The Foundations of Western Civilization

Scope:

In this course of forty-eight lectures, we will explore the essential contours of the human experience in what has come to be called "Western civilization," from its humble beginnings in the ancient Near East to the dawn of the modern world; we will range from about 3000 **B.C.** to **AD.** 1600. We will begin by asking just what "Western civilization" actually is, or what it has been thought to be. Throughout the course, we will pause to reflect on where Western civilization finds its primary locus at any given moment. That is, we'll begin in the ancient Near East and move to Greece, then to Rome; we will explore the shape and impact of large ancient empires, including the Persian, Alexander the Great's, and Rome's. When we take our leave of Rome, we'll move to Western Europe. We'll watch Europe gradually expand physically and culturally. Finally, we'll see the globalizations of Western civilization with the Portuguese and Spanish voyages of exploration and discovery.

But Western civilization is much more than human and political geography. We will explore the myriad forms of political and institutional structures by means of which Western peoples have organized themselves and their societies. These include monarchies of several distinct types, as well as participatory republics. Looking at institutions will draw us to inquire about the Western tradition of political discourse. Who should participate in any given society? Why? How have societies resolved the tension between individual self-interest and the common good?

Western civilization has always accorded a prominent place to religion and, by extension, to religious institutions and leaders. We will ask why this should be the case. Although we will pay some attention to the ancient religions of the Mediterranean world, we'll focus throughout on the three dominant monotheistic traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of these religious traditions produced sacred books and vast commentaries on those books. Christianity also produced art, architecture, and music that have become living parts of the Western tradition.

If Western culture was at its source primarily religious, it was never exclusively so. This insight will invite us to probe the philosophical tradition of the West as it has asked how people should live, how they should conduct themselves, what they should regard as beautiful, and where they should find their pleasure. We will notice that the West has provided many answers to these fundamental questions. What has been common are the rational tools of debate used to seek answers and the ferocious critical tools elaborated to cross-examine every answer that has been offered.

Western civilization, finally, has bequeathed to us a library-full of literary monuments. We will discuss these from the standpoints of their technical artistry, their esthetic adornment, their political and social messages, their real and imagined audiences, and their long-term impact. We'll ask why we continue to read some works and forget others. With literature, indeed, as with other objects of our investigations, we'll continually ask what *is* more than what *was;* we will seek to understand why some things remain living elements of a civilization.

Lecture One

"Western," "Civilization," and "Foundations"

Scope: This lecture will explore the three seemingly simple words "Western," "civilization," and "foundations." We ask, "Where is the West? Who is Western'? How have our understandings of the West changed over time?" The lecture will then turn to civilization and its *civ-* root, which is related to a range of Latin words meaning citizen *(civis),* city *(civitas),* and polite behavior *(civilitas).* Cities, therefore, are crucial. To arrive at cities, we will

discuss the Neolithic Revolution— essentially the rise of agriculture—and such processes as irrigation and specialization of labor. Third, we will think about what foundations are, how durable they are, how easy or difficult they are to recognize. In a sense, we'll open a discussion of the difference between celebrity and distinction. To extend this reflection on foundations, we will conclude by stating several themes that will be pursued throughout the course: the roles of geography, climate, and ecology; the structure and ideology of political institutions; religious ideas and institutions; social structures, values, and customs; literary and philosophical achievements; and aesthetic representations in the arts and architecture.

Outline

For Sherlock Holmes, the first principle of detection was to begin with the obvious. Let's turn the old sleuth on his head and begin with what is not so obvious.

A. What do we mean when we speak of "the West"?

1. We can define this term culturally: free and participatory political institutions, capitalist economies, religious toleration, rational inquiry, an innovative spirit, and so on.
2. We can define the term geographically: a cultural tradition that began around the Mediterranean Sea, spent centuries as a European preserve, then migrated to all the earth.
3. Any definition brings controversy: The West has had freedom and slavery; women have historically enjoyed fewer rights and opportunities than men; some have enjoyed vast wealth while others endured deep poverty.
4. Definitions also bring paradox: Western civilization began in what is now Iraq, but it would be hard to make a case now for Iraq as Western. Today, Japan, in the "Far East," seems "Western"; in the Cold War years, Turkey was Western while Libya, far to the west of Turkey, was Eastern.

B. "Civilization" is no easier to define.

1. The word itself is built from a Latin root *civ*—. We see this in such Latin words as *civis* (citizen), *civitas* (city), *civilis* (civil, polite, citizen-like). Thus, cities appear crucial to our sense of what civilization is.
2. The Greek vocabulary is similarly revealing. *Polls* (city) gives us our words for politics and political.
3. Cities emerged as a result of what is called the Neolithic Revolution, which occurred about 9,000 to 10,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Essentially, this process involved the rise of agriculture and the domestication of animals. The process was *revolutionary,* but it took a long time to produce cities and, then, civilization.
4. Extracting food from arid regions surrounding great rivers demanded social cohesion and cooperation. Irrigation was a key motor process. Concentrated populations grew as more people could be fed more predictably. This led to the specialization of labor, which in turn, resulted in social and political differentiation. Gradually, arts and crafts emerged and, finally, writing. With writing, we cross into the historical period.
5. These key elements seem to mark all civilizations, but one may also speak of Western civilization or African civilization, or somewhat more narrowly, of Maya or Aztec civilization. The West is unique, but it is not uniquely civilized.
6. Civilization arose about 5,000 years ago. That is a long time. But the earth is about 4 billion years old. People like *us—homo sapiens sapiens—have* been around for some 40,000 years and their ancestors, for about 100,000 years. Human ancestors go back to Africa a million or so years ago. These time spans are humbling!

C. Finally, then, what do we mean by "foundations"?

1. We mean origins, of course, but not just origins because all things grow and change.
2. Durability is important but paradoxical: The oldest institution in the world today is the papacy, but Catholics are just under twenty percent of the world's population. The Athenian polis lasted in its highest manifestation less than a century, but its ideals have fired imaginations for 2,500 years. Few places today live by Roman law, yet Rome's law was the most influential ever conceived.
3. Foundations seem somehow related to revivals: Think of Greek or classical revival architecture. Think of one of the West's great movements: the Renaissance (allegedly a revival of classical antiquity). The Protestant Reformers thought they were reviving primitive Christianity, not creating

something new.

4. Foundations seem to be related to traditions, but these can be both invented and discarded. Those famous and "ancient" Scottish tartans were mostly invented in the eighteenth century; I passed a restaurant the other day with a sign that read, "A Tradition Since 1979."

II. In the following forty-seven lectures, we'll proceed through some 4,500 years. We'll begin in the ancient Near East and end with a Western European world beginning to globalize. What themes will we follow?

A. Without being clumsy determinists, we'll talk of ecology, geography, and climate.

B. Both the visible structures and invisible ideologies supporting them will draw continuous and comparative attention.

C. Although pagan religious beliefs and practices will engage us from time to time, we shall concentrate on the three "Abrahamic" faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

D. We'll ask how people lived, how they earned their livings, what their manners and customs were like, how their families were organized, and how they spent whatever leisure time they had.

E. We will explore key philosophical ideas, always with a view to understanding them in specific historical contexts: Why did those people think those things in those times?

F. We will discuss great works of literature, the ideas they expressed, and the forms in which they were presented. We'll look into their backgrounds, their intended audiences, and their actual audiences right down to today.

G. We'll talk about art and architecture as the most public and visible manifestations of the Western tradition.

H. But alongside these concrete issues, we'll repeatedly tease out perspectives on celebrity versus distinction; values versus virtues; changing understandings of the "good, the true, and the beautiful"; the respective roles of faith and reason; the competing claims of the individual and the community.

III. We will end around AD. 1600, when many of the major features of modernity have come into view and the essential traditions of Western civilization have attained maturity.

A. Two great backward-looking movements—the Renaissance and the Reformation—anchored tradition firmly into the Western worldview.

B. "Christendom" was durably divided into Catholic and Protestant communities and cultures.

C. Interlocking relationships of great-power diplomacy foreshadowed the modern state system.

D. The Scientific Revolution altered the old balance of "science" and "wisdom."

Essential Reading:
Braudel, *History of Civilizations.*
Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel.*

Lecture Two

History Begins at Sumer

Fagan, *Journey from Eden.* Mellaart, *Neolithic of the Near East.*

Questions to Consider:

1. If we were playing a free-association game, what would come most readily to your mind when you heard the words "Western" and "civilization"? (Keep this in mind. I will repeat the question at the end of the course!)

2. How do you think about such large-scale notions as change, continuity, revolution, evolution, and tradition?

Scope: This lecture borrows its title from a famous book by Samuel Noah Kramer. Sumer was a small region in the south of what is now Iraq, and scholars agree that Western civilization arose almost simultaneously there and in Egypt (to which we turn in the next lecture). The small, and initially fiercely independent, city-states of Sumer—such as Ur, Uruk, Eridu, and Lagash—developed similar institutions, including monarchies, aristocratic assemblies, military forces, and temple priesthoods. Mesopotamia (the land "between the rivers" Tigris and Euphrates) had no natural frontiers or barriers, and the area was conquered several times: by the Akkadians (c. 2350 B.C.) and the Babylonians (c. 1775 B.C.). As these conquerors built larger and larger imperial states, they actually absorbed and disseminated Sumerian culture, creating in the process a relatively common cultural foundation for a wide region.

Outline

I. The rise of civilization in Mesopotamia.

Although Mesopotamia is all the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, the earliest traces of civilization appeared in Sumer, in what is now southern Iraq, and possibly, at Tell Hamoukar, in what is now northeastern Syria.

1. The Uruk period (3800—3200 B.C.) was tremendously creative, with the invention of the wheel and plow; the planting of the first orchards (of dates, figs, and olives); and the development of metal casting.
2. Perhaps most significant was writing: cuneiform.
3. People built cities with walls —circuits up to five miles—and buildings of mud brick.
4. The most impressive early buildings were temples: *Zig gurats*. Temple priesthoods dominated society.
5. In the "Dynastic period" (2800—2350 B.C.), fierce competition between cities, and perhaps inside them, too, led to the emergence of local strongmen—lugals'-——who evolved into kings.
6. Kings claimed to be the representatives of the gods and to rule by the favor of the gods. This process introduced *theocratic kingship.*
7. As warfare became more important, large landowners formed a military aristocracy.

B. Mesopotamia is a broad, open plain surrounded by deserts and, beyond the deserts, by mountains.

1. The region has no natural frontiers to ward off migrants or conquerors.
2. Areas beyond Mesopotarnia were inhabited by people of lower cultural development who coveted the comparative riches and security of Mesopotamia.

C. After about 2350 B.C., Sumer was several times overrun by outsiders.

1. Sargon (237 1—2316) conquered Sumer from Akkad to the north, then expanded his holdings, as did his son after him, to the east and west.
2. This first imperial state demanded little of its subjects and, ironically, was itself conquered by Sumerian culture.
3. After Akkadian rule eventually weakened, there was a period of relative independence for Sumerian cities, followed by Babylonian conquest.
4. Hammurabi (1792—1750) was the most famous and powerful of the Babylonians (or Amorites). His law code was influential for centuries. Like the Akkadians before them, the Babylonians adopted and spread Sumerian culture.

II. Essential features of SumerianlMesopotamian culture.

A. Religion: people were *polytheists* and *syncretistic*.

1. Sky gods were generally thought of as male and related to power; earth gods were thought of as female and related to fertility.
2. Individual forces of nature were also invested with divine power: *Animism* is a habit of mind that sees nothing as wholly lifeless.
3. Gods and goddesses differed from humans in supernatural powers and immortality. They were capricious. Religion sought to propitiate them.
4. Religion was pessimistic and fatalistic; it had no ethical dimension at all. This outlook was perhaps related to the geography and politics of the region.
5. Religion served as an impressive attempt to begin to systematize knowledge about the natural world.

B. Law: issued by councils of notables in conjunction with priests and kings.

1.
2.

Law was not abstract and philosophical. Publishing laws in public places established the important principles that all are subject to the law; that the law belongs to all; that law rules, not men.

C. Literature: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was a remarkable achievement.

1. The *Epic* is a Sumerian work dating to around 2500 B.C. that survives in later versions dating to around 800 B.C. (A tribute to its dissemination!)
2. An “epic” is a work on a grand scale dealing with gods and heroes; it is serious in tone, elevated in language, and universalizing in outlook.
3. *Gilgamesh* is a tale of the adventures and friendship of King Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu. It contains a mythical account of the civilizing process and a poignant reflection on mortality as the irreducible element in the human condition.
4. There were other works, too, for example, short poems by Enkheduana, Sargon’s daughter and the world’s first known woman writer.

D. Sciences probably derived from watching the heavens, measuring fields, and regulating irrigation hydraulics.

1. Sumerians developed the decimal and sexadecimal systems (hence, we still have sixty seconds in a minute, sixty minutes in an hour, and so on).
2. Sumerians understood place value in numbers, that is, the difference between 35 and 53.
3. They anticipated Greek developments in mathematics.

ITT. Mesopotamia's legacy.

A. Sumerian culture gradually spread over much of western Asia and directly or indirectly influenced all the peoples who emerged within or who conquered those lands, including the later empire-building Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Turks.

B. Specific Sumerian practices and beliefs were adopted and adapted for millennia.

Essential Reading:

Bottéro, *Ancestor of the West.*

Crawford, *The Sumerians.*

Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer.*

Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East.*

Recommended Reading:

The Epic of Gilgamesh.

Lemer, *Creation of Patriarchy.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What specific examples of the civilizing process that we leamed about in the first lecture have we encountered in this one?
2. What are some of the ways in which Mesopotamia's geography influenced the historical development of the region?

Lecture Three

Egypt: The Gift of the Nile

Scope: Ancient Egypt was a ribbon of territory hugging the banks of the Nile, some 750 miles long but, on average, only five to fifteen miles wide. The need to manage the Nile's life-giving waters led, first, to small political entities all along the river, then to unification. Egyptian pharaohs were richer and more powerful than their contemporary Mesopotamian rulers. They were also reckoned among Egypt's gods. Egypt was relatively isolated and, therefore, peaceful for long periods. The pyramids are a symbol of the peace, prosperity, and unity of early Egypt. Eventually, Egypt experienced both political instability and foreign invasion. When order was reestablished and the attackers overthrown, Egypt built a short-lived empire that spread Egyptian influences into Mesopotamia and vice versa. That empire wore itself out in struggles with the Hittites from Anatolia (modern Turkey). The lecture will also reflect on some of the most important differences between Egyptian and Mesopotamian art and literature.

Outline

The Greek writer Herodotus called Egypt "the Gift of the Nile," and so it was.

A. The Nile is a long, powerful river running in a northerly direction some 750 miles from the last cataract to the Mediterranean. It floods-—annually and predictably—an area five to fifteen miles wide. About five percent of Egypt is habitable. Without the Nile, there would be only barren desert.

B. From as early as 5000 **B.C.,** small communities along the Nile began to drain marshes, irrigate, and plant regular crops (mainly cereal grains).

C. Slowly, these communities coalesced into *nomes* (the word is Greek; we do not know what word the Egyptians used) under *nomarchs.* Then the *nomes* of the south—"Upper Egypt" because it is nearer the source of the Nile—and the north—"Lower Egypt," nearer the mouth of the Nile—formed as larger entities.

D. It seems that a need to control irrigation led to political organization on a larger scale.

E. Much about this period is shrouded in legend, but about 3100 **B.C.,** Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt. This unification ushered in the historical period.

II. The course of Egyptian history.

A. Historians divide Egypt's historical period into thirty-some dynasties, or families, of rulers. The dynasties are grouped into the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, with intermediate periods in between.

B. The Old Kingdom (2695—2160 **B.C.**) was an era of great vitality, security, and prosperity.
1. Egypt was isolated and untroubled by invaders.
2. A distinctive Egyptian kingship evolved. The word *pharaoh* comes from *per aa,* meaning the "Great House." Pharaoh was one of the gods and guaranteed Egypt's prosperity and security. In turn, Egypt's prosperity and security legitimized the pharaoh.
3. The Great Pyramids at Gizeh symbolize the Old Kingdom.

C. The Middle Kingdom (2025—1786 **B.C.**) was a period of more widely dispersed rule.
1. Pharaohs shared power with local notables.
2. This period was important in the elaboration of Egyptian religion because the emphasis moved beyond the royal dynasty to nobles and even ordinary people.

D. Around 1700 **B.C.,** the Hyksos, Semitic-speaking peoples from Palestine, conquered Egypt.

E. Hatred for foreign rule eventually led a dynasty from Upper Egypt to drive out the Hyksos and inaugurate the New Kingdom (1550-1075 **B.C.**).
1. Fired by ambition and a desire to ward off future conquest, the Egyptians now built an empire that extended into Mesopotamia and along the shore of the eastern Mediterranean.
2. This was a brilliant and cosmopolitan period.
3. After about 1400 **B.C.,** the Egyptians confronted the Hittites, a powerful and expanding people from Anatolia and the first IndoEuropean speakers in recorded history. In 1274, at Qadesh in northern Syria, the Egyptians and Hittites fought a battle that left them both crippled and declining.

III. The culture of ancient Egypt.

A. Everything starts with the pharaoh in a two-class society (the pharaoh and everybody else). Egypt first displayed an abstract sense of rule—the separation of ruler and office and the complete removal of the ruler from the ordinary realm of humans.

B. Religion grew more complicated over time.
1. The peace and prosperity of the Old Kingdom led to a happy, optimistic outlook.
2. The concept of the afterlife -as a continuation of this life, not something better!—was reserved mainly to the pharaoh, his family, and perhaps a few key advisers.
3. The Middle Kingdom saw a profusion of temples and new cults. Herodotus called the Egyptian the "most religious of all people." This might have been a reemergence of predynastic religion or a response to unsettled conditions. At this time, the afterlife seems to have been considered available to all.
4. The concept of *Ma'at* became crucial, that is, the idea of truth, justice, balance, and order.
5. The myth of Osiris revealing the Middle Kingdom was popular.
6. The New Kingdom saw the remarkable religious experiment of Akhenaton. He abandoned traditional worship to promote the cult of Aton (henotheism or monolatry), but this died with him.

C. Scientific and artisanal advances were striking.
1. The use of papyrus facilitated writing and record-keeping.
2. Hieroglyphic (= pictographic) writing gave way gradually to demotic, which was more efficient than cuneiform.
3. The desire to preserve bodies intact (mummification) for the afterlife led to advances in medical science, including surgery and knowledge of anatomy.

IV. The legacy of Egypt.

A. Greeks and Romans were impressed, even dazzled, by the Egyptians, as have been most visitors to Egypt since antiquity.

B. Seeing just what influence Egypt actually had, however, is not so easy.
1. Political control lasted a short time.
2. Divinized kingship recurred but not necessarily because of the Egyptians.
3. No new literary forms were added.
4. Monumental architecture as propaganda recurred, but this idea is not "Egyptian."

C. Early Egyptologists were eager to claim the ancient Egyptians for the West.
1. After World War II, as colonial empires crumbled and black consciousness arose, some people claimed that Egypt was an African civilization, indeed, that Egypt was Africa and vice versa.
2. In its most extreme forms, this view has held that Western civilization was stolen from the Egyptians by the Greeks.
3. This view again puts a sharp focus on Egypt but without solid reasons for doing so.

D. Perhaps these historical mysteries explain the mysterious smile of the Sphinx.

Essential Reading:

Murnane, *Penguin Guide to Egypt.*
Strouhal, *Life of the Ancient Egyptians.*

Redford, *Akhenaten.*

Recommended Reading:
Bernal, *Black Athena,* vols. 1 and 2.

Questions to Consider:
1. Explain the impact of geography on the course of Egyptian history.
2. How is Egyptian historical development both like and unlike that of Mesopotamia?

Lecture Four

The Hebrews: Small States and Big Ideas

Scope: In the centuries following the collapse of the Egyptian Empire (c. 1200-700 **B.C.**), a number of important and interesting small states emerged. In the area of what is now Lebanon, the Phoenicians— anticipating the Venetians and Dutch of later times—built a commercial empire in the Mediterranean basin. Historically, the most important of the small states was built by the descendants of the patriarch Abraham. This state enjoyed only a brief period of political independence and unity (roughly 1200-900 **B.C.**) but created and bequeathed to the West a set of foundational religious ideas. Those ideas are transmitted in a vast library of religious writings (the Hebrew Scriptures, called by Christians the Old Testament) and may be summarized under the themes of covenant, a chosen people, ethical monotheism, and exclusive monotheism.

Outline

After the Egyptians and Hittites exhausted themselves, and before other large, powerful states emerged, there was a brief period of importance for some small states and peoples.

A. Sea peoples, most famously the Philistines, attacked along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean after about 1200 **B.C.**

B. The Phoenicians managed to avoid conquest. They were Canaanites who spoke a Semitic language and who had been present in the region of what is today coastal Syria and Lebanon for centuries.
   1. After about 900, they created one of the first great commercial empires the world had seen, anticipating the Athenians, Venetians, and Dutch.
   2. Creating colonies all over the Mediterranean, including at Carthage and Massilia, the Phoenicians played a role in spreading Mesopotamian culture and in beginning the creation of a Mediterranean cultural network.
   3. By 600 **B.C.,** they had almost certainly circumnavigated Africa and, by about 450, they had reached Britain.

C. The other significant people who emerged in this big-power pause were the Hebrews.
   1. Again, much of the Hebrews' history is shrouded in legend. A pastoralist, Abraham, who has been dated between 2000 and 1550 **B.C.,** was the leader of a people who were on the outs with the settled city-dwellers and grain farmers of Sumer.
   2. Abraham and his God made a pact, and Abraham was told to leave Ur for the land of Canaan/Palestine.
   3. For some centuries, Abraham's descendants farmed the land, quarreled among themselves, and tried to ward off enemies.

4. Eventually, they were swept up in the struggles between the Egyptians and Hittites. The familiar story says that the Hebrews were carried off in bondage to Egypt. Some probably were prisoners of war, but others doubtless migrated there voluntarily because the area was more peaceful and prosperous.
5. Moses arose as a leader who forged a people during the Exodus, a long process of departing from Egypt and reentering the "promised land."
6. For a time, the Hebrews lived under numerous independent judges, but the threat of the sea peoples, chiefly the Philistines, induced them to choose kings, first Saul, then David, and Solomon.
7. Under Solomon, the kingdom reached its high point, and considerable commercial wealth flowed in.
8. But a distaste for strong central authority led to a division of the kingdom into Israel in the north, with its capital at Samaria, and Judah in the south, with its capital at Jerusalem.
9. Eventually, these small kingdoms were conquered by more powerful neighbors: Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 and Judah, to the Neo-Babylonians in 586. The Assyrians in particular physically dispersed the Hebrews all over the Near East: the "Exile."

II. Never has a people been so politically insignificant, yet culturally so critical in the history of Western civilization. It is the religion of the Hebrews that has left so deep an imprint.

A. Our knowledge of the beliefs of the Hebrews comes from a collection of writings that in some ways cover the period from about 2000 to 200 **B.C.,** but that were mostly written down after 1000 **B.C.**
1. These writings are properly called the Hebrew Bible, or the Hebrew Scriptures.
2. To Christians, these materials are the Old Testament.

B. The Hebrew Bible consists of three major kinds of materials.
1. The Torah: The first five books, sometimes called the "Books of Moses." The name means "the teaching," and these books contain the prescriptions that governed the life of the Hebrews.
2. The Prophets: This group of books contains both historical books, such as Kings, Samuel, and Chronicles, that reveal God's unfolding relationship with His people, and the more obviously prophetic books of the "Greater Prophets," such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the "Lesser Prophets," such as Amos and Micah.
3. The Writings: This is a catchall designation for the poetic material, such as the Psalms and Canticles, and for the beautiful and moving advice literature, such as Proverbs and Wisdom.

III. The central religious ideas contained in the Hebrew Bible, taken together, constitute the key foundations of Western civilization. These are:

A. The idea of the *covenant.* The covenant was created between Yahweh and Abraham—between God and a tribe-and renewed between Yahweh and Moses —between God and a people. It was redefined by the Prophet Ezra during the Exile—between God and a people adhering to the Torah.
1. The unique notion of reciprocity appears here for the first time.
2. The covenant also embodies the unique notion of a *chosen people:* One God for one people, not a god for a place or a state.

B. The idea of *exclusive monotheism.* This idea has a long evolution, from henotheism, still present in the time of Moses, to monotheism in the time of Isaiah.

1. This occasioned a profound tension between the idea that Yahweh was the only God and the God of the Hebrews, and the possibility of universalism.
2. The idea is seen most vividly in the Book of Jonah.

C. The idea of *ethical monotheism.* The profound sense of social justice that runs through the prophetic books is unprecedented in the previous religious experience of known peoples.
1. God demanded a particular kind of behavior as a guarantee of his continuing benevolence.
2. This idea is seen in the *Decalogue* and *Shema,* in Micah.

IV. The Hebrew legacy.

A. Philosophers and theologians have long acknowledged the importance of monotheism for everything from natural philosophy to political ideology.
B. Numerous peoples in the West have called themselves a "New Israel" as a way of claiming a unique, chosen relationship with providence.

C. Historically, social justice has sometimes been a secular concern, but much more often, one with religious roots.

D. Western literature is unimaginable without its fundamental, formative text: the Bible.

Essential Reading:

Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament.*
Moscati, *World of the Phoenicians.*
Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel.*

Recommended Reading:

The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). From a historical and cultural point of view, read Genesis, Exodus, Kings, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Psalms.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do the religious and ethical ideas of the Hebrews differ from those of the Mesopotamians and Egyptians?
2. Does it seem odd to you that a people who were not politically, militarily, or economically powerful exercised such a potent influence on Western civilization? Can you think of any comparable examples?

Lecture Five

A Succession of Empires

Scope: Following the interlude of small states, the ancient Near East experienced a succession of imperial states. The first of these was created by the cruelly efficient Assyrians who used advanced military practices and state-sponsored terror tactics to cow their subjects into submission. Unsurprisingly, the Assyrians generated more loathing than loyalty. Eventually, a coalition of peoples led by the Medes and NeoBabylonians overthrew the Assyrians around 600 **B.C.** For about a century, the Neo-Babylonians (of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon); the Lydians, whose most famous king was the incredibly wealthy Croesus; the Medes; and even a momentarily resurgent Egypt created large, prosperous imperial realms. In Iran, however, the Medes and Persians fused into one imperial people and soon built the largest empire the world had seen to that time.

Outline

The period of Phoenician and Hebrew independence ended with the rise of the Assyrian Empire.

A. The Assyrians were a Semitic-speaking people who had been important in northern Mesopotamia in the second millennium **B.C.,** then declined, and reemerged around Nineveh in about 900.

B. They began a series of campaigns that carried them to Persia in the East and Egypt in the West. Their success was facilitated by a huge army, iron weapons, and cavalry.

C. In 722, the Assyrians conquered Israel and deported its inhabitants, the Ten Lost Tribes.

B. Their policies were cruel; state terrorism was their normal practice.

E. Even their art glorified fear and destruction.

II. The Assyrians eventually evoked a challenge from a coalition of peoples who were seen as liberators by those whom the Assyrians had conquered.

A. One key group was the Nec-Babylonians.
1. The dynasty of whom Nebuchadnezzar (r. 605—562 **B.C.**) was the most famous built a large realm in Mesopotamia after the fall of the Assyrians.
2. The main achievement of this dynasty was the massive rebuilding of Babylon. The Hanging Gardens were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

B. Minor players were the central Anatolian Lydians.
1. The Lydians' main historical achievement was the invention of coinage around 700 **B.C.**
2. Their most famous king was Croesus, whose wealth—probably because he heaped up coins—was legendary.

C. The greatest members of the anti-Assyrian coalition were the Medes and Persians.

III. The Medes were from the Zagros Mountains, and the Persians were from the Iranian plain. They were ethnically related and spoke similar languages. Until Persian Cyrus (r. 559—530) assumed leadership, the Medes had generally been the dominant partner.

A.

Cyrus began a series of lightning campaigns that were continued by his successors, Cambyses (r. 530-525 **B.C.**) and Darius (r. 521—486 **B.C.**). They built the largest empire the world had yet seen.

B. There were several reasons for Persian success.
1. The Persians had a huge army—up to 300,000 men—with an elite core of 10,000 "Immortals."
2. They practiced brilliant cavalry tactics and were the first to understand the significance of the cavalry.
3. They were tolerant of the customs of local peoples and often left their own people in charge.
4. They were highly skilled at administration. The Persians set up an elaborate administrative network under satraps. They developed

common systems of weights, measures, and coinage; the Persian imperial post; and great roads, including the "Royal Road." They also used the widely known Aramaic language instead of Persian.

C. The chief manifestation of Persian culture was the religion Zoroastriamsm.
   1. Scholars dispute the dates for Zarathustra. He may have lived circa 1000, 750, or 550 B.C.
   2. His teachings are revealed by *gathas* (songs) preserved in the Avesta, the holy scriptures of Zoroastrianism.
   3. Zarathustra taught of a single, benevolent god, Ahura Mazda, who was the creator of all. But he also was much intrigued by the problem of evil.
   4. Zarathustra taught that Ahura Mazda had twin children, one benevolent and one evil. These two played out a great cosmic challenge between good and bad, truth and falsehood, and so on. Human beings are endowed with free will to choose one path or the other.
   5. Zarathustra stressed superiority of the spiritual over the material.
   6. This dualism would recur time and time again in the West, such as among the Manicheans, Bogomils, and Cathars.

IV. The legacy of this imperial age.
   A. The Assyrians and Babylonians left some impressive ruifl~ but not much else.
   B. The Persians left a legacy of civilized rule, ideas about kingship and government, and a profound religious heritage that interacted reciprocally with Judaism and Christianity.

Essential Reading:

Cook, *The Persian Empire.*
Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria.*

Recommended Reading:
The Avesta.

Questions to Consider:
1. Given the example of Assyrian failure, why do you think regimes have continued to believe that they can rule by terror?
2. Can you think of inheritances from Zoroastrianist dualism, for example, in the realms of art or literature?

Lecture Six

Wide-Ruling Agamemnon

Scope: On the island of Crete, the Minoans became fabulously wealthy through trade and created a luxurious and aesthetically precocious lifestyle. Following natural disasters, they were conquered by their mainland neighbors, whom they profoundly influenced. In the southern Balkans, while the Egyptians and Hittites were slugging it out, the Greek world produced the first stirrings of civilization. A number of major centers-were they cities?—such as Pylos, Sparta, and above all, Mycenae, rose to prominence. This was the world of Achilles, Agamemnon and Menelaus, Helen, and Troy. And this world came to an end around 1200 B.C., very near the traditional date for the Trojan War. This lecture will explore how the archaeological record of the period from

about 1500 to 1200 B.C. can be brought into dialogue with the much later Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey.*

Outline

Civilization in the Greek world began on the Mediterranean island of Crete about 2000 B.C.

A. The civilization there has been long called the Minoan, from the mythical King Minos.

B. We do not yet know exactly who these people were. Examples of their writing have been discovered, but the language is unknown. It is not Greek.

C. The massive palace complex at Knossos, which covers 5 acres and has a central courtyard that is 55 meters by 25 meters, provides clues about the Minoans.

1. The size, beauty, and decorations of the complex suggest wealth, leisure, and a developed aesthetic sense.
2. Storehouses and Linear A documents suggest bureaucracy.
3. Artistic motifs and, perhaps, architectural forms suggest contacts with the Near East and Egypt.
4. The complete lack of fortifications suggests that the people were peaceful and nonaggressive.

D. Minoan civilization flourished from 1800 to 1550 B.C.

1. In 1626 B.C., a volcanic eruption on Thera, 70 miles away, caused heavy damage and may have initiated the decline of the Minoans.
2. Much of the island was devastated by conquest circa 1550 B.C. The conquerors almost certainly came from mainland Greece.

II. Civilization took hold slowly in Greece.

A. The land is rocky; the soil, poor; and the climate, especially in the north, harsh.

B. By 6500 B.C., villages showed signs of the Neolithic Revolution.

C. Around 3000 and again around 2300 (or, to some, c. 1700), the Balkans saw impressive migrations.

B. By 2600-2 200, we see the first signs of urban development and the "Mediterranean triad" of crops: cereal grains, grapes, and olives.

E. From about 2000 B.C., we can discern Mycenean civilization—named for the great citadel at Mycenae.

F. Almost certainly, the Myceneans conquered the Minoans. Apparently, they had been learning from, and grew jealous of, the Minoans.

G. The highpoint of Mycenean civilization was from 1400 to 1200 B.C.

III. The sources of our knowledge of the Myceneans are three.

A. Linear B documents found in profusion.

1. These were deciphered by Michael Ventris and others in the early 1950s.
2. They revealed a world of bureaucratic regulation.

B. Archaeology.

1. Impressive remains have been found at several major sites, such as Mycenae, Sparta, Pylos, Corinth, and so on.
2. Large fortified sites with strong defensive works and imposing royal residences suggest strong kingship and military rule.
3. Tomb complexes suggest historical memory and dynastic continuity.

C. Homeric poems, especially the *Iliad,* are the most important sources, but also difficult and controversial.

1. The Homeric poems were put into something like their current shape after 800 and probably around 725 **B.C.,** then written down about 550. How can they tell us much about the period from 1400 to 1200 **B.C.?**
2. After World War II, Milman Parry and Albert Lord studied poetic bards in Yugoslavia and discovered that they could recite up to 500,000 lines of material. Think of Alex Haley and *Roots.* Or of performers today with scripts and lyrics!
3. Therefore, it is legitimate to think that much authentic material was transmitted over a long time to "Homer."
4. The Mycenean elements in the story are the basic and concrete details: na mes of key places and, perhaps, people; some aspects of warfare in the "old" days; a vague sense of the diplomatic structure of the time.
5. The Trojan War (traditional date 1194 **B.C.**) was probably a trade dispute and may have been a Mycenean inheritance from the Minoans.
6. The ethical teachings of the *Iliad* relate more precisely to the period when the poems were put into coherent form, our next subject.

Essential Reading:

Dickinson, *The Aegean Bronze Age.*
Edwards, *Homer.*
Finley, *The World of Odysseus.*

Recommended Reading:

Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey.*
Mien, *Finding the Walls of Troy.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Assess **the impact of geography** on the historical development of the Minoans and Myceneans.

2. What similarities do you detect between the Myceaneans and the peoples of the Near East whom we have encountered?

Lecture Seven

Dark Age and Archaic Greece

Scope: The period after the fall of Mycenae has seemed dark for two reasons. First, there was war and conquest (the so-called Dorian invasions), a dramatic scaling-down of the size of cities, a decline in the population, and a lack of fine artisanal work. Second, the Greeks forgot how to write—the only people known to have done so. This may imply cultural darkness, but it leaves the historian in the dark for a lack of records. Still, it is possible to know a good

deal about this period from its own archaeology and from the Homeric poems, which were composed at the end of the Dark Ages. While the Near East was building empires, Greece was laying the foundations for its classical period. In around 750, Greek cities began to fashion the institutions of the *polis,* the city-state that was the basic political unit of the Greek world. Population pressures, military threats, and social upheavals led some Greek states to conquer or subject their neighbors, while other cities exported their populations to colonies. Greek colonization laid the groundwork for the dissemination of Greek culture all over the Mediterranean basin.

Outline

Greek civilization did not grow to glory in a straight line from the Myceneans.

A. Between 1200 and 1100 B.C., there is evidence for widespread destruction of the major Mycenean sites, some of which—not least Mycenae itself!—were never reinhabited.

B. These invasions were traditionally associated with the Dorians, a people from northern Greece who pushed south and settled primarily in the Peloponnesus with Sparta as their key city. But the Dorians were not alone in disrupting Mycenean Greece; they were alone in being remembered.

C. Introducing the Dorians provides an opportunity to clarify some terms.
1. We speak of Greeks, oddly, because the Romans called them Graeci. The "Greeks" called themselves Hellenes and their land, Hellas.
2. There were four major groupings of Greeks with modest ethnic and linguistic differences: Attic, Ionic, Aeolic, and Doric.

B. The Dorian invasions ushered in a period traditionally called the Dark Ages.
1. This was a time of small, illiterate communities. The Greeks forgot how to write!
2. This period also saw depopulation, de-urbanization, and scant construction.

II. Between 800 and 700 B.C., the Greek world began to show signs of life and energy. Historians speak of the transition to the Archaic period (c. 750— 550).

A. The great achievement of this period was the *polis,* the city-state that was the key Greek political institution. We will take a detailed look at Athens and Sparta in the next lectures. For now, we will look at origins.

B. Dark Age Greece was relatively peaceful, and after about 900, the population began to grow. This gradually produced fierce competition for resources in a poor land.

C. Also around 900 or 800 B.C., the commercial exploits of the Phoenicians were a spur to at least some Greeks. Wealth generated by trade also upset the delicate balance in modest agricultural communities.

D. Beginning in around 750 B.C., various Greek cities displayed one or more of three responses to the tensions of the age.
1. Conquest: Sparta conquered and enslaved their neighbors to the west, the Messenians.
2. Trade: Athens, but also Corinth and other cities, entered into widespread commercial ventures. The Athenians and others may have been emulating the Phoenician example.
3. Colonization: Corinth above all, along with many other Greek cities, exported surplus population to colonies that maintained emotional, political, and economic relations with their "mothercities" (literally, *metropoleis).*

E. Of these processes, the commercial and, especially, the colonial, were of immense historical significance.

1. Greek cities, language, culture, art, architecture, literature, and political institutions were scattered all over the Mediterranean world.
2. But the Greeks learned, too. For example, they got their alphabet from the Phoenicians.

III. The later Dark Ages and the Archaic period give evidence for the emergence of some of the most familiar aspects of Greek culture.

A.

B. Sculpture shows a steady progression that may have owed much to Egyptian styles but that also advanced the Greek quest to explore the particularities of the human condition.

C. A return to Homer's poems also opens up a vista on the values and ideologies of the age and hints at some of that age's changes.

1. Intense competition, both verbal and physical, is portrayed in the poems. Compare the athletic contests.
2. The poems evidence reflections on brains (Nestor) versus brawn (Achilles).
3. The poems address respective obligations of the individual and the community.
4. They examine the nature of authority: kings and great advisers versus the ordinary man.
5. We also see changes in warfare in Homer's poems, from the single combat of the heroes to the *hoplite phalanx* featuring the ordinary soldier.

IV. This formative period, then, brought into view, albeit in embryonic form, many of the features of Greece's "classical" period.

Essential Reading:

Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas.*
Burkert, *Greek Religion.*
Desborough, *The Greek Dark Ages.*
Murray, *Early Greece.*

Questions to Consider:

1. You have learned how the Greeks responded to population pressure and competition. Can you think of examples of how other peoples have handled these challenges?
2. Did anything surprise you in the list of Greek values that you encountered in this lecture? Does anything seem to be missing?

Decorations on pottery are revealing.

1. Geometric designs show rationalism but also a sense of order, balance, and harmony.
2. Figured pottery shows a tendency to abstraction, an attempt to discern behind what is visible to what is really "more" true.

Aesthetic tastes and technical virtuosity are also on display.

Lecture Eight

The Greek Polls: Sparta

Scope: This lecture will explore the peculiar Spartan system of government and social organization. Sparta wanted economic security, albeit not prosperity, social stability, or peace. A semi-legendary figure named Lycurgus gave Sparta a constitution circa 750 B.C. that stayed in place until Rome conquered Greece. The Spartan state was organized as a military camp that demanded the service and loyalty of all males between the ages of eighteen and sixty. Political power and influence were securely in the hands of the oldest, most experienced citizens. The system was designed not to accommodate change but to prevent it. Many Greeks had a grudging admiration for Sparta's stability. Have not people often felt a certain attraction for orderly authoritarian regimes?

Outline

The classical polis (plural: *poleis)* was a political, social, and cultural entity. Over the next several lectures, we will look at it from each of these points of view. First, we address some preliminary considerations.

A.
The physical characteristics of a polis may be expressed by a formula:
asty + *chora* = polis.

1. *Asty* is the Greek word for the city proper, the core of the polis.
2. *Chora* means region or district; in our formula, it refers to the agricultural hinterland around a polis.
3. A polis, therefore, is always an urban core and a rural zone: Athens + Attica = Athenian polis; Sparta + Laconia = Spartan polis.
4. The urban area usually had an *agora* (market area), temples, a building or area where public decisions were reached, and entertainment facilities, such as theaters and stadiums.
5. Some poleis had natural fortifications: *acropolis.*

B. Aristotle believed that people "naturally" lived in poleis. He and his pupils studied more than 100 Greek poleis. The amount of variation from one to another could be considerable. We shall look in detail at only two.

II. Sparta's early development is shrouded in legend. Supposedly, Lycurgus, a mythical law-giver, on the command of the gods, gave Sparta a constitution all at once circa 750 B.C. In fact, the Spartan system emerged piecemeal after the conquest of the Messenians circa 725 B.C.

- **A.** One outstanding feature of the Spartan system was the social classes.
  1. The *homoioi* (equals) were adult male Spartan citizens over the age of eighteen. They had substantial rights of political participation, which was unusual at so early a date.
  2. The *periokoi* (dwellers about) were what we would call "resident aliens." These people were not citizens but enjoyed basic protection. There are many theories about just who they were.
  3. The *helots* (state slaves) were, essentially, the conquered Messemans; the helots belonged to Sparta and not to individual Spartans.
- B. There were two kings, drawn from the same two families, who had veto power over each other. One was usually at home, and one away with the anny.
- C. There were two deliberative councils.
  1. All equals belonged to the assembly. This body could propose laws, wars, or treaties but could not legislate by itself.
  2. Real power was vested in a council consisting of the kings, the *ephors* (whom we will discuss in a moment), and equals over the age of sixty. This

body could ignore or act on suggestions from the assembly of equals.

D. There were five *ephors* (overseers) whose job it was to ensure that any law passed by the council or any verdict passed by a court was in accordance with Spartan tradition. They were always old and wealthy equals.

E. *Krypteia* (secret police) were young men between eighteen and twenty who primarily spied on the helots but also snooped on ordinary equals.

III. The Spartan constitution depended on the social system, the *agoge* (the training, or upbringing).

A. Babies were inspected at birth, and the healthy ones were returned to their parents until age seven.

B. At age seven, boys were enrolled in military brotherhoods to which they belonged the rest of their lives. From seven to eighteen, they underwent rigorous physical and military training. From eighteen to twenty, many served in secret service, then entered a regular army unit until age sixty.

C. Marriage was not companionate; its sole function was the production of more equals.

D. The system aimed to create military excellence, discipline, and loyalty.

E. Spartan life was austere and simple.

1. Spartans believed that book-learning made men effeminate.
2. Spartans used iron money to make hoarding unattractive.

IV. The Spartan system aimed to hold the helots in check (their labor made the life of the equals possible) and to ward off any threat of attack.

A. By about 550, Sparta had formed the Peloponnesian League, which gave it the opportunity to control the constitutions of member states. Sparta tried to prevent democracies and social turmoil.

B. The Spartan system was still in place when Rome conquered Greece in the second century B.C., but there were only a few equals left by then.

C. Contemporaries admired Sparta's strength, simplicity, and stability.

Essential Reading:

Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Would the Spartan constitutional system have functioned without the *ago ge?*
2. Why do you think that authoritarian regimes, like Sparta's, have been so attractive throughout history?

Lecture Nine

The Greek Polls: Athens

Scope: Stable and orderly are not words one would use of Athens! Perhaps, tongue-in-cheek, one could say that the Athenians proceeded in orderly fashion from crisis to crisis. Every generation or two, the Athenians revised their laws and political mechanisms so that more and more adult male citizens could participate in the system. In the process, and for a minority of resident male citizens, the Athenians created one of the most free-wheeling democracies the world has ever seen. This lecture will explore why and how the Athenians, quite in spite of themselves, invented democracy; how that democracy worked; and why it finally failed.

Outline

The great story in Athens is the gradual shift of political power from the *eupatrids* (the well-fathered ones) to the *demos* (the people).

A. With the luxury of hindsight, we can see an orderly process that has, almost, an air of inevitability.

B. That process also seems natural to us because we suppose that others would share our admiration for democracy, that is, for rule *(crateia)* by the people.

C. But ancient writers disliked democracy in general and the democracy of Athens in particular.

D. Athens created democracy accidentally as the city's leaders responded to one crisis after another.

II. In the seventh century B.C., most of the Greek world, except Athens and Sparta, experienced tyranny. This was rule by a strong man who set himself up as the leader of the people. Popular discontent, as we have seen, arose from economic and demographic stresses as the beginning of the Archaic period. We have seen how Sparta escaped tyranny. Now we turn to Athens.

A. Circa 621 B.C., Draco codified the laws of Athens and posted them in the Athenian agora. This code was harsh—[2]'Draconian"——-but it represented a concession to those who opposed the arbitrary rule of the eupatrids. Athens was, in principle, now ruled by laws, not by men.

B. Ordinary Athenian farmers still suffered cycles of boom and bust, and the city was home to more and more rich merchants who had no place in a society dominated by wealthy land-owning eupatrids.

1. In 594, Solon, a eupatrid who had made a fortune in trade, was appointed lawgiver, with wide authority to introduce reforms.
2. Solon was a moderate without personal ambition.
3. He abolished many debts and debt slavery.
4. He changed the basic qualifications for office holding from birth to wealth and distributed offices and the right to vote quite widely according to a sliding scale of wealth.
5. He created a Council of 400 that set the agenda for the assembly of all citizens. (This is just the opposite of Sparta's system.)

C. The next generation saw squabbling among many who felt that Solon had not gone far enough and some who felt that he had gone too far.

1. The lowest classes elevated Peisistratus to a mild tyranny in 560. He and his sons dominated Athens for about forty years.
2. He respected most of Solon's system but did redistribute land.
3. Peisistratus also inaugurated festivals and initiated public building projects, partly to make people loyal to, and proud of, Athens and partly to put them to work.
4. Eventually, the Athenian eupatrids allied themselves with some eupatrids and drove out the Peisistratids. A blueblood named Cleisthenes was given powers to make reforms.

III. From Cleisthenes to Pericles, Athenian democracy came into full force.

A. Because Cleisthenes was disappointed with the eupatrids, he turned to the demos.

1. He created a new Council of 500 based on residence, not birth or tradition. He bound together people of different social and occupational backgrounds.
2. He opened almost all offices to almost all men.
3. He introduced *ostracism.*

B. Themistocles was a popular leader during the Persian Wars. Because many of Athens's sailors were still denied some political rights, he worked to

remedy this situation.

C. Between 461 and 450, Ephialtes and Pericles ended all aristocratic privilege by stripping the eupatrid *Areopagus* of the right of judicial review and by instituting pay for public service.
   2. Not for women; metics~—resident aliens; or slaves, which were increasingly numerous.

C. How was it financed?
   1. By tribute from the Athenian Empire.
   2. By slave labor.

D. Who defended it? Pericles, in his "Funeral Oration."

E. Who criticized it? Almost all ancient writers.
   1. Plato and Aristotle believed that it did not advance the "best" men.
   2. The "Old Oligarch" believed it lacked deference and was too unstable, changeable, and subject to demagoguery.
   3. Historian Thucydides gave examples of folly, cruelty, and perversity.

V. Verdict: The Athenians demonstrated *what* a democracy might be. It remained for others later to show for *whom* a democracy might work.

Essential Reading:

Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants.*
Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy.*
Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens.*
Sealey, *Greek City-States.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you think of examples in U.S. history where the "law of unintended consequences" extracted very different political or institutional results from policies designed with different ends in mind?

2. Think of some of the democratic regimes in the world today and ask yourself how they differ from one another and how well they measure up to an ideal standard of democracy.

IV. Reflections on the Athenian system.

A. How did it work?
   1. The Athenian system encompassed a weak executive; powerful role for the assembly, that is, for participation of ordinary people; and vigorous debate.
   2. There was a danger of *demagogues.*
   3. There was no necessary continuity in policy.

B. For whom did it work?
   1. For Athenian citizens, that is, adult males with two Athenian parents, perhaps ten percent of 400,000 people.

Lecture Ten

Civic Culture: Architecture and Drama

Scope: The Greek poleis, especially Athens, developed unique ways of representing themselves and of carrying on civic discussions. Architecture in the Greek world was practical, as it is in all times and places, and put lots of people to work. It added almost indescribable beauty to urban spaces. But certain characteristics of Greek architecture will permit us to see it as an ideological expression of the polis. One key building in many cities was a theatre. Greek drama, and comedy, too—we'll talk about the technical differences between these genres -were public arts *par excellence.* Indeed, Athens provided free admission. The plays are masterpieces of the poetic art and beautifully crafted stories. They have a timeless quality. But the plays often addressed controversial contemporary problems. This lecture will look at some plays as both works of art and as windows into the political life of Athens. In this lecture, as in the several that follow, we shall explore the durable contributions of the Greeks to the Western tradition in the areas of aesthetics, literary conventions, and philosophical outlooks.

Outline

No art form is so public and communal as architecture.

A. We know that at least some temples already existed by about 725 **B.C.** because Homer mentions them.

B. In the Dark Ages and Archaic period, Greeks no longer built palaces as in the Mycenean period. Architecture was increasingly civic.

C. Colonies usually built buildings that mirrored the ones of the metropolis.

D. Peisistratus, as noted, initiated a building program in Athens.

E. In the Persian Wars (490—478 **B.C.**), Athens was sacked and burned, and her public buildings were left in ruins. The restoration of peace and the revenues from the Imperial Tribute permitted rebuilding on a grand scale.

II. We may take the Parthenon in Athens as the finest example of a Greek building and as an example that teaches us a great deal about the people who built it.

A. The Parthenon was built between 447/446 and 438 **B.C.,** with its sculptures finished in 432.

B. The chief architects were Ictinus and Callicrates; the main sculptor was Pheidias.

C. To appreciate the Parthenon, let's consider the basic elements of a Greek building.

1. The key elements of a floor plan were: stylobate with colonnade or peristyle; interior chambers; passageways.
2. The key vertical elements were: stereobate and stylobate; column (shaft and capital); entablature (architrave and metope).
3. Note, too, the Doric and Ionic orders. These were the most common in ancient Greece. The Greeks knew the Corinthian, with its Acanthus-leaf capitals, but it was the Romans who popularized this order.

D. The building was in almost perfect condition until 1687 when a Venetian shell hit it. Fortunately, there were 1674 drawings of the sculptures *in situ.* Many of the best sculptures—the "Elgin Marbles"—are in the British Museum and a bone of contention.

E. The building is more than 100 feet long with eight columns across the front, instead of the usual six, and seventeen columns on each side, instead of the usual twelve to fifteen. The floors all curve outward to the corners; the columns lean in slightly. The building is huge but elegant and graceful.

F. The Parthenon has three great sculptural programs.

1. Pediments (triangular ends) show the birth of Athena and the battle between Athena and Poseidon for control of Athens.
2. Metopes have scenes of battle, both historical (Greek and Trojan) and mythical (Lapiths and Centaurs, Greeks and Amazons).
3. The continuous frieze around the celia depicts— probably—aspects of the Panathenaic Festival.

G. The building was meant to make several points to and about Athenians.

1. Its immense size was meant to be impressive.
2. The cost of the building was to make Athenians proud and to make them accept the empire.
3. The "Historical" (including the mythical) sculptures put Athens's long and proud history on display for all to see, embrace, and cherish.
4. The unusual secular scene of the Panathenaia held up a mirror to the Athenians themselves.

III. In Athens, the other great public art was drama, performed in impressive open-air theaters. Citizens got free tickets.

A. The origins of the word *tragedy,* which means "goat song," are remote and go back to wild celebrations in honor of Dionysus (called Bacchus by the Romans; think of a "bacchanal").

B. In tradition, Thespis (hence, "thespian") performed the first dramatic tragedy in Athens in around 530 **B.C.**

C. The oldest surviving play dates from about 470. We know the titles of more than 100 plays, but fewer than two dozen survive intact and all are by three playwrights: Aeschylus (525—456 **B.C.**), Sophocles (c. 496—406 **B.C.**), and Euripides (485—406 **B.C.**).

D. For Aristotle, whose *Poetics* is the world's first work of literary criticism, tragedy was a kind of poetry that was serious; written in beautiful language; dramatic, not narrative, in form; arousing fear and pity that purify the emotions. In sum, a tragedy is an elegant story of an admirable person struggling nobly against insuperable odds.

E. Aeschylus wrote trilogies, one of which, the *Oresteia,* survives. It is an account of the fall of the house of Agamemnon and becomes a parable for the origins of justice.

1. The trilogy was performed in 458, just when the Areopagus was stripped of its last powers in Athens.
2. Aeschylus also wrote *The Persians,* the only play about a contemporary theme.

Essential Reading:

Beye, *Ancient Greek Literature.*

Biers, *The Archaeology of Greece.*

Boardman, *Greek Art.*

Recommended Reading:

Plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, or Aristophanes.

Questions to **Consider:**

1. What are the most prominent public arts today and how do they work in our society?
2. Is your view of, or appreciation for, art affected by knowing that it was often the result of intense contemporary preoccupations of a nonartistic type?

F. Sophocles abandoned the trilogy. His plays explored justice and principle and the consequences of right action *(Antigone)* and of just punishments for unintentional acts *(Oedipus Rex).* He reflected and participated in the deep philosophical debates of his day.

G. Euripides was unconventional in all ways. He adapted dramatic forms (for example, choruses were less important) and looked at the power of emotions-love, jealousy, and revenge. His plays show the disillusionment of Athens as the Pelopormesian War dragged to a sorry end.

all drama was tragic. There was also comedy.

Tragedy was set in the remote past amongst mythical characters, even though it often commented in pointed ways on current affairs.

B. Comedy was set in the present and satirized, sometimes even ridiculed, prominent contemporaries.

C. Comedy could be vulgar, but it still had a certain elegance and grace.

D. The most famous ancient comedian, and the only one whose plays survive, is Aristophanes (455—385 **B.C.).**

1. *Lysistrata* is a famous anti-war play. In it, the women of Athens stage a sex-strike to end the war. In fact, there are serious themes and social commentary running through the play.
2. *Clouds* pokes fun at currently popular philosophers and scoops up Socrates, unfairly, into the criticism.

V. Public arts, then, provide us with three insights: the pride of Athens; the technical mastery of Athenian craftsmen; and the remarkably open way in which ideas were aired.

IV. Not

A.

Lecture Eleven

The Birth of History

Scope: The Greeks did not invent historical-mindedness, but they did invent history. This lecture will concentrate on Herodotus and Thucydides. Herodotus was the "father of history," the inventor of the art and craft of history. He was one part storyteller, one part researcher, and one part cunning interpreter. He chronicled the Persian Wars. Thucydides is sometimes called the "father of scientific history." The point is to suggest that he brought to research and reportage a coolly analytical bent of mind. He wrote of the Peloponnesian War, the great struggle between Athens and Sparta.

Outline

What is history? Voltaire said that it was lies the living told about the dead.
Henry Ford said it was "bunk." The Greeks invented it. What did they think
it was?

A. Greeks did not invent historical mindedness. This we see among Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and vividly, among the Hebrews.

B. For the Hebrews, history was a way of revealing the unfolding relationship between God and his chosen people. In a richly paradoxical sense, history was also prophetic for the Hebrews: The past pointed to the future. That was true for the Greeks also but without the religious component.

C. The Greeks invented history as a specific literary art.

D. But Aristotle, who knew a bit about literary art, said that poets would never lie, but historians usually did. He meant, basically, that poets capture real motivations, while historians haggle over mere details.

E. The greatest Greek historians wrote down many details, but they also developed large themes about human life and conduct, themes that they believed to be universally valid. The Greek histories, thus, have an
uality about them.
epic q

II. Herodotus (c. 485—425 B.C.) is the "father of history." He wrote a long, highly entertaining account of the Persian Wars, which he saw as the watershed moment in Greek history.

A. Born in Ioma of a good family, Herodotus was widely read (he quotes Homer and Hesiod) and voraciously curious.

B. He traveled all over the Greek world, to Egypt, through central Mesopotamia, and in the northern Balkans. He constantly interviewed people. He placed primary reliance on "what he had seen with his own eyes," but he also collated "what he had heard."

C. Why did he write? He was fascinated by how the Greeks were able to defeat the Persians. To get an answer, he decided that he needed to know all he could about the Persians, about the lands conquered by the Persians, and about how, exactly, the war had begun.

1. For Herodotus, *historiai* meant "researches" or "investigations."
2. He took something of a dramatist's view of his task. There were underlying causes for historical events but also immediate triggers.
3. In the case of the Persian Wars, Herodotus believed that the attack by Croesus of Lydia on the Persians was the proximate cause because it brought the Persians into Anatolia, then into Ionia.
4. But the longer term or underlying cause was the arrogance of great states coupled with a certain inevitability in the clash between East and West, the struggle between slaves and free men, as he saw it.

III. Thucydides (460/555—c. 400 B.C.) knew and admired the work of Herodotus (he even borrowed from it), but he put the writing of history on a new path.

A. He wrote of the Peloponnesian Wars. This was the great contest between Athens and Sparta, between the Peloponnesian League and the Athenian Empire, which lasted from 432 to 401 B.C. but had begun brewing in the 450s. His account stops abruptly in 411.

B. Although Thucydides's work is incomplete and unrevised, enough survives to reveal his working methods and his overall views and intentions.

1. He viewed the causes as Sparta's inordinate fear of Athens, stirred up by some of Sparta's allies.
2. He is cautious about Athens's rise to greatness but thinks the glory of the Periclean age was worth the cost of empire and the danger of war. Pericles's "Funeral Oration" is Thucydides's great statement about Athens.
3. Yet war itself can cause a society such stress as to make its savage character emerge, to change the quality and character of its leaders. His account of the Mitylene affair reveals his thinking.

C. Thucydides was subject to many influences of his time.

1. Like Herodotus, he was influenced by the dramatists, even down to his use of archaic poetic language.
2. The medical writers taught him something about the etiology, progress, and diagnosis of political and social problems.
3. Sophists (more about them in the next lecture) taught him about rhetoric, the power of language to influence people, and about the problems surrounding ideas of absolute truth and justice. The Melian Dialogue is his famous treatment of this theme.

IV. Xenophon (428/427—354 B.C.) carried on the *History* of Thucydides and wrote independent works.

V. Historical writing has been a key feature of Western culture since the Greeks.

A. Partly to preserve accounts of great deeds.

B. Partly to teach one's own generation "lessons."

C. Partly to fashion and shape how later generations will see things.

Essential Reading:
Anderson, *Xenophon.*
Connor, *Thucydides.*
Gould, *Herodotus.*

Recommended Reading:
Herodotus
Thucydides
Xenophon

Questions to Consider:

1. Do the essential criteria that the Greek historians set for themselves measure up to what you think a historian does or ought to do?

2. Are you tempted to read one of the Greek historians? Which one?

Lecture Twelve

From Greek Religion to Socratic Philosophy

Scope: This lecture will start with what the Greeks meant by religion and how they began moving from a "religious" to a "philosophical" view of the world. We'll also ask just what philosophy is and who was present at its creation. The lecture will talk of the pre-Socratic philosophers and their attempts to understand physical reality, human cognition, and the problems of communication. Then we will turn to the Sophists and their smart but easy answers to all kinds of questions. We'll conclude with Socrates's condemnation of sophistry.

Outline

The Greeks invented philosophy as a particular, formal intellectual discipline. *Philosophy* is a Greek work, as is *philosopher* (it appeared about 400 **B.C.).**

A. Conventionally, the history of Greek philosophy is divided at the person of Socrates (469—399 **B.C.).** In this lecture, we will consider the pre Socratics.

B. The Greeks were not the first to marvel at the world around them or to accumulate large amounts of practical information.

C. People asked why everything, or anything, exists. Early Greek poets had done this and had provided "cosmological" answers.
   1. On reflection, it was seen that all peoples attributed the coming-into-being of the world to various religious beings.
   2. Their answers were contradictory and conflicted with experience.

D. People also asked how things worked. This might lead to an inquiry into first principles or might remain at the level of "applied" knowledge.

E. The Greeks began to inquire into the nature of things that exist all around us and into the processes whereby they had come into being and by which

they changed. Consider, for example, a seed that is planted, grows, bears fruit, dies, withers, and decays. What is going on here?

F. The Greeks also saw that explanations about how the world "out there" worked demanded some hard thinking about the process of knowing and the means of communicating knowledge.

G. Three questions may be said to lie at the base of Greek, and subsequent philosophy:

1. What is the world made of?
2. Howcanweknow?
3. What should we do?

II. The quest for wisdom, according to Aristotle, and to most modern commentators, began in Ionia. This was a land open to Persia and, through the Persians, to Mesopotamian knowledge. The people there were familiar, too, with the Greek world and literature.

A. Around 600 **B.C.,** Thales of Miletus began to think about what exists and how it came into being. He decided on water as a primordial element. It is not clear if he thought that everything started as water and turned into other things or if everything we can see is somehow composed of water.

B. Some of Thales's successors posed other "materialist" answers to the question "What is the world made of?"

1. Earth, air, fire, and water.
2. Fire.

C. Parmenides (fl. c. 450) said that being is one, motionless, uniform, and eternal.

1. In this view, change was illusory, which was a response to Heraclitus's idea that change was itself, so to speak, the one immutable thing.
2. But Anaxagoras responded that the mind was critical. Things existed to the degree, and only to the degree, that they were perceived.

D. By the middle of the fifth century **B.C.,** Greek thinking on being had been put on the path it would follow thereafter.

III. As thinkers reflected on being, they began to turn to the problem of knowledge.

A. We may capture this issue with four questions:

1. What does it mean to know?
2. Can we really know anything?
3. What means are available to us for knowing?
4. How is the world constituted, and how am I constituted so that I can know something about the world?

B. Initially, knowledge was equated with what I have seen, what I have experienced myself. (Think of Herodotus and his eyewitness reporting or of the diagnostics of the medical writers.)

C. Soon, this extended to the other senses (hearing, smelling, tasting, touching).

D. But sense perception as a basis for knowledge evoked severe criticism.

1. Senses are unreliable to the extent that they are subjective.
2. There is the problem of hearsay, or second-hand knowledge: I know something because you have told me.

E. With the critique of senses came a critique of language: Is language capable of capturing and communicating reality?

F. One way out of the impasse was offered by Pythagoras (fl. late sixth century).
   1. Pythagoras formed a mystical brotherhood in southern Italy. His philosophy was based on the idea that wisdom came only from a life wholly dedicated to intense thought.
   2. Pythagoras somehow came upon the mathematical relationships between the musical intervals (and, perhaps, the Pythagorean theorem, too, although one of his disciples may have discovered this).
   3. This suggested—like Anaxagoras's concept of mind—4hat material answers were insufficient and that human reason might discover and reliably communicate law-like propositions that pertained to reality, to the world as it actually is.

IV. After some Greeks had spent a century and a half of thinking about reality and knowledge, the Sophists turned to the practical matters of ethics: How should we behave?

A. Sophists and sophistry have a bad name, not without some justification.

B. Sophists were wandering teachers who for a fee—sometimes an exorbitant fee-would teach people the artful use of language.
   1. This was important in Athenian assemblies and law courts.
   2. This art was so much taken for granted that Thucydides larded his *History* with speeches.
   3. Aristophanes pilloried the Sophists in his comedies.

C. Sophistic ethics were based on a few fundamental propositions.
   1. A distinction was made between *nomos* (law, convention) and *physis* (nature, the natural order of things).
   2. The Sophists held that because society's rules were not eternal, not imprescriptibly right, not universal, they were matters of convention, and people could change them if they wished or flaunt them if they could.
   3. "Man is the measure of all things," said Protagoras.
   4. The aim is to prevail, not to be "right."

D. Gorgias posed the hermeneutic paradox: "Nothing exists; if anything existed, I could not know about it; even if I could know about it, I could not communicate my knowledge.

V. At this juncture, Socrates appeared, desiring to vindicate reality, knowledge, and absolute truth.

A. But the Sophists had left their mark indelibly, as in Thucydides, Sophocles, and Euripides (and Aristophanes, as noted).

B. In 399, when Socrates was put to death, the future of the now 200-year-old Greek philosophical heritage was an open question.

Essential Reading:

Brunschwig and Lloyd, *Greek Thought,* pp. 3—93.

Irwin, *Classical Thought.*

Lloyd, *Early Greek Science.*

Questions to Consider:

1. If you hear the word *philosophy* what comes to mind?

2. Do any of the key aspects of pre-Socratic philosophy seem useful to you today?

Timeline

10,000-2500 **B.C.**	Neolithic Era
3500-3000	Emergence of civilization in Mesopotamia and Egypt
	Development of cities and writing
3000-2000	Consolidation of political power in Sumer; Old Kingdom in Egypt
	Conquest of Sumer by Akkadians
2000-1500	Egyptian Middle Kingdom
	Rise of the Hittites
	Highpoint of Minoan civilization on Crete
1500- 1000	Egyptian New Kingdom
	Egypt's wars with Hittites
	Mycenean conquest of Minoans
	Trojan Wars
	Exodus of Hebrews from Egypt
	Invasions of Palestine by "sea peoples"
1000-500	Highpoint, division, destruction of Hebrew kingdoms
	Creation of Phoenician trading networks and colonies
	Rise and fall of Assyria
	Rise and fall of Neo-Babyloman kingdom
	Emergence of Persia

Greek Dark Ages, Archaic period

Homer, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
Greek colonization
Emergence of the polis
Founding of Rome

500-350 Classical age of Greece

Persian and Peloponnesian Wars

Highpoint of Athenian drama and comedy with

Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes

Sophists, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle

Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon

Parthenon

Spread of Roman influence in central Italy

350—3 1 Hellenistic Era

Campaigns of Alexander the Great, 336-323

Antigonid, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic successor kingdoms to Alexander

Cultural achievements of Alexandrian science:
Archimedes, Eratosthenes
Stoicism and Epicureanism Rome's rise to prominence
Creation of republican institutions
Conquest of western Mediterranean, 264—146
Conquest of eastern Mediterranean, 197—31
Early Roman writers: Cato, Catullus, Cicero

Pax Romana and the Augustan principate End of Rome's civil wars and creation of the imperial regime
Empire reached greatest extent "Golden" and "Silver" ages of Latin literature Virgil, *The Aeneid;* Livy and Tacitus in history; Ovid and Horace in verse
Life and ministry of Jesus Christ

Missionary work of original apostles and St. Paul
Emergence of a Christian church
First persecutions of Christians by the Roman state

180-284 The crisis of the third century
Civil wars and succession crises
Barbarian incursions along frontiers
Rampant inflation
Systematic persecution of Christianity

284—600 The world of late antiquity
Reigns of Diocletian and Constantine, 284-337
Creation of "tetrarchy," division of empire
Fiscal and administrative reforms
Imperial regime embraces Christianity
Constantine grants toleration, 314
Theodosius makes Roman Catholicism state religion, 378—380
Western provinces of empire turn into Germanic kingdoms
Roman Catholic Church elaborates its institutions
Popes emerge as key leaders under Leo (440— 461) and Gelasius (492—496)
Bishops become key figures in towns
Rise of Christian monasticism in Egypt
Spread of monasticism east (St. Basil) and west (Honoratus and Benedict)
Church fathers, or Patristic Age
Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, and others define essential teachings Christian culture becomes dominant

600-900 The early Middle Ages
The career of Muhammad and the rise of Islam
Muhammad (570-632) teaches a new faith
Followers build vast "caliphate" in less than a century
Center moves from Mecca to Damascus to Baghdad
Brilliant work of assimilating Greek philosophical and scientific heritage
Admixture of Arabic, Indic, and Persian cultural elements
The rise of the Byzantine Empire and Orthodox

Christianity

Imperial regime focused more and more on the east—Anatolia and Balkans

New administrative arrangements—theme system marked a departure from Roman traditions

Greek culture emphasized; Latin slowly abandoned

Distinctive religious practices mark Orthodoxy as a distinct Christian tradition

Efforts to assimilate ancient Greek philosophical and literary culture

Germanic kingdoms in the West culminated in empire of Charlemagne

Early kingdoms failed: Vandals, Ostrogoths, Visigoths

Franks conquered Burgundians and Lombards

Fate of Europe left to Anglo-Saxons and Franks

Broad area of Christian culture and common institutional characteristics led to idea of "Christendom"

900-1300 Europe's medieval highpoint

Tremendous expansion

Demographic growth, expansion of agriculture and trade

New kingdoms in Celtic world, Scandinavia, and Slavic world

Spanish Reconquista

Aggressive expansion in Crusades

31 **B.C.—A.D.** 180

Political consolidation in England, France, Spain, and Italian towns

Disunity in Germany

Highpoint of power and influence of papacy and Roman Church

Age of cathedral schools, followed by universities

Time of scholasticism and Thomas Aquinas

Brilliant vernacular culture in *Beowulf, Song of Roland, Romances, Divine Comedy*

1300-1500 The late Middle Ages Political crises

The Hundred Ye ars War between France and
England, 1336-1453
The Golden Bull in Germany
Consolidation of Milan, Florence, and Venice in
Italy
Peasants' revolts in France and England; urban
revolts in Flanders and Italy Ecclesiastical crises
The "Babylonian captivity" of the papacy
The challenge of "conciliarism"
The Great Schism Demographic crises
Bad weather and poor harvests, 1311—1322
The Black Death, 1347—1349
Recurring Plague

1300—1550 The Renaissance
Individual figures, such as Bocaccio and Petrarch The Florentine hegemony with Coluccio Salutati and the Medici
The rise of humanism and courtly culture New attitudes toward classical Greek and Roman literature and life
The spread of printing and more rapid dissemination of ideas
Tendency for scholars to travel more Beginnings of European exploration and expansion

1400-1600 Religious Reformations
Shifts in late medieval piety; rise of anti-clericalism;
sharp criticism of abuses in Catholic Church
Christian humanists, such as Erasmus and Thomas
More proposed broad program of reforms
John Wylcif and John Hus challenged theology of
Catholic Church
"Magisterial" reformers—Martin Luther and John
Calvin—created new Christian traditions that were
durable
Based on "faith alone, grace alone, scripture
alone," not on the "works" of medieval
Catholicism
There were sharp differences among the
reformers
Catholic Church also began reforming in late fifteenth
century
New schools and universities, along with new
religious orders, deepened sense of religious
responsibilities

Council of Trent (1545—1563) a watershed for the Catholic Church
By the 1560s, Europe was “confessionalized”
Large areas embraced different forms of Christianity
A fragile tolerance was achieved

1600 The Prospect
Europe was still Christian but badly divided
The “great power” politics and diplomacy that have dominated the modern world emerged for the first time
Growth of overseas empires was globalizing Western civilization
The dawn of modern science was challenging traditional information and ways of knowing

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Recommended

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