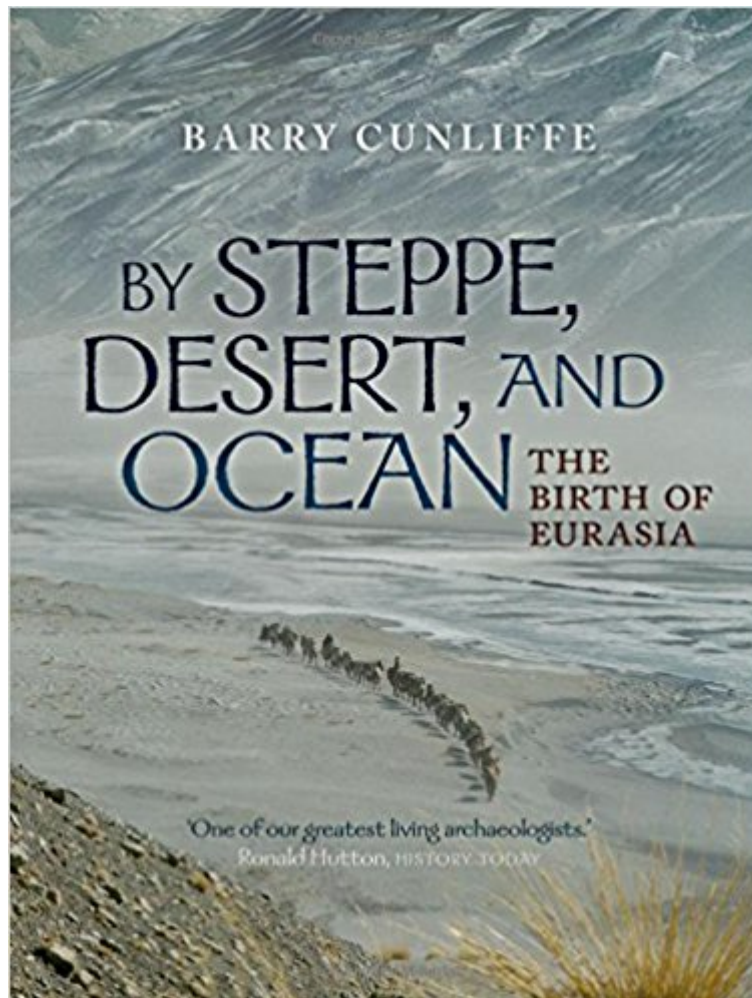




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By Steppe, Desert, And Ocean: The Birth Of Eurasia



Synopsis

By Steppe, Desert, and Ocean is nothing less than the story of how humans first started building the globalized world we know today. Set on a huge continental stage, from Europe to China, it is a tale covering over 10,000 years, from the origins of farming around 9000 BC to the expansion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century AD. An unashamedly "big history", it charts the development of European, Near Eastern, and Chinese civilizations and the growing links between them by way of the Indian Ocean, the silk Roads, and the great steppe corridor (which crucially allowed horse riders to travel from Mongolia to the Great Hungarian Plain within a year). Along the way, it is also the story of the rise and fall of empires, the development of maritime trade, and the shattering impact of predatory nomads on their urban neighbours. Above all, as this immense historical panorama unfolds, we begin to see in clearer focus those basic underlying factors--the acquisitive nature of humanity, the differing environments in which people live, and the dislocating effect of even slight climatic variation--which have driven change throughout the ages, and which help us better understand our world today.

Book Information

Hardcover: 512 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (November 10, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199689172

ISBN-13: 978-0199689170

Product Dimensions: 9.8 x 1.2 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 27 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #49,967 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Historical Events](#) #45 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Asia](#) #82 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Medieval](#)

Customer Reviews

By Steppe, Desert, and Ocean

The Gobi desert in southern Mongolia. This region is known as the Flaming Cliffs and is famous for its prolific dinosaur fossils. Photo credit: Barry Cunliffe.

Domesticated Bactian camels ranging free in the Gobi desert in Mongolia. The beasts are very well adapted to the extremes of climate of these regions and can carry heavy loads

through harsh environments. Photo credit: Barry Cunliffe. Ancient Palmyra, largely ruined, lies on the edge of an oasis, now a date plantation, beyond which the empty desert stretches for 300 kilometers to the river Euphrates. Photo credit: Barry Cunliffe. The upper reaches of the Orkhon valley in the central Mongolian steppe. The fertile, well-watered valley was the center for Turkic, Uighur, and Mongol cultures. Photo credit: Barry Cunliffe.

"Cunliffe is a master storyteller, explaining his carefully researched conclusions through polished language and apropos turns of phrase that make his book a breeze despite its depth and breadth." --Publishers Weekly

"In tracing the rise of Eurasian civilization, Cunliffe makes clear that history is much more than just one thing after another. As migrations and conquests pile up in the book, it becomes apparent that a dizzying array of forces interacted to produce the modern world." --Science News

"By Steppe, Desert, and Ocean: The Birth of Eurasia by Barry Cunliffe is a pathbreaking attempt to enhance understanding of Eurasia by means of a reconsideration of focus, scale, time frame, and sources." --Stewart Gordon, H-Net

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Barry Cunliffe taught archaeology in the Universities of Bristol and Southampton and was Professor of European Archaeology at the University of Oxford from 1972 to 2008, thereafter becoming Emeritus Professor. He has excavated widely in Britain (Fishbourne, Bath, Danebury, Hengistbury Head, Brading) and in the Channel Islands, Brittany, and Spain, and has been President of the Council for British Archaeology and of the Society of Antiquaries, Governor of the Museum of London, and a Trustee of the British Museum. He is currently a Commissioner of English Heritage. His many publications include *The Ancient Celts* (1997), *Facing the Ocean* (2001), *The Druids: A Very Short Introduction* (2010), and *Britain Begins* (2012), all also published by Oxford University Press. He received a knighthood in 2006.

I am torn by the star rating for this book. For the early sections, written on the basis of archaeological knowledge from which Cunliffe draws an erudite and highly readable story, and the closing part, where he takes a big step back and tries to see overarching patterns, it is excellent and, if it were possible I would give it six out of five stars. For the intervening parts, seemingly drawn predominantly from written histories he is less inspiring and, perhaps because of the huge span that this work encompasses, the condensing of details can at time be confusing. Deciding what should be left out of a work of this gigantic scope must be difficult and , no doubt, all readers will have their own regretted omissions; one of mine was that he did not mention, in an otherwise nice summary, Mongol failures against Burma/Myanmar and Japan. However, this is still a good book which may leave readers looking at the world in a slightly different way.

Fantastic book--encompassing the history of all of Eurasia since the last ice age. Ties the disparate histories of East-West-Middle together in exemplary fashion. Minor quibble about the inception of agriculture: as any farmer knows, it is a gamble on how well a crop is going to be from year to year, even today. Clearly then, until the last ice age ended and the climate "stabilized," investing time and resources in planting/cultivating any crop would not have been worth it.

Incredibly well-written and highly recommended for all inhabitants of Earth! Might actually help folks begin to think in terms of big changes over long periods rather than just making it through life one day at a time.

This is a survey of Eurasian history, focused on the Steppe and it's role in migration and trade. The several areas of civilization hotspots in the Middle East and China are referenced early, with the Eastern Mediterranean and India a bit later. This book attempts to cover an enormous area in space and time. Many important details are briefly referenced or omitted for expediency. As the author mentions, entire books could be written on many of his paragraphs. All in all, a reader leaves this book with a rough but reasonable understanding of Eurasian history. Many areas on the periphery such as Europe, Southern India, and most of Africa receive little or no mention - this history is directly focused on Eurasia. This book could be used as a basis of a survey course, but would need additional supporting material. The book's final chapter did seem hurried - with reference to visual media, it felt like the camera was moving too rapidly to see anything but a blurred image.

Cunliffe's history of Eurasia is stunning in most every way. Here is the story of

Eurasia's development along a parallel timeline from East to West. The places in between the otherwise well-known East and West is the vast expanse of the collective ex-Soviet steppes and southern Siberia is larger than the typical West and East of written history. The ancient peoples and cultural complexes of these domains in between demand exploration beyond the scope of the book and it's here that you will find the very latest research from Kindle's on line linkage. The Kindle format with the links to the internet convert this read into a deep study. I'm convinced. Kindle editions in history and technology are far superior to the printed book.

Very, very interesting book. I think Mr. Cunliffe has done an amazingly good job here, presenting just enough archaeological and historical fact and supporting it adequately for an interested layman. To me, Central Asia and its connection to East and West was an empty space interspersed with question marks. After this book, the space is filled with peoples and events, though the questions marks seem to have multiplied! The book is intended to be educational as well as interesting. Chapters are introduced, presented, and summarized: for someone who wants to retain some of what he's read, this book is a wonderful gift. One of the very few books I've seen that has enough maps to keep me oriented. And enough photos to give a feel for the high level of art/artisanship of bronze age craftsmen, to pique one's interest.. I can't praise the author enough for his careful selection of maps and photos, it is a very strong feature of this book. There is the occasional confusion of "east" with "west" in the text, but if you follow the maps, they'll not confuse you. Aimed at general audiences, I hazard a guess that this book will interest specialists as well. I know I'll read it more than once, and will try to investigate some of Mr. Cunliffe's recommended readings. I'm sure Mr. Cunliffe is Dr. Cunliffe, but I'm unable to find this stated in the book or the cover paper.. I've used Mr. in my review, trying to respect his example.

This read is an esoteric read because you have to really be into this type of history. However, if you want to follow the evolution of man from the time he emerged on the 6500 mile long corridor connecting from Berlin to the Iranian Plateau, to the 1200's, this is a great book. I would not recommend it to anyone looking for a casual read. But it sure gave me a picture of a brutal part of man's evolution into modern times.

Barry Cunliffe's By Steppe, Desert, and Ocean: The Birth of Eurasia is a brilliant, if at times

politically left-of-center and dry, read. If you are looking for a sweeping read that helps explain the massive landmass between Ireland and Japan. It concludes with the 13th Century but covers all major issues up until this time. At times enlightening and frustrating [the maps are all on a north-south axis rather than an east-west axis and this seems to be made a political point rather than to be enlightening] Cunliffe's work is very useful and enjoyable. Rating 5 out of 5 stars. Highly recommended for Eurasian history buffs.

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