

# ANCIENT MESOAMERICA

**Tuesday 3:45—5:00; Thursday 2:15—3:30**  
**MULH 4032**

Pyramid of the Magician, Uxmal, Mexico

**INSTRUCTOR**

Dr. MIKAEL HALLER

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Office Hours:           Tues 5-7 pm  
                               Wed 12-5 pm  
                               Thurs 9-11 am  
                               or by Appointment



**Course Summary**

When the Spanish Conquistadores arrived in Mexico and Guatemala, they found Indigenous peoples living in large cities with impressive temples atop tall pyramids, lavish palaces for rulers, elaborate markets, and skilled craft people working in gold, copper, feathers, stone, pottery, and other materials. They were astonished to find a civilization so like their own, in some respects, and yet so different (so “barbaric” to European eyes) in other ways. In this course, we will explore the development of these civilizations back to their roots several thousand years before the arrival of Cortez when radical transformations occurred. This year, we will focus on the geographic area of the Yucatan Peninsula and southern Mexico home to the Maya. We will examine the factors that helped shape Mayan cultural sequences within a greater Mesoamerica context from humble nomadic beginnings to complex states.

**Course Goals**

Our exploration will center on examining archaeological evidence left by the Aztecs, the Maya, the Zapotecs, and their predecessors to reconstruct past lifeways. Using practical exercises with real archaeological data, students will recognize the challenges facing archaeological inquiry and the methods scholars employ in reconstructing the past. At the end of this course, students will be able to reconstruct Mesoamerican politics, history and culture from an examination of historical, ethnographic and archaeological evidence. Additionally, students will address issues of colonialism and acculturation using Mesoamerican examples that can be applied globally to many different cultural situations today and the recent past.

**Course Requirements**

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|----|--|------------------------------------|------------|
| 1) | <b>EXERCISE</b> (Nov. 26)  | Maya Hieroglyphs at Piedras Negras | <b>15%</b> |
| 2) | <b>EXAMS:</b>  |                                    |            |
|    | <b>Midterm Exam</b> (Take home, submitted in class October 22)<br>(Short answer and essay format)  |                                    | <b>24%</b> |
|    | <b>Final Exam</b> (Take home, submitted on-line by December 12 at noon)<br>This will be based on the second part of the course (Short answer and essay format) |                                    | <b>24%</b> |

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| 3) | <b>MAP TEST (Sept. 19)</b><br>(Based on geographical and cultural divisions and archaeology site locations)                                  | <b>6%</b>  |
| 4) | <b>Summaries (23 in total)</b>   | <b>23%</b> |
| 5) | <b>Participation</b><br>Attendance will be taken and used in conjunction with your preparedness and your contributions to class discussions. | <b>8%</b>  |

Handouts and syllabus are available on my website: <http://www.mystfx.ca/people/mhaller/>

### Summaries

2 typed pages double-spaced for the class's readings (1-inch margins, 11 font). These will be a summary of the main themes and arguments of the reading, due on the day assigned before class (no late submissions will be accepted). These are to be in your own words—do not plagiarize the in-text summaries.

Follow specific format. **Use headings.**

Title: (complete bibliographic information; single-spaced)

Description: (include a detailed description of the main themes and arguments of the reading; 1 page).

Relevance: (Describe how this reading relates to the course and our class discussions; 1 page).

(Summaries are worth 1% each)

### Assigned Readings

The required textbook for this course is available at the bookstore:

Coe, Michael D. and Stephen Houston  
2015 *The Maya*, Ninth Edition. Thames and Hudson, New York.

### **STFX Online Journals and Reserve Readings**

Carballo, David, Kenneth G. Hirth, Daniela Hernández Sariñana, Gina M. Buckley, Andrés G. Mejía Ramón, and Douglas J. Kennett.

2019 New Research at Teotihuacan's Tlajinga District, 2012–2015. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 30:95—113.

Chase, Arlen, Diana Chase and Michael E. Smith  
2009 States and Empires in Ancient Mesoamerica. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 20:75-82.

Demarest, Arthur

2004 *Ancient Maya: The Rise and Fall of a Rainforest Civilization*. Chapter 2: Background: Geography, Chronology, and Theoretical Perspective. Cambridge University Press.

2013 The Collapse of the Classic Maya Kingdoms of Southwestern Petén. In *Millenary Maya Societies: Past Crises and Resilience*, edited by M.-Charlotte Arnauld and Alain Breton, pp. 22-48.

Evans, Susan T

2013 *Ancient Mexico and Central America*. Chapter 5: Early Formative Olmecs. Thames and Hudson, New York.

2013 *Ancient Mexico and Central America*. Chapter 15: The Rise of Tula and other Epi-Classic Transformations. Thames and Hudson, New York.

Harrison, Peter

2012 A Marvel of Maya Engineering: Water Management at Tikal. *Expedition* 54(2):19-26.

Joyce, Arthur A.

2004 Sacred Space and Social Relations in the Valley of Oaxaca. In *Mesoamerican Archaeology*, edited by Julia A. Hendon and Rosemary A. Joyce, pp. 192-216. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.

Marcus, Joyce

2012 Maya Political Cycling and the Story of the Kaan Polity. In *The Ancient Maya of Mexico*, edited by Geoffrey E. Braswell, pp. 88-116. Routledge, New York.

Robin, Cynthia

2004 Social Diversity and Everyday Life within Classic Maya Settlements. In *Mesoamerican Archaeology*, edited by Julia A. Hendon and Rosemary A. Joyce, pp. 148-168. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.

Schele, Linda and Peter Mathews

1998 *The Code of Kings*. Chapter 3: Palenque: Hanab-Pakal's Tomb. Simon and Schuster, New York.

Smith, Michael E.

2005 Life in the Provinces of the Aztec Empire. *Scientific American* 277(3):76-83.

2008 The Aztec Empire. In *The Aztec World*, edited by Elizabeth Brumfiel and Gary Feinman, pp. 121-136. Abrams Books, NYC.

Taube, Karl

1993 *Aztec and Maya Myths*. Chapters 4-5 Maya Mythology, pp. 51-77. Texas University Press, Austin.

### Grading Policy

If a student misses an exam it will be possible to write a make-up exam, but the illness or emergency must be documented promptly. Handing in exercises late will result in losing 25% for each day. Late Assignments should be handed in to the departmental secretary (JBB 208) to be time stamped. Do not slide it under my door! Cheating and plagiarism will be dealt with in strict accordance to the StFX's Academic regulations (<http://www2.mystfx.ca/registrars-office/academic-integrity>).

### Special Accommodations

I encourage students that require special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications to contact Learning Services ([http://sites.stfx.ca/accessible\\_learning/services](http://sites.stfx.ca/accessible_learning/services)). You must provide documentation of your disability within two weeks from the start of the course.

All StFX students have access to Microsoft Cloud services and should take advantage of this to ensure a backup of academic files. If you choose not to use this service, you are responsible for making your own backups to prevent losing data and not being able to submit required coursework

### Communication

All students have a StFX e-mail account, which must be checked regularly as notices and information pertaining to the course will be sent electronically. Make sure all electronic correspondence sent to me is to my university e-mail address ([mhaller@stfx.ca](mailto:mhaller@stfx.ca)).

WEBSITE: Handouts and syllabus are available on my website: <http://people.stfx.ca/mhaller/>

MONTH	DAY	TOPIC	Coe and Houston 2015	READINGS	HAND OUT	DUE	
SEPT	3	People, Culture, and History	Preface; Chapter 1				
SEPT	5	People, Culture, and History		Demarest 2004: Chapter 2		Summary 1	
SEPT	10	Earliest Maya	Chapter 2		Map Quiz		
SEPT	12	The Olmec		Evans 2013: Chapter 5			
SEPT	17	The Rise of the Maya Civilization	Chapter 3				
SEPT	19	Maya Political Cycling		Marcus 2012		Map Quiz	
SEPT	24	Classic Maya Splendor: The Early Period	Chapter 4				
SEPT	26	Classic States: Valley of Oaxaca		Joyce 2004			
OCT	1	Classic States: Basin of Mexico		Carballo et al. 2019			
OCT	3	Classic Maya Splendor: The Late Period	Chapter 5		Exercise #1		
OCT	8	Social Diversity and Everyday Life		Robin 2004			
OCT	10	Maya Thought and Culture	Chapter 9		Midterm Exam		
OCT	15-17	<b>FALL BREAK NO CLASSES</b>					
OCT	22	Maya Engineering		Harrison 2012		Midterm Exam	
OCT	24	Maya Hieroglyphs/Exercise #1		Schele and Mathews1998: Chapter 3			
OCT	29	Maya Mythology and Religion		Taube 1993:51-77			
OCT	31	The Terminal Classic Maya	Chapter 6				
NOV	5	Classic Maya Collapse		Demarest 2013			
NOV	7	The Post-Classic Maya	Chapter 7				
NOV	12	Post-Classic States: Tula		Evans 2013:Chapter 15			
NOV	14	Post-Classic States: Aztecs		Smith 2008; Smith 2005 (1 summary)			
NOV	19	States and Empires in Mesoamerica		Chase et al. 2009			
NOV	21	Maya Life on the Eve of the Conquest	Chapter 8				
NOV	26	Societal Collapse in Mesoamerica			Final Exam	Exercise #1	
NOV	28	The Enduring Maya	Chapter 10				
DEC	12	<b>Final exam due by noon (e-mail submission)</b>					