

Benchmark

Volume 34, Issue 7

August 2020

President's Message

AUGUST NTAS MEETING WILL BE VIRTUAL

Much of my NTAS time over the past month has been spent "Zooming" around while not actually leaving home. Since NTAS will be using Zoom for our upcoming monthly meetings, I downloaded the free version of Zoom in late June, took some online training, and then practiced hosting and participating in Zoom meetings with several willing NTAS members. After hosting a few practice sessions using the free version of Zoom, I signed up for a paid version of Zoom that will allow us to conduct meetings that last more than 40 minutes and connect up to 100 devices, so I think we are ready to complete the year using a Zoom approach. Later in this newsletter I have listed Zoom-related information that should make it easier for everyone to participate in our monthly meetings. (See "Preparing to Zoom" on Page 2)

Although it is early August and the afternoon temperatures are extremely high, the holiday season is really just around the corner. As you ponder what to get for the special people in your life, especially since it may still be difficult to shop in brick and mortar stores this Fall, I encourage you to consider giving a TAS membership and an NTAS membership as a gift for Christmas, graduation, birthdays, etc. A membership in these organizations will be meaningful



James Everett, President

to the recipients and will provide benefits to them that could easily last far beyond the coming year.

I will end my article this month on a sad note. Last month, NTAS lost one of our most respected and beloved members with the passing of Lloyd Erwin. Lloyd was one of the reasons NTAS has grown and been so successful over the past few decades. His smile greeted all of us as we gathered for monthly meetings, displays at AARP events or on college campuses, trips to special locations like the Waco Mammoth National Monument, or field work. Lloyd's creative and well-organized mind helped us address many situations faced by the Board over the years. And, he was always pleasant and fun to be around. NTAS will miss Lloyd in so many ways, but we are blessed to have had the privilege of knowing him and working with him.

The **NORTH TEXAS ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY (NTAS)** meeting for **August 13th** will be **held via Zoom** (see **Page 3** for instructions).

NTAS meetings are **free** and visitors are always welcome.

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North Texas Archeological Society

August Speaker: Robert Lassen

The What, Why, and Where of Variation in Folsom Point Technology

When thin, unfluted Midland points were encountered alongside fluted Folsom points beginning in the mid-20th century, archaeologists struggled to understand the nature of the points' relationship. Does one type follow the other chronologically? Were Midland points made in place of Folsom points when raw materials were scarce? Or could there be other explanations? My dissertation research focused on these questions, and I traveled across Texas and far beyond to look at Folsom collections and understand this relationship. This presentation gives a "highlights reel" of my dissertation results, delving into what came to be called the Folsom-Midland Problem.

Robert Lassen received his B.A. at Southwestern University, followed by his M.A. at Texas A&M University and his Ph.D. at the University of Tennessee. Both his thesis and dissertation involved the analysis of early Paleoindian stone tool technology. During his dissertation research, he became involved with the Gault School of Archaeological Research and spent several years working with them after completing his degree. Robert's fieldwork has taken him all over Texas and parts of the southeastern U.S., and his research has taken him across the Plains. He currently works as a Project Archaeologist at AmaTerra Environmental, Inc. in Austin.



Preparing to Zoom

If you do not already have Zoom, it will save time if – before you actually want to use it - you download the Zoom software or app by going to Zoom.us and, at the bottom of the Home Page, clicking on “Download”. This will allow you to download and install the software free, without actually having to set up a Zoom account (with email address and password). If you prefer to have a free Zoom account, click on the “Sign up, It’s free” button, provide your email address and a password, and you will have a free Zoom account (which allows you to host your own Zoom meetings if you want to).

Prior to each monthly meeting, you will receive a “Zoom invite” with the necessary link and other information regarding the meeting. **Keep the “invite”** to make it easier to join the meeting. (You will need the “invite” the night of the meeting.)

Each Zoom “invite” will also include such things as tips about what to expect as you join the meeting, “Zoom etiquette”, and other pertinent information.

The Zoom “invites” will list the names and phone numbers of several NTAS members who have agreed to be Zoom assistants, available to help anyone who encounters a problem joining the meeting or using any of the Zoom features (e.g., raising your hand to ask a question, using the “chat” feature).

At least for the first few meetings, please limit access for each household to one device per meeting. (After the first few meetings, hopefully we will have a better idea of how close we are to exceeding our 100-device limit.)

Using Zoom for our monthly meetings will be a learning experience for all of us. Please be patient and understanding, and, if you are not yet comfortable using Zoom, take advantage of one of the following NTAS Zoom practice sessions:

Monday, August 10, at 2:00 pm

Tuesday, August 11, at 7:00 pm

“Invites” for these sessions will be sent out the week before the sessions.

In Memoriam



On July 19, we lost a valued member of our NTAS family and a true friend, Lloyd Erwin. We will always miss him.

The Pineda Tablet

James E. Barrera and Donna Otto

Archeology has been a fascinating field to the general public for a very long time. One interesting pattern in the public's fascination with archeology are hoaxes. This article describes a potential hoax artifact related to Spanish explorer, Captain Alonso Alvarez de Pineda (hereafter Pineda). This artifact was supposedly found in 1974 near the mouth of the Rio Grande River in Texas. Pineda's 1519 expedition resulted in the first complete map of the Gulf of Mexico including the coast of Texas (Figure 1). Multiple authors report that Pineda and his men were the first Europeans to see Texas (Campbell 1947; Chipman 1992; Chipman and Weddle 2013; Weddle 1992a, 1992b). So, what is the potential hoax artifact associated with Captain Pineda's 1519 expedition? It's a baked clay tablet supposedly left in

1519 by Pineda's expedition at the mouth of the Rio Grande River, with writing impressed into the tablet relevant to the expedition.

This tablet was reportedly found in 1974 by the Harlingen Naval Reserve Unit, NRSD 8-30 (S) (hereafter NRSD) during an excavation to find artifacts at Boca Chica (beach at mouth of Rio Grande River). The best detail on the 1974 excavation that reportedly uncovered the Pineda Tablet is found in Clotilde P. Garcia's 1982 publication on Captain Pineda. Many publications contain details on the state of affairs in 1519 that led to Captain Pineda's expedition and mapping of the Texas coast (Carson 2018; Chipman 1992, 1995; Chipman and Weddle 2013; Garcia 1982; Weber 1992; Weddle 1981). Captain Pineda's benefactor was Governor Francis-



Figure 1. 1519 Map by Alonso Alvarez de Pineda of Gulf of Mexico including Texas coast (de Pineda 1519).

co de Garay, governor of Jamaica, who was desperate for fame and riches to compete with Hernan Cortés. By 1519 Cortés was in the final stage of collapsing the Aztec empire and colonizing eastern and central Mexico, which was viewed as unmatched success by the Spanish crown. On behalf of Garay, Captain Pineda was tasked with overseeing four Spanish ships to accomplish the following: map the Gulf of Mexico, find passage through to Asia, and lay claim to lands that would boost Garay in the eye of the Spanish crown.

Background on Archeological Hoaxes

Creation of an enduring hoax artifact, archeological feature, or even archeological site is not a new practice in archeology or the broader field of anthropology. The Piltdown hoax is one of the most famous hoax artifacts to plague multiple disciplines, supposedly found at Piltdown, Sussex, England around 1912 (Lewin and Foley 2004:11-12, 229). The Piltdown hoax was a falsified paleoanthropological “discovery” that filled in the missing human evolutionary link of the time and created much confusion in hominid studies. This hoax artifact was a single skull constructed from modern human and ape cranial elements, that were chemically treated to create an aged appearance, and presented as genuine fossil discovery. At the time (ca. 1912) it was not easy to disprove this artifact due to sparse comparative samples and limited technology. But eventually by the 1950s the Piltdown hoax was fully disparaged as scientific disciplines revealed this hoax (Ashmore and Sharer 1996:155; Shapiro 1974:45-49). By the 1950’s comparative collections were much more advanced, chemical treatment of the find was confirmed (to falsify the aged appearance), and by this time a means of dating bone (based on amounts of fluorine, uranium, and nitrogen) was utilized on the Piltdown “fossil” and found this to be of modern age. This is an example of a hoax that persisted for a long time within actual scientific circles. But an example hoax artifact where scientific analysis was performed, and the hoax was revealed.

Here in Texas there are no lack of archeological hoaxes. By 1935 there is literature warning archeologists to be mindful about hoax artifacts in Texas (Ray 1935:84-85). In 1974 Robert F. Heizer published a consideration about hoaxes and fakes in

archeology, including good analytical references. One of the more well-known and documented archeological hoaxes in Texas are the Malakoff Heads. A series of three boulders found in gravel quarries near Malakoff, Henderson County. The Malakoff Heads were first reported in 1929 by quarry workers to E. H. Sellards at the University of Texas (Guderjan 1989). Prior to Guderjan’s analysis and article on the Malakoff Heads, some publications mention these as artifacts of Pleistocene age (Suhm et al. 1954; Webb 1958). By taking an analytical approach to these artifacts, Guderjan demonstrated that the Malakoff Head No. 1 was made using steel tools. Analysis of the Malakoff heads focused on patina, to include varying levels of oxidation across the artifacts that indicate modification. And the analysis measured the gouge marks around the eyes and nose and determined these to be consistent with steel tools in the imperial system of measurement. Guderjan reports that the Malakoff Head No. 3 may be either an unmodified boulder or possibly altered in modern times, but not an actual artifact. Guderjan stated that there were still non-archeological publications, without any analysis, continuing to report the Malakoff Heads (and similar boulders elsewhere) as actual artifacts. Guderjan’s effort to perform archeological analysis on long-standing hoax artifacts is a commendable example at approaching this situation.

Hoaxes that become part of the public’s interest (i.e. well known) or hoaxes that are published in some form of archeological context will typically undergo scientific scrutiny. Archeologists with multidisciplinary training can focus on different types of analysis when approaching a single artifact, archeological feature, or archeological site. As described for the Piltdown hoax, some form of dating should be considered when assessing potential hoaxes. The Malakoff Heads case example shows the use of metric data that helped verify modern modification on these artifacts.

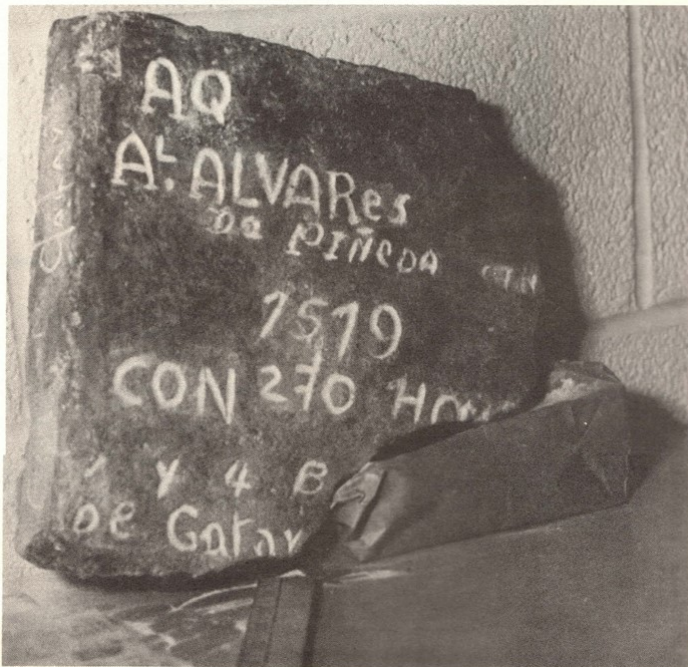
Detail on the Pineda Tablet

This article was spurred by the reportedly earliest European artifact in Texas, which is significant, and is being publicly displayed at a museum in Harlingen as an authentic artifact. As mentioned above, the Pineda Tablet was supposedly discovered near

the mouth of the Rio Grande River in 1974. Garcia's 1982 publication contains the best detail on the discovery, including documents associated with the discovery of the tablet (photos and letters from ca. 1974-1982), and has the most thorough description of the Pineda Tablet artifact (Figure 2). Garcia provides correspondence with the Rio Grande Valley Museum of Harlingen (now called Harlingen Arts and Heritage Museum), who sponsored the expedition that found the Pineda Tablet. In this correspondence the Rio Grande Valley Museum describes that on November 3, 1974 the NRSD, on a community service project for the museum, went exploring for Civil War era artifacts near Boca Chica. The Pineda Tablet was found in an area where one member of the NRSD had previously identified remains of an old boat. The museum's lawyer pro-

duced an affidavit crediting the NRSD with discovery of the Pineda Tablet, which went on display at the Rio Grande Valley Museum in Harlingen. The Geology Department at Pan American University (now University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) determined that the tablet is composed of kaolinite clay, molded, and was fired in burlap (Garcia 1982). The provenience of the tablet is unknown according to the museum in large part because the museum does not have any field records (museum staff, personal communication August 2016), and no archeological site form is known to exist.

According to various authors (Chipman and Weddle 2013; Clifford 1983; Weber 1992), the Pineda Tablet is a poorly made hoax based on the paleography (study of ancient writing) of this artifact and based on the inscription "Garay's Colony". Chipman and Weddle explain that portions of the writing such as the use of the Spanish tilde on Pineda is inaccurate as that was never used for that surname, and a stem on the number "7" was not used in 1519 and only started to be used around the early 19th century. These authors also explain that Garay's Colony must have been established on the Rio Panuco in 1520, which is located approximately 250 miles south of the Rio Grande near modern day Tampico, Mexico. This is first because some of Pineda's expedition successfully returned to Jamaica in 1519 and reported the findings to Garay including the map shown in Figure 1. And then Garay sent a return expedition to establish a colony, which would have been in 1520 by that time. And in 1523 Cortés visited the Rio Panuco and confirmed that this was the site of Garay's failed colony. These authors (Chipman and Weddle 2013; Clifford 1983; Weber 1992) provide further detail to support that Garay did not establish a colony at the Rio Grande by showing that later 16th and 17th century maps clearly show the Rio Grande, Rio de las Palmas, and Rio Panuco in relation to each other which means there was not confusion about the location of these rivers in the 16th century. And details about the native inhabitants at the Rio Panuco provided by survivors of Garay's failed colony are not supported in the ethnohistorical or archeological record along the Rio Grande such as survivor reports of extensive permanent villages, use of metallurgy, and use of "war" canoes. With



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English translation reads as follows:

Here..Capt. Alonso Álvarez de Pineda in 1519 with 270 men and 4 of Garay's Ships.” (Garay's Colony)

Figure 2. The Pineda Tablet and translation.
Adapted from Garcia 1982.

evidence to the contrary, it is unclear why this has been insufficient to close the door on the authenticity of the Pineda Tablet.

The City of Harlingen continues to display the Pineda Tablet to the public as a legitimate artifact from 1519, and there are other publications and monuments reporting Pineda's longer-term presence near the mouth of the Rio Grande in 1519 (Garcia 1982; Sanchez 1992). Chipman and Weddle performed exhaustive historical research and some level of paleographical analysis to the Pineda Tablet, but what about archeological analysis or any scientific analysis of the Pineda Tablet? To date it does not appear that any archeological or other scientific analysis of the Pineda Tablet has been performed.

A regional newsletter from Harlingen mentions that in 1980 a sample of the Pineda Tablet was submitted to the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), University of Texas at San Antonio for thermoluminescence (TL) dating (Clifford 1983). TL dating is a method for providing an age used mostly on pottery and ceramic samples. But TL has also been used to some extent in determining age on bronze (clay cast remnants), heated or burned stone, patina on lithics, and even sediments (Fagan 1997; McIntosh 1999). There were no results of the TL dating of the Pineda Tablet fragment in the 1983 newsletter publication, strictly mention that a TL sample had been submitted to CAR and pending results. In an effort to pursue details on the TL sample, CAR and a former affiliate who worked at CAR in 1980 were contacted (Raymond Mauldin, personal communication August 2016; Thomas Hester, personal communication May 2020). No details on a sample of the Pineda Tablet at CAR could be found, perhaps for lack of an accession number in the Harlingen museum's records or associated archeological site trinomial.

Other methods that have not been applied include analysis similar to what Guderjan (1989) exercised on the long-debated Malakoff Heads. This could include metric analysis for the actual script (length, width, depth, etc.) and patina analysis. It appears based on Figure 2 of this article that the tablet script was cleaned at some point after discovery. Garcia's 1982 publication contains photos showing the tablet in the field presumably at the location of discovery and the script appears to be scratched/

cleaned similar to Figure 2. One interesting difference from the photos of the Pineda Tablet prior to 2019 (Chipman 1992; Clifford 1983; Garcia 1982) is that the tablet appears to have a patinated surface in contrast to the freshly scratched/cleaned script. Based on a recent article in the local Harlingen newspaper (Kelly 2019) the tablet appears to have been cleaned yet again, basically removing all patina sometime prior to 2019 (Figure 3). Another basic method for the analysis of the Pineda Tablet that does not appear to have been attempted include oral histories from folks who participated in the actual excavations. Clifford (1983) mentions that the museum's lawyer provided an affidavit to authenticate the tablet, but when the authors of this article contacted the museum and the City of Harlingen historian (personal communication August 2016) no records from the 1974 field excavations of any kind were known or available associated with the Pineda Tablet. Other records that would be key archeological details include locational information, usually in the form of a trinomial, because the location of an archeological site should be protected. Using the Texas Historical Commission's Archeological Sites Atlas, the authors performed a search of the archeological records within five kilometers from the mouth of the Rio Grande. Based on the results of this search there were no records found that indicate an archeological site was recorded with 16th century artifacts. This is strange because the NRSD group that performed the excavations and discovery of the Pineda Tablet, performed this effort on behalf of the museum which is part of the City of Harlingen. And typically for any excavation there would be daily field notes, photo logs, excavation forms, etc. And understandably the NRSD group may not have had very formal processes for all of this, but no records of any kind are available from the field excavations which is a glaring hole in the Pineda Tablet mystery.

Conclusion on Pineda Tablet

The historians have dominantly stated in publication that the Pineda Tablet must be a hoax artifact (Chipman 1992, 1995; Chipman and Weddle 2013; Clifford 1983; Weber 1992). The lines of evidence that are relied upon by the historians to refute any authenticity of the Pineda Tablet are primarily based

on style of writing and one apparent error inscribed on the tablet (“Garay’s Colony”). However, there is at least one publication from a historian that does not agree with this opinion (Garcia 1982). Garcia’s 1982 publication contains the bulk of direct correspondence with the museum in Harlingen, the only photos of the field crew who discovered the Pineda Tablet, and other details from both the field excavations and museum.

The extent of the analysis on the Pineda Tablet is laid out above, all from historians, so without any archeological or rigorous scientific approach. According to Clifford (1983) a TL sample was submit-

ted to CAR for dating sometime around 1980, however, CAR and former affiliates could not identify any record of this sample. At this point a sample of the Pineda Tablet has not been dated using a reliable method that could prove or disprove the age of the disputed Pineda Tablet. No archeological analysis of the artifact has been performed for artifact metrics or patina analysis. And the museum and City of Harlingen staff do not have any field records or other records to support the provenience of the Pineda Tablet. It’s a hard case to support the authenticity of the Pineda Tablet and the efforts should lie in the owner’s hands. At a minimum the

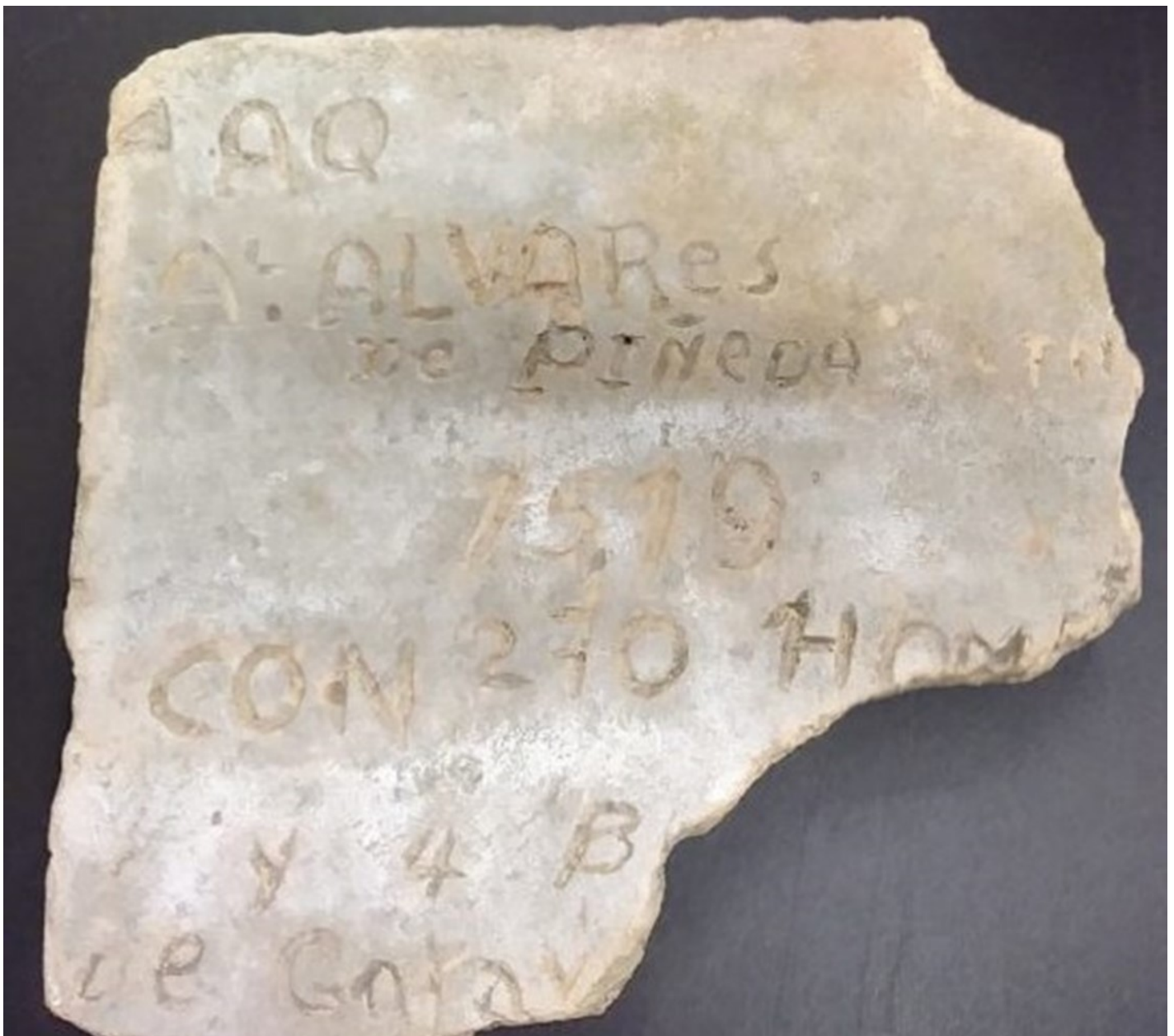


Figure 3. Photo of the Pineda Tablet as of August 2019. Adapted from Kelly 2019

methods that have not been applied to authenticate the Pineda Tablet should be transparently presented to the public along with the artifact.

Must extend thanks to multiple folks that provided detail for this article. Including the City of Harlingen Historian, Mr. Norman Rozeff who provided articles and his perspective on The Pineda Tablet. Dr. Tom Hester who provided advice and information. Dr. Raymond Mauldin of CAR who investigated their collection without any known ascension number or trinomial to aid his search. And finally, Mr. Skipper Scott for providing a quick and thoughtful review with constant encouragement!

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Update Your Calendar - NTAS Monthly Meeting Speakers

September 10th (virtual): Elizabeth Nelson
October 8th (virtual): Marion Coe
November 12th (virtual): Dr. Thomas Guderjan

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