

Scientific Inquiry: Society and Culture
Anthropology 2006
PARANORMAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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appointment

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Course Objectives

This course fulfills part of the Common Curriculum's "Ways of Knowing: Scientific Inquiry: Society and Culture" requirement. In these courses, students will

- describe basic principles of human functioning and conduct in social and cultural contexts;
- describe and explain how social scientific methods are used to understand these underlying principles.

Paranormal Archaeology explores the virtues and limitations of the scientific method for understanding human society and culture. To accomplish this goal it uses selected mysteries and puzzles from the human past that have intrigued, over many years, professional scientists and the general public alike. We will explore a wide variety of topics having anthropological relevance—Bigfoot, the Big Stone Heads of Easter Island, the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Earthen Burial Mounds of North America, and other phenomena—in an effort to sort out hard facts, pure fantasies, and genuine mysteries. The course examines where the more outrageous explanations of mysterious phenomena come from, and investigates why such explanations are of continuing popularity in modern society.

Upon completion of this course students will

- Be able to distinguish scientific and non-scientific approaches to understanding human society and culture;
- Be able to describe variation in the ways of behaving and believing that characterized human groups in the different times and places considered;
- Be able to identify the social and cultural forces that influence how and why scientists and citizens come to believe certain things about human history, and the broader social consequences of those beliefs.

Course Requirements

1. Class attendance, active discussion of course material, and completion of several unannounced, in-class writing assignments (25%).
2. Midterm exam (35%).
3. Final exam (45%).

Required Readings

There are numerous required readings for this course. These readings are available on the course Portfolio site: <http://portfolio.du.edu/paranarch>. You are expected to have the readings read and fully digested for the days they are due to be discussed. I reserve the right to delete or add readings depending on circumstances.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction; Science and Epistemology

- Mar 24 Introduction and Rationale for the Course; Overview of Topics and Issues. Taking the Measure of Belief Systems at DU.
- Mar 26 Epistemology, Paradigms, and the Nature of Science.
- Shermer, M. 1997. I Am Therefore I Think. In *Why People Believe Weird Things*. Freeman.

WEEK 2: Politics of the Past

- Mar 31 The Social and Cultural Context of Archaeology.
Archaeology as Propaganda.
READING:
- Wilk, R. 1985. The Ancient Maya and the Political Present. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41:307-326.
 - Pringle, H. 2006. Hitler's Willing Archaeologists. *Archaeology*, March/April.
- Apr 2 Plato and the Atlantis "Myth"
READING:
- Hope, M. 1991. Plato's Atlantis. In *Atlantis: Myth or Reality?* Viking, New York.

WEEK 3: Sunken Continents

- Apr 7 **NO CLASS.** View National Geographic *Finding Atlantis* film.
- Apr 9 Locating Atlantis.
READING:
- Pheiffer, T. 2004 Santorini and the Legend of Atlantis.
<http://www.decadevolcano.net/santorini/atlantis.htm>
 - Ceaser, M. 1999. Atlantis of the Altiplano. *Mercator's World*, March/April.
 - Kuhne, R. 2004 A Location for Atlantis? *Antiquity* 78:300.

WEEK 4: National Geographic and the Spirit of Exploration

- Apr 14 Archaeology and *National Geographic*.
READING:
- Gero, J. and D. Root 1990. Public Presentations and Private Concerns: Archaeology in the Pages of National Geographic. In *The Politics of the Past*, edited by P. Gathercole and D. Lowenthal. Unwin-Hyman, London.
- Apr 16 **Visitor: Wade Davis, Explorer-in-Residence at National Geographic.**
READING:
- Davis, W. 2003. Dreams from Endangered Cultures. TED Talk.
http://www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_on_endangered_cultures
 - Linden, E. 1991. Lost Tribes, Lost Knowledge. *Time Magazine*, September.

WEEK 5: Human Evolutionary Hoaxes and Puzzles

Apr 21 The Great Piltdown Hoax: Whodunnit?

READING:

- Gould, S.J. 1980. Piltdown Revisited. In *The Panda's Thumb*. Norton, New York.

Apr 23 Does a Big-footed, Human-like Animal Roam the Earth?

READING:

- Napier, J. 1972. Bigfoot in America. In *Bigfoot: The Yeti and Sasquatch in Myth and Reality*. Berkley Publishing, London.
- Krantz, G. 1993. What is It? In *Big Footprints: A Scientific Inquiry into the Reality of Sasquatch*. Johnson Books, Boulder.

DISTRIBUTE MIDTERM EXAM

WEEK 6: Extraterrestrial Biological Entities and the Origins of Civilization

Apr 28 Extraterrestrials and the Evolution of Culture on Earth.

READING:

- Von Daniken, E. 1968. The Improbable World of the Unexplained. In *Chariots of the Gods*. Putnam's Sons, New York.

Apr 30 Did Aliens Visit Ancient Sumer? The Sitchin Chronicles.

READING:

- Sitchin, Z. 1990. A Space Base on Mars. In *Genesis Revisited*. Avon Books, New York.

May 2 **MIDTERM EXAM IS DUE (to my mailbox or by email to dsaitta@du.edu)**

WEEK 7: How Mysterious are Other Great Constructions of the Old World?

May 5 Big Heads of the South Pacific.

READING:

- Von Daniken, E. 1971. Easter Island—Land of the Bird Men. In *Chariots of the Gods*. Putnam's, New York.
- Diamond, J. 1995. Easter's End. *Discover*. August.
- Rohter, L. 2007. Many on Easter Prefer to Leave Stones Unturned. *New York Times*, January 9.

May 7 Heaven, Earth, and Pyramids.

WEEK 8: Lost Tribes and Ancient Mysteries of North America

May 12 Diffusion from Atlantis and Elsewhere

READING:

- Donnelly, I. 1882. The Colonies of the Mississippi Valley. In *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*. Harper and Row, New York.
- Stengel, M. 2000. The Diffusionists Have Landed. *Atlantic Monthly*, January.

May 14 Ancient North America in the Scientific and Popular Imagination.

READING:

- Lawler, A. 2011. America's Lost City. *Science* 334:1618-1623.
- Lovata, T. 2007. The Fake Anasazi of Manitou Springs. In *Inauthentic Archaeologies*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek.

WEEK 9: Some Big Questions

May 19 Is There Life Elsewhere in the Universe?

READING:

- Mayr, E. 1985. The Probability of Extraterrestrial Intelligent Life. In *Extraterrestrials: Science and Alien Intelligence*, edited by E. Regis, pp. 279-285. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Shostak, S. and A. Wolfendale 2000. Is There Other Intelligent Life in the Universe? *Prospect*, June.

May 21 How Should We Deal with Alternative Archaeologies?

READING:

- Holtorf, C. 2005. Beyond Crusades: How (Not) to Engage with Alternative Archaeologies. *World Archaeology* 37:544-551.
- Fagan, G. and K. Feder 2005. Crusading Against Straw Men: An Alternative View of Alternative Archaeologies. *World Archaeology* 38:718-729.

WEEK 10: Fact and Fiction in Cult Archaeology

May 26 **Memorial Day: No Class**

May 28 What's Fact and What's Fiction in the Study of Ancient Cultures? Why are Cult Beliefs So Popular? Why Won't Some Go Away?

READING:

- Goode, E. 2000. Why Paranormalism? In *Paranormal Beliefs: An Introduction*. Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, IL.
- Sagan, C. 1998. Wonder and Skepticism. In *Encounters With the Paranormal: Science, Knowledge, and Belief*, edited by K. Frazier, pp. 15-24. Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY.

WEEK 11

June 2 **FINAL EXAM IS DUE.**