Course title: **Ancient Society**  
Course No.: **M11401/ P11201**  
Programme of Study: MA/ MPhil, Centre for Historical Studies  
Credits: 4 for MA, 2 for MPhil  
Course instructor: **Prof. R. Mahalakshmi**

The Centre for Historical Studies offers four core courses that students admitted to all three streams – Ancient, Medieval and Modern - have to credit over three semesters. *Ancient Society* is the first of these and is offered in the first semester. It is also occasionally recommended for MPhil students who have not done their MA in CHS.

The course will introduce students to a variety of social formations in the ancient world. The focus will be on concepts such as the band, tribe, chiefdom, state, urbanism and empire, questions of the significance of technology as well as on forms of exchange, and attempts to engender investigations into early societies. The shifts that have occurred within the disciplinary fields of history, anthropology and archaeology will be discussed with a view to understanding the shifts in terminology and analysis of different developments in the ancient world. The canvas of the course is very vast, and the focus is liable to change periodically.

There are four broad themes that will be covered in the course. The first two themes relate to the prehistoric period, the third to the protohistoric, and the fourth and fifth to the early historic periods. The first theme will look at categories such as ‘stone age’, ‘hunter and gatherer’ and ‘savagery’, and also discuss the different contexts and methodologies employed to understand these. The second will interrogate the understanding of the ‘Neolithic Revolution’, and the different studies particularly in the West Asian context that have helped us bring a more complex understanding of the earliest food-producing societies.

The third theme focuses on the rise of the earliest state societies, the growth of complex political economic structures and the evolution of specific social institutions. Studies on Mesopotamia and Harappa will be taken up for discussion here. The fourth and fifth themes relate to the Mediterranean region in particular, although the South Asian context will also be discussed. The significance of iron technology in catalyzing change, the growth of states and empires, the nature of economic production, and the social structures that distinguish these societies will be focused upon.

There are two classes scheduled per week, over the semester. There will be special lectures, film
screenings and reading groups that will be arranged periodically. Assignments will include one tutorial and a mid-term test (topic and schedule available on the notice board, and on the Ancient Society facebook page). Instructions on the tutorial word limit and style are available on the CHS website. In addition, all students have to periodically submit short written assignments on readings prescribed for the course, which are available on JStor, and listed on the facebook page.

An examination will be conducted at the end of the semester. It is mandatory for students to take both internal assessments within the stipulated time period, to be allowed to sit for the exam.

Readings:
1. *A People’s History of India*, New Delhi, Tulika, relevant volumes.

Articles (from JStor):


