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instructor: Rebecca Ginsburg
course title: Exploring African Cities
institution: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
date offered: Spring, 2009

posted date: April, 2014
stable URL: www.vafweb.org/resources/syllabi/ginsburg3.pdf

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Exploring African Cities

LA 220/Anthro 223/AFST 199
9:30 – 10:50 on Tues and Thursdays
THB 223

Instructor: Rebecca Ginsburg
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3 - 5
Temple Hoyne Buell M218
5-6737
rginsbur@illinois.edu

Class website: <http://web.mac.com/rebeccaginsburg/iWeb/LA220/Homepage.html>

COURSE SYLLABUS

About the Course

Exploring African Cities is a landscape history/architectural history class that examines the elements and layouts of historic African cities, most of which are today in ruins. We'll employ a case study approach, rather than attempting a broad survey of African cities. Most of the sites we'll study predate the 19th c. European colonization of Africa and all are sub-Saharan. They date from 200 BCE to the 21st century. Our aim is to reconstruct the material culture of each city at the height of its power, from the scale of city layout to that of interior decor. In other words, we will try to bring these cities to life, if only in our minds' eyes.

Underpinning our efforts will be the understanding that material culture—e.g. buildings, cities, and art—reveals much about the values, practices, and attitudes of the people who made and used it. Our main sources will be archaeological and historical accounts and extant physical remains, and we'll rely greatly on the images shown in class and posted on the class website to aid our efforts. This is a class that relies greatly on your willingness to engage your imagination. This is particularly true of the three written assignments.

Course Goals

What can we learn from studying historic African cities?

Please keep that question in mind throughout the semester. The answer will be a little different for everyone, of course—and that's one thing that will keep this course interesting—but at a minimum each of you should be able by May to:

1. describe and explain major events and processes in sub-Saharan history,
2. recognize, identify, and analyze basic elements of urban form,
3. have expanded knowledge of building technologies and materials,
4. look differently at American cities and towns that you're familiar with.

You'll notice that memorizing the particularities of each African city that we study is not a primary goal. I am not as concerned that you master details as that you build a historical and landscape framework within which you can situate any African city, and

that you learn basic tools that will help you understand any urban environment, anywhere.

Course Format

Students who have taken this class before report that it can be frustrating! Because African architectural and landscape history is a relatively young field, there is no single textbook we can use and no clear answers to many of the questions we will pose about African cities. We need to read rigorously, widely, and imaginatively from a variety of sources to begin to grasp the forces that contributed to the physical development of historic African cities and to understand the lives of their inhabitants.

Class time will consist primarily of discussions and activities. Please come prepared to talk about the assigned texts and participate in classroom exercises, and to listen attentively and actively when required. This course has heavy reading requirements and the reading is not easy. You should count on spending at least six hours each week reading the assignments, viewing the images on-line, and preparing the weekly papers.

There are three required books. Connah's *African Civilizations* is an archaeological text written by one of the preeminent scholars in the field of African archaeology. While full of information, it is, unfortunately, dense and difficult. Garlake's *Early Art and Architecture of Africa* is a beautifully-produced book by an architectural historian. However, it is often thin on historical background. For that, we'll turn to Shillington's *History of Africa*. This is an easy-to-read text that will fill in much of the background for the cities and regions we'll study. In addition, there are some readings available via the class website. Class mini-lectures will provide information that these readings don't supply and class discussion will allow us to clarify and synthesize the material.

We will typically examine one African city per week. Each Tuesday morning, except where specified in the syllabus, you'll turn in a one-two page "City Paper" that addresses the following five features of the city in question: environment and geography, what was going on in the world at the time, history, social structure, and built environment. (There is more information on the City Papers attached to this syllabus.) You may write in point form rather than in complete sentences if you wish, but please type your paper. The purpose of the City Papers is to ensure that you do the readings in advance so we can launch into discussion or activities and to provide a basis for assessing your progress in class. Since the papers are meant in part to facilitate more productive use of classroom time, *I will not accept them after 9:30am on Tuesday morning.*

None of the authors of our readings really try to bring these historic places and peoples to life. We'll attempt to do that to some degree during class discussion, but your best opportunity to reconstruct the cities will come with the model making assignment and the three writing Assignments that are spaced evenly over the semester. (More information on the Assignments follows this syllabus.)

Course Requirements

The graded course requirements are: seven City Papers; one group model making Assignment and three writing Assignments; and a Course Portfolio. The City Papers are due most Tuesday mornings, per the syllabus; the model presentations are scheduled for February 5 and the three writing Assignments are due respectively on February 24, March 17, and April 21. The Course Portfolio is due on May 5 in class.

Detailed instructions on each of the Assignment types are attached to this syllabus. In general, I expect all written work to be done in a professional manner. That means, for example, that pages should be stapled together, not dog-eared; work should be submitted on time; and there should be a minimum of spelling and grammatical mistakes. With respect to the three written Assignments, *it is my policy to stop reading an Assignment after the third such mistake and return the paper to its author for revisions. I reduce the grade half a grade for each such return* (e.g. a C+ becomes a C).

If you anticipate that you will need extra time for a written Assignment, let me know in advance. I will usually be happy to negotiate a new deadline with you. Assignments submitted late—i.e. without a previous agreement between us—will be reduced by half a grade. Papers not submitted by 9:30 am the day they are due are considered late. I do not accept late City Papers.

Please visit my office at least twice during the semester. This is to help me get to know you better and create a more relaxed classroom and to make it easier for you to ask for help. It is also much easier for me to write letters of recommendation for students I know than for students I don't know. I'll pass around sign-up sheets for the mandatory office visits. My regular office hours are Tuesdays from 3 – 5.

I grade participation. (Receiving 90% of the total participation points possible will give you an A in Participation, 80% a B, 70% a C.) Although I don't take attendance, if you miss class you will also miss class activities, and this will be reflected in your participation grade. You cannot make up class activities or exercises. No exceptions. Other things that contribute to your participation grade include taking part in classroom discussions and attending the required office hours. For those of you who are painfully shy and can't stand to talk in class, at least nod and look interested.

Grading

The grading system in this class might be unfamiliar to you. Please ask questions if you're even a little unclear about how it works.

Assignments	50% of your final grade
Portfolio	25%
Participation	<u>25%</u>
	100%

Wait, there's more.... Your City Papers will be graded pass/fail. There are five questions you are expected to address (environment, history, etc). Each of the five is worth two points, making ten points total possible per paper. Anything fewer than six points will result in a fail on that paper, as will papers that do not reference an image from our class website. Obviously, late papers (which I will not accept) or papers not turned in are automatic fails. *Regardless of your grade as calculated per your assignments, portfolio, and participation, above:*

You must pass 5 of the 7 city papers to receive an A in the course.

You must pass 4 of the 7 city papers to receive a B.

You must pass 3 of the 7 city papers to receive a C.

In other words, if your overall grade is a B but you have passed only three city papers, you will receive a C in the course. That's how important it is to me that you come to class prepared.

I encourage you to revise your written Assignments until you are satisfied with the quality of your work. The syllabus indicates the last date to turn in revisions for each Assignment. The highest grade you receive on any given Assignment will be the grade that counts. Revising gives you an opportunity to re-think your approach to a given Assignment, to try something bold and different, and to consider different interpretations of the material. Simply correcting errors that I've pointed out on your paper—something that takes little intellectual effort—will not earn you a higher grade. I want to be very clear about this point: if I see that your "revision" is simply a cleaned up version of an earlier paper, I will not give it a higher grade.

Academic Integrity

You are responsible for knowing the university's Academic Integrity policies. You can view them at: http://www.admin.uiuc.edu/policy/code/rule_33.html. Also please be aware that (1) the minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is failure of a project; (2) instances of egregious plagiarism will result in failure of an entire course. If you have any questions about proper and improper uses of work by others, using your own work in more than one class, or related issues, please contact me well in advance.

Miscellaneous

Basic rules of etiquette apply during class. Please turn cell phones off. Ask for my permission if you plan to use a computer to take notes during class. No headsets allowed. If you feel sleepy during class, stand up and walk around or go get a coffee. Please don't sleep in class. If you don't anticipate being able to attend class regularly, please do not register for this course. It depends for its success on student participation. In the beginning of the semester I will ask you to designate a "note buddy" whose notes you can borrow for those rare occasions when you do miss class. Please don't email me and ask me what you missed.

Any item on this syllabus is subject to change, with notice.

Schedule

- Jan 20** **Introduction to Class**
- Jan 22** **Thinking about Africa**
- Keim, “Changing our Mind About Africa” and “Our Living Ancestors,” in *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind* (2009)
- Jan 27 & 29** **Meroë, Kush, 200 BCE**
- Shillington, pp. 40-46
 - Connah, Chapter 2
- Feb 3** **Model-making in small groups** (see syllabus for instructions)
- Feb. 5** **Present models**
- Feb 10 & 12** **Aksum, East Africa, 300 CE**
- Shillington, Chapter 5, esp. pp. 67-71
 - Connah, Chapter 3
 - Garlake, Chapter 4
- Feb 17 & 19** **Jenne-Jeno, West African Savannah, 800 CE**
- Connah, Chapter 4
 - Garlake, Chapter 5
 - John Reader, “Cities without Citadels” in *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (1997)
- *Assignment 1 due Tuesday, February 24***
- Feb 24** **Review key concepts to date; Slide shows: earthen construction, markets**
- Feb. 26** **Return Assignment 1**
- Mar 3 & 5** **Kilwa, Swahili coast, 1350 CE**
- Shillington, Chapter 9
 - Connah, Chapter 6
 - Garlake, Chapter 8
- Mar 10 & 12** **Great Zimbabwe, Southern Africa, 1350 CE**
- Shillington, Chapter 10, especially pp. 147-51
 - Connah, Chapter 7
 - Garlake, Chapter 7

Assignment 2 due Tuesday, March 17

- Mar 17** **Africa map quiz; Slide show: mosques**
- Mar 19** **Individual meetings with instructor**
- Mar 24 & 26** **No class. Spring Break**
- Mar 31** **introduction to the Atlantic slave trade**
- April 2** **Atlantic slave trade, continued**
- April 7 & 9** **Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1850**
- Arthur T. Porter, *Creoledom: A Study of the Development of Freetown Society* (1963), Chapters 3, 4, and 9
 - David Northrop, "Passages in Slavery," in *Africa's Discovery of Europe, 1450-1850* (2002)
- April 14 and 16** **Kano, Hausaland, 1850**
- J.C. Moughtin, "The Structure of Hausa Settlements" and "Architectural Construction," in *Hausa Architecture* (1985)
 - Shillington, pp. 224-27.
 - Dmochowski, "Kano," in *An Introduction to Traditional Nigerian Architecture*
- *Assignment 3 due Tuesday, April 21***
- April 21** **The Diaspora I: 19th and 20th c** (no city paper due)
- April 23** **The Diaspora II: Diasporic Influences on African Cities**
- John Michael Vlach, "The Brazilian House in Nigeria: The Emergence of a 20th Century Vernacular House Type," in *Journal of American Folklore* (1984) (no city paper due)
- April 28 & 30** **21st century African cities** (no city paper due)
- Skim Shillington, pp. 301 – end
- *Portfolio due Tuesday May 5, in class at 9:30am***
- May 5** **Wrapping up**

CITY PAPERS

City papers are due most Tuesday mornings at 9:30 in class. Each paper has two components. First, it must address the following five questions, all relating to the city *during the time period we are studying it (give or take a few years) as specified on the syllabus*. For example, we are studying Meroë as it existed at its height, around 200 BCE. Answers that refer to Meroë in 300 CE would, obviously, be incorrect.

- 1) What was the city's geographic location? What environmental factors affected life and landscape in the city?
- 2) What was going on in the rest of the world at this time? The purpose of this question is to place the African city within a historic context with which you are already somewhat familiar. Please explain how your answer to this question accomplishes this. Simply goggling the date and copying down the information that you find on-line isn't enough to earn credit for this question. (Please note, you are unlikely to find answers to this question in the readings. You'll have to rely on your previous knowledge or do some outside research.)
- 3) What was the history of the city up to this point?
- 4) Describe briefly the nature of the city's most important social practices (e.g. the religion practiced by residents, its political system, its economic system).
- 5) What do we know about the built environment—the buildings and landscapes—constructed and inhabited by the residents of the city? Consider materials, construction techniques, style, city layout, housing form, variety of building types, agricultural landscapes, and any other aspects of the city's built environment.

Please answer these questions succinctly in one-two pages. Answers to all of these questions except #2 can be found in each week's readings.

Second, in your paper please reference at least one of the images found on the class website to explain a point you are making. For example, you might refer to a slide of the area around Meroë to illustrate the geography that surrounded the city. Explain what you see in the image and how it serves to support your answer. Do not simply cite an image without explanation.

ASSIGNMENTS

Meroë Model Making Assignment

Presentation: Feb. 5, 2009

You will work in small groups to form models of Meroë. Your group will present its model to the class on February 5. I'll grade both your model and your presentation. You must participate in both the model-making and the group presentation to earn a grade for this Assignment.

Here are guidelines for your model-making:

1. Your group will make a model of Meroë in 200 BCE.
2. Your model should be a model of the city. It should not be a model of the entire empire, nor should it be a model of agricultural lands outside the city, nor of one select, isolated portion of the city. For example, a model of a pyramid, on its own, will not be very impressive or tell us much about urban conditions in Meroë in 200 BCE.
3. I'll supply the modeling clay. You are free to supply anything else you wish to complete your model. Please don't spend any money on it, though.
4. Build the model at any scale you wish.
5. Work on this assignment whenever you wish and wherever you wish, according to the schedule of group members. You might, at a minimum, considering working during class time on February 3.

Here are guidelines for your presentation:

1. Present your model as a PowerPoint presentation. That means that you have to take digital images of your model once it's complete. (Hopefully somebody in each group will have a digital camera or access to one.)
2. Be thoughtful about the images you take. You can take close-ups. Aerial shots. Photos from the perspective of a person walking through your model/city. Photos outside, shot against a blue sky, or inside, shot against your bathtub. Be creative, in order for us to get a sense of the city from your images of it.
3. There will be 8 groups, which means that in an 80-minute class we'll have time for only 7 minutes per presentation. I'm going to be very strict with time. That means that you should:
4. Practice your presentation. Prepare your remarks in advance. Be professional. Introduce yourselves to the class before starting and assign each person in your group a role in the presentation.
5. Get me your presentation electronically by 9:00pm on Feb. 4. If I don't confirm receipt, please check with me that I have it.

Grading:

A **C** presentation will, at a minimum, contain factually accurate information about Meroë.

A **B** presentation will do the above **and**, at a minimum, incorporate a neat, clear, appropriately detailed model that illustrates engagingly the aspects of the city that you want to draw our attention to.

An **A** presentation will do the above **and**, at a minimum, be professionally presented, keep within the time limit, make clear how work was shared among group members, and give each group member an opportunity to participate meaningfully.

All members of the group will receive the same grade.

Have fun with it!

Assignment #1

Due Tuesday February 24, 2009 at 9:30 am in class

Visit EITHER Aksum or Jenne-Jeno during the period we have studied it and take a walk through it. Describe what you see, hear, and smell in the city, and your experience of being there. Pay particular attention to the built environment of the city. Your account should be between three and four double-spaced pages.

Please do not include your name on any page of your assignment. I will distribute a grading sheet for you to staple to the back of your assignment, and you should write your name on that. This allows me to mark your assignment blind.

If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. I will lower the grade of a late paper half a grade unless you have made previous arrangements for an extension.

Grading

A **C** answer will, at a minimum, contain factually accurate information about your city.

A **B** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, describe three aspects of the built environment of the city in detail. Aspects of the built environment include but are not limited to: elements of urban form (e.g. city layout, road system, open spaces, building forms, relationship between city and surrounding area); construction techniques and materials; specific building or landscape types (e.g. housing, gardens, agricultural holdings, monumental buildings, funerary landscapes). Be very explicit about which aspects you are discussing. You should devote about one full page to each aspect.

An **A** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, give the reader a good sense of what it might be like to travel through the city, providing observations and details that demonstrate you have a strong understanding of the spatial and material connections between urban sites and a good *feel* for the city.

The last day to turn in an Assignment #1 revision is March 12.

Assignment 2

Due Tuesday March 17, 2009 at 9:30 am in class

You are a resident of EITHER Great Zimbabwe or Kilwa (pick one) in the year 1350 CE. For some reason (you decide), you travel to the other city. Of course, you do a lot of research on your destination before you leave, so that you're well acquainted with its history, social structure, etc. Write a letter to the folks at home explaining the differences between your hometown and the city you are visiting. Your letter should be between two and four typed, double-spaced pages. If rough diagrams or sketches help you to illustrate your points, feel free to include them, keeping your written text at between two and four pages.

Please do not include your name on any page of your assignment. I will distribute a grading sheet for you to staple to the back of your assignment, and you should write your name on that. This allows me to mark your assignment blind.

If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. Late papers will be lowered half a grade unless you have made previous arrangements for an extension.

Grading

A **C** answer will, at a minimum, contain factually accurate information about the two cities.

A **B** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, describe, compare, and contrast one aspect of the respective cities' built environments. Aspects of the built environment include but are not limited to: elements of urban form (e.g. city layout, road system, open spaces, building forms, relationship between city and surrounding area); construction techniques and materials; specific building or landscape types (e.g. housing, gardens, agricultural holdings, monumental buildings, funerary landscapes). Be very explicit about which aspect you select. .

An **A** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, explain whatever differences and/or similarities you have identified between the two cities. In other words, it will go beyond description to address the question **WHY**. Why are the housing layouts different (if they are)? What accounts for the similarities between the locations of the two cities (if they are similar)? To answer such questions, you need to be able to explain, first, why X is as it is in Great Zimbabwe; second, why it is the way it is in Kilwa; and, third, discuss these two explanations in relation to one another.

The last day to turn in an Assignment 2 revision is March 31.

Assignment 3

Due Tuesday April 21, 2009 at 9:30am in class

You are a resident of either Kano or Freetown (pick one). Give yourself a specific identity. In the year 1850, you travel to the other city. In any form you like (e.g. journal entry, letters home) compare ONE aspect of the built environment of the two cities. Some aspects you might compare are: building construction and materials, housing, city layout, religious architecture, monumental architecture, city location. Explore the significance of any differences and similarities you discover with respect to this aspect.

Please do not include your name on any page of your assignment. I will distribute a grading sheet for you to staple to the back of your assignment, and you should write your name on that. This allows me to mark your assignment blind.

If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. Late papers will be lowered half a grade unless you have made previous arrangements for an extension.

Grading

A **C** answer will, at a minimum, contain factually accurate information about the two cities.

A **B** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, include a well developed, two to four page comparison between a single aspect of the built environments of Kano and Freetown that describes the aspect in question and explains the differences and/or similarities that you have identified.

An **A** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, discuss your character's experience of the respective cities. It will acknowledge and demonstrate that the experience of a given place depends upon a person's position (e.g. social status, gender, age).

It is not possible to revise Assignment 3 for a grade, but you might include your thoughts on possible revisions in your Portfolio.

COURSE PORTOLIO

Due: Tuesday, May 5, 2009 at 9:30 in class

This is your opportunity to pull together the course in a way that makes sense for you. Your portfolio is your personal record of your work over the semester, your reflections on them, and your reflections on historic African cities. Since each student is going to respond differently to the material in this class, no two portfolios should look alike. Your portfolio is your personal record of your intellectual journey through the semester.

Each portfolio should include, at a minimum:

1. Cover Page and Introductory Material. This should contain complete information on the course, e.g., name, date, title, institution, etc. as well as a table of contents with page numbers of items included in the portfolio.
2. All original written work you submitted during the semester (i.e. all City Papers and all Assignments). These must be the original papers, with my comments on them.
3. The glossary of terms you have compiled over the semester.
4. Analytical Essay. This essay summarizes your intellectual development in this course. I advise you to write it only after reviewing all of your class notes, your City Papers and Assignments, and any other work completed during the semester; looking again at the readings; reviewing the images on the website; and talking to classmates and friends about the class. You will find that some of your best ideas emerge in the course of conversations with others.

Your essay should be a response to the following question: *What did you learn from studying historic African cities?* In the course of answering that question, your essay may or may not address some of the following questions. (Please don't try to address all these questions. You might focus on only one or two.): What were your ideas about Africa and African built environments prior to this course? Did your thoughts change during the semester and if so, why did they change and how? Did the course influence your thinking in any other classes, or did what you learned in other classes this semester help or influence your thinking in this course? What connections can you draw between the material in this course and your major, your personal life, or other spheres of your life? What were the most important things you learned this semester and what is the significance of that knowledge? What are you not sure of now that you thought you knew? If this course had a Part B, what would it include—in other words, at this point what do you want to understand better, and why?

I also encourage you to use the opportunity of the portfolio to reflect on your personal learning style. What did you learn about yourself as a student this semester? Would you do any of the assignments differently, if you could do them again? If so, how? Did you try different ways of approaching the material during the course of the semester? What

worked best for you, what worked least well? Please refer to specific city papers and assignments to explain your answers to these questions.

Obviously, the essay should be self-reflective, personal, and critical. It is not an evaluation of the course. It's a self-evaluation.

Your essay should be 3-4 pages. (I'll stop reading at the bottom of page 4).

4. Anything else you wish to include. Make sure you indicate why you are including it.

Grading

A **C** portfolio will, at a minimum, contain all the elements as outlined above.

A **B** portfolio will do the above **and**, at a minimum, include a thoughtful essay that has a clear thesis, point, or argument.

An **A** portfolio will do the above **and**, at a minimum, include an excellent, thoughtful essay that has a clear thesis, point, or argument.