

Chapter 1: The Earliest Human Societies: 1-1 A Few Definitions of Terms

Book Title: World Civilizations

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1-1 A Few Definitions of Terms

Let's start our exploration of the past with some definitions of certain key words and phrases:

History (Human actions in past time, as recorded and remembered.) is the record of what people have done in the past. In this context, the past can mean 10,000 B.C.E. or yesterday. History depends on evidence of the past. What has happened but been forgotten, or for which no evidence exists—which is, of course, the vast majority of what has happened—is technically not history.

Historiography (The writing of history so as to interpret it.) is the systematic study of history, as processed through an author's brain and bias, working with the raw materials he or she has found.

Archaeology (The study of cultures through the examination of artifacts.) is the study of past cultures and civilizations through examination of their artifacts (anything made by humans). The name means "the study of origins," and like almost every other scientific name in the English language, it is derived from Greek.

Anthropology (The study of humankind as a particular species.) refers to the science that studies humans as a species rather than studying a special aspect of their activity. Its name, too, is derived from Greek.

Archaeologists are crucial to the study of human societies that existed before recorded history. (See [Chapter 20](#) for a discussion of historians' use of archaeological data to reconstruct the past.) For that transitional period when the remembered and recorded past are just beginning to develop, *paleoanthropologists* (students of human evolution from a multi-disciplinary point of view), *paleoenvironmentalists* (students of ancient natural environments), and *paleographers* (students of old writing) are also essential to historians.

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