



**Women in The Epic of Gilgamesh**  
 Women in Antiquity | Meeting #2

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**Upcoming Dates**

- Tuesday, February 17  
 - No class meeting
- Monday, March 9  
 - Images Essay Due
- Sunday, February 8  
 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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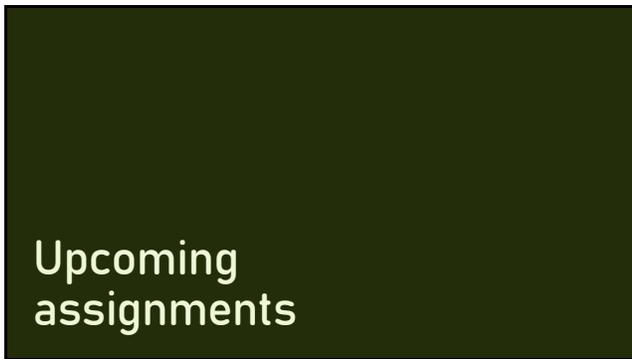
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### The Proposal

- One paragraph
- Contains:
  - Problem (your topic in the form of a question)
  - Possible answers ("Some say... others say...")
  - Your provisional thesis ("I believe...")
- Essentially the intro to your final paper




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## Periodization

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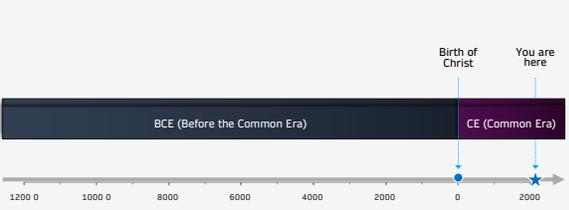
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### The "Common Era" calendar



The diagram shows a horizontal timeline with an arrow pointing to the right. The timeline is divided into two sections: a dark grey section on the left labeled "BCE (Before the Common Era)" and a purple section on the right labeled "CE (Common Era)". The year 0 is marked at the boundary between the two sections. A blue dot at 0 is labeled "Birth of Christ". A blue star at 2000 is labeled "You are here". The timeline has numerical markers at 12000, 10000, 8000, 6000, 4000, and 2000.

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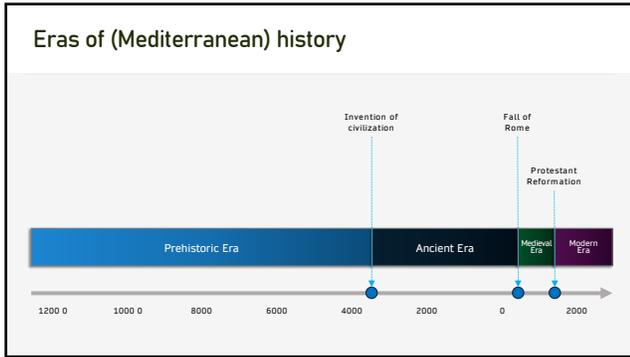
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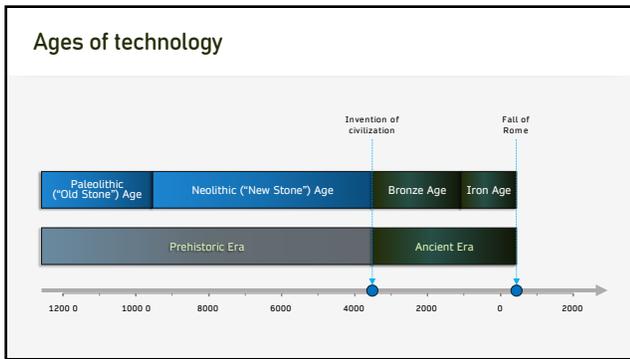
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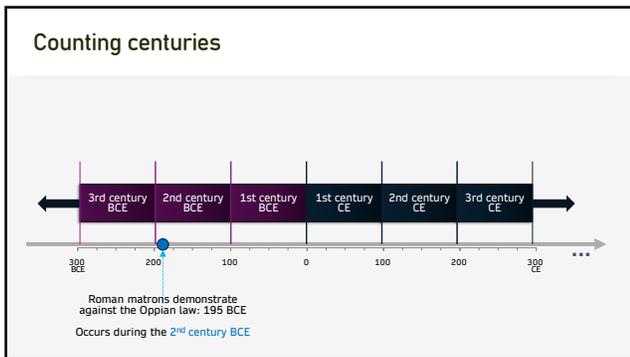
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### Periodization

- 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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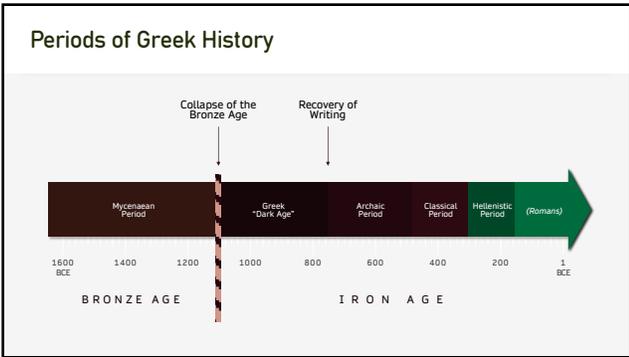
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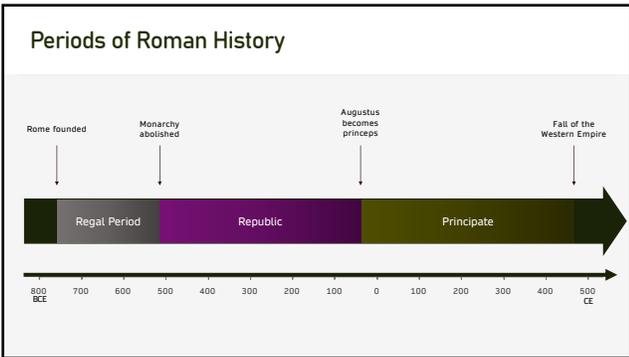
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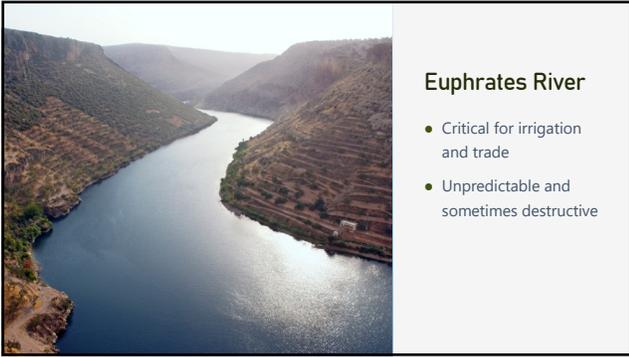
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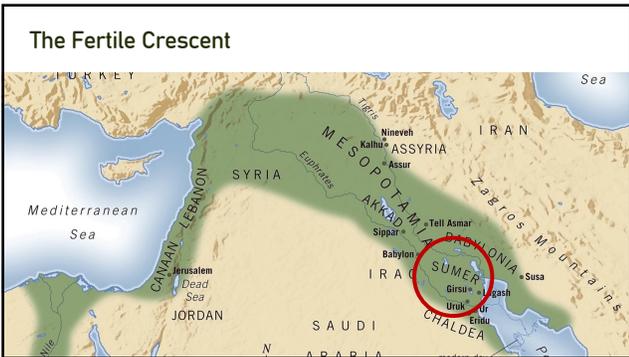
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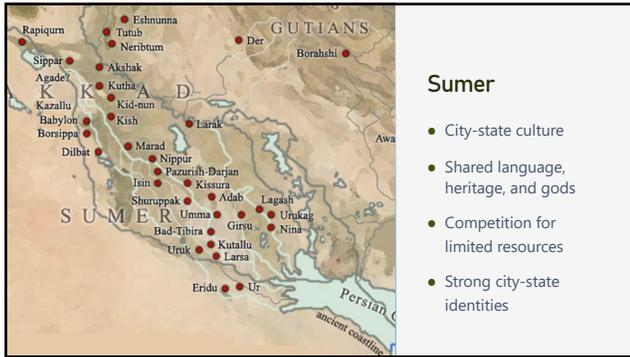
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**Sumer**

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

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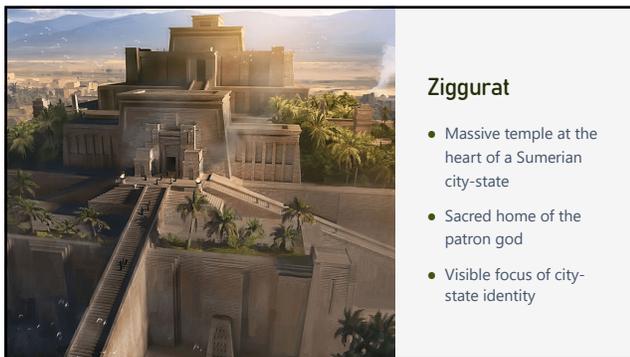
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**Ziggurat**

- 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	<i>king of Úruk</i>	• Shámash	<i>sun-god</i>
• Ninsun	<i>his divine mother</i>	• Humbába	<i>forest guardian</i>
• Enkidu	<i>his friend</i>	• Íshtar	<i>great goddess</i>
• Shámhat	<i>a prostitute in Úruk</i>	• Úta-napíshti	<i>survivor of the Flood</i>

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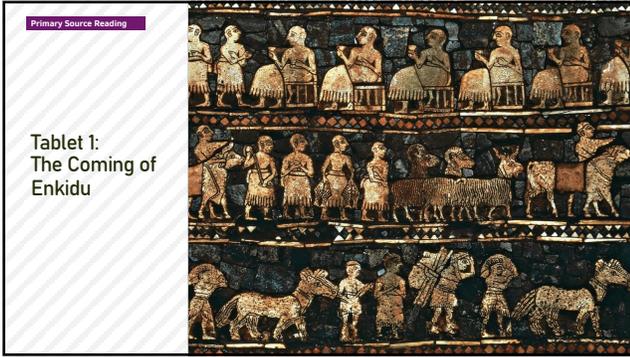
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Primary Source Reading

Tablet 1:  
The Coming of  
Enkidu

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Why are the people upset with Gilgamesh?

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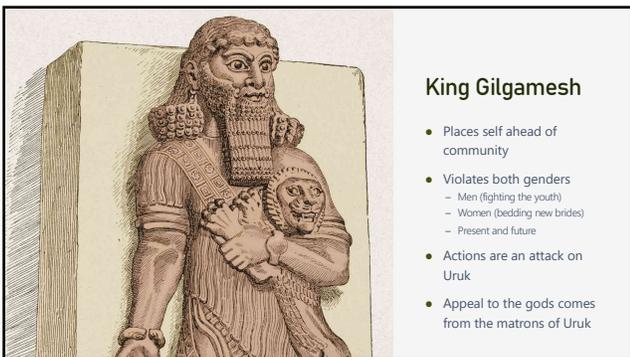
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### King Gilgamesh

- 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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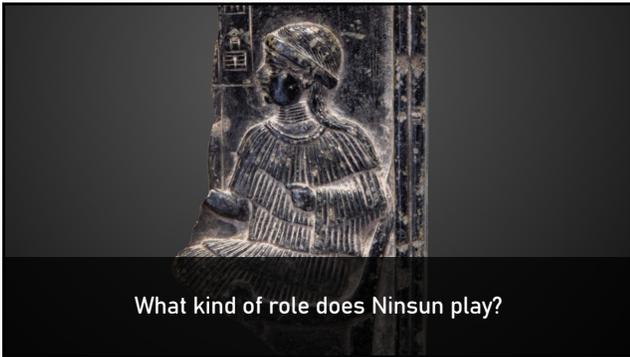
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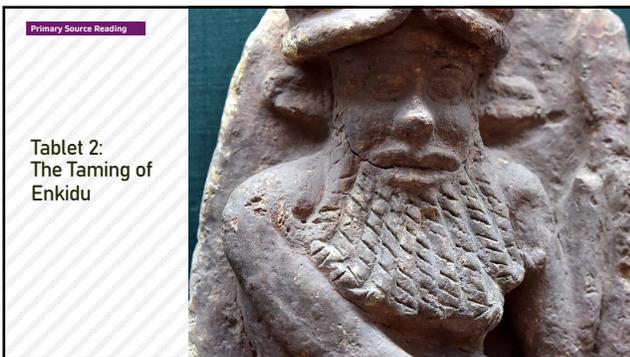
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Why do the gods create Enkidu to fix Gilgamesh?

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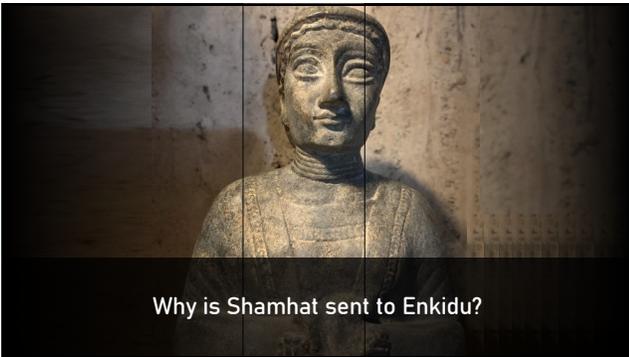
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Why is Shamhat sent to Enkidu?

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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


 An illustration showing a close-up profile of two figures. On the left is Enkidu, depicted with a thick, shaggy mane of dark hair and a wild, unkempt appearance. On the right is Shamhat, a woman with a more refined, human-like face, wearing a decorative headband and a patterned garment. They are shown in a moment of intimate connection, with their faces nearly touching.

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Primary Source Reading

Tablet 6: Ishtar and the Bull of Heaven


 A stone relief carving of the goddess Ishtar. She is depicted from the waist up, wearing a multi-layered, feathered or winged skirt. She has a crown with three horns and is holding a mace in her right hand and a ringed staff in her left hand. The background is a textured, weathered stone surface.

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 A golden relief carving of the goddess Ishtar. She is shown with a crown of horns and wings, riding a lion. She holds a mace in her right hand and a ringed staff in her left. The background is a textured, golden surface.
 

**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 of 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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