

Sample Internship Proposal
Anthropology Major Requirement

Introduction

The *Centro de Arqueología Urbana* (CAU) was founded in 1991 as a center for the excavation, study, and curation of the archaeological remains of the City of Buenos Aires. CAU was established as part of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, but has signed an agreement with the *Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* to care for the archaeological heritage of the city. Subsequently, they have exclusive access to the sites considered an important part of the city's history. They operate under National Law 25.743, passed in 2003, which requires every excavation to be registered by the government's list of historical places and to have a long term plan for the study and curation of the artifacts. CAU also does consultation work for construction projects for the City. The director the research institute, Dr. Daniel Schávelzon, has been my primary contact for this internship and will be setting me up with artifact analysis in the lab. He received his formal training in archaeology in Mexico and has, for the past twenty years, been focusing on the historical archaeology of Buenos Aires. The researchers at the institute come from a variety of different disciplines: zooarchaeology, art restoration and conservation, architecture, and archaeological resource mitigation.

Roles and Organization

My role as an unpaid intern, as far as I understand it now (it subject to change on site), will be data analysis and entry. Hopefully, I will be working on processing artifacts, assisting in their curation and analysis and maybe even designing a small project and collecting some data for myself. I will have access to the facilities and a computer on the UBA campus and at their new facility. There will not be any formal investigative excavations while I'll be there, but there will be rescue work and follow-ups on construction projects, which is part of the institute's ongoing consultation and mitigation work.

CAU is a unique place because it combines, on a formal level, academic research in conjunction with a deep commitment to guiding and mitigating the effects of development on the archaeological history of the city, although its work seems to be limited to government-owned properties ("Centro de

Arqueología Urbana,” 2011). They do a great deal of public educational outreach as well as consultation with government projects ahead of construction. Most of their work is published on their site, with the exception of some books and papers, which is really nice. CAU created the first historical pottery catalogue, the first in-depth zooarchaeological research, and the first archaeological analysis of the life-ways of some of Argentina’s most important cultural symbols, like guachos and tango, as well as historically marginalized populations, like Afro-Argentines (“Centro de Arqueología Urbana,” 2011). Much of the work the researchers at CAU do is the first of its kind in this area of study, and to a certain extent, they are making up the rules as they go, working within the narrow confines of what the city government will allow. In one of my correspondences with Dr. Schávelzon, he wrote of an excavation in a former Spanish Viceroy’s mansion that was postponed because the city wanted to have concerts on the patio during the summer, despite having made arrangements otherwise. The bureaucratic structure in the city can be very frustrating, and as an intern, I would like to learn about how Argentine archaeologists navigate the politics.

Field Site Description

The city of Buenos Aires itself is a culturally and historically rich place, once one of the richest cities in world and in more recent memory, struck by political and economic disasters. Growing from a small outpost on the fringes of the Spanish empire. The indigenous peoples of the area were slowly pushed out of the pampas and would control their own areas of the country in north and the south up until the 1920s. They have only recently been added as a category to the national census, along with Afro-Argentine, while a year before they effectively “did not exist.” As part of the global economic system, in the nineteenth century, the particular era CAU focuses on the most, Argentina became a major exporter of hide, salted beef, and wheat (Della Paeolera and Taylor, 2003, p. 26). Buenos Aires was the port city that exported the fertility of the pampas to the rest of the world. Friendly immigration policies during the same time period saw an enormous amount of Spanish, Italian, Polish, and French immigrants come into the city that had criollos, Afro-Argentines, and Indians (Schávelzon, 2000, pp. 119-129). All left an indelible mark on both the living and buried cultures of the city. The archaeology, though, in turn, is shaped by the

sheer number of people, the constant development projects, the multicultural and global nature of the history of Buenos Aires. This internship is a way of connecting a lot of the themes I have learned in Bay Area history to other kinds of Spanish colonialism, creolization, European immigration, and the formation of national identity.

Objectives and Literature Context

CAU is a unique branch of South American archaeology. None of the researchers studied at a European or American university, and for this reason an internship at CAU will hopefully be a good opportunity to get experience in the outlooks, perspectives and strategies of archaeologists in a semi-periphery country like Argentina. I believe there is a great deal of value in trying to understand archaeology as an internationally as well as nationally situated phenomenon. I am expecting the primary language of communication to be Spanish, which will be a challenge for me personally and a way to leave the English-speaking bubble in archaeology.

CAU's focus on urban and historical archaeology is also a good match to my own interests in that branch of the discipline. Historical archaeology "studies the cultural remains of literate societies that were capable of recording their own history," and takes a particularly global perspective on human interactions (Deetz, 1996, p. 5). My exposure and experience in archaeology has been situated within the United States, particularly in northern California and in urban archaeology. Here, prehistoric, Spanish colonial, Mexican period, Victorian, and 20th century artifacts can be found in six vertical feet of soil. Urban archaeology offers both a way to demonstrate and examine the material complexities of the urban environment and present a different kind of historical narrative based on documentary as well as material history (O'Keefe and Yamin, 2006). Through examining and recording data from the artifacts at CAU, as a student of archaeology, I can get a better sense of what Spanish colonialism and independence from colonial powers meant in a completely different part of the world in part through the material remains.

The cultural resource management (CRM) and academic archaeology systems in the United States operate within well-established laws and tend to be separate from each other. CRM reports, often about historical sites, is not required to have a public component, and sometimes is locked up in a cabinet,

becoming more government “gray literature” that will likely never see the light of day. For this reason CAU’s mission to provide and educate the public is particularly interesting; not only is it a component of their survival to raise awareness and valuation of historical archaeology in the *Ciudad Autónoma*, but the government, to certain extent, promotes it. CAU has produced several short documentaries in partnership with the *Ministerio de Educación* that were aired on the government’s educational channel and have been uploaded to Youtube by Schávelzon. As a intern and volunteer at CAU, I am curious about this particular relationship with the government. Benedict Anderson observed that the institution of the museum and archaeology can be important tools of the concept of the modern nation-state: “While this kind of archaeology, maturing in the age of mechanical reproduction, was profoundly political, it was political at such a deep level that almost everyone... was unconscious of the fact” (2006, p. 183). Although Anderson’s experience was based mainly in South Asia, his ideas about the use of archaeology and museums by the state is powerful phenomenon around the world. Urban archaeology is “always public and political” (O’Keefe and Yamin 2006: 103). The creation of a national identity is in part facilitated by creating a common national past, and so archaeology and the state are connected to each other in both the United States and Argentina, although that discussion is better left for other papers.

Finally, this internship offers very practical skills in the analysis of artifacts and plant and faunal remains. The process of going through a collection of artifacts, identifying, and cataloguing is a basic and important component of any kind of archaeology from prehistoric to underwater types. Because the artifacts are from historic and urban excavations, I’ll be learning how to identify and process a wide range of materials, from animal bone to English ceramics to types of iron nails. Although I have been exposed to these kind of materials in the SCU archaeology lab, I have not systematically analyzed a collection. Being able to approach a collection of artifacts in a systematic way that can create meaningful data is particularly valuable immediately for my honors thesis and potential future graduate research programs and employment opportunities in CRM work.

References

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