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THE ROLE OF THE CITY IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS:
A Study in Conflicting Traditions.

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THE RÔLE OF THE CITY IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS:

A Study in Conflicting Traditions

By Stuart Piggott

In an essay with a title of such wide scope as "The Role of the City in Ancient Civilizations" it is obviously necessary at the outset to impose limitations and make definitions. I shall therefore limit my survey in space to Western Asia and Europe, the area within which the earliest manifestations of city life can be traced, and in time I shall be mainly concerned with the period between the sixth and first millennia B.C., during which the early evolution of the city took place, and its relationships to other communities became established as a recognisable pattern.

Definition is less easy. The term "civilization" has today, in common with many other abstract concepts, become confused by emotional over-tones to a degree which often renders its use meaningless, or dangerously misleading. Like the eighteenth-century English bishop who observed that "orthodoxy is my doxy; heterodoxy is another man's doxy", there is a tendency for modern communities each to regard civilization as its peculiar property, with barbarism or its equivalent as the portion of other men. By origin and primary definition, civilization was the exclusive property of city dwellers - of citizens - and the antithetic division of mankind into civilized and barbarian peoples was a natural concept within the classical tradition of Greek and Roman thought.¹ Such a world-picture, the product of citizens in stable communities with a relatively advanced technology, economically based on agriculture, reasonably enough was conceived

with such an economy as the touchstone. In our own times, some historians have tended to select as historically significant only those communities which approximate to their own ideals.

Since the dominant human societies today are the heirs of those which in antiquity were based on an agricultural economy in which technological development was favoured by circumstances and tradition, a concept of civilization frequently held at the present time is coloured by inherited attitudes of thought in which an advanced technology is equated with a high degree of civilization. Such ideas largely date from the last century, and the materialist and utilitarian doctrines whereby the growing complexity in man's material culture, perceptible through history and prehistory, was interpreted as a natural law of development, and an inevitable progress from savagery to civilization. To archaeologists and prehistorians, whose source-material is in great measure the product of technology, such an assessment of the past societies they are studying can be regarded as one of several valid approaches to the problem, remembering always that like every interpretation of history, it is a subjective estimate of an aspect of human activity in the past.

In this essay, then, I shall avoid the term "civilization" so far as possible, since it carries with it an implicit judgement of values, and a limitation, in its usually accepted sense, to one type of human society. So far as we are concerned with the city community, since this appears to be essentially a product of just those stable, technological active economies usually comprised under the modern Western usage of the word "civilization", little confusion can arise. But as I hope to show, such agricultural economies (with their result-

ant nucleations of population in villages, towns or cities) represent only one kind of response made by men to the problem of subsistence and adaptation to environment, and they cannot be considered in isolation. Whether or in what sense the alternative solutions could be called civilizations need not concern us at the moment, if we make sparing use of that ambiguous word.

The definition of a city does not present such difficulties. My purpose is to discuss the city as a unit within the earliest human societies in the Old World, in prehistory and in those periods when archaeological evidence still bulks large, and may predominate over that afforded by the written record. We are concerned, then, to a considerable degree with tangible manifestations such as those provided by the architecture, planning and lay-out of buildings for public or private use; with walls and fortifications; with the material culture of the population as an index to arts and manufactures, organization and trade, war and peace. It is difficult to define the limits between village and town, town and city, in remote antiquity, though one can use vague standards of size, implications of social cohesion, and evidence for a community which has passed beyond the stage of subsistence farming. In general, I shall give civic status to settlements which can be shown to be more than a cluster of huts occupied by peasant farmers, with some evidence of centralized government and organization, often focussed on a court or temple (or combination of both), with a population largely engaged in occupations other than direct and exclusive agriculture, and so concerned with trade to a greater or less amount. Such settlements may frequently be bounded or defended by walls or fortifications, symbolic and pre-

servative of the corporate individuality of the unit.

In seeking the origins of the city, we must search for the origins of stable agricultural communities, mainly dependent on cereal crops. Archaeological evidence has confirmed the inferences, drawn from considerations of climate, botany and zoology in the post-glacial Old World, that the origins of grain-growing and stock-breeding are likely to have been in those areas where, in a favourable climate, the wild ancestors of the domesticated plants and animals known to antiquity were to be found. Such conditions existed in the region now Western Asia from perhaps 10,000 B.C. or so: here too it has been possible for some time to point out what seems to be transition from the Palaeolithic hunter-fisher and food-gathering economy to one involving at least the collection of plant seeds as food by a simple process of cutting or reaping. It was assumed that the transition from such tentative beginnings to the establishment of village communities of agriculturalists, and again from these to the first townships to which a date can be given by historical means (around 3,000 B.C.) must have occupied a vast period of time, during which the novel techniques of the farmer slowly supplanted those of the hunter.

The recent application of the methods of computing dates in the past by means of radio-carbon has however shown us that at least the second stage in this development was spread over a period of time not likely to have exceeded two or three thousand years. Such sites as Jarmo, in east-central Mesopotamia, a settlement of stone-using people eating a wheat closely approximating to the wild form, though showing evidence of cultivation, and as yet without the technique of pottery-making, appear to date from round about 5,000 B.C.: within little more than a couple of millennia, townships with

the beginnings of literacy and applied science, an evolving technology and a more/^{than}rudimentary code of laws and formal religion have appeared. Indeed, if permanent houses within a defensive wall be taken as the archaeological evidence for at least the rudiments of the city idea (and they surely may), this social and architectural unit had been achieved at Jericho in Palestine by a people with a material culture closely comparable with that of Jarmo - without knowledge of the use of pottery, still less of metals - and at a date likely to approximate to that of the Mesopotamian site.²

While more evidence is of course needed, it is beginning to look as though Childe's thesis³ of two successive economic and technological "revolutions" - one marking the change from a hunter-fisher economy to that of the agriculturalist, later followed by the development of the city concept, closely linked with the first use of metals - may have to be revised. Indeed, as he realized, it was difficult to sustain such a sequence outside the Old World, since the Central and South American stone-using communities had achieved a notable degree of urban development without any accompanying metallurgy save the use of gold for ornaments. Instead, we may be faced in Old World archaeology with a situation in which the beginnings of agriculture are intimately associated with the appearance of a social unit in which the main elements of the urban economy familiar in later prehistory and history are already present.

Be that as it may, by the third millennium B.C., the city is established as an essential feature of all settled agricultural communities in Western Asia, in large measure owing its existence to techniques of farming sufficiently advanced to provide a surplus over

and above the needs of the farming community itself. Economically, such towns or cities would be dependent on trade within their own boundaries and in the surrounding countryside under the city's jurisdiction, and, in response to increased technological developments, with more distant regions where the necessary raw materials for its craftsmen might lie. Spiritually, cohesion and a rallying-point for the emotions of the citizens would be provided by a centralized authority embodied in a temple and its priesthood, or by the court of a ruler whose attributes were at least semi-divine. It is hardly necessary to stress that the emergence of societies in which some form of religion does not permeate and give significance to human activity at every level, is an event of modern times.

The city, then, early became the seat of moral authority for an area beyond its own walls; an authority backed by spiritual sanctions and enforced if necessary by juridical or military action based on the seat of government. In the city, dogma and liturgy would be defined and promulgated; custom and tradition codified into laws; local usages regularised into a general system; diversity replaced by uniformity. Inevitably, the city would become the focus of aspiration for the surrounding population, offering a market for their wares whether these were the produce of the farm or the skills of craftsman and artist. Court and temple could, and so often did, act as patron to the artist, and it was in the early city communities that the sculptor and painter first became pre-occupied with the human form as subject-matter: a tradition which was to become so much a commonplace in the Western world that it is usually accepted as inevitable, though as we shall see, it was in fact a convention peculiar

to such societies in antiquity. And as an indication of how deeply engrained in the traditions of the early agriculturalists it was, Jericho again has shown in recent months that naturalistic portrait modelling was carried out by the town-dwellers there before they made pottery, and long before the use of metals.⁴

We could therefore say with justice, that on the evidence of archaeology and of the earliest historical records of the Ancient Orient, the town or city represented the fullest achievement of the stable agricultural societies in Western Asia from their earliest inception: in it was represented the sum of their capabilities in thought, emotion, and technical ability. But having said this, we pause. Can we regard the creation of the urban unit, in the sense we have sketched it above, as the inevitable culmination of achievement within these societies? Did all food-producing communities tend to develop this pattern, and if some did not, have we to regard them as in some mystic way having failed to fulfill their destinies? And what of other forms of economy, dissimilar from the stable agricultural communities but surely co-existing with them - what is their relation to the city tradition?

In attempting to answer these not wholly rhetorical questions it will be convenient to begin by making a brief survey of the degree of town and city development achieved in Western Asia and Europe by the end of the third millennium B.C., around 2,000 B.C. To start in the east, a complex city economy had been established in north-western India by some time before about 2,500 B.C.; outside the great desert areas of Persia, already ancient cities lay along the trade routes in Turkestan to the north; thence to the Elburz Mountains at the south

end of the Caspian Sea; southwards through Fars into ancient Elam and the kingdoms of Sumer and Akkad. In Syria, the Levant, Cyprus, Egypt and Asia Minor, townships had stood beyond human memory; the second walled city on the site of Troy had been built, and round the shores of the Aegean, and on its islands, fair sized villages at least existed, sometimes with their citadels and walls. Settled peasant communities were establishing themselves up the Danube and in Central Europe, and along the Mediterranean sea-routes similar little colonies were being founded: in southern Spain there were even little townships beginning to be built which recall the Aegean world. Even if by Oriental standards the innovations of stable agriculture had come late, and in simple form, to the hunter-fisher population, there seemed every chance that such communities would flourish and develop there as they had further east.

But if a second survey had been made five hundred years later, around 1,500 B.C. in fact, we should notice at once that the promise had not been fulfilled. There had been no expansion of the city concept in Europe; in India it had collapsed altogether. The familiar classical pattern of the East Mediterranean civilized world surrounded by that of the barbarians is beginning to form, even if Italy is still wholly a land of peasant farmers and Mycenaean Greece a decidedly rustic version of the Minoan culture it has largely superseded. Spain has become a backwater. North of the Alps we are among the simplest peasant economies, even if these are technologically competent in such crafts as bronze-working. Another half-millennium, and the city tradition was almost everywhere either on the defensive or at a low ebb west of the Levant, with even the bastion of the Hittite Empire crumbled.

It is not enough to accept this phenomenon as a commonplace without asking ourselves why, in antiquity, did the city complex, and all that it implied, not in fact develop in certain regions where the antecedent economic and social conditions were to all appearances as favourable as those in areas where it flourished. How did the duality of civilization and barbarism, as apparent to classical thinkers, come about? At least part of the answer is contained in the fact that up to the present in this enquiry we have been considering only one type of human economy in the ancient world, that of the sedentary peasant. It is salutary, and in the immediate context very necessary, to remember that alternative modes of existence and social organization presented themselves to mankind with the slow amelioration of climatic conditions after the final withdrawal of the ice-sheets, and that not everyone adopted the role of the farmer and townsman.

Gibbon, surveying the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, saw that much of the understanding of this problem lay in the appreciation that even at a comparatively late date in history, a "line of separation" could be drawn "between the civilized and the savage climates of the globe; between the inhabitants of cities, who cultivated the earth, and the hunters and shepherds, who dwelt in tents".⁵ And this antithesis was already in men's minds by the beginning of the second millennium B.C., when an inscription of the Third Dynasty of Ur described its dangerous opponents the Amurru (known to us in the Bible as the Amorites) as "a host whose onslaught was like a hurricane, a people that from of old had never known a city". In other words, we have to reckon with the existence of communities, side-by-side with those based on stable agriculture, with the mobile and often nomadic

structure associated with pastoralism.

In considering this aspect of the place of the city community in the ancient world, we are confronted with two major problems. The first is that of the antiquity of nomadism as a self-sufficient economy, as compared with that of settled agriculture, and the second is the relationship of the two economies, or their variants, in origins and status: the questions of whether pastoralism represents an antecedent stage to stable agriculture, surviving as an archaic way of life by the side of these more "progressive" communities, and whether the barbarians beyond the civilized world are to be regarded as potential settled agriculturalists who have never, so to say, had a chance to fulfill themselves in creating the culture of cities.

It would be irrelevant here to discuss at length the question as to whether we can in fact define pastoral nomadism as a self-sufficient economy: the evidence of archaeology and history seem to me consistent in demonstrating its real existence. With the late Sir Ellis Minns, one of the most profound students of the problem, I would regard nomadism not "as a mere stage on the way from food-collecting to agriculture", but as "a highly specialized mode of life enabling man to utilize vast tracts" of country in which settled agriculture, or stable pastoralism, would be very difficult under the conditions of simple economies.⁶ In its very nature, such an economy as pastoral nomadism does not leave archaeological traces so marked or of so permanent a nature as that of the peasant or citizen; it is far more elusive and may leave few memorials save tombs. Nevertheless, there is consistent evidence from Western Asia and Europe to indicate that some form or forms of mobile pastoral communities, at least

semi-nomadic and with a minimum dependence on grain-growing, were in existence before 2,000 B.C. as the counterparts of the stable agricultural economies, and moving over territories immediately beyond their frontiers. It is clear that we cannot discuss one without the other. The city and the camp are complimentary aspects of life which cannot be considered in isolation.

At present, the first clear archaeological evidence for peoples likely to have been semi-nomadic pastoralists is that from South Russia at a date somewhere before 2,000 B.C. In view of the contention sometimes made that pastoralism can hardly develop to its full extent without the mobility conferred by the mastery of the horse as a riding animal, we may notice that the horse does in fact seem to have been domesticated by these people: tangible evidence of bridles shows that tamed animals had certainly been acquired and probably ridden by neighbouring agriculturalists in Hungary before about 1,700 B.C. By a couple of centuries later the horse-drawn chariot was becoming a decisive war-engine in Asia Minor and Greece, though documentary evidence of horse-riding does not appear there until the fourteenth century B.C.⁷

Around 2,000 B.C. we can recognise a whole series of communities, stretching from the Pontic Steppes to the Elburz Mountains, and including at least north Anatolia, mainly characterised by "royal tombs", often of warrior chieftains, furnished with a barbaric magnificence which draws some of its inspiration (and probably some of its actual materials) from the city communities to the south. The implication of these tombs, and of other evidence, is that we have here the southern fringe of a nomadic province which by its proximity to the rich

and technologically advanced mercantile communities in the Sumerian and other cities was able to obtain, by barter or plunder, the costly trappings desired by its ruling families. How early this relationship was established we do not know, but some have thought that the kinship of ideas perceptible between such princely graves and the famous Royal Tombs of Ur, dating from soon after 3,000 B.C., may indicate contacts between the steppe and the sown, with a foreign dynasty bringing in barbaric ideas, at this earlier date. At all events, we can see in these warrior cultures of the European and Asiatic grasslands the ancestors of such historical nomad groups as the Scyths, the Huns and the Tartars, in which the hunter-fisher strains of the Circumpolar zone mingled with the pastoralism of the steppe, and could draw upon the resources of the stable agricultural communities, if necessary by force of arms.

Beyond the zone of contact with the earliest urban communities, the warrior cultures can be traced northwards and westwards into Europe from the Pontic region: impoverished in technological resources at first, with the stone battle-axe as the symbol of authority and weapon of prestige appropriate to the chieftain, but soon acquiring a command of metallurgical techniques. There can be perceived a mixing of traditions between these groups and the stable, if simple, agricultural communities established in western and northern Europe since the eve of the second millennium B.C. Analogies from historical precedent, and from modern ethnological parallels, would suggest that the latter elements were rendered a substrate population under a warrior aristocracy embodied in the pastoralists.

The centuries around 2,000 B.C., and indeed the next half-mil-

lennum, mark one of the great turning-points in Old World prehistory and history. During this time, a decisive trial of strength took place between the two traditions, that of the city and that of the camp, and the outcome of the events resulting from this contest was the laying of the foundations of classical and modern Europe. Not least of the significant factors involved was that many groups of the pastoral nomads, or communities closely associated with them, spoke dialects within the Indo-European family of languages; languages which by virtue of their comparatively simple construction, flexibility, and capacity for adaptation and change without loss of identity, were to become characteristic of the major achievements in expressed thought and imaginative literature in the ancient world from India to Ireland.

History, philology and archaeology combine to show us in outline the way in which the problem resulting from the clash of conflicting philosophies of life was resolved, at least temporarily. In the east, the city civilization of the Indus, somewhere before 1,500 B.C. or so, fell defenceless before the onslaughts of the Sanskrit-speaking herdsmen who commemorated their conquest in triumphant hymns to their gods, transmitted by oral tradition to the modern world as the Rigveda. In Persia, too, it is likely that those who introduced the Indo-European language later to be enshrined in the Avesta were appearing as raiders and conquerors at much the same time. In the most ancient centres of stable agriculture and townships, from Sumer to Egypt, as might be expected the city tradition was able to hold its own against, and eventually to absorb, the invaders - Gutti, Amurru, Mitanni, Kassites, Hyksos and the like. In the absorption however, the old tradition was modified; survival was obtained at a price. In Asia Minor again

absorption seems to have taken place between horse-breeding warriors and the old city populations, with the consequent rise of the Hittite Empire with its mixed languages which included Indo-European dialects. The Minoan kingdom succumbed to the raiders from the Mainland, and though Mycenaean culture was heavily tinged with Minoan colouring, it was something new, more akin to that of the Hittites, with whom it shared an Indo-European language, in this instance Greek.

Further north and west we are in the world of communities of peasant farmers established late, and sporadically, in the period 2,000 - 1,500 B.C. In south Spain we may perhaps see little townships living on until after the middle of the millennium; elsewhere they do not develop until after they are re-established from the east from about 800 B.C. onwards. Can we now, at this stage, find an explanation for this tardy and partial development of the city tradition in Western Europe in the very circumstances we have been examining, the clash of contending cultures around 2,000 B.C.? The question cannot be answered without further considering the nature of the pastoral nomad tradition in the mature form in which we encounter it in the middle second millennium B.C., how it differed from that of the city, and how it affected the successor states which arose after the initial impact.

In a recent study of the problem, pastoral nomad economy has been summed up as based upon "a complex of animals rather than a single species, balanced in terms of grazing characteristics to utilize all the grass cover of each locality", so that the long grass is eaten by cattle or horses, the shorter growth by sheep and goats.⁶ The mobility necessary in such an economy, which echoes in its rhythms that of

the hunters following the wild herds from grazing ground to grazing ground, was maintained and developed by the use of the horse as a riding animal, but a form of pastoralism could well exist without the horse in remote antiquity as it did in recent times in such communities as the Masai of East Africa. In such a setting the social structure becomes one of strong personal relations within a family, clan or tribe, within which framework the individual is largely self-sufficient; this structure tends inevitably to be organized and held together by a warrior aristocracy, and the civil corporations of a settled agricultural economy are unknown.

Patronage of the arts and of technology can however exist in no small measure, though in the simpler system of personal loyalties of the pastoral economy, such patronage becomes an individual attribute of the chieftain and the members of his court, rather than of an institution such as a temple. Representational art is severely subordinated to abstract pattern, and the artist shows little or no interest in the human form as subject-matter, though he may often show a passionate absorption in animal motifs. And while it is obvious that monumental architecture would be irrelevant to a nomad, the demand for equipment for warrior and retinue effectively stimulates technological advances in crafts such as those of the metal-smith and the wheelwright. The normal absence of writing in such societies does not preclude the composition and technical elaboration of imaginative literature transmitted by word of mouth and retained by the enhanced capacity for memory characteristic of non-literate peoples: this is the milieu of the world's epic and heroic poetry, and the Rigveda shows that philosophical speculations embodied in verse of great

metrical virtuosity could also be achieved under such conditions. In its essential dissimilarity from that of the mentality of the settled peasant or townsman, the nomad tradition is marked off as an alternative to, rather than a derivative from, that of the agriculturalist. Once the tradition crystallized, it could only be embraced from choice rather than from necessity. The incompatibility could not be resolved; the barrier could not be crossed.

In such societies the warlike element may often become dominant, especially in the form of inter-tribal cattle raiding such as we see in the early Irish heroic tales, or, where the borders of the nomads march with those of settled agriculturalists, in plunder of the villages and townships so temptingly at hand. "The mountain sheep are sweet, the valley sheep are fatter ..." And on the success or failure of these raids depends the future relationship of pastoralist and city dweller. The equilibrium maintained between the contrasted economies remains uneasy so long as the initiative in warfare, and innovations in military technology, are largely in the hands of the nomads. Once these are adopted by the city communities, and can be backed by the facilities for mass production inherent in a stable economy, potential victory is in their hands. The events of the second millennium B.C. show clearly enough how the more ancient city states were in many instances able to acquire the power and capacity to withstand the onslaughts of the predatory nomads around their frontiers by just these means, though at the price of transforming themselves into semi-military states, in a position not only to act in their own defence, but to wage wars of aggression on an increased scale within and beyond their own borders.

I would repeat that the antinomy between the nomad and the agricultural traditions was not one that could be resolved in terms of the adoption by one side of the economy of the other. From the first, these contrasted traditions were irreconcilable. The settled life of village or township presented no attractions to the pastoralist warrior: for him the town was there to be looted, perhaps, but otherwise to be shunned and avoided. One looks in vain for evidence of city merchants leaving their counting-houses to join the horsemen of the steppes. At a low level of technology on both sides, with neither tradition developed in decisive form, some sort of merging would be possible, as we shall see in the sequel. But at the mature stage of evolution in which the two economies confronted each other in Western Asia in the second millennium B.C., any such amalgamation was out of the question. A choice had been made, on each side, and once accepted had become an innate way of life, acceptable to the other side only when imposed by sheer force. It is misleading to think of the ancient city cultures as an ideal for which all men yearned. "We needs must love the highest when we see it" is a sentiment for which human history offers singularly little support, and at all events ideals are many, each peculiar to a restricted tradition and presenting itself as a goal only to those brought up within the framework of that particular world of ideas.

The nomads had, before 1,500 B.C., achieved priority in the use of the horse for military traction and to a less extent in its employment as cavalry. In Asia Minor the hegemony of the Hittites must have been largely based on chariotry (and the use of iron, exclusive to them at this time), and so far as the use of the chariot is concerned,

the same may be said for the Mycenaeans. The Egyptians adopted the technique as a result of their wars in the Levant, and by the end of the fifteenth century B.C. were importing chariots from the Mitanni of Asia Minor. Under the dynasty of the Amurru (that people who had never known a city), rose the kingdom of Babylon, and while we remember Hammurabi for his noble code of laws, it must be recalled that to his contemporary panegyrist he was "the great hero, the destroyer of foes, the stormwind of war, smashing the hostile land". The city states were not only on the defensive, but were becoming increasingly engaged in aggressive wars, and the chariot was to become, in the hands of the Indo-European Kassites and later under the Assyrians from the end of the second millennium B.C., the characteristic equipment of the warrior aristocracy now firmly established in command. In India, the ancient city tradition did not thus change its character into that of the warrior state. It succumbed completely to the attacking forces of the Aryans and seems only to have slowly re-established itself after centuries of submergence beneath the ruder traditions of the steppe.

The city and all that it connoted in the ancient world survived the crisis of the early second millennium B.C. only when it was able to place itself on a level equal to or higher than that of the nomad hordes in the matter of active warfare. Having thus established its position, it was inevitably prone to use its military prestige to wage wars of aggression with other city states on a far larger and more decisive scale than the internal disputes and changes of dynasty which chequer, for instance, the history of Sumer and Akkad in the third millennium B.C. It survived, indeed, only at the cost of becoming a warrior state, devoting much of its resources to territorial aggran-

disement by force, constantly on the defensive against similarly ambitious states and against the still-present pastoral nomads, themselves more than ever dedicated to warfare and plunder within the prevailing temper of the times.

In Europe, outside the Aegean world, I think we can see a different sequel to the encounter of the two traditions, that of the peasant farmer and that of the nomad pastoralist. Here the situation, on both sides, was on a lower technological scale than in the Orient. As we have seen, by the beginning of the second millennium B.C. the social unit achieved by the prehistoric population of Europe had not substantially advanced beyond the small village, and in many regions is likely to have been little more than the craft or farmstead of a single family of farmers; in northern Europe, there were still considerable remnants of the old hunter-fisher economies of Palaeolithic lineage. Into this loosely knit pattern of scattered communities any spread of pastoralists from the steppes to the east could have been gradual and without any overt contest for land in a sparsely populated Europe - indeed, there may well have been indigenous areas of pastoralism established as early as the first introduction of domesticated animals from Western Asia. We have not here to reckon with the horse (though it may have been already domesticated by the wielders of the stone battle-axes), still less with the chariot, as instruments of conquest and subjugation. What happened as a result of the meeting of the two traditions was fusion and amalgamation, so that prehistoric Europe remained, up to the Roman Conquest, a land of simple economies in which both settled agriculture and pastoralism played a part, but with the latter so deeply permeating the fabric of

society that the evolution of township and city could not take place.

Without this decisive mixture of traditions in Europe at the beginning of the second millennium B.C., it is difficult not to assume that the development of the city tradition would have had every chance of proceeding there along the lines familiar in other regions where settled agriculture had evolved, or been implanted from another centre. We must of course be on our guard against the fallacy of biological analogy, and the assumption that human communities develop according to natural laws in comparable sequences. We must too reckon with natural deterrents, such as the dense forest cover of the deciduous woodlands over much of the area beyond the zone of the Mediterranean flora, and in the north, with increasingly adverse climatic conditions as one moves towards the Circumpolar regions. But these in their kind were no more insuperable barriers to early agriculturalists than the difficulty of irrigation and other problems of environment which faced them, and were overcome, in Western Asia.

With the available evidence before us, it does seem likely that the barbarians of the classical world were not merely the passive products of geography, but rather the result of an accidental mixture of contrasted traditions at a stage in the development of both where neither had the technological advantage over the other, nor had either developed their own set of ideals to a degree which gave them the force of long-inherited conviction. We may say, if we like, that tentative pastoralists encountered tentative agriculturalists, and by so doing produced a mutual modus vivendi which inhibited much development along either path. The instability and inchoate structure of such a mixed economy would not permit of constructive evolution in

either part of the mixture, and if the city idea was to appear in Western Europe, it would only do so after direct transplantation afresh from its ancient home.

Such a transplantation, which was to result in the establishment of the Roman Empire, was achieved within the centuries after about 800 B.C. by the foundation of the first Etruscan settlements in Italy by immigrants of Asiatic origin, perhaps indeed from Lydia as Herodotus believed, and by the planting of the western Greek colonies. These movements had their precursors in the Mycenaean trading-posts set up at least as far west as Sicily by the fourteenth century B.C., and probably beyond; along these routes too came the "grave Tyrian trader" to found the Phoenician depots as far as the Straits of Gibraltar at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. In sum, city civilization in the west was in no sense the product of slow indigenous evolution from simple peasant economies, but the result of deliberate settlement in partibus by colonists coming from already highly developed urban centres in the east, bringing with them the new tradition in a complete, and intrusive, form.

It is desirable to close this brief survey with a Western European postscript. With the establishment and growth of the Roman Empire we have arrived at the point at which this essay began: the antithesis of citizen and barbarian, separated by what Alföldi has termed the moral barrier between two worlds of different ideals, between which no mutual comprehension could be reached.⁹ Transalpine Europe presented to the Romans not only a land of technologically undeveloped agriculturalists, but one in which mobile warrior bands existed as an active opponent to colonial expansion, either in themselves, or as

warrior aristocracies based on a settled peasantry. A succession of events, perceptible in the archaeological record in the earlier stages, later confirmed by the evidence of history, resulted in the formation of the Celtic peoples, against whom much of the aggressive warfare of the Roman army was directed from the second century B.C.

The character of the Celtic world of this time fits naturally enough into the framework of contrasted economies we have been discussing. We can perceive in it not only the substrate population, descendants of the ancient mixed population of pastoralist and agricultural traditions dating from the early second millennium B.C., but a new and forceful infusion of a warrior aristocracy almost certainly associated with pastoralism. The cattle-rearing, horse-breeding, chariot-driving heroes of the Ulster epics at the dawn of the Christian era are closely akin to those of the Rigveda; nearer in time and space, to the Scyths. True, after the establishment of the Roman Province in Gaul in 121 B.C., Gallia Comata - "Shaggy Gaul" - was moving towards the formation of a primitive culture of townships, which might have developed into something more if Caesar's war of conquest had not been pushed northwards. But the Gaulish chieftains, and those in Britain, were not far removed in spirit from their semi-nomadic pastoral ancestors, and areas of pastoralism certainly seem to have survived, in Britain at least, until the Roman Conquest. East of the Rhine lay the territories of warrior bands moving in a nomad state in the woodlands with the barest sprinkling of agriculturalists. The Roman Conquest of Gaul and Britain was a repetition of those contests between the military forces of the city state and those of the warrior pastoralists which we have seen in the ancient East from the second

millennium B.C. onwards.

With the consolidation of the Roman Empire in Europe the ancient interplay of contrasted economies was for a time held in check. The events leading to the Empire's fall, and the coming of the Dark Ages of Europe, are not in themselves anything new, but the resumption of an immemorial order of things, the renewing of a contest between the incompatible ways of thought embodied in the city and the camp. There was nothing new in the so-called Migration Period - peoples had been on the move from choice rather than from compulsion since remote antiquity. By the Middle Ages, the city tradition had established itself on a firm enough foundation in Europe to resist the impact of the still surviving nomadic war-bands, even when, in the Tartar assault of the mid thirteenth century, the nomads' attack was pressed home to the frontiers of Germany, and it "might be apprehended that the shepherds of Scythia would extinguish her cities, her arts, and all the institutions of civil society".¹⁰ Such must have been the feelings of the citizens of Ur at the news of the raids of the Amurru, in Harappa as the Sanskrit war-cries were heard across the city walls, or in Knossos when the Minotaur was doomed.

At the beginning of this essay, I expressed a preference for avoiding the use of the word "civilization" in the discussion which was to follow, owing to its content judgement between contending human societies. But of course such a judgement has to be made, and the pose of the detached anthropologist becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, and decreasingly convincing. All that we, and the great thinkers of the past, have agreed to constitute civilization - not in the sense of technological achievement or political dominance, but

man's mastery of his own powers - finds its most favourable environment in those conditions of security and leisure made possible by the settled agricultural economies and their townships. Civilization does not come by accident, and is no easy or casual process. It is a conscious but disinterested pursuit, involving an uninhibited range of enquiry into all knowledge; the achievement of a sense of values at once fastidious and tolerant; and the refining and enhancing of the intellectual, spiritual and emotional perceptions and experiences of man. By reason of its inherent difficulty of attainment, civilization can never be the endowment of the majority, but it is the influence of the few that determines the climate of thought in any epoch. However imperfect in conception, and however they may have fallen short of the ideal in practice, the fragmentary rough drafts of civilization have been sketched out, piecemeal and by rare individuals, within the framework of the city societies of the past.

It remains only to repeat once more that the foregoing thesis I have outlined has no greater validity than any other interpretation of history; it is a personal estimate of what appear to me to be significant factors, not perhaps sufficiently stressed before, in the formation of the ancient and not-so-ancient world of which we are the heirs. Patterns in history may so well exist, like beauty, only in the eye of the beholder, but a subjective interpretation of the past is better than no interpretation, and is after all the only one possible to the human mind. At least, it recognises that it cannot claim finality or be all-explanatory, and that in its very subjectivity it allows for as many alternative and correlative perceptions of the innumerable facets of human history as there are historians.

Footnotes.

1. For an admirable discussion of this position, see Alföldi, 'The Moral Barrier on Rhine and Danube', in Roman Frontier Studies (University of Durham, 1949), 1-16.
2. For Jarmo, Antiquity XXIV (1950), 189-195; for Jericho, ibid XXVI (1952), 116-122.
3. As developed for instance in Man Makes Himself (1936) and What Happened in History (1941).
4. Antiquity XXVII (1953), 105.
5. Decline and Fall, Chap. XXXIV
6. Minns, 'Art of the Northern Nomads', Proc. Brit. Acad. XXVIII (1945), 47-99.
7. Cf. Hutchinson in Proc. Prehist. Soc. XVI (1950), 52-64 with refs. There is evidence for the domestication of the horse in Kashan and Turkestan as early as the fourth millennium B.C.
8. Beardsley, 'Hypotheses on Inner Asian Pastoral Nomadism', Mem. Soc. Amer. Arch. no. 9 (1953), 24-28.
9. Alföldi loc. cit.
10. Decline and Fall, Chap LXIV