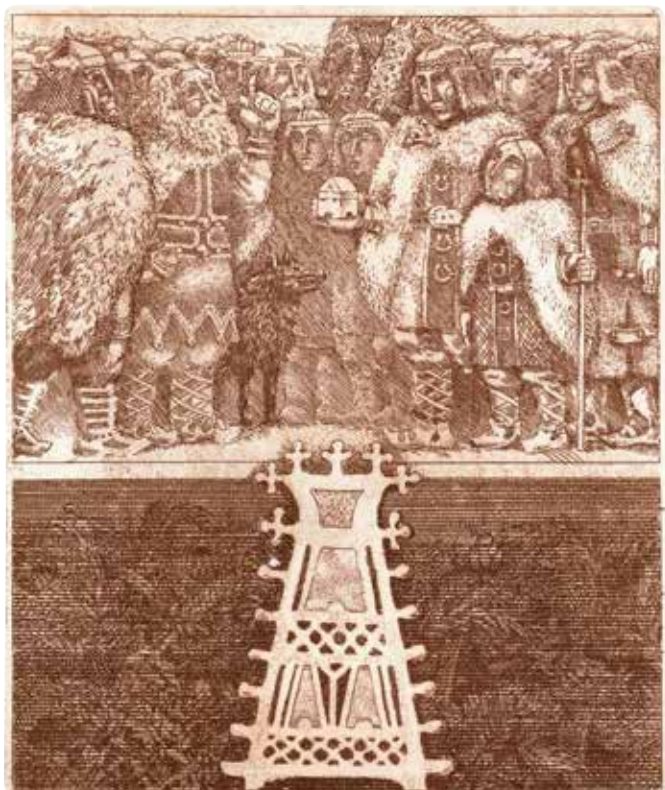


KNYGŲ RECENZIJOS IR KONFERENCIJŲ APŽVALGOS



Arvydas Každailis. „Kūrėjų kūrėjas Brutenis“, ofortas, 21/40, 1986

The New Vision of the History of a Non-European Civilization

Andrijauskas Antanas and Andrijauskas Konstantinas. *Metamorphoses in the History of Civilization: A Comparative Analysis of the Non-European World*. Vilnius: LKTI, 2018. – 608 p. ISSN 2424-3965. ISBN 978-609-8231-06-9

After becoming independent, when Lithuania opened its borders, we quickly realized that we had joined not the Western, but the entire world at the same time, and in the most intense processes of globalization, counter-globalization, and even isolationism in distinct civilizations. Most of the phenomena, and paradoxically, also the search for national identity and Lithuanian self-identity, are precisely the effects of a new meta-civilization culture, the evolution of which follows popular globalization scenarios most of the time.

Studies and monographs on Lithuanian identity issues usually operate in a local civilizational and cultural context, most often including only limited topics and problems of the Western and post-Soviet worlds. However, the most significant influence in the current post-modern world is coming from the East. For the past two centuries, the West has exceeded the East, mainly through the growth of technology and industrial potential. However, over the last 30 years, the most significant industrial potential has gradually moved to the East, and many Eastern countries have already surpassed the West in technology. Also, in the cultural dimension of aesthetics, the Middle East and East Asian civilizations have a much older and more precious cultural heritage.

Hence, without seeing the picture of the global world today, without realizing what is standing behind global phenomenon's, it is almost impossible to talk about the recreation and preservation of the Lithuanian national identity, nor about resistance to the negative tendencies of globalization and consumerist culture. This study is essential for a broader understanding of the world we are living in today. It is worth to note that the authors of the book symbolically belong to different generations and represent different areas of the humanities.

Authors abandon many stereotypes of traditional methodologies of civilization studies in this work. The differences between Western and non-Western cultures are not considered impossible to overcome. Authors reject the aspirations of the Euro-centric world view to treat the ethical norms, the aesthetic ideals, the principles of artistic creation, and the aesthetic ideals of Western civilization as universal. The book also abandons the Western model of the evolutionary development of humanity and develops a much more nuanced idea of the synergy of many different parallel civilizations. They also reject the general idea of progress, which considers ancient or different from Western cultures insufficiently evolved or limited. There is a fundamentally different posture here: the

civilizations and traditions of the past are deemed full-fledged at all critical stages of their development. The more in-depth understanding of the achievements of their survived works of art, reveals why these cultures that have long been marginalized in academic science have such importance and influence today. Hence, to understand these influences, we need to know their origins and cultural heritage.

Therefore, reflecting on the future of our nation and its place in the current world of dramatic civilization contradictions, we must clearly understand the direction Lithuania has chosen, soberly assess the historical context and consider the most effective strategies in the longer term. However, this requires not a dry historiographic knowledge of dates and facts, but a thorough understanding of the civilizational changes that take place in the global world today. The new book develops a new approach to the history of civilizations, complementing and also extending the insights elaborated by another Lithuanian philosopher Algis Mickūnas in “History, Language, Understanding”. Authors present history not as static; it is not described once and for all. The facts of the history of civilization obtain their most profound meaning in a particular horizon. But also, the thinker every time finds himself on a different background, which changes continually because sometimes even a decade brings a radical change. This hermeneutical contemplation continues from generation to generation with new historical content each time. So, the history of civilization in the book opens up as a perception that man is continually



writing history as a reflection of his genesis. This perception helps to understand how a specific ethnic group, a nation or a state, has become such as it is today. Such an understanding is crucial for Lithuania at the intersection of modern civilization influences and geopolitical interests.

The book elaborates the panoramic view of the history of different civilizations. The scale of comparative analysis chosen in the book opens up a vibrant image of different formations of cultures and different intercultural influences, for which we have no analogy in Lithuanian humanities. The socio-cultural phenomenon of civilizations in the book revealed in such a way that we can see precise interactions between them, essential meetings of ideas, symbols, and values in all morphological layers. The arts, religion, traditions of thinking, politics, economics, and other spheres interlink

in a meaningful whole. Cultural shifts are very rarely just local; most of the time, they appear on all layers of civilization. So, it is no coincidence that in this book different dimensions of morphological analysis of culture are revealed next to each other: art next to the economy, politics next to social changes and the tradition of thinking near religion. Such an approach helps to explain the complexities of a historical and cultural phenomenon, what can be revealed only in a broader perspective of comparative analysis.

Only the proficient eye can notice the subtle multi-civilizational links. Therefore, the authors in the book develop a nuanced attitude, where productive dialogue changes traditional analytical monologue. Works of art are allowed to speak. The exceptional focus of the authors on the aesthetic and artistic aspects of the heritage of civilizations in the book is critical. Such an approach explains cultures not only thanks to political, economic, and social facts but even more importantly, via the analysis of the aesthetic perception of the world and the peculiarities of art forms. In this way, cultural phenomena unveil concurrently in their expressions in different kinds of art. The aesthetic details of civilizations in the book uncovers the broad sphere of socio-cultural horizons. Thus, the aesthetic aspect of cognition of the peculiarities of civilization, which is the most prominent in art, become a tool of perception of the depths of culture and profoundly discloses the most vital characteristic features of civilization. Hence, the book deals with political, economic and social phenomena of the time in a productive way alongside art and helps to

perceive the whole cultural context of the epoch, not just a specific historical event.

The insight into the interactions of synergetic relationships revealed in different forms of arts explains the genesis of society and the culture much deeper than just historical facts alone. We often discover the real impact of political and economic events in the expression of the arts of that time, where we see another dimension of civilization change, permeated by human experiences filled with profound thoughts and spiritual determinations. For example, the great Chinese artists of the Yuan era left urban centers and resigned from political life after the Mongol invasion. They created the most delicate works of landscape painting, calligraphy, and poetry in exile, expressing their sad state, but also showing determination to preserve traditional Chinese cultural values. The book reveals a fascinating Chinese civilization that opens up not only as a union of a united nation but as an imperial area of socio-cultural influence. Realizing the historically developed traditional cultural principles of this civilization, we can understand that the spread of cultural and economic importance today is a further growth of the same tradition using the same methods, persistently and consistently developing its traditional values around the world in our days.

Each civilization is very distinct because of its peculiarities of social and cultural development, economic, political, and legal structure, but at the same time socio-cultural phenomena are often widely spread in time and geography, and therefore usually do not fit into any methodolo-

gy of analysis or civilizational theory. Thus, the civilization structures in the book are called organisms, and it is a very insightful observation. The comparison and alignment of civilization with a living organism open up a new understanding of its adaptability, as well as its multi-civilizational and multi-cultural links, which are by the way often most prominent in the arts. The comparative strategy of civilizational analysis reveals what it is impossible to grasp the essence of cultural changes from the study of only one particular civilization. Therefore, every culture here is deliberately viewed as a living socio-cultural organism, and not as a “closed” but as an “open” whole. The comparative aspect of the interaction of cultural phenomena highlighted in the study changes everything here. For example: with the spread of Daoism and later Chan-Buddhism in China, the whole cultural environment, the country’s economy, politics, and social relations changed. All these elements of the socio-cultural organism are closely related. It is impossible to separate and explore something independent from the full environment of civilization; The cultural derivatives in the book appear as the intertwined climbers.

Therefore, in the context of global cultural phenomena and trends, we must not only appreciate the values of Lithuanian tradition, but also the global world aspects that influence them. It is essential to understand the challenges of cultural reductionism, the effects of global phenomena, and reflect the orientations that would help to develop a national identity in the context of globalization. Global cultural, economic, and social transformations and

external cultural influences can wipe out the peculiarities of local historical character, but the phenomena of globalization can also have a positive side. The book shows that culture has influenced the interactions between civilizations at all times. Often, during times of fierce wars of political and economic struggle, the artistic dimension of civilization enriched the cultural phenomena with great success and was the most significant source of fresh insights and renewal of traditional spirit in each culture. So, globalization is not only a negative phenomenon; it is dangerous only to those who do not fully realize the nature of global events. Understanding the essence and character of globalization phenomena, the process of globalization itself can be very productive.

Strict, narrow-minded theoretical models dedicated only to the only one civilizational phenomena in many cases are too narrow and at the end do not give the right perception even of the individual facts. The comparative civilizational studies come with the principles of a broader vision which comes from the understanding of the context of the civilization, including the whole surrounding cultural environment in arts, social relationships, economy, politics, etc. Such attitudes are also essential for the future vision of Lithuania and solving self-identity issues. The principles of a cohesive whole and balanced unity are fundamental here. Issues of Lithuanian identity and values should be developed, including the cultural impact of the global world, by understanding the influence of global cultural phenomena. But it was always like this, even the peculiarity of old Lithuanian folklore,

which is considered authentic, has never been a static or incapsulated phenomenon. It has continuously developed its unique forms parallelly with other traditions, in interaction with neighboring cultures. However, a deeper understanding of current civilizational transformations and intercultural influences helps to distinguish between time-tested old virtues of the nation and the recent emergence of superficial, inap-

propriate, or flawed forms of self. Creation of today's identity comes via seeing the past, present, and future in one picture. The examples of other civilizational worlds with their unique pathways and experiences that authors talentedly discuss in this book give us an enormous amount of insight.

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