

Conference Report: North East Graduate Archaeology Workshop, Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World, Brown University

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Attending the North East Graduate Archaeology Workshop at Brown University on 13 November 2010 was an absolute pleasure, and we are sure that we speak for all those who participated. Members of the Joukowsky Institute graciously hosted the event in their beautiful new facility on Brown's Providence campus. The workshop's goals were clear from the start: to foster professional networking between graduate students in archaeology and related disciplines, and to encourage the sharing of knowledge and resources between graduate communities in the northeast. Representatives from many institutions, including Boston University, Brown University, Bryn Mawr College, Harvard University, Rutgers University, SUNY at Albany, SUNY at Buffalo, UMass Amherst, and UMass Boston, gathered together to exchange ideas openly and without prejudice. In a large group each institution presented on the various aspects and strengths of their programs. In smaller discussion groups, graduate students and faculty engaged in very informal dialogues about a range of topics. All students were encouraged to share their ideas or to describe current research projects. The workshop was a unique opportunity to meet students of both similar and dissimilar interests, and from these beginnings, to form long-lasting professional friendships and networks.

Participants were encouraged to take part in two small afternoon discussion sessions, the choice based on their particular interests. Session topics included materials science, ancient economy, data visualization, complex societies and state formation, household archaeology, colonialism, landscape and survey archaeology, lithic technology and production, the archaeology of food, urbanism, and historical archaeology. The sessions on data visualization and household archaeology were particularly interesting and worth describing in further detail.

The students who met to discuss data visualization hailed from many different backgrounds and specialized in very different fields of archaeology. The session offered the participants an opportunity to talk about the techniques and methods involved with GIS, remote sensing, photogrammetry, statistical spatial analysis, and other types of data visualization. The diversity of the group encouraged participants to take a step back from the context of their own work and to look at cross-discipline issues involved with the expanding utilization of data visualization. Students shared their personal experiences with data

visualization, the open-table discussion effectively enlightening the group to a broader range of options in software, data sources, and equipment. All participants were able to take something away from the discussion, whether it was a suggestion regarding the use of different software, a useful book on surveying, or a recommended course to expand their knowledge of data visualization methods. Finding reliable sources of GIS and geophysical survey training was a hot topic; among several helpful suggestions were Harvard University's two week intensive GIS program course and the numerous online modules offered by Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI). Participants also discussed common problems, such as the difficulty and costliness of acquiring remote sensing data for use in archaeology. The technology of data visualization acted as a common language through which historical archaeologists were able to communicate effectively with Classicists and prehistoric archaeologists.

The group felt strongly that there should be some sort of standard for data collection across all fields of archaeology. Archaeologists use information collected from satellite images, total stations, or even measuring tape to preserve the past; we ought to strive for accuracy and precision across all disciplines, whatever the technique. The use of data visualization in archaeology is a rapidly expanding field and we shall soon reach a point at which every archaeologist (GIS specialist or not) will be required to have an active knowledge of these techniques. At the end of the session, Joukowsky student Clive Vella suggested the foundation of a Google Group to keep the conversation going between the participants, and to encourage continued cross-disciplinary cooperation. The discussion session and the formation of the Google Group are steps in the right direction.

The discussion group which focused on household archaeology was fascinating, thanks to its compelling illustration that both theory and methodology can be shared across quite different archaeological fields. The group consisted of a Roman archaeologist, a Bronze Age Greek archaeologist, two Neolithic archaeologists, and a historical archaeologist. On the surface, their academic interests could hardly have been more disparate, yet the discussion flowed easily. All present quickly realized how the theory of household archaeology could help in analyzing and understanding individual research problems. Neolithic and historical

archaeologists may form opposite ends of the archaeological spectrum; during the session, however, these scholars engaged in a most lively and enlightening discussion about each other's methods. Neolithic and historical archaeologists discovered that they shared interests, such as economic production, self-sufficiency, and integration into larger networks, despite the fact that they worked in different geological contexts and disparate time periods. In contrast, our Roman and Bronze Age Greek archaeologists had relatively little in common with regard to theory and methodology, despite initial expectations to the contrary. Both learned a great deal from each other, and from their Neolithic and historical colleagues. The energetic dialogue on the particulars of respective research projects was particularly interesting.

The North East Graduate Archaeology Workshop was a successful event. It provided an open forum for archaeologists of various backgrounds to voice their opinions, form professional networks, and discuss issues that are shared across archaeological and historical disciplines. We are very grateful to everyone at the Joukowsky Institute for their hospitality and their proficient management of the event, especially students Alexander Smith and Elizabeth Murphy and the director of the Institute, Dr. Susan Alcock. The students at Brown University believe that the event will be held again next year. We certainly hope so. The frequent organization of gatherings like this one would do much to enhance the quality of archaeological research and education in the northeastern United States.

Please consult the following websites for more information:

North East Graduate Archaeology Workshop: <http://proteus.brown.edu/negradworkshop/6461> (22 February 2011)

The Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World at Brown University:
http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute (22 February 2011)

For more information on joining the Archaeological Data Visualization group, please contact Clive Vella at clive_vella@brown.edu