

Interview with Dr. Will Meyer, 2012-2013 IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow

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Dr. Will Meyer is currently the Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Buffalo, SUNY. He received a Bachelor's of Science with honors in Anthropology from Mercyhurst University in Erie, Pennsylvania. Will attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for his graduate work, earning his Doctorate of Philosophy in Anthropology. Utilizing multiple disciplines, Dr. Meyer explores the interactions of gender and landscape in Southern Burgundy during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Dr. Meyer, what are your current research interests and goals, and what projects are you currently working on?

Before we begin, please call me Will. I didn't come up through programs where such titles were required and, I have to confess, haven't quite grown comfortable with my own title. Besides, I think of students as my junior colleagues. It is tough to remember this collegial relationship when you are expected to call me "Dr. Meyer" and I get to call you by your first names. So, please, it's simply Will. Now, onto your question...

My overall interest is in how people, both in the past and in the present, interacted and continue to interact with structures inherited from the past. Such interactions involve the physical structures of the landscape — in an iterative process that I call "landscape syncretism" — as well as conceptual structures, like gender.

As I discussed in my IEMA talk earlier this year, my dissertation was an exploration of landscape syncretism in southern Burgundy, focusing on the long-term "life histories" of burial mounds first constructed in the late Bronze and early Iron Ages. This project brought together a traditional approach to archaeology — including a large amount of field survey — with a consideration of folklore, archaeological historiography, and ethnography dedicated to trying to understand contemporary interactions with the protohistoric tumuli at the heart of my study. What emerged was a complex story of transformations, multiple existences, remembering and forgetting, and landscape conflict. Perhaps most interesting in terms of mapping my professional way forward, I came face to face with an ethical dilemma that faces many archaeologists as we seek to incorporate postmodernity and postcolonialism into our practice: how to navigate the very tricky path between the archaeologists' commitment to historical preservation and the needs of rural people to make a living from the land.

The project I am currently designing is an extension of my dissertation work, both materially and conceptually. A recurrent theme in my earlier research, one that shaped my dissertation, was the poor quality of data about the tumuli themselves, and the general paucity of early Iron Age data for my study area (despite the importance of the region to studies of the late Iron Age). In my new project — what I am currently calling the "Farms as Repositories of the Material Past (FARM-Past) Initiative" — I will focus on improving the quality of data about three specific tumulus complexes. In so doing, I hope to provide effective "anchors" or "attractors" for intensive survey, using protohistoric cemeteries in much the same way that Tina Thurston has used medieval churches in her own landscape research. The principal goal of this intensive survey will be to identify an important feature of Iron Age landscapes that remains virtually unknown in our project area: farmsteads. The FARM-Past initiative will use GIS-assisted predictive modeling, together with a series of remote sensing and geochemical techniques, to execute targeted surveys in the areas around the tumulus "anchors" I mention above. The identification of ancient farmsteads will not only provide a more complete picture of the Iron Age landscape(s) of this region. It will also allow me to examine a hypothesis that has never been systematically tested: that the farmsteads of the region's pre-Roman past are those still in use today. If this proves to be the case, the value of the "traditional farm" will be shown to far exceed its modern productive potential. Farmsteads are likely to contain a great deal of "tangible heritage" in the form of buried structures and artifacts that are directly threatened by changes to rural land use. This threat to patrimony is an ecological concern that I have already presented upon extensively and written about.

In addition to this work in Burgundy, I continue to be active in directing the excavations of the Iron Age port city of

Lattes (ancient Lattara), near Montpellier, on the southern coast of France. This year, with Dr. Michael Dietler (of the University of Chicago), I will conclude the excavation of a large, Greek-style courtyard house dated to the late 4th to early 3rd centuries BCE. This is the largest and earliest such structure known in the Western Mediterranean, and it is one of a number of contemporaneous courtyard houses in the port-side quarter of Lattes. Once we have completed this year's excavation, we will produce a volume on this architectural development — on its form, its social import, and its role in early urbanism in the region — as part of the Lattara series. My own contribution to this volume will likely focus on the importance of drainage structures to the development of these houses, an ecological topic that has captured my interest in recent years. As we finish up our current work at Lattes (ending an intellectual era), the rest of the junior staff and I are working to map out a future for the site and its associated museum, trying to ascertain how best to use the unique resources offered by Lattes to answer a new generation of archaeological questions.

While these two projects occupy most of my time and take up much of my research energy, I think that everyone has a “some day” project that they think about in their down time. My own “some day” project involves the “Pilgrims’ Road” from Vézelay, in northern Burgundy, to Santiago de Compostella, in northwestern Spain — one extensive UNESCO World Heritage area. One leg of this medieval route passes below my field headquarters in Burgundy and a complementary leg passes through Montpellier. Given this proximity to the places I already work, my imagination has been piqued by contact with contemporary pilgrims and with the medieval shrines along the Road. One day I plan to undertake a project that combines ethnography — actually walking the Road and conducting research with its current “inhabitants,” stationary and otherwise — with ethnohistory and archaeology.

My goal will be to explore the very real possibility that similar itineraries existed in the remote past, perhaps even before the sites that make up the Road today (or those that made it up in the 13th century) were Christianized. Further, to help understand how syncretic — both religious and landscape — transformations might have occurred in the past, I would like to find out how the people who currently walk the road and/or live along it understand its complex and fluid landscapes, how they develop relationships to these landscapes and to one another, and how both people and landscapes are altered by the interaction.

Whose work did you find the most inspiring for your own?

Wow! Now this is a difficult question to answer...

First and foremost, I would be remiss if I didn't tell you that Carole Crumley and another of my graduate mentors, Silvia Tomášková (who will be here for the IEEMA conference this year), have inspired me the most. Carole's holistic “historical ecology” has provided a strong framework for my own research, both in Burgundy (where I work directly with her) and elsewhere. Silvia guided me further in exploring landscape approaches, as well as in examining feminist and gendered approaches to anthropology and archaeology. Especially important was Silvia's insistence that the value of gendered approaches to the past need not lie only in discussions of male and female bodies. These two professors had the strongest influence in shaping the scholar that I have become and — as colleagues and valued friends — Carole and Silvia continue to influence my work.

If you mean to ask about scholars whose writing has most influenced my work, I would say that there are quite a few. Chief among them is probably the ecologist Tim Ingold, whose “dwelling perspective” — a practical phenomenological approach to

understanding how humans live with and in their landscape — I greatly admire. If you were to tease out all of the quotes in my dissertation, you would probably find that I quoted Ingold the most.

Another strong influence on my scholarship are recent theories of materiality and what I affectionately refer to as the “new materialism.” Such theories make strange and sometimes uncomfortable bedfellows for Ingold (who deplores them), but I cannot seem to get away from them. Indeed, despite Ingold’s claims to the contrary, I see these approaches as part-and-parcel to a dwelling perspective. I have returned again and again to the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law. While I think that ANT is often over-deployed and misunderstood in anthropology, it does hold considerable promise for archaeology, which is — after all — deeply concerned with the relationships between people and things. Archaeologists like Peter Whitridge, now of Memorial University of Newfoundland and one of my early graduate committee members, have demonstrated how ANT might be applied successfully to studies of human-artifact relations. ANT grew out of science studies and I find the materiality work of other philosophers, historians, and ethnographers of science — like Andrew Pickering, Donna Haraway, and Karen Barad — equally inspiring.

Among the other authors who have greatly influenced me is Marc Bloch, one of the founders of the Annales school of history, whose *The Historian’s Craft* — with its focus on holism, interdisciplinarity, and the *longue durée* — should be required reading for any student of the past. Another such author is Keith Basso, whose ethnographic work among the Western Apache eloquently demonstrates how myth and landscape co-create one another. This emphasis on the importance of storytelling is something that Basso shares with Ingold, who suggests that archaeology is

yet another form of storytelling. This is a point of view that I have sought to explore, drawing on the writing of Walter Benjamin to think of the archaeologist not only as a storyteller, but also as a translator.

Two final authors whose work I will mention can be found a bit “closer to home.” Though she has retired from academic studies of archaeology, I continue to find the work of Barbara Bender incredibly inspiring. She challenged us to “think outside the box,” both in terms of archaeological interpretation and of archaeological method. I hope that I will challenge my own students to be similarly innovative. A similar “crosser of streams,” I also find the writing of the archaeologist Cornelius Holtorf (of Linnaeus University) immensely inspiring. In fact, it seems like every time I feel I’ve had an original idea about archaeological theory and interpretation, I find that Cornelius has already had the idea and written about it. Correspondence that I had with Cornelius when he was reviews editor for the *European Journal of Archaeology* suggests that he is not only brilliant, but also kind. I think this makes him a worthy role model.

Some would say the gender and landscape are specialties unto themselves. What made you want combine these theoretical schools? How has taking interdisciplinary approaches aided this?

I am going to take the liberty of putting together two questions that you asked separately, as the response to the two is related. You are, of course, quite right that landscape and gender are specialties unto themselves, with separate literatures and paradigms. Indeed, I can think of at least 10 different ways to “do” landscape and an equal number of ways to “do” gender!

But it’s important to keep in mind that many of these approaches — or, at least, many of the concerns that drive them — are shared by both landscape and gender specialists. Perhaps the most obvious among them

is a concern with the body. Landscape experts have considered everything from the physical needs and ecological effects of the human body to the sensory / phenomenological experience of dwelling in particular landscapes. Gender scholars have considered how bodies are viewed, interpreted, altered, and experienced. So it does not require a big stretch to begin thinking about how the deeply inflected and diverse bodies that gender scholars discuss move through the deeply inflected and diverse landscapes of landscape archaeologists and historical ecologists.

The question of “nature” is another point of intersection between the two specialties. Since the release of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in the 1940s, feminist scholars have worked to question what constitutes the “natural woman.” With all due respect to Aretha Franklin, it seems that there is very little about gender that is, in fact, purely “natural” if by that one intends to say “biological” and “inherent.” This is a fact that queer scholars have brought into even starker light. While gender scholars have been teasing apart “nature” in one arena, landscape archaeologists and historical ecologists have been questioning it in another: revealing that very little of the earth’s surface — if any at all — remains unaltered by human activity and picking at the notion that “nature” and “culture” are in fact separate entities. Once again, it doesn’t require us to make a great intellectual leap to see how the two specialties might inform and build upon one another.

Since I was an undergraduate, I have been fascinated by how different approaches to knowledge might be put together. I think we get more out of combining different intellectual approaches — whether different theories or different methods — than we could get out of any single approach. I tend to see the potential for synergy when different approaches are added together, opening up new intellectual ground and

new questions that might not be predicted in advance. I encourage my students to seek out the conceptual and methodological synergies that will allow them to break open their own projects and take them to different intellectual places.

In light of this general approach to knowledge, it is probably not surprising that I have sought to put landscape and gender together, nor that I try to design projects that walk the line between archaeology and ethnography.

What have been the most rewarding aspects of the IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow position? What have been the most challenging?

One of the most rewarding aspects of the IEMA position has been that I have had the time, resources, and interlocutors to consider many of the ways that landscape and gender might intersect and inform one another. This was something that I needed: as a junior scholar, the more time one has to elaborate her/his intellectual position the better. I owe IEMA and its members a huge debt of gratitude for allowing me this time and for helping me think through the process.

Another rewarding aspect of my fellowship has been working with IEMA’s graduate students. Yours is a very rich and stimulating intellectual community. You are all working on or developing very interesting research projects and many of you are already very serious scholars — perhaps more serious than I will ever be! Our discussions in my graduate seminar have not only caused me to laugh (in my opinion, an underrated correlate to learning), they have also opened up new paths to thinking about “Landscape & Gender” even for me, who started a bit before you did. This has been incredibly exciting.

The easy answer to what has been most challenging about the period of my IEMA fellowship is: navigating the UB

on crutches. Having broken my leg last fall introduced a lot of difficulties and delays into the plan that I had for my time at IEMA, some of which I find myself confronting still.

Aside from that, one challenging — though also rewarding — aspect of being an IEMA Fellow has been the need to negotiate and translate among several different constituencies. Because the faculty and students of IEMA are not just anthropological archaeologists, I have been challenged to step out of my own “backyard,” to enter into new conversations, and to meet new people. For example, it was difficult to find speakers who would talk about the synergy of landscape and gender from the standpoint of Classics. Yet, having finally found the right people, I discover that they provide a valuable perspective quite different from my own. Thus, as I say, the challenge has come with its own reward.

In your opinion, what are some of the most successful interdisciplinary research projects in archaeology, and what about them in particular yielded positive results?

Again, I am immensely fond of Barbara Bender’s work. In addition to its experimentation with “other ways of telling” archaeological stories, I think that her Stonehenge volume reports upon one of the most successful interdisciplinary research projects in archaeology. Bender concerned herself not only with the history of the site itself, but also on later encounters with the site. She opened herself up to understanding the concerns and perspectives of the area’s contemporary inhabitants. And, importantly, she gave them a role in narrating the history and importance of Stonehenge. I think that as archaeology moves forward into the 21st century, we need to be extra careful to involve the public in our work in useful and meaningful ways. This is kind of daunting, as it means opening up our discipline and

its authority to critique. Bender’s work at Stonehenge (and her current, unofficial work outside the academy) faced this challenge and demonstrated the value of overcoming our intellectual reservations about working with the public.

I am also quite fond of the work that Peter Schmidt (of the University of Florida) has done in East Africa over the past 30 years. Schmidt was one of the participants in the School for Advanced Research symposium that led to the publication of Crumley’s *Historical Ecology: Cultural Knowledge and Changing Landscapes* (1994). In his contribution to the volume, Schmidt demonstrated how understandings of the landscape that developed in the Iron Age have impacted such things as deforestation and the spread of HIV today. In subsequent work, he has expanded upon these themes, indicating — among other things — how the loss of cultural memory that has resulted from AIDS mortality impacts the heritage landscape of the region. With an understanding of the past and the present as fundamentally linked, Schmidt effectively shows his readers that archaeology and ethnography can (and should) work hand in hand.

A final project that I will mention is the study of Maya salt production and salt-producing landscapes undertaken by Heather McKillop (of Louisiana State University). I am interested in McKillop’s study, in part, because I am fascinated by the history and prehistory of salt production (indeed, I nearly focused on this in my own dissertation work). I am also fond of McKillop’s work because some portion of it involves submerged sites and, having worked in the waterlogged lowest levels at Lattes for so long, I am curious about how others meet the challenge of working with wet and waterlogged sites. McKillop’s study is effective as an interdisciplinary project, however, because she has been able to integrate a large amount of information about climate change and sea-level rise

with ethnographic information about the craft of salt production and archaeological information about the locations of this production in the past. It is very exciting and promising work.

Having recently completed your dissertation, do you have any advice for graduate students?

Indeed, I do... Some days it feels like I have too much advice for current graduate students! But I will limit myself to a few observations and suggestions, nearly all of which fall under the heading of “be practical and think ahead.” Much of this advice also falls under the heading of “do as I say, not as I did... learn from my mistakes.”

First — and I direct this advice specifically towards first- and second-year students — invest in a reference manager and start to use it as early as possible. Programs like EndNote and RefWorks are relatively easy databases to manage that will vastly improve the quality of your academic life. To have all of your notes organized in one place is, itself, quite valuable. The real value of these programs, however, is that they help you to cite sources and generate bibliographies simultaneously, as you write. As the amount of written work required from you begins to grow, you’ll come to appreciate the amount of time and effort you can spare on trying to recover your own citations and produce your own bibliographies (perhaps in several different styles during the same semester). I direct this advice towards the junior grad students specifically because reference managers are most effective when you begin them early. They can still be effective if set up later, but it will take more effort on your part to enter your “backlog” of references and notes.

Second, have a goal. Don’t just be in grad school because it is the logical next step in your academic development. Learning for learning’s sake is beautiful and important,

but in today’s political and hiring climate, it is not terribly practical. Start to formulate an idea now of where you’d like to be in five years, then in ten years. What kinds of projects would you like to work on? Where? And with whom? Cruise the AAA, AIA, and SAA job postings from time to time to see what employers are looking for... How might you fit into these positions? The details of your plan will no doubt change over the course of your graduate career, but — to be most effective as a graduate student and to get out in a timely manner — you need to know what you’re working towards, and to select a project and committee members who will help you to reach that goal. Believe it or not, the dissertation will not be final step in most of your academic lives... it is never too early to think about and plan what will lie beyond.

Third, take advantage of the resources available to you now. This is a moment where — while still keeping your long-term goal in mind — you can explore several different topics and approaches... perhaps the final moment for a while. So you should take this opportunity to talk to the non-archaeologist professors in your department. Given that each of us has to work with living communities who are interested (to varying degrees) in what we dig, I personally feel that every archaeologist should sit in at least one ethnography class. Maybe it’s a good idea to sit with the physical anthropologists for a while and think about human bodies, their limitations and potentials. Anthropological archaeologists should take courses in Classics and vice versa, and maybe it’s a good idea to go outside of archaeology, anthropology, and Classics to take courses in geography or the fine arts. While I know that time is at a premium for you, each of these different resources will greatly improve the kind of scholar that you are, offering you valuable new perspectives and expanding your “intellectual flexibility.”

Another place where many of us can use new perspectives is in facilitating and evaluating our writing. As you know, I tried to get a Writing Workshop going last semester that never really got off the ground. While it doesn't have to be as formal as the workshop I had in mind, you will find that writing groups — and particularly small groups that have people from the different subdisciplines — are a fantastic way to help you write in a timely manner and to improve the quality of what you're writing. It is okay to have only one kind of archaeologist on your writing group, but you won't necessarily challenge yourself to write for a broader public. You run the risk of using turns of phrase that are taken for granted in our discipline, but entirely opaque to an outsider, even to other scholars. In the end, no matter how your writing group is composed, you will benefit from have a few extra sets of "critical eyes" pass over your paper, from learning to give and receive constructive feedback, and from working through multiple drafts of nearly everything you write.

A further piece of advice: each of you should actively think about teaching. Many of you are on an academic track, meaning that most of you will probably be called upon to teach one day. So why not start building your pedagogical toolbox now? Take note of the teaching styles and texts that best work for you as a student. If you are assisting with a class, pay attention to the students' responses to lectures, media, readings, and assignments. What tricks does the professor use, if any, to keep students engaged? Could you use the same tricks? What might you do better (I don't suggest sharing this last part with most professors for whom you're working)? If you are lucky enough to teach your own course during your time at the UB, think about how you can integrate new technologies into your teaching and how you can design projects to take your students outside of the classroom. Even if you never get the chance to teach your own course, you

should think about what courses you would like to teach one day. Come up with a few course ideas and generate syllabi for them. When you are on the job market, you will be asked to share your thoughts about courses you might teach. By thinking about them well in advance, you will be able to present potential employers and students with course proposals that are much more "fleshed out" and enticing.

Finally — and this is a piece of advice that James Osborne provided to you last year — publish your work. Over the next few years you will be expected to write a number of pieces of varying lengths, often on different topics and from different perspectives. Many seminar and conference papers are quite good and well on their way to being published. Unfortunately, whether because they are busy or because they feel their approach is too remedial, many graduate students never go on to publish these papers. (I will confess that I am among the list of repeat-offenders here!) In today's hiring climate, you have to do everything possible to give yourself an edge and to make yourself attractive to potential employers. Publications seem to be the most effective means of doing both of these things. By carrying a few pieces through to publication during your graduate career (especially in peer-reviewed journals) you do a few different things: (1) you demonstrate that you are capable of sustained inquiry, (2) you show that you are serious enough to go through the process of submission, critique, and rewriting, and (3) you establish your own "intellectual coordinates," sketching out your scholarly perspective and outlining (through the works you cite) a network of scholars with whom you see yourself in conversation. Of all the suggestions that I have made here, I think that the advice to publish is the most important, and the one that I wish I had taken more seriously when I was a graduate student.

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Over the past 20 years, an important development in social theory has been the recognition that all human life is embodied. Part-and-parcel to this embodiment is an inescapable sexual connection to the non-human things of the world, with which the human body is in a state of constant interaction. The stage upon which such interactions occur is the landscape. How we act – and interact – on this stage is influenced by the different categories of identity to which we belong, including sex, gender, age, class, faction, and ethnicity. In other words, people have different experiences of and in the landscape depending upon their gender and other identities. Further, just as societies endow different kinds of body with different expectations, rights, and limitations, places on the landscape might also be gendered in similar ways. Such intersections of landscape and gender have been explored in archaeology's sister disciplines but remain relatively unexplored within archaeology itself. Where they have been looked at, however, these points of overlap have provided a much richer sense of life in the past, revealing complex heterogeneities in the landscapes and societies that we study. This symposium brings together archaeologists, art and architectural historians, and ancient historians whose expertise spans the length and breadth of Europe in order to build synergy between engendered and landscape perspectives. Drawing on case studies from the Palaeolithic to the Modern periods, we examine how people of different genders experienced the landscapes of the past and how specific places or elements within those landscapes became gendered.

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