



3-1-2011

Editor's Note

Joseph Drew
josephdrew4920@comcast.net

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

Recommended Citation

Drew, Joseph (2011) "Editor's Note," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 64 : No. 64 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol64/iss64/2>

This Front Matter 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.

Editor's Note

This past year was rendered a sad one for all of us with the unexpected passing of Professor Matthew Melko, a former president of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. He died in August of 2010.

The society will be holding a special commemorative session in his honor during the New Orleans meeting. In addition, it is a pleasure to announce that the ISCSC will this year begin awarding the Matthew Melko Prize for the best theoretical paper presented at the annual conference. As Prof. Andrew Targowski, our current president, points out, the innovation "will provide a rather lasting memory of Prof. Melko for all our members and conference participants." He also notes that the Matthew Melko Prize will appear alongside our other new creation, the Toynbee-Talbutt Award, to be given during the annual conference to those individuals who qualify as rising young stars in the field of the comparative study of civilizations.

Who was Matt Melko?

A nice brief, sensitive and thoughtful review of Matt's life was written almost immediately by the current president of the society, Prof. Andrew Targowski, and carried in our last issue.

But what do others who knew him report?

Prof. Michael Palencia-Roth, of the University of Illinois, served as president after Matt. A beautiful writer and distinguished scholar, he recalls as follows:

I no longer remember the first time that I met Matt Melko. It could have been as early as 1978. At any event, it was during the early days of my association with the ISCSC. My first impressions were of a tall man with an awkwardly boyish frame, a short haircut that was combed forward, eyes that twinkled through his glasses, an intelligence that was at once both penetrating and gentle, a delightful sense of humor and irony. Most of all, he seemed to move through life with what I can best characterize as kindly intelligence. While he did not shy away from disagreeing with people, and while he was generally frank in his assessments (I remember him characterizing a book under review as "goofy", with some justification), his dialogues with ISCSC members were always generous and usually led to discussions. He did not fight with people; I never saw him belittle anyone in an argument.

I disagreed with him on occasion. For instance, I thought that his obsession with trying to define Latin America as a unique and distinctive civilization was wrong-headed. I told him so, we argued about it, and he said that he agreed with me. And yet, in meeting after meeting, he insisted on organizing panels to define Latin

American civilization, as well as to determine its boundaries, its birth, and its (actual or potential) demise. Our disagreements never altered our personal affection for each other, however, and we served together on the Ruling Council for several terms, on several program committees, and on other ad hoc committees. I came to consider him one of my closest friends in the Society.

His interest in “boundaries” led to him publishing, with Leighton Scott, *The Boundaries of Civilization in Space and Time* in 1987, a book that I have consulted repeatedly over the years. I also read and enjoyed his book entitled *The Nature of Civilizations*, as well as other writings on “general war” and on “peace in our time,” a book whose title ironically echoed Neville Chamberlain’s remarks on returning from a meeting with Hitler in Munich in 1938.

After I became president of the ISCSC in 1986, Matt told me something about his own presidency, about how difficult it was to get ISCSC members to do things, even to agree on doing things, and how he had trouble with keeping the membership up, with the finances, and with the journal. I came to suspect that he was trying to cheer me up before the fact, if I should run into similar difficulties. I did in fact run into those difficulties, as well as others, and suspect that other ISCSC presidents have had similar experiences.

In later years, especially after about 1999 or 2000, despite health problems, he soldiered on. His contributions remained as valuable as ever. Certainly the last speech that I heard him give, on “War, Peace, and Civilization,” at the Kalamazoo conference in 2009, was vintage Melko: insightful, humorous, well organized, self-deprecating and interesting throughout. I thought that he would be around for years to come.

I will miss him and his wife Nell at meetings. I will miss not being able to pick up the phone and ask him about a problem, a colleague, an address, how to locate a document, or what happened when in the early history of the Society -- in fact, anything at all related to the ISCSC. I will miss his counsel. I will miss his willingness to help. As one of the founders of the Society back in 1971 when it migrated from Europe to America, he became the Society’s institutional memory, along with people like Vytautas Kavolis, Roger Wescott, and David Wilkinson. More than that, and probably more than any of us, Matt was the Society’s heart.

Five additional colleagues of Prof. Melko also quickly reflected upon their association with Matt for this note. Thus, *Comparative Civilizations Review* Senior Editor Laina Farhat-Holzman, of California, writes:

I attended a World History conference in Pomona in the early 1990s and noticed that another association was sharing the conference--ISCSC. When I wandered over, I was immediately surrounded by enthusiastic scholars telling me about their organization. I remember Stedman Noble, who looked like Santa Claus: Matt Melko, a tall, thin, boyish looking man with a shock of white hair; and Ashok Malhotra, who came over to collect a group for some yoga relaxation. After reading the program, I knew that this was the organization for me. It has legs.

Matt and I became friends--and we spoke often on the phone during the time that he was exceedingly frustrated with e-mail technology. As he became more comfortable with it (with help from grandchildren), our conversations increased. We sent each other articles (Matt had been a Reuter's correspondent in his youth) and discussed world issues with gusto. I always learned from him--and relished his cool head and good humor.

The most significant memory I have of Matt was when he spoke at our Paris conference--the one American professor on the podium with French professors and administrators (and simultaneous translation). Matt was charming, learned, self-deprecating, and wise--obviously another breed from some of the others up on stage. I have never been prouder of an American intellectual--a real one without ego--than I was of Matt that day. He did not have to advertise his importance.

Everybody who has ever been his student or his colleague has been very lucky indeed to know Matt Melko, an American treasure. I will miss him, and know that our association will as well.

Another long-time colleague has been Professor Michael Andregg, of Minnesota. He recalls as follows:

I first met Matt Melko at a COPRED conference (Consortium for Peace Research, Education and Development) where we were both active in the mid-1980's. He told me about an unusual group of interdisciplinary scholars who studied "civilizations" and suggested I might come some day.

So I attended my first ISCSC conference in 1988. It stuck because I could get more instant expertise on wars of ancient times there than anywhere else. You never met such an odd group of scholars, always deep in something yet broad at the same time. And not all historians or sociologists -- there were always a few physical scientists, anthropologists and even a biologist or two. I also stayed because of Matt's hard

work over decades to encourage the broad view of human history, so essential for my own work on causes of war.

Of course he served in every capacity of the organization at one time or another, and years after he declined the honors of program chair or conference organizer, he would still arrange perhaps a third of the panels in conferences just by calling old friends and colleagues putting together combinations that moved scholarship forward. Matt was part of the social glue so essential to small academic groups, and he was an intellectual integrator essential to find common ground among scholars from around the world and from every conceivable discipline.

The one project I wish he had finished was forging a consensus on what exactly a civilization is, and a consensus list of which groups deserve that label. He did not fail for lack of trying – Matt arranged many discussions of exactly those topics. Consensus was frustrated by the kaleidoscope of people and disciplines he, and co-founder David Wilkinson, gathered from all over the world. And that's OK, because any firm consensus might have squelched the creative zest with some emerging dogma.

So work remains to be done. Matt was always an advocate for young scholars and for genuine interdisciplinary exchange. And he always believed that the civilizational perspective, whatever that is, held real clues to the great problems of our age like world peace. I hope the young scholars will continue to struggle with these in the graceful ways that Matthew Melko showed us in his search for global harmony.

Brigham Young University's Connie Lamb, an Associate Editor of this publication plus an active leader of the ISCSC in a wide variety of ways, also remembered Prof. Melko fondly for this note. She comments:

I first met Matt at the annual ISCSC Conference when it was held at Brigham Young University in 1997. Although I did not continue attending conferences at that time, Matt kept in touch once in a while and asked me to do a couple of peer reviews for CCR papers.

When the conference was to be held at Asilomar in California, he wrote and suggested I present a book review there since it is fairly close to where I live. I presented a comparative book review and since then, I have attended all the conferences and have become very involved in ISCSC.

During the conferences, I spent a good deal of time visiting with Matt and Nell and enjoyed their company so much. I didn't know Matt very long, but came to appreciate him as a scholar, gentleman, and friend. I am grateful to him for helping me become more involved in ISCSC. ISCSC members, including myself, have

benefited greatly from his knowledge, leadership and stimulating papers and comments. He was always so kind and encouraging and I will miss him deeply.

Dr. Norman Rothman, a historian at the University of Maryland University College who has published widely, including a book review in this edition, reminisces:

I had the great privilege of knowing Matt Melko for nearly a decade. He acted as a mentor to me as he did for so many others whom he encouraged in their scholarship. Very modest about his own considerable attainments as journalist, writer, teacher, administrator, and, above all, as scholar, Matt was generous and unselfish in his support of others. During times of crisis, Matt Melko was instrumental in keeping the association going and, when necessary, making a mid-course correction.

No matter how arduous the circumstance, Matt kept up a cheerful attitude mixed with a healthy sense of realism. He was unique! Common adages such as "he will be missed" and "we will not see his like again" are substantial understatements.

Finally, Donald Thomas Burgy, who has presented dramatic new findings on Paleolithic writing and civilizations in a series of articles carried in the pages of this journal, observes as follows:

Matt Melko and I were on the faculty of a women's college and we played in the Saturday afternoon friendly faculty basketball games, but we didn't know about our mutual interest in large scale cultural patterns until we experienced what Carl Jung called a synchronism. We both stepped up to the college library circulation desk simultaneously and both requested the same book, Thomas Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions." That was the beginning of our new friendship. Today we wouldn't say "synchronism," we'd use the quantum physics term "we were entangled." And we probably still are.

As Editor in Chief of the CCR, an admirer, and friend, I would only add to these excellent commentaries that Prof. Melko was a mentor of virtually every student of comparative civilizations in the United States. He put in many years diligently building the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations and his memory will remain a blessing and an inspiration to every lover of peace and scholarship.

All who knew him are thankful that Matt Melko was a part of our life, and our world. May he serve as a lasting and sage guide for all our future actions, and may he rest in peace.

Joseph Drew