

The paper submitted is the final research paper from the course ANTH341: Introduction to Zooarchaeology. The assignment was rather open-ended; we were given an archaeological faunal assemblage and given the freedom to create our own research question to be answered by the material. My main interest within archaeology is studying past human-environmental interactions, so the research question I chose for this project was: “How did Medieval-Era Icelandic people adapt to and shape their environment, as well as be influenced by environmental conditions?”

I began my research by diving into the background material on the site that the faunal remains came from: Skalholt, Iceland. The background material consisted of a dissertation written by a UMD professor who had worked on the excavations and a brief site history written by one of his colleagues at the University of Iceland. This information was enough to help guide my research in the right direction. It also inspired me to do a site-to-site comparison, instead of only focusing on the one site we analyzed in class. Comparing multiple sites allowed for a more elaborate, in-depth examination of the research question.

Once I read the background material, it was time to find other sources. A professor suggested to me that I look at the sources cited in the background material. I found this enormously helpful. By doing this, I almost had a pre-made list of sorts, of articles and papers to read through to continue my research. The advantage to this was that the large majority of the sources were peer-reviewed and reputable. To this day, reading through bibliographies is my main go-to when beginning research.

From here, I searched keywords and topics that I found relevant to my research on the UMD Library website and Google Scholar. I usually evaluated these sources by making sure they were peer-reviewed. For archaeological reports, that are not the same as published papers, I instead had to check that they came from a researcher who used the proper methodologies and data recording techniques.

I did not seek assistance from a librarian when completing this research project. Instead, I regularly consulted both the professor who taught the class, Barnet Pavao-Zuckerman, and the professor who excavated the material, George Hambrecht. These interactions were extremely helpful in conducting my research and they helped me to stay on track. With them, I was able to discuss zooarchaeological methods, analysis, and techniques. It was especially helpful to sit down with Dr. Hambrecht and discuss his research and my avenues of thought. These conversations taught me different ways to approach faunal data-sets and how to analyze them, such as, understanding age-profiles, butchery marks, and element distribution.

I knew before I took the class that I wanted to pursue zooarchaeology and environmental archaeology as a career since I had already worked in the lab for a semester, but this class helped engrain this even further. The paper for this class was the first paper I was truly excited to write. Reading through the sources and collecting the data felt more fun than it did school-work. Both the material and research techniques I learned through the course have stuck with me. I use the knowledge about the site as I continue to help analyze material. The research techniques have served very useful as I wrote a research paper for another archaeology class. I am also in the beginning stages of my honors thesis and am currently conducting the background research. The skills I learned through completing the research process for this paper are used every time I need to find a new source for my thesis.

If I had to go back and complete the research experience again, there is not much I would change. However, I wish I had understood the Inter-Library Loan service better. It has been very useful for my honors thesis research, and likely would have provided me with even more sources for my research paper. The current library website is also a lot easier to use than it was when I began at the University of Maryland. The user-friendly interface has made conducting online research much more enjoyable and better serves my research needs than it did previously. I even use it when reading papers for fun!