



Week 1

Introduction to the History of Civilization

HIST-221
History of Civilization

Atılım University



Content of today's class

1) What is History?

Definition of a vague term. What do historians do?

2) Sources and methods for studying history

Written sources, archaeology, interdisciplinary methods, modern tools

3) The concept of civilization

Origins and meaning of the term «civilization», Key themes: What makes us civilized?

4) Characteristics of civilizations

Common themes, what to look for

5) Chronology of civilizations



01

What is history?



History is the study of human experiences and changes over time based on the evidences from the past.

→ We speak of “History” as a **discipline**: analysis of human experience over time, evidence-based, requires critical thinking and interpretation.

→ History is **NOT** just what happened, it is our interpretation of what happened.

→ History is **NOT** the past. It is the traces and evidence that the past left behind.



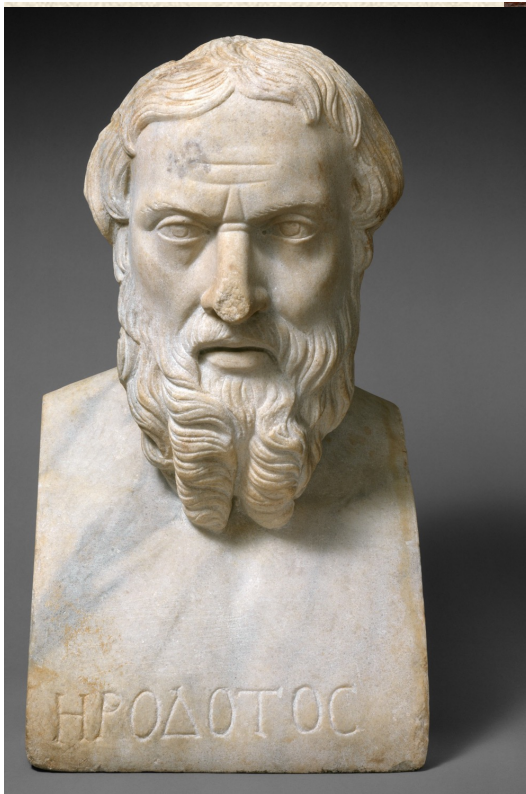


→ Historians do not only collect facts, they investigate **causes and consequences**.

→ History helps us understand **change over time & continuities and transformations**.

→ History sharpens **critical thinking**.

→ History connects us to a **shared human story**.



From Herodotus to Ibn Khaldun, Voltaire, and Fernand Braudel, historians try to make sense of the past. Their methods shifted and evolved over time.

02

Sources and methods for studying history



Methods used by the historians of science



Written sources

Chronicles, laws, letters, religious texts, inscriptions



Archaeology

Architectural remains, artifacts (weapons, tools, pottery, etc.)



Interdisciplinary methods

Anthropology, linguistics, neuroscience, etc.



Modern tools

Carbon dating, DNA, climate studies





03

The concept of
“civilization”

A possible
definition would
be...

a **complex human society**
with certain characteristics
of cultural, social, and
technological
advancements.





The word "civilization" comes from Latin: civis (citizen)
and civitas (city/community)



Characteristics of
civilizations

04

Common features of civilizations



Common features of civilizations

04

Governance - state

05

Architectural
marvels

06

Economic systems

Social complexity and emergence of social classes



Sumerian City State Ur, c. 3000 B.C.E.

- ➔ **Emergence of hierarchy and social stratification:** classes, inequality, exploitation.
- ➔ Rulers, nobles, clergy, healers, merchants and tradesmen, peasants and workers, slaves, etc.
- ➔ **Division of labour:** Everyone has a role and a settled position in the society.

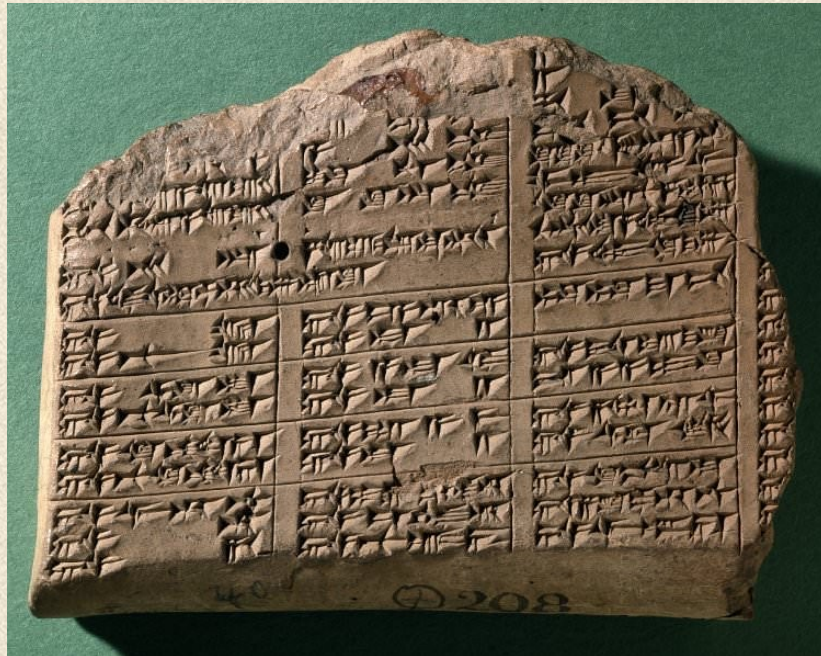
Urbanisation



*Memphis, one of the first capitals of Ancient Egypt,
ca. 3000 B.C.E.*

- Civilizations develop cities as **centers of population, culture, and trade**.
 - **Economy, politics, and religious activities** are centered in the city centres.
 - Cities require **infrastructure** as roads, water systems, and defensive walls.
-

Writing systems



«Cuneiform», the first writing system, Sumerian Civilization, c. 3500 BCE.

→ Writing is essential for **record keeping, legal texts, religious texts, and communication.**

→ **Transmission of knowledge** across generations!

→ **Administration:** Used for laws, taxes, governance (eg. Code of Hammurabi)

→ Helped unify large states through standardized communication!

Governance – state



Ancient democracy in Athens, c. 500 B.C.E.

→ Civilizations establish **organized governments to manage resources and maintain order.**

→ Governments enforce **laws, collect taxes, and organize military forces.**

→ Bureaucracies develop: managing administration, organizing trade, controlling legal matters.

Architectural marvels



Persepolis, Achaemenid Empire, c. 550–330 BCE.

→ Civilizations construct monumental structures to **reflect their political, religious, technological, and economic power!**

→ Architectural structures **serve administrative, religious and defensive** purposes.

→ They require advanced **engineering, mathematics, and organization of labour!**

Economic systems

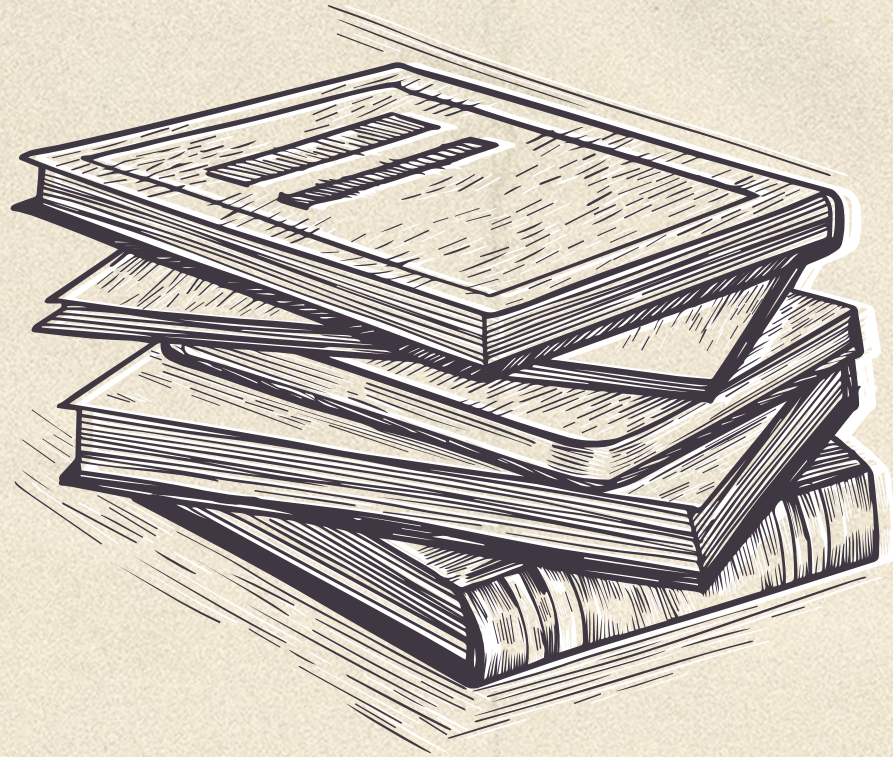


Ancient coins, Roman civilization, 753 BCE–476 AD

- Civilizations develop trade networks (both local and long distance)
 - Labour division: production of goods.
 - Systems of barter, currency, and taxation develop in time to organise resources and wealth.
 - Economic institutions: marketplaces, guilds, banks, etc.
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05

Chronology of civilizations



Chronology of civilizations

c. 2.5 m.-10.000
B.C.E

Paleolithic Age

Homo sapiens is stepping
onto the stage!

c. 10.000-5000 B.C.E.

Mesolithic Age

Transition to the Neolithic
stage

c. 10.000-
2000 B.C.E

Neolithic Age

Homo sapiens is
establishing agricultural
settlements



Chronology of civilizations

c.3300-1200
B.C.E

Bronze Age

Civilizations in Mesopotamia, in the Indus Valley, Egypt, and the coastal areas of the Aegean Sea are on the rise

1200 – 500
B.C.E

Iron Age

The peak of Persian and Greek civilizations

500 B.C.E. –
476 AD

Classical Antiquity

Greek and Roman cultures are changing the world



Chronology of civilizations

476-1500

The Middle Ages

Christianity spreads, Europe experiences cultural and economic revival

1500-1800

Early Modern Period

The Age of explorations and discoveries, Renaissance, Reform of Christianity, nation-states emerge.

1800-
today

Modern Age

Industrial Revolution, colonialism, imperialism, devastating wars, groundbreaking technological advancements



“

As an English writer has wittily remarked, the man who first flung a word of abuse at his enemy instead of a spear was the founder of civilisation.

”

—Sigmund Freud

