***What is a civilization?***

The word "civilization" dates from the 18th century: it refers to the state of human beings who have emerged from the barbarity of the savages and the primitives;

In the 19th and 20th centuries, advances in transport, geographical knowledge of the world, historical investigation and ethnology made it possible to see, in time and space, the existence of many peoples, hotbeds of many different civilizations.

**Civilization**: "Special form of the life of a society, in the moral and religious, political, artistic, intellectual, economic fields" (definition of the Larousse dictionary).

The Oxford English Dictionary’s defines “civilization” as an “advanced stage of human social development and organization”.

The OED elaborates by referring to civilization as providing the “comforts and conveniences only available in towns and cities”. This takes us to the root of the word “civilization”, which comes from the Latin ***“cives****”,* meaning “citizen” – someone who lives in a city.

Civilization first appeared in Mesopotamia and Egypt by c. 3000 BCE, India by c. 2800 BCE, China by about c. 1500 BCE; and Central and South America sometime in the first millennium BCE. From these core centres it then spread outwards, taking in most of the world by 1900 CE.

**Time measurement**

**Chronology** is the science of time and dates. Ancient and current chronological systems have relied on significant events.

**Timeline and dating methods**

In our examination of civilization, we need also to be aware of the dating of time. In recording the past, historians try to determine the exact time when events occurred.

By using dates, historians can place events in order and try to determine the development of patterns over periods of time.

If someone asked you when you were born, you would reply with a number, such as 1999. In this system events are dated by counting backward or forward from **the birth of Jesus Christ** (assumed to be the year 1). An event that took place four hundred years before the birth of Jesus would be dated 400 **b.c**. (**before Christ**). Dates after the birth of Jesus are labeled **a.d**. These letters stand for the Latin words **anno Domini**, which mean “in the year of the Lord.” Thus an event that took place two hundred years after the birth of Jesus is written a.d. 200, or “in the year of the Lord 200.” It can also be written as 200, just as you would not give your birth year as a.d. 1990 but simply as 1990. Historians also make use of other terms to refer to time. A decade is ten years, a century is one hundred years, and a millennium is one thousand years. Thus “the fourth century b.c.” refers to the fourth period of one hundred years counting backward from 1, the assumed date of the birth of Jesus.

Since the first century b.c. would be the years 100 b.c. to 1 b.c., the fourth century b.c. would be the years 400 b.c. to 301 b.c. We could say, then, that an event in 350 b.c. took place in the fourth century b.c. “The fourth century a.d.” refers to the fourth period of one hundred years after the birth of Jesus. Since the first period of one hundred years would be the years 1 to 100, the fourth period or fourth century would be the years 301 to 400. We could say, then, that an event in 350 took place in the fourth century. Likewise, the first millennium b.c. refers to the years 1000 b.c. to 1 b.c.; the second millennium a.d. refers to the years 1001 to 2000. Some historians now prefer to use the abbreviations **b.c.e.** **(“before the Common Era”**) and **c.e**. **(“Common Era”**) instead of b.c. and a.d. This is especially true of world historians, who prefer to use symbols that are not so Western or Christian oriented. The dates, of course, remain the same. Thus 1950 b.c.e. and 1950 b.c. would be the same year.

**The Two most important Calendars**

**The Christian era** counts the years from the birth of Christ.

**The Muslim era** The Islamic calendar begins year 1 on the day Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina, which is the year 622 on the Western calendar.

**Great Periods of Humanity**

**The great periods of humanity** are **prehistory** and **history**.

***Prehistory:***

It reconstructs the lives of men before the invention of writing; we do not know all the steps but only a few links. Prehistoric man, our ancestor, is said to have evolved and progressed in his way of life, from 35,000 to 3,000 BC.

***History****:*

It begins around 3000 BC, with the invention of writing. The first known civilizations leaving us written documents are in Mesopotamia and Egypt. History is divided into **four periods** that are based on spectacular transformations without obscuring the slow transformation of humanity.

**Antiquity**, from 3**,000 BC to 476 AD**, saw the flourishing of Mediterranean civilizations, then ended with the capture of Rome by the barbarians and the collapse of the Roman Empire.

During the ten centuries of **the Middle Ages** (**5th century to 15th century**), the dislocated ancient world tried, in the area of Near Eastern Europe, to reconstruct itself differently. 1492 marks the discovery of America.

The Middle Ages are divides into 3 main periods:

* The Early Middle Ages( known also as The Dark Ages): 5th to 10th century
* The High Middle Ages: 11th to 13th century
* The Late Middle Ages: 14th to late 15th century

**Modern times** (**15th century late 18th century**) opened with the discovery of America, then were marked by European domination over the oceans and the rest of the world. The "economic take-off" that follows transforms societies and upsets traditional balances.

**The contemporary era**, two centuries young, officially began with the French Revolution of 1789 and its extensions in Europe.