Anthropology V14.0218: African Archaeology

Fall 2008, 4 credits
Monday and Wednesday 12:30-1:45 PM
Rufus Smith Hall, Room 612

Instructor: Dr. Christian Tryon
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 2:00-3:00 PM or by appointment
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Course Description: With the longest record of human occupation in the world and a landmass that represents more than one fifth the habitable area of the globe, Africa plays a central role in our understanding of human evolution, the prehistory of our species, and the development of complex societies. Using lectures, in-class discussions, and student projects, we will reconstruct the experiences of ancient human populations in Africa using evidence drawn from archaeology as well as history, ethnography, linguistics, art history, geography, geology, paleontology, biology, and other disciplines. The focus will be not only on the material evidence from across the continent and its interpretation, but also an understanding of the major questions, developing methods of inquiry and problem solving, and situating the African data in the broader context of the archaeological evidence for the evolution of human behavioral diversity. The scope of the course spans hominin origins, the study of Stone Age foragers of the first 2.5 million years of human prehistory, and more recent periods characterized by food production, metallurgy, sedentism, and the development of complex societies (e.g., in Egypt, Mali, Zimbabwe, and the East African coast) with influence and contacts across and outside the continent.

Required Textbooks and Readings:

Additional required readings will be posted on Blackboard as .pdf files and will be announced in class. Additional recommended readings will also periodically be listed for those of you particularly interested in a given topic. All readings are to be completed prior to the assigned date.
Grading: There will be two exams for the course (each worth 25%) and one map quiz on African geography (worth 15%). You will also write a short (5-page) research paper on the pre-colonial history of an African region or culture (or, you may define a problem that crosscuts several regions), worth 20% of your final grade, with 5% of your grade based on an outline/draft submitted before the final copy. You will also write a brief (1-2 page) critique of a film watched in class, worth 5% of your grade. Finally, you will contribute one food item to a lunch featuring foods that originate in or are now widespread in Africa, with a 1-page discussion of (a) whether the item in indigenous to Africa or introduced from elsewhere, (b) when and where it first appeared, and (c) its importance in the diet, worth 5% of your grade.

Attendance: Regular class attendance is required, and you remain responsible for any information you missed during classes. Excused absences should be discussed with me beforehand. Any student who feels that she or he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, 212-998-4980) to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to http://www.nyu.edu/csd/.

Exams: There will be two (non-cumulative) exams in this course. It is expected that you will be present for the exams. Failure to be present for an exam without proof of serious medical and/or family emergency and prior notification of the instructor will result in a failing grade. Exams will focus on major topics covered in readings and class lecture/discussion. Class lectures will regularly consist of new information not covered in the readings.

Academic Integrity: All students are expected to know and adhere to New York University’s policies on academic integrity and academic dishonesty, the latter defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresentation of one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. Further information may be found at http://www.nyu.edu/cas/map/about/academicintegrity.html.