

Subaltern Communities

Archaeological Perspectives Beyond Domination and Resistance

- ARCH 2157
- W 3.00 - 5.20 PM
- Rhode Island Hall room 008

Mediterranean (pre)history is usually cast in terms of an inexorable rise of state domination and colonial exploitation under the euphemistic label of 'social complexity'. This seminar will examine and highlight the role of 'people without history' not by simply pitching them as rebels against dominant powers but by exploring the subtle and manifold connections that interweave subaltern communities with hegemonic groups.



This course explores inequality in the ancient Mediterranean through the lens of material culture by considering social theories about how power is created and maintained and by zooming in on the material surroundings of ancient Mediterranean communities. The objective of the course is to investigate the nature of social and economic power, how it may be established and exercised. The emphasis is however not so much on the elites who wielded power but rather on the majority of people in society, who were at the receiving end of power, and who had to put up with the demands and constraints that were imposed on their lives. Particular attention is given to the seminal writings of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault.

By focusing on a number of exemplary case studies from across the world and from different periods of time on a comparative basis, we will explore themes like materiality, inequality, violence, colonialism, resistance, anarchy, subalternity, shatter zone and hybridity, we will explore how 'things' have mediated both ancient and modern actions and experiences of Mediterranean peoples and elsewhere to shape long-term collective identities and practices.

Subaltern Communities - syllabus (spring 2015)

The course is organized along two parallel tracks. One takes its lead from the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault and the ways in which anthropologists, archaeologists, geographers and other social science scholars have understood and worked with their ideas and notions; it is thus dedicated to exploring key concepts and approaches to power and resistance in both modern and ancient settings. The other track is laid by material culture, and follows archaeological evidence and other relevant information like ancient texts to investigate and interpret particular contexts of subalternity and resistance. The unifying theme of the course is material culture, both past and present.

Practical Information

- Instructor: Peter van Dommelen (peter.van_dommelen@brown.edu)
Office hours: Mondays 2-3 pm and Wednesdays 10-11 am; Rhode Island Hall, 009.

Course Organization

This course revolves around weekly readings, class discussions, a course blog and a course conference to discuss a range of theoretical perspectives on migration, networks and material culture.

The course will primarily be assessed through a substantial final paper, a first version of which will be presented to the class in early April. Students are also required to contribute to the course blog and to lead classroom discussions on a given topic, if possible more than once. Other assessment exercises include the writing of both one short paper on an ancient instance of resistance early on in the course and a review of one archaeological monograph. General class participation is assessed to round the grade up or down.

Assessment Overview

- 40% final paper (below, 5)
- 20% short essay (below, 2)
- 15% book discussion and review (below, 3)
- 15% substantial class presentation (below, 4)
- 10% contributions to course blog and leading of class discussions (below, 1)

Writing Assignments (in chronological order)

1. 10%: starting January 28, deadline as assigned: to write a blog contribution and to lead class discussion: every week two students are assigned to discuss on the blog the papers listed for weekly reading and to suggest two more papers for reading. In class, they use their blog to lead discussion of all papers. Blog posts should be online by Monday morning (8 am) before class.
2. 20%: February 13 (midnight): submission of a short paper of 2,000 words (excluding references) that identifies and discusses an instance of resistance in the ancient Mediterranean on the basis of archaeological and/or textual evidence. Particular attention should be given to material culture.
3. 15%: due March 6 (midnight): review of either Liebman 2012 or González Ruibal 2014, focusing in particular on material culture.
4. 15%: April 1/8/15: substantial presentation (20-30 mins) of an original archaeological case study of subalternity and/or resistance in the ancient Mediterranean; alternatively, a thematic and comparative approach may be taken, as long as it involves Mediterranean evidence.
5. 40%: May 2 (midnight): submission of final paper based on the paper presented in class previously (6,000 words, excluding references)

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Calendar

- 1. Jan. 21** *Introduction*
Set-up of the course and a broad survey of the intellectual landscape
- 2. Jan. 28** *Archaeologies of Inequality*
Discussion of archaeological approaches to the study of power and inequality
- 3. Feb. 4** *Michel Foucault on Power/Knowledge*
Reading texts by and commentaries on Foucault
- 4. Feb. 11** *Antonio Gramsci on Subalternity*
Reading texts by and commentaries on Gramsci
- 5. Feb. 18** *Discussion of Alfredo González Ruibal's An Archaeology of Resistance (2014)*
Chapter-by-chapter discussion of González-Ruibal 2014
- 6. Feb. 25** *Discussion of Matt Liebmann's Revolt (2012).*
Chapter-by-chapter discussion of Liebmann 2012
- 7. March 4** *Archaeologies of Power and Hegemony*
Archaeological approaches to the concepts of power and hegemony
- 8. March 11** *Archaeologies of Symbolic Violence and Silent Resistance*
Archaeological approaches to the concepts of symbolic violence and silent resistance
- 9. March 18** *Archaeologies of Subalternity and Hybridity*
Archaeological approaches to the concepts of subalternity and hybridity
[Spring Break]
- 10. April 1** *Class Presentations*
substantial presentations of archaeological and Mediterranean case studies
- 11. April 8** *Class Presentations*
substantial presentations of archaeological and Mediterranean case studies
- 12. April 15** *Class Presentations*
substantial presentations of archaeological and Mediterranean case studies
- 13. April 22** *Conclusions*
Feedback on presentations, comparing ideas and suggestions for the final paper.

Bibliography

The list below offers a starting-point for relevant publications from the fields Archaeology, History, Anthropology and Cultural Studies. It is reproduced on the blog, where it will be expanded during the course. Required weekly readings are posted in Canvas under 'discussions'.

- Abu-Lughod, L. 1990: The romance of resistance: tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women, *American Ethnologist* 17: 41-55.
- Arnold, D. 1984: Gramsci and peasant subalternity in India, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 11: 155-177.
- Bénabou, M. 1976: *La résistance africaine à la romanisation*. Paris: Maspéro.
- Brown, M. 1996: On resisting resistance, *American Anthropologist* 98.4: 729-749.
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- Comaroff, J. 1985: *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance. The Culture and History of an African People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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- Green, M. (ed.) 2011: *Rethinking Gramsci*. New York: Routledge.
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- Keesing, R. 1994: Colonial and counter-colonial discourse in Melanesia, *Critique of Anthropology* 14: 41-58.
- Kurtz, D. 1996: Hegemony and anthropology. Gramsci, exegeses, reinterpretations, *Critique of Anthropology* 16.2: 103-135.
- Liebmann, M. and M. Murphy (eds) 2011: *Enduring Conquests: Rethinking the Archaeology of Resistance to Spanish Colonialism in the Americas*. (School for Advanced Research Advanced Seminar Series). Santa Fe, N.M.: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Lull, V. and R. Micó 2011: *Archaeology of the Origin of the State. The Theories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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- Mattingly, D. (ed.) 1997: *Dialogues in Roman imperialism. Power, discourse, and discrepant experience in the Roman Empire*. (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 23). Portsmouth, Rhode Island: Journal of Roman archaeology.
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- Mitchell, T. 1990: Everyday metaphors of power, *Theory & Society* 19: 545-577.
- Morton, S. and D. Butler (eds) 2011: *It's Good to Be King - The Archaeology of Power & Authority*. (41st Chacmool Archaeological Conference (2008)). Calgary: Chacmool Archaeological Association, University of Calgary.
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