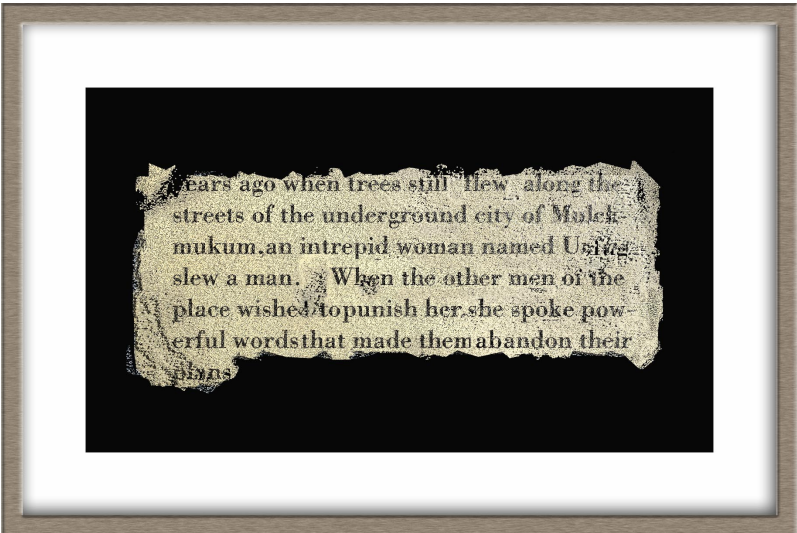




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Archaeology is not an exact science, but rather a very interpretive one.

The Mulckmukum Fragment



A Fictional Adventure In Archaeological Misinterpretation

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Imagine an archaeologist of the distant future, working at a Pacific Northwest excavation. He finds a paper scrap with typed words, still faintly visible. The archaeologist steps into his OUV (Office Utility Vehicle) and transcribes the incomplete sentences preserved on the fragment:

...years ago when trees still flew along the streets of the underground city of Mulckmukum, an intrepid woman named Unfug slew a man. When the other men of the place wished to punish her, she spoke powerful words that made them abandon their plans...

Would the archaeologist take this as an historical excerpt, or as a fragment from a fantasy novel (of the type known to have been popular in the 20th century)? Probably the latter, since he would never have heard of a place named Mulckmukum, nor of trees flying!

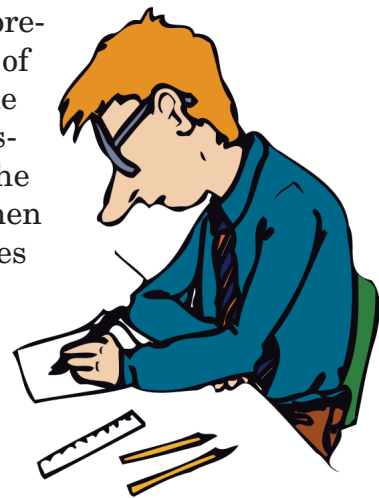
However, as the excavation continues the archaeologist might find a well-preserved page from a book by William Speidel, explaining that Mulckmukum was an Indian name for the location where the important metropolis of Seattle was founded. At this point the archaeologist may decide that his first manuscript fragment was from a legend about Seattle's "prehistory," and that this legend did contain a kernel of historical truth.

A generation could go by before another archaeological excavation would uncover a buried government building with court records mentioning the name "Ursula Unfug." The scholarly world would then publish articles excitedly proclaiming the possible *historicity* of the mythical woman from the "Mulckmukum fragment" whose name had never been attested by archaeology until now! The articles would hasten to disclaim any belief in real "underground cities" or "flying trees," of course.

Then further excavations could reveal that during the 20th century an earlier city of Seattle, partially destroyed by fire, continued to exist largely intact *under* the later development of the metropolis. The news that an "underground city" had actually existed at Mulckmukum would electrify the archaeological world! Granted that by the time the newer city was built over the older one its Indian name had largely been forgotten. Nevertheless, the facts —though telescoped together— would be essentially confirmed by archaeology. Writers of politically correct children's books would begin reconstructing the story of the "Mighty Ursula Unfug of Mulckmukum," weaving delightful tales of a brave mother defending her home and children against the marauding gang members and corrupt city governments of uncivilized antiquity. Still, everyone would acknowledge that the Mulckmukum Fragment recorded a *mixture* of history and myth, because "flying trees" are just unscientific.

Yet another generation could go by before a radical archaeologist would publish a monograph proving that sawing down owl habitats was *actually legal* at one time. This courageous author would cite previously reported evidence from the lower habitation levels of Mulckmukum/Seattle, showing that trimmed logs did at one time skid swiftly down certain streets into the bay. "Is it possible," his monograph would ask, "that the author of the Mulckmukum fragment was speaking metaphorically when he mentioned *flying trees*, and simply meant that the trees were moving very quickly along certain streets before the old city was actually underground?"

Suddenly, public opinion would turn, and if anyone spoke of the Mulckmukum "*myth*" they would be considered poorly educated and behind the times. No intelligent person would admit to doubting the historicity of that legendary heroine, Ms. Unfug who had single-handedly



defended the habitat of the laminate-eating spotted fire-ant, by killing a chainsaw-wielding logger with nothing but her bare hands and her knowledge of oriental martial arts. The Mulckmukum Fragment, once believed to be myth, would now be confirmed as historical and would become part of the cultural literacy of the times.

Before the fragment became entirely overlaid with speculative interpretation, however, another ancient codex could be discovered by the now famous historian of antiquity, William Speidel. It would tell the complete story of Ursula Juanita Unfug, the prostitute who shot one of her clients in cold blood, but escaped prosecution by convincing the all-male jury that she had endured beatings and all manner of abuse but had drawn the line when her “lover” had tried to force her to use her charms to blackmail the leading men of the city, namely men like the very ones presently sitting on the jury. The codex would tell how the jury had agreed that the dead man was “vile,” and that Miss Unfug deserved to go free. The scholarly world would now forget the Mulckmukum Fragment and turn its attention to William Speidel’s combination tour-guide/history-book, *You Still Can’t Eat Mt. Rainier*.*

* Vashon, Wash., Nettle Creek Pub. Co., 1961. Most of William C. Speidel’s books are now out of print, but can still be found in libraries or used book stores. No one has told Seattle’s history in a more delightful manner than Speidel has.