
Central Gulf Coast Archaeological Society

A Chapter of the Florida Anthropological Society

www.cgcas.org



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November 2011



Editor: David Burns

November Meeting

Thursday November 17th

at

Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center
1800 Weedon Dr. NE, St. Petersburg, FL 33702

7 – 8 PM.



Re-Creating the Cosmos: Cycles of Time and Creation in Prehispanic Maya Texts

This program will feature Gabrielle Vail, Ph.D. Professor Vail is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Anthropology at New College of Florida in Sarasota specializing in Pre-Columbian studies, with an emphasis on the iconography and hieroglyphic texts of the screenfold manuscripts (codices) painted by the prehispanic Maya. She has done collaborative research with colleagues on the Borgia group of codices from central Mexico and postclassic murals from the Maya area, as well as ethnohistoric documents from the Maya region. These studies contribute to our understanding of the ideology and religion of Mesoamerica and of interactions among Maya and central Mexican cultures during the Postclassic period.

Pre-register for this event by visiting www.pinellascountyextension.org, clicking the “Online Registration” button, and then choosing the “Weedon Island” tab. You may also call 727-453-6500.

The 2011-2012 Lecture Series

11/17/2011 **Gabrielle Vail**, Ph.D. Re-Creating the Cosmos: Cycles of time and Creation in Prehispanic Maya Texts
12/15/2011 **Tom Pluckhahn**, Ph.D. Competition and Cooperation at Crystal River.
1/19/2012 **Jason Wentzel**, M.A. Towards an Archaeology of Florida Tourism.
2/16/2012 **Larry Clayton**, Ph.D. TBA
3/15/2012 **James Strange**, Ph.D. TBA
4/19/2012 **Clete Rooney**, M.A. TBA

Meet the Research Center's First Resident



Our first resident of the Research Center has been a regular at the maintenance area for a long time. He is a very friendly tortoise who has dug a new burrow just outside the Research Center's door. Those of us who are working there have nicknamed it "C.B. Moore". For those of you not familiar with the expeditions of C.B. Moore, he traveled throughout Florida in the late 1800's and early 1900's, exploring and excavating archaeological sites all over Florida and elsewhere. His main mode of transportation on the waterways was a boat named the Gopher. Thus, the connection with our new mascot's name.

Next time you visit the Research Center, you may be lucky enough to see him roaming his domain. By the way, he loves watermelon.

It's that Time of Year!

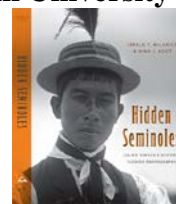
This year's CGCAS Christmas party is planned for December 10, 2011. It will be held at the AWIARE Research Center located at 1500 Weedon Island Drive. It will feature the usual dog gift exchange as well as a potluck meal. Since this is on county property, no alcoholic beverages are allowed.

Dues are Due

The annual payment of membership dues for CGCAS is in January of each year. Thinking of Christmas, it would be a good time to give CGCAS the gift of your continued membership.

Dues can be paid through Paypal or by mailing a check to Cheryl Shaughnessy, the Membership Secretary at 6100 62nd Ave., N. Lot 63, Pinellas Park, FL 33781.

New Book from University Press of Florida



Hidden Seminoles: Julian Dimock's Historic Florida Photographs
by
Jerald T. Milanich and Nina J. Root

In April 1905, A. W. Dimock, a New York financier, and his thirty-one-year-old son Julian, motored their boat across Chokoloskee Bay. They docked at George Storter's store in the small outpost of Everglade on the southwest coast of Florida, at the very edge of Anglo civilization.

At Storter's, the Dimocks saw several Seminole Indians who came from their homes in the interior of south Florida to shop and trade for household goods. Survivors of three wars, these proud people kept to themselves. Julian, an accomplished photographer, set up his camera and expressed an interest in learning more about their lives. Over the next five years he would amass an unprecedented photographic record of the Seminole people and their surroundings. Now archived at the American Museum of Natural History, his six thousand glass negatives, unique for the time in that they were not taken for the tourist trade, are a national treasure.

Milanich and Root relate the adventures of the Dimocks among the Seminole Indians at a time when few whites ventured into the Everglades and the Big Cypress Swamp. Reproduced in rich duotones, Julian's photographs reveal fascinating aspects of Seminole Indian life in the depths of the Florida peninsula.

Details: 224 pages, 8x10 Cloth: \$39.95; ISBN 13: 978-0-8130-3696-0

Scientific American Article about the First Americans



Images by Viktor Deak(l) and Tyler Jacobsen(r)

The November 2011 issue of Scientific American has an extensive article entitled "The First Americans: Mounting Evidence Prompts Researchers to Reconsider the Peopling of the New World."

Archaeologists long thought the first Americans were the Clovis people, who were said to have reached the New World some 13,000 years ago from northern Asia.

But fresh archaeological finds prove that humans reached the Americas thousands of years before that.

These discoveries, along with insights from genetics and geology, have prompted reconsideration of where these pioneers came from, when they arrived and what route they took into the New World.

DIGITAL ARCHAEOLOGY: Are We Alchemists?

By Jack Harvey

Anthropology and archaeology aren't exact sciences like physics or chemistry. While our scholarly papers are often loaded with numerical tables and charts, these are usually just statistics describing particular sites or groups of areas. They aren't empirical data from reproducible experiments. Yet the various sub-fields of anthropology attempt to be more exact than their roots in the social sciences.

Physics and chemistry have such a past: alchemy. While we usually think of alchemy as trying to turn lead into gold, it had much broader goals ranging from medicines to metaphysics. The old Greeks said the elements were earth, air, fire and water. Alchemists built the craft basis for modern chemistry and led to an understanding of atoms. They learned much about what could be combined or separated in repeatable experiments, and they correctly identified many true elements.

Computers are used extensively in archaeology today to prepare the numerical tables and charts for scholarly papers. They turn the raw data from site material analysis into useful statistical summaries. But they aren't able to predict future finds except in the broadest approximations. Yet accurate prediction is one of the hallmarks of hard science.

Modeling is a flexible word. It may mean building a tiny ship replica, or displaying new fashions. But there is another: "Simulate a process or concept with the aid of a computer." A human society might be considered a process. Could the operation of a tribe or clan be simulated on a computer? Could the population growth and movement of a hunter-gatherer group be predicted?

Experts can often predict the existence of an archaeological site by observing the living botanicals in the area because human activities can affect the species found. The gumbo limbo tree, *Bursera simaruba*, often indicates human habitation in Florida because it thrives in disturbed areas. John G. Beriault has identified several other species diagnostic of habitation. While not directly expanding our knowledge of aboriginals, it's a valuable craft. Someday, it might be part of a computer simulation predicting hunter-gatherer movements.

A dictionary definition of *craft* is "An art, trade, or occupation requiring special skill, especially manual skill." While it might be a push to claim manual skills for archaeology, there certainly is much art and special skill required. You don't become a registered professional archaeologist simply by claiming to be one. Recognized training and some level of experience are required. Craft guild apprenticeship provided training and standards. Here we have a bit in common with the alchemists. They too had arts and skills often acquired by apprenticeship under old masters.

The transition from a craft like alchemy to a hard science like chemistry isn't assured. The crafts of woodworking and masonry advanced greatly in recent millennia but hardly became sciences. Still, some archaeologists are exploring how computers can be used for more than summarizing conventional dig data. Jennifer Lewin and Mark Gross of the University of Colorado have used computer modeling to discover and resolve ambiguities in raw site data. Google "Resolving Archaeological Site Data With 3D Computer Modeling" for their paper.

Other authors have used the terms, *computational archaeology* and *archaeological informatics* to describe similar work. There is even an international organization, "Computer Applications in Archaeology" (CAA), with annual conferences. See www.caaconference.org for details.

But in spite of the work explored by CAA, useful digital archaeological techniques seem to me to be currently limited to exposition of data or sites. Virtual Reality displays may make it easier to grasp an author's idea of the meaning of data, but it's hard to find examples of scientific prediction.

Why is this? Surely it would be useful to say with some certainty when and how a particular aboriginal tribe grew strong enough to dominate a region. Many factors influence this, such as food sources, geography, weather, tribal practices and technology or crafts. It's rumored that the Calusa dominated the Tequesta, but why not the other way around?

Could computer simulation shed light on such questions? When attempting to simulate a process with a computer program, you break the process into small bits and calculate what happens to each probabilistically. This is sometimes called the *Monte Carlo Method* and was used extensively during the Manhattan Project to simulate a nuclear explosion. In an archaeological simulation, you might define a bit as a person and then flip a coin (digitally) to decide if it is male or female. The computer program follows each bit of the tribe throughout individual lives, using probability determinants to decide who they marry, number of offspring, etc. The tribe is then the sum of all its bits (people). And of course the probabilities are determined by factors such as food supply, land, hurricanes, cultural rules and skills.

The simulation program must also include competing tribes with different determinant factors. Clearly, it's a daunting project and the programming skills required are not likely to be found in university anthropology departments. Realistically, simulation of the life of an entire tribe is far too difficult for the first project in archaeology modeling. Perhaps we could start by trying to simulate migration of pottery decoration styles. Can a computer program predict what mix of sherd types will be found at a site based on its location and age? This might be a testable hypothesis.

Like alchemy experiments, data for the all important determinant factors that can make archaeology computer simulations accurate are currently being gathered, one artifact at a time.

If we are alchemists, will we make the breakthrough into a predictive science?

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The Society

Central Gulf Coast Archaeological Society (CGCAS) is an association of amateur and professional archaeologists and concerned citizens dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Florida's great cultural heritage. CGCAS is a chapter of the Florida Anthropological Society (FAS) and is a state chartered non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible.



Central Gulf Coast Archaeological Society

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Membership

Membership is open to anyone with a sincere interest in the cultural past of Florida and who is dedicated to the understanding and preservation of that heritage

Amateurs, professionals and concerned citizens are welcomed as members. Membership is yearly and all dues are payable in January. Contact Cheryl Shaughnessy at the address above or at shaughnc@tampabay.rr.com.

	Dues
Regular	\$20.00
Student	10.00
Family	25.00
Life	150.00

