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Newsletters

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## UAH Humanities Center, 2007

University of Alabama in Huntsville

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# *Humanities Center*

Fall 2007



UAH

ON THE COVER:  
"Puppets" by Jose Betancourt, UAH Art Department

The University of Alabama in Huntsville



# The Humanities Center at UAHuntsville

In the early 1990's, a group of faculty members from the humanities departments of the College of Liberal Arts decided to seek funds to establish a Center designed to promote humanistic inquiry both within the university and in the wider Huntsville community. Toward that end, a challenge grant was secured from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This grant acted (as it was intended to do) as a focus for the attraction of other funds, both state and private, and within three or four years, the foundation of the current Humanities Center Endowment was laid. In the years since, the original monies (invested and monitored through the UA system's combined endowment fund) have grown and with some later donations form the Center's current endowment. That endowment is divided into three distinct funds the annual incomes from which support the Center's activities. The first of these funds is the Humanities Center Endowment. The earnings from this fund are used annually to support professional travel undertaken by faculty members working in the humanities and related fields, a program of mini-grants designed to support faculty research in the humanities, as well as general public programming in the humanities. The income from the second fund, the Visiting Eminent Scholar Endowment, is used to support visits to the UAH campus by outstanding scholars in the humanities. While here, these scholars are typically attached to one of the humanities departments in the College, teaching one or two courses, sharing their research with colleagues at UAH, and presenting lectures on their work to the general public. Until recently, scholars invited under the aegis of this program all visited for a full semester. Several years ago, we initiated a new program that uses some of the income from this fund to invite eminent scholars for short-term (usually week-long) visits as well. The third fund is the Humanities Center Salmon Library Endowment. The annual income from this fund is used to develop the humanities collections at the Salmon Library based on proposals submitted by UAH faculty members.

In addition to the activities supported by our endowment funds, the Center continues to seek external funding for other programs designed to enhance the study of the humanities at UAH. Several major grants have been secured in recent years making possible new opportunities for students throughout the university. Given restrictions on the use of endowment and grant funding, the Center depends for all operating expenses on the continuing support of the office of the Vice President for Research without which none of the activities mentioned above would be possible.

## Challenging the Boundaries of the Humanities

What does it mean to participate in a culture? How does culture shape, limit, or liberate an individual personality? Perhaps more importantly, to what extent can the individual shape culture, as well as being shaped by it? To what extent is cross-cultural communication possible?

These questions are at the heart of the humanities today, especially in the movement we now term "cultural studies," an interdisciplinary approach to humanistic studies. This emphasis on interdisciplinarity in recent decades is a major shift from earlier efforts to distinguish disciplines from one another as sharply as possible. In literary study, for example, the formalist critics who dominated literary study in the middle decades of the twentieth century insisted that we focus on aesthetic form, avoid using literature primarily to gain insights into history or biography, and recognize that the hallmark of great art is the dramatization of unresolved opposites, not the affirmation of particular ethical or political values. The great Shakespearean Norman Rabkin summed up the position eloquently: we are drawn to poetry, he argues "because in it as in nothing else we are enabled to re-experience in such a way as to come to understand it the unresolvable complexity of life as life presents itself to the fullest human consciousness." Formalist approaches produced—and still produce—insightful interpretations, but formalists sometimes have sought to limit our methods of inquiry and thus restrict the kinds of value that our scholarship may have.

Today cultural critics often begin with the assumption that artistic form reflects social practice, and, conversely, that social and political practices have an aesthetic dimension, including symbolism that may be interpreted in much the same ways that we interpret poems or visual art. In another recent development, literature scholars have drawn upon cognitive psychology in order to argue that an artistic genius is able to critique the political ideologies of his or her age in ways that ordinary writers cannot imagine. For many humanist scholars today, the value of the arts consists largely of their ability to bring about social and political change.

The challenges of interdisciplinarity are obvious. If we begin as specialists in aesthetic analysis of literature, music, or visual art, can we learn enough about history, political science, sociology, or anthropology to ground our conclusions concerning the political dimensions of cultural symbols? Can a philosopher learn enough about medicine to analyze the complex problems of medical ethics? As we debate the extent to which a work of art can transcend culture, can we learn enough about psychology and sociology to validate our claims? My own response to such questions is that we must continually expand our horizons rather than limiting them, remaining

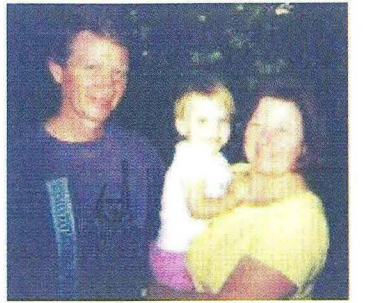
aware of the elements of contingency in our arguments while still believing that searching for evidence and insight from more than one discipline will enrich our work. Perhaps most importantly, we must remain open to challenges to our presuppositions.

The greatest artists and thinkers whom we study were not limited by preconceived notions concerning the nature and purposes of their art or their discipline. In *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and other works Shakespeare explored the issue of cross-cultural communication in ways that we are finally becoming equipped to appreciate fully. Leonardo da Vinci drew no strict boundaries between science and the arts.

Interdisciplinary studies are thriving at UAH. In addition to the many and varied contributions of individual scholars, we now offer interdisciplinary programs in Global Studies, Foreign Language and International Trade, Classical Studies, and Women's Studies. Several departments, as well as the UAH Honors Program, provide interdisciplinary seminars that explore the philosophical implications of modern science, study the history of cosmological theories from interdisciplinary perspectives, examine the culture of global metropolitan centers, and analyze literary works that reflect upon the relation between religion and warfare. These efforts suggest that the methods and the value of the humanities, like human minds themselves, know no boundaries.

Dr. John S. (Jerry) Mebane, Professor of English, has taught English literature at UAH since 1984. He holds degrees in English from Presbyterian College (B.A. 1968) and Emory University (M.A. 1973, Ph.D. 1974). He has served in many roles during his tenure at UAH, chairing the English Department, serving as Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and is currently the Director of the Honors Program, a post he has held since 2002. In addition to numerous articles and conference papers, he is the author of two books: *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989) and *Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest: An Annotated Bibliography of Shakespeare Studies, 1864-2000* (Pegasus Shakespeare Bibliographies, no. 7. Fairview, N.C.: Pegasus Press, 2002), and is currently at work on a book-length manuscript on Christianity, pacifism, and the principles of justice in warfare.

Dr. Mebane wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Carol Mebane (pictured above with the author and their granddaughter, Scarlet) to his reflections upon the topics of this column.

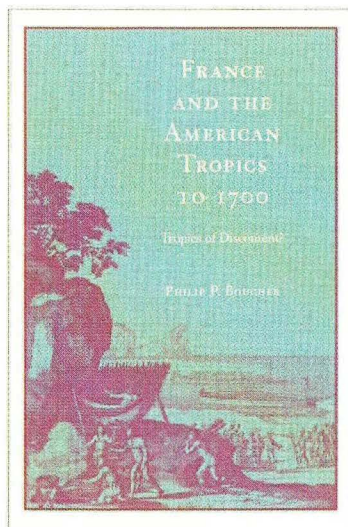


John S. Mebane

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (1967; reprint Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 26.



# Faculty Research Grants



**Philip Boucher**, Distinguished University Professor of History, was granted funding to support illustration expenses for his book, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?*, forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press in December. In this study, Boucher argues that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not merely a prelude to the classic plantation regime model, but were rather an era presenting a variety of possible outcomes. His book demonstrates that the transition to sugar and the plantation complex was more gradual in the French properties than generally depicted—and was not inevitable.

## Library Grants

*Andrew Dunar, History:*

materials for a new class covering the history of England from the Anglo Saxon period to 1660

*Kathleen Kennedy, English:*

Materials for Medieval Studies in literature

*Molly Johnson and Virginia Martin, History:*

Materials concerning World Historical Themes with a focus in East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Oceania and the Pacific Islands

*Richard Moore, English:*

Materials on Terrorism and Literature that focus on the writing of extreme experience, trauma, genocide, and terrorism

*Christopher Paul, Communication Art:*

Materials about the impact of technology and media on our culture and the ways in which we live

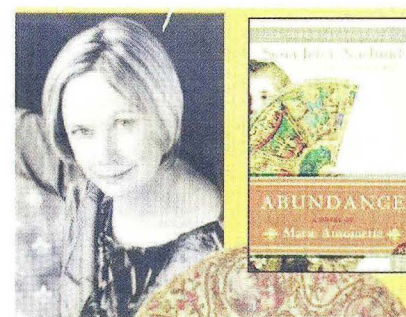
*Eric Smith, English: 2 grants*

Materials about Anglophone literature of the Caribbean Archipelago and form and theory of the novel



## Sena Jeter Naslund to visit **UAH**

The Center is very pleased to announce that Sena Jeter Naslund will join the UAH faculty during Spring Semester 2008 as Visiting Eminent Scholar in the Humanities and Professor of English. Professor Naslund is Writer in Residence at the University of Louisville, program director of the Spalding University brief-residency MFA in Writing, and current Kentucky Poet Laureate. Recipient of the Harper Lee Award and the Southeastern Library Association Fiction Award, she is editor of *The Louisville Review* and the *Fleur-de-Lis Press*. She is the author of the novels *Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette*, *Ahab's Wife*, *Four Spirits*, and *Sherlock in Love* and a collection of stories, *The Disobedience of Water*. A best-selling author, Naslund's work is distinguished by enjoying both critical acclaim and wide popular success. While visiting at UAH, Professor Naslund will teach a fiction writing course, conduct a writing workshop open to the public, and address the wider community through lectures and readings.



"In this exceptional tale that takes the form of a memoir... Naslund paints a richly detailed portrait of an opulent, turbulent time, revealing the Queen's journey -- from frivolity to responsibility, and from palace to prison cell -- to be one of striking beauty and terrible loss."

-- People (four-star rating)

"Naslund commands historical details to portray the world's most extravagant palace in all its dazzling splendor and inane ceremony."

-- Washington Post



### AHAB'S WIFE

"An intense treat, powerfully written, *Ahab's Wife* is one of the best contemporary novels I have read in years."

-- Louise Erdrich

"Beautifully written. Lyrical...alluring and wise."

-- Los Angeles Times



### FOUR SPIRITS

"A stirring popular novel that vividly conveys the everyday texture and moral significance of a movement that permanently changed American society."

-- Los Angeles Times  
(named a Best Book of 2003)

"Filled with the fear Naslund witnessed, the characters in her new novel, *Four Spirits*, come to life ....Naslund succeeds splendidly in making history a page-turner."

-- USA Weekend

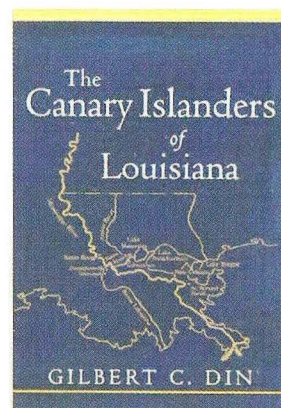


## Visiting Scholars 2006-2007



**Martha Vicinus**, Eliza M. Mosher Distinguished University Professor of English, Women's Studies, and History at the University of Michigan, visited UAH for a week during the spring semester last year. Principally a Victorianist, Professor Vicinus' work has extended from the 18th to the 20th centuries, focusing on groups and subjects that have been "hidden from history." The author of many books (most recently, *Intimate Friends: Women who Loved Women, 1778-1928*; U of Chicago Press 2004) and essays, her pioneering work has been critically acclaimed throughout her career.

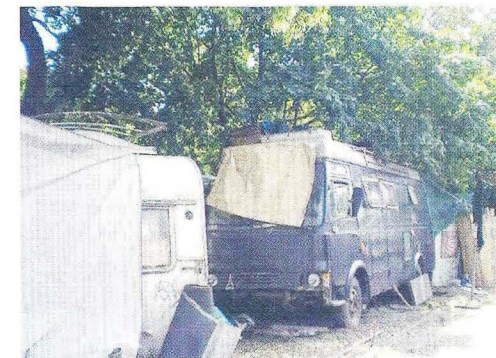
While on campus, Professor Vicinus gave two public programs, visited classes, and attended lunches with students and faculty. Her slide show, "Understanding Dress Codes: Women who Dressed as Men," in the NCRH multi-purpose room at lunch on Wednesday was greatly enjoyed by students and faculty members from several different departments. Her evening program in Union Grove Gallery, "The Late-nineteenth Century Free Woman: Defining Sexual and Economic Freedom" was especially well attended drawing together people from the university and the wider community. The bookstore provided copies of several of her books for sale, and Professor Vicinus signed books at both events. Professor Vicinus' remarkable range of interests and expertise combined with the warmth of her personality made her visit to campus a memorable one for everyone who met her.



**Gilbert Din**, Professor Emeritus of History at Fort Lewis College and now an independent historian, also visited during the spring semester. Widely known for his work in the history of colonial Louisiana, Professor Din drew on his extensive knowledge of the period and the region to enrich the classes he visited in History and Global Studies. His public lecture on the interactions among the "three empires" that vied for control of the Louisiana territory attracted a large audience of students, faculty, and people from the community. Lunches and dinners with Professor Din also provided opportunities for student and faculty interaction with this very interesting scholar.

## Faculty Research Grants

**Kathy Hawk**, Associate Professor and Chair of Political Science, was a Visiting Scholar in Residence at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. Her project, entitled "Exploring Legitimacy and Identity" focuses on problems of statebuilding in the Arab Middle East and will build on the earlier work in her book, *Constructing the Stable State: Goals for Intervention and Peacekeeping*. Her goal is to understand more fully just what makes it possible for a state to form a political identity that comes to be seen as legitimate by those who live under its authority. Specifically, she is working on an analysis of how historical, cultural, and religious factors inform the ideas of Arab Muslims in the Middle East about the legitimacy of leadership and how their notions of identity affect their relations to communal and national leadership.



**Molly W. Johnson**, Assistant Professor of History, received funding from the Humanities Center to travel to Berlin, Germany, to begin archival, library, and oral history interview research for her new project entitled "Collective Living, Social Experimentation, and Cultural Critique in Postwar West Berlin." This project investigates how, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing to the present, alternative West Berliners, sharing a critique of bourgeois society, mass consumption, and the nuclear family, have organized communes, squatters' communities, automobile colonies, and collective apartment communities. The picture here

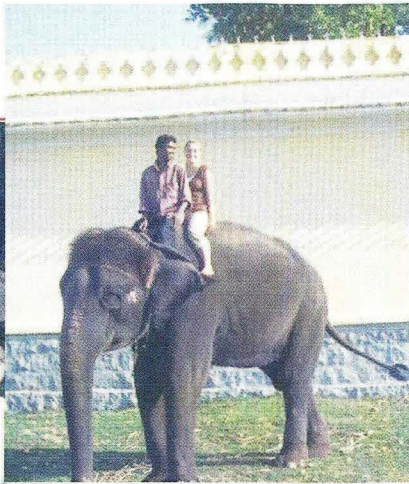
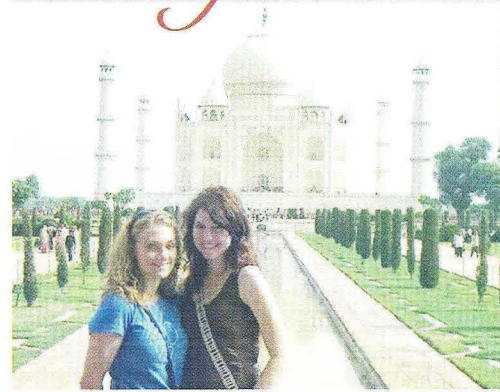
shows an automobile colony in Berlin. The new research project examines the cultural, social, and gender ideals of the communards and situates these experiments within a broad temporal and spatial context, focusing on their origins in the utopian socialist movements of the early nineteenth century and on their transnational connections with the communal experiments that emerged in the United States and in other European countries in the late 1960s. Dr. Johnson recently incorporated the findings of her summer research into an application for funding from the German Academic Exchange Service to support continued work in Berlin in Summer 2008.

**Lillian Joyce**, Associate Professor of Art History, was a visiting scholar at Johns Hopkins' Eisenhower Library. She continued her research on a project called "Roma, Amazons, and the Revealed Breast." The goddess Roma embodied the city of Rome, its Empire, and its people. Artists typically represented her as a bare-breasted Amazon. While numerous scholars have commented upon Roma's martial demeanor, the function of the revealed breast among her ensemble of attributes is overlooked. It is dangerous to assume that the display of the female breast had the same meanings to the Romans as it does in mainstream American society. Consider the responses to Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" at the 2004 Super Bowl. As presented in Roma images, the bare breast is clearly a positive feature. Using the excellent collection of monographs and periodicals at Johns Hopkins, Joyce seeks to demonstrate that Roman viewers brought a number of associations to this representation ranging from ideas of the bare breast as sign of valor to the bare breast as symbol of maternal nurture.





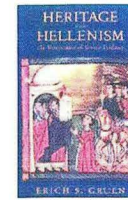
## Study Abroad expands yearly



The Global Studies Cognate, funded through grants secured from the Department of Education by Professor Johanna Shields, Executive Director for Special Projects at the Center, and Dr. Kathy Hawk, Chair of Political Science, sponsored courses in every college of the university last year. Dr. David Johnson, Global Studies Director, reported that in summer 2007, 87 UAH students from across the university participated in faculty-led study abroad courses and other study abroad programs administered by Global Studies. Engineering students, led by Dr. Brian Landrum, traveled to Germany and France for a two-week course in Aerospace Engineering. In Rome, Dr. Richard Gerberding taught students about the history of Rome in a course entitled "Rome: The Eternal City." Guanajuato, Mexico was the site for three intensive Spanish language courses led by Dr. Sharron Abernethy. Nursing students, under the guidance of Dr. Dorothy Foote, traveled to London and studied the public health policies of Great Britain. Dr. Bhavani Sitaraman guided students to India for three weeks in a course on the culture, politics, and history of India. UAH students also participated in an intensive German language program in Düsseldorf, Germany, an art program in Cortona, Italy, and a summer program on Irish literature, history, and music in Galway, Ireland.



## Professor Erich Gruen visits during Classics Week 2007



Erich S. Gruen, Gladys Rehard Wood Professor of History and Classics at UC Berkeley visited campus at the invitation of the Society for Ancient Languages. One of the most prominent ancient historians in the nation, Professor Gruen established his reputation through his work on the later Roman Republic which importantly new way of considering the relation between the Republic and the Empire. His work on the Hellenistic period and on Judaism in the classical world (e.g., *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*, and *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*) has been equally influential. The Center was pleased to sponsor a visit so warmly received by the students of the Society and by the public audiences Professor Gruen addressed.



Playwright advises in  
the production of

## "Rantoul and Die"

The Center provided funds for the visit of playwright, producer, and actor Mark Roberts during the fall semester of 2006. Roberts, an Emmy nominee for producing and writing *Two and a Half Men* for CBS, offered a master class, presented a public lecture on his plays and writing for television, and worked with the cast of "Rantoul and Die" which was in production during his visit. This was a rare opportunity for the students of the cast and for the many other students involved in UAHuntsville's growing theatre program. It was a wonderful way to launch the new studio theatre (Studio 106) in Morton Hall.



# PUBLIC PROGRAMS

## Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards visit campus

For nearly 15 years, Jennifer Baumgardner has made her career in New York City as a prominent voice for women and girls, working as a writer, a speaker, and an activist. After a five-year stint as the youngest editor at Ms. (1993-1997), Jennifer began writing for a diverse array of publications, doing investigative pieces for Harper's and The Nation, writing commentaries for NPR's "All Things Considered," as well as writing for various national magazines. Amy Richards became a spokesperson and leading voice for young feminist issues in the mid to late 1990's. This launched her on the lecturing circuit and led to frequent appearances in various national media venues



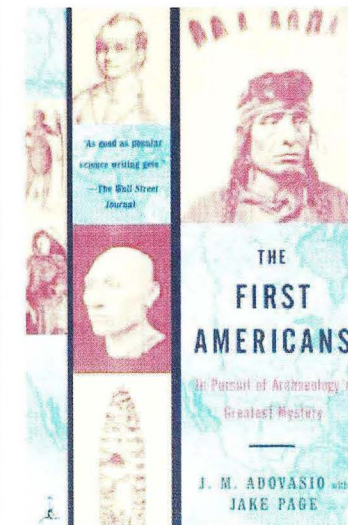
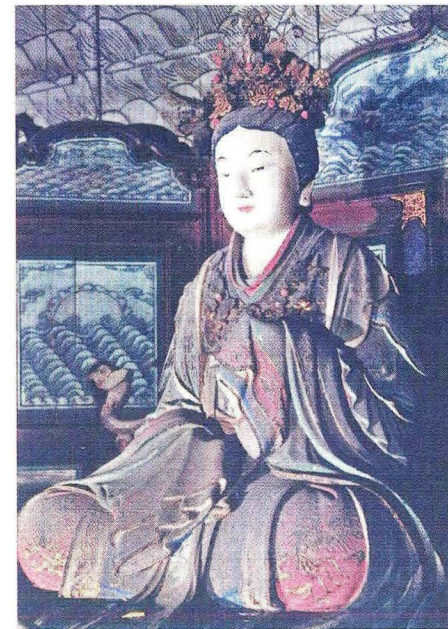
(including The O'Reilly Factor, Oprah, Talk of the Nation, New York One and CNN) offering her perspective on current events and especially youth and feminist culture. Baumgardner and Richards teamed to write *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* which was published in October 2000. Since then the two have worked independently and together to draw attention to women's issues, traveling widely, and lecturing at more than 200 colleges and high schools including Yale, Harvard, Colgate, the University of North Dakota, the University of Michigan, Mills College, Rutgers, Tulane, Vanderbilt, USC, Swarthmore, Appalachian State, and Dartmouth (where both were fellows in 2004). Given the national attention their work has attracted, the Women's

Studies Program invited Jen and Amy to offer a public presentation as the centerpiece of the Third Wave Feminism conference the Program sponsored last year. Their appearance added greatly to the enthusiasm this conference generated and the Center was happy to be able to provide funds supporting it.



Each year, the Center sponsors (in whole or in part) public programs that enrich an understanding of the humanities. Here are some of the programs we were pleased to help bring to UAH this year.

## Archaeology Lecture Series 2006-2007



The UAH Humanities Center and the North Alabama Society of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) brought eight renowned speakers to campus to address a variety of archaeological issues around the globe and through time. Chris Amer, the State Underwater Archaeologist of South Carolina, gave talks on the Whaling Industry in Red Bay, Labrador and the recent survey of shipwrecks

off the coast of South Carolina. From Tulane University, Dr. Susann Lushia led a seminar on the famed Ara Pacis in Rome, including the current controversy

surrounding its new enclosure designed by American architect Richard Meier. At an evening lecture Professor Lushia discussed the political ambitions of Septimius Severus as manifested in his additions to the Roman Forum. Plunging further back into time, the fall season of lectures concluded with a fascinating discussion of Knossos, the great labyrinthine Minoan city thought to be the home of the Minotaur. Dr. Don Evely, the director of the site, delivered an engaging lecture, replete with British wit, about the current state of research at the site. In the spring, the AIA hosted five speakers who discussed the Goddesses of North China, Italian Fascism, and the Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity. UAH sculptor Glenn Dasher led a workshop that explored the tools and techniques of ancient stone carvers and bronze workers. Mr. Dasher brought dozens of tools and gave demonstrations of how the ancients used them. Dr. James Adovasio, an expert on early human populations in the New World, gave the AIA's final lecture. Beginning with a series of modern illustrations of "cavemen," he dissected the available evidence regarding the migrations and lifestyles of early humans. Dr. Adovasio unraveled the stereotypes of spear-toting males in loincloths with scantily clad female companions tending the cave.

