

ARCH B101
INTRODUCTION TO THE ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND EGYPT
Fall 2026

Mon, Wed, Fri, 10:10–11:00 AM; Old Library 224

Instructors:

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The ‘ancient Near East’ is a term invented by western scholars to refer to a part of western Asia and northeastern Africa often called the Middle East in the time before the advent of Islam in the seventh century CE. It originates from the efforts of nineteenth century European scholars to discover the places mentioned in the Old Testament, such as the Tower of Babel or Ur of the Chaldees, and as a result it continues to possess a veneer of orientalist fantasy. Yet the ancient Near East some of the earliest evidence for many aspects of human society that we now consider fundamental, such as cities, towns, religion, writing, taxation and monumental architecture. In this course we will explore these aspects through the art, architecture and material culture left behind by the ancient inhabitants of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Egypt from prehistory to the fall of the Sasanian Empire. In doing so we shall address such topics as identity, gender, religion and imperialism through the study of reliefs, seals, coins, architecture, pottery and statuary. In short, we will reconstruct the social history of the ancient Near East through art. This course is designed for students without prior experience in archaeology.

Goals

The goal of this course is for students to learn the following:

- An overview of the art, culture and geography of the ancient Near East and Egypt, from prehistory to the seventh century CE;
- An understanding of how the people of the ancient Near East understood the world around them;
- How art, architecture and archaeology can inform us about the ancient Near Eastern history and society;

- How modern scholarship about the Near East has been affected by European colonialist perspectives;
- To analyze different types of historical evidence, including art, literature, documentary sources, and architecture, and to use them to address research questions;
- To distinguish between interpretations of evidence and the evidence itself;
- The ability to present information and ideas orally and in writing to a scholarly audience.

Class Format

This course consists of lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays, and discussions on Fridays (beginning September 18). The lectures are intended to be a dialogue. I will ask questions during them, with the expectation that someone will answer them. I also encourage students to ask their own questions during the lectures. The purpose of the discussions is for students to discuss the course material with each other; the instructor's role in these discussions is mainly to provide structure and answer questions. We will divide the students into discussion groups in the first week of class.

You should complete the reading assignment for each day prior to that class; the lectures assume that you have, and you will have some difficulty keeping up without them. The discussions on Fridays will generally focus on either a specific object or monument, or on an article; in either case it is essential for you to have completed the assigned reading.

You are welcome to use laptops during class. However, any one seen using phones or wearing headphones will be regarded as absent for that class.

Reading Assignments

There is no textbook for this course. All reading assignments are posted on Moodle, under the course period by which they should be completed. Some readings are marked 'optional;' these provide further information about a given topic and may be helpful for your coursework or your papers, or may simply satisfy your curiosity. The following abbreviations are used below in the course schedule:

ANE = M. Liverani, *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy* (London: Routledge, 2013)
CAANE = D. T. Potts (ed.), *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)
HANE = M. van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016)

JTC = S. Tinney and K. Sonik (ed.), *Journey to the City: A Companion to the Middle East Galleries at the Penn Museum* (Philadelphia: Penn Museum, 2019)

OHE = I. Shaw and E. Bloxam (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

VL = C. Woods (ed.), *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond*, (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010)

Assessment

Grade Breakdown

<i>Contributions to Class</i>	5%
<i>Map Quizzes</i>	10% (5% each)
<i>Take-Home Quizzes</i>	45% (15% each)
<i>Assignment 1</i>	5%
<i>Assignment 2</i>	15%
<i>Assignment 3</i>	20%

Contributions to Class (5%)

Students are expected to attend each and every class, including discussions, and to contribute to the course as much as possible. Contributions include (but are not limited to) making substantive comments in the lectures and discussions, asking questions, responding intelligently to the instructors' questions during lectures and discussions and participating in group discussions. You are excused from class only in the event of religious observance, a commitment to an athletic team, or sickness; all such absences must be accompanied by suitable documentation. Furthermore, even excused absences will make it difficult to properly internalize this material and students who miss class the least have the best expectation of succeeding.

Map Quizzes (5% each, for a total of 10%)

There are two maps, which will test your knowledge of the geography of ancient Egypt and the Near East. Study maps will be provided on Moodle.

Take-Home Quizzes (15% each, for a total of 45%)

There will be three non-cumulative take-home quizzes. These quizzes will include multiple choice questions and object identifications. The quizzes will be completed on Moodle.

Assignment 1 (5%)

Students will write a brief reaction paper (400-600 words) to the film *Grass*, in response to a prompt that will be provided in class.

Assignment 2 (15%)

Students will write a biography (600-800 words) of a specific object or monument which we have seen in class. This should include a description of the object, and discussions of where and how it was made, how it was used, and where it was found (if known). Further instructions will be provided in class.

Assignment 3 (20%)

Students will write a paper (800-1000 words) comparing two of the objects or monuments we have seen in class. This should include descriptions of the objects, discussions of where and how they were made and how they were used, and a comparison of why their forms are similar and/or different. You may not write about the object you discussed in Assignment 2. Further instructions will be provided in class.

Grading Policy

I will not normally change grades after the fact, save in cases of calculation errors. It is your responsibility to maintain your grade average at the level you desire. In exceptional cases I will consider offering an extra credit assignment, but poor performance in class does NOT constitute an exceptional case. Late work will be accepted for partial credit (determined at the instructor's discretion) until December 18 at 11:59.

AI

Students are explicitly prohibited by the Bryn Mawr honor code from using AI in any way unless instructed to do so. In this course, the use of any form of AI is not permitted. Violations will be treated as plagiarism.

Equal Opportunities and Title IX

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Access Services Director, Deb Alder, or email her at dalder@brynmawr.edu to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with me as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. Any student who has a disability-related need to tape record this class must first speak with the Access Services Director and to me, the instructor. Because of laws within the State of Pennsylvania, class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website (http://www.brynmawr.edu/access_services/).

All BMC employees (including TAs) are Title IX “Responsible Employees” and therefore are required to share a report of sexual misconduct with the Title IX Coordinator. For further details see <https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/policies-guidelines-handbooks/title-ix/am-i-responsible-employee>

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

This class meets on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:10 to 11:00. The Monday and Wednesday classes meet in Old Library 116. The discussion groups on Fridays start on September 18; rooms will be announced in due course. Reading assignments are listed under the class by which they should be completed. All readings are linked or posted on Moodle.

Unit I: Introduction and Prehistory

Mon 8/31: Preliminaries

Reading

- The Syllabus (this!)

Wed 9/2: Archaeology in the Middle East

Reading

- N. Chevalier, “Early Excavations (pre-1914),” in *CAANE*, 48–69
- L. Meskell, “Imperialism, Internationalism, and Archaeology in the Un/Making of the Middle East,” *American Anthropologist* 122/3 (2020), 554–67

Fri 9/4: The Landscape of the Ancient Near East

Reading

- A. Calvert, “The world of ancient Egypt,” *Smarthistory*, February 28, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/reframing-art-history/world-of-ancient-egypt/>
- S. German, “Rethinking approaches to the art of the Ancient Near East until c. 600 B.C.E.,” *Smarthistory*, June 28, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/reframing-art-history/rethinking-art-ancient-near-east/>
- S. German, “Ancient West Asia: cradle of civilization,” in *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015, <https://smarthistory.org/ancient-near-east-cradle-of-civilization/>
- M. van de Mieroop, “Introduction, Sources, Geography,” in *HANE*, 1–10

Mon 9/7: No class (Labor Day)

Wed 9/9 and Fri 9/11: *Grass: A Nation’s Battle for Life*

In these two classes we will watch the film Grass (1925). This is the basis for Assignment 1.

Mon 9/14: The Late Neolithic

Reading

- M. Liverani, "The Neolithic and Chalcolithic Periods," in *ANE*, 34–45 (i.e., first twelve pages)
- S. German, "Çatalhöyük," in *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015, <https://smarthistory.org/catalhoyuk/>
- M. van de Mierop, "Prehistoric Developments," in *HANE*, 10–18
- N. F. Miller and K. M. Moore, "The Geography and Agriculture of the Middle East," in *JTC*, 18–44

Wed 9/16: The Chalcolithic

Reading

- M. Liverani, "The Neolithic and Chalcolithic Periods," in *ANE*, 46–58 (i.e., the rest)
- H. Pittman, "A View from the Highlands," in *JTC*, 101–26
- S. German, "Bushel with ibex motifs," *Smarthistory*, July 2, 2023, <https://smarthistory.org/bushel-with-ibex-motifs/>

Fri 9/18: Discussion Section: Göbekli Tepe

Map Quiz 1

Reading

- A. Curry, "Göbekli Tepe: The World's First Temple?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, November, 2008, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/gobekli-tepe-the-worlds-first-temple-83613665/>

Unit II: Egypt in the Bronze Age

Mon 9/21: Egypt in the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period

Reading

- A. Calvert, "Ancient Egyptian chronology and historical framework," in *Smarthistory*, February 4, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/ancient-egyptian-chronology-historical-framework/>
- A. Calvert, "Predynastic and Early Dynastic, an introduction," in *Smarthistory*, February 4, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/predynastic-early-dynastic-introduction/>
- A. Calvert, "Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, an introduction," in *Smarthistory*, February 4, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/old-kingdom-first-intermediate-period-introduction/>
- N. Strudwick, "The Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period," in *OHE*, 619–37
- Optional: J. Johnson, "Egyptian Hieroglyphic Writing," in *VL*, 149–51

- Optional: A. Stauder, “The Earliest Egyptian Writing,” in *VL*, 137–47

Wed 9/23: Egypt in the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period

Reading

- A. Calvert, “Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, an introduction,” in *Smarthistory*, February 14, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/middle-kingdom-and-second-intermediate-period-introduction/>
- W. Grajetzki, “The Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period,” in *OHE*, 638–56

Fri 9/25: Discussion Section: Ancient Egyptian Portraiture

Written Assignment 1 due

Reading

- D. Laboury, “Senwosret III and the issue of portraiture in ancient Egyptian art,” *Cahier de recherches de l’Institut de papyrologie et d’Égyptologie de Lille* 31 (2016–17), 71–84

Mon 9/28: Egypt in the New Kingdom

Reading

- A. Calvert, “New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, an introduction,” in *Smarthistory*, February 14, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/new-kingdom-third-intermediate-period-introduction/>
- C. M. Darnell, “The New Kingdom,” in *OHE*, 657–83

Unit III: Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Iran in the Bronze Age

Wed 9/30: The First Cities of Mesopotamia

Reading

- British Museum, “Cuneiform, an introduction,” *Smarthistory*, February 28, 2017, <https://smarthistory.org/cuneiform/>
- S. German, “Sumer, an introduction,” in *Smarthistory*, June 8, 2018, <https://smarthistory.org/sumerian-art-an-introduction/>
- M. van de Mieroop, “Competing City-States: The Early Dynastic Period,” in *HANE*, 44–66
- Optional: C. Woods, “The Earliest Mesopotamian Writing,” in *VL*, 33–50
- Optional: W. B. Hafford, “The Royal Cemetery of Ur,” in *JTC*, 195–234

Fri 10/2: Discussion Section: The Uruk Vase

Reading

- S. German, “Warka Vase,” in *Smarthistory*, September 28, 2017, <https://smarthistory.org/warka-vase/>
- H. Pittman, “The Uruk Vase,” in *JTC*, 55–58

Mon 10/5: The Akkadian Empire and the Third Dynasty of Ur
Take-Home Quiz 1 due

Reading

- S. German, “Akkad, an introduction,” in *Smarthistory*, June 8, 2018, <https://smarthistory.org/art-of-akkad-an-introduction/>
- M. van de Mieroop, “Political Centralization in the Late Third Millennium,” in *HANE*, 67–89
- Optional: M. Heinz, “The Ur III, Old Babylonian, and Kassite Empires,” in *CAANE*, 706–12 (i.e., first seven pages)
- Optional: M. Liverani, “The Akkadian Empire,” in *ANE*, 133–54
- Optional: M. Liverani, “The Third Dynasty of Ur,” in *ANE*, 155–70

Wed 10/7: Babylon

Reading

- British Museum, “Babylonia, an introduction,” in *Smarthistory*, August 29, 2016, <https://smarthistory.org/babylonia-an-introduction/>
- S. German, “Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi,” *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015, <https://smarthistory.org/hammurabi-2/>
- M. van de Mieroop, “Hammurabi’s Babylon,” in *HANE*, 118–27
- Optional: M. Heinz, “The Ur III, Old Babylonian, and Kassite Empires,” in *CAANE*, 713–21 (the rest)
- Optional: M. Liverani, “Hammurabi of Babylon,” in *ANE*, 240–55

Fri 10/9: Discussion Section: Gudea

Reading

- I. J. Winter, *On the Art of the Ancient Near East, II: From the Third Millennium B.C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), Ch. 22 (“The Body of the Able Ruler: Toward an Understanding of the Statues of Gudea”)

Mon 10/12 to Fri 10/16: No class (Fall Break)

Mon 10/19: The Elamites

Reading

- P. Amiet, “An Introduction to the History of Art in Iran,” in P. O. Harper, J. Aruz and F. Tallon (ed.), *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures from the Louvre* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 2–15
- M. van de Mieroop, “The Middle Elamite Kingdom,” in *HANE*, 195–200
- Optional: J. Álvarez-Mon, “Elam: Iran’s First Empire,” in *CAANE*, 740–57

Wed 10/21: The Hittites

Reading

- British Museum, “Hittites, an introduction,” *Smarthistory*, February 26, 2021, <https://smarthistory.org/hittites-introduction/>

- M. van de Mieroop, "The Old Hittite Kingdom," in *HANE*, 127–31
- M. van de Mieroop, "The Hittite New Kingdom," in *HANE*, 165–74
- Optional: T. Bryce, "The Hittite Empire," in *CAANE*, 722–39
- Optional: M. Liverani, "The Hittite Empire, in *ANE*, 303–24

Fri 10/23: Discussion Section: Peer Review of Written Assignment 2

Map Quiz 2

Bring a draft of your assignment to class in hardcopy or electronic form.

Mon 10/26: The Bronze Age Collapse

Reading

- O. Dickinson, "The Collapse at the End of the Bronze Age," in E. M. Cline, *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 483–90
- M. van de Mieroop, "The Collapse of the Regional System and Its Aftermath," in *HANE*, 202–220

Unit IV: The Iron Age Near East

Wed 10/28: The Luristan Bronzes

Reading

- B. Overlaet, "Luristan Metalwork in the Iron Age," in T. Stöllner et al. (ed.), *Persiens antike Pracht: Bergbau, Handwerk, Archäologie* (Bochum: Deutsches Bergbau-Museum, 2004), 328–38

Fri 10/30: Discussion Section: Forgeries

Written Assignment 2 due

Reading

- O. W. Muscarella, "Forgeries of Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts and Cultures," in B. A. Brown and M. H. Feldman (ed.), *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 31–53

Mon 11/2: The Assyrian Empire

Take-Home Quiz 2 due

Reading

- M. Liverani, "The Structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire," in *ANE*, 497–517
- British Museum, "Assyrian Sculpture," *Smarthistory*, February 28, 2017, <https://smarthistory.org/assyrian-sculpture/>
- M. van de Mieroop, "Assyria's World Domination," in *HANE*, 265–88
- S. German, "Assyria, an introduction," *Smarthistory*, May 14, 2019, <https://smarthistory.org/assyrian-art-an-introduction/>

Wed 11/4: The Iron Age Levant

Reading

- M. Liverani, "Israel," in *ANE*, 401–19
- M. Liverani, "The Phoenicians," in *ANE* 420–33

Fri 11/6: Discussion Section: Reliefs of Ashurbanipal

Reading

- N. Tallis, "21. Reliefs showing the battle of Til Tuba; 22. Banquet relief of Ashurbanipal," in J. Aruz et al. (ed.), *Assyria to Iberia at the Dawn of the Classical Age* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 71–4

Mon 11/9: The Kushite and Saite Rulers of Egypt

Reading

- E. Hornung, "The Late Period," in *History of Ancient Egypt* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 125–47
- A. Calvert, "Late Period and the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, an introduction," *Smarthistory*, February 21, 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/late-period-and-ptolemaic-roman-periods-introduction/>

Wed 11/11: Iran in the Iron Age

Reading

- O. W. Muscarella, "Iron Age," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, March 30, 2006, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iron-age/>
- L. Ristvet, "Hasanlu," in *JTC*, 235–60

Fri 11/13: Discussion Section: Hasanlu

Reading

- M. Cifarelli, "Costly Choices: Signaling Theory and Dress in Period IVb at Hasanlu, Iran," in M. Cifarelli and L. Gawlinski (ed.), *What Shall I Say of Clothes? Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of Dress in Antiquity* (Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, 2017), 101–19

Unit V: The Great Empires of the Near East

Mon 11/16: The Achaemenid Empire

Reading

- M. van de Mieroop, "The Creation of a World Empire: Persia," in *HANE*, 308–26
- M. van de Mieroop, "Governing a World Empire: Persia," in *HANE*, 327–45
- British Museum, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia," *Smarthistory*, September 18, 2017, <https://smarthistory.org/cyrus-cylinder/>
- S. German, "Ancient Persian art, an introduction," *Smarthistory*, June 8, 2018, <https://smarthistory.org/persian-art-an-introduction/>

Wed 11/20: Provinces of the Achaemenid Empire

Reading

- L. Khatchadourian, “The Achaemenid Provinces in Archaeological Perspective,” in *CAANE*, 963–83

Fri 11/21: Discussion Section: Persepolis

Reading

- H. P. Colburn, “Apadana at Persepolis,” in P. L. Bonfitto (ed.), *World Architecture and Society* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2022), 356–61
- Persepolis Reimagined, <https://persepolis.getty.edu/>

Mon 11/23: Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty

Reading

- K. E. Ismail, “The Ptolemaic and Roman Periods,” in *OHE*, 744–60

Wed 11/25: Paper help

Fri 11/27: No discussion section (Thanksgiving Break)

In lieu of a formal discussion section, please feel free to discuss Ptolemaic Egypt with your friends and family.

Mon 11/30: The Near East under Seleucid Rule

Reading

- L. Hannestad, “The Seleucid Kingdom,” in *CAANE*, 984–1000

Wed 12/2: The Arsacid Empire

Reading

- H. P. Colburn, “Parthian Art,” 2022 (orphaned museum essay)
- Optional: S. R. Hauser, “The Arsacid (Parthian) Empire,” in *CAANE*, 1001–20

Fri 12/4: Discussion Section: Peer review of Written Assignment 3

Bring a draft of your assignment to class in hardcopy or electronic form.

Mon 12/7: The Sasanian Empire

Reading

- B. Hensellek, “Sasanian art, an introduction,” *Smarthistory*, September 16, 2020, <https://smarthistory.org/sasanian-art-an-introduction/>
- Optional: A. Mousavi and T. Daryaee, “The Sasanian Empire: An Archaeological Survey, c. AD 220–640,” in *CAANE*, 1076–94

Wed 12/9: The End of the Ancient Near East

Written Assignment 3 due

Reading

- G. Barlow, “Arts of the Islamic world: The early period,” *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015, <https://smarthistory.org/arts-of-the-islamic-world-the-early-period/>

Fri 12/18: **Take-Home Quiz 3 due**

Congratulations!

I am very impressed you have made it to the end of the syllabus. Write the word ‘Gilgamesh’ on your first map quiz to receive an extra point.