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Barry Cunliffe, *Europe Between the Oceans-9000 BC-AD 1000*

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Barry Cunliffe, *Europe Between the Oceans—9000 BC-AD 1000*. Yale University Press, 2008.

Scholars are once again exploring why Europe, which appears to be just an insignificant geographic appendage to Asia, has risen to world dominance in the past thousand years. In the 19th century, scholars such as Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) took up the racial superiority theory that Aryans, speakers of Indo-European languages, were a special breed blessed with superior intelligence whose mission was to civilize the rest of the world. He added to this the physical element of pale skin. The lighter the complexions of the Aryans, the more superior they were to the dark-skinned Aryans, and certainly all of them were superior in mind, morals, and talents to the other human “races.”

During the first half of the 20th century, the European fascist movement, particularly Nazi Germany, cited Gobineau’s work as proof that the Germans were the epitome of Aryan purity and that it was their duty to purge “inferior races” from their midst—and from the world, if they could. They, and their racial theories, were disgraced after they lost World War II, and younger scholars launched the movement toward racially-sensitive historicity which eventually spawned a movement of studying every culture except for that of the Western world. “Western Civilization” nearly disappeared from university curricula.

Once more, the pendulum is swinging and we have such scholars as Ricardo Duchesne exploring why European (Western) civilization has had such enormous and far-reaching vitality and power. Duchesne attributes this in part to a certain “restlessness” of Indo-European peoples from their very beginnings. Certainly they have been the most mobile of all humans since at least 1,000 BC, as can be observed in the widespread tenure of Indo-European languages. In addition, there has been a strong strain of individualism that still permeates our culture.

Another scholar, Barry Cunliffe, a leading archeologist in Europe and emeritus professor at Oxford, has produced an interdisciplinary tour de force with his latest work: *Europe Between the Oceans*. Here he explores Europe’s history from 9,000 BC to 1,000 AD, the period before which Europe’s global domination began. He attributes this domination to the same “restlessness” that Duchesne is exploring, but also looks at the role of geography (as Jared Diamond has done), the peninsular nature of Europe, surrounded by seas and cut up by navigable rivers. This geography, of course, played an enormous role in river trade and going out to sea for trade and conquest

Cunliffe addresses a new way of looking at space, time, and people and their interaction. He takes up the geography of land between oceans, the foods available for gathering, the first farmers (7500-5000 BC), movement into the Maritime regions (6000-3800 BC), the infinite variety of Europe’s geography and botany, taking to the sea (2800-1300 BC), the 300 years that changed the world (800-500 BC), interlude of empire (140 BC-300 AD), the dark ages (300-800 AD), and the *Longue Duree* (the overview of European mobility).

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The book is well illustrated with photos, maps, and drawings. It seems to me a perfect textbook for a course devoted to the long history of the Indo-European peoples—and is fascinating reading for us in the ISCSC, who so often take the long and interdisciplinary view of civilizations.

Laina Farhat-Holzman