

Material Culture and History



Time and Location

Mondays, 5:10-8:10

Keene-Flint Hall, Faculty Library

Historians of both the Middle Ages and the modern period integrate the material evidence with other source materials, particularly with written sources, which has implication for the theory, methods, and teaching of history. In that respect, the study of material culture is both inter- and transdisciplinary. Therefore, the goal of this course is not comprehensive coverage. Instead, a selection of relevant topics was made with the purpose of inviting discussion of the ways in which archaeology and material culture studies can be used for historical analysis.

Since the challenge for historians of the Middle Ages and of the modern period is to understand the subject of their studies through a multitude of sources, this course will offer a window into the realm of possibilities offered by the study of material culture. One way to do that is through historical archaeology, a form of historical inquiry in which genuinely archaeological sources (i.e., sources obtained through excavation) are tied up within a framework of parallel records, including written and pictorial sources. Although as an academic discipline, archaeology came into existence in several European countries and in the United States in the nineteenth century, historical archaeology (especially its sub-species known as medieval archaeology) is relatively new. Its beginnings are tied to research on one of the earliest Spanish settlements established in Florida in the late 16th century, St. Augustine. Today, no serious historian can ignore the great contributions of archaeology to the study of the Middle Ages or the early modern period without the risk of missing a fundamental category of sources. Meanwhile, historians of the modern age have become interested in “things” because commodities, luxuries, scientific tools, ethnographic specimens, or unique art objects, move across vast geographical areas, even continents. Such objects also embody “otherness”: the unknown, the different, and what is often inaccurately called “the exotic.” Scholars have thus turned to material culture (i.e., material sources not obtained through excavation) to understand the subtleties of historical change. Material artefacts are used to explain the connectivity of what has been called “the first global age.” American historians, for example, have noted that Early American furniture became the touchstone of a peculiarly American cultural identity, owing to an emphasis on its divergence from English models. Silver was treated similarly.

Preservation bled into recreation, with such ambitious statements of cultural pride as the town of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, created from 1927 onward. A growth of interest in early American material culture in the later 19th and the first part of the 20th century was stimulated by nostalgia, a sense of republican virtue expressed by modesty, and cultural anxiety in comparison with Europe. However, much like in the case of historical archaeology, this interest in material culture arose from an emerging realization that knowledge of certain sectors of American society in history is only possible by means of artifacts, whether in combination with written sources, or without them.

The course has three objectives. The first is to introduce you to some of the major issues of materiality and history: agency and engagement; the relation between texts and archaeological evidence; memory and material culture; urban archaeology; zooarchaeology; mortuary archaeology; and ethnogenesis. These issues

should provide a broad understanding of important trends in the study of material culture in the Middle Ages and the modern period, which will enable you to formulate more specialized research projects during graduate work in History. Such a broad understanding can also serve as the foundation for preparation in undergraduate teaching. The second objective is to present the continuing, often heated historiographic debates surrounding these issues. Students will read some “classic” texts, as well as more current literature, reflecting recent historical perspectives. The final objective will be to afford you an opportunity to develop and improve skills in bibliographic development and most important oral and written skills in the critical evaluation of historical texts.

As this is a graduate level course, I assume that everyone enrolled has a basic familiarity with the resources available in the library and is willing to use foreign language sources when appropriate. I also assume that everyone knows the mechanics of researching and writing a scholarly paper. By this, I mean the proper use and acknowledgment of sources as well as the fundamentals of compositions, (English) grammar, and spelling.

Requirements for the course include attendance at class meetings, participation in class discussion, and the timely completion of all assignments. The format of this course will be reading- and discussion-oriented. In lieu of written examinations, I will require a brief (3-5 page) essay on the readings for each week, due in class on the day that they are to be discussed. After we finish with the core set of required readings, I will expect you to locate and read sources on your own, then come to class prepared to discuss them. I have found this to be the most effective way to learn about a topic which is best examined through case studies. You are also to complete a substantial research paper on a relevant topic. Within the first month of the course, you must consult with me on the selection of topic and bibliography for your research paper. **That paper is due on December 5, at 2 pm.**

All essays are worth 60 percent of your overall grade (5 percent for each one of them). The research paper is worth 30 percent of your overall grade. Your class participation covers the remaining 10 percent.

In writing papers, be certain to give proper credit whenever you use words, phrases, ideas, arguments, and conclusions drawn from someone else’s work. Failure to give credit by quoting and/or footnoting is plagiarism and is unacceptable. Please review the section on academic honesty below.

Required texts

- Robert Gilchrist. *Medieval Life. Archaeology and the Life Course*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012. ISBN: 9781843837220 (available as e-book through UF libraries)
- Helena Hamerow. *Early Medieval Settlements. The Archaeology of Rural Communities in Northwest Europe, 400-900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. ISBN: 0199246971.
- Jan Klápště. *The Czech Lands in Medieval Transformation*. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, 17. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- Matthew Koval. *Childhood in Medieval Poland (1050-1300). Constructions and Realities in a European Context*. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, 73 Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021. ISBN: 9789004461062 (available as e-book through UF libraries).
- Peter N. Miller. *History and its Objects. Antiquarianism and Material Culture Since 1500*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780801453700.
- John Moreland. *Archaeology and Text*. London: Duckworth, 2001. ISBN: 0715629980.
- Aleks Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade. Holy War and Colonisation*. London: Routledge, 2013. ISBN: 97804156917170.
- Naomi Jane Sykes. *The Norman Conquest. A Zoological Perspective*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007. ISBN: 9781407300924.

- Ashli White. *Revolutionary Things. Material Culture and Politics in the Late Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. ISBN: 9780300271843 (available as e-book through UF libraries).
- Howard Williams. *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. ISBN: 9780521840194 (available as e-book through UF libraries).

In addition, there are articles and book chapters in pdf format accessible from the “Files” tab in the Canvas course page (elearning.ufl.edu), as needed.

University honesty policy

University of Florida F students are bound by The Honor Pledge (<https://teach.ufl.edu/resource-library/academic-integrity-at-uf>). On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://policy.ufl.edu/regulation/4-040/>) specifies several behaviors that are in violation of that code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

Weekly Topics

August 25: Introduction: material culture, materiality, archaeology

September 8: Materiality

Read:

- Peter N. Miller, *History and its Objects. Antiquarianism and Material Culture Since 1500* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2017)
- Colin Renfrew, “Towards a theory of material engagement.” In *Rethinking Materiality. The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, edited by Elizabeth DeMarrais, Chris Gosden, and Colin Renfrew (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004), pp. 23-32.
- Christopher Witmore, “Archaeology and the new materialisms,” *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 1 (2014), no. 2, 203-46.

September 15: Archaeology

Read:

- John Moreland, *Archaeology and Text* (London: Duckworth, 2001).
- Jorge A. Eiroa Rodríguez, “Historians, historiography, and archaeologically imperceptible change,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 4 (2012), no. 1, 21-25.
- David Austin and Julian Thomas, “The ‘proper study’ of medieval archaeology: a case study.” In *From the Baltic to the Black Sea. Studies in Medieval Archaeology*, edited by David Austin and Leslie Alcock (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 43-78.

September 22: Past and future

Read:

- Ashli White, *Revolutionary Things. Material Culture and Politics in the Late Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).
- Florin Curta and Andrei Gândilă, “Roman nostalgias in Near Barbaricum.” *Dacia* 67 (2023), 83-143.

- Tomasz Kurasiński and Kalina Skóra. "From the past into the future – archaica as a research problem (on the basis of medieval and modern period finds from East-Central Europe)." In *Slivers of the Antiquity. The Use of Ancient Coins in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe in the Medieval and Modern Periods*, edited by Mateusz Bogucki, Arkadiusz Dymowski and Grzegorz Śnieżko (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2020), pp. 301-66.

September 29: Countryside and city life

Read:

- Helena Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements. The Archaeology of Rural Communities in Northwest Europe, 400-900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
- David R. M. Gaimster, "A parallel history: the archaeology of Hanseatic urban culture in the Baltic, c. 1200-1600," *World Archaeology* 37 (2005), no. 3, 408-23.
- Kelly J. Dixon, "Sidling up to the archaeology of western saloons: historical archaeology takes on the wild of the West," *World Archaeology* 38 (2006), no. 4, 576-85.

October 6: Everyday life.

Read:

- Robert Gilchrist, *Medieval Life. Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012).
- Barbara L. Voss, "The archaeology of precarious lives. Chinese railroad workers in nineteenth-century North America," *Current Anthropology* 59 (2018), no. 3, 287-313.
- Mark D. Groover, "The Gibbs farmstead: household archaeology in an internal periphery," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 9 (2005), no. 4, 229-89.

October 13: Animals

Read:

- Naomi Jane Sykes, *The Norman Conquest. A Zoological Perspective* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007).
- Kyra Lyublyanovics, "The cattle of Muhi. Animal husbandry in a thirteenth-century Hungarian village." *Annual of Medieval Studies at the CEU* 15 (2009), 65-84.
- David B. Landon, "Zooarchaeology and historical archaeology: progress and prospects," *Journal of archaeological method and theory* 12 (2005), no. 1, 1-36.

October 20: Social power

Read:

- Jan Klápště, *The Czech Lands in Medieval Transformation, East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450*, 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
- Gergely Szenthe, "Social power, identity and the ritual deposits in 'Attila's Europe'," in *Attila's Europe? Structural Transformation and Strategies of Success in the European Hun Period. Extended, Annotated Proceedings of the International Conference Organised by the Hungarian National Museum and the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, June 6-7, 2019*, edited by Zsófia Rácz and Gergely Szenthe. Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2021, pp. 563-79.
- Dan Hicks, "'Places for thinking' from Annapolis to Bristol: situations and symmetries in 'world historical archaeologies'," *World Archaeology* 37 (2005), no. 3, 373-91.

October 27: Belief

Read:

- Aleks Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade. Holy War and Colonisation*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Irina Achim, "Churches and graves of the early Byzantine period in Scythia Minor and Moesia Secunda: the development of a Christian topography at the periphery of the Roman Empire," in *Death and Changing Rituals. Function and Meaning in Ancient Funerary Practices*, edited by Rasmus J. Brandt, Marina Prusac, and Håkon Roland. Oxford/Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2015, pp. 287-342.
- Anna-Katharina Rieger, "'Do ut des' – the relation of material history and archaeology of religion to the study of religions," *Journal of Religious History* 46 (2022), no. 4: 726-58.

November 3: Death

Read:

- Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- Joseph L. Rife, "Burial and society in the Greek world during Late Antiquity," in *Burial and Memorial in Late Antiquity*, edited by Alexandra Dolea and Luke Lavan, *Late antique archaeology*, 13 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2024), pp. 779-810.
- Leszek Gardeła, "Western Slavic cremation practices: past work, current perspectives, and future directions." In *Cremation in the Early Middle Ages. Death, Fire, and Identity in North-West Europe*, edited by Howard Williams and Femke Lippok (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2024), pp. 43-62.

November 10: Age and gender

Read:

- Matthew Koval, *Childhood in Medieval Poland (1050-1300). Constructions and Realities in a European Context*. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, 73 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021).
- Heinrich Härke, "Gender representation in early medieval burials: ritual re-affirmation or a blurred boundary?" In *Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology. Papers in Honour of Martin G. Welch*, edited by Stuart Brookes, Sue Harrington, and Andrew Reynolds, *BAR British Series*, 527 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), pp. 98-105.
- Florin Curta and Robert Lierse, "Of beards and men: the archaeology of facial hair in the Carpathian Basin (6th-9th centuries)." In *Continuation or Change? Borders and Frontiers in Late Antiquity and Medieval Europe. Landscape of Power Network, Military Organisation, and Commerce*, edited by Gregory Leighton, Łukasz Różycki and Piotr Pranke (London/New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 3-58.

November 17: Identity

Locate, read, and review one book (in English) or two articles/book chapters (in a foreign language) on the use of material culture for the study of ethnicity or national identity.

December 1: Food

Locate, read, and review one book (in English) or two articles/book chapters (in a foreign language) on food as material culture.