Course Description

Africa is often depicted as a land without history. Nothing could be further from the case. In fact, the traces of human cultural expression—art, architecture and objects, or what together might be called the built environment—stretch back tens of thousands of years across the whole continent, and demonstrate the important role that artistic production had in ancient African societies. Archaeology gives us tools to study this artistic production and interpret its meaning, thus enabling us to restore ancient African art to narratives of world culture and societal evolution.

This course will introduce students to archaeological methods of retrieving information about the past and interpreting it. Students will survey the major archaeologically-attested African cultures. They will learn to critically evaluate the impact that modern histories of Euro-American colonial involvement with Africa have had, and continue to have, on the popular understanding of the complexity and importance of ancient African cultures. Attention will be paid to the work of African scholars, post-colonial approaches that center the needs and interests of local populations, and the challenges archaeologists face as they attempt to reconstruct the ancient African past.

Core Curriculum: Expressive Culture

Courses in Expressive Culture are intended to introduce you to the study and appreciation of human artistic creation and to foster your ongoing engagement with the arts. Through critical engagement with primary cultural artifacts, they introduce you to formal methods of interpretation and to understanding the importance of expressive creation in particular social and historical contexts. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, they are designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.
Texts/Reading
Reading assignments are indicated in the schedule of lectures below. You must read assigned texts before each recitation section.

Textbook:
All other course reading can be found on Brightspace.

Attendance
Lecture: If you want to do well in this class, you will attend all lectures. You will be tested on material presented in lecture, so make sure you are taking notes.
Recitation: Attentive, on-time attendance and participation in recitation section is mandatory; each unexcused absence from recitation will result in a half letter drop in your participation grade. In general, students should be absent from class only in case of illness or serious events such as bereavement; absences should be excused before class or as soon as possible thereafter. Section meets every week and is meant to explore ideas and issues beyond the scope of material covered in lecture. The recitation leader in charge of your section will lead discussion and grade all exams and papers for students in that tutorial.

Extensions/Late submissions policy: In keeping with NYU’s policy, individual extensions are not granted except in cases of documented family emergencies or serious illness. Work submitted late without an extension agreed upon in advance may not be accepted, and will result in reductions to your participation grade.

Extra Credit Policy: it is the policy of NYU’s core curriculum not to allow extra credit opportunities in the interests of equity.

Preparation: We will move swiftly through material. We recommend that you review the readings and the previous day’s lecture before each class to build cumulative rather than crammed preparation. You must complete all readings for the week in advance of recitations. Your recitation leaders may call on you to answer questions in section and your participation is graded.

Exams and Assignments
All specified page lengths are guidelines and based on 12-point Times New Roman text, double spaced, with one-inch margins; to be submitted via Brightspace.
**Grades and performance**: If you are concerned about your grade and want to know what it takes to achieve a certain letter, please consult the “grade parameters” sheet on Brightspace. If you want to discuss how to improve your work or how to achieve certain study goals, please see either your course assistant or professor.

**Midterm**: 10%. *October 20, in class*
You will be given documents from a fictional archaeological site in Africa, and asked to interpret the remains that you see. This exam will test your understanding of archaeological methodologies and interpretation.

**Final**: 30%. *December 20, 10-11.15am*
This exam will test your cumulative knowledge of the course material, and your ability to draw connections across different geographical areas, time periods and themes discussed in class.

**Part 1 (30%)**: Slide ID questions. You will be shown four slides of images for ten minutes each. For each image, you should identify the object, the culture and the time period with which it is identified, and briefly comment on its significance. (40 minutes)

**Part 2 (60%)**: 1 Essay question. You will be asked to answer one essay question from a small selection that will require you to think broadly about what you have learned in the class. You should use specialized vocabulary and supportive examples to make an argument. The question may focus on one object or many, one culture or several, or wider thematic issues, but it will ask you to think broadly. (30 minutes)

**Short Papers I and II (3-4 pages each), 5% each. Due 5pm October 1, October 22**
You will provide short responses to provided essay prompts, which you will answer based on the week’s readings. Attention should be paid to structure and argument, and your recitation leader will give you more information about what is expected. The purpose of these assignments is to help you hone your writing skills, and clearly understand the process of moving from evidence to interpretation.

**Paper III: Documentary analysis (5 pages), 10%. Due 5pm November 19**
You will select a documentary film on ancient African art to watch from a provided list and write a review. Analyze the filmmaker’s selection and treatment of evidence, their communication strategies and how they have constructed their narrative. How does the documentary fit into the themes and debates we have discussed in class? How does it reflect the place of ancient Africa in modern, Western society?
“Paper” IV: Object analysis (10-15 minutes), 20%. Due 5pm December 10

This project will develop students’ awareness of the different uses and relevancies of ancient African art to a modern, Western audience. Students will exercise both interpretive and presentation skills in interpreting a piece of African material culture for a general audience. Students should choose one ancient African object, artwork or building and develop a 10-15 minute talk including not only basic ‘tombstone information’, but also information on its significance and what it can tell us about the people who made it and their culture. Why, and how, should we look at this artwork? Does it have relevance to us today? How does it fit into the themes we have discussed in class? For inspiration, I recommend looking at the British Museum’s podcast series, ‘A History of the World in 100 Objects’ (http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrtd2). You should pitch your talk to be accessible to an educated general audience. The assignment should be submitted on Brightspace with an audio file and an image of the object or link to its online museum catalog entry. The recording is most easily accomplished with the built-in microphone on a laptop, phone or tablet.

Participation and attendance (20%)

Attentive and substantive contributions to recitation are expected, in addition to attendance. Your recitation leaders will be looking for evidence that you have read the assigned reading and engaged critically with it. For a sense of how contributions to recitation will be graded, see grading parameters on Brightspace. Included in your recitation grade is also the timely submission of assignments.

Email Policy and Office Hours

I always enjoy interacting with students! However, to make communication more efficient for everyone, before emailing me with a question please 1) check the syllabus, 2) ask your classmates, 3) ask your recitation leader. Please plan for the fact that replies to email messages will not be instantaneous, and are very unlikely to come outside of normal working hours. If your query is not something that you think can be answered in a couple of lines, then please sign up for a meeting via google calendar (link above)–office hours are for you, and whatever your question or interest I would love to chat with you in person or over Zoom and get to know you better. If you have sent an email and received no reply within 48 hours, please send a follow-up email.

Mental Health and Disability Accommodations

Students suffer from mental health problems at a proportionally higher rate than the general population. If you are struggling for any reason, seek help as soon as possible. The Wellness Exchange is NYU's extensive network of health and mental health resources. A 24/7 hotline (212-443-9999) centrally links all of these services and puts students in touch with professionals who
can help them to address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns, including medical issues, academic stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, alcohol and other drug dependence, sexually transmitted infections, and eating disorders.

Students who are entitled to disability accommodations and choose to use them in this class should use the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) online portal to arrange for their accommodation letters to be shared with me (csdportal.nyu.edu). If you require disability accommodations but are not yet registered with CSD, please visit their website at nyu.edu/csd for more information and to book an appointment. I cannot offer accommodations without CSD registration.

Schedule

**WEEK 1**

*September 8: Introduction to course, and Africa*


REVISE: African geography for first recitation meeting

*September 13: Introduction to Archaeological Method 1*

READ: Renfrew and Bahn 2016, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* ch. 2 pp. 53-74; ch. 3 pp. 75-108;

**WEEK 2**

*September 15: Introduction to Archaeological Method 2*

READ: Renfrew and Bahn 2016, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* ch. 4 121-174

*September 20: Race in archaeological research, aDNA*


**WEEK 3**

*September 22: Rock Art in Africa: drawing meaning from the mists of time*
**September 27: Rock Art: theoretical and methodological issues**

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| **September 29: Prehistoric Egypt: the art of death**  
READ: Introduction and ch. 1 in Diana Craig Patch, Dawn of Egyptian Art, pp. 3-81 |

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<th>WEEK 5</th>
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| **October 6: Ife and Nok: realism and the art market**  
READ: Garlake, pp. 109-115; ch. 6 “West African Forests” pp. 116-139  
LISTEN: Ife Head, History of the World in 100 Objects.  
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00st9zb |

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<th>WEEK 6</th>
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| **October 13: Kerma Culture: the power of pottery**  
“The Kerma Culture” in Ancient Treasures: an exhibition of recent discoveries from the Sudan National Museum, eds. Welsby and Anderson, pp. 70-91 |

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<th>WEEK 7</th>
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| **October 18: Kerma Culture: items of adornment**  
READ: Markowitz and Doxey 2014, Jewels of Ancient Nubia pp. 94-127, 142-151, pls. 3-32  
WATCH: 6 short videos from MFA exhibition Nubia Now:  
https://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/nubia |
October 20: MIDTERM

October 25: Afrocentric approaches and the importance of identity: Cheikh Anta Diop, Black Athena
READ: Martin Howe, “Cheikh Anta Diop” in Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes, pp. 163-192

October 27: NO CLASS

WEEK 8

November 1: Djenne-Djeno: ceramic sculpture
READ: Garlake, ch. 5 “The Niger River” pp. 96-108

November 3: Djenne-Djeno: urbanism and architecture
Kevin MacDonald, “Complex Societies, Urbanism, and Trade in the Western Sahel”, Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology

WEEK 9

November 8: Meroë: trade and exchange
READ: Wenig, “Art of the Meroitic Kingdom”, in Raue (ed.) Handbook of Ancient Nubia pp. 847-874
Kuckertz, “Meroitic Temples and their Decoration” in Raue (ed.) Handbook of Ancient Nubia pp. 811-846

November 10: Ghana Empire and Igbo-Ukwu: metal casting and archaeological dating methods
READ: Garlake pp. 117-120
Sarah Guérin, “Gold, Ivory and Copper: Materials and Arts of Trans-Saharan Trade” in Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time, 174-201

Week 10

November 15: Mapungubwe: sacred kingship

**November 17: Great Zimbabwe: construction of knowledge and racism in scholarship**

READ: Garlake ch. 7, pp. 140-165

**WEEK 11**

**November 22: Mali Empire and the Great mosque of Djenne: Timbuktu, memory and Islam**

https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/has-the-great-library-of-timbuktu-been-lost
https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/05/arts/design/african-art-is-under-threat-in-djenne-djenno.html
LISTEN: The Empire of Mali, In Our Time. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06kgggv

**November 24: Ethiopia: Ancient Christian Africa and religious influence in art**


**WEEK 12**

**November 29: Nubia: Ancient Christian Africa**

READ: Dobrochna Zielińska, “Arts and Crafts of the Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia*
LISTEN: The Coming of Christianity, BBC World Service. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03njw86

**December 1: Benin: royal bronzes**

READ: *Royal Art of Benin: the Perls Collection*, pp. 29-66

**WEEK 13**
December 6: Benin: restitution and European involvement in Africa
LISTEN: The Haunting History of the Benin Bronzes, pts 1 & 2, The Art Angle (podcast)

December 8: Environmental Challenges to African Archaeology

WEEK 14

December 13: Community-oriented archaeological approaches
Chirikure, S., Manyanga, M., Ndoro, W., Pwiti, G 2010 “Unfulfilled promises: community participation at some of Africa’s World Heritage Sites” International Journal of Heritage Studies 16, 1 & 2, 30-44.