

Answering learners' questions on Week 1

In May 2015, several members of the course team met and recorded a video answering some of the questions that had been posed in *Shipwrecks and Submerged Worlds: Maritime Archaeology*. The members of the team who took part were:

- Dr Julian Whitewright
- Crystal Safadi
- Rodrigo Ortiz
- Thomas Dhoop
- Dr Fraser Sturt

Transcript

FRASER: Hi! This is a new part of the MOOC for us, in that we realise this is only a four-week course and, as such, we won't have answered all of your questions or interests within the material we can put online. As such, we've been looking through the comments and we'll do this each week, and we're going to try and answer some of the key questions that've been coming up. Now some of these are going to be quite tricky and we can't predict what they're going to be, but we'll do our best. And in that light, I'm going to hand over to Julian for the first question.

JULIAN: OK, thanks, Fraser. So this is in relation to step 1.9 from Salim and I'm going to ask this to Thom, which is **"How do the names of boats and the parts of boats vary through time and space and from place to place and maybe from Europe to the Middle East to China, from the Roman period to nowadays?"** So, quite a big sweep of time and space.

THOMAS: I think the short answer to that, Julian, is that I simply don't know... but I can talk a little bit about how the names changed from language to language nowadays, and I can say that, for example, the word for keel is the same as it is in English, as it is in Dutch, as it is in French, as it is in German. But there are also significant differences, so the word for 'futtock'

in Dutch would be 'oplange', in German would be 'auflange', in French would be 'allangee' - it all means futtock in English. I don't know what it would be in Spanish, for example?

RODRIGO: Corlena.

THOMAS: Corlena, yeah. So there are significant differences today. And in the northwest Europe in the medieval period people did speak some sort of common dialect amongst each other, so it is reasonable to assume that especially seafaring terms would have been commonly understandable, but beyond that I think it would be a very interesting research topic for a historian, to really expand that timescale and speciality of that question.

FRASER: And now it's Thom with one for me, I think.

THOMAS: Yes...

FRASER: No! I'm wrong!

CRYSTAL: That's for you to read to me!

FRASER: Ah - ok! So, ok, in which case, you can see we're very organised! So, Maritime Archaeology - this is from Michael Smith - which is, "**Maritime archaeology is the study of man-made objects, cultures, et cetera in and around the sea. So an aircraft in the water falls under the purview of the maritime archaeologist, but if the same plane crashed in the jungle, it would be a job for simply an archaeologist.**" and Mike quite rightly asks "**Should that just be a 'terrestrial archaeologist'? Are there any 'aeronautical archaeologists'?**" Crystal, do you fancy having a go at that?

CRYSTAL: Yes, but I'm not going to answer about the aeronautical archaeologists, because I think I posted a link for Michael to see a page about it. But what I can say about mostly is in fact the environment where archaeologists work, so if you find an object on land, or in the sea, it entails that there are different archaeologists and different specialists who will be

looking at that. But at the same time we have many maritime objects on land as well, so it's not really about differentiating between terrestrial archaeologists and maritime archaeologists, but just considering all archaeology as one and starting from that seeing what specialists need to look at the actual artefacts, we can. Yeah?

FRASER: Fair enough, fair enough.

THOMAS: OK. I think now it's my turn... So, Fraser, this question's from Hans van de Bunte, from step 1.12 and he asks **"It seems that communities in Southeast Asia, Borneo, have not been calibrated enough to fit any timeline?"**

FRASER: And this is a very fair comment and a number of you may be interested that the first group of people to have been through the MOOC have shaped what's on the timeline and this is something we would really like to address. So, absolutely there are gaps in our timelines, in terms of how different terminologies and what we might call 'dated phases' link up. So, for example, you're absolutely right Southeast Asia is poorly represented on our timeline and this isn't so much to do with lack of calibration. There is very good work going on there, although I would say in a lot of areas we do need more in the way of accurately dated sites to help us link things up and move beyond broad regions.

Similarly, in North America there is a really detailed archaeological record, which has had considerable study, including a variety of terminologies that we haven't included on the MOOC, so far. Now our idea is that this is a live project which is going to keep on going and we'd like to see this build up and we'd like to use you, as a community of people involved in this to add in that extra data, because it's quite a big task to do a history of the globe through all time, but it's something we'd quite like to do over the lifetime of this MOOC, so you're absolutely right in that we haven't included it. There is data that could be included and we'd like people to help us add it in. OK.

RODRIGO: OK, so I'm going to ask Crystal another question. This is from Jackie Hart, step 1.12. So, **"Can you advise if the system of floating reed islands, inhabited by Marsh Arabs, have been around for any known period of time?"**

CRYSTAL: Well, it's quite difficult really to link certain cultures, certain practices, back in time, but there are definitely similarities, so the Marsh Arabs and the floating reed islands sometimes are linked to the Ancient Sumerians, but this really requires a certain historical research and of course like the practices of floating, of people living on floating islands and so on, it goes back so much in time, but in order to really know the link between different phases of time that requires research and it's definitely something for anyone who's interested to take on.

FRASER: Absolutely, I'll just say that floating islands are sort of a technological or adaptive capacity of humanity and something we see across the globe from South America, Lake Titicaca, through to the lochs of Scotland, we have different forms of floating islands, so this is a strategy that people have adopted at various points in time and so there is quite a complex story to tell about living on the water as well as moving over it.

CRYSTAL: I have a question, but I'm not sure for whom... [laughter] So, it's by Debbie Wareham, she's asking, "**I was wondering about the cognitive ability required to built a boat?**" So, Julian, I think... [Laughter]

JULIAN: It is a brilliant question and I think it's one that we are struggling, not struggling with as a discipline, but it's the thing we want to understand, isn't it? The thought processes that go through people's heads when they're building, I don't know, a dugout canoe or they're building an enormous ship and how they design those vessels, create the parts that go between them. I think we're quite good at understanding how the bits fit together, but maybe less good at understanding how people are coming up with the shapes and the rationales and things like that for designing them. Which is a longwinded way of saying, I don't know the answer...

RODRIGO: Well, I'll probably add to like getting to acquire all the materials as well takes a lot of effort to think about because you have to pick out a specific log, have a different type of wood, the type of tools you are using, so it's a very complex process, not only about building

it, but you're thinking it's for a reason and it has objectives. So you have to think of all the steps before thinking about a simple design.

JULIAN: And I don't know how it fits in with our understanding of other varieties of modern humans...

FRASER: Exactly, that's the really tricky part of this. And it is a really interesting question because of that in that, as you'll know in the steps for this week, we've said that the earliest evidence for seafaring or sea-going certainly goes back around 800 000 years and we think it's probably via raft so maybe even natural rafts are being used.

The question asks about a boat which is obviously about displacement rather than buoyancy and that may be a different cognitive capacity to work out that this is a means of floating and directing yourself over the water. A tricky part archaeologically is that the archaeological record for boats really begins in the Mesolithic in terms of physical remains of logboats largely from this period and we can hypothesise about the sorts of boats, which may exist, such as skin boats for earlier periods. The difficulty is extending that hypothesis beyond our own species effectively, beyond anatomically modern humans. We don't know and it would be very hard to find evidence for, but it is interesting to consider if any of our precursors, any of our ancestors beyond that sort of lineage really have that capability. So, to those interested in the Palaeolithic that's going to be a big thing because that's a real cognitive shift.

THOMAS: But also in the late Middle Ages, where we have the transition from clinker to carvel, people have really hammered home the cognitive gap that had to be bridged between clinker and carvel. Well, this is something that more lately and, I think, especially within this department, people have started to question that the cognitive abilities for building clinker and the transition into carvel would have actually been much closer together, so we're actually starting to bridge that gap now.

JULIAN: I think those themes that Thom mentioned build on the next **question from Susan Brett about different types of construction for Roman ships and about frame-first ships and shell-first ships and whether some could have allowed bigger**

ships to be built and I think the work being done here is illustrating that the sequence that you build the ship in doesn't necessarily limit the size of the vessel or the purpose of the vessel, I think we'd probably agree on that, wouldn't we?

THOMAS: I think so, yeah.

JULIAN: But go back to that question in terms of the Roman ships and the Portus MOOC, we're going to look at those a little bit more next week, there's a couple of steps dedicated on Ancient Mediterranean ships and boats. And the question asked about the interior of these being fitted out for carrying marble columns or wine amphora and that's absolutely right, I think things would have been fitted out according to their purpose. But also the shapes of boats are different depending on what they're going to do, so a vessel to operate in a shallow river is going to have a big, flat bottom on it, maybe, something that's being used for harbour dredging is going to look very different to something that's carrying a big obelisk from Egypt to Rome. So it's important not to confuse a building tradition with all the hull-shapes being exactly the same size and that's something we see in the Medieval period as well, isn't it?

THOMAS: Yeah, there's some discussion as well as to the packaging and how that influences ships being built and ship performance, for example, the transport of grain across the northern Baltic Sea. In the Middle Ages, would they have it in bulk or would they have it in sacks, which is if you're having to transport it in bulk, then the grain, or salt for that matter, will start acting like a liquid within your ships. And once your ship starts heeling in the wind, your salt will shift and your ship will essentially heel over. So you would have to either stamp it down very hard so that it acts as a solid within your ship, or you would actually have to package it in sacks and people have now started looking at actual packaging materials in the Middle Ages and how that worked.

FRASER: Brilliant! And that brings us on to the final question which is in some ways a classic and a really difficult one as well, so we're going to all think about this, which is **why did people start to explore other parts of the world in the first place? Is it hunger? Is it curiosity?** So, basically, why? So any thoughts on the why? And this is a big question in archaeology.

RODRIGO: Yeah, well, I definitely think that depends on the context and where, like what type of culture you're studying and you have to look at the landscape as well so if people are running out resources they'll have to look for other resources in different parts and then they'll start exploring in a sense, but there's also human curiosity which you can't rule out just simply because people are very curious in general and they do very, very adventurous stuff. They think, okay let's take a boat let's see how far I can go and see if I come back.

JULIAN: Particularly if they can see things on the horizon. [Yeah]. I'm just going to go over there.

RODRIGO: People, they were very skilful as well so we have to think in different terms than what we would do nowadays, you know, because if you see, if you're looking out at the sea and you say it looks dangerous, maybe somebody that would be living on the coast would say, well, it's not really dangerous. I can really go out, and come back without any troubles, so it depends on the context.

THOMAS: Plus a voyage like that might build reputation and prestige of that might elevate him in the regards of the community that he lives in. I think in the Bronze Age there's some discussion about that.

FRASER: Yeah, absolutely, and there's a lot about knowledge and power which comes in with movement which we can't see really being discussed from what we'd see as potentially the late Neolithic onwards really and that's because that's when we can begin to see these things happen in the archaeological record. And Rodrigo's absolutely right, this means some really interesting things written about this in different periods with different drivers really, so if we look at the really early expansions into sort of what might be seen as almost pristine environments one of the big things people have picked out on is ecological homogeneity in that it's a lot easier to know what you find in a coastal strip and to follow that strip along the coastline and move quite rapidly than it is to traverse inland where your ecologies change really quickly and you'd have to adapt your technologies and work out what you can eat and how to live and so in some ways that expansion may be sort of accelerated along coastal

fringes and then slow down within interior spaces. So, the map of the world becomes quite different when you begin to think of it like that. There's a very good book by James Steel called 'The Colonisation of Unfamiliar Landscapes', which takes on some of these ideas which is worth reading, if we're allowed to say a single book, like that.

Okay, well, in which case we know this has been very informal and probably full of all sorts of errors, but we're deliberately keeping this as a single take and light approach to answering these questions. And on that note we thought we should really highlight what has been the most commented on or used link that's been provided and this is thanks to Felice Goldfinch who shared 'The sound of theory', which I hadn't seen before by Shanks and Garfinkel, which is well worth looking at. If you want to look at this go to step 1.11, which is the theory step and you can then see it on there.

So we hope we've helped by answering some of your questions. Do feel free to pose them directly through the comments boards as we go through the additional weeks, and we'll try and pick up on them and make sure that we answer them. So, thank you very much.