HUMAN SACRIFICE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD
Spring 2019

Instructor: Dr. Daniela Wolin
Contact Information: daniela.wolin@nyu.edu
Class Meeting: Monday 3:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Class Location: TBA
Office Hours: Thursday 9:00-11:00 AM
NYU Silver Center, Room 618

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Human sacrifice formed an integral part of ritual practices in many ancient societies across the globe. In this seminar, we will use a cross-cultural perspective to compare the sociopolitical conditions and world views that gave rise to, sustained, and eventually halted practices of human sacrifice in the ancient world.

Readings will review diverse sources of evidence including: texts, visual representations and iconography, material culture, and the bioarchaeological analysis of human skeletal remains. This course takes an anthropological approach and challenges students to critically evaluate the intersecting functions of ritually-sanctioned violence in the past.

Over the course of this seminar, we will contextualize this highly sensationalized topic, question how we can “know” the past, and explore how representations of sensitive topics, such as violence, can have socio-political consequences in the present.
COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Gain a general understanding of contemporary methods and theory in anthropological archaeology
2. Compare the culturally-constructed meanings and functions of sacrificial practices in antiquity, drawing on examples from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America
3. Critically evaluate the role of archaeologists, historians, and the public in the production of knowledge and narratives of the past

READINGS

There is no required textbook for the class. All assigned readings will be posted on NYU Classes. Students are responsible for reading the assigned material prior to class and are expected to actively engage in classroom discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

The final grade will be calculated using the following breakdown:

10% Class participation and attendance
10% In-class exercises: Leading class discussion (5%) and writing prompts (5%)
20% Paper 1 (5 pages)
20% Paper 2 (5 pages)
40% 10-page final paper (30%) and presentation (10%)

Class participation and attendance (10%): Weekly attendance is required. In addition to attendance, participation will be graded based on active engagement during lectures and relevant contributions to group and class discussions.

In-class exercises (10%):
1) Leading class discussion (5%): Students will be expected to jointly lead one in-class discussion on the assigned readings. Responsibilities include a close reading of the articles, generating discussion questions, and facilitating conversation during class.
2) Writing prompts (5%): Throughout the semester, short writing prompts will be given during class. These prompts are designed to help generate discussion, work through concepts introduced in class, and evaluate familiarity with the readings. The responses, which will be no more than a half to one page in length, will be collected during class. In addition, in-class peer-review of written assignments will be carried out periodically.

Papers 1 and 2 (20% each): The first two papers of the semester will be five pages each. The topic will be distributed in class at least two weeks prior to the due date. The research and writing of these papers must be carried out by each student independently.

Final paper (30%) and presentation (10%): For the final paper/presentation, students will individually design a museum exhibit on the topic of their choice related to human sacrifice. Effective research strategies and proposed topics will be workshopped in class as a group and in one-on-one meetings with the instructor. The paper will include two parts. In the first half of the
paper, students will present a detailed overview of the topic including relevant citations. In the second half of the paper, students will describe the proposed exhibit (mission statement, layout, content/artifacts) and provide a justification for how these choices support the overall narrative that they are creating for their chosen topic. In the final class meeting, students will present their exhibit. The format of the presentation is flexible, but may utilize PPT, a storyboard, computer-graphics, models, artistic renderings, or other forms of visual communication.

All written assignments should be 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Papers must be printed and handed in at the beginning of the classes specified below. Late assignments will only be accepted if approved in advance. Written assignments will be graded on content, structure, clarity, critical-thinking, and grammar. Detailed grading criteria will be distributed and discussed during class prior to each assignment.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please visit the following website outlining NYU’s policy on academic integrity prior to turning in assignments: https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

DISABILITY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

COURSE SCHEDULE

**Please note that the schedule is subject to change**

January 28 Introduction to Human Sacrifice and Course Overview

February 4 Constructing Narratives of the Past: Introduction to Anthropological Archaeology

Required Readings:


February 11 Archaeology of Sacrifice

**Required Readings:**


February 18

**No Class: President’s Day**

February 25 Bioarchaeology: Bones as Records of Sacrificial Victims’ Lives and Deaths

**Required Readings:**


March 4 Mortuary Ritual and Retainer Sacrifices

**PAPER 1 DUE**

**Required Readings:**


March 11 Bridging Human and Non-human Sacrifice

Required Readings:


March 18 **No Class: Spring Recess**

March 25 Child and Infant Sacrifice

Required Readings:


April 1 Sacred Spaces I: Sacrificial Deposits in the Natural Landscape

**PAPER 2 DUE**

Required Readings:


April 8 Sacred Spaces II: Sacrificial Deposits in the Culturally-constructed Landscape

Required Readings:


April 15 Depicting Sacrifice: Art and Iconography of Human Sacrifice

**Field Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art**

Required Readings:


April 22 Sacrifice as Spectacle: Decapitation, Dismemberment, and Display of Human Remains

Required Readings:


April 29 The Relationship between Sacrifice, Social Complexity, and Socio-political Control

Required Readings:


May 6 Confronting Sensationalism: Knowledge Production and Contemporary Narratives of Human Sacrifice in Antiquity

**Required Readings:**


Apocalypto Official Trailer. 2006. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXuwjdQx924](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXuwjdQx924).


May 13 Student Presentations and Class Wrap-up

**FINAL PAPER DUE**