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978-0-521-43253-5 - Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History

Marshall G. S. Hodgson

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In Part I of this posthumous collection of essays, Marshall G. S. Hodgson examines the place both of Europe and of modernity in world history. The result is a challenging contribution to the current debate on Eurocentrism and multiculturalism. In Part II Hodgson seeks to locate Islamic civilization in a world historical framework. Finally in Part III, he argues that in the end there is but one history – global history – and that all partial or privileged accounts must necessarily be resituated in a world historical context. The book also includes an introduction and a conclusion by the editor, Edmund Burke, III, contextualizing Hodgson's contribution to world history and Islamic history.

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Rethinking world history

ESSAYS ON EUROPE, ISLAM,
AND WORLD HISTORY

MARSHALL G. S. HODGSON

Edited, with an Introduction and Conclusion by
EDMUND BURKE, III



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Editor's preface

Marshall G. S. Hodgson is known primarily as the author of the masterful three-volume *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974). That he was also a world historian who in addition to a number of seminal articles left a posthumous work, "The Unity of World History," is known to few. Hodgson died in 1968 at the age of 46, leaving this work unfinished.

Although I was never privileged to know Marshall Hodgson, I have been continually nourished by his thoughts about world history. For some time, I have felt that a collection of the best of Hodgson's writings on world history could provide an important contribution to current discussions about world history and the place of Europe in it. Many of the essays included here were published previously, although only a few have received anything like the audience they deserve. They date from the 1940s to the 1960s;¹ however, their conceptual brilliance and methodological rigor are still relevant today.

The essays in Part I of this book explore the place of Europe in world history, challenging adherents of both Eurocentrism and multiculturalism. The Part II essays are concerned with Hodgson's parallel effort to locate the history of Islamic civilization in a world historical framework. The essays in Part III argue that in the end there is but one history – global history – and that all partial or privileged accounts must necessarily be resituated in a world historical context. My retrospective appreciation of Hodgson's three-volume *Venture of Islam* as a work of world history concludes this book.

Hodgson's spelling, use of neologisms, and transliteration of Middle Eastern terms deserve comment. As with everything else, Hodgson's

¹ I discuss the provenance of the essays included in this book in the introduction which follows.

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prose was an expression of his methodological self-consciousness and dissatisfaction with conventional terminology. (In Chapter 5, "Historical Method in Civilizational Studies," he argues for the necessity of devising new terms, and of self-consciousness in the use of language by historians.)

I have sought to remain faithful to the original spelling employed by Hodgson insofar as possible. His transliteration of Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages has been simplified, however, in the interests of presenting a more readable text. The specialist will know the appropriate transliteration to insert, and the general reader will not be inconvenienced. A glossary of Islamic terms has been appended at the end of this volume. While many of the essays included here were published previously in a variety of different venues, in the interests of consistency, spelling has been conformed throughout.

At the suggestion of Professor Eugene Gendlin of The University of Chicago, Hodgson's literary executor, I came to see the possibility of publishing the best of Hodgson's writings on world history. The encouragement from his widow, Mrs. Phyllis Hodgson, helped me see this project through to completion. Support for the editing of this volume came primarily from research funds of the Division of Humanities, University of California at Santa Cruz. I wish here to record my debt to Michael Cowan, former Dean of Humanities. Finally, I am especially grateful to Helen Wheatley (who input the text) and to Zoe Sodja (who prepared the final manuscript) of the U.C.S.C. Word Processing Center. My thanks to them both.

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Introduction: Marshall G.S. Hodgson and world history

Edmund Burke III

Something important has been happening to the writing of world history in the past two decades. A scholarly tradition that was rooted in the paradigm of civilizational studies has been challenged from both within and without. As a result of the collapse of the sense of moral exceptionalism which had privileged the West above the rest of humanity as well as a new sense of global interdependency, historians have expanded their focus. As a consequence, comparative history has had an increasing impact even on the writing of American history. Neither the history of slavery in the Old South nor that of Reconstruction will ever again be the same. The contribution of Marxism to this new awareness of the ways in which the different societies are linked to one another in time and space is evident. Immanuel Wallerstein, Eric Hobsbawm, Eric Wolf – but also Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin – have developed historical accounts of the rise of capitalism that stress the shaping impact of the world economy.¹ In so doing they have devised new conceptual tools for discussing the history of humanity, and a new terrain on which to situate it. The social and economic interactions of peoples, rather than the cultural interchanges of civilizations, constitute the basic building blocks of this new perspective.

Important though the contributions of those working within the Marxist tradition have been, the remaking of world history owes perhaps more to the work of William McNeill, whose *The Rise of the West* has provided students with a comprehensive account of the history of the

¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, 2 vols. (New York: Academic Press, 1974, 1977); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* and *The Age of Reform, 1848–1875* (New York: New American Library 1962, 1975); Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Andre Gunder Frank, *World Accumulation, 1492–1789* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1978); Samir Amin, *Unequal Development* (New York: Frank 1976).

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world within the tradition of civilizational studies.² McNeill's innovation was to unhook the study of civilizations from the Procrustean bed of metaphysics – whether it be the pessimism of Spengler or the cyclicalism of Toynbee. Borrowing the concept of cultural diffusion from anthropology, McNeill's world history is one in which what goes around comes around – but where inexplicably the West is the principal beneficiary. As opposed to those working in the Marxist tradition, whose concern with the development of capitalism has led them to focus almost exclusively upon the post-1500 period, McNeill situates the emergence of modernity in the context of all of human history. This permits a less presentist and less Eurocentric discussion of the shape of the human past – though as the title of his book suggests, some difficulties remain. Indeed, for both Marxists and followers of McNeill the place of Europe in the history of humankind and of modernity in global time perspective continues to be problematic. It is here that the contribution of Marshall G. S. Hodgson may be relevant.

While McNeill was writing his magnum opus at The University of Chicago during the 1950s, his colleague and friend Marshall Hodgson was simultaneously at work on his three-volume *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*.³ An Islamicist and Quaker, Hodgson operated in the tradition of textual analysis called orientalism, and utilized the civilizations approach to the history of Islamic peoples. However, unlike standard orientalist accounts, *The Venture of Islam* situates the history of Islamic civilization in the context of world history, and not just that of the Middle East. It is this dual aspect of Hodgson's work, together with his methodological self-consciousness and moral sensitivity, that constitutes his chief claim upon our attention. As the chair of the interdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought at Chicago (which has rather different emphases in its current incarnation) until his death in 1968, Hodgson was deeply engaged in an effort to rethink the philosophical and historical traditions of Western civilization. With his vast erudition and enormous self-confidence, Hodgson was a formidable figure. (I'll have more to say about the Chicago environment in my concluding essay.)

It is not generally known that Marshall Hodgson was also a world historian of unusual rigor and commitment.⁴ As a world historian, Hodg-

² *The Rise of The West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

³ Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.

⁴ For example, Hodgson does not figure in Gilbert Allardyce's otherwise thorough and insightful survey, "Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the

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son was concerned with locating the history of the civilization he called Islamic in the context both of West Asian history and of all of prior human history. "Mankind is the only ultimately tenable field of discourse of all human inquiry and consideration of meaningfulness," he remarks at one point. Anything less might permit Eurocentric and presentist biases to distort the basis of the inquiry. For this reason as well, he compared the development of Islamic civilization at particular points in its history with the history of Western European civilization the better to defuse the incipient European exceptionalism which has marked most orientalist writings about Islam.

Among Hodgson's earliest writings (1941) is an essay (written at the age of 19) outlining a new conceptual approach to world history. For the next 25 years he continually reworked this early piece, which went through a number of different forms, always changing, always deepening.⁵ Over the years that followed, Hodgson's thoughts on how to reconceptualize world history and the place of Europe in it were published in a number of seminal articles. Others were included in *The Venture of Islam*. Versions of these essays and others that he did not live to complete were to be included in his unpublished manuscript, "The Unity of World History."

Because of the way Hodgson worked, his unpublished book-length work, "The Unity of World History," has not yet found a publisher. (He constantly revised this manuscript, publishing parts in articles or borrowing them for *The Venture*.) Much of what he has to say on the shape of

World History Course," *Journal of World History* 1, 1 (1990), 23–76, which includes some important pages on what might be called the "Chicago school" of world historians: Louis Gottschalk, L. S. Stavrianos, and William McNeill (though in fact much separates the approaches of the three men).

⁵ The Hodgson papers at the Department of Special Collections of the Joseph Regenstein Library at The University of Chicago allow us to follow this evolution in detail. The essay published here as Chapter 3, "World History and a World Outlook," which dates from 1944, was the first published expression of his distinctive approach to world history. In 1945, inspired by the title of an article by Margaret Cameron, he planned to call his world history "There Is No Orient." Its purpose was to be "to combat western provincialism." Later, in 1955, he spoke of what he called My Epic History: "I have in mind something on the order of the *Divina Commedia*, an imaged world-view like Milton or Ibn Arabi, i.e., epic or occult with the hope it might displace works such as Toynbee's." In October 1960 he referred to the book as "The Structure of World History: an Essay on Medieval and Modern Eurasia." By 1962, the chapter outline resembled the table of contents of his eventual "Unity of World History" unpublished manuscript (the last three chapters of which are reprinted in the present volume). World federalism, for which he had a youthful affection, gradually dropped by the wayside, as did the romantic enthusiasm of casting it in the form of an epic. By examining the gradual transformations of the project over the period from its inception, we see the maturing of a young scholar into an established professional.

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world history in the “Unity” manuscript, for example, exists in a more finished form in his world history articles or as sections in *The Venture of Islam*. Finally, it should be noted that since Hodgson began working on the manuscript in the 1950s, portions of it are simply obsolete. (World historians such as Alfred Toynbee and Harry Elmer Barnes are no longer widely read, their insights long bypassed by the development of the field.)

As an anonymous reader of “The Unity of World History” manuscript a decade ago, I was much struck both by its enormous potential importance to world historians, and by the unlikelihood a publisher would be willing to undertake it. If “The Unity of World History” was unlikely to be published, I began to wonder, might it be possible to make a book of the published articles and some of the selected chapters of the “Unity” manuscript? I decided to try. Research in the Hodgson papers on deposit in the Department of Special Collections of The Joseph Regenstein Library of The University of Chicago in June 1987 turned up a few additional essays that might be included. I also found a note in Hodgson’s hand (undated, c. 1962) suggesting that he had thought of collecting his essays on world history, including sections of *The Venture of Islam*, into a book. The selection of chapters for this book has been guided by this list.

Because of my conviction that Hodgson’s conceptual approach and methodological rigor have an important contribution to make to current efforts to develop global history, I decided to gather the best of Hodgson’s scattered writings on Islam and world history into this volume. I have grouped the essays included here in three sections.

A central focus of Hodgson’s writings on world history was to resituate the history of the West in a global context, and in the process unhook it from Eurocentric teleologies (or what we might call, post-Foucault, the European master discourse on itself). The essays in Part I, “Europe in a Global Context,” group together some of Hodgson’s most important work on this topic. His article, “The Interrelations of Societies in History,” which first appeared in 1963 is probably best known among them.⁶ The early essays “In the Center of the Map” and “World History and a World Outlook” provide an accessible introduction to his conceptual

⁶ “The Interrelations of Societies in History,” *Comparative Studies in Societies and History*, V (1963), 227–250. An earlier version of this article was published in *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale/Journal of World History* I (1954), 715–723. (Both articles are themselves reworkings of Hodgson’s 1941 unpublished letter, written while he was an undergraduate at The University of Chicago.) His unpublished “Unity of World History” manuscript from which we have excerpted chapters 11–13, included in this volume) itself derives from this precocious piece.

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approach to world history.⁷ The problem of modernity, and how one may situate it historically – as a global process rooted in Europe or as a specifically European manifestation – is broached in “The Great Western Transmutation.”⁸ The chapter “Historical Method in Civilizational Studies” presents Hodgson’s views on the perils and pitfalls of doing world history without first thinking through some of the major epistemological and conceptual issues.⁹ It is Hodgson at his teacherly best. Finally, the fragment “On Doing World History” presents in brief compass one of the most lucid brief presentations of the main points of Hodgson’s approach to world history, in which he develops a brief critique of William McNeill’s book, *The Rise of the West*. (It is an excerpt from a letter to John Voll of the University of New Hampshire dated December 16, 1966.) Hodgson was an inveterate letter-writer, and some of his best ideas first appeared in letter form, including the germ from which “The Unity of World History” eventually emerged – it first appeared in a letter in 1941.

In Part II, “Islam in a Global Context,” one can find some of Hodgson’s main statements on Islam and world history. “The Role of Islam in World History” is a tour de force overview of the history of Islamic civilization.¹⁰ The essay “Cultural Patterning in Islamdom and the Occident” first appeared in *The Venture of Islam*.¹¹ It presents a remarkable sustained comparison of Islamic civilization and Western European civilization. The writing is dense but the ideas enormously stimulating. “The Unity of Later Islamic History” argues that there was an underlying unity to post-Mongol Islamic history – against what was then the established scholarly orthodoxy.¹² In the chapter “Modernity and the Islamic Heritage,” Hodgson reflects on the situation of modern Muslims. Here, as so often, he anticipated events.¹³

Part III of this book, “The Discipline of World History,” brings together

⁷ “In the Center of the Map,” *UNESCO Courier* (May 1956), 16–18; “World History and a World Outlook,” *The Social Studies* 35 (1944), 297–301. The latter essay bears the dateline: Camp Elkton, Elkton, Oregon. It may be helpful to know that Hodgson was a Quaker pacifist who was interned during World War II for his views. Camp Elkton was established to house Quaker conscientious objectors. (On the intellectual importance of Hodgson’s Quakerism, see my essay at the end of this text, *passim*. The influence of ideas of world federalism on this essay is striking. This theme, so strong in his early conceptualizations of global history, gradually diminished over time.)

⁸ Originally published in *Chicago Today* (1967). The reworked version included here was originally published in *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 3, Book 6, Chap. 1, pp. 176–200.

⁹ It was first published as the prologue to *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), Vol. 1, 22–74.

¹⁰ *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, I (1970), 99–123.

¹¹ *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 2 (1974), 329–368.

¹² *Journal of World History*, 5 (1960), 879–914.

¹³ *Islamic Studies*, I (1962), 89–129.

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the last three chapters of Hodgson's unpublished work. "The Unity of World History." Here Hodgson discusses the question of objectivity in world history, presents his reflections on historical comparison, and argues for world history as *the* master discipline which alone can give sense to historical inquiry at lesser levels of generalization. Many of his thoughts continue to have relevance to current discussions about world history as a scholarly endeavor.

The book concludes with my essay, "Islamic History as World History: Marshall G. S. Hodgson and *The Venture of Islam*," which provides a series of reflections on the ways these two themes continually interacted in Hodgson's thought.

Islam and the West: Resituating Western civilization

The recent debate provoked by Edward Said's *Orientalism*¹⁴ is a strategic place to begin a reassessment of the relationship of the history of the West to that of rest of the world. Said stresses the putative role of orientalism as a discipline in the extension of European hegemony over the Middle East, and more generally the ways orientalism as a discourse of power was predicated upon the domination of the West over the non-West. On a deeper level, however, Said's approach implicitly questions the validity of civilizational studies, in particular the view that a civilization's Great Books provide the key to its special character. If orientalism is the discourse on the Other, as Said asserts, then it might be argued that Western civilization is the discourse on ourselves. It is here (despite evident differences) that Said's critique joins that of Hodgson, for whom essentialism is a central trait of civilizational studies. At the same time it is important to note that despite Hodgson's awareness of the limitations of the civilizational approach to the study of world history, he remained committed to it.

For Hodgson, before one could engage in the critique of Western civilization, there was an epistemologically prior step: it lay in recognizing that all works are the products of their author's *precommitments*, which fundamentally shape their understanding of the phenomenon in question. For Hodgson, these include not only religious affiliations, but also Marxism and (more surprisingly) what he calls *Westernism*. More clearly than many

¹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). See also Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Malcolm Kerr (ed.), *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems* (Santa Monica: Undena Publications, 1980); Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978); and Jean-Claude Vatin, *Connaissances du Maghreb: Sciences sociales et colonisation* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1984).

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more recent authors, Hodgson does not presume to be speaking from some epistemologically sanitized space, in which one is liberated from having one or more precommitments; rather, he assumes we all have precommitments which both enable and constrain our understanding in various ways. (See Chapter 5 for a more complete elaboration.)

For both Hodgson and Said, Western civilization as a discourse is predicated upon a deeply rooted sense of the moral as well as cultural superiority of Western Europe to the rest of humanity. Both orientalism and Western civilization begin in the textualist position that civilizations have essences, and that these essences are best seen in the Great Books they have produced. (Who decides what's a Great Book, or what connection it might have to the lived lives of men and women in particular places and times is never satisfactorily explained.) The textualist position foreshortens history, annihilates change, and levels difference the better to represent an image of the past in dramatic form – either as tragedy, as in the case of Islamic civilization, or as triumph, as in the case of the rise of the West. In either case, it is a story whose rhythms are guided by the ineluctable working out of civilizational essences allegedly encoded in foundation texts. Thus we get the history of the West as the story of freedom and rationality, or the history of the East (pick an East, any East) as the story of despotism and cultural stasis. While the concept of discourse was unavailable to Hodgson, his understanding of the essentializing tendency in Westernist scholarly precommitments anticipates in important ways the work of Foucault, Said, and others.

Marshall Hodgson clearly saw that Islamic history was a strategic point from which to undertake a critique of the discourse on Western civilization. (Though the nature of that critique was always blunted by his commitment to the civilizations as a unit of analysis.) As he notes, Islamic civilization is the sister of our own. Its roots lie in the same basic Irano-Semitic religious and cultural values, crossed with the ambiguous legacy of West Asian imperium. Islam was the vastly richer and more successful Other against which the West defined itself. Seen in perspective, the history of the Occident and of Islamdom makes a fascinating study in the emergence of two distinctively different yet suggestively similar societies, both of which traffic in blends of Hellenistic learning, West Asian prophetic monotheism, and agrarian-based bureaucratic empires. The study of Islamic civilization thus almost by necessity invites a reexamination of European history in which its development can be placed in world historical context, and in the process, de-exceptionalized.

Moreover, the fact of Islam's spread from the Middle East throughout the rest of Afro-Eurasia further undermines the dominant paradigm of

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the Great Books variety of civilizational studies. The global reach of Islam as a religion spawned a host of Islamic societies, and in the process broke down the walls between the regional civilizations of Afro-Eurasia. The interaction between local societies and the formative ideals of the religion necessarily led to the proliferation of myriad new social and cultural hybrid forms, which while undeniably Islamic, were also patently Chinese, African, Turkish. Thus for example, we get distinctive regional styles of mosque architecture – pagoda-like in Peking, mud brick in Timbuctu, or the needle minarets and vaulting domes of Istanbul mosques. Islamic civilization, by the messy way it spills over the conventional regional boundaries between world civilizations to assert its presence throughout Afro-Eurasia, points toward a more global, pluralistic, and interactional image of the history of world societies. At the same time, it subverts the dominant idea of world history as the story of static civilizational essences in which the couplets East and West, traditional and modern, constitute the conceptual underpinnings. As a world historian, Marshall Hodgson instinctively grasped the subversive potential of Islam's ubiquity for the study of civilizations. (At the same time, his Toynbeeian commitment to the civilization as a unit of analysis undermined some of the salience of his insights.)

In his seminal article "The Interrelations of Societies in History,"¹⁵ Hodgson made a key conceptual breakthrough which enabled him to situate both Islamic and European civilization in the context of world history. In it, he argued that from a world historical point of view the history of civilization is necessarily an Asia-centered history. He notes that the interconnecting band of agrarian citted societies which spanned the entire Afro-Eurasian landmass from China to Western Europe (an ensemble of civilizations which he calls, after Toynbee, the *Oikoumene*)¹⁶ is predominantly Asian. (Four of the five major civilizations are Asian.) It followed, for him, that an interregional hemispheric approach to history was logically superior to approaches which placed the West at the center of history. Moreover, he observed, not until around 1500 did Western Europe reach the cultural level of the other major civilizations of Afro-Eurasia.

In his approach to world history, Hodgson took nothing for granted. He even questioned the validity of our images of the world, notably the venerable Mercator projection map. In his article "In the Center of the Map" (Chapter 2 in this volume), he points out how the Mercator projec-

¹⁵ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 227–250.

¹⁶ Which McNeill renders as *ecumene*.

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tion, because it is centered upon Western Europe, systematically distorts our image of the southern hemisphere, whose actual land area is substantially larger than the map indicates. For this reason, Hodgson referred to it as “the Jim Crow projection.” Although Europe has approximately the square mile area of the other two peninsulas of Asia, India and Southeast Asia, he notes, Europe is called a continent, while India is but a subcontinent, and Southeast Asia has not even that status. Each has approximately the same number of major river systems, language groups, etc. The size of Africa is even more drastically reduced in the Mercator projection.

One of the most important conceptual moves that Hodgson made in *The Venture of Islam* was to focus on what he called “the Middle Periods” (pointedly not the Middle Ages) of Islamic history. (See Chapter 9.) By this he meant the period from the decline of the Abbasid caliphate as a centralized bureaucratic empire (c. A.D. 945) until the rise of the gunpowder empires in the sixteenth century. This focus was important for several reasons. First, although conventional scholarship emphasized that after A.D. 945 Islamic societies entered into a long period of decline from which they allegedly emerged only in the nineteenth century, Hodgson noted that the most celebrated cultural, scientific, and artistic figures of Islamic civilization (including among others, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, al-Biruni, and al-Firdawsi) lived after this date, and that this alone would call for a searching reevaluation. Hodgson’s emphasis on the Middle Periods enabled him to argue that Arabic was not the only Islamic language of culture. Rather, from A.D. 945 Persian and Turkish played major roles in the elaboration of a cosmopolitan Islamic culture. It is this which provides a key to grasping the hemisphere-wide role of Islam in China, India, South and Southeast Asia, as well as the Balkans and the Maghrib. The Middle Periods were times of the greatest advances of Islamic civilization. Thus Hodgson’s reexamination of the traditional periodization led to a remarkably fruitful reinvention of how Islamic civilization might be conceived, this time not as a truncated version of Europe, but in a world historical context and on its own terms.

By giving equal time to the Middle Periods, Hodgson was able to reassess the impact of the Mongol invasions on West Asia. As he shows, it was catastrophic, leading to the depopulation of much of the countryside, the destruction of many cities, and the collapse of the political and cultural infrastructure. Moreover, the Mongols did not depart, as barbarian hordes generally did. They remained in place, and Mongol successor states ruled western Asia until the end of the fifteenth century. The gunpowder empires which emerged from the rubble were profoundly

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marked by the experience, their possibilities of action sharply constrained by the heavy adverse impact of two centuries of pastoralist occupation. While Islamdom was enduring two centuries of decline and cultural turmoil under the Mongol yoke, Western Europe was undergoing the series of transformations which were to give rise to modernity. If we are to understand the rise of the West, Hodgson cautions us, we must first grasp the meaning of this parallel history.

Islam and the problem of modernity

One of Hodgson's most important contributions was his reevaluation of modern (i.e., post-1500) history and the place of Europe in it. The fact that Marshall Hodgson was a student of Islamic history helped him to attain a different view of modernity, one at least partly shorn of the Western exceptionalism which was a major feature of the modernization theory of his day. As the author of an unpublished world history, his approach to Islamic history was less influenced by culturalist views of all kinds. This comes out clearly in his article "The Great Western Transmutation,"¹⁷ in which he outlines the global dimensions of the complex process of change which, from the eighteenth century on, progressively transformed first the West and then other regions. We are still working to assimilate his re-vision of the roots of modernity.

Hodgson's world historian's eye enabled him at least partially to transcend the Eurocentrism of modernization theory. Modernity, which has generally been confused with Westernization by historians, was for Hodgson a global process. Although the West happened to be the first society to transcend the constraints of agrarian civilization, Hodgson insisted that this development must be placed in world historical context. Given the rough parity among Afro-Eurasian citied societies and the tendency for cultural innovations to pyramid, he argues, it was inevitable that a radical break with agrarian conditions would have occurred somewhere on the planet sooner or later. Had it not been the West, Hodgson suggests, it could plausibly have taken place in either Sung China or the Islamic world. Before it was overrun by pastoral nomads, Sung Chinese society had pioneered patterns of large-scale social and technical investment which allowed it for a time to transcend the limits of agrarian conditions. While this first Chinese "industrial revolution" did not ultimately succeed, it is interesting to speculate on

¹⁷ *Chicago Today* (1967), 40–50. It is included here as Chapter 4 in its final version, that found in *The Venture of Islam* (Book 6, Chap. 1).

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what might have happened had it done so. Similarly, if modernity had first emerged in Islamdom, Hodgson suggests, the egalitarian and cosmopolitan tendencies of modern society would have been heightened. But instead of occurring within the chrysalis of the nation-state (a form tied to the Western experience), the modern world would be characterized by an egalitarian universal state under the aegis of a super-ulama and a super-shariah.

The fact that the Industrial Revolution occurred in Western Europe was, to be sure, freighted with consequences for the future. New patterns of social investment and a new mentality (which he calls *technicalism*) led to a breakthrough to fundamentally new levels of social power. By the end of the sixteenth century, these changes had so far altered Western European society as to move it to a new level – though what this might mean in actuality was only gradually to be worked out.

Hodgson broke with the modernization paradigm in seeing that modernity was from the outset a global process. While the West was the epicenter of these changes, once having occurred somewhere, conditions for development were fundamentally transformed everywhere. Even states like Afghanistan, Thailand, and Morocco, which fell under the looming shadow of the West only late in the game, were in important ways affected by these changes beginning in the sixteenth century. (Here Hodgson anticipates Eric Wolf's observation that the isolated peasant village so dear to anthropologists was in fact a trope. Wolf argues that upon investigation, even the most remote village was affected by the emerging world economy and Western-dominated system of states.)

An important aspect of Hodgson's reevaluation of modernity is his insistence that in historical time it is the discontinuities and not the continuities of Western history which are most striking. He notes that the ascending curve which runs from ancient Greece, to the Renaissance, to modern times is an optical illusion. In fact, he argues, for most of history Europe was an insignificant outlier of mainland Asia. Furthermore, he notes, the Renaissance did not inaugurate modernity. Instead, it brought Europe up to the cultural level of the other major civilizations of the Oikoumene. It did so in some measure by assimilating the advances of the other Asian civilizations. The list of inventions which developed elsewhere and diffused subsequently to Europe is a long one. It includes gunpowder firearms, the compass, the sternpost rudder, decimal notation, and the university, among others. Seen in this light, the European experience looks much less original. This is not to deny that there were original European developments. But in the context of three millennia of agrarianate cited life in the Afro-Eurasian Oikoumene,

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there was a tendency for civilizations to achieve a rough parity with one another as cultural innovations diffused throughout the Oikoumene.

There is a deep tension in Hodgson's thought between his tendency to view modernity as a world historical process and as linked to particular cultural trends deeply rooted in the West. "Just as an understanding of the history of Europe cannot be reduced to that of the history of England because industrialization first developed there, so the history of the world cannot be reduced to the history of the West, because industrialism first spread there." This tension may be seen best in his concepts of the *Great Western Transmutation* and *technicalism*. In his theory, these concepts distinguish the agrarian age from the modern age. They are what characterizes our time from all that came before it. Modernity, for Hodgson, was linked to the increasing spread of technical specialization across the entire band of citted societies from the sixteenth-century emergence of gunpowder firearm weapons. As innovations accumulated, especially in the West, the result was a qualitative change in the level and kind of human social organization. This shift he likens to that which civilization underwent at Sumer in the emergence of agrarianate citted life. It was this new cultural attitude, and not industrialization, which was the hallmark of the modern age. (Denmark, he explains, is indubitably modern, yet predominantly agricultural.)

Hodgson's emphasis upon the formative role of culture – and his commitment to the civilizational approach – is apparent in his use of the concept of technicalism. Technicalism is "a condition of calculative . . . technical specialization in which the several specialties are interdependent on a large enough scale to determine patterns of expectation in the key sectors of society." While this cultural tendency may be found elsewhere, only in the West did the effort to maximize technical efficiency become exalted above other values. When Hodgson developed this idea in the 1950s, it seemed a helpful gloss on Weber's rationalization. In the 1980s, its defects are apparent. By turns overly abstract, single-mindedly culturalist, and Eurocentric, technicalism seems to us a conceptual tool of rather limited utility. In the wake of recent work emphasizing the broad patterns in global social and economic change over what the French call *la longue durée*, the limitations of Hodgson's thought are apparent. Because it focuses upon culture, the civilizational approach favored by Hodgson has only a tenuous grasp on the crucially important long-range demographic, economic, and social transformations which accompanied (perhaps even preceded) the onset of the modern age.

In sum, Hodgson's effort to situate the rise of the West in a global context had a rather mixed result. In some respects, his conceptual in-

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sights have yet to be surpassed. Yet in others, his view of modernity remains bound to the old problematic of Western exceptionalism. Here, it must be admitted, Hodgson is in good company. Neither McNeill nor the Marxists have been able to place the momentous changes that ensued first in Europe before spreading around the globe in an authentically world historical framework. Flawed though Hodgson's views were, they constitute a permanent claim on the attention of all who would seek to measure their work by the highest standards of rigor and epistemological seriousness. If world history is to have a more significant place in our consciousness (as the need to produce citizens fully able to operate in the coming century insists that it should), we should listen to his voice.