



Ancient History: Instructor's Syllabus

A VRC Curriculum Syllabus



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A **Verification and Renewal Curriculum (VRC)** Syllabus

Written by John Ropoulous and Ayesha Darab, with VRC Editorial Team Justin Poe, Ibrahim Qureshi, and Aaron Spevack

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Introduction & Purpose

The general purpose of the Ancient History course is to give a broad overview of ancient civilizations and ancient seminal texts that shaped the cultures and worldviews of ancient peoples. This is so students can gain an appreciation of the various manifestations of human experience and culture. Specifically, it is meant to prepare students for the study of Prophetic Biography situated in its historical context since Islam was not revealed within a historical void. Students will develop a narrative of historical events that not only predate the Prophet Muhammad's life ﷺ but were also influential in shaping the conditions in which revelation appeared.

By way of the first aim, students will be introduced to historical epistemology, archaeology, historiography, and seminal ancient texts. They will develop an understanding of the origins of “civilization” including its material preconditions. This includes examining historical civilizations and their interaction with one another. Geographically, the course begins with the civilizations that appeared in various river valleys of the world. It then focuses on Mesopotamia, the Levant, Anatolia, Egypt, and India, followed by the Mediterranean, North and East Africa, and Arabia. All of these were causally linked to the late antique world in which Islam was born. After studying these regions, students will spend several weeks examining the civilizations of East Asia and the Americas.

Preparation for studying the *sīra* of the Messenger ﷺ provides the main formal structure for this course. It is based on the historical fact that at the birth of Islam, there were three major world powers on the fringes of Arabia: the Roman (Byzantine) Empire, the Sasanian Empire, and the Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum. The Byzantine Empire was an admixture of Greco-Roman and Orthodox Christian elements that it had inherited from the Mediterranean and the Levant; the Sasanian Empire was the last pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian, Persian empire, which had developed from the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Iranian Plateau with some influence from the Hellenic Successor Kingdoms of Alexander the Great; and the Kingdom of Aksum was a Coptic Christian, East African power that was the middleman between Rome and India, and that had just conquered the Jewish Himyarite Kingdom of Yemen. It behooves the student of *sīra* to understand the cultural and civilizational origins of these various empires and kingdoms in order to understand the historical context of 6th century Arabia. It provides a deeper understanding and richer experience of the uniqueness of the message of Islam. Additionally, by

studying ancient civilizations such as those of ancient Egypt and Israel, students learn about the historical context to some of the stories referenced in the Qur'an.

The course will also equip students with the basics of historical geography that includes locations of historical civilizations, important natural barriers, and material resources. It will introduce students to the basics of geopolitics (i.e., how geography influences political decisions of political entities) and the movements of peoples and cultures, whether peaceful or violent, that lead to large scale civilizational shifts.

Course Objectives

- 1) The ability to read and understand primary texts.
- 2) To develop a conception and appreciation for history and historiography
- 3) To understand the rise and fall of ancient civilizations and cultures.
- 4) To develop an appreciation for the variety of human experience.
- 5) To understand the causal factors of geography, culture, and power.
- 6) To learn how to hold a respectful, intellectual conversation with peers.
- 7) To be able to listen well.

Use of Seminal Texts

In tandem with a standard academic work on ancient civilizations, the general outline below lists choices for seminal ancient texts from the various civilizations studied. These texts played important roles in the civilizations that they were composed in and are mostly mythic, historical, legal, and religious. By reading these texts, students are exposed to the thoughts and ideas found in these ancient civilizations. They also provide a respite from dry descriptive history. Many of them are full of ethical themes and stories that stand to bring benefit to the students who read them as they brought benefit to the peoples for whom they were written. Some are still read by the descendants of their respective cultures and civilizations today. Thus, a student studying them can garner some insight into the contemporary world that is ever shaped by historical texts that stand the test of time.

Potential Texts

Primary Seminal Texts/Readings

- *Histories* by Herodotus
- *The Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides
- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*

Secondary Texts/Readings

- *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* by Chris Scarre
- *Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Civilizations*
- *History of the Ancient World* by Susan Wise Bower

Themes & Big Questions

Many of the seminal texts deal with major themes of human experience. As teachers prepare their lessons and readings, they should look for these themes and make them important features of their lectures and classroom discussions. Some examples are provided.

History

- What is history?
- Why do humans transmit and value history?
- Can myth be history?
- Can we understand a people through their history?
- Is it true that history is written by the “victors”?
- What is “honest” or “true” history?
- How can the history of language be used as a tool to understand history generally?

Example: Herodotus declares that he writes his history to record the remarkable deeds of both Greeks and non-Greeks.

Happiness and Character

- What is a good life?
- What is good character?
- Does good character determine a good life?
- What makes a person happy?
- How can we determine that an individual is happy?

Example: See the story of Croesus and Solon in Herodotus’ *Histories* Book 1.

Heroes vs. Prophets

- What is a hero? What is a prophet? How are they different?
- How do civilizations based on heroic epics differ from those based on prophetic revelation?

Example: Compare the ancient Mesopotamian civilization’s religions and epics with those of ancient Israel and Islam.

Ruled and their Rulers

- What does it mean to rule?
- Does a society need rulers?
- What is the relationship between ruled and rulers?
- How does that relationship manifest?
- What are political institutions and how are they inherited?
- What is a good leader? What are his/her characteristics?

Example: See the tyranny of Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*; the just rulership of David and Solomon, *Kings 1 and 2*; the political institutions of Ancient Athens; the rulership of Ashoka.

Societal Changes and Upheavals

- When do major societal changes take place?
- How is war a major cause of societal change?
- What is a revolution?
- What leads to changes in the ruling class?
- Do we need political hierarchies?
- How do civilizations fall?
- How do aspects of them continue from the ancient world to the present?

Example: See the collapse of the Bronze Age; the Corcyrean revolution in Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*; the Persian overthrow of the Medes; the influence of Greek culture on a majority of the world in Hellenistic times; the spread of Chinese culture to the rest of East Asia.

Culture and Custom

- What is culture?
- Is custom the dominating force in civilization? Are humans products of their culture?
- How do cultures develop?
- Are cultures "inherited"?
- What changes a culture?
- Are institutions a part of culture?
- Is religion "cultural" or are only non-prophetic religions "cultural"?

Example: Herodotus lists the customs of most peoples in West Asia, Eastern Europe, and North Africa; Rome adopted Greek culture; many peoples and nations imitated Chinese culture.

Religion

- How do we explain the proliferation of varied religious experience?
- What are the differences between paganism and monotheism?
- How did religions change throughout the ancient world?
- How do religions shape civilizations?

Example: The monotheism of the Jews distinguished them from their neighbors; Greek culture was influenced by hero-worship and the articulation of their deities; Rome was forever changed with the adoption of Christianity; consider the spread of the Indo-Iranian “Aryans.”

Geography and Geopolitics

- How does geography impact civilization?
- How do rivers, deserts, mountains, lakes, and seas provide natural borders for empires and other polities?
- How does climate affect peoples?
- How can geography be advantageous or disadvantageous to societies?
- How can geography determine political and military decisions?
- How did the Eurasian steppe influence the rise and fall of civilizations with its corridors into Europe, West Asia, and the subcontinent?
- Was there an “East” and a “West” in the ancient world?

Example: See the Yamnaya nomads; Greece’s victory against the Persians in the Persian wars; the lack of cultural influence between India and China (except Buddhism, notably); Rome’s expansion around the Mediterranean; early civilizations developed in fertile river valleys.

General Outline

How to use the General Outline:

The general outline for the course is a flexible tool for teachers and parents. It provides a guide through ancient history, ordering the civilizations based on importance for reading the *sīra*, and understanding how the past affects the present.

There are fourteen “lessons” in outline form provided. Suggestions for the number of sessions per lesson are given next to the lesson title. After the title is a “Reading” section that lists what chapters from *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* correspond with the lesson. This recent academic history provides the core secondary source for the course, though some lessons do not have selections from it. Then are listed other secondary sources and primary texts from the specific region of the lesson. Students can read selections of these texts or their entirety. Some of the more pertinent selections have been listed.

Next are given suggestions for topics and themes of lectures and discussions, as well as ideas for how to divide the sessions. Following this is a list of potential discussion questions. These are only examples; the readings themselves and students' conversations should be the source of the discussion questions.

The outline is flexible in that instructors can reduce the number of sessions per lesson, read selections from primary texts rather than their entirety, or leave out entire lessons altogether. These decisions should be based on the allotted time and session numbers for the course.

Lesson 1 - Introduction to History (1-2 sessions)

Lecture on history, historiography, and epistemology of history. Gives a broad overview of the development of history and major schools of thought. Includes introduction to the basics of archaeology, influence of DNA on the history of ancient peoples, historical linguistics (especially history of Indo-European and Semitic languages), and mass transmitted reports. A brief discussion on the relativity of historical time, such as using BC and AD vs. BCE and CE, the Islamic calendar, or how various empires determined their calendars may be done at this point. Historical periods such as the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Ancient, Medieval, etc. are also important to mention.

Class Discussion Questions

- What is the difference between history and historiography?
- What is a “historical fact”? And how do you know that they are true?
- What were and are the major schools of historiography?
- What are the fundamentals of archaeology?
- How does the Qur’an differ from other “historical documents”?
- How can we understand historical peoples and civilizations through the diffusion of languages?
- Does how we choose to measure time affect our conception of history?
- How did disease contribute to the history of ancient peoples?

Lesson 2 - Civilizations (1-2 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre’s *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part 1 Chapter 1: The Study of Civilization
- Selections from Ibn Khaldūn’s *al-Muqaddima*

Discuss Chris Scarre’s definition of “civilization” vs. Ibn Khaldūn’s conception of *al-‘umrān* (society/civilization). Instructor can also give a brief lecture on Ibn Khaldūn’s science of *al-‘umrān* (society/civilization) and its important features related to civilizations/societies. Material preconditions for civilizations should be mentioned, as well as how culture often determines how we delineate specific civilizations. Time should be spent distinguishing between

nomadic and urban peoples, especially the influence of nomadic steppe peoples on “civilized” peoples.

Class Discussion Questions

- What is a civilization? What makes one “ancient”?
- How does Ibn Khaldūn define *al-‘umrān*?
- What is the science of *al-‘umrān*?
- Can nomadic cultures be considered civilizations?
- Is there a difference between being “civilized” and “civilization”?
- How does technology influence civilizational development?

Lesson 3 - Politics and States (1-2 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre’s *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part 1 Chapter 2: The Theories of States
- Selections from Ibn Khaldūn’s *al-Muqaddima*
- London, Jennifer A. “THE ‘CIRCLE OF JUSTICE.’” *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 3 (2011): 425–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26225735>.

Discuss the concepts of politics, states, group cohesion (*‘aṣabiyya*), leadership, and urbanization. Instructors may give a short history of the different types of political organization and states. Reference to the “Circle of Justice” analyzed in Ibn Khaldūn would be important here. Discussions on power dynamics, hierarchies, and leadership can also naturally begin here. It is also a good point in time to bring to students’ attention that many seminal texts that are classified as “history” deal more with leadership, politics, and war than anything else (Herodotus being an exception).

Class Discussion Questions

- What is a polity? What is a state?
- How are states formed according to Scarre and Ibn Khaldūn?
- What makes a leader? What are his/her qualities?
- How does urbanization affect civilization?
- Do humans need “structure” in their societies in order to thrive?
- What makes a city?
- What is the job of a leader?
- Do we need leaders in societies?

Lesson 4 - Early Mesopotamia (1-2 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre’s *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part 2 Prelude to Civilization and Chapter 3: Mesopotamia

- “The standard Babylonian version” of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*

Lecture on the geography of Mesopotamia and the resources of river valleys. Instructors can use geacron.com to show the continuance of civilizations centered in Mesopotamia. Discussion on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* can focus on myth, heroic epic, virtue, morality, leadership, tyranny, and power.

Class Discussion Questions

- What type of people are Enkidu and Gilgamesh? What archetypes could they represent?
- Is Gilgamesh a hero?
- How did the Sumerians view their gods?
- Compare and contrast the *Epic of Gilgamesh* with Islamic stories of the Garden of Eden and Noah’s flood.
- How does Gilgamesh resemble Heracles (Hercules)?

Lesson 5 - Ancient Egypt (2-3 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre’s *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part II Chapter 4: Egyptian Civilization
- Selections from *Writings from Ancient Egypt* by Toby Wilkinson or *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* by William Kelly Simpson. Instructors can also read the *Hymn to the Aten*, which is an example of Egyptian “monotheism.”
- Herodotus’ *Histories* Book 2 on Egypt
- On Arabic “Egyptology:” <https://www.aramcoworld.com/Articles/November-2017/Arab-Translators-of-Egypt-s-Hieroglyphs>
- Selections from *Egyptology the Missing Millennium Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings* by Okasha El Daly

Lecture on the geography of Egypt, focusing on the influence of the Nile and its delta. Instructors may cover the structure of ancient Egyptian society, their pantheon, the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza, Egyptian expansion into the Levant, the history of Egyptology, etc. Reference to the Qur’anic and biblical stories of Yūsuf and Mūsā should be made. Herodotus’ chapters on Egypt provide some hilarious anecdotes, but it also shows how much the Greeks revered Egypt.

Class Discussion Questions

- How did the Nile influence Egyptian civilization?
- How was Egyptian society structured?
- What was the importance of the Rosetta Stone for Western scholarship? How had Arab “Egyptologists” unlocked hieroglyphics prior to the modern era?
- (Questions may vary depending on literature selections)
- How does Herodotus view the ancient Egyptians? Their gods? Their monuments?

Lesson 6 - Mesopotamia, Levant, and Anatolia (3-4 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre's *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* PART III - 7 Mesopotamia and the Levant (2000–1200 B.C.) and 8 Southwest Asia in the First Millennium B.C.
- *The Code of Hammurabi*
- *Code of Ur-Nammu*
- "The Cyrus Cylinder"
- *The Avesta*
- Herodotus' *Histories* Book 1.1-94, 1.95-end of Book I and Book 3.1-97

Instructors should start with a lecture on the geography of Anatolia and historical empires in Western Asia from 2000 B.C.-490 B.C. They can then have a session on Mesopotamian social institutions and laws and their continuance into fairly recent times (Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals), using the *Code of Hammurabi*, the *Code of Ur-Nammu*, and the "Cyrus Cylinder" as primary texts. They can then explore West Asian pagan and Zoroastrian religious history. They can then spend a session or two reading Herodotus' *Histories* Book 1.1-94 and then 1.95end of Book I and Book 3.1-97. The supposed confrontation between "East" and "West" is first formulated in these chapters and serves as an inspiration for such a conflict up to our times. Ibn Khaldūn's anacyclosis of dynasties can also be presented here.

Class Discussion Questions

- What allowed Anatolia to be the seat of empire and civilizations?
- How does the Iranian Plateau provide a natural center for empire?
- What made the Assyrians so powerful militarily?
- What Mesopotamian institutions were inherited by subsequent empires? Why were they inherited?
- What is the purpose of law?
- Compare the *Code of Hammurabi* with the "Cyrus Cylinder."
- How was Zoroastrian religion different from other pagan religions? How does Herodotus view Persian religion?
- How did Persia rise to its height in the opinion of Herodotus?
- Is Cyrus the Great a good leader? (Herodotus)
- Is there really a conflict between "East" and "West"?
- What is a fortunate and happy life according to Solon? (Herodotus)
- Is Croesus fortunate? (Herodotus)
- How does Cyrus rise to power? (Herodotus)

Lesson 7 - Ancient Israel and Judah (2-4 sessions)

Reading

- Selections from the Pentateuch, Samuel 1 & 2, Kings 1 & 2, Chronicles 2 Chapters 1-9, Jeremiah, Job, selections from the Psalms

Lecture on the Israelites and their history in the Levant. Instructors should take special care to bring up the issue of authenticity in *Isrā'īliyyāt*. The stories of the Qur'an and Bible should be compared with mention of the inconsistencies and why the Qur'an's version of the various prophetic stories should be taken as true. Instructors should also show the relationships between other West Asian empires/kingdoms with Ancient Israel and Judah, especially highlighting the Babylonian captivity, return to Israel under Cyrus the Great, and the rebuilding of the Temple. Instructors can discuss later Jewish history until the destruction of the Second Temple and the dispersal of the Jews at this point or in the lessons focusing on Rome. Mention should be made of the spread of Judaism in Arabia (various Jewish tribes in the *sīra*) and Yemen (Himyarite Kingdom especially) up to the advent of Islam. It is also an opportunity to bring up modern concerns related to Palestine and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā.

Class Discussion Questions

- How does the Covenant Code of Moses in Exodus 20-23 differ from the *Code of Hammurabi*?
- How do the stories of the prophets differ in the bible from the Qur'an (select certain prophets such as Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, and Mūsā)?
- How did the Jews differ from the nations that surrounded them?
- How does Jewish and biblical history impact modern Middle Eastern relations?
- What are the conditions for kingship in Judaic thought (think Dāwūd)?
- How does a people led by prophets differ from those led by kings? What about prophet-kings?

Lesson 8 - The Mediterranean World (3-5 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre's *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part IV - 9 The First Aegean Civilizations and 10 The Mediterranean World in the First Millennium (1000–30 B.C.)
- Selections from Hesiod's *Theogony*
- Herodotus' *Histories* Book 6.42-131, Book 7, Book 8, and Book 9
- Selections from Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* (Pericles' Funeral Oration, Corcyrean revolution, the plague of Athens, Milan Dialogue, the Sicilian Expedition)
- Arrian's *The Campaigns of Alexander*

Instructors should lecture on the development of civilization in the Mediterranean, especially that of the Greeks and Phoenicians and their respective colonies. Time can be spent

discussing the empire of Carthage here or in the lesson on Rome. Special emphasis should be put on the development of the Greek polis, and the city-states of Athens and Sparta. Here instructors can discuss the birth of philosophy with its origins in Miletus and perhaps West Asia, along with its development into the major ancient schools of philosophy (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and skepticism/cynicism). The political and cultural institutions of Athens should be given an overview given their influence on current world politics. Students can read the chapters of Herodotus' *Histories* dealing with the Persian invasion of classical Greece. This is one of the first occurrences of the "East vs. West" theme in literature. Selections from Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* cover themes like "patriotism," "honor," "revolution," "belief in adversity," "realpolitik/might makes right," and "hubris." An excellent way to bring together all of the previous lessons in the class is to read Arrian's *The Campaigns of Alexander* up until the conquests in India, which can be read in the next section. The conquests of Alexander include all of the geographical locations the class has covered thus far, stretching from Greece to the Indus. A brief mention should be made of the Diadochi and their empires after the death of Alexander. The idea of the *cosmopolis* can also be referenced here.

Class Discussion Questions

- How did eastern Mediterranean geography and history influence the development of the Greek polis?
- Why were Athens and Sparta so powerful?
- Why did the Greeks and Phoenicians colonize the Mediterranean?
- How have Athenian cultural and political institutions influenced the world?
- What makes a just city?
- Was Alexander a virtuous leader?
- Where does the desire for conquest come from?
- What is honor and glory?

Lesson 9 - India (1-2 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre's *Routledge Ancient Civilizations Part II - 5 South Asia: The Indus Civilization*
- Selections from the *Mahabharata* especially the *Bhagavad Gita*
- Selections from the *Rāmāyana*
- Selections from the *Dhammapada*
- Arrian's *The Campaigns of Alexander*

Lectures on the civilizations of ancient India, their religion, the rise of Buddhism, interactions between India, Persia, Alexander the Great, Hellenistic Greek kingdoms, Rome, and Aksum. The Hindu caste system should also be explored in this lesson. The geography of India with special emphasis on the Ganges, the Indo-Gangetic Plain, the Indus, and the Deccan

Plateau. It is also an opportunity to discuss the Indian Ocean trade network, and its influence on world trade and civilizations. Students can discuss heroic epic when reading the *Mahabharata* or *Rāmāyana*. They can discuss the various themes of religion when reading the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Dhammapada*. Presenting the Buddhist “Eightfold Path” would also be a good idea.

Class Discussion Questions

- How can we characterize the interactions between India and the rest of the world?
- What geographical barriers separated India from the rest of East Asia? How did Buddhism transcend these barriers?
- Was King Ashoka a virtuous king?
- Is Hindu paganism the same as Greek paganism?
- How did Greek culture influence India post-Alexander the Great?
- How has trade with India shaped world history?
- Is Indian epic the same as Mesopotamian and Greek epic?
- Why has paganism persisted in India but not the rest of the world?
- How does reincarnation change a culture’s view of death and life?

Lesson 10 - Rome, Christianity, and the Parthian and Sasanian Empires (3-4 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre’s *Routledge Ancient Civilizations Part IV - 11 Imperial Rome*
- Selections of Livy, Polybius, Tacitus’ *Annals*, and Procopius
- Selection from Plutarch’s *Life of Crassus* (Battle of Carrhae)
- Gospel of Mathew and John, Select Letters of Paul
- *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*
- *The Gospel of the Prophet Mani*

There is much to say about the impact of the Roman empire on world history. Selections from Livy, Polybius, and even Tacitus can be used to discuss early Roman republican and imperial history. There are many leaders in these books to analyze. The development of what came to be called “Greco-Roman” culture can be touched upon. It is important to mention Roman public works projects such as roads and canals. The ability of Rome to organize itself militarily should not be forgotten. Roman political and social institutions are integral to the development of modern societies and polities. A survey of the Roman-Persian Wars (54 B.C.E. – 628 C.E.) should be discussed given that they only ended with the Arab conquest of the Sasanian empire and Roman North Africa and the Levant. Crassus and the Battle of Carrhae (53 B.C.E) should be mentioned. The fall of the Western Empire and the invasion of the various “barbarian” tribes that would form many of the ethnic groups of modern Europe is crucial to note. Justinian and his general Belisarius, as well as Khosrow I are important figures in this later time. Justinian’s banning of philosophy in the Roman empire and the transfer of the schools to Persia, which would have an influence on early Arabic philosophy is worthy of

mention. Selections from Procopius can be read. A session on the rise of Christianity in the Roman empire with mention of the various sects of Christianity at this early time, such as the Ebionites, including the rival developments of Mithraism, Manichaeism, and Gnosticism is also key. Class discussion can be around the various Christian gospels and letters of Paul of Tarsus.

Class Discussion Questions

- What made Rome such a powerful empire that lasted for such a long time? Was it its military or its building projects? Or both?
- What Roman institutions still influence our societies today?
- How did Christianity change the Roman empire?
- How is Christianity different from Judaism?
- How did the “East vs. West” narrative play out in the Roman-Persian wars?
- What characteristics made a good Roman leader?

Lesson 11 - Pastoral Nomads vs. Agricultural Sedentary Peoples (2-3 sessions)

Reading

- David Chaffetz’s *Raiders, Rulers, and Traders: The Horse and the Rise of Empires* (first 5 or 6 chapters)
- Kenneth Harl’s *Empires of the Steppes: A History of the Nomadic Tribes Who Shaped Civilization*
- Herodotus’ *Histories* Book 2
- Selections from Ibn Khaldūn’s *al-Muqaddima*

The impact of pastoral nomads on sedentary populations since ancient times has been huge. A geography lecture on the Eurasian steppe is necessary. It is important to highlight the tendencies of nomadic peoples to be more warlike and aggressive than sedentary peoples. Ibn Khaldūn’s *al-Muqaddima* can be used for this. Many dynasties and empires have been started by pastoral nomads once they conquered sedentary populations. Some notable nomads to consider discussing: Yamnaya, Indo-Iranians peoples (Aryans), Cimmerians, Scythians (use Herodotus), Sarmatians, Xiongnu (the Great Wall of China), Kushan Empire, Xianbei, Berbers, the Huns, the Hephthalites, the Bulgars, the Göktürks, and of course the Bedouin Arabs. The Migration Period (300-600 C.E.) when many tribes migrated and conquered parts of the Roman territory is important for modern ethnography. There are two academic histories in the reading list which can be used to supplement this lesson. Herodotus’ chapter on the Scythians is notable and great for discussion. The Bedouin Arabs can be touched upon in this lesson but discussed in detail in the next lesson. Alternatively, this lesson can be blended into all of the other lessons since nomadic tribes will be encountered anyway.

Class Discussion Questions

- How has the horse and bow changed human history?
- Why are steppe nomads more “aggressive” and “warlike” than sedentary peoples?

- How have nomads shaped civilization?
- How is nomadic culture normally characterized?
- How do archaeologists study ancient nomadic cultures?
- How did sedentary peoples counter the threat of pastoral nomads (Great Wall of China)?
- How did sedentary peoples adapt to the military effectiveness of steppe nomads?

Lesson 12 – Northwest Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (2-4 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre’s *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part V Chapter 13 Sub-Saharan Africa
- DK Publishing’s *Africa: The Definitive History of a Continent*, Chapter 1: African prehistory (5MYA–3500BCE), and Chapter 2: Early Civilizations (3000BCE–600CE)
- John Reader’s *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*, selections from Parts 1–4

The African continent can be divided into North Africa (above and including the Sahara Desert) and Sub-Saharan Africa (below the Sahara Desert). In Lesson 13, students will learn more about Northeast Africa aside from Ancient Egypt, which has already been covered. Some time should be spent on Africa’s environment and the evidence of human civilization and culture from the prehistory period, particularly the migration patterns of nomadic tribes (e.g., the Bantu expansion) and trade (e.g., trans-Saharan trade route), which should be tied in with the previous discussions of Ibn Khaldūn’s conception of society/civilization. From there, the lesson’s content should focus on early civilizations from 3000BCE till 600CE, and the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali (especially Djenné-Djenno), and the Tichitt tradition. The discussion of Northwest and Sub-Saharan Africa should be limited to the point of the birth of Islam.

Class Discussion Questions

- How did the diverse African continent landscape affect migration and distinct elements of different African cultures, such as food, clothing, and decorative arts?
- What archeological and documented evidence do we have of migration? What other evidence could be missing?
- Why was agriculture and the cultivation of grain vital to human survival and the development of culture?
- Why have archaeologists placed much importance on the rock art found throughout the African continent?
- Many anthropologists cite the Bantu migrations as a key turning point in the spread of civilization in West Africa to the south of Africa. What evidence do we have of these migrations, and what effect did the migrations have?

Lesson 13 - Northeast Africa and Ancient Arabia to the Birth of Islam (1-2 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre's *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part V Northeast Africa and Asia, The Erythraean Sea, Chapter 12 Northeast Africa: Kush, Meroe, and Aksum
- Selections from Ibn Khaldūn's *al-Muqaddima* (related to Bedouins)

The geography of Northeast Africa and its influence on trade should be lectured on. The harsh geography of Arabia is also important to discuss. The influence of Kush on Ancient Egypt can also be discussed. The Christianization of Ethiopia and the rise of the Kingdom of Aksum are important for the *sīra*, especially the conquest of the Jewish Himyarite Kingdom of Yemen. It is important to impress upon students that Islam was born in the center of three superpowers: the Sasanian Empire, the Roman Empire, and the Kingdom of Aksum. Yemen's overall history can be discussed here as well. The history of Arabia from its first settlers to the various Arab tribes can be discussed here or saved for a prophetic biography class. The same can be said for the various Jewish and Christian settlements in Arabia. However, Bedouin culture should be discussed, especially in comparison to steppe nomads. Ibn Khaldūn has much to say about this in the *Muqaddima*. Of course, teachers should discuss ʿĀd and Thamūd and their potential link with the Nabateans. The trade routes of Arabia and the incense trade should be mentioned.

Class Discussion Questions

- How did the Kingdom of Kush influence ancient Egypt?
- How was the Kingdom of Aksum strategically located in terms of global trade?
- What do you think is the wisdom behind Islam arising out of the Arabian Peninsula as opposed to one of the great empires at the time?
- How was the Kingdom of Aksum religiously similar yet different from the Byzantine Romans (Coptics vs. Orthodox)?
- How are Bedouin nomads different from steppe nomads according to Ibn Khaldūn? How does religion bring them together?
- Why did the Kingdom of Aksum seek to conquer the Himyarites?
- What made the Nabateans so rich and powerful?
- How "diverse" were the Arab tribes in terms of religion prior to Islam?

Lesson 14 - the Far East (2-4 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre's *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part II - 6 The First Chinese Civilizations, 14 Divine Kings in Southeast Asia section "The Rise of States in Southeast Asia (c. 2000 B.C.–A.D. 150)," Part V - 15 Kingdoms and Empires in East Asia (770 B.C.–A.D. 700)
- *Analects* by Confucius
- *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu
- *Mencius*

- *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu
- *Classic of Mountains and Seas*
- *Records of the Three Kingdoms*
- Selections from *Records of the Grand Historian*

A lecture on the geography of China with the Yangtze and Yellow rivers as the sources of Chinese civilization is important. Highlighting China's geographical and historical isolation, which was only broached by the establishment of trade networks, is an important factor in China's development. The development of the Silk Road is important to highlight. Also, showing that the majority of East Asian cultures in the "Sinosphere" mimicked China to lesser or greater degrees impresses upon the student China's cultural dominance in the area. Chinese historical time categorizations such as the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period should be summarized. The Hundred Schools of Thought period is akin to the development of the various schools of Greek philosophy. The dominance of Confucianism for Chinese history is important to reflect upon. Students can have a discussion on the *Analects* of Confucius or the Taoist text *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu. There are many seminal texts that can be read for discussion, and we have listed several prominent ones. The various Chinese dynasties and their influence on Chinese culture should be discussed. The spread of Buddhism from India to China and the rest of East Asia is important to show to students. The rest of Southeast Asia can be touched upon depending on time. Successive Chinese dynasties attempt to keep out steppe nomads with the building of the Great Wall of China is an excellent addition to what is discussed in Lesson 12. A conversation on the Chinese political concepts "Mandate of Heaven" and the dynastic cycles of Zou Yan is a good complement to Ibn Khaldūn's thoughts on political legitimacy and the rise and fall of dynasties.

Class Discussion Questions

- What isolates China geographically from the rest of the Eastern Hemisphere?
- What allowed Chinese civilization to develop?
- How did Chinese culture spread throughout the Sinosphere?
- Describe the tenets of Confucianism. Why did it become so influential as opposed to other schools of Chinese philosophy?

Lesson 15 - the Americas and Conclusion (2-3 sessions)

Reading

- Chris Scarre's *Routledge Ancient Civilizations* Part VI and Epilogue
- *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of The Mayan Book of The Dawn of Life and The Glories of Gods and Kings* translated by Dennis Tadlock
- *The Codex Borgia*

The Americas lesson can go either to the date of birth of Islam or go up to the arrival of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere. Everything pre-Columbian is often categorized as an

ancient civilization because the levels of technological advancement are approximate to ancient ones. If an instructor chooses to have his students go just before the arrival of Europeans, then there are several surviving codices that students can read. Scarre's book only deals with Mesoamerica and the Andes, i.e. civilizations like the Olmecs, Mayas, Toltecs, Aztecs, and Incas are covered. The mythologies and religions of pre-Columbian Americans are easily comparable to pagan religions that students have interacted with in the class prior. Technological advancements, urban planning, astronomy, and social/political structures can also be discussed. The geography of Mesoamerica and the Andes and why they promoted more advanced civilizations than in other parts of the Americas should be highlighted. It may be worth discussing historical migrations into North and South America and various tribal cultures in North America, especially those that resided in the current states of students.

Class Discussion Questions

- How did civilization develop in Mesoamerica?
- What differences and similarities do Mesoamerican civilization have with other civilizations?
- Compare the Maya creation myths with Genesis and Hesiod's *Theogony*.
- What geographical features facilitated more advanced civilizations in Mesoamerica and the Andes over North America?
- How were American civilizations destroyed by the Spanish? What factors contributed to this?

Teacher Guidance

Courses are often determined by the quality of instructors. It takes a judicious eye to discern the best course in presenting the above material. In general, instructors should have a grasp of their students' capabilities and strive to improve them. A history course can often turn into dry lectures that then destroy a student's love for history. This is to be avoided at all costs. A lively discussion on a single historical event for a class session is better than a rehearsal of historical facts and dates. Instructors should aim to blend classes so that short lectures are springboards for discussions. Historical dates are integral to the study of history, but high school students should not be burdened with them. Only major dates such as the reign of Cyrus the Great, Emperor Constantine's decision to make Christianity the official religion of Rome, the Fall of the Roman Empire, and the years of construction for the Great Pyramid at Giza should be memorized. Students should be able to give a brief narrative of historical events in a particular century without specific dates. The use of vivid and descriptive maps goes a long way for students' retention of the material. The instructor should study the geography, historical geography, and geopolitics of a region before presenting to students. It is also important for the instructor to understand the general arc of the class and to know the prophetic biography well, so that students are being prepared for it.

Additional Teacher Resources

Exciting videos for many of the historical events and periods, especially battles, can be found at:

- <https://www.youtube.com/c/KingsandGenerals/videos>
- https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=epic+history

For interactive historical maps that change with chosen dates:

- <http://geacron.com/home-en/>
- <https://www.runningreality.org/>
- <https://history-maps.com/timeline>

For geography:

- <https://www.seterra.com/>
- <https://earth.google.com/web/>

Other useful sites:

- <https://worldhistorycommons.org/primary-sources>

Methodology of Instruction

The method of instruction for this course would incorporate a combination of lecture and seminar-based classes. A balance between the two, such that one method complements and synchronizes with the other, would be ideal. Lectures would be reserved for those concepts and topics that instructors aim to directly share with students, which might prove challenging for students to derive on their own. The seminar allows students to address and work with the texts on their own, with their individual thoughts and ideas at the forefront. Students have more leeway in the latter to direct the conversation and their learning towards the aims of the course, incorporating aspects learned from lectures as they deem appropriate.

Muṭāla‘a (Pre-reading)

This portion of the class requires students to prepare their readings before class. They should read the texts, take notes, write down questions, and make their own timelines of events.

Mudhākara (Group Review)

Students should get together at least once a week to review material from the course. This can include, but is not limited to dates, major themes, narrative historical arcs, or other relevant information. Students can also use this time to discuss questions amongst themselves or to continue a discussion from class. One of the aims of the group review is to allow students a space to take charge of their learning with their fellow peers.

Classwork and Homework Ideas

Classwork for this class would include participation and a grade for seminars (on days there is a seminar). Homework would mainly consist of the reading assignments and group review, both aspects of the class that would be graded, if at least for participation. Teachers can incorporate additional homework in the form of essays, projects, etc. at their discretion.

Testing

Testing for the course would include a mixture of geography quizzes, short answer questions and essays that can be used to ensure students are able to retain the information and work with the ideas discussed in the class. It is recommended that essays are written in the style of the classical oration.