

## **Dreams of Europe and Western Civilization: Culture and Frontiers**

**Topics: -**

- ***Civilization, Culture and 'the West'***
- ***Challenges to the Notion of Western Cultural Superiority and Isolation***
- ***Shifting Frontiers***
- ***Bibliography and Further Reading***

### **1. Civilization, Culture and 'the West'**

The term 'Europe' has long been synonymous with notions such as 'the West', 'Civilization', the 'Modern world', and also that of technology, imperialism, and the 'white man's burden'. By critically examining these ideas, we can see that many of these commonplace terms are dangerous notions serving current political purposes. In doing so, however, we can also show the very real contribution that the 'West', alongside influences from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania, has made to world civilization and to the modern world, with its diversity, pluralism and danger.

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The modern usage of the 'West', though possibly derived ultimately from Greek ideas, is used as a substantive in English during the 12th century, and more commonly from the 16th century. European, too, is found as a descriptive term in the 17th century distinguishing one region from others, e.g. from the Turks, Americans or Indians (Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, 1971). These terms developed alongside the usage of the term 'East', which the emerging discipline of systematic geography soon divided into the Near, Middle and Far East (Wilson 1983, p333). The proper noun Europa, of course, goes back to an early Greek myth concerning a daughter of Agenor, who had settled in the land of Canaan. Zeus, liking the girl, appeared as a bull and took her to Crete (see Graves, 1960, vol I, pp194-196). The only possible connection with this myth and the region of Europe is that the loss of the girl prompted her brothers to explore and settle in lands to the west of Phoenicia. The brothers included the hero Cadmus, who founded Thebes in Greece. The Greek term for Europe is used by Hecataeus of Miletus (late 6th century B.C.) to distinguish the western continent from the continent of Asia, which included, for Hecataeus, the regions of Egypt, Ethiopia and Libya (Pearson 1975, p31).

Cultural systems have helped create ethnic and national identities, with 'history' and projected futures created by the inventive and receptive human intellect in its social setting. This process has been a particularly fertile one in Europe for the last 8,000 years (or more). In this sense, the past, present societal aims, and projected destinies are very much part of the forces that shape the future (Giddens 1991). The question is not so much about the ultimate origin of civilization (interesting as such hypotheticals are), but how any society can retain its own identity, its own tradition and its claim to a certain role in the world in the midst of conflict and change.

Exclusive and precise definitions of 'civilization' and 'culture' are problematic. A word such as culture, for example, has hundreds of different definitions, though these tend to strongly overlap in key aspects. We can borrow a definition, as a starting point, from anthropology and archaeology as formulated by James Deetz. For Deetz culture is the patterned, not directly-

inherited, learned behaviour which sets man apart from animals, and which includes knowledge and skills that are not directly encoded in our genetic inheritance. Deetz's summarized this view as: -

Culture can thus be defined as a uniquely human system of habits and customs acquired by man through an extrasomatic process, carried by society, and used as his primary means of adapting to his environment. (Deetz 1967, p7)

From this point of, human societies are groups of individual organisms interacting together in their behaviour and in an exchange of information. Human societies, however, are also the repository of cultures, which they carry and support, but which are in turn key elements in the way societies adapt and survive in their own environment. It is also possible that some higher animals, e.g. whales and primates, have a very limited potential for culture creation, but in their case whatever limited culture they may have developed does not seem to have been an evolving factor in the way they interact within the environment.

We can see, then, that any social animal will need to carry forward information from one generation to the next. In human societies, their cultures carry the complex layers of skills, languages and data which allow the next generation to carry forward a human existence distant both from animal life and distinct from other human societies. As noted by Colin Renfrew: -

Starting with the manufacture and use of tools and with the development of a complex language for communication, man has developed a rich 'culture' over the millennia, so that, in this respect (and in this respect only), a child born today comes into a very different world from that of 40,000 years ago. 'Culture' in this sense, is something handed on from generation to generation, shaping the growth and education of the child so that a person in one society develops a very different way of life from one in another cultural environment. We are shaped, therefore, from our earliest days by the culture into which we are born, and it is this which distinguishes us from our ice age ancestors. (Renfrew 1980, p15)

Civilizations, on the other hand, are usually regarded as extended human communities that develop over large-scales of time and space, developing unique 'high cultures'. They are also usually associated with cultures that leave large-scale artifacts behind them, such as those of the Egyptians and Maya. It is true that these large-scale urban and religious centres have helped us enormously in the discovery of such societies, but it must be remembered that this is not the only way to go about building a humanized world. The Plains Indians of north America (see, for example, H. Storm's, *Seven Arrows*, a didactic novel which provides a modernised account of the complex culture developed by these peoples), the Scythians of central Asia, and the indigenous peoples of Australia also created not just cultures, but civilizations based on art, oral literature, and complex social patterns. But these civilisations filled a religious and social space more than a material culture. Their civilisations could change and grow, could be articulated as new story-tellers, new heroes entered their worlds. They were static, only on dimensions which really didn't matter to those peoples, while stability was held to be crucial in others, e.g. the cycle of hunting within the natural year. The notion of these 'prehistoric' peoples being somehow trapped in time also ignores how many innovations they did use and develop: when, for instance, did some of the plains Indians develop sign language, and learn to use it when communicating with tribes speaking other verbal languages? Or we can mention the complex, layered storytelling of most Australian tribal groups. Dozens of other inventions, technological and social, could be listed with respect to these so-called 'primitive' peoples. These cultures are only static when compared to the dynamism of the post-Industrial-Revolution West.

We can see some of these misconceptions viewed through problematic notion of 'free time' or 'leisure' (see Morgan 1997; Kenny 1966). It used to be argued that specialized irrigation and centralized control of river valley civilizations were more efficient and gave their people more free time for cultural inventions. Likewise, Aristotle had argued that leisure time, in part based on the produce of slaves, was needed to support political life and philosophy. Such views overlook the reality of hunter-gatherer societies with intact ecosystems. Peasants in ancient societies would often work from dawn to dusk, while a skilled hunter-gatherer might need to 'work' no more than 4-6 hours, during standard and good seasons, to fulfil modest needs. The use of improved hunting tools, traps and nets also allowed early peoples to settle down for periods in areas where season 'food-gluts' occurred, e.g. fisheries, a trend improved once early forms of food preservation and storage were adopted (see McNeill & McNeill 2003, pp19-20). It was during this so-called 'leisure' time that peoples such the original peoples of Australia and the Eskimo of the Arctic were able to articulate lengthy religious cycles and a huge body of folk literature, as well as continue their required physical crafts. Centralized agricultural societies, in fact, do not deliver more leisure time to the average person. What they can provide, however, is a greater surplus which can be extracted for the purposes of the society, its elites, or the state. This allows the emergence of paid 'specialists' within more diversified social systems. It is in this surplus, of course, that a great deal of the dynamism and diversification of these 'great' civilizations can develop. This dynamism includes the ability to attack and enslave others, as well as a tendency to extend internal divisions, statuses, and classes (Renfrew, 1980, p17). Indeed, for a Greek thinker like Aristotle, both high culture and the political life appropriate for a free man can only be provided by the leisure time provided by owning slaves.

However, the term civilization, partly for mistaken political reasons, is usually applied only to strongly centralized and sedentary cultures that allow an extended specialization of labour and social functions. Such a view is presented by J.M. Roberts: -

Because civilisations build up elaborate social organization, permit massive concentrations of labour, devise writings which make the accommodation and exploitation of mental capital much easier and do many other things, they generate in time a cultural potential which cannot exist outside them. They thus make human differentiation yet more marked. Societies cradled by civilizations long continued to grow more diversified. For the whole of historical times - the era of civilisations - people have thus had a much greater chance of living lives strikingly different from those of most other human beings than had their prehistoric ancestors. It might almost be said that with civilisation appears the first chance of a human being living a truly individual life. (Robert 1985, p13)

Notice the ease with which Robert connects the creation of social organization and specialization, role diversification, the development of historical time, and the creation of the individual. It is true that many of these events did occur alongside each other in the emergence of Near Eastern and then European civilizations (with a other 'cores' in the Indus Valley and Northern China, see McNeill & McNeill 2003). Further than this, Roberts argues that the very idea of civilization is 'a European idea, a cultural artifact' (Roberts 1985,p37).

It is true that the word does go back through its Latin root of *civitas* to Roman and Greek ideals. However, a similar concept was held by at least one other culture, having a similar meaning and served a similar purpose; during the unstable Spring and Autumn periods (722-481 B.C.) and then the Warring States period of China (481-221 B.C.), the moral claims of the Chinese Empire served much the same purpose, symbolizing a unified and orderly community based on benevolence and good order, rather than the warfare and ambitions of competing princes (see Confucius *The Analects* I.2; I.12; XI.26; XII.1; XII.22; XIV.5; XVIII.6). It derived, ultimately, from the concept of order experienced hundreds of years earlier under the Chou

Empire, viewed as exemplar of such a civilization. Likewise, the concept of 'wen' or culture (in contrast to 'wu' or the arts of war) was held to be a prime 'attractive' and 'transforming' element. The word *wen*, though originally referring to that which is 'decorated or adorned', came 'to signify all kinds all kinds of order, elegance, ceremony, and culture' (Watson 1958, pp13-14). It was precisely this refinement which attempted to establish authority at the ideological level and through the regulation of human relationships - as such, it had a greater economy of means than brute force, and was also the very basis through which military force could be mobilised and directed. The most ideal use of culture and morality to unify a state is found in Mencius' dictum: -

Mencius said, 'One who uses force while borrowing from benevolence will become leader of the feudal lords, but to do so he must first be the ruler of a state of considerable size. One who puts benevolence into effect through the transforming influence of morality will become a true King, and his success will not depend on the size of his state. T'ang began with only seventy *li* square, and King Wen with a hundred. When people submit to force they do so not willingly but because they are not strong enough. When people submit to the transforming influence of morality they do so sincerely, with admiration in their hearts. (Mencius IIA:3, trans. D.C. Lau)

Are the trends cited by Roberts causally or structurally connected, and does the pattern fall apart if any one of these aspects is not present? Is centralized control required to allow large-scale social specialization? Does a sense of an owned past and a social history have to be discovered before a person can sense themselves as an individual? Is freedom to choose interaction within the community, or to be able cut oneself off, the basis of individuality? Is this pattern a uniquely European construct?

All these conceptions come into play when we consider the foundations of, and the emergence of 'Europe'. A series of earlier concepts underlie the connotations connected with Europe. Notions such as Hellas as the ancient Greek world), the *oikoumene* (meaning the civilized, habitable world of the Hellenistic Age from the third century B.C.E. onwards), the Roman Empire (as a source of law and governance), and Christendom (which emphasized conscience and the fate of the individual soul) are substrata which help give some content to the vague notion of 'Europe'.

Europe, of course, does not exist as a single geographical identity on the map, nor is it just the Europe of the European Union. It lies as part of a series of oppositions and contradictions in social history and the history of ideas. For the legends collected in the work known to us as Homer's *Iliad*, to take one example, the small gap of the Hellespont cut off Hellas from the world of Asia, and from that special 'other', the Trojans. Yet, in the 7th and 6th centuries, one of the great 'European discoveries', analytical philosophy, was probably born on the coast of Asia Minor (Cornford 1912, p1-3), where Greek city-states were impacted by influences ranging from Babylon to Egypt. Likewise, for over 2,000 years 'European' societies and then Christendom had tried to incorporate Israel and Judaea into its own world order, first by direct conquest and control under the Roman Empire, then via an attempt at reconquest during the Crusades (approx. A.D. 1096-1192), and now through the enmeshing of Israel's interests with that of the West, which definitely includes that of the United States.

Since the time of the Roman Empire, Europe has been subjected to forces that integrate and draw it together, and forces which pull apart different groups or interests within the European system. Although a shared European culture had emerged to some extent through the Christendom and the Renaissance, the emergence of strong states and nations from the late Middle Ages began to pull apart any political unity. The state system gradually began to

dominant after the Peace of Westphalia (1648), but did not solve the problem of national conflict (Pagden 2002, p13). This emerged in cycles of intense warfare from the 16th century onwards. In the late 19th and 20th centuries France and Germany have been at war three times and twice at the centre of world conflicts. One of the major themes which affects the future of Europe are forces of convergence and divergence, which Hugh Miall views as central in three possible prospects for Europe; a return to a divided Europe of nation-states, the development of a static 'Fortress Europe', or the development of a 'Wider Europe' with positive relations with countries to the East, including Russia (see Miall 1993; Miall 1994b.) In turn, the European Union and NATO has an expanding sphere of interests that now includes much of Eastern Europe, an extended series of Mediterranean partnerships, a strong interest in the future of Turkey, Georgia and Ukraine, and a crucial if troubled relationship with Russia. This means that the 'European project' remains a contested focus for one vision of civilizational order, but far from a perfect one.

The 'East' too was a drifting conception; after the collapse of the Roman Empire we find the penetration of the West by dozens of 'eastern' tribes, who would become known as the Celts, the Germans, the Franks, the Belgii, the Burgundians, Goths, and Vandals, peoples who would be crucial in the creation of most modern European states. After this, if the 'Slavs' for a time were viewed as the inferior 'eastern' races, then they too in time would be the bastions against a new 'other'; first the Huns, then the onrush of Islam and the Mongols, Tatars and Turks. It must be remembered that penetration into 'Europe' could occur in more than the standard routes across the Mediterranean, or land-hopping across the Hellespont. McNeil has noted that: -

This plain of the middle Danube was the westernmost extension of the steppe zone of Asia; and both before and after the time of the Huns, steppe peoples invading Europe on horseback penetrated to that plain, and there stopped. . . . This geographical limit to the encroachment of horse-nomads from Central Asia played an important part in determining the course of European history; for while wave after wave of Asiatic invaders appeared in Hungary and raided further west, they never tried to settle down permanently in the forested country of Western Europe, despite the military superiority which they frequently enjoyed. (McNeil 1986, footnote, p208).

Thus parts of the Ukraine and Danube basin were in reality an extension of the Eurasian steppes. Poland for a time was a new bastion against the 'east'; her soldiers had helped contain both the Hun and then the Turks, resisting Turkish attempts to conquer Vienna in 1661-1664 and then in 1697 (McNeil 1963, pp612-3). Poland temporarily also managed to contain German expansions, and from 1410 began developing a strong central European state. In time even Russia too would build its way into the West, after 1721 founding St. Petersburg as a great European city, its 'window on Europe' (McNeil 1986, p439). She went on, of course, to claim her place as a major player in the European 'balance of power' of the 18th and 19th centuries, and as a vulnerable though important state in the 20th century.

Today the European boundary of west versus east is still hard to delineate; Greece may be traditionally part of Europe, but Turkey now is a member of NATO, now has the structure of a modern nation-state, and has a timetable towards eventual full EU membership. Others would argue for an invisible line cutting Europe away from Asia along the line of the Urals (*JRO Topic Map, Asia - A Region in Change*, European Publishing Limited, Munich, 1986), but there is still a reflex by many to contain the Middle East as a 'separate region', ignoring that the region is not just simply Arabic nor simply Islamic. This complex of 'orientalism' has been studied by Ted Said, who notes: -

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one

of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting images, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (Said 1978, pp1-2)

The Middle East comprises a complex web of cultures and peoples that have played a decisive role in world history, and have made central contributions to the creation of the 'high cultures' of Greece, Rome, Christendom, and modern Europe. This was true of the past, when Islam received and developed crucial ideas in philosophy and science, and remains true today, due to much more than merely the material resources of the Middle East. Ironically, the nationalism of this region, along with its various strands of Islam, remain one of the few major moral challenges to the 'West', a theme heightened by events since 2001.

Frontiers, physical and mental, change over time. They depend both upon regional political control, cultural influence, and on how people conceive them. Europe is as much a collective notion of identification against others viewed as non-European, as a continued hope for cultural and political hegemony (Said 1979, p7). Any map that we see is a complex cultural creation, often drawn with quite intentional political implications that do not always correlate to any real 'fact'. The very artificiality of many of the borders drawn on maps has been a major problem with conceptually coming to grips with the real Europe, e.g. to realize the complexity of ethnic groups within the Balkan peninsula or the historical fluidity of interactions across much of Eastern Europe (see for example Magosci 1996, contra the kind of view found in Huntington 1993; Huntington 1996).. Likewise, the artificial drawing of borders by imperialistic powers, or as comprise war settlements after two world wars, has likewise left 'mapmines' across much of the post-colonial world, ready to trigger further conflict. These borders are largely the product of historical and political compromises, often between external interests such those of France and Britain. The accuracy and purposes of such artificial barriers can crucially affect the future situation of living peoples, as well as their very survival, e.g. lines demarcating Malaysia from Thailand, or Iraq and Iran, both leaving sizeable religious groupings across modern borders. A misplaced concreteness accorded to a line drawn on a map, of course, can greatly inhibit the understanding of both the players involved in a conflict, as well as misinform the international community.

Much more than borders are involved in cultural formations. One traditional view of Europe and its claims to high civilizational status has been presented (in a critical context) by J.M. Roberts: -

Western civilization had come to birth and matured in Europe, before spreading across the seas to other continents settled by Europeans. By 1900, North and South America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were its overseas centres and strongholds. Not all of those continents and countries reached the same levels of civilized achievements in all sides of their life. But that was true in Europe, too; it was freely admitted that in some parts of Europe - Russia, for instance, or parts of the Balkans - the process of civilization had not gone as far as it ought to have done and that you could reasonably argue about whether they ought to be regarded as 'civilized' or not. Nor was western civilization outside Europe confined to lands settled by Europeans, for the men of the West had been for a long time civilising the whole world in their image by means other than migration. As their ideas and institutions spread round the globe, some of them were prepared to concede that there were westernised Indians, Chinese, Africans, who could be counted as 'civilized' men. In the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century, indeed, one wholly non-western country, Japan, appeared to be joining the civilized world, accepting its standards, ideas and many of its ways. Nevertheless, around 1900 most

thinking people would have broadly agreed that it was only in a 'western' world, however you might precisely define it, that true civilization was found. (Roberts 1986, pp9-10).

Such a view was common earlier this century among many Westerners, but is still unconsciously held by many today. It also covers some amazing uses of Westernism, western ideas and purposes, by nations such as the Japanese, who are quite willing to compete with Westerners at their own games, whether in imperialism, warfare, or economic dynamism. The term Westernism should be used here rather than Westernization. 'Westernism' is a term often used by Koreans, Chinese and Japanese, and refers to a specific ideology and way of life which is adopted by parts of the population, but only for particular purposes, by these cultures. Interestingly enough, it is not always the best which is borrowed for use from another culture, especially when this borrowing often takes place within the enforced context of imperialism and neo-imperialism. Likewise, Westernisation is often based on a very narrow range of elements from the wider and deeper experience of Europe (see Huntington 1996).

A shallow view of 'the West' represents the loss of a true heritage, and confuses certain aspects of modernism which developed in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries within the broader and deeper notion of European culture. We have here a misplacing of means as ends; industry, mercantilism, administrative efficiency, modern organization etc., for more genuine goals which may be held to be more appropriate themes of the western tradition; intellectual understanding, freedom in both a positive and negative sense<sup>1</sup>, a minimum standard of living for all, some kind of genuine social progress, states and communities built upon higher levels of participation, consensus and choice than was possible in the past (see Vitanyi 1986; Huntington 1996). These notions are entailed in both democracy and socialism, though pursued by different means.

## **2. Challenges to the Notion of Western Cultural Superiority and Isolation**

The standard image of the West as the torch bearer of 'civilization' ignores several central historical trends: -

1) Early Mediterranean and European cultures were strongly influenced by peoples and civilization of the Middle-East and North Africa, both during the formative and developmental stages. These influences were both: -

a) direct, including the radiation of techniques, ideas, social processes, as well as some direct migration, and the long-term effects of trade through the Mediterranean. Examples are incredibly numerous, e.g. the invention of the writing, probably in Sumeria, where by 3,300 B.C. some 700 signs were in use (Roaf 1996), and the creation of the Phoenician alphabet, which was then used as the basis of the archaic Greek script. Likewise, the archaic Greek

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<sup>1</sup> Thinkers as diverse as Kant, Hegel, Marx (see West 1985, pp78-9), J.S. Mill, Acton (see Carr 1961, p115) and Croce have argued that one of the crucial senses in which the West can or has made progress is in the liberation of the true potential of man under conditions of political and material freedom, though the exact definitions of what is meant by freedom in these thinkers varies greatly. In his Philosophy of Right (Third Part, III.C.341) Hegel argues that 'world history is not the verdict of mere might, i.e. the abstract and non-rational inevitability of blind destiny. On the contrary, since mind is implicitly and actually reason, and reason is implicit to itself in mind as knowledge, world history is the necessary development, out of the concept of mind's freedom alone, of the moments of reason and so of the self consciousness and freedom of mind. This development is the interpretation and actualisation of the universal mind.'

'canon' of proportions used in the sculpture of the human figure was borrowed from Egyptian art.

b) Indirect eastern influences, due to the tensions between parts of Europe and Asia over some 3,000 years. These indirect effects are a lot more than the idea of 'challenge and response' (as developed by Arnold Toynbee). They include a more sweeping effect through the creation of frontiers that were political, social and cultural. Just as the statesmen during the Meiji restoration were willing to actively modernize and westernize Japan in many ways in order to be able to resist the West (Roberts 1986, p34), so ancient Egypt was willing to borrow military tactics from its enemies the Hyskos, and imperial Rome cavalry strategy from its opponents the Parthians. The Hellenic *oikoumene* created by Alexander was built in part on the foundations of the Persian empire which he had conquered. The Persians had already opened up the Middle East and Levant with roads, trade, a mixing of the skills and abilities by numerous peoples (as demonstrated by the royal palace at Persepolis), and had used a widespread diplomatic language (Aramaic) alongside other official languages, to facilitate ready communication throughout the region.

The world view of various 'European' cultures was created within a kind of cultural space in which the frontiers, and the 'foreign' elements beyond, helped intensify their own identity. This 'other', whether classified as 'barbarian', 'Asian', 'the slave', 'pagan', or 'oriental' actually is created within a set of images that tell us a great deal about the cultures entertaining and using such concepts. These terms are not purely projections, of course, but they too become traditional stereotypes often used for internal political purposes, as in the Roman view of the Gauls and German tribes (see Tacitus *Germanica*). We might note in passing that various eastern cultures use concepts in a similar way to define their cultural pre-eminence compared to certain others: the attitudes of classical Chinese to the tribes of the west is clearly implied through the view of them as 'barbarians' awaiting cultivation. 'Barbarians', for Japan as well, might be both a threat and an opportunity. We might note that in 1811 Japan opened an 'Institute for the Investigation of Barbarian Books' (Roberts 1986, p25), consciously using foreign ideas to strengthen themselves without in any way admitting moral equality. Likewise, ancient China developed a sophisticated range of systems for dealing with the barbarians, ranging from tribute-trade systems to the real-politic approach of using one barbarian group to control another barbarian tribe (see Mote 2003).

2) Greece and Rome were not the birth-places of civilization, though their inventiveness in certain areas, political, philosophical, and artistic should not be under-estimated. High civilizations such as those found in Sumeria, Egypt, Anatolia and Israel, are deeply involved in the creation of 'the West', and it is not really possible to divorce these regions and cultures from developments in the Graeco-Roman world and western Europe (though I do not go as far as Ben-Jochannan or Bernal in arguing for Europe's dependence of Afro-Asian roots). This is well known, but what is often forgotten is that these Middle Eastern cultures remained vital, and interacted intensely with the Graeco-Roman world during the period from 1500 B.C. right through to the birth of modern Europe 3,000 years later. We often have the image of one civilization rising, beginning to decay and fall, and then another taking its place, bearing a new 'advance' for civilization while other regions become backward and decadent, a notion developed for the modern period by Kennedy (Kennedy 1987). This model is both structurally weak and factually incorrect. Late Period Egypt and Ptolemaic Egypt, for example, remained important cultures, as did the first Persian Empire, and the following Parthian Empire, and the later Abbasid Caliphate. Cultural amnesia and ignorance can also beset historians, leading to erroneous assessments such as the following: -



Once the political and military structure protecting it had gone, ancient Egyptian civilization ceased to be significant except to scholars and cranks. (Roberts 1986, p51)

Roberts, here, simply reveals his ignorance of Egyptian history, and of European cultural history as well. Egypt remained an important foci for a unique form of Hellenistic and Christianity influenced by its indigenous culture, followed by a continuing influence on the Fatamid Caliphate. Egypt thereafter captured an important place in the European mind, with a fascination felt by figures as diverse as Napoleon and Flaubert. Likewise, the contemporary fascination for Egypt felt by millions of ordinary people, who buy popular books on Egypt, attend night classes, or supply Egypt's tourist industry does makes them neither scholars nor cranks. They are fulfilling a legitimate interest to explore a key phase of human development, to explore an alien and mysterious 'other', and to be attracted by the deeply artistic and religious viewpoints of a major civilization. Roberts here has missed the point by an overkeen and largely misdirected comparison with the impact of Greece on modern mentality.

Nor were the civilizations created by the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks merely military regimes. The Arabic world too, of course, was one of the main transmitters of original Greek learning to the West of the Middle Ages (Fakhry 1983, pp4-30; Qadir 1988, pp31-41), and in the eight to eleventh centuries became 'the leaders of philosophical and scientific thought' (Qadir 1988, p104) while Western Europe was only slowly rediscovering what it had lost, or intentionally thrown away, during the so-called 'Dark Ages'.

3) Aside from these cultures which are in direct contact with Europe, it must be remembered that there were very ancient and advanced cultures which had some indirect influence on the region, through trade, the radiation of ideas, and to some extent through the political impact experienced indirectly through the Middle East, or through the migration of peoples across central Asian and the European steppes. China and India, of course, are two of the main powers whose cultures and civilizations reached considerable stages of complexity and physical extension during our period. Nor should these cultures be viewed as politically or scientifically 'backward', based on selective judgements about unfortunate periods of their history. China, for instance, had an extremely advanced metallurgy industry, and a strong technology long before Europe, while its failure to follow through with a wholesale industrial revolution was based more on social factors rather than a supposed lack of basic theoretical knowledge (see Needham 1981). In the context of the 1990s and the 21st century, it seems that Asian cultures generally will once again play a major cultural and political role in world affairs.

4) There has been a tendency to break cultures into small regions in the ancient period, and argue that the effects from one culture to another must be carried through directly by trade, immediate radiation of ideas, or migration. Rather, these patterns of trade, radiation, limited migration, along with indirect impacts, created a much stronger 'super-region' of interaction directly linking Western Europe with the Middle East and East Asia. Some of these long linkages were developed as early as the Bronze Age, with patterns of interaction reaching from Turkey into the Balkans (Renfrew 1987, pp160-1), or from Asia into Hungary. There were several *oikoumene*, not just that of Hellenistic civilization. A kind of *oikoumene* was also created through central Asia, north India and Iran as Hellenized regions were broken away from the Seleucid empire, but retained wide regions of trade and contact to the east and west (McNeill 1963, pp316-360). A classic example of this is the kingdom of Asoka (circa 273-232 B.C.), who helped favour Buddhism throughout India and central Asia, sent emissaries to the Hellenistic courts, and whose ideas strongly influenced South-East Asian models of kingship

(McNeill 1963, p301; see Tambiah 1976; Toynbee 1965). Likewise, the Silk Road and 'Sable Road' trading luxury goods through Eurasia were wider patterns of interaction that stretched across diverse cultural systems (see Bobbrick 1992; Christian 2000).

Put simply, all these considerations mean that European civilization and culture did not grow up by itself. Nor was it just a further extension and humanization of the Fertile Crescent civilizations. The re-dating of our sites in Western Europe has shown that monolithic and large cultural formations already existed much earlier than thought in Germany, France and Britain (Renfrew 1978). But the point is that none of these large cultures developed in complete isolation, nor merely as the handmaiden of a great earlier culture. Rather, the key phases of cultural formation from 6,000 B.C. to 1000 A.D. show a much wider range of interaction than has previously been thought. Secondly, one of the other key factors, often ignored, is the inventiveness and adaptability of cultures and societies over time. Each social group adds and invents, recreates as well as changes its heritage. To view Classical Greece, for example, merely as a reworked version of the heritage from Egypt and Phoenicia is to underestimate the Greeks as a source of social innovation and adaptation.<sup>2</sup> It is also misrepresents the very real influences that crisscrossed the Levant from 3000 B.C. onwards, and which persevered right down through the Classical and Hellenistic period.

Furthermore, this analysis shows that the East-West division is not just simplistic (as noted by Roberts 1986, p44), but in large measure a false dichotomy. Neither the 'West' nor the 'East' by itself can be clearly defined as a coherent entity apart from its use within a given culture, while the dichotomy is one of several divisions defining self and other, centre and periphery. This is not to say that the notions associated with the terms East and West are unimportant; on the contrary, the terms have been used in ways which tell us a great deal about the mentalities and prejudices of various cultures going back as far as the classical Greeks. They have also had a positive role in defining what each culture holds as valuable, in contrast to forces that are seen as destructive, chaotic, or inhuman.

Perhaps we can draw a parallel with a culture which was not what we could call European, though very much part of the European story: dynastic Egypt. Egypt did not have our simplistic use of the terms eastern or Asia, though it recognized Babylon and the Hittites as potential foreign threats and regarded the control of its north-eastern and north-western borders as crucial. For them a central division was between the black land and the red land; the black land was the fertile and safe land of the Nile Valley and Delta, while the red land refers to the harsh, dry and dangerous lands to the east and west. One term of scorn for the nomads, for example, was 'Asiatics Who-are-Upon the Sands' (in Pritchard 1969, p227). But this dichotomy went further; the people who inhabited the red lands were also the despised tribes, the traditional enemies of Egypt, called the Nine Bows (in Pritchard 1969, p263). The Nine Bows were seen as inferior in culture, but also a danger to Egypt, since it was they who could try to invade or infiltrate into the Black Land, causing chaos, disorder, and famine. In fact the Libyans to the West, the Sudanese tribes to the south, and the Philistines, Caanites and Hebrews to the north often did cause trouble for the Egyptians, whether by direct invasion, as in the case of the Libyans and the Hyskos people, or by foiling Egyptian foreign policy, her access to resources,

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Bernal in his controversial study *Black Athene* (1987) has overstated his case for the influence of Egypt on Minoan and Mycenaean civilization, and under-estimated the level of discontinuity between Bronze Age and Classical Greece. This is based on the very real collapse of Mycenaean culture, perhaps due in part to climatic change (Carpenter 1968). Although this topic is under intense debate (Croce 1990), comparison between Mycenaean and Archaic Greek cultures show at least as many differences as lines of continuity.

and her desire for direct control of regions to the south and north-east. These Nine Bows are clearly represented in Egyptian art, with different hair-styles and dress, as well as somewhat different facial features. When one sees them being smitten by the Pharaoh, or tied as captives, the ordinary Egyptian would have known immediately who was being portrayed (Romer 1982). These were the 'others' over whom Egypt had a spiritual, and, it was hoped, a military dominance. At times the pharaoh wore special sandals, on the soles of which were inscribed the symbols for the Nine Bows; literally, he walked on them, crushing them beneath his feet.

However, we should not suppose from this that the Egyptians were racists; in fact, compared to most ancient civilizations, they had little racial prejudice as such. They were quite happy to use Nubian tribesmen as mercenaries and police, while individual foreigners could rise to high rank in the royal service. The story of Moses, a Hebrew, rising to high rank in the Egyptian administration, though attested only by Biblical sources, is not entirely impossible. Indeed, a coffin text from the Middle Kingdom (circa 2000 B.C.) stresses that the benefits of the gods are for all men equally (in Pritchard 1969, pp7-8). The superiority that the Egyptians felt was based on a sense of their special cultural and religious place in the order of the universe. For they thought of themselves as the first civilization, where temples, kingship, and the words of the gods were first brought to men. Indeed, from the eight century Nubian kings, themselves influenced by Egyptian cultural forms, took control of Egypt from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and sparked a political revival under their rule.

It is in this light that we can see a major complex of ideas being used to assert not just identity, but superiority; the Hellenes, the Romans, the Chosen People of Israel, the True Believers of Christianity, The Source of Modern Civilization; all these conceptions have been used not only to establish an identity but make a claim for a world destiny. In doing so, 'might' and military superiority have never been accepted as sufficient. Some form of justification, whether religious, intellectual or cultural has usually been appended. The notions of 'the West', arose after the division of the Roman Empire into two major administrative zones in the third century A.D., strengthened by the foundation of Constantinople, and solidified with the division of the Western and Eastern Churches from the 11th century (Williams 1983, pp333-334) The idea of 'Europe', though born during the ninth and tenth centuries (Roberts 1986, p81), was based on the fruits of these earlier political and cultural phases (6). In both cases they were self-identifying terms, and statements connected with views of a superior or special culture.

### **3. Shifting Frontiers**

A related trend has been the shifting focus of different civilizations within moving physical and cultural frontiers. We tend to think of frontiers as a strict line, drawn on a map, following a river, guarded by troops and border stations, backed up by the claims of international recognition and international law. This is a largely a political notion reinforced by the advent of the modern nation-state. It is true that ancient cultures to some extent were defined by natural barriers, e.g. the Alps, the Rhine River, the Euphrates River, by coastlines and deserts. The characters of ancient peoples and the extent of their kingdoms were influenced by such limitations, this is less than half the story. Beyond this: -

- a) Frontiers in the ancient world were often fuzzy, defined by spheres of effective influence with loose areas between them, as the kingdoms of Southeast Asia and India, or were permeable frontiers allowing trade and contact but limiting major migrations or military intrusions. Such was the Roman frontier in Northern Gaul and southern Germany for

some hundreds of years (Dyson 1985), before a more rigid frontier was established in the later imperial period.

b) Zones of interaction and communication are the more effective and immediate causes of the regions controlled by a culture of civilization. Trade routes, zones of population expansion and migration, regions which can be defended militarily etc. all help define a region which is less likely to be torn apart by centrifugal forces. For the early history of the ancient world, for example, there were key routes of trade and expansion in the Middle-East, usually along the coast of Palestine and Syria, inland towards Armenia and then down the Euphrates or Tigris. This was the route followed by the wandering Hebrew patriarchs before they reached Israel and then Egypt, this was the region trampled by Egyptian, Hittite, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian, Roman and then Parthian armies. Only lesser trade routes crossed the Arabic peninsula, or travelled by sea across the Persian gulf, then from the Red Sea across mountains into the Nile Valley. Both these lesser routes relied strongly on the domestication and intensified use of the camel, and were never major routes of conflict or conquest. This major north-south route meant that the regions of Palestine and Syria were strategic zones throughout the ancient period, as they remain today. They were also routes for mutual influence, as well as conflict, e.g. demarcating an unstable border between the Roman and Parthian empires.

For the classical world there is a shift of focus away from this fertile crescent to a different medium of communication: the Mediterranean. It was the most readily available, as well as the most cost-efficient means to most Levant and southern European cultures. Indeed, the classical world can be viewed as essentially a Mediterranean world (Roberts 1986 p60; Rostovtzeff 1935; Rostovtzeff 1920). It is interesting to see how various centres established themselves; in the period 2000-300 B.C. the main focus of high cultures remained in the eastern Mediterranean, with independent megalithic cultures developing in the west. However, the rise of Rome after its major victory over the Carthaginians (The Second Punic War ended in 202 B.C.) shifted this 'zone of relative integration' westwards. This zone of westwards integration also had a north-south boundary; at first its southern limit was the Sahara, while Roman northwards penetration never moved much past the Elbe River and Dacia, just north of the Danube. As the Roman empire gave way to Christendom as a loose system of Christianised states, the north border moved slowly into Germany, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, the Baltic and then Russia. This early attempt to shift from a Mediterranean to a continental power was one of the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, and helped generate preconditions for its successor states (Weber 1950). We also find a break emerging between east and western zones of control in the Mediterranean, beginning along an invisible cultural frontier between the Latin west and Greek east, strengthened by religious divisions within the Christian movement, and symbolized by the creation of a new Rome in Constantinople (A.D. 330). Byzantium was a vigorous civilization, but was later on viewed as alien by a revived West. With the spread of Islam we find that Africa, Greece and parts of Spain were absorbed into a different political and religious integration. Note, however, that both the zones of integration and their boundaries were not absolute. Their change is part of the changing political and cultural face of the synthetic conception now called Europe. It stepson, the West of Europe and its national descendants (the U.S. and the British dominions) are likewise complex claims rather set, rigorous concepts.

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