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Boris S. Erasov, ed. Sravnitelnoe Izuchenie Tsivilizatsiy

David Richardson

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This reader fills a crying need of historians and civilizationists for a low-cost collection of first class texts dedicated to the comparative study of civilizations. I should say, can fill the need of English speaking readers, if it is translated into English. I hope it soon will have a translator. Professor Erasov’s (University of Moscow) selections range from chapters of many pages to chapters composed of several fragments. His book deals with civilizations in a welcome variety of ways.

Most of Erasov’s selections come from twentieth century authors, many of them members of ISCSC. These include such outstanding authors as Carroll Quigley (The Evolution of Civilizations) and John Hord (“Systems of Formal Knowledge as the Foundation of Civilization”).

Though Erasov’s selections range backward in time to Ibn Khaldun, nearly all of them are by twentieth century authors, authorities in their fields; e.g., W.H. McNeill, Stcherbatsky, M.Weber, K. Klausewitz, W. Eckhardt, L. Dumont, T. Hall, F. Braudel, S. Huntington, E. Shils, P. Bagby, S. Eisenstadt, R. Aron, and many others.

The opening chapter is entitled “Civilizational Theory in Formation,” with twelve selections from Danilevski and others. Chapter two deals with structure of society, e.g., civilization as an urban society, or as style, or as axial, etc. Chapter three deals with civilization and religion. Chapter four deals with civilization and state relationships, including a piece from F. Engels.

Chapter five takes up center and periphery of civilizations. Selections from eight authors make up Chapter six. They go into the dynamics of civilizations, changes, declines, long durations, etc. Chapter seven takes up classifications in respect to comparative studies. Here the idea of “Oriental Renaissance” receives criticism from Eidlin. I would like to have seen a selection from Raymond Schwab’s Oriental Renaissance, too. Chapter eight
goes into civilization and war with authors from east and west, old and new.

Chapters 9 through 14 deal, respectively, with several civilizations and all but one by means of “fragments” from several experts. Two titles especially interest me: “Indian Civilization” (11) and “Buddhist Civilization” (13) (fragments from some modern Western and Russian Buddologists).

Chapter fifteen takes up modernization and civilization. Chapter sixteen goes into the interaction of civilizations, with both fragments and more extended statements. Chapter seventeen largely compares civilizational and world systems studies.

Thus the book is almost entirely composed, as the title indicates, of fragments and larger selections from top authors used in the comparative study of civilizations. Perhaps no professor would assign the whole book for reading. Scholars and authors will want to have this book for their own, if only to jog their memory of this theory or author, and that. Since nearly all the selections are available in English, translating Erasov’s Reader should be relatively easy.

To some extent the book is a measure of the impact of ISCSC activities and writings on the present-day images of history and civilization, for it contains selections from many ISCSC authors.

David Richardson