

Ancient Africa: art and archaeology

Mondays and Wednesdays 9.30–10.45am

Prof. Kathryn Howley

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 3pm-5pm, Zoom or in person at IFA, 1 E. 78th St,
3rd floor (<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/1?cid=Y19hczlyb3Zpajh2NnN2NmMxcjg5N3FrODc5c0Bncm91cC5jYWxlbmRhci5nb29nbGUuY29t> for sign up)

COURSE ASSISTANTS

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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:

Peter Garlake, 2002. *Early Art and Architecture of Africa* (OUP)

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

READ: Garlake ch. 1, pp. 9-27. Mitchell and Lane, "Introducing African Archaeology", *Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology*. Fauvelle, "Introduction", *The Golden Rhinoceros: Histories of the African Middle Ages*, 2-15.

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

READ: Prendergast and Sawchuk, 2018. "Boots on the ground in Africa's ancient DNA 'revolution': archaeological perspectives on ethics and best practices" *Antiquity* 92.363, pp. 803 - 815

<https://www.sfu.ca/ipinch/outputs/blog/introduction-ethics-politics-and-practicality-ancient-dna-research-archaeological-conte/>

WEEK 3

September 22: Rock Art in Africa: drawing meaning from the mists of time

READ: Garlake, ch. 2 “Rock art of southern Africa”, pp. 28-49

September 27: Rock Art: theoretical and methodological issues

READ: Smith, 2013. “Rock Art Research in Africa”, in *The Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology*, pp. 1-19

WEEK 4

September 29: Prehistoric Egypt: the art of death

READ: Introduction and ch. 1 in Diana Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art*, pp. 3-81

October 4: Prehistoric Egypt 2

WEEK 5

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>

October 12: Ife and Nok 2

McIntosh, Rj and SK: “Dilettantism and plunder: dimensions of the illicit traffic in ancient Malian art”, *Museum*, 49 (1986), 49-57

Mamadi Dembélé et al. “Fragments at Risk: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in Mali, Morocco, and Nigeria” in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time*, pp. 75-89

WEEK 6

October 13: Kerma Culture: the power of pottery

READ: Knoblauch and Lacovara, “Nubian Ceramics”, in Fisher (ed.) *Ancient Nubia: African kingdoms on the Nile* pp. 200-209

“The Kerma Culture” in *Ancient Treasures: an exhibition of recent discoveries from the Sudan National Museum*, eds. Welsby and Anderson, pp. 70-91

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>

WEEK 7

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 Past 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

READ: SK McIntosh, 1993. "Cities without citadels: understanding urban origins along the Middle Niger". In T. Shaw, P. J. J. Sinclair, B. Andah, and A. Okpoko (eds), *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns*. London: Routledge, 622-41.

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

Holl, Augustin F. C. (2009). "Early West African Metallurgies: New Data and Old Orthodoxy". *Journal of World Prehistory*. 22 (4): 415-438

Bunney, Sarah (1989). "West African metalworking predates European contact" (122, 1668). *New Scientist*

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

READ: Huffman 2005. *Mapungubwe: ancient African civilisation on the Limpopo*. Wits University Press.

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

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

Connah 2001. "A question of context: Great Zimbabwe and related sites" in *African Civilizations: an archaeological perspective* pp. 223-262

LISTEN: "The Whitewashing of Zimbabwe's Ancient History", BBC World Service. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cswqls>

WEEK 11

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

READ: Paulo F. De Moraes Farias, "Islam in the West African Sahel", in *Sahel: Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara*, pp. 108-145

Mauro Nobili, "The Written Word: Islamic Literacy and Arabic Manuscripts in West Africa" in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time*, pp. 240-253

<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

READ: Phillipson, D. W. (2009). *Ancient Churches of Ethiopia*. London: Yale University Press. pp. XXX

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*

Włodzimierz Godlewski, "The Sacral Architecture in the Kingdom of Makuria" in *Handbook of Ancient Nubia*, pp. 921-942

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

READ: Barnaby Phillips, 2021. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*, pp. XXX

LISTEN: The Haunting History of the Benin Bronzes, pts 1 & 2, The Art Angle (podcast)

December 8: Environmental Challenges to African Archaeology

READ: Meskell 2011 "From Paris to Pontdrift: UNESCO meetings, Mapungubwe and Mining", *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 66 (194): 149-156, plus the nice article on Abu Simbel (also *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 65, 1-2 2010).

Chirikure, S. (2014). "'Where angels fear to tread': ethics, commercial archaeology, and extractive industries in southern Africa." *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*.

WEEK 14

December 13: Community-oriented archaeological approaches

READ: Chirikure, S. (2014). Working with and for indigenous people. In Smith, S. (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Archaeology*. New York: Springer.

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.

Chirikure, S. (2015). "Do as I Say and Not as I Do". On the Gap Between Good Ethics and Reality in African Archaeology. In *After Ethics* (pp. 27-37). Springer New York.

LISTEN: "Is the future of museums in Africa?" The Week in Art podcast.