

Working within a University – an interview with Dr. Matthew Pawlowicz

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Dr. Matthew Pawlowicz, an instructor and researcher at VCU, provides an insight into working within a University department He specialises in African Archaeology with a focus on the Swahili coast and conducted his PhD research on the towns and villages surrounding the port of Mikindani in Southern Tanzania. At Songo Mnara he conducted surveying across the island to determine the areas of occupation. Alex, Rianca Vogels and Henriette Rødland all dug at Songo Mnara, during the summer of 2013.

What area of archaeology do you work in?

For the moment, I work in the academic end of things as an instructor and researcher at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

What kind of specialism do you have?

My primary geographic expertise is in Africa, particularly East Africa. I'm also well-grounded in environmental archaeology, settlement archaeology, spatial analysis and archaeological survey.

How did you get involved in your current role?

I'd had contact with the department at VCU prior to completing my graduate work, and there was a slot available for adjunct (part-time) teaching when I graduated. Over the course of a few years, I was able to work that up into a full-time position.

What does this involve?

I teach 8 classes a year, work on writing up my research in between, and try to get into the field during breaks whenever money is available.

What qualifications do you have and where did you study?

I have a BA in Archaeological Studies from Yale University, and a MA and PhD in Anthropology from the University of Virginia.

Your research is focused on East and Southern Africa. What started your interest in this area?

I was sucked into African Archaeology as an undergraduate whilst taking a class taught by Dr. Rod McIntosh; I was quite taken with the scope of archaeology on the continent and the opportunity to do

research on things that are still pretty poorly known, but often amazing in terms of what people were doing in the past. Rod works in Mali at Jenne-Jeno, but I don't speak French (when growing up in the US, Spanish seemed like a safer bet) so I ended up volunteering for some projects on the other side of the continent and stayed there.

As part of your PhD research you spent 13 months in Mikindani conducting field work. What was your favourite part of the project?

It's very hard to choose. We found 54 previously unrecorded sites, some of them as large as 10 hectares, so that was certainly exciting. The excavations were full of features and fun stuff that helped answer the project's major research question. Even the lab work wasn't bad, as we set up our float lab at the beach. But probably my favorite part (and here I give away my leaning towards survey) was becoming familiar with the entire region, seeing how different aspects of geography correlated with the region's archaeology, and being able to do the work and discover new things in a really beautiful part of the world.



Figure 1. *Kisiwa Forests.* Excavations were carried out in the surrounding area of Mikindani for my PhD (Image Copyright: M. Pawlowicz).

You worked as an archaeologist before starting your current position as part of Virginia Commonwealth Universities Anthropology department. What was your experience of this?

I worked for a time at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, where a foundation preserves and conducts research on the property and I also spent a year with a Cultural Resource Management firm. I'm the sort who really enjoys doing archaeology, so that element was always fun, but I found the nature of contract archaeology to be a bit uninspiring, I'm afraid. I think the work is important, but I spent a lot of

time digging holes not in pursuit of a research question, but just to determine if something was there or not, before the government sent in the bulldozers. That said, I'm employed from a different end of things now, so I'll admit a certain degree of bias.

For those wanting to work as a commercial archaeologist, how important do you think it is to have a Masters degree or a PhD?

I think it depends on what you want to do. In the US at least, you can certainly get a job as a field tech without them. A Masters seems to help if you're interested in a supervisor role, but you're most competitive if you can couple that with several years of experience. As far as the PhD goes, in my experience it left me a bit overqualified for what I was doing, but I suppose it probably would have helped me move up a bit faster had I stayed with commercial work.



Figure 2. *Ufukoni Mibuyu 3.* Taken during excavations around Mikindani for my PhD (Image Copyright: M. Pawlowicz).

What projects are you currently working on?

This summer I'm starting a new project working with some colleagues in archaeology, historical linguistics and biological anthropology looking at histories of mobility on the Kafue floodplain in Zambia. I'll be running the survey.

Any tips for those interested in archaeology reading this interview wanting to work in the same kind of role?

Here I think I'll fall back on my standard advice to students thinking about graduate work in archaeology, which is to be aware of what's going on in the field and what you want to get out of it beforehand. It's

certainly a tough job market out there for academics but, if you're committed, there are jobs out there (even if it might take you a long time to find the right one) and I certainly think it's a rewarding career (though I fully admit to bias there). Beyond that, if that's where your interest lies, get in touch with people doing the work. Many of us are friendly, can provide a bit of advice, and have bigger networks to call on regarding projects you might work with or programs that would suit your particular interests.

For more information on Matthew, visit <http://www.has.vcu.edu/wld/faculty/pawlowicz.html>

To view some of Matthew's work, follow:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0067270X.2012.677331>

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0067270X.2012.723510>

http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/712/art%253A10.1007%252Fs10437-013-9146-z.pdf?auth66=1391087020_800cd3179855e156abb7b5c7e2237cd7&ext=.pdf