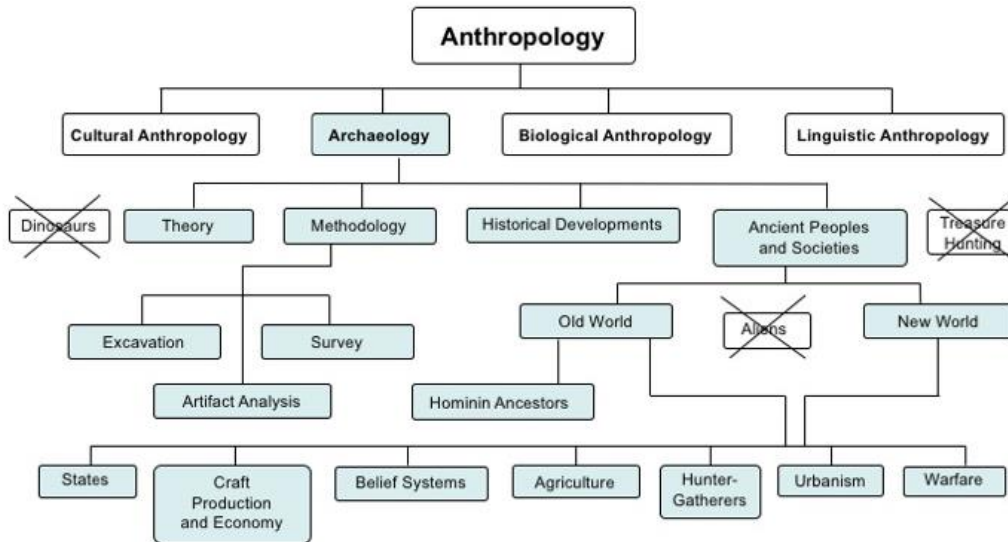


GESM 130  
**ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE POPULAR IMAGINATION**  
 VKC 254, T/Th 9:30-10:50

Professor: Ken Seligson, Ph.D.  
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Office: HNB B29B  
 Office Hours: W 1-3



### Course Description

Ancient aliens, government conspiracies, lost civilizations, apocalyptic prophecies, mysterious technologies... Archaeology seems to inspire an unlimited stream of imaginative cult theories. From Indiana Jones to Lara Croft to Reality TV, depictions of archaeologists in popular culture have skewed the general public's understanding of archaeology and archaeologists. In the age of social media, false representations of the human past spread ever more widely and rapidly with ease. While archaeologists do often travel to diverse regions around the globe and uncover the amazing achievements of past civilizations, the discipline of anthropological archaeology is grounded in practical theories, methodologies and data analysis.

The fact that archaeologists often work with restricted datasets allows room for multiple interpretations of past societies and practices, but also allows for the insertion of pseudoscientific explanations into the popular mix. Pseudoscience consists of information or practices that appear to be based in scientific evidence but in fact have no verifiable scientific underpinnings nor stand up to the rigors of the scientific method. In this course, we will critically examine pseudoscience, archaeological frauds, and implausible interpretations with an eye to dispelling fantastical or cult depictions of archaeology. The ability to parse through a slew of expertly designed false claims and insufficient datasets is an increasingly important skill in the age of social media.

Over the course of the semester, students will find that in many cases the actual archaeological findings and data are even more awe-inspiring than the fanciful explanations conjured in popular culture. Deliberate misrepresentations and innocent misunderstandings alike have the capacity to cloud our understanding of the human past and harm people in the present. This course specializes in critical, evidence-based thinking and uses many examples about the human past to help students understand the importance of examining the sources, motives, and presentation of information.

### Course Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Identify reliable accounts of archaeological finds.
2. Discuss why pseudoscience plays a recurring role in popular understandings of ancient cultures and archaeology.
3. Critique the legitimacy of popular media representations of archaeological methods and research.
4. Formulate an evidence-based, research paper refuting a commonly misrepresentation of how archaeology is conducted or our knowledge of the past.

### Statement on Course Requirements, Late Assignments, and Attendance

Attendance in weekly class meetings is mandatory for all students. Repeated absences will negatively affect your grade. The writing assignments will be turned in online using Blackboard (via the TurnItIn system), and will be due in by 11:59pm PST on the assigned due date. Assignments handed in one day late will lose 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B+ becomes B). Each additional day late will result in the loss of a full letter grade.

### Statement of Contact Hours and Out of Class Workload

The best way to reach me is through email (seligson@usc.edu). I will try to respond within 24 hours. Your out-of-class workload is about 75-125 pages of reading per week plus the time you need to spend on assignments and exam preparation. Reading for each class is to be done prior to the lecture or discussion. Participation in class discussions will also contribute to your grade.

### Description of Assignments

There will be three types of assignments in this course: written critiques, exams, and a final research paper. Students will write two short critiques (750-1000 and 1000-1250 words, respectively) on course materials discussed in class and popular depictions of archaeology. These critiques will be a combination of personal opinion and critical analysis. Your final project will include either a written paper or a non-essay option (such as a video documentary, digital comic book, photo blog or conference-level research poster, to name a few). You will need to discuss your idea for your final project with Prof. Seligson by the 8<sup>th</sup> week of class. You will present the results of your research to the class in the final weeks of the semester as a brief “3x5” overview. There will be both a midterm and a final examination.

### Grading Scale

A (94+pts), A- (90-93.99pts), B+ (87-89.99pts), B (84-86.99pts), B- (80-83.99pts), C+ (77-79.99pts), C (74-76.99pts), C- (70-73.99pts), D+ (67-69.99), D (64-66.99pts), D- (60-63.99pts), F (<60pts.) Pass (>69.99 pts), Fail (<60pts). **Final grades are non-negotiable.**

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade	Due Date
Class Discussions	20%	Ongoing
Critique 1	15%	Feb. 7
Midterm Exam	15%	March 7
Critique 2	15%	March 28
Final Project	20%	April 26
Final Exam	15%	May 7

### Required Readings

Book chapters and articles from scholarly journals, as well as examples of fantastical or pseudoscientific publications, will be posted on Blackboard. In addition to the assigned reading for the week, for some weeks you will find additional optional readings that pertain to that week's course material, but are not mandatory.

### Course Schedule and Weekly Breakdown

Wk	Date	Topics	Readings
1	1/8	Introduction to the Course	
	1/10	Introduction to Archaeology	Lynne 2003; Price and Feinman (excerpt)
2	1/15	A (Very) Brief History of Archaeology	Fagan (excerpt)
	1/17	Discussion: How do We Know What We Know?	Bohannon 1966; Frank 2018; Patrik 1985
3	1/22	Pop Culture Representations of Archaeology	Baxter 2002; Bonacchi 2013; Hall 2004
	1/24	Case Studies: Indy, Lara, and Megan	Seligson and Farah 2018; MacLaren Walsh 2008; Anderson 2018
4	1/29	Recognizing Pseudoscience	Derricourt 2012; Fagan 2006
	1/31	Case Study: Rock Lake, Wisconsin	Romey 2003; Fagan 2003; Lloyd 2018
5	2/5	Alternative Paleolithic Facts	Zuk 2013; Hudson 2005; Naish 2015
	2/7	Case Studies: Paleo-diet, Piltdown Man, Stupid Neanderthals <b>CRITIQUE 1 DUE</b>	Kilgannon 2010; Frayer 2013; King 2018
6	2/12	Americas B.C.	Blakeslee 1987; Trigger 1980
	2/14	Case Studies: Moundbuilders, Vikings, Solutreans	Hughey and Michlovic 1989; Oppenheimer et al. 2014
7	2/19	Diffusionism	Balch and Babcock 1917; Feder 2008; de Montellano et al 1997
	2/21	Case Studies: Atlantis, African Olmecs	Herva and Nordin 2015; Haslip-Viera et al. 1997
8	2/26	Ancient Aliens	Bond 2018; Brier 2004; Malamud 2000
	2/28	Case Study: Ancient Egypt	O'Connor 2009; Richter 2012
9	3/5	Midterm Review	
	3/7	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>	
10		SPRING BREAK	
11	3/19	New Age Archaeology	Aveni 2009; Chippindale 1986
	3/21	Case Studies: Stonehenge, Maya Apocalypse	Odling-Smee 2007; Wallis and Blain 2003

<b>Wk</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>
12	3/26	Archaeology, Nationalism, and Colonialism	Andersson 2012; Arnold 2006;
	3/28	Case Studies: Nazis, India, Oceania <b>CRITIQUE 2 DUE</b>	Arnold 2008; Flexner 2014; Ratnagar 2004
13	4/2	“Mysterious” “Collapses”	McAnany and Yoffee 2010: Excerpts
	4/4	Case Studies: Classic Maya, Greenland, Rapa Nui	McAnany and Yoffee 2010: Excerpts
14	4/9	Biblical and Epic Archaeology	Batuman 2011; Palevitz 2002; Silberman and Goren 2006; Rose 1993
	4/11	Museum Visit: Visible Vault	
15	4/16	Archaeology, Tourism, and the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	Kersel and Yorke 2012; Nhamo 2013; Castañeda and Mathews 2013
	4/18	Case Studies: Maya Sites, Zimbabwe	Walker and Carr 2013; Anderson et al. 2013; Young 2003
16	4/23	Student 3x5 Presentations	
	4/25	No Class – Work on Final Projects	
		<b>FINAL PAPER DUE</b>	<b>APRIL 26</b>
		<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	<b>MAY 7 8am – 10am</b>

### Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

### Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will

provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)