
AMERICANIST ARCHAEOLOGY SEMINAR SERIES HT 2023

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 TUESDAY, 17 JAN, 16:00 GMT, ONLINE VIA TEAMS

[Professor Claudia Brittenham \(University of Chicago\): Unseen Art, Ritual, and Doings in Ancient Mesoamerica](#)

WEEK 2 TUESDAY, 24 JAN, 16:00 GMT, ONLINE VIA TEAMS

[Professor Jesper Nielsen \(Copenhagen University\): Riders of the Feathered Serpent: New Understandings of History and Mythology at Epiclassic Xochicalco](#)

WEEK 3 TUESDAY, 31 JAN, 16:00 GMT, ONLINE VIA TEAMS

[Professor Alexis McLeod \(Indiana University\): Correlative Metaphysics in Maya Philosophy](#)

WEEK 4 TBC

WEEK 5 TBC

WEEK 6 TUESDAY, 21 FEB, 16:00 GMT, SEMINAR ROOM AND TEAMS

[Panos Kratimenos \(UCL\): Reorienting the discipline: critical cartographic praxis for archaeologists](#)

WEEK 7 TUESDAY, 28 FEB, 16:00 GMT, SEMINAR ROOM AND TEAMS

[Professor George Lau \(University of East Anglia\): New stonecarvings at Pashash: Pre-Incaic sculptures of the Recuay Tradition \(AD 1-700\) of Peru's north highlands](#)

WEEK 8 TUESDAY, 7 MAR, 16:00 GMT, ONLINE VIA TEAMS

[Professor David W. Mixter \(Binghamton University\): Community Resilience and Urban Planning at the Maya City of Actuncan, Belize](#)

ABSTRACT

Week 1: Professor Claudia Brittenham (University of Chicago): Unseen Art, Ritual, and Doings in Ancient Mesoamerica

Many works of Mesoamerican sculpture were difficult to see in their original contexts. For over three thousand years, from the earliest moments of Olmec civilization, around 1500 BCE, to the Aztec empire at the time of the Spanish invasion in 1519 CE, people in the region of modern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras made works of art whose initial conditions of display were radically different from the ways that we encounter them in museums or photographs today. The difficulty of seeing these visually elaborated things focuses attention on the moments when they *were* visible: during the process of making, an act imbued with generative significance in many Mesoamerican cultures, and at ceremonies of dedication, which might create enlivened and agentive beings out of inert stone. Yet because these ritual acts cannot be separated from other kinds of labor, both durable and ephemeral, they offer an opportunity to reflect on the nature of ceremony in ancient Mesoamerica.

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Week 2: Professor Jesper Nielsen (Copenhagen University): Riders of the Feathered Serpent: New Understandings of History and Mythology at Epiclassic Xochicalco

Recent epigraphic and iconographic research at several Epiclassic sites in Mesoamerica (c. AD 600-1000), including Cacaxtla, Teotenango, Cerro de la Estrella and Xochicalco have contributed significantly to new insights into the history and mythology of one of the most dynamic, yet often neglected, periods of Mesoamerican history. In this talk, I focus on a re-interpretation of the most iconic structure at Xochicalco, the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, which displays a rich iconographic program combined with numerous hieroglyphic brief texts. Using supporting evidence from other Epiclassic sites in central Mexico as well as Terminal Classic Maya sites, I suggest that the texts and imagery of the building served as a public legitimization of Xochicalco's dynasty and its mythological foundations and responsibilities.

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Week 3: Professor Alexus McLeod (Indiana University): Correlative Metaphysics in Maya Philosophy

In this presentation I discuss the view found in Maya sources of the nature of things in the world as defined by associations between those things and other parts of the world. This “correlative metaphysics” can be seen at work in discussions of calendrics and time, gods, persons and substitution (*k'ex*), and other aspects of the world in colonial period texts such as the *Chilam Balam* books of Yucatan, the K'iche' *Popol Vuh*, as well as earlier imagery and text stretching back to the Classic Period. Here, I look at connections between key metaphysical ideas in the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, *Popol Vuh*, and Classic and Postclassic text and imagery, to sketch an account of the nature of correlative metaphysics in Maya thought, distinguishing it from other familiar forms of metaphysics such as substance or process metaphysics.

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Week 6: Panos Kratimenos (UCL): Reorienting the discipline: critical cartographic praxis for archaeologists

Maps are an indispensable tool within archaeological practice. However, in spite of their centrality to the discipline, critical reflections on what maps are, what they do, and how we use them have been largely absent from archaeological discourse. Instead of appreciating the intricate power of maps, archaeologists tend to view them in a functional manner, as epistemically neutral, 'objective' illustrative tools. This stands in contrast to the last few decades of theorising in the discipline of Cartography. This talk will survey some of the key tenets of Critical Cartography and their applicability to large-scale archaeological maps and mapping. By focusing on the Precolumbian Maya region, it will be demonstrated that a more nuanced appreciation of the innate power of maps is a potent tool towards both a more emic appreciation of the past societies which we study and a reflexive approach to the study of the past in general.

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Week 7: Professor George Lau (University of East Anglia): New stonecarvings at Pashash: Pre-Incaic sculptures of the Recuay Tradition (AD 1-700) of Peru's north highlands

Long before the Inca, Recuay groups (AD 1-700) graced their most important buildings with finely made blocks and carved stone figures. Recent excavations at the chiefly centre of Pashash, in Peru's north highlands, revealed a series of carved stones of the Recuay tradition. They reveal great changes and variability in the fashioning of stone, compared to what had come before during the great Chavín civilisation. We see new innovations in form and imagery, and there is also evidence of intensive local production. The most significant discoveries highlight their carving for palatial complexes and tombs, gaming/ritual boards, and cult objects. The changes can be attributed to the rise of new kinds of secular leaders and their respective collectives, and a cosmology based on new mythical beings and symbols. Even after the Recuay disappeared, some of their carvings were fitted into later architecture (both prehispanic and Spanish Colonial), suggesting they were at once curiosities, gestures to a monumental past, and things with a lingering resonance.

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Week 8: Professor David W. Mixter (Binghamton University): Community Resilience and Urban Planning at the Maya City of Actuncan, Belize

To remain in place in the immediate aftermath of the ninth-century Maya collapse, Maya groups employed various resilient strategies. In the absence of divine rulers, groups needed to renegotiate their forms of political authority and to reconsider the legitimizing role of religious institutions. This kind of negotiation happened first at the local level, where individual communities developed varied political and ideological solutions. At the community of Actuncan, located in the lower Mopan River valley of Belize, reorganization took place within the remains of a monumental urban centre built 1000 years before by the site's early rulers. I report on the changing configuration and use of Actuncan's urban landscape during the process of reorganization. These modifications included the construction of a new centre for political gatherings, the dismantling of old administrative buildings constructed by holy lords and the reuse of the site's oldest ritual space. I draw on heritage theory, collective memory, and our understanding of Maya political ideology to interpret these urban transformations. The result is a case study provides an example of how urban resilience relies on planning decisions to actively take the meanings of the local built environment into account.

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