

PAST LECTURES – 2014

November 8, 2014 – Dr. Morag M. Kersel, DePaul University

Mission Impossible? Tracking the Lives of Early Bronze Age Pots from the Dead Sea Plain, Jordan

Early Bronze Age (3600–2000 BCE) artifacts from the Dead Sea Plain in Jordan have long held a fascination for locals, pilgrims, and tourists, which can often be tied to a substantiation of faith based on the material past. These pots have led varied lives as grave goods, as excavated artifacts, as looted objects, and as collected items revered in private homes and in exhibition cases in museums. Demand for these archaeological objects has resulted in decades of illegal excavation and the destruction of the archaeological landscape. Tracking the movement of these pots is an important aspect of understanding the emergence of prehistoric urbanism and increasing social complexity at these early mortuary and domestic landscapes. Piecing together how artifacts go from the ground to the consumer is at times an impossible mission – or is it?? Archaeological evidence, archival documents, ethnographic interviews, and aerial surveys using unmanned aerial vehicles (drones and hexacopters) all provide valuable clues from the past and present, enhancing our knowledge of Early Bronze Age society during this vibrant period.

October 18, 2014 – Professor Sharon E. Keefe, University of North Florida *Villa Romana del Casale Piazza Armerina, Sicily*

The Villa Romana del Casale located in central Sicily, near present-day Piazza Armerina is a late Roman Provincial villa built in the early 4th century CE, and is regarded as one of the most important examples of provincial architecture from this period, illustrating the predominant social and economic structure of its time. Some scholars believe that the villa was built by a wealthy aristocrat, while others contend that it belonged to an Emperor – possibly Maximian, or his son, Maxentius. The mosaics of Villa Romana del Casale are extremely important because they are in such a well preserved state, and because almost all of the floors have remained intact. The villa was rediscovered in the mid-eighteenth century, and sporadic destructive exploration continued through the 19th century. Between 1950 and 1954, the bulk of the remaining excavation was carried out by Gino Gentili, then current Inspector for the Dept. of Antiquities and Fine Arts for Eastern Sicily. From 1957 to 1960, the entire structure was covered with transparent Perspex to protect the mosaics.

September 20, 2014 – Dr. Buzz Thunen, Dr. Anita Spring, and Dr. Fletcher Crowe *Fort Caroline Debate*

This year is the 450th anniversary of the establishment of Fort Caroline by the French in 1564. After all this time, Fort Caroline has recently generated controversy regarding its actual location. Tradition has it located on the St. John's River in Jacksonville, but a group of archaeologists has proposed that it was actually built on the Altamaha River in Georgia. Dr. Robert (Buzz) Thunen from UNF presented the case for the St. John's River in Jacksonville, and Dr. Anita Spring and Dr. Fletcher Crowe from the University of Florida presented the case for the Altamaha River in Georgia. Dr. Crowe spent the summer excavating the area in Georgia where he believes Fort Caroline was built and revealed the results of that research.

May 17, 2014 – Gordon F.M. Rakita, University of North Florida

Living with the Dead: Unusual Mortuary Treatments from the Prehispanic Southwest

The American Southwest has been called by some scholars a natural laboratory for Anthropology. This characterization is based in part upon the tremendous richness of both ethnographic peoples and preserved archaeological remains. Moreover, as a famous archaeologist once noted, there is more information per cubic meter of a human burial than any other part of an archaeological site. Combined, these two observations suggest that human burials from the American Southwest and contiguous regions should present archaeologists with unique insights into the peoples that have made this region their home. In his talk, Gordon Rakita examined several cases of unusual mortuary treatments from the Southwest and discussed what he thinks they tell us about these fascinating cultures. He also discussed some of the work he and his students have recently been doing in historic cemeteries here on the First Coast.

April 26, 2014 – Keith Merwin *Early Maya Ruins at Holmul, Guatemala*

In 1910, Harvard's Peabody Museum Expedition investigated, a small buried structure named Building B of Group II. It would be the first structure to be scientifically studied in the Maya lowlands. This study would produce many surprises. It provided the first proof that the Maya built new structures on top of existing structures. It also provided the first burial found inside a structure and not just one burial but six burials containing 22 skeletons. These burials contained the first polychrome ceramics found. The large and varied selection of ceramics produced the first ceramic sequence. Yet, one hundred years later the same structure provided an additional early burial, the largest sample of Pre-Mamon ceramics in the Lowlands and a pair of large witz masks dating from 400 B.C. This lecture reviewed what we have learned from this small structure located at a small and remote Maya site.

March 15, 2014 – Dr. Keith Holland *Civil War Shipwreck Maple Leaf*

Dr. Holland presented an informative discussion of his work locating and excavating the Civil War shipwreck Maple Leaf in the St. Johns River. The Civil War troop transport Maple Leaf sank in the St. Johns River on April 1, 1864 when it struck a Confederate mine. Dr. Keith Holland and other amateur historians located the wreck in 1984. After forming the St. Johns Archaeological Expeditions, Inc., they excavated the site and recovered a large amount of material culture that revealed what life was like at the time. It has been called "the most important repository of Civil War artifacts ever found . . . "

February 15, 2014 – Dr. Rachel Wentz, FPAN East Central Regional Director

Life and Death at Windover: Excavation of a 7,000-Year-Old Pond Cemetery

According to Dr. Ben Brotemarkle, the Executive Director of the Florida Historical Society, "The Windover site has been called 'one of the most important archaeological discoveries in the world' because of the quantity and quality of the human remains and artifacts uncovered, which are 3,200 years older than King Tutankhamen and 2,000 years older than the Great Pyramid in Egypt. The presence of intact brain matter in more than ninety skulls, tools made of animal bone and other materials, and some of the oldest woven fabric found anywhere all add to the significance of this archaeological site. It is important to note that the Windover Dig would probably not happen today with the current federal laws regarding the excavation of Native American remains. It may be one of the last such archaeological excavations to take place in the United States."

January 25, 2014 – Professor Cheryl Sowder, Jacksonville University *Excavation of the Well at Cetamura Del Chianti, Italy*

Professor Sowder presented work as a member of the team excavating the well at Cetamura del Chianti in Tuscany, Italy. This is an ongoing, collaborative project of Florida State University, associates from other universities, and the Italian archaeological firm Ichnos. Excavation of the well has now reached a depth of 107 feet. Extracted have been numerous levels, each filled with a plethora of artifacts and organic remains. From pottery and coins, these levels have been identified as dating between the Etruscan Hellenistic era and Roman early Empire, or 4th century B.C.E. and 1st century C.E. Analysis of the finds is yielding new insights regarding Etruscan and Roman habitation of this ancient site.