

**HISTORY OF ANCIENT RELIGION**

Meeting 2 **Sumerians**

- Religious fluidity and persistence in the Mediterranean world
- Sumer
- Gilgamesh, Ishtar, and the Bull of Heaven

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**The story so far**

Website & syllabus [markbwilson.com](http://markbwilson.com) [mark.wilson@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:mark.wilson@lehman.cuny.edu)

**Key Ideas**

- Kinds of religion: gods (polytheism, dualism, monotheism) or spirits
- Paganism almost universal in the ancient world
  - Form of polytheism
  - Local natural forces given names, faces, stories
  - City-states give special attention to a patron deity
- Temples are homes to the gods
- Priestly classes trained to interact with gods, preserve lore
- Mortals and gods have multilayer interactions
  - Gods and the state
  - Gods and the community
  - Gods and the family/individuals

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**Evidence**

*Most of our evidence of what happened in the past is flawed*

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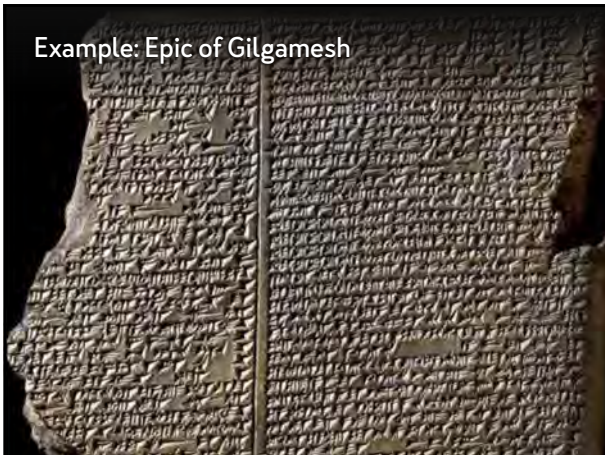
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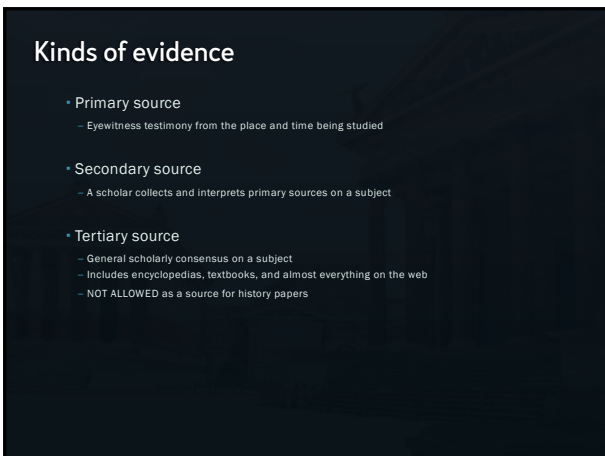
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### Problems with primary sources?

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

**CONCLUSION:**  
There are no facts in history

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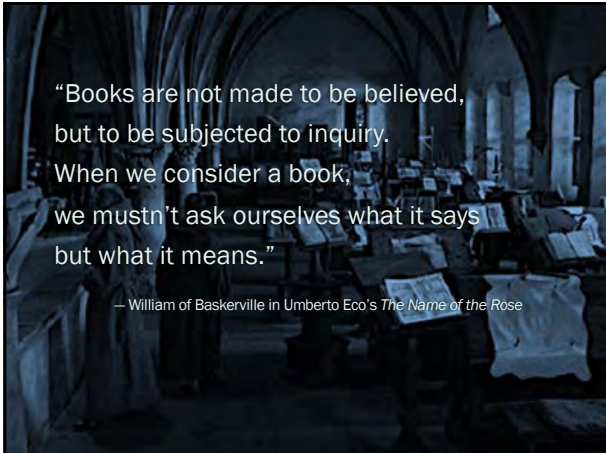
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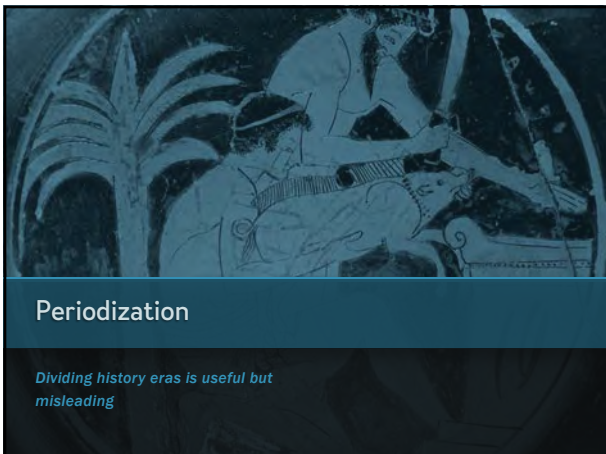
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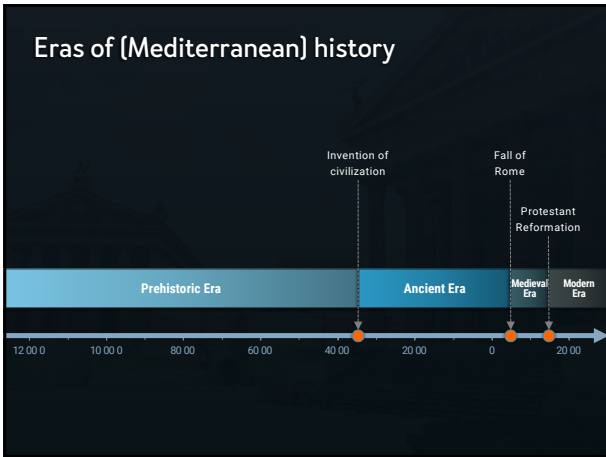
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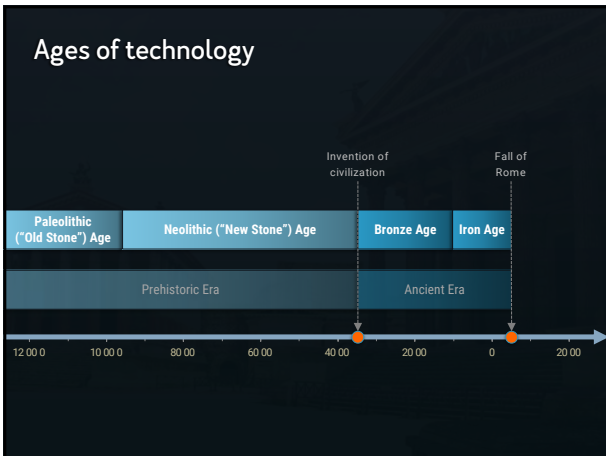
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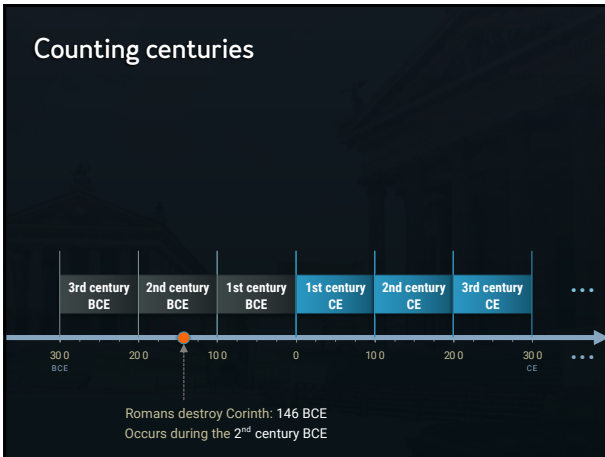
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### Periodization

- 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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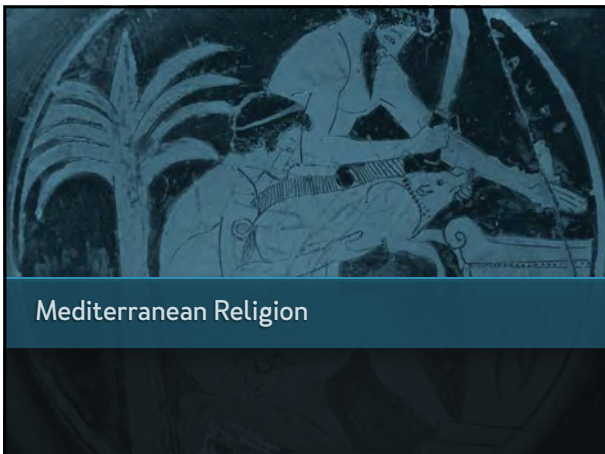
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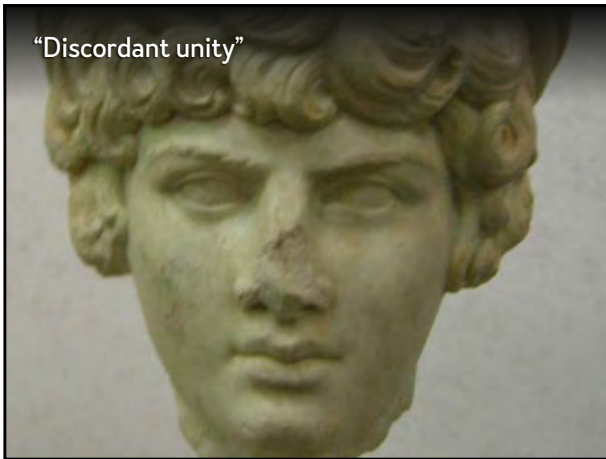
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### Transmission between cultures

- "Between cultures" includes time as well as space
- Commerce
- Political interaction
  - Diplomacy
  - Exile
  - Foreign consorts
- Alien minorities populations
  - Immigration
  - Colonialism
  - Merchant communities
- Transmission of writing systems
  - Cuneiform, hieroglyphics
  - Linear A/Linear B
  - Phonetic writing

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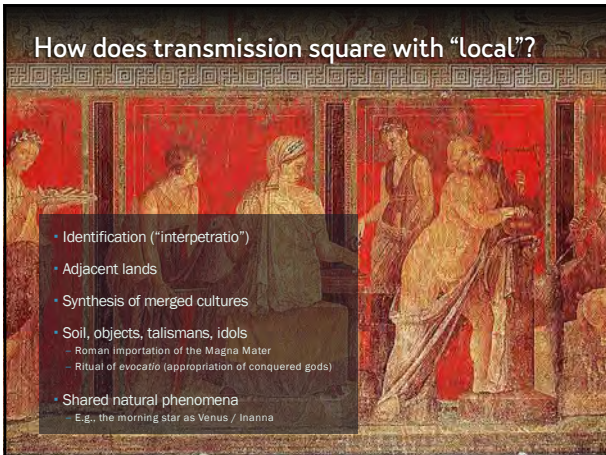
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### How does transmission square with "local"?

- Identification ("interpretatio")
- Adjacent lands
- Synthesis of merged cultures
- Soil, objects, talismans, idols
  - Roman importation of the Magna Mater
  - Ritual of evocatio (appropriation of conquered gods)
- Shared natural phenomena
  - E.g., the morning star as Venus / Inanna




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### Identification ("Interpretatio")

- Caesar: "the Gauls worship Mercurius"
- Herodotos: "these foreigners love Hestia best"
- Hesiod: "Akkadians' Anu is another name for our Ouranos"
- Consequences:
  - Acquisition of stories and aspects blurs/changes role
  - Use as a cultural normative




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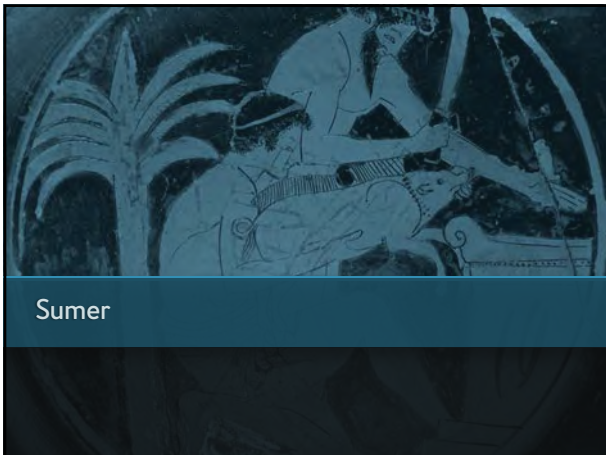
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Ziggurat

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The priests and the priest-king

- Many gods as rulers/owners of the land, with priestly attendants
- Kings asserting role as chief priest: the priest-king
- Gods of dominant cities gain importance  
- Inanna / Ishtar as patron deity of Akkad

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Rivalry for resources → warfare



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The deluge



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Life and afterlife



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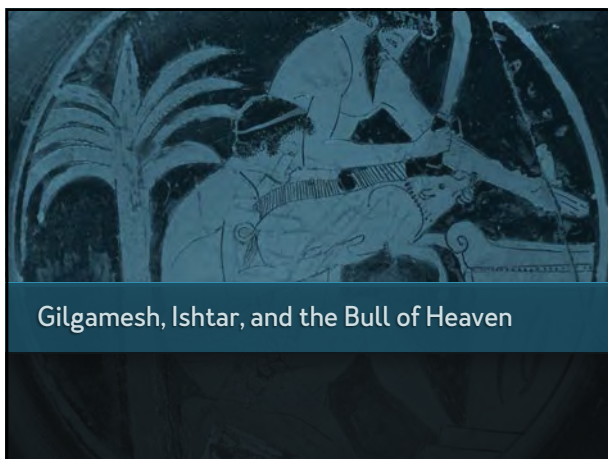
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