

A WORLD HISTORY

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Preface

HUMAN SOCIETIES, distinguished from one another by differing styles of life, are very numerous, and have existed from pre- and proto-human times throughout mankind's history. Civilizations are unusually massive societies, weaving the lives of millions of persons into a loose yet coherent life style across hundreds or even thousands of miles and for periods of time that are very long when measured by the span of an individual human life. Being both massive and long-lived, civilizations must perforce also be few. Indeed, from the time when human societies first attained civilized complexity and size, no more than four different major civilized traditions ever co-existed in the Old World; and in the New, where Amerindian development remained always weak and retarded, no more than three distinct civilizations ever emerged.

These facts allow an overview of the history of mankind as a whole. To be sure, the effort to hold simultaneously in mind what was happening in widely separated parts of the earth requires us to focus attention on certain aspects of reality and to pass others by. The same is true of the study of more detailed segments of the human past—think, for instance, of the idiosyncratic experiences of each town and village that are so ruthlessly neglected in our standard national histories! As in cartography, each scale has advantages and shortcomings, and an appropriate amount of detail. Too much information will obscure the whole; too little will deprive history of its verisimilitude and disguise the open-ended surprisingness of human experience. Historians of the nineteenth century erected a frame for national histories that continues to command general assent; and in the twentieth century, American textbook writers arrived at a rough consensus concerning the history of something called Western Civilization. But for world history, an agreed criterion has not yet appeared. What to omit and what to pay attention to remain very much matter for debate and disagreement.

Because of these disagreements, it seemed worthwhile to write this brief account of mankind's past. The success of my book *The Rise of the West* (Chicago, 1963) made it plausible to believe that a shorter work, suited for use as a college text, would make my

personal vision of the whole history of mankind more accessible to students—a vision which, however imperfect, still has the virtue of being cohesive and intelligible, something that can be grasped and remembered and reflected upon afterwards.

The organizing idea is simple: in any given age the world balance among cultures was liable to disturbance emanating from one or more centers where men succeeded in creating an unusually attractive or powerful civilization. Neighbors and neighbors' neighbors were then tempted or compelled to change their own traditional ways of life, sometimes by outright borrowing of techniques or ideas, but more often by adjusting and changing things to suit the local scene more smoothly.

In successive ages the major loci of such disturbance to the world altered. It therefore becomes possible to survey the epochs of world history by studying first the center or centers of primary disturbance, and then considering how the other peoples of the earth reacted to or against what they knew or experienced (often at second or third hand) of the innovations that had occurred in the prime centers of cultural creativity.

In such a perspective, geographical settings and lines of communication between different civilizations became centrally important. Archaeology, technology, and art history provide important clues to ancient relationships which the surviving literary record sometimes disguises.

This book was written during the summer of 1964 and revised in the summer of 1965. The Carnegie Corporation helped to finance its preparation and the reproduction of a set of readings for an experimental course in world history. Students who took that course, both in the College and in the Extension Division of the University of Chicago, during the academic year 1964–65 earned my gratitude by cheerfully serving as guinea pigs. I owe special thanks also to Professor John A. Wilson of the University of Chicago, who read Part I, and to Professor Immanuel Hsu of the University of California at Santa Barbara, who checked the passages dealing with the Far East. Both detected errors and infelicities which have, hopefully, been removed.

W. H. M.

Chicago, Illinois
December 1966

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Part I

EMERGENCE AND DEFINITION OF THE MAJOR EURASIAN CIVILIZATIONS TO 500 B.C.

The first great landmark of human history was the development of food production, which permitted an enormous multiplication of human numbers, and laid the basis for the emergence of civilizations. How, when, and where hunting and gathering gave way to farming and pastoralism is uncertain. One of the earliest and most important instances of this transition took place in the Middle East, perhaps between 8500 and 7000 B.C. Thence, through migrations and borrowings, few of which can be reconstructed by modern scholars, grain cultivation spread into Europe and India, China, and parts of Africa. The Americas, monsoon Asia, and west Africa may have seen independent inauguration of agriculture, though this is not certain, nor are the dates known at which the cultivation of plants became central to human life in these parts of the globe.

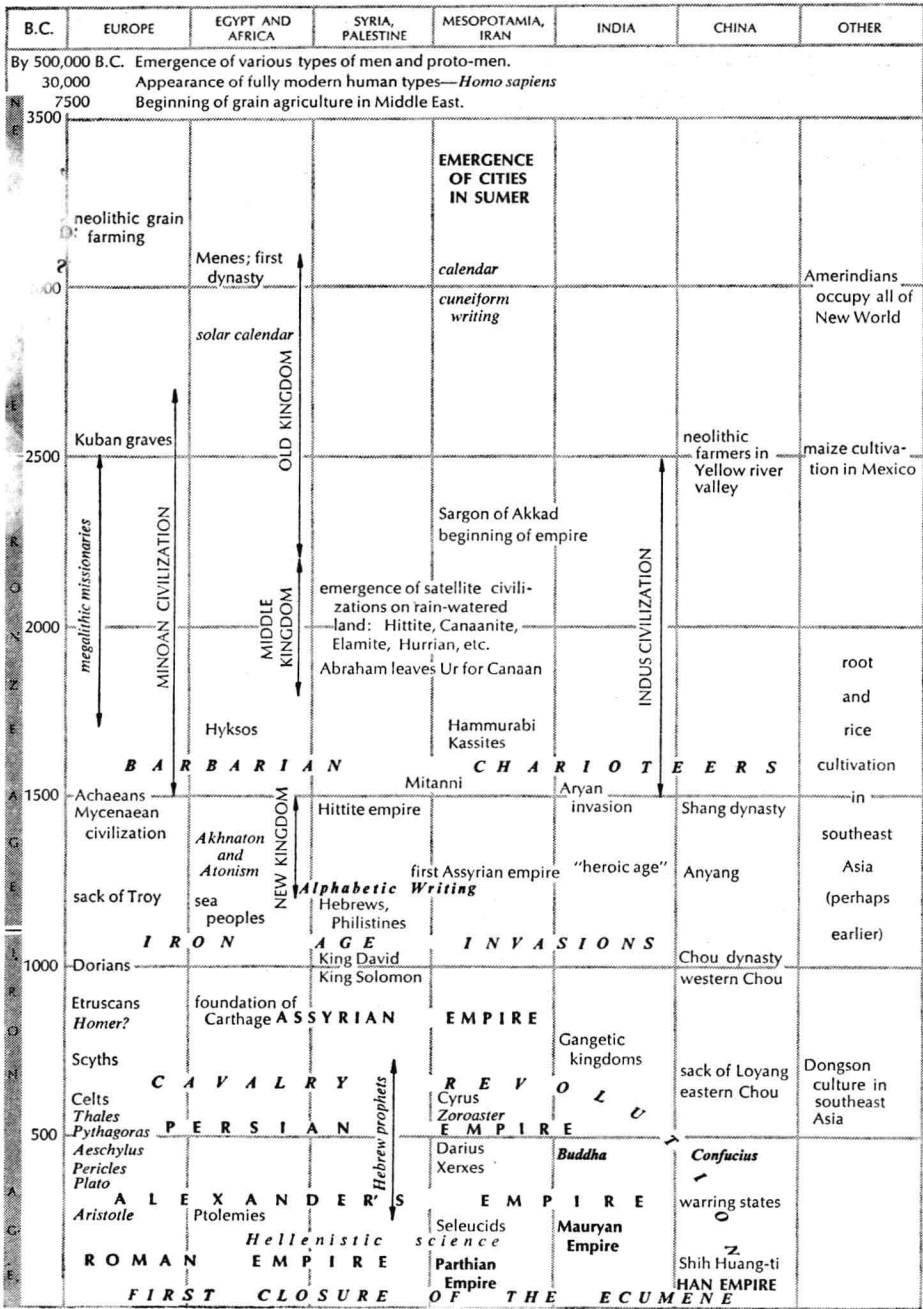
The second great landmark in mankind's history was the emergence of skilled and complex societies we call civilized. Here the primacy of the Middle East is undisputed. Man's earliest civilized communities developed in the valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates and the Nile between about 3500 and 3000 B.C. The Indus valley followed suit soon afterwards. At first civilized complexity required very special geographical conditions. Only on irrigated land could rich crops be harvested year after year from the same fields; and only where irrigation was needed did large numbers of men find it

necessary to co-operate in digging and diking. An agricultural surplus that could support specialists, together with habits of social organization embracing large numbers of men, thus could and did emerge in the flood plains of the principal Middle Eastern rivers and, until much later, not elsewhere.

About a thousand years thereafter, men began to extend civilization's complexity to rain-watered land. The invention of the plow was here fundamental. It permitted ancient farmers to harness the strength of animals to the tasks of cultivation, and thereby allowed the individual farmer to increase his food production very substantially. This made available an agricultural surplus such as had previously been reserved for irrigated land. In addition, civilization demanded a distinctive social order. It required a sharp polarization between rulers and the peasant majority to compel the latter to part with their surplus crops in order to support the courts and palace cities that rulers and aristocrats gradually built up. A significant variation depended on sea trade, which allowed rulers of such an island as Crete to gather the fruits of the entire Mediterranean coastline and sustain a palace city at Knossos on the strength of mercantile enterprise.

A fourth great change in human relationships brought steppe pastoralists and warriors to the fore for the first time. This happened soon after 1700 B.C., when techniques of chariot warfare were perfected somewhere along the northern fringes of Mesopotamia. Chariots gave dominion to warriors who knew how to tame horses, and since the great center of horse raising was on the steppes, it was warrior tribes of central Asia and the Ukraine, speakers of Indo-European tongues, who reaped the principal advantage. These warriors overran all of Europe, western Asia, and India. Others, who had somehow acquired the techniques of chariot warfare, also conquered the peasants of the Yellow river valley in China.

In Europe, India, and China, interaction between the existing agricultural peoples and the new masters of the land laid the groundwork for the emergence of three new and enormous successful styles of civilization. The pace of their development was roughly comparable, so that by 500 B.C. a distinctive Euro-



type of civilization had emerged in Greece; an equally distinctive Indian style of civilization had become manifest in northern India; and in the middle reaches of the Yellow river, Chinese civilization had likewise asserted itself.

The Middle Eastern center had a more complicated history. The effect of the chariot conquest on Mesopotamia and Egypt was comparatively superficial, since before long, local peoples learned how to use chariots to oust their conquerors. Three civilized empires, based in Egypt, Asia Minor, and northern Mesopotamia, then competed for supremacy in the Middle East until a new wave of barbarian invasion struck. The newcomers were equipped with iron (actually soft steel) weapons, and the great empires of the Bronze Age broke under the attack of tribesmen armed with the new and more abundant metal. But once again the effect of barbarian conquest was transitory. New empires arose, climaxing in the unstable political unification of the entire civilized area of the ancient Middle East, first under the Assyrians and then under the Persians.

As a result of this tangled development, what had once been separate civilizations in Egypt and Mesopotamia, not to mention the constellation of satellite civilizations that had arisen on rain-watered land around and between the two great river valleys, all began to merge into a new cosmopolitan Middle Eastern style of life. A decisive formulation of a Middle Eastern world-view appropriate to this cosmopolitan civilization took place among the Jews, whose religion, as shaped by the prophets of the eighth to sixth centuries B.C., was as vital and persuasive as the Buddhism of India, the Confucianism of China, or the philosophy of Greece, all of which also found their initial expression before the end of the sixth century B.C. With the clear and emphatic fourfold patterning of Eurasian civilization that thus came into focus by 500 B.C., an initial, constitutive phase of world history came to a close.

To explore this initial period of civilized history, when the main lines and distinctive emphases within which most men subsequently were to live first printed themselves upon human minds and feelings, will be the aim of Part I of this book.

In the Beginning



UMAN history begins with the emergence of *Homo sapiens* from proto-human populations. The process was undoubtedly very slow, but by about 100,000 years ago scattered hunting packs of biologically modern kinds of man roamed the savanna lands of Africa and perhaps also inhabited regions with suitably mild climates in Asia as well. These earliest human communities depended in part on skills inherited from their proto-human ancestors. The use of wood and stone tools, for example, seems to have started long before fully human populations had come into existence. Elementary language, and habits of co-operation in the hunt, were also proto-human in their origin. So, perhaps, was the domestication of fire.

What mainly distinguished fully human populations from the man-like creatures who flourished before them was a prolongation of infancy and childhood. This meant a longer time when the young depended on parents, and a correspondingly longer time when the elders could teach their offspring the arts of life. From the child's side, slower maturation meant prolonged plasticity and a much-increased capacity to learn. Enlarged learning capacities, in turn, increased the frequency of selective preservation of inventions and discoveries made, presumably, more or less at random. When this occurred cultural evolution began to outstrip the compara-