



BGC 960: From Artifact to History in Mediterranean Archaeology

Fall 2017, Tuesdays, 1:30-4:00 pm

2nd floor classroom

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Office: BGC 505
Office Hours: W 10 – noon

"An object is a companion in life experience."
Sherry Turkle

"We are made up of stories—and we make them up."
Adam Gopnik

"Story is our only boat for sailing on the river of time."
Ursula K. LeGuin

DESCRIPTION

To study archaeology is to ask: What do we want from material remains? And what do we want from the past? There are many answers: insights, explanations, a feeling of wonder, a sense of connection, and, perhaps most fundamentally, "to save from oblivion and all-erasing time ... the fleetingness of human memory and ... traditions [which] are in constant peril of being ... extinguished."¹ How can we accomplish this in ways that are effective and enduring? One mode is to take advantage of the innate power of artifacts to evoke sensation, create connection, and inspire understanding by means of three methodological modes: materiality, embodiment, and (especially) narrative.

In this course we explore ways that archaeologists transform material remains into evidence about the past. We also make our own attempts to do so via the crafting of a digital platform that will present and explain individual objects from multiple perspectives, and so extend their status as evidence for various historical and cultural inquiries. The goal is to go beyond classification and description, interrogate how artifacts reveal the behavior and values of their ancient owners, and enlist them in stories that can matter to others. For in the end, history is story. Stories need objects to make them real, and objects need stories to make them matter.

¹ Asheri 2007, 21 in Asheri, David; Lloyd, Alan; Corcella, Aldo. *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV*. Oswyn Murray and Alfonso Moreno, eds. Barbara Graziosi, Matteo Rossetti, Carlotta Dus, and Vanessa Cazzato, trans. Oxford University Press: 2007.

THE GOAL

The goal is to brainstorm and experiment our way to an effective digital platform for presenting a representative array of material remains from the excavations of a single site: Tel Anafa, a small rural estate in modern-day northern Israel that was primarily occupied for two short bursts of time, the late Hellenistic period (c. 125-80/75 BCE) and the early Roman period (c. 10 BCE – 40/50 CE). The Tel Anafa excavations, which took place over the course of ten seasons between 1968 and 1986, were a pioneering project in their day: the first total-retrieval excavation in Israel; the first to investigate a small, anonymous, rural site rather than a major urban center; the first to focus on a classical site without biblical or Christian associations.

The excavations were also unusually careful, with meticulous daily record-keeping and pottery reading, such that every artifact could be mapped and every soil deposit interpreted – an approach that ultimately created a deluge of data. The amount necessitated organizing artifacts by category and parceling them out to numerous specialists. There was minimal integration between scholars and categories, and publication took a long time. Vol. 1, on the site's stratigraphy and architecture, with additional studies on stamped amphora handles, coins, faunal remains, and geology, appeared in 1994. Vol. 2.1, on the ceramics associated with the main periods of occupation, appeared in 1997. Vol. 2.2, on the glass, lamps, metal, and stone objects, appeared in 2012. Vol. 2.3, the final installment, with studies of the painted wall stucco, figurines, weaving tools, glass and stone jewelry, and remaining pottery studies, is scheduled to appear by December 2017 – almost 50 years after excavations began.

Now what? In these past 50 years, the field has caught up to the ideals of the original excavators. Study of Near Eastern and Levantine societies and cultures in the eras after Alexander the Great's epic conquests is an expanding field. Scholars seek information from small and non-urban sites, and appreciate quotidian objects, especially those from reliable chronological and spatial contexts. The remains from Tel Anafa are pertinent to many current scholarly conversations and investigations – but the challenge is to make these remains accessible, understandable, and relevant.

I propose that this class devise a stable, expandable digital platform for the presentation of key categories of remains from Tel Anafa, from multiple perspectives, with the larger goal of helping to bridge the gap between artifacts and the histories they can inform.

The Tel Anafa Final Reports

- Sharon C. Herbert, *Tel Anafa I, i and ii: Final Report on Ten Years of Excavation at a Hellenistic and Roman Settlement in Northern Israel*. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 10. Ann Arbor 1994.
- Andrea M. Berlin and Kathleen Warner Slane, *Tel Anafa II, i. The Hellenistic and Roman Pottery*. Sharon C. Herbert, ed. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series 10.2.1. Ann Arbor 1997.
- Andrea M. Berlin and Sharon C. Herbert, eds. *Tel Anafa II, ii. Glass Vessels, Lamps, Objects of Metal, and Groundstone and Other Stone Tools and Vessels*. Kelsey Museum Fieldwork Series. Ann Arbor 2012.
- Andrea M. Berlin and Sharon C. Herbert, eds. *Tel Anafa II, iii*. Kelsey Museum Fieldwork Series. Forthcoming 2017.

All readings are on the class web site: <https://berlinarchaeology.wordpress.com/courses/bgc-960-from-artifact-to-history/>

ASSIGNMENTS

Please note that the deliberately short length of these assignments will require careful thought *and multiple rewrites* in order to make your points with focus and clarity.

- **Sept. 19th: Four paragraphs.** For *each* of the readings in the first assigned group plus one assigned reading from the second group, write a single paragraph (no more than 200 words each) in which you distill the main point and at least one key methodological insight.
- **Oct. 3rd: Object 1, three ways.** Select one object from Tel Anafa and compose three brief paragraphs (no more than 250 words each) in which you describe, explain, and/or interpret the object from three different perspectives. You may focus on the object's material, technique of manufacture, probable/possible use(s), archaeological context, conservation, typology, connections, modern-day interests (e.g., to individual collectors or museums) or the lack of them, ability to evoke a past, or any other aspect you deem worthy.
- **Oct. 17th: Four paragraphs.** For *each* of the readings in the first assigned group plus one assigned reading from the second group, write a single paragraph (no more than 200 words each) in which you distill the main point and at least one key methodological insight.
- **Oct. 24th: Object 2, three ways.** Select a second object from Tel Anafa. Follow the instructions above.
- **Nov. 7th: Object 1 or 2, another way.** Using the articles by Finlay and Hellman as inspiration, write a single brief paragraph (no more than 250 words each) in which you bring yet another perspective to the first or second object. You may choose any of the objects so far proposed.
- **Nov. 14th: Object 3, three ways.** Select a third object from Tel Anafa. Follow the instructions above.
- **Nov. 28th: Preliminary Platform and Narrative presentations.** Compose a brief narrative (no more than 500 words) starring at least one object from Tel Anafa. You may use the object as a jumping off point, a centerpiece, a surprise element, or in any other imaginative capacity.
- **Dec. 12th: Final Narrative due.** Submit a polished final narrative (no more than 500 words).

GRADING

Paragraphs and narratives will be graded from 1-5, with 5 the highest grade. Points will be awarded as follows:

- 5 points: Excellent: well written, factually accurate in all details, thoughtfully incorporates information from reading, makes a significant point that is supported by the facts presented.
- 4 points: Good: well written, factually accurate in all details, thoughtfully incorporates reading.
- 3 points: Fair. Factual information is presented but there are also errors and/or significant omissions, ideas are general rather than focused and do not relate directly to the facts presented, writing is repetitive and/or sloppy, assigned reading is not properly used.
- 2 points: Poor: writing is repetitive, sloppy, and/or unclear, references are absent or incorrectly used, there are errors in facts and/or the ideas to be drawn from them.
- 1 point: Writing is sloppy and unclear, little information is offered, no larger ideas are presented.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation	10% of final grade
Four paragraphs (as a group) (10% each)	20% of final grade
Object stories (as a group) (15% each)	45% of final grade
Object 1 or 2, another way	5% of final grade
Final Narrative	20% of final grade

EXPECTATIONS

1. Punctuality and attendance are required. This is a discussion-based course and your active participation is essential to its success. Two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your final grade by one full letter grade (e.g., B+ to C+). Three or more unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your final grade by two full letter grades.
2. Emergency absences should be phoned in (651-491-9591) or emailed to aberlin@bu.edu before the class meeting. ALWAYS NOTIFY, even about a projected late arrival to class.
3. Written assignments must be professionally presented:
 - typed, and correct, with no errors in spelling or grammar (use SPELL CHECK!)
 - 12 point *Times New Roman* font
 - 1.5 spacing with 1" side and top/bottom margins
4. Written assignments must be handed in on their assigned due date. Late work will be marked down a half-point (e.g., from 4 to 3.5) for each day after the due date.