

ANTH 291: Forbidden Archaeology

Fantasies, Frauds, and Mysteries of the Human Past

Course Overview

This is a course in critical thinking, argument, and communication. We will actively examine the history of several popular “fringe” claims about the human past and critically evaluate the support for those ideas. We will focus on topics such as the existence of giants, the presence of an advanced global civilization during the Ice Age, and various claims for pre-Columbian contact between the Old World and the Americas. We will also address the idea that there is a worldwide conspiracy among academics to suppress knowledge about what really happened in the past.

For each of these cases, we will:

- outline the claims that are being made;
- determine what assumptions are embedded in the claims;
- examine the relevant evidence;
- evaluate the arguments used for support;
- try to understand where the idea originated;
- try to understand why the idea is popular today.

In other words, we will evaluate claims in each of these cases in a historic, anthropological, and scientific framework. Where did these ideas come from? What kind of evidence could prove the claim to be false? Are the claims connected to social, political, and financial agendas?

We will engage with and evaluate these ideas about the past through readings, discussions, online research and communication, and in-class interactions with guest participants.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

- understand the basis of archaeology as a science for understanding the past;
- understand the nature of archaeological and historic evidence;
- be able to critically evaluate claims about the human past based on evidence and logic;
- be able to effectively and persuasively communicate ideas and arguments about the human past;
- be able to perform independent online research related to archaeology;
- be able to use basic graphics and presentation software to communicate ideas effectively in both written and spoken arguments;
- understand how claims about the past are connected to current national, ethnic, political, religious, and financial agendas.

Course Readings and Media

Readings and other materials in this course will include three books (which you must purchase), sections from historic books available online, and numerous other online resources (papers, blogs, videos, forums, and other web content). The following books should be purchased:

- Colavito, Jason. 2013. *Faking History: Essays on Aliens, Atlantis, Monsters, and More*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. [Abbreviated “**JC**” in the schedule.]
- Sepehr, Robert. 2015. *Species with Amnesia: Our Forgotten History*. Encino, CA: Atlantean Gardens. [Abbreviated “**RS**” in the schedule.]
- Wolter, Scott F. 2009. *The Hooked X: Key to the Secret History of North America*. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press of St. Cloud, Inc. [Abbreviated “**SW**” in the schedule.]

A list of additional readings (most of which are available online) is appended to this syllabus. Some readings will be made available to you via Blackboard.

Please do the readings and any requested activities (such as the preparation of discussion questions) **PRIOR** to class for which they are assigned!

Course Requirements

Your grade in this course will be based on a combination of individual writing assignments, an individual project, group presentations/debate, and class activities and participation (each of these is discussed below). There are no exams. The grade breakdown will be as follows:

Small Group Presentation/Debate	60 points
Individual Blog Posts (n = 3 x 50 points)	150 points
Individual Blog Responses/Critiques (n = 3 x 10 points)	30 points
Individual Project	100 points
Class Activities and Participation	20 points
<u>Attendance (n=40 x 1 point)</u>	<u>40 points</u>
Total	400 points

Grading Scale

A	90+
B/B+	80-85/86-89
C/C+	70-75/76-79
D/D+	60-65/66-69
F	<60

Small Group Presentation/Debate

Each student will participate in the preparation and delivery of a group presentation focusing on an assigned topic related to a claim we’ll be reading about and discussing in class. Group presentations require students to identify and analyze issues as well as develop and communicate arguments about those issues.

Student groups will be assigned randomly and will consist of 3-4 students. The students in a group will be given a “pro” or “con” position on a claim. Each group will prepare a short (10-15 minute), polished presentation explaining their assigned claim and supporting their position with evidence. Presenters should try to anticipate possible counter arguments to their analysis and should be prepared to

defend the content and conclusions of their presentation. Topics and further guidance for the presentations will be provided within the first few weeks of class.

The “pro” and “con” sides will present their cases in the same class period. The presentations will be followed by a debate between the groups. Students not in the group will exercise their critical listening skills and will be invited to engage in a productive and responsible exchange with the presenters. No tomatoes will be thrown.

Individual Blog Posts

Each student will write three blog posts related to claims or themes discussed in class. These blog posts will help students learn to communicate persuasive, insightful, evidence-based arguments through writing.

Student blog posts will be incorporated into a public website (“Forbidden Archaeology 2016”) that we will build during the course of the semester. The website will persist after the semester concludes and will serve as an open resource for others looking for information about the topics we will discuss. The following general guidelines will apply to the blog posts:

- **Subject:** Two topics will be assigned by the instructor; choice of the remaining topic will be made by the student;
- **Length:** Each blog post will be between 800 and 2000 words;
- **Content:** Each blog posts will address a specific claim, topic, or theme. Each post will contain a central argument about the topic that invokes evidence and/or logic (referring to outside sources when necessary). Accuracy of information is very important, as is providing support for your arguments;
- **Structure:** Blog posts should be structured to be easily understandable (clear and concise);

Students will be expected to do their own independent research to develop and support the arguments in their blog posts. Blog posts will be edited for content and structure by the instructor and critiqued by other students prior to going live online. Grades for blog posts will be based on accuracy, completeness, persuasiveness, and effectiveness in communicating an idea.

After critiques (see below), editing, and grading, blog posts will be published and available to the public. Blog authors will be expected to engage with (reasonable) outside readers who comment. Blog authors will also be expected to post their work in relevant online forums and groups and engage with those who comment on their work. Sometimes the comments will be negative.

Individual Blog Responses/Critiques

Students will spend time (in class and outside of class) critiquing the blog posts of others and editing their own work based on student critiques. This process of feedback and revision will help students increase the effectiveness of their writing and the clarity of their arguments.

Final Project

Each student will prepare an individual final project based on some aspect of the topics we will discuss in class. The project will be an original piece of work that describes and evaluates a controversial claim in historical perspective, addressing the origin, development, and evidence for the claim. The project can be in the form of a video or an extended analytical essay. In either case, the project should be in a format suitable for online publication and should do the following:

- define the claim;
- trace the history of the claim (referencing primary sources);
- evaluate the evidence for the claim (again referencing primary sources);
- explain how the claim's history relates to its present incarnation.

Students may choose to expand on a topic they have worked on previously (i.e., in the context of a group presentation or a blog post). An informal proposal (describing the subject and format of the project) is due at class time on **October 31**.

Class Activities and Participation

Developing the skills necessary to confidently and respectfully interact with others in an environment of competing ideas is an important component of this course. In class, we will engage in a variety of discussions, debates (mostly ad hoc, but some more formalized). Some activities in class will be graded, while others will not. I will often ask you to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings or videos.

Attendance

Attendance in class is strongly encouraged and counts toward your grade. Your understanding of the material in this course will benefit greatly from your attendance. I will take attendance in class daily, using either in-class activities or a sign-in sheet. Each day of attendance is worth 1 point.

Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

The topical coverage of this course will be organized into four sections. The first section (**Background**) will provide students with the background information they will need to understand scientific and pseudo-scientific claims about the human past. We will discuss the science of archaeology, the motivations for making claims about the past, and the nature of archaeological evidence. Students will also learn how the internet is used to make claims about the human past and how to make a compelling argument using blogging and social media.

In the second section (**Giants**), we will tackle ideas about the existence of giants. These ideas can be traced into past through texts such as the Bible and Greek mythologies. We will follow the history and development of "modern" ideas about giants from these ancient sources, through the 1700s, up to the present day. Where do these ideas come from? What is the relevance of giants to modern society? Why is there currently a re-emergence in interest in giants? Are any of these claims credible? Videos, book sections, and online information will be used. Jim Vieira, a researcher best-known from his television program *Search for the Lost Giants*, will travel to Columbia to participate in the class.

In the third section (**Ice Age Civilization**), we will discuss the claim that the Earth was home to some single advanced civilization that, through its destruction, gave rise to all the recognized early civilizations of the world (e.g., the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Olmec, etc.). We will trace the history of ideas about a "mother culture" from Plato's Atlantis onward and examine the assumptions underlying such ideas, trying

to understand how archaeological evidence has been used (and misused) to construct the narrative. We will read and critically examine Robert Sephr’s (2015) book *Species with Amnesia*. [Jason Colavito](#), a prominent skeptic of pseudo-archaeological claims with expertise in the history of ideas about Atlantis, has agreed to participate in the class via Skype.

In the fourth section (**Transoceanic Pre-Columbian Contact**), we will examine ideas about pre-Columbian contact between the Old World and the Americas. We will discuss the persistence of the 19th century “Moundbuilder” myth (the idea that Native Americans could not have built the earthen monuments of eastern North America), the history and motivations of hoaxes pertaining to transoceanic contact, and current ideas about evidence for such contact and whether the “true” prehistory of North America is being actively suppressed by the academic establishment. We will spend some time examining claims about the Kensington Rune Stone (KRS), which some argue is an authentic medieval artifact marking a 14th century journey by Europeans into the interior of North America. Several researchers who have examined aspects of the claims about the KRS (i.e., Harold Edwards, Henrik Williams, and Paul Stewart) have agreed to participate in the class.

Other guests may be added during the semester.

Wk	Date	Topics	Readings	Activities
Section 1: Background				
1	Aug 19	Introduction and overview		
2	Aug 22	Science vs. pseudoscience	“What is Science? What is Pseudoscience?” (Simanek) “Science vs. pseudoscience” (Pigliucci) ““Fringe” Misconceptions about Science” (White)	
	Aug 24	Archaeology: the science of the human past	Peregrine 2012 :5-7	
	Aug 26	A “mainstream” view of the prehistory of the world	“What Archaeologists Really Think” (Killgrove); Peregrine 2012 :22-38	
3	Aug 29	Why the past matters (part 1)	Arnold 1990 ; “Why Archaeologists Should Engage with “Fringe” Notions about the Human Past” (White)	
	Aug 31	Why the past matters (part 2)	The Bosnian pyramid (Woodard 2009); Feder 1984 ; JC: 1-10	
	Sept 2	Communication, archaeology, and the internet	“How to Write an Awesome Blog Post in Five Steps” (Shewan)	
Section 2: Giants				
4	Sept 5	NO CLASS: Labor Day		
	Sept 7	Giant mythologies of the past	Genesis and the Book of Enoch (sections TBA); “Evolution, devolution, and the incredible shrinking of humanity” (White); “Giants and the Ages of Man” (Colavito);	

	Sept 9	The emergence of new mythologies (19 th , 20 th , and 21 st centuries)	"Hans Sloane, Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, and Gigantology" (Colavito); "The "Giants of Olden Times" Stories in 19th Century America: A Progress Report" (White)	
5	Sept 12	Giants, evolution, and conspiracy	"2015 Lubbock Conference Session 1: Joe Taylor - Were the Giants Real?" (video)	
	Sept 14	The Nephilim Whirlpool	"Are Giants People Too?" (White); "Steve Quayle World Cover Up, Giants, Nephilim, History & Biblical truth" (video); JC: 163-166	
	Sept 16	An ancient giant race in North America?	"The Modern Mythology of Giants: "Double Rows of Teeth"" (White); Hamilton 2007 (portions TBA); "More Misinterpretations: "Giants with Double Rows of Teeth" from Ohio" (White)	
6	Sept 19	Jim Vieira presentation	TBA	Guest: Jim Vieira; Blog 1 draft due
	Sept 21	Jim Vieira discussion	TBA	Guest: Jim Vieira;
	Sept 23	Presentation/debate day	TBA	Groups 1 and 2 presentations/debate; Blog 1 critique due
7	Sept 26	Writing/editing day		
	Section 3: Ice Age Civilization			
	Sept 28	An introduction to Atlantis	Plato's description of Atlantis; Donnelly 1882 (portions TBA); Christopher 2001	Blog 1 edited draft due
	Sept 30	Hyperdiffusionism	Smith 1933 (portions TBA); "Hyperdiffusionism in Archaeology" (Wikiwand)	
8	Oct 3	The history of Atlantis mythology	JC: 222-233; 296-298	Guest: Jason Colavito (Skype)
	Oct 5	OOPArts and high technology	"17 Out-of-Place Artifacts Said to Suggest High-Tech Prehistoric Civilizations Existed" (Maclsaac); ArchyFantasies podcast, Episode 27 (Head and Feder)	
	Oct 7	Mu and Lemuria	"Atlantis, Lemuria and Mu: The Truth about these Lost Continents" (video); JC: 101-104; Blavatsky 1888 (sections TBA); TBA	
9	Oct 10	Evolution, genetics, and a "mother culture"	RS: 1-52	
	Oct 12	Atlantis, swastikas, and megalithic monuments	RS: 53-124; JC: 219-221	
	Oct 14	NO CLASS: Fall Break		

10	Oct 17	Sun gods and cyclical cataclysms	RS: 125-143;	Blog 2 draft due
	Oct 19	Presentation/debate day	TBA	Groups 3 and 4 presentations/debate; Blog 2 critique due
	Oct 21	Writing/editing day		
Section 4: Transoceanic Pre-Columbian Contact				
11	Oct 24	A brief history of ideas, evidence, and hoaxes about Old World contact with the Americas;	Feder et al. 2011 ; "The Moundbuilder Myth" (Lepper) "2013 Burrows Cave Hoax Update" (Flavin);	Blog 2 edited draft due
	Oct 26	No CLASS: SEAC		
	Oct 28	NO CLASS: SEAC		
12	Oct 31	Inscribed stones: some classics	Lepper et al. 2011 ; Lepper 2008; Sorenson 1977 ; TBA	Final project proposal due
	Nov 2	Missing copper?	Martin 1995 ; <i>America Unearthed</i> S1E3 (portion TBA); "Review of <i>America Unearthed</i> S01E03" (Colavito);	
	Nov 4	The Kensington Rune Stone: introduction	SW: vii-xii; 3-28; Williams 2011 ; Bengtson n.d.	
13	Nov 7	The Kensington Rune Stone: geology	"The Geology of the Kensington Rune Stone" (Nielsen and Wolter); Michlovic 2010;	Guest: Harold Edwards (Skype)
	Nov 9	The Kensington Rune Stone: linguistics	SW: 31-37; 45-67; 86-112; Williams 2012 ; TBA	Guest: Henrik Williams (Skype)
	Nov 11	The Kensington Rune Stone: interpretations	" Kensington Rune Stone Inscription Finally Solved! " (Wolter); TBA	Guest: Paul Stewart
14	Nov 14	#Swordgate!	" Startling new report on Oak Island could 'rewrite history' of the Americas " (Gadd) "A Falsifiable Hypothesis about the "Roman Swords" " (White); "Ten Great Moments in Swordgate History: A Look Back" (White); "Roman Sword" Advocate Wants Me to Debate Data I'm Not Allowed to See" (White)	
	Nov 16	The use (and abuse) of genetics	" Genes May Link Ancient Eurasians, Native Americans " (Morell) "Civilizations Lost and Found: Fabricating History - Part Three: Real Messages in DNA" (Bolnick et al.); "DNA vs. Book of Mormon" (video); Raff and Bolnick 2015	Blog 3 draft due

	Nov 18	Presentation/debate day		Groups 5 and 6 presentations/debate; Blog 3 critique due
15	Nov 21	Writing/editing day		
	Nov 23	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break		
	Nov 25	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break		
16	Nov 28	Why we want to get it right: final thoughts	TBA	Blog 3 edited draft due
	Nov 30	Project work time		
	Dec 2	Wrap up		Projects due

Online and Other Readings (Subject to Additions)

Arnold, Bettina. 1990. The Past as Propaganda: Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany. *Antiquity* 64(244): 464-478. [\[Link\]](#)

Bengtson, John D. n.d. "The Kensington Rune Stone: A Study Guide." [\[Link\]](#)

Blavatsky, Helena. 1888. *The Secret Doctrine*. [\[Link\]](#)

Bolnick, Deborah A., Kenneth L. Feder, Bradley T. Lepper, and Terry A. Barnhart. 2012. Civilizations Lost and Found: Fabricating History -- Part Three: Real Messages in DNA. *Skeptical Inquirer* 36(1). [\[Link\]](#)

Christopher, Kevin. 2001. Atlantis: No Way, No How, No Where. *Skeptical Briefs* 11.3. [\[Link\]](#)

Donnelly, Ignatius. 1882. *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*. [\[Link\]](#)

Feder, Kenneth L. 1984. Irrationality and Popular Archaeology. *American Antiquity* 49(3):525-541. [\[Link\]](#)

Feder, Kenneth L., Bradley T. Lepper, Terry A. Barnhart, and Deborah A. Bolnick. 2011. Civilizations Lost and Found: Fabricating History – Part One: An Alternative Reality. *Skeptical Inquirer* 35(5). [\[Link\]](#)

Gadd, Gemma. 2015. "Startling New Report on Oak Island Could 'Rewrite History' of the Americas." *Boston Standard*, December 16, 2015. [\[Link\]](#)

Hamilton, Ross. 2007. *A Tradition of Giants: The Elite Social Hierarchy of American Prehistory*. [\[Link\]](#)

Killgrove, Kristina. 2015. "What Archaeologists Really Think About Ancient Aliens, Lost Colonies, And Fingerprints Of The Gods." *Forbes.com*. [\[Link\]](#)

Lepper, Bradley T., Kenneth L. Feder, Terry A. Barnhart, and Deborah A. Bolnick. Civilizations Lost and Found: Fabricating History – Part One: False Messages in Stone. *Skeptical Inquirer* 35(6). [\[Link\]](#)

Lepper, Bradley. 2008. The Newark "Holy Stones": The Social Context of an Enduring Scientific Forgery. *Current Research in Ohio Archaeology*.

Lepper, Bradley. 2011. "The Moundbuilder Myth." *Ohio History Connection Archaeology Blog*, June 5, 2011. [\[Link\]](#)

- Maclsaac, Tara. 2015. "17 Out-of-Place Artifacts Said to Suggest High-Tech Prehistoric Civilizations Existed." *Epoch Times*, September 24, 2015. [\[Link\]](#)
- Martin, Susan R. 1995. The State of Our Knowledge about Ancient Copper Mining in Michigan. *The Michigan Archaeologist* 41(2-3):119-138. [\[Link\]](#)
- Michlovic, Michael G. 2010. Geology and the Age of the Kensington Rune Stone. *Minnesota Archaeologist* 69:139-160.
- Morell, Virginia. 1998. "Genes May Link Ancient Eurasians, Native Americans." *Science* 280(5363):520.
- Nielsen, Richard, and Scott F. Wolter. 2006. "The Geology of the Kensington Rune Stone." In *The Kensington Rune Stone: Compelling New Evidence*, pp. 13-47. Lake Superior Agate Publishing.
- Peregrine, Peter N. 2012. *What Happened in Prehistory?* Lawrence University Faculty Monographs. [\[Link\]](#)
- Pigliucci, Massimo. _____. "Science vs. Pseudoscience: Where is the Difference?" [\[Link\]](#)
- Raff, Jennifer A., and Deborah A. Bolnick. 2015. Does Mitochondrial Haplogroup X Indicate Ancient Trans-Atlantic Migration to the Americas? A Critical Re-Evaluation. *PaleoAmerica* 1(4):297-304. [\[Link\]](#)
- Shewan, Dan. 2016. "How to Write an Awesome Blog Post in Five Steps" [\[Link\]](#)
- Simanek, Donald. "What is Science? What is Pseudoscience?" [\[Link\]](#)
- Smith, Grafton Elliot. 1933. *The Diffusion of Culture*. London: Watts.
- Sorenson, John L. 197. Review of *America B.C.: Ancient Settlers in the New World*, by Barry Fell. *BYU Studies* 17(3). [\[Link\]](#)
- Williams, Henrik. 2011. The Kensington Stone Again. *Swedish American Genealogist* 2011:3. [\[Link\]](#)
- Williams, Henrik. 2012. The Kensington Rune Stone: Fact and Fiction. *The Swedish American Historical Quarterly* LXIII(1):3-22. [\[Link\]](#)
- Wolter, Scott. "Kensington Rune Stone Inscription Finally Solved!" *Scott Wolter Answers*. [\[Link\]](#)
- Woodard, Colin. 2009. The Mystery of Bosnia's Ancient Pyramids. *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 2009. [\[Link\]](#)