

ANCIENT MAYA ART AND CULTURE

A Multi-disciplinary Seminar at the University of Illinois-Chicago, Spring 2006

<u>Departments and Course Info.</u>	<u>Undergraduate</u> (3 hrs.)	<u>Graduate</u> (4 hrs.)
Anthropology 494	23722	23723
Art History 470	22825	23624
Latin American and Latino Studies 491	19522	21291

Class time and location: Tues. 2-4:45 (BSB 3160)

Instructors

Prof. Virginia Miller

Art History

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Anthropology, Latin American and Latino Studies

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Course Orientation

Ancient Maya civilization and its spectacular art and architecture have captured the attention of scholars and students for over one hundred years. But what is so fascinating about Maya art and culture and why should they be studied? The ancient Maya, who lived from about 1000 b.c.e. to 1700 c.e. in Mexico and upper Central America. They are among the most thoroughly-studied and best-known of ancient world cultures, although many questions about them remain unanswered. Maya scholars rely on a combination of archaeology, art history, ethnohistory, linguistics, and ethnographic data to reconstruct past behaviors and social practices. Moreover, Maya art and architecture are appreciated for their aesthetic qualities, symbolism, and cultural context as indicated by the increasing number of Maya exhibitions around the world. The examination of ancient Maya art and culture is important for the appreciation of the accomplishments of a magnificent civilization, crucial for our understanding of cultural diversity, and essential for the comprehension of Latin American history.

Course Goals

This course was created as part of a growing alliance between art history and anthropology in research and teaching on ancient Maya art and culture. The diverse approaches these two fields offer have led to significant breakthroughs in our knowledge of ancient Maya civilization. Here we cover previous and current significant findings regarding Maya art, architecture, hieroglyphs, and culture, including our own on-going investigations. We recognize the centrality of the ancient supporting populations and contemporary Maya peoples in this civilization, but the focus in the course will be on elite Maya art and life ways. A sample of topics include: Maya sculpture and religious beliefs, architecture and political structure, painted ceramics and social organization, writing and history, and polychrome murals and elite rituals.

We will study Maya warfare, religion, sacrifice, the ballgame, gender ideology, the royal person, and the art of hieroglyphic writing, for example. We will largely examine art and hieroglyphic writing and their relationships with Maya culture, but we will also discuss archaeology, Spanish conqueror accounts, ethnographies, and comparative studies in art, architecture, and anthropology. In class we will present images of ancient Maya art and architecture, analyze the course readings, and reconstruct Maya social life.

Requirements

Students must have taken previous courses in Mesoamerican or Maya art or archaeology; intermediate knowledge of the ancient Maya is essential for this course. Participation in class discussion is mandatory. Attendance is essential: no more than one unexcused absence will be permitted without serious consequences in terms of the attendance grade. For excused absences, notification of the absence should be made to at least one of the professors on the day of class and documentation explaining the absence may be required.

Undergraduate students are also required to complete weekly summaries of readings, create an annotated bibliography and a thesis statement, and write a term paper. Graduate students will also prepare summaries (including of occasional additional readings), write a research paper, and give an oral presentation of their work. Students are required to hand in summaries for at least 10 of the 14 weeks: if more than 10 are completed, the summary grade will be based on the top 10 grades. Within limits, incomplete summaries will be accepted but graded down. You are expected to have done the reading each week, even if a written summary is not handed in. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE WEEKLY SUMMARIES WILL BE ACCEPTED ONLY AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS: LATE SUMMARIES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. If you are unable to attend class but have completed the summary, you may email it to one of the instructors BEFORE the beginning of class. Other assignments, if handed in late, will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for each day late (i.e. A would become a B+, etc.). Assignments handed in after class has begun are considered a day late, so be on time! Please hand in late assignments to either the Anthropology or Art History office, where a staff member will initial and date it. Do NOT put assignments under our office doors!

All assignments must be completed in order to receive credit for the course. For example, if you chose not to do the thesis statement, you would not merely lose 5% of your grade, you would fail the class. Furthermore, students failing to complete at least 10 of the 14 weekly assignments could also jeopardize their final grade if a substantial number are missing.

The course materials are: Maya Art and Architecture (Mary E. Miller, Thames and Hudson), Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World (Lynn Foster, Oxford University Press), and “The Land of the Ancient Maya” (Map, National Geographic, 1989) available at Chicago Textbook (1076 Taylor St.) and the UIC Bookstore. Supplemental readings will be assigned each week and will largely be available through UIC reserve (library and electronic reserves).

Course Requirements

Undergraduate:

Attendance and participation	25%
Weekly summaries (10 of 14)	30%
Annotated bibliography	10%
Thesis statement	5%
Paper	30%
TOTAL	100%

Graduate:

Attendance and participation	20%
Weekly summaries	30%
Annotated bibliography	10%
Thesis statement	5%
Oral presentation	10%
Paper	25%
TOTAL	100%

Course Schedule

January 10

Introduction

January 17

Calendar and Writing

LAST DAY TO ADD A CLASS FRIDAY JANUARY 20

January 24

Sites and Architecture I

January 31

Sites and Architecture II

February 7

Social Structure and Rulership I

February 14

Social Structure and Rulership II

February 21

Sculpture

LAST DAY TO DROP WITH A "W" FRIDAY FEBRUARY 20

February 28

TOPIC DUE

Ritual and Religion

March 7
Death and Afterlife
Popol Vuh video

March 14
Ballgame

SPRING BREAK

March 28
The Human Body and Gender
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

April 4
Ceramics

April 11
Collecting and Exhibiting Maya Art
Art Institute visit
THESIS STATEMENT DUE

April 18
Murals

April 25
Warfare and Tribute
PAPER DUE

May 2 2 p.m. (2 hours)
GRADUATE STUDENT PRESENTATIONS