

ANTH 1503 - The Rise and Fall of Civilizations

Fall 2026 Syllabus, Section 01, CRN 42729,

Credit hours: 3

Instructor

Matt O'Mansky

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Public Instructor Information

Instructor Title: Dr. Matt O'Mansky

Instructor Professional Qualifications: Ph.D., Anthropology, Vanderbilt University, 2007

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Course Description

1503. The Rise and Fall of Civilizations. Comparative survey of the archaeological evidence on the origins, development, and collapse of the great early civilizations of the world. The transformation of societies from settled villages to urban states in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, Mexico, and Peru. Analysis of the archaeological discoveries, alternative interpretations, and general theories of cultural evolution. 3 s.h.

Course Readings

Group	Title	Author	ISBN
	No textbook		

No textbook is assigned in this course. There are weekly readings from various sources and these are listed below in the course schedule.

The course readings are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances, research developments, current events, and/or to ensure better learning.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

Week of	Reading(s)	Proposed Topic	Due/To Prepare for Class
8/24	"Introducing World Prehistory" from Fagan, Brian and Nadia Durrani (2018) <i>People of the Earth: An Introduction to World Prehistory</i> , 15th ed.	Archaeology at YSU Introduction to the course What is archaeology?	Syllabus Quiz Module 1 Video Lecture Quiz Discussion 1a: Introduce Yourself Discussion 1b: Hunter and Gatherer or Early Farmer?
8/31	"Political Systems: from Kottak, Conrad Phillip (2021) <i>Anthropology: Appreciating Human Diversity</i> , 19th ed. Diamond, Jared (1987) "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race"	What is civilization? Cultural evolution Political Organization – types of cultures The nature of hunter-gatherer societies – and of early farming communities	Module 2 Discussion: Is cultural evolution progress? Module 2 Video Lecture Quiz
9/7	"Theories of State" from Scarre, Chris and Brian Fagan (2016) <i>Ancient Civilizations</i> , 4th ed.	Theories on the origin of complex society The Neolithic Revolution: Domestication of plants and animals Theories on the origin of domestication	Module 3 Discussion: Consequences of Domestication Module 3 Video Lecture Quiz
9/14	"The First Farmers: from Fagan, Brian and Nadia Durrani (2014) <i>People of the Earth: An Introduction to World Prehistory</i> , 14th ed. Curry, Andrew (2021) "Last Stand of the Hunter-Gatherers?"	The Near East: Geography Göbeklitepe: Early complex religion? Natufian Culture: First villages The rise of complexity: First towns	Module 4 Video Lecture Quiz Module 4 Essay (Essay #1)



9/21	"Transitions to States in Southwest Asia" from Scarre, Chris and Tammy Stone (2021) The Human Past Essentials.	Mesopotamia: The Rise of the World's First Civilization	Module 5 Video Lecture Quiz Module 5 Essay (Essay #2)
9/28	Betz, Eric (2020) Nabta Playa: "The World's First Astronomical Site Was Built in Africa and Is Older Than Stonehenge" -"Egypt and the Bronze Age" from Mathisen, Ralph W. (2021) Ancient Mediterranean Civilizations: From Prehistory to 640 CE, 3rd ed.	Egypt, The Gift of the River The beginning of complexity Gerzean Culture	Module 6 Video Lecture Quiz Module 6 Essay (Essay #3)
10/5	"Egyptian Civilization" from Mathisen, Ralph W. (2021) Ancient Mediterranean Civilizations: From Prehistory to 640 CE, 3rd ed.	The Unification of Egypt: The formation of the Egyptian state From the Old Kingdom to the First Intermediate Period	Module 7 Discussion: Chaos and Order Module 7 Video Lecture Quiz
10/12	Chapter 1 "early China", pp. 1-4 from Craig, Albert M. (2007) The Heritage of Chinese Civilization, 2nd ed.	The Rise of Civilization in China	Module 8 Video Lecture Quiz Module 8 Essay (Essay #4)
10/19	Chapter 1 "early China", pp. 4-19 from Craig, Albert M. (2007) The Heritage of Chinese Civilization, 2nd ed. selection from Ch. 10 "States and Empires in Asia and Africa (pp. 462-475) from Price, T. Douglas and Gary M. Feinman (2005) Images of the Past, 4th ed.	China: The First Dynasties and the Rise and Fall of the Qin Empire	Module 9 Video Lecture Quiz NOTE: Last day to withdraw with a grade of "W" – Sunday, 10/25
10/26	Malakoff, David (winter 2016-2017) "How were the Americas Colonized?"	The Peopling of the Americas	Module 10 Discussion: Theories on Peopling of the Americas Module 10 Video Lecture Quiz
11/2	"Lowland Mesoamerica" from Scarre, Chris and Brian Fagan (2016) Ancient Civilizations, 4th ed.	Mesoamerica: Introduction to the Region First Farming and the Shift to Sedentary Villages The Olmec	Module 11 Discussion: Religion and Cultural Evolution Module 11 Video Lecture Quiz
11/9	"The Maya" from Feder, Kenneth L. (2020) The Past in Perspective, 8th ed.	The Rise of Maya Civilization The Nature of Classic Period Maya Civilization	Module 12 Video Lecture Quiz Module 12 Essay (Essay #5)
11/16	-"The End of Classic Maya Civilization: from Demarest, Arthur (2004) Ancient Maya: The Rise and Fall of a Rainforest Civilization O'Mansky, Matt and Arthur A. Demarest (2007) Status Rivalry and Warfare in the Development and Collapse of Classic Maya Civilization"	The Collapse of Maya Civilization Reformulation: Postclassic Maya Civilization	Module 13 Discussion: Theories on the Classic Maya Collapse Module 13 Video Lecture Quiz
11/23	Aztec Civilization (1200-1521)" from Fagan, Brian (2007) Ancient Lives, 3rd ed.	Blood and Empire: The Rise and Fall of Aztec Civilization	Module 14 Discussion: Aztec Sacrifice Module 14 Video Lecture Quiz
11/30	None	Final thoughts on the Rise and Fall of Civilizations	Module 15 Discussion: Is Extreme Social Stratification Inevitable? Module 15 Video Lecture Quiz

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