Accessibility statement

Archaeological Theory - ARC00005C

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- **Department**: Archaeology
- **Module co-ordinator**: Dr. James Taylor
- **Credit value**: 20 credits
- **Credit level**: C
- **Academic year of delivery**: 2020-21
  - See module specification for other years: 2018-19 2019-20

Module summary

The study of the past is inherently theory laden and always political. We are subject to biases from our own social and cultural perspectives, which can influence how we view and react to archaeological interpretations and practice. This module sets the scene for developing essential critical analytical skills by challenging you to think about how our philosophies and experiences shape the questions we ask of the past. Everyone takes something meaningful from this module - and many students have come back in later years of their degree and affirmed they could not possibly have predicted the huge value of the concepts and ideas they learned in this first year module.

Module will run

Occurrence	Teaching cycle
A	Spring Term 2020-21

Module aims

This module aims:

- to introduce students to the development of key strands of archaeological thought from the nineteenth century to the present

- to provide students with a critical understanding of the development of the discipline of archaeology world-wide

- to provide a basis for a critical appreciation of current archaeological practice and theory

Module learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should:

- appreciate that all archaeologists apply theoretical principles to their work, consciously and unconsciously

- recognise that interpretations of data may differ because of the theoretical positions of archaeologists

- have a basic understanding of the principles and applications of Culture history, Processualism, Marxism, Structuralism, Postprocessualism and various other critical approaches and be able to place their development and application within a historical, political, international context

- begin to appreciate the links between theory and practice and to understand how the wider social and political context of archaeology has influenced the development of the various theoretical positions within the discipline

- understand the role of British archaeology in the development of the discipline world wide and to recognise the influences of other regional archaeologies on the development of theoretical debates within the wider discipline

- begin to appreciate which theoretical positions they feel are most appropriate for their own studies, and which relate to their wider world view

- learn to work in small teams to produce seminar output, and improve their oral presentation and argument skills within the seminars

Module content

The module will introduce students to a range of theoretical debates and, through reading a combination of textbooks and original papers, students are exposed to the emphases, terminology and assumptions behind the various theoretical movements as applied to archaeology. Analysis of case studies, drawn from a range of regions around the world, will be utilised to help explain the development and application of various theoretical approaches. Case studies will be used to illustrate the impact of theoretical developments on archaeological practice and the subsequent implications this had for the development of the discipline both regionally and world wide.

The course will be broadly structured by the big themes that dominate archaeological discourse and will demonstrate the importance of theory to every aspect of our understanding of the past, our disciplinary practice and the way we disseminate the past to our audiences. We will shine a light on the political implications of the theoretical context of our research, and consider the paradox that theory we use and the knowledge we create on one hand embodies implicit and inherent power structures and hierarchies, which we seek to dismantle in on the other hand with the very same theory.

Content warning: The content and discussion in this course will necessarily engage with issues relating to post-colonialism, racism and various political discourse.

Assessment

Task	Length	% of module mark
Essay/coursework Essay	N/A	100

Special assessment rules

None

Reassessment

Task	Length	% of module mark
Essay/coursework Essay	N/A	100

Module feedback

Formative: The marker will share written feedback with you in a timetabled one-to-one meeting and you will have the opportunity to ask further questions about how to improve your work before your summative assessment. It is important that you attend these feedback sessions to discuss your work and to gain a good understanding of how markers use Grade Descriptors to mark your work. If you are unable to attend the feedback session, your tutor will share the formative feedback with you digitally.

Summative: Written feedback sheets will be uploaded to your e:vision account (your personal University of York online services account) within 20 working days of the submission deadline, along with your overall mark for the module. There will also be a timetabled feedback meeting with the marker.

Indicative reading

Johnson, Matthew (1999) Archaeological Theory : An Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell.

Harris, Oliver J. T, and Cipolla, Craig N. (2017) Archaeological Theory in the New Millennium. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Trigger, Bruce G. (2006) A History of Archaeological Thought. West Nyack: Cambridge UP.

Detailed reading for the module will be available via YorkShare (the University's virtual learning environment). When you have enrolled on a module, you will be able to access the full reading list.

The information on this page is indicative of the module that is currently on offer. The University is constantly exploring ways to enhance and improve its degree programmes and therefore reserves the right to make variations to the content and method of delivery of modules, and to discontinue modules, if such action is reasonably considered to be necessary by the University. Where appropriate, the University will notify and consult with affected students in advance about any changes that are required in line with the University's policy on the Approval of Modifications to Existing Taught Programmes of Study.

Coronavirus (COVID-19): changes to courses

The 2020/21 academic year will start in September. We aim to deliver as much face-to-face teaching as we can, supported by high quality online alternatives where we must.

Find details of the measures we're planning to protect our community.

Course changes for new students