

than parochially (Montgomery, 2021). The Inca past, Kosiba argues, derived from both living (huacas, stones) and dead ancestors; a past that implied the negation of other Indigenous pasts.

Moser's chapter also concerns stone: exploring the relationship between ecology, rock, experience, ideas, and art, he confronts the question of ontology head on, formulating stone as a scale-changing hyperobject (an object which is 'massively distributed in time and space relative to humans' (Morton, 2013: 1)) that confuses traditional ontological distinctions in Buddhist statuary in Anhui, China. Moser argues that experience of the notable lateral stratigraphy of sedimentary rock in Anhui promoted a new kind of aesthetic at the same time as the explicit logic of Buddhism promoted a thoughtful response to that rocky setting. Geo-aesthetics guided sculptors but were also produced by sculpture; a geo-aesthetics, then, that resulted from an implicit ontology derived from the local experience of stone.

Cohesion in the volume is helped, as Hamann shows, by the import/export trade in pasts across times and cultures, both modern and non-modern, Christian and pagan. The other pasts that I find most exciting are those that are neither ours nor theirs, neither corrective nor additive, but something entirely new, something that emerges at the confluence of materials, practices, and concepts. Here Cabral's and Moser's chapters stand out. But the tension I alluded to remains. The editors know they sail treacherous seas when they use the signifying language of fish and humans to

draw Abdullah and the Makuna close. Is it enough to state clearly 'I compare' to avoid the pitfalls of doing so, especially when ontological difference is concerned? Would it not be safer to insert more difference—as the *jacamín* might suggest—into the editors' tale? Yet the volume is not about the *jacamín*; nor is it only about difference. The book braves the waters of a global, comparative, ontological approach, a 'comparative archaeophilia,' that succeeds at encouraging the reader to put into dialogue the multiple, layered pasts that each past itself reveals.

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BENJAMIN ALBERTI

Framingham State University, USA
balberti@framingham.edu

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Naoise Mac Sweeney. 2023. *The West: A New History of an Old Idea* (London: W.H. Allen [Penguin Random House], 2013, 437 pp., 14 illustr., hbk ISBN 978-0-7535-5892-8)

The West is a grand book: grand in its timespan of nearly three millennia; in its

near-global geographical spread; and, above all, in its subject: a new history of

an old idea. Naoise Mac Sweeney writes with clarity and verve; and it's always refreshing to read something about the ancient and modern world which is anything but pale, male, and stale.

Mac Sweeney's main argument in her introductory chapter 'The Importance of Origins' (pp. 5–6), has two parts: first, that 'the grand narrative of Western Civilization is fundamentally wrong'; and second, that 'the invention, popularization and longevity of the grand narrative of Western Civilization all stem from its ideological utility'. In other words, the grand narrative of Western Civilization is useful as part of what I call a chronology of desire—use of the past in the present, to justify the future that people want (Nixon, 2004: 239)—in this case 'Western expansion and imperialism, as well as ongoing systems of White racial dominance' (p. 6).

The body of the book consists of fourteen intellectual and historical biographies (six women, eight men), similar to the approach successfully taken by Herrin (2020) in her book on Ravenna. These are 'all people in whose lives and work we can see something of the zeitgeist; through whose experiences, actions and writings we can discern changing ideas about civilizational inheritance and imagined cultural genealogies' (p. 11). The biographies, starting with Herodotus and ending with Carrie Lam, cover six periods, the 'classical world', the so-called Dark Ages, the Renaissance, the seventeenth/eighteenth centuries AD, the mature form of Western Civilization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the changing reality of our own twentieth and earlier twenty-first century world. The biographies also highlight the 'dazzling diversity' (p. 7) of the ancient and modern world—not just women and men, but different races and ethnicities.

The biographies of Livilla (Ch. 2) and Godfrey of Viterbo (Ch. 4) explain why

Romans, and later Germans, wanted to be associated with the losing side of the Trojan War (which I personally had never understood before; see especially pp. 95–6). Chapter 4 also illustrates how the concept of 'Europa' changed more than once, and how the combination of Greek and Roman antiquity, which we often take for granted, was a much later development than we might think.

Chapter 3, on Al-Kindi of Baghdad, perfectly represents the malleability of late antiquity, when at least some people were open to all knowledge and wisdom, not just their own. Similarly, Chapter 7, on the astonishing correspondence between Safiye Sultana and Elizabeth I, reveals contact between the Ottoman and Elizabethan realms at the highest level—and, I would add, only twenty years after one of the greatest cross-cultural transfers ever, Sinan's Süleimaniye mosque in Istanbul, inspired by Agia Sophia built a millennium earlier. In Phillis Wheatley's lifetime (Ch. 11), Greco-Roman antiquity was first labelled 'classical' (p. 264), and 'Western Civilization became racialized', and therefore superior and significant (pp. 206–7). Edward Said's work (Ch. 13) showed that Western Civilization is 'an invented social construct, one that is extremely powerful and has far-reaching consequences in the real world, but a construct nonetheless' (p. 306).

The concluding chapter, 'The Shape of History', calls for a new grand narrative of Western history—one that actually takes the facts into account, and applauds the work of people studying Greco-Roman antiquity to make it richer and more diverse as well as more accurate.

I have four comments about this book. First, Mac Sweeney doesn't engage with the term 'civilization', western or otherwise. Kenneth Clark (1969: 1) famously said that he couldn't define civilization, but he was sure that he knew it when he

saw it. It was clear that civilization for him was implicitly Western and European (Ottoman Turkish and Chinese civilizations get only a brief mention, p. 197).

Kenneth Clark is not the only person to recognize civilization when he sees it. Mac Sweeney's Chapter 14 on Carrie Lam discusses the Ancient Civilizations Forum, launched by China and Greece, plus Bolivia, China, Egypt, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Mexico, and Peru—conspicuously omitting most of northwestern Europe and north America, Asia apart from China, and Africa south of Egypt. These countries are considered 'cradles of ancient civilization'; the aims of the Forum are 'to transform culture into a source of soft power' and 'to highlight... international cultural cooperation as a factor for economic development'. These nine countries also 'represent more than 40 percent of the world population and are at the centre of international political developments in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa' (Ancient Civilizations Forum n.d.).

Civilization, it seems, depends on the eye of the beholder: what isn't civilization is by implication uncivilized. The inclusion of Egypt and India in the Ancient Civilizations Forum is interesting. In the final periods of Western Civilization, as discussed in this book (later nineteenth to twenty-first century), the modern peoples of Egypt and India were clearly not civilized enough, or not civilized in the right way—even though their complex societies included literate urbanites (Abd al Gawad & Stevenson, 2021 on Egypt).

Mac Sweeney points out that the idea of classical Athens held up as a 'beacon of democracy' (p. 7) is false—but that that didn't stop Western Civilization from so enshrining it. What she doesn't discuss is the reasons for the veneration of the *Iliad* as a foundation text of Western Civilization, which would be worth exploring. Homer

does say that the poem is about the anger of Achilles, but what this means is not, say, a righteous rage for social justice, but the world-class sulking of an over-entitled man in connection with the division of booty, specifically female prisoners—is this 'civilized' by any definition of the word? And is dragging the corpse of your defeated opponent Hector around your friend Patroclus' grave 'civilized'? Is it 'civilized' for Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter to make the winds blow in the right direction?

The word civilization matters—it's a hugely loaded term because of Tylor and Morgan's terrible nineteenth-century taxonomy (civilization, barbarism, savagery; Morgan, 1877). So, does 'civilization' in this book mean what it used to mean, i.e. literate, urban cultures? Or does the author think that civilization has some other meaning (e.g. treating people fairly)?

Second, the author establishes clearly that racism clouded the definition of Western civilization (Ch. 11, as already noted). The false binary of whiteness and blackness was inaccurate for antiquity; there is plenty of evidence for mixed populations. In addition, ancient sculpture was almost always polychrome, rather than pure white (Bond, 2017). But in the mindset of Western Civilization, whiteness was equated with purity, and blackness with the mongrelization of impurity and possible 'barbarism'—the 'uncivilized' category mentioned above. When Mary Beard used credible evidence to suggest, correctly, that the population of Roman Britain included several races rather than one white one, there was immediate push-back (Higgins, 2017). It will not be easy to persuade everyone that the evidence we have for racial mixing in Greco-Roman antiquity is factually true. What Mac Sweeney does not discuss in any detail is ethnicity, another important category for the past and the present; see Rebecca Futo Kennedy's videos on YouTube (2020).

In addition, ‘whiteness’ or ‘blackness’ of people are not fixed categories but rather ones that change from period to period. Well into the twentieth century, the perceived dilution of purity meant that modern Greeks were not quite white enough, and thus, considered the unworthy successors to the grand Greeks of the fifth century BC (Nixon, 2020). By the same token modern Italians have sometimes been considered neither deserving of their glorious past, nor properly white, especially as immigrants to North America.

Third, it is surprising that material culture forms so little of Mac Sweeney’s exposition in *The West* that there are no pictures of any of it in this book (cf. Herrin, 2020’s splendid colour plates). The importance of Graeco-Roman material culture for the idea and indeed appearance of Western Civilization can be seen in several ways. One is the eighteenth and nineteenth century Greek revival, in the UK and the USA in particular. In addition to Inigo Jones’s banqueting-hall in Whitehall and Palladio’s neoclassical houses (pp. 195–6), think of Buckingham Palace, The White House, Congress, banks, museums, universities, and even observatories (often copies of the Tower of the Winds in Athens); and think of ideology made classically monumental in Italian Fascist architecture and Nazi notions of racial purity.

The entitlement of northwestern European collecting (shades of Achilles and the division of spoils in the *Iliad*) is another aspect of material culture. Mac Sweeney mentions the Earl of Arundel’s statue gallery (p. 195); but, on an even grander and more public scale, remember the bronze horses at St Mark’s in Venice, the Pergamon Altar in Berlin, the Winged Victory of Samothrace and Venus de Milo in Paris, and, above all, the Parthenon marbles in London. It was clearly

important for people in north-western Europe to ‘acquire’ and incorporate pieces of the classical past into their then present—behaviour which is part of the phenomenon of chronologies of desire, whereby people choose the past, physical as well as metaphorical, that best fits their present and hoped-for future (Nixon, 2004: 435–39).

And there is no mention of the excitement of archaeological excavations, not even Schliemann’s nineteenth-century projects at Troy and at Mycenae, where he famously exclaimed ‘I have gazed upon the face of Agamemnon’, upon discovering the sixteenth century BC gold mask from Shaft Grave V in Grave Circle A, in this case extending the history and archaeology of Greece even farther back in time to the (mythical) time of Homer, more than a millennium before Herodotus. Mac Sweeney’s chapter on Gladstone strangely omits his interest in Schliemann’s work: among other things, Gladstone (1880) wrote a substantial preface to Schliemann’s book on Mycenae, and this information would have added significantly to Chapter 12.

Fourth, there are no maps in this book (again cf. Herrin, 2020, which has maps as well as colour plates); although the UK edition does have a very strange map on the cover, featuring a north-south tear through the east coast of the Americas and Europe. But ideally there would have been several maps, because, as Mac Sweeney’s discussion shows so dramatically, neither the West nor the implied East are monolithic concepts nor unchanging geographical realities—it is more a question of Wests, just as it is also a question of Easts; and maps can show these changes quickly and easily—for example, the contrast between the Roman Empire and the territories of the later ones (Byzantine, Holy Roman, Ottoman), and the accompanying changes in those Wests and Easts.

In our own time, there are two other important geopolitical compass directions, separating the Global North and South, based on ‘the concept of a gap between the Global North and the Global South in terms of development and wealth’ (Royal Geographic Society n.d.). The Global North includes the USA, Canada, Europe, Israel, Japan South Korea, Australia, New Zealand; and the Global South encompasses countries in the regions of Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia without Israel, Japan and South Korea, Oceania without Australia and New Zealand. Indigenous peoples are included in both groups, as are people of different races. The boundary between the Global North and South partly coincides with ideas of the West and East, but mostly it does not. If we return to the Ancient Civilizations Forum, we can see immediately that it is a combination of two Global North countries (Greece, Italy) and eight Global South countries (Bolivia, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Mexico, Peru). Which of these two sets of compass points, West and East, or North and South, will be important in the future? Who will be constructing their respective grand narratives, and what will those grand narratives be based on?

To sum up: as Mac Sweeney shows, we have our work cut out for us—the construction of more accurate, and more useful, grand narratives, Western or otherwise.

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LUCIA NIXON
Wolfson College, University of Oxford, UK
lucia.nixon@classics.ox.ac.uk

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