

ANTHRO 206/322: The Origins of Civilisation

Semester 1, 2017

Lecture times: Monday 4-6pm, Wednesday 3-4pm

Food, Water and Sustainability: changes leading to socio-cultural complexity during the Holocene

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Left: Lake Qarun, Right: UoA students in the Fayum

Course Objectives

The Origins of Civilisation is a course about changes in the late Pleistocene and Holocene (approximately the last 20 000 years) that had a profound impact on humanity. During this time, many communities shifted from a hunter-gather way of life to village based agricultural. Popular accounts see this transition as a revolution, an inevitable progression from simple to complex societies. However, as we shall learn in the course, no such unilineal progression occurred. The notion of a 'transition' implies two clearly defined categories – simple societies before and complex societies afterward perhaps with an 'intermediate' form in the middle. The aim of this course is to deconstruct this simple linear view. We will consider what socio-cultural changes were involved as Holocene societies developed in different parts of the world. A second aim is to consider the nature of the relationship between humans and the environment. The transition from the Late Pleistocene to the Holocene was a period of marked environmental change. Modern climatic patterns were established but also the nature of human impact on the environment shifted. We will consider what practices were sustainable and which led to substantial changes in the relationship between people and the environment.

Overview of course structure

This course is designed to involve you in our Egyptian research project based in the Fayum close to Cairo. Here we are investigating an early-mid Holocene Egyptian landscape with some of the earliest evidence for grain agriculture in Egypt. We are studying a series of stratified and surface deposits along the edge of ancient Lake Qarun. Today the lake is 44 m below sea-level but during the early and mid-Holocene the lake was much higher. People occupied the lake environment. They left a spatially extensive record of flaked stone, pottery, animal bones and hearths both as surface and stratified deposits. We are interested in reconstructing the socio-economy, settlement pattern and mobility of the peoples who occupied the Fayum.

Archaeology is a field based discipline which means that most archaeologists undertake survey, excavation and increasingly artefact analysis at the locations where people lived in the past. Field research is intended to answer particular questions often related to processes of culture change. Rather than simply lecture on the results of our research we would like you to understand the relationship between the field-research we are undertaking – literally the techniques we have adopted in the field, and the research questions these techniques are employed to answer. Hence we have devised a structure for the classes that always begins with our fieldwork then situates how we are undertaking research in relation to the work of others. As a consequence, this course is structured around themes rather than a chronological progression of changes through time.

Overview of class structure

Each week we will meet twice, two hours on Monday and one hour on Wednesday. These classes will include a combination of lectures, activities, and quizzes. You need to attend all classes as only the lecture content will be recorded and linked on Canvas.

Readings and weekly topics

Readings can be found through the Library website (Talis) unless otherwise specified.

Assessment

This paper has a two hour exam at a date to be announced (40% of the final grade).

Reading quizzes (the best 5 grades will be counted (10%).

The other 50% of the course assessment consists of two assignments each worth the same mark (25% each). Both are research assignments rather than simply essays. They ask you to search for literature yourselves using the library resources rather to rely on the material provided to you in class. The assignments are a chance for you to develop your investigative skills. Your grade will reflect the effort you put in to the research process.

Faculty guidelines indicate that undergraduate course assessment should total 5,000 (2nd year) or 6,000 (3rd year) words for a 15 point course. Each hour of examination is counted as 1,000 words. Therefore the two written assignments should be 1,500 words each (and 2,000 for 322).

Assignment 1

Anthro 206 only

- Pick one of the domestic species (either plant or animal). What is the history of this species? When and where was it domesticated? Provide a chronology that shows how the species spread from its original area of domestication. Describe the morphological changes that occurred to the species and comment on its importance for economies through time.

Anthro 322 only

- Discuss one of the major theories for the domestication of plants and/or animals. How has this theory been applied to archaeological assemblages? What are some critiques/limitations to applying this theory?

Due, 13th April (Week 6), 5pm on Canvas only. No late work will be accepted without medical certificate or equivalent.

Assignment 2

Anthro 206 Only

- Pick one archaeological site relevant to the themes discussed in this course. How have the archaeologists who have worked at the site used the information they acquired to develop research questions relevant to one of these themes? What types of information did they acquire? What types of analyses did they undertake? How did they integrate the results with previous studies?

Anthro 322 Only

- Discuss one of the major theories for the origins of complex states or civilisations. How has this theory been applied to archaeological assemblages? What are some critiques/limitations to applying this theory?

Due, 19th May (Week 9), 5pm on Canvas only. No late work will be accepted without medical certificate or equivalent.

Honesty in coursework

Plagiarism can involve direct copying, paraphrasing, or not acknowledging your indebtedness to 'books, articles, the Internet, and other students' work. This specifically includes essays from previous years or essays purchased from online sources. Using work from either of these sources is academic cheating.

Wherever you make use of the work or ideas of other people, published or unpublished, you must properly acknowledge and cite it. You would usually acknowledge material by providing a reference, in brackets in the text to the source and then providing a list of references at the end of the essay.

The University views cheating in coursework as a serious academic offence, and will not tolerate cheating, or helping others to cheat. Any instance of cheating will be dealt with through the University of Auckland disciplinary process. The work you submit for grading must be your own work. Where you have used work from other sources, it must be properly acknowledged and referenced. This also applies to sources on the Internet.

The following chart gives a useful indication of the grading system used for your exam and assignments.

Assesment of Student Learning

Example of a Grading System and descriptors relating to student attainment

GRADE	% VALUE	DESCRIPTION
A + A A -	90 – 100 85 – 89 80 - 84	Work of high to exceptionally high quality showing excellent knowledge and understanding of subject matter and appreciation of issues; well formulated arguments based on strong and sustained evidence; maps and diagrams, graphs and tables, etc included where appropriate; relevant literature referenced; high level of creative ability, originality and critical thinking; excellent communication and presentation skills.
B + B B -	75 – 79 70 – 74 65 - 69	Work showing good to strong grasp of subject matter and understanding of major issues though not necessarily of the finer points; arguments clearly developed and based on convincing evidence; relevant literature referenced; evidence of creative ability, originality and critical thinking; good communication and presentation skills.
C + C C -	60 – 64 55 – 59 50 - 54	Work showing a knowledge of subject matter and appreciation of main issues though possibly with some lapses and inadequacies; arguments developed and supported by some evidence and references; creative ability, originality and critical thinking present but limited; adequate communication and presentation skills.
D + D	45 – 49 40 - 44	Work lacking breadth and depth. Work generally has gaps. Frequently work of this grade takes a simple factual approach and understanding and coverage of material is inadequate; does not attempt to interpret the material; at the lower end, indicates a need for considerable effort to achieve improvement; communication and presentation skills are poor.
D-	0 - 39	Highly unsatisfactory. Work shows a lack of knowledge about and understanding of the topic. Inadequate in degree of relevance, sometimes completeness, sometimes both. Communication and presentation skills are weak.