
AMERICANIST ARCHAEOLOGY SEMINAR SERIES MT 2022

Either remotely via MS Teams or in person in the Seminar Room of the Institute of Archaeology,
36 Beaumont Street, Oxford

For any questions, please contact Guopeng Chen (guopeng.chen@arch.ox.ac.uk) or Dr Alexander Geurds (alexander.geurds@arch.ox.ac.uk)

WEEK 1 TBC

WEEK 2 TBC

WEEK 3 TUESDAY, 25 OCT, 16:00 GMT, SEMINAR ROOM AND TEAMS

Professor Elizabeth Graham (UCL): Do people *really* kill people for gods?

WEEK 4 TUESDAY, 1 NOV, 16:00 GMT, ONLINE VIA TEAMS

Professor Michael Smith (Arizona State University): The urban structure of Teotihuacan: New data from an old project

WEEK 5 TUESDAY, 8 NOV, 16:00 GMT, SEMINAR ROOM AND TEAMS

Dr David Beresford-Jones (McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge): New Perspectives on the Neolithic from the Pacific Coast of Peru

WEEK 6 TUESDAY, 15 NOV, 16:00 GMT, ONLINE VIA TEAMS

Dr Natalia Donner (Leiden University) and Lucy Gill (UC Berkeley): Archaeology in service of the present: Place-based knowledge and Indigenous sovereignty in Darién, Panama

WEEK 7 TUESDAY, 22 NOV, 16:00 GMT, SEMINAR ROOM AND TEAMS

Dr Christophe Delaere (FNRS, Université libre de Bruxelles): Use of inland water archaeology for the reconstruction of inundated cultural landscapes in Lake Titicaca

WEEK 8 TBC

ABSTRACT

Week 3: Professor Elizabeth Graham (UCL): Do people *really* kill people for gods?

What, exactly, do we mean by ‘human sacrifice’? The term is widely used—in history, in the news, in the film industry, even in Nature—but never explained. The meaning of the term is assumed to be self evident, widely understood, and it therefore warrants no examination. What scholars have done, and continue to do, is to assume that something called human sacrifice existed in past societies, and then they hotly debate ‘explanations’ of what gods want and how people please their gods. What a rich field to mine! My first question will be to ask you what comes to mind when you read or hear ‘human sacrifice’. The term involves killing—not suicide—which means one person or persons end the life of another human being. But how do we know that the motivation for the killing was the will of a god? In the case of the Aztecs, the Conquest-period friars and religious authorities used accusations of ‘human sacrifice’ as a legitimating tool for colonial policy. They assumed that they knew the Aztecs’ or Mayas’ rationale for killing. Curiously, or perhaps not surprisingly, the Spaniards never asked priests or any other native religious authority about rationales behind the killing that the Spaniards claimed was ‘human sacrifice’. In this lecture I will challenge the idea not only that ‘human sacrifice’ as a concept never existed among the Maya or Aztecs, but that it never existed in any society.

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Week 4: Professor Michael Smith (Arizona State University): The urban structure of Teotihuacan: New data from an old project

The Teotihuacan Mapping Project assembled one of the most complete plans of any city in the ancient world. René Millon and George Cowgill published their map in 1973. While this map is well known, the other activities of the project were only sporadically published. The excavations remain undescribed and many of the artifacts were never analyzed, leaving important project goals unrealized. I will describe four ongoing efforts, based at Arizona State University, to rectify this situation and advance understanding of Teotihuacan as an urban place. We are: (1) Digitizing project notes and records and archiving them at Digital Antiquity; (2) Attempting to complete the basic descriptions of excavations and artifacts in Mexico; (3) Upgrading the digitized architectural map, and pursuing a variety of spatial analyses of urban form, including demography, economic structure, and neighborhood organization; and, (4) Assembling data from excavations by many archaeologists to answer new questions on housing, burials, and urban social structure at Teotihuacan.

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Week 5: Dr David Beresford-Jones (McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge): New Perspectives on the Neolithic from the Pacific Coast of Peru

The Neolithic Revolution was a significant evolutionary event that transformed human society and the planet we live on. It laid the foundation for all subsequent social asymmetries and the emergence of complex civilisations. Yet decades of research, dominated by evidence skewed towards the Near East and Europe, have produced little consensus as to why it happened. I attempt a new perspective on this old question by focus on the less explored archaeological record of the Pacific coast of Peru.

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Week 6: Dr Natalia Donner (Leiden University) and Lucy Gill (UC Berkeley): Archaeology in service of the present: Place-based knowledge and Indigenous sovereignty in Darién, Panama

Throughout its history as a discipline, and up to the present day, archaeology in the Americas has relied on the desecration of Indigenous sacred sites for its research, while contributing to the primitivization, essentialization, and material dispossession of Indigenous communities. Over the past two decades, however, the framework of Indigenous archaeology— archaeology with, by, and for Indigenous Peoples—has challenged this dominant Eurocentric perspective. In this paper, we explore the implications of implementing an Indigenous archaeology framework in Central America through the case study of our partnership with the Indigenous Emberá community of Mogue in Panama's Darién Province. We first discuss the legal context of Indigenous sovereignty in Panama and the relationship between Indigenous leadership, place-based knowledge, and ecological conservation. We then discuss how a participatory mapping approach to archeological survey can elicit place-based knowledge that resides in archaeological landscapes through a detailed description of three sites documented in the vicinity of Mogue. We end by considering how mapping place-based knowledge can further Indigenous-led efforts towards sovereignty over land and cultural heritage, in Darién and elsewhere in the Americas, with important implications for the protection of tropical forests.

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Week 7: Dr Christophe Delaere (FNRS, Université libre de Bruxelles): Use of inland water archaeology for the reconstruction of inundated cultural landscapes in Lake Titicaca

Andean societies have undergone abrupt climate changes that have affected their water resources and habitable or cultivable land. This is the case for Lake Titicaca, which has experienced fluctuations up to 20 metres during the last three millennia. Although paleoenvironmental reconstructions have provided valuable data on these lake level variations, their resolution is often not sufficient to assess their impact at the human time scale of land-use patterns. In this lecture, we present our results which highlight that the level of the lake rose globally with multiple events of transgression and regression over the last two millennia. We also show that certain abrupt lake variations coincide with major transformations of the societies such as the emergence of the Tiwanaku state in the 6th century during a major transgression.

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