

BA Arch & Anth Dissertation Examples from 2015-16

Re-examining 'hyper-carnivory' in Neanderthal diets

In my thesis I will be considering Neanderthal diets. The long-standing view that Neanderthals were top-level carnivores has recently been challenged by new evidence suggesting a broader diet including small game, as well as plant foods, fish and birds. However, it is still unclear when the diet broadened and whether hunted meat always provided the mainstay of the diet. I will conduct a literature review and will aim to find out whether there was any temporal and regional variability in the Neanderthal diet by comparing Mediterranean with northern temperate regions of Europe.

What can entomological evidence tell us about the character of Roman settlement in Britain with reference to the site of Gill Mill, Oxfordshire?

I propose to examine what species of beetle are present at Gill Mill, a Roman rural settlement in Oxfordshire, and compare that with the species commonly found at other sites from the period. The most important factor in the investigation is whether pests of stored grain are present. They are usually only found at large Roman settlements, towns and military sites. Through studying these insects, I hope to assess the character of Gill Mill, and contribute to a wider understanding of grain storage on Roman sites in general.

Labour migration in Nepal: a blessing or a curse?

Labour migration, especially in the villages to India once the crops have been sown, has been an ongoing practice in Nepal. In the last couple of decades, however, labour migration has expanded towards the gulf and beyond, and is no longer on a seasonal basis. I propose to investigate through fieldwork how migration is affecting life on a micro level in Nepal, and I will draw on literature to determine how culture has changed on a macro level. My conclusion will aim to discern how migration has changed Nepalese culture, and whether it is a positive or a negative outcome.

The lived world of a Finnish organic farm and its relation to the global foodscape

My research will analyse data collected from two months living and working on an organic farm in North Karelia, Finland and is discussed in relation to wider debates regarding conceptions of what is 'natural' and 'authentic', and how this feeds into the wider food economy and the phenomenon of agrotourism. The field research will be situated within the literature on the global foodscape, food security and alternative food networks such as La Via Campesina, fair trade and Italian solidarity purchase groups.

An exploration into the food culture of low socio-economic status populations in the UK

In the UK, a large body of statistical data presents a link between persons of low socio economic status and the consumption of unhealthy foods; a correlation often simplistically explained as a result either of a lack of education or of a lack of financial resources to purchase 'healthy' foods. This thesis will critically examine these assumptions through an ethnographic investigation into the eating patterns of people commonly assigned the label of 'low socio-economic status'. Beyond merely focusing on the limitations of research participants, it will seek to understand the cultural dynamics underlying the acceptance and rejection of certain foods, and how these are embedded in the context of the participants' daily lives. My research will take place in the areas of St Radigunds, Tower Hamlets and Buckland in Dover,

using these locations (which have been identified as amongst the 20% most deprived in England) as a platform to discuss the food habits of the lower income segment of the local population. I would like to make clear that my intention is not to essentialise my subject group as 'lower class' or 'low socioeconomic status'. Rather, I seek to access the views and internal logics of people typically defined as such from the outside and to find out how the foods they eat are implicated in social their relationships and relate to how they themselves reflect on their identities and lived experiences.

Veneration and Destruction: an exploration of attitudes towards the printed word during the English Reformation

I will look at how changing religious identities in 16th century England were negotiated through book construction and binding practices. During the English Reformation, there was an intense relationship between the continuation of the artistic heritage of the medieval period and its destruction, and equally complex relationship with the emerging printed word. I will use Gloucester Cathedral Archives or archives from Oxford colleges to explore changing attitudes towards materiality, and skills and the relationship between maker and object in a broader context of mass consumerism and changing religious identities and doctrines.

Unraveling the Fabric of Life: Tradition and modernity in Ladakhi Dress

For a long time anthropology looked at dress in a way that greatly detached it from the bodies and lives of the people wearing it. Clothing was relegated to the backdrop of ethnographies, seen as a consequence of the social position of the wearer. Today it is acknowledged that examining dress can play a key role in understanding a culture (e.g. Tarlo, 1996). Ladakh is a Himalayan region of India though very distinct from other parts of the country and bears more resemblance to Tibet. It is particularly relevant to this study, as it is a place that was long closed to foreigners. Today it is part of an increasingly globalized nation, and Ladakhi's clothing habits are changing accordingly. I propose to explore how clothing is used to show individuality and 'modernity' and the extent to which 'tradition' is still adhered to among different people. By focusing on Ladakh, I will argue that the categories of 'traditonal' and 'modern' in dress are constructed classifications that simplify social issues greatly, as they mean very different things to people of different ages, gender and social positions.

To what extent does museum imagery of British Neolithic societies in which gender is depicted correlate with the archaeological record?

I will conduct primary research in national and local museums across southern England to establish the extent to which museum imagery (reconstructed 2D images and 3D models) relating to the British Neolithic depicts an 'accurate' portrayal of gender in this period. The accuracy or otherwise of these depictions will be ascertained initially through a comparison with the archaeological record for the Neolithic period. However, I will also pursue a critical analysis of the archaeological record itself, in order to fully investigate how accurately gender in the archaeological record for the British Neolithic is depicted in museums.

Urban Resistance: Everyday resistance and agency in the Dharavi 'slum' of Mumbai

The Dharavi Slum, made famous by the blockbuster 'Slumdog Millionaire', is notoriously and erroneously referred to as the largest slum in the world. Here, utilising ideas on everyday resistance, I hope to consider a classic structure and agency debate, framed in the context of people's daily lives in Dharavi. Integrating with theory from scholars such as Gramsci, Marcuse, Scott and Bourdieu my fieldwork will pay special attention to the new wave of 'slum tourism' created and

delivered by Dharavi residents themselves and the economic productivity and great industry within the 'slum' to consider an urban as opposed to rural perspective on everyday resistance.

The Underdog Effect: Why have we evolved to support those at a competitive disadvantage, and why does this urge diminish as we become more invested in the outcome?

In my thesis I will be investigating the reasons why humans support the underdog, and what we can learn from those who don't. I then attempt to apply this to an evolutionary context in order to hopefully better explain why we have evolved this urge, and why we usually only support the underdog when we are not invested in the outcome. I also hope to conduct an experiment that looks at how people respond when they are affected by the outcome of a conflict; for example if the amount of money they receive is dependent on the winner.

English Folk Music and its Relation to the Wider Landscape

The mid-20th century saw a resurgence of traditional folk music in Britain. My thesis looks at the ways in which sense of place and English identity interact in the wider context of this comeback. Through exploring the different ways in which folk music is enacted, such as through melody, lyrics, performance, instrumentality and music events I aim to look at folk music's connections with the English landscape. Folk music's relationship with anti-modernism, environmentalism and notions of 'simple living' will also be discussed.

To what extent does humour contribute to the production and negotiation of social norms?

Humour studies have been largely overlooked by mainstream Anthropology until recently. In this dissertation I will look at how humour contributes to the production of social norms. I will do so by looking at humour in a highly formalised environment, stand up at the world's largest comedy festival (the Edinburgh Fringe). I will also use ethnographic accounts of humour during political crisis, and views of the comic performer as an outsider and cultural critic. I will ask questions such as does humour create and exclude social groups? and does humour reflect social norms or can it alter them?

Heritage, Gentrification and Creative Industries: a case study from Soho, London

This thesis will examine the anthropology of heritage, using the example of the changing urban landscape of Soho, London as a case study. The study will focus on the conflicting discourses of urban planners, developers, and community members around the past, the present, and the future of Soho. Through interviews and archival and documentary research, the thesis will explore the variety of ways in which the idea of heritage is imagined and used. The Soho example will be compared with parallel cases in other cities.

Photography & Memory in the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War was a traumatic and nationally symbolic event, which despite being heavily documented by photojournalists, was followed by a period of government-enforced censorship and taboo which impeded the transmission of memory from survivors of the war to younger generations. My dissertation will examine how photographs from the war are being used by modern generations who did not experience the war for themselves to create an emotional memory and strengthen their national identity. To accomplish this I will primarily undertake archival and library research, as much has been written in the last two decades about the effort to reclaim the events and memories of the Civil War.

A Stable Isotope Approach to Farming Ecology in the Indian Neolithic-Chalcolithic

The purpose of this study, to be conducted at the Research Lab for Archaeology and the History of Art, University of Oxford under the supervision of Dr. Julia Lee-Thorp and Dr. Amy Bogaard, is to utilise stable isotope analysis to investigate faunal ecology and human diet during the Neolithic at these sites. Such a study is of global significance for the understanding of human adaptive flexibility in the event of environmental change as a result of a hypothesised increase in aridity during this period. Isotopic analysis of this material is a well-developed and well-known technique. However, this work will be the first of its kind to be undertaken for material from this time period in India. This study will, therefore, also fill a significant gap in the scientific literature of this methodology and its global application.

From the Ottoman Antiquities Law to the Destruction of Nimrud: Law and the Movement of Antiquities out of Iraq, 1874-2015

This thesis will focus on artefacts that were exported from Iraq at different points in the time period in the title, and also a few before this period in order to understand the background to the initial introduction of the Ottoman Antiquities Law. Focusing on the different laws that were in place when the artefacts were exported at different times will allow this thesis to explore the changing engagement of governments with antiquities, and who 'owns' them. It will also cover recent archaeological damage in Iraq and the role of antiquities in the Islamic State.

Why do people destroy material culture? An anthropological consideration of *Damnatio Memoriae* and Byzantine Iconoclasm.

The influence and power of material culture, especially statues and images, on people has been a topic of interest in many disciplines, including history, sociology, psychology, art history and more. Some, if not most, of these have considered how this power incites and encourages people, collectively in most cases, to physically alter and destroy such pieces of material culture. Anthropology, however, has largely focused on the other side of such studies, concerning the preservation of material culture, the ethics connected with it, and the significance of maintaining heritage. Thus, by drawing together archaeological as well as anthropological approaches, I aim to explore why people destroy material culture in differing socio-cultural contexts. Although the destruction of material culture is socio-culturally specific, themes that have their roots in archaeological contexts, such as memory, which I will demonstrate using the phenomenon of *damnatio memoriae* in Rome and politics as well as theology, which I will elucidate using the example of religious iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire, become repeatedly apparent, especially when compared with appropriate ethnographic examples.

What causes the emergence of nationalism, neo-nationalism and racism in contemporary multicultural societies?

My thesis will investigate whether or not national identity and neo-nationalism manifest in modern society more prominently in situations of multiculturalism, and why those viewpoints develop. In particular, my study will look at the emergence of the English Defence League and its roots in the multicultural UK town of Luton, Bedfordshire. The study aims to grasp why, in such a multicultural and diverse urban setting, marginalised views such as racism manifest strongly in ethnic communities. My fieldwork will involve talking to local individuals from various ethnic groups, as well as members of the English Defence League, to understand their opinions and views and to gain an insight into the reasons for such dislike to have occurred.

What does phytolith analysis of cattle teeth recovered from the Mahilaka site, Northwest Madagascar, tell us about the diet of the cattle?

Phytoliths are the silica skeletons of certain plant cells which have distinctive sizes, shapes, and surface areas. They can be used as identifiers for particular plant taxa. Phytoliths can sometimes be found imbedded in the folds of ungulate teeth and reflect the diet of the animal. In July 2013, the excavation of the site of Mahilaka, which was occupied during the 11th - 15th Centuries AD in Northwest Madagascar, yielded bovine teeth associated with *Bos indicus*. They were situated in MHLK20, on a feature that abuts part of Mahilaka's stone perimeter wall, but is mostly situated outside it. Nine phytolith samples have been obtained from them. It is proposed to analyse them in order to identify the grazing cover on which animals fed and any changes over time.

The Cutting Edge - Use-Wear Analysis of Wessex Culture Daggers

I will be undertaking microscopic use-wear analysis of a number of daggers from Wessex culture burial contexts, primarily from the Ashmolean Museum and hopefully also the Wiltshire Heritage Museum or British Museum. Though similar analyses have been undertaken in the past, I hope to explore more widely the premise that functional and ritual purposes are not mutually exclusive, and demonstrate a clearer function for these daggers than has previously been supposed. To this end, the Ashmolean have offered me use of their Reflectance Transformation Imaging system, and have also agreed to the possibility of gathering chemical data via hand-held XRF, borrowed from the RLHA.

"Love me Tinder": Gender and self-presentational strategies in online dating

This research will explore the self-presentational strategies of online daters in a novel context of mobile-dating applications. Focusing on a sample of "Tinder" members, the study will explore gender differences in self-presentation by applying visual and textual content analysis methods to evaluate components of user profiles. Drawing on earlier gender and CMC research, this digital ethnography will explore identity construction through digital presentations of self and their relationship with culturally dominant ideologies of gender.