Archaeology has often been described as a technology of memory, a discipline committed to recuperating pasts long forgotten. But archaeology is also a powerful tool for forgetting and in few places is this as clear as the Armenian Highlands of eastern Turkey. The year 2015 marks the hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, a systematic program of mass murder sponsored by Ottoman authorities that resulted in the deaths of up to 1.5 million people and the dislocation of countless others. The event continues to define regional politics as a century of denial by Turkish authorities strains relations with allies and foes alike. Even as an increasingly vocal cadre of Turkish historians has grappled with what Fatma Gocek calls the originary violence of the Turkish state, archaeology in eastern Anatolia has been distressingly silent. Where a number of significant archaeological studies conducted during the 20th century addressed the region’s millennia of Armenian heritage, archaeology in the 21st century has become a powerful technique of forgetting, effectively erasing the region’s past and constructing a heritage that fails to come to terms with the violence of 1915. Archaeology’s effort to shape contemporary global heritage programs in ways that enhance community participation has been a signal contribution to the discipline’s public engagement, but what happens when local communities continue to be shaped by the haunting legacy of genocide denied?

Adam T. Smith is Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University and Director of Graduate Studies for the Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies. Smith holds a Ph.D. (1996) and M.A. (1993) from the University of Arizona’s Department of Anthropology and an M.Phil. (1991) from the Social and Political Science Faculty at Cambridge University. His research is currently focused on the emergence of complex societies in the South Caucasus as a case study in the materiality of political authority. Smith is a co-founder, along with Dr. Ruben Badalyan, of the joint American-Armenian Project for the Archaeology and Geography of Ancient Transcaucasian Societies (Project ArAGATS), a long-term collaborative research project conducting diachronic investigations in central Armenia. In 2014, he and Lori Khatchadourian established The Aragats Foundation, a public charity that seeks to harness the archaeology of Armenia to foster rural economic development (http://aragats.org). Smith is the author most recently of The Political Machine: Assembling Sovereignty in the Bronze Age Caucasus (Princeton 2015). His earlier work includes The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities (California, 2003), and the co-authored work The Archaeology and Geography of Ancient Transcaucasian Societies, volume I: Regional Investigations in the Tsaghkahovit Plain, Armenia (Oriental Institute Press, 2009).

Wednesday, October 21, 2015
12:00pm - Seminar Room

Location: Building 500
488 Escondido Mall
Room 106

If you have any questions regarding our events, please contact:

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