The Exploration Foundation’s 2011 Archaeological Field School in Honduras at the Formative Period Center of Yarumela

July 9th-Aug 12 2011
This field school offers students the opportunity to participate on a project that will investigate changes in social, economic, and political organization at the ancient center of Yarumela, Honduras. This site was first occupied around 1000 B.C. and grew into an important political center that lasted until about A.D. 250.

Students will be trained in modern archaeological, methods, theory, and ethics. The program will include hands on experience with techniques of archaeological excavation and documentation. It will also include lectures and discussions of archaeological methods, modern problems in archaeology, an overview of the evolution of socio-political complexity in Mesoamerica, and its southeastern frontier. This project also presents a unique opportunity for students to become familiar with the process of initiating an archaeological research project in Latin America.

In addition to learning archaeological field methods, students will experience the cultural landscape of Honduras. Optional weekend activities may include trips to indigenous communities, white water rafting, and guided tours of neighboring sites of archaeological and historic interest in Honduras.
This project will investigate 1) The origins of village life; 2) The evolution of social inequality; and 3) how and why political developments in this area contrast with contemporary societies in Mesoamerica and in the Isthmian region.

The site of Yarumela is near the geographic center of the Comayagua Valley, Honduras, on the southeastern frontier of Mesoamerica. This area lies directly to east of the southern Maya area. Ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence suggest that the Comayagua Valley was populated by speakers of a Lenca language, very different from that of the neighboring Maya groups.

The Yarumela elite participated in broad networks of interaction within Mesoamerica. These networks extended to the Olmec of the Gulf Coast of Mexico, the Izapa culture of the Pacific Coast of Chiapas and Guatemala, and the early highland Maya of Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala. People at Yarumela were also participating in communication and exchange networks that extended out of Mesoamerica, into Costa Rica and Nicaragua (Dixon 2008:204-206).
The landscape of the site of Yarumela is dominated by an imposing earthwork called El Cerrito, a 20 m tall pyramid and platform structure measuring approximately 160x120 m at the platform base. This structure faces eastward across a 225 meter long plaza to a 10 m tall pyramid, (Figure 1 and 2). This complex likely dates to the end of the Middle Formative, around 400 B.C. The Yarumela civic-ceremonial complex was larger than any contemporary complexes at the nearest Maya capitals of Copan, Honduras or San Andres, El Salvador, and rivaled in Honduras only by the civic-ceremonial precinct at the site of Los Naranjos (Dixon 2008). Yarumela appears to have been occupied from at least the Early Formative period, around 1000 B.C., growing into a settlement and regional center with an area of about 30 ha (Dixon 1988).
During the Late Formative period the size of Yarumela, and the scale of its civic-ceremonial structures and spaces indicate that it was the dominant political and civic-ceremonial center in the Comayagua Valley. Yarumela appears to have maintained its dominance over the valley until about AD 250, when the site appears to have been abandoned along with most of its subordinate political centers in the valley (Dixon 1988:60).

Southern Mesoamerica with the location of prominent Late Formative sites.
Deadline for application: April 15, 2011
Start Date July 9, 2011
End Date August 4, 2011
Project Affiliation: The Exploration Foundation
Academic credit: 4 hours from Transylvania University in Lexington, KY
Tuition, Room and Board, and Local Transportation: $3700
Transportation to Honduras: Airfare not included in price
Project Directors
Christopher Begley Ph.D, Assoc. Prof at Transylvania University
Tim D. Sullivan Ph. D. Research Associate, University of Pittsburgh
Prerequisites
Enrollement in a degree program at an accredited university, or enrollment as non-degree seeking student at Transylvania University. Applications from individuals interested in participating not for credit will also be considered, but should be accompanied by one letter of reference, and a statement of interest. The ability to communicate in Spanish is not a prerequisite, but Honduras is a Spanish speaking country, and basic control of Spanish will result in a much richer experience of the local culture, and an opportunity to improve language skills.
Field School Contact E-mail: Dr. Tim D. Sullivan sullitim@gmail.com
Field School Contact Website: http://explorationfoundation.org
Dr. Chris Begley
Director, The Exploration Foundation
2389 Randolph Court
Lexington, KY 40503
References and suggested readings

Dixon, Boyd


Recommended reading

Dixon, Boyd


Joyce, Rosemary A., and John S. Henderson


Urban, Patricia, and Edward Schortman (Eds)

1986 *The Southeast Maya Periphery*. University of Texas Press, Austin.