones and covered on top with the epiphysis of a vertebra of a whale; a large steatite olla containing the skeleton of an infant, wrapped in matting; an olla containing a skull (particulars not given); a mortar covered by the shoulder-blade of a whale, containing the skull of an infant, covered by an abalone shell; an olla containing the bones of a child. In addition, we find a custom where skulls, accompanied by their skel-

¹ *United States Geographical Surveys West of 100th Meridian*, vol. VII, "Archæology," edited by Prof. F. W. Putnam, p. 35 et seq.

² *Baron Erland Nordenskiöld*, speaking of very recent urn-burials in South America, says: "They bury their dead in giant pots, as is usual with the Guarani people. These pots they bury in a corner of the rancho, which — at any rate, on the death of a master of the house — is set on fire. This manner of burial will, of course, soon disappear. I have myself dug up a double pot containing a skeleton, which it was stated had been buried in 1899. It cannot have been much longer ago, since in the spring of 1902 there was a perceptible smell." — *Travels on the Boundaries of Bolivia and Argentina*, Geographical Journal, May, 1903.

etons, were covered by large stone mortars, orifices down. In one instance a skull was covered by a copper (brass?) pan,¹ inverted.

The placing of inverted mortars of stone over skulls accompanied by their skeletons is closely related to a custom we shall refer to later, as practised in Arizona and New Mexico.

At Forestdale, eastern Arizona, among other burials, Hough² found cremated remains in gray vases, not of stone, as in lower California, but of earthenware, as are all vessels subsequently treated of in this paper, "which were luted with clay, stopped with a stone, or covered with an upturned bowl." "A remarkable fact connected with the interments of this class," says Dr Hough, "is that the vases are usually set on the bones of an infant. No explanation derived from historical or present observances of any of the Pueblo tribes can be given of this strange custom, which appears to have been of sacrificial character."

The Hemenway Expedition, under Cushing, found, near Phoenix, Arizona, burial-urns used as receptacles for cremated human remains.³ Certain of these vessels, which are now in the Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass., had each a small bowl, inverted, for a cover.

Near Solomonsville, southeastern Arizona, Fewkes⁴ found an urn-burial of cremated human remains.

Doctor Fewkes says: "Evidences of cremation were common, consisting of calcined human bones in mortuary ollas, with ashes, evidently of bones, buried on certain low mounds adjoining the houses. It was apparently the ancient custom to burn the dead on certain pyral mounds and then to gather up the remains of the burnt bones and deposit them in small, rudely decorated vases. A circular disc, made of pottery, was luted to the orifice of these vases and

¹ I am indebted to Mr C. C. Willoughby for the information that a skeleton now in the Peabody Academy of Science, Salem, Mass., was found in Essex county, Mass., with the skull placed in a brass kettle. The kettle, however, lay on its side, and was not over the skull, mouth down.

² *Report of the U. S. National Museum*, 1901, p. 292.

³ *Compte Rendu* of the Seventh Session of the International Congress of Americanists, Berlin, 1889, published 1890. See also Matthews in *Memoirs Nat. Acad. of Sciences*, vol. VI, Seventh Memoir, pp. 149-150.

⁴ *Two Summers' Work in Pueblo Ruins*, by Jesse Walter Fewkes, 22d Report Bur. Amer. Eth., part I, pp. 171, 175 et seq.

the whole was buried in an upright position near the edge of the mound upon which the burning took place."

I am unable, in this hastily prepared paper, to give satisfactory reference to any instance of urn-burial of cremated remains in New Mexico, though one might, with reason, expect evidence of the custom there. The instance cited in a certain book intended for popular reading, and by Doctor Yarrow,¹ are unsatisfactory.

Another form of what possibly might be called urn-burial, recalling the use of inverted mortars on the Pacific slope, obtained in southwestern United States, namely, the placing of an inverted bowl over a skull. The skull, however, was present with its skeleton and was not buried alone, apart from the skeleton, under a mortuary bowl, as we shall see was the case in northwestern Florida.

This custom, in the Southwest, of placing bowls over skulls which were with their skeletons, was not general even when practised, the placing of the bowl over a skull being occasional only. Cushing and Hodge² noted this custom near Phoenix, Arizona, as did Fewkes³ in one instance at Sikyatki in northeastern Arizona.

Professor Duff has described the occurrence of the same custom in the Mimbres valley, southwestern New Mexico,⁴ and Prof. Edgar L. Hewett⁵ noted that the same custom prevailed in cemeteries in the Pajarito Park country, northwest of Santa Fé.

What might be called a collateral branch of urn-burial is described and figured by Pepper⁶ as occurring in southeastern Utah, where circular baskets were found laid over burials.

Continuing eastward, we note that urn-burial was practised occasionally in Mississippi—at least, C. C. Jones makes a general statement to that effect.⁷

¹ Doctor Yarrow (*First Ann. Rep. Bur. Eth.*, 1879-80, p. 137 et seq.) quotes E. A. Barber (*Amer. Nat.*, 1876, vol. x, p. 455 et seq.) as authority for the discovery of burial-urns in New Mexico. In point of fact, Doctor Barber, in his *Ancient Pottery of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico*, describes the pottery of that entire region in a general way, and nowhere refers to the finding of burial-urns in New Mexico.

² F. W. Hodge, in private letter.

³ *Seventeenth Ann. Rep. Bur. Am. Eth.*, part II, p. 654.

⁴ *American Antiquarian*, Sept.-Oct., 1902.

⁵ F. W. Hodge, in private letter.

⁶ *Journ. Am. Mus. of Natural History*, vol. II, no. 4, Guide Leaflet No. 6, New York, 1902. Also referred to in Mason's *Aboriginal American Basketry*; Report U. S. Nat. Museum, 1902.

⁷ *Antiquities of the Southern Indians*, p. 456.

Proceeding northward into Tennessee, we find recorded¹ an interesting urn-burial from Hale's Point, consisting of a heavy casket of earthenware in two irregular, quadrangular parts made in a way that the sides of one come down a short distance below the top of the other. "This is one of the very few vessels," says Professor Holmes, speaking of the United States, "that would seem to have been constructed especially for mortuary purposes." Within the casket were the decaying bones of a very small child.

In a mound in Roane county, Tenn., it is said² that an adult skeleton lay in a boat-shaped vessel of soft clay, nine feet long.

Mr William McAdams³ tells of mounds in Calhoun county, Illinois, where partly burned human bones and ashes lay in large sea-shells, and, in two instances, in shells of turtles.

Mr Henry Gillman⁴ gives exact details of what he considered a unique discovery at that time, being cremated human remains found in an urn, in a mound near Fort Wayne, Mich.

From the Andross village site, near Saginaw, Mich., Mr Harlan I. Smith⁵ reports the finding of a vessel 3 feet 9 inches in circumference, and about 2 feet in height, before it was broken, under the following conditions: "While a pioneer was plowing on the site, the foot of one of his oxen suddenly sank into a hole. On investigation the farmer found that the ox had broken through the bottom of an urn which had been turned mouth downward over the head of a human skeleton. . . . It is reported that a number of similar urns have been found near Detroit, and one was dug up at Point Lookout, on the west side of Saginaw Bay; but unfortunately all these specimens have been broken or lost, so that the Andross urn is probably unique."

In this case we note that the details of the discovery are based on hearsay testimony.⁶

¹ W. H. Holmes, *Ancient Pottery of the Mississippi Valley*, Fourth Ann. Rep. Bur. Eth., 1882-83, p. 381.

² Cyrus Thomas, *Report on Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology*, Twelfth Ann. Rep. Bur. Ethnology, p. 359 et seq.

³ *Proc. A. A. A. S.*, 1880, p. 712 et seq.

⁴ *Proc. A. A. A. S.*, 1876, p. 315.

⁵ *The Saginaw Valley Collection*, Supplement to American Museum Journal, vol. 1, No. 12, Nov.-Dec., 1901, p. 21.

⁶ See also *American Antiquarian*, 1879, p. 164, as to urn-burial in Michigan.

Returning now to the Gulf coast, the Mobile and the Alabama rivers, Alabama, were investigated by me.¹

Going northward, in the mound on Little river were two burials of unburnt bones of infants, each in a vessel, which, to judge by fragments around, had been surmounted by another vessel.

At Matthew's landing, among many ordinary inhumations, was a single urn-burial, being a large vessel covered by an inverted platter. Within were the uncremated bones of a number of infants, carefully stowed away. Here we are introduced to a new feature in urn-burial in the United States, namely, plural uncremated burials in a single urn.

In the famous cemetery at Durand's Bend, above Selma, were numerous great vessels, many covered by shallow bowls inverted; some, by large but imperfect vessels in a reversed position. Most of these vessels held single skeletons of infants, very badly decayed, but in one instance, at least, parts of the skeletons of two infants were present.

There were also two great vessels, each enclosing parts of a skeleton of an adult, without the skull. As the bones barely covered the bottoms of the vessels, lack of room cannot have been the motive for a partial deposit.

In one striking instance, two skeletons, one of an adult, the other of an adolescent, had been carefully packed away in one receptacle. On top, side by side, lay the skulls.

In all directions in the cemetery at Durand's Bend were unenclosed inhumations of the usual character.

Explorations made by me on the boundary between Alabama and Florida, and eastward along the northwest coast of Florida,² yielded numerous bowls of large size, inverted over lone skulls or skulls accompanied by a few scattered bones. In two cases only, on the Florida coast, was the regular form of enclosed urn-burial met with: once where a great bowl, capped by a large inverted

¹ *Certain Aboriginal Remains of the Alabama River*, by Clarence B. Moore; Journ. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., vol. XI. See also *Shell Heaps on Mobile River*, Smithsonian Report, 1878, pp. 290, 291.

² *Certain Aboriginal Remains of the Northwest Florida Coast*, parts I and II, by C. B. Moore; Journ. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., vols. XI and XII.

fragment of another vessel, held the decaying parts of a skull and certain other bones. Again, at Ocklockonee bay, the easternmost limit of urn-burial in Florida, none having been noted in the peninsular part of the state, I found a single urn-burial, containing the bones of a child, in a deep bowl surmounted by another bowl inverted. With the bones were two bracelets of brass. Farther to the westward, also, on the Alabama line, I found evidence of contact with Europeans, with certain burials covered by inverted bowls. We see, then, that in southeastern United States also, urn-burial survived into the historic period.

For further examples of urn-burial in the United States, we must go to the Altamaha river,¹ in Georgia, to points along the mainland of the Georgia coast, and to the sea-islands which border that coast.²

In Alabama, and along the northwest Florida coast, cremated remains in urns were not found by me. On the Altamaha river, however, I found pots containing quantities of fragments of charred and calcined human bones. These pots were covered wholly or in part by other pots inverted over them. In one instance, a great pot of yellow ware, decorated all over with a modification of the swastika, stamped on the clay when soft (stamped decoration being characteristic of south Appalachian ware), lay inverted over a great unenclosed mass of partly-cremated fragments of human bones, among which were tobacco pipes and pearls.

Also along the Altamaha were pots, each turned over uncremated bones of an infant, lying on the sand, without enclosing vessel.

Along the mainland of the Georgia coast I met with vessels inverted over piles of charred and calcined bones; and cremated remains in urns, some of which were covered by surmounting vessels, some by fragments of pottery. Here again, as in all other

¹ *Certain Aboriginal Mounds of the Altamaha River*, by C. B. Moore; Journ. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., vol. XI. See also *A Primitive Urn-burial*, by Dr J. F. Snyder, Smithsonian Report, 1890, p. 609. Also notice of an urn-burial from Oconee river, a tributary of the Altamaha, Ann. Rep. Bur. Eth., 1879-80, p. 138 and figure.

² *Certain Aboriginal Mounds of the Georgia Coast*, by C. B. Moore; Journ. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., vol. XI. See also C. C. Jones, *Antiquities of the Southern Indians* p. 454 et seq.



URN-BURIAL FROM A MOUND ON ST CATHARINE'S ISLAND, GEORGIA. (ABOUT ONE-THIRD SIZE)

examples of urn-burial with which I have had to do, the urns were among unenclosed burials, and never in mounds or cemeteries by themselves.

Among the sea-islands of Georgia the form of burial placed in the urns seems to have varied.

On Creighton island were jars, capped by inverted vessels, containing unburnt skeletons of infants, single skeletons presumably.

On Sapelo island,¹ in the principal mound, were uncremated single skeletons and parts of skeletons, of adults, in urns. In a smaller mound, not far distant, the urns contained, each, the uncremated remains of an infant, with one interesting exception. A burial in an oblong vessel, covered with fragments of pottery, consisted of part of a skeleton of a woman, which completely filled the vessel. Below, in the sand, were many other bones belonging to the same skeleton.

On this island the vessels were variously covered, some by other vessels, some by sherds, some by decaying slabs of wood.

The urn-burials of St Catharine's island yielded uncremated remains, belonging to adults in all cases but one, where bones of an infant were present. Certain urns were covered by other vessels inverted; some were unprotected, as is shown by the accompanying illustration (plate XXVIII).

Ossabaw island, rich in archeological remains, yielded uncremated bones of infants, in urns,² while other urns contained cremated remains, usually of adults. Some enclosing urns were capped by other vessels, some by sherds, while some were without covering.

In my mound work along the southern part of the coast of South Carolina³ and its outlying sea-islands no instance of urn-burial was discovered *in situ* by me. I was shown there a vessel,

¹ In summing up results in my report on the Georgia coast, unfortunately I have erroneously said that bones of adults only were found in urn-burials on Sapelo island. Fortunately the records in my report are full and correct.

² In addition to my report on the mounds of the Georgia coast, see *Aboriginal Pottery of Eastern United States*, by W. H. Holmes; Twentieth Ann. Rep. Bur. Am. Eth., p. 136.

³ *Certain Aboriginal Mounds of the Coast of South Carolina*; Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., vol. XI.

said to have been found in level ground near the South Carolina coast, similar to those used for burial along the coast of Georgia, in which a thoroughly reliable person said he had found human remains. Such evidence, however, is far from final.

C. C. Jones says, in a general way, that urn-burial was practised in South Carolina, but he, perhaps, like Foster,¹ got his information from a loose statement made by Squier and Davis.² Nevertheless, it is likely that urn-burial obtained to a certain extent in South Carolina, as that region is contiguous to Georgia, where we know the custom prevailed.

This list of forms of urn-burial and of localities in which the custom was practised within the limits of the United States, will be increased, no doubt, by additional references brought forward by others and by the results of further investigation.

So far as this record goes, however, we note that urn-burial occasionally was practised in the southern part of the United States, from ocean to ocean, though as yet a continuous line of occurrence has not been traced. Urn-burial seems to have been almost unknown in the north.³ Perhaps the much greater use of pottery

¹ *Prehistoric Races*, p. 199.

² Squier and Davis, *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, p. 167, say: "In the mounds on the Wateree river near Camden, South Carolina, ranges of vases, filled with human remains were discovered." On p. 108 of the same work is a detailed description. In one mound, which was two-thirds washed away by the river, Dr Blanding, according to his account which is given, saw "layers of earth, pottery, charred reeds, etc. Some few of the vases were entire, containing fragments of bones and were well arranged in tiers, one above the other." Old-time statements must be taken with considerable allowance. Moreover, even Dr Blanding does not speak of the urns as having been used for burial purposes. Fragments of bones often fall into vases which have been placed in the neighborhood of skeletons.

³ Doctor Yarrow, in *Mortuary Customs of North American Indians* (Ann. Rep. Bur. Eth., 1879-80), in the part devoted to urn-burial, page 137 et seq., figures four vessels, three from Indiana, one from Kentucky, which he says are taken from Foster's *Prehistoric Races*, and describes them as "burial urns." In point of fact, Foster makes no assertion that these urns were used to contain human remains, but describes the three from Indiana (pp. 144 and 247) as "sepulchral urns" found "filled with black mould." The diameter of the largest vessel is about 6 inches! The vessel from Kentucky is equally small and is given by Foster (p. 248) as coming "from an ancient grave."

Foster (op. cit. p. 200) says: "Professor Swallow informs me that from a mound at New Madrid, Missouri, he obtained a human skull, enclosed in an earthen jar, the lips of which were too small to admit of its extraction; it must, therefore, have been moulded on the head after death." The Eighth Annual Report of the Peabody Museum gives

in the south than in the north may account for this in part, though under this hypothesis one might look for urn-burials in Missouri, Arkansas, and neighboring states.

The placing of cremated remains in urns seems to have been practised in part of the southwest and in the extreme southeast, but in the region between records as to its occurrence are most exceptional.

Plural burial of uncremated remains seems, so far, to have been recorded from Alabama alone.

details of this alleged Missouri urn-burial, taken from reports furnished by Professor Swallow; and Conant (*Footprints of Vanished Races in the Mississippi Valley*) speaks of the vessel as containing "the upper portion of a human skull and one vertebra." In a foot-note in the Peabody Museum Report, Professor Putnam says the vessel contains "a few fragments of a human cranium and the vertebra of a deer." It is interesting to note the evolution of this Missouri urn-burial. At a meeting of the Missouri Academy of Science, held in 1857 (*Trans. Missouri Acad. of Sci.*, St Louis, vol. 1, 1856-1860, p. 36) Professor Swallow personally describes the finding of the urn-burial "in the upper part of the larger mound. . . . On taking it up, the top portion of a human skull was seen inside, lying across the mouth of the jar, with the convex side downward." The diameter of the jar is given as "about ten inches." Sixteen years later Professor Swallow had something to say about this same urn-burial to the A. A. A. S. (*Proceedings A. A. A. S.*, No. 22, B. 401, 1873). The fragment has become a skull. Professor Swallow says: "The mouth of the jar was so small that the skull could not be removed whole. This skull was taken out in the presence of several gentlemen from a depth of thirty feet below the undisturbed surface of the mound." The skull is contemporaneous "with the early mound-builders, the elephant and the mastodon." It lay near the "charred remains of many victims." This interesting relic which, from a fragment, became an entire skull, which came from both the top and the bottom of a mound, subsequently was broken, along with the enclosing vessel, by accident to the box in which it was packed, we are told by the Peabody Museum Report, which, as has been said, got its information from Professor Swallow. The vessel, pieced together, is now at the Peabody Museum and contains a few fragments of an adult skull and the vertebra of a deer. The inside measurements of the vessel, I learn from Mr Willoughby, are, height $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches, aperture $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, maximum diameter 6 inches.

In Professor Starr's carefully-prepared "Bibliography" of the archeology of Iowa (*Proc. Davenport Acad. Nat. Sci.*, vol. VI, pp. 19 and 55) are two references. One refers to the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1887, in which is described work by Mr B. Morgan in a mound near Richland, Keokuk county, Iowa, where "burial-urns," vessels nine feet in circumference, are said to have contained human bones. The other reference, when looked up, shows that some years previous to the newspaper account, in an abstract of correspondence from Mr Morgan, describing this same investigation of the mound near Richland, which appeared in the Smithsonian Institution Report, 1880, p. 445, no mention is made of the measurement of the vessels nor of their having been used for burial purposes.

It is not probable that urn-burial was practised exclusively in any locality within the United States. As above said, I have never found burials in urns except in conjunction with other forms of burial, and I have been able to learn of but one account where urn-burials alone are said to have been met with, and to this statement I attach but little importance.¹

Within the limit of a paper necessarily so brief as this, space is wanting particularly to describe the enclosing vessels of earthenware belonging to urn-burials. Fortunately, in Professor Holmes' exhaustive memoir, *Aboriginal Pottery of Eastern United States*,² the matter is fully discussed, so far as a large part of the United States is concerned, and I can do no better than to refer the reader to him.

¹ Squier and Davis, op. cit., p. 167, speak of a cemetery, devoted to urn-burial only, on St Catharine's, an island of the Georgia coast. I have conducted field work on St Catharine's island for a considerable period with a large force of men, and in view of the fact that neither there nor on any island of the Georgia coast did I meet with cemeteries of the class described, and considering the loose method of mound work and of the reports on it that prevailed in former times, one may well discredit this case cited by Squier and Davis on the authority of another.

² Twentieth Ann. Rep. Bur. Am. Eth., pp. 104-110 incl., 130-136 incl. et al., and numerous plates. For Professor Holmes as to urn-burial, see pp. 37-39 incl. of the same work, reading "Florida" in place of "Georgia" under figure 11.



Aboriginal Burial, Three Rivers Landing, Alabama.

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A Form of Urn-burial on Mobile Bay. — In the last number of the *American Anthropologist* (October-December, 1904) I contributed a paper, "Aboriginal Urn-Burial in the United States." In this paper I pointed out that the occurrence of what might be called a form of urn-burial, namely, the placing of a vessel of earthenware inverted over a skull with which the rest of the skeleton was present had not been reported, to my knowledge, east of Arizona and New Mexico. The fact was emphasized that the form of urn-burial in question should not be confused with that obtaining along the northwestern Florida coast where inverted bowls are found lying over isolated skulls or skulls with a few scattered, accompanying bones.

While consulting authorities for my paper I came upon a description¹ of the finding of an urn-burial, exact particulars not given, on Simpson's island, one of a number of islands to the north of Mobile bay.

Having decided to make certain investigations around Mobile bay, I visited Simpson's island in January, 1905. On the western, or Mobile river, side of the island, about three miles from the northern end, is a cultivated tract on which are several frame houses. About 250 yards in a southerly direction from the houses was a mound, 3 feet in height and 87 feet across its circular base, made of a mixture of tenacious muck and small clam-shells (*Rangia cuneata*). As the owner valued the mound as a place of refuge for stock in flood-time, the outer part of the mound, subject to wash, was not touched by us; but the central part, fifty feet in diameter, was dug through and a considerable number of burials of types common to southern mounds, not in connection with urns, were encountered.

There was one exception. In the northeastern part of the mound was a skeleton of an adult, the head directed to the east. The skeleton lay at full length on its back, with the head turned slightly to one side. Inverted over the skull, and completely covering it, was a decorated, imperforate vessel of earthenware, maximum diameter 11.75 inches, height 3.75 inches, with its upturned base but 8 inches from the surface.

Here we have a burial, as far east as Alabama, similar to the burials reported from Arizona and New Mexico.

Considering the interesting urn-burials found on Alabama river and those of the northwestern Florida coast, beginning at Perdido bay, the coast boundary between Alabama and Florida, which is but a few miles distant from Mobile bay, one might look for records of the finding of urn-burials on Mobile bay, but such records are not forthcoming, and even the testimony of inhabitants as to the discovery of such burials seems to be wanting. My investigation, which included the circuit of the bay, resulted in the finding of no urn-burial of any sort other than the one described.

In a mound on Tombigbee river, however, sixty-five miles by water above Mobile, at Three Rivers Landing, Washington county, Alabama, I since have found a skeleton having on the skull, part of which it covered like a cap, an inverted vessel six and one-half inches in diameter.

Fuller description of the archeological work on Mobile bay and on Tombigbee river will appear in the Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

CLARENCE B. MOORE.

¹ *Smithsonian Report*, 1878, p. 290.

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