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ANTH 247 Archaeology of Africa

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ARCHAEOLOGY OF AFRICA
ANTHROPOLOGY (ANTH 247) – Spring 2025

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Class: Tu & Th 3:10 - 4:25 PM
Venue: Kiely Hall 059
Office Hours: Tues & Th
(2:00 – 3:00 PM and by appointment)

Course synopsis

Welcome to ANTH 247. This course unravels the mysteries of Africa's deep history, from early humans to the rise of early cities and civilizations. Topics covered include human evolution, the emergence and spread of agriculture, the development of complex societies and urbanism, the role of trade and exchange networks in shaping African societies, and the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on African archaeology. Additionally, the course explores Africa's global influence through Indian Ocean and transatlantic trade, alongside groundbreaking archaeological discoveries and critiques earlier archaeological studies that contributed to stereotypes of precolonial Africa as undeveloped and isolated. No prior knowledge is required, just curiosity!

What one can expect to take away from this course

- Appreciation of precolonial Africa as home to diverse peoples and cultures, and how they transformed from the early Pleistocene through to the colonial period,
- An understanding of current debates in African archaeology, and the complexities of relationships between archaeologists, anthropology, and society today.
- Understanding the role of globalization in shaping past African societies
- Understanding the impact of colonialism and politics of knowledge production on African archaeology, and how this heritage can be useful in everyday life and preserved for future generations

Format

- This course comprises in-person lectures, interactive classroom conversations, assigned readings, tasks, and supplementary exercises, all aimed at aiding students in grasping the subject matter. Active involvement in classroom discussions and the submission of written assignments showcasing comprehension of the course subjects will be obligatory for students. Furthermore, students will need to interact with original sources and enhance their research proficiencies. As indicated in the syllabus, both readiness for class and active participation will play a substantial role in determining your final grade
- Most of our communication will take place through email using the Brightspace platform. In the event of any alterations, I will ensure you stay informed. Regular attendance is obligatory. Should you be unable to attend a class due to an emergency, kindly inform me promptly so that we can ensure you stay up to date. In situations

where you foresee requiring additional time to finish assigned tasks, please notify me at least 24 hours ahead of the deadline

Good classroom citizenship

- Your presence at each class and your dedicated effort are anticipated. Demonstrating respectful behavior in the classroom involves refraining from causing disruptions, such as noise or unnecessary conversations, especially during lectures. Do not plagiarize in any form. Utilizing AI software to generate assignments is considered a form of academic dishonesty. If proof of such misconduct is detected post-grades being assigned, an official grade change request will result in an automatic F grade.

Grading

Grades will mirror the extent of your interaction with the readings, lectures, and additional assignments within the course. They will also gauge the degree to which you have assimilated essential knowledge and skills over the course of the semester.

1. Class Participation (10%)
2. Quiz (8%)

(A set of multiple-choice questions will be set according to the optimal time for a quick recap of some of the weekly seminars.

3. Exhibition Review (14%)

This task aims to deepen your understanding of the role of African archaeology in uncovering and interpreting the histories of the transatlantic slave trade and global interconnectedness.

Instructions**:**

i. Visit the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture Slaves Wrecks Project StoryMap: From No Return: The Journey of the Slave Ship São José and explore the digital narrative of the São José, a Portuguese slave ship that sank off the coast of South Africa in 1794.

ii. As you navigate the StoryMap, consider the following questions:
   - What is the story of the São José?
   - How did archaeologists and historians uncover the shipwreck and its connection to the transatlantic slave trade?
   - What methods or techniques were used, and what challenges did they face?
   - How does this project contribute to our understanding of the transatlantic slave trade and its enduring legacy? Reflect on the importance of this work for descendants and global audiences.
   - Critique the effectiveness of the digital StoryMap as a medium for communicating archaeological findings. Was it engaging and accessible?

- What aspects stood out to you, and why?

iii. Write a 600–800-word review comprising an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
   - Provide specific examples from the StoryMap to support your analysis.
   - Reflect critically on the broader implications of the São José project and its relevance to the study of African archaeology.
   - Use clear and concise language. No citations are required unless you use additional sources. Additional guidelines will be furnished during our in-class sessions.

iv. Upload your completed review on Brightspace in DOC format by **11 March 2025, 10:00PM**.

4. Paper Review and Presentation (16%)

The purpose of this assignment is to develop your critical thinking, teamwork, and communication skills while engaging with academic literature in African archaeology. You will review a paper allocated to your group and present your analysis to the class.

Instructions:

i) You will be assigned to a group of 3–4 students. Each group will be provided with a scientific paper focusing on a specific archaeological topic or region in Africa.
ii) Read the assigned paper thoroughly and collaboratively. Focus on the following key aspects:
   - What questions or hypotheses does the paper address?
   - What methods were used in the study (e.g., excavation, dating techniques, material or archival analysis)?
   - What are the key findings, and why are they significant for the archaeology of Africa?
   - What are its contributions, and are there any limitations or areas for improvement?
   - How does the paper connect to topics discussed in class?

iii) Prepare a 10-minute group presentation summarizing your review. Use visuals (e.g., slides or handouts) to make your presentation engaging and informative.
iv) Ensure all group members contribute to the preparation and presentation.
v) Deliver your presentation during the scheduled class session on **15 May 2025**. Each group will have 10 minutes to present, followed by 5 minutes for questions from the class and instructor.
vi) Submit a one-page printed summary of your group's review by the presentation date. The summary should highlight the main points from your analysis.

NB: This is your opportunity to engage deeply with academic research, so take your time and enjoy the process! Schedule group meetings early to divide tasks and brainstorm ideas effectively. Practice your presentation together to ensure a smooth and polished delivery. Critically engage with the paper and connect it to the broader archaeological

themes covered in the course. Additional guidelines will be furnished during our in-class sessions. If you have any questions or need clarification, don't hesitate to reach out during office hours or via email.

5. Tests 1 and 2 (22%)
6. Final Exam (30%)

Readings

This course is licensed under a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC 4.0 license and operates on a zero-textbook-cost basis, meaning all readings used are accessible online. Please refer to the course Brightspace page, specifically under **Schedule & Syllabus**, for the assigned reading materials. This will encompass links to useful documentaries that can enhance your understanding. Some of these materials may seem old and outdated but provide critical foundations and data for the development of debate. It is expected that students engage with the materials before class. You can also use the Queens College Library databases to look for additional reading resources. Some of these include the following books which are freely available as part of the Rosenthal Library collections.

Insoll, T. (2015). *Material explorations in African archaeology* (First edition.). Oxford University Press. (online)

Phillipson, D. W. (2005). *African archaeology* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Stahl, A. B. (2005). *African archaeology: a critical introduction*. Malden and Oxford. Blackwell Publishers.

Shaw T., P. Sinclair, B. Andah and A. Okpoko (1993). (eds). *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, metals and towns.* London and New York: Routledge.

Themes to be covered (Tentative Schedule & Syllabus)

Jan 28: Introduction and course logistics

No Reading

Jan 30 & Feb 4: Africa and the beginnings of archaeology

Reading

Chapters 2 - Connah, G. (2013). Archaeological Practice in Africa: A Historical Perspective, in Mitchell, P, and Lane P, J (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology*. University of Oxford. Oxford.

Feb 6, 11 & 13: Human beginnings, diversity and innovation: Part 1

Readings

Chapters 1 & 2 - Connah, G. (2004). *Forgotten Africa: An Introduction to its Archaeology*. Routledge. London and New York

You can also watch, Our incredible origins: The astonishing tale of Homo naledi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gspjzX0Pq3U

Feb 18: No Lecture - Classes follow a Monday Schedule

Feb 20 & 25: Human beginnings, diversity and innovation: Part 2

Readings

Chapters 3 & 4 - Connah, G. (2004). *Forgotten Africa: An Introduction to its Archaeology*. Routledge. London and New York

Feb 27 & Mar 4: Early farmers, and the beginnings of sedentism: North, East and West Africa

Readings

Chapter 10 – Neumann, K. 2005. The Romance of Farming: Plant Cultivation and Domestication in Africa, in Stahl, A.B. (ed.). *African Archaeology*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell.

Mar 6: No Lecture - Classes follow a Wednesday Schedule

Mar 11 & 13: Early farmers, and the beginnings of sedentism in Central and Southern Africa

Reading

Mitchell, P. (2013). Early Farming Communities of Southern and South-Central Africa, in Mitchell, P, and Lane P, J (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology*. University of Oxford. Oxford.

Mar 18: Test 1

Mar 20 & 25: Early cities, states, and empires in North Africa

Reading

Chapter 1 - Naylor, P. (2015). North Africa, revised edition: A history from antiquity to the present. Austin Texas. University of Texas Press.

You can also watch,

Tutankhamun's Treasures (Full Episode) | Lost Treasures of Egypt
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-obKX-mqjXQ&t=1455s

The Rise Of Aksum - History Of Africa With Zeinab Badawi [Episode 5]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4OSEpexs_Q&t=2164s

Mar 27 & Apr 1: Early cities, states, and empires in East and West Africa

Readings

Horton, Mark. (2020). East Africa. A Companion to the Global Early Middle Ages, edited by Erik Hermans, Amsterdam: ARC Humanities Press, 2020, pp. 15-40.

Chapters 19 - Connah, G. (2004). *Forgotten Africa: An Introduction to its Archaeology*. Routledge. London and New York

Optional

MacDonald, K. C. (1996). Djenne: A Thousand-Year-Old City in Mali. The African Archaeological Review, 13(2), 147–152. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25130591

Apr 3 & 8: Early cities, states, and empires in Central and Southern Africa

Reading

Reid, A. (2013). The Emergence of States in Great Lakes Africa, in Mitchell, P, and Lane P, J (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology*. University of Oxford. Oxford.

You can also watch Southern Kingdoms - History Of Africa with Zeinab Badawi [Episode 13]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdSupLM4zAA

Apr 10 & 22: Making interconnections: Africa and the Atlantic and Indian Ocean world

Readings

Chapter 1 – Monroe, J, C., and Ogundiran A., (eds). (2012). *Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa: Archaeological Perspectives*. New York: Cambridge University. Press

You can also watch The Swahili Coast | Africa's Great Civilizations
https://www.pbs.org/video/africas-great-civilizations-swahili-coast-africas-great-civilizations/

Apr 15 & 17: No Lecture – Spring Recess

Apr 24: Test 2

Apr 29 & May 1: Anthropology of technology

Reading

Gosselain, O.P. (1999). In pots, we trust: the processing of clay and symbols in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Material Culture* 4(2):205-230.

You can also watch Technological light from dark Africa | Shadreck Chirikure | TEDxTableMountain
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABiHYniJCWw&t=3s

May 6 & 8: Decolonization and the politics of knowledge production in African archaeology

Reading

Shepherd, N., (2002). The politics of archaeology in Africa. *Annual review of anthropology*, 31(1), pp.189-209.

May 13: Managing African heritage

Reading

Arazi, N, and Ibrahima, T. (2013). Managing Africa's Archaeological Heritage, in Mitchell, P, and Lane P, J (eds), The Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology. University of Oxford. Oxford.

May 15: Consolidation