

## **Book Review After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall Of Global Empires, 1400-2000**

Darwin begins his world historians with William H. McNeil. However, he doesn't seem to realise that McNeil's father, an authority about John Calvin, was a close friend of Arnold Toynbee, whose 12 volumed *A Study of History* (1934-1961) made such a splash when I was young. Now Toynbee himself was inspired by Oswald Spengler whose *The Decline of the West* (German: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*), or *The Downfall of the Occident*, was a two-volume work. The first volume was published in the summer of 1918. Spengler revised it in 1922 and published the second, subtitled *Perspectives of World History*, in 1923. Spengler himself was inspired by Otto Seeck's, *History of the Decline of the Ancient World* (1897). All of these echo Nikolai Danilevsky's *Russia and Europe: a look at the cultural and political relations of the Slavic world to the Romano-German World*, first published in the journal *Zarya* in 1869. So far as I can ascertain, no one has been able to write a one-volume world history that goes from the beginning to the end that can incorporate all the civilisations. When I was 19 I read volume 1 of the very competent condensation two-volume work by the American, D. C. Somervell, *A Study of History* (see *Volume 1* (1947) and *volume 2* (1957) of Toynbee ) (Long out of print).

William McNeil himself studied at Cornell University during its glorious period. His dissertation supervisor was none other than Carl Becker, President of the American Historical Association, but Becker died before McNeil completed his dissertation. So Becker's successor, Edward J. Fox, signed McNeil's PhD. Fox then became a friend of Toynbee and planned to have Toynbee write the first half of a Western Civ text with him. Fox would author the second half of it. That scheme didn't work out but Fox edited the

Cornell Series on Western Civ, with one volume by each expert, which I helped him revise and finish. Then with Fox's extensive help I completed a volume covering Western Civ. until 1715, commissioned first by Prentice-Hall and then by McGraw-Hill. In it we put half a chapter on the rest of the world after each of our four chapters of the twelve we had in volume one. My half was accepted but Fox never finished his, so the whole thing was never published. Thus we tried half-heartedly to integrate world history into Western Civ., which unlike world history, can be seen to have a theme.

Darwin's "After Tamerlane" is an overwhelmingly brilliant synthesis. It very correctly states how much work has been done in world history over the last thirty years, exactly since I quit working on our Western Civ text to specialise in gay history. Darwin very well exploits other syntheses, for example, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* by Jurgen Osterhammel, from Princeton University Press (2009). And doubtless the other volumes in their as yet unfinished series will provide further insights.

Astutely, Darwin exploits a particularly brilliant monograph, *A History of the World in 12 Maps* by Jerry Brotton, Penguin Press (2012). He seems not to overlook a work much closer to his own that begins, not with Tamerlane, but with his ancestor, Genghis Khan, namely, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* by Janet L. Abu-Lugbod, Oxford University Press (1989). 11/16/2015

All the books that I've mentioned above are far too advanced for anyone except a senior honours history student or even graduate student and none of them, except for Toynbee,

give due credit to the genius of the Europeans. They are all tainted by 'White Guilt'. None of them appreciate the 'Greek Miracle'. See my *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, Illinois University Press (1996). In it I forgot to stress that the Greeks, like all the other Western Indo-Europeans, were uniquely monogamous, although serially so. That, plus the fact that after 630 the Greeks uniquely postponed marriage of males till thirty, so that they took brides as old as eighteen, gave Greek girls time to develop longer than any other groups, civilised or not.

The Romans married according to traditional patterns: males in their late teens to females between 12 and 14 but after 'Manu Marriage' was replaced by about 300 BC, Roman wives could be protected by their 'Patres Familiar', and windows with three children became virtually independent (see our 'The Age Of Marriage In Ancient Rome' (2003), Edwin Mellen Press. Though very less speculative than the Greeks, Romans assimilated much of the greatest achievements of the Greeks. More practical, they consolidated the best principles of Greek law and constitutional theory. They excelled the Greeks in engineering and encouraged Greek physicians. Most importantly, by conquering all the Celtic countries, except for the fringes, they transferred this to Western Europe. Rome's greatest rival, Carthage, and also adopted much from the Greeks but the Romans destroyed it and brought more Greek culture to the former Carthagenean lands with their excellent engineering and government.

After 300 AD, as Petrarch and Gibbon noted, Christianity ushered in a Dark Age in Europe. During Europe's 'Dark Age', the Muslims preserved and expanded Greek

mathematics and sciences (physics, chemistry, astronomy and medicine). Their art, architecture, fleets and economic institutions dazzled people. Unfortunately, for all of their greatness, no Muslims have ever had constitutional government, secure private property or political liberty.

Even in their darkest age (400-1000 AD), the Roman Catholics did improve agriculture with the mouldboard-plough and the horse collar. The crude feudal system made reciprocal duties between lord and vassal, out of which grew the Common Law and eventually representative institutions. The quarrels between popes and emperors, and later between popes and kings, also helped prevent the tyranny that existed in all other civilisations. Property rights were also better protected, especially after Justinian's Code was rediscovered towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The recovery of Roman Law as well as the re-emphasis on logic, during the Renaissance of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century helped set the West apart. The Italian and Northern Renaissances, the Age of Discoveries, the Reformations and the scientific and commercial revolutions that followed put the West far ahead intellectually of all other civilisations, well before our Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. Thus all of those works about world history failed to give Europeans and Americans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans of European descent our due (see Frank Wilczek for science and Niall Ferguson for Economics), whilst failing to mention anything about Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists.