

Call for Papers, "Contact, Colonialism, and Comparison" Conference

Different methods of 'comparing antiquities' do or do not presuppose the existence of contact between the civilizations they compare, or else weigh differently the importance of contact to the work of comparison. Underlying these differences are methodological questions like: to what extent, and in what ways, the history of contact between different civilizations plays a role in the work of comparison? To what extent the fact of contact between two civilizations legitimates their comparison? How the aims and methods of comparison differ in cases where contact has or has not taken place? More subtly, how should the intellectual history of contact in later periods of a region's history affect how we do comparative work on earlier periods of that history?

These questions are particularly urgent in the case of comparison between the early Americas and Greco-Roman antiquity, where the practice of "comparing antiquities" has a long history as an intellectual tool of colonialism. Early missionaries, both Spanish and Mexican, used the texts of Classical Antiquity to dismiss as primitive the beliefs and practices of Indigenous peoples. Under the influence of racial theories inherited from the authors of classical antiquity, colonial intellectuals used comparison between the Mediterranean and tropical climates as grounds for racist generalization aimed at dehumanizing Indigenous peoples. Both assertions of similarity between the Americas and the Greco-Roman world and assertions of difference have been put in the service of colonizers' arguments.

This conference, then, aims to think through the methodological implications of the intellectual history of contact for the modern-day academic study of Comparative Antiquity between the early Americas and the Greco-Roman world. What can the intellectual history of contact between Spanish invaders and Indigenous populations teach us about the possible methodological pitfalls of comparativism? In what ways should the history of contact affect the comparative methodologies we bring to bear on the study of American and Greco-Roman antiquities? What forms of comparison that avoid complicity with colonialist analogy are possible? How can scholars strive to make comparisons on equal terms, while acknowledging the treatment different cultures have received at the hands of intellectuals over the centuries?

To this end we invite papers from any discipline that tackle the intellectual history of contact between Spanish invaders and Indigenous populations (especially claims of analogy between pre-Christian Greco-Roman antiquity, and the pre-Christian Americas), papers that tackle methodological questions in the study of Comparative American and Greco-Roman antiquity, and papers engaged in this work of comparison with an eye to its broader political and historical context. We hope that this marriage of intellectual history, theoretical speculation, and comparative work can help scholars of many disciplines think critically and specifically about the ethical and methodological questions implicated in the work of comparison.

The conference will be held virtually from April 16-17, 2021. Papers will be pre-circulated, and each paper session will be led by a respondent before moving into a group discussion. The deadline for submissions is Tuesday, December 15, 2020. Please submit an anonymized, 200-300 word abstract to antiquityintheamericas@gmail.com. For more information about Antiquity in the Americas, including past events and current projects, visit <https://www.antiquityintheamericas.com/>.