

## **ARTH/CHTE 323 | Photography and Archaeology: The Art of Documentation Spring 2026**

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### **Course Description**

When we look at photographs of antiquity we often privilege the subject over the photograph. In fact, one of the unwritten tenets of archaeological photography is that of impartial depiction. This effectively implies that the "hand" of the photographer should be invisible. But can it actually be made invisible, and to what extent? Perhaps we have desensitized our vision when examining archaeological photographs, considering only the subject and not the photograph that delivers it? In recent years, the photograph itself has become the focus of study, thus transforming it from being a mere document to a cultural object in its own right.

By their nature, photographs and archaeological evidence may appear to document "the facts." Reading a photograph or an artifact at face value, however, can be misleading. In truth, "the facts" are often presented by people with varying agendas. Therefore, one of the primary objectives of this course is to learn to interrogate images to discover their broader context, since photographers and archaeologists are as much cultural producers as they are observers and scientists.

The study of the relationship between photography and archaeology requires a multi-disciplinary approach. We must be practitioners and theorists, researchers and analysts, approaching the depiction of archaeological subjects from a variety of angles. Through lectures and through viewing the work of major figures in the field you will become familiar with the development of the medium alongside the discipline of archaeology. Through site visits, classroom activities and hands-on experience you will gain insight into the mechanics of photography and how it shapes vision. Through examining case-studies and conducting your own research you will discover how photography has often held up a mirror to the greater cultural contexts of archaeology.

Greece is an ideal setting for this course: photography and scientific archaeology were born at roughly the same time and the histories of both disciplines are intricately connected. To explore this relationship, the class will visit archaeological sites, photographic archives and museums. Students will also be required to conduct visits in their own time to complete a photography-based research project.

### **Course Approach**

In this course, key topics, issues, and questions will be explored through a rich and varied approach that combines theoretical readings, practical experiences, and hands-on methodologies. Students will begin by engaging with foundational texts on the history of archaeology and the role of photography as an artistic medium. Furthermore, we will be using the cultural context of Greece which will provide a comprehensive backdrop for understanding the intersections of these fields. Visual culture theory will further enhance this understanding, offering critical frameworks for analyzing visual representation. Case studies of archaeological photography will be examined to illustrate best practices in documentation and interpretation, supplemented by technical readings that introduce essential skills in photographic recording techniques.

Fieldwork will play a crucial role in the learning process, with students participating in site visits where they will photograph using large-format analogue equipment at an actual archaeological site. This hands-on experience will deepen their appreciation for the intricacies of capturing archaeological contexts. Additionally, class sessions will involve research work at a photographic archive, allowing students to engage directly with historical materials. A dedicated studio class will focus on the methodologies of artifact photography, equipping students with the practical skills necessary for professional documentation. The course will also explore innovative approaches, such as using photographic collage to visualize archival images creatively.

Finally, a site visit to an active archaeological excavation will provide students with a real-time experience of the excavation process, enhancing their understanding of the dynamic relationship between photography and archaeology. Through this multifaceted approach, students will develop a nuanced perspective on the role of photography in archaeological practice and visual culture.

Key academic skills will be developed through a variety of assignments that emphasize reading, writing, speaking, and research. Students will write an illustrated midterm essay and a final research project, requiring them to synthesize information and present their arguments effectively. Throughout the course, they will engage in hands-on tasks such as cataloging historic photographs for an archive and conducting research on these images, enhancing their analytical skills and attention to detail. Additionally, students will scout and execute images of an archaeological site based on specific briefs, fostering practical application of their knowledge. Each assignment will require students to analyze their findings and articulate their results clearly in written form. This multifaceted approach will not only build critical thinking and interpretation skills but also improve their ability to communicate complex ideas through various mediums, preparing them for both academic and professional contexts.

Students will work individually on their written assignments, such as the illustrated midterm essay and final research project, allowing for personal exploration of topics. However, they will also collaborate in small groups for all coursework, engaging in discussions and sharing insights to deepen their understanding.

Group projects will encourage teamwork and collective problem-solving, while in-class presentations will provide opportunities for students to present their research findings, fostering communication skills. This combination of individual and collaborative work will enhance their knowledge and skills, promoting a dynamic learning environment that values both personal reflection and group engagement.

## **Learning Objectives**

- Reflect on the influence of individual perspective in visual and textual documentation, assessing how this perspective can shape the interpretation of any cultural, historical, or scientific material.
- Explain the evolution of photography and documentation as tools that contribute to both historical record-keeping and cultural interpretation, articulating their broader impacts on knowledge construction across fields.
- Recognize and critique the presence of biases and agendas in various forms of documentation, from photographs to written records, identifying how these may affect perception and public understanding of “facts.”
- Analyze evidence from multidisciplinary perspectives, synthesizing cultural, historical, and technical information to build well-rounded interpretations of materials in diverse contexts.
- Compare and contrast traditional and contemporary methods of documentation and interpretation, assessing the advantages and limitations of each in terms of accuracy, bias, and effectiveness.
- Interpret and discuss theoretical frameworks for analyzing visual representation, applying these critical tools to diverse media and disciplines to evaluate how visual culture shapes meaning.
- Evaluate the role of technical tools and methodologies in shaping documentation and representation, gaining insights through hands-on experiences that develop critical thinking and technical proficiency.
- Apply acquired skills to create a research-based project that integrates technical, historical, and theoretical knowledge, producing a cohesive, well-supported argument or narrative that contributes meaningfully to a chosen field.

## **Course Requirements**

This course requires students to complete readings, written assignments, image production and analysis, a group project, and a final exam. Each assignment is designed to develop skills in critical analysis, research, and practical application of photography in archaeology.

## **Reading:**

Students are expected to read 40–50 pages per week from assigned articles and book chapters, accessible on Moodle. These readings will provide essential background for class discussions and assignments. The Moodle calendar includes specific reading assignments and due dates.

## **Individual Assignments:**

Students will work individually to produce and analyze photographs according to specific briefs, emphasizing various visual and technical approaches in archaeological photography. Each assignment will be accompanied by a brief written analysis that discusses photographic choices and techniques. Assignments will be due throughout the semester, as specified in the Moodle calendar.

## **Group Research Project and Presentation:**

Working in small groups, students will research and analyze a set of historical images, focusing on their cultural and historical contexts. Each group will present a 15-minute analysis of their findings, supported by visual references and historical documentation.

## **Midterm Assignment:**

A research assignment and analysis of a selected case of archaeological photography will be due during midterm week. Students will critically assess the image's historical and cultural context, applying theories from the readings and class discussions.

## **Final Research Project (Multimedia Format)**

The final research project will be presented as a multimedia work that synthesizes research, visual production, and critical reflection. Projects may take diverse forms—such as a curated exhibition, short film, photographic essay, interactive presentation, or other creative format—but must integrate both theoretical and practical components developed throughout the semester. Each project should demonstrate a strong conceptual framework, rigorous research, and an understanding of how photography and visual media can be used to interpret and communicate

archaeological and cultural themes.

## **Classroom and On-Site Participation**

Participation includes attending all classroom sessions and on-site visits (to archaeological sites, photographic archives, and museums) and actively engaging in discussions and activities. Attendance and participation are critical and will be recorded. Unexcused absences will affect the final grade.

## **Class Field Work**

Students will participate in a photography session using a professional grade large format analogue field camera at the Temple of Olympian Zeus in central Athens. This field work offers students a hands-on experience at one of the most significant archaeological sites in central Athens and ties directly into course objectives by combining historical methods with practical skills. Working with an analogue field camera, students gain insight into the challenges of early archaeological photography, learning how factors like light, equipment, and technique shape visual representation. Furthermore, the experience cultivates appreciation for the deliberate process of early photography, where each shot required planning and precision—skills essential for accurately capturing and interpreting cultural artifacts and just as crucial today as they were in the past.

This experience builds on objectives related to understanding and comparing traditional and modern documentation methods, as well as analyzing how technical choices impact interpretation. Photographing a culturally significant site also reinforces theoretical aspects of the course, encouraging students to consider how their biases and decisions influence the portrayal of the site. Additionally, this session complements archival studies and image production assignments, bridging practical skills with critical analysis to prepare students for their final projects where they integrate technical, historical, and interpretive insights.

## **CYA Field Study**

A field study session at the Photographic Archives of the American School of Classical Studies will provide students with invaluable hands-on experience with primary historical sources. In this setting, they will catalog photographs from a historic collection and conduct on-site research to deepen their understanding of these images. Exploring rare and original materials, students will gain insight into the technical limitations, stylistic choices, and cultural biases that influence photographic documentation. This experience sharpens their critical thinking as they analyze the physical characteristics and preservation needs of archival materials, interpreting the images within broader socio-historical frameworks.

Additionally, the archive visit cultivates an appreciation for the importance of preserving visual records and the role of archives in historical research. Engaging with historical images in this way enhances students' analytical and observational skills and fosters a more nuanced understanding of how history and culture are visually represented and documented. This experience will be essential to their research projects, where they'll apply these methods to interpret and analyze visual materials with greater depth and accuracy.

## **Evaluation and Grading**

### **Final grades will be based upon the following:**

- 10% Attendance and Informed class participation
- 20% Class Assignments
- 30% Midterm paper
- 40% Final paper

## **Evaluation Criteria - Course Assignments**

Assignment: Class Assignments throughout the Semester

- Analytical Depth and Application of Course Concepts: Assignments will be evaluated on students' ability to analyze images and materials in relation to key course concepts, focusing on the intersection of photography and archaeology. This criterion assesses the effective application of theoretical frameworks and terminology from readings to interpret visual evidence and critically engage with biases in documentation.
- Creativity and Technical Execution in Image Production: Students will be assessed on their creativity and technical proficiency in producing and sourcing photographs for assignments. This includes evaluating their understanding of photographic techniques and composition, as well as how well they articulate their artistic choices and the sourcing of images in the accompanying written analyses.
- Detail Orientation and Precision in Work: Assignments will be evaluated on the attention to detail and precision demonstrated in both written and visual components. This includes thoroughness in research, accuracy in citations, and clarity in presenting visual elements, ensuring that all aspects contribute effectively to the overall argument and presentation of the work.
- Assignment: Midterm

- **Depth of Analysis and Contextual Understanding:** Work submitted should demonstrate a comprehensive analysis of the selected images, effectively exploring their meanings within the frameworks established by the course readings. This includes contextualizing the images within the history of archaeology, the archaeology of Greece, modern Greek history, and the photographic processes involved, drawing connections to relevant theoretical concepts from authors such as Marita Sturken, Frederick N. Bohrer, and Yiannis Hamilakis.
- **Integration of Visual References:** Work must effectively incorporate and analyze the six chosen images, demonstrating how they support the thesis and contribute to the overall argument. The discussion should clearly explain how each image represents archaeological subject matter, utilizing insights from class discussions and ensuring that the selection of images is relevant and well-researched.
- **Clarity and Coherence of Argumentation:** Written work should present a clear thesis and maintain logical organization throughout, with well-structured paragraphs that articulate the argument coherently. Clarity in writing, proper academic formatting, and adherence to citation standards will be essential for conveying ideas effectively and demonstrating scholarly rigor.
- **Assignment: Final Multimedia Research Project**
- **Concept Development and Research Question:** Students will develop a clearly defined research question or conceptual framework that connects directly to the course themes of photography, archaeology, and visual culture. Evaluation will consider the originality and clarity of the project's central idea, as well as how effectively it translates theoretical and research-based inquiry into a multimedia format.
- **Integration of Theoretical Frameworks and Class Readings:** Projects must demonstrate a sophisticated engagement with key theoretical frameworks and readings discussed in class, such as those by Sturken and Cartwright, Bohrer, and Hamilakis. Students will be evaluated on how effectively they incorporate these perspectives into the conceptual and visual structure of their work, showing a critical understanding of how theory informs creative and documentary practice.
- **Depth of Analysis and Critical Engagement with Visual and Aural Material:** Each project should reflect a thoughtful and critical approach to image-making and media use. Students will be assessed on their ability to analyze and interpret visual, spatial, or auditory elements within their project, considering their historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. The work should reveal an awareness of the biases, choices, and visual strategies that shape perception and representation.
- **Quality of Research and Source Integration:** Students must support their creative work with well-researched contextual material, drawing from both primary and secondary sources. Evaluation will emphasize the effective use of archival, textual, and visual references to support the project's conceptual foundation. Proper citation and documentation of sources—both visual and textual—are required.
- **Technical Execution and Creative Synthesis:** The project's technical and creative elements—such as photography, video, sound, editing, sequencing, or exhibition design—will be evaluated for their effectiveness in communicating the central concept. Students should demonstrate technical proficiency appropriate to their chosen medium and an ability to synthesize research and creativity into a cohesive, compelling work.
- **Organization, Clarity, and Presentation:** The final submission must exhibit a coherent structure, whether presented as a film, digital installation, exhibition, or other multimedia form. Students will be assessed on the clarity of their presentation, the logical flow of ideas, and the integration of written components (e.g., artist statement or project summary) that articulate their conceptual and research intentions.

## **CYA Regulations and Accommodations**

### **Attendance Policy**

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal.

### **ePolicy on Original Work**

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided.

### **Use of Laptops**

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

### **Class Schedule and Bibliography**

For more information, please refer to the **class schedule** for dates and topics, and consult the **bibliography** for

required and recommended readings. These resources will support your learning and help you stay on track throughout the course.

**Course Overview**

Class Day	Place	Date	Title
1	CYA	26 January	Intro - Ways of Seeing
2	CYA	28 January	Methodologies
3	CYA	30 January	Early photographers
4	Benaki Museum	2 February	The "Western" gaze
5	CYA	4 February	Photography and Archaeology in Greece, Part I
6	CYA	9 February	Photography and Archaeology in Greece, Part II
7	Ancient Agora Excavations	16 February	Photography at the Agora Excavations
8	Online	18 February	Interrogating an image
9	Online	25 February	Introduction to Photographic Archives
10	Archives of the ASCSA	27 February	Photography Archive Visit
11	Archives of the ASCSA	2 March	Investigating an Archive - Cataloging
12	Central Athens	4 March	Investigating an Archive - On site research
13	CYA	9 March	Perspective and the Photographic Image
14	CYA	11 March	Archive Presentation
15	Temple of Olympian Zeus	16 March	Working with a field camera
16	Temple of Olympian Zeus	23 March	Working with a field camera
17	The Roman Agora in Athens	31 March	The Palimpsest of Archaeology - Roman Agora
18	CYA Art Studio	1 April	Object Studio I
19	CYA Art Studio	15 April	Object Studio I
20	CYA Art Studio	20 April	Object Studio II
21	CYA Art Studio	27 April	Object Studio II
22	CYA	29 April	New Technologies and New Ways of Seeing
23	Ancient Athenian Agora	4 May	Vrysaki - A neighborhood preserved in photographs
24	Presentations	6 May	Presentation of final projects

**COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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