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# Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

### **Cover Page Footnote**

Bulliet, Richard W.; Goldman, David P.

## Book Reviews

**Ricardo Duchesne. *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*. Brill Press, 2011.**

Reviewed by Laina Farhat-Holzman

**Overview:** After many decades of replacing courses in Western Civilization with World History, some younger historians are beginning to challenge this approach. The teaching of history, like educational philosophy in general, goes through cycles, fashions, and fads. In the case of history, this discipline has never been detached from other disciplines, nor from the social philosophies of the day. The first duty of education is to teach us who we are and how we became what we are today.

Anthropologists in particular have been responsible for the past half-century of dethroning Western Civilization from its central role in the consciousness of the educated West. Anthropology, in response to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's view that Western Civilization was unlike that of any other civilizations, has reversed this view by instituting the model of non-judgment: treating all other societal models as equivalent, in the hope of avoiding prejudice or intolerance. However, taking this moral high ground was not enough to avoid prejudice. Western civilization had to be found to be imperialistic, violent, and evil---and if taught at all, only the warts, not the virtues, had to be emphasized. In academically throwing out the baby with the bath water, students lost sight of what has made the West distinctly different—and arguably more fortunate—than every other civilization.

Despite the proliferation of “ethnic studies,” few scholars wanted to take on “Indo-European Studies,” lest they be thought to support the Nazi movement's wildly flawed theory of Aryan superiority. Thus, out of fear of criticism and in obedience to the Post-World War II progressivism, not only was Western Civilization tossed out, but even “Indo-European Studies.”

Ricardo Duchesne, a Canadian professor and scholar, has taken on this challenge, producing a volume that took a decade to write, and one that I believe may become as consequential as Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, which accentuated the role of geographic good fortune to explain the rise of the West, and Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, which warned of wars on the bloody borders of Islamic Civilization with all of its neighbors.

Toby E. Huff's *Intellectual Curiosity and the Scientific Revolution: A Global Perspective* showed in great detail why the 17<sup>th</sup> century rise of the scientific revolution was not just a temporary stroke of good luck, but was the inevitable result of an entirely unique civilization that began with ancient Greece. There were good reasons why this revolution (and its ultimate string of freedoms that produced the modern world) did not,

and could not happen in the great civilizations of the time: China, India, and Ottoman Turkish. Even when Westerners brought the groundbreaking telescope as gifts to these other civilizations, there were no already existing institutions to propel the telescope into all the other scientific discoveries that created the Western scientific revolution.

Huff made a strong case for understanding this element of the uniqueness of Western Civilization. Duchesne goes much further, painstakingly exploring the entire body of scholarly progressives who have dominated the past half-century of history, and brings back to life Indo-European Studies, a discipline that explains a great deal, both good and bad, that has made the West unique. Duchesne has had five closely related objectives in writing this book:

First, to trace the ideological sources behind the multicultural effort to “provincialize” the history of Western civilization (anthropological relativism, critical theory, dependency theory, evolutionary materialism, post-modernism, feminism, and identity politics).

Second: to assess the empirical adequacy of a highly influential set of revisionist works published in the last two decades dedicated to the pursuit of dismantling the “Eurocentric” consensus on the “rise of the West.” Duchesne demonstrates that the entire revisionist school was founded on precarious and doubtful claims in an attempt to rewrite history.

Third, the traditional Eurocentric historiography on the rise of the West still holds much significance despite the unrelenting attacks on it. There are numerous additional sources from historians of Europe who have written about Western achievement from the ancient Greeks to the present. The West has always existed in a state of variance from the rest of the world’s cultures, as can be shown in the “Greek miracle,” the Roman invention of the legal persona, the Papal revolution, the Portuguese voyages of discovery, the Gutenberg press, the cartographic revolution, the Protestant reformation, and the “industrial enlightenment.” Not one of the other major civilizations had such experience in their histories.

Fourth, Duchesne insists that the development of a liberal democratic culture was an indispensable component of the rise of the West. Western culture is more than just scientific or industrial; the ideals of freedom and the reasoned pursuit of truth were cultivated and realized only in the development of the West.

Fifth and finally, Duchesne argues that the roots of the West’s “restless” creativity and libertarian spirit should be traced back to the aristocratic warlike culture of Indo-European speakers. The primordial basis for Western uniqueness lay in the ethos of individualism and strife. This is an extremely original position, and one that I had never considered before. What Duchesne writes about this particularly prickly

nature of the Indo-European culture I recognize from my own work on the ancient Persian psyche, before they got carried away with the autocracy of the Semitic world which surrounded and outnumbered them.

I have read and made margin notes on almost every page of this volume. I cannot say any better what Duchesne says for himself. Just one guide to the reader: the chapter titles:

Chapter One: The Fall of Western Civilization and the Rise of Multicultural World History.

Chapter Two: Eurocentrism over Sinocentrism.

Chapter Three: Whence the Industrial Divergence?

Chapter Four: The Continuous Creativity of Europe.

Chapter Five: The Rise of Western Reason and Freedom.

Chapter Six: The Restlessness of the Western Spirit from a Hegelian Perspective.

Chapter Seven: The Aristocratic Egalitarianism of Indo-Europeans and the Primordial Origins of Western Civilization.

Chapter Eight: The Emergence of the Self from the Western “State of Nature” and the Conciliation of Christianity and Aristocratic Liberty.

This may be the most significant historic work to appear in a decade. Scholars will have plenty to talk and argue about in reading this work.

**Mark Graham, *How Islam Created the Modern World*. Amana Books, 2010.**

Reviewed by Norman C. Rothman.

The object of this tome is spelled out in the preface by the Muslim scholar Akbar Ahmed: to demonstrate that it was Islamic Civilization that “pulled Europe out of the dark ages and into the enlightenment.” It is a compendium of substantial Islamic achievements before 1500 CE. The major thesis is put forth on page 39 when the author begins to provide evidence that “Islam was the giant upon whose shoulders the (European) Renaissance stood.” Overall, the book is meant as a riposte against those who view Islam as an intellectual and cultural backwater through the lens of presentism.

In a rather brief work, the writer squeezes a multitude of information that is not always present in standard historical works. In music, for instance, the guitar was introduced by Muslims as was the use of the halo as a motif in painting. Islamic culture had philosophical schools and scientific academies which discussed empiricism, a spherical earth and the heliocentric theory long before Locke, Kepler and Copernicus. Universities and libraries were more common before 1000 AD than in Western culture. Economically, textiles and fabrics as well as tempered steel and the processes associated with these products were in advance of European techniques before 1000 AD.

The author reminds the reader once again that the original Islamic culture came to be multicultural as it embraced influences from all over the globe—China, India, Persia, and other civilizations were utilized in the emerging Islamic paradigm. Arabic numbers were imported from India and ultimately replaced the more cumbersome Roman numerals. When ultimately introduced via the Crusades from the Middle East to Europe, Arabic numbers helped in the rise of accounting and bookkeeping, thus aiding the development of modern business and commerce. The importation of the symbol zero from India also facilitated commerce. The importation of the Chinese use of the compass was an invaluable aide to navigation, as was the importation of paper from China, which forwarded the accumulation of information in the millennium before the use of e-books. Not bound by church doctrine, the Islamic culture made free use of classical, especially Greek, culture in medicine and science, and of the scientific method. Muslim sailors made use of the Greek knowledge of latitude, and Muslim mathematicians perfected classical knowledge and developed Algebra (an Arabic term).

When dealing with the Crusades, the author can both be praised and criticized. He draws a rather controversial analogy -- but not without some foundation -- that the Crusaders were similar in behavior to the activities of fundamentalist militants in the way they sometimes massacred women and children as well as Muslims, Jews, and Orthodox Christians. However, he may not advance his major theme when he reports that Muhammad ordered the massacre of all adult Jews in Medina. This has been contradicted by the noted author, Karen Armstrong, who in her biography of Muhammad indicated that only those Jews who had gone back on a pact made with

Muhammad were marked for killing.

His reason for the decline of Islam as compared to the rise of the West is also open to question. He attributes the advancement of the West in science and technology to the availability of specie brought in by Spain and Portugal from the new world. However, as has been shown by writers such as Hamilton, the importation of gold and silver led to ruinous inflation which in turn led to decline. Rather, the advance of the West was due to a variety of reasons, including a new spirit of inquiry and a climate of openness, as exemplified by the Age of Renaissance, the Age of Science, and the Enlightenment in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries respectively.

Overall, although limited by its length, its emphasis on a few individuals rather than currents of thought, and the stress entirely on Christians as opposed to Muslims in the formation of the modern world without reference to other groups, the book serves a useful purpose. It reminds us that we cannot project backward in the evaluation of a group or culture based on present circumstances.

**Lyons, Jonathan. *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009.**

Reviewed by Connie Lamb

This is a fascinating book which covers a vast amount of subjects over a long historical time and wide geographic space. Written almost like a novel, it intertwines the stories of rulers, religious leaders, great Arab philosopher-scientists and Jewish, Christian and Persian scholars who lived in the Islamic Empire. It is a lively discussion of how a few Westerners traveled to Islamic countries in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries; there they discovered a wealth of scientific writings which they recognized to be of great value.

While Europe had languished in ignorance, superstition, and Christian religious restrictions during the Middle Ages, the Arab world witnessed a dynamic flowering of scholars, libraries, and scientific advances in mathematics, astronomy, geography, navigation, medicine, philosophy and agriculture. The Arabs had obtained much of their learning from knowledge left by the Greeks, Romans, and Persians, which was discovered as the Islamic empire spread through Iraq and Central Asia. The Arabs translated and synthesized this material and used it to further advance scientific understanding. Arabic replaced Greek as the universal language of scientific inquiry. Arab knowledge passed into Europe by way of the Crusader kingdoms, Sicily, and Spain and helped prepare the groundwork for the Renaissance and greater scientific advances in the Western world. Much of the transmission was accomplished by scholars such as Adelard of Bath, Michael Scot and Stephen of Pisa who found and translated significant Arabic language scientific texts and translated them into Latin.

The author, Jonathan Lyons, served as a foreign correspondent, mostly in the Muslim world, for the Reuters News Agency for more than twenty years. His posts included Moscow, Tehran, Turkey, and Jakarta. He left this work to pursue a doctorate in sociology at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia and has since become an author and professor, teaching at Monash University, George Mason University, and at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. His first book, *Answering Only to God: Faith and Freedom in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Iran*, co-authored with Geneive Abdo, was published in 2003 and his latest is *Islam through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism*. His website explains that he has spent much of his life exploring the shifting boundaries between East and West, first in the Cold War and then on the cusp between the Islamic and Western worlds. Over time he has come to see the relationships between these seemingly polar fields as a problem not of geography or politics, “but of thought, ideas, and knowledge – that is, as essential problems of epistemology.” This idea is reflected in his book.

*The House of Wisdom* is a well-researched and extensively documented book with 24 pages of endnotes. In addition, the front matter includes a clarifying note to

readers, a chronological list of significant events from 622-1687 AD, and a list of leading figures discussed in the book. A few colored illustrations from Arab sources about the various sciences discussed in the book add visual understanding.

The title of the book comes from the House of Wisdom, a royal library and academy built in the mid 700s AD in Baghdad by the Abbasid Caliph, al-Mansur, and which, in a sense, represents all the learning and culture that transpired during the Arab renaissance of scientific development. “Over time, the House of Wisdom came to comprise a translation bureau, a library and book repository, and an academy of scholars and intellectuals from across the empire” (p. 63). For many years, it provided, under the patronage of ruling caliphs, the working space, administrative support, and financial assistance needed by the scholars.

The book is organized loosely chronologically but also by topic. It is divided into a prologue and four sections titled by Arabic terms for sunset, nightfall, dawn, midday, and afternoon which pays tribute to the success of Arab scholars in measuring out the ever-changing pattern of night and day that determines the times of the five daily Muslim prayers. Lyons explains that each designation reflects a time period in the history that the book covers. “The book begins at sunset (al-maghrib) the traditional start of the day in the Middle East; then moves through the nightfall (al-isha) of the Christian Middle Ages; recounts the dawn (al-fajr) of the great age of Arab learning; soars toward the glory of midday (al-zuhr) with our central hero, Adelard of Bath, in the Near East; and concludes with the rich colors of afternoon (al-asr) that mark the end of the age of Faith in the West and the seemingly unstoppable triumph of Reason” (x).

The prologue tells the story of Adelard of Bath, who traveled to Asia Minor in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century not as a Crusader but to investigate the studies of the Arabs (**studia arabum**). He found in Antioch many books taken there by the Crusaders and realized their importance. He, and others who followed, translated various works in order to make this knowledge known in the West. The second chapter discusses the stagnation of science in Medieval Europe, which, after the fall of Rome, was cut off from classical learning. For centuries in Europe, the Church taught that the world was God’s mystery and was unknowable to man. Most people believed that the earth was flat and there was little advancement in science. The Crusades were a way to consolidate Church control over fragmented and unstable political realms of kings and princes; warring against the “infidel” brought groups together but also was the root of anti-Islam feelings in the West.

Just before the Crusades, in the late 900s, an intellectual monk named Gerbert, who later became Pope Sylvester II, went to Catalonia for further study. There he learned about the scientific advances in al-Andalus, the Spanish Muslim Empire. He is credited with bringing the knowledge of the astrolabe, a powerful scientific tool, to the West. “The perfection of the astrolabe reflected the genius of Arab science: it drew on

classical sources but then went well beyond them to refine the device and to address the burning questions of the day in such fields as timekeeping, astronomy, astrology, and cartography” (p. 39).

In chapter three we learn about the House of Wisdom that was built when the Abbasids moved their capital to Baghdad. It became a place of book production, research, and translation, and a repository of accumulated and extended knowledge. In 771, Mansur invited an Indian delegation to teach about astronomy and math, from which the Arabic numerals became wide-spread. The caliph from 813-33 AD, al-Mamun, was the force behind the greatest achievements of medieval Arab scholarship, especially in astrology, astronomy, mathematics and optics. Al-Khwarizmi created star tables and furthered the understanding of algebra. Chapter four continues the discussion of advancements with the focus on mapping the world. As Islam spread, the direction of Mecca became important in the construction of mosques which were to face the city showing the direction to pray. This fueled the arts of mapmaking and navigation which produced portable instruments like the astrolabe. Al-Mamun had a world map constructed with accompanying descriptions of earth’s people, places and wonders. Individual Arab scholars then developed and refined the disciplines of geography and cartography. As late as 1138, an Arab, al-Idrisi, created a new world map for the Christian King of Sicily, Roger II.

Adelard spent seven years in and around Crusader lands where he found many works, some of which he translated into Latin, including an Arabic translation of Euclid’s work. He also translated al-Khwarizmi’s star tables as well as the work of al-Balkhi (or Albumazar), *Introduction to Astrology*. In Adelard’s own book, *Questions of Natural Science*, he sets out to encapsulate the spirit of learning and inquiry he found in the East, recognizing the accomplishments of the Arabs. Adelard also wrote a treatise on the use of the astrolabe, which he states is a great tool but is also symbolic of a new way to look at the world informed by classical philosophy and the innovations of the Arab scholars of the House of Wisdom (p. 128).

In the next three chapters, Lyons speaks of great Arab scientists such as ibn Sina (known to the West as Avicenna), ibn Rushd (Averroes), al-Buruni, Razi, and Masudi along with al-Khwarizmi, and then explains how and through whom this Arabic scholarship was transmitted to the West. Through trade and travelers their works became known. Translators like Adelard, Stephen of Pisa, Gerbert, Gerard of Cremona, and Michael Scot in the East, and Hermann of Carinthia, Robert of Ketton, and Daniel of Morley in Spain, rendered much of this knowledge available to the West’s intellectual consciousness. Stephen of Pisa translated a prominent medical encyclopedia by al-Majusi, Gerard and his team translated medical textbooks including Avicenna’s great *Canon of Medicine* as well as assorted treatises on alchemy, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, optics, and the science of weights (p. 155); Michael Scot translated works of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), one of the preeminent Arab philosophers. Hermann translated

a different version of Albumazar's *Introduction to Astrology* than did Adelard while Robert of Ketton introduced the West to al-Khwarizmi's science of algebra and produced the first Latin text on the Arab art of alchemy (152). Daniel of Morley studied with Gerard and went back to England with a multitude of Arabic books, extending a tradition introduced by Adelard (p. 156).

The fact that the Muslims were spread over three continents helped the movement of ideas and tools along to the European West. By the 1220's there was a growing network of commercial, political and intellectual ties that had begun to bind the East and West and provide the connections to encourage the West in its renaissance. Then religion and science began to conflict in the East as it had in the West in medieval times, slowing the advance of Arab science. Meanwhile in the West, Thomas Aquinas's view that the world is both eternal and created by God allowed people to defend doctrine and still make room for the science unleashed by the Arabs, which helped create the atmosphere for great scientific advances in the West.

Lyons' book is just one of many recent publications on the topic of Arab science. One of the first was John Hoyt's book titled *Arab Science: Discoveries and Contributions*, published in 1975. Others include *Science in Medieval Islam: An Illustrated Introduction* by Howard R. Turner (1995), *Science in Islam and Classical Modernity* by Roshdi Rashed (2002), *How Islam Created the Modern World* by Mark Graham (2006), *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* by George Saliba (2007), *Aladdin's Lamp: How Greek Science Came to Europe through the Islamic World* by John Freely (2009), and *Science and Islam: A History* by Ehsan Masood (2009).

Each has a little different focus, approach, and coverage, but includes much of the same material of what Saliba calls the "classical narrative" of the Golden Age of Islam, which he and some other revisionists are analyzing using varied perspectives. Although Lyons' book covers much of the same information as the books just listed, its emphasis is on the Western translators and their interest in what the Arabs had to offer. The significant contributions of Adelard of Bath have been established by the research of Robert Burnett, who has published two books on Adelard's work of translation and transmission of Arabic learning into England, including a listing of his works. Lyons' book is a very readable, interesting look at the broader history of the transmission of ideas and learning, through several civilizations and across a broad swath of geography, that strongly impacted the modern Western world.

**Emmet Scott, *Mohammed & Charlemagne Revisited: The History of a Controversy*, New English Review Press, 2012.**

Reviewed by Laina Farhat-Holzman.

Scott is part of a growing body of revisionist Islamic scholars who are revisiting what had become the unquestioned history of Islam. We have all been told that Europe descended into a Dark Age upon the fall of Rome to the Germanic “barbarian” invaders in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and that it was rescued from this darkness by the energetic arrival of a new religion, Islam, which saved and transmitted the “lost” classical culture. There has never been an explanation for why Europe was dark for five centuries after its collapse, not to revive until the 10<sup>th</sup> century, if Islam’s Golden Age (supposedly the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries) was so glowing. What was that Golden Age really like that it could not influence events and culture just across the Mediterranean?

An early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar, the Belgian Henri Pirenne, was the first to dispute this theory. He claimed that contrary to the notion that Europe’s Dark Age was caused by the barbarians, he said that Europe quickly recovered from these invasions and that the invaders themselves wanted nothing more than to become “Roman” themselves. These invaders pledged fealty to the Emperor in Byzantium, used gold coins with the emperor’s profile on them, and engaged in a flurry of church and palace building by the 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. What really brought this civilization to a screeching halt was the new barbarian invasion, Islam.

Scott is a supporter of Pirenne, whose work was much criticized by scholars of the prior theory. His “revisiting,” however, is built on a foundation of archeology, much of it within the past century since the death of Pirenne. Rather than just accepting the conventional wisdom, Scott takes note of actual “facts on the ground” that archeology provides. He says that archeology finds great activity in Europe in the 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> century (cities enlarging, gold coinage, grand urban architecture, and indications of healthy trade). But from mid-7<sup>th</sup> century until mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, not only is Europe much reduced (dark), but so is the Muslim world. Both seem to have recovered by 1095, with the start of the first Crusade.

Scott makes an important distinction between the backwardness of northern and western Europe during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly in Italy, and the status of Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire’s satellites in North Africa and Spain. Classical civilization continued in Byzantium and its subject states, and even the population crash that accompanied the decline of Rome in the West reversed as Byzantium became Christian. The two groups with substantial birthrates were the Christians and the Jews, neither of which engaged in the Roman practice of widespread infanticide and abortion.

So what was it that Islam did that created the catastrophe of a real Dark Age for not only the former Roman Empire, but even for the Byzantine, as well as the flourishing areas conquered by the Muslims, which also went into sharp decline for several centuries. How did that happen? What was different about Arab barbarians as opposed to Germanic barbarians?

A barbarian, by definition, is usually an illiterate warrior, directed by tribal chiefs or warlords, whose main purpose is to take from others what they can. War, plunder, and rapine are their modes, primarily out of need (and often out of desperation). However, in repeated historic examples, when barbarians invade and conquer civilized (rich, agricultural, and urbanized) lands, it scarcely takes one generation for the barbarians to adopt the culture of the conquered. Throughout history, invaders of China always became Chinese—and this was true even for the Mongols, who began their invasions full of scorn for the weak civilized. And this was true repeatedly for Iran/Persia too. It took little time for the savage Seljuk Turks to become Persianized after they overran Iran in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

But Muslim barbarians did not just have loot and rapine in mind, but were also energized by a militant religion that demanded of their conquests conversion, extortion, or death. They also followed Bedouin values of scorn for agriculture and prohibition of the wine grapes and olive groves that were the bedrock of Classical economy. Goat herding followed the destruction of vineyards and farmland, resulting in a desertification of North Africa—an actual climate change. Where you see goats, you see poverty.

In addition, the vibrant trade in the Mediterranean, which had flourished for nearly a thousand years during the time that Rome ruled the Mediterranean, swiftly collapsed under Muslim pirate raids that made normal shipping almost impossible. Under this new lawless regime, there grew an enormous slave trade (slavery as an institution had virtually disappeared in Christian Rome by the 6<sup>th</sup> century). Islam had an enormous appetite for women in their harems and castrated males to guard them, in addition to slave armies.

The Muslims found a helpful ally in the kidnapping and selling of slaves. The Vikings, who were tribes of pagan pirates and looters, partnered in this nasty trade. Not only was the northern Mediterranean depopulated by Arab slaving pirates, but northern Europe and the lands along the Volga River were equally depopulated. Archeology has proved this, not only through written accounts of the time, but also through troves of Muslim gold coinage in Viking archeological sites from the pre-Christian period.

But the most serious cause of the European Dark Age and the end of classical learning occurred when Muslim conquerors cut off the papyrus supply from Egypt. Consider what happens to a largely literate civilization that depends upon papyrus, not only for learning but also for administering government, when there is suddenly no

more paper. Literacy crashed, and it was only sustained by the Christian monks who painstakingly preserved what they could of classical learning.

Most thought-provoking is a discussion of less desirable Muslim influences on Christian society. When cultures clash, they exchange some negative elements as well as positive ones. Scott makes a case that the notion of “holy” war was alien to Christianity and only came about in response to Islam’s Holy War and its conquest of the Holy Land; the Inquisition, the punitive search for religious unorthodoxy, was practiced in Islam well before such practice in the West; and the virulent anti-Semitism that compelled “non-believers” to wear distinctive clothing and to live in ghettos was a distinction adopted from Muslim treatment of Christians and Jews. The most oppressive ghettos appeared in Rome during the Renaissance.

Scott fully explores the arguments of all the most famous Islamic scholars of our time, bringing in the work of other revisionists and the hard-to dispute archeology. I think that this is an important work, and that more such explorations of what is the real history of Islam, not the imagined one, will be changing what we thought we knew about this extremely important—and even timely—issue.

One last thing to remember: Islam is the only great religion hostile to history. As even modern Islamists tell us, the Prophet condemned all that happened prior his mission, calling it *Jahilia* (ignorance). It is such a religious philosophy that is responsible for the Afghan Taliban destroying the ancient statues of the Buddha in eastern Afghanistan and current Egyptian Islamists proposing the destruction of the pyramids.

**Richard W. Bulliet. *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*. Columbia University Press 2004.**

Reviewed by Norman C. Rothman.

Noted Middle Eastern/Islamist scholar and historian Richard W. Bulliet has compiled this work. It is an updating of essays and reflections that he has composed over a period of four decades as a response to works, especially those of Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, which emphasize conflict between Islam and the West, as well as to an outlook from policy makers over the past 5 decades which stresses differences rather than commonality. Accordingly, each of the chapters is devoted to countering one of these views.

The first chapter gives the title to the book. It is devoted to a rebuttal of the Huntington “Clash of Civilizations” thesis. Bulliet indicates that the Christian and Islamic faiths were very similar before 1500, and especially before 1000 A.D., when it came to proselytizing and the hope both religions gave to lower socio-economic orders. Hostile contacts -- especially the Crusades and the **Reconquista** against Muslims in Iberia (and also Southern Italy) -- led to an estrangement between what he terms “sibling” civilizations. Even during this period, Muslim influence penetrated the world of European culture (1000-1500 A.D.). The Islamic world helped to reintroduce Classical learning especially Greek influences in philosophy (Aristotle) and theology (Averroes), either through Muslim scholars or Arabized Jews. Other imports that passed through the Muslim world or were invented or perfected there included mathematics (algebra and Arabic numerals); science (gunpowder); medical science, especially surgical techniques; folk literature (Arabian Nights, Omar Khayyam, even Italian folk tales); music and art (the use of the halo and the lute and guitar); manufacturing (glass, paper, pre-movable woodblock print); even food (sugar, pasta).

The second chapter deals with the religious establishment and its role as a counterbalance to tyranny. Entitled “What Went On?” -- a play on the Bernard Lewis’s work “What Went Wrong?” -- (Dr. Bulliet is also a satirist), this chapter is devoted to countering the work of Lewis, who, the author believes, sees Islam only from the point of view of the 20th century western support of democracy. Bulliet argues that the emphasis of the religious establishment was on “justice” rather than “freedom” in the Western sense. He cites Iran, but a more contemporary example today would be the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

The third chapter is based on Bulliet’s own experiences as an academician. “Looking for Love in all the Wrong Places” is concerned with the prevalence of Orientalism in Western studies of other cultures (a topic most famously covered by Edward Said) whereby the Muslim world was observed from the point of view of triumphalism when it came to democracy and economic and social development. Societies that did not live up to this “development theory paradigm” were found to be

deficient. The logical extension of this perspective resulted in intervention which in turn may have resulted in hostility from those in the Muslim world who are supposed to be helped by this intervention. The parallel to recent events involving American involvement overseas is only too obvious.

The final chapter, which is a reconfiguration of a book published in 1994 and is entitled “The Edge of the Future,” asserts that in the past, progress within the Islamic world has come from the “periphery” people outside the traditional power centers, both in terms of orthodox thought and in terms of geography. In this latter respect, Bulliet points to the role played by the Muslim diasporas in Europe and America, by democratically-oriented parties in the Muslim world, and by Western-trained academics in universities and institutions of higher learning. The author cites Indonesia as a current example of this last part of his thesis. Although Indonesia is a good example of progress from the periphery, the first two sources of change have not materialized as yet, so Dr. Bulliet may be a bit optimistic at this time.

This book is meant to be a rebuttal of negative perceptions about the Muslim world. At the same time, it attempts to view progress and change in the Islamic world both in the past and in the future in a positive vein. Although rather abbreviated, it is a thoughtful addition to the literature of the field. It is hoped that the author will further develop his arguments in future longer works.

**David P. Goldman, *How Civilizations Die (And Why Islam is Dying Too)*. Regnery 2011.**

Reviewed by Laina Farhat-Holzman

Summary: “Population decline is the elephant in the world’s living room.” If population declines continue in the developed world, there will be an inverted pyramid of the elderly on top being supported by too few young people, the opposite of most of world history. “For the first time in history, the birth rate of the whole developed world is well below replacement, a significant part of it has passed the demographic point of no return” (p. x).

What has not been noticed is a very precipitous crash of population in the lesser developed world, the most significant of which is the crash of Muslim population—the opposite of what we have assumed. The author notes:

“... Islamic Society is even more fragile. As Muslim fertility shrinks at a rate demographers have never seen before, it is converging on Europe’s catastrophically low fertility as if in time-lapse photography. Iranian women in their twenties who grew up with five or six siblings will bear only one or two children during their lifetimes. Turkey and Algeria are just behind Iran on the way down, and most of the other Muslim countries are catching up quickly. By the middle of this century, the belt of Muslim countries from Morocco to Iran will become as gray as depopulating Europe. The Islamic world will have the same proportion of dependent elderly as the industrial countries—but one-tenth the productivity. A time bomb that cannot be defused is ticking in the Muslim world” (p. x).

Radical Islamists already are driven by despair that their culture has been ruined. The demographic bomb will frighten them even more. What happens to society when people’s very existence is under threat? We have no idea how people will behave under existential threat, and social scientists have not cast much light on this issue as yet.

Goldman takes this speculation to the extreme, anticipating irrational responses from the Muslim states who think they have no future. He asks: why do individuals, groups, and nations act irrationally, often at the risk of self-destruction? The question, of course, is what is rational?

It seems irrational to us when people set themselves on fire to make a political protest (Buddhist monks in Vietnam) or enlist and send their young to become suicide bombers. Americans could not understand why the Japanese in World War II made human explosives of their pilots and sailors—suicide dive-bombers, human torpedoes

strapped with explosives sent to swim out to American ships. It was so apparent that they were losing the war that such extreme actions seemed highly irrational.

The same can be said for the seeming Muslim “death cult” that has enlisted (and often deceived) youngsters to be suicide bombers. How many young can they afford to lose in a hopeless and delusional struggle?

Despair does strange things. Canada has noted that the overall suicide rate among their Native American communities is twice that of the rest of Canada, and the rate among the Inuit is still higher. There is also an epidemic of suicides and alcoholism among the ancient Amazon tribes, who were until recently isolated.

Demographers have identified several different factors responsible for population decline overall: urbanization, literacy and education, and modernization of traditional societies, enforcing changes in the treatment of women and children. Female literacy is the most powerful predictor of population decline among the world’s countries.

My feminist antennae go up when I hear that female literacy is a powerful predictor of population decline. Literate females are perfectly capable of having two or three children at replacement levels (as they do in the United States). But when such women choose to have no more than one (or none), they have plenty of reasons for this other than the frivolity of materialism. When such women live in authoritarian states, they neither have adequate housing nor hope for the future. It is rational for them not to bear children.

Goldman particularly notes how the fertility rates of women links directly to religious faith. The highest fertility rates in the developed world are found in countries with a high degree of religious faith, he says, namely the United States and Israel (p. xv). He does not recognize that educated women in both the United States and Israel are predominantly secular.

But in the underdeveloped world, religious faith among women is linked to illiteracy and traditions of misogyny and abuse. Those factors have until now produced the runaway population explosion and simultaneously infant and female mortality.

Goldman is correct, however, in his observation that secularism in all its forms fails to address the most fundamental human need: the dilemma of mortality. Why do we die, why do we suffer, why is there hunger, disease, and war? However, I think a more practical criticism of secularism is the absence of community, which religion has always provided (for better or worse).

Franz Rosenzweig, author of *The Star of Redemption*, written at the end of World War I, noted that awareness of death defines the human condition, so that human beings cannot bear their own mortality without the hope of immortality. And our sense of immortality is social. The culture of a community is what unites the dead with those yet to be born (xix).

**The Closing of the Muslim Womb.** The demographic winter has been encroaching slowly on the West for the past two hundred years. In the Muslim world, however, it has been happening in twenty years. Iran, Turkey, Tunisia, and Algeria are all graying. Today's generation of young Muslims (the bulge) whose political humiliation and frustration over economic stagnation stoked the Arab rebellions of 2011, will be followed by a generation dramatically smaller than their own (p. 2).

As bad as this situation is for Europe, there is a good possibility that their technological development will be able to cushion this—or even at some point reverse the death spiral. With the Muslim world, they have no technological or social cushion, and the dramatic increase in Islamist fundamentalism makes the problem worse.

The Muslim world, Goldman says, is trapped between two extremes. “Some countries---notably Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Egypt—have populations nearly half of which cannot read. These populations retain the habits of the tribal world, including high fertility rates. But these countries can barely feed the illiterate half of their people, let alone employ them; and the persistence of extreme poverty and the threat of hunger keep them poised at the precipice of social instability.”

At the other extreme, countries that have achieved a high degree of literacy---Iran, Turkey, Tunisia, and Algeria---are facing an even more devastating degree of social failure, in the form of deficient family formation and a dearth of children” (p.7).

What Goldman fails to note is that the link between faith and fertility in the Muslim world is not the same as that between faith and replacement level fertility in the US and Israel. In the Muslim world, women within Muslim believer communities have no choice over their fertility at all. When educated, they have choice for the first time in generations and they do not want the role of fertility machine. Faith in the United States and Israel is not in a position to be oppressive.

Where Goldman's book becomes important to civilizationalists is his exploration of historic fertility rates. The great population surge in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an anomaly, not a harbinger of global doom. This one-time event was the result of a radically declining death rate from modern medicine: antibiotics, for example. Industrialization replaced human-intensive agriculture, replacing the need for farm labor, and today robotization is replacing the need for much industrial manpower as well. Because of improved human circumstances, we experienced the fastest rate of

population increase the world had ever seen. The need for children has changed from a labor asset to a cost. The need for children to support their parents in old age has been replaced by pension plans (funded by other people's children).

Goldman never contemplates an alternative other than the disastrous decline of population in the developed world. I believe this should be addressed—and will need to be addressed in the future. This prognosis may not be all negative. It is certainly possible that fertility rates could return to replacement level in modern societies that have been in decline: we are already seeing this in France and Sweden. Population explosions and declines do not have to be linear in one direction forever.

**Fate of Muslim World.** Most important in this book are Goldman's predictions about the Muslim world—quite the opposite of alarmists who believe that Islam will overwhelm Europe through migration and that the “one-billion Muslims” around the world will be at perpetual war with us.

Goldman does foresee violent confrontations, but these are the confrontations of a dying society, not triumphant conquest.

Europeans are beginning to turn back swarms of refugees from the Muslim world, and to change laws to compel compliance with European laws, not Islamic laws. This is simultaneously helping Europeans to remember their own heritage.

Hunger is becoming a major concern in North Africa. Egypt is running out of food, and also running out of money with which to buy it.

Despite the rise in literacy across the region, few university graduates have the skills to work in the modern world. This seriously affects the economy of such countries. Not only are the old skills (agriculture) melting as peasants flee the countryside for cities, but the new skills needed for a modern economy are lacking. The International Monetary Fund notes that all the oil-poor Arab economies are not only broken, but dysfunctional, incapable of earning more than a small fraction of their import bill.

Most serious of all: “An entire generation of young Muslims has lost its traditional roots without finding new roots in the modern world....In maleducated, underemployed and depopulating Tunisia, the world can see the impending future of Arab societies” (p. 34).

## Conclusions

The issue of human demographics is extremely important if we are to rationally address the needs of the future. This is a book worth reading, even when mentally

arguing with the author as I did throughout. I would still like to know how accurate population numbers are taken in traditional countries, where answers (if there are any) are unlikely to be candid.