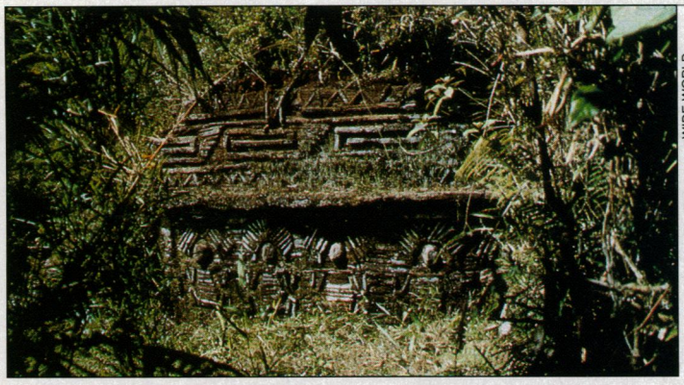
edited by RICHARD STONE



WIDE WORLD

Easy target. A new sensor system may prevent the plundering of archeological sites, such as this Peruvian ruin that was inhabited between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500 by an unknown pre-Incan people.

A Trap for Archeological Looters

For archeologists, the scene is all too familiar: Not long after they discover a site, vandals sneak in and loot or deface it. But help is coming in the form of a new system that will tip off law enforcement officials to lurking vandals.

The system is a combination of three sensors hidden at the digs. Dubbed HIPROTECT by its designers, at team of engineers at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the system is composed of a seismic sensor to measure ground vibrations, a magnetometer to detect metal implements such as shovels, and an infrared eye to sense body heat. A computer integrates data from the three sensors and the plan is to have it channel signals to a computer at a law-enforcement agency. Law officers then can activate an on-site video camera and open an audio link that would enable them to question intruders. HIPROTECT is scheduled to be tested this summer at Fort Benning, a military base near Columbus, Georgia, that's littered with valuable artifacts ranging across thousands of years—from Native American campsites to 19th-century farms—and which has suffered heavy looting.

The Livermore team aims to price HIPROTECT at between $5,000 and $10,000. That's a small price to pay, asserts University of California, Riverside, archeologist Ervin Taylor, who is collaborating with the Livermore engineers, because there's more at stake than money: "We're losing sites at such a rapid rate that something needs to be done now," he says.

In Search of: One NIH Director

If you hear people dropping names of potential candidates to replace departing National Institutes of Health Director Bernadine Healy, don't believe them—the search hasn't even begun. NIH's parent agency, the department of Health and Human Services, only last week set up a five-person committee to identify candidates.

Although the panel membership is supposed to be a secret, *Science* has learned that it includes Bruce Alberts, the University of California, San Francisco, biologist who will become head of the National Academy of Sciences later this month. Other members are: Samuel Thier, president of Brandeis University; Linda Wilson, president of Radcliffe College; and James Wyche, a molecular biologist at Brown University. A fifth member, who had not been identified at press time, is expected to possess NIH experience.

LEAH ROBERTS

Samuel Thier

When contacted by *Science*, Thier acknowledged that he would serve on the panel but said the appointment hadn't been confirmed. The panel is to offer its recommendations within 6 weeks.

DOD to Single Out MicroGeneSys Vaccine

The Department of Defense (DOD) has spurned the scientific advice of a blue-ribbon panel organized by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), *Science* has learned, and now plans to spend $20 million to test just one company's therapeutic AIDS vaccine. This single-track approach may make it harder to tell whether therapeutic vaccines generally have beneficial effects.

The project traces its origins to a campaign last fall by lobbyists from Connecticut's MicroGeneSys Inc., who persuaded Congress to appropriate $20 million to DOD for a trial of that biotech firm's AIDS vaccine. At the time, the scientific community assailed it as "pork" and an end run around peer review. NIH Director Bernadine Healy quickly convened a blue-ribbon panel, which decided in February that the money would be better spent testing several therapeutic AIDS vaccines in a head-to-head trial. DOD's own advisory panel reached the same conclusion—provided there was enough money to pay for such a trial.

But now military sources have told *Science* that after reviewing "thorough cost analyses," DOD top brass have decided that $20 million would only be enough to fund one large-scale test—that of the MicroGeneSys vaccine.

The plan isn't set in concrete, however. The law stipulates that if the NIH director, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner, *and* the secretary of defense provide Congress with written objections to the trial by 6 April, the money would go instead to DOD's general AIDS-research budget.

NIH and FDA spokespersons told *Science* that their bosses plan to file such objections. But that won't be enough to tip the scales against MicroGeneSys—unless the defense secretary concurs. And DOD's position is still unclear. In a written statement to *Science*, DOD said that it's unaware "of any submission to Congress from either NIH or FDA that such a trial should not proceed. Likewise, [DOD] does not plan to submit such a statement."

Grants Go to Russian Science, Despite Turmoil

You might think the welfare of Russian science had been forgotten in the turmoil of the past few weeks, as Russia's president and congress struggle for power. But the Soros Foundation, for one, has not forgotten and is now forging ahead with a plan to award aid to scientists and science institutions in the former Soviet Union (FSU).

Established last December by billionaire financier George Soros, the International Science Foundation (ISF) has pledged to spend $100 million over the next 2 years on basic research and graduate science education in the FSU. And last month, the foundation made its first big award: $500,000 to the Komarov Botanical Institute in St. Petersburg, Russia. Much of that money is expected to go to repairs (such as a new roof) for the institute, Russia's main biodiversity research center.

"It's miraculous things are still on track," says Gerson Sher, a National Science Foundation program manager and ISF's associate director. Shortly after *Izvestia* and other newspapers carried a Soros advertisement on 25 February, a few hundred proposals a day started pouring in to the ISF's Manhattan office, Sher says. A panel of scientists is sifting through the proposals and over the next several months expects to award "many thousands" (about $10 million worth) of $500 "emergency grants," according to Sher. These will tide researchers over until early next year, he says, when ISF expects to award a number of 2-year research grants of roughly $10,000 each.

The ISF is "waiting for one or two more signatures" from FSU officials before disbursing the emergency grants, says ISF board member Harley Balzer, director of Georgetown University's Russian area studies program. He says the grants will be paid in U.S. dollars to avoid the vagaries of the Russian ruble. "We want people not just to eat but to do science as well," Balzer says.