




Women in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #2

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Upcoming Dates

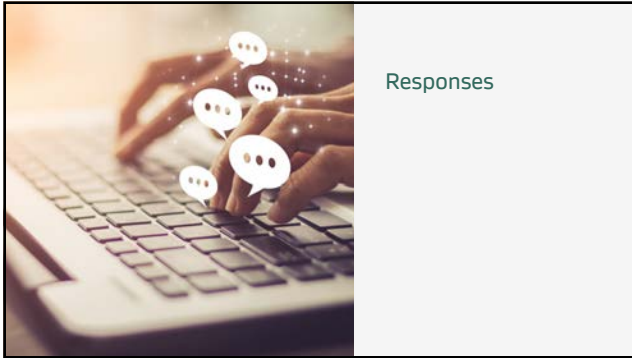
- Monday, October 6
Images Essay Due
- Monday, October 27
Proposal Due
- Sunday, September 7
Responses for Week 2 Due

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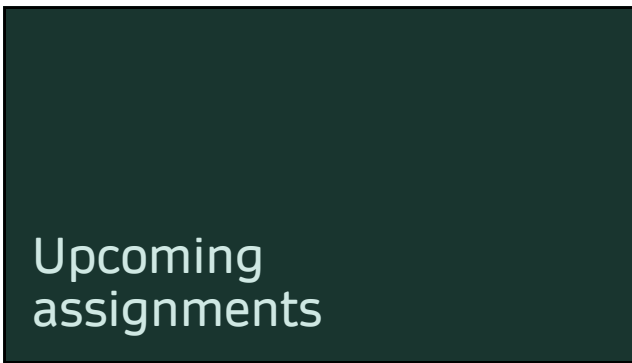
Five things today

- Upcoming assignments
- Periodization and Evidence
- Sumer
- Gilgamesh and Uruk
- Enkidu and Shamhat

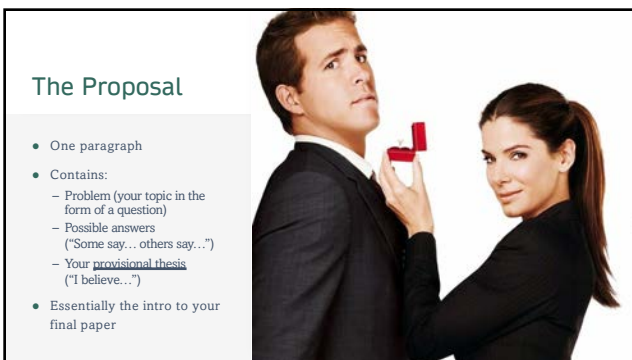
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The Images Essay

The Museum Option

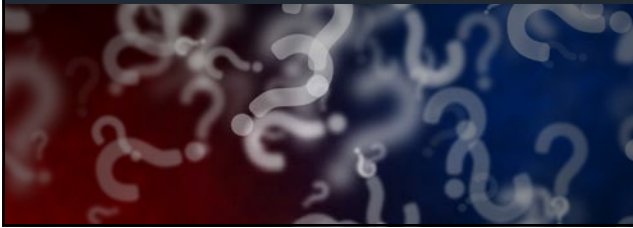


The Film Option



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Questions about whatever



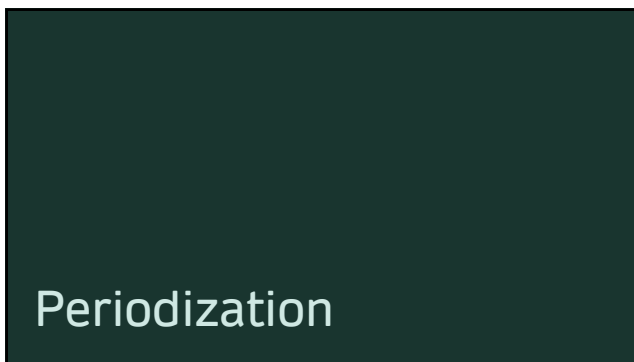
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Geography

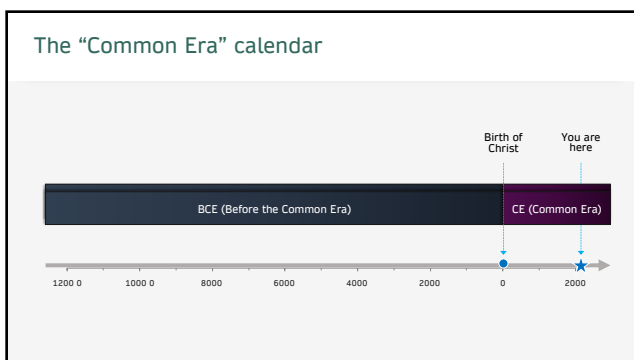
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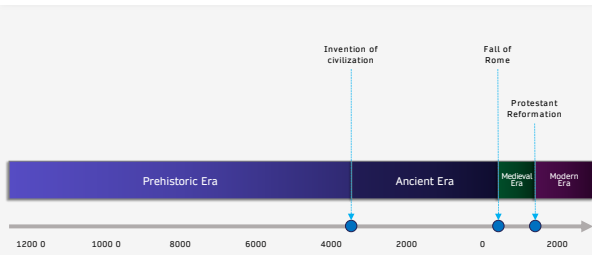


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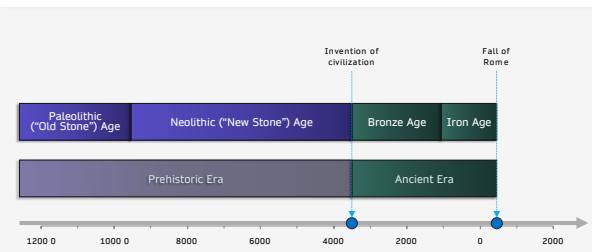
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Eras of (Mediterranean) history



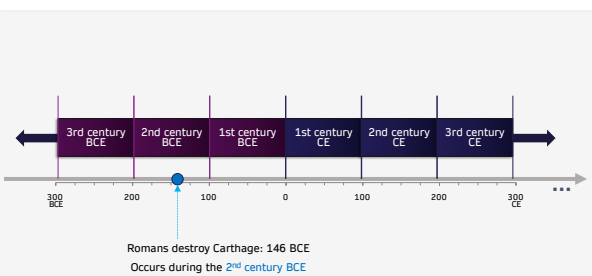
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Ages of technology




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Counting centuries



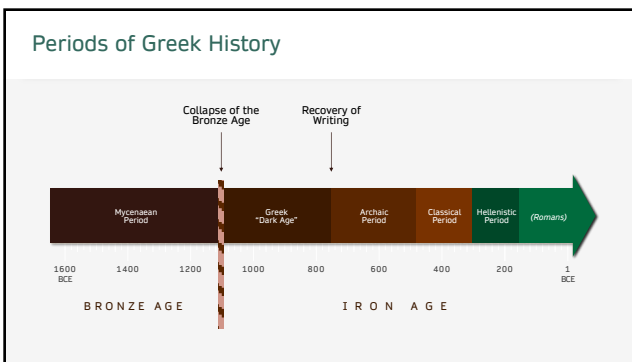
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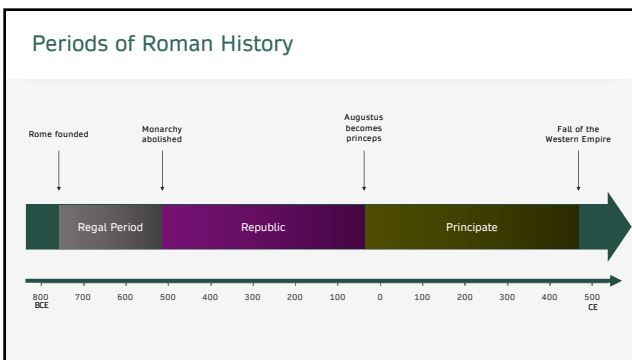
Periodization

- Historians divide history into “eras” based on how we can characterize society
- Archaeologists divide history into “ages” based on changes in prevalent technology
- These periods help organize our studies, but also overgeneralize places and times within each period

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Evidence

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How do past events get to us?

- Material Culture
 - Tools, coins, architecture, art, grave goods
- Written documents
- Oral history

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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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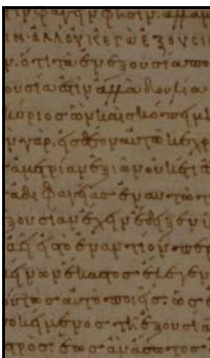


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Kinds of evidence

- 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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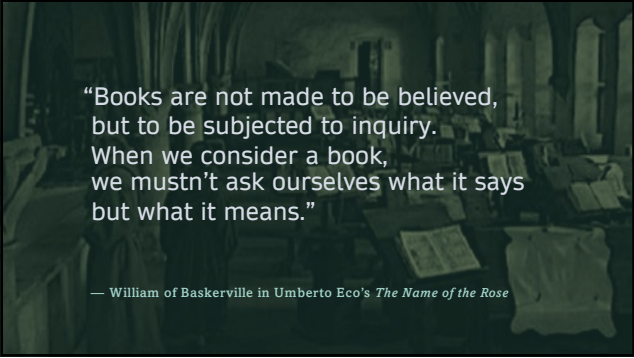


Problems with primary sources?

- 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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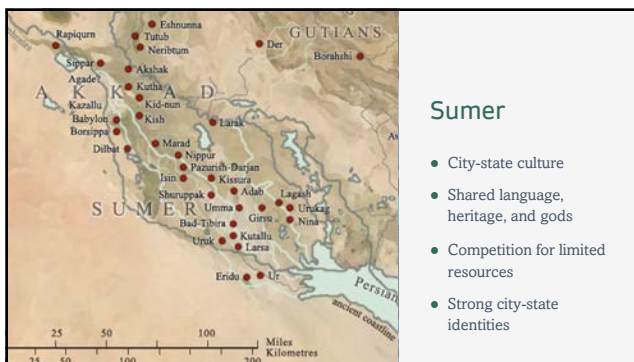
Sumer

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The Fertile Crescent



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Sumer

- City-state culture
- Shared language, heritage, and gods
- Competition for limited resources
- Strong city-state identities

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Rivalry for resources leads to warfare



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Ziggurat

- Massive temple at the heart of a Sumerian city-state
- Sacred home of the patron god
- Visible focus of city-state identity

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The Deluge

- Massive flood destroys cities of Sumer
- Lone survivor separated from humanity
- Sumerian gods are sometimes nurturing, sometimes destructive
- Death is universal



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Life and afterlife

- Sumerian afterlife is a place of impotence
- Gods cannot be trusted
- The living must act
- Build to create a strong and enduring future

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The Epic of Gilgamesh

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King Gilgamesh

- Named in the Sumerian list of kings
- Used as a legendary figure
- Story explores Sumerian ideas of humanity and community

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The Epic of Gilgamesh

- Written on clay tablets
- Cuneiform writing

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Characters

- | | | | |
|-------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| • Gilgámesh | king of Úruk | • Shámash | sun-god |
| • Ninsun | his divine mother | • Humbába | forest guardian |
| • Enkidu | his friend | • Íshtar | great goddess |
| • Shámhat | a prostitute in Úruk | • Úta-napishti | survivor of the Flood |

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Primary Source Reading

Tablet 1: The Coming of Enkidu




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King Gilgamesh

- Places self ahead of community
- Violates both genders
 - Men (fighting the youth)
 - Women (bedding new brides)
 - Present and future
- Actions are an attack on Uruk
- Appeal to the gods comes from the matrons of Uruk

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Ninsun

- Mother of Gilgamesh
- He comes to her for guidance on dreams
- Wise and constructive
- Role involves the future


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Primary Source Reading

Tablet 2: The Taming of Enkidu



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Shamhat and Enkidu

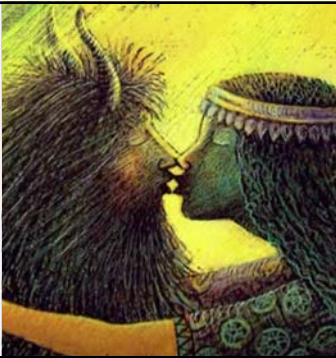
- Enkidu as the answer to the problem of Gilgamesh
- Shamhat doing the "work of woman"
- Creates a bond that links a man to the community = wife
- Creates a future citizen = mother
- Only a harlot could do this

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Secondary Source Reading

John A. Bailey
 "Initiation and the Primal Woman in *Gilgamesh* and Genesis 2-3"


- Bond between Enkidu and Shamhat
- Relates to other similar bonds in legend
- Nature of the transformation
- What Shamhat represents



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Primary Source Reading

Tablet 6:
 Ishtar and the Bull of Heaven



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Ishtar (Inanna)

- Sumerian goddess of fertility and war
- Depicted as capricious and not to be trusted

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Secondary Source Reading

Tzvi Abusch

"Ishtar's Proposal and Gilgamesh's Refusal"

- Ishtar's proposal has obvious and not-so-obvious consequences
 - Ishtar's treatment of past lovers
 - Refusal to pass from mortal life into being consort if goddess



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Secondary Source Reading

Rivkah Harris

"Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites"

- Complex and multifaceted, as a god and as a female god
- Reflects the Sumerians' understanding of divinity
- Ishtar as a unique kind of goddess



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