Book Reviews

Cover Page Footnote
Lamb, Connie; Rhodes, Lynn; Malhotra, Ashok;
Book Reviews


Robert Kagan is a recognized conservative historian, conservative because he has served as an advisor to several Republican administrations. What is interesting today is that his latest book, The World America Made, happens to be a favorite of President Obama. This book certainly makes a case supporting the idea of American Exceptionalism, a view more common among conservatives than liberals today, but this view may be enjoying a general renaissance.

Kagan’s Dangerous Nation, 2006, tracked American foreign policy from the country’s very beginnings. It contradicts the often held belief that the basic nature of America is isolationist and inward-looking. Kagan shows that we were promoting democracy from the start, a promotion that made us appear as a menace to the old order in Europe even before our revolution succeeded. Our only truly isolationist time was during the decades leading up to the Civil War, because the South wanted to expand into the Caribbean to extend slavery, but the North saw this as detrimental to the future of America. Once the issue of slavery was resolved, America again launched into an ambitious foreign policy and increasingly influenced world events.

Kagan’s present work poses an important question: if the US declines in power from its position as the hegemonic leader of a multipolar world, will the global order survive? He makes a devastating case that what we consider the global order today is neither inevitable nor would continue without us.

Kagan notes: “We take a lot for granted about the way the world looks today—the widespread freedom, the unprecedented global prosperity (even despite the current economic crisis), and the absence of war among great powers. In 1941 there were only a dozen democracies in the world. Today there are over a hundred. For four centuries prior to 1950, global gross domestic product (GDP) rose by less than 1 percent a year. Since 1950, it has risen by an average of 4 percent a year, and billions of people have been lifted out of poverty.” Would any of this have happened without us?

Many analysts think that the current global order is the inevitable consequence of human evolution. But, says Kagan, “Perhaps the progress we enjoy today was not an inevitable evolution of the human species but rather the product of a unique and perhaps fleeting set of circumstances...Perhaps democracy has spread to over a hundred nations since 1950 not simply because people yearn for democracy but because the most powerful nation in the world since 1950 has been a democracy. Perhaps the stunning global economic growth of the past six decades reflects an economic order shaped by the world’s leading free-market economy. Perhaps the era
of peace we have known has something to do with the enormous power wielded by one nation.”

Being a historian, he looks throughout history for comparable models. When Rome, which had maintained an extraordinarily successful world order in its time, fell to barbarian invasions and in one case, North Africa, total reversal of culture, not only did the Roman world order collapse for centuries, but people even lost the recipe for making cement! Without Rome, order was no longer.

In the 20th century, we saw the rise of other candidates for world order: the Communists and the Nazis. Had either prevailed, could we imagine a world order that would resemble the one we have today?

The elements that shape the United States are unique in the world in a number of ways: our unique geographical circumstances (not surrounded by enemies); a democratic form of government that has been functioning for several centuries; and enormous military power. Together these things “have shaped a particular kind of international order that would have looked very different had another nation with different characteristics wielded a similar amount of influence.” Imagine if it had been China, for example, these elements would not have been present.

Another anomaly of the American character is that despite our belligerence (demonstrated many times since our beginnings), Americans are not eager to colonize, unlike the European powers in the 19th century. We go to war, but we generally bear no grudge afterwards (note Germany and Japan), and we do not really want to nation-build. We do nation-building not well at all, unlike the British Empire, which tried to do that. The American public can hardly wait for us to leave Iraq and Afghanistan, for example. Because of our obvious reluctance to rule the world, other nations more or less trust us, and expect us to be a good hegemon.

The rest of the book (actually a long essay) describes in detail the world America made, with an analysis of just how it happened. America has demonstrated over and over again how it believes that when other countries do well, we will do well too. This is not a universal practice when others are the hegemons. The amazing Marshall Plan after World War II had destroyed Europe (and its pretensions to power) enabled Europe to not only recover, but also to thrive. Our former enemies, Germany and Japan, became our allies, much to the benefit of the now increasing global order. Could that have happened without us? It does not seem likely. Nor could a European Union have emerged without specific American encouragement and help.

The danger for us is to think that the current world order is inevitable and permanent. The early 20th century looked permanent under the hegemony of the British Empire and the obviously increasing prosperity and technological advancements of the
time. The world had been more or less at peace for decades, and war was unthinkable. Unfortunately, that illusion was shattered by the horrific World War I, followed by the even more horrific World War II, and the brooding threat of a nuclear conflict between the West and the USSR for the next nearly half century. Without US intervention, none of these wars would have ended as they did—with a much more ordered and hopeful world.

Today’s world order might indeed evaporate if the US loses its position as the exceptional hegemon. Kagan does not think that we are about to lose this position, but much depends upon our understanding who we are and what role we play. It would be a great folly for us to abdicate our military role in keeping the world stable. Ask any Asian countries how they feel (especially today) about the US Navy patrolling Pacific waters. They want us there, and they know perfectly well why they do. We play the role there of the cop on the beat.

“What has made the United States most attractive to much of the world has not been its culture, its wisdom, or even its ideals alone. At times these have played a part; at times they have been irrelevant. More consistent has been the attraction of America’s power, the manner in which it uses it, and the ends for which it has been used.”

If we decide to drop that role, if the US looks like a less reliable defender of the world order, that order will begin to unravel. “People might find Americans in this weaker state very attractive indeed, but if the United States cannot help them when and where they need help the most, they will have to make other arrangements.”

This would not be a good thing; just consider the alternate players in today’s world and make your choice.

Laina Farhat-Holzman
During the last years there has been a growing interest in civilizational issues, and no fewer than three large volumes have been published on civilizations and on the reasons for the rise of the West. Niall Ferguson in his *Civilization: The West and the Rest* notes that before the rise, European civilization was more of a “backwater” divided into small competing kingdoms. In comparison Chinese civilization was strong and prospering. The threat of the Ottomans in Eastern Europe was a matter of survival for Western civilization.

In the 19th century things were different. Chinese civilization was in stagnation and the Ottomans were no longer a threat to Europe. Turkey had become the “sick man” of Europe. Europe was prospering and able to project its power in all corners of the earth. European settlers were moving in large numbers into North and South America and other parts of the world. In the world-encompassing British Empire, India was the “jewel in the crown.”

There were six main reasons for the rise of the West, according to Ferguson:

1. Competition. Decentralization made nation-states and capitalism possible. It was the intense rivalries between Western powers that gave them the edge over non-Europeans, whose realms were vast and stagnant.
2. The growth of science, which gave the West a way of understanding and conquering nature. One of the most important parts was a leap in military technology.
3. Property rights defined by law. This led to stable governance that furthered growth.
4. Western medicine, which was good for productivity and extended life expectancy. Improving health also meant that Europeans could cope with colonial climes.
5. A consumer society, which in turn fueled demand and economic growth.
6. Possibly the most important was work ethic. This held together society and helped keep society together when the other five could have led to fragmentation. The work ethic to a great degree depended on the rise of Protestantism (Max Weber).

Ferguson, being an economic historian, forgets much of the roots of Western civilization (he even calls the Roman Empire the first incarnation of the West), although he readily accepts civilizations as complex systems that sooner or later, he says, succumb to
sudden and catastrophic malfunctions. Ricardo Duchesne (The Uniqueness of Western Civilization) has, however, shown us that we have to go back thousands of years before Athenian democracy to find the roots of the West. He argues for more attention to our Indo-European roots, so often forgotten today.

One of the standard assumptions of modern Western social science (history included) is that material conditions drive historical development. All of the “Great Transitions” in world history—the origins of agriculture, the birth of cities, the rise of high culture, and the industrial revolution—can be associated with some condition that compelled humans to act in new ways. Not so, says Duchesne: history is driven by creative people and their ideas and he points to the aristocratic warlike ethos of the Indo-Europeans as a vital contribution to the origins of Western civilization.

Indo-Europeans migrated westward into Europe over a long period from around 4000 BC to about 1000 BC and the Mycenaeans, representing a new type of warlike society, managed to Indo-Europeanize Greece: they had ox-drawn wheeled wagons, cattle rearing and ploughs and a more robust culture.

In the field of war they introduced chariot warfare, which resulted in military victories. The Indo-Europeans glorified death in battle and their religion included warrior gods of the sky. The culture was essentially warlike. The society of Mycenae was not the society of a sacred city but that of a military society. It was driven by the ethos where fighting and voluntarily risking one’s life was the basis of being a man of virtue. Duchesne uses the Indo-European poetry that revolves around heroic deeds, immortality and fame as an example of the restless ethos. The picture of the world was vital, action-oriented and linear.

The rise of Western civilization took place in Europe and the rise of poor, thinly populated and poor in natural resources Protestant Prussia is a good example of the importance of work ethic. Scientific revolution grew, however, throughout the east, the south, the west and the north of the continent. Then there was the Industrial Revolution in England, soon transferred to other parts of Europe.

Mr. Ferguson also describes in a convincing way how the countries which used Western ideas in other parts of the world also prospered. The most important example is, of course, Japan. It had used Western armies as models when building its own army. This resulted in the defeat of Russia by Japan in 1905. By adopting the American model Japan built an effective Western style productive democracy after the defeat in 1945. Another example is Israel, with its Western style structures that have made it prevail against the Arab foe.

The challenge to the West during many decades came from within: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The latter country was built around a Eurocentric Marxist critique of
capitalism. So the Cold War was actually a struggle between two rival Wests, a free market one and a communist one.

Slavery in the form it took in the West was indeed a grave sin but Ferguson should have put more emphasis on the fact that it was Western abolitionism beginning in the late eighteenth century that was responsible for ending slavery. It had been widespread in Africa before the Europeans arrived. When the Europeans left Africa slavery returned--of which, for instance, Sudan is an example.

It is also important to note that self-critique is a unique Western civilizational trait. Where the West finds or brings disease in any form it also in time provides a cure.

The ISCSC conference last summer, with the title “The Coming Clash of Civilizations: China versus the West?” held in Crystal City, Virginia, chose a very timely subject, namely the possibility of a coming clash between the West and China. Until at least the end of the Cold War there was no outside challenger to the West. In the 1980s, however, China adopted a Western style capitalist system and has in a few decades risen in wealth to become the leading challenger to the West--or so it seems.

There has been no change in the political system in China, which on the surface seems stable. In reality the autocratic system, as all such systems, is unstable and recent events in China have proven that. Dissidents are demonstrating the vulnerability of the system, and corruption and internal factional strife within the Communist Party both have shown the weakness of the power structure.

To be able to understand the challenge of China we must look to what I would like to call American civilization. In reality today’s Western civilization is divided into a waning European civilization and a still vital American civilization. It is not a split of the West or two rival civilizations. America and Europe cooperate reasonably well, but American civilization has developed into a far stronger defender of the present structure of Western civilization than Europe.

To quote the latest book by Robert Kagan, *The World America Made*, the most important features of today’s world – the great spread of democracy, the prosperity, the prolonged great-power peace – have depended directly and indirectly on power and influence exercised by the United States. Containment was an important geopolitical weapon of the West against the Soviet tyranny during the Cold War. After the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991 there has been no challenger to Western civilization until the rise of China and its civilization after the 1980s.

China has all the characteristics of a challenger: it is a large landmass in East Asia with the largest population in the world; it has access to the ocean and a strong, growing economy as well as military and the ambition to become number one. The military
build-up has been ongoing for two decades and the regime now has access to a network of satellites, anti-satellite weapons, a cyber warfare system, attack submarines, cruise missiles and soon, aircraft carriers. Most importantly it is building a huge nuclear ballistic missile force.

Furthermore, there is a strong naval build-up. Recent naval strategic thinking in Peking has been influenced by the geopolitical ideas of American Alfred Thayer Mahan. Using the ideas of Mahan the Chinese are studying his works on command of the sea, control of communications at sea, and the strategic passages in the Pacific. Chinese control of the Pacific would be a dangerous challenge to the United States.

In 2012 it became clear that the United States is taking the challenge of China seriously and is preparing for geopolitical containment of China. It may soon be 1948 all over again but this time in Asia. Here the thinking of Dutch-American geo-politician Nicholas Spykman is relevant. Spykman believed the Asian “Rimland” was of great importance for an American hegemon. He warned that China would be the strongest power in East Asia. Already in the 1940s Spykman noted that the United States needed to ensure that no power rose to become dominant in the Eurasian rimland.

Currently two powers along with the United States and Japan are part of the containing of China: Mongolia in the north and India to the south. In the case of Russia we do not really know what its China policy will evolve into. In case of a conflict between Russia and China it is clear that Russia does not have enough military, demographic and economic strength on the long border with China in Siberia.

At the present a breakout of China would be to the east, into the Pacific Ocean. Here are three important barriers: US military force, Japan and Taiwan. They form a kind of Gibraltar to the “Asiatic Mediterranean”. An American abandonment of Taiwan would therefore be a strategic mistake for the United States and the West. Thus, a concentration of strategic interest in Taiwan and the Malacca Strait is of utmost importance.

Other necessary preparations would be the strengthening of U.S. nuclear deterrent forces in East Asia, strategic cooperation with India and the securing of Afghanistan and helping Pakistan against Jihadist terrorists. The alliances with Japan and South Korea need to remain strong. A NATO-like organization is also needed, possibly a Pacific Ocean Treaty Organization. Australia is of course another partner of strategic importance in the Pacific area.

During the Cold War the United States and its allies did not exploit the weaknesses of the Soviet Union until the 1980s, during the administration of Ronald Reagan and the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. Containment policies in respect to China ought to include the close watch of future domestic unrest in China and the economic instability
of that country along with a continued ban on sale of weapons to China. The economic development of China has been restricted to the coastal areas so that the inland masses could be a growing potential danger to the present regime.

During 2012 there were growing signs that the United States is shifting the geopolitical focus from the North Atlantic and Europe to the Far East and the Pacific. America is a two ocean continent; the Pacific coast is growing in importance as what seems to be a containment policy towards China emerges. The added focus of containment of China is a part of the geostrategic shift to Asia and the Pacific.

The present crisis of the Eurozone makes it less likely that Europe will have a strengthening of military forces. There has for a long time been a need for stronger European defense commitments. The shift of focus from Europe to Asia of the United States should mean greater responsibility of NATO’s European partners for the defense of the own continent while the American partner concentrates more on the rimland of Asia. Unfortunately growing European military strength seems out of the question and will likely be postponed until the present crisis is over.

Ian Morris, a British classicist and historian, in his book Why the West Rules – For Now, believes that what he calls “Eastern social development” will catch up quickly to the West after 2050 but will lag behind in “war-making capacity, information technology, and per capita energy capture.” But China has problems, Morris admits. Economic success drives up wages. Manufacturing jobs are already leaving China for other Asian countries that allow for even lower wages. It could be the first sign that China is losing its edge.

Demography might be an even bigger challenge. The average age is rising faster in China than in America. By 2040 entitlements may weigh more heavily on China’s economy than on the United States economy. Another problem of China concerns natural resources which may slow the economic growth, and tensions might rise between the booming coastal cities and the languishing inner China. Popular unrest could get out of control with ethnic revolts and growing protests against the corruption of the party elite. Environmental catastrophe might add to the problems. China has broken apart earlier in its history and this might occur again. The country may even slide into civil war.

On the other hand prosperity can lead to Westernization of the East. The question then of whether the West rules would be rendered meaningless, because the whole world will have become Western. But will Asia really be Western? Chinese rule might lead to Easternization and the rise of Confucian cultural traditions. We must, however, remember that there are other cultural traditions in China than Confucianism, such as, for instance, authoritarian legalism, which is far from the peaceful statecraft of Confucius.
There are many unknown aspects, however. The United States may come to dominate new technologies as much as Britain dominated in the industrial age. The development of the genetic, nano-technological and robotic revolutions may shift wealth and power westward to even a greater extent than during the Industrial Revolution. The coming technological revolutions could even make civilizational categories completely irrelevant. Geography could be abolished. It should however be noted that Morris never uses civilization as a category. The word “civilization” does not appear in the index of his book.

Conclusion

Morris suggests in *Why the West Rules – For Now* that geography could be abolished. As you may have noted in my text I am strongly influenced by classical geopolitical and geostrategic thinking and I believe geography can never be abolished. It is fixed by nature. Neither do I agree with the German-American political philosopher Eric Voegelin that the origin and end of history can be defined by ideological constructions found in, for instance, Hegel and Marx.

These so-called “stop history” programs claim to have discovered the ultimate meaning of history and how history ends. History remains, I firmly believe, a mystery and its development cannot be discovered.

It would, therefore, in my opinion be wrong to use a system of the decline and fall of civilizations as a model for the future of Western civilization. The West is indeed unique and differs from all earlier civilizations. It is quite possible that the ongoing technological revolution will move wealth and power westward, not eastward. History never stops and predictions are not possible. China is not the end of history nor is the rise to domination of China inevitable. The second half of the twenty-first century may very well be the finest moment of Western civilization.

Bertil Haggman

During the first phases of the rise of philosophy two opposite lines of thought developed. They diverged as to the point of view of the origin of human knowledge. For the *rational* line, the production of ideas is a creation of the mind (Plato), while for the *sensory* line, the beginning of knowledge lies in the empirical experience of the world, through the senses, (Aristotle). In its evolution philosophy shifted to the view of an integration of both rationality and sensibility (Kant) in the production of knowledge. It was followed by the idea that knowledge is continuously transformed in a dialectic way, inside the movement of history (Hegel’s *dialectic*).

Later, the inseparable integration of subject and object was stated (Marx and *historical materialism*). The *Marxian theory*, connected to historical materialism, defines the economic level of social life as a *deterministic level*. At each historical phase it is covered by one or another level that appears as the *dominant level*. The *dominant level* of each moment defines the *conjuncture* presented at this moment.

In the case of religion, its origins were linked philosophically to rational ideas, about *supernatural rational powers*. (In the case of the Bible, however, there are references to sensory experiences, as it tells about conversations between God and chosen personalities.) The idea of God appears in a *transcendent* manner which means that He transcends nature, or in an *immanent* manner, which means a power rising from nature (Spinoza). In the case of the sciences, their historical development is linked to the increase of instruments connected to the senses.

Although sensory arguments have been introduced into theology since the Medieval Age (Saint Dominic), religion remained linked to the rational line, while, even though some scientists maintain religious beliefs, the progress of science cannot be separated from life experience.

In other words, the old philosophical debate between rationalists and empiricists moved to a higher level by questioning about a supernatural power or about nature only as an explanation for the origin of the world – a question that still remains open for each individual. In philosophical terms, one calls *Idealists* the believers in God as a rational power preceding nature. *Agnostic* is the name applied to people in doubt about the existence of a supernatural power or God. *Atheist* labels the nonbeliever in God. *Materialists* are those who see nature at the origin of the world and of knowledge. *Historic materialists*, Marxian-based, consider the *real*, the perceived world, as an object of knowledge, what means built and rebuilt by the inseparable integration of rationality and sensory experience along human history.
During these historical developments, covering 2,600 years, the integration of rationality and sensibility took many forms. This can be seen, for instance, in the idea that information received by the senses has to be rationally and methodically analyzed, or in the tendency to use rationality, methodically, in all social practice. In this way, rationality has acquired different meanings, as an ideology, as a method, or as a form of behaving. The true meaning of the sentence is that man is a rational being.

The observations here presented may serve as an introduction to the following review of the book by Kit-Man Li, *Western Civilization and its Problems: A Dialogue Between Weber, Elias and Habermas*. Each of the authors commented on in Kit-Man Li’s book, Weber, Elias and Habermas, was influenced, in a particular manner, by the philosophical lines and principles presented above. One can find in the emphases of their statements, reproduced in the book, the role of their different ideological affiliations. Kit-Men Li actually gives some information about the philosophical affiliations of his subjects, but he does not go deeply into the matter.

There is not a consistent explanation about the philosophical contents behind the positions of the three authors. Nor does the author present, prior to their statements, a comprehensive description of the philosophies which they follow. He certainly took it as unnecessary, considering that his readers are familiar with those questions. But the result is that this very interesting and rich book turned to be closed to the lay reader. It may leave the idea that the differences between the three authors are mainly due to individual variations and that their philosophical assumptions do not play a decisive role.

Weber, known as a straightforward believer, confesses his rationalism (in a philosophical sense, which connects rationalism to religion). He considers “that his diagnosis of Western civilization emerges from his own ideal-typical construction which selectively picks out from historical reality some significant elements and conceptually depicts the connections” (…) Moreover, Weber “assumes an unbridgeable gap between concepts and reality.” In another place the book states that Weber’s pessimism on Western civilization is “rooted in the process of rationalization in the West.”

Here the issue of what is rational is taken to mean a form of behaving in the lived space (Lefèbvre). For the lay reader, however, the statements reproduced above may appear as contradictory and with no discernible meaning. This is because Weber’s sentences presented in the book were not preceded by some explanation about the different meanings of the term “rationalism.”

One reads in the book that Elias did criticize Weber and the mainstream of social thought while he was alive for overlooking or evading the temporal and relational dimensions of social phenomena. However there is no explanation in the book about the difference between the concepts of time and history or about the concept of historical
materialism. The difference between Elias and Habermas lies precisely in the fact that the latter holds a Marxian formation that emphasizes historical materialism.

Thus, while Elias asks for a “good balance between involvement and detachment,” on his side, Habermas holds the same stance. However, as a Marxian dialectician, he cannot conceive of an absolute separation of ideology or involvement from knowledge. He “suggests one way of understanding that consciously incorporates into it an evaluative stance.” And he adds that there is no utopia without some involvement. Kit-Man Li interprets correctly both, by saying that “they have contributed [to] a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of Western civilization.”

The book is organized in a structure that presents the approaches of the three thinkers to a number of questions and the importance they gave to these questions. While Weber, philosophically a rationalist, bases his thoughts on man and his brain, Elias and Habermas “reject the solitary image of human beings (…), the Cartesian distinction between subject and object cannot be sustained.”

One of the questions raised has to do with methodical rationality and its relation to fragmentation and integration. Weber “equates the development of rationality per se with that of instrumental rationality.” Habermas “shifts from a subject/centered model in social theory to a communicative model, or a shift from the philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of language, or inter-subjectivity.” He distinguishes between instrumental rationality and communicative rationality.

Another question: the power issue is treated by Weber very narrowly as associated with decision-making processes. He is “unable to grasp the effects of power in non-decision-making” and how power acts “before it appears in the agendas for collective discussion and decision making.” For Elias, human interdependency and power define each other. Power means preparing minds, molding mentalities. But for Habermas the interest lies in the relation between power and social development. There is no utopian project without the use of power and he distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate powers.

On the question of values, Weber and Elias consider them as absolutes, while Habermas sees values in an historical, relative context.

The book deals with questions on communicative actions, systems, social differentiation and social integration, life world, and many other matters.

Kit-Man Li makes pointed comments throughout the book while putting his subjects in dialogue. However, one does not find a consolidated position of the author himself in relation to the problems of Western Civilization. He presents very interesting problems experienced by Western societies, develops philosophical thinking around them, but he
does not present a conclusive evaluation of Western problems and needed policies. Also there is no reference to post-modernity. One may wonder about the absence of a conclusive chapter which would summarize the questions debated and would better approach the title of the book.

A rich bibliography, occupying 17 pages, covers the authors analyzed in the book.

Pedro Geiger

First, let me confess that this is a very serious look by a dedicated author that I cannot competently assess. It is a comprehensive but affirmably “unconventional” prehistory that makes a number of claims about the four groups or tribes examined in detail. Those claims are very interesting, but many are new to me. Thus it requires a real expert on Native American cultures, which I am not. Several examples will follow briskly.

What I can do is faithfully describe Joseph’s allegations and affirm that he has done a yeoman’s job of providing evidence to support them, including classic archaeology but also comparative linguistics between Gaelic and Algonquian (a Plains Indian tribe) and Zuni Indian compared with Japanese. I know none of these languages.

Second, one of Joseph’s main theses is that each of these civilizations was animated by infusions of outsiders coming to North America, clashing, merging and no doubt interbreeding with native peoples of longer standing here (usually) building varieties of monumental architecture, and then each disappearing in their turn. Appendix I provides a simple timeline that helps make some sense of his claims.

Joseph thinks that Celtic peoples migrated west from the British Isles and Ireland around 1000 BCE to create what modern archaeologists call the “Adena” who introduced agriculture, astronomy, iron-working, road building and monumental architecture. He claims they were refreshed by continuing migrations over long times.

He also thinks that Japanese seafarers known as the Munakata arrived on America’s Pacific Northwest around 300 BCE, but then moved to the Midwest. That is a daunting journey under any circumstances. There Joseph thinks they made common cause with surviving Adena against threatening tribes of native peoples, ultimately developing huge ceremonial centers. The resulting culture is known as the “Hopewell” today. By 400 CE the Hopewell were killed off and, Joseph alleges, around 700 CE the last of the Adena died in battles in Kentucky.

Around 900 CE, Joseph thinks the Mayans abandoned Yucatan and Central America following dictates of their sacred calendar, some relocating to Illinois and Eastern Missouri where they built the megalopolis of Cahokia and the Mississippian culture. How the Mayan calendar dictates this is not completely clear.

A century later he thinks that two peoples from Peru, the Huari and Llacuaz moved up the Colorado River to Arizona and New Mexico, where among other notable achievements they built the Great Houses at Chaco Canyon, NM. Conventional archaeologists refer to these as the Hohokam and Anasazi, or “ancestral Puebloans.”
Then, around 1240 CE, the onset of prolonged drought triggered collapse such that within a century the Neo-Mayans left the Mississippi Valley for the Valley of Mexico, and most Hohokam and Anasazi went to northern Mexico.

The bibliography Mr. Joseph uses to support these conclusions includes over 250 references, most quite conventional and academic. But the whole picture he presents is so new to me, and spiced with exotic items like Japanese immigrants and long term Celtic migrants mixing with original aboriginals and remnants of the Mayans, that I cannot well assess it.

There is no doubt that many mysteries remain about the origins and transformations of North American native peoples, not least the mystery of why the original Mayan civilization collapsed and what happened to the Mississippian who seemed so dominant over all during their time. So I appreciate that Frank Joseph has done the best he can to present an alternative explanation for these and many other mysteries. At the very least, he provides stimulating hypotheses that may help better scholars than I discern the ultimate truths of our complex prehistory.

Finally, like so many other civilizational authors of our era, Joseph is worried about our future. From his Afterword, page 263 [Is Ours the Next Lost Civilization of America?] Joseph writes: “Seen from a wider perspective, the story of civilization in North America, as it is everywhere, is a recurring cycle of birth, growth, expansion, prosperity, corruption, decline, and death.” In this respect he mirrors those who think that civilizations cycle, including the venerable Carroll Quigley in the Evolution of Civilizations of 1961.

Let us hope that decay phases are not inevitable, but better than hope, let us study history to actually learn its lessons, and then work on improvements so that collapse is not inevitable in our time or our children’s.

Michael Andregg

The regions of both northeast Africa and the southern Levant witnessed a number of major cultural changes from 5000 BC to ca. 3000 BC.

The premise of this book is that these changes must be seen in a context of the following important factors: 1) widespread changes in animal husbandry and agriculture, 2) expanding exchange and interaction over vast areas, and 3) the later emergence of metallurgy. In the study of civilizations, there seems to be a relationship between the development of social complexity and the introduction of metallurgy.

Over time, various modes of living advanced which initiated constant communication across enormous areas between different regions where ideas diffused and commodities were exchanged. The author proposes that pastoral nomads acted as the dynamic component of diffusion and cultural change between different modes of subsistence. Settled village societies had created economic surplus which made it possible to procure metal ore from nomads.

These settled societies acted in turn as middlemen because of their position as a supply and demand zone to the larger formative societies in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The author bases his conclusions on archaeological sites and materials. The author, Nils Anfinset, is a Research Fellow at the Department of Archaeology, University of Bergen in Norway. His research interests include political archaeology and cultural heritage in the late Neolithic and Bronze Age, and he has conducted research in Norway, Nepal, Tanzania, Syria and the West Bank. He has taught at the University of Bergen, the University of Oslo, and Birzeit University (Palestine). This book is amazing in its scope and depth. The author covers a broad geographical area and over two millennia at the same time. Its documentation is stunning with 26 pages of references.

He deftly intertwines all the literature on a particular topic with objectivity. The book reads like one large literature review so in this respect it is somewhat tedious but the author’s extensive knowledge of the literature is impressive. The conclusions at the end of each section, chapter and book itself are very valuable in providing the reader with effective summaries. In some cases I wish the concluding remarks had been provided at the beginning of the chapter as an introduction.

The time coverage and chronology included in this book are:

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<td>Early Bronze Age I</td>
<td>Nubian A Group</td>
<td>(3500-3000 BC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the last phase, there occurs a large increase in complexity

The book is organized by topic and is meant to build up to the conclusion, but in doing so, the author many times refers to later chapters, which is a little disruptive. The first chapter is an introduction and the second a discussion of perspectives and approaches. Anfinset then provides the setting by discussing the areas of the southern Levant and Northeast Africa for the 5th and 4th Millennia. Other chapters cover the role of nomadic pastoralists, the role of copper, and the processes of contact, specialization, and valuation of commodities. He discusses the secondary products of the animals such as milk, wool, etc. that helped them survive and became commodities which the nomads could sell or exchange on their travels.

This is known as the secondary products revolution and resulted in substantial change to social organization, gender roles and modes of subsistence. Anfinset considers many factors and changes in demonstrating the complexity of civilizational development in the region discussed.

The author provides many figures which are useful. The book also includes several maps; however some of the maps are difficult to read because of the background of the map and the small print. The book includes a good list of figures and a valuable index. I wish the author had included a glossary for those who are not familiar with the terminology. As I read I often had to try to find definitions of time periods and various words maybe mentioned briefly before and then used later without definition or context. As the Levant is considered an important area in the development of civilization, this book provides valuable insight into how some of this took place.

During the Late Neolithic, there seems to have been a gradual economic specialization regarding animal husbandry and agriculture, as well as some indications of contact with the Northern Levant. There was probably a gradual development of specialized pastoralism in both northeast Africa (cattle) and the southern Levant (sheep and goats) as part of the growing demands for space and secondary products. As new areas were used, there was an increase in interaction between groups with difference economic bases.

Contact zones between settled and nomadic societies played a significant part in the existence of villages. It is likely that the nomads introduced metal, especially copper, to the southern Levant and Egypt which they probably learned about from further north. It left me wondering how metal was discovered and how metallurgy developed. More detail about this aspect would be helpful as the author discusses the nomads as intermediaries of this metal transportation. Copper became of value to the settled population as the process of metallurgy produced tools, weapons, and household goods for them. The products of both animals and metal helped increase more complex societies and begin the development of social strata.
The literature about this topic is quite sparse. There are a few book chapters which discuss metallurgy in the Levant and a book on craft specialization and social evolution in general. So this work by Anfinset is a great addition to the study of culture contact, the importance of metallurgy and the possible mechanisms by which cultures and civilizations developed.

Connie Lamb

Who would ever think about the role of wood in civilization? We so take wood for granted, yet it has played an enormous role in our cultures since the emergence of man. John Perlin, author of *A Forest Journey – The Story of Wood and Civilization*, has addressed this issue in an encyclopedic survey. Humankind has interacted with forests for the entire existence of Homo Sapiens, forests having been our original home. Over the last 5,000 years of mankind’s agricultural revolution, wood was essential: first as fuel and then as building materials, from the Bronze Age through the 19th century. This interaction has affected the demographics, politics, economy, and technology of the great civilizations of Sumer, Assyria, Egypt, China, Knossos, Mycenae, Classical Greece and Rome, Western Europe and North America.

Harvard University Press has selected *A Forest Journey* as one of the Press’s “One Hundred Great Books” of all time.

With heat to make fire, cold climates became habitable; inedible grains were changed into a major source of food; clay could be converted into pottery, serving as useful containers to store goods; people could extract metal from stone, revolutionizing the implements used in agriculture, crafts, and warfare; and builders could use wood as fuel to produce substantial construction materials such as brick, cement, lime, plaster and tile for housing and storage facilities. Charcoal and wood also provided the heat necessary to evaporate brine from seawater to make salt; to melt potash and sand into glass; to make grains into bread; and to boil materials into useful products such as dyes and soap. Wood is so ubiquitous that we scarcely notice it any more.

Perlin paves a way for us to understand how cities or states developed thanks to their proximity to forests. Time after time however, the forests were destroyed without regard for the future of the forests—or society. Once the forests were depleted, society had to reach further afield or abroad in order to purchase or lay claim to new lands with adequate forests for its insatiable needs. Upon finding the new forest resources, those in power built their civilization anew and the pattern was repeated.

In Perlin’s introduction, the groundwork is laid by citing ancient writers who observed that forests always recede as civilizations develop and grow. He goes on to say that trees have been the principal fuel and building material for almost every society for over five thousand years, from the Bronze Age until the middle of the 19th century.

Without enough supplies of wood from forests, the great civilizations would never have emerged. Wood, according to Perlin, is in fact the unsung hero for the technological revolution that has brought us from a stone and bone culture to the present age.
As Perlin describes the decline of forests, the reverse is true when society declines. For it is then that forests tend to regenerate. Meaning, that as societies decline, their need for and taking of the forest declines and hence, the forests are given a new life of restoration.

The idea for Perlin’s book began when he co-authored another book, *A Golden Thread*, which covered the use of solar energy throughout history. In the course of researching that book, Perlin discovered that reliance on the sun for house and water heating occurred when people began to run short of wood. Hence, he discovered that wood was the principal fuel and building material of nearly every society from the Bronze Age through the 19th century.

Perlin describes how the abundance or scarcity of wood has shaped the culture, demographics, economy, internal and external politics along with technology of societies. He does this through two sections of the book which are laid out in 12 chapters. The first section of the book “The Old World” takes us through the use and impacts of wood from Mesopotamia; Bronze Age Crete and Knossos; Mycenaen Greece; Cyprus; Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Greece; Rome; the Muslim Mediterranean; the Venetian Republic; and England through the ages as well as England’s departure from the wood age. “The New World” takes us to Madeira, the West Indies, Brazil, and America.

Man’s evolved dependency on wood is linked to many topics, including one unexpected insight into Western Hemisphere slavery. In the Indies, both natives and forests were destroyed to create plantations. With the native populations gone, the planters lacked hands to work their sugar mills, making it necessary to import slaves from Guinea; thus, the African slave trade developed. Sugar was in great demand in Europe and elsewhere and enriched those who grew it.

Plantation owners in the West Indies earned large profits from sugar and sought new ways to maintain their operations rather than letting the diminishing wood supplies curtail their operations. With wood supplies becoming scarce, they developed alternatives to their operations to minimize their dependency. They converted worn out wood rollers into iron ones and burned bruised cane in the furnaces. Even though they could use wood substitutes in certain portions of the sugar-making process, they would have had to stop production without a permanent supply of wood, which they found in New England.

Yankee traders traded their wood for rum. With their cargo of rum, they would then head to Africa to trade the rum for more slaves or sell it to European slave merchants. Then, they returned to the West Indies with their human freight and they bartered many of the slaves for sugar. The New Englanders then shipped the sugar to England and traded it for goods which they sold in America. Money from those sales was used to
purchase more timber for another round in the slave trading, goods-exchange loop.

New England merchants had no trouble in finding other markets for their timber in newly deforested areas. The islanders of Madeira, for example, once had adequate supplies of their own wood to build casks in which to ship their wine. By the late 1600s, most of their island was covered with vines rather than the trees of earlier times and New England provided the needed timber. When Madeira was then no longer able to send wood to Portugal and Spain, those countries also became dependent on New England’s wood supply.

Throughout early America, some new leaders realized the importance of forests to the successful development of the country. One close friend of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Tench Coxe (author of several economic works and administrator of the Census of 1810), said that no country was blessed with such abundance of wood and timber as the United States. He felt the wood supply provided “an immense and unequalled store of wooden raw materials and fuel.”

Manufacturing villages were scattered across the new country, hosting gristmills, sawmills, oil mills, fabric mills, iron mills, sheet-iron mills, clover mills, paper mills, and tanneries run by water power. The mills were, of course, constructed primarily of wood. Many villages and towns grew around the mills. The first building to go up in a wilderness was usually a saw mill. The cycle would continue whereby lumberjacks sold their logs to the mill owner. The mill owner accumulating wealth, through his business, would build a large wooden style house and usually open a store. In this manner, a good portion of the surrounding countryside was eventually cleared.

From needing heat for the industrial sector, to building houses and factories, transportation, travel, bridges, ships and boats, and railroads, Perlin illustrates the dependency on forests and wood for their necessity, development and sustainability, at least in the short-term. However, from the end of the Revolution to the beginning of the Civil War, not many appreciated the role wood played in the development of the United States, except for one well respected scientist of the time, a gentleman named Increase Lapham.

In 1867 at the request of the legislature of Wisconsin, Lapham wrote his “Report on the Disastrous Effects of the Destruction of Forest Trees Now Going on So Rapidly in the State of Wisconsin” which described the “experience of other countries, ancient and modern, whose forests have been improvidently destroyed…the effects of clearing land of forests, upon springs, streams, and rainfall…how [forests] temper winds, protect the earth…enrich the soil and modify the climate…the economic value of forests in their relation to cheap houses, cheap fuel, cheap bread, cheap motive power, cheap transportation and cheap freights…and the propagation and culture of trees…”.
The book leaves off where one might wish it to further explore. There is only brief attention given to contemporary forest policy and practices in the United States. There is room in Perlin’s story for another edition to bring about a more full and updated global picture.

That aside, the book is satisfying in its detail and scope. It is impressive to realize how wood has contributed to the growth or decline of civilizations, from using it as fuel, building material for shelter, transportation (carts, wagons, and ships) throughout the ages, and how wood is the foundation upon which early societies were built. Furthermore, Perlin links the history of wood with the history of civilization’s many successes----and failures.

Quite simply, wood has always been integral to civilizations’ stability, power, and decline as we maintain or lose access, use, deplete or sustain the supply. I recommend this book.

Lynn Rhodes
Andree F. Sjoberg: *Dravidian Language and Culture (Selected Essays)*, Dravidian University, Srinivasavanum, Kuppam, India, 2009 (Compiled by Dr. D. Balaganapathi)

*Dravidian Language and Culture* is a collection of 12 essays written between 1956 and 2001 by Professor Sjoberg. She received her BA degree in Geology, MA in Anthropology and PhD in New Linguistics. Her doctoral dissertation was on the influence of Sanskrit on the phonology of Telugu and was done under the direction of Professor Winfred P. Lehman, who went on to become a world renowned linguist. Her extensive research on the Dravidian languages of India along with the Turkic language of Central Asia resulted in this volume that is compiled by Dr. Balaganapathi, a Professor of Philosophy from the Dravidian University in Kuppam, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Since this edited volume appears to be meant more for the scholars and less for the general reader, Sjoberg provides a brief but useful guide to understanding the content and structure of the work.

In the words of the author, “the first five chapters seek to answer the questions: Who are the Dravidians? What has been their impact on the development of Indian culture? And how are the Dravidians connected to other linguistic groups of Asia?”

The last seven chapters, which deal with “selected features of Dravidian linguistics” are very specialized “dealing with the locative case in some of the languages, the role of aspect in the Dravidian simple verb, and discussion of negative verb roots and similar phenomena in other languages.”

In chapter one, Sjoberg looks at the Dravidian language group of Tamil, Telugu, Kanada and Malayalam and places it in the larger Eurasian language group consisting of the Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic and Japonica of Central Asia and the East. The author believes that her topological analysis reveals the similarities but not a genetic connection in these two groups of languages. She also asserts that her research is pioneering because it chalks out “the place of the Dravidian in the context of the broader Eurasian linguistic context.”

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 make up the core of her thesis, which is that “most Indologists have been intent upon examining the linguistic and cultural data on India through a narrow Indo-Aryan and even Indo-European lens” by neglecting or even ignoring the central role played by the Dravidians in “shaping Hinduism and Indian culture for more than 3500 years.”

Out of these 12 chapters, seven are on the specialized subject of linguistics dealing with similarities between the Altaic language group of Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic and
Japonica and the Dravidian language group of Tamil, Kanada, Telugu and Malayalam. These seven essays are meant for the scholars or specialists, who should not only know these languages well but also should understand and comprehend fully the rules of grammar of the two language groups being compared. These seven specialized articles are being used by the author to provide justification for her thesis in the book, which is presented in the other five chapters.

Her thesis is that there is much more influence of the Dravidian languages and their culture on the Indo-Aryan languages, culture and civilization of India than has been recognized. The Indo-European scholars studying the Indian languages and culture have taken only a myopic view. They have not given proper importance to the impact of the Dravidian languages on the Sanskrit language and its offspring. Moreover, they have neglected to give due weight to the “Dravidian features in the religious content of the Indian Epics;” “The Impact of Dravidian on Indo-Aryan;” and the “Dravidian contribution to the Development of Indian Civilization.”

All this is due to a lack of understanding among the scholars regarding “who the Dravidians were.” Through her research, Sjoberg attempts to rectify this scholarly lacuna about the contributions of the Dravidians. She tries to restore to the Dravidians their rightful place by showing that the Indian culture of today owes a great deal of its philosophical, religious and cultural content to the influence of the Non-Aryan Dravidians. These cultural elements supplied by the Dravidians make up the quintessential ingredients of Indian civilization.

Who were the Dravidians? Recent research points in two different directions. First, the Dravidian who occupy the Southern states of India have “certain genetic components... and a number of cultural features that appear to be similar to the people of southwestern Asia and second, the linguistic evidence suggests “connections with Uralic language family, found in northwestern Asia and parts of eastern Europe.” (p133) Sjoberg’s research indicates that the Dravidians were an amalgam of divergent peoples and cultures.

Because of a number of invasions and migration, the blending took place in Northwestern India, the Near East, and Central Asia. Sjoberg further asserts that at present though physically the Dravidian people cannot be separated from the North Indians except that they are of darker complexion, linguistically they belong to a separate group. The Dravidian languages are unrelated to the North Indian language group. Though they borrowed a number of words from the influential Sanskrit language of the North, their grammar has not changed throughout the ages.

According to Sjoberg, some of the core concepts that the Indian civilization developed are due to the influence of the Dravidians. This impact is evident on the religious philosophy of Hinduism as displayed in the books of the Upanishadas, the Epics, the
Puranas and in particular the concept of Bhakti (devotion) as displayed in the Bhagavad Gita. The Dravidians added rich content to a number of other concepts: by modifying the meaning of Brahman as “sacred utterance” to “one ultimate principle” of creation; Atman as “life breath” to the “subjective essence that is identical with Brahman;” and Maya as “craftiness or deception” to “phenomenal universe which is illusory in nature.” Furthermore, they supplied other important themes of Yoga as the technique of controlling the body and the mind; Samadhi as the highest level of achievement in meditation; and Tapas as one of the Yogic austerities including non-injury (Ahimsa) towards all living beings.

They also contributed the ideas of both Siva and Shakti as the god and goddess of fertility in addition to Siva as the perfect Yogi and Shakti as the creative mother goddess. Furthermore, Vishnu, Krishna and other major gods like Siva, who are regarded as possessing darker skin in contrast to less powerful deities, clearly show the influence of the dark complexioned Dravidians. The emphasis on Bhakti (devotion) in contrast to salvation through knowledge is also influenced by the Tamil segment of the Dravidians.

Sjoberg argues that all of these influences on the Indian religious philosophy came from the non-Aryans (Dravidians) with whom the Aryans had mingled for 3500 years. This blend of Dravidian and Aryan cultures has been ignored by previous researchers because of the strong pro-Aryan bias amongst Western Indologists. Sjoberg’s book challenges this prejudice, which she believes is an extension of the European cultural heritage that presumes itself to be superior to the Asian culture.

Overall, the book presented a challenge to read because of the technical material accessible only to the linguist. As a non-specialist, I had to use the dictionary as well as Wikipedia to understand some of the concepts and vocabulary that was associated with the seven technical chapters. The other five chapters dealing with the Dravidians and their influence on the Indian civilization were fun to read. Sjoberg’s book is a pioneering attempt, which tries to restore to the Dravidians their rightful contribution to the Indian culture and civilization. It is a must read for the scholars of Indian civilization!

Ashok Malhotra