



10-1-2007

Jaroslav Krejci, *The Paths of Civilizations: Understaning the Currents of History*

Tseggai Isaac

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr>

Recommended Citation

Isaac, Tseggai (2007) "Jaroslav Krejci, *The Paths of Civilizations: Understaning the Currents of History*," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 57 : No. 57 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol57/iss57/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Jaroslav Krejci, *The Paths of Civilization: Understanding the Currents of History*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan 2004, 281p.

REVIEW 1

Scholars continue to grapple with the meaning of civilization. In many cases, the difficulties encountered in articulating the meaning of civilization are made even more challenging when the methodology is a cross-hybrid of different disciplines. Multidisciplinary approaches may add richness to analytical tasks, but they can also compromise the mission by creating forests of half-developed methodological approaches, obscuring operationalization of the topical concept at hand. *The Path of Civilization* shares the problem of failing to balance conceptual clarification with methodological utilization. In this case, eclecticism, with respect to methodology, sells short the vast detail so painstakingly put together covering all the major civilizations.

The Path of Civilization is rich in details. The prose is elegant and masterful. The book is divided into three parts. Part I, containing 7 chapters, is the theoretical basis for the analytical task. These chapters trace the theoretical dilemma scholars are bound to encounter as they select their "angle of observation" for the study of civilizations. Contextual and positional environment of the concept of civilization must be analyzed. Contextual analysis would pay attention to culture and history while positional analysis would address geographical elements. This is not an easy task. The author notes that where the observer of a phenomenon stands, in this case, the evolution of civilizations, determines the body of work the researcher plans to develop. "The choice of focus is influenced either by the angle of empirical observation or by one's theoretical starting point, which may involve taking an *a priori* ontological or epistemological position" (p. 3). Methodologies that the author marshals to define "the paths of civilizations" include history, sociology, economics, political science, and anthropology.

Early in the first chapter, the author reflects on past studies undertaken by A. J. Toynbee, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. Toynbee's approach is dismissed on the basis of inconsistency, lack of coherence and lack of appeal to European scholarship. Toynbee's 12-volume work can be "appreciated as a source of interesting insights and juxtapositions rather than a coherent view of history" (p. 5). Marx's appeal to Marxists was as an inspiration for his followers, but their failure to cap-

italize on Marx's structural focus while dwelling on his polemics has reduced Marx's universal appeal. Krejci grabs on the failure of Marx's disciples to fully develop his own ideas via structural analysis. Marx had left a legacy of looking at history from "socio-economic insights." Marx's structural elements rather than his "global categories" need to be extended to cover the structure of power as a definitional tool for the attributes of civilizations.

Chapter 4, "Spatio-temporal outlines of civilizations," lays the groundwork for analyzing civilizations in the Levant (Egypt and the Middle East), South Asia, East Asia, Europe, America and Africa. The dynamics of social formation (chapter 5) viewed from Marxian, Spencerian, and Weberian perspectives brings the spatio-temporal and social formation together as germane components of the path of civilization. Chapter 6 discusses structures and ideas based largely on Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrian prophesies. Chapter 7 covers the geopolitical formation as regards tribes, dynastic states, city states, nations, nation-states and international organizations. "In the style of this book, the states and their historical precursors as well as the territorial derivatives, such as colonies or dependent territories, may be described as geopolitical formation" (p. 37). Civilizations start at the lowest level of human organization and evolve into global influence at the international level. These chapters represent the theoretical base for the author's panoramic approach to the regional civilizations mentioned above.

Parts II and III of the book are descriptive analyses, the substantive part of the book. The antiquity of each civilization is explained fully and then related to the theoretical groundwork set forth in Part I. What becomes apparent from careful study of the book is that the author possesses unsurpassed mastery and encyclopedic knowledge of global civilizations even to their lowest common denominator of primitive tribal life in remote Africa or Asia. The depths and breadth of the pedagogy is short-sold by abrupt transitions from one topic to the next.

Reading the book one cannot help but surmise that it is perhaps an outline of a multivolume work that the author is working on, but now being introduced as a bellwether until a fully developed work is heralded. The richness of details summarized in short and choppy chapters and the frequent use of provisional punctuations, particularly the parenthesis, indicate a work in progress rather than one that is completed. Chapters 1 through 7 cover 37 pages only. Chapters 8 through 13 cover the empirical analysis of book expertly detailed and developed. Chapter

14-16 are concluding "observations" covering only 25 pages.

Another observation about the work is the apparent use of twentieth century upheavals and ethno-linguistic and confessional conflagrations as indicators of ancient features of particular civilizations. For instance, the civil wars that resulted in the separation of Pakistan and India are attributed to the civilizational features of Hinduism and Islam. It seems that there may be ecological fallacy at play here. Could it be the case that the coming of Islam to India in the twelfth century may have foretold the events of post-colonial crisis? Can civilizations cohabitate and coexist? If the answer to this question is yes, then something else may be the cause of the internecine bloodshed. If the answer is no, then the civilizations are to blame. And if civilizations are incapable of harnessing the worst forms of human temper, by the standards of Professor Krejci's definition of civilization, they fall far short of being called civilizations (see Chapters 2). If not both, at least Hinduism or Islam must be the cause for India's nightmares in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Further observation of the book indicates the absence of analytical balance. For example, Africa is analyzed in terms of Sub-Saharan, colonial and post-colonial struggles. The author disavows organic African civilization. The parameters laid out as part of the theoretical methodology in terms of social formation, historical evolution, and geopolitical formations touch on Africa in terms of the actions taken by Europeans on behalf of or against Africans. There is no home-grown African civilization to analyze, because Egypt is amputated from Africa and grafted to the Levant. The term used by historians to describe African races and linguistic patterns such as Afro-Asiatic or Afro-Hamitic and their social formation, historical evolution, language, hieroglyphic scripts, and cultural artifacts are not included in this analysis.

In terms of editorial workmanship, page 44 is missing and the indices that would be referred to that page cannot be found. In all fairness, the book is hard to read and this review may have done some injustice by pointing out some points the author would consider insignificant. A work so detailed and authoritative in the topical components of civilizations and their evolutions should be praised for its apparent excellence and its potential regardless of a reviewer's few misgivings.

Tseggai Isaac