

Save Ancient Studies Alliance

Summer 2022 Texts-in-Translation Reading Group

World History through the Environment: How Ancient Cultures Viewed and Observed their Natural Surroundings



How did ancient peoples view the environment around them? What was its importance to the social hierarchies, religious beliefs, and day to day living for these cultures that lived hundreds and thousands of years ago?

The field of world history is vast and complex since its true goal is to understand the complete history of every person, culture, and society that has existed in human history. This is no easy task as it requires a multi-disciplinary approach of experts in the humanities such as historians, archaeologists, linguists, alongside experts in the field of sciences to try to piece together the jigsaw puzzle that is world history. As a result, it is impossible to know “everything about everything,” but organizing the field into a central theme helps explain events that occurred so far in the past.

While my dissertation is an environmental study of Old Kingdom pyramid location in ancient Egypt, the field of Egyptology oftentimes directly (and indirectly) focuses on the environment that surrounded the ancient Egyptians. From the importance of the Nile River to the ancient Egyptians, to the surrounding desert plateaus that exist on both sides of the river which contain the extravagant tombs and temples that Egyptologists have been studying for centuries, the story of the ancient Egyptians cannot be told without the physical and natural environment that surrounded, and surrounds, the people that lived/live there.

The theme of this reading group fits together with our modern times. The role that humans have played on the environment since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and into the present day constantly appears in media, journals, and conversations all across the world.

The field of World History is complex and diverse. As a result, we will be studying how a variety of ancient cultures and societies viewed their world. From using their environments to create and evolve a city that helped spring the largest empire in the ancient world (Rome), to religious documents that show the power of the environment over human agency (Hymn to the Nile and the Bible), these ancient people spanning from the Americas to China were conscious of the role the physical and natural environment played in their everyday lives.

Participants will get a brief glimpse into the mindset of humans who lived during the ancient world, as well as a glimpse into the job of someone who studies in the humanities. More specifically, group members will see the questions that historians ask of their documents in order to understand the past.

Your SASA Educational Ambassadors:

My name is Greg Viessman, and I am a late-stage doctoral candidate in the History Department at the University of Memphis concentrating on Egyptology. I will have defended my dissertation as we proceed with our weekly readings and will graduate with my PhD in Egyptology the weekend after our final reading session. Over the past ten years I have taught (and graded for professors) both sections of World History. This reading session covers the time period most universities give for the first half of an introductory World History seminar: to 1500 C.E. While universities often cover “the beginning of time” at the beginning of the course before moving into societies such as Mesopotamia and Egypt, we will begin our reading sessions with Mesopotamia in the first week.

Email: gviessman@saveancientstudies.org

Dates (8-weeks):

Tuesdays at 2pm EST

Start date: June 14th

End date: August 2nd

-Session 1: date June 14th, 2:00 EDT

-Session 2: date June 21st, 2:00 EDT

-Session 3: date June 28th, 2:00 EDT

-Session 4: date July 5th, 2:00 EDT

-Session 5: date July 12th, 2:00 EDT

-Session 6: date July 19th, 2:00 EDT

-Session 7: date July 26th, 2:00 EDT

-Session 8: date August 2nd, 2:00 EDT

Location:(Provided by SASA)

Zoom Meeting Link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89737402087?pwd=d3c0UkFGUDZPRmhDSHFQeDg0bjh1dz09>

Zoom Meeting ID

897 3740 2087

Zoom Meeting Password

895050

Reading Group Google Folder: (PDF Readings and Recordings of Sessions)

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11zqERvUNiH3RjZ0KStOqYVFUDx4mNQW?usp=sharing>

Week 1 June 14th: Mesopotamia

Excerpt from the Epic of Gilgamesh

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gGsr81c1dobQLLwHReAjq_bXgXCokXk/edit?usp=sharing&oid=112036891839976444660&rtpof=true&sd=true

Week 2 June 21st: Egypt

Hymn to the Nile

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZGJeV5q4KkV9vLP6VoauYXH-TNuD8RcY/edit?usp=sharing&oid=112036891839976444660&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Week 3 June 28th: India

Rig Veda: Sacrifice as Creation

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CY6zSBvPSoxPS5TCn40M5cEBpisJg2vE/view?usp=sharing>

The Upanishads: Brahman at Atman

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JCEH8aubH9nyJhIAW6rcGWXMinwaQ22F/view?usp=sharing>

The Upanishads: Caste and Reincarnation

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/11QBr8C5Zg9xwEXx9NzpsWpBjE39Yassd/view?usp=sharing>

Week 4 July 5th: China

Excerpts from the Analects

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1N3UPPRD4rD9Zibu1yZaC7I-wX8R1LYy0/edit?usp=sharing&oid=112036891839976444660&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Laozi and Daoism

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l-m52jwdlpv-qPqBY417EciHm_3FZZeK/view?usp=sharing

Gotama's Discovery

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yCr5eIFd63-4Opo6Rv4DaS2Q4kzqSAHR/view?usp=sharing>

Week 5 July 12th: Greece

Excerpt from Timaeus

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WiCCZgJ2pAEt8EWgQRLoV9zD8I7LL4rW/edit?usp=sharing&oid=112036891839976444660&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Timaeus Background Information

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NogTNmtQ3ZV9I3q6IhPv71cv88gEV8dh/edit?usp=sharing&oid=112036891839976444660&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Week 6 July 19th Rome

Excerpt from Pliny the Elder's Natural History

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kW7_iURn7P50CqgPDDw30C4X1bc4rl0T/edit?usp=sharing&oid=112036891839976444660&rtpof=true&sd=true

Week 7 July 26th: Christianity

What the Bible Says About the Environment: Excerpts from the Bible

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NNK_xX_frMASsQ4igFd7g6jZjI6ylwyF/view?usp=sharing

Week 8 August 2nd: The Americas

Cortes' Description of the City of Tenochtitlan

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ChsNHFQ_WampC8LIO4MRvTHOOrYRUhXZ/view?usp=sharing