

# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MAYA

Anthropology 189.10

The George Washington University

Fall 2010

Monday-Wednesday: 2:20-3:35pm

Funger Hall #210



"Maize-Gruel Person," painted mural on pyramid, Calakmul, Mexico (CE 620-700)

**Professor:** Linda A. Brown

**Email:** [labrown@gwu.edu](mailto:labrown@gwu.edu)

**Office:** 2112 G Street, Office # 302

**Cell phone:** (202) 907- 5523

**Office hours:** Monday 3:45-5:00 pm or by appointment

## Required materials:

### 1) Texts

- *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization.* Arthur Demarest (2004). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- *The Maya – Iconographic Resource Book.* Coloring book compiled by Inga Calvin (2008). [NOTE: I will make this available as class handouts and via Blackboard.]

2) Supplementary required articles for course will be posted to the Blackboard website.

## Required supplies:

### 1) Colored pencils

- You need a set with a minimum of six different colors (please consider buying an inexpensive set at a grocery or drug store).



## Course Overview

This course is an in-depth study of the prehistoric Maya civilization, which stretched from the southern area of present day Mexico into El Salvador and Honduras. Emphasis will be placed on ancient Maya social and cultural worlds as gleaned from archaeology, architecture, epigraphy and the rich iconography that the Maya peoples left behind. The class will proceed chronologically, starting with the Maya's earlier Olmec neighbors to the north then tracing over 2,000 years of Maya history from first appearance of Maya peoples in the first millennium BCE up to the arrival of Spaniards. Topics to be examined include: social and economic systems, religion and shamanism, the so called Maya "collapse," hieroglyphic writing and the Maya calendar system (including what the ancient Maya said about 2012), the lives of ancient commoners and kings, as well as family relations and gender roles.

Contemporary studies of the ancient Maya weave archaeology with various other disciplines including art history, epigraphy, cultural anthropology and astronomy. The ancient Maya left us a corpus of images and writing which have enriched our present understanding of them, thus there is a strong visual component to Maya studies. Yet the iconography can be dense and difficult to decipher. Thus we will do in-class coloring exercises to help you learn how to read these images. **Bring your colored pencils to all classes.** The coloring sheets will help you learn about the symbols and messages conveyed by the Maya in their art, costume and writing. Coloring provides a way of identifying the complex icons — without your doing these exercises it would be difficult to learn this information.

## Learning Outcomes

- To gain knowledge of the ancient Maya civilization by using holistic and historical perspectives.
- Explore a non-western culture to understand the lifeways, beliefs, and material expressions both different and similar from your own.
- Become familiar with various interdisciplinary methods used in contemporary archaeology to infer knowledge about the ancient Maya.
- Understand contemporary debates and issues surround the ancient Maya.



## Evaluation and Grading: Undergraduate Students

1. Three exams based on your comprehension of readings and in-class materials (worth 25% each): **75%**
2. Two assignments (worth 7.5% each): **15%**
3. Class attendance and participation: **10%**

## Evaluation and Grading: Graduate Students

1. Three exams based on your comprehension of readings and all in-class materials (worth 20% each): **60%**
2. A research paper (15-20 pages) due at the end of the semester: **30%**
3. Class attendance and participation: **10%**

## Exams

Your grade in this course is primarily based on your learning the material as demonstrated in tests. All students will take three formal exams during the semester. The exams will be equally weighted and will test you on all materials including: lecture notes, readings, films, iconographical analysis and epigraphy. We will talk about the format of the exam closer to the testing date.

Make-up exams will be scheduled **ONLY** under extreme circumstances and if you have an official college excuse in writing (i.e., sports teams, health services). If you know that you will miss an exam, you must notify me in advance for rescheduling.

## Assignments (Undergraduate Students)

All undergraduate students will complete two assignments during the semester. The assignments will ask you to apply specific knowledge you have learned in class to new situations, such as deciphering or writing glyphs or reading the symbols in a Maya iconography from a piece that I have not discussed in class. Additional information about these assignments will be provided during the semester.

## Research Paper (Graduate Students)

All graduate students will complete a 15-20 page research paper on some aspect of ancient Maya culture. Please make an appointment with me early in the semester so we can narrow down your subject.

**All assignments/papers are due IN CLASS on the due date. Any assignment turned in after the due date will be penalized and subjected to grade reductions as described below:**

### Penalty for Late Assignments/Papers

All assignments/papers **are due in class** on the due date. Late assignments/papers will be penalized as follows:

- Assignment/paper turned in on the date due yet after class = minus 10% of total points possible for assignment
- Assignments/paper turned the day after due date = minus 20% of total points possible for assignment
- Assignment/paper turned in 2 days after due date = minus 30% of total points possible.
- For each day late an additional 10% will be subtracted from your score until reaching a score of 0% (ouch!)





## Grading

The following system will be used to assign letter grades to score totals:

A = 100-93	A- = 92-90	
B+ = 89-87	B = 86-83	B- = 82-80
C+ = 79-77	C = 76-73	C- = 72-70
D+ = 69-67	D = 66-63	D- = 62-60
F = less than 60		

## Attendance Policy

Most of the course material will be delivered in the form of lectures supplemented with Powerpoint slides. As there is a highly visual component to Maya studies, you need to come to class regularly to do well. I will keep track of attendance in every class. You can earn up to 10 points (10% of your grade!) just by showing up for class. I will assign points based on the following criteria:

**Full credit** – student attended every (or nearly every) class during the semester and actively participated in class by engaging with others in a positive and thoughtful manner.

**Half credit** – student missed 3 or more classes and periodically engaged in discussions.

**No credit** – student did not attend classes regularly (missed 4 or more classes) or was disruptive during class.

## Personal Devices

All portable electronics need to be turned off and put away for the duration of the class. You may use personal computers for notes but if I see you surfing the web, checking email or chatting on your computer, then I will mark you “absent” for that day. Similarly, texting, listening to music, studying for another class or reading materials not related to this class will earn you an “absent.”

## How to Succeed in this Course

- Come to class – I will present information not found in your readings.
- Learn the Maya words – especially the names of places and people. Some of these names will be unfamiliar to you and may be tongue-twisting. Practice pronouncing



them as this will help you remember them for testing.

- Learn the maps and chronologies - you need to know the areas where the Maya lived (and still live) and the main historical timelines.
- Do the coloring sheets and make sure you understand how to identify and read the iconography. These items appear in tests.
- Keep up with the readings and look over your class notes each week. Waiting until the last minute to cram for an exam is a strategy for failure.
- Come and see me during office hours. If you can't make the posted time, talk to me and we'll figure out a time to meet.

## Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is taking someone else's ideas, words, or work and representing those ideas, words, or works *as your own*. This includes 1) buying papers on-line, 2) copying another student's work, and 3) lifting sentences from web pages or printed matter without proper citation. Anyone caught plagiarizing will risk ritual heart extraction as well as the GWU penalty listed below.

As per the GWU Code of Academic Integrity, the *lightest* penalty for a first-time plagiarism is failure of the assignment – the *lightest* penalty for a second time offense is failure of the course



## IMPORTANT NOTES

- If you cannot take an examine or submit a graded assignment on a particular day due to your religious beliefs, please advise me IN WRITING (you can email me) in the first two weeks of class so we can make alternative arrangements.
- If you have any special needs please let me know during the first two weeks of class so we can arrange for the appropriate academic accommodations.
- I will only grant an Incomplete in this course for incredibly serious reasons (death and/or dire illness) and you will need the appropriate documentation.



# Lecture Topics/Readings/Assignment Due Dates

This is a general guide for the semester – however, like all preconceived plans, it may change once I see the pace and interests of the class...



## Part 1 – Setting the Stage

### Introduction

### Cultural & Natural Geography, Chronology

### Early Explorations

Monday 8/30

Wednesday 9/1

Monday 9/6 – Labor Day - No Class

Wednesday 9/8

### Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 1-20, Chapter 3, pp. 31-45.

## Part 2 – Shamanism & Cosmology

### Shamanism & Cosmology: The Foundations of Power

### Film: Popol Vuh

Monday 9/13

Wednesday 9/15

### Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 8, pp. 183-184
2. Introduction: An Overview of Shamanism. Peter Furst (1994), In *Ancient Traditions: Shamanism in Central Asia and the Americas*, edited by Gary Seaman and Jane Day, University of Colorado Press, Niwot, CO, pp. 1-13.
3. Maya Mythology. Karl Taube (1993). In *Aztec and Maya Myths*, University of Texas Press, Austin, pp. 51-67.



## Part 3 – Origins to Pre-Classic Olmec

### Paleolithic, Archaic, & Pre-Maya Olmec

Monday 9/20

Wednesday 9/22

Monday 9/27

Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 4, pp.53-72.
2. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/18/science/18tomb.html>

## Part 4 – Maya Calendars

**The Short Count  
Long Count and 2012**  
Wednesday 9/29  
Monday 10/4



Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 8, pp. 193-198.

## EXAM #1: Wednesday - October 6



## Part 5 – Pre-Classic Maya

### Developments in the Highlands & Lowlands

#### Film: Dawn of the Maya

Monday 10/11

Wednesday 10/13

Monday 10/18

Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 4, pp. 72-88.
2. Additional readings TBA...



## Part 6 – Introduction to Maya Writing

### Writing and History of Decipherment

#### Film: Cracking the Maya Code

Wednesday 10/20

Monday 10/25

**Note: We will discuss Assignment #1**

#### Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 3, pp. 45-48.
2. Early Maya writing at San Bartolo, Guatemala. William Saturno, David Stuart, Boris Beltrán (2006). *Science* 311: 1281.
3. Chapter 2: The Maya Script: Its Character and Origins. Michael Coe & Justin Kerr (1988). In *The Art of the Maya Scribe*, Thames & Hudson, London, pp. 49-62.

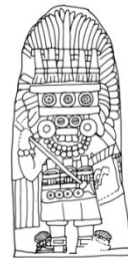
## Part 7 – Early Classic Maya & the Teotihuacan Connection

### Early Classic Maya & Teotihuacan

Wednesday 10/27

#### Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 9, pp. 218-222.



## Part 8 – Classic Period Maya I

### Subsistence, Settlement in the Rainforest

#### Maya Economies

Monday 11/1

Wednesday 11/3

**Note: Assignment #1 Due: 01 November**

#### Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapters 6-7, pp. 113-174.
2. Daily Life of the Ancient Maya Recorded on Murals at Calakmul, Mexico (2009), Ramón Carrasco Vargas, Verónica A. Vásquez López, Simon Martin. *PNAS* 106(46): 19245-19249.

**EXAM #2: Monday – November 8**





## Part 9 – Classic Period Maya II

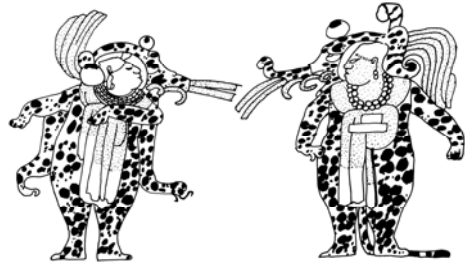
### Lifeways of the Rich (and Not-so-Rich) and Famous Belief & Rituals of the Theater State Warfare & Mega-States

Wednesday 11/10

Monday 11/15

Wednesday 11/17

Monday 11/22



**Note: We will discuss Assignment #2**

#### Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 8, pp. 175-193, 201-207 & Chapter 9, pp. 208-217; 222-235.
2. Provisioning the Cerén Household: The vertical economy, village economy and household economy in the southeast Maya periphery. Payson Sheets (2000) *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11:217-230.
3. *Courtly Art of the Maya: Life at the Maya Court*. Mary Miller and Simon Martin (2004). Thames & Hudson, pp. 17-49.
4. Body and Soul among the Maya: Keeping Spirits in Place. Susan Gillespie (2002) In *The Space and Place of Death*, edited by H. Silverman and D. Small. *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, No. 11, pp. 67-78.

## Part 10 – Terminal Classic & the Southern Maya “Collapse”

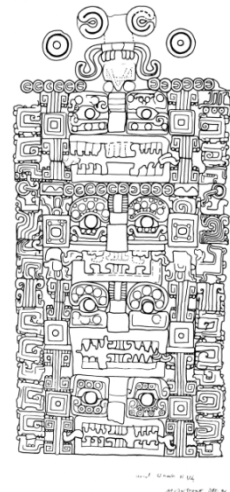
### Collapse or Transformation

Wednesday 11/24 – No Class: Thanksgiving Break

Monday 11/29

#### Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization*. Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapter 9, pp. 235-239; Chapter 10, pp. 240-276.





## Part 11 – Post-Classic Maya

**Chichén Itzá**  
**The “Toltec Problem”**  
**Arrival of Spaniards**

Wednesday 12/1

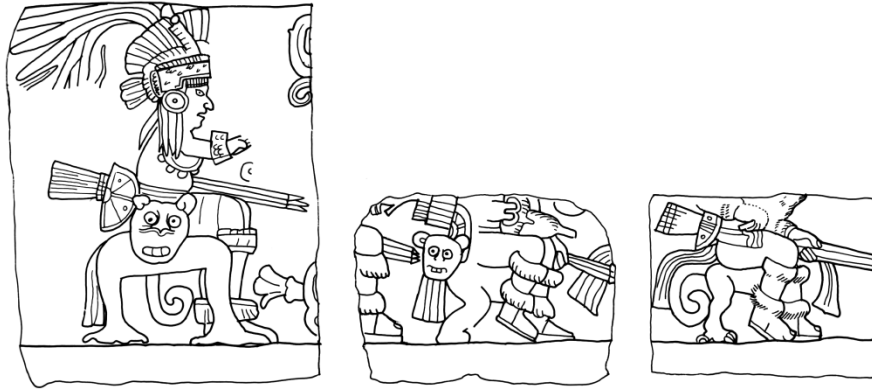
Monday 12/6

Wednesday 12/8

**Note: Undergraduate Students - Assignment #2 Due: 01 December (in class)**  
**Graduate Students - Papers Due: 08 December (in class)**

Readings:

1. *Ancient Maya: The rise and fall of a rainforest civilization.* Arthur Demarest (2004), Chapters 11-12, pp.277-297.



**EXAM #3: TBA by GWU**

