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course title: African Architecture and Urbanism
institution: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
date offered: Spring 2007

posted date: June 2008
stable URL: www.vafweb.org/resources/syllabi/ginsburg1.pdf

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African Architecture and Urbanism
LA 220/ANTHRO 223
Tues/Thurs, 9:30 – 10:50 am
Armory 386

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COURSE SYLLABUS

About the Course

African architectural history is a discipline in its infancy. Accordingly, I expect this class will be both demanding and rewarding. Demanding, because there is no single text to draw from. We will have 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 past lives of their inhabitants. Rewarding, because it's one of the few courses on African architecture and landscapes offered in the United States, which means that we'll be forging intellectual paths together.

This course employs a case study approach rather than attempting a broad survey of African urbanism. Most of our sites 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 its urban fabric to that of interior decor and art.* 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 any society's material culture can reveal much about its values, tensions, social institutions, and other matters. We examine the physical fabric of cities in order to understand better the people that inhabited them. 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.

Goals for the Semester:

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. describe and explain major events and processes in sub-Saharan history
2. identify and analyze basic elements of urban form

You'll notice that memorizing the particularities of each 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 architectural framework within which you can situate any African city and that you learn basic tools that will help you understand any urban environment, anywhere.

How We'll Work Towards These Goals

Class time will consist of lectures, discussions, and activities. I expect you to come prepared to discuss 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 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. By midnight preceding each Tuesday class period (except where specified), please submit over email a one-two page "city paper" that addresses the following five features of the city in question: environment/geography, people, 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. The purpose of the city papers is to ensure that you do the readings in advance so we can launch into discussion or activities, to give me a sense before class of how well you understood the readings so I can plan class accordingly, 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 Monday midnight.*

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 on the four written assignments that are spaced evenly over the semester. (More information on the assignments follows this syllabus.) I encourage you to revise your assignments until you are satisfied with the quality of your work. I will accept revisions until 5:00 pm on the day our class' final exam is scheduled. The highest grade you receive on any given assignment will be the grade that counts.

How I'll Assess Your Learning

The grading system used in this class might be unfamiliar to you. Please approach me early in the semester if you have any confusion about how I will grade your work and/or calculate your final grade.

4 Written Assignments	75% of final grade
Class exercises and quizzes	25%
	<hr/>
	100%

Wait, there's more.... Your city papers will be graded pass/fail. There are five questions you are expected to address (environment, people, 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 and exercises, above:*

- You must pass 7 of the 8 city papers to receive an A in the course.**
- You must pass 6 of the 8 city papers to receive a B.**
- You must pass 5 of the 8 city papers to receive a C.**
- You must pass 4 of the 8 city papers to receive a D.**

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

If your grade is on the border, I will consider extra credit in determining your final grade. Some suggestions for extra credit readings are included on this syllabus. Extra credit readings generally introduce a new perspective—e.g. a local voice or an account from an early explorer of the site—on the cities we’re studying. To get the credit, you must read the selection and report on it in class during our discussion of the relevant city. Typically, in a given semester, one-third of the students in this class use extra credit work to improve their final grades. Please note, though, that it is possible that you might do extra credit work and not have your grade raised (i.e. if your final grade is not on the border). If you have other ideas for extra credit work, please see me.

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; and (3) such infractions may lead to a student being dropped from the program. 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

General rules of etiquette apply to all that happens during the period. 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. 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 for success. You may want to designate a “note buddy” whose notes you can borrow for those rare occasions when you do miss class. Please note that if you miss a graded classroom exercise you will not be able to make it up without a very, very good excuse.

Schedule

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Jan. 16 | Introduction to class |
| Jan. 18 | Thinking about Africa (no city paper due) <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Curtis Keim, “The Origins of ‘Darkest Africa’,” in <i>Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind</i> (1999) |
| Jan. 23 and 25 | Meroe, Kush, 200 BCE <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Shillington, pp. 36-45○ Connah, Chapter 2 Extra credit possibility: selection from John Garstang’s account of his 1909-10 excavations of Meroe, <i>Meroe: The City of the Ethiopians</i> |
| Jan. 30 and Feb. 1 | model-making |
| Feb. 6 and 8 | Aksum, East Africa, 300 CE <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Shillington, Chapter 5, esp. pp. 68 - 71○ Connah, Chapter 3○ Garlake, Chapter 4 Extra credit possibility: chapter on “Aksumite Coins” in short and lively history of Ethiopia, <i>Ethiopian Civilization</i> , written by Ethiopian Belai Giday |

Assignment 1 due Tuesday, February 13

- Feb 13** Some basic tools and principles for thinking about urban form
- Feb 15** Return and discussion of Assignment 1; exercise due
- Feb 20 and 22** 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)
- Extra credit possibility: Roderick and Susan McIntosh’s (challenging and technical) article on their archaeological discoveries in Jenne-Jeno, “Initial Perspectives on Prehistoric Subsistence in the Inland Niger Delta (Mali)”
- Feb 27 and Mar 1** Kilwa, Swahili coast, 1350 CE
- Shillington, Chapter 9
 - Connah, Chapter 6
 - Garlake, Chapter 8
- Extra credit possibility: chapter on “Materials and Techniques of Construction” by Peter Garlake, an architectural historian who, in addition to writing one of our text books, undertook extensive study of Kilwa in the 1960s.
- Mar 6 and 8** Great Zimbabwe, Southern Africa, 1400 CE
- Shillington, Chapter 10, especially pp. 149-52
 - Connah, Chapter 7
 - Garlake, Chapter 7
- Extra credit possibility: chapter by the current director of the Great Zimbabwe National Monument that discusses early interpretations of the site, “Rhodesian Views About the Zimbabwe Birds,” in *The Soapstone Birds of Great Zimbabwe* by Edward Matenga

Assignment 2 due Tuesday, March 13

- Mar 13** Review of cities, concepts, and terms to date (no city paper due)
- Mar 15** Return and discussion of Assignment 2; exercise due
- Mar 20 and 22** Spring Break
- Mar 27** movie, “The Slave Kingdoms”
- Mar 29** no class. Instructor at conference (Vernacular Architecture Forum)
- April 3 and 5** Ife, West African forest, 1500 CE
- Shillington, Chapter 13, esp. 188-91
 - Connah, Chapter 5

Extra credit possibility: Account of the various discoveries of artifacts at Ife and their often serendipitous nature by Thurstan Shaw in *Nigeria: Its Archaeology and Early History*

Assignment 3 due Tuesday, April 10

- April 10** The Diaspora I: 19th and 20th c (no city paper due)
- April 12** The Diaspora II: Diasporan Influences on African Cities
- John Michael Vlach, “The Braziiian House in Nigeria: The Emergence of a 20th Century Vernacular House Type,” in *Journal of American Folklore* (1984) (no city paper due)
- April 17 and 19** 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)
- Extra credit possibility: very informative history of the development of Freetown written by an administrator formerly in Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Housing and Country Planning, R.J. Olu-Wright, “The Physical Growth of Freetown”
- April 24 and 26** Kano, Hausaland, 1850
- J.C. Moughtin, “The Structure of Hausa Settlements” and “Architectural Construction,” in *Hausa Architecture* (1985)
 - Julius O. Adekunle, “The Jihads in West Africa,” in *African History Before 1885*
- Extra credit possibility: gendered analysis of the spaces within the Kano palace by Dora Crouch and June Johnson
OR very important (and challenging) chapter about how the nomadic roots of the jihadists influenced the architecture of Kano, by Labelle Prussin in *Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa*

Assignment 4 due Tuesday, May 1

- May 1** 21st century African cities (no city paper due)
- Shillington, pp. 301 – end. Skim all, paying particular attention to Chapters 21, 24, 26, 28, and 29
- Day of final exam** Final versions of written assignments due in instructor’s mailbox (in 101 TBH) by 5:00pm. Please submit all previous versions at the same time.

City Papers

City papers are due at 12:00 midnight on Mondays before our Tuesday meetings. Please send them to my email address, rginsbur@uiuc.edu, and put the name of the relevant city, and that name only, in the subject line of your email. You should get an auto-response message verifying that your assignment has been received. If you do not receive that message, please let me know.

Each paper has two components. First, it must address the following five questions, all relating to the city *during the time we are studying it*, as specified on the syllabus:

- 1) What was the city's geographic location? What environmental factors affected life and landscape in the city?
- 2) Which linguistic group was dominant among the city's inhabitants?
- 3) What is the history of the city up to this point?
- 4) Describe briefly the nature of the city's most important social structures (e.g. the religion practiced by residents, its political structure, its economic structure)
- 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, and/or urban form.

Please answer these questions succinctly in one-two pages. Answers to these questions 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 Meroe to illustrate the geography of its site. Explain what you see in the image and how it serves to support your answer. Do not simply cite an image without explanation.

Assignment 1

African Architecture and Urbanism

Due Tuesday February 13, 2007 at 9:30 am in class

Visit either Meroe or Aksum during the period we have studied it and take a walk through it. Describe what you see, paying particular attention to the built environment and landscape—for example, the construction of the buildings, layout of the city, interiors of houses, surrounding farmlands, views from the city, and different building types. Your account should be between two and four double-spaced pages.

Please do not include your name on any page of your assignment. Instead, attach a sheet to the very back of your assignment with your name and any other identifying information. This is so I can mark your assignment blind.

If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. I will not accept late papers unless previous arrangements have been made for an extension.

Grading

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

A **B** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, describe at least three aspects of the built environment, e.g., construction, layout, environment.

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.

Assignment 2

African Architecture and Urbanism

Due Tuesday March 13, 2007 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. Instead, attach a sheet to the very back of your assignment with your name and any other identifying information. This is so I can mark your assignment blind.

If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. I will not accept late papers unless previous arrangements have been made 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 and discuss three points of comparison between the built environments of Kilwa and Great Zimbabwe or one point very well developed.

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 religious architecture of the two cities (if they are similar)? What are the reasons for the differences between the two cities' road systems (if they're indeed different)? 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.

Assignment 3

African Architecture and Urbanism

Due Tuesday April 10, 2007 at 9:30 am in class

You are a ninth century resident of Jenne-Jeno. Using your handy time machine, you visit Ife in the year 1500. Record a conversation you have with an Ife resident in which you explore the differences and similarities between the two cities.

Please do not include your name on any page of your assignment. Instead, attach a sheet to the very back of your assignment with your name and any other identifying information. This is so I can mark your assignment blind.

If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. I will not accept late papers unless previous arrangements have been made 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 and discuss at least three points of comparison between the built environments of Jenne-Jeno and Ife or one point very well developed.

An **A** answer will do the above **and**, at a minimum, explain whatever differences and/or similarities you have identified between the two cities.

Assignment 4

African Architecture and Urbanism

Due Tuesday May 1, 2007 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, house layout, urban form, religious architecture, building types, geographical setting, and environment. 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. Instead, attach a sheet to the very back of your assignment with your name and any other identifying information. This is so I can mark your assignment blind.

If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. I will not accept late papers unless previous arrangements have been made 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).