

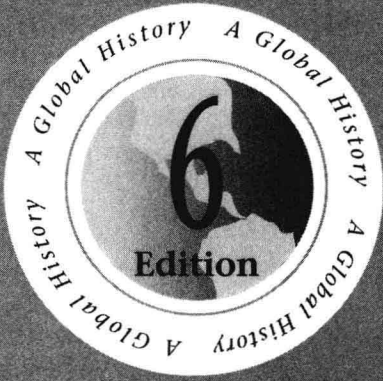
A Global History A Global History A Global History A Global History

**SIXTH EDITION**

# THE WORLD TO 1500



**L.S. STAVRIANOS**



# The World to 1500: A Global History

L.S. Stavrianos



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# From the Author to the Reader

The use of history is to give value to the present hour.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The old term "Western civilization" no longer holds. World events and the common needs of all humanity are joining the culture of Asia with the culture of Europe and the Americas, to form for the first time a world civilization.

*Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

**T**his book is distinctive in three ways.

First, it connects the past to the present. History is something more than "one damned thing after another," as a famous historian once complained. That type of history is more likely to give intellectual indigestion than intellectual understanding. This does not mean that only the study of current affairs is useful and worthwhile. Rather it means that the past should be analyzed in a manner that is meaningful for the present, and that the relationship between past and present should be noted and emphasized. This is why each of the four parts of this volume ends with an essay entitled "What It Means for Us Today."

The second distinctive feature of this book is that it connects not only the past and the present

but also the present and the future. Many argue that history cannot be used to foresee the future because it is not an exact science like chemistry or physics. They argue that history deals with human beings whose actions cannot be predicted with the precision and certainty with which a chemist can predict what will happen when element A is combined with element B. Therefore, it is argued that the historian cannot use the past with the confidence that a scientist can use predictable experiments in the laboratory.

On first thought this argument seems correct, but if we think again we find that it is false. Its error becomes clear if we compare meteorologist with historians. Meteorologists are very successful in predicting that tornados will strike in this region or that, and therefore they are considered scientists. But meteorologists cannot predict which house in a given region will be struck and which house will not. This does not mean that meteorology is not a science. It only means that different sciences provide different levels of predictability. Therefore the chemist with his flasks can predict more precisely than the meteorologist with his gauges. Yet meteorology remains a valid science with useful predictive purposes, and it is becoming steadily more precise with the use of computers and satellites.

So it is with history. It cannot be used like a

crystal ball to predict which political party will win or what national leader will be assassinated or which country will have a revolution or where a war will break out. But history, properly studied, shows what combination of conditions and policies have resulted in the past in assassinations and revolutions and wars. If we understand such past patterns, then we have some guide to the present and to the future. But if we have not studied the past, the present will seem mysterious and the future terrifying.

The last chapter in the second volume of this history (*The World since 1500*) is entitled "Second Industrial Revolution: Global Repercussions." It shows that all societies today—developed and underdeveloped, capitalist and socialist—are experiencing profound internal disruptions as well as the external threat of "nuclear winter." If we end our history with that chapter, the future will indeed seem hopeless. The reader might well ask, "Why bother studying the history of the past since none of us may survive to enjoy the future?" For this reason that final chapter is followed by a concluding essay entitled "Human Prospects," in which we try to find some guidelines from our study of the past and present so that we can have some idea what to expect in the future.

This brings us to the third distinctive feature of this book, which is that it is a *world* history. It deals with the entire globe rather than with some one country or region. It is concerned with *all* peoples. It is as though you, the reader, were perched on the moon looking down on our whole vast planet. From there your viewpoint would be different from that of an observer living in Washington, D.C., London, or Paris—or for that matter, in Peking, Delhi, or Cairo.

This global approach is a departure from traditional modern history. Since the days of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, historical emphasis has been on nations rather than on peoples. But in recent years, interest in world history has been growing, in response to present-day events that are sweeping our globe. With astronauts and cosmonauts encircling the entire planet in a few hours and venturing out in space exploration and with headlines concerned just as much with Asia and Africa as with Europe and the Americas, we must have a wider angle of vi-

sion. World history is essential for the understanding of a world that has become "one" in reality as well as in rhetoric.

The need for world understanding is not the only reason for turning to world history. Equally important is the fact that the story of humankind from its very beginnings has a basic unity that must be recognized and respected.

We cannot truly understand either Western or non-Western history unless we have a global overview that encompasses both. Then we can see how much interaction there is between all peoples in all times, and how important that interaction is in determining the course of human history.

At first the interaction was fitful and rather slight. But then the Europeans Columbus and da Gama set forth on their overseas explorations. In the following decades they and their successors brought all parts of the world into direct contact, and the intimacy of the contact has grown steadily to the present day. By contrast, the many human communities prior to 1500 had existed in varying degrees of isolation. Yet this isolation was never absolute. During the long millennia before the European discoveries, the various branches of the human race had interacted one with the other—though the precise degree to which they did differed enormously according to time and location. The details of this interaction, from early human history to roughly the year 1500, are the subject of this book. Following that date, the earth, in relation to humankind's growing communication and transportation facilities, has been steadily shrinking faster and faster, so that today it has become a "spaceship earth," a "global village."

If we accept the fact that all people share a common world history, how can we possibly learn about the whole world by taking a single course or reading a single book? Some historians say that world history, by definition, encompasses all civilizations, and thus it is a subject far too broad for classroom purposes. Western civilization, they say, is barely manageable by itself; how can all the other civilizations—including the Chinese, the Indian, and the Middle Eastern—all be encompassed? The answer, of course, is that they cannot, and that world history, *thus defined*, is obviously impractical. But such a defin-

ition is inaccurate and misleading. World history is not the sum of histories of the civilizations of the world, just as Western history is not the sum of the histories of the countries of the West.

If the study of Western civilization were simply a series of surveys of British history, of German history, of French, Italian, Spanish, Balkan, and the rest, Western civilization would not be a feasible subject of study. Yet, in fact, it is feasible, and the reason is that the approach is not agglomerative. Rather it focuses on those historical forces or movements that affected the West as a whole, such as Christianity, Islam, the Crusades, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French Revolution, the scientific and industrial revolutions, and so forth. So it is with world history, though the stage in this case is global rather than regional, and the emphasis consequently is on movements of worldwide influence.

In Paleolithic times, for example, humans emerged in Africa and gradually spread through Eurasia, Australia, and the Americas. The fateful breakthrough to agriculture occurred during the neolithic period, followed by metalworking and

assorted other crafts and leading to urban life and civilization. This in turn led to the development of the great Eurasian civilizations—the Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, and European—which for millennia developed autonomously along parallel lines. The amount of interaction among Eurasian civilizations varied as a result of powerful interregional historical forces such as Hellenism, Christianity, Buddhism, and the recurring invasions from the central Eurasian steppes. After 1500 this Eurasian balance gradually gave way to a global unity imposed by an emerging West and culminating in the nineteenth century in an unprecedented worldwide domination. Finally in the twentieth century, world history becomes the story of the growing reaction against this domination and the perilous groping toward a new world balance that was made necessary by the rapid diffusion of Western technology and ideology. This, in a nutshell, is the rationale and structure of world history. It is a structure that is no more complex than that of Western history. The difference is merely that the stage is our planet rather than the continent of Europe.



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## SOME OTHER BOOKS BY L. S. STAVRIANOS

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# Before Civilization

Part I is concerned with the 4 million years before human *civilization*. The other parts of this book are devoted to history since humans became civilized, less than 6,000 years ago. Thus, by far the longest phase of human evolution will receive by far the briefest consideration. The reason for the disproportionate emphasis on the story of civilized people is the constantly accelerating tempo of human history. Geologic time is measured in billions of years, and human prehistory in thousands, but since the advent of civilization, the time unit has shrunk progressively to centuries and to decades, until fateful events now daily crowd us, unceasingly and inexorably. Indeed the pace of change has reached such proportions that it is a very real question whether the human species is capable of adjusting quickly enough to avoid obsolescence, or even extinction.

The disparity in the pace of events, and the corresponding disparity in emphasis in this study, should not lead us, however, to minimize the significance of what happened during prehistory. During those millennia, two developments provided the bedrock foundation for all later history. One was the gradual transition from *hominid* to *Homo sapiens*, or thinking human being. The other was the transformation of the human newcomer from a *food gatherer* who was dependent on the bounty of nature to a *food producer* who became increasingly independent of nature—the master of its own destiny. These two epochal events—the appearance of human beings and their invention of *agriculture*—are the subjects of the two chapters of Part I.





# Humans as Food Gatherers



*Anthropology holds up a great mirror to man and lets him look at himself in his infinite variety.*

Clyde Kluckhohn

One of the outstanding achievements of modern peoples is their study and reconstruction of the past. The ancients had little understanding of what had happened before them. Thucydides, the most objective of Greek historians, began his study of the Peloponnesian War by stating that nothing of great importance had happened before his time. His ignorance of history prevented him from recognizing the unique glory and contribution of Athens. By contrast, our age is more history-minded than any other. We know more about the early history of the Egyptians, the Greeks, or the Chinese than they themselves knew. Furthermore, knowledge of our early human ancestors is being increased every year by the findings of scientists in various fields such as geology, archeology, anthropology, paleontology, and biology. To this list of fields should be added space

technology, which is being used to survey the surface and even the subsurface of the earth from satellites, space shuttles, and airplanes. These are equipped with sensors that can measure subtle variations in temperatures on the ground. Because sand, cultivated soil, vegetation, and different types of rocks have distinctive temperatures and emit heat at different rates, the sensors can identify loose soils that had been prehistoric agricultural fields, or were covering ancient caravan routes or architectural ruins. Thus radar imaging systems have been used to map the ancient intercontinental Silk Road traversing Central Asia, as well as Maya causeways in the Guatemalan jungle and footpaths along the shore of Lake Arenal in Costa Rica.

Ongoing research in all these fields has extended our knowledge back before the beginning of civilization, even before there were written



records. This is very important, for it was only about 5,000 years ago that humans learned to write, whereas their hominid beginnings have been traced back over 4 million years. We shall consider these long prehistoric *millennia* when people became human. They existed, as did the other animals, by collecting food wherever it was to be found, rather than by growing it as their agriculturist descendants would learn to do.

## I. FROM HOMINIDS TO HUMANS

Our globe revolves around the sun, which is one of 10 billion stars in our galaxy. This in turn is one of millions of galaxies that make up the universe. The enormity of this scale should be kept in mind while we trace through our human experiences and human concerns in the following pages. It is well to remember that in the context of the universe our planet earth is literally like a speck of dust on the Pacific Ocean.

Earth took form about 5 billion years ago, and the first life appeared on it about 4 billion years ago in the form of single-celled creatures. Although such primitive life traditionally has been viewed as qualitatively different from non-life, scientists no longer accept this assumed dichotomy between organic and inorganic. Rather they think of living matter as having evolved naturally from nonliving matter. They classify all matter into a hierarchy of states of organization. At a certain level in this hierarchy the transition occurs from inorganic to organic. More specifically, electrons, protons, and neutrons combine to form atoms, and the atoms form molecules. The molecules become more or less well-organized aggregates, and one class of these is living matter.

Organic matter in turn went through a comparable hierarchical evolution: from the original microorganisms to primitive plants such as seaweeds, to animals without backbones (invertebrates) such as jellyfish and worms, and ultimately to animals having backbones (vertebrates). These vertebrates, with some of their invertebrate and plant cousins, began their successful adaptation to life on land about 300 million years ago. First came the amphibians, followed by the great army

of prehistoric reptiles, then the birds, and finally the mammals. For the past 60 million years, mammals have been the dominant form of life on earth.

Almost all scientists accept the proposition that humans belong to the animal kingdom—more specifically to the order of Primata, which they share with the tree shrews, lemurs, tarsiers, monkeys, and apes. Evidence from several fields of study supports this conclusion. Anatomists have found basic similarities between humans and the other higher animals in the general plan of their skeletal, muscular, and organic structures. Embryologists have noted that the human embryo displays, at different stages of its development, characteristics of some of the lower forms of life, such as gill arches at the end of one month and a rudimentary tail at two months. Anthropologists have shown that human fossil remains show a consistent trend away from the general anthropoid type, or hominids, toward *Homo sapiens*. Other scientists have discovered many similar indications of our ties to the other animals, including close resemblance between the chemical composition of the blood of apes and of humans, possession of common parasites, and similarities in their ways of learning.

The differentiation of the human stock occurred during the *Pleistocene epoch*, with its six or seven glacial and five or six interglacial periods. These drastic environmental changes compelled all animals to adapt and readapt themselves continually to new conditions. Success in this crucial matter depended not on brute strength nor on the ability to resist cold but rather on the continuous growth of intelligence and the use of that intelligence to work out satisfactory adaptations. This, of course, is the secret of the unchallenged primacy of human beings on earth. Humans have been, first and foremost, generalists. They never adapted exclusively to one type of environment, as the gibbon did to the forest with its long lithe arms, or the polar bear to the arctic with its heavy white fur. Rather humans relied on their brains, not their bodies, to adapt to any environment.

The human species is the product of *natural selection* from a succession of humanlike ancestors, or hominids, some of which were capable of