Newsletter Vol. 25, Fall 2026
University of Michigan

Museum of Anthropological Archaeology



Panoramic view of corrals and huts recorded in the high-altitude wetlands of the upper Santa Valley, Peru. *See story, page 18*

Contents

Letter from the Director page 2
Support the Museum! page 2
Meet the New Director page 4
Meet the New Fellow page 6
Meet the New Graduate Students page 8
Undergraduates Go to the Field page 13
News from the Field 2026 page 15
News about UMMAA Collections page 28
UMMAA Press page 31

Letter from the Director

Greetings from the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, where autumn is just beginning its annual pilgrimage to Ann Arbor, and with it the beginning of a new academic year. It's a new year for UMMAA, too. After nine years of remarkable leadership, Mike Galaty has passed the director's torch to me and is enjoying a well-deserved sabbatical for the next few months. As many of you know, my term as UMMAA director began July 1, and I'm happy to report that Raven Garvey has stepped into the role of associate director. I want to thank Mike again for everything he's given to the Museum. He always made the job look easy—though it was anything but—and his energy and enthusiasm for the Museum remained unshakable. We have every reason to share that energy and enthusiasm. No doubt there are challenges ahead as we set out to build a new UMMAA from the ground up, but the opportunities are so much more. At this moment of transition, it's worth taking stock to consider where we are and how we got here.

From about 1965 to 1970, long-serving director James B. Griffin took the opportunity to reshape the Museum into a unit with broad, international reach by hiring a talented group of recent PhDs directing new field projects around the world and developing new theoretical perspectives that would transform our understanding of the human past. With this core group of young faculty in place, UMMAA became the top-ranked archaeology program in the United States. Today I believe that we are poised to retain this position at the forefront of international archaeology, given the strengths of the hires we've been fortunate to make during the years of Mike's leadership: Alicia Ventresca-Miller (archaeological science and Central Asia), Tiffany Fryer (historical and contemporary archaeology), Giulia Saltini-Semerari (Mediterranean), and Bryan Miller (Asia) are all internationally recognized scholars, and they are likewise exceptional teachers and mentors for our graduate and undergraduate students.

Thus, despite the significant turnover in senior faculty that we've experienced in the sixteen years that I've been a curator, we celebrated UMMAA's 100th anniversary in 2023 in as strong a position as when Griffin reshaped the Museum on the cusp of its halfway mark. We continue to pursue scientific and theoretically driven research that sets the course for the wider discipline; we continue to

Thank you, generous donors! Your support allows the Museum to send students on excavation trips around the world. Gifts are critical for our ability to attract the best minds in archaeology, which in turn contributes to our standing as a vital and vibrant museum with a reputation as a leader.

To give online, go to the UMMAA main page **(lsa.umich.edu/ummaa)** and look for the blue Look to Michigan rectangle. If you prefer to use mail, cut out and complete the gift form below and send it with your check.

Please make checks payable to the University of Michigan. Mail your check and the gift form (below) to:

University of Michigan
Museum of Anthropological Archaeology
3010 School of Education Building
610 E. University Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Address _____

Email _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

STEP ONE:
CHOOSE YOUR GIFT

One-time Gift:

☐ $100
☐ $250
☐ $500
☐ $1000
☐ $ _____

OR

Monthly Gift:
Charged the 10th of each month

☐ $ _____ per month

STEP TWO:
CHOOSE YOUR AREA TO SUPPORT

$ _____ Museum of Anthropological Archaeology Strategic Fund (325892)*

$ _____ James B. Griffin North American Range Fund (701284)

$ _____ Museum of Anthro Publications Gift Support (732105)

$ _____ Other _____

*If no fund is selected, your gift will be used where it is needed most.

The university requires sufficient time to process credit card gifts prior to December 31, 2026, in accordance with IRS rules and regulations. In order for a credit card gift to be deductible in 2026, credit card gifts sent by mail must reach the University by December 16th; OR you may give online at giving.umich.edu. You may also call (888) 518-7888 (toll free) or (734) 647-6179 (local), M-F 9 AM - 4 PM EST, between December 19 and 30, 2026 to donate over the phone. PLEASE HAVE THE SOLICITATION FORM ON HAND FOR YOUR CALL. Do NOT send your credit card information by email.

MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

STEP THREE:
CHOOSE YOUR PAYMENT METHOD

Online at: https://donate.umich.edu/x5JDZ
Credit Card: ☐ AMEX ☐ Discover ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA

Acct. # _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature required

Check (Payable to the **University of Michigan**)
Phone (**888.518.7888**)

ID: A: 36911

successfully recruit talented graduate students who become outstanding scholars in their own right; we continue to place these students into academic departments around the country and world; and we continue to bring archaeology to the next generation of undergraduate students, using what we know of humanity's deep past to widen their understanding of why the world we live in looks the way it does today. Just as importantly, we've worked hard to create a sense of community that includes curators, staff, graduate students, and undergraduates. We enjoy each other's company. In sum, I believe that Mike is stepping away from the role of director with UMMAA in better shape—internally and externally—than at any point in my time here at Michigan.

There are three main challenges that I believe will shape our next few years. All of us have known since we began our move to the School of Education in 2018 that it was only a temporary home. We've made the best of the uncertainty, shifting the atmosphere of our space at SOE from compartmentalization toward a more open and community-focused layout. Now that we can finally see a clear path to our permanent home, it is essential that we bring this idea of an UMMAA community with us in how we design and occupy the new space. One of our first challenges will be to bridge the gap between those two processes, the designing and the occupying. Designing the new UMMAA will demand most of our attention over the next year, but how we occupy that space will shape what UMMAA ultimately becomes. We have an opportunity to create a destination space—one that attracts undergraduates for research opportunities and hands-on work with curators and museum staff; one that can help us continue recruiting the best graduate students from around the country and the world; one that will have room for post-docs, visiting scholars, and descendant groups to work with us and our collections; and one that can expand what UMMAA's community means in the 21st century.

This brings me to what I believe is our second significant challenge. UMMAA has never been an exhibit museum. We're a research museum, and most of the materials that we curate have far more research value than visual or commercial value. As such, we've historically attracted like-minded archaeologists pursuing analysis of our extensive collections. Tomorrow's Museum, though, will need to be public-facing, seeking and creating opportunities to build partnerships with a range of stakeholders at the local, national, and international levels. This future will demand that we reach beyond our traditional constituency of fellow archaeologists. We can and should continue doing the work that made UMMAA such an important institution in the development of American archaeological practice, but we must simultaneously shift into the practice of expanding our community. We have already begun taking such steps, from local work on historical archaeological projects with African American communities in Ypsilanti and Detroit, to working nationally with Office of the Vice President for Research on NAGPRA and the repatriation of Native American ancestors and sacred objects, and to international partnerships with stakeholding communities in the Philippines. Moving forward, the way we build and maintain these kinds of relationships will rank among our most important forms of curatorial work. This is no less collections work than what we have done in the past, but it will require us to think differently about our role as curators in tomorrow's Museum.

Finally, we have entered a troubling moment for the funding of original archaeological fieldwork and analysis. The NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant, which gave so many of our PhD students the means to develop and carry out their own survey and excavation projects around the world, or else to fund the analysis of materials from their fieldwork, has disappeared and is highly unlikely to return anytime soon. And now, as *Science* has just reported, NSF has gutted all of its social science funding for senior researchers, with programs including archaeology, anthropology, and sociology distributing **zero** new awards this year. With our most essential source of support all but disappearing overnight, private organizations such as Wenner-Gren are facing a deluge of funding requests. It is difficult to see any light at the end of the tunnel. A year ago we reached out to the family of Jimmy Griffin and got their approval to open the Griffin endowment to all of our graduate students, not only those working in the US Eastern Woodlands. This will repair some of the damage of losing the DDIG, but it is not enough. And there is little it can do to fill the loss of NSF support to our curators.

For those of you who love Michigan archaeology, now is the time to help us continue the work we know is so important. Few endeavors in science mean more than the efforts we make to understand why the world looks the way it does today. It is a story that takes us back to the very beginning of our species, and it is only accessible through archaeology. We're committed to the work of telling that story, and we're hopeful to continue that work with all of you.

The flip side of challenge is opportunity—let's meet them both together.

Sincerely,

Rob

Robin Beck, Director
Curator of Eastern North American Archaeology
Professor of Anthropology

Meet the Museum's New Director: Rob Beck

If anyone had asked, the 8-year-old Rob Beck would have had a short list ready for what he wanted to be when he grew up. "Archaeologist," he says. "One of my earliest Christmas memories was throwing a fit in our local Kmart. I was seven years old and they had the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Archaeology*. My parents wouldn't get it because they'd already bought a copy for Santa Claus to bring me. I still have it on my shelf. My mom duct-taped the spine for me about 20 years ago."

Rob grew up in Marion, North Carolina, about half an hour east of Asheville, walking the fields of aunts and uncles with farms in the area. Using the few archaeology books at the local county library as reference, he realized he could identify the sherds he was finding.

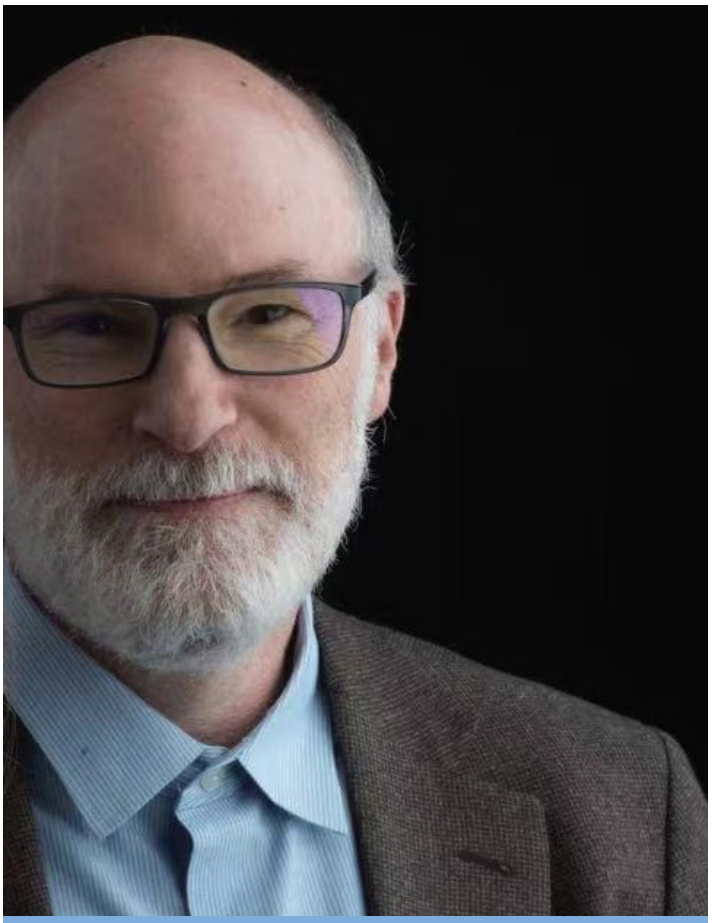
"What stunned me, as a 12-year-old, was that I could walk out into the field and collect pottery and look it up and all the different types had names. I started labeling them."

After a few years, he made a discovery. "I found that the ceramics at one of the sites I'd collected weren't supposed to be there."

He called the state archaeologist, Dave Moore, to ask him about it.

"I was 14 when I gave him a call," says Rob. Later Moore would comment that their conversation about west North Carolina ceramics was one that many of his colleagues couldn't have had. And Rob was right: the pottery he found near Marion was of a type usually found in northern Georgia.

"That was 40 + years ago, and Dave and I are still working together," says Rob. "We became professional colleagues when I found Spanish artifacts at the Berry site."



Dr. Robin Beck is the director and curator of Eastern North American Archaeology at UMMAA and a professor in the Department of Anthropology.

A Spanish olive jar

Rob Beck, who assumed the role of UMMAA director on July 1, has had a career full of such discoveries and connections—as much about the people he's met and worked with as about the passion that was driving him forward even when he didn't realize it.

In college, it didn't occur to him to major in anthropology, even though he was working in the archaeology lab at UNC. After his bachelor's he worked in CRM for three years, but by the time he was looking seriously at graduate schools he knew he didn't have the grades.

Then came another conversation with Dave Moore. Dave had done his dissertation fieldwork at the Berry site, near Morganton, North Carolina—about 20 miles from Marion. Dave believed that Berry dated to the 16th century, a period of Spanish exploration in the Carolinas, but his committee had argued that he lacked evidence to support the idea. Dave suggested that Rob do a surface collection and distribution map of ceramics from the site.

"In 1994, the first day out there, my brother, Kevin, had gone with me to help. I started picking up this strange glazed pottery that was clearly European… and my brother walked up with a wrought iron nail." Rob knew they had something. He contacted Steve Hahn, a friend who had worked with him in CRM (now a history professor at St. Olaf's), and who was taking a course with Charles Hudson, a renowned southeastern ethnohistorian at the University of Georgia who was working to reconstruct early Spanish routes of exploration.

"I called Steve and told him I thought I might have some Spanish artifacts," Rob remembers. "Steve said to bring them down. I showed them to one of the archaeologists, Mark

Williams, who said it was a Spanish olive jar. Then Hudson saw the artifacts and he could barely contain himself. I called Dave, and it turned out he had a bag labeled "check this" from his own Berry site collections. When we compared our sherds, several were from the SAME JAR." He and Dave soon identified Berry as the Native American town of Joara, where Spanish explorer Juan Pardo established the colony of Fort San Juan in 1566. It is the earliest European settlement in the interior of what is now the United States.

Rob applied to graduate schools that year, and on the strength of a phone call from Hudson, he was provisionally accepted into the MA program at the University of Alabama, where Jim Knight became his advisor. For his thesis, Rob directed an archaeological survey of the Berry site's catchment zone in the upper Catawba Valley. Meanwhile Dave Moore defended his dissertation and was hired at Warren Wilson College. In 2001, Rob, Dave, and colleague Chris Rodning (Tulane University) began a long-term project at Berry, where excavations are still ongoing and have resulted in an NSF grant, an edited volume, and more than two dozen journal articles and book chapters.

From AL to NW to OK to MI

Rob earned his MA in anthropology at Alabama in 1997, then entered the PhD program at Northwestern University. Although he had planned to continue his work at Berry, his PhD advisors had other ideas. Rob had never worked (or even traveled) outside the US, and his advisors Jim Brown and Tim Earle wanted him to broaden his experience. Rob was welcomed by Christine Hastorf and her team at Chiripa, a Middle Formative site in Bolivia's Lake Titicaca Basin. Rob spent the next several years doing survey and excavation in both Bolivia and Peru. He did his dissertation work on a Middle Formative site named Alto Pukara, about 5 km from Chiripa, where he excavated two of the earliest stone temples in the southern Titicaca Basin.

After a postdoc at the University of Illinois-Carbondale, Rob decided to return to the Berry site. In 2006 he obtained an NSF grant for work in the site's Spanish compound and landed a tenure-track position in southeastern archaeology at the University of Oklahoma, where his faculty mentor was UMMAA alum Paul Minnis, and his fellow assistant professor was UMMAA alum Patrick Livingood. He'd been at OU three years when the University of Michigan posted a tenure-track position in North American archaeology just prior to John Speth's retirement. One of the things that attracted him to Michigan was the chance to prepare PhD students for their own careers.

"It was an opportunity to rebuild a southeastern North American program. It's so exciting to help students set up their own projects, to help them narrow their ideas down to a dissertation-sized problem and a project that they can pull off. It's great to have the colleagues I do, but the chance to work with UMMAA graduate students and to help them launch careers—that's the best."

One of his former students, Casey Barrier, now a professor at Bryn Mawr, is currently working with Rob, Ed Henry (Colorado State), and Tim Horsley (Horsley Archaeological Prospection) on a multiyear project at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Park. They are conducting a gradiometer survey of all the current park grounds (nearly 6 square kilometers) to create a map of subsurface anomalies at Cahokia, including houses, temples, borrow pits, and smaller features.

The Museum

As director, Rob will need to steer the Museum through some complicated projects and challenging times. One is the creation of a new home for UMMAA at the Research Museums Center, south of campus.

"We'll rebuild all of our existing ranges, but we'll also have new labs, a photography studio, a space for consultation, and more. Our plan is to create one of the best archaeology centers in the United States," he says.

Another big challenge is ongoing NAGPRA work. "We have two years to bring all of the collections into federal complicance, and we're working with the [U-M] Office of the Vice President to do this in a timely way," he explains. "It's a responsibility we take very seriously. We expect it to take two full years."

Finally, there is the shocking reduction in federal support for archaeology. "We are in a challenging moment for funding," Rob says. "Changes … threaten the ability of curators to do the pathbreaking work we've been doing since NSF was created. The NSF's dissertation grant program in archaeology has been shut down altogether and will remain so for the foreseeable future. That has been the primary way that our graduate students have funded their dissertations."

At U-M, graduate students have other potential sources of funding, including the Griffin Endowment Fellowship, although there's no way to fully replace a funding source like the NSF.

In spite of these challenges, Rob believes that the Museum will thrive.

"There are a lot of times that you want to keep the course, and I think for most of what's going on at UMMAA that's the case," he says. "The Museum is fiscally healthy, we have a healthy climate, we're in a very good place."

Plus he knows some people.

Read more about the Cahokia project in U-M's spring 2025 *LSA Magazine*: https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/news-events/lsa-magazine/spring-2025/notes-from-underground.html

Read more about the Berry project on the website Exploring Joara.org

Meet the Museum's New Fellow

Tanner Kovach



Tanner Kovach (left) and Jayson Gill examine the stratigraphy of Solak-1, an Upper Paleolithic site, before beginning excavation in 2026. It may not look like much now, but groups of modern humans deposited large amounts of obsidian tools at this location roughly 30,000 years ago on a plateau overlooking the Hrazdan River Gorge in central Armenia.

We are very happy to announce that Dr. Tanner Kovach is joining us as a three-year postdoc in the Michigan Society of Fellows with a joint appointment as a non-tenure track assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology.

Tanner became interested in Neanderthals and early modern humans while taking his first undergraduate course in archaeology at New York University. He wrote his final essay about Neanderthal extinction in that class, and initially he wanted to focus on Neanderthals because there were so many questions surrounding their existence and extinction.

"I actually thought modern humans were not interesting at all," he laughs. "Like, we already know about us. Of course, now most of my research is on modern humans. But that's because I found some good questions—some unknowns... If we had all the answers, I wouldn't be as interested in it, because it wouldn't be this puzzle you're putting together."

Tanner's initial fieldwork took place as an undergraduate in the Dordogne region of southwestern France, at the little-known site of Sous-le-Roc as well as the much more famous La Ferrassie. On his first day at the site, he found a stone tool (a core tablet) just below the surface in the backdirt, and that's when he knew that he wanted to study the material culture of Paleolithic peoples.

"There was something about finding it and holding it," he says. "Something about the visceral thing about archaeology that I really liked. It was probably thirty to forty thousand years old."

Since then he has been interested in the interactions between different human species and the similarities and differences between us and our closest hominin relatives.



Tanner Kovach and team at Ptghavan-4, a Middle Paleolithic site in northern Armenia, in 2022. Left to right at the top: Tanner, Dan Adler, Gunther Möller, Alex Brittingham, and Kate. Middle level: Maddy McCartin. At the base is Jayson Gill.

Tanner's current research focuses on the last Neanderthals and earliest modern humans in the southern Caucasus countries of Georgia and Armenia. In particular, he studies the Middle and Upper Paleolithic lithic technology of the region in order to understand long-term patterns of cultural evolution and technological organization in the region.

These topics served as the basis for his dissertation research at the University of Connecticut, where he analyzed lithic assemblages from the sites of Ortvale Klde and Dzudzuana Cave in western Georgia and Solak-1 and Lusakert-1 in central Armenia.

"I've been lucky to pursue the questions that interest me personally, and I think that's probably why I put as much effort into the research that I did," he says. "I am really interested in this weird moment in prehistory, when our species was interspersing across Eurasia and interacting with other species like us in different ways and different places."

His recent fieldwork includes the excavation of Ptghavan-4 in northern Armenia, a Middle Paleolithic open-air site dated to about 300,000–100,000 years ago. This past summer he co-directed the re-excavation of the Upper Paleolithic open-air site of Solak-1 in order to better understand the depositional processes, the spatial distribution of artifacts, and the chronology of the site.

In 2027, Tanner and his colleagues plan to resume fieldwork at several caves in western Georgia in order to generate new insights into regional patterns of Middle and Upper Paleolithic technology, subsistence, demography, mobility, and population interactions and introgression.

Please welcome Tanner to Michigan!

Meet the New Graduate Students

Jonah Bullen



Jonah Bullen received both his bachelor's and master's degrees in anthropology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. As an MA student, Jonah tested the archaeological utility of mycoliths— opal silica microfossils produced in the tissues of mushrooms, analogous to phytoliths. To do so, he created a reference collection to determine the extent to which mycoliths are taxonomically diagnostic and conducted a proof-of-concept case study isolating and identifying mycoliths from paleosols in the Tennessee River Valley. Mycolith and phytolith assemblages from this case study suggest an environment that was increasingly stewarded by Indigenous peoples from the Late Archaic through Early Colonial period. As an undergraduate student, Jonah also participated in a project comparing macrobotanical assemblages from Salado sites across the southwestern United States and an experimental project comparing carbon stable isotope ratios in carbonized moonshine mash. Between working on his degrees, Jonah also worked as a CRM field technician in California, Arizona, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Colorado.

At Michigan, Jonah plans to continue studying human and other-than-human relationships in Southern Appalachia through the analysis of phytoliths and mycoliths. He is especially interested in Indigenous forest stewardship and the roles played by humans, fungi, cultigens, and wild plants in shaping the past environments and political economies of the Mountain South.

Please join us in welcoming **Jonah Bullen** to our program!

Jonah Bullen takes a soil core in South Carolina in summer 2026 for the Yamasee Landscapes Project.

Meet the New Graduate Students

Setareh Shafizadeh

Setareh Shafizadeh is from Iran, where she earned her bachelor's degree in archaeology from the University of Tehran and her master's degree in prehistoric archaeology from Tarbiat Modares University in Tehran. She later earned a second master's degree at the University of Washington, studying geoarchaeological materials from Boomplaas Cave in South Africa.

Her interests center on Stone Age archaeology, particularly the Paleolithic, lithic technology, and geoarchaeology. She is interested in how hunter-gatherers responded to changing environments and what stone tools and archaeological sediments reveal about their daily lives, movements, and use of places. She also enjoys exploring statistical methods, coding, and data science to address archaeological questions. Her fieldwork experience includes projects in Iran, South Africa, and Athens, Greece.

At UMMAA, Setareh hopes to bring these interests together through research on Late Pleistocene hunter-gatherers in the Lesotho highlands. Working with Brian Stewart, she plans to explore how raw-material selection and stone-tool production relate to mobility and risk management in mountainous environments. She also looks forward to gaining her first fieldwork experience in the United States and learning from colleagues working in different archaeological settings.

In addition to archaeology, she enjoys photography and graphic design, including working with Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator.

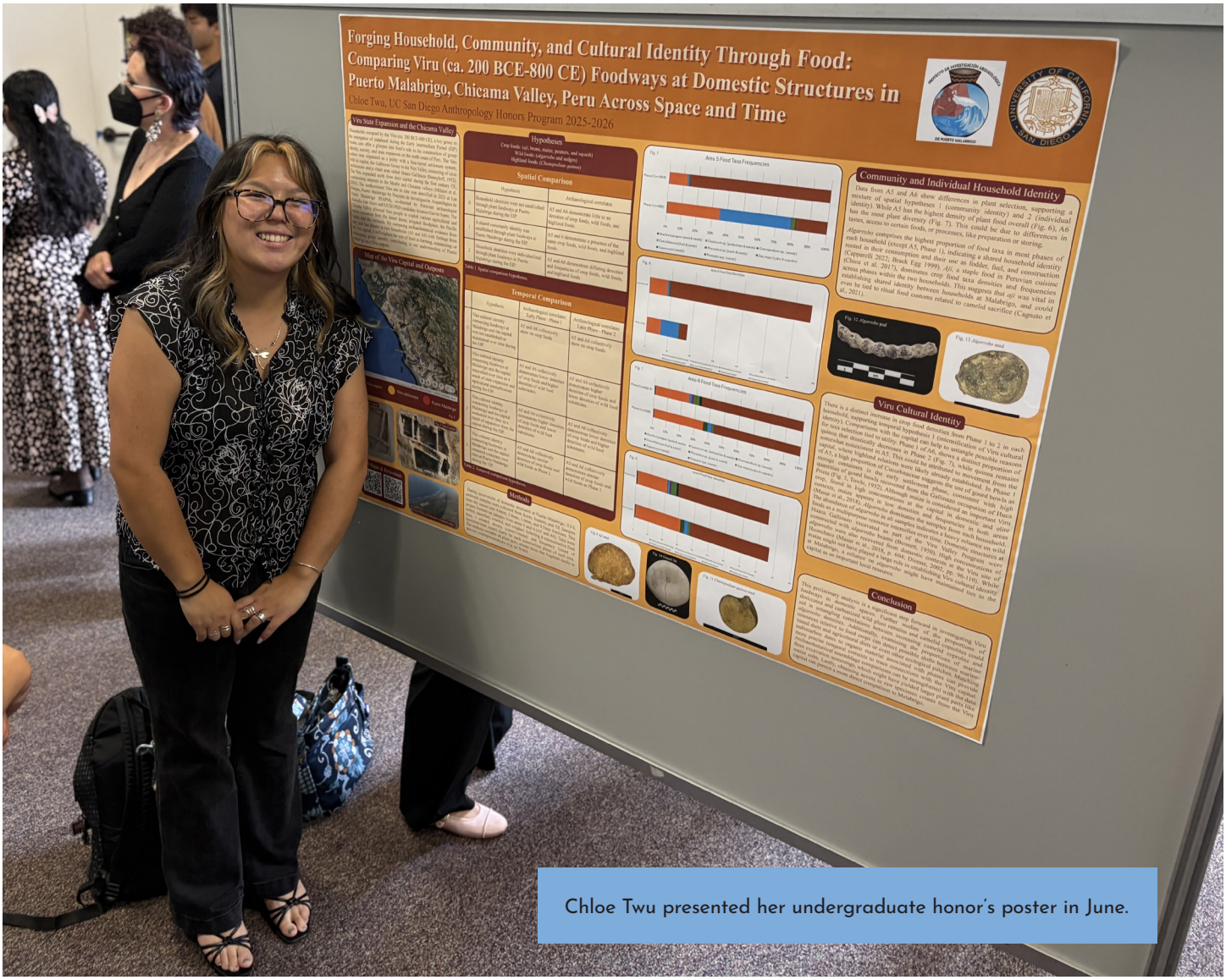
Please join us in welcoming **Setareh Shafizadeh** to our program!



Setareh Shafizadeh at the Sahele Arm, located in North Cascade National Park, Washington, summer 2026.

Meet the New Graduate Students

Chloe Twu



Chloe Twu presented her undergraduate honor's poster in June.

Chloe Twu completed her bachelor's degree at University of California San Diego (UCSD), where she double majored in anthropology with an archaeology concentration and art history. She was a volunteer in Dr. Paul Goldstein's South American Archaeology Laboratory, where she examined sediment samples from PhD candidate Arianna Garvin's excavation project, Proyecto de Investigación Arqueológica de Puerto Malabrigo (PIAPM); the sediment was extracted from Early Intermediate Period (EIP) households at the Viru (200 BCE–800 CE) colony of Puerto Malabrigo in the Chicama Valley, Peru. Her macrobotanical experience in the lab led to the development of her honor's thesis, in which she compared crop and wild food taxa in two Malabrigo households and with archaeobotanical evidence from the Viru capital to investigate individual/shared household identity and changes in Viru cultural identity tied to agricultural intensification and state expansion during the EIP. Chloe also served as a lead gallery guide at the UCSD's Mandeville Art Gallery, was a docent at the Mingei International Museum (a San Diego craft and folk art institution), and was involved in an Asian-American-Pacific-Islander student-driven archival project, exploring the origins of the Philipino Cultural Celebration at UCSD. She hopes to find avenues for continuing community engagement, including plans to participate in Reconnect/Recollect projects and work with the Philippine Collections at UMMAA. Identity and heritage continue to play a role in shaping her current research interests, involving human–environmental interaction and responses to typhoons through foodways in the Philippine Visayas during the Spanish colonial period.

Please join us in welcoming **Chloe Twu** to our program!

Meet the New Graduate Students

Jesse Weaver

Jesse Weaver grew up working in cultural resource management. After an extended break of goofing off, COVID convinced him that digging holes alone in the woods was a better use of his time than bartending.

Jesse's experience is largely in the public sector, having worked extensively in the American Southeast and Mid-Atlantic, but he's also been lucky enough to have worked in the Levant, Morocco, Tuscany, and the US Virgin Islands. His interests are varied, but include emergent monumentality, landscape archaeology, GIS, site formation processes, community based archaeology, and science communication.

He has spent the last two years working in downtown Philadelphia, monitoring excavations for a major construction project situated over one of the earliest train roundhouses in the United States. Working with contractors, many of whom were descendants of local racially displaced populations, coupled with his work with the Arab Scouts in Palestine/Israel, as well as the present US administration's ongoing removal of longstanding safeguards towards heritage sites have all influenced his goals of working in a politically situated archaeology.

Jesse received his bachelor's degree in 2017 from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and his master's in 2025 from Mississippi State, where his thesis assessed site integrity and climate change-related hurricane damage on a threatened precolumbian coastal midden in the US Virgin Islands. He plans to continue his work in the Caribbean with a focus on chronometric hygiene, community collaboration, and socially relevant archaeology.

Please join us in welcoming **Jesse Weaver** to our program!



Jesse Weaver recently worked in Philadelphia, monitoring excavations for a construction project placed over one of the earliest train roundhouses in the United States.

Meet the New Graduate Students

Nikki Wu



For her master's at UC Davis, Nikki Wu collected known reference samples at UC Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology for ZooMS (left). Before that, she worked in CRM in California, including on the Rapid Recovery Excavation along Hwy 1 in Big Sur, California (below).



Nikki Wu earned her bachelor's degree from Mississippi State University, where she worked as a laboratory assistant in the Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology Lab. Afterwards, she worked in cultural resource management for four years at Far Western Anthropological Research Group, Inc. doing fieldwork throughout northern California, the central coast, and the California Great Basin, and gaining practical experience in field, laboratory, and project/data management roles.

Nikki recently graduated with her master's in anthropology from the University of California, Davis where she focused on sea turtles, using ZooMS (zooarchaeology by mass spectrometry) to differentiate between species and stable isotopes (δ^{15}N and δ^{13}C) to investigate the historical ecology of the Aklis site in St. Croix (US Virgin Islands).

Nikki is interested in Caribbean archaeology, diet and subsistence, human-environment interactions, environmental reconstruction, and rising cultural complexity. She intends to further explore how changes in Caribbean animal biodiversity relate to human behavior and cultural evolution. She very much looks forward to conducting this research and mentoring students in the Ancient Protein and Isotope Lab in the coming years!

Please join us in welcoming **Nikki Wu** to our program!

Undergraduates Go to the Field

Gabriel Fanning



Gabriel Fanning (left) describes the experience of a physical landscape tour: "We traveled through many different protected environmental spaces across central Ireland, seeking to understand the ways that geological history has shaped the lives of people living in the spaces we would study later in the program. Here I am sitting among sandstone bedrock at Glenbarrow Falls, where we studied erosion patterns and learned about the centuries of stone quarrying that occurred at the site and provided the materials for human construction across Ireland. This river was redirected multiple times by human activity in the medieval and early modern periods, and today flows through a conservation area perfect for our geological studies."

Undergraduate **Gabriel Fanning** reports on his summer field school as follows:

I am very grateful to have received undergraduate research funding from the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology this past summer! The grant helped fund a truly life-changing experience at an archaeological field school, which reaffirmed my love of field archaeology and taught me many new skills and methods of field research.

The program, run through the Institute for Field Research, was the Irish Heritage School's "Monastic Midlands in Ireland" field program. During the program, I studied the medieval history of Ireland, with a particular focus on monasticism and the archaeological study of religious life in the medieval period. The focus of this program perfectly lines up with my own interests and the topic of my upcoming honors thesis research project, so UMMAA research funding also allowed me to visit many of the archaeological sites and landscapes that I will be independently researching now that the academic year has begun.

My field school experience was incredible and would not have been possible without the funding I received from UMMAA. My experience in the Monastic Midlands program has prepared me for a career in archaeology to a far greater degree than I could ever have expected. I studied alongside experts and professionals, learning the ins and outs of archaeological excavation, site recording, conservation and management of ongoing archaeological sites, photogrammetry and modeling of archaeological objects, pre-excavation site survey, excavation find reporting, and so much more. In addition, I not only had the opportunity to make connections with professionals in each of these fields but also had the chance to learn so many different archaeological methods through actual in-the-field practice.

As a senior soon to receive my undergraduate degree in anthropological archaeology, I had studied some of these techniques in the classroom and had an understanding of how they worked, but the chance to really go into the field and work alongside professional archaeologists at sites of archaeological significance completely changed my view of my field of study and broadened my idea of the many opportunities available to me as a student of archaeology.

The independent research that I was able to conduct while abroad was also a major part of my travels, and another aspect that was made possible by UMMAA undergraduate research funding. I had started initial research for my honors thesis proposal before leaving, but the chance to see the sites I had studied with my own eyes, and really understand the geological and environmental landscapes of the people I was writing, has entirely changed my conception of what my own research can be. If I had never been able to visit so many of the sites that interest me and that are a large portion of my thesis research, I would never have had the same level of

Undergraduates Go to the Field





Gabriel reports: "These photos come from the program's extensive experimental archaeology unit, where I and my fellow students practiced a wide variety of historical methods of construction and object manufacture. Here, we are recreating a Norse-style sunken-floor structure, common in Early Medieval Ireland. While building, we learned about traditional methods of wattle-and-daub construction still used across the world today and gained a better understanding of how people would have lived and worked in the time period we were studying. The project also educated us on the purposes of experimental archaeology, as we sought to understand which methods would most likely have been used, and how sturdy a structure could be when built with certain materials that do not preserve in the archaeological record."

understanding of the peoples who first built and occupied the burial sites I am studying. Thanks to instruction from and connections with experts who study the same area that I hope to study, this experience has completely changed my view of my own research interests. I am so grateful to the U-M Museum of Anthropological Archaeology for helping me accomplish my research goals and further my education in anthropological archaeology!"

Africa

Graduate student **Ying Cui** conducted fieldwork in Lesotho at two sites (Ha Soloja and Likonong rockshelters) that have Middle Stone Age deposits. Her doctoral research focuses on early human adaptations to the highlands of Lesotho. Ying Cui spent April and May at the Ha Soloja rockshelter, located at ca. 2300 masl in the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains. This year's excavation team included project director **Brian Stewart** (University of Michigan), Michael Schillaci (University of Toronto), Joseph Ralimpe (Lesotho archaeologist), Jacob Kasztelan (U-M alumnus), Charles Arthur (Environmental Resources Management, UK), and Ying Cui. The 2026 field season was the fifth season at the site. This season the team reached deposits that likely date to late MIS 6 (~150,000–130,000 years ago), pushing the archaeological sequence further into the Middle Pleistocene. Much of the newly excavated sediment had large sandstone slabs, suggesting a period of substantial rockfall within the shelter. Archaeological materials were less abundant than in the overlying deposits excavated during previous seasons, but the team recovered flakes, blades, hammerstones, flake fragments, and faunal remains. Although artifact densities declined with depth, these deposits provide an important opportunity to investigate how—and potentially when—people first began using this high-elevation landscape before the Last Interglacial.

From May to June Ying Cui went to Likonong, a collapsed rockshelter situated at ca. 1800 masl near the Orange River in Lesotho. The excavation team included Ying Cui, principal investigator Kyra Pazan (U-M alumna; now at California State University, Stanislaus), Kristin Cimmerer (University of Toronto), Molopi Matela and Joseph Ralimpe (Lesotho archaeologists), and Emma Cleminson (University of Johannesburg).

The 2026 field season marked the third season of excavation at Likonong and Ying Cui's first season working at this site. The crew, camped in tents set above the valley, was located high enough to have sweeping views of the surrounding Maloti mountains. Likonong preserves a remarkably deep and rich record of human activity, including hearths, stone artifacts, animal remains, and traces of burning. When combined with earlier excavation results and luminescence dates, researchers can show that the site reveals hominin activity extending back ca. 242,000 years ago, making Likonong the earliest known archaeological site in highland Lesotho.

Both excavation projects have helped Ying Cui reconsider how changes in human behavior developed. In particular, the excavation at Likonong allowed her to trace these behavioral patterns further back in time and investigate the deeper origins of human adaptation to highland environments.



Above: Ying Cui excavating in the ACT layer in the Basement at Likonong rockshelter in Lesotho, which contains abundant lithic artifacts.

Below: Timilehin Ayelagbe (left) and local archaeologist Ibrahim Idowu evaluate the stratigraphic profile of the ditch section of the excavated Udo moat, a ditch and embankment system in Nigeria.



Graduate student **Timilehin Ayelagbe** spent much of 2026 conducting his dissertation fieldwork at Udo, Edo State, Nigeria, where he is investigating the relationship between monumental earthworks, past environments, and sociopolitical organization. He completed excavations across several areas within the Udo earthwork system and began developing datasets on ceramics, sediments, environmental remains, and other material culture. The field season significantly expanded the archaeological evidence available for reconstructing the history and organization of this important settlement.

The Americas

Argentina

Curator **Raven Garvey** received a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship to continue and expand the interdisciplinary research she began during her Andrew W. Mellon Foundation New Directions Fellowship (2022–2024). Working with aerospace engineers, Garvey uses modeling and experimentation to investigate how persistent, powerful winds influenced prehistoric lifeways. The Guggenheim Fellowship (2026–2027) will allow her to amplify this research and explore its many implications in Patagonia. Garvey also continued her field program in Neuquén Province, Argentina. Her collaborative work combined archaeological survey and excavation with rock art documentation and new approaches to understanding past use of *pehuén* (*Araucaria araucana*). This research includes the use of ancient and environmental DNA to investigate how people interacted with *pehuén* forests and their resources through time, particularly in the arid uplands of northwestern Patagonia.

Garvey was also selected to join the working group "From Close Kinship to Population Interactions in the Deep Past: Integrating Biological and Cultural Indicators of Social Identities in a Multiscalar Framework," co-sponsored by the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis and the Kiel Center for Collaborative Synthesis in Archaeology. The group met in Germany earlier this year to begin their long-term development of novel approaches to the integration of genetic, cultural, and environmental evidence designed to improve our understanding of how social identities and networks emerge, persist, and change across temporal and spatial scales.

Belize

Doctoral candidate **Brett Meyer** spent the summer analyzing his data from four field seasons at Ek Tzul, Belize. He also began writing his dissertation, which explores how this ancient Maya secondary center navigated its position between the ruling elite at the polity capital and the people living in the periphery. He uses excavation, survey, quantitative, and spatial data to assess whether the intermediate elites at Ek Tzul were operating as administrators, ceremonial leaders, or border managers within the regional sociopolitical networks.

Caribbean

First-year graduate student **Nikki Wu** assisted her friend Emily Kracht (PhD candidate at the University of California at Santa Barbara) in conducting fieldwork in Puerto Rico, as part of the latter's dissertation fieldwork. Together they collected more than 50 clay samples from around the island



Curator Raven Garvey discusses a rock art motif with SARG Angel Garro, Escuadrón 31 de Gendarmeria Nacional, in Neuquén Province, Argentina. For the last several years, Garvey has partnered with local stakeholders, including the gendarmes.





Left: Graduate student Ally Sabo sampling an undocumented obsidian source in the Andean altiplano, north of San Pedro de Atacama, Chile. Right: Geological samples collected for analysis from an obsidian source in the Puna de Atacama (~4,800 masl), just south of the tri-point where Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia meet.

and collaborated with a local ceramicist to gain another 10 clay samples. Emily will be using PXRF elemental analysis on the raw clay samples to source different pottery types through time. Nikki and Emily also visited several well-known sites, including Los Indios, Guayama, and Tibes.

Chile

Graduate student **Ally Sabo** spent a month in Chile, traveling between the Pacific coast and the *puna* to collect data on lithic sources. She applied a refined model using remote sensing and satellite imagery in her search for chert sources in the coastal mountain range. She had success finding sources! She also spent time visiting two obsidian sources in the *puna* (~15,000 feet above sea level), collecting obsidian samples for geochemical characterization.

Mexico

Soren Frykholm has finished his excavations and analyses in Mexico. He is now drafting his dissertation and has started to publish his excavation results—"New Research at Monte Negro, Oaxaca" has appeared in *Latin American Antiquity*; "Reworking Inherited Relationships at Monte Negro, Oaxaca" is forthcoming in *Oaxacan Worlds*, in the Routledge Worlds book series; and "Perspectivas arqueométricas sobre la manufactura de un depósito de objetos de piedra verde de Monte Negro, Oaxaca" will be published in the *Anales de Antropología*.

Jennifer Larios spent most of the summer working on her dissertation, which reports the results of three seasons of excavations at the Postclassic settlement at the Jalieza archaeological site in the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico. She also took U-M undergraduates to the United Nations in New York, where they attended the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as part of their work as research assistants for the Violations Against Indigenous Africa project. Larios also co-founded AntroDialogues Inc., a nonprofit organization, which will be tackling inequities in research and academics. The AntroDialogues collective hosted their second annual symposium "Diálogos por Oaxaca" in collaboration with the Ervin Frissell Museum of Oaxacan Archaeology. The symposium was created to foster dialogue between archaeologists who work in Oaxaca and as a response to the decreasing accessibility of US academic spaces for Mexican colleagues. For the event, Larios also organized a roundtable that largely featured Oaxacan and Indigenous activists and community organizers. The roundtable gave participants a platform to discuss their experience with academic research projects in their communities and pathways towards more inclusive and engaged research projects in Oaxaca. You can learn more about these projects at indigenousafrica.org and antrodialogues.org.

Curator Tiffany Fryer continued her historical archaeology survey in the Yucatan Peninsula. This year their regional survey program focused on a remote area of the communal land-holding where they recorded several previously undocumented ranches, roads, and field fortifications. This year the team published the seventh volume of their zine *Imágenes de Ti-hosuco: Hacienda xArcos o Tzitz*, which features one of the ex-haciendas her research has contributed to documenting and preserving. She also dedicated herself to a new partnership in the town with a group of cultural promoters who are working with the land organization to found a community museum, El Museo Comunitaro: La Huella de Nuestros Ancestros. And, as usual, she finished up the season by co-sponsoring an annual commemoration festival to the Maya Social War—the historical context for all of her research in the community where she works.

Additionally, last year Fryer joined the leadership of the Woodlawn Cemetery Restoration Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan. This project supports local community members in the documentation and reclamation of this historically Black cemetery. This summer they hosted several "restoration days," where volunteer community members helped clear the overgrowth at the cemetery. They also had a comprehensive geophysical survey conducted at the site and received the onsite aid of a trained cadaver dog to help delimit the boundaries of the burial grounds within the property limit. The project continues to conduct investigations on and offsite as they attempt to recover the hundreds of names of Woodlawn's interred and construct place-based biographies for each of them.

Additionally, she has been working with curator **Bryan Miller**, collections manager **Jim Moss**, and poet Janice Lobo Sapigao on an interdisciplinary anthology featuring the works of archaeologists, museum specialists, artists, and creative writers centered on UMMAA's foundational and widely renowned Philippine collections.

Peru

PhD candidate **Jhon Cruz** returned to Peru in the summer to conduct survey, analyses, and experiments using andesite tools. Jhon spent three months producing andesite tools, using the tools, and studying the use wear patterns. Jhon compared his results with archaeological stone tools collected during his 2024 excavation at Tuco Ragra. Later in the summer Jhon led a workshop for archaeology students in Huaraz on stone tools and experimental archaeology. The activities included knapping, shearing wool, cutting and chopping wood and bones, and grinding quinoa. Jhon also continued his high-altitude exploration of the Santa Valley, seeking Archaic and Formative rock art and camelid corrals created by camelid hunters and early llama pastoralists during the Formative Period (1800–500 BC). These new data augment Jhon's dissertation project which is focused on the transition from hunting and gathering to camelid pastoralism. He expanded his survey for open-air camps and corrals around wetlands and lagoons, as well as acquired new data on the use of stone tools for specialized tasks related to the management of camelids, and added data on rock art as sacred places where ceremonies and rites are depicted.



Archaeology students from Huaraz, Peru, shearing wool with flake tools they produced during a stone tool experimental workshop led by Jhon Cruz.

This summer graduate student **Ian Beggen** was writing his dissertation. He anticipates defending his dissertation, titled "Archaeological Investigation of Forager Cultural Adaptations to Climate Change in the Highland Andes," in the fall semester. Along with dissertation writing, Ian married his college sweetheart, Nicole Colasurdo, in a beautiful ceremony that took place in Ann Arbor on June 27. It was a summer of major milestones for Ian and Nicole, and they both look forward to their future together with blissful optimism.

Graduate student **Julia McCuaig** traveled to the Lake Titicaca Basin to survey Formative period sites for her dissertation. Her aim is to examine ancient agriculture and foodways. Three students—graduate students Matthew Brown and Liley Bozard as well as U-M undergraduate Patrick Phang (now a graduate student at the University of Texas)—joined Julia on this trip. Julia has recently joined



Julia McCuaig, Matthew Brown, and Liley Bozard in the highlands of Lake Arapa, the lake northwest of Lake Titicaca.

CARI (Collasuyo Archaeological Research Institute), a research institute for archaeologists working in the Lake Titicaca area; the institute generously provided a field station where they could work (Julia and others say "Thank you!"). One site was particularly promising for future excavation; it contained terraces, a sunken patio or sunken court, and a number of carved stones and sub-surface tombs. When the team had "down time," they explored famous archaeological sites, including Pukara and Sillustani. Following their work in the Lake Titicaca Basin, Julia and Patrick joined Dr. Véronique Bélisle (U-M PhD, now associate professor at Millsaps College) on her archaeological survey project southeast of Cusco.

After spending winter semester on an internship at the University of Missouri Research Reactor, **Matthew Brown** traveled to Puno, Peru, for two weeks to assist Julia McCuaig with initial site visits for her future dissertation excavations. Julia and Matt were able to visit a handful of sites identified by Dr. Charles Stanish (University of South Florida) on a prior survey of the northern Titicaca Basin. After returning from the field, Matthew spent the rest of his summer teaching a course he designed called "The Incas and Their Ancestors," which focused not only on the archaeology of the ancient Andes but also how archaeologists collaborate with local communities in their work and other ethical issues in modern archaeology. When not teaching, Matthew continued writing and analyzing data for his dissertation, which he will continue during the upcoming semester.

This summer **Liley Bozard** joined fellow graduate student Julia McCuaig's survey project in the Lake Titicaca Basin, which identified sites with associated residences and agricultural management systems that will be tested in later field seasons for McCuaig's dissertation project.

United States

The 2026 Lake Huron field season, directed by curator **John O'Shea**, began with the installation of two new pieces of equipment: a movement recording unit (MRU) and a frame to support the marine vibracore system. The MRU records the movement of the vessel in three dimensions during data collection, allowing for smoother and more accurate acoustic images. It also provides enhanced locational accuracy, now on the order of 10 centimeters. The unit and new antennae were installed and tested with the help of David Cummins, marine technology instructor at Alpena Community College, and Brian Abbott of Abbott Underseas.

The custom frame was designed and adapted for use on the S/V Blue Traveler with the help of David Cummins, Jason Shaw, volunteer dive team member, and graduate student **Amy Socha**. The frame system will support the collection and recovery of cores from beneath the lake floor. Coring is an essential aspect of the research, as it

allows researchers to calibrate the images collected via the sub-bottom profile, as well as date the layered strata and collect samples for further analysis via eDNA.

The initial use of both systems was conducted in Thunder Bay. Based on a prior survey, it appears that Thunder Bay was a shallow "perched" pond during the Early Holocene, with an early manifestation of the Thunder Bay river cutting across and emptying into the lake via rapids formed by limestone underlying the mouth of the bay. This summer, additional sub-bottom mapping was conducted across the mouth of the bay and across the zone between North Point and Thunder Bay Island to better define the dynamic outlet of the bay. With the assistance of Erich Schlueter, course instructor for the Science in the Sanctuary class at Alpena High School, three cores were successfully collected—one in a relatively shallow area inshore, and two in the central portion of the basin. These cores are currently being processed at the Research Museums Center (RMC) laboratory in Ann Arbor.

Having successfully managed coring in the confines of Thunder Bay, O'Shea's next effort was directed at the deeply layered deposits associated with the Peat-1 site (20AA272). Coring in the open lake is more challenging given both the deeper water (roughly 30 m deep at this location) and the need to keep the coring apparatus vertical and stationary. After two failed attempts, his team modified their procedure, monitoring the actual coring via the ROV with a diver onsite to cap the base of the core immediately as it was withdrawn from the lake bottom.

The revised protocol proved successful. With the assistance of lead diver Tyler Schultz, of Michigan Adventure Diving, one long core (Core 4) was recovered from the area of thick layered deposits, along with a second shorter core (Core 5) located roughly 45 m east of Core 4 in the area of peat. The depth of the second core appears to reflect a very hard buried surface, as is visible in the sub-bottom imagery. These cores have been transported to the RMC in Ann Arbor and await processing.

Following the successful recovery of the cores, they began efforts to identify the location of the campsite associated with the obsidian microdebitage found in the peat. Two initial locations were selected for sampling. The first was located on the shore of the one-time pond immediately to the west of the obsidian finds, while the second was located further to the south in a location that produced resonance "haystacks" during sub-bottom survey. Sample recovery was conducted by Tyler Schultz and volunteer diver Betsy Campbell, also of Michigan Adventure Diving.

Sampling in the first area (PST-1) was disappointing, as the location had been heavily scoured and retained only very modest amounts of sediment, along with sizeable boulders. It seems likely that the ancient land surface here has been affected by slope wash and has eroded away. The second location (PST-2) exhibited much more sediment, although on first impression it appeared to be more gravelly rather than sandy, again suggestive of water flow across the surface. Large boulders were also present at this location. Bottom samples from both locations were collected and have been returned to RMC for analysis.

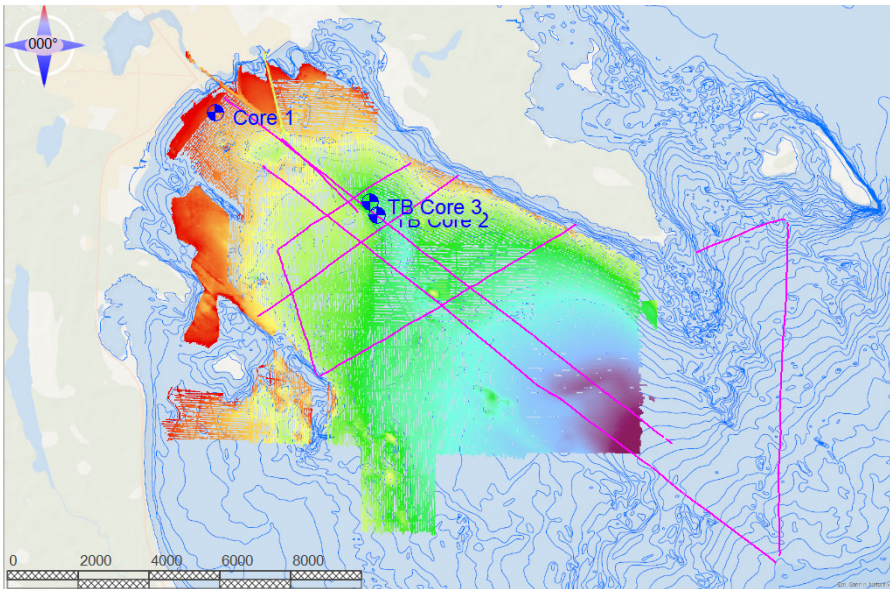


John O'Shea and his crew collected cores with this coring unit, pictured here at maximum depth on the lake floor. The core tube extends roughly 11 feet into the bottom prior to extraction.

The second half of O'Shea's field season will be devoted to additional SCUBA sampling in the area of Peat-1 in a continuing effort to identify the early campsite. His team will also begin a more detailed survey of the Klinsky Cave locality in anticipation of further sampling in this deep-water setting.

Graduate student **Liley Bozard** participated in the Arkansas Archeological Survey (ARAS) and Arkansas Archeological Society (AAS) Training Program at Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park in Arkansas, where she has previously worked. Under the direction of Dr. Paige Ford (ARAS station archeologist), Liley excavated a series of pits and associated structural debris in the plaza area of this site. Plum Bayou Mounds, one of the largest Woodland period sites in the Mississippi Valley, was a gathering area for ceremonial activities between AD 650–1050. Liley was awarded the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship, which supports students who will make significant contributions to STEM research and education. These three years of financial support will help Liley conduct her dissertation research in the Central Mississippi River Valley.

News from the Field 2026







Liley Bozard holds a large piece of cane-impressed daub that was recovered from a pit feature at Plum Bayou Mounds, a Woodland period site in the Mississippi Valley in Arkansas.

Above left: John O'Shea and his crew created this map of Thunder Bay, showing the sub-bottom survey track lines and the locations of Cores 1–3. The background color and contours reflect the modern bathymetry of the bay.

Above right: Dan Garner looking over a screen at Willow Springs, a large site in the Laramie Basin in Wyoming.

Graduate student **Dan Garner** and his family packed up their gear this summer and headed to Laramie, Wyoming, where they spent two and half months. His work included both excavation and research in collections, with time split between being in the field and in the University of Wyoming Archaeological Repository.

Dan participated in excavations at Willow Springs, a large multicomponent site in the Laramie Basin, following up on the work started by George Mulloy in the 1960s and continued in recent years by state archaeologist Spencer Pelton. Dan also began excavating a new site, Hundred Springs, on University of Wyoming property near Red Buttes. At Hundred Springs, he conducted a series of auger tests and excavated a test unit. To his surprise Dan and other project members actually found what he was looking for—a late Paleoindian component and the base of a projectile point.

When Dan wasn't in the field, he spent a considerable amount of time doing a deep dive into the collections at the University of Wyoming Archaeological Repository. He examined Late Paleoindian collections from across Wyoming, gathering information for his dissertation. When he took time off from research, Dan and his family went hiking and fishing in the Medicine Bow National Forest and began exploring the mountains around Laramie.

Graduate student **Amy Socha** spent three weeks with the Montereggi Project in Italy, a hilltop excavation project jointly run by Florida State University and Archaeorete. During the rest of the summer she conducted pilot fieldwork and lab work for her dissertation, looking at paleoenvironments associated with deglaciation and human adaptation in the Great Lakes region, focusing on submerged landscapes. She joined curator John O'Shea on the Alpena Amberley Ridge to collect sediment cores and began working with the samples at the RMC in Ann Arbor.

Asia & Central Asia

China

Graduate student **Qi Zheng** joined an excavation at the Shendun site in Nanjing, China, where she found abundant pottery and some bronze daggers. The site is roughly dated to the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770 BCE–256 CE).

Kazakhstan

Graduate student **Kara Larson** participated in several research and writing projects. She traveled to the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology at La Sierra University to continue zooarchaeological research on the Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan fauna. She began zooarchaeological and isotopic analyses on faunal material from Khirbat al-Balu'a, Jordan, where she will also begin a new excavation project investigating the site's Iron Age lower city neighborhood. Kara also published three peer-reviewed articles this summer. The first, published in *Archaeometry*, focused on Silk Road herd management practices at Dzhankent, Kazakhstan. An article on diverse livestock management at Tepe Farukhabad appeared in *Scientific Reports*; the article was co-authored with her former AUGMENT mentee, Anna Luurtsema (when the latter was an undergraduate at Michigan). A third publication, with several UMMAA members, appeared in *PLOS One*; it discusses dietary stability in Serbia. A fourth article (accepted for publication in *Advances in Archaeological Practice*) outlines a framework for the incorporation and mentorship of undergraduates in archaeological lab spaces.

Kara is currently serving as an adjunct professor in anthropology at Troy University. This fall she defended her doctoral dissertation on Early Bronze Age urban foodways in the Southern Levant. Congratulations, Dr. Larson!

Mongolia

This summer the Klinsky-funded fieldwork in the northern Mongolian province of Khövsgöl was led by curators **Alicia Ventresca-Miller** and **Bryan Miller**. They collaborated with Jamsranjav Bayarsaikhan of the Mongolian Institute of Archaeology. Excavations focused on the burials of local elites of the Mongol Empire (ca. 1200–1400 CE) in frontier regions between the Steppe and Siberia. Most tombs had been pillaged, either centuries ago or in more recent times, but several burials were fully intact.

In May, at the site of Gol Mod, the team excavated eight tombs on a high mountain ridge. One permafrost tomb yielded an imported Chinese wine jar repurposed as a candle, with remnants of butter preserved inside. Another unlooted tomb held the remains of a woman, replete with gold and silver earrings, decorated riding equipment



Qi Zheng standing in her excavation pit at the Shendun site in Nanjing, China, holding a newly found sherd with a trowel.



Kara Larson works on faunal material from Khirbat al-Balu'a, Jordan at the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology at La Sierra University in California.



Some members of the fieldwork team in northern Mongolia in July 2026, including (from left to right) Tömörbaatar Tuvshinjargal, Tsegmediin Mönkhbat, Bryan Miller, Alicia Ventresca-Miller, Retstendorj Bayarmaa, and Tsogtgagarin Ganzorig.

(including a full bridle, a saddle, and stirrups), gilded silver ornaments, and offerings of sheep.

During June and July, with a team from NOMAD Science, Miller and Ventresca-Miller excavated twenty additional burials on the mountain ridges of Nariin Goliin Gozgor and Khankhmait. Many of the burials of elite men, women, and children were looted, but the team recovered birch bark for quivers and a woman's elite hat (*boqtaq*).

The team also unearthed an intact grave of a warrior with a long iron sword. Swords are rarely recovered from Mongol era burials; thus, this was an important discovery. Another burial on the Azargiin Nuruu mountain ridge further west (although heavily looted within recent years) yielded the fragments of a Mongol robe (*deel*) made of gold-threaded brocade silk and bearing intricate floral designs. These collective discoveries provide robust insights into the dynamics of local elite networks that the Mongol rulers depended on, detailing ritual traditions that united them and their connections to continental trade networks.

In August a small team ventured out to the northwestern province of Bayan-Ölgii and into the high alpine Bear Valley (with access via horse and camel caravan) to investigate a burial ground of mounds. A test excavation of one unlooted burial confirmed the site to be of the Early Iron Age Pazyryk culture, and this will be the focus of more intensive surveys and excavations in summer 2027.

Europe

Greece

The Medieval Roman Archaeological Survey of Kalymnos is directed by graduate student **Drosos Kardulias**. His



Drosos Kardulias (2nd from left) and his team have mapped three Early Medieval settlements on the island of Kalymnos, Greece.

summer field season concluded with the full mapping of the island's three Early Medieval fortified settlements. The 2026 focus was the site of Agios Konstantinos on the neighboring islet of Telendos, the largest of the three sites by far. Combining handheld GPS mapping and photogrammetry, Drosos recorded every extant piece of the site's architecture, totaling 243 houses, 28 cisterns, 1.9 km of defensive walls, 4 threshing circles, a basilica, and countless agricultural terraces. With the help of colleagues from Davidson College and U-M's own Calvin Stineman, the area surrounding the site was also intensively studied, leading to the first clear picture of subsistence and mobility

News from the Field 2026



This summer, curators Alicia Ventresca-Miller and Bryan Miller led excavations at multiple sites in Mongolia. In August, a small team traveled by caravan over a mountain pass in the Altai Mountains to an area known as Bear Valley, in the northwestern province of Bayan-Ölgii. Several camels were used to bring the field equipment and the *gers* (yurts) for the field camp. *See back cover.*

on Telendos. The process of constructing these sites was further studied through ongoing raw material sourcing. Drosos' project is now moving into data analysis and sampling for AMS radiocarbon and OSL dating. Initial publications of his work include an article on the island's watchpost network in the journal *Origini* and a forthcoming edited volume on the global archaeology of war, including a chapter on how landscapes can be read to determine their influence on past conflicts.

Kosova

Doctoral student **Zhaneta Gjyshja** spent the summer in Kosova analyzing the artifacts that she recovered in her excavations at the Late Neolithic village of Lluga, Vrella, her dissertation site.

Erina Baci defended her dissertation, "Re-examining the Hillfort in Balkan Prehistory: A Case Study from Western Kosova," which examined settlement and mobility in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age (1400–800 BC) in the Plains of Dukagjin in western Kosova. She focused on the role of hillforts within regional settlement systems. Combining archaeological survey and excavation, GIS-based spatial analyses, radiocarbon dating, artifact analysis, and stable isotope analyses, Erina demonstrated that hillforts were not uniform defensive refuges but fulfilled diverse roles within settlement networks. The results show that hillforts are best understood in relation to lowland and terraced settlements and burial tumuli, while isotopic evidence indicates that people and livestock were more locally mobile than traditionally assumed. The dissertation contributes new empirical data to the study of Balkan prehistory, including 28 new radiocarbon dates and the first stable isotope analyses of prehistoric human and faunal remains from the region. She says that her work would not have been possible without the support of the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, the Department of Anthropology, and external funding sources, including the National Science Foundation. She also benefited enormously from the collaboration of local partners at the Archaeological Institute of Kosova and the University of Prishtina, as well as the many undergraduate students from both institutions who contributed to her research.

In June of 2026, **Michael L. Galaty**, curator of European archaeology, co-directed excavations at the Pepaj site in Western Kosova with Premtim Alaj, an archaeologist with the Archaeological Institute of Kosova. Pepaj was identified in 2018 by a survey team with the Regional Archaeology in the Peja and Istog Districts of Kosova (RAPID-K). RAPID-K was an intensive, diachronic survey project that operated in the Dukagjin region from 2018–2022. It was designed to determine whether there were direct



In 2026, Erina Baci successfully defended her dissertation, "Re-examining the Hillfort in Balkan Prehistory: A Case Study from Western Kosova." Congratulations, Dr. Baci!

connections—e.g., movement of people, animals, and trade goods—between northern Albania and western Kosova via mountain passes during prehistory.

Finding large numbers of prehistoric (Bronze and Iron Age) surface artifacts at Pepaj was not a complete surprise, given its proximity to a known hillfort and nearby tumuli, excavated in 2008 and 2014 by an Archaeological Institute of Kosova team. What was surprising, however, was the extremely large size of the artifact scatter, ca. 20 ha, indicating a potentially very large settlement. In 2018, Galaty extracted charcoal for radiocarbon dating by Beta Analytic, Inc. from cultural strata exposed by a construction cut; it yielded a date of ca. 1200 BC. A program of shovel testing in 2019 and geophysical survey in 2021 confirmed Pepaj's large size and largely prehistoric date.

During the month of June 2025, Galaty and Alaj conducted test excavations at Pepaj. Eight 1 x 1 m and one 1 x 2 m sondages were excavated across the site, down to sterile soil or bedrock, in order to identify intact stratigraphy, determine more precisely the settlement's chronology, and plan future excavations. One of the units excavated in 2025, Unit 5, was unlike all the others: it produced the most pottery, the most small finds, the most faunal bone from the most species, and a wide variety of botanical remains. At the bottom of Unit 5, at ca. 1.5 m, the team uncovered a burnt clay floor, overlain by ash and



In June 2026, Michael L. Galaty co-directed excavations at the Pepaj site in western Kosova with Premtim Alaj, an archaeologist with the Archaeological Institute of Kosova. The team appears to have identified three superimposed houses with dates from the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age.

daub, interpreted as the remains of a possible structure. Levels 11 and 12, just above and including the floor, were AMS radiocarbon dated by Beta Analytic, Inc. to 1900–1740 cal. BC and 2057–1920 cal. BC, very early Middle Bronze Age (or transitional from the Early Bronze Age).

Based on the results of 2025's test excavations, in June of 2026, with funding from the University of Michigan and the American Institute for Southeast European Studies (AISEES), Galaty and team excavated a larger, 4 x 4 m unit, encompassing 2025's Unit 5. While the results are still being processed, the 2026 excavations appear to have identified three superimposed houses, dating to the Middle Bronze Age, the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age, and the Late Iron Age. Artifact, faunal, and botanical analysis, followed by radiocarbon dating, to take place in the coming year, are expected to clarify the site's chronology, function, economy, and trade connections, with implications for the history of Dukagjin and Kosova, generally. In fact, excavations at Pepaj will have an impact well beyond the immediate region. The combination of prehistoric flat settlement, hillfort, and tumuli, all of which have been excavated, is rare in the Balkans. We expect our results to make major contributions to European archaeology, helping further integrate Kosova's archaeological record with that of the rest of the continent.

Carpathian Basin

Györgyi Parditka successfully defended her dissertation on the Carpathian Basin of Eastern Europe. She examined why some cultural practices proved more resilient to major social and environmental change than others, focusing on whether differences in community connections could help explain these varied responses. She explored the Middle to Late Bronze Age transition (ca. 1600/1500 BC), a time of substantial change but regionally variable changes in settlement organization, mortuary practices, and material culture. Archaeologists have increasingly recognized variation in how Middle Bronze Age communities were organized, but Parditka's research asked whether these differences were significant enough to contribute to the contrasting long-term trajectories of different regions.

She compared two neighboring regions that experienced different degrees of disruption. The results showed significant differences in community organization that likely contributed to these contrasting trajectories: communities in the Lower Maros Region, which experienced more substantial changes during the transition, were more regionally integrated and centralized during the Middle Bronze Age than those in the neighboring Körös Region, which showed a more decentralized community structure.

Congratulations, Dr. Parditka!

Italy

PhD candidate **Megan Savoy** has been awarded the Fulbright Research Award, Fondazione con Il Sud (Foundation of Southern Italy), to collect skeletal data for her dissertation. She will be conducting her research at the University of Salento (Lecce, Italy) on a very large skeletal assemblage from Roca Vecchia, which dates to 950–700 BCE. The Early Iron Age was a period of recovery and transition after the collapse of the Late Bronze Age, and Roca Vecchia was one of the most important fortified settlements in southern Italy during the Bronze Age. A hypogeic chamber tomb was discovered near Roca Vecchia which contained thousands of commingled and fragmented skeletal remains. This grave is the only known example of an inhumation burial of the Early Iron Age in Salento and, up until now, little was known about the living conditions and population health due to the lack of skeletal remains. In collaboration with Professor Teodoro Scarano (University of Salento), Megan is investigating the skeletal remains and archaeological material to understand the living conditions and quality of life during the Early Iron Age at Roca Vecchia, as well as the origins of these individuals and their connections to the Messapians, an indigenous group from Salento.

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Megan completed her second field season on the Roca Vecchia skeletal assemblage. In September, she trained American and Italian students at the Roca Vecchia Field School to help her clean, catalogue, and photograph a portion of the assemblage. She continued her work at the University of Salento, completing the preliminary data collection in December. In January, Megan began collecting even more data such as (1) demographic information; (2) taphonomy, fracture, and pathology observations; (3) and metric data for every single identifiable skeletal element. This extremely detailed method proved to be time-consuming and Megan was only able to catalogue 14% of the entire skeletal assemblage by the end of her Fulbright period. Therefore, this September Megan returned to Lecce to continue her data collection but with the goal to prioritize skeletal elements that yield important demographic information (age, sex) that are also strong candidates for chemical analyses (aDNA, stable isotope analysis, etc.). Once this focused data collection is complete, Megan will submit samples for chemical analysis to better understand the origins and life stories of these individuals. This research was funded by (in the order received): The Lewis and Clark Fund for Exploration and Field Research, John R. Coleman Traveling Fellowship, Fulbright Research Award, and the Griffin Endowment Fellowship.

Curator **Giulia Saltini Semerari**, along with graduate student **Arantxa Bertholet del Barrio** and colleague



Above: Giulia Saltini Semerari and Dr. Vincenzo Marasco, a sociologist at the University of Florence, document the history of a village cemetery in Sicily.

Below: Arantxa Bertholet del Barrio and Professor Merixtell Ferrer worked to systematize collected data on published tumuli burials in the Mat Valley in Albania.



Professor Meritxell Ferrer (with the online contribution of U-M alumna and Stanford graduate student Gabriella Armstrong) spent a study season in Burrel, Albania, to organize data on unpublished tumuli burials in the Mat Valley. In August Giulia did the groundwork to start an ethnoarchaeological project in the village of Ginostra on the island of Stromboli, Sicily. She documented the cemetery of the town and collected oral testimonies on the people buried there.

Graduate student Arantxa Bertholet del Barrio attended the Balkan Field School Archaeometallurgy workshop and learned how to conduct metal analysis in multiple ways—from using the naked eye to using an SEM microscope. Arantxa also conducted survey and excavated in a cave in the Vallo di Diano in southern Italy, where she was looking at Bronze Age transhumance, connectivity, and migration.

News about UMMAA Collections



Collections manager Jim Moss, recent U-M graduate and UMMAA intern Frank Wang, collections manager Andrea Blaser, and NAGPRA compliance specialist Sarah Carlson at the Research Museums Center.

At UMMAA collections, in addition to caring for the objects we house, we continue our efforts to make the Museum more accessible to the community. This work takes many forms—below are some of the highlights.

Museum website on Chinese collections

In August, UMMAA published a new website, which features one of the Museum's founding collections--the Chinese Government Collection. This large collection of textiles, ceramics, and other contemporary materials came to the University in 1885 and was transferred to the newly created Museum of Anthropology in the 1920s. The website, called China's Image Across the Seas: The Chinese Government Collection and the New Orleans World's Fair, explores the historical context under which this collection was made, in both China and the United States. This exhibition was researched and written by undergraduate student Frank Zijie Wang (class of 2026).

Philippine Culture Night

In January 2026, collections manager Jim Moss was invited to participate in the annual Philippine Culture Night (PCN) hosted by the Filipino American Student Association



At Philippine Culture Night in January 2026, three contestants were shown three objects from UMMAA's collections and had to guess which area of the Philippines the objects were from. The event was hosted by FASA Culture co-chairs Ellie Thai and Sophia Atendido. (Photographer: Marianne Thai)



(FASA) at the University of Michigan. The event took place in a packed Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre. PCN is a celebration, sharing, and honoring of Filipino/Filipino American culture through traditional dance, musical performances, acting, and spoken word. This year's theme was Matatag, meaning resilience. Resilience includes resistance to colonialization, assimilation, dictatorship, and displacement through the preservation of language, dialects, stories, and culture.

With Jim's help, FASA culture co-chairs Ellie Thai and Sophia Atendido chose three objects from UMMAA's ethnographic collections that represented the three main geographic areas that the Philippines are generally divided into: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The three contestants were then shown the items in-person, on-stage, and made their guesses. The winner was… well, we were all winners in the end, because it was an amazing night with an impressive cast of students from Ann Arbor and beyond!

Osteology news

This semester Irene Hochgraf Cameron, osteology inventory specialist, is pivoting from work with the Corydon LaFord Collection to begin work reassociating skeletal remains from the Philippines with help from undergraduate student Ava McKenzie.

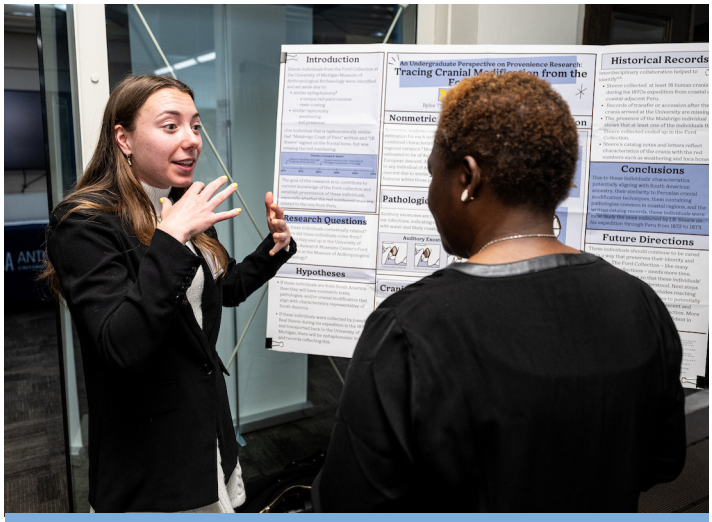
Irene is also continuing work on advocacy and building community around the identification and care of human remains with unknown provenance. She recently spoke at the 25th European Paleopathology meeting in Berlin. She is now under contract to write an edited volume with the University Press of Florida on stewardship osteology with chapters highlighting the history and ethical context for this work; the methodological approaches to the reconstruction and reassociation of human remains; stories of working with reference and descent communities; and the institutional and legal frameworks that shape stewardship decisions.



Above: Irene Hochgraf Cameron, UMMAA osteology inventory specialist, speaks at the 25th European Paleopathology meeting in Berlin.

Left: Watercolor on paper scroll titled *Sowing Cotton*. Late 19th century. Chinese Government Collection, UMMAA 16911b.

News about UMMAA Collections



Rylee Tolson (class of 2026) at the Anthropology Honors Research Poster Symposium. After working with collections for a year, Rylee Tolson won the Anthropology Honors Research Poster Award. Now as a graduate student in transcultural studies, Rylee will continue the work from her undergraduate thesis, "A Perspective on Provenience Research: Tracing Cranial Modification from the Ford Collection," which unveiled Peruvian origins of some of the skeletons from the Ford Collection associated with Joseph Beal Steere's expeditions. (Photo by Michigan Photography)



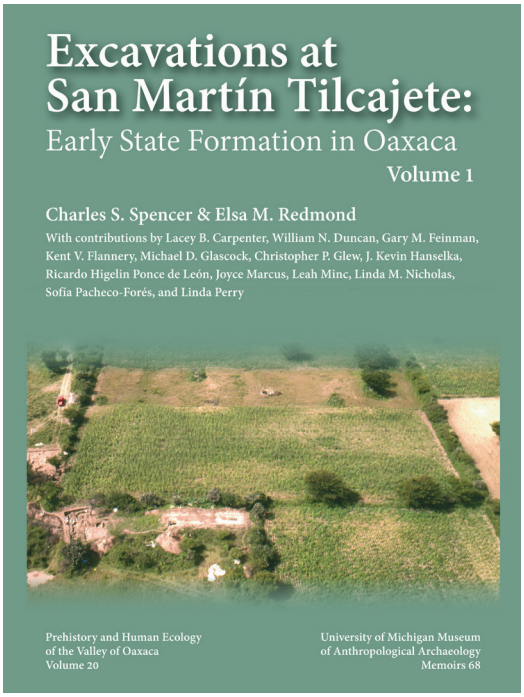
Runyi Wang (class of 2026) at the Anthropology Honors Research Poster Symposium. Runyi worked with Jim Moss to catalog and update content for the Dean Worcester Collection. She also studied objects from the 1884–1885 Chinese Government Collection for her undergraduate thesis, "The Cultural Biography of a Chinese Cotton Jacket from the New Orleans World's Fair to the Museum" (see photo below).

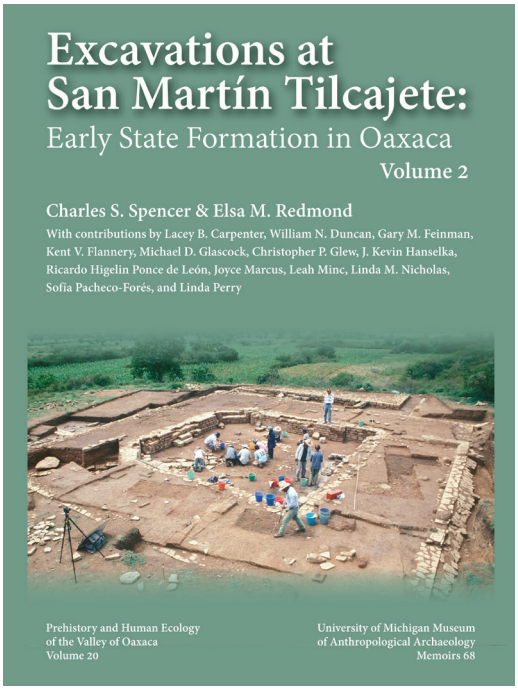


Women's black and blue cotton jacket. Late 19th century. Collected in Canton, China for the 1884–1885 World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition. Chinese Government Collection, UMMAA 11991. Photographer: Zhiwen Gong.

UMMAA Press

sites.lsa.umich.edu/archaeology-books





December 2026 release!!

Excavations at San Martín Tilcajete: Early State Formation in Oaxaca

Volume 20 of the Prehistory and Human Ecology of the Valley of Oaxaca series and No. 68 in the Memoirs series

In this two-volume site report, authors Charles Spencer and Elsa Redmond present the final, comprehensive results of two decades of archaeological fieldwork (1993–2014) on the lands of San Martín Tilcajete, in the Ocotlán-Zimatlán subvalley of the Oaxaca Valley of Mexico. Their work focused on El Mogote and El Palenque, two archaeological sites with successive occupations spanning 500–100 BC, a time of transformational cultural change in Oaxaca. El Mogote and El Palenque were the largest sites in the Ocotlán-Zimatlán subvalley during their phases of greatest occupation: the Early Monte Albán I phase (500–300 BC) at El Mogote, and the Late Monte Albán I phase (300–100 BC) at El Palenque.

Through intensive survey and large-scale excavation of public buildings and residences, Spencer, Redmond, and their crew documented major political and religious changes between the Early Monte Albán I phase and the Late Monte Albán I phase, notably the appearance around 300 BC at El Palenque of key state institutions such as the palace and multiroom temple. The evidence also revealed that the Tilcajete locality maintained its political independence from the city of Monte Albán until the 1st century BC, even though Monte Albán had conquered far more distant regions by 300 BC. State formation at Tilcajete played a substantial role in this independent polity's ability to resist Monte Albán's aggressions for two centuries.

Hardcover • 2 volumes • 1070 pages • 8.25 x 11 inches
$170 in print, ebook, and epub

The University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA) has published academic books on archaeology and ethnology for more than 90 years. UMMAA Press books are available in print, as ebooks, and online at Fulcrum, a platform hosted by the University of Michigan Press at press.umich.edu.

Find this and all UMMAA Press titles at **sites.lsa.umich.edu/archaeology-books**

LSA MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The University of Michigan
Museum of Anthropological Archaeology
3010 School of Education Building
610 E. University Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259

Regents of the University of Michigan

Jordan B. Acker
Michael J. Behm
Mark J. Bernstein
Paul W. Brown
Sarah Hubbard
Denise Ilitch
Carl J. Meyers
Katherine E. White

Domenico Grasso (ex officio)

A tomb mound and *gers* (tent houses) at camp in Bear Valley, in the northwestern province of Bayan-Ölgii, Mongolia. The tomb in the foreground was excavated in 2026 and contained one person with offerings and an entire sacrificed horse, as most burials of the Pazyryk culture do. There are almost a dozen graves at this burial ground and potentially more within the valley that the team will explore in 2027.

