HIST 110
HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONS

Week 1
September 18, 2015

Historical Periodization

WHAT IS IN THIS WORKBOOK
Historical eras : a quick review
What do these divisions mean ?
How are turning points selected ?
What is Eurocentrism ?
More on Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance
The Modern Era and the Early Modern Era

Historical eras :
a quick review

Once we get to literate societies with towns and states --
remember that 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 is there a question mark ?
                    what does this imply ?)

        (and now : what era are we part of ?)
        (when shall we know the answer ?)

What do these divisions mean ?

What does it mean to separate "ages" or "eras" in this way ?
      to take the distant and the bird's eye view
      to see the forest more than the trees
      comparable to looking at a painting not up close
      but stepping back to look at it from a distance
      to be able to distinguish the rough outlines of shapes
      or the most basic blocks of color --

to be able to identify certain key "civilizational qualities"
that is to say :
what was Prehistory generally like ?
what was Ancient History/civilization GENERALLY like ?
      how can we describe what Antiquity was,
      and/or what was in Antiquity ?

similarly :
      what was Medieval History/civilization basically like ?
      what imparted to the Middle Ages
          their distinctive qualities, shape, color ?

<u>How are turning points selected ?</u>

How do we decide on these turning points or lines of demarcation ?
How have historians or other thinkers have decided on them in the past ?
The first point to grasp is that these "decisions" evolve over a long time
      somebody, looking for significant or symbolic events,
          tosses out an idea
      which in the course of further writings and debates
          is taken up and repeated by others
      so that it comes to stick
And usually, there is a strong argument behind each such consensus
That is to say, it is not purely random
      there *is* a big difference between Prehistory and Antiquity
      and between Antiquity and the Middle Ages
      and so on and so forth
      and there is a rough "band" within which we can make our choices

Consider, for example :
      1453, 1492, 1517
      OK, there are some differences between them

but all of them fall around AD 1500
and clearly, something significantly new was emerging at that time

The second point to grasp is that even with such strong grounds
it is also essentially a subjective decision
Nothing really "ends" and nothing really "begins" in AD 476
i.e., real life goes on, and goes on pretty much as before
(give or take a few decades) on both sides of the divide
no black and white
no sharp endings or sharp beginnings
* the old continues in the new
* and the new has already begun within the old
Stil, it is important to find an aggregate line that will roughly fit
the various parameters or criteria

An example : the Antiquity x Middle Ages divide
Rome vs the Germanic tribes and their barbarian kingdoms
the peoples
the languages
paganism vs Christianity
slavery vs serfdom
cash-based state vs fief-based state

Not easy to fit everything
but roughly, AD 500...

At the end of the day, there are no obvious signposts in history itself
And all these are nothing but *conventions* adopted
by (some) people who live long after the event
and can look back and think about it

Let's repeat this : these are all matters of convention, of conventionality
And therefore, the proper way to speak out these things
is NOT to say that "Antiquity ended and the Middle Ages began"
with the fall of the Roman Empire in the west in AD 476
BUT to say that "the fall of the Roman Empire in the west in AD 476
is conventionally regarded by historians as marking......"

To some extent, therefore,
it depends on the people involved in such selection

their consciousness
their mental outlook
their preferences

<u>What is Eurocentrism ?</u>

One such problem is that of Eurocentrism, of a Eurocentric outlook
look at AD 476, or AD 1517
for what geography or history are these relevant ?
do they have any relevance outside Europe ?
what, if anything, changed in China in AD 476 ?
or in India ?
or in Arabia ?

Europeans looking at European history
and picking what is (was) important for them

Meanwhile, the ascendancy of Europe
not just political & military
but also intellectual, scientific, educational
the exporting of European knowledge, norms, ideas
to non-European countries and societies
so : a process of universalization
and the use of conventions that do not really fit non-European
histories
e.g. the rise of Islam,
and the Islamic Middle Ages ?
or Medieval Anatolia ?
e.g. juxtaposing European and Ottoman history

looking a bit more closely at these divisions
and when they are decided
and where
and by whom

Consider :
Antiquity –- why Antiquity ? what antiquities ?
Middle Ages –- middle between what and what ?
when did this terminology arise ?
when was the earliest point at which it could have arisen ?
Italy during the Renaissance
why ?
various explanations

a sense of the passage of time
a sense of DIFFERENTNESS
of NOVELTY
a new way of periodizing the past

But of course, things are somewhat different for 1789
    or the 1770s
    or c.1800
for the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution
    were big events of not just European importance
    but world-importance
nevertheless, our existing "standard" classification
    is at least to some extent Eurocentric
    for Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Early Modern Era
but as world history begins to become unified
it becomes more and more relevant

<u>More on Antiquity, the Middle Ages
and the Renaissance</u>

* There is a traditional schematic division of European history into three "eras." Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444), leading humanist, historian and a chancellor of Florence, was the first to conceptualize the concept of a three-tiered history in his *History of the Florentine People* .

* The concept of a Dark Age for the second era had been laid out by Petrarch (1304 – 1374), an Italian scholar, poet, and one of the earliest Renaissance Humanists. Disdaining what he believed to be the ignorance of the centuries preceding the era in which he lived, Petrarch is credited with creating the concept of a historical "Dark Age" (or Dark Ages).
    = Karanlık Çağ, Karanlık Çağlar

* The idea of periodization as 1- the classical civilization of Antiquity, 2- the Middle Ages and 3- Modern Times is attributed to Flavio Biondo (1392-1463), also an Italian Renaissance Humanist and historian.

* Flavio's greatest work is the *Decades of History from the Deterioration of the Roman Empire* (Venice, 1483), a history of Europe in three "decades" and the start of a fourth, from the plunder of Rome in 410 by Athanaric, to then current-day Italy in 1442. Using only the most reliable and primary sources, it was highly

influential in furthering the chronological notion of a Middle Age that lay between the fall of Rome and Flavio's own time. It is the first work in which the term Middle Age is used.

* "Antiquity", then, is the Renaissance vision of Greek and Roman culture by their admirers from the more recent past. It remains a vision that many people in the 21st century continue to find compelling.

* The arts and the humanities, the Renaissance intellectuals reasoned, had declined during the "Middle Ages" that stretched between the end of Antiquity and their own time.

The Modern Era
and the Early Modern Era

Basic definitions :

The Early Modern Era is a term used by historians to refer mainly to the period roughly from 1500 to 1800 in Western Europe. It follows the Late Middle Ages. It is marked by the first European overseas colonies, the rise of strong centralized governments, and the beginnings of recognizable nation-states that are the direct ancestors of today's states. This era spans the three centuries between the Late Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution that created modern Europe.

The Modern Era, the Modern period, or Modern Times are all terms used by historians to loosely describe the period of time immediately following what is known as the Early Modern period. Modern Times are generally regarded as the period from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century and continuing up to today (or until very recently in the late 20th century).

How did all this arise ?

* The word *modern* was first recorded in 1585 to describe the beginning of a new era in the sense "of present or recent times." The word was derived from Latin *modo* in the sense of "just now."
* Renaissance Humanists were given to talking of themselves as "we moderns", and of the Greeks and Romans as "the ancients."

* For a long time during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, there was just one big, undivided block of Modernity. However, as Modernity developed further, and new qualities or characteristics were introduced (such as the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution or the French Revolution), thinkers and scholars felt the need to divide it further.
* The term "Early Modern" was introduced into English "high" language during the **Enlightenment** to distinguish the time between Middle Ages and time of the late Enlightenment (1800).
* Later, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of industrial societies, as well as the French Revolution and the rise of republican-democratic states or societies, became much more important.
* Today, we basically regard the Early Modern Era as pre-industrial modernity, and the Modern Era as industrial modernity.