

## Masterclass 5. Intellectual History as Global History *Siep Stuurman (Erasmus University Rotterdam)*

Att.:	all PhD-students
Credits:	1 ECTS
Date:	26 maart 2010, 10.00-16.00 hrs.
Venue:	Amsterdam
Registration:	huizinga-fgw@uva.nl
Fee Huizinga members:	none
Fee others (non-Logos):	€ 50
Participants:	12

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In a world-historical perspective, globalization is a recent phenomenon that has variously been traced to the sixteenth, the eighteenth or the nineteenth century. A global ; ‘republic of letters’, a regular worldwide exchange of ideas, concepts and discourses, is an even more recent phenomenon, that probably did not exist before the late nineteenth century. Does that imply that we cannot have global intellectual histories of earlier parts of world history? In this class, I will argue that global intellectual history without globalization is feasible and useful.

The question I propose to answer is whether different civilizations can, and do, produce concepts and discourses that are sufficiently similar to enable us to discuss them as episodes and examples belonging to an overarching ‘global’ intellectual history, without abandoning the basic methodological rule of intellectual history that the meanings of texts are constituted in their historical and intellectual context(s).

As examples I will take the narration and theorization of the sedentary-nomadic divide in Herodotus (Greek World, late 5th century BCE), Sima Qian [Ssu-ma Ch’ien] (Han China, early first century BCE), and Ibn Khaldun (North Africa, late 14th century CE): Herodotus on the Scythians, Sima Qian on the Xiongnu, and Ibn Khaldun on the Bedouins (This is an extension and further generalization of my argument in ‘Herodotus and Sima Qian: History and the Anthropological Turn in Ancient Greece and Han China’, *Journal of World History*, 19 (2008), 1-40).

The three historians all belong to an urban sedentary culture, but they definitely are not imprisoned within that culture. Their histories of the nomads are premised on a critique of the traditional view of the culture of the monadic ‘other’ as a deviant way of life or a simple enumeration of exotic oddities. Instead, they seek to understand nomadic culture as a rational and intelligible way of life, well adapted to the natural environment of the steppe and the desert. Their narratives and comments destabilize, and sometimes invert, the hierarchical view of the sedentary as a ‘higher’ and the nomadic as a ‘lower’ culture.

Moreover, it is not by chance that they focus on the sedentary-nomadic divide as the most relevant and challenging variety of cultural difference. The sedentary-nomadic divide constituted the great frontier of the old world. It represents a structural feature of world history from the 6th-century BCE Scythian invasion of Persia to the final demise of the nomads as autonomous historical actors in the 18th and 19th-century colonization of Central Asia by the Russian Empire and in the late 19th-century European colonization of North Africa.

Moving forward to the European (and global?) Enlightenment, the issue of temporality is a useful vantage point. For Herodotus, Sima Qian and Ibn Khaldun, the side-by-side existence of sedentary and nomadic cultures represented a permanent feature

of world history. In their historical vision, the nomads were there to stay. There is no prospect whatsoever of a future “civilizing mission” of the sedentary civilizations (although the universalistic message of Islam somewhat complicates the picture in the case of Ibn Khaldun). In the European Enlightenment, however, this culturally pluralist historical vision is challenged by the eighteenth-century rise of ‘philosophical history’ (Fontenelle, Turgot, Adam Smith, William Robertson) that was underpinned by a powerful notion of time as ‘development’. In their historical vision all peoples on earth had to move from the first stage of hunting and gathering (‘savages’) to a second stage of nomadic pastoralism (‘barbarians’), a third stage of agriculture, writing and urban culture (‘civilization’), and finally to ‘commercial society’, a stage only Europe had entered. The Enlightenment notion of developmental time was taken up and further elaborated by the nineteenth-century world historians and ethnologists. It was not really questioned before the emergence of cultural anthropology at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the conclusion, I will offer some methodological suggestions for a comparative and structurally anchored global intellectual history, and how it might relate to the intellectual history of globalization in more recent parts of world history.

#### *Preparation*

PhD-students with an interest in this masterclass will be requested to study a reader and to hand in a (provisional) outline of their dissertation and their CV.