Semitic Mesopotamia

Civilizations of the Ancient World | Meeting #5

1

Upcoming Dates

- Thursday, February 12
  Tuesday, February 17
  No class meeting

- Monday, March 9
  Gilgamesh Essay Due

- Sunday, February 15
  Responses for Week 3 Due

2

Four things today

- Gilgamesh and Humbaba
- Akkad and Sargon
- Babylon and Hammurabi
- Writing systems

3

the

4

Quiz #1 | Semitic Mesopotamia

1. All of the following are true of Sargon EXCEPT:
   a. He claimed to be the lover of Ishtar
   b. He was king of the Akkadians
   c. He ruled weakly and passively
   d. He established the first Near Eastern empire

2. The Old Babylonian Empire was known for
   a. Mathematics and astronomy
   b. Romance novels
   c. Inventing an early form of baseball
   d. Lasting for thousands of years

3. All of the following are true of the Code of Hammurabi EXCEPT:
   a. It was a compilation of laws relating to civil and criminal procedures
   b. Its penalties were harsher than older laws
   c. It helped to unify the empire by placing it under a single legal system
   d. The three classes—noble, free, and slave—were treated exactly equally

4. The Indo-European people who settled in central Anatolia (modern Turkey) were the
   a. Hittites
   b. Mennonites
   c. Kassites
   d. Samsonites

5. All of the following are true of the Indo-Europeans EXCEPT:
   a. They were originally nomadic before settling in new grazing lands
   b. They were pastoral (animal herders)
   c. They never migrated anywhere, and all its tribes stayed in their homeland until they died out
   d. Their language was the origin of many related later languages, including Persian, Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit

Extra Credit

EC.   Give an example of one of the punishments you remember from the Code of Hammurabi.

5

Questions about whatever

6

Gilgamesh

7

Primary Source Reading

Tablet 5:
The Combat
with Humbaba

8

Why do Gilgamesh and Enkidu go to fight Humbaba?
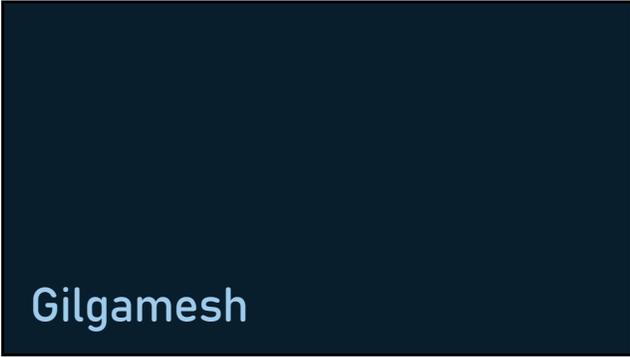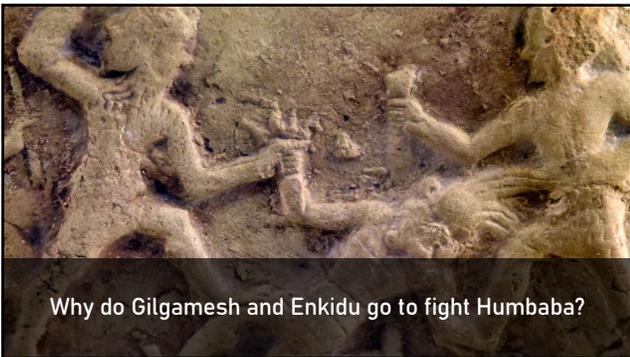
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The combat with Humbaba

- Gilgamesh and Enkidu
- The Forest of Cedar
- Humbaba, the forest guardian

10

Some themes so far in Gilgamesh

- Individual and community
  - Gilgamesh places himself ahead of community and so is not civilized
  - King must protect community
  - Enkidu becomes a part of community
- Gender
  - Male nature is to be a wild beast (Enkidu and Gilgamesh)
  - "The work of woman" is to transform beast-men into citizens as mothers and and wives
- Mortal and divine
  - Gods are capricious and untrustworthy because they do not die
  - Mortals must grow in order to build and contribute before death
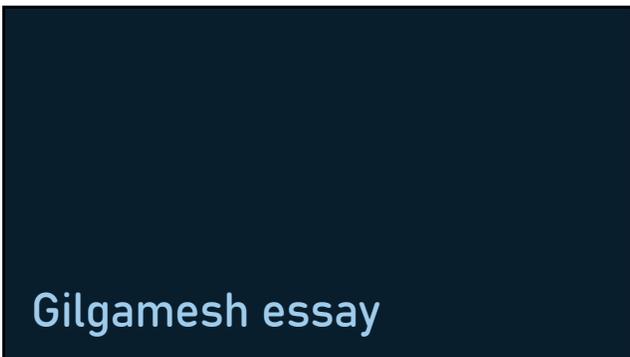- Bonds between individuals
  - Men and women
  - Men and men

11

Gilgamesh essay

12

Slide 13

Guidance and resources

Requirements for All Papers

All written assignments for this course MUST adhere to these requirements —
or be subject to a reduced grade. Check for all of the following before submitting any paper.

Before starting on your assignments, I urge you to watch the videos below. They're very short, and they cover the key requirements with tips on how to make them happen and avoid damage to your grade.

- Formatting Mu... Form...usts *(video)*
- Evidence Musts Evid...usts *(video)*
- Structure Musts Struct...usts *(video)*

1. Essay on *Epic of Gilgamesh*

⚠ IMPORTANT

- **Watch the video.** The overview video explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.
- **Before you upload**, make sure your essay meets the **Requirements for All Papers**, including formatting, structure, and citations.
- For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the **Research and Citation Center**. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Quick Overview: The Gilgamesh Es...
Quick Overview: The Gilgamesh Essay *(video)*

Research and Citations Center

Citations are absolutely essential in any academic paper, but particularly and especially in history. All information that is not from your own head must be cited, whether it's a direct quote, a paraphrase, or even just an idea.

Citations are how we can tell the difference between what you're claiming is your research and analysis, and the work of others. If you don't cite others' work, you're claiming it for your own, and that's plagiarism. Plagiarism is not tolerated at any academic institution; the lightest you'll get off is a zero for the paper, but in many cases harsher penalties are invoked, including an F for the course and academic disciplinary proceedings that may result in a range of transcript damaging punishments.

- Evidence Musts Evid...usts *(video)*

Writing a Position Paper for History Students

AKA the **Elephant Pamphlet**. Below is the text of the Third Edition, also available in PDF and to print.

« Prev   Next »   1/10

A sample introduction
Here's what the introduction would look like for the elephant paper:

13

Slide 14

Writing a Position Paper

- Link on Resources page
- Structure, research, citations, etc.

14

Slide 15

Ancient Civilizations
SPRING 2026

Choose your topic from one of the three prompts below

Option A
The mortal and the divine. Choose any of the mortal characters from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and discuss his or her relationship with the gods. (Note: your best bets are either Gilgamesh or Enkidu; Utanapishtim is also a possibility.)

What does the *Epic* show us regarding Sumer's take on religion and the gods, and what it means to be human?

Option B
Gender in Sumerian society. Choose any of the female characters from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and discuss her relationship with the other characters and Sumerian society. (Note: your best bet is Shamhat; Ninsun and Ishtar are also possibilities.)

What does the *Epic* show us regarding gender expectations and the roles of women in Sumerian culture?

Option C
Life and death. Mortality is one of the major themes of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, but what is the epic saying about it?

What does the *Epic* show us regarding Sumerian ideas of death and legacy, and how Sumerian culture thought about death?

Find three moments from the *Epic* that are strong examples of your topic.

Option A
For the "mortal and divine" option, find three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* showing your character interacting with or contemplating the gods.

Option B
For the "gender" option, find three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* showing your character's actions or behavior and how it relates to her role as a woman in Sumerian society.

Option C
For the "life and death" option, find three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that involve death or mortality—either an actual death, or discussion of death and mortality.

Write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you take a position on Sumerian culture.

You'll need an Introduction ... State what you believe the *Epic* shows us about the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of ancient Sumer in a way that answers the question in the prompt you chose. (This is your thesis statement.)

... a Body ... Describe and discuss, one by one, each of the three moments you found from the *Epic*. For each section, discuss what the evidence tells us about ancient Sumer.

... and a Conclusion. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

15

Structure of an interpretive essay

Introduction
- State the problem (some say … others say …)
- Give your thesis (I believe…)

First reason
- ASSERTION #1
- Evidence from primary or secondary sources
- Discussion of how the evidence demonstrates your thesis

Second reason
- ASSERTION #2
- Evidence from primary or secondary sources
- Discussion of how the evidence demonstrates your thesis

Third reason
- ASSERTION #3
- Evidence from primary or secondary sources
- Discussion of how the evidence demonstrates your thesis

Conclusion
- Address counterarguments
- Connect your "reason" sections together
- Restate your thesis as having been demonstrated

16

Evidence vs. discussion

17

Footnotes and bibliographies

18

Writing

19

Forms of writing

PICTOGRAPHS	SYLLABARIES	ALPHABETS
Each character represents a word or a concept	Each character represents a syllable (consonant + vowel)	Each character represents a sound

Cuneiform

Linear B

Greek

Hieroglyphs

Arcado-Cypriot

ISPANIAE · AFRICA · SICILI
RES · QVAM · DCC · IN · IIS
I · SVNT · HAEC · LXXXIII
FINITIMAE · FVERVNT
PROVINCIAS · ITEM · GI
S · A · REGIONE · EA · QV
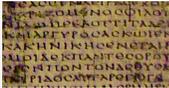
Latin

20

Cuneiform

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21

Hieroglyphs

- Roughly contemporary with cuneiform
- Used for formal writing and records

22

Hieroglyphs: cartouche

- Within a cartouche, the first syllable is sounded out to make proper names

23
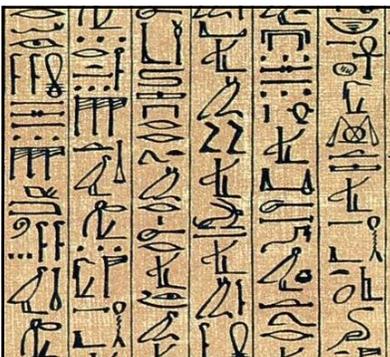
From stone to papyrus

- Papyrus is made from woven reeds
- Fluidity of ink version leads to a more informal script
- Still difficult to learn

24

The phonetic alphabet

- Bronze Age scripts are pictographic or syllabic
- Many characters with a high learning curve
- No phonetic scripts until the Iron Age

25

Semitic peoples of Southwest Asia

26

Fertile Crescent

- Soil and climate offer better odds for farming
- City-state cultures develop
- Neighboring nomadic peoples attracted by wealth and stability of the city-states

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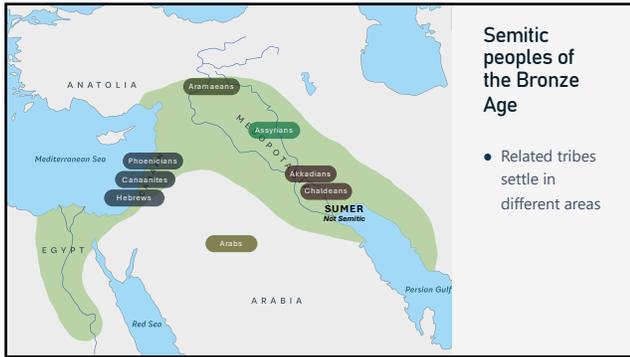
Semitic peoples of the Bronze Age

- Related tribes settle in different areas

28

Sargon and Akkad

- Akkad becomes a strong city-state
- King Sargon I extends control over more and more od Mesopotamia

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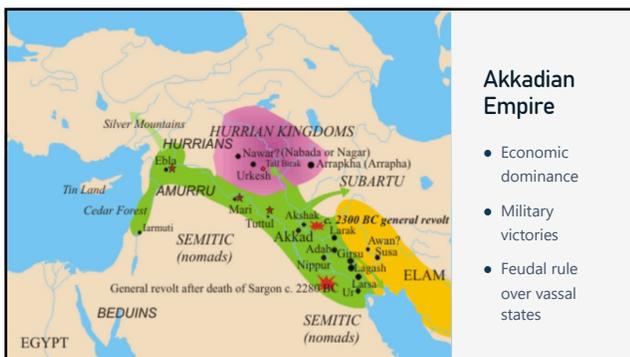
Akkadian Empire

- Economic dominance
- Military victories
- Feudal rule over vassal states

30

Sargon's Empire

- Control of distant resources
- Political unity
  - Connecting disparate peoples
  - Autocratic rule
  - Defortification of cities
- Economic unity
  - Goods
  - Access to resources not available locally
  - Ideas

31

Why doesn't Sargon's empire last?

32
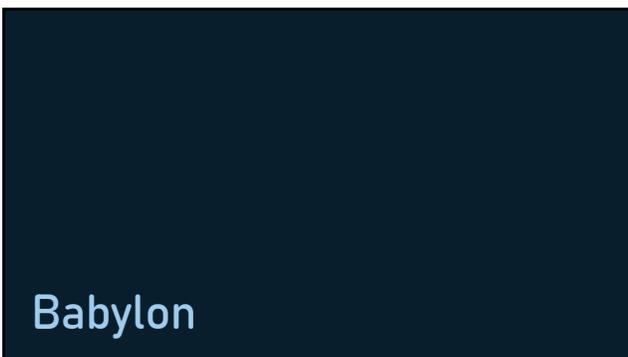
Babylon

33
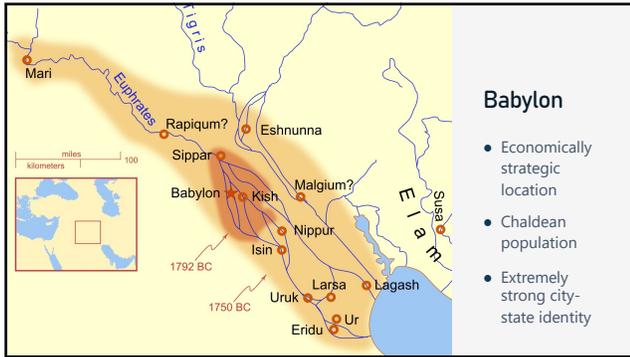
Babylon

- Economically strategic location
- Chaldean population
- Extremely strong city-state identity

34

Marduk

- Babylon has thousands of god and goddesses
- Marduk dominant
  - Patron deity of Babylon
  - Judges other gods as well as the living and the dead
- Henotheism: many gods, one dominant

35

The Old Babylonian Empire

- Around 1900-1600 BCE
- Absorbed culture and stories of conquered peoples
- Babylon as a center of science and natural history, especially astronomy

36

37

Code of Hammurabi

- Unified legal system emphasizes benefits of empire
- Consistent rules for guilt and sentencing
  – From city to city
  – From judge to judge
- Public law
  – Justice associated with the people, not just nobility
  – Known laws/punishment minimizes arbitrary/corrupt rulings
- State supersedes family/local
  – Emphasis on center rather than parts
  – Makes possible a sense of identity with the larger whole

38

39