

THEMES in World History

Your job in the following assignments will be to perform as an historian, particularly as one involved in the themes of global history. With the new global approach to history, which coheres with the growing globalism of thought in science, social thinking, and literature, the thematic approach is particularly important. Over the past forty years historians have opened a host of new thematic topics for historical research, thereby bringing the past alive in ways that older-fashioned world histories could not, narrowly focused as they were on political events. Newer thematic studies have explored gender, or childhood, or the experience of leisure; they have offered important new insights into the nature and service of early consumerism; they have looked at the arts, religion and philosophy as concrete expressions of the spirit of an historical age. As a global historian you will be asked, here, to plug into this new world of concerns: to examine themes of government, military operations, gender, class, innovations and trade, as well the cultural setting--religious and philosophical--in which they take place. In other words you will be looking at a wide gamut of options, in which to perform as an historian of the ancient world.

Political Themes in History

Please compare and contrast three 'political systems' from the ancient world: these can be top-heavy Pharaonic bureaucracies, as in New Kingdom Egypt, or relatively pure democracies, such as that of fifth century B.C.E. Athens. The following questions will give you a chance to take a wide view of the topic before you.

This will be an opportunity for you to review the issue of the origins of political communities, in the broad context of human development. What factors contributed to the development of the first states? What led to the rise of monarchy? What challenges did it face and how did it adapt to them? What were the main regional differences concerning forms of government in the Agricultural Age? What were the main variations in government functions among different regional civilizations in the Agricultural Age? What caused some of the differences? What were the most common religious or cultural roles of governments during the Agricultural Age? What public administration innovations were developed by the Persian Empire? What was the role of the state in economic and trade growth? Do these differences persist today? Why were aristocracies so important in government bureaucracies during the Agricultural Age? What role did early Chinese bureaucracies have in production and control of knowledge? What other roles did the bureaucracy assume in early dynasties? To what extent did Chinese bureaucratic innovations influence practices elsewhere, at some key points in world history? Rumination on these questions should enrich your reflections, as you address the compare and contrast assignment before you.

Social Themes in World History

Please compare and contrast the class and gender structures of three 'social systems' in the ancient world, remembering to clarify what time periods you are referring to. For instance you could compare and contrast the roles, in ancient Egypt, ancient Mesopotamia, and ancient Rome of the *urban slave*, or the conditions under which divorce was acceptable in these three ancient societies.

Once again, you may find it useful to reflect on a series of questions, concerning the origins of gender and class relations in society. How did humans and their ancestors in pre-historical times manage conflict through social hierarchy? How and why did inequalities increase with agriculture? What is the role of religion in defining the caste system? How has the caste system evolved over time? What were the main differences in social hierarchy in ancient China and India? What were the main social effects of the world religions? What were the constraints on change? When did patriarchy begin? How was society organized before this? What changes caused the development of gender inequality? Compare the gender ideas and impacts of the major religions. Did some religions affect or improve women's conditions more than others? What were the main regional differences in gender conditions during the Agricultural Age? What has the role of the state been in reinforcing patriarchy? What were the distinctive features of ancient Mediterranean and Mesoamerican families? What were the functions of polygamy in the Agricultural Age? What was the impact of slavery? What are some key regional patterns? What are some important changes over time? What major changes in sexuality have occurred over time in world history? How did gender play into this sexual behavior? Did differences among the major religions cause significant differences in sexuality?

Economic Themes in History

Please compare and contrast the economic function of the *central market place* in three ancient societies. What was the function of this central market place, how were goods exchanged--barter? coinage?--and what kind of supervision was there over the activities of the market place? Please review the following questions as a means of enlarging your sense of the issues before you.

The development of economic and trade patterns has its roots deep in the human exchange culture. Once again, it may lead our investigation of market cultures to reflect on a variety of questions. What impact did the development of stone tools have on early human development? How do new findings shift arguments about early mankind? Describe the process of iron technology diffusion in Asia. What impact did it have on this world region? How did Mesoamerican trade compare with patterns in Afro-Eurasia? What were the changes in early modern trade patterns and structures, compared to earlier patterns? What was the impact of agriculture on the nature of work?. What is meant by a peasant economy? What was the nature of peasant labor? Why did slavery spread in the Mediterranean region? What was it used for? How did it change over time? How did deforestation impact the ancient Mediterranean? How prevalent was it? What roles did the state play in environmental issues, before modern times? How did forest policies reflect political debates?

Cultural Themes in History

Compare and contrast three ancient civilizations in terms of their central religious and cultural institutions. Who controlled the power over the dominant belief system of the society, if there was one. Was there a supreme religious leader, or a priestly caste which assumed the role of religious leadership? Who or what bankrolled major cultural projects?

The following questions aim to stir your reflections on the backgrounds of human cultural development. What were the main scientific emphases in early civilizations like Mesopotamia? Compare the scientific emphases of China, India and the Mediterranean in the classical period? What kinds of scientific exchanges occurred before the Scientific Revolution? Are art forms, such as drama, universal? What differences are there across different regions? How are art forms influenced by other parts of society? What transnational forces influence art? Why was polytheism so common in early human societies? Why did polytheism decline? Compare priesthoods in the major religious regions. What were the main similarities and differences? What role did trade have in spreading religion? What regions were impacted most by this? How did Buddhism become global? What types of people spread it? Why did so much religious change occur during and right after the period of classical decline?