

CLAS Events – Lent Term 2026

Wednesday 21 January - 5:00pm | Book Launch
Room S2, Second Floor, Alison Richard Building

Mexico: A History

Paul Gillingham (Northwestern University)

Chair: Benjamin Smith (University of Warwick)

Abstract: It begins in 1511 with the shipwreck of two Spanish sailors in Yucatán. Only ten years later, an army of European adventurers and indigenous rebels seized the island city of Tenochtitlán, seat of one of the world's great empires. It would become Mexico City, and marked the collision of two radically different worlds. Spaniards discovered tomatoes, chocolate and the most sophisticated city they had ever seen. For Mexicans the encounter brought horses, wheels, but also lethal germs – sparking a cataclysmic century of disease that would kill a majority of the indigenous population.

Paul Gillingham's superb history chronicles how this convulsion led to a startling recombination of cultures. He shows how the industrial mining of Mexico's silver transformed the wealth and trade of the world, making it the centre of the first truly global economy. We then see how independence from Spain went on to bring calamitous wars with the United States and France. One of the world's great social revolutions then remade Mexico and ushered in a one-party state that, whatever its shortcomings, brought peace throughout many of the global horrors of the twentieth century – before the country collapsed into violence in the drug wars of the 2000s.

Mexico: A History uses the latest research to dazzling effect, showing how often Mexico has been one of the world's great innovators; a dynamic and vital shaper of world affairs.



Paul Gillingham (DPhil, Oxon, 2006), is Professor of History at Northwestern University, where he specializes in politics, culture and violence in modern Mexico. His books include *Unrevolutionary Mexico: The Birth of a Strange Dictatorship* (2021), *Cuauhtémoc's Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico* (2011), *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (co-edited with Benjamin T. Smith, 2014), and *Journalism, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico* (co-edited with Benjamin T. Smith and Michael Lettieri, 2018). His most recent book is *Mexico, A 500-Year History* (2025).