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Editor's Note

Essay

Pestilence and Other Calamities in Civilizational Theory: Sorokin, McNeill, Diamond, and Beyond

Peer-Reviewed Articles

William of Rubruck: Cosmopolitan Curiosity and Restraint in an Age of Conquest and Mission

Political Power of Iranian Hierocracies

St. Thomas Aquinas and the Third Hellenization Period

The Cold War and The Political Legacy of The Counterculture of the 1960s

Civilizational Dynamics of "Hybrid Warfare"

Letters to the Editor

Book Reviews

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Editor’s Note

Fall 2020

The ferocity of Covid-19 has struck worldwide this year. In the process, all of humanity has been affected. Civilizations and societies, and nations large and small, have responded to the challenge, some with more success than others.

One result of the arrival on Earth of this horrible pandemic, a recurrence of an ancient human problem, has been that it naturally prompts scholars to ponder the impact on civilizations of such tragedy.

So, to gauge this titanic event, the *Comparative Civilizations Review* asked several prominent writers, members of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, all of whom have long been professionally and academically concerned with aspects of this topic, to comment. Here are eight fascinating analyses, each of which has been brutally and artificially restricted by the editor to just a few hundred words.

Finally, this Editor’s Note concludes with an on-point university syllabus on Covid-19 and Pitirim Sorokin, a perfect primer for teaching this topic. It was prepared by Prof. David Wilkinson. A scholarly article on the history of pandemics, especially written for this issue by journal editor Dr. Vlad Alalykin-Izvekov, follows.

Readers who wish to contribute their views are invited to submit and we will run the comments in our next issue.

In the meantime, stay safe, one and all!

Joseph Drew
Editor-in-Chief
Prof. David Rosner, president of the ISCSC from 2013 to 2016, has weighed in on how humanity adjusts to pandemics from the philosophical perspective:

Human beings need to “make sense” out of the world, but our world is sometimes unintelligible.

We “make sense” out of the world through holding certain fundamental assumptions, based on past experiences, which help us both navigate the present and predict the future. Psychologists have discussed this as “the assumptive world.”

Catastrophes such as pandemics suddenly upend these very presuppositions. When our basic presuppositions about reality are abruptly challenged, civilizations (and especially their leaders) need to exhibit the following two qualities (though there may be more):

1. The humility to understand that the human race is ultimately a blip on the screen in an infinite universe, and that our lives are fundamentally contingent and uncertain. We are not always in control of reality and we will need to find ways to adjust when our lives change in a sudden and radical way.

2. The flexibility to try to find new ways of seeing and being (e.g., the positing of new assumptions) with which to reorient ourselves (individually and collectively) to the new, often painful, realities. Civilizations that can do this endure, while those that cannot collapse.

---

Prof. John Grayzel, an anthropologist, attorney, and veteran official at the Agency for International Development, who also serves on the current ISCSC Board of Directors, examines civilizations and this epidemic as he views the broad sweep of human history from the perspective of the “Great Man Theory of History”:

There is no question that pandemics can shake up a seemingly stable set of circumstances and, in that way, affect history.

However, I think we would be hard pressed to actually attribute to pandemics significant causality in terms of making a difference in the direction of the evolution of specific civilizations.

As serious as they might be, I would say the evidence is that pandemics (or more specifically the resulting "die-off" they have caused) only exacerbate the influence of the most prevailing factors. This is because their actual effect is mediated by extant social, political, economic, demographic, and religious/psychological parameters.

The exception may be Polynesian civilization.

For thousands of years smallpox was a repetitive scourge for much of humanity, but Polynesian civilization constituted probably the only civilization that a pandemic actually ended. In the case of Polynesia, the relatively small population, and its relatively thin distribution across a large area of bounded islands, made the die-off unusually swift, repetitive (each time a new European ship visited), and catastrophic—and without ample opportunity for rapid regeneration.

In the Americas, disease also decimated the indigenous populations, but what it did to the independent civilizations located in North, Central, and South America was the result of purposeful political and economic policies of the new European rulers.

What is different today with the Covid-19 pandemic is that its most pathological effect is not being visited upon any particular group or society but on the process of globalization itself. The struggle of individual nations to protect themselves from outside carriers, as well as competition among them to access limited available medical resources, has generated a retreat from what has otherwise been an evolving global civilization.
Ironically, this is most attributable to a single person, the current President of the United States, Donald Trump.

Had the current situation occurred under any of President Trump's predecessors, they would have used the circumstances to reinforce American leadership within the institutions of international organizations and thereby actually advanced the world's acceleration towards global governance.

In this sense, President Trump has proven that the "Great Man Theory of History" has validity and that he may well turn out to be a figure of truly causative historic importance. The Covid-19 virus pandemic has exacerbated the deleterious effect of Trump's behavior from merely being highly disruptive to the normal operations of the institutions of American democracy to being disastrous regarding the entire world's movement towards global governance of common concerns.

Because of the challenges his authoritarian behavior posed to American Presidential authority, General Douglas MacArthur was called the "American Caesar." For the damage President Trump has visited upon the behavioral integrity of the Western World in the face of the clear and common threat of Covid-19, he may well become known as the "American Commodus the Monster."

---

2 The Roman emperor Lucius Aurelius Commodus (161-192 CE) came to power in 180 CE when his father, the philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius, died during what is known as the Antonine Plague (probably smallpox) that decimated the Mediterranean world from 165-180 CE. Gibbons writes that "every sentiment of virtue and humanity was extinct in (his) mind."*

His licentiousness, cowardice and disdain for Roman institutions was described by the Roman historian Cassius Dio. He wrote: "Moreover, a pestilence occurred, the greatest of any of which I have knowledge;... not alone in the city, but throughout almost the entire empire... Now the death of these victims passed unheeded, for Commodus was a greater curse to the Romans than any pestilence or any crime."**


Prof. Michael Andregg, a scholar of biology and long-time activist for global peace and international amity, is the Vice President of the ISCSC and a veteran member of the Board of Directors of our organization. Here is his view of the civilizational consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic:

We have already determined that global civilization is experiencing a flurry of interrelated crises that challenge many things we hold dear, in *extremis*, human survival.

Therefore, many biologists around the world interpret the latest pandemic as a warning shot across the bow of human civilization and all the smaller civilizations that it embraces.

In aggregate, we are slowly destroying the living system of the earth that sustains all civilizations. Many scientists have reported on the folly of that for at least two generations. Mostly they have been ignored. Derivative symptoms, like climate change or the “sixth great extinction” get worse each year despite these warnings, while the forces of denial are much better funded than the forces for positive change.

The simplest farmers know that only fools fool with Mother Nature. Collective elite leaders do not seem to understand this experience-formed observation despite their lofty educations. So, every year we destroy more virgin forests and eat more exotic animals from the wild — like bats and chimpanzees. Nature threw us Ebola (origins in chimpanzees) not once but fourteen times. It keeps coming back and will eventually escape containment if we keep begging it to. Nature threw us SARS and MERS, both coronavirus variants, and we contained them too … barely.

Now, Covid-19 comes with the ideal combination for viral predators of high transmissibility with low enough lethality that undetected “asymptomatic” carriers spread it faster than most testing and remediation can follow.


They show how often ancient elites had ample warning of impending crises but chose to ignore them for short-sighted reasons.
Dr. Andrew Targowski, president of the ISCSC from 2007 to 2013, provides a futurist’s perspective on Covid-19:

Pandemic 2020, triggered by the coronavirus, reminds us that life on Earth has been evolving for 3.5 billion years from a virus, which is just a deficient bacterium.

We humans in the last 6000 years are trying to be rational and civilized but we are not good enough to be immune to a pandemic. It is a loud voice of nature that is advising us today that we have a long way ahead to be healthier and wiser than a virus.

The Spanish Flu of 1918-1919 killed about 40 million people, those who did not pay attention to keeping distance and avoiding the crowds. In Pandemic 2020, we repeat the same mistakes.

However, some people in some American cities—those who are demonstrating widely these days — are trying to mitigate the political aspect of civilization, making it more friendly for everybody. Hence, Pandemic 2020 looks to be a wake-up call, appearing as it has simultaneously with calls to implement social justice, as life should be.

But at what cost?

Not killing 40 million by the virus but bankrupting 40 million small businesses by irrational behavior?

Are we wise enough to not repeat the Bolshevik Revolution? It took more than 70 years to learn about its outcomes and to correct them for the sake of about 200 million victims.

Is our civilization politically wise? Or should we keep developing civilization another 6000+ years, having in mind that the sky is the limit?

Is it possible? If not, what to do wisely now? What is lacking — technology, knowledge or wisdom, or conscious and willful leadership?
Prof. John Berteaux, a philosopher from the School of Humanities and Communication at California State University Monterey Bay and a new member of the Board of the ISCSC, has given wonderful presentations over the years at the annual meetings of the organization.

Below he presents a view of the quality and actual community-based meaning of freedom in an age of Covid-19:

In discussions of how the state should react to the current pandemic, one controversial issue has involved whether it should force citizens to wear masks when in public. As a matter of fact, from New Orleans, Louisiana to Turlock, California, and from Aurora, Colorado to San Antonio, Texas, individuals asked to put on a mask have occasionally turned violent.

In a recent New York Times article, Economist Paul Krugman suggests “a cult of selfishness is killing America.”

On the one hand, many argue that laws requiring citizens to wear masks infringe on their freedom, their self-determination. Indeed, liberalism is characterized as “an attitude toward life and life’s problems that values freedom, for individuals, minorities, and nations.” Yet, given the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic, others insist everyone should be forced to wear a mask in public spaces.

In fact, philosophers Charles Taylor, Alison Jagger, and Michael Sandel suggest we often misconstrue our capacity for self-determination and neglect the social preconditions under which that capacity can be meaningfully exercised.

They remind us that freedom or self-determination is not abstract. It is a social and political construct.

Our self-determination is expressed from within a community, and that requires we seek a balance between it and our shared social responsibility. Destroy the community and we destroy a vital precondition for the expression of our freedom.
Dr. Tseegai Isaac, a professor of History and Political Science at the Missouri University of Science and Technology, long-time member of the ISCSC and an editor of this journal for over a decade, sketches the stark and tragic history marking the encounter of pandemics with the Ethiopian civilization.

He observes as follows:

Ethiopia is celebrated for its ancient biblical civilization. Its political traditions for centuries blended Old and New Testament tenets, creating templates for daily social and religious life.

Ethiopia may nurture pride in its lengthy history and civilization, but its political and social experiences have also been ravaged with the advent of famine, pestilences, and pandemics.

The causes for the onset of Ethiopia’s frequent pandemics can be traced to two factors: wars and post-crisis upheavals.

The first pandemic in Ethiopia, as noted in the liturgical chronicles, was recorded by church scribes. This was in the early years, when the Fatimid Dynasty was consolidating rule over Egypt. The fervency of jihad reached its highest ascendance there. From Egypt, however, the Fatimid branched out, driving forcefully to extend Islam over the neighboring territories of Sudan, North Africa, and Ethiopia.

This influence affected Ethiopia via the region that is known as Eritrea today. Fatimid’s religious propagators were sent to convert the Christian Baja tribes living in Eritrea. When the fervency of this jihad that had been raging for over two centuries reached Eritrea, the result was a blockade of the Ethiopian Empire’s sea access.

Muslim forces from the North pushed the Christian population ever southward as they occupied the Red Sea coast ports.

“As a result of these wars, the Abyssinian kings gradually lost control of northern Tigre (northern Ethiopia and today’s Eritrea) and the coastal areas” (Luther, E. W. 1958:13).

Thus, the history of the Ethiopian civilization has been a long-term clash between the status quo faith of Christianity and the expansionist faith of Islam.
The determination to Islamize Ethiopia has been unrelenting throughout Ethiopian history.

With every jihad, wars have taken place; one repeated result of these has been that the Ethiopian highlands have experienced famine and pestilence. The population was decimated over and over again, and villages left empty. Corpses have been scattered by the roadsides for hyenas, rats, and vermin to feed on them.

One tragic result has been that between 1225 CE and 1880 CE, over 35 famine and pandemic scourges have attacked Ethiopia. Finally, however, there arrived in Ethiopia the severity of the 1880s famines, with various pandemics that followed.

As Hancock writes:

The greatest famine of all occurred towards the end of the [19th] century in the years 1888-92. Still referred to as “the Great Famine,” this had profound impacts on Ethiopian society. . . .The Rinderpest Epidemic started in the north, as the result of the introduction of infected Indian cattle by the Italians who were at that time annexing Eritrea, and it quickly spread through Tigray, Wollo and Gonder into Shoa (Hancock, G., 1985: 63).

We may conclude that, with the exception of the 1880s pandemic, a result of colonial invasion, all of the pandemics and pestilences in the recorded history of Ethiopia have come subsequent to wars that Samuel Huntington would call “Clashes of Civilizations.” In this case — Christian civilization vs. Islamic civilization.
Two experts within the university community have written of the practical effects of the current pandemic on life in academe.

**Connie Lamb** has long been the patron of this journal as well as Editor. It is because of her work that Brigham Young University has made possible the online version of the Comparative Civilizations Review. Currently she serves as Librarian – Social Sciences for the university and she is also on the Board of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations.

She comments on the effect Covid-19 has had on libraries in America and worldwide:

> The Coronavirus pandemic put a halt to many normal activities. One of the institutions heavily impacted by the virus is libraries.

Public libraries across America and other countries shut their doors earlier this year to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Yet libraries are central to our free society. Libraries are critical elements in the free exchange of information at the heart of a democracy.

> “Public libraries are the soul of a civilization” (Gautam Parel). They provide space where people of all ages and income levels can practice lifelong learning. They are also social spaces for community members. Libraries are the most democratic institution because they level the intellectual playing field.

Library closures have reduced the influence of this democratic institution in public life. Libraries have been innovative in creating options and supporting learning as much as possible, especially using technology. One result is the increased demand for e-books and access to online resources. But people without computers rely on library access, so that portends that the knowledge gap will widen. Unique material found in archives, for example, are not accessible for research.

> In an article about reducing library staff in Pakistan’s libraries, Abid Hussain makes the comment that “it is an established fact that those who shut the door of libraries will open the door of ignorance.” Thus, remote librarians can do much but not everything to guide patrons to the information they desire.
Libraries have been an essential element in major civilizations for millennia. Knowledgeable and progressive societies need them, and although technology has improved access, it is librarians who lead the way in organizing and making knowledge available as well as providing community service.

Let’s hope libraries are not closed much longer.
Prof. Rosemary Gillett-Karam is frequently honored by national educational bodies as one of the foremost academic experts on the significance of a great American innovation: community college. She has served as university president and held other positions as an administrator and a scholar. She also is an editor of this journal.

Here she reports on the effect of the pandemic, and precipitous action by the US government, on international students attending higher education institutions in the United States:

The Department of Homeland Security, with its Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS) arms, announced unexpectedly on July 6 of this year that international students studying in the United States at universities and colleges which were converting to all-online instruction because of the pandemic would become immediately ineligible to continue their enrollment in their college or university courses if their own countries had similar programs available.

They would have to return home precipitously.

Fortunately, following lawsuits that were filed quickly by Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, then joined by Princeton, Columbia, and many other universities, this order was rescinded. The new policy had also been opposed by a coalition of seventeen states and the District of Columbia; these jurisdictions insisted that the government revert to rules that had been issued in March and on which the universities and students had already based planning for the coming year. The earlier edict had given current students in higher education institutions the flexibility to take classes online for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic. Apparently, this will now be the case once again.

Nevertheless, the painful nature of the combination of this change in regulations along with the seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic and the concomitant need for students and their universities to proceed with enrollment as the fall semester approached, could not be gainsaid. When the sudden switch in ICE and SEVIS regulations happened, international students found themselves confused, forced to deal with the vagaries of university and college life, especially with a range of variable and inexact strictures relating to reentry now being made on the fly.

Such dilemmas have led to compelling, but unresolved, discussions for higher education researchers and for higher education administrators over recent months.
International students constitute roughly six percent of the student body in American higher education today. They come to these shores from China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Vietnam, Germany, Canada, and elsewhere for both undergraduate and graduate studies. These students bring to their institutions payments that are at least three to eight times higher than the tuitions paid by American students.

After the new rules were announced (and before they were rescinded) some US institutions had already proposed moving foreign nationals to other nearby compatible academic institutions with on-site courses.

There are two paths to understanding the many complexities of the role of foreign nationals in the student bodies of contemporary American higher education — institutional concerns and student concerns. For institutions, there are budgetary considerations to weigh principally but not exclusively; for students, there are personal planning and academic concerns. The impact is national.

Just as faculty and staff are being re-geared for online and remote teaching and learning in the face of the continuing pandemic, they find themselves confronted with frequent and usually unhelpful surveys, the purpose of which is to determine the future sustainability of institutions and to measure the impact of foreign nationals on the support of their programs.

Student concerns, on the other hand, range from the mechanics of transferring to how to undertake online coursework. Students often report that they are being shattered physiologically and physically by the anomie being precipitated by these changes of government, and thus school, policies. Additionally, housing is now uncertain, food is not always easy to come by, critical medical, dental, nursing, and science labs are closed, and coursework itself is in question.

Moreover, most foreign students express their own disfavor with the conversions to online courses, and not just because of language issues. Typical complaints center on technological inadequacy. Further, almost none of these students indicate that they have had any input into critical decisions being considered by institutional administrators as government regulations shift. Efforts by university administrators to respond to student concerns have been limited and vague.

This bleak situation since the arrival of Covid-19 does not confront the United States alone. Great Britain expects a three-billion-dollar reduction in revenues and predicts a two- to three-year disruption of services. Germany has issued through DAAD (https://ww.daad.de/en/coronavirus) a comprehensive guide to Covid-19 research and international higher education.
Thus, the financial and service delivery disruptions caused by the virus are widespread. In part, they flow from unpredictable edicts from the government. But, additionally, those institutions substantially serving low-income students already often do so via frequently unreliable technologies; they find that the changing situation, plus limited student use of technology, impedes the full delivery of curricula.

In conclusion, the pandemic and its ancillary problems restrict the ability of higher education to serve national and international students effectively as the new semester commences.
Finally, **Dr. David Wilkinson**, one of the world’s leading scholars of comparative civilizations, is leading a freshman seminar this fall at the University of California, Los Angeles, that would surely be of enormous interest to every reader of this journal. Its purpose is to involve discussion “of a topic of current intellectual importance.”

Now, as readers may know, Dr. Wilkinson is the author of “Sorokin vs. Toynbee on Civilizations,” in a 1995 work edited by J. Ford, M. Richard and P. Talbutt entitled *Sorokin and Civilization: A Centennial Assessment*. So, it is no surprise that his course is entitled Political Science 19-1: **Pitirim Sorokin and Covid-19**.

The syllabus begins by observing that in 1942, Pitirim Sorokin published *Man and Society in Calamity*. The calamities he discussed were:

- war,
- revolution,
- famine, and
- pestilence.

Sorokin had personal experience of each: war (World War I); revolution (Russian Revolution); famine (Soviet famine 1921-1922); and pestilence (typhus in Russia, Spanish flu in the world).
Notes Dr. Wilkinson:

In his life, Sorokin was variously a starving peasant orphan, an itinerant icon gilder, a self-taught bookworm, a political activist, a six-time political prisoner, an empirical penologist, a quantitative sociologist, a Socialist Revolutionary, a starving intellectual worker, an involuntary passenger on the Ship of Expelled Russian Thinkers, a founding comparative civilizationist, a conservative Christian anarchist, a Tolstoyan believer that “the Kingdom of God is within you,” and an elected write-in candidate for President of the American Sociological Association.

He continues:

The book *Man and Society in Calamity* reflects Sorokin’s life experience (the sections on famine are particularly vivid), his empirical-sociological praxis, and his Tolstoyan focus on altruistic love as the primary counterstrategy against all calamity.

In *Man and Society in Calamity*, Sorokin gave an extremely brief overview of the artistic, behavioral, cultural, economic, ethical, ideological, political, psychological, religious, scientific, sociological, and technological consequences of calamities; and he proposed, again, an extremely brief view of their causes, remedies, and future.

Covid-19 is, of course, the world’s latest calamity of “pestilence.”

Furthermore, by disrupting supply chains in a globalized world economy, Covid-19 also threatens the companion calamity, “famine.” A total of 12,000 people per day could die from hunger linked to Covid-19 by end of year, potentially more than the disease, warns Oxfam. This prediction was published on July 9. See: https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/12000-people-day-could-die-covid-19-linked-hunger-end-year-potentially-more-disease

The seminar is shaped as follows:

- **Week One:** Students are to read *Calamity*, Introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz (ix-xviii) and Preface by Sorokin (9-10). They are then to post an essay of 500 words on the question, “Why are you here?”

- **Week Two:** Further reading of *Calamity*, Part One: The Influence of Calamities Upon Our Mind. Special attention is to be paid to “Pestilence” (21-2, 30, 45), while deducing from the general propositions their application to pestilence.
The students are next asked whether the theories of Sorokin match or mismatch their personal experiences, including those that are indirect (via conversation or media review). He inquires: “Would you be inclined to endorse, amend, or replace Sorokin’s theory of ‘the influence of calamities upon our mind’?”

➢ Week Three: The reading moves on to Part Two: The Influence of Calamities Upon Our Behavior and Vital Processes.

➢ Week Four: Next, it is Part Three: The Influence of Calamities Upon Social Mobility and Organization.

➢ Week Five: Students read and write about Chapter IX, Two General Effects of Calamity Upon Sociocultural Life, and Chapter XV, Dynamics of Ideology in Calamity.

➢ Week Six: Next, it is Chapter XIII, The Influence of Calamities Upon Science and Technology, and Chapter XIV, The Influence of Calamities Upon the Fine Arts.

➢ Week Seven is devoted to reading and discussing Chapter X. How Calamities Affect the Religious and Ethical Life of Society; Chapter XI, Calamities and Ethico-religious Processes; and Chapter XII, Sinners and Saints in Calamity.

➢ Week Eight involves reading and written analysis of both Chapter XVI, Causes of Calamities, and Chapter XVII, The Way Out of Calamity.

➢ Week Nine calls upon students to read and write a discussion of Chapter XVIII, A Glance into the Future.

➢ For the final session, Week Ten, students are to reconsider Sorokin’s theory of pestilence, explicit and implicit, through the entire book. What (if anything) survives unscathed by history? What needs amendment? What needs replacing, and by what?

Dr. Wilkinson notes that students in their posts are to pursue the following possible lines of commentary: Request further information; Request clarification; Offer opinions; Describe comparable experience; Suggest crossroad of another’s posts; and Suggest outside reading.

He further adds, “Other lines of comment will no doubt come to mind as you proceed to read one another’s posts.”
In his syllabus Professor Wilkinson lists the following additional works by Sorokin, first those of general interest:


_Sociology of Revolution._ Philadelphia, 1925.


_Contemporary Sociological Theories._ New York 1928.


_The Crisis of Our Age._ New York, 1942.


_Russia and the United States._ Dutton, 1944.


_Leaves from a Russian Diary, and Thirty Years After._ Boston: Beacon, 1950.


_Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences._ Chicago: Regnery, 1956.


Then, he offers students a way to read more Sorokin online. It is at: https://www.questia.com/library/sociology-and-anthropology/sociologists-and-anthropologists/pitirim-sorokin

Next, for pestilence, in general, as a factor in human affairs, he recommends:

http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/42686
http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/43671

Finally, for a look at Conservative Anarchism, he lists:

Leo Tolstoy, The Kingdom of God is Within You.
Leo Tolstoy, The Gospel in Brief.
Petr Kropotkin. Mutual Aid.
Albert Jay Nock. Our Enemy the State.
Paul Eltzbacher. Anarchism. (Chapters on Godwin, Proudhon, Tucker, Kropotkin and Tolstoy)

My conclusion: How lucky can students be to take such a course!!
Pestilence and Other Calamities in Civilizational Theory: Sorokin, McNeill, Diamond, and Beyond

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Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. — Albert Camus

Truth unfolds in time through a communal process. — Carroll Quigley

Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable. — John F. Kennedy

Abstract

This paper analyses the phenomenon of pestilence through paradigmatic and methodological lenses of several outstanding social scholars, including Pitirim A. Sorokin, William H. McNeill, and Jared M. Diamond. All three thinkers have advanced original, fundamental, and revolutionary paradigms regarding the profound role which infectious diseases played, are playing, and will continue to play in world history and culture. The phenomenon of pestilence is studied in the context of other major calamities. The relevant historic, as well as contemporary macro-level and long-term sociocultural research, is reviewed. The author advances a number of original concepts, as well as makes relevant projections into the future.

Keywords: calamity, “civilized diseases,” disease vector, endemic, epidemic, great sociocultural systems, great socioeconomic systems, infectious diseases, outbreak, pandemic, plague, pestilence, revolution, social change, zoonotic diseases

Pestilences Through the Ages

One of the most powerful factors behind the turbulent trajectory of human evolution is the phenomenon of calamity. It played a colossal role in the evolution (and revolutions) of world history and culture. Countless lives have been ruthlessly affected and tragically lost during a perpetual struggle of humanity with calamities. Among the most devastating calamities are pestilence, wars, revolutions and invasions. These calamities are magnified by fires, famines, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and environmental disasters.
As Pitirim A. Sorokin authoritatively demonstrates, calamities exert extremely powerful effects upon human minds, behavior, social organization, and cultural life. (Sorokin, 1968).

Among other existential threats, an enormous role is played by pestilences – a mysterious and much feared phenomenon. Often, they kill more people than even the deadliest of wars. During the American Civil War (1861-1865), for every soldier who perished from battle wounds, two died of infectious diseases such as dysentery, measles, small-pox, and malaria. The 1918 Influenza Pandemic alone slayed 50 million people worldwide – almost three times more than the 17 million, killed by violence during WWI.

The roots of infectious diseases go back a long way since they have been here for eons, even before humanity evolved.

William H. McNeill notes: “An amazing variety of animals suffer from one or another form of tuberculosis. Indeed, on chemical grounds it is commonly believed that the bacillus became parasitic when all life was still oceanic” (McNeill, 1976:332). Unsurprisingly, incurable pestilences have been a part of human history for millennia. They exerted a powerful impact on virtually every aspect of our lives, influenced outcomes of battles and wars, subdued proud rulers and ruined empires, formed our everyday habits and ways, and even dictated cultural trends and fashions.

Caused by draught, famine, cold, and other environmental changes, massive prehistoric migrations spread them in their wake. Epidemics accelerated further as societies became settled, more complex, and people started to congregate in ever more densely populated cities. The ancient Romans, Aztecs, and other empire builders created networks of paved roads for armies and messengers to move quickly around their realms. The ancient Egyptians, Chinese, and others introduced elaborate systems of navigational canals. Lakes, rivers, seas, and later, oceans, became humanity’s first superhighways.

Spurred by wars, technological advances, and proliferation of international trade, further massive movements followed, with armies, trade caravans, religious pilgrimages and crusades, as well as expeditions of “exploration and discovery” traveling far and wide.

One of the results of these advances has been the emergence of what William H. McNeill termed “civilized” diseases (McNeill, 1976:106), i.e. mostly incurable, and therefore mysterious epidemics, which periodically devastated lands and, especially, towns of ancient and medieval societies. Then, steamships and steam-driven locomotives announced with their powerful whistles and bells the arrival of an era of mass transportation.
Introduction of internal combustion, jet, and electric engines turbocharged the spread of infectious maladies even further. Now, with the advancement of cars and highways, commercial aviation and rapid land transit, any infectious disease is just one day away from anybody on the planet.

Through the ages, pestilences fell, as if from the sky, like bolts of lightning. Known as The Black Death (1346–1353), the bubonic plague epidemic was just the initial stage of The Second Plague Pandemic. With mortality rate of up to 70 percent, it exerted a tremendous toll on countless European towns and villages.

The great Italian writer and Renaissance humanist Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) describes horrors caused by the bubonic killer in his beloved city of Florence in the year 1348:

> There came a deadly pestilence. …It … showed its first signs in men and women alike by means of swellings either in the groin or under the armpits, some of which grew to the size of an ordinary apple and others to the size of an egg (more or less), and the people called them gavoccioli (buboes).

> And from the two parts of the body already mentioned, in very little time, the said deadly gavoccioli began to spread indiscriminately over every part of the body; then, after this, the symptoms of the illness changed to black or livid spots appearing on the arms and thighs, and on every part of the body – sometimes there were large ones and other times a number of little ones scattered all around.

> And just as the gavoccioli were originally, and still are, a very definite indication of impending death, in like manner these spots came to mean the same thing for whoever contracted them.” (Mark, 2020)

Following those initial signs, plague victims usually developed an acute fever and started vomiting blood. Most of them died two to seven days after the initial infection. (Stanska, 2020:5)

Another vicious killer was cholera, known also as the Blue Death. There were no less than seven cholera pandemics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Between 1817 and the present there has been no fewer than seven cholera pandemics (Hays, 2005: V-VII). When untreated, the mortality rate of this ruthless malady was about fifty percent. William H. McNeill testifies:

> The speed with which cholera killed was profoundly alarming, since perfectly healthy people could never feel safe from sudden death when the infection was anywhere near.
In addition, the symptoms were particularly horrible: radical dehydration meant that a victim shrank into a wizened caricature of his former self within a few hours, while ruptured capillaries discolored the skin, turning it black and blue. The effect was to make mortality uniquely visible: patterns of bodily decay were exacerbated and accelerated, as in a time-lapse motion picture, to remind all who saw it of death’s ugly horror and utter inevitability. (McNeill, 1976:261)

A contemporary scholar adds:

Cholera is a horrible disease. At first, the symptoms produce no more than a surprised look as the bowels empty without any warning. Then surprise changes to agony as severe cramping pains begin. Copious quantities of liquid, resembling rice water, pour through the anus. As the pain intensifies, the only small relief is to draw oneself into a ball, chin held against the knees; the breath whistles softly between the teeth.

When death occurs at this stage, the body cannot be unrolled, and the victim has to be buried in the fetal position. Those who do not die from this first attack suffer a slow and painful decline. The cheeks become hollow, the body liquids surge more slowly but still remain beyond control, and the watery stools contain fragments of the intestinal lining. As the hours pass, the skin darkens, the eyes stare vacantly without comprehension, and then life ends. (Sherman, 2007:33)

For most of humanity’s difficult story, the true causes of infectious diseases were not precisely known. The invisible is almost impossible to explain, and, therefore, it remains in a realm of the unknown or the unproven. Through the ages, God’s punishment for sins has been invoked, miasma, i.e. foul smells or vapors, have been blamed, innocent cats and dogs exterminated, and inevitably, disenfranchised groups, such as the Gypsies, the Jews, the immigrants, and the poor were blamed, forcibly isolated, expelled, and prosecuted.

The process of discovering true causes of pestilences was gradual, onerous, as well as dangerous, and until very recently, the answers remained elusive. The first inklings came only in mid-nineteenth century, during the Third Cholera Pandemic (1839-1856). In 1854, a London physician named John Snow (1813–1858) proposed that cholera was disseminated by the way of being located next to an open sewer in Soho. Dr. Snow’s discovery led to the development of water and waste sanitation systems, first in London, and then around the world, and he is considered one of the founders of the science of epidemiology.

It is now common knowledge that most infectious diseases are caused by certain microorganisms, such as pathogenic bacteria and viruses.
Introduction of optical microscopes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into medical research led to establishment of microbiology and bacteriology as scientific disciplines. Even then, only the largest of the pathogenic microorganisms could be studied, such as, for example, bacteria.

As to viruses, they are on average 100 times smaller than bacteria, and their discovery, as well as inauguration of the field of virology, had to wait until the invention of the electron microscope in 1930s. By mid-20th century a significant number of epidemic diseases caused by these and other microbes have been tamed, and a few of them altogether eradicated.

The spread of infectious diseases is at times facilitated by disease vectors, i.e., agents that carry and transmit infectious pathogens (fleas, ticks, mosquitos, etc.). Zoonotic diseases are the ones that are transmissible from an animal, often an insect, to a human. An epidemic is a situation in which a disease affects a large number of people within a community, population, or region.

When a disease becomes a permanent feature in the given circumstances, it is known as endemic. An outbreak is a sudden surge of infection, for example, an increase in the number of endemic cases. If it is not quickly controlled, an outbreak may become an epidemic. Virgin soil epidemic defines a situation in which the affected population has not been previously exposed to the disease and, therefore, has no immunological defenses against it.

Especially devastating are pandemics – epidemics that may spread over multiple regions, countries, or continents.

**Reflection of Pestilences in Literature and Visual Art**

Through the centuries, a dramatic struggle with the horrifying multi-headed monster pestilence continued unabated. Due to their uncanny ability to extract a dreadful toll on humanity, pestilences found an abundant expression in important religious and historic sources, as well as in significant works of literature and visual art.

We need go no further than John of Patmos’s (circa 6 CE ~100 CE) final book of the *New Testament* entitled the *Book of Revelation*. It features four supernatural beings charging forth on white, red, black, and pale horses. (Holy Bible, 1989:175). Those riders are often seen as symbolizing Pestilence, War, Famine, and Death. According to the Christian apocalyptic teachings, the Four Horsemen are to set a divine apocalypse upon the world as harbingers of the Last Judgment. In fact, those awesome figures make their appearance even earlier, for example, in the Old Testament's *Book of Zechariah* (Holy Bible, 1989:585-591) and in the Book of Ezekiel (Holy Bible, 1989:515-552), the roots of which go as far back as the sixth century BCE.
Plagues have served as an ominous background in classic books by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340s–1400), Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851), and Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849).

Tuberculosis made its menacing appearance in major works of Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), and Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970). Albert Camus (1913-1960) situated his novel *The Plague* (1947) in the French Algerian city of Oran in the 1940s, even though it was, conceivably, based on tragic events of the Sixth Cholera Pandemic (1899-1923).

The same disease hovers in the background of the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) by the Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927–2014). Since his story unfolds approximately between 1880 and the early 1930s, it most probably reflects on either a Fifth Cholera Pandemic (1881-1896) or a Sixth Cholera Pandemic (1899-1923).

Various incurable afflictions reflected, at times right before succumbing to them, such prominent artists as Titian (c. 1488/90[1]–1576), Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525–1530–1569), Paulus Furst of Nuremberg (1608 - 1666), Pavel A. Fedotov (1815-1852), Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901), Egon Schiele (1890–1918), and Edvard Munch (1863–1944).

Set in Sweden during the Black Death Epidemic (1346-1353), Ingmar Bergman’s (1918–2007) classic movie *The Seventh Seal* is a parable about a medieval knight and his imagined interaction with a personification of Death. Based on Michael M. Crichton's (1942–2008) novel (1969) is the eponymic film *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), as well as more recent movies *Outbreak* (1995) and *Contagion* (2011); these are just a few examples of Hollywood “science fiction” interpretations of epidemics and pandemics.

**Pestilences as a Double-Edged Sword of Destruction and Change**

Pestilences, very often in fatal combination with other calamities, complicate or even outright disrupt social and cultural activities, trade, business, and other conditions and circumstances of normal life. Before radically decimating Europe in 1346-1353, the bubonic plague, in conjunction with Mongol invasions, ravaged medieval China on an apocalyptic scale. McNeill comments:

> The combination of war and pestilence wreaked havoc on China’s population. The best estimates show a decrease from 123 million about 1200 CE (before the Mongol invasions began) to a mere 65 million in 1393, a generation after the final expulsion of the Mongols from China.
Even Mongol ferocity cannot account for such a drastic decrease. Disease assuredly played a big part in cutting Chinese numbers in half. The bubonic plague, recurring after its initial ravages at relatively frequent intervals, just as in Europe, is by all odds the most likely candidate for such a role. (McNeill, 1976: 163)

In much more extreme cases, infectious diseases lead to a complete downfall of societies, empires, and civilizations. For example, the transfer of infectious diseases to the Americas and other regions of the worlds, for example, Oceania, during the so-called Age of Discovery (15-17th centuries), decimated most of the local populations, often irreversibly so. (McNeill, 1976:199-234; Hays, 2005:297-301)

As late as in the nineteenth century things were not much different, even in the most advanced industrial countries and even among the powerful, rich, and famous. Queen Victoria’s husband Prince Albert (1819–1861) died at the age of 42 from what appears to have been typhoid. The Scottish novelist Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), the English Romantic poet John Keats (1795–1821), and the English poet and revolutionary Lord Byron (1788–1824) all perished from the then untreatable tuberculosis.

It was even worse elsewhere. A shaken British diplomat testified about his experiences in the Brazilian city of Recife in the year 1856, during the Third Cholera Pandemic (1839-1856):

> The town has had all the appearance of a city of the plague, business is at standstill, the streets deserted, tar barrels burning in them by day, and penitential processions by night, which carried the mind back to the middle ages, men and women with torches, covered with sheets and barefooted, groaning, weeping, praying, chanting, and scourging; the dead carts galloping to and fro with six or eight bodies, by day and night. (Hays, 2005: 231)

That is why outbreaks and even some epidemics of infectious diseases have been at times under-reported, covered up, as well as outright concealed by the authorities. In his (contemporary but published much later) novel entitled “Death in Venice,” Thomas Mann (1875–1955) reflects on such a "secret" outbreak, presently known as the Cholera Epidemic in Naples (1910-1911).

> Obsessed with obtaining reliable news about the status and progress of the disease, he went to the city’s cafés and plowed through all the German newspapers, which had been missing from the hotel lobby during the past few days. (Hays, 2005:373)

Later research revealed that the true Italian toll in 1911 was about 16,000, and in Naples, at least 2,600. Due to complicated political and business circumstances (Naples was the main port of departure for the massive immigration flow at the time), this epidemic completely “disappeared” from almost all official, medical, and mass media records.
Multiple levels of government (municipal and royal in Italy) in three countries (Italy itself, Argentina, and the US) were to different degrees involved in the cover-up. (Hays, 2005:369-375)

Exactly 110 years later, those catastrophic blunders have been repeated in Italy and elsewhere in the world during the coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the Italian city of Bergamo was affected by coronavirus on a massive scale and became the country’s epicenter for the disease. For various bureaucratic reasons, the areas that should have been locked down were not, and that augmented the spread of the virus. (Castelfranco, 2020)

Another, more benign aspect of the phenomenon of pestilence is that it is a very powerful factor of social and cultural change. The Black Death (1346–1353) and the subsequent waves of The Second Plague Pandemic (1346-1844) completely altered the European social structure, as well as the belief systems of many of those who survived it. (Mark, 2020). McNeill elucidates:

“… the inadequacy of established ecclesiastical rituals and administrative measures to cope with the unexampled emergency of plague had pervasively unsettling effects. In the fourteenth century, many priests and monks died; often their successors were less well trained and faced more quizzical if not openly antagonistic flocks. God’s justice seemed difficult to find in the way plague spared some, killed others; and the regular administration of God’s grace through the sacraments (even when consecrated priests remained available) was an entirely inadequate psychological counterpoise to the statistical vagaries of lethal infection and sudden death. Anti-clericalism was of course not new in Christian Europe; after 1346, however, it became more open and widespread, and provided one of the elements contributing to Luther’s later success.” (McNeill, 1976: 184-185)

In addition, it is a well-known fact that in the wake of the Black Death epidemic European societies witnessed remarkable economic, scientific, and technological advances, as well as a virtual explosion of inventiveness and entrepreneurship. J.N. Hays notes:

The new supply-demand situation of labor also encouraged greater efficiency of production. The pre-Black Death economy had little incentive to save on labor costs; surplus population made labor cheap. The Black Death – and the continuing demographic pressure of the ongoing pandemic – coincided with a remarkable period of technological innovation, which likely was not coincidental. (Hays 2005: 49)
It was during The Second Plague Pandemic (1346-1844) that the Italian perfume maker Giovanni Maria Farina (1685–1766) introduced in 1709 his famous Eau de Cologne. The perfume with sweet yet refreshing and stimulating aroma was concocted according to a highly guarded formula from the aromatic essences of oranges, lemons, grapefruits, bergamot, flowers, and lavender. Originally very expensive, it was believed to have the power to ward off the bubonic nemesis.

An even more tantalizing issue is the relation between the plague and the creative genius of Isaac Newton (1642 –1726/27). Between April 1665 and January 1666, the city of London suffered a major epidemic of bubonic plague, which killed about 100,000 people, almost a quarter of London's population, in just eighteen months. The Great Plague of London (1665-1666) was even described by Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) in a novel entitled A Journal of the Plague Year (1722). This was the last major outbreak of the Second Plague Pandemic (1346-1844), by then receding in Europe. With the University of Cambridge closed because of the epidemic, Newton returned to his home in rural Lincolnshire between June 1665 and April 1667. During that period, he developed calculus and realized that white light contained the colors of the spectrum. Newton also conceived of his famous theory of universal gravitation then. (Hays 2005: 129)

Thus, pestilences, as well as other calamities, while viciously attacking society on a “physical” or “biological” level, are also capable of exerting profound social and cultural changes. Moreover, their true significance in history, as well as in social and cultural life of multiple societies was at times hidden behind euphemistic formulations convenient for the elites. Gradually, a number of prominent historians and social scholars began a process of uncovering the true significance and the enormous role of epidemics and pandemics in human history.

**Pitirim A. Sorokin: Apocalypse Explained**

Russia is no stranger to calamities and hardship. In fact, some of the greatest Russian literary works reflect or persistently dwell on various cataclysms. The Russian historian Nikolay M. Karamzin (1766-1826) lived during the Napoleonic Wars, and the scholar’s unique library perished together with his apartment during the Fire of Moscow in 1812. Apparently, the historian’s labors on his 12-volume History of the Russian State were in no small measure motivated by the forthcoming threat of the Napoleon’s almost million-strong military juggernaut. (Smirnov, 2014:5-6)

In *War and Peace* Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) presents nothing less than his own deterministic philosophy of history using the Napoleonic Wars as a dramatic background (Tolstoy, 1960:588-625). Yet another type of calamity, revolution, continues to be an endemic feature of Russian historical and cultural landscape.
In 1993, Daniel Yergin and Thane Gustafson published a book on Russia’s fate after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They started it with the words: “The twentieth century closes as it began, with revolution in Russia…” (Yergin at al., 1995:3)

Sorokin hails from the historic land of Komi people, located north of the 60th parallel. The climate conditions of this unforgiving but beautiful region approximate those of Alaska, northern Canada, and even Greenland. Having been born in a Russian-Komi family of an impoverished itinerant artist, the precocious youth overcame enormous obstacles to become Russia’s “second Lomonosov.”

In just a few years after arriving penniless at the age of 18 in Saint-Petersburg, the young genius became not only a prominent scholar and public figure (sociologist, lawyer, ethnologist, and journalist), but also literally a “second person” in the Provisional Government (March-July, 1917) of a gigantic state occupying one sixth of the globe. (Alalykin-Izvekov, 2017:21)

After the October Revolution of 1917 the already widely known scholar and popular political leader joined the anti-Bolshevik insurrection. On November 30, 1918, he was thrown into jail in the Russian far-northern town of Ustyug.

There, he almost drank the bitter cup of a political prisoner sentenced to death. If not execution, then certain death from typhus awaited him in the overcrowded and pestilence-infested jail (Sorokin, 1963:141-175). This vicious disease killed millions during World War I (McNeill, 1976:220) and was particularly fatal during the Russian Revolution (1917) and the Russian Civil War (1917-1923).

However, even in these harrowing conditions, the scholar soberly contemplated an omnipresent toll of calamities on humanity. In words worthy of the pen of Nicolas de Condorcet, he noted: “The revolution, this voracious monster, cannot live without human blood” (Alalykin-Izvekov, 2017: 40). With yet more ordeals to follow, the American sociologist Michel P. Richard keenly summarized the scholar’s unique career by saying: “The amazing thing about Sorokin’s life is that he managed to survive it” (Sorokin, 1991:V).

The American sociologist and Sorokin biographer Barry Johnston notes: “The scientific value of the work is that it is a factual, analytically driven theory of catastrophic social change. … In it, Sorokin explores how hunger, epidemic and war affect the mind and lead to regression of social behavior and social organization” (Johnston, 1995:168-169).
Not surprisingly, Sorokin deeply investigated the phenomena of revolution, hunger, pestilence, and other calamities in such works as *Hunger as a Factor* (1922), *Sociology of the Revolution* (1925), *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies* (1950), *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1937-41), *Society, Culture, Personality* (1947), and *Sociological Theories of Today* (1966). Especially significant in this regard was Sorokin’s classic monograph *Man and Society in Calamity* (1942).

With his unique talent and panoramic scholarly vision, Sorokin investigated the phenomenon of pestilence as a complicated occurrence closely connected with other calamities. He was one of the first social scholars to recognize fully that calamities may also inspire profound thought, boost creativity, promote inventions and discoveries, and even evoke in a significant number of people their best qualities. Sorokin reminded us that some of the greatest achievements of human spirit have been created during times of change and crisis.

The scholar wrote in his monograph *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies* (1950):

> Even in normal times, cogitation about man’s destiny – on the whence and whither, the how and why, of a given society – is now and then carried on by at least a few thinkers or scholars. In times of serious crisis these problems suddenly assume exceptional importance, theoretical as well as practical; for thinkers as well as for plain folk. An enormous part of the population finds itself uprooted, ruined, mutilated, and annihilated by the crisis. People’s routine of life is entirely upset; their habitual adjustments are broken; and large groups of human beings are turned into a flotsam of displaced and disadjusted persons. …

This means that in times of crisis one should expect an upsurge of cogitation on and study of the how and why, the whence and whither, of man, society, and humanity. Most of the significant “philosophies of history,” most of the “intelligible interpretations of historical events,” and most of the important generalizations about sociocultural processes have indeed appeared either in the periods of serious crisis, catastrophe, and transitional disintegration, or immediately before and after such periods (Sorokin, *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies*, 1963:3-4).

Later, Thomas S. Kuhn would agree by saying “… crises are a necessary precondition for the emergence of novel theories” (Kuhn, 1970:77). Not surprisingly, as to the way out of pestilences, Sorokin, looked far ahead of his times. A true humanist, he wrote:

> … side by side with the biological and medical questions, the problem of alleviation and elimination of epidemics has its no less important social and cultural aspects. A wise society, desirous of being free from pestilence, would eliminate not only its biological roots but also the social causes of epidemics; famine, ignorance, revolution, and war.
Such a goal requires a society supremely well integrated in scientific, religious, moral and social respects. Unfortunately, many societies have been, are and probably will be lacking in this integration and wisdom. Hence, they have been paying the penalty of the visitation of pestilence with its death toll and will probably so continue (Sorokin, 1968: 301).

Thus, by expertly studying the effects of war, revolution, famine and pestilence upon human minds, behavior, social organization and cultural life, Pitirim A. Sorokin confidently set forth the foundation for a rigorous scientific study of calamities.

**William H. McNeill’s tour de force in *Plagues and People*.

William H. McNeill was a friend, collaborator and biographer of one of the founders of the field of the comparative study of civilizations, Arnold J. Toynbee—the man who, according to Time magazine (circa 1947), “found history Ptolemaic and left it Copernican.” This significant connection may explain the profound depth and astounding scope of McNeill’s writings. In his compact, competent and elegantly written volume *Plagues and Peoples* (1976), he described a dramatic struggle of humans with infectious diseases through the ages. The book is highly interdisciplinary, yet fundamental in character.

McNeill methodically followed the development of what he justifiably called civilized diseases through eons of time and among peoples of a breathtaking diversity of regions.

The book bursts with insightful observations, original thoughts and profound scholarly judgments. He suggests, for example, that the Indian castes originated, at least in part, due to the role of infectious diseases (McNeill, 1976:93-94). Epidemics had a major impact on the spread of Christianity, as well as on the fall of the Western Roman Empire (McNeill, 1976:121-123). A subsequent shift of civilization away from the Mediterranean toward the cooler climes of Northern Europe happened not in small part due to the death-carrying breadth of epidemics (McNeill, 1976: 127-128).

Following in the footsteps of Sorokin’s earlier observations, McNeill rightfully noted that epidemic diseases usually arrive amongst other calamities, such as invasions, uprisings, wars, as well as internal conflicts (McNeill, 1976:118-20).
One of the book’s most fundamental revelations is a realization of the effects of cataclysmic epidemiological catastrophes which transpired in the Americas and elsewhere in the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE. Multiple societies, empires and civilizations collapsed in a large measure due to a combined onslaught of Eurasian diseases such as plague, malaria, typhus, smallpox, yellow fever, and measles (McNeill, 1976:181-182).

According to scholarly estimates, the astounding total of 100 million perished due to the transfer of then incurable infectious diseases to the Americas by the invading European colonizers (McNeill, 1976:203). Before McNeill’s groundbreaking book, these apocalyptic calamities were conveniently obscured by various euphemistic and “umbrella” terms like *The Columbian Exchange* (Hays, 2005:79), *The Seeds of Change* (Hays, 2005:79) and *The Virgin Soil Epidemics* (Hays, 2005:X).

So, he shares with us his initial insight:

… as part of my self-education for writing *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, I was reading about the Spanish conquest of Mexico. As everyone knows, Hernando Cortez, starting off with fewer than six hundred men, conquered the Aztec empire, whose subjects numbered millions. How could such a tiny handful prevail? How indeed? All the familiar explanations seemed inadequate. … A casual remark in one of the accounts of Cortez’s conquest … suggested an answer to such questions, and my new hypothesis gathered plausibility and significance as I mulled it over and reflected on its implications afterwards.

For on the night when the Aztecs drove Cortez and his men out of Mexico City, killing many of them, an epidemic of smallpox was raging in the city (McNeill, 1976:1-2).

Therefore, systematically building on the foundation laid by Pitirim A. Sorokin, McNeill continued a thorough, rigorously scientific study of profound and perennial effects of calamities and pestilences on humanity’s arduous story.

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1 The dominant city of the Aztec empire was known as the city-state of Tenochtitlan. Contemporary Mexico City is essentially located where Tenochtitlan formerly stood. (Author’s note).
**Guns, Germs and Steel by Jared M. Diamond**

Covering a span of 13,000 years, Jared M. Diamond’s book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* reveals the main forces behind the eventful story of humanity on all inhabited continents and even on distant islands. As it is clear from the title of the book, he identifies as such three major factors — advanced weapons, infectious diseases, and cutting-edge technologies.

Initially, he focuses on reasons why Eurasians found themselves in an auspicious position compared with societies in other regions of the world. For example, there were mostly Eurasian species of wild plants and animals that proved suitable for domestication, while other lands had few or even none. The settled agricultural life and food production based on those domesticates led to the development of dense and stratified human populations, writing and centralized political organizations.

This domestication of certain animal species (i.e., livestock, beasts of burden and pets) brought humans into close contact with them, creating favorable conditions for zoonotic infectious diseases (i.e., transmissible between animals and humans). In chapter eleven, entitled *Lethal Gift of Livestock: The Evolution of Germs*, he writes:

> The major killers of humanity throughout our recent history — smallpox, flu, tuberculosis, malaria, plague, measles, and cholera — are infectious diseases that evolved from diseases of animals, even though most of the microbes responsible for our own epidemic illnesses are paradoxically now almost confined to humans. Because diseases have been the biggest killers of people, they have also been decisive shapers of history. Until World War II, more victims of war died of warborne microbes than of battle wounds. All those military histories glorifying great generals oversimplify the ego-deflating truth: the winners of past wars were not always the armies with the best generals and weapons but were often merely those bearing the nastiest germs to transmit to their enemies. (Diamond, 1997:196-197)

While brilliantly elaborating on the Sorokin’s and McNeill’s insights, Diamond also points to much needed solutions to the exponentially mounting problems of a globalizing humanity, for example, the alleviation of deleterious effects of *infection diseases* by restoration of the historically evolved natural habitats.

**Great Cultural Systems vs “Killer Apps”**

The British and American historian Niall C. Ferguson confronts the reader of his recent book *Civilization: The West and the Rest* with a seemingly perplexing question.
How did it happen that within a span of just five centuries, a dozen countries of a particular civilizational identity gained control of three fifths of mankind and of four fifths of the world’s economy and wealth? As an answer, the thinker invokes six “Killer Apps”—Competition, Science, Property, Modern Medicine, Consumerism, and Work Ethic (Ferguson, 2011:13).

In fact, the idea appears to be not as groundbreaking as it seems. Back in 1947, in his magnum opus entitled Society, Culture, and Personality (1947), Pitirim A. Sorokin introduced a notion of the “Great Cultural Systems.” He wrote about a direct correlation between the universal significance of such systems and their relative lifespans:

When we turn to such systems as a given language, a major religion, notable philosophical, ethical, juridical, aesthetic, scientific, technological, economic, and political systems, we find that most of them endure for decades or centuries and that the greatest of them function for a thousand or more years, fluctuating qualitatively and quantitatively, but maintaining an uninterrupted existence. … The decisive factor is the greatness of the system itself. The more universal, the more essential to the survival and creativeness of humanity the meanings, values, and norms of the system are, the longer its span of life is likely to be. (Sorokin, 1947:707-709)

This, of course, means, that while societies themselves may collapse and disappear, their Great Cultural Systems often continue to exist.

Sorokin’s contemporary Arnold J. Toynbee (both scholars were born in 1889) proposed the concepts of “Challenge and Response” to explain how civilizations rise and fall. By “challenge” Toynbee means an unpredictable factor that presents a threat to an organized group of people. A challenge may arise as a result of many circumstances— for example, overpopulation, resources depletion, or a climate change. Response is an action taken by the group to deal with the new situation. According to Toynbee, an adequate response initiated by the group’s creative elite would ensure its survival and prosperity (Toynbee, 1947:60-79).

In his book The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949), the American mythologist Joseph J. Campbell suggests a notion of the “Ultimate Boons.” The scholar describes the concept as follows:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell 1949: 23)

The ultimate boon may be a limitless bounty, indestructible life, but also valuable experience, profound insight or revelation, innovation or discovery, and so forth.
Upon return from his mythical journey, the hero shares those hard-earned ultimate boons with his people.

This crucial action usually serves a purpose of saving a society (civilization) from troubles and ensures its further existence and prosperity.

In the 1960s, the American historian Carroll Quigley developed the concept of Instrument of Expansion. According to this thinker, those provide civilizations with a mechanism for dynamism and growth (Quigley, 1979:132-145). For example, for the Classical civilization, which occupied the shores of the Mediterranean Sea from 950 BCE to 550 CE, the Instrument of Expansion was the institution of slavery (Quigley, 1979:269-270). For the first stage of expansion of Western civilization (970-1270 CE), the Instrument of Expansion was the institution of feudalism (Quigley, 1979:358); for the second stage (1440-end of the seventeenth century), it was commercial capitalism, and so forth (Quigley, 1979:367-369).

Essentially, Jarred M. Diamond’s concepts of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (Diamond, 1997) are an elaboration on the same eternal topic. The scholar writes in his 2003 afterword to his famous book: “... the themes of GGS seem to me to be not only a driving force in the ancient world but also a ripe area for study in the modern world” (Diamond, 1997:440).

In a less-well-known quote, the American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington elevated his famous concept of the *Clash of Civilizations* to the level of universal values:

> In the greater clash, the global “real clash,” between Civilization and barbarism, the world’s greatest civilizations, with their rich accomplishments in religion, art, literature, philosophy, science, technology, morality, and compassion, will … hang together or hang separately (Huntington, 1997:321).

Altogether, what Pitirim A. Sorokin, Arnold J. Toynbee, Joseph J. Campbell, Carrol Quigley, Jarred M. Diamond, Samuel P. Huntington, Niall C. Ferguson, as well as many other scholars have proposed is something rather similar. All those concepts reflect on real or imaginary insights, systems, concepts, ideas, revelations, instruments, and vehicles that have a potential capacity to benefit humanity.

However, who exactly did they benefit so far? Apparently, as Ferguson convincingly demonstrates, not everybody. Some, if not most of those Instruments of Expansion and Killer Apps have been used in an expansionist, conquering, and/or subjugating mode.
Yet, is not humanity presently in a desperate need of the new *Great Sociocultural Systems* and the new *Great Socioeconomic Systems*, which would provide it with advanced tools, instruments, and vehicles of overcoming or, at least, alleviating such existential threats as pestilences and other calamities? In order to accomplish that, they ought to be based on the universal values, rights, and human needs of a rapidly globalizing humanity, not on an outdated set of values, rights, and needs of one or several elite groups. Reflecting universal aspirations of humankind, those powerful new systems would encompass insights, discoveries, innovations, and creative breakthroughs in medicine and public health, science and technology, literature and art, politics and management, education and philosophy, law and religion in a caliber range of Greek Philosophy, Roman Law, Renaissance Humanism, Enlightenment Ideas, European Rationalism, Romanticism, and Russian Classical Literature and Musical Art.

For instance, in the medical and public health fields, those great new systems are needed in a caliber range of such previous discoveries and innovations as vaccination (1796), anesthesia (1846), pasteurization (1863), water sanitation and waste disposal systems (mid-nineteenth century), penicillin (1928), and the like.

One of examples of such new systems appears to be a specific type of gene editing, known as CRISPR Technology. As the term implies, it can be a powerful tool for “editing” genomes, which can help to destroy targeted infectious pathogens. In fact, researchers sometimes turn the pathogenic microorganisms’ reproductive mechanisms against them. (Doudna, 2020; Vidyasagar, 2018)

Obviously, the problem of epidemics and pandemics can be solved only in conjunction with the resolution of multiple pressing issues such as overcrowding, social, ethnic, and racial injustice, lack of resources, development of safe water and sanitation systems, and equal access to medical care.

The alternatives to speedily devising and urgently implementing solutions based on universal values, rights, and human needs and new *Great Sociocultural and Socioeconomic Systems* may be quite grim. A number of contemporary thinkers even foresee a collapse of contemporary civilization from such calamities as nuclear war, diseases, resource depletion, economic decline, ecological crisis, or sociopolitical disintegration (Tainter, 1988:3).

**Case Study: The Coronavirus Pandemic**

Being an ultimate expression of the massive “civilized” infectious diseases, pandemics are occurrences of astounding scale, complexity, and significance.
The grim roster of these monsters includes at minimum a dozen planet-encompassing pandemics: two influenza pandemics (1889-1890; 1918-1919), three plague pandemics (541-747; 1346-1844; 1894-?), and seven cholera pandemics (1817-1824; 1827-1835; 1839-1856; 1863-1875; 1881-1896; 1899-1923; 1961-Present), as well the inexorably unfolding AIDS pandemic (1981-Present) (Hays, 2005).

Starting in 2019, the world saw yet another pandemic unleashing its terrific force on human communities, cities and societies around the planet.

Sadly, the onset of the coronavirus Covid-19 was met with a sense of condescending superiority by some governing elites in the US, as well as in a number of other Western countries. However, not for long. The pandemic tore through the social, economic and cultural fabric of Western society, as well as other societies, like a massive, vicious and prolonged biological warfare attack.

As of the end of June 2020, over ten million cases of COVID-19 had been reported in more than 188 countries, resulting in more than 500,000 deaths. The United States experienced the highest death toll so far, accounting for more than a quarter of the global total. (Hollingsworth, J. et al., 2020)

As we have already seen from the example of the cholera epidemic in Naples (1910-1911), as well as from the coronavirus pandemic-related human catastrophe in Bergamo (2020), there is nothing new about the government-level arrogance, ignorance and incompetency. Pitirim A. Sorokin prophetically wrote in 1959, right before the impending calamity of the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962):

“Thus, the question *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes* (Who shall guard the guardians?) acquires a truly fateful importance. … the powerful ruling groups have been rather poor guardians of peace and moral order in the human universe. A large percentage of rulers have had either mediocre or low intelligence; many have also suffered from split personality, compulsive-obsessive complexes, aggressiveness, manias, paranoia, schizophrenia and other mental disorders. Morally, the ruling groups have been more criminal than the ruled populations.

No wonder, therefore, that this kind of leader has been unable to secure for mankind any lasting peace or “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness” in the preceding millennia of human history. (Sorokin, 1959:105-106)

President John F. Kennedy was familiar with Sorokin’s ideas (Sorokin, 2008) and, apparently, learned from them. Perhaps because of that, the world was saved from a nuclear annihilation back in 1962. However, not all political leaders are equally considerate, educated, or have the sense of anticipation, as well as compassion and empathy for human suffering.
As a consequence of belated measures and mismanagement, the situation in the United States quickly turned phantasmagoric, surreal. Far from leading others in the fight against the new global threat, the country quickly became the world’s epicenter of a ruthless and highly infectious disease. The social measures of containing pandemic, such as lockdowns, social distancing, and sanitation, could only go so far.

As to the much-awaited vaccine, according to the American epidemiologist Lawrence Brilliant, creating a worldwide Covid-19 vaccine program would require a prolonged and sustained international effort (Sample, 2020: 4). Clearly, this would have to wait for another country’s leadership.

Meanwhile, the unemployment level rose higher in the first three months of the pandemic than it did in the two years of the Great Recession (2007-2009). By the end of June of 2020, about 40 million Americans were unemployed — the largest number since the unemployment insurance system was created in the 1930s. A rush to jump-start the nation’s economy without proper safety measures in place caused new spikes of infections. By the end of June 2020, some state governors were reversing course and tightening restrictions yet again.

More bad news could be in store as a second wave of infections is looming in the fall.

Despite the official “we are all in the same boat” rhetoric, it was almost immediately apparent that the pandemic is not the “great equalizer” that transcends all social, cultural, demographic, and economic boundaries.

As George Orwell (1903-1950) sardonically quipped in his allegorical novella Animal Farm (1945), “some … are more equal than others.” The pandemic has almost grotesquely amplified existing social, racial, ethnic and economic disparities. Spurred by the pandemic, social tensions have ensued. With demonstrations against systemic racism and police brutality spreading far and wide, the Black Lives Matter movement has rapidly gained support around the world.

Could it be that the unfolding political processes during the summer of 2020 represent an initial, moderate stage of an impending revolution (Alalykin-Izvekov, Satkiewicz, 2014)? That would be a perilous path. As Pitirim A. Sorokin reminded us: “A society … which has been incapable of carrying through adequate reforms but has thrown itself into the arms of revolution, has to pay the penalty for its sins by the death of a considerable proportion of its members” (Sorokin, 1967: 412). Obviously, a revolution during the pandemic could turn out exponentially more deadly.

So far, it appears that American society is moving forward by the way of reforms. Sweeping changes are being introduced on all levels of society.
A number of monuments, memorials, and portraits of controversial historical figures have been removed, and contentious books and films pulled off the shelves. The process of re-naming schools, streets and other public places and institutions is gaining momentum. Outdated designs of flags and other symbols are being changed. Private business companies are discussing relevant changes in policies. Police reform-related bills are being considered in the US Congress. Substantial changes in educational, legal, medical and other fields are obviously underway.

Conclusions

One of the most powerful factors behind the turbulent and eventful trajectory of humanity’s story is the phenomenon of calamity. It played, is playing, and will continue to play a significant role in the evolution (and revolutions) of the world’s history and culture.

Calamities exert extremely powerful effects upon the human mind, behavior, social organization, and cultural life. They seldom arrive alone, often triggering one another and multiplying each other’s effects. Besides inflicting an enormous toll on populations, calamities tend to exacerbate existing social, economic, and cultural problems. Yet while exposing the inner workings of the social system, calamities present a society in question with opportunity to regroup and address what needs to be remedied, thus at times opening the way for new, creative and constructive ideas, concepts, and developments.

Among other great calamities, a colossal role is being played by pestilences. As societies became settled and more complex, infectious diseases followed them at every turn. Through the centuries, a dramatic struggle with this horrifying multi-headed monster figured prominently in some of the most fundamental sources on history and religion, as well as in a number of prominent works of literature and art. Only recently and quite gradually has science and medicine achieved a degree of control over some of the most dangerous infectious diseases. A number of them have been conquered and even completely eliminated. In no small degree, this helped to prolong the lifespans of our contemporaries, in some cases to more than twice the duration of our ancestors’ lives.

However, due to the mysteriousness of their origin and mechanisms of proliferation, as well as the self-centered attitudes of some of the ruling elites, the true role of infectious diseases in history remained obscure. Only recently, a number of prominent social scholars offered a number of groundbreaking ideas, concepts, theories and paradigms which greatly contributed to a better understanding of the phenomenon of pestilence. Pitirim A. Sorokin, William H. McNeill, Jared M. Diamond and others advanced original, fundamental, and revolutionary paradigms.
These have revealed the true patterns and dynamics of proliferation, the important laws and regularities, as well as the enormous impact of the infectious diseases, as well as other calamities on human societies.

Our analysis of multiple calamities, including the latest coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic, clearly demonstrates that efficiently confronting existential threats facing humanity takes a concerted, prolonged, and sustained international effort, involving enlightened leadership and adequate funds. It can only be done simultaneously with solving such pressing global problems as social, racial and ethnic injustice, hunger, poverty, lack of medicine, sanitation, fresh water and other resources, as well as equal access to medical care.

All these giant tasks would require devising and implementing a number of new Great Sociocultural Systems and Great Socioeconomic Systems. The alternatives may be quite grim, since our contemporary civilization may collapse under a combined pressure of such calamities as diseases, nuclear war, resource depletion, economic decline, ecological crisis, or sociopolitical disintegration.
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William of Rubruck: Cosmopolitan Curiosity and Restraint in an Age of Conquest and Mission

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Abstract

William of Rubruck’s account of journeying to Mongolia (1253-55) remained relatively elusive in scholarly and popular discourses. A Franciscan friar, his mission helped tentatively acquaint two (literally/figuratively) distant civilizations, Latin Christendom and the Mongol Empire. We may assess the extent to which a critical reading of Rubruck can propel knowledge of a Christian Eastward mission. Rubruck’s account was found to evince a degree of restraint and cosmopolitan curiosity that not only went against the grain of Christendom’s exceptionalism and expansionism, but also enabled the pursuit of a rudimentary inter-civilizational dialogue.

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Introduction

To what extent can a critical reading of Rubruck propel knowledge of a Christian Eastward mission? This is the research question animating work for this paper. Rubruck journeyed to the Mongol Empire with companion Bartholomew of Cremona (Charpentier 1935: 255) between 1253 and 1255. That this Franciscan monk from Flanders (Frankopan 2015: 165) and his account largely eluded scholarly and popular discourses – that it “slipped almost immediately into relative obscurity” (Campbell 1991: 112) – is regrettable.

1 The Mongols of this epoch have been referred to as the Tartars, but I only use the former term in this investigation. Note, however, that Frankopan identifies in ‘Tartar’ “a reference to Tartarus – the abyss of torment in classical mythology” (2015: 163).
2 At the time of Rubruck’s journey, the Mongol Empire contained “most of Asia, from the Manchurian coast in the east, to Persia, Kiev, and Konya in the west” (Watson 2011: 90-91).
3 The account I use here is Jackson and Morgan’s (1990) translation and edition. I refer to Rubruck’s account as Rubruck (1990). I took the deliberate decision to use Jackson and Morgan; it is a majestic contemporary work of translation and scholarship that captures Rubruck’s account of his experiences with real people, in real places, in a manner that engages contemporary audiences. Meticulous attention is paid to linguistic and contextual accuracy, and Jackson and Morgan do not shy away from defending their translation and scholarship against others’ inaccuracies. They discuss, in their copious introduction, the relative (de)merits of earlier translations, and surpass expectations in justifying their contribution.
Whilst first-person travel narratives did not prevail until the seventeenth century, Rubruck explored experiential ethnographic and literary modalities four centuries earlier, in the central Middle Ages, voicing “keen self-discovery in his sights and feelings” (Montalbano 2015: 598).

But why the obscurity? Firstly, Rubruck was eclipsed by such ‘celebrity’ explorers as Marco Polo, after whom the Ovis Poli sheep was named, despite already being identified and documented by Rubruck (Jackson 2016). Secondly, Rubruck was as elusive as his manuscript: his only description is his ‘very large size’, and one can only speculate what ultimately became of him (Jackson and Morgan 1990). Such ambiguity makes him and his account suitable objects for (re)investigation.

Rubruck was brought to my attention during archival work for a previous publication, wherein I traced a broader history of exploratory incursions into Central Asia. That investigation identified a good corpus of work on Marco Polo (Akbari et al 2008; Bergreen 2007; Hudson 1954; Jacoby 2006; Larner 1999; Latham 1958; Man 2009; Tucci 1954; Vogel 2013; Wood 2018), but relatively brief reference to Rubruck. Yes, there is coverage in the literature, and I hope to have employed it accordingly. But it appears that this character on the stage of early ethnography has, for the most part, been appearing in the shadows of the backdrop, and on the margins of the play.

Work sought the degree to which a critical (re)reading can propel understanding of a Christian Eastward mission. It found that Rubruck went against the grain of Christendom’s exceptionalism and expansionism, the doctrine that the heathen ‘otherland’ would be brought within the purview of Christendom – encountered, civilized, converted – through peace or war. Whilst “dominant cultures of Latin Christendom valorised the settled, the agrarian and the urban, over the roaming, the nomadic and the cityless” (Phillips 2016: 81), Rubruck studied the Mongols with an immersive ethnographic embrace of which today’s field researchers would (and should) be duly proud.

I identified, in Rubruck, a degree of restraint and cosmopolitan curiosity in contradistinction to the prevalent universalizing imperatives of conquest and mission.

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4 Campbell notes that Rubruck’s account evinced “a freer sense of the importance and authority of first-person experience and a new interest in such secular topics as other human cultures” (1991: 9).
5 I join Burns in defining the central Middle Ages as that epoch “from 950 (or 1000) to 1300 (or 1350) …an essentially frontier experience [wherein]…a suddenly urbanized, dangerously overpopulated, and…religiously energetic society overpoured its boundaries, transforming the world and the actors themselves” (1989: 313).
6 I join Jackson in orienting my analysis according to “Latin (Catholic) Christendom, embracing not only Western Europe and Scandinavia but also the ‘crusader states’ in Syria, Palestine and Greece, together with Poland, Hungary and the present-day Czech Republic – all those territories, in other words, that owed obedience to the Roman Church and the pope” (2018: 1).
I argue that the use of such restraint and cosmopolitan curiosity set the context in which intercivilizational (not international)\(^7\) dialogue could be pursued.

Four sections substantiate this. The next situates Rubruck in the historical context of conquest and mission. Thereafter, Rubruck’s account is critically examined in one section that identifies his restraint and another that observes his cosmopolitan curiosity. The paper closes by discussing the civilizational purchase of ‘bridging’ two distant ‘otherlands.’

### Setting the Scene: Conquest and Mission

The Franciscans were an order of “penitents, living in total poverty and preaching to their fellow-men to repent and follow Christ” (Jackson and Morgan 1990: 1). Journeying beyond the order, they relied on charity to support them (Montalbano 2015: 588).

Rubruck, a Franciscan, was tasked with journeying,\(^8\) in 1253, from Acre (Biller 2000: 230) in Palestine\(^9\) to the Mongol Empire not only for mission but also for reportage to King Louis IX of France (hereafter Louis). Louis was an interesting character in the tale of conquest and mission. So devoted was he to his religion, supporting the Dominicans and Franciscans, that he pondered abdication, eventually striking balance between religion and kingship.\(^10\)

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\(^7\) I join Brummett in feeling “leery of the attribution of the ‘national’ to the peoples, cultures, and narratives of the long early modern era. Who exactly did our traveller authors think they were” (2009: 29)?

\(^8\) But Rubruck was not alone. The Dominican Andrew of Longjumeau participated in a Papal embassy to the Mongols in 1247, alongside Ascelin, Simon of St Quenten, and others (Charpentier 1935: 255). One year beforehand, the Franciscan John of Plano Carpini (hereafter John) observed, in Karakorum, the enthronement of Güyük Khan (Rubíés 2009: 52). Biller corroborates this, noting that in 1245, “Innocent IV commissioned the Franciscan John of Pian di Carpine and the Dominicans Andrew of Longjumeau, Ascelin of Cremona, and Simon of St Quentin to go on missions to the Great Khan, while Louis IX again commissioned Andrew in 1248” (2000: 230). Phillips insightfully remarks that whilst John and Rubruck “were travelling at a time when the terrors of the Mongol attacks on Europe were fresh in their minds and were describing a society that was alien almost beyond imagining, they nonetheless succeeded in treating the Mongols with sympathetic understanding” (2016: 6; emphasis added).

\(^9\) In 1099, following the First Crusade, a Latin Christian kingdom was established in Palestine, chiefly by French, Flemish and Norman nobles (Linehan et al 2018a: 5). Resultantly, as Phillips notes, “between 1099 and 1291, European colonists held a position of local dominance in Syria and Palestine in the crusader states of Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem” (2016: 55). At the time of Rubruck’s departure, Louis had been in the region on crusade (Jackson 2000: 207). For Kedar, Louis’ “four-year stay in Palestine was mainly motivated by his hope of taking advantage of the Ayyubid-Mameluke struggle in order to enlarge the rump kingdom of Acre” (1984: 163).

\(^10\) Kedar recalls that Geoffroi of Beaulieu, Louis’ confessor on both of his crusades, documented that when Louis was in Palestine, he had many Saracens baptised and “transported to France, where they and their families were provided for as long as they lived” (1984: 163).
This task was one in which he “succeeded in the eyes of most of his contemporaries [deeming] him worthy of sainthood” (Little 1964: 145-146). Louis maintained, from 1245 onwards, “a consistent policy that sought a peaceful, united Christian community” (Ibid: 130).

That Louis “was seeking information towards a possible military alliance between Christendom and the Mongols against Islam” (Phillips 2016: 84) indicates that Rubruck’s mission was imbued with field intelligence prerogatives.

Indeed, at the time of Rubruck’s journey, Christian mission coincided with the Seventh Crusade (Campbell 1991: 112). This was an era wherein, to deploy Linklater, “[n]ew social ideals emphasized the virtue of harnessing violence to religious objectives” (2016: 115). Latham identifies three elements of what he deems the “institution” of crusade: “First…the crusade [w]as a martial instrument for righting injustices and combating evil in the world…Second, the crusade was constituted as an instrument of ecclesiastical statecraft…Finally, the crusades were constituted in the medieval imagination as an act of piety, pance, and Christian love” (2011: 237; emphasis original).

This was also an era, then, wherein Civita Dei, “a potentially universal moral/spiritual community founded on Christian love” (Ibid: 230), was sought. Achieving this ‘City of God’ was replete with geopolitical fervor: it required “extending the spatial limits of the community of Christian believers …by evangelizing and Christianizing the peoples beyond the pale of the Christian world and… expanding the respublica Christiana beyond its existing frontiers” (Ibid: 230).

But pursuing Civita Dei – seeking this elusive “vision of an all-embracing Christian society, the City of God on earth” (Dawson 1953: 88) – involved not only crusade but living out the vita apostolica, a life “dedicated to the saving of souls through preaching” (Little 1964: 126). It is exactly such expeditionary evangelism for which Rubruck was concerned.

The foregoing indicates, then, that the temporal locus of my enquiry is pre-Westphalian. Rubruck journeyed between civilizations. We are dealing here with different “meanings of sovereignty…[and] forms of geopolitical social organization that arose before modern statehood” (Teschke, 1998: 325).

This was an era of civilizational exceptionalism and expansionism. On one hand, Christendom and the Mongol Empire deemed themselves exceptional in their perceived divine right to mold the world as they saw fit. Each saw their respective worldview as yielding universal import and universal salvation. On the other hand, and resultantly, both evinced an expansionism deriving from such convictions.
The logic was that politico-religious *universalisation*, on the part of both Christians and Mongols, resulted from their self-perceived God-given rights to rule. The risk, here, is that the Mongols – and their shortly-to-be-discussed ultimatums – will be othered and ostracised as megalomaniac *Lebensraum* hunters.

Let me be clear: both civilizations were ardent in their expansionism. Louis’ letter to Cairo, before he commenced crusade against the Sultanate of Egypt, is *just as* inflammatory as the Mongol ultimatum we are about to witness: “Were you to swear to me by every oath, present yourself to the priests and monks, and obediently carry candles before me to the crosses [good; otherwise] I will come to you and kill you in that part of your lands which is dearest to you” (in Kedar 1984: 162).

Indeed, Mongol susceptibility to conquest and mission arose as early as 1206, when their leader was “strong enough to be recognized [as] Chinggis Khan (‘Universal ruler’)” (Jackson and Morgan 1990: 11). For Montalbano, Chinggis Khan “induced political strife throughout Eurasia…[h]is ultimate goal [being] to unify the diverse tribes and conquered people of Mongolia” (2015: 591-592). His was “an almost constant programme of conquest” (Frankopan 2015: 159) precipitating “a worldview that stopped nothing short of global domination” (Ibid: 166).

The Mongols were propelled by a homogenizing dynamic seeking to subsume constituent *particularities* within a *universal* whole. Such universalisation surfaces in Chapter 36 of Rubruck’s account, noting how Mongol ruler Mangu Chan declared at a feast: “I have dismissed my brothers and have sent them to *court danger* among foreign peoples: now it will emerge how you will act when I wish to send you out for the extension of our state” (Rubruck 1990: 246; emphasis added).

Thirteen years before Rubruck’s departure for Mongolia, by 1240, the Mongols had already attacked Kiev (Jackson and Morgan 1990: 14).11 Two years before then, in 1238, Muslim rulers from the Middle East had visited England asking for assistance against the Mongols. Bishop of Winchester, Peter des Roches, stated: “Let us allow…[them] to devour one another…When we come upon those of Christ’s enemies who remain, we shall slaughter them…so that the whole world may be subject to one catholic church, and there may be one shepherd and one flock” (in Ibid: 15).12

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11 Biller notes that in December 1240, Kiev was reduced “to 200 houses and piles of human bones which later travellers (such as John of Pian di Carpine) could still see” (2000: 229).
12 This coheres with Biller’s observation that, “[i]n St Albans [chronicler] Matthew Paris wrote under the year 1238 of Saracen [Muslim] emissaries coming to the kings of England and France, with reports about the Tartars, adding his famous observation on herring prices in Yarmouth, which were driven down because Frisian and Baltic merchants, terrified by the Tartar threat, had not turned up” (2000: 228-229).
It was in 1241 that the battles of Liegnitz and Mohi witnessed the Mongols defeat Hungary, Poland and their German allies (Phillips 2016: 42-43; see also Jackson 2018: 1). Liegnitz witnessed the defeat and death of Polish Duke Henry II of Silesia (Jackson 2000: 206), whose head was “paraded on the end of a lance, together with nine sacks filled with ‘the ears of the dead’” (Frankopan 2015: 163).

By July 1241, Mongol raiding units had reached Neustadt by Vienna, and it was only the death of Khan Ogotai that led them to withdraw from these western reaches (Biller 2000: 229). In fact, Frankopan deems that occasion one on which Europe was “saved by a stroke of great fortune…This was not the moment to be chasing troublesome monarchs through the Balkans. It was time to be at home, watching the [succession] situation unfurl. And with that, the Mongols took their foot off the throat of Christian Europe” (2015: 164).

Although the Mongols never fully incorporated Poland and Hungary (Jackson 2000: 206), the turmoil prompted Pope Gregory to sanction crusade against the Mongols (Jackson and Morgan 1990: 17) and caused Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen to appeal, inter alia, to Henry III of England “for aid to resist their [the Mongols’] expected advance into western Europe” (Phillips 2016: 43).

It is in this context that the Mongols were othered in the western civilizational imagination as barbarians: as people lacking civilization in the sense of (a) environment: grounded, emplaced, urbane civilization and (b) collective psyche: a ‘civility’ societal habitus. The Mongols could “readily be identified with…the image of the barbarian…distinguished by such features as his lack of an ordered urban or rural existence, his inability to manufacture and to employ the material artefacts of more advanced civilizations, and by the absence of a sophisticated spoken and written literary culture…Barbarism…was particularly ascribed by the members of settled civilizations to neighbors whose way of life was conspicuously different from the accepted norms. When the ‘barbarian’ was not simply someone of a different culture but was also perceived as a threat, the idea became a very emotive one” (Ibid: 49-50; emphasis added).13

Indeed, the Mongols were the “most familiar” barbarians to thirteenth-century Europe (Jones 1971: 398), feared to be the dreaded Biblical peoples of Gog and Magog “who, according to the Book of Revelation, would overrun the civilised world at the end of time” (Jackson 2000: 209). Gog and Magog were, according to myth, quarantined by Alexander from civilization behind “stout walls of iron or brass traditionally located in the Caucasus at the passes of Dariel or Derbend” (Ibid: 399).

13 For Jones, the “classical criticism of the barbarian…often equated him with the dumb brute…the retarded, disoriented, irrational infancy of mankind, before man had begun to achieve better things for himself through his submission to law and the exercise of reason” (1971: 397).
Such popular medieval equations of the Mongols with these heralds of doom were of politico-religious benefit, serving “not only to identify the various historical challengers of civilization but also [give] hope for the eventual triumph of Christian civilization over the forces of Antichrist…satisf[ying] European curiosity about an astonishing and frightening people…and reassur[ing] medieval man that they occupied a place in the Christian plan of salvation” (Ibid: 400).

By the time the Mongols withdrew from Eastern Europe in 1242, Pope Innocent IV despatched three embassies to them, one of Franciscans and two of Dominicans. Such fusion of cooperation/conflict should not be shocking: Kedar notes that “[i]t fell to Pope Innocent IV, the erstwhile canon lawyer Sinibaldo dei Fieschi, to formulate the linkage between Christian warfare and infidel conversion that would become normative” (1984: 159). This linkage embodied the “notion of warfare waged to force open the way for missionaries” (Ibid: 161).

From this perspective, crusade warfare was the violent force that ‘laid the table’ for subsequent attempts to win unbelievers’ hearts and minds. It is in this context that Rubruck was sent not only to preach but to gather field intelligence for dissemination to Louis.

Rubruck was thus caught amidst centrifugal geopolitical forces pushing out from Christendom and the Mongol Empire, and towards if not into one another. There was a ‘clash of civilizations’, to use Huntington’s clichéd but apt lexicon (2002). Both sought exception and expansion.

Rubruck’s task was to permeate the otherland and capture the people and places that embodied the Mongols’ outward ‘push’. Rubruck noted that the Mongols “believe the whole world is longing to make peace with them” (1990: 173).

No better evidence of this ‘push’ is found than the Mongol ultimatum, which gave its recipient two choices: submit to the Mongols (‘making peace’) or risk invasion and prepare for war. The logic was bipolar: the world had been bestowed on the Mongols “by the Eternal Heaven (Tenggeri), and all other rulers – whether they recognized the fact or not – were their subjects. Pliant submission…was consequently mere recognition of a duty” (Jackson and Morgan 1990: 25).

Christendom’s response was that Mongol conversion “would either follow or (even better) precede any successful agreement” between the civilizations (Rubíés 2009: 95).

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14 Note Frankopan’s finding that “[t]he Mongols cultivated such fears carefully, for the reality was that Genghis Khan used violence selectively and deliberately. The sack of one city was calculated to encourage others to submit peacefully and quickly; theatrically gruesome deaths were used to persuade other rulers that it was better to negotiate than to offer resistance…Peaceful submission was rewarded; resistance was punished brutally” (2015: 160).
Christendom’s propensity for such logic becomes more comprehensible, from a pragmatic angle, when one considers the Mongol ultimatum that Rubruck relayed to Louis in Chapter 36:15

“In Heaven there is only one eternal God; on earth there is only one lord...From the moment they hear my order [to submit to the Mongol Empire] and understand it, but place no credence in it and wish to make war against us, you will hear and see that though they have eyes they shall be without sight; and when they would hold anything they shall have no hands; and when they would walk they shall have no feet” (1990: 248).

Striking is how the rhetoric here is similar to Louis’ above. Both Christendom and the Mongols were rhetorically crusading in the sense that they were giving (potential) adversaries two options: submit and come within my jurisdictional purview, or prepare for war. I do not claim that Rubruck stimulated Rubiés’ ‘successful agreement’, or that he overcame such exceptionalism and expansionism. What I do claim, however, is that his account goes against the grain of such universalization and set the context in which intercivilizational dialogue could be pursued.

Work for this paper observed restraint in his dealings with the Mongols and cosmopolitan curiosity surrounding the politico-religious culture in which he found himself. As Khanmohamadi puts it, Rubruck “adapts to his environment in ways that he probably never imagined he would” (2008: 112). Rubruck’s ethnographic immersion in the otherland enabled him to have “bridged” Christendom and the Mongols, weaving one tentative thread of east/west convergence (Montalbano 2015: 590). His embrace of the otherland afforded one of “the first important ethnographies of the East written in medieval Europe, preceding Marco Polo by decades” (Rubiés 2009: 96).

And to deem Rubruck’s narrative an ethnography is neither exaggeration nor academic folly: within his account are “records [of] having actually met and conversed with – and feared, and quarrelled with, and warmed to – individuals” (Jackson 1987: 92; emphasis added).

But before we proceed any further, caveats are due. In narrowing my sights on Rubruck’s diplomatic traits – his restraint, his attentiveness to others and the otherland, I am consciously avoiding the trap of deeming him a diplomat per se.

15 Seven chapters beforehand, Rubruck paints a violent portrait of Mongol sentiment: “Mangu had a very strong bow made...His instructions to the [Mongol] whom he was to send...were as follows: ‘You will go to the king of the French...and you will present him with these things...If he wants peace with us, we shall conquer on the one hand from the Saracens the territory as far as his, and we grant him on the other the remaining land to the west. If not, you will bring back to us the bow and arrows, and tell him that with bows like this we shoot far and hit hard” (Rubruck 1990: 185-186).
That he was not party to a formal embassy, he indeed confirmed in a sermon in Constantinople (Watson 2011: 93). Scholars have lamented (a) omissions of Rubruck’s religious work and (b) inaccurate portraits of him as an ambassador (Jackson 1987: 95). One might forget, for instance, Rubruck’s chief objective of attending and proselytizing in the camp of Mongol prince Sartaq, rumoured Christian (Jackson 2016: 273). One might also forget Rubruck’s intention to bring “spiritual comfort” to a group of Germans enslaved by the Mongols during the latter’s invasion of Hungary in 1241-1242 (Ibid: 273).

Such obfuscations are not my intention. I will resist the tendency “to portray these journeys mutually exclusively, as either diplomatic or evangelistic” (Ho 2012: 947). I heed Ho’s injunction to avoid old “missionary vs diplomat” debates (Ibid: 948). It is worth reaffirming that Rubruck bore “a letter of introduction from the French king, in which Louis asked that he be allowed to stay and preach the Gospel” (Jackson and Morgan 1990: 43). As I began this paper, so too I close this section: Rubruck was despatched by Louis – a pious politicker, to both spread the Word and to record, for conquest and crusade purposes, his observations of an otherland that had, by the time of his departure, already curried intrigue and fear.

Self-Restraint

Work for this paper identified deliberate restraint in Rubruck’s account. This bolstered him against Mongol iterations of superiority and hostility. Whilst restraint surfaces in his coverage of such incivilities as drinking, plight and extortion, they are most palpable in his discreetly geopolitico-religious dealings. I will address each in turn.

Concerning drinking, Rubruck draws incivility distinctions between Mongol incivility and Christian presuppositions of civility. Crucially, he avoided universalising Christian ethics and imposing them on the otherland. He observes, for instance, that when the Mongols “want to challenge someone to drink, they seize him by the ears, tugging them vigorously to make him open his gullet, and clap and dance in front of him” (1990: 77). This remains a discretely ethnographic observation, rather than an iteration of disgust or ethical opposition.

In Chapter 28, he recounts being offered alcohol at the Imperial court. His reply was diplomatic: “‘My lord…we are not men who look to drink to fulfil their desire: we shall be satisfied with whatever you please” (Ibid: 179). There is a sense of courtesy here: Rubruck neither wished to offend his hosts, nor indulge in vice.

16 Such a document bears resemblance to the letters issued by local bishops affirming their approval of friars’ missions, “which would have added to the crusade preacher’s authority and safety” (Maier 1994: 104). Maier identifies evidence of such affirmations a decade before Louis’ letter to Rubruck, in August 1243, when “Bishop Henry of Constance issued a safe conduct for Franciscan crusade preachers against the Mongols” (Ibid: 104).
He was mindful of the need to adapt to the customs of the otherland, but equally cognisant to his Franciscan prerogatives.

In the following chapter, he recalls the chief wife’s visit to the court, whose participation in a drinking ritual again receives ethnographic treatment rather than ethical judgement: “Drink was brought – rice ale, red wine…and comos. The lady held the full cup…and on her knees asked for a blessing. The priests all chanted in a loud voice, while she drained the cup. My colleague and I were also obliged to sing at another juncture when she wanted to drink…The lady was by [the end of her visit] drunk, and climbed into her cart, to the chanting and wailing of the priests, and went on her way” (Ibid: 191).

Rubruck observes affinity, here, between religious practice (priests’ chanting) and Imperial drinking. Implicit is a sanctity: the chief wife received ‘a blessing’ as she ‘drained’ her cup. Not only did the host priests chant as she drank; Rubruck was ‘obliged’ to ‘sing’. This places Rubruck in an ethical quandary. On one hand, he must comply with the norms of a hostile host. On the other, he must fulfil his (literal/figurative) mission of spreading the Word. Either way, restraint was adopted as a means of balancing these priorities; it was a form of insurance policy that facilitated concomitant proximity to, and distance from, the Mongols.

In relation to plight, Rubruck observes but does not politicize suffering. He notes in Chapter 5 that “slaves fill their bellies with dirty water, and with that rest content” (Ibid: 84). There is a sense of compassion here. Slaves are portrayed as resigned to the notion that their circumstances are sufficient. In Chapter 13, Rubruck links plight to the wilderness and wilderness of Mongolia’s environment: “We travelled on for three days without encountering human beings. We, and the oxen, likewise, were thoroughly exhausted…When on the fourth day we finally came across some people, we rejoiced like shipwrecked men coming into harbor” (Ibid: 110; emphasis added).

Human/animal distinctions blur; the explorers are equated with their vehicles: both are worn out. The environment is cast as a hostile, barren void from which human life itself is absent. Three days of isolation ‘shipwrecked’ Rubruck and his troupe; such a notion implies the likelihood of death in the otherland without rescue.

Similarly, in Chapter 22 he notes: “There is no counting the times we were famished, thirsty, frozen and exhausted” (Ibid: 141).

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This is not the only occasion on which priests were observed to officiate in drinking ceremonies. Later, Rubruck recounts how he was “in the residence of [a] young princess…and she gave the priests a good deal to drink…[T]he priests made a great howling as they chanted in their drunkenness: a state not viewed there with disapproval either in a man or a woman” (Ibid: 196).
In Chapter 29 he ponders the ultimate sacrifice: “[T]here are so many starving people who are not provided with food, and the instant they saw us preparing a meal they would crowd in upon us and we had to share it with them. It was there that I experienced what a martyrdom it is, when destitute, to give bountifully” (Ibid: 188).

The foregoing imagery of wilderness, destitution and solitude in the otherland should be understood in the context of medieval preoccupations with *ars bene moriendi*, the art of dying. Etiquette governing ‘good death’ followed Christian pro- and prescriptions surrounding certain actions during death (Lahtinen and Korpiola 2017). Rubruck faced spiritual as well as existential peril. Put bluntly, he was “lucky to come out alive” (Rubiés 2009: 96). The duration, climatic hostility and environmental risks of the journey were such that “the friars’ mere survival seems a success in itself” (Ho 2012: 948). Rubruck demonstrated humility and discipline in the face of such risk. He avoided taking umbrage at the otherland in which he found himself.

Concerning extortion, Rubruck recalls in Chapter 9 how, on acquaintance with the Mongols, “they began brazenly to demand some of our rations…Having drunk one flagon of wine, they demanded another, claiming that a man does not enter a house on one foot. We gave it to them, saying by way of apology that we did not have much” (Ibid: 97; emphasis added). In the same chapter, he observes how the Mongols “laid wondering and covetous eyes on everything they could see on our attendants – knives, gloves, purses and belts. I refused on the pretext that we had a long way still to go and ought not to divest ourselves so soon of the items we needed to complete such a journey. At this they said I was an impostor” (Ibid: 98).

One chapter later, Rubruck recalls how an interpreter, working for Mongol commander Scacatai, “demanded some of our food, which we gave him. He also asked for some garment or other…We made our excuses. He enquired what we were taking for his master. We took a flagon of wine and filled a jar with biscuit and a dish with apples and other fruit. He was disgruntled that we were not taking some valuable cloth. Nevertheless, in fear and diffidence, this was how we entered” (Ibid: 100; emphasis added).

In Chapter 16, Rubruck recounts how, “anticipating their [the Mongols’] greed I had removed…the Bible…and other volumes to which I was more attached. But my lady the Queen’s psalter I had not dared remove, as it had attracted too much attention by reason of the gold illuminations it contained” (Ibid: 120). These reflections offer valuable insights into Rubruck’s restraint in the face of material demands. Whilst he gave wine, he was left with no choice other than to deny greater provisions. For already “[o]n the outward journey…Rubruck found himself quickly stripped of most of his valuables by acquisitive members of the Mongol camps he encountered” (Watson 2011: 91).
Rather than framing these circumstances within the context of Mongol hostility, he exercised relative discipline by arguing – truthfully – that the length of his onward journey necessitated those goods. When Scacatai’s interpreter was ‘disgruntled’ at Rubruck’s provision of wine, biscuit and fruit, he entered in ‘fear and diffidence’, anticipating hostility. And whilst Rubruck removed the Bible from his person given his perception of the others’ ‘greed’, he ‘had not dared’ alter the location of his Psalter due to the Mongols’ interest in its gold illuminations. Rubruck’s discipline manifests itself as a tempered adaptation to the otherland. He neither ‘submitted’ nor sought to impose his beliefs on the people and places in which he was a guest.

But Rubruck’s restraint is most evident in his politico-religious dealings. Work found that Chapter 28 contained the richest evidence. There, he recalls being questioned why he journeyed to Mongolia:

“I would reply: … ‘the King of the French sent by us a sealed letter… I tell you that he has never done you any injury. If he had done you any, so that you were obliged to wage war on him and his people, he himself, as a man of justice, would be willing on his own accord to make amends and to seek peace’… They were amazed and kept repeating constantly: ‘Why have you come, seeing that you did not come to make peace?’” (Ibid: 172; emphasis added)

The interrogators were ‘amazed’, I argue, at Rubruck’s restraint. The earlier universalising logic – logic of exceptionalism and expansionism applied by both Christendom and the Mongols – was cast as bipolar(izing) in consigning the other as either ‘with’ or ‘against’ the collective self. Christendom was either ‘with’ or ‘against’ the Mongols, and vice versa.

Rubruck’s response to the interrogators, however, goes against the grain of universalization. He neither cast Christendom as ‘pliantly submissive’ nor ready for war. He confirmed royal authority to travel and affirmed that Louis had never hurt the Mongols, and that peace would have been sought had this been the case. Such tact is disciplined in both (a) complying with Rubruck’s Franciscan prerogative – avoiding contravention of Christendom’s politico-religious objectives – and (b) avoiding harm done to the otherland in which he is a guest.

In the same chapter, Rubruck recalls being questioned about France, namely “whether it contained many sheep, cattle and horses – as if they were due to move in and take it all over…I had to exercise great self-control in order to conceal my indignation and fury, and I replied: ‘It contains many fine things, which you will see for yourselves if you happen to go there’” (Ibid: 180; emphasis added). The tone indicates Rubruck’s concomitant grievance at Mongol insensitivity and self-discipline, acknowledging the fragility of his own otherness abroad.
Another interrogation, in Chapter 33, narrowly avoids bloodshed. Rubruck recalls being asked “numerous questions about the Pope and the king of the French, and about the routes by which they were reached. But [a] monk overheard this and…warned me not to answer [the interrogator], on the grounds that he was seeking to get himself sent as the ambassador. Consequently, I held my tongue…He made some insulting remark…to me, for which the Nestorian priests wanted to denounce him, and he would have been either executed or beaten to a pulp; but I would not have it” (Rubruck 1990: 227-228; emphasis added).

Two italicizations indicate Rubruck’s restraint in this instance of an aspiring ambassador seeking intelligence on Christendom. On one hand, he maintained silence under questioning, out of loyalty not only to Louis and Christendom, but also the host who counselled caution. On the other, he prevented the host priests from executing or beating ‘to a pulp’ the would-be ambassador after the latter insulted Rubruck. Discipline was used to avoid harm not only to Christendom and France, but also the Mongol whose insolence would have cost him his life.

That is not the only occasion on which Rubruck mediated with his hosts. Revisiting Chapter 28, Rubruck recalls the Nestorians asking if he would follow their customs or his own. His reply was bold: “We are priests, dedicated to the service of God…We have safely brought us this far from so great a distance; and after that we shall do as your master wishes, provided we are given no order which is contrary to the worship and honour of God” (Ibid: 177).

Here, Rubruck conditionally agrees to participate in Nestorian practices, with the condition being that no order is given that contradicts Rubruck’s perception of holiness. Palpable is his avoidance of value universalization. He did not exceptionalize Latin Christian protocols. He accepted his own otherness abroad, and with the Nestorians’ permission proceeded to worship God in the Franciscan way. Rubruck shall do as the Nestorians wish, so long as he is not ordered to contravene his doctrines.

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18 The Nestorians, an Eastern Christian community, had established themselves in Mongolia by the eighth century, but remained unfamiliar to the West until the Fifth Crusade (1218-1221) (Montalbano 2015: 591). The Nestorians belonged to that group of “Oriental Christians – Greeks, Armenians, Nestorians, Jacobites and other churches considered ‘heretical’” by Latin Christendom” (Rubíes 2016a: xiii-xiv). The Nestorians were “declared heretical at the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon but established themselves in Mesopotamia and Persia. Nestorius of Constantinople had himself studied at Antioch but his teachings on the nature of Christ and the Virgin Mary were nevertheless declared heretical at the council of Ephesus in 431” (Goody 2015: 285). Such observations illuminate the deeper chasms within Christianity in the medieval period. Rome was but one of five patriarchal sees: “the other four, reflecting the eastern Mediterranean origins of Christianity itself, were located in the eastern Roman Empire, in Constantinople…and in Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria” (Linehan et al 2018a: 3).
Rubruck situates himself ‘between’ west/east, seeking common ground between both domains’ priesthoods, and disciplining himself in such a way as to be willing to practice in Nestorian fashion, conditional on not contravening Franciscan custom. Considering the Nestorians were deemed heretical (Ho 2012: 949), this is no small feat. 

Work for this section identified restraint and discipline in Rubruck’s account. Not only did he control himself in the face of perceived Mongol incivility. Not only did he demonstrate tact – giving wine, expressing ‘fear and diffidence’, safeguarding his Bible whilst ‘daring not’ remove his Psalter – in the face of extortion. Rubruck’s restraint was most evident in his politico-religious dealings. He controlled himself to the extent he permitted the possibility of Latin-Nestorian collaborative practice, on the condition he did nothing to jeopardise his Franciscan duty. These manifestations of discipline set the context in which intercivilizational dialogue could be pursued between (literally/figuratively) distant civilizations.

If it is true, as Tolan suggests, that “denigration of the other is the back side of Christian universalism…[which] crystalized…in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries” (2002: 283; emphasis added), Rubruck conducted himself contra universalism, seeking common ground on which relatively hostile actors could tentatively converge. Pursuing common ground involved attuning himself to the needs and mores of the Other, alongside acknowledging his own otherness abroad.

Attunement denotes here an open mindset, receptive to alterity and mindful of one’s own alterity beyond frontiers. To be attuned is to be cosmopolitan and curious. It is to demonstrate attentiveness to the ‘others’ around oneself, and to be inclined towards reflecting on one’s own otherness in the world. It is to such attunement that the paper now turns.

**Cosmopolitan Curiosity**

It was Montalbano who questioned how one’s “entry into a new physical space oblige[s] an individual to re-evaluate his or her cultural assumptions” (2015: 606) in a world of multiple particularities.

By crossing the frontier of homeland/otherland, and entering a new space – new for the traveller, and in this instance relatively new for the origin civilization – one’s presuppositions are thrown in stark relief; they are illuminated in contradistinction to the new environment, the new surroundings in which one is a guest, the new presuppositions of otherland.

Cosmopolitan curiosity is about such reflection and re-evaluation in ‘other’ spaces that are not one’s homeland. It involves engagement with, and attentiveness to, otherness: both others’ and one’s own.
Rubruck’s is an account of such attunement: he navigates Mongol particularities, making sense of them and their distinctiveness. He avoids quarantining the Mongols in the realm of the barbaric alien. He is aware that he may be deemed by the Mongols the barbaric and alien other, his earlier ‘fear and diffidence’ indicating the figurative thinness and frailty of the ice upon which he was treading.

Rubruck’s ethnography, then, “is filled with his gazes upon Mongols” (Khanmohamadi 2008: 90). In each of his encounters, “we find the subject-viewer of the scene, William, represented as an object within the frame of description…[making] his own subjectivity and emotions part of the message, locating himself as an inextricable part of the scene he is setting” (Ibid: 101). His was an attempt “to understand…rather than criticize their [the Mongols’] culture and society” (Montalbano 2015: 600; emphasis added).

Work found that such attentiveness to the otherland, such cosmopolitan curiosity, manifests itself most palpably in the otherworldly imagery used in Rubruck’s account. Whilst I am not aware of otherworldliness receiving discrete coverage in the extant Rubruck corpus, the use of such imagery should not be entirely surprising: for Rubiés, “[i]f the opposition between barbarism and civilization constituted a powerful paradigm for explaining cultural differences, geography and ‘climate’ – both associated with astrological influences and distinct national ‘temperaments’ – offered an important alternative” (2016a: xxxv; emphasis added).

And Jackson attributes “the meagre harvest of… mission” not only to the physical distance between Christendom and the Mongols, the dearth of missionaries, and language obstacles, “but also to the universe the Mongols themselves inhabited and in particular to their preoccupations in matters of religion, nature and magic” (2018: 5). There is a sense, then, that spiritual and environmental otherworldliness – captured in the Mongols’ world and worldview – was itself a hindrance to Rubruck’s Franciscan prerogatives.

Imagery contains figurative capital with which otherness is illuminated in contradistinction to selfhood. Otherworldly imagery helps delineate the competing ‘we’ feelings of Christendom and the Mongols, but Rubruck avoids barbarising the ‘other’ civilization.

As early as Chapter 1, he notes how “I really felt as if I were entering some other world” (1990: 71). Rubiés identifies this statement as “a qualified experience of otherness” (2009: 95). And Montalbano cites this statement in substantiating Rubruck’s use of “metaphysical language, suggesting the inefficacy of words to describe his surroundings” (2015: 599).

The fact Rubruck’s available lexicon could only go so far in describing the otherland is crucial: his worldview, his homeland, hinged on Christendom.
The chasm between homeland/otherland was so vast that language could only do so much. In experiencing the feeling of ‘entering some other world’, Rubruck becomes the object of his own ethnography, at one and the same time author and protagonist in a narrative wherein he is the other in someone else’s homeland. “Sometimes,” as Khanmohamadi observes, Rubruck “is simply at a loss for words” (2008: 100).

Nowhere is otherworldliness more evident than in Rubruck’s coverage of the (human/natural) environment in which he finds himself. In Chapter 35, soothsayers are said to “disturb the atmosphere with their incantations, and when the cold is so severe...that they can find no means of relief, they hunt out people in the camp whom they accuse of bringing on the cold; and these are put to death without delay” (Ibid: 244; emphasis added). Two italicisations denote otherworldliness. Firstly, the atmosphere is ‘disturbed’ – deliberately altered for the worse – by soothsayers with ungodly powers. Secondly, environmental peril is an outcome, in the Mongols’ eyes, of people ‘bringing on’ climatic ills. Human beings are cast as conduits of evil.

Importantly, Rubruck does not question the moral and theological presuppositions causing the soothsayers to see that bringers of the cold are ‘put to death without delay’. Neither does he question the theological and moral probity of the soothsayers per se. He records his observations, disciplining himself in terms of the extent—or even presence—of normative opposition. The otherworld forms a rhetorical locus of his enquiry; the attention he pays to it exemplifies his attentiveness to otherness. He demonstrates a curiosity for the world beyond his Franciscan horizons, casting the otherworld as firmly of another civilization, without barbarising the other.

As with soothsayers and ‘bringers of the cold’, so too spirits and winds. Rubruck notes, in Chapter 8, that when a prominent member of society falls ill, “guards are stationed at a distance around the camp and allow nobody to pass within those limits, since they are afraid an evil spirit or wind may come in with those who enter” (1990: 96). Evident here is a form of environmental malevolence: the spiritualization of the environment. Such an ‘evil’ environment is a life-taking rather than life-giving rhetorical phenomenon (see Weaver 2018: 7), embodying evil, a force Christians trace to original sin. Evil ‘comes in with those who enter’; entrants are outsiders whose trust is contingent on Imperial acceptance. ‘Others’ hailing from beyond boundaries bring (or may be tailgated by) malign extra-jurisdictional forces. By deploying guardspersons and cordonning the ill from the otherworldly, the Mongols conduct bordering19 practices that control ingress/egress and protect their homeland.

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19 Bordering is a concept widely used in critical political geography to denote the act of “separat[ing] and bring[ing] together. Borders allow certain expressions of identity and memory to exist while blocking others” (Paasi in Johnson et al 2011: 62). Bordering is evident in Rubrick’s assessment of the threshold taboo, a prohibition on touching the Mongol equivalent of a front doorframe. This offence was punishable by death (Rubruck 1990: 117).
Such evil is associated with demonic forces. In Chapter 27 Rubruck recalls, when traversing the Tarbaghatai range (Watson 2011: 98), his guide asking him “to recite some auspicious phrase that would put demons to flight, since along this pass it was usual for demons suddenly to carry men off… Sometimes they would seize the horse, leaving the rider behind, and at others they would pull out a man’s inwards and leave the corpse on the horse” (Ibid: 166; emphasis added).

Rubruck observes the guide linking human mortality to non-human risk. Rather than dismissing or barbarizing his guide, Rubruck complies, chanting the Credo in unum Deum, and noting that “by the grace of God we passed through unharmed” (Ibid: 166). Rubruck became ‘other’. ‘Other’ attuned himself to host, orienting his conduct to the norms and mores of Montalbano’s (2015) ‘new physical space’, the otherland. Rubruck’s was “the role of protecting the small group [his travelling party] from the supernatural; his usefulness within Mongol society was thereby confirmed, and his status as a holy man with power akin to that of a Mongol shaman was established” (Watson 2011: 98).

Finally, consideration should be paid to Rubruck’s observation of Mongol ritual, which is also replete with otherworldly imagery. The ritual that struck a chord, during work for this paper, was one that appears to sanctify the classical elements (earth, air, fire, water). In Chapter 2, Rubruck notes that during Mongol celebrations, “the steward leaves the dwelling with a goblet and some drink, and sprinkles it three times towards the south, genuflecting each time, in honour of fire; next towards the east, in honour of the air; next towards the west, in honour of water; and some is thrown towards the north for the sake of the dead” (1990: 75-76); the latter can be profitably associated with the earth.

Rubruck’s treatment of those elements situates the Mongols in a temporal-civilizational (pre-Christian) hinterland that is (literally/figuratively) distant from Christendom. But his observation of this ritual is objective and avoids value-loaded moral or theological critique. He avoids barbarizing the Mongols.

This section gauged, in Rubruck’s account, a cosmopolitan curiosity for the otherland.

Whilst my next investigation will trace the origins of the threshold taboo and cast it as one historical birth of geopolitics – namely a stimulus of the inside/outside delineation – let us content ourselves in here observing Rubruck’s objective observation of this phenomenon. He reports, in Chapter 15, how “we were given a stern warning to be careful not to touch the threshold” (Ibid: 117). In Chapter 29, Rubruck recounts how, on exiting the ruler Mangu Chan’s residence and bowing to Chan, his colleague “stumbled over the threshold… [and] the men keeping watch…laid hold of my colleague and made him halt so that he could not follow us; someone was called and ordered to escort him to Bulgai, the chief secretary at court, who condemns accused persons to death” (Ibid: 194). The next investigation must identify the reasons for, and presuppositions underpinning, this taboo. It must, through a historical lens, assess the threshold taboo’s geographical and historical prevalence.
By this, I mean Rubruck was attentive not only to the ‘other’ but also, crucially, his own otherness in a realm beyond his homeland. He offered what Watson termed “his ‘gift of self’” (2011: 90). Otherworldly imagery was observed to temper the way he ‘read’ and ‘wrote’ the (human/natural) environment in which he was guest and observer. Environmental peril was observed by Rubruck to be associated with evil forces, the soothsayers ‘putting to death’ bringers of the cold, the demonic forces knocking riders off their horses.

The Mongols were observed by Rubruck to be situated in a temporal and civilizational hinterland, with classical elements animating celebratory rituals. The otherland he observes is one of wildness and wilderness. But nonetheless, Rubruck avoids barbarizing the ‘other’. He avoids drawing civil/uncivil binaries that delineate the (un)holy. He avoids quarantining the Mongols in the realm of the alien. The findings presented in this section cohere with Khanmohamadi’s claim that “William discovers…not the prescribed aimlessness and unreason of nomadic society, but precisely the opposite…[going] out of his way to affirm Mongol humanity, eschewing in all but rare instances the varied discourses of dehumanization available to him in favor of an affirmation of Mongolian humanity and reason” (2008: 93-94).

Conclusion

“…there has never been an age in which Christianity attained so complete a cultural expression as in the thirteenth century. Europe has seen no greater Christian hero than St. Francis…perhaps even no greater Christian ruler than St. Louis”

(Dawson 1953: 183)

Dawson’s is an apt quote with which to close this investigation. Despite existing differences of opinion, it can be agreed that the central Middle Ages were a time of exploration, conquest, and pathfinding. Latin Christendom sought to universalise its Civita Dei, pushing its extant frontiers to the limit. At the same time, the Mongol Empire evinced equivalent exceptionalism and expansionism, stretching its very boundaries seemingly ad infinitum, only to turn away from Austria as a result of internal politicking.

Centrifugal geopolitical forces pushed away from these respective civilizations and – in very particular instances – into one another. One such instance of frontier penetration, in this ‘clash of civilizations’, was Rubruck’s passage to Mongolia at the behest of Louis. It was an unenviable task: preach the Word and collect field intelligence for dissemination to Louis on return. ‘Crusade and mission’ (Kedar 1984) went hand in hand.
Whilst there is a small corpus on Rubruck, it is nowhere near as expansive as its counterpart on Marco Polo, graced not only with an explorer’s stardom but academic honor (recall the *Ovis Poli*). Noting this understudy status on the civilizational stage, my goal was to seek the extent to which a critical (re)reading of Rubruck could propel extant understandings of a Christian eastward mission, in an era when “the classical image of civilized man’s degenerate, deceitful, and deadly antagonist” (Jones 1971: 406) prevailed.

What followed was an acquaintance with a Franciscan friar about whom the academic and public domains seemingly know little: a man whose report has but bobbed upon the ocean of history and anthropology, and whose subsequent history following the report’s dissemination is unknown. The ensuing work exposed an ethnography that was human, intimate, and replete with personal and experiential learning (Jackson 2016).

Rubruck’s account brought into question such prevalent notions of the barbarian. There was no indication that Gog and Magog would be breaching Alexander’s walls. Whilst the Mongols were portrayed as Other, Rubruck also portrays himself as Other: he is aware of his own otherness, his awkward alterity in a land that hosted him as a guest and a potential enemy. Rubruck was sandwiched between and within civilizations pursuing concurrent policies of exceptionalism and expansionism.

Two palpable themes became evident in the analysis: Rubruck’s restraint in the face of perceived incivility and his cosmopolitan curiosity, defined here as attentiveness to otherness: both others’ and his own. Rubruck evinced self-discipline by observing but not ethico-theologically ostracising the Mongols in their circumstances of drinking, plight and extortion. His narrative is one of self-control in his discretely politico-religious dealings. In fact, perhaps he was too restrained: after all, he converted only six persons on his journey (Montalbano 2015: 599). “His is indeed”, for Rubiés, “a narrative of disappointment” (2009: 109).

Meanwhile, his concomitant attentiveness to otherness yet avoidance of barbarization was demonstrated in his use of otherworldly imagery. The soothsayers, spirits and sanctification of classical elements each helped distinguish self/other, but such distinctions were not weaponised in favour of Latin Christendom and against the Mongol Empire.

They responsibly delineated homeland/otherland, observing but not rendering alien the incongruous otherworldliness of nature, magic and spiritualisation. He did not fight these particularities; he noted them and accommodated them to the extent that his Franciscan prerogatives were not placed in jeopardy. Think of the *Credo in unum Deum* and the Franciscan-Nestorian collaborative practice.
In the final analysis, the restraint and cosmopolitan curiosity evident in Rubruck’s account sets a context in which disparate civilizations could be tentatively bridged in a dialogue of civilizations, to use Lynch’s lexicon (2000). Rubruck took one fractional, cautious step forwards in intercivilizational history. His was an attempt at “cross-cultural comprehension” in an age of crusade and mission (Phillips 2016: 81), a display of “willingness to attempt some understanding of those diverse peoples and their alien cultures” (Ibid: 85; emphasis added).

Rubruck’s “great self-extension towards the other” (Khanmohamadi 2008: 89) is as radical today as it was in the thirteenth century. I just hope that scholars will discover more about this ethnographer of otherness.
Bibliography


Political Power of Iranian Hierocracies

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that the current Iranian regime is no novelty in Iranian history and political thinking, but has two antecedents: the rule of the Sasanians in late Antiquity (3rd–7th centuries) and that of the Safavids (16th–18th centuries) in modern times. After a brief outline of relevant historical events the paper scrutinizes the common features of these three regimes. The comparison includes the analyses of foreign policy, its scope, aim and direction, cultural policy and the relevance of political ideologies, socio-economic policy, religious policy, political structure and mechanisms of decision-making. The results of the comparison are visualized in a table pointing out numerous similarities and remarkable common features throughout the centuries.

Keywords: Iran, hierocracy, comparative politics, religion

Introduction

The nature and causes of the Islamic revolution have been the focus of attention of social scientists for decades, but the answers they have provided for this undoubtedly complex phenomenon emphasize considerably different aspects. There is an enormous amount of literature dealing with the subject.

Some deal with the Iranian revolution within the theoretical framework of Islamism and underline that the Iranian revolution is a manifestation of modern political Islam.¹ These writers are interested in what can be fitted into the theoretical framework of political Islam and pay less attention to the historical and cultural background of Iranian society.

Other writings are works of modern historians pointing out Iranian socio-economic peculiarities in detail, while putting less emphasis on ideological features.\(^2\)

This essay does not belong to either of these types, since it intends to approach the problem rather from the global viewpoint of history.

As we will see, the current system is not the only hierocratic form of rule in Iran, but it has two antecedents during the long history of the Iranian nation. That is why it seems worthwhile to compare and contrast these systems, and to underline similarities and differences between them, which in turn will also provide us with the opportunity to draw more general conclusions.

1. Turning points in Iranian history

A history going back thousands of years could not be told in one article; therefore, I will highlight only some decisive turning points in Iranian history that will help to understand the main arguments of this paper.

1.1 Ancient Iran

Pastoralist tribes speaking various dialects of Iranian languages arrived on the Iranian plateau around 1000 BCE and settled down in Western Iran along the Zagros Mountains. Tribes which later came to be known as Medes settled close to the eastern border of the then powerful Assyrians, a military hegemon of the Ancient Near East which regarded the presence of the Median tribal confederacy both as a military threat and an opportunity to gain horses which the Assyrian army greatly needed. As a result, wars were fought with Assyrian victories, but when the Median leaders formed an alliance with the Babylonians, they were powerful enough to drastically change events.

In a couple of years, the most important Assyrian cities, including the capital, fell into the hands of the allied forces and the last battle in 610 BCE diminished the Assyrian state altogether. The territory of the former Assyrian state was divided between the Medes and the Babylonians, two powerful empires which regarded each other more and more as rivals, not allies. Open hostilities were abandoned, however, and the next decades witnessed an equilibrium of forces in the Near East.\(^3\)


This situation came to an end when Kurush (Cyrus), backed by the Persian tribes, revolted against Astyages, the last king of the Medes, and secured his victory on the battlefield near Pasargade with the help of the Median aristocracy changing sides.

With the great wars of Cyrus and his son Cambyses (530–522 BCE), the Persian Empire grew to an unprecedented extent, including territories from Egypt to Afghanistan, and Pakistan to Bulgaria and Greece. Although Darius I and his son, Xerxes, ultimately lost the Greek wars, it was by no means a great disaster for the Persians. The real problems were found within the empire itself: ineffective government, heavy taxation, open revolts and harem intrigues prevented the Achaemenid Empire from stabilizing itself in a radically changing environment (the rise of the Macedonians; the secession of Egypt; and the wars of the governors with each other).

When Alexander sought revenge for Athens, he found a disorganized state which fell to him within a few years. But Alexander seems to have had no strategy for the future, or at least was prevented from acting accordingly by his early death, a consequence of his dissolute lifestyle.

As a result, open hostility broke out between his former commanders to decide succession, with Seleukos emerging as victor (Ipos: 301 BCE). This is how the Seleucids came to power in Iran and the Near East. 4

But Seleucid power did not last for long in Iran because they lost more and more territories to an Eastern Iranian tribal federation, the Parnis. The Parnis settled down in the north-eastern province of Iran already known during Achaemenian times as Parthava. They were renamed after it, which is the reason they are called Parthians today. The Parthians annexed Iran and later also Mesopotamia from the Seleucids and under strong leadership by kings, such as Mithridates I (171–138 ) and Mithridates II (123–87), they established an Iranian empire large enough to be a dangerous rival to the Romans during the coming centuries.

The Parthians restored the Achaemenid Empire without the territories of Egypt, Asia Minor and Palestine, although they did everything to have access to the Mediterranean Sea through Syria and Palestine. The Romans, for their part, wanted to prevent the Parthians from occupying these strategically important territories, both for military

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reasons and for long distance trade, resulting in unavoidable hostilities. The great Roman-Parthian wars of the first two centuries CE always started with Roman military successes but ended with peace treaties confirming the status quo. When during the first years of the 3rd century CE Caracalla was defeated by the Parthians, nobody believed this powerful kingdom would soon be destroyed.5

Here history repeated itself: as in the case of the Medians, a regional power not overthrown by rival states, its sudden end came from within in the form of a revolt, seemingly unimportant at the beginning but growing very dangerous with the powerful nobility changing sides.

In the case of the Parthians, Ardashir, a local Persian leader in the remote province of Pars, revolted against the Parthian king who was engaged in world politics and paid no attention to his case. But Ardashir’s revolt spread as he won more and more battles against other local leaders and in the end established himself as the greatest challenge to the Parthian king. The final battle was won by Ardashir with most of the Parthian nobility on his side. This is how the Parthian kingdom came to a sudden end and the Persian Sasanian dynasty started.6

With the coming to power of the Sasanians, the political landscape of Iran changed: the religion of Zarathustra (Zoroaster) evolved more and more into central position both in a religious and political sense; a new Zoroastrian church was established, an ecclesiastic organisation unknown to the Achaemenids and the Parthians.

The Sasanian kings tried to centralise their monarchy, though this effort was hindered by the joint opposition of the nobility (both Parthian and Persian) and the Zoroastrian clergy. Foreign policy, however, remained unchanged, and the strategic importance of the Levant was also acknowledged by the Sasanians, who fought bloody and victorious wars with the Romans during the 3rd century. The celebrated victories of Shapur I over the Romans (244; 259–260) correspond at the same time to the shame of the Roman rulers being captured or killed in the battlefield.

In spite of this, the Sasanians were prevented from occupying Syria and the Levant and with the death of Shapur I, former Persian victories were transformed into heroic stories of the glorious past, yet were unable to prevent the Romans to retaliating for their losses. After decades of warfare the border was established, as in the case of the Parthians, at


6 The story of Ardasir’s coming to power is narrated by a short work full of legends and contradictions called Kar Namag-i Ardasir (accessible in Middle Persian in H. S. Nyberg’s: Manual of Pahlavi vol. I-II: Otto Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden: 1974.).
status quo ante. During the long reign of Shapur II (309–379), the Sasanian state witnessed remarkable stability and prosperity.

But the next decades proved to be very turbulent both in domestic and foreign policy. The coming of the Huns from the East and the catastrophic foreign policy of Peroz forced the empire to subjugation by the Huns. Peroz’s son, Kavad, was also unable to restore law and order and to free Iran from the Huns, while the Mazdakite uprising against the nobility and feudal system contributed to more chaos.

It was left to Khusrav I (531–579) to secure law and order, gain victory over the Huns, and re-establish a state on solid ground both politically and economically. Small wonder that Khusrav was and still is regarded as one of the most talented and celebrated Persian kings. His son,Ormazd, followed the path of his father but was dethroned and killed by conspirators from among the nobility who secured the throne for his son, Khusrav II (590–628). This king opened hostilities with the Byzantines which resulted in a nearly 25-year war ending in 628 with catastrophic consequences: with no territory won the empire suffered heavily. It lost a great amount of military forces and labourers, was ruined economically, and its king was killed in the end by the hands of his own men.

The next decades bear witness to the agony of the dynasty unable to restore order even in its own palace, due to constant harem intrigues, a situation very similar to that of the last decades of the Achaemenids. To press similarities further: with Yazdagerd III, the last Sasanian king, we have a tragic historical figure similar to Darius III: both kings had to face a powerful enemy with a disintegrated, ruined empire. Just as Darius III lost to Alexander, so did Yazdagerd III to the Arab-Muslim army.7

1.2 The coming of Islam to Iran

The demise of the Sasanians was perhaps the most important turning point in Iranian history: not only a dynasty disappeared, but Iran as a hegemonic power in the Middle East and a sovereign state ceased to exist.

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What is more, the native Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism, lost ground against Islam which became dominant within three centuries as more and more individuals and communities embraced Islam.⁸

As a result, Iran lost its former status and became one region of many in the Umayyad Caliphate. After 750, with the Abbasids on the rise, the importance of Iranian cultural heritage grew, symbolised by the new capital, Baghdad, where Iranian influence was heavily felt, most notably in the state administration.⁹

When the power of the caliphate was in a steady decline during the next centuries, we can witness the secession of the periphery, among them Iranian territories, from the Caliphate. This is the reason why local dynasties such as the Samanids (East Iran), the Saffarids (South Iran), the Buyids or Buvayhids (West Iran) managed to establish semi-independent states which remained within the boundaries of the Caliphate and acknowledged the caliph as their supreme lord.

Things changed drastically when the Saljuqids, a confederacy of nomadic tribes of Turkish origin who entered Iran in the first half of the 11th century, captured Baghdad and devastated the Byzantine emperor’s army in the battle of Manzikert (1071), a victory of importance for the next centuries.¹⁰ The Saljuqids established their own reign in Iran, converted to Islam but failed to unite the country effectively, although a member of the local gentry, Nizam al-mulk (1017–1092), a genius in public administration, did everything to form an effective government. The last ruler, Sanjar’s death (1157) in East Iran marked the end of the dynasty and the beginning of a new power vacuum.¹¹

This power vacuum was brutally filled by the invading Mongols who entered East Iran at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and their conquest was only stopped by the Mamluks in 1260 in Syria. Since the ruling dynasties’ power was split according to the territories in their control (e.g. the Golden Horde, the Mongol dynasty in China), the Mongols remaining in Iran formed the Ilkhanid dynasty.

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⁸ For the spread of Islam in Iran and the various political and religious resistance against it see Patricia Crone: *The Nativist Prophets and Early Islamic Iran. Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 2012.


Established by a grandson of Genghis Khan, Hülegü (1218–1265), this dynasty remained in power for less than a century, with Iran falling into a power vacuum again upon Arpa Khan’s death (1336).

The Mongol invasion brought devastation and horror at the beginning but there was also some cultural flourishing at its end. It was Ghazan Khan (1295–1304) who did the most to create a unified and prosperous state from a devastated country by instituting martial rule, stopping plunder and other forms of devastation, and establishing a state administration with the help of Iranian collaborators. His reforms did not last long, however, and Iran became disunited again after a few decades of his descendants’ unfortunate rule.\(^{12}\)

The next unified Iranian government was established only in 1501 with the Safavids coming to power. In the interlude Iran or, properly speaking, some parts of Iran, were governed for shorter or longer periods by Timur and his successors, the Timurids (1370–1506) in the east and the south,\(^{13}\) the Qara Qoyunlus (1380–1468) and the Aq Qoyunlus (1378–1508), Turkish nomadic tribal confederations, in the west and the north.\(^{14}\)

The rising of the Safavids was, therefore, an important turning point, marking the end of the period of fragmentation and the birth of a central government. The changes brought about by the Safavids were more complex than this. The Safavids were originally masters of a Sufi order founded by Safi al-Din, a highly respected figure among his contemporaries who lived in Ardabil during the last decades of Mongol rule in Iran. The Safavid order evolved over the next century into an influential and powerful Sufi brotherhood with no direct political aspirations.

When, however, Shaykh Junayd changed policy in the middle of the 15th century, the Safavids entered Anatolian politics, made an alliance with the Aq Qoyunlus and even participated in local wars where Junayd and later his son and successor, Haydar, lost their lives. The Safavids were backed by many Anatolian Turkmen tribal warriors, the Qizilbash who formed the main basis of their army.

With their help the very young Isma’ïl, the leader of the order, became victorious in these local tribal rivalries and was crowned Iranian king in 1501.

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Shah Isma’il, as he was known from this time on, declared Shi’ism as the state religion, causing indignation among the Sunni majority of Iran.

After the successful conquest of modern-day Iran and some parts of Iraq and Afghanistan, the encounter with the Ottomans – who regarded the Safavids with good reason a powerful rival – was inevitable. The battle of Chaldiran (1514) showed the military supremacy of the Ottomans and ruined the myth of Isma’il’s invincibility; therefore, the treaty of Amasya in 1555 was concluded in favour of the Ottomans. Safavids were, by contrast, more successful in the eastern frontier where Shah Tahmasb (1524–1576) defeated the invading Uzbeks and annexed some territories in the east around Qandahar.\(^{15}\)

Securing thus both the western and the eastern frontiers, a new Iranian state emerged governed by a former Sufi brotherhood of Turkish origin. But the new regime was more and more Iranized as local experts were needed to run an effective government. When the capital was later moved from Tabriz to Isfahan, this change was expressed symbolically, too.

The Qizilbash Turkmen warriors, however, did not welcome these changes and tried to regain their former leading positions, even threatening the royal power of the kings. With the liquidation of the Qizilbash leaders, Shah ɛAbbas I put an end to this power struggle and secured absolute power for the kings.

With Shah ɛAbbas the Great, we have the most capable Safavid king on the Iranian throne, one who effectively strengthened royal power against nomadic influence. He terminated their political and economic privileges, established a more effective central government than his predecessors, reformed the army which enabled him to wage wars with decisive victories, and developed infrastructure by building roads and bridges, thus contributing to the flourishing of local and long-distance trade. He also had a tolerant policy toward non-Muslims but was at the same time intolerant against Muslim heretics. The beautiful city centre of Isfahan as we know it today was also taking shape during his reign.

Unfortunately for the Safavids no such competent king ever emerged from among Shah Abbas the Great’s offspring, and the rule of the Safavids started to decline. Deteriorating economically, militarily and politically, Sultan Husain (1688–1726) was unable to stop invading Afghan tribesmen who managed to blockade the capital causing endless suffering for the inhabitants (1722).

Though the Afghan interlude did not last for long, with the collapse of the Safavids, Iran remained disunited for the rest of the 18th century because neither Nadir Shah (1736–1747) in the east nor the much beloved Karim Khan Zand (1751–1779) in the south-west were able to unite the country.\textsuperscript{16}

### 1.3. The Modern Period

Only with Agha Mohammed Khan (1789–1797) and the rise of the Qajars (1789–1925) was there a united Iran again.

The Qajars were no newcomers in Iranian politics: a tribe of Turkoman origin in north-eastern Iran, they had close relations with the Safavids, enjoying prominence during their rule. After the demise of the Safavids, the Qajars contested for power for half a century with the Zands, which they won in the end. The backwardness of Iran became manifest during the Qajar rule which was to be seen not only with respect to the European countries but also to the Ottomans and the Russians.

This is the reason why the Qajars lost all military encounters with the Russians during the reign of Fath \textsuperscript{5}Ali Shah (1797–1834) and lost considerable territories in the following humiliating peace treaties. Although some efforts of reform were made during the long reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–1896), notably by the reforming minister, Amir Kabir (1848–1852), his assassination marked also the end of any such policies.

Ineffective governance, harsh rule, corruption, and humiliating concessions granted to foreigners gave rise to an opposition wanting gradual reforms. These demands included a constitution which was granted at the end by Mozaffar al-Din Shah in 1906, after some protests and demonstrations. The first Iranian constitution was modelled on the constitution of Belgium (1831), though political and social circumstances were rather different in Iran. As a result, the constitution did not bring calm into Iranian domestic politics, which became more complicated when the First World War broke out.

Though declared neutral, considerable parts of Persia were occupied by the rival powers (Ottomans, Russians, Britain). No wonder, then, that at the end of the war Qajar rule was \textit{de facto} non-existent, which made it possible for Reza Khan, Commander of only 2,500 Cossacks, to enter the capital in 1921. He became Minister of War that year, etc.

Prime Minister in 1923, and was crowned as king in 1926. He took the name Pahlavi (a hint to the Sasanian period) and this is how the Pahlavi dynasty was born. Modelled on Kemal Atatürk’s reforms, a modernization period began which was accompanied by westernization and secularization (expansion of the army, improvement of transport infrastructure, education reforms, new dress code, language reform, renaming the country from Persia to Iran) which met social opposition headed by the ‘ulama’, who feared to lose their traditional power (education, vaqfs, courts). As a result of Reza Shah’s pro-German policy during the 1930s British and Soviet forces entered Iran in 1941, and the shah abdicated in favour of his son.

Mohammed Reza took effective control only after 1946 when the Azerbaijan crisis was solved, and the Soviet troops withdrew from Iran. A new crisis soon emerged when Mohammed Mosaddeq, leader of the National Front, became Prime Minister in 1951, and decided to nationalize Iranian oil. This made him very popular in the country, but he was unable to settle all domestic and international problems resulting from this action (the blockade of the British, large debt).

Mosaddeq was finally removed from office in 1953 with the help of the CIA (Operation: Ajax) and sentenced to life-long house arrest. Though this action brought the king back to full control again, it gave rise to enduring nationwide conspiracy theories about hidden foreign manipulations in Iranian politics. Moreover, the coup made the shah a close ally of the USA, his position being denounced by the opposition as a puppet of the Americans (see such caricatures after the revolution).

The king continued the reforms initiated by his father some decades earlier including more educational reforms, land reform, liberalization, and modernization of the army. It was put together in a program called the White Revolution in the 1960s. Being a nationalistic, secular westernization, this program again met the opposition of the ‘ulama’, this time headed by a young cleric, Khomeini, who was expelled from the country.

The 1970s saw an economic boom fuelled by rising income from the oil industry and at the same time the controversies over the land reform, which made millions of people unemployed. It forced them to settle in cities looking for jobs, more often than not in vain.

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Thus, as a result of the reforms, Iranian society became polarised between the very few rich and a mass of people living in poverty; therefore, dissatisfaction with the regime grew. Dissenters were silenced with the help of the security agency SAVAK for decades, but repression failed at the end and revolutionary forces were not to be stopped even by imposing martial law in 1978.

Since the army was not in full control of the situation the shah fled the country the next year and made the way free for Khomeini to return.  

2. Iranian hierocracies in history

2.1 Zoroastrianism

The Avesta, the holy book of the original Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism, has several terms to refer to ecclesiastic functions. One of them, *ratu*, designates a peculiar group of priests, who were more than priests performing rituals but had to be regarded rather as spiritual leaders, and whose unquestionable intellectual abilities and social authority gave them absolute power with respect to the people under their care. Besides religious leadership this included legal competence as well, since the *ratu* had the power to excommunicate those who challenged their leadership.

Therefore, as demonstrated by Philip G. Kreyenbroek, the leadership of a spiritual authority is deeply rooted in Iranian tradition and goes back millennia (Kreyenbroek 1994, 3-5). There seemed to be no fundamental change in the *ratu*’s competencies for centuries since in the Sasanian era (224–651 CE): the *rad* continued to be a spiritual leader of those under his leadership, and in line with Sasanian politics, he was also the discretionary judge of sins and crimes committed against religious morality (Jany 2007, 350-352). Against this background it is worth considering the political leadership of spiritual authorities in Iranian history.

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At first sight the Achaemenid period (559–331 BCE) has no place in a discussion on hierocracy since the rule of the Achaemenids was a secular monarchy with no official state religion and, therefore, providing considerable religious autonomy to its subject peoples. Even so we can witness references to the high god Ahura Mazda in the inscriptions of Persian rulers, but it was a common practice for centuries and fits the political traditions of the Ancient Near East.

More significant than this is the so-called daiva-inscription of Xerxes (486–465 BCE), a royal edict which orders the destruction of the temples of false gods and forbids the cult of demons (= false gods) as the only sign of religious intolerance in this period. While it is unclear against which religion’s practice the order was issued, it is evident that it represents a policy change compared to earlier practice.

The replacement of the secular, agriculture-based Ancient Persian calendar by a fully Zoroastrian calendar in the second half of the Achaemenid era was another step to establish a more religion-based political structure, but the inscription of Darius I (522–486 BCE) and its worldview is of primary importance for our present investigation.

In fact, Darius I came to power through a conspiracy followed by an armed revolt which took Darius almost two years to suppress. After his victory, Darius put in writing his own version of the events in the rock inscription near Behistun, in which the king presented himself as a representative of law and order and the favourite of the divinity. This is commonplace in the Near East, but he goes further and condemns his enemies as men of lies. It is hard to overestimate the significance of this rhetoric because in Zoroastrianism lying (Old Persian drauga, Avestan druj) is one of the most evil acts which is attached to the world of Angra Mainyu (Evil Spirit) and his associates like Azi Dahaka, a fearful dragon who was defeated by the great Iranian hero Thraetaona.

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22 The interpretation of the inscription is still subject to debate among Iranists as the word daiva (demon) could refer to various entities unacceptable for the Persian king. It could denote foreign gods and their cults (Babilonian or even, Greek gods), or the ancient Iranian pantheon the gods of which were declared demons by Zoroaster in his teaching to highlight the role of the supreme god Ahuramazda.
24 Darius told the story completely different, of course, and his version was accepted also among Iranists. It was Olmstead who expressed his doubts first and pointed at the contradictions in the narrative: Albert T. Olmstead: History of the Persian Empire. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1948: 109.
In this way the king transferred religious dualism into a concrete political situation elevating the fight for political power to a cosmic level in which Darius represents law and order and righteousness while his enemies the forces of destruction symbolised by the act of lie. In referring to this dualism between the forces of order and destruction Darius implicitly puts himself into the position of Thraetaona and his enemies to the role of Azi Dahaka, the embodiment of lie. Since according to the dualistic Iranian (Zoroastrian) worldview mankind is divided between the righteous (ashavan) and the liars and the wicked, his inscription fits perfectly into the religious understanding of his own society.  

Though modern Shi’ism was developed independently from Zoroastrian dogma, the heritage of age-old Iranian worldview and way of thinking could nevertheless remain alive in some religious and political affairs. It is probably no accident that Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution also fought against several “Satans” (such as the shah and his ally, the United States, together with the Iraqi leader, Saddam Husain), thus making his political adversaries evil creatures.

And while political opponents all over the world fight each other with rhetorical weapons, the elevation of their struggle to a cosmic level is not a general tendency. It was the deeply religious American president, G. W. Bush, who understood the real message of this rhetoric and answered in his own way with the creation of the Axis of Evil. From this point on, it was not two rival states (Iran and the USA) any more who oppose each other but two ‘Satans’ struggle against each other and in such a situation there is no room for compromise.

Small wonder then that after Khomeini’s death, this “satanic” rhetoric was dropped from the Iranian political discourse to achieve a less confrontational policy towards the US, and the new American president also put an end to the previous rhetoric.

A more developed example of hierocracy was born in the Sasanian period. Immediately after his military coup d’êtat, the new Sasanian king Ardashir (224–240 CE) embarked on centralisation on a scale never seen before: he eliminated the previously existing small kingdoms within the empire and established a central administration, which his successors brought to further perfection throughout the centuries. As a result, districts, towns and villages came into being as the basic units of administration.

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26 The phrase was used first by President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002, that is, some months after 9/11; this is why it was not targeted against Iran on the first place.
At the same time, the Zoroastrian church established its own institutional system, an ecclesiastic organization which had not existed previously. Two powerful persons of the 3rd century, Tansar and Kardir, organised the Zoroastrian clergy into a hierarchical church which was modelled on the state administration: the church was headed by the mobedan mobed, the equivalent of the king of kings, followed on the provincial level by the provincial mobeds, the structure ending with local mobeds in the bottom of the system.\footnote{Josef Wiesehöfer: *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD*. I. B. Tauris: London: 1996: 183-191; Touraj Daryaee: *Sasanian Empire: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. I. B. Tauris: New York: 2009: 123-133.}

Establishing organizational structures went hand in hand with the standardization of the religious doctrine: Zoroastrian priests narrowed down the competing readings of Zoroastrian religion, and defined the circle of canonical texts, which was followed by the codification of the Avesta (although complete standardisation was never achieved). Religious practices which were irreconcilable with the new doctrine were eliminated (e.g. the cult of Anahita); this is how a central role was given to the fire cult, an already existent but not exclusive form of cultic activity.\footnote{Mary Boyce: *Zoroastrians. Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, Boston: 1979: 106-109.}

All of these had the logical consequence that Zoroastrianism, now redefined, was elevated to the rank of state religion and, therefore, the Zoroastrian church presented itself as a powerful political player for centuries. Its influence was further developed when almost the entire legal functions were transferred into the hands of the Zoroastrian priesthood: the various dignitaries of the Zoroastrian church were at the same time judges deciding in civil and criminal cases, interpreting legal norms and the head of the church, and the chief mobed was the legal advisor to the king ex officio. It comes as no surprise that the religious law established by the Zoroastrian priesthood was at the same time the law of the Empire and the fact that not a single royal decree has reached us can hardly be explained only by archaeological misfortune.\footnote{For more on Sasanian legal sources and legal theory see Maria Macuch: *Rechtskasuistik und Gerichtspraxis zu Beginn des siebenten Jahrhunderts in Iran. Die Rechtssammlung des Farrohmard i Wahraman*. Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden: 1993: 11-15; and Jany János: The Jurisprudence of the Sasanian Sages. In: *Journal Asiatique* 294, No.2, (2006): 291–323. Paris.}

In this world view, there was hardly any place for followers of other religions, and in fact, the persecution of the members of other religions began in the first decades of Sasanian rule, putting an end to the previous tolerant policy.
The first targets of religious persecutions were the Manicheans, the Jews of Babylonia suffered less, while the situation of the Iranian Christians depended heavily, but not exclusively, on the actual state of affairs of foreign policy, Christian Roman and Byzantine Empires being the rivals of Sasanian Iran.  

The persecution of Christians was achieved by legal means, but these criminal procedures were in the majority of the cases examples of show trials where almost no attempt was made to observe even contemporary Zoroastrian criminal law.

The reign of mobeds was a collective rule, and the powerful mobedan mobed was not a leader in one person, but the head and representative of the priestly class. There was strong group cohesion within the Zoroastrian church, a caste-like, closed system since it could be entered only by birth. The group cohesion protected members who were in line with the policy of the clergy but eliminated dissenting members as happened with Mazdak, most probably a Zoroastrian priest whose egalitarian teaching attracted the underprivileged. The movement was supported by the monarch Kavad at first (495–531 AD); later, however, when the initially peaceful movement stirred up acts of violence and brought general chaos upon the country, he changed his policy. The movement was suppressed by Kavad’s chosen heir to the throne, Khosrav I, in the years before his ascent to the throne of Iran.

Political behaviour was determined by religious doctrines and by the interests of the church while consideration of state interests was either of secondary importance or non-existent. Some examples prove that rulers opposing the power of mobeds and the nobility were dethroned, blinded, imprisoned, sometimes even killed by the joint effort of both the clergy and the nobility (e.g. Kavad (488-496; 498-531), Hormizd IV (579-590), Khosrav II (590-628), Ardasir III (630)).

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The queens Buran and Azarmidukht as well as others were in power only for a very short period of time between 630 and 632, leaving the king as the only figure to represent the interests of the Iranian state against lobbying interests, with less and less success as time went on.

This policy did not change even when the decline of the demoralised dynasty and the attacks of the first Muslim groups brought the state to the brink of collapse. The fall of the Iranian state brought about the demise of the Zoroastrian church as well; therefore, this policy was ineffective and self-destructive for both the nobility and the priesthood.

Efforts to strengthen the power of the clergy were also visible in works on political theory, written by priestly scholars.

One of them, the Letter of Tansar, claims that the heir to the throne was to be elected from among the sons of the dead ruler by the leading officials of the imperial administration and the mobedan mobed, but in case of disagreement, it was the mobedan mobed whose vote decided. Sources prove that this was far from contemporary political reality and no king left the decision on his heir to any of his officials. Nevertheless, the demand itself speaks volumes about the ambitions of the clergy.

Despite both theoretical and practical efforts to decimate the king into a shadow figure, the Sasanian monarch remained the most important political figure for centuries. Therefore, we can witness a dual rule of kings and mobeds, best expressed in the so-called twin-theory formulated in the Letter of Tansar. Accordingly, religion and kingship are twins born of one womb and never to be separated. This is not a fully developed hierocracy like the Caliphate which unites both religious and secular administration but is closer to the Byzantine model with the emperor and the patriarch on his side.

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33 This point and the hostility of the old (Parthian) nobility towards the Sasanians is highlighted by Parvaneh Pourshariati’s recent analysis about the fall of the Sasanians: Parvaneh Pourshariati: *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*. I. B. Tauris: New York: 2017.

34 Zoroastrianism was reduced to a minority religion within three centuries while the nobility was outmanoeuvred and sometimes even killed by the invaders even though they were previously promised important posts and land holdings if they support the new regime.


2.2. Islam

After the fall of the Sasanians, there was no independent Iranian state for centuries, Iranian territories being incorporated into the Islamic Caliphate. Although the conquering Saljuqids made some efforts to organise an Iranian state with effective administration, they ultimately failed as did the Mongols and the Timurids.

Only the rule of the Safavids (1501–1736) is worth mentioning in a discussion of Iranian hierocracy. The state of the Safavids, born in a power vacuum in Iran, was a turning point because: (1) a central, sovereign Iranian state was established again; (2) political power was seized by an originally Sufi order of Turkish origin, which embraced Shi’ism in the long run and, therefore (3) proclaimed Shi’ism as the official religion of the state in 1501.

Safavid rule represents a more developed form of hierocracy since the head of the Safavid order was at the same time the Iranian monarch; thus the former dual structure of the Sasanian state was replaced by a personal union. It is worth emphasizing that the Iranian state was in fact governed by the head of a religious order, and it was not the king who joined an order, a tiny but important difference. Even Shah Abbas the Great (1587–1629) emphasised that he ruled as the leader of the Safavid order although it is undeniable that whenever the interests of the order and the state were at variance, he gave priority to the latter.37

What is more, the order sometimes even interfered with the system of succession to the throne, as happened at the election of Safi I (1629–1642), at the coronation of whom there was a marked emphasis on following the ceremonial rules of the Safavid order. Only after Abbas II (1642–1666), that is, in the last decades of Safavid rule, became the link to the order, an empty formality when the position of the head of the order sunk to the level of a royal title, but monarchs were still regarded as having supernatural power in the eyes of society at large.38

The regime formed after the Islamic revolution (1979) provides the third and most developed model of Iranian hierocracy, which is different from its predecessors in several aspects.

The most important structural difference is that we cannot find either dualism (between the state and the church) or personal union (in the head of a religious order and the state), since the leader of the revolution and the Islamic state (rahbar), that is, Khomeini, was not head of any religious order.

38 ibid: 279; 289
This is the most developed form of hierocracy because the leading person of the clergy (marja’-e taqlid) is at the same time the supreme leader of the state, organs of state administration being necessarily subordinated to him directly or indirectly.

Overcoming the dual system of the Sasanians the clergy was now victorious over the state which had no leader of its own of equal standing to the rahbar. This is the reason why the qualification of the rahbar was originally defined so that it had to be the leader of the clergy alone who could fill the position.

The qualification of the rahbar was in fact tailored to Khomeini’s person, who indeed fulfilled all the requirements. After his death, however, no eligible person was to be found; therefore, the qualifications were modified, thus weakening the theoretical foundations of the system. 39

With the advent of the Islamic republic, the revolution eliminated the monarchy because of its alleged anti-Islamic nature, propagated by Khomeini himself, and shaped the constitution in a way that the head of the clergy could have no rival. 40 The president of the republic is subordinate to the power of the rahbar, and since the Prime Minister was no more efficient either, the position itself was abolished during a revision of the constitution.

All of this led to the paralysis of executive power, witnessed time and again in succeeding decades. Legislation by the Parliament (Majles) is also subordinate to the power of the clergy as a result of the veto of the Guardian Council, controlled by Shi’a religious scholars. 41

Moreover, the leader of the clergy has been incorporated into the constitution, with his unique qualities of leadership as the underlying principle of the constitution (velayat-e faqih). This is more than concentration of power in the hands of one person, codified in the constitution, since velayat-e faqih is a religious doctrine as well. Therefore, the velayat-e faqih theory, legitimising the leadership of the rahbar, signifies a legal and a theological foundation of the system at the same time. 42

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Thus both executive and legislative powers are controlled and sometimes-paralysed by the dominant clergy.\textsuperscript{43}

In other words, to uphold dominance and enforce the interests of the clergy takes priority over the proper functioning of state organs: these are already signs of the self-destructive policy of the \textit{mobeds} and the nobility in the Sasanian period.

Similarly, to the rule of the \textit{mobeds}, the current system also represents a collective rule: a group-domination by the politically active members of the Shi’a clergy. This does not include the whole clergy, as there are clerics who turn away from politics and withdraw into the solitude of madrasas (in the same way as \textit{herbeds}, the priest-teachers who did not take part in political activities in the Sasanian era), and there are also dissenting clerics.

The latter are sometimes more threatened by the oppressive mechanism of the regime than civilians are, since a separate court has been established for processes against dissenting clerics, and this court passes sentences of imprisonment and capital punishment by the hundreds: up to 1990, 286 clerics were convicted, including 14 death penalties.\textsuperscript{44}

This group, constantly changing in composition, rent with inner conflict and fraught with faction battles, is not a ‘party’ or any other institution but a conglomerate of learned individuals sharing common values, beliefs and interests protected by both the constitution and its supreme leader. In this respect, it resembles the Sasanian hierocracy, which also had its own supreme leader but lacked, obviously, any constitutional support.

Therefore, the person of the leader was of vital importance for both the Sasanian and the current clergy since it was the leader who protected their common interests against anybody (including the representative of the Iranian state), guaranteed inner cohesion, and punished dissenting members. But the position of the two leaders is different in their respective systems: the leading role of the \textit{mobedan mobed} was a consequence of his position in the ecclesiastic hierarchy while that of the \textit{marja’-e taqlid} is the result of his position in the scientific hierarchy among the learned and, therefore, learning and social prestige are the dominant factor in his selecting.


\textsuperscript{44} Asghar Schirazi: \textit{The Constitution of Iran. Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic}: 153-154.
To achieve the smooth operation of the Sasanian clergy was easier, since a new administrative leader could be created any time to avoid a leadership vacuum, whereas it is not easy to find a genuine spiritual leader, which may lead to leadership crises, as happened after Khomeini’s death in 1989.45

3. Common features

3.1 Foreign policy

In what follows I will explain the common features of the three hierocratic systems outlined above. For the sake of clarity, I divided them into foreign and domestic issues, although, evidently, there are interactions between these two fields.

In the field of foreign affairs, the first striking phenomenon is the confrontational, offensive policy, most of all during the first decades of a given period, predominantly directed against the West.

The Roman wars of the Sasanians, even though they had antecedents in the Parthian period, were offensive encounters of this kind, which began to lose their intensity after the initial successes of Shapur I (241–270 CE), and ended in defeats and territorial losses at the end of the 3rd century, and resulting in upholding the status quo in the following century.46

We can find a similar situation in the early Safavid period when the wars against the Ottomans stopped with the defeat at Chaldiran (1514), establishing the status quo which changed only to the disadvantage of the Iranians with the loss of Mesopotamia.47

The foreign policy of the current regime directed against the West also began with a complete change of orientation (the shah being a close ally to the US), hallmarked by the occupation of the American embassy, and it has been going on until the present day on the level of both rhetoric and armaments.

None of these three regimes was able to transform initial, rather symbolic victories into political or territorial advantage in the long run.

- The Sasanians, it is true, conquered some Roman towns near the border but it was the most they could achieve and finally had to withdraw.

The Safavids, too, gained some minor victories over the Ottomans due to their surprise attacks and enthusiasm at the beginning but were routed in the battle of Chaldiran.

The current regime also enriched itself with a symbolic victory over the US with an attack against the American embassy but nothing more was achieved: the hostage crises ended, and Iran found herself on the defensive against Iraq.

The intensity of these early confrontations is in direct relationship to the ideological-rhetorical attacks that accompany them. The anti-West onslaughts of Khomeini (the US as the great Satan) and Ahmadinejad are essentially no different from the inscription of Shapur I in which the Roman emperor is depicted as a dishonest liar (again!) attacking his country.48

It is an important question why Iran is so aggressive on the western front and far less belligerent on the others. I think the reason for this is the fact that Iran always had to face stronger attacks from the west, both in a military and in an ideological sense, while she was less vulnerable from other directions.

As mentioned above, during its history Iran had to face strong military competition from the west which she was unable to overcome (Roman-Byzantine advances, the military supremacy of the Ottomans, the military predominance of the West).

As far as ideology is concerned, Iran had to face strong ideological and religious competitions coming from the west against which she had to protect herself. During the Sasanian period, ideological unity (Zoroastrianism) had to be established against Hellenistic, post-Hellenistic, and Christian Rome. Similarly, Shi’ism became the official religion because it markedly separated Iran from the Sunnite-Hanafite Ottomans. In modern times, the program of re-Islamization against secular westernisation is in line with the previous policies.

No such attacks were perceived from the east from whence no concurrent ideologies threatened with victory. Therefore, foreign policy toward the east was no more than defence against the nomads (Massagetes, Huns, Turks, Mongols, Uzbeks) for two thousand years. Hinduism did not enter Iran, Buddhism reached only Merv on the eastern border, and conquering Turkish-Mongol people adopted Iranian culture (embraced Islam) instead of forcing their own belief on the Iranian population.

Soviet Communism as an ideology was not perceived to be as dangerous as Western ideas already present in Iran during the Pahlavi regime. No surprise, then, that the Soviet Union was the lesser evil for Khomeini: Iran shared a common border with the Soviets but none with the Americans.

This offensive but at the same time self-defensive foreign policy was accompanied by a cultural policy which emphasized Iranian heritage in general and the Iranian religious tradition and included the denial and occasionally the demonization of the outside world. The cultural policy of the Sasanians was strongly built around the first organized Iranian religious tradition, Zoroastrianism, both in domestic and foreign policy. Legitimacy, social structure, legal system and cultural life were all in line with Zoroastrian religious demands as were foreign and religious policy. The latter included a harsh denial of Christianity (the leading ideology of the West) in the form of both apologetic writings and prosecution of Iranian Christians.49

Shi’ism, when declared to be the official religion of the Safavids, had a similar function: it displayed a marked separation from the Ottomans, the rival from the West and from the less dangerous Southern power, India. Thus, it is religious ideology again which separates Iran from the other powers. But it had the consequence that Iran became more and more isolated from both the Muslim societies and the Western world.

It is symptomatic that among Safavid rulers it was only Shah Abbas the Great who was acquainted with the contemporary trends of international politics and who took some steps to strengthen his rule with diplomatic efforts among the nations.50 In the modern period, the anti-Western rhetoric of writer Al-e Ahmad (gharbzadegi: ‘west-struckness’)51 became one of the most important messages of the Islamic revolution, reduced to a few brief slogans understandable for all, emphasising the need to forget about foreign ideas and to return to the genuine Iranian cultural heritage.

The current regime had chosen for the third time in Iranian history to isolate its country from the world with the help of religious ideas and it is the opposition, quite logically, which is more receptive to foreign, mainly Western, ideas (democracy, human rights, etc.).

These rejectionist policies resulted in losing touch with contemporary global trends and Iran found herself sooner or later in a fight against powers of unequal strength. Byzantium was stronger than Sasanian Iran in every respect (it was not by accident that it survived the Sasanians by 800 years), just as the Ottoman state was more modern than that of the Safavids in all decisive factors.

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The rejectionist policy of the current regime manifests itself in the wilful breach of the norms and values of the international community (hostage crises, the denial of the Holocaust) and the effort to build up a coalition with partners which share also an anti-Western political line for whatever reasons (e.g. Venezuela under Chavez). Despite this there is no doubt about the regional power of Iran when governed by hierocracies: the Sasanians were such a regional power and what is more, they were the only dangerous rivals to Rome and Byzantium.

The regional power of the Safavids cannot be questioned either, although they were less dangerous to the Ottomans than the Sasanians were to the Romans. The regional power of Iran today cannot be doubted either; nevertheless, their more ambitious plans certainly raise questions.

A similar continuity may be seen in the efforts to reach the Mediterranean Sea for both geopolitical and economic advantages.

Already the Parthians fought desperate wars against Rome for the possession of Syria, which the Sasanians continued in vain for centuries. The Safavids were prevented in their similar intentions by the loss of Mesopotamia to the Ottomans, and in the modern period states like Syria and Iraq stand in the way of these ambitions.

It is, of course, no accident that the current Iranian foreign policy is very active in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, participating in a complex matrix of regional conflicts in order to achieve the upper hand and it is again the western powers (most importantly the United States) which hinder Iran from doing so.

3.2 Domestic policy

Coming to domestic affairs, it is also important to point out that each hierocratic system seized power by military means. Both the Sasanians and the current regime acquired supremacy by armed revolts against the previous regimes (Parthians, Pahlavi government). The Safavids, too, seized power with weapons, although they filled a power vacuum in Iran rather than revolting against an established power.

A further similarity is that in all three cases the leaders of the new system were believed to have supernatural powers, and they did not neglect to emphasise this. In his inscription, Shapur I presented himself and his founding father, Ardashir, as the descendant of gods, the interpretation of which causes considerable trouble to modern scholarship but seemingly less to his contemporaries.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{52}\) For text edition see: Michael Beck: *Die Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*. E. J. Brill Leiden: 1978: 281-283; Touraj Daryaee thinks that early Sasanian rulers were vested with religious authority which they lost only in the fourth century as Shabuhr II (30-379) was the last king who claimed a lineage from...
In a similar vein, Shah Isma’il I saw and represented himself as a kind of a supernatural being, a claim unconditionally accepted by his followers.\(^5^3\) This is exactly why the defeat at Chaldiran was a turning point in Safavid history, since it was more than a military collapse in a battle against the Ottomans: it was the charisma of Isma’il that was destroyed.

Despite this, later kings also demanded a certain superhuman status, the acceptance of which was made possible by a religious system built upon a peculiar combination of Sufism, folk Islam and Shi’ism. The situation was essentially similar in the case of Khomeini as well. Although he never made claims to a supernatural position, his followers attributed a charisma to him which made his leadership unquestionable. His supernatural position was replaced by his standing as *marja’-e taqlid, rahbar* and the constitutional superpowers granted him by the Iranian constitution. Moreover, he was referred to as Imam, a title reserved for the Twelve Imams, a novelty which some clerics believed was on the edge of blasphemy.\(^5^4\)

Outstanding personalities were decisive in the chain of events or, to put it differently: the establishment of the hierocracies was rather the personal achievement of the leading figures than the result of a popular uprising or the attempt of the powerful clergy to achieve dominance.

Sasanian history began with the revolt of Ardashir against his overlord, the Parthian king, which was no more than a successful attempt to seize power by an overly ambitious petty local leader which was not backed by the *mobeds* at that time. What is more, the establishment of the Zoroastrian church and its incorporation into the state administration took place only subsequently, in a long and systematic process which reached its peak only towards the end of the 3rd century. Neither can we find the Shi’a clergy behind Isma’il I, a lonely hero with a small group of enthusiastic followers fighting for power.

Since Iran was overwhelmingly Sunni at this time, obviously no Shia clergy existed to back Isma’il’s movement. To overcome this shortcoming, Safavids had Shi’a legal scholars, the *Amilis*, brought in from Syria to work on the ideological foundations and the power structure of the new system which lasted for several generations.\(^5^5\)

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The current system is not different in this respect, since the Islamic revolution was fought not by the Shi’a clergy as a group but mostly by Khomeini himself, who was supported by a variety of different social groups, while the clergy was divided on the issue of whether or not they should give up their traditional apolitical attitude and take part in everyday political activities. The victory of the revolution reinforced the position only of the politically active clerics again as a result of a longer process.

Behind these regime changes there were no socio-economic considerations, attempt at economic reform or even rhetorical references to such aims. Under the early Sasanians, socio-economic conditions deteriorated compared to the less rigid and repressive Parthian rule, which had not established a caste-like social structure as its successor did. Isma’il I, too, was not in the least concerned with the wellbeing of his subjects, had no intention to be so, and his followers did not support him because of any such demand. Abbas the Great was the single ruler among the Safavids who tried to revive agriculture, industry and commerce, but his successors created such chaos in these fields that the state lacked enough economic-military power to oppose the Afghan invaders.\(^{56}\)

The Islamic revolution was not born out of the intention to eliminate poverty either, although it is true that the revolution was backed predominantly by the impoverished, mostly urban, population who were no beneficiaries of Pahlavi modernization. Should they have any hopes for economic progress, these were soon dashed since, as of today, the presidency of Rafsanjani was the only brief period during which economic considerations received any attention.\(^{57}\)

As Khomeini put it: “Economics is for donkeys” and “We did not make a revolution to slash the price of watermelon.”\(^{58}\)

Though President Ahmadinejad emphasised again the issues of economics during his presidency, this policy did not change the fundamental orientation of the regime. Basic issues remained what they were for decades: the role of the rahbar and that of the clergy in politics, the interpretation of Islam, the role of the state in society and the struggle for more international influence.

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Opposition thinkers such as Soroush, Shabestari, Kadivar and others do not criticize the regime on grounds of what they perceive as bad economic policy but present a different religious understanding of Shi‘ism, another interpretation of Islamic law and have dissenting views on the role of the clergy in politics and democracy.\textsuperscript{59}

3.3 Ideology

Another remarkable common feature of these three systems is a strong ideological unity guarded by unbending rigor. To explain this one may often come across the argument that without such an ideological unity it would be impossible to keep together a state like Iran with her enormous size and geographical division. No doubt, there is considerable merit in this argument, but it should be qualified since the empires of the Achaemenids and the Parthians were significantly larger than the states run by the hierocracies and they still managed to survive for altogether 700 years.

To understand this, we should bear in mind that the Achaemenid and the Parthian states were decentralized, being a conglomerate of local autonomies attached to and controlled by the court, a system which could function without any compulsory ideology. By contrast, hierocracies always attempted to create a centralized government (with varying success) which was backed in fact by a similarly centralized ideology in order to eliminate local autonomies and secessionist movements. If the central governments were able to protect the unity of the country with political and military means, Iran remained intact. When, however, the government failed to do so, the country fell apart into different smaller territorial units. This happened after the fall of the Sasanians and the disintegration of the Safavid state resulted in the same end.

Closely connected to this ideological centralization we can find the policy of declaring the primacy of religious law. In the Sasanian period, Zoroastrian law functioned as state law as well, and in the modern period we can also witness Shi‘a law being the foundation of Iran’s legal system. More importantly, the entire legal function was concentrated in the hands of the clergy: in the Sasanian period, jurisdiction was administered by the clergy, with different priests (rad, mobed) in charge of particular courts, and the whole system was controlled by the mobedan mobed with his theoretical and practical directives.

In principle, the head of the legal system was the monarch as the supreme judge, but in the absence of a well-organised system of appeals, it did not work. People had the chance to appeal to the king only twice a year during two religious festivals, but this clearly inoperative system was eliminated in the 5th century, and the king lost his last opportunity to alter the corrupt or unlawful decisions of his officials to the advantage of the society.\textsuperscript{60}

A similar tendency can be observed in the Safavid period as well: under Shah Sulayman, in 1683, the right to appeal to the monarch was abolished, with the result that society lost its last legal hope to correct an unlawful or wrong judgment.\textsuperscript{61}

The present-day court system is also under the influence of the ‘ulama’, especially the special court of the clergy, which is under the exclusive control of the rahbar, with the task of charging dissenting clerics.\textsuperscript{62} The rahbar therefore fulfils the same function in the modern legal life as the mobedan mobed did previously, since his statements are regarded as theoretical and practical guidance for courts.

These systems are also characterised by a tendency to diminish the inherent pluralism of the official religion by attempting to elevate one single interpretation to canonical status while neglecting others, although the regimes never fully succeeded in this effort. For example, Sasanian Zoroastrianism highlighted the fire-cult and abolished the cult of goddess Anahita even though the ruling dynasty had strong ties to this cult, but was unable to diminish Zurvanism, a Zoroastrian ‘heresy’ even followed by some Sasanian kings.\textsuperscript{63}

The current system also emphasises a legalist-normativist understanding of Shi’ism and tries to downplay other interpretations, although they are deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and were taught in madrasas for a long time. Contemporary thinkers such as Montazeri, Soroush, Kadivar, Shabestari, and former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, clerics and intellectuals who backed the Islamic revolution and the Islamic regime for years or even decades, developed rival interpretations of Islam to the current, legalist-normativist reading in previous years.\textsuperscript{64} But these ideas were regarded as onslaughts on the official religious understanding and these persons were treated immediately as enemies although they previously belonged to the inner circle of power.

\textsuperscript{64} See note 59.
If pluralism within the official religion was not tolerated, the status of other religions deteriorated even more. Some religions were allowed to exist (Judaism, Christianity) while some others were not.

It is interesting to note here that religions having nothing (or little) to do with the official religion were treated much less harshly than those which came into being as a result of a schism within the official religion. Mazdakism was brutally uprooted in the late Sasanian period. Followers of Manicheism, a very complex religion built upon Iranian tradition were persecuted during the entire Sasanian period.

Meanwhile, a few atrocities against the Jews and Christians were in the spotlight of Sasanian wrath when the rulers believed that foreign policy demanded punitive actions against them (since they could easily be charged with loyalty to the enemy, that is Rome and Byzantium). In the Safavid period we can occasionally observe the persecution of Sunnites (Abisaab, 2004, 24-27; 33-35), but the Baha’is, followers of a new religion deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, were denied any protection and are not members of tolerated religions according to the current constitution.

It is not to say, of course, that followers of tolerated religions were treated equally with members of the official religion but at least they could operate, although atrocities occurred as in the case of Tateos Mikaelian, an Armenian priest murdered in 1994.65

Advocates of foreign ideologies are treated similarly to adherents of non-official religions irrespective of whether they are for Western (democracy, human rights, political pluralism, etc.) or non-Western (e.g. Soviet-type socialism) thought. The Iranian communist party, the Tudeh, was outlawed at the very beginning of the Islamic republic irrespective of the fact that it was also a member of the broad coalition against the shah’s regime.

Similarly, advocates of Western thought are believed to be or at least denounced as Western agents collaborating with foreign powers against Iran, a charge with serious consequences. This helps us understand why leaders of the green opposition demanding more democracy and openness hastened to declare publicly that they respect the underlying principle of the Iranian constitutional system, velayat-e faqih, although this undermines their own program, since this very principle is the most important obstacle in the way of further democratisation.

Another common feature of these systems is that they represent a collective rule. The present-day regime is not a one-party system or a personal dictatorship, and to interpret the power of the rahbar as a one-person leader or a dictator would be to misunderstand the situation.

The *rahbar* is only the leading representative of the clergy, its political and ideological leader and the guardian of the hierocracy. The *mobedan mobed* used to have the same position: as the head of the Zoroastrian church he represented its interest at the royal court, influenced political decisions and guaranteed the ideological unity. But powerful Zoroastrian clergy was a relatively narrow circle: just as not every priest was involved in politics in the Sasanian era, not every cleric participates in political activities today. The functions of local, low rank priests and clerics are reduced to local leadership and propaganda: as earlier it used to be the provincial *mobeds* who fulfilled these roles, today it is the imams of the Friday prayer sent to the countryside who do the same.

Besides political advantages, all three systems provided economic advantages, too, for their members. The *mobeds* were in a privileged position in the Sasanian era in an economic sense as well, and they did not hesitate to support the monarch if the protection of the existing feudal order was at stake. The Safavid period was not at all different; the privileged status of Shi’a legal scholars, judges and high-ranking officials, and the financial advantages provided for them by the *vaqfs* (pious “endowments”), were in sharp contrast to the miserable plight of peasants who were close to starvation in a year of poor harvest.

It is no accident that when chronicles wanted to emphasize the scope of sufferings, they claimed that not even members of the ‘*ulama*’ had enough to eat. In this context the proverbs, satires parodying the hypocritical behaviour of the ‘*ulama*’ are understandable together with the increasing enthusiasm for Sufism, which can be interpreted as a non-political, religious opposition to the dominant Shi’a normativism. No wonder that this development gained strength in the last decades of Safavid rule, that is, during the time of disintegration and economic collapse.66

Today, too, the hypocritical behaviour of the mullahs comes up against constant criticism, the social and economic positions and the autocratic way of exercising power meet increasing social opposition. The socio-economic dissatisfactions logically manifested themselves in a religious disguise in these hierocratic systems. The Mazdakite movement in the Sasanian period started as a religious reform supported by the destitute, the impoverished peasants who had lost their lands. Nowadays, leading thinkers of the opposition started a religious discourse to point out the shortcomings of the current regime and to elaborate their own religious and political vision. The programs of Soroush, Kadivar and Shabestari urge a religious reform, highlighting the reconsideration of the principle *velayat-e faqih*. No wonder that the regime answers in a similarly religious way: labelling every member of the opposition collectively as hypocrites.67

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Conclusions

As outlined above, the three hierocratic systems share a variety of common features in their composition, domestic and foreign policy, socio-economic structure and power base. It is not to say, of course, that they are identical in every respect. Perhaps the most remarkable difference is that the hierocracy of the Sasanian period manifested itself in a dual system, with parallel and competing competencies between the Zoroastrian church and the state.

The Safavid system was already monistic in the sense that the leader of the Safavid order was at the same time the head of the state, this personal union guaranteeing a co-ordinated relationship between the two, with the interests of the latter in mind whenever the two clashed.

The current system differs from its forerunners in that it emphasises the priority of the hierocracy: the leader of the clergy is at the same time the supreme leader of the Iranian state and every state organ (including the president, the government and the legislative) is ultimately under his direct or indirect control. Being, however, a collective rule, it is small wonder that important positions in the economy, the media and the judiciary are in the hands of the clergy and its non-cleric allies.

When the interest of clerical rule is at variance with the proper function of state organs, it is in most of the cases that the former one gains the upper hand and dominates. This is the reason of the numerous dysfunctions in the government and the legislature, known by both Iranian politicians and society.

But I think it is not what Khomeini originally had in mind. Studying his fatvas and decisions we can find numerous examples to prove that the leader of the revolution gave priority to the interests of the state. In his opinion the only thing that matters is the interest of the Islamic state, and this is the only one which must be taken into consideration. Shocking some in his audience he once declared that the government of the Islamic state has the right to override even Islamic legal regulations such as the pilgrimage, if that is what the interests of the community, that is, the Iranian state, require (Schirazi 1998, 64).

In other words, Khomeini resembles rather a Safavid ruler, while his current successors are uncertain as to what strategy to follow. This loss of orientation is the most important cause of the fragmentation within the ruling elite which can be perceived even by outsiders.

I outline the results of the comparison in the table that follows:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues of systemic comparison</th>
<th>Sasanian period</th>
<th>Safavid period</th>
<th>Islamic republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of the state</td>
<td>Monarch</td>
<td>Head of the Safavid order</td>
<td>Leader of the clergy: marja’-e taqlid and rahbar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position of the leader of the clergy</td>
<td>Head of a church, vertically structured</td>
<td>Head of an order and ruler</td>
<td>Leading jurist of the clergy and rahbar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious standing of the first leaders</td>
<td>King is supernatural (god): Ardashir I; Shapur I</td>
<td>Supernatural: Isma’il I</td>
<td>Imam, charisma and above the constitution: Khomeini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Wars with rivals</td>
<td>Clerical backing of the movement: No priests behind the revolt</td>
<td>Armed revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical backing of the movement</td>
<td>No priests behind the revolt</td>
<td>No Shi’a clerics behind the movement</td>
<td>Clerics being divided concerning active role in politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political ideology</td>
<td>Twin-theory: state and church are twins</td>
<td>Shi’ism</td>
<td>Velayat-e faqih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of state religion</td>
<td>Trying to abolish immanent pluralism and to establish one canonical interpretation</td>
<td>Immanent pluralism narrowed</td>
<td>Trying to abolish immanent pluralism and to establish one canonical interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical positions</td>
<td>Court, judiciary, teaching, propaganda, intellectual elite</td>
<td>Court, judiciary, teaching, propaganda, intellectual elite</td>
<td>State organs, judiciary, teaching, propaganda, intellectual elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privileges for the hierocracy</td>
<td>Political and economic privileges</td>
<td>Political and economic privileges</td>
<td>Political and economic privileges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic policy</td>
<td>No priority</td>
<td>No priority</td>
<td>No priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious policy</td>
<td>State religion; others tolerated or persecuted</td>
<td>State religion; others tolerated or persecuted</td>
<td>State religion; others tolerated or persecuted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural policy</td>
<td>Inward looking; internationally isolated</td>
<td>Inward looking; internationally isolated</td>
<td>Inward looking; internationally isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign policy</td>
<td>Offensive in the early decades</td>
<td>Offensive in the early decades</td>
<td>Offensive in the early decades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation of offensive foreign policy</td>
<td>West; only defensive in other directions</td>
<td>West; only defensive in other directions</td>
<td>West; only defensive in other directions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The end of such a long essay brings the question of what to learn from all this. In answering this question, one should avoid two mistakes.

The first would be to think that we can infer from historical examples directly to future events and can tell the future only because we have parallels in the past, however strong these parallels may be. *Historia est magister vitae* is a commonplace, although with merit, but is insufficient to build up theories or worse, policies, upon it.

The second mistake would be to forget all about these remarkable structural similarities. As I have demonstrated, these came into being not by accident but as inherent features of the Iranian hierocratic regimes. If we understand these, in fact very complex and sometimes contradictory socio-economic and political factors, we can have a better understanding of current Iran, which enables us to see things as they are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues of systemic comparison</th>
<th>Sasanian period</th>
<th>Safavid period</th>
<th>Islamic republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International standing and aim</td>
<td>Regional power; confrontations with rival local and global enemies (Rome) to achieve more</td>
<td>Regional power; confrontations with rival local and global enemies (Ottomans) to achieve more</td>
<td>Regional power; confrontations with rival local and global enemies (US, Iraq) to achieve more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of the state</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political system</td>
<td>Centralized; opposition non-existent or paralyzed</td>
<td>Centralized; opposition non-existent or paralyzed</td>
<td>Centralized; opposition non-existent or paralyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political style</td>
<td>Oppressive; backed by unquestionable religious-political ideology</td>
<td>Oppressive; religious-political ideology is less rigorous</td>
<td>Oppressive; backed by unquestionable religious-political ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of opposition and dissatisfaction</td>
<td>Politically motivated religious reform: Mazdakism ending in crushed popular uprising</td>
<td>Non-political religious disguise: Sufism</td>
<td>Politically motivated religious discourse: Sorush, Shabestari, Kadivar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now we see an Iran with a relatively stable system (the green movement is over, a current Arab spring having no impact at all) although handicapped by a variety of systemic contradictions and social dissatisfactions. The current hierocracy is, just like its forerunners were, a centralized – both in state administration and ideology – and strongly-controlled state which rules out any debate over fundamental issues. State organs function despite numerous dysfunctional aspects, the territorial integrity of Iran is in no danger while the opposition is divided and powerless.

This was the model of the previous hierocracies, too, which managed to survive for many centuries and their collapse was brought about by their own unsolved inner contradictions in the long run. External attacks (Arab-Muslim armies, invading Afghans) only put an end to the agony, being consequences rather than causes.

References


St. Thomas Aquinas and the Third Hellenization Period

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Abstract

In this paper, I assert that currently the world has been experiencing the Third Hellenization Period that started with the Italian Renaissance, instigated by the teachings of the theologian and philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). Unlike philosophers in previous periods (First and Second Hellenization as well as Medieval), St. Thomas preached that Truth is a function of both Natural Revelation and Supernatural Revelation. This resulted in, simultaneously, Christianizing Aristotle (St. Thomas’ most referenced philosopher) and Aristotleizing Christianity, thus opening up the doors to human reason that had been muted during the Medieval centuries.

I also assert that the basic constituent of Hellenization is freedom: the freedom to think or reason, the freedom to seek gratification from aesthetics, and the freedom to undertake a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis. Ancient Greeks realized that freedom to pursue their desires, subject to constraints (geographical, cultural and legal) as well as balance of mind and body, would give them the capability to excel in whatever they set their minds to, a freedom that sparked an unyielding endeavor for truth, perfection and excellence that made them achieve phenomenal accomplishments which astound us to this day. It appears that, despite obstacles, this kind of freedom drives the current Hellenization period on a path to higher levels of wellbeing for all.

Keywords: Hellenization, Western Civilization, freedom, Aquinas, philosophy, democracy, aesthetics, globalization, history, wellbeing

Introduction

Figuratively, we all carry the Greek gene. To a small or large extent, we are all connected by a thread, the inheritance that ancient Greeks bestowed on us: Philosophy, Democracy, Athletics, Theater, Mythology, Science, Art, Architecture and Literature among many more. In general, all those universal fundamental ingredients were needed to create an evolving and prospering civilization.¹

¹ Of course, the Greek thread is not the only thread that connects us. We are also connected by the inheritance we have received from, among others, China, India, Egypt, Judaism, Babylonia, Islam, the Vikings, the Ottomans, the Mayas, the Incas and many more. In this paper, I choose to write about the Greek thread; hopefully, future work will bring to light other threads.
My first objective in this paper is to assert that today the world experiences the Third Hellenization Period which started with the Italian Renaissance in Europe after the Middle Ages. (Hellenization is the way of life based on general principles, established or improved by ancient Greeks.)

This period, like previous such periods, is characterized by universal principles which guide us towards a common denominator world structure for the benefit of all. The differences between this Hellenization period and the previous two are that (a) the current one is global in its scope, (b) the underlying principles are adopted at increasing rates (oftentimes through violent uprising), and (c) it is facilitated, a great deal, by (and evolves with) technological improvements in communications (e.g., internet and social media) and in transportation, as well as the spread of commerce, tourism, sport and entertainment.

My second objective is to try to offer an explanation as to why the ancient Greek contributions are everlasting and growing in relevance. I believe that the ancient Greeks detonated an explosive, an outburst of ideas and principles that, as we speak, is still in progress, engulfing in its inferno, like an expanding fireball, the modern open-minded freedom-valuing world. In the words of Henry Miller (*The Colossus of Maroussi*, pp. 210-211):

[The] spirit of eternality … is everywhere … [S]elf-perpetuating Greece … has no borders, no limits, no age … it is impressively vast. (pp. 46-52). Greece … made me free and whole … still … the fountainhead of wisdom and inspiration.

It is indeed remarkable that today’s free people base their evolving way of life on the increasingly important, practical and rewarding formulae invented by the ancient Greeks.

In whatever follows, in Section 2, I attempt to justify why we are currently experiencing the Third Hellenization Period; in Section 3, I stress the importance of freedom in conjunction with Hellenization. This is followed by summary and conclusion in Section 4.

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2 In addition to readings excerpts that are quoted throughout the manuscript, the paper has benefited from information and knowledge contained in the following books: Aquinas (1977 and 1999), North (1973), Berlin (1956), Osborne (2008), Paine (2003), Russell (1986), Fine (1983), Kenny (2012), Weitz (1966), Strauss (1987), Cornford (1965), Warner (1986), and Graves (1960).
Third Hellenization

The First Hellenization Period (FHP) of the western world ended with the unification of Greece under Macedonian rule when Philip II defeated Thebes and Athens (and their allies) in the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE). During the FHP period, Greece experienced three civilizations: the Minoan Civilization (with its center in Crete), the Mycenaean Civilization (mainland Greece, primarily Peloponnese) and the Classical Greek Civilization (with Athens serving as both its center and main contributor).  

The FHP period was characterized by city states and, according to Morton Smith (The Ancient Greeks, p.87): by “the dissemination of Greek artifacts and customs through trade and colonization” — a period during which the western world experienced the birth of sophisticated architecture and art as well as the first work of its literary canon, Homer’s epics; a period interrupted by the so called ancient dark ages (1200–750 BCE) triggered by the invasion of the Dorians who swept down from the North, to be followed by Classical Greece (5th–4th centuries BCE).

The Second Hellenization Period (SHP) of the western world started in 336 BCE with Alexander the Great and continued until 391 CE when Theodosius I the Great decided to suppress non-Christian traditions. The period was characterized by empire-building (Macedonian, Roman, Western Roman, Eastern Roman) founded on, mainly, classical Greek thought. As stated by William Morey (Outlines of Roman History, Chapter XVIII), "we might say that when Greece was conquered by Rome, Rome was civilized by Greece."

The SHP ended when, in 391 CE, Theodosius I the Great instituted a series of decrees called the "Theodosian decrees" suppressing non-Christian traditions. Theodosius I the Great ordered the demolition of all ancient temples, sanctuaries, the banning of the ancient Olympic Games in 393 or 394 CE and, most sadly, the raising to the ground of the Serapeum of Alexandria inclusive of its rich library.

Theodosius I was called “The Great” because he (a) managed to unite the Western and Eastern Roman Empires (the last Roman Emperor to successfully do so), (b) temporarily secured the future of the Eastern Roman Empire through diplomacy, and (c) championed Christianity with the issuance of his “decrees” against non-Christian traditions.

Unfortunately, though the foundations he built for the unity between Western and Eastern Roman Empire were not very strong; after his death the two Empires broke apart and never united again.

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3 Dates, along with main events, have been placed in timelines in the Appendix: Table A1 offers a condensed timeline on Hellenization Periods and Table A2 a more extended version from the Bronze Age to Sulla.
“The Great” one, prior to his death, unwisely enthroned his two sons, Arcadius (12 years old) to rule the East, and Honorius (8 years old) to rule the West. His diplomacy amounted to giving autonomy to non-Roman people, such as the Goths, in exchange for military assistance inclusive of troops and horses to fight for the Empire. The unintended result was the creation of a separate nation within the Empire, which remained a persistent danger to its internal stability.

Some modern historians have intimated that this threat was a factor in the eventual decline of the Empire. For example, in 390 CE, the population of Thessaloniki rioted in complaint against the presence of the local Gothic garrison. The garrison commander was killed in the violence; in revenge, Theodosius ordered the Goths to kill all the spectators (about seven thousand) gathered in the local arena for a circus. For this brutal massacre against humanity, “The Great” one was excommunicated by the bishop of Milan, Saint Ambrose.

Undoubtedly, the “decrees” of Theodosius I against non-Christian traditions mark, as asserted here, the beginning of the Medieval Period which held back western civilization for about a thousand years. Likely, the decrees were motivated by the inferiority of the non-Christian Syrian Neo-Platonism philosophy school, in fashion when Theodosius I acquired power, led by the post-Plotinian philosopher Iamblichus (250-325 CE).

According to John Cooper (Pursuits of Wisdom, pp.384-385), “the post-Plotinian so-called Syrian Neo-Platonism … diverged in momentous ways from the purely rationalist, traditionally Greek-philosophical spirit of Plotinus’s (and Porphyry’s) work. … In short, for Iamblichus, salvation depended on pagan religious magic” which Cooper (p.385, footnote 123) sees as rationalism’s “degradation and loss of intellectual nerve.”

The ideas of Iamblichus contradicted the prevailing, until then, way of thinking by Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman philosophers; he challenged the predominant philosophy paradigm according to which truth was a function of natural revelation or inference based on human observation. As Cooper (p.387) eloquently puts it, Iamblichus challenged the “philosophy, in the old sense, going back to Socrates and continuing through Plotinus, of a life led on the basis of, and exclusively from, a rationally worked out, independent and authoritative, account of reality (including an account of the nature and characteristics of divinity).”

The ideas of Iamblichus could not compete against Christianity as conceived by Theodosius I. Truth as a function of magic could not hold water; especially the kind of magic that is different from religion.
R. Merrifield (The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic, 1987) defines the difference between religion and magic (stated in Wikipedia, 2016) as follows: “'Religion' is used to indicate the belief in supernatural or spiritual beings; 'magic', the use of practices intended to bring occult forces under control and so to influence events; 'ritual', prescribed or customary behavior that may be religious, if it is intended to placate or win favor of supernatural beings, magical if it is intended to operate through impersonal forces of sympathy or by controlling supernatural beings, or social if its purpose is to reinforce a social organization or facilitate social intercourse.”

Unfortunately, the faulty transformation Iamblichus established contaminated the pre-existing philosophical paradigm which, as a result, lost its appeal, opening the road to the Christianity model of the times. According to the Christianity model of those times, truth was a function of supernatural revelation (divine communication of truth in which either the manner of communication or its content is beyond the capacity of human nature to attain). Undoubtedly, the ideas of Iamblichus could not compete against Christianity’s powerful messages of hope, renewal, selflessness, compassion, justice, forgiveness, and unconditional love and therefore, justifiably, Theodosius I made it the mandatory religion for his people.

Regrettably, the contaminating ideas of Iamblichus caused the disappearance of the pre-existing philosophical paradigm of natural revelation from the scene, to appear again about a thousand years later through the teachings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). During its absence, humanity experienced the Medieval Period or, as some prefer to call it, the Dark Ages. (The timeline in Table 1 indicates major philosophical paradigms and the corresponding Hellenization periods.)

The “decrees” of Theodosius I the Great against non-Christian traditions, marking the beginning (as asserted here) of the Medieval Period that held back western civilization for about a thousand years, the killing of many people (inclusive of the seven thousand Christians in Thessaloniki), his unwise treaty (diplomacy) with the Goths and the appointment of two minors as his successors — all serve as data against greatness. One may wonder, why still affix the words “The Great” next to Theodosius I?

Later, in 529 CE, Justinian I closed the first university ever established in the history of humanity — Plato’s Academy. Although the second university ever established, Aristotle’s Lyceum, was no longer an active school at that time, by then Aristotle’s “positive” and Plato’s “normative” philosophies had settled, harmonically, around Neoplatonism. Hence, when Justinian I closed Plato’s Academy, he closed Aristotle’s Lyceum as well. In other words, he turned off “reasoning.” Without a doubt, the Theodosian decrees, along with the closing of the two schools in Athens, plunged Europe and the Middle East into intellectual stagnation.
Additionally, the millennium-long Medieval Period was marked by barbarian invasions (similar in havoc-causing to the invasion of the Dorians in ancient Greece), long wars, epidemics, the decline of free trade and atrocities such as the crusades and the various inquisitions, committed by misguided Christian zealots. The Medieval Epoch ended with the advent of various rebirth (Renaissance) occurrences which in some areas of Europe started earlier than in others.

As knowledge of Greek declined in the west after Theodosius I and the fall of the Roman Empire, so did knowledge of the Greek texts, many of which had remained without a Latin translation. The fragile nature of papyrus, as a writing medium, meant that older texts not copied onto expensive parchment would eventually crumble and be lost. The introduction of Greek philosophy and science into the culture of the Latin West in the Middle Ages was an event that transformed the intellectual life of Western Europe. It consisted of the discovery of many original works, such as those written by Aristotle in the classical period. Greek manuscripts had been maintained in the Greek-speaking world in Constantinople, Armenia, Syria, and Alexandria.

Interest and availability of Greek texts was scarce in the Latin West, but ancient Greek ideas, mostly philosophy and science, had permeated the Islamic world; Muslim conquests extended to the European continent. Sicily and Spain were conquered by the Arabs at around 700 CE. With the aid of Greek and other ideas, Iberia quickly became the most heavily populated and thriving, materially as well as culturally, area in Europe. One of the rulers of Muslim Spain, Al-Hakam II, sought to gather books from all over the Arab world, creating a library which would later become a center for translation into Latin.

Later, crusaders during the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204 CE) sacked Constantinople, thus giving them access to its rich libraries populated by ancient Greek and Roman texts. In turn, many of these texts were translated into Latin by William of Moerbeke (1215-1286 CE), a Flemish Dominican scholar, and Philhellene, one of the most distinguished men of letters of the thirteenth century. At the request of Thomas Aquinas, he undertook a complete translation of the works of Aristotle or, for some portions, a revision of existing translations. It is noteworthy that he was the first translator of the "Politics" (c. 1260 CE) and of the mathematical treatises of Archimedes, among many more.

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4 From 1277 on, until the end of his life, William of Moerbeke, served as archbishop of Corinth. A little Greek village, Merbaka (Agia Triada), is believed to have been named for him; it lies between Argos and Mycenae.
Table 1: Philosophy & Hellenization Periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Philosophers</th>
<th>Truth as a Function of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st HPc</td>
<td>Socrates, Plato, Aristotle (470-322 BCE)</td>
<td>Natural Revelationa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd HP</td>
<td>Alexander the Great (356-324 BCE)</td>
<td>Natural Revelationa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plotinus (204-270 CE)</td>
<td>Natural Revelationa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval Period</td>
<td>Iamblichus (250-325 CE)</td>
<td>Magic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd HP</td>
<td>Theodosius I, the Great (347-395 CE)</td>
<td>Super Natural Revelationb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aquinas (1225-1274 CE)</td>
<td>Super Natural Revelationb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Today</td>
<td>Natural Revelation &amp; Super Natural Revelation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a **Natural Revelation** is inference based on human observation.
b **Super Natural Revelation** is divine communication of truth in which either the manner of communication or its content is beyond the capacity of human nature to attain.
c **HP** stands for Hellenization Period.

Especially after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 CE, and the resulting influx of refugee Byzantine scholars into Western Europe, the spread of ancient Greek and Roman knowledge began to intensify, setting the foundations for the Italian Renaissance and the Third Hellenization Period (THP).

As asserted here, the Italian Renaissance and thus the THP began with Saint Thomas Aquinas whose work marks the end of the *long sleep of reason* from the time of Theodosius I through the Medieval centuries.
Saint Thomas Aquinas played a major part in reinstating the rationalist tradition by intertwining it with Christian theology. By the time Aquinas began his literary work, a large part of Plato’s and Aristotle’s writings had become available in Western Europe. Although his philosophical orientation was dominated by Aristotle, he was aware of the vast scope of thought produced by the ancients (translations into Latin by William of Moerbeke of Greek and Roman texts collected in Byzantine libraries), and the earlier medieval writers who were also influenced by ancient Greek thought, namely: Saint Augustine (354-430 CE) and Boethius (480-524 CE); the Islamic philosophers and writers al-Kindi (800-872 CE), al-Farabi (872-950 CE), Ibn Sina or Avicenna (980-1037 CE), Ibn Rushd or Averroes (1126-1198 CE); and the Jewish philosopher and writer Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE), whose opposition to the Neoplatonism of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina significantly contributed to Aquinas’s understanding.

Thomas Aquinas was influenced heavily by Saint Augustine who in turn was influenced by the works of Aristotle (particularly his Rhetoric and Poetics). Augustine, in both his philosophical and theological reasoning, had formulated an earlier synthesis of philosophy and theology by combining the Christian faith with elements of Plato’s thought, which he had discovered in the writings of the Neoplatonist Plotinus and his early and influential writing on the human will — a central topic in ethics, which would become a focus for later philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer. Shortly after Augustine, in the sixth century, Boethius made a portion of Aristotle’s works available in Latin.

Prior to Saint Thomas Aquinas, thinkers wrestled with the problem of relating philosophy and theology, expressing this problem as the relation between faith and reason. Aquinas exerted a decisive influence by clarifying the precise questions involved, acknowledging alternative solutions offered by different authorities, and answering the major objections to his Aristotelian-Christian solutions. In this way, Aquinas perfected the “scholastic method.”

Thomas Aquinas believed that revelation could guide reason and prevent it from making mistakes, while reason could clarify and demystify faith.

By combining the philosophical principles of reason with the theological principles of faith, he became the chief founder of Scholasticism, the objective of which was the reconciliation of classical and late antiquity philosophy, especially that of Aristotle and Neoplatonism, with Christian theology.

He argued that Aristotle’s method of using reason and observable facts from nature to arrive at truth led to God.

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5 Averroes’ reception in Western Europe contrasted with his ultimate rejection by Arabs in Spain. Soon after Averroes, ancient Greek ideas in the Arab world were largely opposed by those who disliked anything not “truly Arab.”
According to Aquinas, humans must use reason to understand “natural law,” which comes from God. Scholastic philosophy was an attempt to put together a coherent system of traditional thought rather than a pursuit of genuinely novel forms of insight. The content of this system was for the most part a fusion of Christian theology and the philosophies of Plato and especially Aristotle. Most distinctive in scholasticism was its method, a process relying chiefly upon strict logical deduction, taking on the form of an intricate system and expressed in a dialectical or disputational form in which theology dominated philosophy.

It has been said that Aquinas “Christianized” or “Baptized” the philosophy of Aristotle but, in the centuries that followed the Renaissance and to this day, there is ample evidence that Christianity was also “Aristotleized” by Saint Thomas Aquinas.

According to Josef Pieper (Guide to Thomas Aquinas, back outside cover): “Aquinas reconciled the pragmatic thought of Aristotle with the Church, proving that realist knowledge need not preclude belief in the spiritual realities of religion. …[T]he marriage of faith and reason proposed by Aquinas in his great synthesis of a ‘theologically founded worldliness’ was not merely one solution among many, but the great principle expressing the essence of the Christian West.” In other words, Aquinas taught us to seek truth as a function of both natural revelation and supernatural revelation.

After the initial surge of interest in classical learning and values, which brought us the early THP, chiefly characterized by the renewed freedom to reason and explore, many discoveries and events followed that fanned the flames of change and progress, turning this latest Hellenization progression into an ever growing explosion that today has been engulfing in its inferno, at increasing speeds, the whole world. It is also during this period that the Scientific Revolution gained momentum, and observation of the natural world replaced religious doctrine as the source of our understanding of the universe and our place in it. Copernicus up-ended the ancient Greek model of the heavens by suggesting that the sun was at the center of the solar system and that the planets orbited around it. At the same time, exploration, colonization and Christianization of what Europe called the "new world" continued.

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6 According to Petrakis (2004), "The theory that the Earth revolves around the Sun was a truly revolutionary scientific advance. It also provided great impetus to the development of the modern scientific method, which was finally liberated in the middle of the 16th century from the constraints of dogma and nonscientific considerations. This breakthrough is often but mistakenly attributed to the great Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus, and despite indisputable evidence to the contrary, the true discoverer of the theory, the astronomer Aristarchos of Samos that lived in the 3rd century BCE in Alexandria, is still sometimes denied his due credit." Petrakis quotes Sir Thomas Heath regarding the matter as follows: "Sir Thomas Heath has written in his definitive study on Aristarchos: 'Copernicus himself admitted that the theory was attributed to Aristarchus, though this does not seem to be generally known ... But it is a curious fact that Copernicus did mention the theory of Aristarchus in a passage which he afterwards suppressed.'"
Suddenly, the world of the Europeans was a lot bigger, and opinions about that world were more varied and more uncertain than they had been for centuries.

Among the many discoveries during or after the early THP are: clocks, lenses (eyeglasses, microscopes and telescopes), the printing press, compass, gunpowder, the submarine, the market system, scientific progress (e.g., chemistry), the industrial revolutions (from the first to the fourth), and many more. And among the many events, one may enlist the exploration of new lands, the end of the Hundred Years' War between the English and the French, the writings of Shakespeare and the Protestant Reformation. Additionally, the West experienced the advent of the Age of Reason, the re-birth of Democracy as well as the re-birth of the modern Olympic games.

Undoubtedly, during the THP, the World appears more united, increasingly morphing into a global entity—a more progressive, more compassionate and more peaceful cosmopolis that takes advantage of the net benefits associated with all those valuable concepts contributed by the ancient Greeks.

It seems that Globalization [the rising interdependence of nations in terms of economics (free markets and international trade subject to some regulation), governance (mostly free democratic nations), and culture (continually liberated and amalgamated via social media, international sport and entertainment)] has been fanning the flames of Hellenization across the known world especially since “economics,” “governance” and “cultures” are all governed by freedom to reason, the freedom that gave birth to the ancient Greek achievements, the freedom that still propels us today towards better understanding and higher levels of well-being.

**Freedom and its impact**

For the ancient Greeks, freedom was the basis of their civilization. They realized that freedom to pursue their desires, subject to constraints (geographical, cultural and legal) as well as the balance of mind and body, would give them the capability to excel in whatever was important to them. This freedom sparked an unyielding pursuit of truth, perfection and excellence and made them achieve phenomenal accomplishments that astound us to this day. According to Herbert Gintis (2006):

> There is a model of human well-being compatible with the notion that we humans are complex adaptive systems, endowed by our genetic constitution with certain capacities—cognitive, affective, psychomotor, aesthetic, and spiritual—and an individual well-being depends on the extent that we have developed these capacities and have the means of exercising them. Happiness, in this view, is not what you have, but what you are. Societies are judged, then, not on what material comforts they generate, but on the extent to which they foster the development of human beings fully capable of exercising their personal capacities.
Did the ancient Greeks attempt to create an environment (a society or civilization) conducive to enabling human beings to use their personal capabilities?

Clues for an answer to this question may be found in Thucydides. In his superb *Pericles’ Funeral Oration* (available on various online sources in many languages) in addition to offering a *how-to* formula for the ages on what ought to constitute a funeral oration for fallen patriots, Thucydides describes morals, traditions and customs of the times that are practiced even today in the West.

Most significantly though, he points out that *freedom* is the factor that contributed to the achievements of Athens — a factor that is still in force today especially as it applies to the so-called western nations which are classified as *free nations* relative to the rest of the world. Undeniably, freedom is one of those founding blocks of western civilization.

Pericles starts by eloquently stating that those who fall defending freedom deserve the paramount honor and that the orator should be careful neither to disregard nor to exaggerate the achievements of the fallen defenders.

In turn, he states:

- that freedom has given birth to a “greater than her reputation” Athens ready to die for resisting rather than to live submitting;
- that the power of Athens is freedom, that happiness is the fruit of freedom, that freedom is the fruit of valor;
- that freedom equals fearlessness and military advantage.

He continues by declaring that it is best:

- to remain free instead of imitating others;
- to govern with freely elected officials through democracy;
- to lead free and enjoyable individual lives subject to ethics and the law;
- to encourage free and open discussion, purposefulness and good risk-taking, wealth accumulation for use (not for show), anti-poverty efforts and the practicing of genuine generosity.

He concludes by stating that “comfort, therefore, not condolence, is what I have to offer to the parents of the dead.”

Broadly speaking, the answer to the question posed above (‘Did the ancient Greeks attempt to create an environment (a society or civilization) conducive to enabling human beings to use their personal capabilities?’) is yes.
Greeks unleashed three fundamental freedoms which enabled people to more effectively utilize their abilities:

- the freedom to think or reason; in other words, the freedom to critically think about everything — from the human body and spirit to the entire universe; they believed that everything is governed by an order accessible to human reason;
- the freedom to deal with the nature, creation and appreciation of beauty (natural and human-made) through the prism of subjective rationality and societal parameters; in other words, in the splendor of Greek scenery, the freedom to endeavor gratification from aesthetics;
- the freedom to undertake a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis.

These three freedoms propelled Greece (especially Golden Age Greece) to become classic; they established vehicles to evolving optimization rooted in morality (truth and justice), genuine happiness (honor, sacrifice, respect, and struggle against evil) as well as unique spirituality (to deal with, primarily, empowerment and the need for security and psychological comfort.) At an increasing rate, these vehicles to evolving optimization are still used today; they constitute the well-known concepts of philosophy, democracy, theater, sport, mythology, art, architecture, medicine and many more.

Sir Maurice Bowara (The Greek Experience), the eminent scholar and author, has called these ancient Greek achievements “incredible,” revealing “Greece in its Golden Age [as] a dynamic, colorful, infinitely creative society based on the belief that action in all its forms was the natural end of men.”

There is an abundance of evidence that since then, these freedoms are enabling humanity to progress in an evolutionary fashion towards a new optimum, subject to new knowledge and constantly adapting to timely universal concerns.

As one may infer from above, the most important freedom that ancient Greeks permitted to themselves and pursued with vigor and rigor was the freedom to reason, the freedom to philosophize. Chronologically, Figure 1 shows, non-exhaustively, how philosophy has evolved since ancient times in the West. The same figure can also be viewed as a distribution of philosophers from ancient times to modern; it exhibits a high-low-high pattern (such as the letter M), where “low” corresponds to the Medieval Period.

As pointed out by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, unless new studies reveal additional names, “Histories of medieval philosophy often treat Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham as the ‘big three’ figures in the later medieval period; a few add Bonaventure as a fourth.”
After Philosophy, freedom to reason in ancient Greece (especially ancient Athens) contributed Democracy. In 2019, there are 195 countries in the world. This total comprises 193 countries that are member states of the United Nations (UN) (2019) and two countries that are non-member observer states: the Holy See and the State of Palestine. Not included in this total count of 195 countries are: (1) Taiwan (the United Nations considers it represented by the People's Republic of China); (2) The Cook Islands as well as Niue, both states in free association with New Zealand which are members of several UN specialized agencies and have been recognized “full treaty-making capacity,” but are neither member states nor non-member observer states; (3) Dependencies (or dependent territories, dependent areas, dependencies) and Areas of Special Sovereignty (autonomous territories); and (4) Other countries recognized by the UN as not being self-governing.

Figure 1: Distribution of Philosophers from BCE to CE
Currently, out of 193 recognized countries, 123 are democratic. Unlike philosophy, since ancient Greek times, democracy did not spread as fast. Figure 2 depicts the slow rise in the number of democracies over the last two centuries. The end of World War I led to the birth of many democracies. However, during the 1930s, many of these young democracies then reverted to being autocratic. After World War II, the number of democracies began growing again. But it was the fall of the Iron Curtain, circa 1989, that led to a more dramatic increase in the number of democracies.

Although there are many negatives associated with Democracy (such as, among others, gridlock and polarization, harmful lobbying, slow in deciding, susceptible to kidnapping and to social media interference), democratic nations are more likely to secure the peace, deter aggression, expand open markets, promote economic development, protect their citizens, combat international terrorism and crime, uphold human and worker rights, avoid humanitarian crises and refugee flows, improve education, improve the global environment, and protect human health. By and large, the benefits associated with Democracy exceed the costs.
Comparative Civilization Review

Other contributions made by ancient Greek free thought, which continue to evolve and mutate during the THP, are those that relate to their undertaking of a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis by relying on a religion that made gods in their own image, mythology, drama, comedy, and of course art in all its forms, concepts which to this day evolve and mutate as we speak; more specifically:

- **pleasing to the senses, visual and performing forms of art** (from ancient theater to modern theater and cinema, from hand-made to machine-made art, from lyra to modern guitar music, and from ancient temple to modern skyscraper architecture);
- **mythology** (from Hesiod, Homer and Aesop to modern Superman, Harry Potter and Star Wars);
- **epic and lyric poetry** (from Homer and Pindar to modern literature narration, to sonnets and from free verse poems to lyrics for songs);
- **prose fiction** (from Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe* and *Clitophon*, to Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Hemingway, and Rowling);
- **historiography** (from Herodotus and Thucydides, the fathers of historiography, to cliometrics);
- **science and mathematics** (from Thales, Pythagoeas, Democritus, and Archimedes, to Tesla, Einstein, Mendeleev, and Higgs);
- **technology** (from triremes to modern boats and from the Antikythera mechanism to modern computers); and
- **athletics** (from ancient to modern Olympics and to other modern sports such as football and basketball).

Undoubtedly, in this increasingly globalized THP, one must wonder how society would deal with (a) income disparities between the haves and the have-nots that appear to be stagnant, (b) climate warming, (c) conflict and unrest, and (d) threats to global health? What the above paragraphs imply is that the world is more likely to deal with these problems successfully when the freedoms to reason, elect and create are nurtured universally than when they are not.

**Summary and Conclusion**

I asserted above that currently the world has been experiencing the Third Hellenization Period which started with the Italian Renaissance, instigated by the teachings of the theologian and philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE).
Unlike philosophers in previous periods (First and Second Hellenization as well as Medieval), St. Thomas preached that Truth is a function of both Natural Revelation and Supernatural Revelation which resulted in, simultaneously, Christianizing Aristotle (St. Thomas’ most referenced philosopher) and Aristotleiz Christianity, thus opening up the doors to human reason that had been muted during the Medieval centuries.

During both the First and the Second Hellenization Periods, Truth was a function of Natural Revelation. Towards the end of the Second Hellenization Period, the philosopher Iamblichus (250-325 CE) started to preach that Truth is a Function of Natural Revelation and Magic (magic resembling what today is known as black magic).

Unfortunately, the faulty transformation Iamblichus established contaminated the pre-existing philosophical paradigm; as a result, it lost its appeal, opening the road to the Christianity model of the times, according to which Truth was a function of Supernatural Revelation alone (divine communication of truth in which either the manner of communication or its content is beyond the capacity of human nature to attain).

Undoubtedly, the ideas of Iamblichus could not compete against Christianity’s powerful messages of hope, renewal, selflessness, compassion, justice, forgiveness and unconditional love; therefore, justifiably, Theodosius I made it the mandatory religion for his people. Regrettably, the contaminating ideas of Iamblichus caused the disappearance of the pre-existing philosophical paradigm of natural revelation, only to appear again about a thousand years later through the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. During its absence, humanity experienced the Medieval period or, as some prefer to call it, the Dark Ages.

I also asserted that the basic constituent of Hellenization is freedom: the freedom to think or reason, the freedom to seek gratification from aesthetics, and the freedom to undertake a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis. Ancient Greeks realized that freedom to pursue their desires, subject to constraints (geographical, cultural and legal) as well as balance of mind and body, would give them the capability to excel in whatever they set their minds to; this freedom sparked an unyielding endeavor for truth, perfection and excellence and made them achieve phenomenal accomplishments that astound us to this day.

It appears that this thirst for freedom drives the current Hellenization period on a path to higher levels of wellbeing for all. Undoubtedly, universal exercising of the freedoms to reason, elect and create are more likely than not to contribute solutions to our current global ailments such as stagnant income disparities between the haves and the have-nots, climate warming, conflict and unrest, and threats to global health.
References


Morey, William (1901), *Outlines of Roman History*, American Book Company, New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, USA.


Appendix

Table A1: Hellenization Periods

| First Hellenization Period of the Western World (3000 BCE to 338 BCE) | • Architecture & Art
| From the Minoan & Mycenaean Civilizations (3000 BCE) to the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE) won by Philip II of Macedonia | • Epic Poems
| • City States
| • Trade
| • Colonization
| • The ‘Greek’ Dark Ages
| • Birth of, among other, Philosophy, Democracy, Theater and Sport

| Second Hellenization Period of the Western World (337 BCE to 391 CE) | • Macedonian Empire
| From the time Macedonians took over with Alexander the Great (336 BCE) until Theodosius I The Great (390 CE). | • Hellenistic Centuries
| • Roman Empires (Unified, Western, Eastern or Byzantine until 390 CE). |
### Medieval Period
(Western Europe)
(392 CE to 1200s, 1300s, or 1400s CE)

From the suppression of non-Christian traditions by Theodosius I the Great (391 CE) to Renaissance (variously interpreted as beginning in the 1200s, 1300s, or 1400s CE, depending on the region of Europe and on other factors)

- Suppression of non-Christian traditions
- End of Olympic Games
- Demolition of Alexandrian Library and Ancient Temples
- Barbarian Raids
- Population Decline
- Decline of Free Trade
- Scarcity of Literacy
- Cultural Decline
- Long Wars
- Epidemics
- Crusades
- Inquisitions

### Third Hellenization Period
of the Entire World
(1200s, 1300s, or 1400s CE to today)

- **Renaissance**
  Surge of interest in Classical Learning and Values (Thomas Aquinas), Printing Press and Compass, Gunpowder, Discovery and Exploration of New Continents, Free Trade, Copernican System, End of the Hundred Years' War between the English and the French, Capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans, Translation of Ancient Literature from Arabic to Latin and other Languages, Protestant Reformation, Ejection of Moslems from Spain

- American Revolution and re-birth of Democracy
- Emergence of the Free Market System (Adam Smith)
- Re-birth of Olympic Games
- Democracy: dominant form of government in the world (2014)
- Western Philosophy, Sport, Theater (and its mutations), Art, Architecture, Science, prevalent in all countries across the globe
- Globalization (increasing interdependence of nations in terms of economics, governance and cultures) spreads Hellenization at increasing rates
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Bronze Age</strong></th>
<th><strong>3,000 – 1,100 BCE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,000 - 1,700 BCE</td>
<td>Mycenaens enter mainland Greece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,700 - 1,500 BCE</td>
<td>The height of Minoan Civilization is reached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,400 BCE</td>
<td>The rise of Mycenaean naval strength.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,200 BCE</td>
<td>The Trojan War, civil war, and the fall of the Mycenaens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,150 BCE</td>
<td>Dorian Immigration into Greece mainland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,150 - 1,100 BCE</td>
<td>Aeolian Immigrations begin to Asia Minor.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Dark Age</strong></th>
<th><strong>1,100 - 800 BCE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,100 BC</td>
<td>End of Mycenaen age and civilization. Early city states are ruled through monarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,100 - 1,000 BCE</td>
<td>Ionian Immigration to Asia Minor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900 BCE</td>
<td>Dorian migration to the Aegean islands, Asia Minor (area around Rhodes), and through the Peloponnese.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Archaic Period</strong></th>
<th><strong>800 - 500 BCE</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>800 - 700 BCE</td>
<td>Monarchies begin to be replaced by Aristocratic Republics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>776 BCE</td>
<td>Date of the first Olympic games.</td>
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<tr>
<td>621 BCE</td>
<td>Draco's code of law - Athens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600 BCE</td>
<td>Coin currency introduced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>566 BCE</td>
<td>Panathenaic festivals established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>546 BCE</td>
<td>Persian invasion and conquest of Greek territories throughout Asia Minor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>507 BCE</td>
<td>Cleisthenes' democratic constitution.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Classical Period</strong></th>
<th><strong>500 - 400 BCE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>490 BCE</td>
<td>First Persian invasion of Greece, the Battle of Marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480 BCE</td>
<td>Second Persian invasion of Greece, Spartans are defeated at Thermopylæ, Athens is occupied by the Persians. The Persians are finally defeated at Salamis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Period 500 - 400 BCE</td>
<td>The founding of the Delian League.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>479 BCE Persians are defeated at Plataea.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>448 BCE Peace with the Persians</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>443 - 429 BCE Pericles is leader of Athens during the Golden Age.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>431 - 404 BCE The Peloponnesian War</td>
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<td></td>
<td>430 BCE Plague in Athens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>411 BCE Revolts in Athens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>404 BCE Athens Surrenders to Sparta.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>404 BCE Athens Surrenders to Sparta.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late Classical Period 400 - 330 BCE</td>
<td>395 - 340 BCE Warfare between rival Greek leagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>371 BCE Thebes defeats Sparta at Leuctra</td>
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<td></td>
<td>338 BCE Philip of Macedonia leads the Greek City States.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>336 - 323 BCE Alexander the Great's reign begins.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hellenistic Age 330 - 30 BCE</td>
<td>323 - 148 BCE Greek City States remain relatively independent.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>200 - 196 BCE First Roman victories over Greece.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>148 BCE Macedonia becomes a Roman providence.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>146 BCE Corinth destroyed by the Romans.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86 BCE Athens is sacked by Sulla.</td>
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The Cold War and The Political Legacy of The Counterculture of the 1960s

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Abstract

A crisis of modernity — specifically the crisis of a modern vision of society — arose in the United States and in the Soviet Union following World War II, simultaneously with competition between capitalism and socialism and an ongoing Cold War. Both countries faced similar economic and social crises that demanded resolution through globalization. This meant that it was necessary to reconsider the very basis of social order that had been formed in the 1930s and manifested in politics, economics, science and mass culture. On the one hand, America saw a counter-culture develop while it entered a period of capitalist globalization. On the other hand, the Soviet Union remained within its existing paradigms, and did not try to promote a socialist project of globalization. This led to its eventual collapse and integration into global capitalism.

Introduction

Between August 15 and August 18, 1969, roughly four hundred thousand young people gathered in Bethel, New York for three days of peace and music known as the Woodstock festival. It was not just an important event in the history of music and symbol of counterculture movement of 1960s, but Woodstock was one of the turning points that marked transition from modernity to post-modernity. Although the two world wars eroded some faith in modernity, Western society remained within a modern framework, with only slight negative impacts, limited mostly to another “lost generation” of artists or intellectuals. The counterculture of the 1960s arose from skepticism over a modern vision of society and economics and sought to turn quantity into quality.

How did the United States and the Soviet Union react to simultaneous crises of modernity? The crisis brought on by a modern vision of the human condition impacted the global competition between capitalist and socialist paradigms as the Cold War raged.

Both nations had to reconsider foundational theoretical assumptions and implement radical transformations of politics, economy, science, and mass culture. They were forced to reconsider the social function of technology and science.

Why did the Soviet Union fail, and America succeed?
Historical scholarship on the Cold War traditionally covers a wide range of topics, including extensive studies on politics, economy, science, or the military, but the problems of the humanitarian dimension of competition between capitalism and socialism are often overlooked. Study of these problems may help to create meaningful contrasts between various aspects of the Cold War, including socialist and capitalist reactions to modernity, and to develop an integrated understanding of this period.

Instead, the human aspects have generally appeared in Cold War scholarship in only a restricted, narrow sense, as, for instance, in the analysis of pro-state personality behavior of Soviet political elites or the anti-state personalities of Soviet dissidents. Others have examined the human dimension through extensive research about ideology, information wars, competition of economic systems, or manipulation of consciousness that covers different aspects of anti-communist propaganda pitted against each other.

However, these topics need to be addressed as a part of much more fundamental problem of society, one based on competing socialist and capitalist visions of modernity and its practical implementation in political, economic and cultural institutions.

The purpose of this article is to compare two crises of the social order, one that developed in the Soviet Union as a result of Stalinist modernization and the other that arose from President Roosevelt’s “New Deal” in the United States. Both emerged during the decades of the 1920s and the 1930s and they reached a crisis stage in the 1960s.

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2 Nikolay Inozemtsev, Evgeny Primakov, and Igor Gušev, Uglubleniye obshego krizisa kapitalizma (Moscow: Mysl, 1976), 126-137.
8 Walter L. Hixson, Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War (Houndmills; New York, 1997).
Stalin’s modernization and Roosevelt’s New Deal relied on a similar idea, that the state could intervene to mitigate problems of inequity and decrease social tensions. From the perspective of Soviet authorities, class antagonisms were the main obstacle to a fair distribution of wealth in society. This meant that the Communist party, as the so-called “vanguard of the working class,” had to lead a class struggle as it sought to build socialism in one country, to erect a self-sufficient national economy.

In the West, the social disaster of the Great Depression in the United States saw government adopt the role of mediator in conflicts between labor and corporate management, thus keeping any class struggle within the framework of labor unions. In addition, in order to decrease social inequities, the government imposed some restrictions on corporations while simultaneously providing a safety net for all, thus laying the foundations for a system that has become known as the welfare state.

During the post-war period, however, the Soviet Union and the United States responded in opposite ways to the crisis of the existing social order. Increasing social complexity and the individualization of expectations now meant that certain problems of society could no longer be reduced simply to class conflict. Besides, by the 1960s, national economies around the globe started showing the signs of recession due to the depletion of internal natural and social resources. Under these circumstances, the emerging counterculture protest movement and a recession during the 1970s led to modifications of the New Deal as well as reconsiderations of classic liberalism.

There thus arose in the West the ideas of postmodernism and neoliberalism as main paradigms of capitalist globalization. Neoliberal capitalism developed the economic basis for a new social order through commercialization of individualized expectations.

But, unlike in the United States, reforms in Soviet Union largely remained within the old framework, the Stalinist model of self-sufficient national economy. Eventually, depletion of internal resources and the inability to develop a socialist version of globalization led to collapse of the Soviet Union and the integration of its remnants into global capitalism.

**The United States and the Crisis of Capitalist Modernity**

Following World War II, the prevailing idea was that economic and political stability as well as sustainable development would be possible within the boundaries of the nation state. World economic policies during this period relied on the idea that a return to an unregulated free market economy would create rivalries that might create new social and political instabilities.\(^\text{10}\)

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The main government strategy was to create national economies that regulate the flow of finances and enable tax and spending to stimulate domestic investments. This permitted government to ensure full employment while preventing a return of the Great Depression and its concomitant communism and fascism.\footnote{11}{Henry William Brands, The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3-30.}

However, economic growth of the post-war period sharpened contradictions between collective production and individual consumption that could not be resolved within the framework of the aging New Deal consensus. The regulation of economic relationships between large corporations and labor unions, backed by the state and based on a somewhat conservative social morale, shaped the life of American households as individuals enjoyed the growing prosperity of post-war America. Economic stability, increasing prosperity and a housing boom produced the independent economic basis for American households that then led to the formation of more diverse and individualized social expectations.

This success, however, inevitably produced conflict as the government continued to guarantee consensus between large corporations as major employers and labor unions as main guarantors of workers’ rights. As a result, parts of society started to describe themselves as critics of the conformity of American life and as opponents of the corporate culture that had marked the New Deal consensus, thus weakening its mass support and legitimacy.\footnote{12}{Erich Fromm, Sane Society (London: Routledge, 2010), 78-208.}

In essence, the post-World War II consumer economy\footnote{13}{John Kenneth Galbraith, The Affluent Society (Boston and New York: A Mariner Book, 1998): 1-6.} cultivated social expectations that it could not satisfy. New welfare programs, such as the G.I. Bill, increased the diversity of individualized expectations and simultaneously weakened established social ties, making more difficult meaningful interconnections between personal and collective identities.

There were also growing disappointments about post-war abundance of consumer goods. Some began to criticize society as hedonistic and materialistic, and this legitimized a weakening of the social fabric.\footnote{14}{Theodore Roszak, The Making of Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition (Garden City. N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969).} For instance, mass entertainment and popular culture promoted images of individuals whose behavior did not fit collective identities.\footnote{15}{Douglas Brode, From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004): 88-91.}
Mass education generated increasing numbers of educated young people with high expectations about upward social mobility that the economy could not satisfy. Unrealistic expectations of intimacy and love imposed on men and women in American households produced growing disappointments about the family institution and the assumptions of traditional gender roles.

Finally, neither the economic nor the political system could fully address in a satisfactory way the growing pressure from social and racial groups — and the majority of Americans who supported them — as they fought to oppose the vicious suppression that they had long experienced. A significant fact is that they had been excluded from wartime or post-war prosperity because of the longstanding bigotry that defined American society.

1970s: “New Deal” vs “Woodstock”

The conflict between the older New Deal consensus and the emerging Counterculture movement marked American society for nearly a decade from the late 1960s to the late 1970s.

Increasing anti-authoritarian sentiments, anti-establishment protest, the Civil Rights movement, the women’s rights movement, and the opposition to the Vietnam War, as well as the beginning of an economic recession, were the first signs of a deep crisis of the postwar economic boom and also of the national economic growth model based on domestic investments and social welfare.

American establishment and countercultural movement activists adopted two opposite strategies to deal with the emerging crisis. The former tried to integrate new social expectations into the existing political and economic system without changing it. The latter sought modification of the existing state of affairs by an increasing number of social distinctions to justify claims that varied from class and race to gender and ethnicity.

Government policies relied on the idea that economic prosperity equals cultural homogeneity.

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The post-war programs of economic and social development from the 1950s to the 1960s tried to adapt New Deal principles of full employment as well as equal rights to disadvantaged groups in American society and thus integrate growing social expectations and claims into mainstream society without gross qualitative changes.

The New Deal consensus had been the basis for legitimacy for American presidents since Franklin D. Roosevelt, when government guaranteed economic prosperity in exchange for political support. The guiding principle of government policies had rested on the perception that it was possible to reduce social contradictions and preserve cultural homogeneity by granting the access of all to economic benefits and equal opportunities in politics or education. Specifically, the national administrations had believed that access to economic benefits would result in assimilation and integration of racial and ethnic minorities into mainstream society.

Thus, different presidential administrations during the 1960s relied on similar mechanisms of government spending and interventions to guarantee equal rights (the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965) and employment opportunities (Economic Opportunity Act of 1964) as a part of John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier or within the War on Poverty as a part of Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society initiative.

This paradigm of direct correlations between economic prosperity and cultural homogeneity was based on the particular role of state as a mediator of disputes between capital and labor. Protection of worker’s rights was a legacy of New Deal policies that had reduced the risk of a socialist or fascist revolution produced by growing discontent of working people or others during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The solution was to modify rampant capitalism via regulations addressing the roles of capital and labor through a system of labor relations backed by the state. The role of government was to ensure that all conflict situations could be resolved within the framework of corporations-unions-state.

It was necessary to put restraints on the power of big business and to preserve the ability of unions to protect their members within certain limits that were safe for the existing political and economic system.

During the two decades of the 1950s and the 1960s, it had become clear that the triple structure of consensus *state-capital-labor* had reached maturity and needed reforms.

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The government programs of fighting poverty increased diverse social expectations but failed to improve living conditions overall.

Workers became frustrated as the economy started to fall; further, job segmentation as well as growing inequality in pay among workers eroded class solidarity. Thus, a longstanding consensus began to unfold.\(^{22}\)

During the 1970s the forces of American industrial and financial capital wished to restore the previous status quo. The New Deal and the subsequent postwar economic models produced a unique moment in the history of capitalism. The power of big business could not retard mass inflation and recession during the seventies. The New Deal paradigm permitted labor unions to demand a rise in wages, but big business reacted by increasing the prices of consumer goods to compensate for the wage increases. This resulted in heightened inflation; that forced workers to demand salary increases and in turn made companies increase prices. Thus, inflation rose once again, now at an even higher pace. This put the financial sector into a disadvantage because inflation decreased the value of money, forcing down investments. As a result, both industrial and financial capital sought to weaken unions and control the employment rate and, thus, agitate social sentiments.

The countercultural movement arose from the idea that economic prosperity should lead to cultural and social heterogeneity. The narratives of the several protest movements during the 1960s referred to traditional American values such as individual freedom, democracy or economic prosperity; yet these movements did not explain how Americans from different social backgrounds could co-exist. They advocated the same goals as government, but their means were different. They wished to build independent social and economic bases as alternative sources of legitimization of their claims against mainstream society.

The political legitimacy of the counterculture movement in America rested on diversity. It maintained an openness to varying claims about mainstream society and utilized slogans that would appeal to people of different backgrounds, advancing meta-narratives of “class” or “nation”. The counterculture offered a variety of individualized interpretations of these notions from all possible backgrounds, from racial to gender.

It adopted two parallel strategies: collective and individual. The first one was aimed to diversify as much as possible the social potential for protest movements through varying claims and expectations. The second one addressed the individual personality, as the counterculture encouraged discourse of searching for one’s “true self.”

\(^{22}\) Randi Storch, Working Hard for the American Dream: Workers and Their Unions, World War I to the Present (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), 128-173.
The mass movements of the 1960s posed a challenge to dominant theories of society that had failed to keep up with growing diversity of “atomized individuals” who live in a situation defined by the loss of personal authority. Marxism had failed to give a convincing answer as to why social conflicts or new forms of social solidarity could no longer be reduced to traditional class distinctions. Structuralism overlooked the problems of human diversity and the creativity of imagination, believing that it could produce an “objective” description of the world by defining universal principles and interrelations of social experience.

In addition, the academic discipline of Anthropology did not develop a wide-ranging theoretical apparatus that would describe how ethnic culture functions in modern urbanized society, nor did it result in a transition from the study of culture to the study of ethnic boundaries as constructed in the process of negotiations among individuals.

The Postmodernist answer was that if a unified description of society is not effective, then the answer should not be the development of a new modified systems approach but rather the inclusion of all possible descriptions without their coherent interrelation.

According to advocates of the postmodern paradigm, the dominant description of society legitimized itself through reference to meta-narratives. This put these approaches over other kinds of discourse and thus silenced the voices of those who were excluded from the dominant discourse. Inclusion of individualized observations was possible through the deconstruction of what previously was employed in the attempt to unify different observations on society.

For instance, according to Michel Foucault, it is not the concept of unity, but discontinuity that is characteristic of every discursive statement. The purpose of discursive analysis is to discover the rules according to which this discontinuity and the fragmented character of objects and narratives is present.

Protest movements became one of the crucial vehicles for introducing a postmodern agenda into the Western political mainstream.

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New Left intellectuals during the 1960s and the 1970s helped to diversify major elements of class-centered protest movement narratives that represented the struggles between labor and capital while keeping its basic principle: differences must receive fair compensation, the basis for the post-war welfare state ideology.

Thus, notions such as ethnic, racial, gender and class differences, along with ecological problems, have become special cases of social criticism and the ideological justification of compensatory claims through protest movements. Protest movements have emerged as episodic forms of expression of discontent and expectations concerning specific issues; protestors hope that state and the public will respond to the demands of these protesters.

To deconstruct traditional social boundaries, it is crucial to describe the individual and not the collective as the starting point for all identities and social actions. The reason is that individual needs do not have any boundaries and they are limited only by imagination.

The idea of social justice as a crucial element of the New Deal paradigm died in the atomized society of the postwar period. According to these thinkers, it is the conception of individual self (not the collective) that makes community constitutive.

Excessive anticipation of collective actions and identities of the New Deal paradigm during the decade of the 1950s in the United States, as well as alternative forms of communal life as proposed by countercultural activists during the 1960s, were tools to solve social and economic problems, but both produced widespread disappointments. This resulted in a decrease in the popularity of collective actions and a rise in the belief of individualism and “zero-sum society” during “The Me-Decade” of 1970s.

However, this loss of confidence in the paradigms of the 1960s provided several advantages for those who favored empowerment of individualized identities instead of collective ones. Disappointed expectations regarding collective identities permitted society to break away from the cohesion of social control; at the same time, it demanded compassion or compensations for the disappointments of the old ways.

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29 Keith Barlow, *The Labour Movement in Britain from Thatcher to Blair* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009): 305.


The first strategy was to describe the ideas of collective identity as backward and/or unjust while at the same time coercive, suppressing individual expectations. This legitimized a breaking away. The second strategy developed from an opposite direction: it depicted the inability of individuals to overcome domination and the coercion of unjust society, thus suppressing the feelings of compassion towards others. This legitimizes the right to break away from collective ties.  

**The Reagan Period: A synthesis between the “New Deal” and “Woodstock”**

The administration of Ronald Reagan led to a synthesis between the New Deal consensus and the countercultural movement, based on an asserted neo-conservative ideology. By the late 1970s, the counterculture movement and the New Left had receded in popularity and become fragmented. Simultaneously, there was a reconsideration of liberalism, in part under the influence of the countercultural challenge.

The result was the development of a unified comprehensive theoretical apparatus of neoliberalism. This became mainstream ideology under Reagan, during the decade of the 1980s.

The Reagan idea combined both individualism and collectivism based on a certain vision of the American nation and its role in the international arena. The core element of this Reagan revolution was a form of “communitarian individualism” that turned American nationalism into a postmodern matrix integrating all possible individualized observations on the idea of America without trying to establish interrelations between them (and sometimes with reality) within a new meta-narrative.

This synthesis would not have been possible without development of neoliberal economic policies known as “Reaganomics.” The Great Depression, the legacy of World War II, and the communist threat all strengthened the role of national economies in restricting the flow of finances and stimulating domestic investments in the United States during the post-war years. However, a full employment policy had resulted in wages and prices rising together, decreasing investments in the economy and leading to stagflation during the 1970s. The neoliberal approach promoted price stability and inflation control as well as globalization of industrial production chains and financial markets.

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Sino-American contacts during the early 1970s laid the basis for economic symbiosis between two countries. China tried to find alternative solutions to failed socialist modernization through foreign investments while the United States was anxious to deal with the economic downturn of the 1970s.

Outsourcing of industries abroad to take advantage of cheap Chinese labor and the eventual fragmentation of the American working class made a neoliberal economy, with its focus on individual needs, possible. Flexibility of production was crucial to satisfying the individualized demands of American consumers. This became possible through the exploitation and violation of the rights of workers abroad.36

Another crucial aspect of “Reaganomics” was a new financial system that re-established capital through refinancing of previous loans with new lines of credit. The early 1980s saw the beginning of the emergence of the financial sector37 in the economy of the United States.38 This period marked the beginning of the decline of personal savings, previously a strength of the American people. The main source of money for American households was not savings39 but credit provided by financial institutions. Simple access to credit permitted the use of money for current consumption instead of saving against future economic uncertainties. This system of refinancing was possible because of an increase in the interest rate and then by a constant decrease in the value of money, as represented by the interest rate of the Federal Reserve Bank. This system continued until mid-2000s, when interest rates dropped to nearly zero and further credit financing demanded new forms of speculation and marked the beginning of global recession.

Reagan nationalism changed the mechanism of processing contradictions between state and society. Neoliberal politics produced growing economic inequality; this, alongside reduced government spending on welfare programs, created risks of losing legitimacy. In response, Reagan proclaimed the importance of traditional American democratic values, and denounced government assistance; he thus dealt not only with economic difficulties but also with a crisis of confidence posed by the counterculture movement of the previous decade.

Detaching the national meta-narrative from the real economy, moving to a debt-driven financial speculations model while retaining a modified version of consumerism, permitted many possible observations on “traditional values” without forming a coherent single whole.

37 Repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act by the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA) in 1999 that separated investment banks from commercial (depository) banks contributed to bubble growth.
The Reagan administration then reduced the problems of growing social inequalities into “culture wars” between different narratives. On one hand, this permitted mobilizing more people with diverse agenda into mainstream politics that official propaganda could represent as a success of American democracy and thus legitimize the Reagan Administration. On the other hand, political diversity fragmented collective actions and thus decreased the risk of possible unified protests against government neoliberal politics. The Reagan years offered a distinctive mechanism addressing the contradiction between the collective and the individual.

The American mass culture during the 1980s often promoted a storyline where an individual had to break ties with a traditional collective entity but eventually re-united with it, bringing new meaning to the community that had once been. It was important to show that traditional values were not just another propaganda slogan, detached from real life, but constituted an integral part of American society and history.

Traditional values were supposed to appeal to the personal experience of every individual; these values also helped to cultivate a sense of the national community as well as to create a social basis for Reaganesque on the grass-roots level.

The standard opposition or juxtaposition of the collective and the individual was also found in movies of that period. In these movies, dissatisfaction with a membership in a certain community empowers an individual to break from its coercive ties in order to pursue a stable life in an American household (Big, 1988) or create their own distinctive collective identity (The Breakfast Club, 1985).

Success or failure of individual attempts encourages one to re-think the value of the collective entity, a reconsideration that gives a chance to return and thus regain a sense of community once again but this time on voluntary basis as a free individual choice. It means that membership in a collective entity is no longer coercive and fake because it is based on a balance between collective and individual expectations as well as true and authentic feelings.

The American dream was a crucial element of Reagan nationalism; it encouraged people to develop certain aspects of their individual personality in the form of individualized upward social mobility. In case of failure, national ideology offered the opportunity for self-improvement, which was a modified version of the search of “true self” but this time with clear criterion of commercial efficiency.

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This helped to legitimize transfer of the responsibilities for growing social inequality from the Reagan era’s society and the economic system to the individual.

One of the most representative examples of success in the Reagan era was Steve Jobs; he was a symbol of the possible synthesis between the 1960s counterculture, Reagan neo-conservatism of the 1980s, and computer technology with an emphasis on individual freedom and the neoliberal economy. Specifically, Steve Jobs turned the legacy of New Communalist digital utopian ideas of personal computing and networking into a commercially successful business project after Apple Inc. introduced its “most personal computer,” the Macintosh 128K, for sale in 1984. As a famous commercial campaign dubbed “1984” demonstrated, Apple Inc. tried to use information technologies as a tool to augment and empower human intelligence. It was a device opposed to the aspirations of the military industrial academic complex which sought to replace people with artificial intelligence.

Simultaneously, Steve Jobs stood in solidarity with Ronald Reagan’s stance against unions that he considered un-meritorocratic and “the worst thing that ever happened.” Further, he also was a proponent of outsourcing production facilities abroad to take advantage of cheap Chinese labor, in a country where Apple factories later became examples of neoliberal dystopia. His efforts did not go unnoticed; Steve Jobs was awarded the National Medal of Technology by Ronald Reagan in 1985.

Finally, neoliberalism would not be successful without a particular understanding of human nature that permitted it to justify its globalist claims. According to advocates of the neoliberal agenda, the free market economy is the best fit for human nature against national boundaries. For this purpose, neoliberalism locates economic motivation at the center of an individual worldview imagination that usually operates with contradictions in a self-referential manner between nature and culture and between economic and non-economic expectations.

The first contradiction between nature and culture is crucial to draw attention to: it is the particular image of the human body as a source of needs for economy.\(^{42}\) The second one draws attention to scarcity risks that force individuals to pursue upward economic mobility.

Reference to the universality of “human nature” appears as an omnipresent instrument to overcome the coerciveness of national boundaries that limit individual freedom. At the same time inequality is a universal motivator, driving us to search for opportunities to open up the potential of human nature for the market.\(^{43}\)


The Soviet Union and the Crisis of Socialist Modernity

Historically, the role of the state in Russia has differed considerably from the role of the state in the United States, and this has defined the way both countries reacted to the modernity crisis of the postwar period.

In the United States, it may be argued, society felt the existence of federal government seriously only with the Civil War or, at the latest, in early twentieth century after the introduction of a federal income tax. By contrast, Russian statehood had emerged and developed long ago as a hierarchically organized society with a strong centralized bureaucratic apparatus where the state traditionally was the main employer. After the Bolsheviks seized state power in 1917, they had to rely on this historical legacy, one that by that time had lasted nearly two hundred years; it began manifestly with the reforms of Peter the Great in the first quarter of 18th century.

Socialist modernization reproduced and augmented the already dominant role of state, one that played a crucial role in the exploitation of the political and economic potentials of society. Subsequently, any crises evolved not as contradiction between state and society but from the disintegration of centralized statehood.

The Fragmentation of Economic Integrity

In order to justify their political legitimacy during the post-Stalin period, Soviet authorities tried to solve the problem of increasing social complexity and growing individualized expectations through an attempt to cultivate national solidarity promoting the idea of Soviet people. After Stalin’s death in 1953, Soviet leaders for the first time faced the crisis of collective objectives and goal-setting.

This had direct political implications because legitimacy traditionally depended on the ability of the Bolsheviks to set clear goals and put them into practice through economic and political programs on a national and international level.

Stalin’s death sharpened a power struggle, one in which every faction in the Communist Party tried to mobilize all possible resources to secure and strengthen their own power. At the same time, it was crucial to find new ways to justify the vanguard role of the Communist Party and thus preserve the power of the nomenklatura.
Although Soviet leaders could still refer to the traditional goal of the building up of communism, this time it was unclear what meaning they should put into “communism,” how they should combine this with nationalistic rhetoric, and how they could practically materialize these ideas into Five Years Plans and the ideological programs of the Communist Party.\(^{44}\)

Attempts to adapt to new realities demonstrated the inability of the Communist Party to match growing diverse social expectations with a unified and centralized system of national economy. Soviet society responded to the appeal of the Communist Party to participate in so-called “all-people’s discussions” (vсенародное обсуждение) about future economic plans.\(^{45}\) According to official data, about seventy million people participated in the discussions and more than four million projects were prepared in the period which ran from the official publication of the Seven Years Plan project on November 14, 1958, until the opening of the 21st Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on January 27, 1959.

However, after calculations were made, it became clear that Soviet Union simply did not have enough resources to bring to fruition the many social expectations encompassed in the various Seven Years projects. The inability to implement them, nonetheless, actually meant a lessening of political risks for leadership because those expectations were supposed to become a new source of legitimacy for the Communist Party.\(^{46}\)

The centralized distribution of resources to satisfy growing social expectations enhanced decentralization. The Communist Party’s status as taking the “leading and guiding role” and its assignment to guarantee “social justice” prevented authorities from undertaking discriminatory acts against interest groups.

They had no choice but to allocate resources in every possible direction, including social welfare for the Soviet people, until there were no resources left for maintaining the socialist system.

\(^{44}\) Anatoly Borzenko, Problema tseli v obshesvennov razviti [Problem of Purpose in Social Development] (Moscow: VPSH i AON, 1963), 34-37.
A struggle for power forced Premier Khrushchev to give priority to mass consumption-oriented industries and decentralization to meet growing social expectations as an attempt to secure and strengthen his own power base.47

His Sovnarkhoz Reform of 1957 marked the transition from an all-Soviet Union branch management to a decentralized territorial principle which damaged the integrity of the centralized system.48 The fragmented management system complicated the goal-setting task for the whole economy because it was not clear what national project should receive priority. Under these circumstances, different groups and factions within the Soviet Union ruling class, from big factories to sectoral ministries and military complexes, started promoting their own interests to justify them as national goals that would benefit the entire society.49

The Communist Party exhausted its internal resources as it moved to combine centralization and decentralization tendencies into a coherent whole. By the mid-1960s, the Communist Party had at least two major projects available to overcome the turmoil that had been produced by Khrushchev reforms in economy and politics. They pursued opposite objectives: whether to promote centralization using information technologies or to move towards further commercialization and decentralization of the national Soviet economy.

The first project was the development of a nationwide system of computer centers for information processing, collecting and use; it was known as OGAS (National Automated System for Computation and Information Processing) with key functional subsystems such as the Automated System of Plan Calculations50 and the program of an Optimal Functioning Socialist Economy.51 The second project was an attempt to introduce various criteria of the market economy, such as profitability and sales to increase the efficiency of the planned economy.52

51 Niklai Fedorenko, Optimal Functioning System for a Socialist Economy (Moscow: Progress, 1974).
Both eventually ended up in failure because Soviet authorities considered them as separate and competing projects without trying to unite these two projects into an integrated approach to economic reform. As a result, OGAS overlooked on-going decentralizing tendencies both formal and informal, while the second reform tried to institutionalize actual fragmentation into the economic system. It clashed with the political interests of the *nomenklatura* which, naturally enough, sought to preserve its centralized control over society.

In addition, the Soviet Union failed to initiate its own version of “socialist globalization” to solve contradictions inside a national economy. During the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, the capitalist states and the Soviet Union faced similar crises of national economic slowdowns. For the United States by the mid-1970s the solution to ongoing recession was transition from a national economy to globalization. Theoretically, an alliance between the Soviet Union and China could have become the core of socialist globalization but ironically, it was an alliance between the United States and China that became the basis of capitalist globalization.

The socialist camp suffered from a contradiction between the promotion of the Stalinist modernization model, one aimed at self-sufficient and relatively closed national economic development, and the demands of international political solidarity.

Given the realities of postwar anti-colonial movements, the opportunity to develop an independent national economy was very attractive and, in the short-term, this enhanced the international political influence of the Soviet Union. However, in the long-term, the USSR failed to offer a comprehensive model of integration of different national economies into stable international alliances and common markets.

Further, the struggle for power during the post-Stalinist period forced Soviet leaders to search for alternative sources to secure personal power, a drive that gradually evolved into the De-Stalinization campaign. This posed serious political risks for Soviet allies in East Asia who modelled their political regimes on Stalin’s legacy.

After failed attempts at socialist modernization, De-Stalinization could easily turn into “De-Maoization” in China and “De-Kimization” in North Korea. Eventually, growing tensions between China and Soviet Union culminated in a series of military border conflicts in the late 1960s; these marked the disintegration of socialist camp.53

In response to the failure of socialist globalization, Soviet leaders preferred to initiate integration into global capitalism.

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Joseph Stalin in the early 1950s allowed for the possibility of peaceful co-existence between Soviet-allied socialist states and the capitalist bloc that marked a transition away from the domination of basic principles regarding socialism and capitalism.

Later, during the Khrushchev (1953 - 1964) and the Brezhnev (1964 -1982) periods, this idea attained practical implementation as well as theoretical development. It took the form of economic and political treaties between the Soviet Union and capitalist states, as well as in ideas of convergence between the two systems.

Warming of relations was the result of a combination of international and domestic factors on both sides. The Soviet Union tried to take advantage of recently discovered oil and gas deposits in Siberia to compensate for its lagging behind the West in economy and internal economic problems. Long-term contracts were supposed to ensure the inflow of foreign currency necessary for purchase of Western technologies and consumption goods.

For countries in the capitalist bloc, normalization of relations with the USSR was a guarantee that the Soviet Union would not take advantage of domestic political turmoil caused by the counter-culture movement and the economic recession as well as the 1970s energy crisis. Besides, a stable supply of energy resources was crucial for the development of integration in Western Europe.

Thus, these kinds of agreements had been initiated between Soviet and Western German leaders since the late 1960s and embodied into the Treaty of Moscow (1970) and the “Natural Gas Pipeline Deal” (1970), the latter followed by similar agreements with France and Italy. The signing of the Helsinki Accords (1975) marked not only the economic integration of the Soviet Union into capitalism but also the adoption of Western political discourse by accepting international obligations of human rights primacy (although without an actual intention to implement them in practice) and in the exchange of agreements in the military sphere and regarding guarantees of territorial integrity.54

**The Fragmentation of Political Integrity**

Similar to such drives in economic matters, attempts to modify the political system of the Soviet Union demonstrated the inability of the Communist Party to integrate diversity and marked the beginning of its disintegration.

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Soviet society perceived the speech of Nikita Khrushchev “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,” made to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (February 1956), as an official acknowledgement that the Communist Party can be wrong and thus requires correction. De-Stalinization for the first time in Soviet history clarified that it was for all classes of society and not merely the “vanguard of the working class” to be empowered to demand modification of the Communist Party politics and Soviet politics in general. Debates about the legacy of Stalin gave an opportunity to Soviet people to cultivate and to openly express individualized expectations. The speakers could come from various social and ethnic backgrounds and directly politicize their views, introducing them into the political mainstream.

As the main hero in the Soviet cult film "Beware of the Car" (1966), arrested for stealing cars and giving money to charity, said in his final statement before the court: "I just wanted to help!"

All of these measures destabilized the political situation not only in Soviet Union but also throughout the states of the socialist camp. Growing and diverse political anticipations demanded new mass upward social mobility, thus changing the composition of the nomenklatura; also sought was considerable modification of the political system. This could pose a danger to the personal power of Khrushchev and later to that of Brezhnev, and it could break the political monopoly of the Communist Party. Diversification of social anticipations during the Khrushchev Thaw divided Soviet society into pro- and anti-Stalinists, including some who criticized the Communist Party for supporting Khrushchev, others who criticized Khrushchev for supporting the Communist Party, and yet others who were against both.

Mass widespread social discontent varied from undercurrents of dissatisfaction to the overt riots and mass disorders leading to many causalities such as Novocherkassk massacre (June 2, 1962) or Prague Spring (January to August 1968).\(^55\)

In addition, a nationalist agenda presented the Communist Party with a dilemma: promote national unity or increase economic inequality?

The official propaganda promoted the necessity of collectivist values and the national solidarity of Soviet people but the implementation in practice was only possible through more inequality and alienation. The XXII session of the Communist Party (October 1961) proclaimed the establishment of a state of all people (obshenarodnoye gosudarstvo) that later became a crucial element of the 1977 Constitution of the Soviet Union, securing a leading role for the Communist Party among all workers and peoples of the country.

However, the Soviet economy as a hierarchically-organized labor division system within national boundaries had to keep a large number of people involved in low paid manual work in spite of growing expectations of upward social mobility.

Further, urbanization, the large-scale migration from rural areas to cities, exhausted the rural population as a crucial source of labor by the 1950s – 1960s. This created a conflict between a proclaimed national solidarity (collective production) and inequality (individual consumption) of hierarchically-organized social life where level consumption depended on the place within hierarchy.

Since the majority of people worked for the state this contradiction influenced the life trajectory of a majority of Soviet citizens, thus producing disappointed expectations and automatically politicizing them. Produced disappointments for individuals translated into narratives of their social, regional or ethnic backgrounds as latent resistance against the state, eroding the social basis of the Communist Party in particular and the Soviet nation in general.56

In response to the process of disintegration of the centralized management system, the Communist Party developed a sophisticated mechanism of control and discipline over the ruling class. Mikhail Suslov, Second Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Politburo member responsible for ideology, in his speech before the All-Union Conference of Ideological Workers (October 15, 1979), set mutually incompatible goals: be (self) critical against bureaucratic constraints as well as against a superficial approach towards ideological-educational work, but at the same time follow strictly established rules and procedures.

Specifically, Suslov referred to a Central Committee resolution “The Further Perfection of Ideological, Political and Educational Work.” This document suggested encouraging Soviet people to perceive and describe their life events and individual experience through the ideological framework of “real socialism” as represented by the 1977 Constitution of the Soviet Union and Brezhnev's memoirs such as “The Minor Land” (Malaya zemlya), “Rebirth” (Vozrozhdenie) and “Virgin Lands” (Tselina).

This put Communist Party members into what is known as a double bind; any response whatsoever to a part of the message results in a failed response to the other part, and vice versa. Participants could not solve the dilemma between what Mikhail Suslov said and what he really meant.

Although the message was clear (do as you are told and leave your future to the mercy of higher authorities), in reality any choice was wrong that made a certain person the potential object of negative sanctions that increased the Party’s control over the nomenklatura. For instance, the Central Committee could punish anyone for “formalism” in ideological work and represent the Communist Party as an advocate of people's interests against excessive red tape. Simultaneously, punishment for excessive “creativity” and “voluntarism” towards “popular initiatives” could result in informally representing the Communist Party as an advocate of the nomenklatura’s interests against society.  

Failure to set collective national objectives transformed into a necessity to fit together the fragmentation of the centralized management system and the growing diversity of social expectations with the legitimacy of a one-party system. The answer was a slogan, “Final Victory of Socialism,” declared at the 21st Congress of the Communist Party (1959). It later developed into the idea of “Real Socialism” during the Brezhnev Stagnation era. The ongoing disintegration was represented as proof of unity in diversity and the dynamism of socialism. Socialist economics was necessary to create the basis for building a communist society, the leadership said.

In reality, these ideological frameworks consisted of economic and humanitarian dimensions. The former implied investments in a large number of infrastructure projects that included logistics, irrigation, energy, and military infrastructure or space programs. The latter tried to involve society in the practical implementation of these initiatives. Both dimensions stressed the importance of the projects as basis for national solidarity but without explaining their rationale for economy and society as a whole. Different organizations and factions were willing to convince the Communist Party to support their projects while society was to a certain degree free to describe their individual participation experience and represent it publicly in literature, films or songs. For instance, during the 1970s many young people participated in so-called “Shock Construction Projects” such as the Baikal–Amur Mainline or the Kama Automobile Plant (KAMAZ) under coaching from the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol). These activities were reflected in Soviet mass culture as becoming crucial Soviet national symbols during Brezhnev period (1966 - 1982).

The “Soviet theory of ethnos” was an attempt to develop a scientific basis for the existence of Soviet people. Similar to ideological framework of the “Real Socialism” that did not exist in reality, Ethnos Theory was supposed to justify the existence of “Soviet people” during the rule of Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982) in spite of the persistence of ethnic differences in the USSR.

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57 Mikhail Suslov, Delo vsey parti [The Party’s Common Cause] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1979), 17, 23
In order to solve this contradiction, at least in theory, a group of Soviet ethnographers from Institute of Ethnography of Academy of Science, led by Academician Yulian Bromley, formulated a dualistic approach towards ethnic communities. It divided ethnos into etnikos with stable cultural features of historically formed communities of people and volatile ethno-social organisms where constant components take different shapes depending on economic formation in a Marxist Leninist sense.

Thus, the theory of ethnos combines subjective and objective factors where objective aspects presuppose that the abolition of class contradictions result in growth of ethnic homogeneity and that the formation of the new historical community of Soviet people as an interethnic entity based on socialism can exist. The subjective aspect covers ethnic self-awareness; that includes not simply membership but also collectively-shared opinions about the nature, territory and integrity of the ethnic community.

The identity “Soviet people” permitted individuals not just to perceive themselves as a part of this inter-ethnic entity but also to concretize this experience to local conditions of “small motherland” (native land) as a part of bigger Soviet motherland.

Perestroika: Centralized Decentralization

Unlike during the Stalin period when authorities used anti-state, anti-Bolshevik and other social sentiments that did not fit the Communist Party line to justify expansion of state power during the period from the 1920s to the 1950s, Gorbachev’s reforms during the second half of the 1980s used similar logic but in reverse order: he exploited anti-Soviet sentiments as important sources of his personal power that had much wider implications.

These measures officially institutionalized fragmentation of political and economic system.

Besides, unlike the synthesis combining the legacy of the 1930s New Deal and the 1960s counter-culture legacy into a new ideological framework during the Reagan years, Gorbachev used Stalin’s legacy to rely on a growing diversity of social expectations without any attempt to unify them into a coherent ideological framework. Instead, his exploitation of anti-Soviet sentiments marked the beginning of the narrowing of state power that had long-term effects during the final Soviet statehood crisis of the 1990s.

Disintegration of economics and politics forced Soviet leaders to look for alternative sources of political legitimacy. Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985-1986 publicly stressed on several occasions his critical attitude towards the current state of affairs in the Soviet Union and he admitted the necessity of rebuilding an economic system which had become inappropriate for the Soviet people. He called it the “improvement of socialism,” later known as Perestroika.

By the mid-1980s, it had become obvious that the Soviet Union had exhausted its internal resources. Fragmented economic links as well as political ambitions of individual institutions and factions outweighed national interests, impeding the mobilization of economic and political resources by the Communist Party to solve existing contradictions and misbalances. The Perestroika solution was to transfer the diversity of individualized social identities to the political mainstream, justified as “democratic socialism.” It meant that the logic of political leadership demanded the establishment of direct symbolic links with society, thus bypassing official institutions and expressing solidarity with those who felt excluded and discriminated against by the Soviet system.

As the crisis worsened, the ideology of Soviet leadership evolved from Mikhail Gorbachev’s alliance with dissidents like nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov to Boris Yeltsin who himself became a “dissident” by voluntarily resigning from Politburo.65

The exhaustion of resources forced Soviet leaders to look for alternative internal and external bases for their political legitimacy. The Communist Party passed a number of legal acts such as the Law on Individual Labor Activity (1986) or the Law on State Enterprises (1987) that not only officially institutionalized fragmentation of the Soviet national economy and central planning but also encouraged further disintegration under slogans of enhancing economic efficiency. By the late 1980s, the Soviet Union was no longer able to service foreign debt obligations to compensate for internal misbalances. In order to extend new loans Soviet authorities needed to meet the requirements of international financial institutions and implement neoliberal reforms of social welfare reduction, deregulation, and mass privatization.

For global capitalism, these reforms anchored certain positions of national economies within international value chains. For Soviet leaders, dependence on foreign investments was supposed to become a new economic basis for internal political legitimacy. In order to justify reliance on external legitimization, the *nomenklatura* tried to provide more freedom to units of the Soviet economy involved in underground commercial activities in exchange for political support.66

The search for alternative internal and external sources of political legitimacy posed a threat to Soviet authorities and the national integrity of the Soviet Union.

Democratization of Soviet society during Perestroika mobilized large numbers of people into the political process, bringing in those with diverse social background who had been previously excluded from the political mainstream. However, implementation of neoliberal economic policies inside the country and reliance on a nascent Soviet bourgeois class excluded the majority of society from economic and political activities and worsened the problems of social inequality. These actions deprived Soviet leaders of much-needed support.

On one hand, it was much easier to pursue commercial profit both on domestic and foreign markets without being a part of the Soviet economy and even the Soviet state. Economic freedom granted by the Communist Party obviated the need to check economic actions with other aspects of the economic system and to reckon with labor unions bearing additional mandatory expenses for social welfare. Simultaneously, there was growing opposition that publicly challenged the legitimacy of the Communist Party and tried to promote alternative projects for reforming Soviet politics and the economy that varied from nationalists, to Stalinists, to human rights advocates.67

Perestroika meant deconstruction of the Soviet meta-narrative. It put the Communist Party in a deadlock between the necessity to criticize the current state of affairs and an inability to develop a new positive agenda. Public discussion about existing problems during the “Era of Glasnost” helped to integrate individualized descriptions and claims towards the Soviet state into political discourse.

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The “Revert to Lenin” campaign opened official ideology to arbitrary interpretations under slogans of supposedly Leninist tactics of political pragmatism, thus allowing deviations from Marxist basics when required.

This justified the transition from ideas of “peaceful co-existence with West” or “convergence of Soviet and American systems” to complete renunciation of the Soviet experience as a “deviation from world civilization” and the eventual transition to a market economy. Simultaneously, criticism towards state violence and socialist modernization during the Stalin period delegitimized any attempts to “re-build” Soviet nationalism via a comprehensive ideological narrative.

As a result, the Communist Party failed to justify state interventions or to offer new ideology to recover from a crisis; it had nothing with which to confront the onrushing collapse of Soviet statehood.

The last desperate effort to hold onto power included a transition to personal dictatorship and then, the total disintegration of state institutions. During the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, it had become popular to muse about a national leader who would extricate the Soviet Union from sliding into chaos and somehow combine the interests of the national bourgeoisie with the political will of disadvantaged classes in pursuit of social justice. The image of a strong leader varied from the Stalin-type to the Pinochet-type of dictator, one who would complete neoliberal reforms and transition to market economy or re-establish the old order.

Conforming to this public mood, Mikhail Gorbachev tried to change his status from leader of Communist Party to national leader, becoming the first President of the Soviet Union, on March 15, 1990, without general elections. However, a similar process of pursuing personal leadership on the regional level spread throughout the country. These self-proclaimed “dictators” ranged from leaders of Soviet republics to local crime lords.

Eventually, a failed coup d’état on August 19, 1991, made it clear that Mikhail Gorbachev could rely neither on crumbling Communist Party nor on alternative political forces mobilized during Perestroika. The end of the year witnessed the institutionalized disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion: Towards the New World Order

President George H.W. Bush proclaimed the beginning of a New World Order on January 17, 1991.


Although the speech was about the beginning of airstrikes against Iraq, it had much deeper meaning and wider implication. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp in 1991, the United States was left as the only power that could set and enforce international rules. Achievement of this superpower status was the result of efficiently reforming political, economic and cultural aspects of American society in response to crises.

Social turmoil during the 1960s significantly challenged a modernist vision of human life and society. In both the United States and the Soviet Union, many shared a similar illusion: that solutions to social problems lie principally in the field of economics.

As Zygmunt Bauman put it, modernity was preoccupied with “orderly, manageable society, to make human affairs regular and amenable to planning and control.” Yet, the horrors of two world wars dampened some illusions of progress, even though the development of computer technologies, medical breakthroughs, meaningful social progress, and several postwar economic booms occasionally restored the faith of many in modernity.

Ironically, there is today a disintegration of global capitalism, as mankind confronts what it was fighting six decades ago: namely de-humanization. While mainstream culture around the globe summons individuals to discover and develop positive aspects of their personality, on-going artificial intelligence advances foreshadow the possible control of freedom and innovation in human life through algorithmizing of big data.

The experience of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union should clearly demonstrate to contemporary mankind that attempts to ignore the human dimension or to put diversity of social life into Procrustean bed of algorithms may have devastating consequences.

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Civilizational Dynamics of "Hybrid Warfare"

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, analysts have struggled to make sense of the proliferation of smaller scale conflicts. Several labels have been used to describe this phenomenon, the most recent being “Hybrid Warfare.” This paper attempts to analyze them through the perspective of civilizational theory.

Very rarely, however, have the civilizational dimensions to these "Hybrid Wars" been extensively addressed. Considering that civilizations represent collective identities on perhaps the most macro-scale, they play an important potential dimension in this ongoing debate. Avoiding any gross simplified variation of a "clash of civilizations" type thesis, a civilizational perspective into this debate can also shed significant insight into the nature of intra-civilizational conflicts and how they might also overlap with any inter-civilizational conflicts.

A civilizational perspective also raises the critical issue of the persistence of collective identities, even in an increasingly globalized world.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War not only brought about a marked transition in world order; it also marked a critical transitional moment from modern to “late-modern” forms of warfare. Throughout this time, stretching from the 1990s to the present-day, numerous terms have been proposed to define this phenomenon, among them “New Wars,” “Asymmetrical,” “Non-Linear” and more recently “Hybrid.” Intense debates contend about what are the significant differences between these terms, if any significant differences do exist. However, analysts all seem to agree that the nature of warfare in the post-Cold War world is seemingly more complex and chaotic than during the previous Cold War era. Many have even argued that traditional military theory (represented by Carl von Clausewitz) is absolutely obsolete in this environment.¹

In parallel to these debates, in the early nineties, Samuel Huntington caused a huge uproar with his analysis concerning what he regarded as a marked transition in global geopolitics, from the age of ideological blocs to the one of a “clash of civilizations.”

One marked aspect of this clash concerns what Huntington referred to as “fault-line wars” that primarily are defined as “communal conflicts between states or groups from different civilizations.” Certain parallels to the current rethinking of the nature of warfare are intriguing and do deserve a reexamination in light of subsequent events and research.

Aside from Huntington’s analysis of “fault-line wars,” there has been extraordinarily little if any major attempt to analyze the phenomenon of post-Cold War conflicts through the prism of civilizations or civilizational theory. Most literature related to “hybrid warfare” refers to the tactical or strategic elements, while this paper seeks to analyze these conflicts through the prism of what it can discern regarding civilizational dynamics in the contemporary world.

It is primarily the clashes of collective identities that hold the most proper interest for civilizational-based scholarship, for even the whole “clash of civilizations” thesis is built upon this basic framework, albeit on a macro-scale. A proper civilizational analysis need not be wed to only a macro-scale viewpoint, or at least not on any simplistic model of such.

“Hybrid Wars” and the clash of collective identities need not involve simply the clash of one civilization against another civilization; they may just as well involve clashes within a civilization or rather one faction of a civilization battling within its own civilization as well as battling factions of another civilization. This suggests the multi-faceted nature of these conflicts and how they correspond to the multi-faceted nature of civilizations and collective identities in and of themselves. This overlap implies a certain civilizational ontology to such conflicts. The formal addressing of this element has often been neglected within both the existing body of scholarship and the established civilizational analysis. There are several possible reasons for this, which shall hopefully be addressed to a sufficient extent within this paper. A proper synthesis of the existing scholarships holds much potential for yielding meaningful results into the underlining relationship of war and peace at the present moment in world history and its potential future.

The multi-layered approach necessary for investigating the nature of hybrid wars is a natural fit for a civilizational paradigm. Civilizational analysis also provides a fruitful potential for enriching the scholarship in the field, given its proper interdisciplinary nature. Too often over-specialization in scholarship can hinder investigating complex phenomenon for the varying angles and paradigms necessary for obtaining a proper comprehensive understanding.

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Humanity at the current moment faces a precarious state of affairs which lays at the very heart of this explosion of hybrid wars. On the one hand, they testify to the endurance of collective identities; however, at the very same time, the existence of Globalization testifies to the reality of cosmopolitanism and a proper engagement with that reality as well.\(^3\) This tension cannot be easily resolved, if such a resolution is even possible. This is not necessarily a reason for despair, for tensions are part of the human condition and can often provide outlets for human creativity.

**Theoretical Outline of “Hybrid Warfare”**

Among the first to analyze the shift in military conflicts in the post-Cold War era was the noted Israeli Martin Van Creveld in his 1991 book *The Transformation of War*. Creveld made the argument that the age of modern warfare, dominated by the modern state, was over. In its place would be a shift to lower-scale tribal-forms of warfare that would become the new norm.

As Creveld starts off his book: “A ghost is stalking the corridors of general staffs and defense departments all over the ‘developed’ world — the fear of military impotence, even irrelevance.”\(^4\)

Towards the end of the decade, Mary Kaldor followed up with her analysis of so-called “New Wars.” Whilst “Old Wars” were characterized by large-scale clashes between states, “New Wars” are often characterized by smaller-scale clashes by varying networks across both local and global contexts fought by varying forces. Examples involve human trafficking, new forms of slavery such as in Libya, Boko Haram, ISIS, al Qaeda and the global narco-traffickers; in addition, there are terrorists, insurgents, and proxy actors such as in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Iraq.\(^5\)

“Old Wars” were predominantly about geopolitical objectives; “New Wars” are primarily about asserting collective identity politics.\(^6\) The parallels to Creveld’s analysis are striking. There was significant debate over the concept of “New Wars” that predominated during the late 1990s and 2000s.\(^7\)

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6 Ibid. pg. 7.
The context of Kaldor’s analysis was largely to make sense of the ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia as well as the struggle against terrorism, in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, which often necessitated the use of Humanitarian Interventionism on the part of NATO forces as a response.

Since the 2010s there has been a shift towards a different conceptualization called “Hybrid Warfare.” Frank Hoffman was the first to coin the term “Hybrid War” in 2007, arguing that it constituted a combination of actors (both state and non-state) using a mixture of regular and irregular military means to achieve their common strategic and geopolitical objectives.  

Although Frank Hoffman was the first to conceptualize “Hybrid Warfare,” he certainly has not been the only scholar to write on the subject. Col. John J. McCuen (Ret.) further explains the nature of “Hybrid Warfare” as follows:

Although conventional in form, the decisive battles in today’s hybrid wars are fought not on conventional battlegrounds, but on asymmetric battlegrounds within the conflict zone population, the home front population, and the international community population. Irregular, asymmetric battles fought within these populations ultimately determine success or failure.

Unfortunately, a major weakness of “Hybrid War” theory is that there is no consensus about how exactly to define it, and many of the conflicts it seeks to analyze are still ongoing and thus difficult to analyze fully with precision. To avoid this difficulty, this paper largely relies upon Frank Hoffman’s original conceptual framework.

While sharing many of the critical characteristics of the “New Wars,” there is one significant difference in that the “New Wars” were generally characterized as being conducted outside the sovereignty of the modern state. By contrast, “Hybrid Wars” were characterized as being used by both state and non-state actors, and furthermore derived from a blurring of the distinctions between the two.

Part of this contrast can be explained by considering the contrasting geopolitical contexts of their formulations.

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10 Hoffman, pg. 8.
Much of the discourse of the “New Wars” was situated in the immediate post-Cold War context of American and NATO hegemony that engaged in humanitarian interventions and focused more on the prerogatives of non-state actors. Its paradigmatic example was the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina of the 1990s. By contrast, the “Hybrid War” discourse considers the resurgence of competing great powers (such as Russia, China, India, etc.) and how such powers might exploit irregular and non-state forces to their wider geopolitical ends.

As Alex Deep explained: “The unipolar moment that has persisted since the fall of the Soviet Union has given rise to an international system in which unconventional challenges to the idea of traditional state-on-state war are increasingly prevalent.” Its paradigmatic case study remains the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the continuing conflict in eastern Ukraine.

One major strength of the “New Wars” discourse was its analysis of the importance of collective identities in such conflicts, and their continual role in a globalized world. With the resurgence of populist nationalism throughout the world in the past decade, this bleeds into the current discourse of “Hybrid War” as well.

A predominant weakness of the “New Wars” discourse was the emphasis of a certain cosmopolitan approach to collective identities (both on the local and especially on the global scale), which almost seeks to disregard the importance such identities hold upon human groupings. Mary Kaldor herself is deeply dedicated to this cosmopolitan approach. Given the geopolitical context of “New Wars” discourse explained above, this made some sense.

By contrast, “Hybrid War” theorists tend to take into more proper consideration the continual reality of great power competition. In another contrast to the “New Wars” discourse, “Hybrid War” theorists tend not to focus so much on the importance of nationalism and collective identity politics, but rather to focus more on the wider geopolitical implications of the rise of powers capable of challenging American and Western hegemony. Nationalism, if addressed, is usually interpreted as one tool of such powers to expanding their spheres of influence.

In a comparable manner, the relevance of civilizations in connection with hybrid warfare has largely been absent from the related scholarship. This is not an easy issue to address, not in the least because it requires discerning the best conceptualization of “civilization” that would be most appropriate for the task at hand. To achieve this goal, a foundational look at the underlining nature or ontology of civilizations is required.

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Theoretical Outline of Civilizational Ontology

The dynamics of human identities are complex and operate upon varying levels. This helps necessitate the need for a civilizational paradigm that can carefully consider these complex levels that participate in hybrid wars. Whilst a certain “clash of civilizations” type of scenario is involved here, it does not, however, account for the totality of such realities.

To provide one famous example: the inter-ethnic conflicts in the Balkans of the 1990s were as much a “clash of civilizations” (Western Latin Catholics vs. Eastern Orthodox vs. Islamic) but yet could also be simultaneously interpreted as an intra-cultural clash between different groupings of a fairly common southern Slavic meta-culture (former Yugoslavia in a certain political sense).

This type of dynamic is seen in other examples of hybrid war type conflicts—that the conflicting sides are fighting for distinct identities (even civilizational ones at times), yet at the same time these identities’ characteristics can be very blurred. The current on-going conflict in Ukraine between ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians presents a similar perplexing dynamic involving two distinct historical identities that have strong historical ties to one another as well.

This raises a fundamental concern for studies of Civilizational Ontology. Civilizational Ontology is concerned with the underlining nature of civilizations and seeks to define their fundamental characteristics.

This can prove to be an elusive task, as demonstrated by the innumerable definitions for what exactly is considered a “civilization.” This difficulty is due to the inherent complex natures of civilizations, which also further necessitate the need for a multi-paradigmatic approach in Civilizational Ontology. This helps establish Civilizational Ontology as a proper over-arching framework to properly synthesize the varying definitions and approaches regarding civilizations.

Due to this multifaceted nature of civilizations, a certain Civilizational Uncertainty Principle could be proposed as a foundational starting point for Civilizational Ontology. This Civilizational Uncertainty Principle would stipulate that the more one attempts to precisely define a civilization’s characteristics the less we know of its essential qualities.

Working on certain metaphors with natural sciences such as physics and astronomy, civilizations can be best understood as constituting cosmologies on their own accord. Pitirim Sorokin spoke of a Socio-Cultural “universe” from which its dynamics could be studied in depth.
This would establish the multi-faceted and multi-layered natures of civilizational reality, yet also note the holistic unity at its foundation—albeit a chaotic unity.

The Civilizational Uncertainty Principle should not be interpreted as negating the necessity for precision in defining the characteristics of civilizations, but rather simply stressing the inherent limitations in achieving an over-arching precision. Civilizations do exist and can be defined with a certain amount of precision; yet too much precision can come at the cost of totality. Totality is a necessity for any macro-scale study of reality, and civilizations do represent a macro-scale reality in the human universe. As E.F. Schumacher once explained:

Maybe it is necessarily so that the higher things cannot be known with the same degree of certainty as can the lesser things, in which case it would be a very great loss if knowledge were limited to things beyond the possibility of doubt.\(^{14}\)

Even given these inherent limitations and uncertainty, certain fundamental characteristics of civilizational ontology can be established. There are two main approaches to analyzing civilizational ontology, which roughly parallels the distinction between substances as opposed to processes that exist within philosophy.\(^{15}\) They are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but this distinction can pose significant challenges if the goal is to synthesize these two approaches properly because they have differing implications. For example, most conceptions of the “Clash of Civilizations” thesis often exemplify a more substance or essentialist style of analysis.\(^{16}\)

An issue related to civilizational uncertainty as well as the distinction between substantial and processual approaches regards civilizational borderlines. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson summarized the dilemma:

It is quite challenging to determine where any one civilization ends and another begins, even though every kind of analysis of what a civilization is or does depends, at least implicitly on some sort of boundary-demarcation exercise.\(^{17}\)

That means borderlines between civilizations can often be blurred. This should not mean resorting to the opposite extreme of arguing that civilizational identities are meaningless and that such borderlines do not exist.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
\(^{17}\) *Civilizations in World Politics*, pg. 176
Rather, a more balanced argument could present such borderlines as operating on a gradual spectrum of degrees as opposed to abrupt black/white dichotomies. Participants in hybrid wars often resort to such dichotomies to help bolster the distinction of friend and foe.

This presents a challenging complexity to hybrid warfare theory that parallels the challenging complexities of civilizational ontology in general. A resort to a Weberian Ideal Type methodology may be the best resource available to pinpoint distinct characteristics of certain civilizations from one another, yet without sacrificing the honest recognition of the peculiar contingent circumstances involved in each context.

Benjamin Nelson, a pioneering historical sociologist of civilizations, made it a goal of his scholarship to help resolve this exact kind of issue. He famously argued about the existence of “civilizational complexes” and “inter-civilizational encounters” as being at the heart of civilizational analysis. This provides a potential framework to synthesize the substantial and processual approaches more properly. This would involve expanding Nelson’s bipartite model into a tripartite model as follows:

1. “Civilizational Complexes” (or “Civilizational Complexity”) involve the most basic underlining principle. Civilizations are complex macro-scale social entities.

2. “Intra-Civilizational Encounters:” Due to the inherently complex nature of civilizations, many subgroups and sub-entities within civilizations will internally interact with one another on various levels. This can take the form of both cooperative and antagonistic forms.

3. “Inter-Civilizational Encounters:” Civilizations can and often do interact with one another in external forms as well, but like its internal counterpart can take the form of both cooperative and antagonistic forms.

This model can help establish the complicated and overlapping nature of civilizational encounters as noted above related to the hybrid wars phenomenon. Hybrid Wars cannot be simply reduced to a simplistic “clash of civilizations” scenario, even if on the surface it might have the appearance of such. Rather, as mentioned in the example of the current clashes between Ukraine and Russia, it can be as much a clash within civilizations as a clash between civilizations.

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This is reflective of the on-going processes of Globalization that have produced the possibility for greater interconnections around the world, even producing the possibility for the creation of a world-wide “meta-civilization.” This has had the effect of further blurring the distinctions between “inter” and “intra” civilizational encounters. “Hybrid warfare” can possibly be considered a predominant form of “civilizational encounters” of the contemporary world. It is, so to speak, the other side of the coin of an increasingly globalized world.

The entire nature of the debate concerning the underlining principles of civilizational ontology and analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, which is focused on the relevance of civilizations and civilizational analysis in regard to contemporary forms of hybrid warfare. It is hopeful that a useful preliminary introduction to the relevant issues has been presented to create a workable framework to proceed further in research.

Hybrid Wars and Geopolitical Prospects

The question then arises: what is to be done, or rather what can be done, about the hybrid wars phenomenon? There are no simple or easy answers to such questions, although it must be acknowledged they do raise particularly prominent issues that must be properly addressed. Among them is the harsh truth that warfare is both a potential and an actual reality in our world. The paradox one must contemplate is that peace itself is dependent upon military force to become a reality in the modern world. War thus has not become obsolete, as many such as Steven Pinker have argued, but rather may be the best possible means for securing peace.

This paradox is borne in the issue of deterrence being among the best means for securing peace. During the Cold War, nuclear-based mutually assured destruction (M.A.D.) was a critical factor in preventing direct military conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union.

It can also be argued that the military predominance of the United States over that of any other potential major military rival in the post-Cold War world has been a critical factor in the decline of inter-state wars as well. The conceptual framework presuming that peace and warfare as mutually exclusive is counterproductive for such purposes, especially in the age of hybrid wars which themselves break traditional frameworks for understanding warfare.

This means that “war,” “peace,” and even “deterrence” can and often do mean different things depending upon the historical, civilizational, and geopolitical contexts involved.

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The age of hybrid wars would necessitate a different understanding of “deterrence” than what existed in the Cold War. A suitable form of “deterrence” in the age of hybrid wars would include not just nuclear weapons but, as James K. Wither explains, would also have to expand into “the application of specific political, informational, economic, diplomatic” as well as traditional military means.\(^\text{20}\)

Hybrid Wars are paradoxically not only a means of deterrence but also a means around deterrence as well. To provide one contemporary example: Russia may not be able to invade and to conquer parts of eastern Ukraine directly, as might have been possible in a nineteenth or early twentieth century context. (Crimea remains the only exception.) Not only could it prove too costly for Russia to mount a direct invasion, but it faces a severe blow to its international reputation as well. However, giving support to pro-Russian paramilitary forces as a means to help extend its geopolitical interests in the region is a more viable option for Russia to pursue. At the same time, such paramilitary forces could use the indirect Russian support to help further their own ends as well within the Ukrainian realm.

As military analysts Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky explain, this ultimately leads to a situation where “the unplanned succession of different tools to fit different — often unexpected — operational realities” takes its full effect.\(^\text{21}\)

There is the more civilizational-orientated paradigm that enters into this mix as well. Sticking to the Ukrainian example above, Samuel Huntington argued back in 1993 that it provided a potential “clash of civilizations” between the Catholic Uniate West and the Orthodox East.\(^\text{22}\)

In light of the current situation, subsequent civilizational analysis proves a certain rethinking of Huntington’s paradigm.

- For one thing, the current clashes seem as much between the Ukrainian Orthodox against the Russian Orthodox—which would indicate an “intra-civilizational clash.”
- Second, the Ukrainian Orthodox and Ukrainian Uniate Catholics seem more united against the Orthodox Russians.
- Third, the Ukrainian Uniate Catholic Church is an Eastern-rite of the Catholic Church, with liturgies and theology remarkably similar to the Eastern Orthodox.

\(^{22}\) Huntington, pg. 37.
Fourth, the issue of a united Ukrainian Orthodox Church independent of the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate was a major issue which even resulted in a full schism between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul in 2018.

The underlining point is that in this example it can be remarkably difficult to determine which civilizations are clashing exactly. This relates to a larger issue of how best to define what “civilization” even means in a given geopolitical context.

Civilizations and geopolitical blocs do not necessarily correspond with one another as Huntington presumed when he articulated his “clash of civilizations” model, almost in a manner of projecting the Cold War model of two monolithic blocs opposed to one another into the realm of civilizations. This approach, while still common at the time of Huntington’s writing, neglects the greater complexity of the Cold War, in which different factions sought to exploit the support of one of the two major superpowers to further their own interests.

This was especially the case in terms of the relationship between the Soviet Union and Communist China, which ended in a bitter ideological split and conflict.

In an analogous manner, civilizations should not be interpreted as monolithic, either. This is not to suggest that civilizations are irrelevant to geopolitics, but that the manner in which they are relevant should not simply be reduced to clashes between groups of differing civilizations. The Ukraine case, as explained above, helps to demonstrate the difficulties that can arise when attempting to impose such a model on actual realities.

In fairness to Huntington, the events in Ukraine transpired long after he first formulated his theories and subsequently never had the opportunity to modify his model to suit the current situation due to his death in 2008. It should also be pointed out that Huntington acknowledges the difficulty of trying to pinpoint the exact boundaries between civilizations, which corresponds to the Civilizational Uncertainty Principle articulated earlier. Nevertheless, these do not negate the significant weaknesses and flaws in Huntington’s model that should be further reexamined in light of current circumstances.

Given these kinds of circumstances in which hybrid wars tend to thrive, peace may not necessarily mean the complete absence of violence but rather the lack of escalation in violence to mutually assured destruction levels of intensity.

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23 Ibid., pg. 21.
24 Ibid., pg. 43.
Research concerning the violence in the former Yugoslavia had led researcher Yaneer Bar-Yam to conclude that “well defined boundaries that allow for more local autonomy”25 may be the best means to resolving such long-term tensions between warring groups. These may not necessarily correspond to civilizational boundaries (which are difficult to pinpoint), but no doubt civilizational analysis could play a critical role in helping to discern where those boundaries do exist.

Conclusion

The analysis of contemporary forms of warfare continues to be an on-going issue. It is vitally important that Civilizational Analysis should play a critical role in helping understand this aspect of our world.

There already exists ample precedence for Civilizational Analysis being applied to the general study of warfare, as Matthew Melko’s example was able to demonstrate.26 There is also the analogous increase of scholarship related to the subject matter that already exists in the field of Sociology and Social Evolution studies.27 Therefore, it is not out of the question for Civilizational Analysis to be able to investigate this phenomenon thoroughly as well.

This paper does not intend to present an exhaustive investigation into the matter, but rather seeks to help provide a foundation for further research by civilizational scholars. The subject of contemporary forms of hybrid warfare is complex enough that it could be studied from any number of paradigmatic angles. It would also be paramount to avoid any simplistic definitions of civilizations and applying them in ahistorical and inappropriate contexts.

This was among the fundamental flaws of Samuel P. Huntington’s model, which also emphasized too much the “clash” as well. Contemporary hybrid warfare is more complex than that and may actually include clashes within civilizations as much as between them. However much we may dislike it, warfare remains a critical part of our world.

It is necessary for civilizational analysts to pay close attention to hybrid warfare if it seeks to better understand the world as it exists.

By doing so, their perspective would be greatly welcomed, since by nature they are comfortable with investigating complex human social groups and behaviors which lay at the heart of the very phenomenon of civilizations.

References


The Psychology Department, Brandeis University in the 1960s: A Comment on Feigenbaum’s Memoir

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Kenneth Feigenbaum has written a colorful account of his time as a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at Brandeis University from 1962-1965 and his interactions with Abraham Maslow (Comparative Civilizations Review: No. 82. 63-73, 2020). This view, from the perspective of the graduate students, supplements Feigenbaum’s account.

I applied to the Department of Psychology in 1963. I was finishing up my B.A. in psychology at St. John’s College, Cambridge University, and I had decided to emigrate to the United States. (I had met a family in California who agreed to sponsor me.) I applied to the University of California, Berkeley. I did not know that American undergraduates applied to several graduate schools, and so I was content with that one application.

However, I noticed a flier on a bulletin board from Brandeis University offering fellowships for foreign students, and I decided to apply, even though it was on the other side of the country from Berkeley.

My psychology advisor and I checked on the psychology faculty at Brandeis, and we had not heard of any of them, including Abraham Maslow. (The psychology department at Cambridge University was a Department of Experimental Psychology.) Berkeley did not offer me a scholarship. Brandeis did, and so I chose Brandeis.

I did not get the foreign student fellowship, but instead a Charles Revson Science Fellowship which paid my tuition and $3,000 a year for living expenses. (The foreign fellowship went to John Benjafield from Canada who graduated and rose to become a Full Professor at Brock University in Canada.) Since Kenneth Feigenbaum was in charge of graduate admissions, I must thank him sincerely for admitting me.

In my first year, I was assigned to Jerome Wodinsky to run a rat study for him, and that led to my interest in animal research. During my three years there, I carried out and published many studies on exploratory behavior in rats. The psychological department paid for the food and shavings for the rats and for the first few batches of rats.

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¹ David Lester is a suicidologist and has served as President of the International Association for the Prevention of Suicide.
I eventually started my own breeding colony to save the department expenses (even keeping the rats in my apartment). The department never asked me what research I was doing or even about my research publications.

Having now learned who Maslow was, I wanted to take a course with him. He was not offering graduate courses because, he said, graduate students were too angry and, therefore, a nuisance. I took an undergraduate course on utopias with him that he team-taught with Frank Manuel. It was an interesting course, and Maslow let Manual, a dynamic individual, take the lead in the course. Since I was now the only current graduate student that Maslow knew, he asked me to be his teaching assistant for his undergraduate course. Of course, I accepted.

His teaching style continued to be low-key. At one point, the students in the seminar told Maslow that he was talking too much and that he should be quiet until they asked him a question. He agreed – for two weeks. Then he shut them up and took over again.

In my first year there were eight entering graduate students, and, under the Maslow culture, we were the last students who were allowed to choose our own topic for our dissertations. (Thereafter, graduate students were assigned to help faculty with faculty research.) I chose suicide. Since no one in the department knew anything about suicide, I was assigned to a new faculty member, Melvin Schnall, who was a developmental psychologist.

The psychology department, led by Ricardo Morant as chairperson, had three groups: experimental psychologists, humanistic psychologists and clinicians, and the three groups did not seem to get along. However, in my three years there, I got to know and to learn the theories of three major figures in the field. There was Maslow, of course, and in my second year George Kelly came. In addition, for one semester each year, Walter Toman, an Austrian psychoanalyst, came and taught his modern, rational version of Freudian theory. Maslow thought that a major, but ignored, theorist of personality was Andras Angyal, and Maslow convinced me that Angyal had, indeed, proposed a powerful theory of personality. (Eugenia Hanfman and Richard Jones of the psychology department edited Angyal’s essays for a book on his theory.)

These three theorists (Angyal, Kelly and Toman) are the underpinnings of my own theory of personality, and I am still amazed that this small department of psychology should have introduced me to three major theories of the mind.

What was the mood of the graduate students? We had our own lounge in the department and a few offices for the senior graduate students. The mood was one of gaiety and support. We had a pet gerbil in the lounge named Harry Harlow.
On one occasion, a new faculty member (Harvey London) was showing his undergraduate students the film of Stanley Milgram’s obedience research, but he would not the graduate students in to view it. We called Maslow at home to protest, and Harvey had to let us in.

As for supporting one another, we were allowed to attend dissertation defenses and ask questions and, on one occasion a graduate student (Myron Arons) asked a question. We took him aside and told him that the unwritten rule was that, even though we were allowed to, graduate students never asked questions.

An interesting contrast came when George Kelly arrived. He brought his best graduate student with him (Jack Adams-Webber), and he developed some followers in the department. Early in his seminar, Kelly said that he wanted to split the seminar into two groups – one for him and one against him. This was despite Kelly’s own theoretical construct of constructive alternativism. His supporters argued him out of this because, they said, they wanted to hear the critical questions and his response to them.

Maslow was on my dissertation committee. I went to his office where he was lying on his couch. I sat in his chair at his desk and waited. “David, I would never write a dissertation like this.” My stomach churned. “But who I am to tell you how to write your dissertation? I think you will be a good psychologist. Are you happy with it?” “Yes, Dr. Maslow,” I replied. “If you’re happy with it, then I am,” and he signed the form. Maslow was true to his theory. I was allowed to self-actualize rather than help him actualize his potential.

What of my path through the psychology department? I continued my research on rats (eleven published papers by the end of 1967). The department did not offer a master’s degree. You were given an M.A. if they threw you out. I told them that I wanted an honest M.A. I applied for an M.A., much to their dismay. I had published articles in Psychological Bulletin (on the fear of death) and some research articles on the fear of death, and so the department awarded me an M.A. on that topic, using my published papers.

My thesis advisor (Schnall) had a rule passed that graduate students could not publish without faculty permission. I went to Ricardo Morant, the chairperson, and protested. I had published far more than Schnall, and so he also should have to get approval. Morant calmed me down, and we found a way around the rule, basically letting me ignore it.

The result was that Schnall threw me out, and I asked James Klee to be my thesis advisor even though it was already written. He agreed.
My thesis defense was scheduled while Schnall was teaching, and the thesis defense of Schnall’s student was scheduled while Klee was teaching. And no graduate student asked me any questions at my defense!

Myron Arons, a graduate student starting in 1965, left with only a master’s degree and persuaded James Klee to join the faculty at West Georgia College in 1970. (Feigenbaum has his dates wrong here.) Klee died in 1996. Maslow retired in 1969 and moved to California where he died in 1970. Kelly died in 1967. Schnall was denied tenure and became a child psychologist in Massachusetts. Feigenbaum is correct in that the psychology department at Brandeis shows no interest in its history. Several years ago, I tried to get their help in tracing all the graduate students from the early years. They declined to help. Of my group of eight, three finished their PhDs – myself, John Benjafield and Clair Golomb.

A final note. At one point, as an angry young man, I said to Marianne Simmel (a professor in the psychology department) that Maslow had produced only one good idea in his life. “David, if you have one good idea, you’ll be very happy,” she said.

I am still waiting for that one good idea.

References
Response to Prof. Ernest B. Hook’s Comments On “So-Called Euroasianism”

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I was quite pleased by the fact that a professor, a full professor from the prestigious University of California Berkeley, not only read my article, but commented on it. (Comparative Civilizations Review: No. 82. 129, 2020) Indeed, millions of articles are published every year, and the vast majority are absolutely ignored.

In order to respond to Professor Hook’s criticisms, I believe I need to do the following:

1) To provide a short synopsis of my article, “The Twisted Mirror of Perception: Social Science in Service of Political/Ideological Expediency – The Case of Russian Eurasianism.” (Comparative Civilizations Review: No. 81. 9-29, 2019)

It will help those potential readers who did not read my original article.

2) I would not elaborate on Prof. Hook’s assertion that I am a “Putinist” and do not see the evil of Putin’s dictatorship. The reason for this is simple: the response requires another long, separate letter. And my present response is long enough. At the same time, I would be happy to respond to Professor Hook’s statement in a separate letter, of course upon request. Also, Professor Hook as well as others, of course, could find useful information about my views about Putin’s regime in my forthcoming book, to be released by Palgrave.

3) I will focus on two of Professor Hook’s objections:
   a) I claim that Francis Fukuyama was almost universally accepted in the beginning of the post-Cold War era, and
   b) I claim that both Gorbachev by the end of his tenure and Yeltsin were viewed quite negatively by the majority of Russians.

Prof. Hook published a critical response to my article on the fate of Eurasianism, the idiosyncratic political/philosophical doctrine which emerged among Russian émigrés in the 1920s. I hold that interest in the creed in the United States and assessment of its influence in Russia has been related not so much to the influence of the teaching in Russia, but to the need of the “market,” the general public, political and economic elite, and academia. And this implicitly shows how intellectual output is produced in the West, especially the USA.
Consequently, Western scholars ignored or marginalized Eurasianism when it was quite popular in Russia, plainly because Eurasianism, with its stress on Russian cultural uniqueness and penchant for authoritarian-totalitarian rule, did not fit the prevailing Fukuyamian “end of history.” At the same time, interest in the creed re-emerged in the 2000s and especially after 2014, when American observers started to assert that Eurasianism, or at least such people as Alexander Dugin, became quite influential in shaping Kremlin policy.

It was done at the time when interest in Eurasianism in Russia had declined sharply and Dugin became a political non-entity for the Kremlin.

The reason for such changes in views was, once again, the need of the American public, at least a good part of it – the socio-economic and related political elite. All of them wanted to present Russia as an insane imperialist, pouncing on the peaceful West. Thus, I conclude that many Western, especially American, scholars do not so much study events “as they are,” to paraphrase Leopold von Ranke’s famous expression, but as a “marketable” intellectual product, often decorated with a postmodernist “fig leaf.”

The assumption that American scholars do not engage in abstract detached research but often instinctively look for “marketable” intellectual output, whereas the market could be the public, academia, or government, apparently irritated Prof. Hook and led him to respond to my article, raising several objections. I will limit my analysis to two of them. First, he challenged my assumption that the premise of Fukuyamism was universally accepted. Secondly, he challenged my statement that Gorbachev and Yeltsin were hated by the majority. Let me start with his first premise. I am a historian, and one of the principles of the craft is to look at a phenomenon from a historical perspective. Timing is often, albeit not always, essential. If I were to state that Fukuyamism is prevailing today, I would definitely be wrong. After Trump’s victory, the rise of “populism” and the statement of Fukuyama himself, who often started to sound quite un-Fukuyamian, one could indeed state that the idea of total domination of the “end of history” is far-fetched.

Moreover, there is one publication in a most prestigious press which elaborates on some ideas that were unthinkable, almost obscene, a generation ago. Jason Brennan published a book entitled Against Democracy. The major notion of the book is surprisingly simple: the idea of one-man-one-vote is dangerous. The point here is that the average American is just a primitive, illogical “basket of deplorables,” if one would remember Hillary Clinton’s expression, and their collective decisions could be disastrous. Thus, only a few educated persons should make decisions.

There was hardly novelty in this idea.
Even those who had the most perfunctory knowledge of history or political thought would state that such an idea has been in circulation for more than 2,000 years, at least from the time of Plato and Confucius. It looks as if it was widely circulated in present-day China. At least this idea was elaborated to me in impeccable English by a young Chinese woman with whom I strolled along by a lake in the summer residence of the Chinese emperors.

The extraordinary nature of the book is the fact that it was published by a leading academic publishing house (Princeton University Press). There is no doubt that at the time when Fukuyama penned his famous essay, the proposal for such a book would be immediately rejected by any Western publisher, more so by such a prestigious one as Princeton University Press.

Jason Brennan is hardly alone in his views on democracy and implicitly on average Westerners, especially Americans. Tom Nichols, a contributor to the prestigious *Foreign Affairs*, lamented that present-day average Americans ignore the views of experts and have become stupid, arrogant zombies. The present-day intellectual and, implicitly, political arrangements are nothing but the road to “idiocracy” and “in such an environment, anything and everything becomes possible, including the end of democracy and republican government itself.” (Tom Nichols, “How America lost faith in expertise. And why that’s a giant problem,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-02-13/how-america-lost-faith-e...)

Tom Nichols’s view on democracy and implicitly the *hoi polloi* is structurally similar to Brennan’s, albeit not without a difference: For Brennan, the “deplorable” is still in power and should be replaced by the rule of the enlightened authoritarian elite, for Nichols the elite is still in power. Still, its enlightened rule could be challenged by rising “deplorables.”

Yet, with all their differences, both authors implicitly conclude that democracy as it is usually understood is not a workable institution. So, when I state that Fukuyamism was almost totally embraced in the West, especially in the USA, I mean not today or even more so tomorrow, when authoritarianism and, possibly even totalitarianism, could be increasingly in vogue, especially if the economy tanks. However, I am speaking of what was true more than 30 years ago, in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

If Fukuyamism were not the dominant trend, anti-Fukuyamian ideas would be visible and manifest themselves either in publications in leading mass media, books and, last but not least, employment of those who opposed the creed in leading universities, think tanks, etc. And here, the authors of those articles and books, well placed in prestigious positions, could well challenge Fukuyama’s statement about American capitalism as the best among all possible arrangements.
They could note that the United States is hardly the promised land from all perspectives. Already by the late 1980s the process of the country’s deindustrialization was in full swing and while factories were closing, the statistics faithfully recorded an economic rise. High inflation, often marginalized by statistics, was also underway, making higher education and medical services increasingly out of reach for the majority. And of course in the future, it would affect housing and even food. As a matter of fact the present-day economic troubles could be traced to this time.

Indeed, the current pandemic is a case of just an acceleration of the economic decline, with generations-long roots. One might remember here that the Black Death did not prevent the flourishing of the Renaissance, and the Spanish Flu did not stop the advent of the “Roaring Twenties,” despite the fact that both these pandemics led to a catastrophic loss of life. Finally, these observers could well pay much more attention than Fukuyama did to urban ghettos, populated by minorities. Their residents were poor, desperate, criminalized and ready for violence.

The critics of Fukuyama’s ideas shall be connected with the view of China. As a matter of fact, the publication of Fukuyama’s essay coincided with the brutal suppression of protests in the center of Beijing. The observers could have noted that while these actions were brutal – thousands were killed – it was the only way to save the country from chaos and disintegration, and preservation of its totalitarian skeleton, essential for China’s spectacular rise.

There is no doubt that these views circulated, at least in foreign countries. They could well exist in the USA, and if they were indeed spread, those who embrace them could well elaborate on their views on the pages of leading mass media, publishing their monographs with prestigious presses, such as Princeton University, where a similar treatise would be published thirty years later. And, of course, they could have been employed by major universities, think tanks, and government offices. From their position they could argue with supporters of Fukuyama’s creed.

The conflict between opposite views propagated by people with the same social status would help to develop social thought in a truly unfettered manner. Is not the USA supposedly a place of the “free market of ideas”? Still, those people who would preach these ideas not only would not be published in leading publishing houses and teach in top universities, but they, most likely, would not have any academic employment at all even if openings were in abundance. They would most likely drive cabs or flip burgers.

The second question in the letter was related to my views that most Russians started to hate Yeltsin and Gorbachev soon after their rise. Prof. Hook noted that my claims are not substantiated, for no public opinion polls indicate the feelings of the majority.
Moreover, he could well note that all Western monographs and countless articles present both of them as heroic individuals and it was suggested that the majority of Russians were quite pleased with them, the liberators from the totalitarian grip.

These, like many other political and historical images, are axiomatic in American political science and public opinion in general. I remember that when Yeltsin died, I was interviewed by local radio about him. Still, when I stated that many Russians had no good feelings about Yeltsin, the interview was abruptly ended. So much for the “free market of ideas.”

The subject of the study of public opinion has some personal importance to me. I am a historian by training and interests, albeit I became more interested in more recent events by the end of my academic career – I am 69 now. Still, my late father, Vladimir Shlapentokh, a professor at Michigan State University for almost 40 years, pioneered in the study of public opinion in the USSR. (He also published a dozen books and countless articles in the USA.)

As in the beginning of my letter, I noted that time is quite important to the study of a phenomenon. For present-day Russians in their 20s and 30s, not only Gorbachev but Yeltsin also are the stuff of their parents and grandparents. They could not compare Yeltsin’s Russia and even more so Gorbachev’s USSR with the pre-perestroika Soviet regime.

When I noted that most people hated Gorbachev and Yeltsin I meant people of my age range, 50s through 70s and above, those who could compare Gorbachev’s and Yeltsin’s era with the late/pre-Gorbachev Soviet periods.

Life in the late Soviet Union was hardly pleasant for the majority of Soviets. The problem was not the absence of “liberties” and “democracy” (of course free from the “perversion” of “populism”) but for another, more mundane reason. The food supply was not adequate – meat was in great shortage in most provincial cities – living quarters were crowded and consumer goods, such as clothing, were often of low quality; at least these clothes were often made without any concern for fashion.

It was these problems which concerned the vast majority of Russians, especially those who lived in the provinces, where the supply – of course centralized by the state – was much scantier than in the capital and, possibly, a few other big cities. While the lives of most ordinary Russians were hardly glamorous, the West, especially the USA, was perceived as a place of riches, glamor, and all conceivable pleasures, mostly, of course, sensual ones. A few Soviets, mostly highly-positioned figures, who visited the West in official positions and were treated accordingly by their also well-placed hosts, also brought this glamorous vision of the West.
They also might have informed their interlocutors back in the USSR that the average Westerner, especially the average American, is quite friendly to strangers and always smiles, quite different from the grim-looking Soviet bureaucrats and average Soviets in the crowd.

Thus, the West and related capitalist democracies were indeed viewed by many average Russians in the context of Fukuyamism, long before the publication of his essay.

It was not surprising that quite a few cheered at the emergence of Gorbachev, the smiling, affable leader who promised to lead Soviets, if not to full-fledged American capitalism to at least “socialism” in a Bernie Sanders fashion. They were as excited as most émigrés who first saw the contours of skyscrapers in Manhattan.

Still, soon enough, the excitement was short-lived. It was not because Gorbachev’s reforms and “openness” and “perestroika” (restructuring) slowed its course. Actually, with each year, there was more and more “openness.” The results on the ground were, however, hardly pleasing. Soviet food supermarkets were hardly well-stocked, especially in the provinces. Still, they became almost empty as “openness” progressed. Finally, they would be stocked again. Still, the prices, including for staples, rose to unbelievably high levels, at least in relation to the average Russian salary.

Moreover, increasingly, even formally working people did not receive their salaries and had no place to go besides being criminals. Indeed, crime, including violent crime, became increasingly a part of daily life. Prostitution also became pandemic. All of these processes intensified considerably when Yeltsin came to power. In addition, not only did the USSR fall apart, but millions of ethnic Russians, actually any Russian-speaking folk, became a peculiar new edition of Sudetendeutsch, and discriminated against in many post-Soviet republics. In addition, NATO forces moved closer to Russia’s borders. What should have been the feeling of the majority, those whose views were often ignored by Western media?

Of course, these people have nothing but revulsion toward both Gorbachev and Yeltsin. And many of them, those who are in their 70s and who remember well the late Brezhnev’s Russia and the USSR, transformed the past into an almost ideal society. They have rediscovered, retrospectively, the goodness of late Soviet rule: absolute job security, the stability of prices for staples, miniscule payments for rent and utilities, free higher education and medical services, etc. All problems were forgotten.

To understand the feelings of these people one needs to be engaged in Gallup polls. One might add here that polls, even in the United States, are not always reliable when the pollsters, like many intellectuals, are more concerned with production of “politically correct” results rather than studying reality, as I noted in my article. One could remember the recent presidential campaign.
Donald Trump, the Republican contender, was clearly not just a misogynist but a rapist. His obscenity violated all political taboos. All the pundits were sure that such a person could not be elected as president. Thus, practically all polls predicted Trump’s defeat. Still, he was elected.

I clearly do not agree with Prof. Hook’s statements. Still, I understand that the major problem with my article was not so much my statements that a) Fukuyamism was the dominant creed, at least in the USA in the late 1980s and early 1990s and seen as universally applicable, and that b) hatred of Gorbachev (in the later years of his tenure) and Yeltsin was widespread. Not even my alleged “Putinism” was the reason for this rancor.

The reason, most likely, is different. I asserted that quite a few Western, especially American, scholars, in a way American intellectuals in general, do not so much study a phenomenon as it is but produce “marketable” products for “peer-reviewed” scholars or the broader public at large. Prof. Hook clearly does not accept this notion. Still, even critics are important, for they provide a framework for intellectual discourse and development of social thought.
Introduction

Warfare had undergone many revolutionary changes over the centuries. Hittite chariots, for example, are said to have spread east and south bolstering aristocracies at the dawn of urbanization some three thousand years ago. Then, the quality of swords and armouries infinitely improved, as the infantry steadily took centre stage, and the Iron Age swept across Eurasia and, later on, Africa. The Chinese invented the crossbow as early as the 7th Century BCE, and Hannibal surprised the Romans with elephants few centuries later.

Presaging modern conscription, the Greek city states lined up citizen hoplites in impervious phalanxes during the Classical era, while the Caliphs later relied on slave-soldiers in no small measure. The Romans are credited, in turn, with elaborate fortifications and catapults, and these later trans-morphed into the famous *trace italienne*. Early Christianity is credited with the doctrine of just war (*jus bellum justum*), and Confucianism with war aversion.

The Mongols famously used gunpowder, and the technology gradually spread from the East Asia through the Islamic World to Europe. More importantly, they demonstrated the importance of mounted archery skills. In the end, it was ironically gunpowder weapons that would eradicate the danger to sedentary societies from nomads like the Mongols themselves. What is more, the Mongols did not just impart knowledge but learnt in fact a good deal from European siege methodology. ¹

On the high seas, the Byzantines famously employed oil explosives (“Greek fire”). The Ottomans employed fast oared ships, and the Portuguese sailed fast ocean-going carracks in the 1400s. Yet, at much the same time, the famous Zheng He fleet possessed much bigger ocean-going ships, which was loaded with thousands of Chinese marines, among other cargo. The seas were getting more crowded, but blue-water warfare was rare until the 1600s.

¹ This book review by Niv Horesh is entitled *Warfare and Modernity in World History: Re-examination* (rpt. 2015). ²

True, by uniquely mounting cannons on ships the Portuguese were able to gain a toehold in far-flung corners of the planet. Recall the compass here: it was needed to get to those corners but had actually been a Chinese invention. Peter Lorge therefore concludes that early-modern warfare was actually a Chinese invention even if European armies markedly grew in size in that era. To be sure, China developed a centralised taxation system with which to fund its large standing army earlier. Recall here, too, that the Chinese had actually invented gunpowder to begin with.

Clearly, innovation was not just Western but a two-way street throughout history. Yet, Parker famously postulated in the 1990s that European warfare had been from the outset distinct: it was technologically superior and expensive. So it was requiring a larger tax revenue than elsewhere. The nub of the argument on European distinction defaults to the consistent improvement of muskets and cannons, although Michael Roberts had earlier in the 1950s also stressed innovative tactics. And more recently, Jeremy Black also called attention to European cartography and intelligence gathering as superior.

In sum, Roberts showed that the distinction between Europe and “the rest” started showing up in the 1500s with the advent of gunpowder technology, mercantilism and high taxation. And as Charles Tilly would later famously conclude his study of early-modern Europe, ‘wars made states and states made war’.

Nevertheless, since the 2000s, a growing chorus of scholars have cast doubts on the extent to which European polities can be seen to be distinct. At first, the research onus was on comparative standards of living, where early modern China was seen to be just as affluent as Europe, according to Kenneth Pomeranz for example. From another perspective, Robert Markley ably showed the misgivings that some early modern European writers had about the status of Europe against that of the giant land empires of Asia.

Lately, attention has shifted to warfare whereby scholars like Tonio Andrade have admirably detailed the tenuousness of European presence in East Asia in the 1600s. Yet even Andrade concedes that by the early 1800s, China had fallen so far behind the West in gunpowder technology that it was easily defeated by Britain in the Opium War. True, as Kaushik Roy suggests, the technological gap may have been smaller in India, and gunpowder weapons may have not mattered on the battlefield there as much to begin with. But India was considerably colonised, and closer to Europe than China.

**Situating the Book Under Review**

Herein Jason Sharman intervenes with a beautifully written and cogently argued book exhorting us against reading too much 1800s history into the 1600s-1700s. For Sharman gets to grips with his subject matter with both historical and social-science acumen.
Echoing Pomeranz, Sharman posits that Europeans had no technological or institutional advantage over Asian land empires before the Industrial Revolution even if Asian polities were less interested in naval expansion. In other words, frequent wars in Europe did not necessarily entail improved performance on the battleground elsewhere.

Barry Buzan and Richard Little would no doubt agree with Sharman that the Westphalian system in Europe, created as it was as a result of the traumatic Thirty Years War, is largely irrelevant to other parts of the world in terms of theory. That war and modernity are conceptually so intertwined does call for a larger case-study palette. However, as will soon become apparent, the emergence of the “national debt” economy in Europe, which later spread around the world, undergirding an expansion of armies, is one key dimension of the story largely absent in the book.

Sharman may also needlessly overstate the case against Eurocentrism when he writes right at the outset that nothing interesting happened in Europe since Roman times. So does his claim that, Atlantic slavery notwithstanding, Europeans and African rulers were on equal terms in the 1500s (p. 49).

More to the point, Sharman also seems to be overstating the case when arguing that the styles of warfare used by Europeans overseas were vastly different than at home, hence whatever military revolution occurred in Europe could not matter that much elsewhere (p. 4). To the contrary, one would be rather surprised to see Europeans using the same methods everywhere given that they were vastly outnumbered in Asia until the 19th Century, as he himself concedes. As late as 1740 there were, for example, only 2,000 troops employed by the East India Company (hereafter EIC, p. 87, p. 90).

Political correctness aside, is it not impressive that an organization like the EIC could later occupy so much of India relying in no small measure on local sepoys? My own research on British banking in Asia has led me to similar conclusions: Europe came to dominate much of Asia relying in no small measure on Asian capital and Asian human resources. The secret to power was thus as much institutional as technological. Ann Carlos and Stephen Nicholas’ study is apposite here but it is not cited.

In Latin America, Europeans faced much lighter resistance, and Jared Diamond most evocatively tells how epidemics had wiped out the Incas and Aztecs even before they rose in arms. Vastly outnumbered, Diamond attributes the Conquistadors’ astonishing triumph to the possession of guns and, to a lesser extent, horses. Recall, too, that no civilization in the Americas used metal weapons. Sharman therefore infers that metal swords and local allies mattered much more to the Spaniards than guns, drawing on the very same Diamond (p. 5). In that sense, he is turning the Cortez and Pizarro occupation stories on their respective heads.
The shock-and-awe impact that Conquistador guns created cannot be erased from the equation, precisely because – as Sharman notes – the Spaniards were so vastly outnumbered (p. 39).

Anyone reading Diamond would agree that hand-to-hand fighting mattered too, and here Spanish metal swords were infinitely better than obsidian or stone weapons used by the locals. Spanish armoury was better than the cotton padding used by the locals. The same applies once again to horses and pack animals, which the locals did not have (outside llamas). But is all of that enough to disqualify the shock-and-owe effect? Sharman resolutely cites John Guilmartin here to suggest the Spanish would have won anyway even without gunpowder weapons (p. 41)!

**The Muslim and Russian ‘Counterpoints’**

Sharman rightly reminds us that the Ottomans were fairly adept at using gunpowder weapons until the 1700s, and that this factor partly explains their success versus the Mamluks and Safavids (p. 107). As Gábor Ágoston has shown, the Ottomans did indeed not just import guns and cannons from Europe but also manufactured some themselves. In the 16th century Ottoman mills could manufacture up to 1,000 metric tons of gunpowder. By the end of the 18th Century imports made for the great bulk of ordnance, however.3

Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725) famously modernised Russia’s industry and army. He newly mobilised peasants, and had experts brought from Western Europe with a view toward acquiring the nous of manufacturing armaments independently. In 1705, the English ambassador to Russia, Charles Whitworth, praised the quality of Russian ammunition, and the country remained largely self-sufficient in that regard until the 1850s.4

The point, then, is that Western European military superiority over the Ottomans cannot be established before 1750; neither perhaps can superiority be established over the Russians before the Crimean War (p. 111-113). Modern arms cost states a lot. In essence, Sharman asks how could Russian self-sufficiency be reconciled with its refractory tax system and prevalence of serfdom? This is a thought-provoking question but it remains the case that neither the Ottomans nor the Russians became ocean-going powers, dominating global trade flows. Since the taxation of overseas trade was at the heart of state formation in early-modern Europe, much fiscal revenue was therefore lost.

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Sharman draws on Giancarlo Casale to highlight, by way of contrast, the Ottoman “powerful” navy, sailing as it did from Ethiopia right through to Sumatra; and the Ottoman “central” taxation system (p. 100-101). Yet, as even Casale concedes, Ottoman naval prowess waned as early as 1600. For its part, far from being centralised, the Ottoman fiscal system increasingly relied on tax farming in the early modern era, as Sevket Pamuk shows.

Recall here, too, that the Ottomans did not play any role whatsoever in stemming 1700s Dutch encroachment into Java or even Aceh, where devout Muslims ruled. Ottoman gunpowder technology may have spread in India earlier but that may not be the case for Southeast Asia. Drawing on Sun Laichen, Sharman argues that much of mainland Southeast Asia had adopted gunpowder weapons presumably from China well before the Ottomans and Portuguese arrived.

To be sure, Pamuk’s work is cited in the book, but somehow interpretations lead in different directions. For revisionists, the Ottoman Siege of Vienna in 1683 is, despite ultimate Ottoman defeat, a demonstration of their singular military and fiscal prowess, right at the heart of Europe. But conservative accounts point to the fact that Catholic-Protestant tensions at the time meant the Holy Roman Empire had been subverted by other European powers, and in that sense the Ottomans had been greatly assisted.

My own work highlights banks note issuance as a form of state debt that had been invented in Song China but re-emerged in Sweden in the 17th century, that is to say well before the Industrial Revolution. From then on, bank note issuance diffused quickly across Northwestern Europe but reached Istanbul only in 1840. In stark contrast to Western Europe, the US and Japan – less than 7% of the Ottoman money supply was made up by bank notes as late as 1914. Clearly, in relative terms, the Ottoman financial system was lagging behind – this is not a 19th Century story read backwards. As already mentioned, the story has a fiscal dimension too which, according to the Parker narrative, translates into military shortfall.

If disease helped Europeans in the Americas, it held them back until the “New Imperialism” of the 1800s in sub-Saharan Africa. Here, in the tropics, horses and pack animals were of less use (pp. 35-36). Sharman is absolutely correct in drawing our attention to the late colonisation of Africa, a continent that was after all on Europe’s doorstep.

Curiously, African gold and slave markets were approached by sea. Overland, Europeans would have had to traverse the Maghreb but there was vehement Muslim resistance there that made the idea impossible. After all, Portugal itself was partly occupied by Muslims until the 1400s.
When the Portuguese did forcefully try to invade the Maghreb like in the Battle of Alcazarquivir of 1578, they were resoundingly defeated amid heavy artillery from both sides. What is more, the Portuguese King Sebastian was killed in battle; the Spaniards would invade Portugal, and the Ottomans would increasingly be involved in the Maghreb thereafter (p. 48, p. 114).

At this juncture, Sharman insightfully points to Oman as another very important spoiler of European expansion. In 1661 Omani naval forces aided by local collaborators wrested Mombasa from the Portuguese, and would later take over Zanzibar too. In 1668, Omanis sacked the Portuguese fort as far away as Diu (p. 54, p. 58).

In sum, Sharman shows there was a lot of gunpowder in use in North Africa. The traditional narrative foregrounds, for example, Mamluk (and Japanese) reluctance to embrace firearms, and in that sense Sharman provides a powerful corrective. He even suggests Mamluk-made guns reached Western India in 1500 (p. 74). But, notably, Peter Mundy who visited India in the 1630s, did not describe in his famous travelogue any guns used by Mughal soldiers.

**India and China Revisited: the Religious Card**

Religion played its part not just in Vienna. Sharman rightly mentions the Ottomans were tolerant of religious minorities, and in that sense they presaged perhaps social modernity. He also insightfully shows how the Portuguese conspired from the 1500s with Hindu principalities against Muslim attacks, as was the case in Goa in 1510. Ottoman contact with, on the other hand, the Muslim principalities in Sumatra come across as rather feeble (p. 58).

For revisionists, ‘Vienna on sea’ is the 1509 Battle of Diu in modern Gujarat. There, 1,500 Portuguese faced an “unlikely” but large fighting coalition of sea-seasoned Mamluks, Ottomans and even Catholic Venetians, as well as local Indians (p. 57-58). But the nub of the matter is that the Portuguese actually won, thus entrenching their partial domination of the spice trade. And yet Sharman stresses what he sees as subsequent Ottoman inroads into the spice trade, and domination of the Red Sea. Frankopan suggest he may be right as, shorn of some revenue, the Portuguese turned their attention also to cotton and silk import.⁵

If Diu was a triumph, the Portuguese lost their grip on the all-important entrepot of Hormuz in 1622 (p. 83). Here, the usurper was the Protestant English with Safavid assistance, which brings to mind Rhoads Murphey’s famous argument about the English singular ability to entice the right Asian rulers to their side at the right time.

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https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol83/iss83/25
In keeping with this argument, the French support for the Mughals against the EIC during the famous 1757 Battle of Plassey came to nothing.

Sharman claims that the Ming navy drowned interloping Portuguese ships between 1521-22 (pp. 129-130). But the picture is more complicated. Actually, by 1557 the Portuguese were able to establish a permanent settlement in Macau through kickback to local officials and, importantly, by demonstrating their vitality to the Ming as counter-piracy agents and as cannon makers. Macao’s survival in the face of local and intra-European (mainly Dutch) pressures is a testament to the ingenuity of the Portuguese sea empire. On the other hand, the Ming were defeated by the Qing even though the latter had fewer cannons, thus reinforcing Sharman’s point about the irrelevance of European technology on the Asia battle field.

It’s the Economics

Pooling private capital through enhanced property rights was key to European ascendancy in the early modern era. In that sense, joint-stock trading companies like the EIC, or its Dutch competitor the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie), were great innovations. Yet, strangely, Sharman seems to read weakness into the EIC and VOC precisely because of their joint-stock nature as compared with the more statist but less dynamic colonization effort by the Portuguese (Estado do India) and the French (Compagnie française pour le commerce des Indes Orientales). That is to say, statism strangely equates with modernity in Sharma’s narrative but not necessarily with military strength or profitability for that matter (p. 69).

Actually, as Sharman himself shows (p. 53), all European ‘India’ companies enjoyed official backing to one degree or another, including the Spanish Casa de Contratación. All enticed private capital to one degree or another, in return for limited trading rights. And even though Sharman sweepingly deprecates the profitability of those companies, they delivered massive revenue to their governments. The Habsburgs otherwise creamed off much of the silver bonanza discretely scooped up by encomiendas across Latin America by way of financing war against the Protestant Dutch (p. 66).

On its part, the VOC is said to have seen sharp decline in profits over the course of the 18th Century due to rising military and administrative costs (p.80). Yet, it is implicitly accepted that the VOC successfully drew much tax revenue from peasants deep into Java, not just from trade. After the Battle of Plassey, one can point to similar tax-farming success by the EIC in India (pp. 91-92) but the quantitative data are sorely lacking in both cases. Certainly, in their The First Modern Economy, Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude give a very different impression about VOC and EIC profitability compared with Sharman.
Profits sometimes tell only part of the story anyway. The EIC and VOC apparatus in the region helped convey the best of Asian technology to European master artisans. Thus, both Delft and Stoke-on-Trent boasted a sophisticated china industry in the early 17th century. Lord Macartney was famously rebuffed by the Qianlong Emperor in 1793 because China was supposedly self-sufficient, and did not need British mechanical clockwork. The British were portrayed in turn as slavishly reliant on quintessentially Chinese imports like tea, silk and ceramics. What historians rarely appreciate is that Macartney also brought along British-made ceramics to impress the locals. In other words, Europeans in the early modern age copied technology faster than the other way around even at a time when they were not sufficiently militarily strong to open the region for trade.

The VOC and EIC adapted to local taxation norms, but paid their governments handsomely for the chartered trading privileges they received. As argued above, Europe came to dominate much of Asia relying in no small measure on Asian capital and Asian human resources. It should therefore not come as a surprise that the EIC borrowed heavily from local creditors so as to finance its military build-up in keeping with European norms. Indeed, EIC’s debt-to-revenue ratio rose from 120% in 1793 to over 300% in 1809! (p. 94) This is a marker of modernity not of weakness, as all European governments trod a similar fiscal path of “national debt”, and the EIC was after all a state within a state.

More generally, after 1500, commercial rather than land taxes gradually became the main source of revenue for European governments. Income tax did not become a significant contributor until the 20th Century, while customs and duties made for the lion share beforehand. It is no accident that Europeans set their eyes on the Ottoman and Qing customs service later in the 19th Century.

In that sense, none of the land empires surveyed by Sharman passes muster. Of course there were differences among them: Russia had a strong feudal aristocracy, whilst slave-soldiers were rife in the Islamic world. But apart from China, where the tax burden was light and the levy system centralised, all those empires relied to one degree or another on tax farming with high intermediary costs. As Gennaioli and Voth observe, increasingly heavy tax loads underpin economic modernity. For commercial tax receipts to grow commerce had to grow, so EIC and VOC importance also hinges on custom payments, not just charter fees.

The costs of waging war so far away from the metropole were surely prohibitive. Here, Patrick O’Brien comes to mind with his famous conclusions that ‘empire’ did not pay off to the British although his focus was the 19th Century. In fact, drawing on Lorge, Sharman rightly contends exorbitant outlays were the reason why the Ming gave up on naval expansion in the 15th Century (p. 133-138).
But the wider implication that the various East India companies set up by European powers were loss making is wanting at best. As argued above, these companies’ operation yielded many largely positive externalities from a metropolitan perspective.

Concluding Remarks

The persistent rise of China and “all the rest” in the 21st Century re-positions the conventional story of European exceptionalism. It calls for reassessment of what some may see as a short moment in history, disconfirming hackneyed scripts of modernisations. Indeed, why should we assume frequent warfare is a desirable setting to begin with, where China and India offer alternative pre-modern ‘modernities’. As we saw above, even with the best of weapons, Europeans did not always win on the battle front. And Sharman might even add that non-Western powers who sought to emulate Western warfare sometimes made themselves more vulnerable.

Vastly inferior in technological terms, Vietnam was able to defeat the mighty US in the 20th Century. In that sense, Sharman's caution about the suitability of technology to local conditions seems justified. So, too, is his emphasis on learning being a two-way street. Yet, the scholarly conversation on the so-called Military Revolution must entail a fiscal dimension and robust quantitative analysis. The emergence of the “national debt” economy in Europe, which later spread around the world, undergirding an expansion of armies, is key to the story.

The Westphalian system in Europe is largely irrelevant to other parts of the world in terms of theory because it emerged from an intense distinct warfare setting. Sharman is right, then, to call for more non-Western historical case studies to enrich our understanding of international relations. He powerfully observes (pp. 150-1):

A more cosmopolitan, less ethnocentric perspective, giving due weight to regions beyond Europe, shows Western dominance of the international system as relatively fleeting, and thus makes it much less surprising if this dominance is now being challenged with the rise of powers beyond the West.

The book makes good on its promise by delivering precisely that perspective. In passing, it also unpacks many historical conjunctures that have been scarcely discussed thus far, like the role religion played in early-modern empire building. What emerges is exceedingly cogent story, but one that often relies on narrow perusal of the pertinent secondary sources. If Sharman’s attention to the Maghreb as a ‘counterfactual’ is enlightening, his reconstruction of the Diamond story on the other end of the spectrum is troubling. In between, lie for the most part the Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal and Ming-Qing China. All willingly used guns: China invented gunpowder to begin with, and the Ottomans copiously manufactured gunpowder weapons. Yet, by 1700 all those empires heavily relied on Western munitions expertise. The rest is open to debate.
Philipp Ammon. *Georgia zwischen Eigenstaatlichkeit und russische Okkupation (Georgia between Nationhood and Russian Occupation).* Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2020

Reviewed by Andrew Andersen
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The book provides detailed analysis of political, historical, religious and cultural roots of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Georgia, which started more than 200 years ago in what is now a strategically important area of the world – the South Caucasus. That region, which includes Georgia alongside Armenia and Azerbaijan, serves as a natural corridor through which Western countries can get access to the vital hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia, bypassing Russia. At the same time, after the disintegration of the USSR, the South Caucasus turned into one of the “hot zones” where polar ideologies and economic interests of major powers collide. However, the region somehow gets neglected by Western politicians and media.

As a result of such neglect, Georgia and other small nations of the Caucasus are often left at the mercy of their powerful and ambitious neighbor – Russia. That causes disappointment and disillusionment among pro-western Georgians and increasingly weakens Western positions in the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean including the South Caucasus. Meanwhile, the recent Russian aggression against Georgia and Russian-sponsored ethnic cleansings in the occupied Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia serve as a grim reminder of how important it is to understand the volcanic forces that may explode the region, with dire consequences for the whole world.

In investigating the dramatic events of Georgian history and the origins of Georgia’s conflict with Russia, the author of the book adheres to an original cultural-historical hermeneutic method of analysis that makes his study different from the studies of the majority of his colleagues, most of whom prefer sociological and structural methods. The methodology chosen by the author allows him to sharpen his view of a number of significant historical and cultural phenomena and, in particular, to cast doubt on the concept of "invented nation", which many contemporary researchers of recent Georgian history and Russo-Georgian conflict tend to adhere to.

Ammon’s book is rich in scope and offers a clear and concise (but not simplistic) outline of Georgian history from 1112 BC to 1924 AD, with the focus on the major events of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries connected with the expansion of Russia in the Caucasus in general, and in Georgia in particular.
Those events, described in chapters II-VIII of the book, include but are not limited to the secret agreement between King Vakhtang VI of the East Georgian Kingdom of Kartli and Czar Peter the Great of Russia (1720), the conclusion of the Treaty of Georgievsk (1783), the annexation of Georgian kingdoms and principalities by the Russian empire in breach of the above-mentioned treaty (1801-1867), the national awakening of Georgians in the 19th century, the abolition and restoration of the autocephalous status of the Georgian Church (1811 and 1917, respectively), Georgian role in the Russian revolution of 1905 and in World War I, the restoration of Georgian independence (1918), the Soviet-Georgian war and Sovietization of Georgia (1921) and the revolt of 1924.

While appreciating the detailed and meticulous research performed by the author of the book, one should mention though that he seems to have overlooked the fact that upon incorporation into the Russian empire, Georgia never constituted an integral administrative unit. Historical Georgian lands were split into two separate provinces (gubernii) – the province of Tiflis and the province of Kutais. When a few more historical Georgian territories were incorporated into the empire following the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, they were organized into the separate districts of Batum, Ardahan and Olty, thus further fragmenting the Georgian cultural and linguistic realm. The author also uses the phrase “Samachablo and Kartli,” which is rather questionable, keeping in mind that throughout history, the feudal fief of Samachablo comprised a part of the province of Shida Kartli.

While covering the fall of the First Republic described in Chapter VIII, the author seems to overestimate the role of Georgian Bolsheviks in the Sovietization of Georgia in 1921. Despite the fact that well-known Russian Bolsheviks of Georgian descent were quite active in undermining the independent Georgian statehood which they considered “bourgeois” and “nationalistic”, there were way more important geopolitical and economic factors that led to the loss of Georgia’s independence in 1921. Those factors include the inability of the three South Caucasian states (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) to come to agreements regarding the disputed territories (as they clearly demonstrated at the conference in San Remo in April, 1920), and the lightning collapse of independent Azerbaijan. These events, in turn, resulted in the failure of Lord Curzon’s doctrine of the “Transcaucasian palisade” against possible Russian and Turkish expansion into the Middle East and India, and the formation of the Soviet-Kemalist alliance and certain interests of British oil-exporters. One may also question the author’s statement that the Menshevik-dominated government of the First Republic of Georgia failed to create an effective army. In fact, the said government did not trust the professional military for protection of the country. That prejudice and mistrust was deeply rooted in the social democratic ideology of the Menshevik leadership. Accordingly, the government of the First Republic constantly exerted moral and financial pressure on its army and regularly conducted unnecessary personnel shifts thus reducing its combat readiness.
Instead, the leaders of the First Republic preferred to count on the National Guard which in 1921 proved ineffective due to the lack of professionalism and discipline.

However, in general, most of the historical facts and events of Georgian history are described in the book quite accurately. The contents of Ammon’s study is supported by rich and diverse bibliographic material listed at the end of the book. The multiple sources in four different languages used by the author in his research work include more than 200 books and magazine articles, as well as dozens of dictionaries, encyclopedias, websites and other reference works in a wide range of areas directly or indirectly connected with the subject of his book.

One of the main advantages of the book by Philipp Ammon is that it not only describes the important historical events but also examines the significant processes that have been fuelling the political, cultural and military clashes between Russia and Georgia. That makes it an asset for a wide-ranging readership, from students of Georgian history to diplomats and politicians who would like to gain balanced and objective information on the backgrounds of the long-lasting conflict in one of the sensitive regions of the world. The significance of Ammon’s book is further magnified by the fact that the history of Georgia still remains an under-studied and under-researched field, as there is still not enough professional literature on this subject available in the West in general and even less so in the German-speaking countries.
Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014

Reviewed by Constance Wilkinson

*The Dawn of Tibet: the Ancient Civilization on the Roof of the World* by John Vincent Bellezza is a unique work by an intrepid explorer-scholar who, purely from his own inspiration, spent decades doggedly tracking down traces of the prehistoric Zhang Zhung civilization, a Metal Age culture (famed for making iron weapons of war) and a polity that dominated the remote northwestern plateau of Upper Tibet until the 7th century CE.

This rich and unusual book summarizes the results of Bellezza's many expeditions into this high-altitude, inhospitable, and often life-threateningly dangerous Changthang1 region; it presents his archaeological discoveries, informed by written records, histories, myths, rituals. He has also collected oral histories, myths, legends, and narratives from local narrators, nomad herders of sheep and yak who claim descent from the ancient clans of Zhang Zhung, and whose daily lives are still impacted by ancient indigenous rituals and beliefs.

The arising of Zhang Zhung is generally set--but not in stone--around 1,000 BCE; whether its manifestation was more a Late Bronze age or Early Iron age occurrence has not yet been demonstrated with precision.

What has been demonstrated with precision by Bellezza is inarguable evidence of not merely the existence of Zhang Zhung2 as a civilization, but its power, stability, and regional influence, reflected in Bellezza's identification of a great network of ancient ruins, which, collectively, span "a thousand miles from west to east." (2)

Bellezza states that "this [Zhang Zhung] civilization remained a major force in uppermost Tibet for roughly fifteen centuries3, [lasting] twice the length of time of the Roman republic and empire combined." (76)

In the mid-700's CE, Zhang Zhung was invaded by its neighbor to the east, Imperial Tibet, and, under its imperialist hegemony, it virtually disappeared, aided in its destruction by an abruptly worsening climate and the near-total annihilation/assimilation of its religious culture.

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1 Literally, "Northern Plain."
2 "'Zhang Zhung' is used in this work as a generic appellation for pre-seventh century CE upland civilization, including its cultural, linguistic, and political aspects." (76)
3 1200 BCE to 700 CE
John Vincent Bellezza began to explore the northern plains, or, Changthang, in 1986. He "managed to walk across a swath of open basins without a stove or tent," a journey of 175 miles, out in the snow and sleet. Later that year, he went to Mt. Kailash, again traveling without a stove or tent, travelling as Tibetan pilgrims do, learning the language, even reaching the source of the Indus. (17)

In the nineties, Bellezza explored Lake Namtsho and Lake Dangra, and was guided to certain places "where signs of a past age of greatness could still be seen." (19) On the basis of his work, he published the monograph, "Divine Dyads: Ancient Civilization in Tibet."

During this time, Bellezza met a number of helpful luminaries: H.H. the Dalai Lama, H.H. Menri Khenpo, head of the Eternal Bon religion, the eminent Bon scholar Lopon Tendzin Namdak, abbot Chado Rinpoche, and Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, providing encouragement and information.

In 1997, he traveled to Darok Tsho, in the northwestern section of the plateau. Around this freshwater lake, he found ruins of temples and hermitages. Most interesting on this expedition were two islands in the lake; he could see ancient ruins on the islands, Tsho Do and Do Drilbu, but he had no way to get to them.

In 1998, the indomitable Bellezza decided to circumambulate Lake Teri Namtsho, a huge undertaking. He discovered two headlands that had once been islands known as Po Do. In order to reach them, Bellezza "had to negotiate several kilometers of alkaline flats, pockmarked with pools of quicksand." (21) There he found "traces of ancient edifices, parts of elite cloistered communities, nerve centers of culture that in their time drew in resources from around the region." (21)

By the end of 1998, he had located and documented over 100 sites belonging to Zhang Zhung, hoping to document every visible ancient remain in Upper Tibet to build a "comprehensive inventory of pre-Buddhist archaeological sites." (23)

In 1999, his Changthang Circuit Expedition braved snowstorms, sandstorms, flooded roads, and a supply truck that "plunged off the edge of a ravine," and found "a striking spectrum of ancient castles, temples, villages, menhirs, tombs, cave shelters, and rock art." (22)

Bellezza's Upper Tibet Circumnavigation Expedition presented other obstacles, as "the trails to many mountaintop citadels had long since collapsed, forcing climbs up and down cliff faces and narrow ledges with only the most minimal of holds for the hands and feet. It was a precarious undertaking using a tape measure on crumbling stone walls along the edges of precipices." (22)
In 2001, his Upper Tibet Antiquities Expedition "clocked five thousand miles in vehicles and hundreds more on foot and horseback" to find 90 sites. In 2002, the High Tibet Circle Expedition covered eight thousand miles by vehicle (and more on foot and on horseback) and found another hundred sites.

It was only in 2002, after 18 years, that his work became officially sanctioned. A bilateral agreement was signed through the University of Virginia and the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences. Bellezza was able to organize expeditions through the auspices of the TASS. This produced the High Tibet Circle Expedition which, in 2002, discovered Chunak⁴, a large burial ground with a network of tombs, pillars, and mounds. In 2003, the TASS/High Tibet Antiquities Expedition revealed architectural remains that served to fix the Western geographic limit of Zhang Zhung.⁵

Bellezza put together the Tibet Ice Lakes Expedition in 2006 to explore ruins of stone buildings on islands locals told him could be reached - in winter, over ice. These were the same islands he had seen from afar when he went to Lake Namtsho nine years before.

Approaching the frozen lake, in a warming climate, he reports, "The ice was uncomfortably thin when we arrived at the lakeshore opposite [the island of] Semo Do. The way across to the island was unnerving. The lake would screech and shudder every time we tried to walk on it. There lay an abyssal black expanse below the frozen surface, and only six to eight inches of ice separated us from it. If it were not for [my Tibetan associates], I never would have ventured onto Lake Nam Tsho." (26)

In order to discover clues to new ruins, Bellezza needed to win the trust of local people, the nomad livestock herders, and he did. They repaid his trust with hospitality and information as to the lay of their land, ruins they had seen, ruins they had heard of, ruins Bellezza had heard of, but only in texts.

In a region with an *average* elevation of 15,000 feet, the dauntless Bellezza survived travelling quicksand and windstorms to document more than seven hundred separate ancient sites: castles, temples, rock paintings, metal artefacts, monuments, ceremonial places, yielding thousands of individual structures and pictorial compositions that have managed to survive for thousands of years.

Exemplar ruins still remain, not only because of their locations are so remote as to be nearly inaccessible, but also because the majority were indeed "set in stone."

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⁴ Lit., "black water."
Many Zhang Zhung structures rely entirely on stone, as Bellezza describes them, designed "with sinuous ground plans and meandering walls, these edifices present a very different appearance from structures created with wooden roofs. They contain warrens of tiny rooms connected by short passageways, internal spaces isolated from the glare of the sun and the brunt of the wind." (118)

Bellezza states that "the Metal Age in Upper Tibet was a time of thriving agricultural centers guarded by a chain of mountaintop strongholds and fortified temples. Established at over 17,000 feet above sea level, these robustly built all-stone structures appear to have housed the chieftains and priests who ruled over Zhang Zhung.... nowhere else in the world did humanity construct permanent dwellings in such lofty locations." (5)

In ruins made visible by the arid, harsh, windy climate, he finds evidence of complex social hierarchies, inter-regional trade, irrigated agriculture, all ringed by a coordinated chain of defensive citadels and fortresses.

Bellezza says that "the high-altitude harshness of Upper Tibet is mediated by stunning beauty. The inherent sublimity of the landscape offsets its destructive power...glowing with an almost otherworldly resplendence, rock formations and bodies of water assume the richest hues imaginable. Upper Tibet is so spacious as to appear limitless...the countryside is as vivid with eyes open as it is in dreams." (30)

He describes with fondness the people who in the present day manage to survive in this impossible environment, nomad livestock herders (drokpas, in Tibetan) whose lives are to this day still connected to rites and myths and texts that have come down to them from ancient Zhang Zhung.

In a chapter called “Touching the Sky: The Citadels and Temples of Zhang Zhung,” the reports locating and then surveying 140 archaic era castles, pointing out that "[t]he ancient castles of Upper Tibet occupied strategic economic and military positions, enjoying unencumbered views of the outlying terrain. Their unassailable geographic aspect would have made attack by an enemy difficult and costly . . . [only] the most powerful members of society would have had mastery over the mountaintop castles." (121) Funerary sites reveal other information about Zhang Zhung: differences in site size and intricacy suggest socially stratified communities.

What have I omitted? Detailed sections on rock art, religion, magic, mystery, history. Truly peculiar, precious objects: agate-like artefacts called Dzi, amulets called "Thogchak" apparently made of meteoric iron, both said to be "self-arisen;" that is, objects found, not made by artisans.
Detailed sections on literature, colorful, fantastical "tales of powerful magicians controlling the elements and movements of planets, perfecti knowing everything there is to know in the universe, saints stopping powerful armies in their tracks with mantras." (77)

Bellezza's work is too rich for this review to do it justice. Those interested in, say, the comparative study of civilizations, may benefit from learning of Zhang Zhung, a singular civilization long lost, beginning to be re-found.
Chogyal Namkhai Norbu. The Light of Kailash, 
A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet.

Translated from the Tibetan and edited by Donatella Rossi; 
English editing by Nancy Simmons.

Volume Two: The Intermediate Period. 
Volume Three: The Late Period.


Reviewed by Constance Wilkinson

The Light of Kailash: A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet is a three-volume series by the late Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, former professor of Tibetan and Mongolian Language and Literature at the University of Naples L'Orientale. Born in Derge, Tibet, he spent much of his career researching the origins of pre-Buddhist Tibetan culture, finding sources in an ancient civilization, Zhang Zhung¹, and an indigenous ritual tradition, Bon².

The Light of Kailash presents a compelling alternative to the standard versions of Tibetan history in which Zhang Zhung is given short shrift, and Bon nearly erased, eclipsed by its powerful post-Buddhist 7th century successor civilization, Central Tibet under Emperor Srong-btsan sGam-po, a perfect example of history being re-written by the (of course!) victors.

"Great scholars and practitioners of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition have universally proclaimed that Tibet did not have a written language, let alone a culture, before the advent of the Dharmaraja Srong-btsan sGam-po," according to Chogyal Norbu. "They essentially defined the country as a region of darkness." (234, III)

¹ Many sources point to a civilization known as Zhang Zhung, a large area of what is now western and northwestern Tibet, a society loosely centered around Mount Kailash, called "the navel of the world," (23, I) Kailash, from ancient times was said to be the sacred source of four holy rivers This was regarded as pure myth. Western expeditions traced the sources of those rivers: the Indus, Brahmaputra, Karnali, Sutlej eventually admitting that the myth was the truth. Likewise, the existence of Zhang Zhung, to this day is often dismissed and regarded as mere legend, wishful thinking.

² Bon--an ancient and complex tradition of practical rituals carried out in symbolic fashion to achieve specific worldly outcomes; these rites are then performed by practitioners who then can pass on such knowledge down, teacher to student. This tradition arose in Zhang Zhung; this tradition was reformed and systematized by Tonpa Shenrab Miwo (dates uncertain) often cited as the founder of Bon.
The three-volume work, dedicated to Tibetan youth in particular, is inspired by a desire to reverse persistent misconceptions about the roots of Tibetan culture, in which pre-Buddhist Tibet is portrayed as a wasteland, "peopled" by a race descended from the coupling of a local ogress and a hairy ape.\(^3\)

*The Light of Kailash* initially began as lectures Professor Norbu gave at the University of Nationalities in Beijing in 1988. Professor Norbu then elaborated upon the topics, doing further research, adding sources after source, until a final manuscript (1,900 handwritten calligraphed pages) was complete.

To elucidate certain errors, Professor Norbu compiled a dazzling, dizzying host of primary sources from which he quotes extensively, often comparatively, over three rich volumes, creating a compelling vision of pre-Imperial Tibet, tenaciously reconstructing it from the scraps and shards left after acquisitive imperialist Emperor Srong-btsan sGam-po of Central Tibet decided it was time to usurp his richer, more powerful neighbor, Zhang Zhung, and swallow it whole.

Ch. Norbu states, "Starting from the time in which the precious teachings of the sacred dharma appeared in the vast country of snowy mountains that is Tibet, the majority of scholars who were born there and become renowned have done their utmost to show the contrast between all the good that flourished in the country with the arrival of Buddhism and all the bad that had existed before then, maintaining that . . . Tibet was an obscure, uncivilized place and that the ancient Tibetans living there were all dim-witted and dull." (240-241, III)

Histories and historians of Tibet still share this view: pre-Buddhist Tibet was not worth a second glance until glorious Emperor Srong-btsan sGamp-po got his hands on it.

Side note: glorious Srong-btsan sGamp-po achieved this glorious victory by arranging the assassination of Lik-mig-kya, the Emperor of Zhang Zhung. The army of Zhang Zhung was too powerful to defeat in a fair fight, so the glorious Emperor, adjusting to circumstances, had him ambushed.

After the conquest, Zhang Zhung vanishes.

Bon, suppressed, goes underground.

Bring in the Buddhists.

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\(^3\) Well, and we still believe in the hairy ape but not so much the local ogress, do we not? Viz. Sir Charles Bell, "The Tibetans anticipated Darwin by claiming descent from a monkey." p.21, "Tibet, Past and Present" by Sir Charles Bell, Oxford University Press, 1924, 1968.
Gloriously spread the teachings of Buddha while acting as if arranging for the assassination of your own brother-in-law, as Zhang Zhung Emperor Lik-mig-kya had been, doesn't count as really bad karma.

Ingloriously spread new history according to the viewpoint of the new glorious Emperor: where there had been no writing, the new glorious emperor makes it magically appear. All that was crude is now civilized! Prior magico-ritual traditions are co-opted or banished, almost erased, certainly replaced.

Splice in the story of the ogress and the hairy ape.⁴

Interestingly, this pattern of disparagement and erasure continue to this day; as Imperial Central Tibet once dismissed, disparaged, and erased Zhang Zhung, today, Tibetan civilization is viewed as "less than," according to eminent Central Asian scholar Christopher Beckwith:

> It is probably no exaggeration to say that all of the general books (and most of the specialized books) about Tibet assume, and stress constantly throughout, that the country and its people were and are abnormal. Biases unfortunately die hard.⁵

Over decades, the author consulted original historical texts from both the Bon and Buddhist traditions, meticulously reviewing existing published texts, collected unpublished texts, consulted literary and ritual sources, using narratives from scrolls such as Old Tibetan Annals, Old Tibetan Chronicles found in caves of Dunhuang.

Prof. Norbu interprets facts and symbols gleaned from sets of ancient ritual instructions; from a wealth of sources, in these volumes, he presents a (sacred?) mountain of evidence, almost an avalanche of evidence: multiple versions of names and texts, side by side (in transliterated Tibetan⁶), so that readers can judge patterns for themselves, can see precisely the bases for his conclusions, a process he has adopted throughout his career, reviewing multiple points of view in texts, "endeavoring to clarify their fundamental characteristics."⁷

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⁴ "The Tibetans anticipated Darwin by claiming descent from a monkey," Sir Charles Bell in "Tibet, Past and Present" Oxford University Press, 1924/1968, p21

⁵ "The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power Among the Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese During the Early Middle Ages," Christopher I. Beckwith, Princeton University Press, 1987

⁶ Wylie transliteration is used throughout. It's a hard slog but unavoidable.

⁷ "Drung, Deu, and Bon: Narrations, Symbolic languages, and the Bon tradition in ancient Tibet" by Namkhai Norbu, Translated from Tibetan into Italian edited and annotated by Adriano Clemente, Translated from Italian into English by Andrew Lukianowicz, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharmsala, 1995. Introduction, xix.
Volume One begins with stories of beginnings, first describing the primordial origin of the universe. There are many to choose from, and Professor Norbu cites several; here he quotes a passage from an old Bon text\(^8\) "which clearly describes the arising of the elements." (20, I)

"From totally void emptiness,  
a totally clear light appeared.  
That light completely transformed itself,  
and came into being as a luminous wheel,  
whirling spontaneously.  
From the self-produced energy of the wheel,  
weightless,  
wind came into being." (20, I)

Whirling spontaneously\(^9\), as in evolving of itself, arising through its own arising; moving and continuing, coming more and more into being through movement itself, moving of itself, not from any outside force, self-existing.

Hardly the cosmology of dunces.

These illiterate yokels seem to have quite sophisticated thoughts about how the universe came into existence, how things came to be, do they not?

Chogyal Norbu presents sections from identifiably non-Buddhist\(^10\) texts on the origin of the universe, the origins of a number of pre-human groups, then lists the first human generations of Zhang Zhung.

In the section transitioning, from, literally "not-men" (mi-ma-yin) to human beings, Professor Norbu quotes from the 12\(^{th}\)-century history written to narrate ancient events, lDe'u rgya bod kyi chos 'byung; there is an ordered list of the appearances of various, um, ruling groups; it distinguishes them by name and weapons of war, as things evolve over time.

"The first to rule was the Black gNod-sbyin . . . from that time, bows and arrows were used as weapons.

The second to rule was the mGo-g.yag dDud-yul Re-lde. . . at that time axes and hatchets were used as weapons.

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\(^8\) gSas sphyi spungs kyi bshad byang, Dechen Lingpa (b. 1833) u-med ms., Chengdu

\(^9\) Rang gyis rang gyurpa "means originated only on the basis of movement, without reliance on any other factor other than the power of movement itself."

\(^10\) Which are clearly non-Buddhist because Buddhists do not do cosmic eggs. Many cultures do, not them.
The third to rule was the Srin-po gNya'-ring Phrag-me . . . catapults and Srin-mo boots\textsuperscript{11} were used as weapons.

The fourth to rule was the lHa [deity] dMar-ljam; . . . from that time, goothe 3-pointed kha tam\textsuperscript{12} was used as a weapon.

The fifth to rule were the Klu [and the country] was called Ngam-Brang Cang-Brang; from that time, spears were used as weapons.

The sixth to rule were the 'Dre, [and the country] was called Lang-tang Ling-tang; from that time maces [rkyug pa skog can] (an iron ball studded with iron spikes swung around on a rope) were used as weapons." (17-18)

This account, weirdly enough, is given specific credence in an article on the ancient history of iron from Cassier's Engineering Monthly of 1915; where writer George F. Zimmer states that "the aborigines of Tibet" have had iron since 3,000 BCE and were making iron swords and iron hatchets at that time. He further states that the later Chinese "Emperor Yu received tributes from them [the aborigines of Tibet] in supplies of iron, circa 2000 BC." \textsuperscript{13}

This suggests that way back in ancient Tibet, that backward backwater, iron war weapon-making had already begun even before men were, even, well, men.\textsuperscript{14}

From volume to volume, the literature moves in an almost perfect Zhang Zhung creation metaphor, whirling around like the universe creating itself, spiraling back and revisiting basic topics as each round provides a deeper and richer analysis. Professor Norbu presents the reader with ever more precise documentation: cosmologies, human generations of ancient Zhang Zhung, early family/clan genealogies of ancient Zhang Zhung, the early royal dynasties of Zhang Zhung, Bon priestly lineages of ancient Zhang Zhung before and after Shenrab Miwo; the written language and scripts of ancient Zhang Zhung; the origins of the Bonpo lineages; kings, gShen-pos, and Bonpos; royal castles of ancient Tibet; Bonpo lineages in the later period.

\textsuperscript{11} "srin mo rkang , "ancient weapon consisting in iron boots with a pike on the front with three longer pikes protruding from it."(18, n5)
\textsuperscript{12} Knife/khatvanga
\textsuperscript{13} "The aborigines of Tibet . . . have iron swords and hatchets at that time [the time of Tubal-Cain in Genesis, and Emperor Yu received tributes from them in supplies of iron, circa 2000 BC." He also states that they had iron "since the time of Emperor Fo-Hi" and Tubal Cain, earlier. "The Antiquity of Iron," Cassier's Engineering Monthly, Vol 47, 1915 by George F. Zimmer, p 14, p88
\textsuperscript{14} See, "mi-ma-yin, p7, above.

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol83/iss83/25
Painstakingly collected and presented in almost unfathomable detail, viz., The Succession of Thirty-Four Tibetan Dynasties of the Intermediate Period According to Twenty Different Sources (Table 8, Volume II Chapter III, The Royal Lineages of Tibet). Twenty sources? Thirty-four dynasties? You do the math.

We learn about artifacts of its uniquely magical culture: self-created ornaments; traditions of medicine and healing known nowhere else, certainly not mere imports from "greater civilizations."

Each aspect merits further mention: distinctive methods of divination: by dice, scapulimancy, rituals for health, wealth, averting obstacles, rituals that have been in use over thousands of years; these are rituals considered sufficiently effective as to have been passed down through the centuries and are still practiced, still practical and relevant, to this day.

Every topic is addressed with such precision, fully annotated, beautifully translated by Donatella Rossi (Professor of Religions and Philosophies of Eastern Asia at the Sapienza University of Rome) and crafted gloriously into English by the literary genius of editor Nancy Simmons.

The Light of Kailash: A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet is stunning; it is inspiring and slightly impossible. Its scope and depth are beyond my ability to cognize, but well within my ability to recommend.

Perhaps with The Light of Kailash, seen in light of the archaeological findings of John Vincent Bellezza, the erasure of Zhang Zhung may itself become erased.

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15 Of particular interest, I think, to those interested in the comparative study of civilizations is the apparent pattern of erasure and contempt; in this trilogy, as Professor Norbu attests, the erasure by Imperial Tibet of Zhang Zhung; as Beckwith attests, the disdain with which later Tibetan culture is still met, its achievements still invisible, passed over.

16 The impossible part is, of course, the transliteration of Tibetan. Unavoidable, alas. No way out.

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In October 1961, in Salzburg, Austria, an extraordinary group of scholars gathered to create the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. Among the 26 founding members from Austria, Germany, France, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Spain, Italy, England, Russia, the United States, China and Japan were such luminaries as Pitirim Sorokin and Arnold Toynbee.

For six days, the participants debated such topics as the definition of “civilization,” problems in the analysis of complex cultures, civilizational encounters in the past, the Orient versus the Occident, problems of universal history, theories of historiography, and the role of the “human sciences” in “globalization.” The meeting was funded by the Austrian government, in cooperation with UNESCO, and received considerable press coverage. Sorokin was elected the Society’s first president.

After several meetings in Europe, the advancing age of its founding members and the declining health of then president, Othmar F. Anderle, were important factors in the decision to transfer the Society to the United States.

Between 1968 and 1970 Roger Williams Wescott of Drew University facilitated that transition. In 1971, the first annual meeting of the ISCSC (US) was held in Philadelphia. Important participants in that meeting and in the Society’s activities during the next years included Benjamin Nelson (the Society’s first American president), Roger Wescott, Vytautas Kavolis, Matthew Melko, David Wilkinson, Rushton Coulborn and C.P. Wolf. In 1974, the Salzburg branch was formally dissolved, and from that year to the present there has been only one International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC).

The presidents of the ISCSC are, in order: In Europe, Pitirim Sorokin and Othmar Anderle; in the United States, Benjamin Nelson, Vytautas Kavolis, Matthew Melko, Michael Palencia-Roth, Roger Wescott, Shuntaro Ito (from Japan), Wayne Bledsoe, Lee Daniel Snyder, Andrew Targowski, David Rosner, Toby Huff, and current president Lynn Rhodes. To date, the Society has held 47 meetings, most of them in the United States but also in Salzburg, Austria; Santo Domingo, The Dominican Republic; Dublin, Ireland; Chiba, Japan; Frenchman’s Cove, Jamaica; St. Petersburg, Russia; Paris, France; New Brunswick, Canada; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and Suzhou, China.

More than 30 countries are represented in the Society’s membership. Its intellectual dynamism and vibrancy over the years have been maintained and enhanced through its annual meetings, its publications, and the participation of such scholars as Talcott Parsons, Hayden White, Immanuel Wallerstein, Gordon Hewes, André Gunder Frank, Marshall Sahlins, Lynn White Jr., and Jeremy Sabloff.

The Society is committed to the idea that complex civilizational problems can best be approached through multidisciplinary analyses and debate by scholars from a variety of fields. The Comparative Civilizations Review, which welcomes submissions from the Society’s members as well as other scholars, has been published continually since its inaugural issue in 1979.

Prof. Michael Palencia-Roth
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