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ANTY 354H.01 Mesoamerican Prehistory

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MESOAMERICAN PREHISTORY, ANTY 354

Professor:

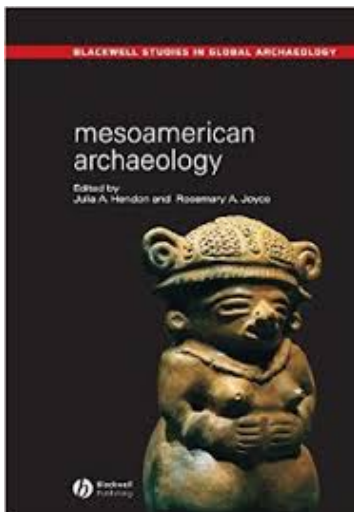
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Purpose:

Participants in this course gain an appreciation of cultural developments within Mesoamerica up to the Spanish conquest. "Mesoamerica" is a term used to identify an area encompassing part or all of the modern nations of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, where some of the most complex Native American societies flourished. The course takes a chronological approach, first focusing on the domestication of important crops such as corn, beans, and squash. The process of creating larger settlements—first villages, then towns and ceremonial centers, and, ultimately, cities—and the concurrent increase in social and political complexity, are major themes.

Developments that are traced include: population growth, social inequalities, the intensification of agriculture, changes in religious authority, specialization of craft production, the delineation of state art styles, and the expansion of technical fields such as writing, mathematics, astronomy, and calendrics. These trends, summarized on page 4 of this syllabus in the terminology employed during the course, involved different people and traditions, were punctuated by rapid periods of reorganization—which resulted in simplification or “collapse” as frequently as increased scale—and were often not region-wide. Therefore, we will closely examine the causes and consequences of the development and collapse, looking at individual traditions, such as the Gulf Coast Olmec, the Classic Maya, and the Aztec.

**Learning objectives:**

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the Aztecs, Mayans, and other cultures that make up the Mesoamerican archaeological record.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of key topics of major interest and significance to archaeologists today (such as the origins of agriculture, the role of regional interaction, and the development of state society).
3. Demonstrate an understanding of key methods and theoretical perspectives that guide contemporary archaeology in Mesoamerica.
4. Gain an appreciation of the complexity and sophistication of large-scale Native American Societies.

Required text:

Hendon, Julia A., and Rosemary A. Joyce, 2003, *Mesoamerican Archaeology*. Blackwell Publishing. Several articles are also required, available from the Mansfield library; the PDFs are on Moodle for your convenience.

Tests and assignments:

There are three tests. Each test is worth 100 points. A test follows each unit and covers the lecture materials and readings. Tests consist of objective questions (multiple choice, true-false and

matching) along side definitional/short essay written questions. An *optional* comprehensive exam is given in the second hour of the final period. This exam replaces an exam with a lower grade. *It cannot lower your grade.*

Besides the tests, students have a written assignment, due **April 26** examining a question or issue in Mesoamerican archaeology. Papers should be submitted on Moodle, where full instructions for the paper can be found. The paper will be judged on a 50-point scale, based on six areas (roughly equal weight): Do you apply your knowledge from the class to this topic? Is your discussion focused appropriately? How insightful is your analysis? Is your paper organized and easy to follow? Do you appropriately cite sources for the information that you present? Are there problems with grammar, spelling, and punctuation?

An extra credit assignment, due on the last class day (**May 5**), can be completed for up to 10 points. The task is to analyze a professional paper in Mesoamerican archaeology; instructions are found on Moodle. The extra credit assignment is judged on the criteria as the regular assignment (see above).

Policies and Expectations:

Conduct: Honesty is required. Students are expected not to cheat, plagiarize (including “patch write,” taking phrases or sections copied from several sources), or giving false excuses. If you are unfamiliar with college expectations about plagiarism, please start with the Indiana University Bloomington’s [Understanding Plagiarism](#). Academic misconduct in this class will be subject to an academic penalty (up to receiving a failing grade in this class) and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#).

Attendance and participation: Class attendance is crucial to gain mastery of the material. 40 points will be based on attendance and 10 points on participation. With appropriate documentation/explanation, absences can be excused.

Final Grades: Not including bonus points, there are 400 points possible in the class, with 90% (360+) or more will receive an “A,” etc. The +/- system is not used in this class.

Drops: **February 10** (5:00 pm) is the last day to add or drop a course on Cyberbear without penalty, and **April 3** (5:00 pm) is the last day to add or drop with approval from your advisor and instructor and without the Dean’s signature (leaves a “W” on transcript)

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodations in this course. To request course modifications please contact me as soon as possible. I will work with you and Disability Services in the accommodation process. For more information, visit the [Disability Services website](#) at or call 406.243.2243 (Voice/TTY).

Incompletes: An incomplete will be considered only when requested by the student. At the discretion of the instructor, incompletes are given to students who missed a *portion* of the class because of documented serious health or personal problems during the session. Students have one year to complete the course; requirements are negotiated on a case-by-case basis.



Stay connected--outside of class: Turn off you phone or mute the ringer, and *stow it away*—no texting/browsing!

Mesoamerican Chronology¹Error! Bookmark not defined.

Period	Date	Description
Pre-Clovis and Paleoindian	15,000[?]-8000 BC	Early hunting and gathering people; utilized high-profile extinct Pleistocene animals, but probably used a range of other resources, including lowland estuary, riverine, and forest resources; presumably highly mobile, small populations.
Archaic	8000-1600 BC	A period when populations focused more on seeds/roots as a food source over restricted areas, leading to the addition of domestic plants and agriculture as a way of life; in some regions, a change from mobile, small groups to a sedentary village life.
Formative (or pre-Classic)	1600 BC-AD 150 (early: 1600-1200 BC; middle: 1200-900 BC ; late: 900 BC-AD 150)	Development of most of the features that distinguish Mesoamerica, including stable villages, ceremonial centers, social inequalities, and ideology; developments in the gulf coast Olmec region exemplifies many of these trends.
Classic	AD 150-800	Larger and increasingly urban populations; full development of calendar system and writing; dominated by Teotihuacan in the central highlands and the Classic Maya in the lowlands.
Early Post-Classic	AD 800-1200	Reformulation of regional cultures; more standardized and secular states appear with apparently greater emphasis on trade and tribute; power appears fragmented between small, warring states
Middle and Late Post-Classic	AD 1200-1519	Continuation of the processes in the former period, but with short-lived regional empires emerging and collapsing, culminating in the emergence of the Aztec state in the Late Post-Classic; distinguished by the availability of European and native documents.

¹ Sources: Richard Adams *Mesoamerican Prehistory*, 1991, pp. 23-4, and Rosemary Joyce, "Mesoamerican: A Working Model" in *Mesoamerican Archaeology*, 2003, edited by J. A. Hendon and R. A. Joyce, p. 15.