

HIST 110 HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONS

Week 1
September 18, 2015

**A sense of time --
the most important divisions
in world and human history**

WHAT IS IN THIS WORKBOOK

The need to classify; hence, to periodize

The vastness of Time

- the age of the universe

- the age of the Earth

- the beginnings of life on Earth

- the break-up of the continents

- the first hominids

 - Homo erectus*

 - Neandertals

 - the first proto-Neandertal traits

 - complete Neandertal characteristics

 - Modern humans (*homo sapiens*)

 - Cro-Magnons

 - The disappearance of the Neandertals

 - The beginning of “history” for Michael Cook

 - the emergence of farming (= food production)

 - Civilization (= literacy + cities + the state)

 - Historical “eras”

 - Antiquity, Ancient History

 - the Middle Ages, Medieval History

 - the Early Modern Era

 - the Modern Era

 - what next ?

The onset of Modernity

The need to classify;
hence, to periodize

The flow of time is continuous
and doesn't really contain any breaks;
nevertheless, we as humans, historians or other scholars
are constantly introducing such breaks into history
basically because of a need, a necessity to classify --

because there is no way of talking about
“all of History,” or “all past events”
without such classification.

All sciences, or even more generally,
all branches of human knowledge
need to be able to classify their subject matter
so for Physics, we have the Laws of Thermodynamics
and for Chemistry, we have the Table of Elements
(or the Atomic Table)
and for Biology, we have Biological Classification, comprising
Plants and Animals
mono-cellular vs multi-cellular animals
invertebrates vs vertebrates
non-mammals and mammals
and primates
and earlier forms of humans
Hominids
Homo erectus
Homo neandertalensis
and eventually modern humans (*Homo sapiens*)

So the Social Sciences, too, have their ways of
classifying and categorizing their subject matter

For History, the most urgent need and the basic form of
classification
has to do with classifying time
that is to say : periodization

In order to create periodization
in order to take the infinite continuum of time
and to be able to break it down into different periods, ages or eras
What do we need ?
We need turning points
(= dönüm noktaları)
or lines of demarcation
(= ayırım çizgileri)

Various disciplines and groups of scientists, including :
astronomers and astrophysicists
(who deal with the history of the universe
and the origins of the planet Earth)
geologists

(who deal with the “age” of different stages
in the history of the Earth)
biologists
(who deal with the history of life on Earth)
and historians
(who deal with the history of human societies)
have to decide on “where to divide”;
that is to say, they have to pick and choose various “key” events
as turning points or lines of demarcation

Here we shall be taking up some of the most important such
divisions
in natural, biological and human history

The vastness of Time

Do you think that Atatürk (1881-1938) lived very long ago ?
or that the 19th century in Europe is so far behind us
(i.e. 1801-1900)
as well as the Tanzimat era in the Ottoman empire
(from 1839 onward) ?
or the French Revolution (1789-1815) ?
or the rise of the factory system (from the 1770s) ?
If so, what about white Europeans’ “discovery” of America
(1492) ?
The rise of the Ottoman empire
(emerging onto the stage of history from c.1300) ?
Medieval Europe (approx. 500-1500) ?
Charlemagne (747-814; reigned 768-814) ?
The Viking Age (ca.750 to ca.1050) ?
Ancient Greece & Rome ?
And before them, the first civilizations (from ca.3000 BC
onward) ?

If you think that these were very very old
then what about the Neandertals
or the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*
or events much, much earlier ?

Do we have a sense of the vastness of time ?
Of just how old the universe is ?
Of the age of the earth ?
And of how small “human existence” is
and of how infinitely smaller civilization is

and how much much smaller industrial civilization is
in this scheme and scale of things ?

This is an exercise in first, zooming back and out;
then, pushing the “fast forward” button and zooming in
on that “smallness of human history

Difficulties of comprehension
arising from our human scale

There are great variations in human well-being
from the most affluent societies on Earth
(mostly in North America and Europe)
to the least affluent
(mostly located in the Southern hemisphere)

Consider that the average human life-expectancy
in affluent societies is

around 80-85 years at most

approx. 73 in Turkey

then dropping to around 40 years in parts of Africa

Also consider that a generation is usually measured as 30 years
(with a century therefore estimated as three generations)

Also consider that

while virtually all people know their parents’ names

and most people know their grandparents’ names

very few people know their grand-grandparents’ names

So our direct, personal, family memory goes back two generations at
most

With that kind of limited horizon and experience

how can we relate to

how can we comprehend

some of the numbers to follow ?

The age of the universe

measured as the time elapsed between

the Big Bang and the present day

is estimated by scientists as 13.73 billion years

with an uncertainty of about 120 million years

The age of the Earth

is close to 5 billion years

since the planet is estimated to have formed
around 4.54 billion years ago

The appearance of life on Earth

(in the beginning, and for a long time, only in the sea)
is around a billion years later

i.e. approximately 3 – 3.5 billion years ago

The continents began to break up 175 million years ago

and this process was still going on around 50 million years ago
(that is to say, they had not been fully separated)

(this has had major consequences

for the flora and fauna of continents

that were isolated before certain species had come into being

-- consider, for example, Australia and Madagascar

which are uniquely rich in marsupials)

The appearance of the first hominids is 4.5 to 4 million years ago

It is from that point that we begin to get

fossils of creatures as close in kind to human beings as to apes

though there is an undecided case that could perhaps be

from 6 million years ago

The first known individual with partially human characteristics is

a little *Australopithecus* female called Lucy

who was given that name some 3 million years after her death

Homo erectus then appeared 2 million years ago

to judge by a fossil skeleton

that is even more complete than Lucy's

The first proto-Neandertal traits appeared in Europe

as early as 500-350 thousand years ago.

Complete Neandertal characteristics appeared

130,000 years ago.

Meanwhile, modern humans (*homo sapiens*, or *homo sapiens*
sapiens)

emerged as a completely new species in Africa

just 100,000 to 200,000 years ago.

They began to migrate to the rest of the world

about 100,000 years ago.

Cro-Magnon Man is one of the main types of *Homo sapiens* in the European Upper Paleolithic. It is named after the cave of Crô-Magnon in southwest France, where the first specimen was found.

The term falls outside the usual naming conventions for early humans and is used in a general sense to describe the oldest modern people in Europe.

Cro-Magnons lived from about 45,000 to 10,000 years ago in the Upper Paleolithic period of the Pleistocene epoch. Cro-Magnons were anatomically modern, only differing from their modern day descendants in Europe by their more robust physiology and slightly larger cranial capacity.

So Neandertals and Cro-Magnons,
or *Homo sapiens neandertalensis* and *Homo sapiens sapiens*
overlapped
from around 100,000 years ago to around 30,000 years ago

Then, Neandertals disappeared
from Asia by 50,000 years ago
and from Europe by 30,000 years ago
(we don't quite know why)

Then we come to the next major turning point
which has to do with the beginning of "history"
in the sense used by Michael Cook (a Princeton professor)
in a book called *A Brief History of the Human Race*

Cook notes that after tens of thousand of years
of little or no development,
humans entered a period of rapid cultural change
(that is to say, "history" began to happen)
only from around 10,000 years ago

Why ? Cook argues that it was around 10,000 years ago
that the world entered a period of unusually warm climate
and that this has remained extraordinarily stable since then
This is what geologists call the Holocene period
and "history" fits snugly into this warm and stable climatic
niche

Earlier, during the very unstable Eemian
or during the very exceptionally cold Ice Ages

humans could not have made “history”
for, to begin with, they could not have developed
farming, or food production

Summarizing Cook : with the end of the Ice Ages
and the beginning of the Holocene,
“a window of opportunity” opened for humans --
and they (we) jumped right through it

The other side of the coin is that
humans were able to jump through this “window of opportunity”
because they had previously acquired a unique cultural agility;
the sharp up-and-down swings,
the extreme hot and cold periods of the Eemian had forced them
to endure hardship,
to become adaptable,
to acquire flexibility
which they put to good use when the Earth warmed up for good

In any case, the key turning point in this regard
becomes, to repeat :

the emergence of farming
= the beginning of food production

Previously : no production in the real sense, but
hunting & gathering
(or) foraging
(or) simple appropriation of nature
(= doğaya basit el koyma)

And it is important to realize that
hunting & gathering is actually 99 % of human existence !

But so, beginning 10,000 years ago (i.e. around 8000 BC)
food production enables humans to do lots of new things :
to settle on the land = to become sedentary
to live in stable villages
to store food
to produce and store food surpluses
to allocate these surpluses to non-farming specialists
to accumulate more and more “culture”

And all this prepares the way for the next jump, or turning point :
the invention of writing (= literacy)
+ the rise of cities
+ the emergence of the state

all of which adds up to :
civilization,
around 5000 years ago, or 3000 BC

From then on, we divide
the history of civilized societies

(= uygar toplumlar)

(or) the history of state societies

(= devletli toplumlar)

into various “eras” (= tarih çağları) :

Antiquity = Ancient History = Eski Çağ = İlkçağ
3000 BC to AD 500

the Middle Ages = Medieval History = Ortaçağ
AD 500 to 1500

the Early Modern Era = Yeniçağ
1500 to 1800 (or 1789)

the Modern Era = Yakınçağ
1800 to around 1980 (?)

(why ? what does this imply ?)

(and now : what era are we part of ?)

Further note, and think about :

* something called Modernity begins around 1500

-- what is this Modernity that is only 500 years old ?

* each age or “era” is shorter than the previous one

-- why ?

* is history accelerating (speeding up) ?

-- what do we understand by the acceleration of history ?

-- do you feel history accelerating in your own life-time ?