

## TOPICS

Ancient World History  
Soiset

As will be discussed in the first week of class, you need to give me your selection for your topics ASAP. This is to prevent duplication of effort as much to insure that work is under way. Some topics which would be acceptable for your research papers or presentation groups (**note these are all separate topics**):

### Africa

Kush and Axum--did they link Asia to the West?  
The Carthaginians--Africans, Semites or mercenaries?  
Great Zimbabwe--who built it?

### Mesopotamia

Urukagina--a tax reformer in the second millennium B.C.E.?  
Gilgamesh--did the epic poem of Babylonia provide the basis for Noah and the Ark, Hercules and The Odyssey?  
Nebuchadnezzar II--the Hanging Gardens and the Babylonian Captivity--fact or fiction?

### Egypt

How old is the Sphinx, and who built it?  
Pyramid construction--do the theories make sense?  
Egyptologists--is it nationalism or preservation?  
Did the pharaohs rule Egypt, or did the viziers?  
Atonism and the fate of Akhenaton--what happened?

### India

Arthashastra--did Machiavelli plagiarize Kautilya?  
Ceylon (Sri Lanka)--how did a matriarchal Buddhist society (a contradiction) survive in man-dominated Hindu India?  
The Aryans--who were they?  
The Caste System--class stability or segregation?

### China

The northern barbarians--the Xiongnu, the Huns, the Mongols; were they all the same people?  
Confucianism--did it influence Greek philosophy and Christianity?  
Empress Wu Zhao--benefactor or villain?  
The Chinese Civil Service and the American version--any similarities?

### Greece

Athenian democracy vs. the American version--what would Cleisthenes think?  
Ostracism--how did it work, how often was it used, and could it be used in our system?  
Pericles--after such great accomplishments, how could he

fail?

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Euripedes--in a city that would try and execute Socrates, how could anyone dare to write The Trojan Women?  
The Lycurgan Reforms--an early attempt at totalitarianism?  
The Alexander of Arrian--history or hero-worship?  
Sophocles and Oedipus Rex--was this criticism of Pericles and his policies *hubris* for the Athenian Empire?

Rome

Latifundia--did it kill the Republic, and ultimately the Empire?

Julius Caesar--his accomplishments were many, his popularity immense; but who were his enemies? Why was he hated?

The satires of Horace, Juvenal and Petronius--what do they tell us about Rome?

Ovid's Amores--what does it tell us about the morals of the Roman Empire? What does it tell us about Augustus and his daughter?

The alimentary system--welfare to (1) provide for the poor (2) buy political influence or (3) control the urban mobs?

Religion

The "mystery" religions--Zoraster, Isis, Mithra--did they contain elements that paved the way for Christianity?

The Jewish Wars by Josephus--is it history, or is it an attempt to rewrite the record by a traitor?

Diocletian--did this ruthless emperor ever change his attitude toward the Christians?

Arianism--was the Council of Nicaea a compromise or a power play? Or was it something else?

Cassiodorus--he went against the trend to purge all pre-Christian (i.e., pagan) sources, and thereby helped save Greek and Roman philosophy. Who opposed him, who supported him, and why?

The Invasions

Feudalism--why did it incorporate Germanic customs at the same time it provided for a defense against the Germanic Danes, Norsemen and Varangians? What turned out to be the most effective weapon against the invaders?

Justinian--did he grow fearful of his victorious general Belisarius? What did both men want, and what did they ultimately get? Examine the role of Theodora.

The "Barbarians"--were they all bent on rape and pillage, or is there another side to the story?

## Islam

Harun-al-Rashid led a golden age from Bagdad, a city many times the size and wealth of anything in Europe. His empire stretched from India to Spain, yet his contemporary Charlemagne receives far more attention. Compare the two, and explain this lack of appreciation for a much more powerful (and more cultured) ruler.

The Shi'ites and Sunnites--Explain their dispute.

The Ottomans--the most powerful, richest and advanced society in the world 500 years ago, yet by the 18<sup>th</sup> century were called the "sick man of Europe". What happened?

## The Crusades

They were set off by Alexis I's fraudulent claim of Christians being persecuted (or by Peter the Hermit, depending on your source), resulted in surprising experiences for the citizens of Constantinople and Jerusalem. Discuss the "Christian" behavior, especially in the first five crusades.

The Albigensians (aka Cathars)--were they a precursor to the Reformation?

William Wallace, Wat Tyler and Martin Luther--what did they have in common?

## Japan

Shintoism--a religion that was designed to suit feudalism? Japan and Korea--neighbors, economic partners, and traditional enemies; why the animosity?

The samurai and their bushido--why did Japanese feudalism turn inward, while in Europe it turned to expansion?

## The Americas

The claims to being the first to discover the West--examine. Technological developments in the Maya, Aztec and Inca kingdoms--compare.

The Black Legend--was it all propaganda? Discuss the latest estimates of population in the New World pre-1492.