At a small village off the Tiputini River in Ecuador, SUNY Potsdam students are welcomed on New Year’s Eve with chicha (a drink made from the yucca root), traditional facepainting, and dancing.

(Photograph courtesy of Mary Brunet).

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Collegiate Anthropologist is a student-faculty journal published twice a year by the SUNY Potsdam Anthropology Department.
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From the Editor

The Collegiate Anthropologist is, as Dr. Omohundro says, “rare” for its goal of allowing students to have an active role in the publishing of a peer-reviewed journal. It seems fitting to use his description to introduce this issue, as after decades of tireless devotion to Potsdam, Dr. Omohundro is retiring at the end of this semester.

This issue is a great send-off in honor of him, as we have included a wide variety of research topics, internship reflections, reviews, and more. From the fascinating topic of comparing New and Old World pyramids to an entertaining look at the depictions of anthropology in film, we believe that the journal continues on in the tradition set forth by Dr. Omohundro and its student founders.

The editing staff and I have worked hard to bring you a great issue once again, and I am sad to hand off the torch to the next editor-in-chief as my time at SUNY Potsdam comes to a close. Being a part of the journal has been one of my most memorable college experiences, and I know the editors will continue to do an excellent job publishing student work and providing the department with an educational and entertaining publication. We hope you enjoy this issue, and we wish Dr. Omohundro a happy and relaxing retirement!

Sincerely,
Alyssa Petroski
Editor-in-Chief

To many Anthropology students entering the department within the past few years, Dr. John Omohundro has seemed more like a mythical force than a professor. We have known that he was the longest-serving member of the teaching staff, and we have remained in awe that our Cultural Anthropology class was being taught based around his textbook. Some of us, however, may never have had the opportunity to take a course taught by this enigmatic figure. And that chance has likely passed on. For, after serving SUNY Potsdam as a professor, mentor, faculty advisor to the Collegiate Anthropologist, author, and so much more for 36 years, Dr. Omohundro will be retiring after this semester. We are honored to dedicate the Spring 2011 issue of the Collegiate Anthropologist to him and to reflect on his countless contributions to the department, the campus, the North Country, and the field of Anthropology as a whole.

So who is Dr. Omohundro? Raised in a military family, he lived in eight different places throughout the United States during his childhood, including Florida, Washington and New Mexico. He told me that his experiences growing up in these various places equipped him with the tools to become a good anthropologist. Not only was he fascinated by the diverse Native American cultures surrounding him in New Mexico, but constantly having to adjust to new environments also required him to act as an outsider before learning how to adjust to the new culture. Although he had originally gone to school expecting to study medicine, he became convinced that anthropology was his true interest after attending an archaeological dig in his sophomore year at Stanford. He attended University of Michigan for graduate school and received his PhD in 1974. At this point he began looking for a teaching position, and out of five interviews he was torn between two options: SUNY Potsdam and a school in California. He told me that the deciding factors for him were how large Potsdam’s department seemed at the time (with six professors) and the appeal of the surrounding area.

In over thirty years at SUNY Potsdam,
Dr. Omohundro has influenced the education of thousands of students and has remained a driving force behind many changes to the curriculum both inside and outside of the department. He was present at the first induction ceremony for the college’s chapter of Lambda Alpha (the National Anthropology Honor Society), formatted the Senior Seminar and Practicum class as a capstone for the Anthropology degree, and was integral in starting the Environmental Studies program. It is largely thanks to him that the department is so involved in the Northeastern Anthropological Association’s annual conference, which we host every ten years. And, last but not least, he was the faculty founder of the Collegiate Anthropologist in 1980.

The list of Dr. Omohundro’s contributions and accomplishments could go on for pages, but perhaps his largest impact comes not from an award or establishment of a curriculum, but rather in the way he approaches the people with whom he works. Dr. Patricia Whelehan, who has worked with him for most of his career here, has always been appreciative of his ability to be calm and reasoned in the face of any obstacle or dilemma. In particular, he helped her through a challenging time during the publishing of her last book simply by being available to her for advice, and through his controlled, logical approach to the issue. A former student, Dr. Glenn McRae, fondly recalls Dr. Omohundro’s teaching style: "I found [him] to be fully and genuinely engaged with his students, including me, and energized about creating opportunities for them... He felt learning happened in many formats and hence the hallmark of many classes was a series of wonderful ethnographic exercises from exploring garage sales to backyard gardening, making the familiar exotic.” Those who have had the opportunity to take a class with Dr. Omohundro can surely attest to this, but even students without this pleasure have likely experienced his hands-on approach through his textbook, Thinking Like an Anthropologist. Although initially only designed to be a workbook of anthropological exercises, once he began to include his own ethnographic experience the book more or less took on a life of its own. To students new to the concepts of anthropology, these personal glimpses into the work of a researcher builds a bridge between classroom topics and actual study, an essential parallel for a holistic understanding of the field.

Though Dr. Omohundro’s research interests have spanned many cultures, topics, and continents, he has had a long interest in environmental anthropology and has brought this back to the campus. He taught a class in environmental anthropology for many years as well as sponsored a Freshman Interest Group (FIG) specifically designed around the study of the Adirondacks. More recently, he served as the Program Coordinator for the Environmental Studies major, which reflects one of his main goals in education: interdisciplinary learning. The adjustments that he made to the curriculum also reflect this, in his expansion of the General Education requirements and recent endorsement of the Certificate in Applied Anthropology. He also sponsored a scholar.” For both the Anthropology and Environmental Studies programs, a testament to his commitment to student education. This ongoing interest in the environment is not only academic but also personal; he has been active in many outdoor activities in the Adirondack Park, which he plans to continue participating in after retirement.

It would be impossible to go into detail with all of Dr. Omohundro’s generous and selfless contributions. For decades he has kept students and faculty calm with his logical demeanor in the face of problems while at the same time making light of difficult situations with his sense of humor. The department will be sad to see him leave but are eternally grateful for everything he has done. Dr. Omohundro’s love for SUNY Potsdam’s Anthropology Department is something he has made evident over the years, and he was clear that his hope for its future was that it would continue to shift with the times and suit the needs of the students in a rapidly changing world. Likewise, it is undoubtedly the collective hope of this department that we can all live up to the standards set by our departing professor, mentor, colleague and friend.

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About the Author

Alyssa Petroski is a Senior Anthropology major and Biological Anthropology minor from Utica, New York. This is her third year editing for the Collegiate Anthropologist and second semester as Editor-in-Chief. Her interests lie within medical, evolutionary and forensic anthropology, and in the future she hopes to attend graduate school for forensic anthropology or medical school for forensic pathology.
Across an ocean and separated by thousands of years, two societies created enormous structures that still awe any who see them. In Egypt, three pharaohs built incredibly large monuments to house their bodies as their spirits continued on to the afterlife. Although there are many pyramids located throughout Egypt, the three at Giza are the most well known and in the best condition. As Silverman (1997) has written, “Ancient Egyptians left no greater monuments than its pyramids, which stand as towering memorials to the entire pharaonic period.” Thousands of miles away in Mesoamerica, rulers built large monuments of similar size and shape, many more of which have survived than their Egyptian counterparts. To many of the civilizations in this area, the sky was a sacred place, as were mountains since they brought them closer to the sky and the gods. Pyramids served as man-made replicas of mountains where they conducted rituals to commemorate their gods. The two cultures had many of the same reasons for why and how they built their pyramids, but they also had many differences.

The three Pyramids at Giza are the last surviving member of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and are a tribute to the pharaohs who built them. The most common purpose of an Egyptian pyramid was as a mortuary tomb built by and for the current ruler. It was meant to protect and house the mummified body of the leader and was generally located in a tomb under the pyramid in a maze of chambers. The Egyptians believed the pyramids were places of exchange between the earthly world and the celestial universe where the reborn pharaoh would rise and rule in the afterworld. The complexes that surrounded the pyramids were also believed to be replicas of cities that they would rule in the afterworld (Silverman 1997).

The Egyptians incorporated mathematics and astrology into the construction of their monuments. The largest pyramid, called the Great Pyramid, was built by Khufu. Its four corners line up almost exactly with the four cardinal points. The four sides of all three pyramids also form perfect three-dimensional plane isosceles triangles, quite a fantastic feat for that time (Stierlin 1995). There is also a strong belief that they are aligned to represent the constellation of Orion’s belt, which was sacred to the Egyptians. The Egyptians called this constellation Osiris, and they believed it was the gateway to the stars (Silverman 1997).

The Great Pyramid was built by work crews using a series of ramps that were built upwards as the structure grew. The exact type of ramp is debatable. During the time of year that the Nile flooded its banks, limestone blocks, some weighing as much as 80 tons, were transported to the site of construction by boat. Once the stones arrived at the site, they were dragged over a layer of wet silt by laborers harnessed to sledges. They would drag these stones up ramps made of brick or sand, which would be taken down once the work was finished. Contrary to popular belief, the workforce was more likely to have been made up of farmers who would work during the off season for farming rather than slaves (Stierlin 1995).

The reason for this transition is unclear but one possibility is a change in religion that placed more emphasis on the Sun God, which led to the idea that pyramids represented the rays of sun (Freeman 2004). How the Great Pyramids were built has been a topic of debate and inquiry for quite some time and there have been many theories put on the table. One of the more bizarre suggestions is that aliens built them. A more probable hypothesis supported by the evidence is that they were built by work crews using a series of ramps that were built upwards as the structure grew. The exact type of ramp is debatable. During the time of year that the Nile flooded its banks, limestone blocks, some weighing as much as 80 tons, were transported to the site of construction by boat. Once the stones arrived at the site, they were dragged over a layer of wet silt by laborers harnessed to sledges. They would drag these stones up ramps made of brick or sand, which would be taken down once the work was finished. Contrary to popular belief, the workforce was more likely to have been made up of farmers who would work during the off season for farming rather than slaves (Stierlin 1995).

The pyramids on the Giza plateau were built in the Fourth Dynasty during a period of prosperity and stability. Sneferu’s son, Khufu, built the Great Pyramid. It was the first one built to the plateau and is the largest of the three with a height of 480 feet and a base with a width of 755 feet. It was formed using 2.3 million limestone blocks and took about 20 years to finish with about 25,000 workers.

The interiors of the pyramid, three chambers were built. The one furthest up was where the pharaoh’s body was laid to rest. The next pyramid to be built was slightly smaller and was for Khafra, Khufu’s son who was commonly known as “Khafra is Great.” Khafra’s pyramid rose to 471 feet and had a base width of 705 feet. The interior of his pyramid had two entrances but only one burial chamber. The smallest of the three pyramids was made for Menkaure, who was called “Menkaure is Divine.” This pyramid was originally 240 feet high, but today it is only 204 feet high and sits on a base with a width of 357 feet. Inside of all of these pyramids would have been rich possessions and valuables meant to help the pharaoh make it to the afterlife, but unfortunately all three tombs were looted during antiquity (Freeman 2004).

On the other side of the world and nearly 2,000 years later, a society developed that could build stone monuments large enough to rival those built in Egypt. To the cultures in Mesoamerica, the sky was a sacred place because it was where the gods resided. Mountains were consecrated...
Pyramids

priests would enter and come in contact with meant to be replicas of caves where the ceremonies and rituals were considered to be a sacred building. Most of them were built with temples at the top where religious ceremonies and rituals would be conducted. These temples were meant to be replicas of caves where the priests would enter and come in contact with their ancestors and the gods. At the close of many religious festivals and celebrations the priests and their processions would climb to the top of the temples to give a sacrifice and honor the gods from up high, nearest to the sky. Large-scale public sacrifices also took place on the top of these pyramids, which made powerful statements to any who thought about invading (Phillips 2008).

How a pyramid was built also held religious and cultural significance to the society that built it. In many Mesoamerican pyramids, the thirteen tiers of heaven and the nine levels of the underworld were incorporated into the construction. The nine levels, such as is seen in the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, represented the nine levels in the underworld that the king would encounter on his way to the spirit world. In the ceremonial centers, many are considered to have been planned to represent the waterways that offered the deceased a way to the underworld. Some pyramids show the importance of the 365-day and 260-day calendars, which also had a sacred meaning in ceremonial buildings. For instance, the Temple of Niches at El Tajín has 365 niches built into it, and El Castillo at Chichen Itzá has a total of 365 steps. Both show references to the calendars that were used. One architectural custom was the practice of a ruler rebuilding a temple directly on top of and encompassing a previous one built by his predecessor. In doing so, he made a statement to the people that a new leader took over, a ruler rebuilding a temple directly on top, but in 1952 a great discovery was made which completely changed the way in which we understand New World pyramids. It is a nine level stepped pyramid with a height of 65 feet. Lord Pakal was one of the great rulers at Palenque; his wealth could be seen through his massive palace located near the temple, but little did we know he left behind another tribute to his wealth. Within the temple atop the pyramid was a trap door that led to a stairway descending 80 feet below the temple to a tomb that had not been seen by human eyes since it was sealed after Pakal’s death. Inside this crypt was a large sarcophagus with a decorated lid that showed Pakal descending the world tree into the underworld. Within the sarcophagus the king would encounter on his way to the spirit world.

The first Mesoamerican culture to produce giant pyramids was the culture from Teotihuacán in the central part of Mexico. Here there was a cave that held religious significance in that people believed it was a gateway to the world of the spirits. It was a place of pilgrimage where people would place items of sacrifice and worship. Eventually, the Pyramid of the Sun was built directly on top of this, where it stands 216 feet high and has a mass of 1,080 cubic yards. It is built in the step style but only has about 3 layers with nearly 280 steps that go straight up the front of the structure. Following in Teotihuacán’s footsteps, the Maya began to build large pyramids, all for many different reasons. At Chichén Itzá is El Castillo, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. It is remarkable that the architects built it so precisely that at the spring and fall equinoxes the light will reveal a sacred serpent descending the staircase. At Tikal, there is evidence for some of the most extensive cycles of rebuilding as temple after temple was placed on top leaving behind the last stage which soars up high into the sky. And at Palenque, there is one of the most interesting and unique pyramids located in Mesoamerica, the Temple of the Inscriptions (Phillips 2008).

Upon first looking at the Temple of the Inscriptions, it appears to be just like any other Mayan pyramid with a stone temple on the top, but in 1952 a great discovery was made which completely changed the way in which we understand New World pyramids. It is a nine level stepped pyramid with a height of 65 feet. Lord Pakal was one of the great rulers at Palenque; his wealth could be seen through his massive palace located near the temple, but little did we know he left behind another tribute to his wealth. Within the temple atop the pyramid was a trap door that led to a stairway descending 80 feet below the temple to a tomb that had not been seen by human eyes since it was sealed after Pakal’s death. Inside this crypt was a large sarcophagus with a decorated lid that showed Pakal descending the world tree into the underworld. Within the sarcophagus the king would encounter on his way to the spirit world. The discovery of building and rebuilding (Phillips 2008).
of this tomb within the pyramid proved that the previously believed sole-use of stepped pyramids as a place to raise the temple above the other buildings was false and that there were other possibilities (Phillips 2008). Although separated by thousands of years the Egyptian and Mesoamerican temples bear great resemblance to each other. There are some people who believe the two cultures came in contact at some point, which would explain the similarities. The most obvious resemblance is the actual shape of the stepped pyramids. Some of the pyramids, such as the three pyramids at Giza and the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, functioned as funerary monuments for the tomb of a ruler. Also, for both the Egyptians and the Mesoamericans, the complexes that surrounded the pyramid held religious significance in relation to the afterworld for the deceased. In Egypt they believed the replica of a city surrounding the pyramid would be ruled over by that particular leader, while in Mesoamerica they believe that area was a pathway that led the deceased to the underworld. During construction, both societies used the cardinal points as well as precise mathematical and astrological calculations. This can be seen in the orientation of the pyramids at Giza in relation to the Orion’s belt and the Castillo at Chichén Itzá with the play on light as well as many other pyramids and complexes laid out based on the cardinal points. Upon rational examination, most people see these similarities as coincidences and believe that the differences between the two are more significant.

One incredibly important point is that the earliest Mesoamerican pyramids were built much later than the pyramids in Egypt. This is a vital piece of information, due to the fact that during that time, technology and knowledge changed and much of it was lost; later Egyptians would not have had the technology to teach to the Mesoamericans. Another key difference between the New and Old World pyramids is in their construction. Egyptian pyramids were built entirely with cut stone, making them capable of lasting an incredibly long time. Mesoamerican pyramids were built with a core of rubble and then faced with more regular stones, which were covered in stucco and painted. As shown by the many layers of deterioration of the pyramids, this method was not as effective at withstanding the elements. Even the building process was done completely differently from each other. In Egypt the pyramids at Giza were built by lamers during the off-season and so took nearly 20 years to complete one. In Mesoamerica, because of the cycle of rebuilding, much of it was completed by skilled artisans at an almost continuous rate (Phillips 2008).

For the most part these two types of pyramids were not built for the same function. Egyptians built their pyramids as a private house for the body of a dead ruler for the rest of eternity and was not to be reentered once he was placed to rest. Mesoamerican pyramids, although occasionally built as tombs, were generally public buildings where religious ceremonies were carried out. The location of the pyramids also reflected their purpose. Egyptian pyramids were located out of the way in a remote area while Mesoamerican pyramids were located directly in the middle of the city. What the pyramids stood for symbolically for the people who built them was also different. The Egyptians believed their pyramids represented rays of sun that would lead the ruler to the Sun God. Mesoamericans thought their pyramids represented mountains and worshiped their ancestors as well as their gods from the top of them. The differences between the New and Old World pyramids are too great to suggest any sort of communication between the two cultures and the similarities can simply be explained as coincidences.

Throughout human history we have built some magnificent and impressive monuments. Some of the most remarkable are the pyramids found in both the New and Old Worlds. Although there have been suggestions that the people who built these large structures had been in contact with each other, the differences between them are too vast for this to be true. The most admirable Egyptian pyramids are the ones found on the plateau at Giza, and they are the epitome of perfection. They are nearly mathematically perfect and are tributary tombs for three of the Fourth Dynasty pharaohs. In the New World, similar structures were created using completely different techniques and for very different reasons. In Mesoamerica, the main purpose for their pyramids was to house temples at their peaks where people could worship the gods from high above the city. On both sides of the world these enormous buildings held great religious and ceremonial significance to the people who built them, and they have left many wondering how they were built without modern technology. However these feats were accomplished, the builders of these great structures have left the rest of the world in admiration of their cultures. And many – including myself – have been attracted to studying them.

REFERENCES

About the Author

Jessica Mehm is a graduating Junior with a double major in Archaeology and Art Studio and a minor in Art History. She hopes to continue on to graduate school and get her Masters and possibly her PhD in Anthropology with a specialty in Mesoamerican studies. This paper is what she hopes to be the beginning of a long career in studying the amazing accomplishments of these cultures.
Alumnus in Action: Building a School for Gembeltu

ANDREA WENDEL

On Saturday, March 19th recent Potsdam alumnus Alex French came to speak about his experiences with building a school in Ethiopia. Alex, who graduated from SUNY Potsdam in May 2008 with a major in anthropology and a minor in economics, spent a little more than a year in Africa with his wife Kayla and friend Danny Smith building an elementary school. The presentation was held almost exactly a year from the day of their first fundraiser. In just over three months with countless fundraising activities and donation efforts, they earned the money that they needed for the construction of this school.

The construction process took many different turns over the course of a year. The lumberyard, or "Home Depot" as Alex and Danny called it, was the place to get supplies. Whether they needed wood, nails, hammers, or other supplies, this was where they would travel to in the back of their truck. Piles of eucalyptus wood were stacked in this lumberyard. This type of wood is ideal for construction in developing countries because of its extremely fast growth rate (National Park Service). One of the problems they faced throughout the building process was the treacherous and unpredictable weather. The rainy season saw to it that mud, which made the process of transporting materials slow. Another frustration they encountered was a lack of communication with the contractors. On some days, the hired contractors would not come to work.

The dedication of the villagers was even more evident when they spent a whole day building a new latrine by hand, without the help of the contractors.

Even volunteers building a school need a break sometimes, and the close relationships with the people of the village and the interesting places to visit provided opportunities for exploration and socializing away from the school construction. In order to avoid becoming a burden to the people they were aiming to help with their project, Alex, Kayla, and Danny did not stay directly in the village. For $12 a month, a small room was theirs to live in, with mattresses placed on the floor as beds. Despite the living conditions, they made close friends with the people in the compound and often ate dinner with them. By the end of the project, the friends began to speak some of the language and were able to coordinate whole projects on their own.

An opening ceremony was held to celebrate the completion of the school and as a thank you ceremony for all the hard work done by everyone involved in the project, including; Alex, Kayla, Danny, and all of the members of the village. In this gathering, the children sang songs as a thank you. A new flag was raised and is flying high above the newly built school.

The return of Alex and his friends to the United States does not signal an end to the project. In the future, the government will ensure that the new building has a supply of running water safe for the children to drink. There are also plans for another school to be built by the NGO in another village. Within the village itself, the villagers plan to contribute to the school by offering classes to women of the village in the evenings, after the children have gone home. The volunteer teachers of the village will continue to teach at the school, and will now get paid for it.

Alex extended some advice to students interested in this type of work. He accessed his internship through the website idealist.org, which is a directory for positions with numerous NGOs and the government. He also says that having a degree in Anthropology can be useful in any number of fields. A great way to understand your own culture is to go to a developing country and see the vast differences between life there and the conditions we are accustomed to. Any type of international volunteer experience is ideal, however, if only one of these can be done. “Get out of your comfort zone,” Alex says, and get involved in volunteer work, whether it is here in the North Country or a half a world away, in Africa.

REFERENCES

About the Author

Andrea Wendel is a first time editor from Sanborn, New York. She is a Junior majoring in both Anthropology and Chemistry. She is particularly interested in physical anthropology and specifically forensic anthropology.
Maple Syrup and its Relationship with Northern New York

COURTNEY DOYLE

The evolution of maple syrup in Northern New York is an interesting one. Maple syrup has its beginnings with the original inhabitants of this area and their legends of the sweet sap’s discovery. Native Americans taught the first European settlers in the area (the French and eventually the English) exactly how to collect sap and make syrup. Those first European settlers continued to collect maple sap for years and passed the knowledge of maple syrup production to later generations. From its simple beginnings, maple syrup production has evolved into a very scientific process, which can be seen in Northern New York. Besides the techniques and tools used in the process, it would also appear that the people involved in producing maple syrup have changed.

Maple syrup can be found all over the world, but it cannot be produced in all the places it is found. That is because the maple, the kind of tree that produces the right sap, is only found in North America. Throughout North America there are thirteen different species of maple (Eagleson 2006), but it is only the hard maples that produce the right sap (Burns 1990). These specific maples include sugar, black, red, and silver maple; sugar and black maple are the most common sources for maple sap. Even though hard maple trees can be found throughout North America, certain environmental conditions need to be met by the environment for enough sap to be produced. The areas that meet those requirements (freezing nights, warm days) are from Maine to Minnesota in the United States and Quebec and Ontario in Canada (Eagleson 2006).

Maple trees must be a certain diameter for tapping to be successful, this is because the tree’s sap is for its own use, the sap helps the tree to grow (Lasky 1995) through the nutrients it supplies to the tree in the form of sugars and minerals (Burns 1990). When a tree has finally grown to be 31 centimeters in diameter, it is safe to put one tap in the tree, as the tree grows and increases in size more taps can be put in the tree. At about 44 centimeters two taps and at around 56 centimeters three taps can be put into the tree (Burns 1990). Many maple syrup producers, though, will not go past two taps on a tree no matter what the size is, so that they do not destroy the tree (Eagleson 2006). Finally, sap is collected in March and can go into April, when the nights are still freezing but the days are warm. When the days are warm the sap flows upwards from the roots (Burns 1990). Once the sap is collected it must be boiled for a long period of time. During this boiling much of the water in the sap is evaporated, so this means a lot of sap needs to be collected to make a moderate amount of syrup. For example, ten gallons of sap makes one quart of syrup, or 40 gallons of sap is needed to make a gallon of syrup (Burns 1990).

Native Americans, the first inhabitants of North America, were also the first people to make maple syrup. There is no actual date associated with the first tapping of a maple tree, but there are legends among the different tribes pertaining to its discovery.

An Iroquois legend about maple syrup is about Woksis and his wife. One day Woksis had thrown his ax into a maple tree before he went to bed, and when he woke up the next day he removed the ax and went on his way. Throughout the day, the tree cried tears of sap and these “tears” were collected in a container at the base of the tree. Woksis’s wife came upon this container and thought it was water, so she used it to boil her husband’s dinner. When Woksis came home, he tried his dinner, which was sweet and flavored with the maple resulting in the discovery of syrup (Nearing 1971).

Another legend from the Eastern Woodlands is about Nanabush, a powerful trickster. One day he discovered his village empty of its people. In his search for them he found that they had become fat and lazy from eating maple syrup directly from the trees, so he filled all the trees with water and flavored it with the maple syrup (Nearing 1971). The syrup became syrup (Nearing 1971). One last legend about maple syrup comes from the Anishinabe people of Minnesota. Their story is about a family during the end of winter who have run out of food to eat. That is when Ininatig (‘the tree man’) explains to them how to collect sap out of his trunk and then how to boil it into syrup and make maple candy. This allowed the family to survive and to pass their knowledge on to other people (Wittstock 1993).

Native Americans did not have metal buckets to collect sap or stainless steel pans to boil the sap when they first started tapping trees, but they had a wide variety of tools to aid in collection and boiling. They used containers made out of tree bark to collect sap at the base of maple trees (Eagleson 2006). Stone axes were used to form the hole in the tree to reach the sap and shingles, reeds or small pieces of bark to run the sap from the trees (Nearing 1971). Bark containers and even clay containers were used as containers to boil the sap. The process of boiling could have either been done using hot rocks added to the sap or by hanging the container of sap over an open fire (Eagleson 2006).

During the maple sap season, Native Americans would have moved out to their sugar camps in the woods and remain there until it was over. The female heads of household would each be in charge of their own sugar house and had rights to trees because of their mother’s family. Both children and men would take a break from hunting and other activities to assist the women with making maple syrup (Nearing 1971). According to European eyewitnesses, Native Americans never used salt at all but instead grain sugar, made by boiling the sap and then stirring until it crystallized. Two other types of sugar made with maple sap

New techniques continued to arise as the years went by: hand drills were used to tap efficiently; the wooden buckets were switched for galvanized metal buckets.”
Maple syrup

are cake sugar, made by boiling it until it thickened and poured it into molds to let it harden and “gum” or “wax sugar,” made by pouring syrup onto snow making it into a soft, flexible mass (Nearing 1971).

The first Europeans in North America learned to make maple syrup from the Native Americans and at the same time brought new technology to the process. The first changes occurred with the containers used to collect the sap, when the early Europeans made buckets out of fallen trees by hollowing out the trunks. These early pioneers at first placed the buckets at the base of the tree just like the Native Americans, though eventually blacksmiths created spikes to hang buckets on the tree under the hole (Nearing 1971). The method of tapping trees also changed at this time; instead of creating a gash in the tree with an ax, they tried to create holes, which does not harm the tree as much as a gash does (Burns 1990). At this time, spouts were made out of wood but were normally one inch wide and six inches long (Nearing 1971).

The process in the early days of European maple syrup production continued to be a long and exhausting process which the entire family took part in, just as it did among Native Americans (Nearing 1971). These early European producers were normally just small families making syrup for themselves and selling any abundance they had for a little profit. Families would work together for hours on end, collecting sap and boiling it down, mainly because boiling the sap took many hours and needed to be watched carefully. After this process, families would keep a certain amount for their own use and trade the rest of it for other needed goods.

Paulette Reid’s father, Merchant Taylor, represents some of the early producers of Northern New York and his process shows in numerous ways how the early European families worked. Their family originally did not make maple syrup until they moved out to a farm that was surrounded by maple trees. The first year that they tapped trees, they used coffee cans to collect the sap but they did boil the majority of the sap in a sugar house out in the sugar bush. The final boiling occurred inside the house in the kitchen. Many of the members of their family helped in producing the syrup. Merchant Taylor and his brother would set up the coffee cans and collect the sap. Paulette and her siblings would then watch and help with the boiling of the sap. Paulette recalls her father doing it because “that time of the year was a big time to gather that sap and grandmother would put it into jars and we would have that...sometimes to a year, maybe not it all depends who got in it the maybe not it all depends who got in it the most.” (personal communication, April 10, 2010). Even though this family did not sell or trade their finished product, they made the syrup for their own personal use and because it was another resource they could use from the surrounding land they lived on.

The technology that these families used to collect sap and produce maple syrup began to change from the simpler tools that the Native Americans used. These families of maple syrup producers would use large cast iron pots to boil the sap, which was a major change from the bark buckets the Native Americans had once used. However, the boiling of the sap still continued outdoors with the pot hanging over an open fire just like Native Americans had done (Mongrain 2003). New techniques continued to arise as the years went by: hand drills were used to tap efficiently; the wooden buckets were switched for g a l v a n i z e d metal buckets. Horse-drawn w g o m e s were even incorporated to make the transportation of sap to the fire easier (Eagleson 2006). The biggest innovations, though, seem to have occurred in the 19th century; the first major change would have been the first sugar houses built in the sugar bush (Mongrain 2003). This allowed farmers boiling sap to create syrup to be protected from the hostile environment. The sugar houses also allowed the tools used for boiling sap to be improved and allowed for a cleaner and faster operation to occur (Eagleson 2006).

Innovations in metal working created new types of pans that could be used in boiling sap. The new type of pans that was created were made out of sheet metal. These pans were long, rectangular and had flat bottoms, which allowed there to be more surface area; having more surface area would speed up the boiling process of the sap (Eagleson 2006). Eventually the metal pans were no longer kept over an open fire. Instead, producers created boxes around the fire much like stoves to make the fire even hotter.

Eventually this idea resulted into the invention of evaporators. Evaporators are machines that can hold large amounts of sap and r e g u l a t e the sap as it boils. As the sap is boiled, it moves through the metal pans until at the end when it is an actual syrup, it is taken out of the pan through a drain (Eagleson 2006). The finished syrup is then filtered numerous times to get the bark bits, niter (another word for sugar sand), and any other impurities out of the finished product before it is bottled (Lasky 1995).

Along with evaporators being created for boiling sap, the collection process began to change also. People with large production operations for maple syrup have begun to use technology for collecting sap. Most large operations today use plastic tubing, pipelines, and vacuum pumps to get sap
Maple syrup

out of maple trees (Eagleson 2006). To be successful with tubing though, the pressure in the trees need to be greater than outside of it (Eagleson 2006). Tubing stays up year round, meaning it only has to be set up once. With that being said, it is important that all the tubing be checked for leaks which will affect the sap collection. Reverse osmosis removes a good portion of the water found in sap when it is run through the tubing into the evaporator. This process makes boiling sap quicker and more environmentally friendly (Mongrain 2003, Eagleson 2006).

Tubing is more commonly used today even here in Northern New York. President of the St. Lawrence County Maple Syrup Association, Hugh Newton, uses mostly tubing today in his sap collection. When Hugh started out in 1990, he used buckets but he switched to a tubing and vacuuming system to be more efficient in his production of maple syrup. “I still use some buckets, about a hundred but that’s just for show. I mainly use the tubing and vacuum system and reverse osmosis” (personal communication, March 20, 2010). Fred also uses the metal buckets because he finds them easier to clean and maintain than the tubing.

The University of Vermont and their Proctor Maple Research Center, run by Dr. Timothy Perkins, is dedicated to maple syrup, sap, and maple trees. A survey conducted last year by Timothy Wilmot, who investigated what systems were used by producers (90% from Vermont, 10% from surrounding states), found that the majority of the producers tap with vacuum tubing systems. The range of how much sap can be collected using the tubing system is between .228 and .347 gallons per tap; in comparison to buckets, which collect on average .169 gallons per tap (Wilmot 2009).

From the beginnings of maple syrup production it was a family- and community-based process. With Native Americans, the entire tribe was involved; men took a break from hunting and fighting to assist the women of the tribe with the boiling and collecting of sap. Children also helped with collecting sap and firewood to create the fire. When the first pioneers arrived with their families, it remained a family-oriented tradition. It remained like that because so many people were needed to collect sap and to watch the sap boil so that it would not burn. With new technology like the tube systems and evaporators, the need for so many participants has subsided. Regarding Henderson’s and Newton’s businesses, they employ only one person who is not from their immediate family; this person helps with collecting the sap and watching it boil. Newton in particular mentioned that his son and grandson are often too busy with school and work to help produce maple syrup; the same can be said about Henderson’s operation.

These two examples stand in contrast to Merchant’s family, who helped with the collection and boiling of sap. Merchant’s syrup production was primarily for his family and they used basic tools to create the syrup. In both Henderson’s and Newton’s businesses, syrup was being produced for a market, so they have more advanced technologies to boil the sap in mass amounts to sell. In addition, Newton and Henderson largely worked by themselves with no major help from their immediate families. This points to the possibility that the advanced technology used by maple producers seems to have taken the family tradition out of the process.

The production of maple syrup has a long and glorious history here in Northern New York. The first peoples to discover the sweet sap were the Native Americans, who still live in this area today. They passed their knowledge of creating maple syrup to the first European settlers of the area. That knowledge has been passed down through the generations and has allowed for changes to occur in the process of creating maple syrup. The increase in the amount of technology used by maple producers, however, seems to be a recent tradition. Fred and Hugh’s production process only has a few people involved and not the entire family, which is different from Merchant’s family. Consequently, in trying to produce
Discovering SUNY Potsdam’s Past: Reflecting on an Internship in the College Archives

JESSICA BELLINGHAM

When I sent my first email to College Archivist Jane Subramanian, asking for an internship in the archives, I never imagined that it would so drastically change my perspective and career goals. The experience turned out to be one of the most valuable ones I have had thus far at SUNY Potsdam.

I would encourage anyone interested in archives or historical records to make an appointment at some time during their college career to discover the wealth of information that the archives hold. Not knowing much about the archives, except that they are a carefully managed and protected collection in the library, I had a few initial misconceptions that were quickly corrected as I was introduced to the collections and began to work. At first, I was under the impression that the archives were mainly comprised of old books and information on the general history of the college. Archives may indeed contain old books but are more commonly the unpublished, unbound documents that record the important transactions of an institution. Archives may indeed contain old books but are more commonly the unpublished, unbound documents that record the important transactions of an institution. Although there is plenty of information to be found on the history of the college, the archives are much more specific and extensive than I had imagined. Potsdam’s archives include non-current financial records, records on staff and administration, records of special events, and of course, records of the students who have attended the school. These records date back to the beginning of the college’s history and extend to as recently as a few months ago.

In other words, archives are not necessarily old documents, as I had previously thought. In addition, archives have their own system of organization, quite distinct from that of library volumes. Archival collections are also meant for use in research. In Potsdam’s case, patrons are most commonly students and faculty of the college. Archives allow patrons to consult primary documents in order to gain information.

The knowledge I have gained from working in archives has been twofold. First, I’ve learned a lot about the way an archival collection functions and about the different responsibilities of an archivist. A variety of projects has exposed me to various parts of the processes of adding materials to the collection, organizing them, and describing them. I have also learned a lot about the history of the college and its people. As an anthropology and art history major, I have a heightened awareness of people and culture. My work in archives has allowed me to move through a number of time periods in Potsdam’s history, and I have had the opportunity to experience the culture of the college in these different time periods. Although cultural anthropologists most often conduct research with living subjects, I still feel that there is a note of anthropology in my work with archival documents and records. Working with letters, photographs, and other formats that intrinsically record human activity and the human experience, I have been able to pick up on certain cultural

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Courtney Doyle is a Senior majoring in both Archaeology and History. Upon completion of her degree, she plans to relax and then find a job, preferably as an archaeologist.
traits, despite this not being the focus of my work. Looking at the language people use, the clothing they wear, their expressions in photographs, and their nature of record-keeping has been fascinating and enlightening.

My first project was to describe the contents of nine boxes of materials relating to Brock McElheran, formerly a professor of SUNY Potsdam’s Crane School of Music. I came across literally hundreds of handwritten letters, which made me think a great deal about the way communication methods have changed. Being something of a nostalgic person, I have always enjoyed writing and sending letters, but I can probably (absolutely, even) count the number of personal letters I have received in the last year on one hand. The ways we keep in touch have changed as a function of convenience, technology, and our generation. My work with this collection made me think more deeply about the ways people communicate. Will we be sifting through electronic correspondence records of notable people in the future, instead of hard copies of handwritten letters?

In addition, the letters made me consider the purposes for which we correspond with each other. Many of the letters sent to Brock McElheran were from friends and colleagues, sent not for business or professional aims but for the purpose of corresponding about daily life. In contrast, almost all of the emails I send are purpose-oriented: to ask a question, respond to an inquiry, or to provide important professional information to someone. I only send one or two emails a month that are solely for the purpose of keeping in touch with someone, discussing my life and asking about theirs. In addition, my emails are always short and to the point. I am unsure as to whether this is due to the stage I am at in my life (too often too busy to write lengthy emails) or perhaps due to the use of social networking sites, where it is faster and more convenient to leave short messages for a greater number of people than it is to write a longer message in one or two. In either case, the shift in the reasons and methods of communication is a very interesting topic to consider.

My second project taught me the importance of context and heightened my attention to detail. I was given a large garbage bag full of color slides, a light board with which to view them, and a box, and was asked to organize the slides by subject. It was my first experience creating and implementing an organizational scheme in a professional setting. There were hundreds of slides containing images of the college, its students, and events. I started out at first with broad, general categories to classify the slides. I began with three categories: sports, Crane/music, and other. The first two categories were fairly easy to find at first glance – presence of instruments, conductors, music stands, jerseys, basketballs, and giant bear mascots were all fairly straightforward. More difficult was the “other” pile, still containing a few hundred slides.

Frankly, I had no idea where to begin, and became frustrated at first. I tried to create different subject categories, labeling slips of paper to indicate which pile was which, but there ended up being so many that I forgot what I was looking for and started making duplicate piles by mistake. Using the light board is the only efficient way to really see the image, so it was difficult to view more than about fifteen slides at a time. I also had a lack of work space and my stacks of slides kept falling over and toppling into one another. After much frustration I decided to narrow down the slides by format first before determining their subjects. There were a variety of formats for the slides: some had a plastic casing, some had cardboard casings, and some were stamped with the name of the department, the date, or the initials of the photographer. Slides with the same format or date were more likely to be created at the same time, and so were more likely to be similar subjects, and it was an easy way to keep a series of photos together. I found this to be a decent strategy, and it was easier to sift through smaller piles at a time.

This approach was also beneficial because it made it easier to identify slides that did not have a clear subject. For example, an image of a person in the gym could be from a class, a sporting event, etc. When considering the format, however, and looking at the slides with the same format, you might notice that it has similar elements to the slides of a basketball awards ceremony, and then you might be able to recognize someone in the background from another shot in that series. I did a lot of comparing backgrounds: context became very important. An image that seemed to be of an individual (and had previously been labeled just “student”) was more often someone who was part of an event. Something categorized as a music performance was later realized to be an instrumental group at a larger campus-wide event. I did a lot of rearranging of categories and learned not to label anything until I had gone through all the images in that format.

The final project I was assigned was by far my favorite. Potsdam archivist Jane Subramanian is currently working to create a separate photograph collection in order to provide better access to the photographs and to reduce the amount of confusion and stress when trying to locate an image. Archives are searched by means of a finding aid, a document that describes the different categories that a collection is organized into and indicates where certain items are located. Subramanian is creating a new finding aid for the photograph collection, with categories such as buildings, people, and student organizations. My main responsibility was to search through the archives collection in order to locate all the photographs. I was also to assess whether or not the categories in the new finding aid were sufficient for cataloging our archives collection: in other words, whether or not our photographs fit into the rough categories of the finding aid.

This project was particularly fascinating for me because I got to sift through all of the really interesting photographs of students and buildings from the early days of the
college. Many of the photographs I was examining were from the late 1800s and early 1900s. In addition to being an anthropology major, I am also an art history major. This project appealed to my interest in the art of photography, such as the poses held by the subjects and their expressions, and the lighting that was used for the photograph. I was also fascinated by the styles of clothing worn by the students in the photos. I really enjoyed noting the changes in fashion as I looked at photographs from the 1890s, early 1900s, and 1930s. To me, the information written on the back of the photographs was secondary to my particular goal of categorizing the photos, it made the work more extensive with archival collections. I would encourage anyone who is interested to take the opportunity to make an appointment and discover the archives. It is an experience you will not easily forget.

NOTE: SUNY Potsdam’s Archives and Special Collections are located on the second floor of Crumb Library in the Snell Room (Room 214). An appointment is required in advance with the College Archivist, Jane Subramanian, in order to enter the archives for research. More information is available at: http://potsdam.libguides.com/archives.

About the Author

Jessica Bellingham is an Art History and Anthropology major who is also pursuing a minor in Museum Studies. Currently a junior at Potsdam, Jessica is also working on a Presidential Scholars project that will allow her to design and construct a museum exhibit for display on campus. After graduation she hopes to pursue a Master’s degree in either Library Science or Museum Studies.

Stay Dedicated: An Unpaid Internship Pays Off in the End

KATRINA BRAINARD

You know what they say…internships are important. I know it is hard to believe that they are important when you, the intern, are required to do a great amount of work for little to no pay (and usually it is no pay). Internships can be frustrating because they might not turn out the way you want them to, and very few of them lead to any “A-ha” moments. However, completing an internship during your college career will quite likely lead to a successful future in the field of your choosing. More importantly, you should be interested in and dedicated to what you are doing during your internship regardless of pay or type of project. You never know where eagerness will get you.

When I declared my minor in museum studies, I dreaded the thought of having to complete 6 internship credit hours. The thought of going out and actually doing something outside of academia scared me. After all, I came to college so I could stay out of the real world for another four years! But, I eventually had to face my fears so that I could graduate with my minor.

In August of 2009, I began an internship at Traditional Arts in Upstate New York (TAUNY) in Canton, New York. Executive Director Jill Breit and I decided that I would curate my own mini-exhibit about a North Country folklore topic. I chose to research and curate an exhibit about the art of taxidermy. After researching, collecting and analyzing data, and designing panels, I completed my exhibit, titled “Taxidermy: Is it Art?,” in December of 2009.

Even though I was busy working on my exhibit throughout the semester, I spent a lot of additional time at TAUNY getting to know the organization and the staff. The majority of my work for the actual internship credit happened at home and on campus far away from the internship site. However, I made sure I made myself known to the TAUNY staff. I sat in on weekly staff meetings and was invited to participate in a board meeting. At the time, I figured I was just being a good intern, but it turns out that I exceeded Jill’s expectations. Going above and beyond turned out to be a wise choice when it came time to complete my second 3-credit internship for the museum studies minor.

I made it very clear to Jill early on that I wanted to complete my second internship at TAUNY, but I was not planning on doing so until the following fall semester. I was worried that the gap of time between internships would hinder my relationship with the organization, so I decided to make myself available on a volunteer basis. During the spring and summer of 2010, I assisted with the installation and development of other exhibits, took a folklore class on campus taught by Jill, assisted the staff at various events, and traveled around the North Country with the TAUNY tent. The time between my two internships was spent learning everything I could about the organization.
When it came time to register for my second internship in the fall of 2010, I had already developed a strong relationship with the TAUNY staff. It was easy for me to dive right into another project because Jill and I had been talking for weeks about what I would work on next. My plan was to curate another mini-exhibit about “welcome home art,” the artful displays created by soldiers’ loved ones at Fort Drum in Watertown, New York. Jill gained permission from the Public Affairs office on the base to go ahead with the project, and I began collecting background research and looking for ways to get in touch with informants. Week after week, Jill and I tried to figure out how to get the project going, but nothing was happening. In the end, we were forced to cancel the project because the families who were creating the art did not want to participate in the research because they felt it was too personal for public display. I never was able to curate the mini-exhibit.

“My experience as a failure, but I learned a lot from not being able to complete the project.”

I did not let the unfinished project stop me from doing everything I could for TAUNY. I visited Canton weekly and helped implement the new computerized inventory system to be used in the gallery shop. Big deal, right? It was a big deal. In the past, the shop used an old-fashioned register and hand written receipts. The implementation of a computerized system was difficult, time consuming, and took a lot of coordination and cooperation from the staff. I continued to attend weekly staff meetings and assisted with planning events and running the new register at them. I will say that installing and implementing a new computerized inventory system is not my idea of a great internship experience, but I now realize that I know more about technology and business than ever before. Something as simple as stuffing envelopes on your day “off” could lead to something great. I could have easily ended my relationship with TAUNY in 2009 after my exhibit opened, but I did not, and now I have a full time job before even becoming a college graduate.

All of my hard work paid off, and during the past year and a half, I kept an open mind and remained enthusiastic about what I was doing at TAUNY. I did not always like what I was asked to do and there were times when I thought about giving up entirely. However, remember that not every experience you have as an intern is going to work out the way you want it to. Sometimes plans change, but you have to remain flexible and apply your skills to everything you do. Something as simple as stuffing envelopes on your day “off” could lead to something great. I could have easily ended my relationship with TAUNY in 2009 after my exhibit opened, but I did not, and now I have a full time job before even becoming a college graduate.

About the Author

Katrina Brainard is a senior anthropology major and museum studies minor from Houston, TX. She plans to stay in the North Country and work for TAUNY after graduation. She plans to eventually continue her education at the graduate level.
INTRODUCTION: A few days after Christmas this past year, I spent two weeks in Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands as part of a winterim course focusing on biology and biodiversity. The course included sixteen SUNY Potsdam students.

RIGHT: At the Charles Darwin Research Center on the island of Santa Cruz, we were not able to get a glimpse of the famed Lonesome George, who had already gone to sleep, but we did get to see this 800-lb male tortoise. He is nearing 100 years old.

ABOVE: On Monkey Island, a refuge for monkeys saved from the pet trade and habitat degradation, we saw these woolly monkeys in their natural habitat. We also learned how to throw spears that are used in traditional hunting.

ABOVE: After climbing into an underground cave and back, Dr. Christopher Kelson (Geology professor at Potsdam) gave us a short lecture on the types of fossils that we had found in this limestone formation.

LEFT: One of the last things we did while in Ecuador was visit the equator located just outside of Quito.

BELOW: While swimming in the beach cove off of Bartolome Island we were joined by a playful young sea lion and even glimpsed some sea turtles as they visited one of their nesting grounds.
Critical Book Review: 
Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain 
REBEKAH BARRETT

In every society, death is inevitable. During the Middle Ages, death was an everyday occurrence and much time and effort was put into worrying about and preparing for deaths and subsequent funerals. Howard Williams took this concept and looked at it from an archaeological perspective. Though the archaeological record of Medieval Britain is far from complete, Williams combined a number of archaeological studies that provide new perspectives and new interpretations of how Medieval societies and individuals dealt with, reacted to, and prepared for death.

Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain focuses on mortuary archaeological evidence from England, Scotland and Wales dating from the secession of Roman rule in the 4th century CE to the Norman Conquest seven hundred years later. The majority of Williams’s research focused on the mnemonic significance of artifacts and mortuary practices, meaning that he studied how they relate to and aid memory. Because of this, many of his research questions probe into the realm of ideology and identity. Near the beginning of the book he tries to establish how the commemoration of the dead took place and why it took the forms that it did (Williams 2006:20). To do this, he focuses on how material culture can create a link between ritual practice and memory. Later, he goes on to question how the adoption of new “technologies of remembrance” helped create distinctive identities and connective relationships with the past (Williams 2006:22). According to Williams, these “technologies of remembrance”, the actions and memories that we use to help us remember, contribute directly to social memory and how a particular society views the dead.

Assuming social memory is different for each society or culture, he goes on to ask whether or not it would then be possible to differentiate cultural origins from the archaeological record alone. If mortuary practices and grave goods for a particular group carry distinctive features, it should be possible to separate them from the practices of other groups. This idea, however, does run into problems. When two groups have practices that leave inherently similar imprints on the archaeological record, the idea can fail to work. One example, Williams states, is the difficulty of differentiating 9th century Viking and Anglo-Saxon burials, as their mortuary practices had many overlapping ritual components (Williams 2006:23).

One of the most important research questions Williams presented in the book was how the life history of the deceased (such as their social status and their actions during their lifetime) affected the treatment of their corpse and the burial they received. I thought this question opened up an interesting perspective because it focuses on how human thoughts and actions can and may directly influence the archaeological record. By asking this question, Williams opens the door to a number of interpretations of his collected data that would not have been possible otherwise.

Williams seems to have a post-processual influence in his approach to data. He focuses on answering mostly high-level theoretical questions, though there are other schools of archaeological thought that do this as well. He embodies post-processual influence most when he interprets artifacts by their meaning, rather than simple form and function (Johnson 2010). For example, in trying to establish memory and thought patterns in the past from the archaeological record, the post-processual influence is reflected, because that endeavor or itself is one of the bases of post-processual archaeology. He establishes that mortuary practices are intentional actions by the mourner placing their ideology on the deceased (Williams 2006:39).

Another element commonly stressed in post-processualism is the agency of the individual and what relationship they have with the archaeological record (Johnson 2010). Williams is very good about acknowledging his biases, and he brings up the fact that Medieval mortuary archaeology has tended to focus on elite or furnished burials and it is just recently that less elaborate burials have been the focus of extensive study.

But it is not just post-processualism that shapes Williams’s research, because even though he falls under that broad paradigm, he also brings in elements of systems theory when he discusses how the mnemonic significance of mortuary artifacts may change based on the political, social, geographical context from which they enter the archaeological record (Johnson 2010). He also attributes changes in certain types of burials to pressures from other systems.

As an example, he posits that the decline in lavishly furnished burials from the 9th century onward may have been a result of the rise of Christianity in Britain and the subsequent attempts to eradicate those types of “pagan” habits (Williams 2006:44-45).

Later in the book, a few chapters focus on landscape and monuments and the ways they can affect social memory. In these chapters, he brings in phenomenology where he explains how these landscapes and locations would have influenced the experience of the people taking part in funeral rituals (Johnson 2010). A relatively recent development in archaeology, phenomenology approaches archaeological research from a philosophical standpoint focused on what ancient people would have seen and felt. Williams tries to establish what these experiences would have been like, followed by the mnemonic significance they would have held for the people who experienced them. For example, he uses his analysis of spatial patterning in the Ripon cemetery to make the point that boundaries (like a Medieval wall created to demarcate a Bronze Age barrow) are not only physical markers but conceptual spaces. The people would have perceived this monument as sacred ground, and as a result, the wall was their way of acknowledging the space’s mnemonic significance (Williams 2006:157,186).

Williams’s theoretical paradigms inevitably influenced every step in his research process. Theory shapes the questions that any archaeologist will ask because what they will want to know is inherently related to the paradigm to which they subscribe. Williams asked questions
about how the life of the deceased and their status or actions during their lifetime could affect their treatment in death. This can be explained by his focus on the agency of the individual and how they can have a profound effect on society (Johnson 2010).

Williams centers his other research questions on how mortuary practices not only affected other aspects of the society, but also the human experience. By asking how communication took place and why it took the forms it did, he shows the link between ritual practice and memory and discusses how this formulation of memory would influence other aspects of the society. He also asks how “technologies of remembrance” can affect how people take part in mortuary ritual (Williams 2006:36).

Theoretical paradigms also influence the methods archaeologists use to gather and analyze their data, and Williams is no exception, even though his book was a collection of other scholars’ research. Death and Memory compiled data and research from other archaeologists and historians, but these other researchers were influenced by their own theoretical paradigms. Williams chose to use examples of data, whether it was excavation or survey, which would back their claims easily because of the specific methods that were used. The majority of Williams’s cited data was from cemetery excavation and survey. Because Williams was also interested in mortuary landscapes, he also cited a large number of landscape surveys. Also, his focus on mnemonic significance forced him to cite mostly furnished burials like Sutton Hoo and Swallowcliffe Downs because it is difficult to try to interpret ideas and memory when you do not have a wealth of material culture to draw data from (Williams 2006:28, 162).

Depending on the questions being asked, the data necessary to support them can be very different. One’s theoretical paradigm will also affect the type of data collected and highlighted because of the fact that theory directly influences the perspective from which the data will be viewed and selected (Johnson 2010). Taking a phenomenological approach, Williams uses the survey of the land around the cemetery in Ripon and the placement of the graves themselves to establish what the mortuary landscape would have looked like and how it would have influenced the experiences of people performing mortuary or funerary rituals there (Williams 2006:186-196). Williams actually separated his chapters by data types, leaving nothing to chance when it came to letting the reader know exactly what data he was using to support his ideas. In the first two chapters, he discusses how basic material culture, grave goods and mortuary gifts serve as mnemonic devices for the construction of social memory. He uses the example of female burials with brooches and male burials with weapons in multiple sites across Britain to infer the way these artifacts would help the community remember these deceased individuals (Williams 2006:46-59).

The next chapter takes an interesting spin on biology and sets up the body from the burial as material culture; the placement and treatment of the body would serve as a canvas for creating active memories (Williams 2006:79-86). He does the same thing with the grave itself in the following chapter. In instances where a person was cremated, a public affair in the Middle Ages, he claims that this type of “burial” ritual would have created very specific memories of the deceased for those in attendance. In the last two chapters, Williams uses both monuments and the landscape itself to help establish what the people engaging in mortuary ritual would have experienced and how those experiences would have contributed to the creation of memory (Williams 2006:171-183).

Williams concludes stating that while archaeologists can attempt to identify how memories were made, reproduced and preserved, it will always be impossible to say for certain what those memories were (Williams 2006:221). In essence, the presence of certain grave goods, the treatment of the body, and the memorial landscape in which it is placed all directly affect the way the deceased would be remembered by their society but we can never truly know what that was. However, as Williams examined his data in search of memory and human experience, he concluded that every part of mortuary ritual, whether it was an artifact, a location, or evidence of the actual ritual, added to the development of social memory and served to create distinct relationships with people in the past.

REFERENCES


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About the Author

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Can you match the descriptions of these anthropologically-centered films with their movie posters?

1. This movie, about real-life primatologist Dian Fossey, depicts how to gain entry into a non-human primate group and the ethical dilemmas anthropologists face when working in other cultures.

2. Dr. Rae Crane and Dr. Robret Campbell, the main characters of this film, “go native” while conducting research in the heart of the rainforest for a pharmaceutical company.

3. Stanley Shepherd is a prehistoric anthropologist in this film, interested in studying “Charlie”, a pre-modern human who was brought back to life after being discovered near an arctic base.

4. The plot of this film follows a Cro-Magnon woman who is taken in by a group of Neanderthals, showing possible interactions between the ancestors of modern humans.

5. In this film an anthropologist is faced with the challenge of finding a new group of people to study, and when he is unable to find an unknown culture, creates one of his own.

ANSWER KEY

1 = Gorillas in the Mist
2 = Medicine Man
3 = Iceman
4 = Clan of the Cave Bear
5 = Krippendorf’s Tribe
SUNY Potsdam student Jessica Mehm standing outside El Castillo at Chichen Itza, Mexico
(Image courtesy of Jessica Mehm)