Archaeology of African Thought  
ANT324L; ANT380k  

Spring 2014  
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OVERVIEW

This course uses archaeological, anthropological and historical works to examine the development and transformation of African societies from the Neolithic through the slave trade and the beginning of the colonial period. The course will discuss the historic and prehistoric foundations of contemporary African societies south of the Sahara, focusing especially on equatorial and southern Africa. The intention is to develop an understanding of the cultural dynamics of African societies and traditions, and their transformations through time. This provides an interpretive framework from which to examine emerging archaeological perspectives on the Atlantic slave trade and the cultural foundations of the Diaspora in the New World.

COURSE FLAGS

1) This course carries the Global Cultures flag. Global Cultures courses are designed to increase your familiarity with cultural groups outside the United States. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one non-U.S. cultural group, past or present.

2) This course also carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers’ work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

REQUIREMENTS

Grades for undergraduate students in ANT 324 will be based upon two short 3 page papers, a 5 page mid-term paper, and a final 10 page paper and class presentation on an African country, with a focus on the historical context of a problem of the student’s
choosing. The first two papers will count for 15% each. The mid-term paper is worth
20%. A map quiz will account for 15% of your grade. The final paper and presentation
making up 35% of your grade. One class period will be devoted to showing students
how to make and use PowerPoint presentations. Students should purchase a copy of
Microsoft Office, which includes PowerPoint, or use the Mac equivalent, Keynote.
The classroom is equipped with both Windows and Macintosh machines. Students
might also find a bibliography program such as EndNote useful for creating and
organizing citations and bibliographies. Information on how to purchase and use this
program can be found following the links provided here:
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/citations/endnote.html. Such a bibliographic program would
be useful to you if you continue in graduate school or in writing future papers because
it stores and formats all your references and can even include pdf copies of articles.

Initial sources for country information can be found by searching by country in
UTCAT. On the web you may find resources such as the BBC website, which has
African pages and even a podcast: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/africa/. Many
African countries also have online newspapers and, in some cases, even television
news broadcasts. Paper grades will be based both upon comprehension of course
content and written expression in the papers. A guide to writing is included on the
course blackboard site along with this syllabus. Please pay special note to the systems
of referencing and bibliographic formats. We will be using the standard ones for
American Antiquity.

Requirements for graduate students enrolled in ANT 380 include a 20-page term paper
on an African topic chosen by the student in consultation with and approved by the
professor, and a 20 minute presentation of this topic to the class. Several meetin
gs outside class time will be scheduled to discuss topics in African history/archaeology in
more depth.

**TEXTS**

Textbooks should be available at the University Co-op and can also be purchased
online from retailers such as Amazon.com or Barnes and Nobles. I have included
below the summary review of each book and the price from Amazon.

1. Pdf articles all of which are posted on the course blackboard site and designated
with a ** in the syllabus below. Some of these articles are password protected. The
password will be announced in class, or you can ask or email me for it at any time.

(ebook) editions; $33.82 paperback)

(From the exodus of early modern humans to the growth of African diasporas, Africa has had a
long and complex relationship with the outside world. More than a passive vessel manipulated by
external empires, the African experience has been a complex mix of internal geographic,
environmental, sociopolitical and economic factors, and regular interaction with outsiders. Peter
Mitchell attempts to outline these factors over the long period of modern human history, to find their commonalities and development over time. He examines African interconnections through Egypt and Nubia with the Near East, through multiple Indian Ocean trading systems, through the trans-Saharan trade, and through more recent incursion of Europeans. The African diaspora is also explored for continuities and resistance to foreign domination. Commonalities abound in the African experience, as do complexities of each individual period and interrelationship. Mitchell’s sweeping analysis of African connections place the continent in context of global prehistory and history. The book should be of interest not only to Africanists, but to many other archaeologists, historians, geographers, linguists, social scientists and their students.)


(The Archaeology and Ethnography of Central Africa provides the first detailed description of the prehistory of the Loango coast of west-central Africa over the course of more than 3,000 years. The archaeological data presented in this volume comes from a pivotal area through which, as linguistic and historical reconstructions have long indicated, Bantu-speaking peoples expanded before reaching eastern and southern Africa. Despite its historical importance, the prehistory of the Atlantic coastal regions of west-central Africa has until now remained almost unknown. James Denbow offers an imaginative approach to this subject, integrating the scientific side of fieldwork with the interplay of history, ethnography, politics, economics, and personalities. The resulting "anthropology of archaeology" highlights the connections between past and present, change and modernity, in one of the most inaccessible and poorly known regions of west-central and southern Africa.)


(In a book as splendid in its wealth of information as it is breathtaking in scope, British writer and photojournalist John Reader brings to light Africa's geology and evolution, the majestic array of its landforms and environments, the rich diversity of its peoples and their ways of life, the devastating legacies of slavery and colonialism as well as recent political troubles and triumphs. Written in simple, elegant prose and illustrated with Reader's own photographs, Africa: A Biography of the Continent is an unforgettable book that will delight the general reader and expert alike.)

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Jan. 13, 15, 17

Course introduction and overview of Africa

Readings:
5) **Denbow, Mosothwane and Ndobochani. Everybody here is all mixed up. Postcolonial Archaeology in Africa. P. Schmidt, ed. SAR Press, pp. 211-230.

**Weeks 2 and 3: Jan. 22, 24, 27, 29, 31**

African climates, rainfall, vegetation and economic resources

**Readings:**

**Assignment:** Choose a sub-Saharan African country that you will become familiar with and use to illustrate your short papers. This country will also be the subject of your final paper.

**Short paper #1:** write a brief but formal paper (4-5 double spaced pages) outlining the physical geography, climate and natural resources of your chosen country. Include one major problem facing your country in terms of its natural resources or climate. (Due Jan. 31st)

**Week 3 and 4: Feb. 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14**

Distribution and characteristics of African languages. Social context: gender, age, household, family, lineage, clan and marriage.

**Readings:**
2) **Schneider, Harold (1981). The Africans: an ethnological account. Chapter 4, Marriage, descent, and association, pp. 82-119.**
3) **Bohannan and Curtin. Chapter 5. African Families, pp. 64-75.**
4) Denbow. Chapter 8, sections on: Languages, Bantu languages, Khoisan languages, Pygmy languages, pp. 157-162.

**Map Quiz:** exact date to be announced in class

**Week 5:** Feb. 17, 19, 21
Tribes and Tribalism: imposed or indigenous? Historical tradition, situational construction, western rationalization?

Readings:

Short paper #2. Summarize the linguistic and ethnic diversity of your chosen country (4-5 pages). What is the difference between ethnicity and tribalism? What problems facing your country are commonly framed in the international press in terms of ethnicity or tribe? Is this point of view shared or contested by local people? In what ways? (Due Feb. 21st)

Weeks 6 and 7: Feb. 24, 26, 28, March 3, 5, 7

Development and Spread of African Farming Systems

Readings:
2) Reader, J. Chapters 16-19: The Beginnings of Agriculture; Renewable Resources; The Pastoral Scene; The Impact of Iron, pp. 149-192.

SPRING BREAK MARCH 10-14

Week 8: March 17, 19, 21

African Traditional Religion: status, authority and power.

Readings:

Film: Inagina, Last House of Iron

Mid-term Paper (4-5 pages): Using examples from your readings and lectures, discuss how authority, power, gender, and religion are situational dimensions that come together to inform relations of status and power in your country.

Weeks 9 and 10: March 24, 26, 28, 31, April 2, 4
The Development of States in Eastern and Southern Africa

Readings:

Weeks 11 and 12: April 7, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18
The Historic Period: the slave trade, Imperialism and Colonialism

Readings:


**Weeks 13 and 14: April 21, 23, 25, 18, 30, May 2**

**Class Presentations**

These 10 page final papers will summarize student research into the country of their choice: its peoples, cultures, languages, history and problems. You may incorporate elements of earlier essays in this final paper. Students will sign up to present a 10-minute summary of their country and its problems during the final two weeks of class. Facilities will be available for PowerPoint presentation and overhead projections. Two to three minutes will be reserved after each paper for other students to ask questions of the presenters.

**Extra Credit paper: 10 points.** Discuss how the archaeological record can be used in conjunction with historical and ethnographic sources in order to elucidate what happened in both Africa and the Americas during the slave trade period. What advantages can archaeology bring to such studies. What, in your opinion, are the drawbacks and how do you think they could be overcome.