

Saturday, November 21, 2020 at 12 noon (via webinar)

Dr. John Quarstein, Emeritus Director of the Monitor Project at the Newport News Maritime Museum and Park

The Last Days of The Monitor



The ironclad, USS MONITOR, was known as the “little ship that saved the nation” due to its drawn battle with the CSS VIRGINIA during the 8-9 March 1862 battle of Hampton Roads. On Christmas Eve 1862, the MONITOR received orders to proceed to Beaufort, North Carolina, to join a planned operation against Wilmington, NC. Executive Officer Samuel Dana Greene said the MONITOR was not a “sea-going vessel” as the ironclad almost sank twice during its voyage from New York to Virginia. The MONITOR left Hampton Roads in clear weather on 29 December; but, encountered a heavy gale the next afternoon. The ironclad was overwhelmed by heavy seas and sank in the early morning of 31 December 1862. As crew member Frank Butts noted, ‘The MONITOR is no more!’



Saturday, Oct. 17, 2020 at 12 noon (via webinar)

Dr. Jayur Madhusudan Mehta, FSU

Contrasting Trends in Early Monumentality between Mesoamerica and North America

The Gulf Coast of Mexico unites two distinct culture-historical regions, the Southeastern United States and Mesoamerica. In the Southeast United States, precocious earthen and shell monument construction dates to as early as 6500 BP and precedes agriculture by thousands of years. In Mesoamerica, the first public building dates to the early-middle Formative period, at around 2800 BP, after the development of corn agriculture. Other than differences in agriculture, what else divides these two regions? What unites these two regions? This paper strives to abandon a culture-historical perspective and consider an “Archaeology of the Americas” united by the Gulf of Mexico and related regions..

Dr. Jayur Madhusudan Mehta is an Assistant Professor in Anthropology at Florida State University, specializing in the study of North American Native Americans, human-environment relationships, and the consequences of French and Spanish colonization in the Gulf South. Dr. Mehta earned his PhD in Anthropology from Tulane University (2015) and his MA (2007) from the University of Alabama. He received his BA from the University of North Carolina (2004) and is an avid Tarheel! Dr. Mehta is also a Registered Professional Archaeologist and he has lead excavations in both the United States and Mexico. He is currently lead investigator for the Carson Mounds Archaeological Project (CMAP), a long-term study on the development of hierarchical and agricultural monument-building societies in the Lower Mississippi Valley, and Resilience in the Ancient Gulf South (RAGS), an interdisciplinary investigation into delta formation, hunter-gather settlement dynamics, and monumentality in the Mississippi River Delta region south of New Orleans. Dr. Mehta is a National Geographic research fellow and he has published research in the fields of environmental archaeology, ethnohistory, and indigenous religious and ritual practices.

THIS LECTURE WAS CANCELLED. PLEASE CHECK BACK TO SEE IF IT IS RESCHEDULED.

March 21, 2020

University of Florida Ph. D. Candidate, Lisa Duffy

Using Residue Analysis to Explore Ancient Maya Recipes and Food-Processing Technologies

The food and drink of ancient societies is of great interest to scientists and the public alike. Food represents sustenance and also symbols. What we eat and drink is embedded in our cultural attitudes, but is also affected by the availability of resources. In areas like the ancient Maya world, it has been difficult to trace the material remains of many foods because they do not preserve well and, in this area of high biodiversity, are difficult to identify.

My colleagues and I at the University of Florida are investigating the foods and beverages consumed by the ancient Maya, by analyzing organic chemical residues and starch grains in pottery vessels and on stone grinding tools. Our techniques are interdisciplinary and include artifact analysis, liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry, and starch grain analysis by microscopy.

I will explain how these analyses can help identify a broader range of food items and particularly, reveal ancient Maya “recipes.” My approach explores “recipes” rather than single ingredients to provide insights into ingredient choice and methods of combining, processing, and serving foods and drinks, using different tools and vessels. This approach enables us to learn about the individual who prepared the food/drink.

This study is focused on periods of cultural transition at several pre-contact Maya sites in Belize and Guatemala to better understand the relationship between people and food during times of social and environmental change. Differences in Maya recipes through time, across space, and among community members are revealing intriguing information about the relationships among people, their foods, and their environmental and social circumstances.

FEBRUARY 15, 2020

Dr. John Cherry, professor at Brown University

Taking to the Water: New Evidence and New Debates About the Earliest Seafaring in the World

Until recently, archaeologists have supposed that the seas and oceans represented a barrier to human dispersal, and that islands were among the last places on earth to be colonized by people, only fairly recently, as part of the worldwide spread of modern humans. But is that picture still correct? Startling new data have come to light just in the last few years, in parts of the Mediterranean and islands in Southeast Asia, that have been claimed as evidence for a far longer antiquity for seafaring, reaching back hundreds of thousands, and perhaps as much as a million years. Naturally, these claims have attracted widespread attention and much discussion—and not only among archaeologists.

This lecture outlines what we know, with reasonable certainty, about patterns of global maritime dispersal in the past few tens of thousands of years, before turning to present the new evidence and its strengths and weaknesses. In trying to understand it, we will need to consider information (amongst other things) from ethnographic analogy, experimental seafaring, and our current knowledge of the relative configurations of land and sea over the course of the Pleistocene era. Some of the bold assertions made in the past few years require more supporting data before they can be accepted. That cautious conclusion does not detract from the excitement and importance of this fast-moving field of research in archaeology.



After a brief stint in the late 1970s in the Dept. of Ancient History and Classical Archaeology at the University of Sheffield, John Cherry was appointed to a University Lectureship in Aegean Prehistory in the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge (1980 - 1993), and as a Fellow and Tutor at Fitzwilliam College, where he directed studies in Classics and in Archaeology & Anthropology. In 1993 he moved to the University of Michigan as Professor of Classical Archaeology and Greek, serving there for 11 years as Director of the Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology, and as a Curator in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology. He was appointed at Brown in 2006 as Joukowsky Family Professor of Archaeology and Professor of Classics. His archaeological fieldwork over four decades has included projects in Great Britain, the United States, Greece, Italy, Armenia, and (currently) Monserrat in the Caribbean.

JANUARY 25, 2020

Dr. Jacqueline Meier, professor of Anthropology at the University of North Florida

Neanderthal Hunting Strategies in the Northeastern Mediterranean

Our early human ancestors used diverse strategies to meet the changing subsistence demands of a wide array of environments. Until recently, the general research consensus supported a hypothesis that prior to the Upper Paleolithic period, Neanderthals and other archaic Homo species hunted a narrow range of animals and exploited mainly large herd animals across the Mediterranean region. This presentation will reveal new data about hunting practices from some of the earliest Paleolithic archaeological sites in France to reconsider the notion that Neanderthals exclusively hunted big game. Together, the recent findings of this zooarchaeological research yield new insights into early human and Neanderthal life-ways.



Meier's research investigates human-animal relations across pivotal shifts in human history—from the decline of Neanderthals in Paleolithic France, to the beginning of animal domestication in Neolithic Israel, and to the rise and fall of urban centers across Bronze–Iron Age Greece. During these uneasy transitions, animals played diverse roles as active participants in daily life, symbols, and sources of calories and waste. She integrates zooarchaeological and contextual taphonomic methods to detect daily meals, past rites (i.e. feasting), and norms of refuse management. By examining this evidence through social zooarchaeology and ecological anthropology frameworks, she works to form more complete models of past ecologies during times of human stress across diverse environments.