

NEAGU
DJUVARA

CIVILIZATION AND
HISTORICAL PATTERNS

An approach to the comparative
study of History

Translated by Serban Broche

 HUMANITAS
BUCUREȘTI

© HUMANITAS, 2019 (ediția digitală)

ISBN 978-973-50-6585-0 (pdf)

EDITURA HUMANITAS

Piața Presei Libere 1, 013701 București, România

tel. 021/408 83 50, fax 021/408 83 51

www.humanitas.ro

Comenzi online: www.libhumanitas.ro

Comenzi prin e-mail: vanzari@libhumanitas.ro

Comenzi telefonice: 021.311.23.30

To my mother

PREFACE

This work was published for the first time in Paris in 1975 and was awarded a history prize by the French Academy in 1976. The study includes part of my doctor degree thesis presented at the Sorbonne University in Paris under the guidance of the reputed sociologist and philosopher Raymond Aron. This, however, does not necessarily imply that Professor Aron was in total agreement with my views. Being himself mostly concerned at that time with the *critical philosophy* of history (the term seems to have been his finding) i.e. with the analysis of history as a science, with the problem of the very existence of history as a science, he was “allergic”, like most French scholars to the *speculative philosophy* of history, i.e. to the over ambitious and even politically dangerous attempts to find the meaning of human development and eventually the invariables rhythms or patterns that govern the development of the great “ensembles” that can be identified throughout history.

It is true that the dogmatic extravagance of Gobineau in France, then of Danilevsky in Russia, of Spengler in Germany and more recently, even of Toynbee in Great Britain (the only true historian among them), contributed to the disparagement of this branch of philosophical curiosity which, however, cannot be simply eliminated from our natural inquisitiveness and metaphysical anxiety. The great flaw in the theses mentioned above, the great mistake of their authors, was that, instead of limiting their studies to an attempt at explaining the past, they claimed their ability to predict the future starting from the patterns discovered in the past. But, as Victor Hugo says, “*L’avenir n’est à personne, l’avenir est à Dieu*” (Future belongs to nobody, future belongs to God).

Even if we estimated ourselves in possession of all the data of the Present (something impossible to imagine), we would still be totally unable to predict the Future. That is why I consider that the historian who dares to

search for certain constants in the long course of the universal history should know when to stop at the level of diagnosis of the present moment, avoiding to venture himself further in a prognosis of the future. However, I confess that I also let myself be carried away in venturing certain questions and predictions regarding the future. The reader should not forget that this book was written fifty years ago and that nothing has been added to it in the present edition except a few notes that I thought necessary considering the notable events of the last fifteen years. The dramatic political circumstances that my generation has passed through (this book was written between 1951 and 1970) did not allow a historian, involved himself in the drama of that historical period, to watch the events in a completely detached manner, as if from another planet.

I should also mention that the appendices from V to VIII with the list of the French, English, Russian and Nord American governants in the last two centuries – illustrating the thesis that Raymond Aron considered as the most original in the book – all stop in 1970. To bring them to date would have represented a considerable amount of work without bringing any additional support to my thesis.

N.D.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the almost unanimous opposition of historians to Spengler's theses and, later on, to Toynbee's, it is evident that the use of the word *civilization* (*Kultur* with Spengler), with the meaning given by these authors, is now widely spread and that historians now speak currently of "the Egyptian civilization", "the Hellenic civilization", "the Chinese civilization", or "the Indian civilization" without admitting explicitly that the term might mean something else than a vague assembly of techniques, customs, institutions, beliefs or artistic and intellectual creations. Few of them would be willing to admit that these assemblies might represent natural entities, animated by a dynamics of their own.

Anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists and ethnographers are pre-occupied with this problem, even more than the historians. Whatever the label attached to it: "philosophy" with Spengler, "morphology of culture" with Frobenius, "sociology" with Sorokin, "anthropology" with Kroeber, "culturology" with Leslie White, or simply "history" with Toynbee – the problem is now raised.

We do not mind using here the label of "philosophy of history", in spite of the disfavour cast on this term. Isn't any reflection on a particular science "philosophy"? Undoubtedly, the term is somewhat ambiguous. At first, it designated the great attempts at interpreting human development, still attached to such names as Herder or Hegel. Later on, after Dilthey, only what was called "the critical philosophy of history" was considered as legitimate i.e. the study of the preliminary problems, the problems of logic raised by the historical science.

More recently, a whole school – essentially Anglo-American – claimed to reconsider the same problem under the new label of "analytical philosophy of history".

Finally, the historian the least disposed to reopen the discussion on the acquisitions of history, will have to admit that the methodology of history represents a legitimate philosophical preoccupation.

Do these three meanings of the philosophy of history exclude each other? Isn't there, on the contrary, an organic link between these three series of problems? For how can one venture to give a global interpretation of History if one does not first try to know if, or to what extent, history is possible? And, on the other hand, does not any historian apply, consciously or not, a method based on a particular global interpretation of History? In this study, originally a doctor degree thesis, we tried to answer, in the first part, some of the essential questions raised by the critical philosophy of history. In this edition we tried to avoid these preliminary questions which would have been tedious for the non-specialists. They will make the object of a future study.

We present here a new definition of civilization, regarded as a big unit of history, delineated in space and time. This might allow us to identify the historical units with greater accuracy than before. The comparative study of the civilizations thus circumscribed will reveal certain constants, certain patterns, and we shall try to draw some conclusions for the historical method as well as for the understanding of the present time.

*
* *

The word *civilization* seems to have been born in France, in mid 18th century. It was originally penned in 1756 by the marquis de Mirabeau, father of the famous orator of the French Revolution, in *L'Ami des Hommes ou Traité de la population* (1). Was the word already in use in the fashionable salons attended by the "physiocrates" and by Mirabeau or was the latter the true inventor of the word? The detail is of little matter, the essential thing is that this word knew a great success in England and Germany, as well as in France (2). It proved that it responded to a necessity, that the notion was "in the air" and, to better distinguish it from the neighbour notions and expressions, such as "civility", "politeness", "refined society", it was appropriate to create for it a new word. This was derived from the verb *civiliser*, in use since the 16th century, but employed with two completely different meanings, one belonging to the judiciary jargon (*civiliser un procès*, i.e. to turn a trial for a criminal offence into a civil one), the other meaning the process of civilizing, of making urban and polishing the savages, the barbarians, the boores. The Latins knew already the antinomy *civilis/silvaticus*,

but since then the term *civil* acquired a few other meanings, and it is possible that the neologism *civilisé* (civilized) had kept from its relation with *civil* and *cité* part of their meaning which opposed it not only to *sauvage* (savage) or *barbare* (barbarian) but also, more vaguely, to *paysan* (peasant) and *militaire* (military).

The noun derived from the verb – *civilisation* – had, like many other French terms with the same ending, both an active meaning «the process of civilizing» and a passive meaning «the state of a society that has surpassed the stage of savage or barbarian to accede to urbanism». This was the egocentric viewpoint of the western society of the 18th century which placed itself instinctively at the top, since it did not doubt for a single moment that it had reached the highest degree of «enlightenment» that allowed it to judge all the other existing societies in comparison with its relative perfection. But it would be a mistake to think that this egocentricity was specific only to the western society. It was a characteristic feature common to all superior civilizations: the Chinese had treated the western Europeans with great contempt until the middle of the 19th century, and they have not yet overcome the feeling of humiliation they experienced subsequently when they got to know the western power, which explains many of their present reactions. In Antiquity, the Egyptians, the Orientals and the Greeks considered each other, successively or simultaneously, as barbarians. But furthermore, as Levi-Strauss (3) very well observed, it is characteristic to all cultures, no matter how primitive and small, to consider “barbarian” any form of social life which is different from theirs. However, it seems that for the western world, in the middle of 18th century, two new events give to this natural egocentricity a particular tint, which eventually lead to a new notion and a new word to designate it. For the first time in History, a group of nations representative of a certain model of society, of a certain culture, was practically in contact with all the other human societies in the world and preparing to bring them under its influence or domination. To this, a new conviction was added – that should probably be related to the sudden development of sciences – that humanity is in continuous progress. It is to this double phenomenon – the belief in the indefinite progress and the beginning of the world hegemony of the western society – that we should ascribe the need to designate by a new term an action and a state corresponding to the adoption of the Occidental way of life. To get *civilised meant to adopt the western way of life* – and *civilization* was the state of high refinement that Western Europe and, more precisely, a certain social class within this Europe

had achieved. (It is funny to realize that, parallel to this belief, which is far from having disappeared two and a half centuries latter, the “good savage” myth was born in the same environment, like an antidote!)

Thus the context in which the word had appeared implied that the monist meaning should be primordial: the civilization was one, it was in motion and the few refined states of Western Europe naturally represented the “*avant-garde*” of this humanity on the go. The idea that other nations or groups of nations in different periods and different places, could have lived under other systems of human and divine laws, could have had another vision of the world and could have created some forms of art essentially different and that these other “ensembles” equally deserved the name of civilization, came only later, towards the end of the century (with Volney and Humboldt) and especially at the beginning of the following century. Now it is absolutely remarkable to see that the marquis de Mirabeau, the assumed inventor of the word, was already using it in a pluralist meaning! Indeed in a letter addressed to Monsieur de Butré, he was writing, in 1779, this amazing phrase: *Galilee, Egypt, Greece, Carthagina, Africa, Asia, Spain, maybe soon the whole of Europe will show that societies never know how to revive and make reflourish territories, once they have been destroyed by ephemeral civilizations and their consequences, a terrible and physical truth.* (4)

It is Spengler “*avant la lettre*”. However, we have to admit that the use of the word with this pluralistic meaning remained exceptional for a long time and it is only now, that in its everyday use, the pluralistic (or relative) meaning has finally taken the lead over the monistic (or absolute) meaning. Could this have anything to do with the success of Toynbee’s theses? At present, the reestimation of all the values of our civilization is probably sufficient to explain this evolution.

The attempts made to delineate these social units in space and time, have met with little success since, besides those who want to keep the term for the greatest detectable “ensembles” in the cours of history, numerous contemporary authors continue to use the term for any human society, no matter how small and primitive it is, as long as it presents an undeniable homogeneity and distinguishes itself sufficiently from any other human group. Thus we shall hear about the civilization of the Pueblos or of the Jivaro Indians in the same terms as of the Hellenic or of the Chinese civilization. It is clear that, leaving aside any estimation of value, the same word refers in the two cases to different realities. However, this ambiguity of the term, even within its pluralistic meaning, seems to have passed through the

centuries without any one of the meanings to have taken precedence over the other. The first meaning, “civilization” as the history of a superior culture (to simplify the problem, let us call it the “historical meaning”), seems to precede all the others since the marquis de Mirabeau himself was using the word with this meaning. But, at the beginning of the following century, Wilhelm von Humboldt had already used the term *civilization* in its *ethnologic* quality, to designate the totality of the characteristic features presented by a human collectivity: language, institutions, customs, techniques, beliefs, ways of thinking, which all together represent a *sui generis* unity. The definition of *civilization* given by Humboldt in the introduction to his essay on the Kawi language in Java is already very close to that of the contemporary ethnologists (5). Now, between what we have called the “historical meaning of the term” and its ethnologic meaning, there is not only a difference of dimension – on one side, the biggest units of History and, on the other side, any culture which can be isolated, even at the level of an island or a village, but also a different point of view: the ethnologist either does not take into consideration the diachronic observation of the collectivity or, is satisfied to look in the past for the explanation of a particular custom or a particular institution, in fact, for any cultural feature. However, that is not his main object which remains to study the mechanism of a society in a synchronic cross – section, whereas, for the historical philosopher the object is first and foremost the evolution in time of the cultural “ensemble”. Thus from the beginning it appeared that only the largest collectivities presented similarities in their process of evolution and it is now evident that Mirabeau’s enumeration implies more or less clearly the same view as do also the works of his quasi–contemporaries Montesquieu and Gibbon. And since we have mentioned Wilhelm von Humboldt, probably the first who gave the term civilization its ethnological meaning, we should mention now that he seems to be also the initiator of the slight difference of meaning between culture and civilization, which was to become increasingly marked with the German authors.

The word *culture* is very old. The metaphor “the culture of the spirit” (*cultura mentis*) had already been used by the Latins. The Renaissance revived it with the same meaning of enriching the spirit and it is only in the circles of the XVIIIth century French “philosophers” that the word was to be used with a passive meaning for the first time, as a synonym of the neologism *civilization*. From there, the term culture traveled to Germany with a clear tendency to differentiate itself from *civilization*, the latter being used

rather more for the material acquisitions of a society, the progress of its technics and of its institutions, while culture is the totality of its spiritual acquisitions, of its most original moral features. Whence the gradation that Humboldt will distinguish between *civilization*, whose definition we have seen earlier, *Kultur*, which represents a superior degree of refinement manifested in art and sciences and, finally, *Bildung*, which is applied only to a small elite of superior individuals, issued from the very heart of culture and whose works will represent the greatest creations of this culture.

This distinction between culture and civilization became classical in Germany and found its extreme expression in Spengler's works where the term *Kultur* designates the totality of a civilization considered in its historical development, while *Zivilisation*, with a clearly pejorative meaning will be the somewhat rigid form that culture will take in its final stage of unity and uniformity. The distinction was not adopted in France, nor in the Anglo – Saxon countries, where culture and civilization were extensively used interchangeably. (6)

Today, owing to Toynbee's influence, on the one hand, and to the influence of the American school of anthropology on the other hand, another distinction tends to impose itself: civilization would preferably designate the larger ensemble of a superior culture, while *culture* would be used to designate any organised society conscious of being different from all others whatever their dimension and duration in time. Thus the term *culture* would designate the totality of techniques, customs, institutions, beliefs, arts and other spiritual creations of a particular ethnic group: it could just as well be used for a major culture (*Hochkultur*), like the French, the German or the English culture as for the culture of the Eskimos, of the Pueblo Indians or for the aborigenes from Australia. *Civilization* would indicate larger groupings presenting common features and characterised by a certain dynamics and by following a particular curve in time. Thus we hear about the Egyptian civilization, the Chinese, the Hellenic or the Greco-Roman civilizations.

Finally, the evolution in time of a civilization suggests another distinction: if the term civilization is more and more used to designate a big historical grouping in its evolution, culture could be a "vertical" local cross-section carried out at a certain moment in that civilization. Thus we could talk about the Chinese culture in the time of T'ai-tsong within the Chinese civilization; or about the French culture during the reign of Louis XIV, within the western civilization.

Among the authors who have had a cyclic vision of History and who for about two centuries have been trying to present a cutting up of History into major civilizations, we should like to name five: Gobineau, who in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (7) proposes a more rational enumeration of the civilizations than the "literary" one of the marquis de Mirabeau, and at any rate a remarkable work considering the level of the historical knowledge at that time; Danilevsky, who in *Rossia I Evropa* (8) (Russia and Europe) presents, for the first time, a coherent system of the philosophy of civilizations, unfortunately blemished by his too obvious panslavist intentions; Spengler (9) who, in spite of his dogmatic statements, errors and excesses, still dominates by far the whole contemporary philosophy of history; Toynbee (10), whose talent and originality probably justifies his prodigious success, but who suggests such a misleading classification that it cannot be taken into consideration in any systematical historical study; and, finally, the American Philip Bagby, dead prematurely, who put in a work of very small dimensions (11), a model of method and clarity, a classification fairly similar to Spengler's. A critical presentation of these systems would go beyond the limits of the present study, but I believe that the wide spread especially of Spengler's and Toynbee's works can dispense us of this retrospective look.

To conclude we should like to specify that if we also choose for civilization its pluralist meaning and moreover if we use it mainly for the largest units in History, it is merely a matter of convention, and we do not intend to monopolize the word for one of its meanings, thus depriving it of its initial meaning unitary or "monist". Words have their individual life and the most vivid words are necessarily those with several meanings. In trying to avoid as much as possible any misunderstanding, we might have used the word with its monist meaning, or applied it to an isolated or minor society. The context will facilitate the understanding.

Notes:

1. The confirmation was brought by a group of researchers from the Sorbonne, *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*, in 1959–1960, under the guidance of Professor Alphonse Dupront, a group the author was also part of. The matter was already known: see especially Norbert Elias, *Ueber den Prozess der Zivilisation*, Basel, 1939, vol.I, pp.47–48, quoting also (*ibid.*, pp. 306) J. Moras, *Ursprung und Entwicklung des Begriffs Zivilisation in Frankreich*

(1756–1830), *Hamburger Studien zu Volkstum und Kultur der Romanen*, 6, Hamburg, 1930, pp.38. However new discoveries are always possible.

2. The Italians did not adopt it under this form, preferring to keep with this new meaning the old *civiltà*, corresponding to the French *civilité*.

3. *Race et Histoire*, 2nd edition, Paris, 1961.

4. Mirabeau's letter addressed to Mr. de Buré on the 8th of April, 1779, was published in *Carl Friedrichs von Baden brieflicher Verkehr mit Mirabeau und Du Pont*, Heidelberg, 1892, vol. I, pp. 108.

5. "*Die Civilisation ist die Vermenschlichung der Voelker in ihren ausseren Einrichtungen und Gebrauchen und der darauf Bezug haben den inneren Gesinnung*", in "*Ueber die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Java, Einleitung*", pp. XXXVII, Berlin, 1820 (published only in 1836), quoted by Gobineau in his "*Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*", chapter IX. Gobineau translates this passage as follows: "Civilization is the humanisation of the peoples within their exterior institutions, customs and the inner feeling towards them."

6. In exchange, it had a certain influence on the Russian political philosophers and thinkers, from Alexander Herzen to Berdiaev – including Dostoevsky, Danilevsky, and Pobedonostsev – who understood, both the liberals and the conservatives, that "civilization" was the "rotten" Occident, while "culture" which was to save Europe, was incipient in Russia. This quasi-messianic belief was repeated many times and with so much passion in such diverse works and forms, that strangely enough it ended by influencing certain German thinkers too. It is evident in Spengler.

7. Paris, 1853–1855, 4 vol.

8. Danilevsky (Nicolai Iacovlevich), *Rossia I Evropa*, Sankt Petersburg, 1871; German translation (partial) *Russland und Europa*, Stuttgart-Berlin, 1920.

9. *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Munchen, 1918–1922; French translation *Le déclin de l'Occident*, Paris 1948; eng. transl. *Decline of the Occident*.

10. *A study of history*, 10 vol; Oxford University Press, 1934–1954.

11. *Culture and History. Prolegomena to the Comparative Study of Civilization*, London 1958.

Part one

THE CIVILIZATIONS

DEFINITION AND ENUMERATION

Attempt of Periodization

Definition. When do civilizations appear? Characteristics. Different phases. An attempt at enumeration. Brief comparison: typical case and variantes. An attempt to establish periods for each separate civilization: the Egyptian civilization; the Middle East or Babylonian civilization; the Cretan civilization; the Hellenic or Greco – Roman civilization; the Byzantine civilization; the Western civilization; the Arabian or Islamic civilization; the Indian civilization; the Chinese or Far – Eastern civilization; the pre – Columbian civilizations.

Though none of the authors mentioned in the Introduction gave an entirely satisfactory definition of civilization and though their systems present many obscurities and contradictions, they express nevertheless an evidence that gets more and more clear for historians: in the tangled multi – shaped shifting immensity of the past, ever since the dawn of history, one can distinguish here and there big “ensembles” of societies, whose view of the world, techniques, arts and institutions give the peoples sharing them, a specific “colouring”, a particular style.

The development in time of these “ensembles” follows a curve that presents, from one case to another, amazing similarities.

These “ensembles” that are called civilizations, do not cover by far the whole field of History, but everything happens as if the civilizations, sometimes parallel, othertimes successive, represented the big ramifications that life follows in its upsurge towards superior humanity. In time, numerous forms of culture have cropped up wherever human societies were organized, but it is only the large units that we call civilizations (since the beginnings of history their number does not seem to exceed twelve) which represent the privileged areas where for several millenniums the evolution of mankind has manifested itself most dynamically.

CONTENTS

Preface	7
Introduction	9

Part one. The Civilizations

Definition and Enumeration	19
Attempt of Periodization	19
The Egyptian Civilization	43
The Babylonian Civilization	49
The Cretan Civilization	67
The Hellenic or Greco-Roman Civilization	72
The Byzantine Civilization	82
The Western Civilization	113
The Arabian (Islamic) Civilization	170
The Indian Civilization	196
The Chinese or Far-Eastern Civilization	217
The Precolumbian Civilizations	236

Part two. Recurrent Phenomena

Chapter 1	249
Chapter 2	291
Chapter 3	340
Conclusions	397
Appendix	425