

A few years after Litvinov had welcomed conclusion of the treaty as meeting his country's interests, Stalin was pressing the Turks for revisions that would put the Straits under effective Soviet control, and he pursued that end through the war, first with Hitler and then with Churchill and Roosevelt. The latter were prepared to consider revision of Montreux, but Stalin overplayed his hand, pressing not for new rules of maritime traffic but for Soviet bases on the Straits and the reduction of Turkey to satellite status. The Turks resisted, were backed by the United States, and the policy of containment began, two years before the so-called Truman Doctrine.

Although Harry Howard begins his narrative early in the nineteenth century and deliberately follows the thread of United States policy, which until World War II was concerned only with freedom of navigation, his account of the crucial events of 1945–46 is the heart of the book. He is the ideal American historian to tell it, because, during this period, he was a State Department officer whose job it was to prepare memoranda on the Straits question for the high policy-making officials. Furthermore, he has been writing extensively on the Straits question and on Turkey's role in world politics ever since producing his fundamental *Partition of Turkey* in 1931, and he is meticulously careful in his research. Although nothing strikingly new is presented, this book does a good job of elaborating and documenting Soviet policy from newly available American and Turkish documents. While the message of the book is the consistency of United States policy over the years, it also shows the basic consistency in Soviet aims through alternating phases of active and passive diplomacy.

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VENICE: THE HINGE OF EUROPE, 1081–1797. By *William H. McNeill*.
Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974. xvii, 334 pp. \$10.75.

The scope of this book extends far beyond Venice: it is a study of the rise and fall of empire in southeastern Europe. It discusses the tensions between orthodoxy and heresy in Islam as well as in Greek and Latin Christianity; it shows how the Greek Orthodox church was able to gain a privileged position under the Ottoman Empire; and it traces the development of Orthodoxy in Russia. Extended discussion of these topics occupies about a third of the book, although they do not figure in the title or in the table of contents.

The major turning points in the course of empire are traced to technological revolutions. The first era, based on an "alliance between Frankish knighthood and Italian shipping," came to a dead end at the Sicilian Vespers (1282), where the crossbow overcame the spear, and "gave the towns of Italy a chance to slough off the medieval carapace of knighthood, and assert their power, in all its manifold forms, independently. Doing so, they inaugurated a new era—the era of the renaissance" (p. 39).

The political conditions for the rise and decline of the Italian city-states also receive attention. Their rise was made possible by the decline in power of the Byzantine Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Papacy. The decline of the city-states was made inevitable by the rise of France and of the Spanish and Ottoman Empires, and it was the monopoly of powerful siege guns by these rising

powers that made their victory inevitable. The era of the city-state was brought to a close, as it had been inaugurated, by a technological revolution in warfare (p. 89).

Two chapters deal specifically with culture, in the eras 1282–1481 and 1481–1669 respectively. The first of these chapters deals mainly with Latins, Greeks, Turks, and Slavs, for the cultural role of Venice was, then, “of trifling importance,” despite the fact that this was the era of her greatest commercial and political power (p. 90). The second, entitled “Venice as a Cultural Metropolis. 1481–1669,” considers Venetian painting, humanism, the medical school at Padua, the significance of the carnival, and the Venetian-Paduan contribution to the Hellenic renaissance within the Ottoman Empire.

The author recognizes the awkwardness in referring to the period 1282–1481 as a “renaissance” in view of the fact that humanism and the visual arts became significant in Venice only during the subsequent period. To cope with the difficulty he offers the theory of cultural lag (p. 92). He is familiar with the work of Lopez, but does not share the view that the crises of the 1340s marked a decisive turning point. Neither the bankruptcies nor the Black Death “sufficed to overthrow—or even to undermine—the power that the most active Italian cities exercised over Europe as a whole” (p. 57).

The book contains many such general summations with which readers will often disagree. They are based, however, as the extensive notes show, on the author’s reading of the best books on all the areas with which he is concerned. His is a work of synthesis, rather than the result of new discoveries in the archives. Like Burckhardt, he calls his work an “essay.”

Despite the emphasis on technology and economics, this book does not follow a Marxist interpretation (which the author feels is inadequate for his purposes). He offers an “alternative model for the history of southern and eastern Europe,” and his “fundamental assumption” is that “when a group of men encounter a commodity, technique, or idea that seems superior to what they previously had known, they will try to acquire and make their own whatever they perceive to be superior, but only as long as this does not seem to endanger other values they hold dear” (p. xv). This assumption is obviously valid, but it seems to beg the question. The criteria of superiority are, after all, what we would like to identify.

To correct the assumptions of culturally isolated nationalist histories, the author tells us that he has used a “model of acculturation and/or cultural repulsion” (p. xiii). The Toynbee influence is obvious but I did not notice any direct reference to Toynbee, perhaps because the author has endeavored to avoid the deductive reasoning that has made Toynbee’s work suspect in the eyes of many historians. McNeill has attempted to base his interpretations of the rise and fall of civilizations upon objectively verifiable phenomena. This endeavor would have elicited Marx’s applause, though he and other believers in progress would complain about the cultural relativism which substitutes ebb and flow for a sense of direction in history.

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