He is right. Archaeology makes you think about people. About how you fit into the whole of the human experience. It causes you to stand in awe of history and your place in it. You can marvel. Wonder. Feel the living presence of the past. And a remarkable thing usually happens – you are able to put your own life in a much larger perspective. You know more about who and where you are and about what is important. You have a better idea of what life is really all about.

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Join archaeologists like those excavating the Moche tombs in Sipán on their journey of discovery this and every year.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Clendenning
Executive Publisher

P.S. The contents of the new issue are under wraps, just like a mummy. But I can guarantee you that you will be surprised and enlightened. Fascinated and engaged. Your free issue will leave you wanting more. Mail your token now so you don’t miss even one more issue.

Sipán, Peru. 1987. Police raid the home of a well-known local grave robber and find a treasure trove of looted artifacts, including gold and silver amulets, funerary masks, and turquoise-inlaid ear spools. They summon Walter Alvarez, the director of Peru’s Brüning Museum, who confirms that these precious objects were stolen from an ancient mound at the edge of town and were the finest Moche artifacts ever uncovered. Fortunately, when archaeologists began excavating the site, they found that the grave robbers’ tunnels had stopped just a few feet short of one of the richest burials ever found in the New World, that of a young man they called the Lord of Sipán. Resting on his chest was a large hammered gold crescent-shaped diadem, the Moche symbol of divine power. Clutched in his right hand was a gold scepter bearing a blood-chilling scene of ritual sacrifice…

A few miles away. 1991. Archaeologists locate the burial of a Moche princess. Artifacts buried with her identify her as one of the main participants in the Sacrifice Ceremony where prisoners of war were killed and their blood consumed in tall goblets.

But who were the Moche? A fearsome and formidable people, the Moche flourished along the north coast of Peru between A.D. 100 and 800. They established extensive trade networks and developed elaborate irrigation systems, turning the desert into arable land that supported settlements of more than 500,000 people. We are just beginning to learn about their religion and beliefs, including the Sacrifice Ceremony.

Would you like to discover more about the world of the Moche? The Maya? Aztecs? Ancient Greece and Rome? Egypt? The archaeology of the Bible? …more about the human race than has come down to us in the written historical record?

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Let me tell you about some of my favorite discoveries:

Untouched: A 2,200 year-old underground palace

The tomb of Qin Shihuangdi, China’s first emperor. Historical sources say that this vast burial chamber (really an underground palace) took 36 years and 700,000 laborers to build. The emperor himself was laid to rest in 210 B.C. dressed in jade and gold, and with his mouth stuffed with pearls. His coffin was said to be floating on a river of mercury. Amazingly, when archaeologists tested the foundations of the two walls encircling the tomb, they confirmed the presence of unusual concentrations of mercury, up to 100 times the normal level. The debate over whether to continue excavation or concentrate on preservation of the tomb continues today.

Discovered: A fantastic landscape filled with now-extinct creatures

In North Central Ohio the clearing of a sinkhole revealed Sheridan Cave. There archaeologists found the remains of plants and animals that lived at the end of the Ice Age, between 13,000 and 12,000 years ago. Their investigation has revealed a landscape where the ancestors of today’s Native Americans would have hunted now extinct species such as the short-faced bear, the giant beaver, stag moose, and herds of pig-like peccaries. This was a landscape that even a moviemaker could not imagine.

Solved: Secrets of the Maya revealed

The mystery of the Mayan code. Archaeologists are now able to decode many of the inscriptions on temples, tombs, statues, and other artifacts. We know, for instance, that a ruler named Smoke Imix was a strong leader. He came to power on February 8, A.D. 628, and he consolidated his rule over the next 67 years at the site of Copan in western Honduras.

ARCHAEOLOGY magazine comes to you six times a year —engagingly written, superbly illustrated, incredibly rich in its range of subject matter. You’ll feel that you are part of the greatest discoveries that archaeologists are making now!

Did you know that the Maya and Aztecs had wheeled-toys? So why didn’t they use wheels for transportation?

Did you know that the Romans practiced dentistry and maybe even orthodontics at a barbershop located under the stairs of the temple of Castor and Pollux in Rome?

Would like the taste of ancient beer? (Ancient beer has been brewed today. You’d probably find it sweet – less bitter than modern beer.) Would you like the wine in ancient Rome? (Maybe not. The sweet wine was usually diluted with water, almost turning it into a soft drink.)

Anyone for dinner?

We have all heard about the decadence of the ancient Romans, but how much of this is true? And what can you learn from a rib fragment of a pork chop? These and millions of other remains of meals consumed over 2,000 years ago are being found by archaeologists and are confirming the classical authors’ accounts of the Roman taste for luxury. Banquets were extravagant feasts where patrons competed to outdo and outspend each other. During the evening guests would consume dozens of courses that might include such delicacies as dormice, sausages, peahen eggs, orioles, hares, capons, and fish.

$10,000 in today's money! That is about how much a feast for 15 would cost. The author Seneca wrote that his friend, the food writer Apicius, drank poison and committed suicide rather than give up the gluttonous lifestyle he could no longer afford.

So why did the Moche (whom we met at the start of this letter) practice human sacrifice? Other civilizations that engaged in human sacrifice include the Aztecs, and they provide some clues. According to Aztec myth, the sun god Huitzilopochtli drove back the darkness at the start of each day. He needed strength for this struggle and he got it from the nourishment of human blood. But the truth is that we don’t know for sure yet, so archaeologists keep looking for answers.

A professor of anthropology at Grinnell College in Iowa may have said it best:

“Few of us would bother with archaeology if we weren’t emotionally involved with the past. We don’t dig for dry bones and dusty pot sherds, but for people.”