

What is Ancient History?

The term Ancient History is commonly used as a modern way of altering a conversation which usually includes discussions that somebody is keen to move away from. However, for the purpose of this essay, Ancient History refers to both an academic subject and the time period before the common era (BC). The length of time and the way things were recorded makes this form of history both interesting and open to interpretation because of the limited original sources that have survived. The majority of the information that we know about Ancient History comes from limited first hand texts and surviving artifacts for example coins and ancient ruins.

In addition to the lack of physical sources, Nietzsche argues that "the ancients lacked the distance necessary for a truly historical perspective" (John Marincola 2011). This shows us how the historians would be relying on the memories of others when it comes to the details of the event. This however, could lead to pieces of the events being left out due to the person not remembering or due to it not fitting the persons views and the historians narrative. Due to this a lot of the ancient historical texts could be leaving out necessary information that could've changed the entire way we modern historians view the Ancient world.

One of the most important historical sites during the Ancient times was The Library of Alexandria. The Library of Alexandria contained the first hand accounts that a lot of historians had access to until it was subsequently destroyed in 48BC when Caesar turned the tides of a battle. After the destruction of The Library of Alexandria, Caesar kept quiet about the extent of damage that was caused. However, Plutarch tells us that "Caesar was forced to repel the danger by using fire, which spread from the dockyards and destroyed the Great Library." (Mostafa El-Abbadi) This resulted in the future historians no longer having access to these accounts thus making their sources less authentic. Macleod (2002) reports that in the first fire thousands of scrolls that were collected and composed by nine generations of scholars and philosophers were ultimately destroyed. Another fire in 450AD caused further damage to the library resulting in the loss of Greek, Hebrew, Mesopotamian and Ancient Egyptian literature. This makes it harder for modern historians to understand the different cultures and their impact on each other.

There are some weaknesses with Ancient History such as there aren't enough written sources available. At the time a lot of information was done through the oral tradition or was engraved on stones or slate. This meant that the information was either lost or decayed over time. However, the sources that were preserved, the historians end up exaggerating specific parts of their writings. This could be due to what type of historian they are since some historians would compare two people and would make one appear better than they were while showing the other as one of the worst. One of the historians that did this was Plutarch especially during his parallel lives biography. There are a lot of sources that are obviously biased. An example of this would be with Thucydides due to him favouring Pericles throughout his writings. This can be seen when he talks about the complaints due to the fact that Thucydides wrote forty chapters on the first two complaints while the Megarian Decree he only wrote two sentences. Thucydides likely did this since the Megarian Decree would put more blame on Pericles for the fall of Athens which is something that Thucydides was trying to avoid. This tells us that we can't take what the sources say at face value as each historian is telling what happened with a specific view in mind which ends

up with them leaving out details and different view points if it doesn't match the narrative that they are attempting to create.

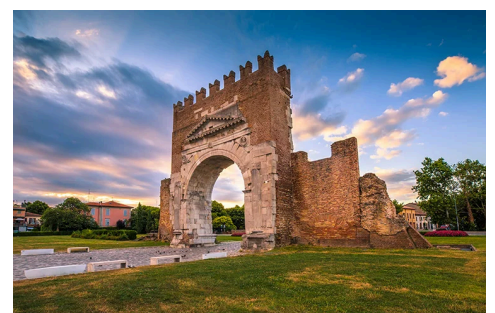
Despite the weaknesses of the study of Ancient History, there are advantages to it. One of these is that by going into detail about Ancient History we can learn what the everyday lives were for the people at the time. This would allow us to get an insight on the society's roles and how the decisions of the Senate would influence the economy and the impact of these decisions would affect the outcome of the coming years. By looking in depth of the society's roles we can see the differences between then and modern day. This would provide us with information that would help us to realise how much the social rules have changed to include more members of the society. For example, women were considered to be 'minors' and possessions of the male family members. Daughters were owned by their fathers until they were 'sold' to their husbands by marriage. Understanding historical society's rules supports our understanding of modern culture.

Another strength of Ancient History is that it brings people together. The current day democracy is a direct result of the ancient democracy of Rome and Greece. The word democracy comes from the Greek word *dēmokratia* where *dēmos* means people and *kratos* means rule (David Fromkin 2026). Democracy has made some changes since the ancient Greeks. It was originally seen practised by a tribe or a small city-state. It wasn't until the 18th century that democracy became associated with a nation or country (David Fromkin 2026). The size of modern societies has changed how we implement democracy but the principles remain the same. All eligible citizens have the right to vote and to elect a parliamentary voice.

Ancient History is not just for academics and historians. Modern popular culture often uses historical references in films and art. For example *The Odyssey*. A lot of the more popular films take a focus on the Ancient myths. Their popularity allows these myths to continue to be told thus making them well known and relevant throughout the modern day. The cinematography enables people to take a glimpse of what life would have been like in ancient times and ensures that we remain interested in history.

A major difficulty in understanding life in ancient cultures were the limited written texts and the reliance on oral teachings. Oral teachings cannot be relied upon for accuracy. It was up to the people to pass on the tale or information that was said by the historian, member of the Senate or playwright throughout the future generations. This meant that a lot of information would end up being lost over time or would have been altered due to the fact that it was up to the people to remember what transpired when the information was first said. The speaker would naturally adjust the information dependent on the audience.

Important information was sometimes engraved into stone. This would allow for the information to be kept intact for the generations to come. The downside of this however is that the stone could be destroyed or damaged thus resulting in the information being uncompleted or obliterated before it can be passed down. An example of information being engraved is the *Triumphal Arch of Augustus* in the Roman Forum that was erected in 19BC as a way to commemorate Augustus (Lothar Haselberger and Carlos F Noreña). The first *Triumphal Arch of Augustus* was built in 27BC to showcase the fact that Augustus was the emperor. However, the large statue of Augustus that was on the arch has been lost to history (Antara Bate 2020). This is still with us today thus showcasing how important this piece of information was since these arches have remained mostly intact despite all the situations that have taken place after they were built. (*Triumphal Arch of Augustus 27BC HistoryHit*)



One of the most famous ancient historians is Herodotus. Herodotus is known as the Father of History due to the fact that he is considered to be the first historian. This means that he didn't have the same criteria that modern day historians have. This resulted in a lot of mentions of the Gods due to the fact that at the time it was Greek tradition to use omens and the Gods as a way to explain what's going on. The Greeks, mainly the military leaders at the time, would go and consult the Oracles like the Oracle of Delphi before doing anything (D Midgley 2026 10:17 - 10:25). This is due to the fact that religion was so engrossed within Ancient times that it was something that people couldn't avoid as it was something that everybody followed.

Another reliable source can be found in the carvings on coins, many of which survived today. These coins provide us with information such as who were the powerful leaders. It is known that coins could also be used as propaganda for example showing the outcomes of battles. Augustus did this with the battle of Actium thus highlighting his victory over Cleopatra as an enemy of the state rather than Mark Antony, a fellow Roman. (Battle of Actium coin British Museum)



The study of Ancient History tends to focus on Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. While there are other Ancient Civilizations such as Ancient Egypt and the Aztecs much of the focus remains on these European countries. It is believed that Ancient Greece and Rome are the foundations of modern European culture so should be understood (Hendrik Pahl 2024). Other ancient cultures have their own area of study, for example Egyptology.

Swansea University describes their course as the opportunity to understand theories that will allow for people to "grasp the variety of lived experiences that resulted from the ancient world". Ancient History provides knowledge on the everyday lives of these ancient civilizations and the impact these teachings would have on the modern day timeline. The sources that we use for the purpose of Ancient History provides us with an opportunity to understand the archaeological remains we found. This covers a multitude of different topics including politics, military strategies, health, entertainment, death, mythology, education and marriage (University of Wales Trinity Saint David Carmarthen). The continuing interest supports ongoing investigations into the ancient world ensuring funding for future exploration.

When it comes to the future, the likelihood of finding new written text is very slim however, with the use of archaeological tools it's highly probable that we'll continue to discover ancient buildings and artifacts. The recent discovery of the Roman villa in Margam Park shows us that there are more historical sites to be found that would impact the views both on Ancient Roman times and also of Welsh history. Initial findings suggest that Wales was more than the once thought political outlier and may have had its own seat of power. The fact that these remains have remained covered by earth should allow us to gather untouched artifacts. The ancient buildings or pottery that could be found may reveal some parts to the lives of the people that we didn't first think of. The ongoing discoveries secure both funding and interest in exploring ancient remains and ensure that potential sites of significance are protected. This is particularly important when developing green sites such as major road developments. The need to understand these sites has led to an increase in archaeological opportunities.

In conclusion, Ancient History is understood to be the study of ancient civilisations in the period before the common era. Whilst there are limited first account sources its ongoing significance in modern culture continues to support its study. This interest allows for further exploration, increasing both knowledge and understanding. The fact that we are still discovering such major remains is exciting for future historians.

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