



Introduction and Evidence

Civilizations of the Ancient World | Meeting #1

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What is this course?

Civilizations of the Ancient World
HIS 246, cross-listed with LEH 354

Tuesdays and Thursdays
3:00 – 4:15 p.m. in Carman 209

markbwilson.com/courses/BB/BB_aw/



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Who am I?

Mark Wilson
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Dept. of History

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- Carman 292
- Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays,
5:00 to 5:45 p.m.



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Four things today

- Civilization
- The syllabus
- Themes for the course
- Evidence

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Civilization

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Civilization

- What is civilization?
- Why was it invented?

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Origins of civilization

- What do we need for civilization?
 - Agriculture (farming + pastoralism)
 - Not just subsistence farming but surplus production
 - Specialization of labor
 - Government
 - Religion
 - Long-distance trade
 - Metalworking
 - Writing

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Civilization as a social revolution

- What do people sacrifice in adopting civilization?
- Why did people choose civilization?

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civilization:

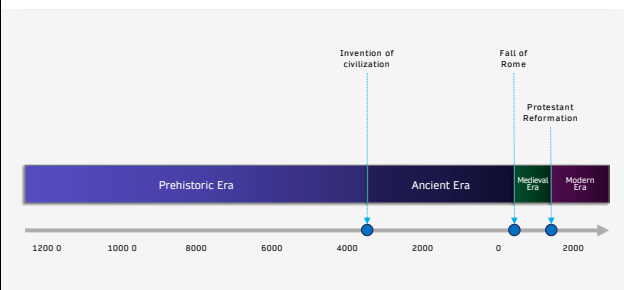
a social technology for the creation of stability and prosperity for the present and for posterity

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The “ancient era”

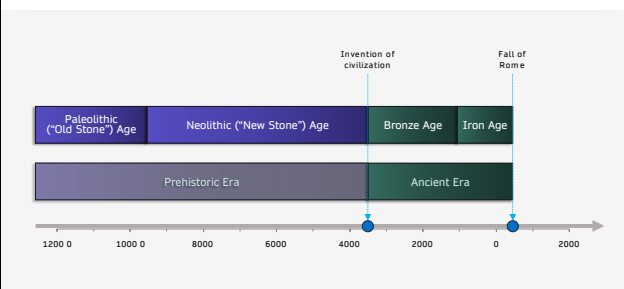
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Eras of (Mediterranean) history

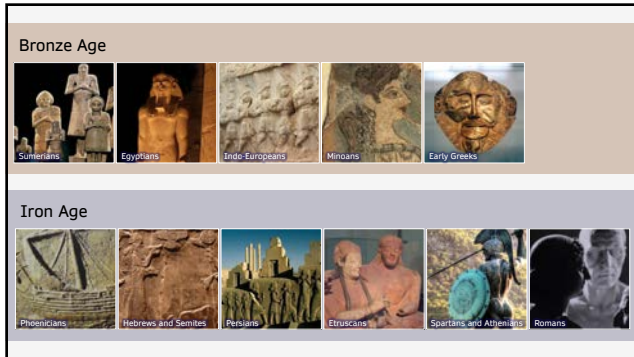


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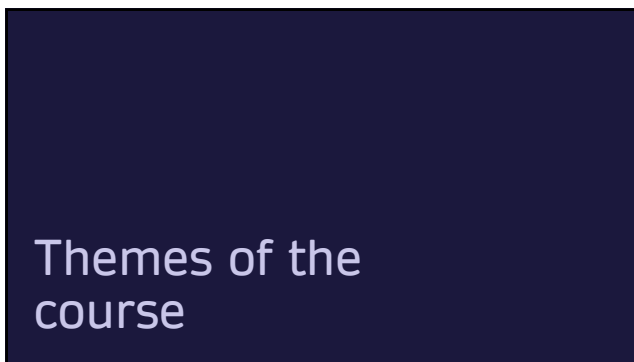
Ages of technology



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(2) The mortal and the divine

- Cultures envision the gods in different ways
- Stories and rituals tell us what the gods mean to each community
- Pagan gods represent local natural forces

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(3) The male and the female

- The public and the private were each crucial to survival
- Men were responsible for the public/present, women the private/future
- Plays out differently in each community

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(4) City and Empire

- Cities are strengthened by a strong central identity
- Empire is about control of distant resources
- Foreign rule conflicts with local identity

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Approaching the course


- Come to class prepared
- Read critically
- Ask questions
- Take notes
- Discuss with each other
- Manage your time
- Use me as a resource

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The course website

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Questions about whatever



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website:
markbwilson.com

email:
mark.wilson@lehman.cuny.edu

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Evidence

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How do past events get to us?

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(1) Stories are passed on

- Written documents

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(1) Stories are passed on

- Written documents
- Oral history

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(2) Things survive

- Archaeology

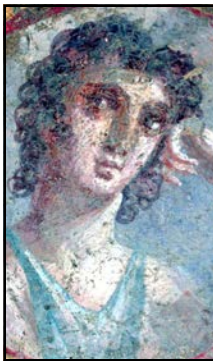
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(2) Things survive

- Archaeology
- Material culture
 - tools, coins, household goods, etc.

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(2) Things survive

- Archaeology
- Material culture
 - tools, coins, household goods, etc.
- Art

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Example

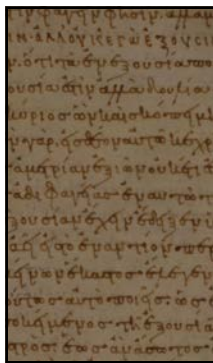
- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
- Survives as 4000-year-old baked clay tablets
- Both the tablets and the contents are artifacts

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Kinds of evidence

- Primary source
 - Eyewitness testimony from the place and time being studied
- Secondary source
 - A scholar collects and interprets primary sources on a subject
- Tertiary source
 - General scholarly consensus on a subject
 - Includes encyclopedias, textbooks, and almost everything on the web
 - NOT ALLOWED as a source for history papers

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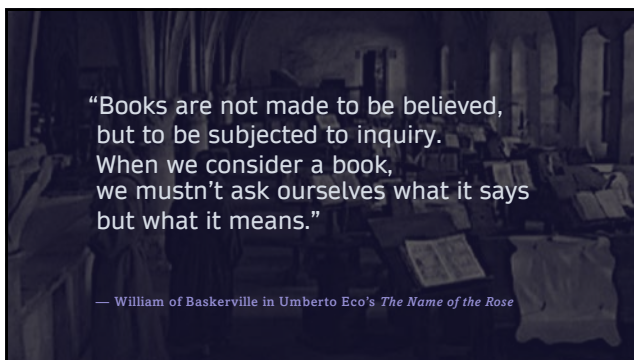


Problems with primary sources?

- Intentional bias
- Unintentional bias
- Point of view
- Survival
- Translation

CONCLUSION:
There are no facts in history

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“Books are not made to be believed,
but to be subjected to inquiry.
When we consider a book,
we mustn't ask ourselves what it says
but what it means.”

— William of Baskerville in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*

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Example

- Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, 79 CE
- Account by Pliny the Younger
- Nothing is ever written for no reason

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