



Topic
History

Subtopic
Ancient History

Lost Worlds of South America

Course Guidebook

Professor Edwin Barnhart
Maya Exploration Center



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Edwin Barnhart, Ph.D.

Director

Maya Exploration Center

Professor Edwin Barnhart is Director of the Maya Exploration Center. He received his Ph.D. in Anthropology with a focus on Archaeology from The University of Texas at Austin in 2001; his dissertation was entitled *The Palenque Mapping Project: Settlement Patterns and Urbanism in an Ancient Maya City*. Professor Barnhart has more than 20 years of experience as an archaeologist, explorer, and instructor in North, Central, and South America and has published more than a dozen papers and given presentations at eight international conferences.

Professor Barnhart's involvement in Maya studies began in 1990 as an archaeological intern in the ruins of Copán, Honduras. In January of 1996, he was invited to return to Copán and help a team from the University of Pennsylvania excavate the early acropolis and the tomb of the city's lineage founder. From 1992 to 1995, Professor Barnhart studied New World art, iconography, and epigraphy (hieroglyphic translation) under the late Dr. Linda Schele at The University of Texas at Austin. During that time, he intensively studied the Andean culture, writing a number of papers about Moche shamanism as seen through art and iconography.

In 1994, Professor Barnhart began working as a surveyor and University of Texas field school instructor in the jungles of northwestern Belize. After finding numerous small villages, he discovered the ancient city of Maax Na ("Spider-Monkey House"), a major center of the Classic Maya period. Professor Barnhart mapped more than 600 structures at Maax Na between 1995 and 1997 before moving his research focus to Chiapas, Mexico. He received his master's degree in Latin American Studies in May of 1996 and began teaching anthropology classes at what is now Texas State University the following September. He taught archaeology and anthropology classes there until 1998, when he was invited by the Mexican government to direct

the Palenque Mapping Project, a three-year effort to survey and map the unknown sections of Palenque's ruins. More than 1,100 new structures were documented, bringing the site total to almost 1,500. The resultant map has been celebrated as one of the most detailed and accurate ever made of a Maya ruin.

In 2003, Professor Barnhart became Director of the Maya Exploration Center, an institution dedicated to the study of ancient Maya civilization. He has led dozens of student groups on journeys through Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia.

Over the last 10 years, Professor Barnhart has appeared multiple times on the History Channel; the Discovery Channel; and NHK, a Japanese public television network. In addition, he is a Fellow of the Explorers Club and teaches University of Texas travel courses for college professors on ancient Andean and Mesoamerican astronomy, mathematics, and culture. ■

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Lost Worlds of South America

Scope:

Did you know that before the first pyramid in Egypt was constructed, thousands of people were already living in stone-built cities in Peru? If not, you're not alone. Very few people realize not only how old but how sophisticated civilization was in ancient South America. This course will introduce you to thousands of years of South American history, much of which has come to light only recently.

The title of this course, *Lost Worlds*, might sound a bit melodramatic, but in the case of South America's history, it's fitting. Cities going back past 3000 B.C. are still lost under the deep sands of the desert coast. Magnificent palaces, such as that at Machu Picchu, are hiding on the peaks and in the valleys of the cloud-covered Andes Mountains. The evidence of an ancient population of millions is being recovered but remains mostly lost under dense rainforest canopy. Much of South America truly is a lost world. In addition to the many aspects of history still to be found through archaeology, the world's museum collections also represent the way in which South America's history has been lost. Most of the vast exhibits of gold, silver, and other precious objects from South America come from looting and grave robbing. The original locations of those thousands of artifacts have been lost and, with them, important clues about their meanings and functions.

This course will lead you, more or less chronologically, through the many cultures that rose and fell during South America's long pre-Columbian history. The pace of archaeological discoveries in what is generally called the "Andean region" has greatly accelerated in recent decades, in some cases, radically changing what is still being printed in textbooks. This course will discuss those new discoveries, bringing viewers up-to-date in a way that few other information sources can. One of the aspects of Andean history that has changed the most in recent times is our understanding of just how far it goes back in time. Peru's coast is now known to be home to the oldest cities in the Americas and among the oldest in the world. South America is also the place in which the famous Monte Verde site represents the oldest known

human habitation in the Americas, baffling archaeologists who believe that the first Americans crossed the Bering Strait.

As you'll learn, South America is home to many firsts. The earliest pottery in the Americas comes, surprisingly, from the Amazon. The New World's first metallurgy, weaving, cultivated plants, and even astronomical observatories also come from South America. And guess where the world's first mummies are found? Despite what you may think, the answer is not Egypt.

South America was home to a wonderful patchwork of cultures, and in many respects, it remains so. Starting as communities of fishermen along the northern coast of Peru, cities, civilizations, and powerful kingdoms spread across the Andes. Sometimes, they clashed with one another and, other times, fell victim to massive natural disasters. Ultimately, they developed into a single empire of more than 10 million people—the Inca. Then, less than 100 years after the Inca Empire was established, Pizarro arrived with a few hundred soldiers and 12 infectious diseases to change South America forever.

This course will discuss not only the various culture groups of South America but also the idea that underlying elements bind them all into a cultural continuum. The ancient people of South America—from the Chavín people of 1000 B.C. to the Chimú people of 1000 A.D.—shared a fundamental vision of the cosmos. Social organization patterns, subsistence strategies, construction techniques, and especially religion were things that all seem to have held in common. This course aims to explore both the amazing archaeological discoveries in South America and, more importantly, what those discoveries tell us about the lives of the world's ancestors from a still poorly understood part of our planet—South America. ■