

1938, May 8.

Dear Mr. Getzendaner:

Your letter with quotations from the books by Santeleben was all new and interesting to me. On checking such literature as we have, I find this undoubtedly refers to the Casas Grandes meteorite, the final accurately measured weight of which was 3,407 lbs. There are two early somewhat conflicting accounts of the first finder or possessor (tho the mass is undoubtedly historically ancient, as will be seen from below), and your story fills in something of a gap:

"The meteorite from Casas Grandes was first mentioned by Tarayre. (1867). According to him, the director of the mint, Muller, of Chihuahua, found the meteorite while excavating the temple ruins of Casas Grandes, in Chihuahua, in a labyrinthine room near the surface. It was a lenticular shaped mass of meteoric iron...incased in wrappings similar to those surrounding the bodies in the neighboring graves.

"Burkart added that the mass was in the possession of Muller in 1870. In 1873 Mr. William M. Pierson, U. S. Consul at El Paso, in a letter to the State Department gave an account... The inhabitants of....Casas Grandes...searched the neighboring ancient temple ruins of the "Montezuma Casas Grandes" for treasure, and found...a sort of grave with an immense block estimated at 5,000 lbs. weight, carefully wrapped, like an Egyptian mummy, in a coarse linen cloth...The block was first brought, he says, to the little town of Casas Grandes and placed in the street before the house of the finder, Alverado by name, from whom it was purchased, years afterward, by Pierson and some others. Together with Pierson's report a piece of this meteorite came into possession of the Smithsonian Institution in 1873.

"Nothing further was heard from the mass until 1876, when the Smithsonian Institution came into the possession, by gift, of an uncut mass of meteoric iron which had been exhibited among the Mexican minerals at the Centennial Exposition..."

Santeleben clearly erred in stating the British Museum got the mass, and he was likewise wrong in giving credence to the story that the mass had fallen in recent times on the Mueller ranch, but this man is clearly the same Muller mentioned in the accounts I quoted. I would guess that he was probably one of the "others" associated with Pierson, and that Santeleben made his deal with some one or more of them.

I think the topic would be worthy of a published note, either in our "Bulletin" or perhaps to be submitted to the Society for Research on Meteorites. If you concur I would like to borrow the book or get fuller quotations from it at some future date--no hurry.

The chunk of red silica or whatever you may term it was duly cut, and I am mailing it to you. One end bears mute testimony to a little trouble with our saw. Of the central piece, all sawn surfaces but one were left just as they came from the saw; you will note that I made a crude beginning of hand-polishing one face with pumice. We have a felt polishing wheel not yet rigged up, and probably some such device would give a higher polish, but I believe you would encounter trouble with areas of variable hardness. There is some interior porosity or at least tiny caverns which would also tend to leave surface flaws on polished areas. I am sending the whole piece to give you a neat exhibit of the work of a diamond saw. We can pick up a slice or two on some future visit to Uvalde.

Since our return, one of our associates at Abilene has turned up and procured for us a stone meteorite from Tatum, New Mexico, weight almost 4 lbs. And I presume you noticed the Bureau of Economic Geology at Austin got a fresh iron meteorite from Dickens County, some 4½ lbs. So you see they're thick as hops!

With many, many thanks for the courtesies extended to us on our recent trip, and with kindest regards to your daughter, I am

Yours sincerely,