

Changing Views of the Ancient Maya

FINA561

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Description

Production of the Ancient Maya for a European and North American Public has taken place in an expanding trajectory for over a century and a half. These imaginings have included images as well as texts, often involving juxtaposition of Maya people against the known architectural and sculptural monuments. Whereas initially contemporary Maya, often serving as labourers in archaeological exploration and excavation, fill in for their ancient ancestors, by the 1920s many painters were commissioned to create illustrations of ancient life based in part on excavation data.

Throughout this trajectory of visual productions are interwoven the changing social, political, and economic relationships linking the archaeological and anthropological communities with their Maya subjects. Equally implicated are larger-scale relationships between Maya peoples of Central America, the non-Maya governments of the nation-states into which they have been incorporated, non-Latin American countries, particularly the United States (including American governmental organizations, economic corporations), and academic institutions that focus on the Maya as subjects of inquiry.

Obviously then, these visual and textual productions of the Ancient Maya are not merely intellectualized commodities, but are also designed to enter at different times into volatile political debates, such as the nature and legitimacy of patriarchal institutions in North America, appropriate control and use of land, or levels of foreign intervention and control in Latin America. This seminar is designed to interrogate some of the complex ways in which these visual representations entered into such debates by teasing out some of these contemporaneous relationships. At the same time, we will ask how such debates inflected ways in which archaeologists have been imagining Ancient Maya society, looking at the genealogy of such productions to understand how and why the interpretive products of earlier debates have been retained as fossils in current discourse.

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