

ANTH E335 ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS OF MESOAMERICA

Course syllabus

Professor: Dr. Chris S. Beekman

Office: CM 223

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Office Hours: 12:00-1:30pm W

12:00-1:30pm R

Class Time: 10:30-11:45am TR

Class Location: CM 152

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The archaeology of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Belize, and Honduras has often been in the news in recent years, as discovery after discovery has highlighted the seemingly exotic nature of **Mesoamerican** society. Students have probably heard about the Maya and the recent spectacular decipherments of their hieroglyphs, or the Aztecs and their practice of human sacrifice. However, are these cultural practices just curious traits of dead peoples, or can they tell us something of the society of which they were a part? The trajectory of Mesoamerican change has also been used to evaluate anthropological theories of social and political change (usually developed in the Old World, with little appreciation of the variation in human society), and this research has helped refine and define our current perspectives on the transition to sedentism and agriculture, the origins of social inequality, and the nature of political power. Students will be introduced to these theories, and will also be exposed to the benefits of integrating different datasets, such as archaeological, art historical, biological, and historical data. The rich historical database, for example, provides a striking ethnographic quality to our picture of Mesoamerica, despite the passage of time, and will give students exposure to different worldviews and thought in these non-western cultures.

The course is divided into three parts. The first examines the earliest societies of Mesoamerica, and how nomadic bands of hunters and gatherers developed into sedentary and agriculturally-based chiefdoms, with complex religious, economic, and political systems. This is the period of the Olmec, and the beginnings of pan-Mesoamerican trading and political networks. The second part focuses on the Classic period, certainly the most ostentatious epoch in terms of investment in architecture, sculpture, and art. This is the era of Teotihuacan, Monte Alban, the Teuchitlan Tradition, and the Maya cities. The third section describes the dramatic reorganization of Classic period society into new and deceptively less visually impressive forms that nonetheless included the most far-reaching and complex political and economic systems of the entire sequence. The course will end with a discussion of the Spanish Conquest in the 16th century, and the incorporation of Mesoamerica into a larger world.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

There will be three examinations over the course of the semester, including the final exam. Each midterm will be worth 20% of your grade, while the final will be worth 30%. Exams are to be taken the day they are scheduled, and students cannot expect to miss exams and be able to make them up later at their leisure. Students with special needs should inform the professor, but it

is their responsibility to provide documentation to Services for Students with Disabilities if they wish to take exams through those facilities.

A 20-25 page paper is also required from students in this class, and will count for the remaining 30% of your grade. Details will be provided the second week of class, but students will need to submit an abstract, outline and bibliography as preliminary steps over the course of the semester.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors: Archaeology of Mesoamerica. Muriel Porter Weaver. 3rd Edition, Academic Press, 1993. (**W** in the reading list below)

The Aztecs of Central Mexico: An Imperial Society. Frances F. Berdan. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982. (**B** in the reading list below)

COURSE ORGANIZATION AND READINGS

Date	Topic	Readings
Jan. 13 (T)	Introduction to Anthropology, Archaeology and the course	
Jan. 15 (R)	Mesoamerica as a culture area	W 1-12
Jan. 20 (T)	The first occupation of Mesoamerica	
Jan. 22 (R)	Early adaptations and the transition to sedentism and agriculture	W 13-24
& Jan. 27 (T)		
Jan. 29 (R)	The origins of social complexity along the Gulf Coast and elsewhere	W 52-71
Feb. 3 (T)	Who were the Olmec? Who were not Olmec?	W 26-52,71-76
Feb. 5 (R)	Alternative forms of Formative society	W 77-140
Feb. 10 (T)	EXAM	
Feb. 12 (R)	The centralization of the Classic period	
Feb. 17 (T)	Teotihuacan as the first urban center	W 162-205
Feb. 19 (R)	Teotihuacan: its role outside of central Mexico	W 205-207,229-237
Feb. 24 (T)	The Classic Maya: The integration of hieroglyphics and archaeology	W 237-333
& Feb. 26 (R)		W 141-160
& Mar. 3 (T)		
Mar. 5 (R)	West and North Mexico: outer orbit of Teotihuacan or independent centers?	W 187-202

Mar. 10 (T) - NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

Mar. 12 (R) - NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

Mar. 17 (T) - Monte Alban and Oaxaca

W 217-223

Mar. 19 (R)

Mar. 24 (T) - EXAM

Mar. 26 (R) - NO CLASS

Mar. 31 (T) - The Epiclassic and the decline
of the old system in northern Mesoamerica

W 187-202,207-229

Apr. 2 (R)

Apr. 7 (T) - The Classic Maya Collapse
and the rise of new centers

W 333-382

Apr. 9 (R)

Apr. 14 (T) - The reorganization of Mesoamerican society
and the legend of the Toltecs

W 383-434

Apr. 16 (R) - The Aztecs of central Mexico: Origins

B 1-14

Apr. 21 (T) - The Aztec Empire

B 15-158

Apr. 23 (R) - The Tarascans

W 434-438

Apr. 28 (T) - The Spanish Conquest

B 159-186

Apr. 30 (R) - catch-up and REVIEW

W 481-487

May 5, (T) 10:30am-12:30pm. FINAL EXAM