

Anthropology Lecture Series

NETWORKS OF MATERIAL, KNOWLEDGE, AND POWER: OBSIDIAN AND OCHRE EXCHANGE IN CENTRAL HONDURAS

Dr. Alejandro Figueroa

*Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of
Anthropology, University of Missouri*

The dynamics of interaction and exchange in small-scale societies are still not well understood in Mesoamerica, particularly in areas such as central Honduras, where chiefdoms developed alongside state-level societies like those of the ancient Maya. It has often been assumed that societies in these areas were either structured similarly to those of their more complex neighbors or were smaller and less developed versions of them. My postdoctoral research shows that the Prehispanic chiefdoms of central Honduras exchanged knowledge and resources across a wide variety of trade networks, some of which were aligned with long-distance trade routes, while others were reserved to Honduras alone, all of which ran through different political, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries. These networks existed and were maintained by people who moved these resources from one place to another to meet the various needs and demands of local cities, towns, and villages. The peoples that inhabited the central highlands of Honduras shared common ideas on what to depict in the art that decorates the many caves and shelters that dot this area, creating these images using locally available ingredients, namely mineral pigments. At a different scale, obsidian used to make stone tools across this same area was mined from a huge source located deep within these mountains and was traded alongside obsidian mined in places as far as central Mexico to the north. In this talk I discuss what such exchange networks can tell us about how small-scale societies navigate the competing demands for inequality, reciprocity, cohesion, and conflict, in Mesoamerica and beyond.



**Wednesday,
January 31st**

3:30PM

Tate 111

VISIT ANTHROPOLOGY.MISSOURI.EDU



Anthropology
University of Missouri