

The secret air war in North Vietnam

From IAN McDONALD

Washington, Jan. 30

The fighter-bomber and helicopter that were shot down over North Vietnam yesterday were the eighth and ninth American aircraft to be lost over the north since the bombing halt, according to official figures.

Officials today repeated that the incident, in which American aircraft also fired at a North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile site, did not represent any change in policy or any resumption of the air war against North Vietnam. Such flights are common, they said, and aircraft escorting reconnaissance fighters are under orders to respond to enemy fire.

The United States Command in Vietnam acknowledged today that since the bombing halt there had been a number of attacks on North Vietnamese anti-aircraft sites which fired on American aircraft. The attacks had not been made public earlier, because they were not considered significant. The official position is that the reconnaissance flights are part of the "understanding" reached with North Vietnam when the bombing was halted at the end of October, 1968. It is felt they are necessary to keep track of men and supplies moving into South Vietnam.

Officials also say that it is not uncommon for reconnaissance aircraft or their escorts to come under fire. The last aircraft lost over North Vietnam was shot down on August 19. Yesterday was apparently the first time that a rescue helicopter had been lost since the bombing halt.

One ominous development is the North Vietnamese use of a MiG21 fighter to shoot down the helicopter. The appearance of a MiG so far south confirms reports that North Vietnam has moved its air force nearer the border with South Vietnam in recent months. If this is so, future American reconnaissance sorties are likely to encounter increasing opposition.

'Smuggled' treasure from royal tomb turns up in museum

Peter Hopkirk writes of mystery deal that may anger Turks

A hoard of royal gold treasure, which is believed to have been smuggled out of Turkey and has now turned up in an American museum, looks like touching off a sizable archaeological row.

The treasure—said to be 4,000 years old—has just been given to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts, by one of its trustees as a centenary present. It was bought for a large and undisclosed sum.

The museum, which puts its new acquisition on show for the first time next week, says merely that the treasure comes from a coastal tomb "somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean."

Stylistically the treasure could come from a number of Near Eastern countries, but it is known that at least one other museum was offered it by dealers who stated categorically that it came from Turkey. Turkey has strict laws forbidding the export of archaeological material.

To the Turks, who are highly sensitive about the loss of archaeological relics from Anatolia through smuggling, the phrase "somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean" will mean Turkey.

Already the hoard has been compared in the New York Times to the celebrated royal Dorak treasure which a British archaeologist, Mr. James Mellaart, reported being shown by a girl in Turkey under somewhat mysterious circumstances some years ago.

When the Turkish authorities investigated, they found that the girl and the treasure had both vanished, so starting one of the strangest whodunnis in modern times. The Turks claim that the treasure was smuggled out of the country, and ever since have refused Mr. Mellaart permission to excavate his famous neolithic site at Catal Hüyük. Some claim that the Dorak treasure never existed, or that it was part of an elaborate forgery.

Yesterday I showed photographs of the Boston hoard to

for the export of unimportant pieces or duplicates, but it is considered impossible that one could have been granted for this hoard.

Some archaeologists say they do not believe that the Egyptian seal—the oldest and most exciting object in the collection—belongs to the rest of the jewelry. They think it was added at some stage to make the treasure appear even older than it is.

One archaeologist told me he thought that the Boston museum authorities had made a serious "diplomatic blunder" in acquiring the treasure, in view of the uncertainty about its origins. Not for nothing, he said, had it been turned down by at least one museum and possibly others.

Moreover, without a provenance—exact knowledge of how and where it was found—it was "academically worthless", however beautiful it might be. If it was found in Turkey, then it would be extremely significant to Near Eastern scholars.

The inability of the Boston museum to name the site, or even the country of origin, is thought likely to confirm Turkish suspicions that the treasure comes from an Anatolian site.

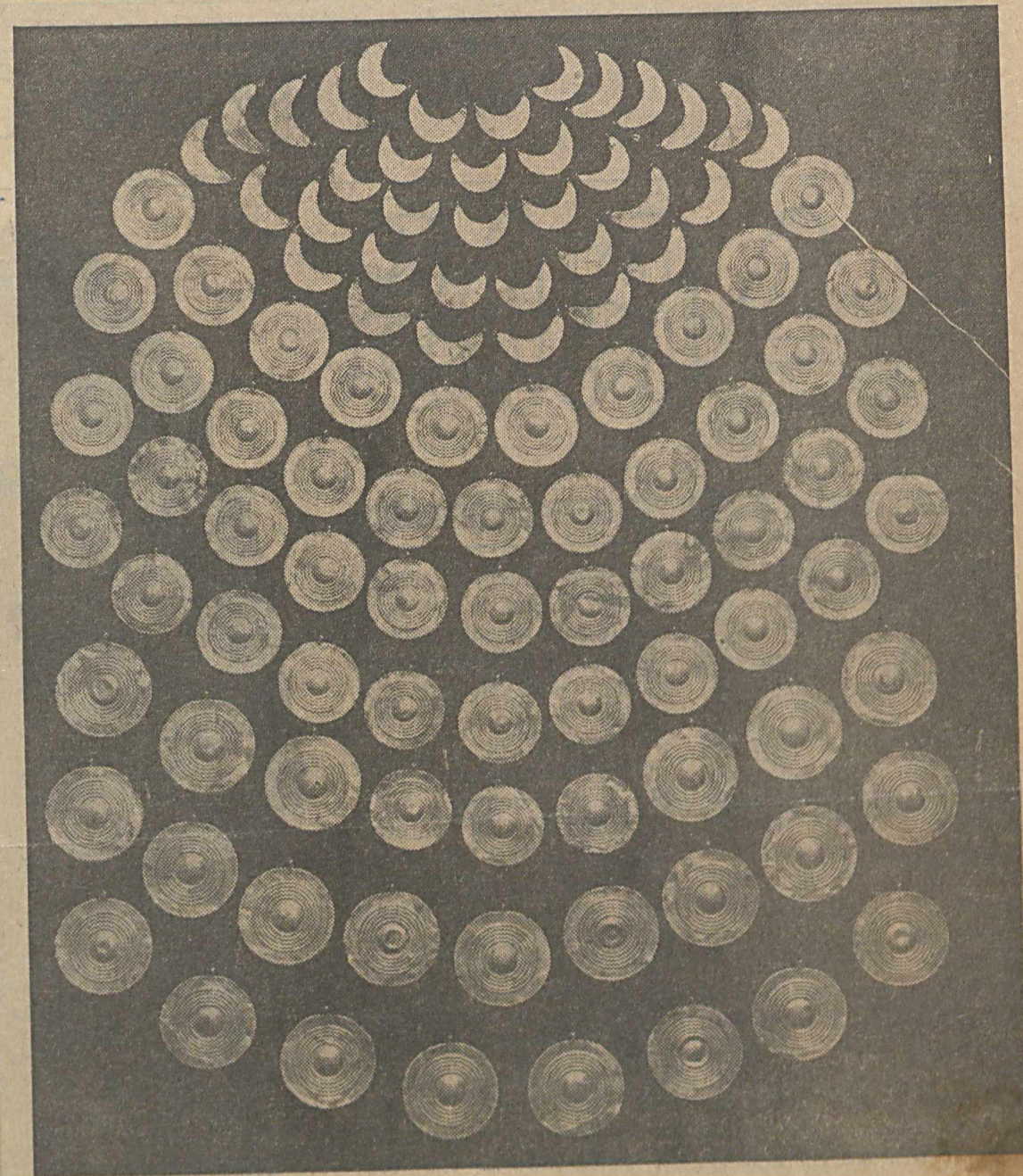
Most archaeologists are of the opinion that the museum should disclose all it knows of the treasure's origins, however little this amounts to.

Dr. Cornelius Vermeule, one of the museum's directors, told Michael Knipe, New York correspondent of The Times, that the treasure had been on the Swiss and New York markets before his wife, an archaeologist, recognized its importance. He said it had been paid for by Mr. Landon Clay, one of the museum's trustees. A "six figure sum" is said to have been paid, according to the New York Times.

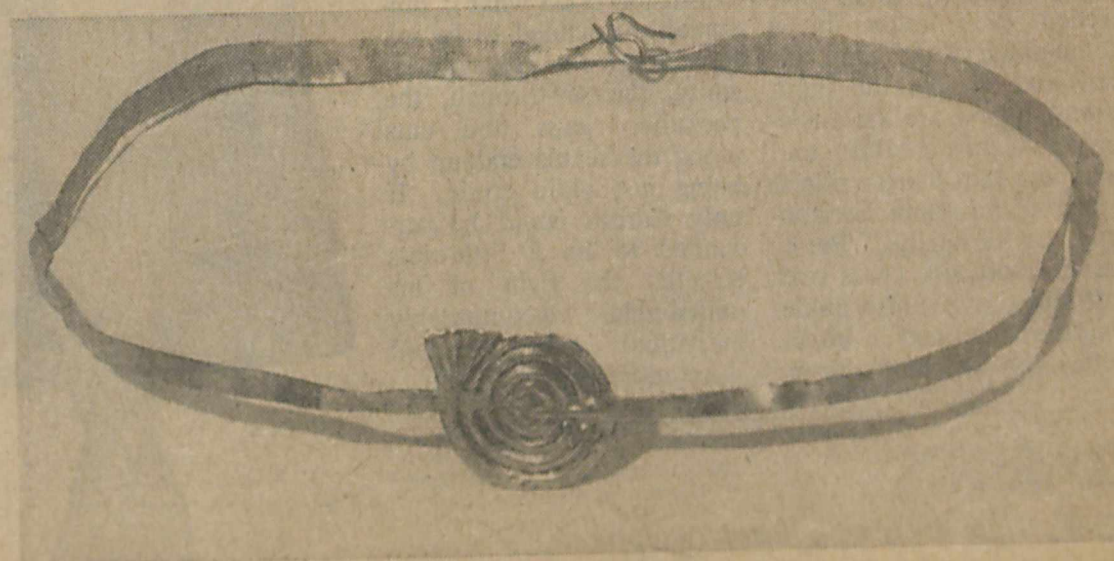
Dr. Vermeule would not dis-



Above, a gold Egyptian cylinder seal and, below, a bracelet.



One of the finest pieces from the collection: an early Bronze Age gold necklace



Above, a gold headband and, below, four pieces possibly for decorative wear



moved its air force nearer the border with South Vietnam in recent months. If this is so, future American reconnaissance sorties are likely to encounter increasing opposition.

The number of American flights has almost certainly been increased recently to check troop movements in advance of a possible Tet (lunar new year) offensive next month.

The Mu Gia pass, where yesterday's incident occurred, is 90 miles north of the demilitarized zone and is used by material moving out of North Vietnam down the Ho Chi Minh trail. With the end of the air war against North Vietnam, much of the emphasis of the bombing has been shifted to the trail, and up to 400 strikes a day are being made against it in Laos.

The fact that the F105 that was shot down was a two-seater version of the fighter-bomber has prompted informed speculation that it was a "wild weasel" aircraft, which is equipped with elaborate electronic gear designed to counter Soviet-built anti-aircraft missiles.

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Yesterday I showed photographs of the Boston hoard to Mr. Mellaart at his home in Swiss Cottage where he lives with his Turkish wife Arlette. After studying them with interest he told me there was no question of this being the Dorak treasure.

According to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the 137 pieces of jewelry—weighing 22lb. and of 18-carat gold—form a homogeneous collection that once probably belonged to a princess. A gold seal of Egyptian origin appears to date the collection to about 2400 B.C., although some archaeologists question this.

Archaeologists who have seen photographs of the treasure say that judging from its stylistic characteristics it could have come from a number of countries, including Turkey, Greece, Syria, Cyprus, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon. Egypt, Iraq, and Persia were unlikely sources.

All the possible source countries have laws forbidding the export of archaeological material. In some countries export licences can be obtained

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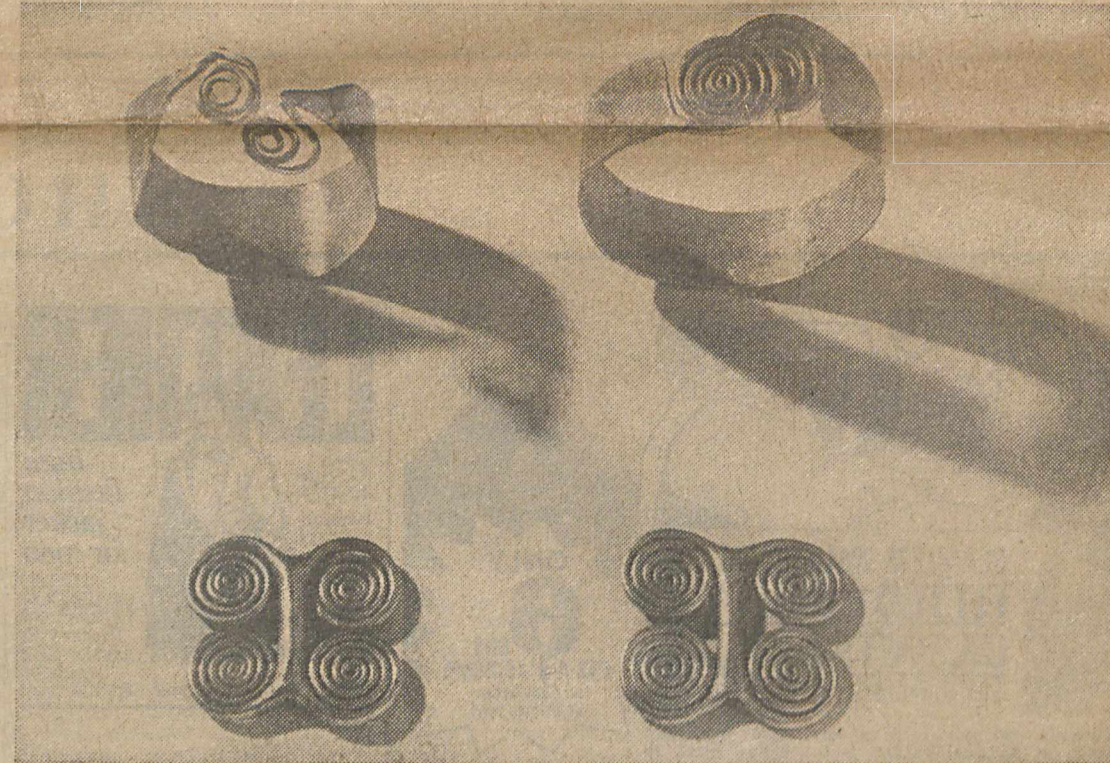
Dr. Vermeule would not disclose from whom it had been bought, but said he had no fear of any government contesting its ownership. Asked whether any export regulations had been transgressed, he replied: "One doesn't know what export controls it might have come under. After all, things like this are coming up at Sotheby's all the time."

This statement was described last night as "a considerable exaggeration" by a prominent authority on Near Eastern antiquities. He could not remember anything like it coming up at Sotheby's—"let alone all the time".

Asked yesterday where precisely the treasure had been found, Dr. Vermeule reiterated that it came from a coastal tomb "somewhere in the eastern half of the Mediterranean". He added: "One can make guesses, but we don't know for certain." He declined to make a guess himself. The treasure goes on view on Wednesday as part of the museum's centenary exhibition.



Above, a gold headband and, below, four pieces possibly for decorative wear



Several of the 137 pieces of gold treasure from an eastern Mediterranean royal tomb which have been acquired by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts

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JALARC0700201