

What do we mean by “civilization”?

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- The reading from Wenke and Olszewski gives a good general orientation to many of the issues and ways of thinking that we use in this course
 - I won't rehash it here, but I suggest that you read it
- Finally we are going to define civilization!
- A definition just specifies what we agree that an arbitrary term means
 - a definition just states what exactly is included in a category like “cities” or “civilized societies”
 - There are no "true" definitions, and you can't "prove" a definition
 - instead, you accept a definition as a starting point, and then use it
 - as in "was Çatal Hüyük a city according to such-and-such a definition?"
 - We don't have to *like* each other's definitions, we just have to *understand* them or we can't communicate
- Later on, we will look at some *theories* about the emergence of civilization
 - a theory is quite different from a definition
 - a theory is a logical story that explains how or why something happens
 - as in “civilization arose because people consented to work together under a leader in order to build canals, which then led to... etc.”
- We should first get a few more general terms under control
 - these are defined in the (virtual) handout "Concepts and terms related to social and economic organization"
 - We will be using many of these, and most also appear in various readings, so you want to be clear on what they mean
 - I will only touch on a few that people sometimes seem to have trouble with
 - but you are responsible for all of the terms in the handout!
 - Surplus
 - food or other products beyond the minimum subsistence needs of the producer (may be an individual, family, etc.)
 - this amount is available to be collected in taxes, tribute, etc. without harming the producers to the point that they cannot keep producing
 - what is “surplus” depends on the prevailing ideas about the minimum tolerable standard of living
 - Specialization
 - people devoting some or all of their time to certain tasks other than producing their own subsistence
 - part-time vs. full-time specialization
 - Monumental architecture

- architecture intended largely to impress people with the wealth and power of the builders
- Ideology
 - a system of ideas shared by members of a society that makes sense of their world and suggests that it is normal, natural, and right
- Iconography
 - system of imagery or symbolism used by a members of a culture
 - symbols are images that convey meanings (ideas) to people who understand the iconographic system
- Long-distance exchange
 - emphasizes long trips, involving planning, capital, trading specialists, etc.
- Three kinds of economic systems
 - Reciprocity
 - exchange with expected return of something of comparable value
 - the payback is often delayed
 - as in gift-giving, or food sharing among foragers
 - Redistribution
 - some goods are collected by a central institution like a chief's household or a temple, as taxes, tribute, tithes, etc.
 - often stored in a central facility
 - then redistributed back to people in public feasting events, as compensation for group work projects, as a safety net for crop failures, etc.
 - Market economy
 - impersonal exchange based only on supply and demand
- Pristine (or primary) vs. secondary states or civilizations
- Elman Service's typology of social organizations: Band, Tribe, Chiefdom, State, (Empire)
 - based on size of political groups and, more importantly, the kind and degree of stratification of power within them
- Before we can define civilization, we need to define "city" and "state"
 - because many of the definitions of "civilization" use "cities" and "states" as criteria
 - There are three definitions of "city" in the (virtual) handout
 - They generally agree on the basic characteristics of a "city":
 - large population
 - a typical figure is at least 5000 people
 - dense settlement (urban)
 - lots of people who do things other than produce all their own food
 - craft producers, administrators, record-keepers, religious experts, etc.
 - these are supported by food surpluses produced by others
 - the city is part of a city-hinterland system
 - the city gets food from the surrounding hinterland
 - and residents of the hinterland get goods and services from the city
 - this may be organized on a market basis, or through something more centrally controlled like taxation, tribute, redistribution, etc.

- this adds up to the city being economically complex, and the people living in it being economically interdependent
 - that is, the people who produce food, craft goods, and services need each others' products and services to continue living as they are accustomed to
- The differences between the definitions are mostly matters of emphasis and details
- General point: there is more to a city than just size
- There are seven definitions of “state” in the (virtual) handout
 - They differ more than the definitions of "city", and in some interesting ways
 - Still, there are some areas of overlap:
 - A state is a kind of *political* organization
 - although some definitions throw in cultural features, too
 - States are typically said to involve, among other things:
 - A central authority or government
 - an administrative hierarchy
 - sometimes specified as comprising at least three levels
 - A monopoly on the legitimate use of force
 - to enforce laws and/or coerce people
 - to collect taxes
 - Territorial sovereignty
 - a state has the right and power to decide what happens within its geographic boundaries, and to exclude other states from its territory
 - if in a paper you need to argue that a state existed, refer to one of the specific definitions
 - so that it is clear exactly what you mean by the term “state”, and what evidence you are looking for
- Some definitions of “civilization” and “complex society”
 - I will often use those terms interchangeably, even though they are not quite identical
 - **The long list definition** of civilization
 - This is Charles Redman’s 1978 reorganization of V. Gordon Childe’s 1950 list
 - although often regarded as old-fashioned, Childe's definition identified many of the concepts still used by later anthropologists, geographers, historians, etc.
 - Civilizations generally have most of the following characteristics:
 - Primary traits (the organization of the society)
 - Cities
 - Full-time labor specialization
 - Concentration of surplus
 - that is, concentration of a lot of wealth
 - in the hands of institutions like "the church" or "the government"
 - or in the hands of certain individuals like a king or aristocrats
 - or both
 - Class structure
 - that is, people fall into economic or social status categories that have common points of view and interests, often different from those of other classes
 - classes often have different degrees of prestige and power

- as in upper, middle, and lower classes
- or elite and commoner classes, etc.
- State organization
 - political hierarchy of power and administration
 - as defined earlier
- Secondary traits (the material expression and results of that organization)
 - Monumental public works
 - meant at least in part to impress, like temples, palaces, city walls and gates, etc.
 - Long-distance trade
 - Standardized, monumental artwork
 - big, impressive statues, murals, etc. in a specific, widespread style associated with the civilization
 - Writing
 - Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy
- **The short list definition** of civilization (Clyde Kluckhohn 1955, cited in Whitehouse and Wilkins 1986)
 - **Civilized** societies possess at least *two* of the following *three* characteristics:
 - Towns of over 5000 people
 - Writing
 - Monumental ceremonial centers
 - A practical rule of thumb, but does not even attempt to capture the essential features of civilization
- **The "functional interdependence" definition** of complex society (Robert Wenke 1989)
 - complex societies are characterized by functional interdependence rather than functional redundancy
 - functional redundancy:
 - society is made up of units (families, villages, etc.) that can do everything necessary to perpetuate their lifestyle
 - functional interdependence:
 - neither the extended family nor the village could reproduce all the economic, social, and political activities necessary for physical and cultural survival
 - i.e. the units are dependent upon each other for goods and services that they cannot produce themselves
 - this is another way of saying "social complexity"
 - note that this definition is about functional interdependence between units at least the size of families, if not villages or larger units
 - this is because virtually all people are interdependent within the family unit
 - virtually all societies have divisions of labor by sex and age, so within a family, the men are dependent on the women, the women on the men, the young on the adults, etc.
 - and even just interdependence between families seems unconvincing, as in having farming families and pottery-making families
 - is that enough to call a society civilized?
 - or should we insist on whole villages not being self-sufficient? Or is even that enough?

- **The “social structure” definition** of civilization (William Sanders and Barbara Price 1968)
 - The key feature of civilization is its complex social structure
 - which is made evident in several ways, described below
 - Complex societies are stratified, that is, they have:
 - categories of people with different degrees of access to resources
 - a small, wealthy group in control of power
 - a larger, poorer group that is dominated
 - Social class is more important than kinship in determining people’s roles and relationships
 - Sanders and Price claim that this sort of society typically has monumental architecture, which is evidence of
 - a large, diversified labor force
 - specialists to control and coordinate it
 - taxation or redistribution to support it
 - that is, monumental architecture implies these kinds of complex social arrangements
 - They say that civilizations are organized into a nested hierarchy of communities with at least three levels
 - this is a key part of the definition
 - it is a way of specifying *how much* hierarchy or interdependence is enough to qualify as a civilization
 - For example:
 - at the lowest level there might be lots of little villages
 - at the next level, the villages are organized into counties, each of which is administered by a larger town that houses all the people and activities of a regular village, *plus* the people and facilities required to function as the county seat
 - at the next level, the counties are in turn lumped into provinces, each with a larger town yet that serves as a village, *and* as one of the county seats in the province, *and* as a provincial capital
 - that is, there is a *settlement hierarchy*, from villages to towns to cities, with additional functions added to settlements at each step up the hierarchy
 - these levels should be visible archaeologically
 - since the higher-level sites must be larger in order to have enough people for the additional functions
 - and some of the additional functions may require recognizable buildings, like temples or palaces
 - Comment: Sanders and Price suggest that all societies with cities are states, but not all states have cities. Cities are not listed as a characteristic of civilization in their definition.
 - because they were working with Maya sites, which at the time were not thought to have been large population centers
 - we now know that they really were!
 - Another comment: many definitions, including this one, emphasize the increasing importance of class over kinship. Is class really independent from kinship?
 - Aren't most people usually born into their class, and stay there?
 - Haven't lots of states been ruled by hereditary kings and aristocracies (based on kinship)?

- Isn't family important even in our own state (the Kennedys, the Bushes)?
- There may be some good ideas here, but it sounds like our own American ideology being applied to the past
- **The "achievement" definition** of civilization (Richard Burger 1992)
 - a high level of cultural achievement in the arts and sciences
 - as made visible in the form of material objects (buildings, sculpture, metalwork, etc.)
 - that is, if we see sophisticated, impressive buildings, artwork, technology, etc., we consider the society civilized
 - in part for the following reasons:
 - societies that can produce such impressive achievements are probably always socially complex, since such advanced cultural accomplishments imply the existence of
 - a body of esoteric knowledge (religious symbolism, technical methods, sources of materials, etc.)
 - esoteric knowledge: things that most people would not know, and that probably take a lot of training to master, such as specialized techniques for certain crafts, complex or secret religious doctrines, writing, etc.)
 - groups of specialized artisans
 - a surplus of labor and/or food to support the specialists
 - the social mechanisms to appropriate this surplus for non-domestic purposes.
 - that is, means of taxation, collecting tithes, etc.
 - "appropriating surplus": getting people to produce and hand over a surplus; by taxation, social or religious pressure, etc.
 - such a civilization must be hierarchically stratified
 - but the details are open for investigation.
 - cities may be required for civilization, or may just be a common feature
 - Note: this definition does not require cities, trade, state-level social organization... just a high level of "cultural achievement" which, according to Burger, could only exist if most of the rest were present
- **The "wasteful" definition** of civilization (Kwang-Chih Chang 1980)
 - "When we see an ancient society willing and able to devote considerable wealth for seemingly useless tasks, we would admire its people and call them civilized. The more wasteful they are, the greater their civilization looms in our eyes."
 - by "waste", Chang means things like:
 - monumental architecture
 - religious art
 - that are things that are remote from daily use or from subsistence needs
 - these are wasteful from a utilitarian point of view
 - although the people who made and used them presumably thought they served a real purpose
 - to medieval Catholics, there was nothing wasteful about building a cathedral
 - but we might consider it wasteful from a purely practical point of view
 - In order to be "wasteful", a society must produce a big surplus to support the wasteful activities
 - but surplus does not automatically result from improved farming technology

- people could just work less to produce the same amount
- surplus is probably only produced if people are somehow convinced or coerced into producing more than they need
- this probably only happens when there is an elite class to convince people to produce surplus, to organize them, collect the surplus, and administer its use
 - This concentrates society's wealth in the hands of a small segment of society
 - it gives them both the capability to create the wasteful hallmarks of civilization,
 - and the need to do so, in order to legitimize their privileged position
- Chang suggests that large surpluses of wealth (and hence, civilization) arise only through
 - interactions between classes
 - i.e. economic stratification
 - at a minimum, an elite class with access to a surplus of wealth, vs. a lower class
 - interactions between city and hinterland
 - cities where the surplus is concentrated and administered
 - surrounding rural hinterland that produces it
 - Relations with neighboring societies (states or civilizations) that have a similar level of complexity
 - Comment: do we agree with all of these? These are some complex ideas here.
- Comment: For Chang, the presence of "wasteful" monuments and art automatically implies all the rest.
 - If so, this is a very practical, useful definition
 - easy to tell if it applies to any given case
 - all the economic and social features are automatically implied if there is "waste"; there is no need to find ways to document them separately
 - but you would make a stronger case in a paper if you did so anyway
 - This is similar to Burger's definition, but focuses more on the *magnitude* of the use of resources, while Burger emphasizes the *quality* of their use
- **The "cultural interaction" definition** of civilization (Eric Wolf 1982)
 - civilizations are "cultural interaction zones pivoted upon a hegemonic tributary society central to each zone. Such hegemony usually involves the development of an ideological model by a successful centralizing elite of surplus-takers, which is replicated by other elites within the wider political-economic orbit of interaction."
 - what on earth does that mean?
 - *cultural interaction zone*
 - a group of people who interact mostly with each other, and less with people outside their web of interaction
 - thus the members of a civilization share roughly the same culture, and are culturally different from people outside the "interaction zone"
 - *tributary society*
 - a society in which elites extract surplus production (tribute)
 - from economically relatively independent producers (or communities of producers)
 - by political or military coercion
 - in other words, these individuals or communities control their own means of production (land, canals, tools, mines, etc.)

- as in taxation of individuals, communities, companies, etc. that produce on their own, but then have to pay tribute
- or tribute that conquered communities must provide to conquerors
- this tributary society is *hegemonic*
 - the elites have power over the region
 - they have the power to require others to pay tribute or comply with other demands
 - in any given place, there is generally only one group in control, not a chaos of competing gangs or warlords
 - such a society could include multiple political/economic units, each with its own elite
 - that is, one could talk about the hegemonic society of European nations, even though each nation is separate and has its own elite
 - the point is that all have the same general hegemonic structure European culture
- the *ideological model* is a worldview (often a religion, but also political beliefs) that makes the system of extraction and hegemony seem appropriate and natural
 - like our ideological model in which "anyone can grow up to be President", success is based on merit and hard work, competition leads to the best products at the lowest prices, the government is democratic, and so on.
 - ideas like these lead us to think of our government and economic system as normal, appropriate, and legitimate, so we cooperate with it
 - if we lost our belief in too many of these ideas, we might become bitter, uncooperative, or even resist the government
 - this is no airy-fairy intellectual game; leaders really think about creating and maintaining ideologies. Why do you think you said the pledge of allegiance in school so often?
- this scheme of tribute extraction is *replicated* or copied by elites in neighboring interaction zones
 - much as K.C. Chang suggested that civilizations are always multiple interacting states
- this definition of civilization emphasizes interaction and shared culture (including ideology), along with the dominance of an elite that extracts tribute from producers.
 - many features of the other definitions are not included
 - but some of the features of other definitions probably have to be present, even if they are not specifically mentioned
 - like an interdependent economy
 - hierarchical, stratified society
 - the government (state) having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force
 - etc.