Theories of the Past: The Role of History in Archaeological Approaches
An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference
Sponsored by the University of Michigan Collaborative Archaeology Workgroup

Date: March 23-24, 2012
Where: University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, MI

Understanding the human past is the goal of both archaeology and history, yet the methodologies and theoretical approaches they implement intersect in both complementing and contrasting ways. This conference will provide an opportunity for junior researchers to present innovative research and provide a forum for discussing the gaps, bridges, shared goals, and incompatibilities of archaeological and historical approaches to the human past.

We are calling for papers of 20 minutes in length that deal with the relationship between archaeology and history and tackle broad themes through specific case studies and applications. Papers will be presented in panels with other graduate students working on similar themes or approaches. While engaging with these panel themes, presenters should situate their research in particular archaeological or historical case studies. The following themes will structure these panels and provide a starting point for contributed papers and larger discussions:

**The Formation of Texts**
Archaeologists often employ written evidence to provide accounts of processes not materially visible. These sources may include ethnography and ethnohistory, administrative documents, journals and personal accounts, and ancient historical records. Textual scholars must wrestle with questions of authorship and consider the context and conditions in which texts are produced—a process we can think of as text formation. How does the production and preservation of texts affect how they are employed by archaeologists in the analysis and interpretation of the past?

**Contemporary Issues as Historic Processes**
Many issues of contemporary political, social, and economic interest have deep histories in the human past. How can contextualizing contemporary problems like debt, inequality, cultural interaction, or environmental impacts with a long-term perspective help us understand the genesis and dynamics of these issues?

**Events and Processes in the Past**
Different lines of evidence, both material and textual, engage with multiple tempos – from singular events to the long duree. Archaeologists must consider tempo of archaeological formation processes that produced these lines of evidence, but also consider short and long-term scales of change. How can we synthesize multiple lines of evidence to provide a more complete understanding of the impetus for and implications of change?

**Comparative Approaches**
The comparative approach continues to find widespread use in the study of the past. In addition to using narratives from different places and/or times, archaeologists and historians also use comparison to approach methodological and evidentiary problems. What do comparative approaches add to our understanding of the past? What are the similarities and differences in the ways archaeologists and historians deploy comparative examples?
Presentations will be followed by a moderated discussion of the papers and their relationship to the panel’s central theme as well as the broader subject of the conference. All fields of archaeology and history (anthropological, classical, area studies, etc.) are welcome.

To facilitate a ‘workshopping’ atmosphere and to promote informed discussions, participants are asked to submit a paper copy of their presentation one week before the conference (March 16, 2012). Pre-circulated papers should be of presentation text length only (approximately 10-12 double-spaced pages); polished written copies are not expected.

Abstracts of no longer than 200 words should be submitted by February 1, 2012.

Please submit abstracts and direct questions to CAW.Conference.2012@umich.edu.

Although travel stipends will not be available for this conference, accommodations (with Michigan archaeology graduate students) for Friday and/or Saturday night(s) will be arranged upon request. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner will be provided on the day of the conference.

The Collaborative Archaeology Workgroup (CAW) is a group of graduate students from several departments at the University of Michigan (including Anthropology and Classical Art and Archaeology) who share an interest in archaeological research, theory, and methods. We are dedicated to promoting interdisciplinary research and facilitating the exchange of information among all students interested in studying the past through archaeological techniques.

The conference is co-sponsored by the Rackham Graduate School, International Institute, Museum of Anthropology, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, and Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology.