

Sichuan University – Pittsburgh Institute
Early African Civilizations
HSS Elective
Fall 2019

Instructor: Professor Emily Jane O'Dell

Thursday 6 pm-8:35 pm

Location: Zone 3-106

Office Hours: Monday: 12-2 pm; Tuesday 12-2 pm; Thursday 4-6 pm

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Course Description

The course surveys the emergence and growth of early African civilizations from the beginnings of the evolution of the human race to the eve of the European colonization of the continent. It introduces students to the multiple disciplines contributing to knowledge about early Africa, and shows the centrality of Africa and Africans for humanity in general. Among the principal themes that the readings and discussions focus on are: pre-history of Africa and the genesis of humankind; the complexity of migration, and state formation; and African and European earlier contact. A fundamental approach will be to look at Africa from the inside out and to analyze African societies from the perspective of their internal development and reaction to external influences. Its basic goal is to promote an appreciation of Africa's contributions to world civilization.

Student Learning Outcomes

With successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify ancient, medieval, and contemporary environments and geographies of Africa
- Understand the histories, cultures, languages, and archaeologies of Africa
- Interrogate and critique Eurocentric models of interpreting “precolonial” Africa
- Relate contemporary politics and development in Africa to the historical past
- Analyze primary and secondary sources of African civilizations
- Discuss the diversity of social, cultural, and religious practices on the continent
- Assess African Studies as a field in a global context

Required Texts

All of the reading for this course can be found on Blackboard. Many of the readings come from:

Harms, Robert. *Africa in Global History with Sources*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Blackboard will also be where you can find our syllabus, weekly assignments, recommended reading suggestions, and other relevant files.

Grade Distribution

Map Quiz: 10%

Participation: 10%

Final Paper: 40%

Group Presentations: 20%

Group Project: 20%

Copyright Issues

Lecture, lecture notes, slides, handouts, quizzes, assignments, and exams are the intellectual property of the professor—who cannot be recorded without her permission. These are not intended to be distributed outside of the course.

Student Use of Electronic Technology Policy

Students must use electronic technology (including cell phones, laptops, tablets, and iPads) in appropriate ways during classes. Out of respect, cell phones should generally be turned off or on silent and stored out of sight. They should not be used during classroom activities unless the instructor has given permission. Electronic devices are forbidden during quizzes, tests or other in-class graded assignments, unless the instructor has given permission. Technology use in this class is meant to improve the learning environment for all students. Please be respectful of your instructor and classmates and use the technology appropriately. If you have questions about what this means, please talk to your individual instructor.

Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may NOT record classroom lectures, discussions, and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly recorded in advance can be used solely for the student's own private study.

Make-up Policy for Missed Assignments and Tests:

Students are responsible for the assignments in their classes. Assignments include in-class activities, quizzes, tests, homework, and any other work related to classes. You are only allowed ONE unexcused absence this semester (meaning one Thursday).

- If you have an excused absence from class, you should try to contact one of the students in your class to find out what work was missed.
- If you cannot find out from another student about what work you have missed, when you return to class you must talk to your instructors about the missed work and if/when you can make up the work. You are responsible for talking to your teacher; your teacher is not responsible for reminding you about missed work.
- If you are absent from class on the due date of an assignment, you must hand in the assignment and be prepared to make up tests the day that you return to class or on a date decided with your teacher.

- If you know you will have an excused absence, talk to your teacher before you leave or email your teacher to find out about the work that you will miss while you are away.
- If you have not been absent from class and you want to hand in an assignment late, you must first discuss the reason with your teacher before or on the due date. Do not assume that your teacher will accept late assignments. Also, you will lose points for late work in this situation.
- If you and your teacher arrange to meet so that you can make up an assignment and you miss that meeting, you will receive a “0” for that assignment.

SCUPI Honor Code

Students in this course must follow the SCUPI Honor Code. This includes:

- must not get help from anyone to do his/her work without the teacher’s permission.
- must not get help from any outside sources to do his/her work without the teacher’s permission.
- must not copy the words of another and present those words as his/her own work.

Participating in these activities can result in an F. Turning in work that is not your own can result in an F.

Writing Center Policy: first instance will result in failure in assignment with option of re-write; second instance will result in failure of assignment and meeting with Writing Center director; third instance will result in failure in the course and referral to university officials for Honor Code violation.

Participation

Active participation is crucial for language learning. Participating in class makes you an engaged learner of English. In this class, participation means:

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| • arriving to class on time | • attending class regularly |
| • staying on task (including appropriate use of technology) | • completing all homework on time |
| • actively listening to your classmates and teacher when they speak in class | • actively and constructively participating in class activities |
| • asking questions | • being prepared to answer questions |
| • bringing all class materials | • using only English in class |

Plagiarism

All work must be your own. Do not plagiarize any assignments as you will be penalized for it. This includes not only copying word for word but also stealing the ideas of someone else or paraphrasing without attributing the ideas to their original source. You are expected to follow SCUPI’s guidelines concerning academic honesty and conduct. I will be using Turnitin to detect if any work was purchased or copied from online.

EARLY AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS

Syllabus

Introduction to the Course and Material (September 4th)

Students will be introduced to the syllabus, professor, and course topics. They will begin to study various geographies of Africa and consider the environment, land, and histories of Africa. They will also learn how to write their names in Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs. Together we will read “The Tribulations of Two Chinese in Africa (East Africa, the 8th-15th Century)” from *The Golden Rhinoceros: Histories of the African Middle Ages* by François-Xavier Fauvelle to learn how, when, and why Chinese encounters with Africa began.

In-Class Work:

- “Africa in the Old World: Early Times to 1500 CE” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (41-43)
- Michael McNulty, “The Contemporary Map of Africa” (9-40)

Geographies of Africa (September 11th)

Students will begin by considering the history of the study of Africa, the Eurocentric biases of African Studies, and common notions, misconceptions, and misrepresentations of Africa around the world. We will then look at the environment and significant geographical features on the continent. We will also begin our study of early hominins and humans.

For this class, you should have read:

- “Out of Africa” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (2-19)
- Answer the study questions on page 35 (#1-4)

Out of Africa: Human Origins (September 18th)

Students will study the origins of human life in Africa and early migrations out of Africa. The professor will share her slides from visiting “Lucy” in Ethiopia and the archaeology and museum at Olduvai Gorge.

For this class, you should have read:

- “The Evolution of Humans in Africa” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (20-34)
- “Discovering Lucy” (p. 37)
- “Turkana Boy” (p. 38)
- Answer the study questions on page 35 (#5-7)

Ancient Egyptian & Nubian Civilizations (September 25th)

Students will be introduced to the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Nubia, and Aksum. We will begin by examining the Narmer Palette and the ancient Egyptian king list to understand the chronology of Egyptian dynasties. Students will also learn the basics of Middle Egyptian (hieroglyphic) grammar. We will study the pyramids through the slides of the professor's excavation at the Great Pyramids of Giza.

For this class, you should have read:

- “Food Revolutions and Frontier Societies,” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (45-58)
- Answer the study questions on page 81 (#1-4)

*****NATIONAL HOLIDAY*** (October 2nd)**

Meroe and Aksum (October 9th): QUIZ!

A quiz on the geography of Africa will be given. We will also discuss the sophisticated diplomacy in the seventh century between newly Islamized Egypt and Christian Nubia which took the form of a treaty—that required the return of Egyptian slaves who fled to Nubia. The professor will share slides from her temple excavation in Sudan at the Royal Pyramids of Meroe, and her research in Ethiopia in Aksum.

For this class, you should have read:

- “Egypt and Nubia” and “Aksum” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (58-70)
- Answer study question #5 on p. 81
- “The Travels of Harkhuf” and answer the questions (p. 84)

Recommended Reading

- Nubian Dictionary (C to End): Appendix IV: 25th Dynasty Dynamics; Gods and Goddesses of Nubia (170-171); Kerma (219-227); Kush (235-237); Meroe (258-259); Nubian (288-290); Napata (274-276); Ta-Seti (385); 25th Dynasty (395-398); Viceroy of Nubia (400); Islam Early History (197-198); Jebel Barkel (203-204); Meroitic (259-265); Musawwarat es-Sufra (268-273); Naqa (276-277); Philae (304-307); Shabaka (354-358); Taharqa (378-381)

Film Screening (October 16th)

Due to a prior commitment with Harvard, I will be in India to guest lecture. Please watch the assigned film and answer the questions on Blackboard.

For this class, you should have read:

- “North Africa and Its Invaders” (Carthage and Cleopatra) in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (87-96)
- “Africa’s Lost Kingdoms,” and answer the homework questions posted on Blackboard

GUEST LECTURE (October 23rd)

We will have a guest lecture on the politics of Egyptian archaeology today.

Christianity & Judaism in Africa: From the Cairo Geniza, Djerba Island, and Maimonides to Desert Fathers, Lalibela & Augustine (October 30th)

In this class, we will look at the presence and influence of Judaism and Christianity in Africa. We will consider how these communities shaped intellectual, political, and social-cultural developments on the continent. In our investigation of Judaism in Africa, we will study the Cairo Geniza and Elephantine Island in Egypt, the Jewish community on Djerba Island in Tunisia, and the far-reaching influence of Maimonides who lived in North Africa. In our discussion of Christianity in Africa, we will focus on the Desert Fathers in Egypt, the city of Lalibela in Ethiopia, and the figure of Augustine in Algeria. The professor will show slides from her research trip to Lalibela. Students will also translate basic Ge'ez sentences.

For this class, you should have read:

- “Anthony of the Desert” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (p. 120)
- “The City of God” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (p. 121)
- “Christianity in North Africa” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (96-103)

Recommended reading:

- Nubian Dictionary (C to End): Christianity in Nubia: (112-8); Copts (123); Elephantine Island (152-4)

The Spread of Islam in Africa (November 6th)

We will look at the spread of Islam across the African continent and study the doctrinal differences that shaped Islamic leadership and practices in medieval times. We will focus on the famous traveler Ibn Battuta who traveled throughout the Islamic world and provided unique insights into life in Africa.

For this class, you should have read:

- B.G. Martin, “The Spread of Islam” in Martin & O’Meara (96-99)
- “The Rise and Expansion of Islam” in Harms’ *Africa in Global History* (103-112)
- Answer questions #3-6

Cities of Gold: The Kingdom and Empire of Mali (November 13th)

We will study the kingdom and empire of Mali with special attention paid to the oral tradition of Sundiata, its founder and greatest king. The professor will share slides from her time studying Malian music, dance, and oral storytelling in Bamako, Mali. We will also have a guest lecture on Mali’s history and oral performances of its history from Michelle Bach-Coulibaly at Brown

University. We will watch Dani Kouyaté's "Keita: Heritage of the Griot" and clips from "The Road to Timbuktu" and *Caravans of Gold*.

For this class, you should have read:

- "Cities of Gold: The Empire of Mali" in Harms' *Africa in Global History* (134-147)
- Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (excerpt)

Recommended Reading

- "The Meanings of Sunjata and the Dawn of Imperial Mali" in *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* by Michael A. Gomez

Guest Lecture: South Africa (November 20th)

In this guest lecture, students will learn about the encounter between Europeans and Africans in southern Africa, and the policies of settlers in South Africa. Students will also hear first-hand about apartheid and its eventual demise and legacies from Professor David Jeffrey.

From Virginia to Zanzibar: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Slave Trade (November 27th)

We will examine the history of slavery across the continent. Special attention will be paid to the Transatlantic Slave Trade (1490-1870) and Omani slavery practices in Zanzibar and the East African Coast. The professor will show slides from her research on this topic in Zanzibar and Oman.

For this class, you should have read:

- Ayubah Suleiman Diallo, "Recalls his capture and enslavement"
- "With Boots Worth 3 Slaves: Slavery and Value in the 18th Century" (262-265; 292-295)
- "Oh ye Americans: The Autobiography of Omar ibn Said"

Colonialism, Capitalism, & Global Legacies of Slavery (December 4th)

We will consider the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and capitalism in a variety of different contexts. We will relate the history we have studied to the present day and try to draw connections. Matthew Desmond recently wrote: "If you want to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation." We will look at the vast and racialized wealth gap in America, the privatized prison system, deadly police brutality, collective trauma, discrepancies in healthcare and education, the struggle for civil rights, and revolutionary movements against American imperialism, racism, and white supremacy.

For this class, you should have read:

- "Five Things People Still Get Wrong about Slavery" by Karen Turner
- "Why American Prisons Owe Their Cruelty to Slavery" by Bryan Stevenson (NYTimes)

FINAL PRESENTATIONS (December 11th)

FINAL PRESENTATIONS (December 18th)

December 25th * FINAL REVIEW*****

January 1st *NEW YEAR'S DAY*****