

FW22 AP/HIST 2110 6.0A The Ancient Near East

Additional Contact Details: [ehrllich@yorku.ca](mailto:ehrllich@yorku.ca)

Expanded Course Description (expanded from course calendar description):

According to the title of a popular book from a generation or so ago: *History Begins at Sumer* (by Samuel Noah Kramer). This expresses an essential truth, namely that our earliest historical writings come from the ancient Near East (= ANE), where writing was invented first in Sumer in southern Mesopotamia in the late third millennium BCE and shortly thereafter in Egypt. Although the impetus for the invention of writing was mainly economic in nature, it was soon employed for the recording of all aspects of human activity. Hence, the late third millennium marks the transition from prehistory to history in the human narrative.

In this course, we will be exploring the history of the part of the world known popularly as the “cradle of civilization” (on account of the antiquity of its recorded history) or as the “fertile crescent” (on account of its approximate geographic contours). Our journey will take us from the dawn of history in the ANE in the late third millennium BCE until the dawn of the Hellenistic and/or Roman period(s) there in the late fourth or early first century BCE respectively. The geographic range of our investigation will take us from the Persian Gulf in the east, through Mesopotamia (the “Land between the Rivers”), to Anatolia (aka Asia Minor) in the north, down through the Levant, and into Egypt and the Nile Valley in the west. In modern terms, we will be looking at the Middle East and Northeast Africa.

The course itself will be divided into three units of somewhat unequal length. First, we will concentrate on the civilizations of Mesopotamia: the Sumerians, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, whose records were written in cuneiform. Next, our attention will turn to Egypt, the “gift of the Nile,” whose most wellknown script was the popular hieroglyphic. Finally, we will glance briefly at the best attested civilization caught between the powers of Mesopotamia and Egypt, namely ancient Israel, which employed an alphabetic system of writing. Our main focus will be on the development of human civilization from city-states to empires, and from national states to vassal states. Our historical methodology will be informed by fields as diverse as archaeology and anthropology, economics and gender studies, sociology and textual analysis.

Required Course Text/Readings:

\*TENTATIVE\*

- Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. 2006. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Second edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*. 1985. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Wilkinson, Toby. 2013. *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*. New York: Random House.
- Van De Mieroop, Marc. 2016. *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000-323 BC*. Third edition. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

Weighting of Course:

**\*TENTATIVE Grade Breakdown\***

**Assignments and Grading**

Weekly (in-class?) quizzes	20%	
Three tests	60%	two in-class, one final
Two short papers	20%	Due at the final class of each term. Topics TBA.