

Noted marine archeologist to deliver first Phi Beta Kappa lecture

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Noted archeologist George F. Bass, professor emeritus at the Institute of Nautical Archeology, Texas A&M University, will deliver Alfred University's first lecture under the Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholars program, at 8 p.m. Monday, Oct. 25, in Howell Hall on the AU campus. Just a year ago, Alfred University's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences was awarded a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, an honor fewer than 300 of the nation's nearly 4,000 colleges and universities can claim. With the awarding of a chapter came the ability to participate in the national Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar Program. Bass' topic is "Two Bronze Age Shipwrecks," during which Bass will describe a shipwreck from around 1300 B.C., off the Turkish coast that has yielded 20 tons of artifacts from the Age of King Tut, including the oldest book, the oldest tin ingots, the oldest known glass ingots, the largest hoard of Canaanite gold and silver jewelry, and the only gold scarab of Egypt's famed Queen Nefertiti. Its excavation and the excavation of a wreck found not far away, from about 1200 B.C., have provided unique information for Homeric, Near Eastern, and Egyptological studies, as well as for histories of metallurgy, metrology, glass, music, trade and economics. Bass was studying for his doctorate in classical archeology at the University of Pennsylvania when, in 1960, he was asked if he would learn to dive in order to direct the excavation of Bronze Age shipwreck reported off Cape Gelidonya, Turkey, by journalist Peter Throckmorton. It was the first ancient shipwreck to be excavated in its entirety on the seabed, and led to the then controversial conclusion that the Greeks did not hold a monopoly on maritime commerce during the Late Bronze Age, but that early Phoenician traders were already active in the Aegean. For the next decade, Bass devoted his time to excavation of two Byzantine shipwrecks off Yassiada, Turkey, where he developed new techniques for underwater research: a submersible decompression chamber, a method of mapping under water by stereo-photogrammetry, and a two-person submarine, the Asherah, launched in 1964, the year he finished his doctorate and joined the University of Pennsylvania faculty. In 1967, his team was the first to use sonar to locate an ancient underwater wreck. The following year he returned to dry land, assisting with the excavation of Akrotiri, a Bronze Age city covered by volcanic ash and located on the Greek island of Santorini, and in 1971, he directed the excavation of a pre-classical site in southern Italy. In 1973, Bass left the University of Pennsylvania and founded the Institute of Nautical Archeology, which in 1976 became affiliated with Texas A&M University. He remained there until his retirement in 2000 as the George T. and Gladys H. Abell Distinguished Professor of Nautical Archaeology and holder of the George O. Yamini Family chair in Nautical Archaeology. Today the institute he founded conducts research on four continents and has excavated the oldest known shipwrecks in the Mediterranean and Caribbean seas, although Bass continues to concentrate his efforts on shipwrecks in Turkey, including an 11th century medieval ship with a large cargo of Islamic glass, and a wreck from about 1300 B.C. with a cargo of copper, tin, ivory, glass, amber, gold, silver and ebony. Between 1999 and 2001, he excavated a wreck from the Golden Age of Greece, the fifth century B.C., and in 2000 began using a two-person submersible to locate additional wrecks. In 2002, he excavated an Archaic Greek shipwreck of the late sixth century B.C. Bass received the Archaeological Institute of America's Gold Medal for Distinguished Archaeological Achievement and a Lowell Thomas Award from the Explorers Club, both in 1986. The following year, he received an honorary doctorate from Bogazici University in Istanbul, and in 1998, received a similar degree from the University of Liverpool. The National Geographic Society awarded him its La Gorce Gold Medal in 1979, and in 1988, one of its 15 Centennial Awards. In 1999, he received the J.C. Harrington Medal from the Society for Historical Archaeology, and in 2002, President George W. Bush awarded him the National Medal of Science. Last year, he assisted in mapping the Titanic from a Russian MIR submarine. A native of Columbia, S.C., Bass grew up in Annapolis, MD. He was graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1955 with an M.A. degree in Near Eastern archeology, and spent two years at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Greece, for two years, gaining excavation experience at Lerna, in Greece, and Gordion in Turkey, before entering the U.S. Army as a lieutenant. After two years' service, he began his doctoral studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He has written or edited seven books and more than 100 articles, and has lectured around the world. With his wife, Ann, he divides his time between College Station, TX, and Bodrum, Turkey, where he is an honorary citizen. They have two grown sons, Gordon and Alan.