

Bringing Asia to the World: Public Outreach via the Museum of Underwater Archaeology

Michelle Damian

Abstract

The most fascinating explorations of underwater cultural heritage lose much of their value if the information gathered is not disseminated to a wide audience. While much of our public outreach has traditionally come from publications and conference talks, the Internet has become the fastest way to reach the greatest numbers of people. Though technology for website creation has become easier in recent years many archaeologists lack the time and expertise, not only to create web sites, but also to promote them in ways that will reach the widest possible audience. The Museum of Underwater Archaeology (MUA)'s mission is to assist and promote the use of the Internet by ethical professional, student, and avocational underwater archaeologists.

This paper will focus on the various methods the MUA uses to present different projects, with a special spotlight on our Asian sites. It will also highlight ways to connect what is on the screen to actual hands-on experiences through different classroom-based teaching resources developed by the museum.

Introduction

As archaeologists we are responsible for disseminating information about the projects we conduct. Unfortunately those ideas are often pushed aside in the excitement of digging a new site. The often-heard lament is that archaeologists like to be in the field, but are less inclined to publish their findings. The nonprofit Museum of Underwater Archaeology (MUA) was founded in 2004 in an effort to combat this problem (<http://www.themua.org>). Our mission statement is to assist and promote the use of the Internet by ethical professional, student, and avocational underwater archaeologists, encouraging archaeologists at all levels to circulate information about our craft.

From the outset the MUA has tried not to focus on one particular nation or territory. Although it was founded in the United States it has sought to provide global coverage of underwater archaeology and to that end has made concerted efforts to introduce its audience to projects outside of the western hemisphere. We have an established audience: to date we have had over one hundred sixteen thousand views from over ninety countries on the main page, let alone all of the individual projects and subposts throughout the site. We do not charge any fees, but make our services available for free to all ethical archaeologists. The Asia-Pacific region is of particular importance to the MUA. The underwater cultural heritage of this area includes some of the most significant shipwrecks in human history and so requires due attention, preservation, and curation. The MUA seeks to assist underwater archaeologists working within this region with their public outreach efforts. This paper will discuss not only the publishing options available on the MUA website but also our past efforts within the Asia-Pacific territories included in this conference. Our hope is to provide greater coverage and assistance to the conference attendees in the future.

There are numerous benefits to posting one's research online. First and foremost is the need to publish our findings for the general public as well as our professional colleagues. The best discovery is meaningless if the information remains unavailable, locked away on a dusty shelf in a small office. A typical archaeological investigation publishes results through a journal article or two, or perhaps in a presentation at a conference. That results in a highly limited, specialized audience. Conversely, online publishing can reach a worldwide audience literally at the click of a button. Promoting this information helps draw greater numbers of viewers to our projects, in turn hopefully increasing interest in preserving our underwater cultural heritage.

Posting project reports online for a general audience can also be helpful to the individual authors. I have posted my own research as a project journal on the MUA, and I as well as other authors have been fortunate enough to gather additional information from readers who contribute their own observations. While those comments can occasionally be somewhat off-topic, often readers will provide helpful information or suggestions for further research. The internet allows us to connect with others whom we may never have reached otherwise. On a very pragmatic level, particularly for students and young archaeologists, it also helps to increase name recognition. My own research as posted on the MUA has been seen by over seven thousand people, and in the "real world" I have encountered archaeologists working on projects as diverse as Confederate submarines or American government preservation projects who have read my Asia-related work on the MUA. It is highly unlikely that our paths would have crossed in any other way.

MUA Presentation Styles

The MUA's presentation formats consist of three major categories as well as several experimental designs. The most in-depth category is museum exhibits, generally focusing on a detailed presentation of a single site or concept. Based on the idea of a brick-and-mortar museum, exhibits consist of several "galleries," similar to walking into a room of a museum. Within each gallery are a number of clickable links, representing the "artifact cases" of a traditional museum exhibit. MUA exhibits most often consist of three galleries, usually focusing on the history, methodology, and findings of an archaeological investigation. Each gallery might have anywhere between five and twelve links, allowing the archaeologists to introduce numerous aspects of the site. While at present there are no exhibits focusing on an Australasian maritime site, the MUA is eager to develop one with a partner from the region.

The exhibit format is not limited to site-specific topics, but is also used to explore more conceptual frameworks. The two best examples of this are the "Raising the Fleet" and the "Children's Introduction to Underwater Archaeology" exhibits. The former highlights the synthesis of science with art. In the project director's words, "the exhibit team used their artistic talents and scientific expertise to develop new and exciting methods of exploring the underwater frontiers of Lake George, New York, USA" (Zarzynski, *et al.* 2010). This not only

brought a new perspective into the archaeology of Lake George, but it also broadened the appeal of the site to artists and scientists as well. Similarly, the “Children’s Introduction” was designed to target the younger generation, teaching the basic steps of any underwater archaeological investigation. This exhibit incorporates interactive exercises encouraging the viewer to solve problems or explore the tools of maritime archaeology (Knoerl and Damian 2006). Neither exhibit is limited to a particular geographic locale, but encourages a topical approach to the concepts introduced.

Project journals also highlight one site or project, but are less structured than the exhibit galleries. They are generally conducted in “real time,” following an individual or group throughout the course of a project in a bloglike format. This type of MUA submission is most often utilized in a field school or student project, though it is not restricted to those submissions. Through periodic updates for projects spanning anything from two weeks to several years, the audience follows along with the archaeologists on their investigations. We are fortunate to have several Asia-based project journals, including a survey by the USA-based company Southeastern Archaeological Research, Inc. (SEARCH), of World War Two landing sites in Saipan. The SEARCH team worked in conjunction with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Historic Preservation Office in Partnership with the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, to identify and record magnetic anomalies along Saipan’s coastline. SEARCH also used their project journal to appeal to the general readership for additional information about the invasion as well as for insight into some of the artifacts found (Burns and Krivor 2008).

Our most common form of project journal is conducted in conjunction with training projects. Particularly in teaching underwater archaeology, many instructors are likely to focus on mapping, research, and technologies used for a project. Dissemination of information often gets short shrift in the classroom. The project journal format offers a way to incorporate public outreach and publication into the field experience itself. Assigning students entries in a project journal reinforces the need to present the work to a variety of audiences. The success of the first university field school project journal, done by East Carolina University in 2006, prompted Flinders University in Australia to incorporate the same training for their students. Two consecutive field schools in 2007 and 2008 showcased students learning maritime archaeological techniques and crafting journal entries that described their daily activities in an entertaining and informative manner (Flinders University 2007). The UNESCO Project on Safeguarding the Underwater Cultural Heritage of Asia and the Pacific is another Asia-based example of the field school project journal. This enterprise, conducted in Sri Lanka, trained the future trainers of maritime archaeology. Fourteen maritime archaeologists and conservators participated in a two-week series of lectures and fieldwork for the long-term goal of protecting Sri Lankan maritime heritage. This journal highlights international cooperation as well, as instructors came from within Sri Lanka, India, Japan, and Australia (Khan, *et al.* 2008). The various perspectives from within Australasia are brought together in this type of collaborative field school project journal.

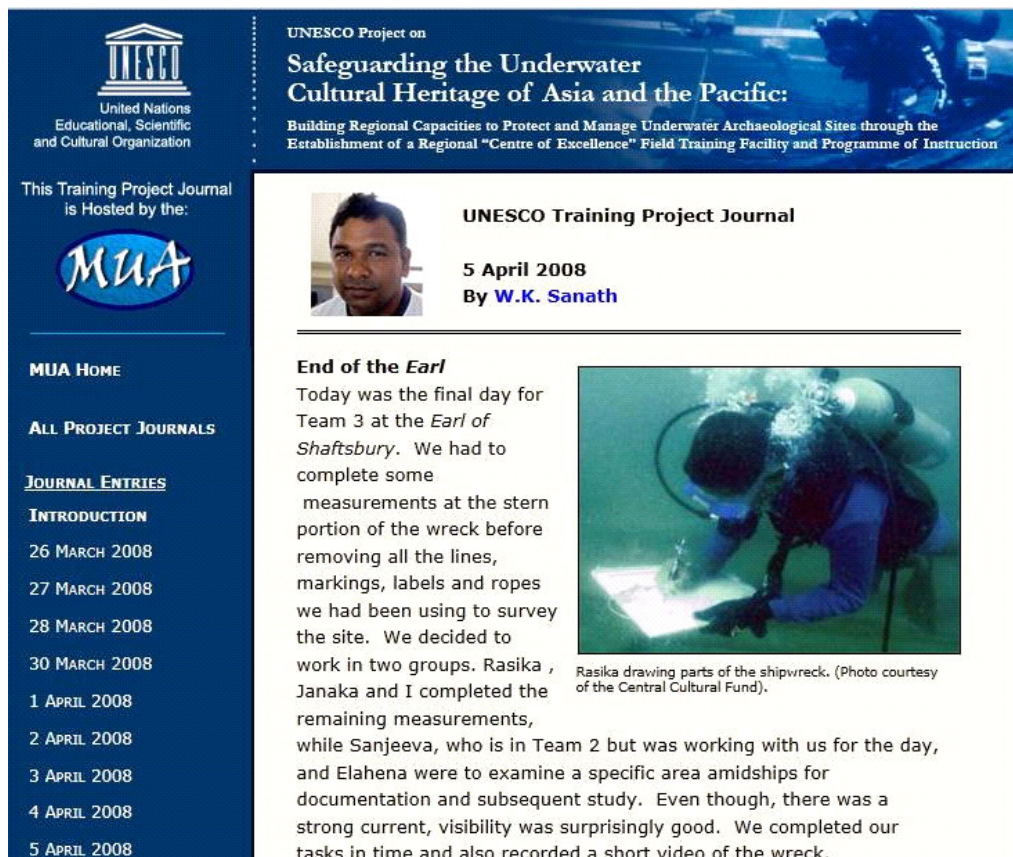


Figure 1. Sample page from the Sri Lanka field school project journal (Sanath 2008)

A third variant of project journal focuses on student research, chronicling a single graduate student's advanced research. This is exemplified in our final example of an Asian-based project journal, my own master's program research at East Carolina University. My project focused on examining representations of Japanese wooden boats in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a topic that has gone almost entirely unstudied in Western scholarship. As such, resources were scarce, and I wanted both to cast a wide net to gather information and to promote this topic to an audience that was likely largely unfamiliar with Asian maritime history (Damian 2005). These types of projects are a fantastic chance for individual students to promote their own research as well as disseminate information about their studies. The versatility of this format is apparent, as fully half of all the MUA's project journals are Australasian-based, and have been produced by students, professionals, non-profits, and instructors.

The third major category of MUA presentation is the "In the Field." These are brief entries, usually only a page or two of text with three or four illustrations. This type of entry is ideal for shorter projects or for those individuals or groups who want to introduce their work to a global audience via the MUA. We have several Australasian In the Fields that showcase a variety of topics. Warang Petch, a student at Silpakorn University, Thailand, wrote about overcoming the

challenges of obtaining underwater archaeology training in an area with no formal university program (Petch 2007). An Australian avocational group, the Pericles Research Group, described the history of the White Star Line's SS *Pericles* and their work mapping its wreck (Pericles Research Group 2006). The chronicle of the *General Harrison*, written by James Delgado, is based in San Francisco and is at first glance not an Asian story. Through reading this post, however, we learn about the Chinese diaspora, as Delgado describes the evidence of Chinese workers in Gold Rush era California (Delgado 2010). An even more dramatic tale of Chinese emigration is evident in posts by Dione Chen on the *Free China*, an early 20th-century Chinese junk that crossed the Pacific and is desperately awaiting preservation in a California shipyard today (Chen 2009). These relatively brief posts are wonderful examples of different manifestations of Australasian maritime archaeological and historical issues.



Figure 2. "In the Field" post calling for preservation of a Chinese junk (Chen 2009)

The MUA is also exploring other presentation methods. Recent innovations include the periodic Guest Blogger, which invites leaders in the field to discuss key topics and concerns in maritime archaeology. This conference has been highlighted in the guest blog by Mark Staniforth, and in August 2011 another Pacific Rim country was featured for the first time as Peruvian

archaeologist Carlos E. Ausejo submitted a state of the field report. We also have begun creating online posters that incorporate a number of pictures into a zoomable poster-style presentation, allowing for a variety of images and videos to be visible on the same page. Flinders University's most recent field school posting from 2010 is presented in this way (Flinders University 2010).

We draw our contributors from all levels of archaeology, so long as those archaeologists subscribe to the Code of Ethics as put forth by the USA-based Society for Historical Archaeology. Each post undergoes minimal editing for grammatical clarity, and although the MUA reserves the right to edit content, we strive to maintain the integrity of the original authors' words and formats.

Additional Outreach

A final step in the MUA's outreach includes moving out of the online realm and into the classroom. At present there are over three hundred pages of content on the MUA, by over seventy archaeologists from six continents. This represents an invaluable collection of information about sites and projects from a myriad of perspectives worldwide. In the online world, however, people want new, updated content constantly, often relegating previous posts to obscurity. This does not negate the validity and importance of those earlier contributions, though. To maintain the current relevance of all of the posts online, we work to use that information in other ways as well. We feel that students especially can benefit from our contributors' experiences, and have targeted younger students in some of our outreach efforts.

Our flagship student outreach program includes the classroom kit, "Holding History in Your Hand," based loosely on the framework outlined in the Children's Introduction to Underwater Archaeology exhibit (MUA 2008). We have gathered materials for teachers to use in the schoolroom, including a written curriculum presenting the six steps of the archaeological process, replicas of artifacts for examination, videos, a sidescan sonar slideshow, and other activities for further exploration. The lesson plan familiarizes the teacher with the items and information in the kit, and allows them to teach their classroom about the basic steps of a maritime archaeology project. In order to make this kit as easily available as possible, we only charge a shipping and handling fee; no money is collected for the kit itself. To date it has been widely distributed throughout the world including numerous kits sent to western Australia and the Republic of Korea.

The most critical step in the program is the artifact analysis, in which students are each given an "artifact" similar to one they might find on a shipwreck site – beads, buttons, plain and decorative ceramics, bone, glass, coins, brick, and more. Students are encouraged to examine their artifact for clues as to where it might have come from, what its function was, and whether it was manmade or natural. The teacher then posits several questions to encourage the students to think about the fictitious wreck site. Who might use a fancy pottery piece? What if there are a lot of plain ceramics and fewer fancy pieces? Where is the coin from? What might the marks on the bone mean? Through examining the

artifacts and questioning the relationship between them, students recognize that we are not only investigating the objects, but more importantly are learning about the people associated with the wreck site.



Figure 3. Students examine a replica "artifact" as part of the classroom kit artifact exercise. Photo by author, 2005.

This process also encourages students to recognize the importance of provenience and site preservation. When the students have thought through the ramifications of the presence of the various objects, we then suggest that they consider what happens in their *absence*. Perhaps they have decided that a site with a large amount of decorative ceramics may have been a trade ship, sunk on the way to deliver its wares. We then ask them to imagine the consequences of sport divers on a site, one by one each taking away a piece of those ceramics as a souvenir – and giving the archaeologist fewer clues to work from to understand the history of the ship and its people. Invariably the students, having just gone through the reasoning process themselves, are shocked and saddened to think that we may no longer have the tools to piece together the ship's story. Instilling these ideas at a younger age will help the next generation be more concerned about preserving our maritime cultural heritage.

As an additional follow-up to the classroom kit, we also provide online "learning paths" for students and teachers who may want to further explore particular topics or the MUA as a whole. The original MUA learning paths were divided by age group, with a designated page that asked additional age-appropriate questions and suggested links within the MUA that addressed the

answers. Students are encouraged to read the linked pages to draw their own conclusions. This again allows older content to remain fresh and in use, even if the posts themselves are several years old. We are excited to announce the first of our regional-based learning paths, highlighting thematic approaches to some of the issues discussed in the Asian projects on the MUA. Using posts from the Pacific and Indian Oceans, we encourage readers to consider topics ranging from maritime archaeological training, to Asian ship construction, problems in interpreting evidence, remnants of war, and the Asian diaspora. We hope to continue to add to these learning paths with additional contributions to the MUA.

Finally, we have also created a pdf compilation of the first year of guest blogger posts, containing contributions from eminent archaeologists such as James Delgado, Joe Flatman, Felipe Castro and more. Taken together these essays become an excellent introduction to the state of the field and would be a useful learning tool particularly in an undergraduate class on maritime archaeology.

Conclusion

We are grateful for the opportunity to discuss the MUA at this first Asia-Pacific conference on maritime cultural heritage, and hope to be able to increase our service here in Asia and the Pacific. We strongly encourage anyone interested in promoting their work on the MUA to contact us. We also welcome additional volunteers who may be willing to help us expand our offerings. Please do not hesitate to contact us with additional questions, suggestions, or potential posts. We look forward to continuing to work to make information about our global maritime cultural heritage available at the click of a button to archaeologists, the general public, and students throughout the world.

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(NOTE: All the Websites listed here are hosted on the Museum of Underwater Archaeology webpage address)

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