

CLAS Open Seminars - Lent Term 2025

Mondays 5:15pm

SG1 Ground Floor, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, CB3 9DT

Monday 10 February - 5:15pm

Excavating Mexico: Archaeology and the Making of Territorial Sovereignty

[Andrés Bustamante](#) (University of Oxford)

Chair: [Adrián Lerner Patrón](#) (University of Cambridge)

Abstract:

Archaeology transformed the modern Mexican state from the ground up. Since Mexico's independence in 1821, ancient monuments and artifacts have played a fundamental role in constructing a national identity and shaping ideas about race, Indigeneity, and colonialism. Yet, beyond the power of cultural discourse, the practice of archaeological excavation also built new models of territorial sovereignty. Specifically, excavations shaped one of the defining processes of Mexican state formation: the nationalization of subsoil resources. Using the case study of the contested discovery of "Tomb 7" at the site of Monte Albán in 1933, this talk will explore how excavations became key testing grounds for regulatory mechanisms and legal frameworks that extended the state's power underground.



Andrés Bustamante Agudelo is a historian of modern Latin America and is a Julia de Lacy Mann Fellow at Merton College, University of Oxford. His research examines the intertwined histories of archaeology, resource extraction, and sovereignty in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico. Andrés graduated with a BA and PhD in History from Yale University, and received MPhils in Archaeology (Heritage & Museum Studies) and History of Art & Architecture from Cambridge University where he was a Paul Mellon Fellow at Clare College. He is also curating a forthcoming exhibition at the Yale Center for British Art about Mesoamerican art and archaeology in nineteenth-century British visual culture.