

ACRL-Anthropology and Sociology Section
Anthropology Librarians Discussion Group
Midwinter 2014

Sunday, January 26th at the Philadelphia Convention Center, 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Our speaker was Dr. Janet Monge, Curator of Physical Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Dr. Monge shared anecdotes about her work. She described facets of museum work in physical anthropology, as they have been developed by current projects undertaken by the Penn Museum, one of the nation's oldest and most famous anthropology museums. (1) Librarians can take note of these trends when supporting faculty, especially archaeologists and physical anthropologists. First, Dr. Monge described a casting service which was developed by the Penn Museum. The program has several purposes: it serves to reproduce rare and fragile bone materials, preserving the originals from degradation by constant use. It provides a revenue stream to support the Museum's work, while also allowing allows the museum to sell reproductions world-wide at a reasonable cost, especially for museums whose institutions are not wealthy.

Another museum project has been to make CT scans of its collection. The project received NSF funding, and one of its first products was the imaging of some 5500 specimens. Part of some of the Museum's projects have been carried out using a nearby hospital's CT scanning facilities during off hours. This project has given rise to an open-access website,

A further project has been analysis of materials from areas near the Indian Ocean coastal areas of Kenya; this is part of a larger study of relationships between biology, culture, technology, and the expansion of the trading peoples known as the Swahili. . Another project, with the Mütter Museum of the History of Medicine, provides 3-d scans for the "Adopt-a-Skull" project. Another example was a study done by the Penn Museum on the mummy of Tutankhamun. Additional scans have been done on a bust of Thomas Jefferson from the American Philosophical Society, residues of cacao (chocolate) on pottery from the American Southwest, and other items. Each scan produces hundreds of individual scans, which must be compiled and stored on a CD. The Project makes use of freeware provided by the University of Indiana, and stored on supercomputers in two locations. It is an example of collaborative work between institutions.

Another recent project was a re-examination of human crania from Iran in the Samuel Morton collection, named for the famous (or infamous) 19th-century physical anthropologist Samuel Morton. Morton was accused of racist misinterpretation of evidence in the late Stephen Jay Gould's book, *The Mismeasure of Man*. The research team, including Dr. Monge, scanned the crania and determined that Morton's measurements were largely accurate, although they agreed with Gould that his interpretations of the data were motivated by a mistaken sense of racial superiority. The team's findings were reported in PLOS Biology, the public access journal of science (2)

Another project Dr. Monge recounted was the analysis of a Philadelphia crime scene evidence against a serial killer.

Yet another of Janet Monge's her famous projects was the investigation of burials from Duffy's Cut, Pennsylvania. This 19th-century site was the perhaps the most expensive mile of railroad construction in Pennsylvania history, costing about one million dollars in 1832. The burials were those of 57 Irish indentured servants who had been workers on the rail line. The deaths supposedly were due to a cholera epidemic, fostered (as many epidemics in the 19th century) by large populations in close quarters and in warm weather, conditions favoring the incubation of pathogens. Some surprises from the close examination and DNA testing by the physical anthropologists were that at least some of the causes of death had been murder, not cholera; and that one of the skeletons belonged to a sister of one of the worker (3)

Attendees introduced themselves after Dr. Monge's talk; there were about 30 members attending. She extended a warm invitation to all to visit the Penn Museum and contact her.

Submitted by Helen Clements for

Erin Pappas and Miriam Rigby, Co-Convenors

- 1) "125 Years and Still Exploring: (1887-2012). *Expedition* 54.3 (2012): 20-21. Web. 14 Feb. 2014
<http://www.penn.museum/documents/publications/expedition/>
- 2) *Open Research Scan Archive (ORSA)* Penn Museum. Web. 14 Feb. 2-14
<http://plum.museum.upenn.edu/~orsa/Overview.html>
- 3) Lewis JE, DeGusta D, Meyer MR, Monge JM, Mann AE, et al. The Mismeasure of Science: Stephen Jay Gould versus Samuel George Morton on Skulls and Bias. *PLoS Biology* 9.6(2011): e1001071. Web. 14 Feb. 2014
[doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1001071](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1001071)
- 4) Ellsworth, Amy. "Dead Men of Duffy's Cut" (blog entry). *Penn Museum Blog* 15 Mar. 2012. Web. 14 Feb. 2014
<http://www.penn.museum/blog/museum/video/dead-men-of-duffys-cut/>