EUROPE

A Cultural History

FOURTH EDITION

Peter Rietbergen

ROUTLEDGE

Europe

Fully revised, updated and extended to include the momentous developments of 2020, this fourth edition of Peter Rietbergen's highly acclaimed *Europe: A Cultural History* is a major and original contribution to the study of Europe.

The book examines the structures of culture in this part of Eurasia from the beginnings of human settlement on to the genesis of agricultural society, of greater polities, of urban systems, and the slow transitions that resulted in a (post-)industrial society and the individualistic mass culture of the present. Using both economic and sociopolitical analytical concepts, the volume outlines cultural continuity and change in Europe through the lenses of literature, the arts, science, technology and music, to show the continent's ever-changing identities. In a highly readable style, it expertly contextualizes such diverse and wide-ranging topics as Celtic society, the Roman legal system, the oppositions between 'elite' and 'popular' culture in pre-industrial Europe, Michelangelo's world-view, the interaction between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the growth of a society of time and money, the appeal of fascism and other totalitarian ideologies, and the ways the songs of Sting express late twentieth-century thinking. Structured both chronologically and thematically, the text is distinctive in the attention consistently paid to the many ways Europe has been formed through its contacts with non-European cultures, especially those of Asia and the Americas.

This edition concludes with an epilogue that discusses the ways Europe's recent past – including the long-term efforts at further unification, and the various forms of opposition against it – has been both interpreted and misinterpreted; the importance of globalization; and the major challenges facing Europe in the present, amongst which are the consequences of the pandemic of 2020. With a wide selection of illustrations, maps, excerpts from primary sources and even lyrics from contemporary songs to support its arguments, the text remains the definitive cultural history of Europe for both the general reader and students of European history and culture.

Peter Rietbergen is Emeritus Professor of Cultural History at Radboud University, Nijmegen, in the Netherlands. He is author of 15 monographs, including *Europe's India* (2007); *Rome and the World – the World in Rome: The Politics of International Culture, 1861–2011* (2012); and the best-selling *Short History of the Netherlands* (1993, and ten revised editions till 2018), which has also been translated into Dutch, German and Japanese.

Praise for the previous edition:

'*Europe: A Cultural History* does not just provide an accessible and lively account of European cultural thought and practice from prehistory to the present; more importantly, it also offers a sustained reflection on what the idea of "Europe" has meant to different people at different times. Peter Rietbergen's book is a superb one-volume introduction to European cultural history.'

Paul Stock, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

'Peter Rietbergen's fluently written book is an insightful account of the cultural history of Europe, its multiple cultural identities and its continuously changing webs of significance. Rietbergen draws on an impressive array of source material to examine the transformation of Europe from its earliest developments to the challenges it today confronts. *Europe: A Cultural History* is highly recommended reading for students and researchers of European culture and its history.'

Hannu Salmi, University of Turku, Finland

'This book remains a reliable, stimulating and readable guide to many aspects of European cultural history. It is Peter Rietbergen's own idiosyncratic selection of material and ideas, and it provides us with an original and entertaining take on an immense spread of material.'

Michael Wintle, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

'Nuanced, non-teleological and critically distinguishing, yet comprehensive and remarkably readable, Rietbergen's history of European culture will be an unavoidable reference point for any serious debate on its topic for years to come.'

Bertel Nygaard, Aarhus University, Denmark

'Peter Rietbergen presents a book which is unlike the standard textbooks on the cultural history of Europe. Instead of just summing up names, dates and facts, it offers the reader a provocative personal reflection on the incredibly rich and highly varied contents of the European heritage. It will serve as an eye-opener for all those students who aspire to look beyond the main narrative into the primary sources of Western thought. Therefore, this book can be an invaluable tool in higher education.'

Henk Kern, Leiden University, The Netherlands

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Contents

Figures

Maps

Preface to the fourth edition

Over the past 20 years, people have responded variously to the previous three editions of this book. Whereas there have been many encouraging and even laudatory reactions and reviews, some critics have suggested that my interpretation of Europe as a culture was, perhaps, a bit idiosyncratic. But how could it be otherwise? Or, rather: why do I, why do we, need the past anyway?

The original meaning of the Greek verb 'historein' was 'to inquire'. Hence, a 'historia' was a text – usually a narrative – presenting knowledge about people, events and things acquired by investigation. Indeed, even nowadays, both in French and in German, the terms 'histoire' and 'Geschichte' may still refer to a tale of something that happened only a minute ago. Only in the fifteenth century did 'histoire' and 'history' also, and primarily, become the narrative of knowledge acquired of people, events and things past.

Reversing a famous warning often but wrongly attributed to Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), one may argue that a person who is not interested in his own past and, indeed, in *the* past will be a good-for-nothing, because, to paraphrase Robin Collingwood (1889–1943), history is the foundation of self-knowledge.[1]

But why should we try to know something about the history of such a huge and, to many, ill-defined space as is Europe? One may consider the very pertinent remark made in the 1980s by the British politician George Walden, who told his readers that: 'a country losing touch with its own history is like an old man losing his glasses, a distressing sight, at once vulnerable, unsure and easily disoriented'. Though he was referring to Great Britain, people living in other parts of Europe would do well to extend that message to their own compatriots and, indeed, to Europe at large.[2]

Yet, obviously, Europe is not a given entity with fixed attributes, but essentially a changing concept and, hence, an ongoing realization as well as an interpretation. A geographical map and the many assumptions and choices behind it are an interpretation, because people thus describe as well as circumscribe the space they inhabit, perhaps even ascribing to it a shared identity. A community is an interpretation, because people attribute to the sociocultural group they feel they belong to certain characteristics, which

supposedly create cohesion and identity. All culture is interpretation, since it is the tangible, readable and visible form people give to their thoughts about the nature that nurtures them, about themselves and about the people around them. All of these – spaces, bodies, communities, cultures – are essentially subject to the dynamic of time, to the alteration that comes with its relentless passing.

In his famous 1917 talk about 'scholarship as a profession (and a vocation)', one of the twentieth century's most creative historians, Max Weber (1864–1920), argued that scholars, including, and I should perhaps stress, especially scholars who somehow deal with the human past, should always be aware of themselves as being part of a specific present, in terms of time, location, community and indeed culture. All of these condition the questions they ask. Moreover, with their answers they also will contribute to the needs of that present, their present: their time, location, community and culture.[3] In that sense, man, who creates history, is, himself, a creature of history. Writing about the past, he is always doing so in the present, wherein everything that can be written about already is history, since even things which happened an infinitesimal amount of time ago are past, and cannot but be interpreted as such.

Following Weber's exhortation, I will not disguise the many realities – both challenges and restrictions – of my 'standing-place', as he called it. I, the person who has authored this book, am a man, born in Europe at the beginning of the seemingly secure second half of the twentieth century, but writing in the crisis-filled first decades of the twenty-first century, a scholar moreover politically inclined towards social democracy, and with a decided interest in the continuing complex role(s) of religion(s) in culture and in the interaction between Europe and other world cultures. Nor should I myself forget – or forget to mention to my readers – that I am writing as a citizen of a nation, the Dutch one, the larger part of which for several decades professed itself to be 'pro-European', though, in recent years, many of my compatriots have started to feel doubts about that erstwhile stance. Et cetera.

Yet, in the end, as all proper historians do, I have striven to present an interpretation of culture in Europe that represents the consensus of at least part of the scholarly community about the value of what has been searched for, found, analysed and interpreted.

To better understand Europe's history, it is, in a book like this, helpful to return to specific sites, to seek out what memories, what stories and histories have been associated with them, to better understand that however general history is, it is, at the same time, local. Visiting sites all over Europe, each one of them forced me to consider not only how much the people living there now owe to their past but, also, to what extent, generation after generation, sometimes century after century, these people have changed and, consequently, have reshaped their world and their tales of its past. To somehow bring to life that reality, throughout the book I also have added a series of essays, or 'dossiers', describing and analysing cultural phenomena that, I feel,

are evoked by a special location but in a more general way bring to life ideas and actions that have contributed to the Europe we now know. Thus, each of the 17 chapters is now illustrated with an item from this 'Europe Dossier'.

Last, but not least, new elements also include a longish paragraph in the Prologue discussing another of Max Weber's texts, written nearly a century ago, in which he describes the cultural manifestations he felt to be typical of Europe; phenomena that made it unique: a set of 'touchstones of Europeanness', that is to say. They have helped me both to sharpen some of my own analyses and interpretations throughout the text, as well as to select some of the themes connected to the locations that have led me to write the 'dossiers' at the end of each chapter. For though nowadays we may no longer agree that such manifestations of culture as, for example, polyphonic and large-scale orchestral music, or Gothic and Renaissance architecture, with the weight-bearing vault and the cupola, really are uniquely European, or should even be considered major identifying features of European culture, yet the very existence of Weber's list has forced me to think about the many elements that, perhaps, do deserve to be so characterized.

Of course, when necessary bibliographic references have been added, and mistakes have been rectified, insofar as I am aware of them.

Finally, and inevitably in view of the time that has passed since I last revisited and revised the book, I have reconsidered the Epilogue, for I have had to ask myself whether the Europe I saw unfolding more than 20 years ago still is the Europe that now seems to be evolving.

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July 2020

Notes

1 R. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford 1956, 10. One should note that this very perceptive study was posthumously compiled from earlier versions and from Collingwood's various manuscripts.
2 G. Walden, *The Sunday Times*, 20 December 1986.
3 M. Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, Munich 1919, 1921.

Prologue

Europe – a present with a past

> Es irrt der Mensch, so lang er strebt.
>
> We err as long as we strive.
>
> God, in the 'Prologue' to Goethe's *Faust I*[1]

This history of 'culture in Europe', parts of which, as is my claim, also became or, to put it better, still are becoming 'European culture', is told as a story, a narrative, chronologically presented in 17 chapters, and Epilogue. Specifically the Epilogue is a text that, I have to confess, was the most difficult to write because, inevitably, it deals with the recent past and, even, the present, the first two decades of the twenty-first century, that are characterized by turbulent politics and, on a deeper level, by profound cultural changes that may even shatter the dreams of many Europeans of the past generations. But precisely because 'Europe' is an ongoing process, I felt I could not very well end my book around the turn of the millennium; to make sense of developments such as the ones we witness now is a historian's job, too, because, of course, they are rooted in the past as well.

I also have chosen to introduce the 17 chapters with this Prologue. Of course, readers may decide to leave it for what it is: not part of the narrative proper – the sorry lot of many prologues. But while everyone is free to skip it, I would like to stress its importance. For in it, I argue and explain a number of themes that by their very nature can have no place in a chronological story, but yet are essential to an understanding not only of European history but, also, of the considerations that have led to this book, and that, consequently, determine its structure.

Europe: on the problems of writing a (cultural) history

What is culture? Definitions abound. Indeed, many dozens of monographs, and many hundreds of articles address the question. I propose to use a relatively simple, threefold definition.

Despite all varieties of time and place, all humans, including those who have lived and live in the world called Europe, always have had to deal with

nature, using it as a source of food, shelter and energy but also battling against its sometimes inimical, even destructive forces. Thus, from the very beginning, in satisfying his needs man has created 'culture' by, somehow, altering 'nature'. Indeed, though till the 1970s almost everyone thought that especially climate was, despite its periodical variations, the one immutable constant in man's life, we now know that we have changed, altered it, too – perhaps even irrevocably so.

Then, of course, all humans have needed to create forms of cooperation, of society, beyond the primordial parent-child family: clan, village, town, state, but, also: religious communities, social organizations, political parties, sports' clubs, trade unions, et cetera. Only in and through functioning in these contexts can a person ever feel that he or she has an identity. Last, but not least, humans have invented means of representing not only their physical surroundings and their society, but also their own role(s) therein in such a way that the accumulated knowledge of these realities – all of which partly or wholly of their own making – give them a mental framework that help them to comprehend the world they create and hand down that knowledge to following generations. To do so, people have developed speech, language, writing. They have stored that knowledge in texts that (re-)present images and ideas. In all these acts of communication, they inevitably yet again change, alter their views and their handling of nature and of society.

Taken together, these three aspects of human action constitute culture. Or should we rather use the term civilization?

Actually, to explain the distinction is not simple. Culture definitely is the older term, having been used already by authors in ancient Rome to denote the entirety of man's actions – especially in relation to the manifold forms of mastering nature. The concept of civilization is of far more recent vintage. It is an eighteenth-century French noun, formed from the older adjective 'civilisé', civilized, which was used as an alternative for 'poli', polite, polished – hence, for example, in Dutch 'beschaafd', or 'shaven', i.e. smooth, polished, as against 'ruw', raw, rough. Referring to such older concepts as civility, or the Italian 'civiltà' – the culture of a 'civitas', a town, where people knew how to behave, because they were not rustics or, even worse, barbarians – the new noun, too, came to signify certain aspects of culture, but perhaps the more superficial ones rather than the essence.

But in German, 'Kultur' – together with the concept of 'Bildung', as man's intellectual as well as physical formation though education – still was considered to denote something of a more complex and indeed higher-ordered quality than 'Zivilisation', the latter seen as no more than a veneer, a polish. Yet, in France it was 'civilisation' that prevailed, to indicate the 'high' culture of the French elite who aspired to lead the rest of Europe. That notion then spread to other countries, being understood as the cosmopolitan, refined way of life of which seventeenth-century France had set the example.

Consequently, when in 1879 the English anthropologist E.B. Tylor published his famous *Primitive Culture*, about the life of the native Americans,

he specifically chose his title to challenge the distinction between civilization and culture. He felt that 'civilization' had become a word used to express European superiority, a hierarchical and, indeed, exclusive term. For him, culture was a more neutral, and certainly more inclusive concept. While I do feel he was right, yet the two terms increasingly have become equivalent.

Europe: a name, a hope – a reality?

As I wrote, culture is lived and, indeed, experienced as an identity on various levels: of the individual, the family, the clan, the tribe; of the street or the neighbourhood; of the peer group; of the village, the town, the region, the nation or the state. And, perhaps uniquely but also very problematically so, it is lived and experienced on the level of 'Europe'. For while, during the past millennia, Africans, native Americans and Asians mostly have not identified themselves as such – and even now often do not – for many centuries already people living in the geographical entity called 'Europe' have developed the notion of a specific, hence European culture, and identity.

The question of why the word, the name and, even more so, the concept of 'Europe' was coined at all leads to another one: namely, when it was first used; why; and by whom? What was its content, then and in later ages, and for whom and in what way was it a living reality?

Since the seventh century BC, the Greek-speaking people in the eastern Mediterranean started using the name to denote a geographic region – albeit one only vaguely defined – that included their own, specific habitat, which they referred to as 'Hellas'. To give this geographical Europe a cultural meaning, they 'personalized' it: people were told 'Europe' had been an Asian princess abducted by Zeus, which suggested that the world of the Greeks had taken something essential from the otherwise inimical, allegedly barbarian world of Asia.

Over the past more than 2,500 years, all regions north and west of 'Hellas' successively have been geographically subsumed under the name Europe, that thus came to describe the entire western part of the Eurasian landmass. Indeed, though, geographically speaking, it was not a continent, it yet was presented as such – as a world with a specific identity. For its inhabitants 'filled' their continent with content, with notions about their culture, though these notions continuously changed. For every identity, whether personal or collective, results from contrasts with other persons or groups. If the relationship with these persons or groups changes, their identities will, inevitably, change, too. To put it otherwise, every identity is fluid, rather than fixed: a construction that adapts to the constellation wherein it exists.[2]

Thus, beyond its geographic definition, the world named Europe is the result of people's hopes about a humane world, and through those hopes, that have been expressed metaphorically in images and words that encode concepts and emotions, it has become, in some ways, a reality: Europe is not a defined space, but a space that has defined itself.[3] Therefore, Europe now is

a more or less strongly felt bond between those living in it. It is situated in that sphere of tension which links dream to deed, thinking to doing. But by that very token, it also has always been, and still is an excluding criterion, used by those who want to distinguish themselves from other, outside worlds perceived as alien, foreign, threatening: Asia, Africa, America; or Islam; or dictatorships; or failed states; or terrorism, et cetera.

Yet, for almost 1,500 years, the shared culture in the world geographically called Europe mostly was articulated in the concept 'Christianitas', 'Christendom'. Only from the fifteenth century onwards did 'Europe' really take its place, not only to encompass the geographical region but also the culture associated with it.

Yet, only during the years following the Second World War, a number of politicians – mainly economists and lawyers – attempted to bring to full fruition what they, interpretively and sometimes manipulatively, presented as the 'idea of Europe', hoping to provide an identity and, hence, a cause for the people who had survived the world's worst war, ever. They wanted forever to suppress the danger of the European states once more destroying themselves with their own arms – for both the Second and the First so-called World Wars were, after all, wars inflicted by European nations upon themselves and, worse, upon the wider world.

To give this idea the strength of legitimacy and, even, inevitability, it once more was presented as the outcome of a long historical tradition.[4] Europe was defined as a community with features distinctly its own, of which all Europeans were part: a supremely humane 'civilization' that by its very moral strength would survive, through the elimination of the devastating interstate rivalry of the previous centuries. Creating further economic growth, only, was not enough, for as Jacques Delors, then president of the European Commission, wrote in 1996: 'You don't fall in love with the common market: you need something else'.[5] To put it otherwise, to facilitate the acceptance of what these men felt to be a political-military necessity, they yet tried to give it an ideological foundation. Earlier generations only had managed to convey their notions of Europe to restricted strata of society: the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Now, through mass communication and education, the 'idea of Europe' was held up as an ideal to all its peoples, urging them to give up some of their proudly-felt but potentially always dangerous national identity and independence, and to realize, instead, a form of cohesion that would ensure peace and prosperity.

In short, insofar as a European consciousness, a European identity exists among the majority of the peoples living in geographical Europe – which according to many, is debatable – it is a consciousness of recent vintage. Yet, the fact that the 'idea of Europe' has been voiced explicitly either as the instrument of a political elite – as, for example, the elite of nineteenth-century Prussia, who, in the museums they established in Berlin, wanted to create a basis for their own national identity and, consequently, power – and/or as an ideal community, a utopia for all, does not mean that, in the course

of time, it has not become a reality of sorts, first for these European elites and, during the last century, for far larger groups. As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: 'Ein Traum, ewig wiederholt [kann] durchaus als Wirklichkeit empfunden und beurteilt werden' – 'The continuous repetition of a dream may well turn it into a reality felt and judged'.[6]

Indeed, attempting not only to initiate but also accelerate the process of European integration and, perhaps even, unification, in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century politicians – who, in 1957, established the European Economic Community which in 1993 became the European Union and which was given a constitution in 2007/2009 – have embarked upon a course whose manifold consequences have reached, and still are reaching, much further than in any previous period, pitting a belief in the necessity of an increasingly integrated European world against the tenacity of older local, regional and national allegiances.

Precisely the problems created by the contrast between these two views constitutes one of the major issues confronting the peoples of Europe in the present. For nothing about the genesis of the culture we call European is 'natural', logical, pre-conditioned. What continuities there are, are balanced by as many changes that, in the end, make it impossible to describe present-day European culture in terms of a linear process with an inevitable outcome. Certainly at the beginning of what most people term European history, i.e. well before the fifth and sixth centuries, when Europe ceased to be only a part of the previous, far larger, Mediterranean cultural world, little that was achieved in this geographical region was 'typically European'.

During many millennia, the entire world was made up of agrarian civilizations: those of the Americas and of sub-Saharan Africa, of Islam, of Hindu Indian, of China and Japan, of South-East Asia and Polynesia – and those of Europe.

In their sociopolitical structures and, in the widest sense, their culture, the peoples in Europe were by and large undistinguishable from those of other 'oikoumenai'. My argument is, that only during the past five centuries, very slowly a culture has developed in what we call Europe that has not only become different from other civilizations but also has changed large parts of the world. To put it otherwise, only recently, in a situation that was entirely contingent, many of Europe's long-time unremarkable features came together remarkably to create a civilization that was at that time unique: a world characterized by the transformation of an agrarian into an industrial culture and society, a world that, for better or for worse – according to one's perspective – also came to dominate most of the non-European 'oikoumenai': economically, politically and culturally.

This transformation first became manifest in the fifteenth century. It accelerated in the late eighteenth century and, as only now we begin to see, came to an end again in the late twentieth century. By that time, however – and through the processes of cultural appropriation mentioned above –

Europe had gained characteristics as well as a cohesion most of the other worlds (still) lack.

But what, then, is Europe if we cannot attribute to it the specious security of a distinct geographical entity, and if its culture is not a 'natural fact' either? As I indicated above, if anything, Europe is a political and cultural concept, constantly invented but, also, experienced in 'real time', always by an intellectual elite, first, and then, to a greater or lesser extent, by larger groups, specifically whenever there was or is need for a more precise definition of this world at the western edge of Eurasia.

Therefore, the question is, when was such a definition or is needed? Obviously, mostly in moments or periods of change, of crisis, even. Then, people become self-reflective and describe their own identity – an identity that, though not always based on 'hard cultural facts', in that very process yet does become such a fact.

The above process can be illustrated through the analysis of one particular, very revealing case of cultural policy and, indeed, identity-building.

In 1999, UNESCO put the so-called 'Museumsinsel' of Berlin on the world's cultural heritage list. Yet, in thus rightly honouring one of Europe's most impressive museum complexes, situated in the heart of the German capital on an island in the Spree River, the UNESCO managers probably did not realize they were actually endorsing a fascinating vision of history that is closely related to the development of European culture as an idea, as a self-image.

Already in 1830, the first museum on the island had opened its doors. On the façade of a severely Classicist building created by Prussia's leading architect, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the visitors read the following inscription: 'Studio antiquitatis omnigenae et artium liberalium' – 'for the study of the origins of all people and of the free arts'. The 'Altes Museum', as it is now called, was created to house the antiquities collected by Prussian monarchs as well as private persons in, mostly, ancient Greece, as well as in Egypt and the Near East. Obviously, these regions, both culturally and geographically, were only marginally related to nineteenth-century Germany or, even, Europe, if at all. Yet, in those decades, many Europeans pondering and wondering about their roots, after the chaos of the Napoleonic period, felt that, at least partly, these lay in those very regions. Their reasoning was complex.

They saw their own time as, in a sense, the epitome of human achievement – not least because, during those decades, most European polities were in a state of political, economic and social upheaval while, at the same time, transforming themselves into global empires. However, to create a new identity that would explain those changes and that new political and economic power, they 'appropriated' earlier cultures, arguing these contained elements that, or so they wanted to believe, had prefigured and contributed to Europe's contemporary dominance. Both in this and, soon, in other, even more recent Berlin museums, Europe was presented as the world's ultimate civilization also because it was steeped in, and, indeed, was

the rightful heir of a millennial tradition that, as archaeologists and philologists told the visitors, originated in ancient Egypt as well as Mesopotamia, and, of course, in ancient Greece and Rome.

To visually bring this message home, in the vestibule of the 'Altes Museum' a cycle of huge frescoes depicted the history of mankind, beginning with man's linguistic dispersion after the destruction of the Tower of Babel as described in the first book of the Old Testament. Moreover, viewing the many exhibits that – as in so many other museums created in Europe during that period – were presented in a very persuasive (chrono-)logical but therefore also ideological sequence, the public should think of themselves as the final product of the traditions embodied therein. Thus, Berlin's artistic and intellectual establishment sought to link their own world to ancient Greece, and more specifically to Periclean Athens during the fifth century BC – the world, or so they thought, of the perfectly-proportioned men and women who had represented themselves in gleaming white marble statues; a world characterized by the kind of democracy that a number of European states were now institutionalizing, and by a humane philosophy the intellectual elite of Europe felt to be uniquely theirs. In short, ancient Athens was presented as the cradle of all that was beautiful and noble in contemporary Europe.[7] 'Antiquity', as another term for the civilization of the Greeks, became 'classical': the origin as well as the continuing, and preferred example of what made Europe a great culture.[8]

In thus constructing history as a process of cultural continuity, nineteenth-century Europeans were actively creating a past that suited their present. Though empirically at least partly false, by the very fact of its creation this continuity became, in another sense, true. For as the American poet Ezra Pound once remarked: 'Not what happened, but what is remembered is significant'.

In 1841, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia decided the entire Spree Island should be dedicated to the Arts and the Humanities. Expeditions to Egypt[9] enlarged the kingdom's collections of ancient Near Eastern art and artefacts. The King himself left an inscription on the great pyramid of Giza to record Prussia's and, therefore, Europe's cultural appropriation of the civilization of pharaonic Egypt. No wonder that in Berlin a 'Neues Museum' was opened, to exhibit the shiploads of artefacts taken from these regions by German archaeologists. Again, the message of continuity was preached to the visitors the very moment they entered the building: the gigantic frescoed decoration that covered the walls of the so-called 'Fatherland Hall' connected, in a convoluted way, the history of ancient Egypt to ancient Norse epics such as the *Edda*, which told the history of the early Germanic peoples – or so they thought – and then brought that history to the sixteenth century, to the time that, according to German historians, their nation had started growing.

In the 1860s, a third museum was built on the Spree Island, to house the Prussian state's growing picture collection. The building itself, however, once

Figure 0.1 View of the 'Museum Island' on Berlin's Spree River, with the temple-like structure built from designs by Friedrich August Stuler between 1862 and 1876 to house the new German National Gallery. It stands amidst a number of other magnificent museum buildings, such as the 'Altes Museum', the Pergamon Museum, the Bode Museum, etc. The entire complex was obviously meant to convey the idea that the German capital was, in a sense, Athens reborn on the banks of the River Spree, with this 'Acropolis of the Arts' enabling Europeans to study their civilization from its beginnings to their own times. When, by 2020, the rebuilding of the former imperial palace will be completed, the museum-complex will have doubled in size.

Source: Centre for Art-historical Documentation/Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

more illustrates the underlying idea of Germany's, and Europe's cultural continuity. The '(Alte) Nationalgalerie' is obviously modelled on the Parthenon, the temple of the goddess Pallas Athena that crowns the Athens Acropolis. Inside the museum, continuity is the message, too, for around the monumental stairwell a huge frieze runs, depicting the 'great men' of German culture.[10] But it takes the notion of 'German' very broadly indeed. For the German tribes who, according to the accepted view of history, originally laid the foundations of the states that, by the 1870s – when the museum was opened – merged into the new German Empire, had no direct links to the Graeco-Roman world. Yet, in this building, dedicated 'To German Art' according to the huge inscription on its façade, the inventors of this tradition again spun the line of civilization from their own time backwards to the Romans – who they wanted to see as the heirs of ancient Greece and of Greece's cultural example, Egypt – and to Europe's early Christians, seen as the moral heirs of Roman culture.

In the first years of the twentieth century, yet another museum was constructed, now to house the monumental remains of Assyria, Babylonia and other cultures from the ancient Near East excavated by Germany's state-sponsored archaeological expeditions. It was, like comparable and contemporary efforts by the French and the British, large-scale robbery, some people now say; others argue that it was the timely preservation of works of art and other testimonies of the past that almost certainly would have disappeared if Europe had not rescued them; from that perspective, the destruction wrought by the continuous warfare in the Near East has proven them right.

The nucleus of this so-called Pergamon Museum consists of an enormous sculpted frieze created for a huge ceremonial open-air altar brought to Berlin from the ruins of the eponymous city – dating to the second century BC – in what is now Turkey. The sculpture was specifically admired for the quality of its depiction of the human form, as full of movement and yet ideally-proportioned as Europeans wanted themselves to be.

At the same time, a fifth and last museum, dedicated to Emperor Frederic III but nowadays named after its first director, Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), came to house an extensive, albeit miscellaneous collection both of European paintings from the Middle Ages to the late eighteenth century and of the, often related, products of the applied arts.

Thus, the Berlin museum-complex became not only a vast repository of the treasures of the better part of Western Eurasia but, in the decoration of its very buildings, a politically-laden visual history of that world as well. When, sometime in the 2020s, the rebuilt imperial palace on the Spree-island also will have been turned into a museum, to house collections documenting the eastern part of Eurasia as well as Africa, Oceania and the Americas, it will, truly, be 'a treasure island of the world', though its curators feel that, in the twenty-first century, the cultural messages it so fascinatingly proclaimed have to be re-interpreted. Rather than still suggesting Europe was the unique

outcome of these civilizations, it will present it as one of them, and in interaction with all of them.

All over nineteenth-century Europe, people were similarly occupied with inventing and presenting their own past as the epitome of culture: in museums like the British Museum in London and the Louvre in Paris; in history textbooks; in the historical scenes depicted on frescoed murals in almost every public building; and, soon, also in epic films.[11] Thus, the European elite wanted to show that it was precisely and, indeed, only Europe that had inherited everything mankind had ever created by way of things humane and, in its European form, sublime. Only Europe was truly civilized.

Europe: the quest for 'European-ness'

Almost a hundred years ago, one of the giants of European intellectual history, the German historian and sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) wrote his 'Vorbemerkung', or Foreword to a voluminous collection of 'Aufsätze', essays, both previously published and new ones, which appeared in the year of his death as *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (1920–21). Interestingly, in his preface he did not primarily address the theme of the book, the sociology of religion. Rather, it seems an almost independent text, in which he ponders those elements of culture that he, and others, felt to be 'typically' European.

Though nearly a century has passed, even now Weber's musings can help us understand not only which notions of 'self' and 'other' contributed to this great scholar's understanding of the 'essence' of Europe, but also to what extent recent scholarship has modified and, sometimes, though not always, invalidated a number of his views and opinions. Such an analysis will help us understand not only the (recent) development of the notion of culture in general, but also of the concept of a European culture.

Whether or not Weber intended the cultural phenomena he lists to be interpreted as a prioritized or, even, causal sequence, he first identifies the role of empirically gained knowledge as typical of European civilization. Admitting that other Eurasian societies have developed impressive, and sometimes even systematic views of the cosmos, of the world and of nature as well as of man, he yet feels that only Europeans produced that specific combination of critical observation and rational experimentation that resulted in the kind of science that, as he writes 'we now recognize as *valid*' (ital. P.R.).

Weber's second perspective is that of the arts in, significantly, two manifestations, viz. music and architecture. For the paragraphs about music, he referred to a long essay of his own which also was published posthumously: *Die rationalen und soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik* (1921) – 'The rational and sociological foundations of music'. European music, Weber felt, had been special for a long time. It produced a number of elements that, he acknowledges, singly occurred elsewhere as well: rational tonal intervals,

polyphonic harmony, the use of the major and the minor third, counterpoint, the chromatic scale, and, on another plane, the creation of the (large) orchestra with the string quartet as its nucleus, and so forth. However, their combination, according to him, was unique. Though, given our present, far greater knowledge of non-European musical cultures, this interesting analysis no longer holds in its details, the general idea still stands.

In architecture, Weber wrote, Europe created a very specific culture as well, with the use of the pointed, 'Gothic' arch not only as a decorative element but as a structural means to cross-vault huge spaces to which, in the Renaissance, the (re-)invention of the cupola added new possibilities. Nowadays, of course, people argue that the pointed arch may well have come from the Islamic world, while the cupola originated in Hellenistic-Roman culture. Yet, Weber rightly emphasizes that the (rational) combination and further elaboration of these structural elements did, indeed, occur only in Europe: there, huge spaces were created which had no parallel in other cultures.

Continuing, Weber stresses that only in Europe the printing press, while first invented in Korea and China, did create a world of texts that only existed because of and indeed in the printed word. Moreover, by Weber's own times that world had been immensely enlarged by the proliferation of journals and periodicals. Somewhat surprisingly, he does not relate this relatively recent phenomenon directly to science, as we would now. Nor does he link it to the development of general education in most European countries from the early nineteenth century onwards, that was spurred on by, precisely, new, cheap printing methods. Though nowadays we know that in Ming and Qing China, too, extensive print cultures did exist,[12] we also see that they did not affect the lives of as many people as in Europe.

Weber goes on to argue that whereas both China and the Islamic world had known academies and universities, only in Europe did these institutions produce the 'professional man', or, to be more precise, the 'professional official', the 'cornerstone of the modern state and the modern economy of the Occident'. Admittedly, though imperial China continued to exist as a state largely through a huge bureaucracy, the officials that manned it were not schooled in the subjects that, in Europe, increasingly were felt necessary for their function, such as a thorough legal training, as I myself have recently shown.[13] Weber, analysing developments in contemporary Europe, holds that precisely this professional bureaucracy 'determines our very existence, the political, technical and science-organizational preconditions of our life, [through] state officials who also carry the most important daily functions of society'. Following his own logic, he then characterizes as typically European the phenomenon of the bureaucratic, rational, legal state. Though Weber's link between the growth of state bureaucracy and the genesis of an elected parliament may not convince everyone, admittedly these parliaments themselves are undoubtedly of European origin.

Halfway through his text, Weber writes that what really determines 'our modern lives in the most fateful way' is capitalism. Having already published, in 1889, his *Geschichte der Handelsgesellschaften im Mittelalter* – 'The History of Medieval Commercial Businesses' – he sketches the outlines of capitalism's origins not only in (medieval) international and overseas trade, but also in (early-modern) merchant-venture enterprise and the financing of colonial plantations, etc. He adds that its modern specificity really lies both in its financing the economy through the stock exchange, for which Weber relied on his own essay *Die Börse* (1896), and in its relationship to '(formally) *free* labour.' In doing so, Weber distances himself from such (near-)contemporary sociologists and economists as Georg Simmel and Werner Sombart who also wrote about (the origins and nature of) capitalism. Interestingly, the capitalism debate has continued unabated till the present, though most younger scholars seem either not to have read or to have forgotten what Weber contributed.

Summarizing the elements that make up his foreword, Weber returns to his initial statement, viz. that what essentially differentiates 'the Occident' from other cultures is 'rationalism'. This, he feels, is not necessarily the same as the many forms of 'internal' rationalization that, all over the world, exist within almost all spheres of human life and culture – as in, for example, the rationality of, even, the mystical experience. Rather, it is a way of living one's entire life in a praxis-related, rational way, not accepting the forces that, according to Weber, most tend to obstruct such a choice, i.e. the powers attributed to and ensconced in magic and religion, and the ethical beliefs and prescripts that follow from them. Obviously, he must have realized that in 'the West', too, in the early twentieth century many people still lived according to such premises but he seems to have felt that if one wanted to understand Europe in its turn-of-the-century phase of modernity, by and large it should be characterized as, in his word: 'disenchanted'.

Inevitably, Weber's general approach entails the danger of anachronism, as well as of creating a de-historicizing and de-historicized perspective that tends towards a timeless universalism but, really, is a form of idealized Europeanism. Indeed, some authors who have recently adopted some of Weber's categories have also used them for their own political ends, arguing that they are the very proof of the fact that 'the West beats the Rest'.[14]

Nevertheless, while the debate about Europe's pretended or real 'European-ness' seems endless, I do feel that such generalizing syntheses as Weber's help us formulate necessary questions, as well as force us to realize that any 'European-ness' is the sum total we create from what was really a myriad of pasts set in different times and spaces. To understand it, we need to see that everyone and everything associated with even a single and singular moment in the past of the world named Europe is a 'palimpsest', or, as the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote: 'je suis mon passé' – 'I am what my past makes me'. Insofar as people share the better part of their individual

palimpsest with others, they share a culture that identifies them and makes them what they are, too.

Consequently, a Greek tragedy, a Roman road, a king's statue in Visigothic Spain, a medieval Polish monastery, a Renaissance Italian poem, a baroque tomb in Sweden, a 'Romantic' English garden, a 'Modernist' Russian novel, early democratic institutions in the Netherlands, the Napoleonic laws still in use in France, a German funk song: each of these myriad manifestations of culture needs to be analysed both as to the form and function they had in their own time and place and be seen or understood as an intricate compound. To put it otherwise: from our present-day point of view each of those manifestations has its specific past, but also is characterized by what were its own set of experiences, and, also, its own acts of reiterated reception of other, earlier pasts. The past that every past accepted as its own history was as much a complex of things remembered and things forgotten as is our own past, too. In short, all pasts once were their own present. And that present, as well as its reconstruction, its representation of its pasts, was shaped by its own, contemporary expectations of what, at that time, was seen as the future. Perhaps most essential in studying the past, and indeed all pasts – embodied in persons, things, concepts – is to understand that they always express their contemporary present: 'we are'. Now we, who, in our own day and age, 'receive' these people, objects, ideas, are able to say of them: 'you have been, and therefore now are part of our past, of us, in this present'. Only we give the past its historicity. But we inevitably do so – consciously or not – from a 'presentist' need which, of course, always entails the risk that we adapt it beyond what we should scientifically accept as its inevitable alterity: as the famous dictum goes, the past is 'another country', where people did things differently.

And indeed, the differences are, often, hard to understand and, moreover, to accept, contradictory as they are. For Europe is a place 'where Goethe's garden almost borders on Buchenwald, where the house of Corneille abuts on the marketplace in which Joan of Arc was hideously done to death'.[15]

Setting out to ask the famous sequence of questions of who did what, when and why, obviously we will find an answer, if only because we will modify our questions till we are finally satisfied with the result. But the danger is that, having found the answer, or rather our answer, we all too easily assume it to represent the entire reality of the past we have sought to uncover, failing to see that we have only uncovered part of it. If we accept that we cannot establish the past in a 'history' that is a 'hard fact' but, rather, as the result of our own consensual interpretation of the available data, we will realize that we see through the palimpsest as through a glass darkly. Applying that 'method' to a reconstruction of what was Europe or, to be more precise: what has become Europe, we will have to be satisfied that what we see in the glass will not be crystal-clear. Rather, the image will remain vague, its contours forever shifting.

Europe: old Europe, new Europe, old borders, new borders

Of course, there is a Europe beyond the idea and the ideal of it: a world forever between old and new borders, that combine geography and culture, and shape it, too.

Few people thinking about Europe will know that, according to modern geographers, its centre is located some dozen kilometres north of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, a city itself situated near the border of the Russian Federation. Given this fact, geographically speaking Europe is a world that extends from the westernmost part recognized as such – the Irish Atlantic coast – to the Urals. Yet many Europeans have difficulty in accepting that the Baltic countries of which Lithuania is one and which only became members of the European Union in 2004, really belong to 'their' continent – let alone that they consider Russia west of the Urals a 'natural' part of it.

Nevertheless, travelling in the Baltic region, one becomes very much aware of what Europe is. One will experience at least the urban civilization of cities like Tallinn – formerly Reval – and Riga, the capitals of, respectively, Estonia and Latvia, as sea-oriented. Its features show it to be a culture that became European in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries because these towns were founded as ports by merchants of the German Hanse, to be part of the great shipping route that connected Flanders and the other Netherlands, on the North Sea, all the way around Denmark and the cities of northern Germany, to the Baltic Sea and beyond, as far as the upper reaches of the Finnish Gulf.[16]

Indeed, since the Hanse was a sociocultural as well as a commercial-financial network, Hanse cities show all kinds of similarities. Thus, the churches of Tallinn and Riga have the typical, purely ornamental brick bands of the ecclesiastical architecture one also finds in Stralsund, Rostock and Lubeck, to name but a few finely-restored cities of the German Hanseatic heartland, but also in small Dutch Hanse towns like Doesburg or Deventer.

Other traces of an old, common culture have recently been discovered and uncovered in these Baltic capitals: the frescoed medieval saints who were plastered over during the iconoclast furies of the sixteenth century that happened here as elsewhere in Europe. Though the – German-speaking! – elites of these Baltic towns turned Protestant-Lutheran after the Reformation, they used Italian Baroque forms – notwithstanding their Roman Catholic, 'popish' connotations – for their pulpits, baptismal fonts and richly-carved pews and, indeed, for their funerary monuments as well. Besides grand churches, the burghers of these Baltic towns – traders and descendants of traders – also built grand mansions for their own use and even grander town halls and guild halls to express their collective identity, with Gothic façades of glazed bricks; in later centuries they added Baroque staircases and Classicist assembly rooms. In these towns, too, Church schools were established where Humanist knowledge 'European-style' – which, from the sixteenth century onwards, also meant through the printed book – was dispensed.

And yet, these Baltic cities existed within an older, different, agrarian culture: the culture of the heirs of the Crusading German knights who had first occupied these territories – for themselves and for the Church – in the thirteenth century, like the Spanish Christian knights had conquered the Muslim parts of Iberia from the tenth century onwards. The Germans, like their Spanish contemporaries, appropriated the countryside, dividing it into huge estates, and reduced to the harsh conditions of serfdom the non-urban, indigenous population – whom they converted from their own so-called 'heathen' religions to Christianity, as had happened to the Islamic population of central and southern Spain.

In the seventeenth century, both this imported, but by now local aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie of these lands had to accommodate another imported elite: the Swedish rulers who came to create an empire encompassing the entire Baltic Sea. Although the Swedes became landed magnates as well, they tried to introduce some freedom for the populace, as had become the policy in Sweden itself. The Swedish kings also founded a university, at Dorpat, which soon became a centre of regional learning, imparting to its students the ideas of civilization that also were taught to the young men who went to, e.g., Bologna or Oxford.

A century later, the tsars of Russia occupied these lands. Now the local elites of Estonia, Latvia and, also, Lithuania, themselves the descendants of earlier occupants, became part of the cosmopolitan, Enlightenment culture that was first introduced from Western Europe at the imperial court at St Petersburg in the early eighteenth century and, from there, spread to the country houses of the aristocracy all over the Russian empire. Czar Peter I built his wife a Baroque summer palace in Tallinn, while some decades later the favourite of one of his successors constructed a Versailles-like chateau at Rundale, in the depths of Latvia.

Thus, in Estonia and Latvia, both an urban-bourgeois European culture and an aristocratic-feudal but equally European culture existed side by side and intermingled. During the nineteenth century, they increasingly modelled themselves not only on St Petersburg but also on Berlin and Paris, the capitals of two of Europe's by then most powerful states.

Yet, the Baltic lands also were a border region, with a 'different' culture: for unlike in Western Europe, most of what was European in the towns and in the country houses of the elites never really touched the majority of the population. And whereas in Europe the lot of the masses slowly improved, certainly from the late eighteenth century onwards, the conditions of the peasantry in the Baltic region deteriorated under the autocratic-aristocratic czarist regime until, in the early twentieth century, the serfs were finally freed. Then, for the first time, they started to participate in the culture of their own region, to become its bearers, also because they became part of the larger, town-based economies that were now growing.

At the same time these regions, to stress their independence from the continued imperialist aspirations of Russia – meanwhile turned Communist –

showed a tendency towards cultural nationalism, as had so many other regions in North-western, Southern and Central Europe. Trying to find proof of their historic roots as a cultural community, they stressed the uniqueness of their language – Estonian and Latvian – and of their art and customs to create their own national identity as the basis for a newly-won statehood. But these two Baltic states became border countries again when, after the Second World War, Communist Russia actually did occupy them. The Russian forces and the thousands of colonists who came in their wake created a culture of dependence, of fear, instilling anti-European or rather anti-Western feelings in these states now turned satellites.[17]

The same happened in Lithuania, though it shows a partly different culture: visiting Vilnius in the early twenty-first century, one is very much struck by its almost South-European character, with its churches – baroque, Roman Catholic – dominating a hill-top town. For hundreds of years, this too was a border region, conquered and contested, mostly by Poland and Russia. Out of this struggle arose another national culture – one, moreover, which showed an element that, though largely absent in Estonia and Latvia, was very much part of the European experience as well: the Jewish aspect. For Vilnius was the 'Jerusalem of Lithuania' from the seventeenth century onwards: a town where almost one-third of the population was Jewish until, between 1940 and 1945, first some of the Roman Catholic inhabitants themselves – restrained all too little by the Lithuanian Church – then the soldiers of the German Wehrmacht and the SS and, finally, the Soviet occupants slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews. Yet, precisely the Jewish Lithuanians had created the better part of the country's industrial economy and, therefore, its prosperity. They also had created a magnificent Yiddish culture: around their synagogues (one built, incidentally, in the same Baroque style and by the same architect who designed some of the city's grandest eighteenth-century Roman Catholic churches), their schools and their charitable institutions. As elsewhere in early twentieth-century Europe, this essentially religious Jewish culture produced not only a secular variant, in the so-called 'Yiddische Wissenschaftliche Institut', the 'Jewish Scientific Institute', but also such outstanding men as Jascha Heifetz, the violinist, Itzak Lipschitz, the sculptor, and Chaim Soutine, the painter.

In short, the experience of the Baltic states – often seen as peripheral from a Western European perspective, while they themselves consider their culture pure European, and rather think of Russia as a border region – in many ways mirrored what has happened and is still happening elsewhere in Europe. Out of a continuous process of amalgamation that resulted from and, at the same time, existed alongside forms of multiculturalism, identities have grown – and are still growing – on a local, regional and even national level. At the same time, at least part of the Baltic peoples feel they share yet another identity, overarching these three, which they call European.

Indeed, identities can and often do exist alongside each other, fulfilling different needs. Thus the Estonians, having won statehood and having created

a national history as well as, in 2004, having been given membership of the European Union, look for other forms of cohesion too. Together with the Finns and the Livonian-speaking minority in Latvia who, like their compatriots, also have opted for Europe, they want also to stress their Finnish-Ugric identity, which linguistically they share with the Magyar-speaking part of Hungary. On the other hand, the many Russians still living in the Baltic states, feeling their role has diminished with the demise of Soviet power, would like to create a Russian axis along what is now the eastern border of the European Union.

It is a border that, for example in Bjelo-Rus and in Ukraine – the vast, uninterrupted 'European plain' that connects Western and Central Europe to Eastern Europe and, if only therefore, has been the scene of so many battles and other forms of geopolitical struggle – even by that very fact probably will remain contested during the next decades, since many of its inhabitants fear the rulers of Russia, while these fear the proximity of Europe or, to be more precise, of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO.

By the twenty-first century, all over geographical Europe, 'nations' – mostly imagined communities created, like the Baltic ones, out of older, regional cultures – have to come to terms with institutional Europe: the Europe of the European Union, constantly forged and reaffirmed in its 'capital', Brussels, by a seemingly endless stream of rules and laws. But they also face another Europe, which terms itself the actual foundation for that very Union: a cultural Europe that, according to many, makes the political, social and economic Europe both logical and viable.

Yet, over the centuries, but especially since the nineteenth century, many people, including historians, have questioned this cultural Europe: they have questioned its component parts, its divisions, its boundaries, even its very existence, arguing that it always has been and even now is no more than a convenient prop for politicians who dream of unity for the sake of increased power or to maintain their own state's independence. Others feel that it is a romantic but unrealistic notion, cherished mainly by artists, men of letters and, yes, some idealistic politicians as well, who dream of unity because they cannot deal with diversity. Admittedly, I do not share the criticism implicit in these two views, though the arguments of their proponents, like the scholarly ones put forward by Max Weber, are useful tools for further analysis as well.

About the authorial condition

Over the past nearly 20 years, people have responded variously to the first (1998) and the revised, second (2006) and third (2015) editions of this book. A number of reviews, both formal and informal, have sharpened my own views of what I term the 'authorial condition', and the ways it impinges on a scholar's choices.

Of course, writing history always implies cultural-political, perhaps even moral dilemmas. For historians of necessity involve their own culture, as well

as their own self, in their writing: if they do not create a contemporary picture of the past, few will want to read them. Yet, when the images they conjure up are too period-bound, they will quickly fade. That said, my search for Europe unavoidably is a wilful journey along a number of paths, some of which not yet taken by other authors, others obviously well-trodden. I hope this book will provide a time- and place-bound journey through selected fields of culture in Europe, guiding readers past various points of recognition and yet stimulating their thought. Therefore, as I already wrote, I have chosen not to describe all features of the European cultural landscape. Nor do I intend to try definitively to define what cannot be defined, namely, what Europe 'really' is, for, again as indicated above, Europe will continue to change, to re-invent itself and, moreover, will mean many different things to many different people.

Also, regardless of the extent to which one's perspective is determined by the views of earlier travellers, what we see is always new, and never all-comprehensive. Just as a landscape and our perspective of it change during a journey, similarly, when we think about Europe, its contours shift and its characteristics rearrange themselves. For Europe was, is and indeed always shall be a series of world-views, of peoples' perspectives on their reality, sometimes only dreamt or desired, sometimes experienced and realized as well.

This already was clear to me when I finished the first draft of this book, before I even submitted it to a publisher. Given that, at that time, I was still in the process of writing a text that could be used by the European Council of Universities, I was asked to submit the manuscript to a number of critics, from all over Europe. I was unpleasantly surprised when some of them proved nothing less than vituperative in their judgement, revealing a bias that, I felt, was both extreme and definitely uncalled for in the scholarly debate that a review is always part of.

After I had found my publisher, of course I realized that a text is not published before it has been scrutinized by a few readers who remain anonymous for the very reason that they are asked to comment on it in view of its scholarly acceptability and commercial viability. Other critics followed, both in the scholarly press and on the Internet. Perhaps precisely because of the genuine emotions voiced by them, I became increasingly aware that Europe continues to change in time, its idea differing from individual to individual, from group to group. Now having returned to my task for the fourth time, i.e. to write its third revised edition, I have fair view of the, often to me contradictory criticism it has elicited.

A basic problem was, of course, how to give body to the concept, the definition of culture outlined above. Many authors who have written on culture in Europe – or, indeed, about 'the' culture of Europe – only vaguely indicate the actual design of their program and the extent of their research.

In my turn, I had to decide whether I should study the 'concept of Europe', only, as argued in texts that claim for Europe a cultural, even

spiritual unity – texts, therefore, that voice ideas and ideals which frequently betray an unspoken yet only barely concealed moral basis and bias. Or should I approach the problem of culture in and of Europe by searching for and then analysing behavioural patterns and institutions, ways of looking at man and society, at the things man makes – all of them 'manifestations of meaning' that, collectively, constitute a given culture as much as or, perhaps, even more than the concepts created by intellectual and/or political elites? Of course, these manifestations can help answer the question of what elements, and when, did (begin to) create an identity for Europe that differed from other parts of the world.

These alternative approaches touch upon the much-discussed problem of the difference between cultural history conceived as, on the one hand, a tale of ideas and ideologies and, on the other hand, as a far wider-ranging survey of the great variety of cultural forms as expressed in man's handling of nature, of himself and of the society he lives in and of those of his representations thereof that both give and constitute meaning. Obviously, both approaches are respectable ones. Yet the many, often opposing views of what has characterized and, partly, continues to characterize Europe are so charged with norms, values and political aspirations that I felt it to be prudent to try to combine them. After all, if I were to study articulate ideas about Europe without considering them in the context of the time, the political-economic circumstances and the social framework in which they were voiced, not interpreting the very diverse cultural forms in which they became manifest, I would run the real risk of perceiving such ideas as timeless and universal and to attach too much value to them. If the past has anything to teach us, it is that ideas claiming absolute validity are always dangerous.

Some critics have argued that an undertaking of this magnitude – describing the infinitely complex history of culture in Europe – was doomed to fail if I did not harness my data in an economic or sociological 'grand design' such as, for example, the ones chosen by the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902–85)[18] or the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897–1990),[19] or judge them against some all-embracing and explaining concept or even 'theory' of culture as did, amongst others, the German historian-philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), in his famous *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 'The Fall of the Occident' (vol. 1 1918, rev. 1922; vol. 2 1923) and the English historian Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), with his massive, twelve-volume *A Study of History*, published between 1934 and 1961. I cannot but say that though I have found many of the ideas put forward by these and other (cultural) historians immensely inspiring, I have nevertheless found none that has satisfactorily allowed me to use any of them as an overall, structural concept, let alone a 'theory'.[20]

In the end, to solve a number of problems, I decided that this book could not be 'The Cultural History of Europe', nor, even, 'A Cultural History of Europe' but should be titled 'Europe: A Cultural History'.

On a more detailed level, some critics vehemently accused me of being too irreverent regarding the Biblical sources of the Christian tradition. Yet, I persist in feeling that no sources should ever be beyond critical analysis.

Quite contrarily, others wrote that I should not give such prominence to the influence of Christianity as my book yet does. I happen to think that in every culture, the role of religion(s), and of institutionalized Churches cannot be overestimated.[21] Some also told me that a cultural history of Europe should chastise the various Churches for the iniquities perpetrated by them or in their name, to show that Europe's, or, rather, Christianity's record is far from unblemished, indeed, that there is a definite black side to European-Christian culture – which, of course, there is, and which I do expressly acknowledge, without, however, devoting large parts of my text to the various inquisitions, to witch-hunts and, in another context, to the genocide perpetrated by so-called Christian Europeans against their Jewish co-Europeans.

Of course, there were reviewers who felt that I should have used the gender perspective to analyse how a patriarchal society like the European till the late twentieth century not only suppressed the female part of its population but also succeeded in silencing its voice in the story that is history or, as some would rather have it, her-story. While I have striven to remain 'gender-neutral', I also must tell my readers that in many respects research does not (yet) reflect this perspective; indeed, through lack of archival or other documentary sources perhaps it never will.

In a comparable vein, some readers took me to task for not writing about 'the masses', the 'common people', who, according to them, suffered most in the 'making' of Europe. However, I feel there is little sense in expatiating on the human costs of the cultural process, both in Europe and elsewhere. Admittedly, it is important to know, for example, how many people worked on the construction of the colonnades in St Peter's Square in Rome, or, for that matter, the building of Versailles, and, also, how many died in those laborious processes, not yet regulated by labour legislation we now feel to be essentially humane. However, to give such an indication for each and every one of Europe's major buildings or, in another context, to try to work out how many people died, directly or indirectly, at the hands of each of Europe's great, albeit to many controversial enterprises – for example, Spain's colonial expansion, or the Napoleonic campaigns – is fraught with problems of methodology and statistics, again partly through lack of or biases in the source material. Even so, there also were those who wondered why this cultural history yet contains so many details about the economic as well as the political background. But while I think 'doing' cultural history always also is searching for contexts and, consequently, should pay attention to those human actions and consequences we term economic and social, I do not think it should be burdened by graphs and tables which only give the reader an often false sense of facticity.

Not surprisingly, some people argued that my text, which often describes the roles of individual historical actors, did prove what they had always thought and said, namely that cultural history is nothing but a meaningless and, even, misleading paean to so-called great men and great ideas. Others however noted the dozens, nay hundreds of 'culture makers' who I failed to mention, arguing that Europe's art, literature and music constitute its most precious heritage and, indeed, its very identity. I was a bit saddened to note that the numerous past culture makers I was accused of having excluded from my pantheon often were the compatriots of these reviewers; they were not convinced by my argument that any attempt at strengthening the old canon of 'great men (and women)' – or, for that matter, creating a new one – would invite only a host of hostile reactions.[22] Yet, I really do feel that culture is made by people; that, consequently, a cultural history should name at least some of the men and women who have contributed to its making. However, I also feel that a book like this should not read like the index of a history of art, literature and music, or, for that matter, of science. Moreover, rather than only describing men and women with whom almost everyone is familiar from the age of primary school onwards, I thought it might be revealing also to mention those who, though lesser known, are equally representative of their place and time, if only to indicate that the spectrum of people involved is broad indeed.

Finally, and rather strangely in view of my text, a few readers were convinced I was in the pay of the European Union, writing an apologia for the ideologies of its power brokers. Others, however, accused me of being a Euro-pessimist, presenting altogether too bleak a view of the reality of the values that, especially during the past 70 years, have been presented as uniquely European, and of the blessings of the process of integration and unification that is, at least according to the ardent Euro-optimists, logically based upon them.

In short, though I actually deal with all these issues and topics – but, apparently, not enough to satisfy the tastes of some critics – I definitely do not think that writing history is about apportioning praise or blame to those who have lived before us, who thought and acted under different circumstances and from different moral precepts. For indeed, human morality, too, is culturally determined and, therefore, always changing. Rather, writing history is about trying to understand people in their own time and place. Moreover, we can actually do so, for contrary to the views of the more extremist post-Modernist theorists, the texts that serious historians produce are not fictions, nor 'just interpretations': they are solidly and scholarly based on data that have been tested for their reliability.[23]

To conclude, if writing this book – and reading the reviews it has elicited over the past two decades – has taught me anything, it is that in talking and writing about Europe the biggest problem actually is the reality of passions aroused by Europe's past in the present, whether these be religious,

nationalist, political or moral. Precisely therefore, it is necessary to again consider the historical profession, and its claims.

However, in his famous 1917 talk about 'scholarship as a profession (and a vocation)', Max Weber argued that scholars, including, and I should perhaps stress, especially scholars who somehow deal with the human past, should always be aware of being themselves part of a specific present, in terms of time, location, community and indeed culture. All of these condition the questions they ask. Moreover, their answers will become part of that present, their present: their time, location, community and culture.[24] In that sense, we should agree with the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866–1952), who said: 'Tutta vera storia è storia contemporanea',[25] 'all true history is contemporary history', which, contrary to some translations, should be understood as meaning that man, who creates history, is himself a creature of history. Writing about the past, he is always doing so in the present, wherein everything that can be written about already is past, since even things that happened an instant ago are past, and cannot but be interpreted as such.

Weber's plea for what we might term self-reflexivity and, indeed, social and political awareness as the first responsibility of any scholar, obviously antedates the precepts given by Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) to his fellow-thinkers of the so-called 'Frankfurter Schule' in the 1930s and 1940s,[26] and, indeed, the ideas of many 'postmodern' historians, such as, for example, Alun Munslow and Keith Jenkins,[27] who in the 1990s seem to have wilfully forgotten what the German master had written, and blithely re-invented the wheel.

To conclude, I am happy to say that over the past two decades there have been many encouraging and even laudatory reactions and reviews. Even the fact that some critics have suggested that my interpretation of Europe as a culture was a bit idiosyncratic I take as a compliment. Following Weber's exhortation, I do not disguise the many realities – both challenges and restrictions – of my own 'condition', as he would have called it. I, the person who has authored this book, am a man, born in Western Europe at the beginning of the seemingly-secure second half of the twentieth century, but writing in the crisis-filled second decade of the twenty-first century. A scholar, moreover, politically inclined towards socio-democracy, and with a decided interest in the continuing complex role(s) of religion(s) in culture and in the interaction between Europe and other world cultures. Nor should I myself forget – or forget to mention to my readers – that I am writing as a citizen of a nation, the Dutch one, the larger part of which for several decades professed itself to be 'pro-European', though, in recent years, many of my compatriots have started to feel doubts about that erstwhile stance. All these characteristics determine who I am, as a person, as a scholar, as a historian who looks at the world he is part of and yet sets out to, as much as possible, describe and analyse as an outsider. Let me once more quote Freud. He once wrote a text that his editors have given the title 'General Theory of

Psychology' – quite misleadingly, for Freud did not adopt the, for the Humanities false notion of 'theory' at all. Rather, he argued:

> The view is often defended that sciences should be built up on clear and sharply defined basal concepts. In actual fact no science, not even the most exact, begins with such definitions. The true beginning of scientific activity consists rather in describing phenomena and then in proceeding to group, classify and correlate them.[28]

My text, too, departs not from definitions, or, even worse, 'theories', but from my own and other people's questions. Yet, in the end, as all proper historians do, I have striven to present an interpretation of culture in Europe that represents the consensus of at least part of the scholarly community about the value of what has been searched for, found, analysed and interpreted. I maintain that producing the umpteenth bland collection of 'facts about Europe', suggesting they constitute its reality, not only would be impossible in scholarly-philosophical terms, but also would amount to presenting a text of no real significance, for it would not make the reader think about his own interpretations. If the present book may lay claim to any value and validity, it is by bringing together meaningful data for what I hope will be a thought-provoking analysis of the spaces, communities and cultures people in Europe have created for themselves – a book that I, as already stated, I consciously present not as 'Europe: Its Cultural History', but, rather, as 'Europe: A Cultural History'.

About choices: the scope and structure of this book

The above paragraphs show that writing history means making choices against a background of complex factors, including the questions a writer poses himself, his assumptions about his reader's interests and his selection of the disorganized details from different and often discordant sources about the past, the many pasts, which he can use. Ultimately, all these factors contribute to the final text. But in the last instance, of course, the author's interpretation is the result of an effort to ask meaningful questions – which, as I already indicated, means present-minded questions – while trying to avoid meaningless, that is to say present-minded answers.

In view of all this, I found writing this book not an easy task. Not only did I need to determine the chronological scope of what is, essentially, an analysis as well as an interpretive tale, a story; more importantly, I had to decide where, both geographically and culturally, the Europe of this book begins and ends. Having given some general considerations on these vital points in the previous pages, an effort at a more precise definition is called for.

Must everything be described which has happened from the North Cape to Gibraltar, from the west coast of Ireland to the Urals – the, as I wrote,

accepted geographical circumscription of Europe as a 'continent'? Or should only those developments be emphasized that can help us understand Europe's culture as it is seen today?

Rather than engage in a futile attempt at writing an all-inclusive, encyclopaedic and, consequently, unreadable book – and also aware of the great risk of taking too teleological a view – I have decided to follow the latter approach. However, in doing so I limited both my geographical scope and the elements of culture discussed, full well knowing that to some these restrictions will be disappointing, not to say painful.

As a result of many geo-economic, geo-political and cultural-religious developments, some of which can be traced far back into past millennia while others are of more recent origin, in Europe many internal divisions have arisen that create a multiplicity and diversity of culture(s). To many, the most obvious is the 'dividing line' separating the Western parts of Europe from what, geographically, is called Eastern Europe. This 'line', actually a very wide transitional zone often referred to as Central or even Central-Eastern Europe, stretches from the Baltic to the Balkans and roughly coincides with the Baltic states, Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and the small states of the Balkans proper, that have gained independence after the dismemberment of former Yugoslavia – states that, precisely in 2018, have started seeking membership of the European Union. In a way, Greece, too, belongs to this transitional zone, as does, to make matters complex, the entire island of Cyprus, though the Union does not recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus that calls half of the island its territory.

This book mainly, though not exclusively, records events and discloses patterns that I have noticed in the Western zone. I dwell somewhat less upon the Central-European countries and their cultures. Although there are sound scholarly reasons, besides considerations of a politically correct nature, to induce an author to fully include the cultures of the latter region, I have chosen not to do so. First of all, I lack the language skills necessary to delve into the relevant primary literature. More important, however, I believe that this non-inclusion can be defended on the basis of past developments themselves. With many 'accidents', during the past centuries links have been forged between a number of regional cultures in Western and Central Europe which, consequently, have shown a comparable historical development, resulting in a more widely experienced, common culture that, however diverse in many of its elements, has yet grown towards an overall unity.[29] However, in view of the above, this book gives but scant attention to the Balkans, and even less to Bjelo-Rus and Ukraine – though many people, there, proclaim themselves European – or to the Russian Federation, whose citizens have decidedly mixed feelings about the 'European-ness' of their culture.

Of course, I am very much aware of the limitations this choice creates for the interpretation of 'European-ness' in this book. Indeed, I have to admit

that it is entirely possible to write a book called 'Europe: A Cultural History', that starts from the many pasts experienced by the peoples east of the dividing line referred to above. Such a book, as the complement of the present one, definitely would help readers to better understand the discordant feelings about the pretence of an overall 'European-ness' that, nowadays, seem as much to divide as to unify the countries that, somehow, accept the cohesion promised to them by that manifestation of Europe that is called the European Union.

One factor often named as determining the relative unity of the area that I do study is the way of life and of thinking which was paired with and is still coloured by the development of Western Christianity after the break-up of the Carolingian Empire in the tenth century and the schism between the Churches of Rome and Byzantium-Constantinople in the eleventh century. However, another, far more important element is the fact that a number of countries in Western and Central Europe, while being ruled by 'absolute' monarchs up until the end of the eighteenth century, have yet developed towards consensual and finally even constitutional government over the past two centuries partly because, even earlier, a tradition of civic societies had evolved there. Moreover, these parts of Europe also experienced a slow transition from a mainly agrarian to an industrial economy and culture. Thus, Western and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Central Europe have long been characterized by increasing economic and political freedom for the individual and, from the late nineteenth century onwards, by some sort of collective care for that individual as well – a mixture of capitalist consumerism, political liberalism and social democracy. If judged by those criteria, the Europe that now projects itself with such a pretence of historical inevitability is a creation of the past three or four centuries, only.[30] Indeed, some people hold that it only came into being as late as the nineteenth century,[31] or, as I argued above, as recently as the second half of the twentieth century.

Due to a number of historical accidents as well as to the absence of certain preconditions, in Eastern Europe that combination of traditions and structures has only been developing during the past decades. Obviously, even as I write and, certainly, in the near future, economic and political changes may or, perhaps, necessarily will result in a growing integration not only of already superficially comparable lifestyles but also of the views of the people and societies of, respectively, Western(-Central) and Eastern Europe. In this process, that really is driven by profound changes in the world's economy and in the resulting global communication networks, people in 'the West' – in this case meaning both Europe and the Americas – will be forced also to reconsider their notions of what they want Europe to be.

However, my conscious choice to apply the above cultural-geographical, and, also, political restrictions did not solve the problem of other choices. Looking into the past, I had to establish which traditions 'my' Europe is characterized by. Again as indicated above, I do realize that each one of them was not specifically, let alone uniquely 'European', but, taken together, they

have come to constitute a coherent culture, a heritage that now is worth exploring from a historical point of view, if only to determine what roles it plays in the present.

This first involved choosing the amount of detail given about ancient cultures that, while geographically speaking manifestly not part of, or restricted to the geographical Europe, yet are traditionally included in most histories of Europe – those presented in history books as well as in museums and in films. Specifically, the migration of peoples from Africa into the European parts of Eurasia and the so-called 'Neolithic' revolution, which introduced agriculture and the forging of iron to the world, were part of far larger movements, on a sub-global scale, though that revolution became a phase in the subsequent development of the European environment to an extent that, since then, only the Industrial Revolution has, with its aftermath till the present.

Precisely because Europe, more than any other of the world's cultures, except China, has been searching for a historical continuity that legitimizes its uniqueness, most histories of Europe nowadays begin with an extensive analysis of ancient Egypt and the ancient Near East from *c.*5000 BC, suggesting that civilization was born in the eastern Mediterranean. As this is indeed the region where, first, Graeco-Roman culture and, later, Christianity originated, becoming the two probably most important ideological cornerstones of the concept of 'European culture', I will discuss developments in those regions, albeit only sketchily, in Part I, Chapters 1, 2 and 3. However, limiting the story to these 'roots' of Europe would do no justice to what was occurring, at the same time, in geographical Europe proper and, more specifically, in its Western and Central parts. Therefore, I sketch the culture of the Celts and, later, the Germanic peoples, too.

In trying to isolate the relevant traditions or sources of inspiration provided to later generations by these pre- and proto-European cultures, we have to first, albeit cautiously, concentrate on the nascent democracy of ancient Greece, specifically Athens – cautiously because it was a democracy that left out the majority of the town's population. We should then go on to the legal structures devised in ancient Rome, which protected both individual life and property, and to the moral values of Christianity that tried to teach that protecting only oneself would not result in a humane society. The merging of the so-called Classical Tradition with the beliefs of Christianity, and the characteristics of the society that brought about this fusion – and was formed by it – are described in Part II, Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Yet, we need to realize that both the traditions of the Graeco-Roman world and of Christianity were the product of Near Eastern, 'Asiatic' civilizations. Also, this fusion resulted in a frequently difficult partnership of resolute rationalism on the one hand and beliefs based on revelation on the other hand. For the past 2,000 years, this has stimulated a creative tension that has become one of the dynamics of European culture, influencing the thoughts and actions both of those Europeans who remained religious and of those who, precisely because of

that tension, sought new ways. In later parts of the book, I try to show how, as a result of this process, many ideas were absorbed as normative values in the self-image of Europe as propagated by its elites.

After these two parts, an Interlude looks at Europe from another point of view, namely as a world that, for many centuries, consisted largely of local, self-contained rural cultures and of more open, urban societies. Through their more dynamic nature, the latter were, many historians have argued, the motors that brought about the change that altered Europe from the fifteenth century onwards.

To substantiate my thesis that Europe slowly underwent its most important transformation since that period, Parts III and IV take up two-thirds of the book, covering Europe's history since then. As indicated above, Max Weber argued that during these centuries Europe acquired some of its prevailing characteristics: it became a world of comparatively small, fiercely competitive 'nation-states' but, also, a world increasingly characterized by elements of an overarching capitalism, rationalism and scepticism. While nationalism embedded the peoples of Europe in an often 'invented' tradition that gave them a sense of political-cultural security, capitalism was one of the factors in often bloody inter-state strife. Meanwhile, and partly through that process, Europe became, in a sense, 'disenchanted'. This development, Weber felt, during the eighteenth but, even more, the nineteenth century was exemplified in the bipolarity of the Enlightenment, with its glorification of the 'logos', and Romanticism, with its continued search for the inspiration of the 'mythos'. The tension seems to characterize culture in Europe to the present day.

Also in Parts III and IV, I have chosen to highlight the growing importance of Europe's roles in the world's other regions: to me, this development, that can be witnessed from the fifteenth century onwards, seems as important as the discussion of Europe's pre-European roots in Part I. It also is necessary to consider it because those roles became inextricably bound up with Europe's growing economic and political power, as well as its own vision of its global cultural status and significance. Moreover, though nowadays Europe no longer is what it once claimed to be, the 'Mistress of the World', because its erstwhile power has considerably diminished with the end of its colonial and imperial presence in the twentieth century, even now that part of Europe's past impinges on the present. The background of this situation is complex.

If people want to describe themselves as 'Europeans', they can only do so by referring to their supposed or alleged contrasts: their 'opposites'. Yet, in doing so, they will all too easily forget their 'un-known side', i.e. the characteristics of fears and desires that also define them. Man, and therefore also 'European man' as he sees himself, has made and known himself through a confrontation with the 'other', and will, perhaps, continue to do so for a long time, yet.

Therefore, it is crucially important not to forget that from the earliest times onwards, but especially between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries, the in many ways diverse peoples of Europe, as well as, more visibly and to Europe more profitably, peoples in other worlds together have played an important, not to say an essential though also contested part in shaping Europe's culture. Conversely, Europeans themselves have always had an articulated perspective on other worlds, the more so as they came to dominate large parts of them – culminating, of course, in the inclusion of, first, Central and South America and, later, North America in its own culture, which resulted in the concept of the 'Western World'. Moreover, though in the parts of Asia and Africa that came into its orbit European political dominance effectively lasted only two centuries, covering the short period of *c.*1750 to *c.*1950, its consequences for the cultures of the present world, and for the ongoing process of globalization, yet have been enormous. Indeed, if Europe is to be called 'unique', as it is by some, one of the arguments surely should be that at least up till now no other single culture has ever influenced the globe as long and as completely, for better or for worse.

To put it otherwise: during the past five centuries, Europe really came to acquire the characteristics it now prides itself on. In this period, the economic importance of Europe's Eurasian, Atlantic and African colonies and, even, empires, and the complex interaction of these overseas possessions with the building of consumer-oriented, literate, democratic societies in Europe itself, really constituted a process that some have termed the 'Miracle of the West'. In short, if I do not at least indicate the roles various non-European worlds and their peoples and cultures played in this process, my story of the European world would be both partial and incomprehensible. Moreover, to avoid misrepresenting world history and the history of Europe in it, justice must be done to the global aspects of Europe's past also because, especially since the late twentieth century, the impact of non-European cultures on Europe through mass immigration has surprised and shocked large segments of society in all of Europe's countries. If anything, in the twenty-first century precisely this development will determine what kind of Europe its inhabitants, old as well as new, will create.

Linked to the above considerations, in Part III, I also stress the various ways in which, since the sixteenth century, forms of tolerance have been slowly developing, both through interregional and interconfessional contacts within the narrow confines of (Christian) Europe, and through intercultural relations between Europe and the various other worlds and their religious cultures. At the same time, I stress the intolerance that often characterized the daily practice of the majority as against what was preached by only a minority.

Again in Part III, I have chosen to describe the impact of the invention of printing, because it constitutes Europe's first communications revolution since the introduction of scripture through the cultures of the ancient Near East:

an essential stimulus not only to a wider distribution of knowledge and the diffusion of a spirit of criticism and debate but, perhaps more important, a road to better education and consequently to more wide-spread opportunities for cultural diversity and personal development, although this only turned into a mass phenomenon since the nineteenth century.

By then, Europe really had become the first 'knowledge society' of the world. Information density increased markedly from the mid-nineteenth century onwards: not so much as a result of any political will but, basically, in consequence of technological and related commercial developments.

In this process, still ongoing, inevitably people increasingly search for distinction – when 'others' become too near, they retire to their 'self' and to its trusted social and cultural parameters, that are often local and regional rather than national, European or global. Consequently, tolerance, multiculturalism even, and the perceived need to retain one's own identity are certainly not easily reconciled, but in its development education plays a role of major importance.

Meanwhile, again between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries, forms of representative government emerged, in intricate interaction with economic changes that turned Europe from a mainly agrarian world – in which, through a complex set of social and legal rules, equality of chances was largely absent – into an industrial society with opportunities that were, at least in principle, open to all. The process in which people articulated ideas of social equality and social justice eventually resulted in the concept of human rights, a concept not unequivocal or historically universal, but, as developed in Europe, certainly inspiring.

Of course, we should be aware that especially tolerance and human rights represent ideas and ideals that neither were, nor yet are fully realized in practice. On the contrary, Europeans often have been untrue to their vision of themselves and of the heritage they claim. One of the historian's tasks, I think, is to evaluate – though, again, not to judge – past practices precisely to allow people to determine what they feel to be important enough to preserve as an inheritance for the future. Throughout the book, I will show how Europeans, often though not exclusively intellectuals and scholars, did so shape their lives, creating culture in increasingly complex manifestations.

Obviously, the cohesion of elites, as of all other groups, is determined by a variety of socioeconomic and cultural factors; they share a way of thinking which determines their spoken and – much more powerful – written words as well as, at least partly, their deeds. As long as elites dominate communication and, thus, information processes, they have a strong influence on the cultural expressions of society at large, certainly on those expressions that one encounters on the surface: political and social ideas, the public manifestations of power, customs and manners, and so on.

All this does not mean to say this book deals with 'elite culture' only and omits any reference to 'popular culture'. These concepts, often referred to as the 'great' and 'small' traditions, are too simple and, hence, distorting to be

tenable. Rather, I prefer to stress that precisely the question of what people thought and, more important, how and in which circumstances they acted, gives direction to every study of cultural history.

Having made all the above choices, including the one not to search for an all-encompassing framework to present the data that my research brought me, I still felt that I needed to avoid a simple chronology – though, of course, there is no denying the influence of time evolving, of new generations choosing from the inheritance of their forebears, adding to it, altering it. Yet, having said that, we have to realize that histories of culture never follow the strict chronology used by the more traditional political histories. Specifically as to Europe, for various reasons categories like 'the Middle Ages', the 'Early Modern Period' and 'Contemporary History', long in use, are more or less inadequate, if not actually misleading. The patterns shown by different domains of culture and, also, in different sectors of society sometimes remain static for centuries, and sometimes change in quick succession within a relatively short time-span. Therefore, if I had searched for useful beginnings and endings, and for synchronicity, I would have distorted the past only to suit the format of a textbook, which this history definitely is not. However, to yet give some structure to a story that stretches over thousands of years, it charts Europe's cultural past along the lines of what I have termed four grand phases of continuity and change. These phases can be summed up as follows.

The *effort at survival*, characterizing the past of all mankind from the beginning, produced a great change in culture in Europe, with the slow transition, from the fifth millennium BC onwards, to an agricultural-pastoralist society, and a rather more secure livelihood.

The acceptance of *one dominant religion*, which in Europe really started when Christianity became widely imposed from the fourth century AD onwards, had enormous consequences for life and thought.

Then, though with some rhetorical exaggeration, one might argue that from the fifteenth century onwards the development of *a broader view of the world* brought Europeans slowly out of the confines of the village into the orbit, first, of the state, then into the economic and political system that was (Western) Europe, and finally even into other worlds.

Last but not least, the genesis of *mass consumption and communication* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gave culture in Europe its present characteristics. Yet, more than anything that came before, it also robbed the local and regional parts of Europe of many of their traditional cultural forms.

Obviously, this is not to say that the phases outlined above were peculiar only to European history, for at least the first and second definitely occurred in other parts of the world as well. But I maintain that, taken together and seen in their interaction-over-time, these four developments do represent both the result of and a framework for choices that people in Europe have made, and thus have contributed to the singularity of their world, to its peculiar cultural identity as it stands today.

Nevertheless, if we accept, as I do, that during part of its past, culture in Europe has had features that were distinct from those characterizing other world civilizations, it is now definitely part of a global dynamic in which, in complex interaction, almost all cultures start resembling each other more than ever before the 'great divergence' that gave Europe a temporary uniqueness.

About the use(s) of this book

In view of all the above arguments of definition, construction and limitation, any history of culture in Europe is a selection. It is, as mine is, influenced not only by an author's field(s) of interest, the scope of his reading and the choices he makes – which I have dealt with in the preceding pages – but also by the format of the book, the outcome of a confrontation between the author, his publisher's policy and his presumed audience.

Of course, I hope that the interested lay reader will find this book a stimulating point of entry into the history of culture in Europe. At the same time, I intend it to be an introduction for students in the early years of their academic progress, though many will never be professional historians. Some caveats are therefore appropriate.

Presenting this book as a cultural history in the broad sense, I consider economic, social and political structures and processes as well. Yet as any cultural history is, inevitably, an attempt at a synthesis, trying to recreate and analyse the lifestyle of a number of more or less cohesive groups in a specific region, I do not give a lengthy, in-depth treatment of all these aspects of Europe's past. Readers who want to be thoroughly informed of these will have to turn either to more specialized works in these fields or to works which claim to cover European history in all its aspects.

Moreover, the nature of a cultural history of Europe that tries to explain present structures and manifestations through an analysis of past developments, almost automatically leads to a selection and discussion of precisely those aspects and episodes that clarify the process of continuity and change that transformed the past into the present. Writing history that way is, therefore, the (teleological) chronicling of the behaviour and achievements of the 'victors', whether they were individuals or groups, whose actions or concepts contributed to today's cultural fabric. Some historians argue that the 'losers', those who have been side-tracked by history, are just as important. They feel we can learn just as much from the possibilities that once existed but which were never realized, the 'paths not taken' as a result of circumstance, coincidence, the exercise of power, choice. The questions implicit in this view are intriguing but unanswerable. Some would feel that, in fact, none of the energy that once existed really has been lost; that all thoughts and trends, even if, at particular moments, they have been

condemned or cast off as too unorthodox, as heretical, even, or as, simply, irrelevant, yet have only temporarily sunk into oblivion: they may well play a role in the fruitful interaction between 'past' and 'present' which always creates a 'future'. For as William Shakespeare wrote in *The Tempest*: 'Whatever is Past, is Prologue'.

In short, I envisage a book that will be of use both to a large audience and to students. In consequence, I felt that, if anything, my history should not be so voluminous as to be daunting instead of inviting. Therefore, I have tried to write a relatively short book. To increase its readability, a large number of quotations have been used, hoping that the reader, for whom, as I quoted above, the past is, by definition, a foreign country where people do things differently, will yet feel that he can travel there. For the same reason, longish extracts from original sources have been used to provide opportunities for discussion, reflection and further investigation. The annotation of the text is meant to serve both as a bibliography and as an incentive to further reading. Therefore, a separate bibliography has not been included.

About the 2020 edition of this book

Just as in the early 1990s, when I had wondered whether I should not renounce my project altogether, and again in 2004 and 2013, when asked to write a first and a second revised edition, in 2018 I asked myself if I would not be wiser to decline the publisher's request for a third revision. However, in re-reading my own positions, I felt that I actually did want to reconsider some issues, as there was some truth in many – though certainly not all – of the critical remarks made over the past decades. Consequently, in 2018 the challenge and, indeed, the pleasure involved in presenting yet another, and by now completely revised text have prevailed again.

As always, a revision forces an author to rethink both the structure of his book as well as reconsider even the smallest details of his text. Therefore, I have reorganized almost all chapters, and have deleted many a redundant paragraph. Of course, I also have tried to meticulously redress mistakes both great and small, both of content and of style.

Preparing this edition, I realized how much I owe to two persons: Thomas Rietbergen and Theodore Drijvers. Over the past 20 years, they have accepted that I took direction of our summer holidays. By car, train or plane, on foot or by bicycle we travelled all over Europe, to regions and places I would never have visited by myself. Thus I came, purposefully or by chance, to locations where, in many ways, the incredible variety of culture in Europe burst upon me. For indeed, a space, a location is where man, singlehandedly or as part of a group, creates culture – his culture. Thus, all culture is, essentially, also the story of a location. Many a location becomes a 'site', viz. a place with meaning, as the stories connected with it, relating experiences

both individual and collective, are turned into facts that are the stones of memories. And memories, somehow, are turned into 'historiai' – i.e. stories describing the knowledge we think we have of our past – and, eventually, into a history that, certainly in the case of Europe, always will be a 'grand narrative' and yet, as I argued above, also a complex 'palimpsest'. Therefore, without wanting to de-construct that history, for me it was, in a book like this, helpful to return to specific sites, to seek out what memories, what stories and histories have been associated with them, to better understand that, however general history is, it is, at the same time, local. As I visited sites all over Europe, each and every one of them forced me to consider not only how much the people living there now owe to their past but, also, to what extent, generation after generation, sometimes century after century, these people have changed and, consequently, have reshaped their world and their tales of its past. To somehow evoke that reality, throughout the book I have added a series of essays, or dossiers, describing and analysing cultural phenomena that, I feel, while linked to a special location, in a more general way yet bring to life ideas and actions that have contributed to the Europe we now know. Sometimes, the phenomena presented by Max Weber as 'specifically European' have helped me to decide which topics I needed to discuss. Thus, each chapter now is illustrated with an item from this 'Europe Dossier'.

Finally, and inevitably in view of the time that has passed since I last revisited and revised the book, I have reconsidered the Epilogue, for I have had to ask myself whether the Europe I saw unfolding more than eight years ago still is the Europe that now seems to be evolving.

Acknowledgements

The way I learnt to experience Europe during my continuous journey has been made decidedly less one-sided by the candid criticism of a few friends who want to remain unnamed, and from remarks made and suggestions offered by those reviewers of the previous editions who did not obviously have an agenda all of their own.

Yet the book owes just as much to the questions raised by the seven generations of my Nijmegen students during my lectures and seminars in Mediterranean and Eurasian History, in Intellectual History and in the History of Cultures and Mentalities. With this book I hope to repay the debt of gratitude every teacher owes to his pupils.

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Notes

1 G. Erler, ed., *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Werke, VIII, Faust*, Berlin 1984, Faust I, 77.
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3 R. Brague, *Europe: la voie romaine*, Paris 1992, 187.
4 Some surveys: C. Curcio, *Europa: Storia d'un Idea I–II*, Florence 1958; J.-B. Duroselle, *L'Idée d'Europe dans l'histoire*, Paris 1965; H. Foerster, *Europa: Geschichte einer politischen Idee*, Munich 1967.
5 J. Delors, 'Have we betrayed the European economic and social venture?', in *European Trade Union Yearbook 1996*, 6.
6 G. Colli, M. Montinari, eds, *Fr. Nietzsche: Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, III/2, Berlin 1973 [=Fr. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Schriften, 1870–1873: Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne I*], 378.
7 S. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970*, Princeton 1996.
8 Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, 'Les quatre significations du mot "classique"', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 12 (1958), 5–22. For the European case: A. Grafton *et al.* ed., *The Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, MA 2010. But see also: G. Holst-Warhaft, a.o. eds., *The Classical Movement. Views from Seven Literatures*, Lanham 1999, that compares parallel movements in seven Eurasian civilizations.
9 M. Kunze, ed., *Winckelmann und Egypte*, Tubingen 2003; D. Wildung, *Preussen am Nil*, Berlin 2002.
10 M. Wellen, *Die Deutschen sind im Treppenhaus. Der Fries Otto Geyers in der Alte Nationalgalerie*, Cologne 2002.
11 Peter Rietbergen, 'Oriëntalisme: een theorie van ficties – de fictie van een theorie? Een poging tot contextualisering en herinterpretatie', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 111 (1998), 545–75, esp. 552–70. Idem, *Clio's stiefzusters. Verledenverbeeldingen voorbij de geschiedwetenschap*, Nijmegen 2015.
12 E. Rawsky, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*, Ann Arbor 1979.

13 P. Rietbergen, 'Father and mother official: the district magistrates in imperial China and the Papal States', in P. Puschmann, T. Riswick, eds., *Building Bridges*, Nijmegen 2018, 118–33.
14 As in, for example, N. Ferguson, *Why the West Beat the Rest*, London 2011.
15 G. Steiner, *The Idea of Europe*, Tilburg 2004, 22.
16 For this and the following: Z. Kiaupa, *et al.*, *Geschichte des Baltikums*, Tallinn 2002.
17 Cf. P. Sztompka, *From East Europeans to Europeans: Shifting Identities and Boundaries in the New Europe*, Wassenaar 2004.
18 For example, his *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*, London 1973, with his *Afterthoughts*, Baltimore 1977, that was then elaborated as *Civilization and Capitalism*. Also, his *Grammaire des Civilisations*, Paris 1987. However, there is, I find, little of a really unifying concept behind Braudel's often rambling writings.
19 One may think of his *The Civilizing Process*, I–II, Oxford 1978, 1982, though these two volumes do seem to follow two different strands of thought.
20 Obviously, this is not to say that such theories cannot be fruitful. Yet I find, for example, G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*, London 1994, not entirely convincing.
21 Peter Rietbergen, 'Not of this world … ? Religious power and imperial rule in Eurasia, ca. thirteenth – ca. eighteenth century', in M. van Berkel, a. o. eds., *Prince, Pen and Sword. Eurasian Perspectives*, Leiden 2018, 129–296.
22 The dangers of such an approach are evident in the recent and surely ridiculous effort by H. Bloom, *The Western Canon*, New York 1994; of the 26 authors included, about three-quarters are Anglo-Saxon.
23 For a spirited defence of the historian's craft against some of the sillier post-Modernist claims, see R. Evans, *In Defense of History*, London 1994.
24 M. Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, Munich 1919, 1921.
25 Croce first explained this position in *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, Bari 1917, and in another context in *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, Bari 1938.
26 Mainly in M. Horkheimer, *Die gegenwärtige Lage der Sozialforschung*, Frankfurt 1931; Idem, *Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie*, Frankfurt 1937.
27 For example, A. Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, London 1997, 2006; and: K. Jenkins, *On 'What is History?'* London 1995, 2003.
28 These are the opening lines of Freud's 1915 essay 'Triebe und Triebschicksale':

> Wir haben oftmals die Forderung vertreten gehört, daß eine Wissenschaft über klaren und scharf definierten Grundbegriffen aufgebaut sein soll. In Wirklichkeit beginnt keine Wissenschaft mit solchen Definitionen, auch die exaktesten nicht. Der richtige Anfang der wissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit besteht vielmehr in der Beschreibung von Erscheinungen, die dann weiterhin gruppiert, angeordnet und in Zusammenhänge eingetragen werden. Schon bei der Beschreibung kann man es nicht vermeiden, gewisse abstrakte Ideen auf das Material anzuwenden, die man irgendwoher, gewiß nicht aus der neuen Erfahrung allein, herbeiholt. Noch unentbehrlicher sind solche Ideen – die späteren Grundbegriffe der Wissenschaft – bei der weiteren Verarbeitung des Stoffes. Sie müssen zunächst ein gewisses Maß von Unbestimmtheit an sich tragen; von einer klaren Umzeichnung ihres Inhaltes kann keine Rede sein. Solange sie sich in diesem Zustande befinden, verständigt man sich über ihre Bedeutung durch den wiederholten Hinweis auf das Erfahrungsmaterial, dem sie entnommen scheinen, das aber in Wirklichkeit ihnen unterworfen wird.

29 B. Geremek, *The Common Roots of Europe*, London 1996, gives an interesting, short survey of the genesis of the concept of Europe; he also argues that, at the

end of the twentieth century, the notion of European civilization is felt rather more strongly in central than in western Europe. Ph. Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe*, London 1992, goes into the long history of the diverging paths of east and west. E. Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty*, London 1994, seems to view the ancient German lands as the frontier region between east and west.

30 See also P. Burke, 'Did Europe exist before 1700?', *History of European Ideas*, 1 (1980), 21–9.

31 For example, A. Corbin, *Time, Desire and Horror*, Oxford 1995, viii–ix.

Part I

Continuity and change

New ways of surviving

1 Before 'Europe'

Towards an agricultural and sedentary society

Beginnings in Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, or the non-European origins of culture in Europe

Already in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European scholars were searching for the origins of man in a past far remote from and in developments more complex than the simple picture painted – and accepted by most of their contemporaries – in the first chapter of the Jewish Bible. To most Europeans, Holy Scripture still was the only touchstone of truth, teaching that the earth and man came into existence when God created the universe on the morning of a momentous day in the year 4004 BC.

In 1698, an English medical doctor, Edward Tyson, visited the docks in London – famous as a place where other, non-European worlds entered Europe – having heard that a chimpanzee was displayed there. When the animal died, he asked permission to dissect it. He studied all its forms and functions and compared these with those of humans. Observing many differences, he yet considered the number of similarities to be greater and more significant. His conclusion, in a book called *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris*, 'Orang-Outang, or the Wild Wood Man' (London 1699), was that a fundamental distinction between humans and certain simian types was scientifically untenable.[1] Tyson scrupulously refrained from elaborating on the dangerous implications of his observations for the traditional, i.e. religious view of man's history as the final, most perfect stage of God's creation. However, these cannot have escaped his more perspicacious readers.

In 1819, a young Dane, Christian Jurgensen Thomsen (1788–1865), was entrusted by the king with the task of classifying archaeological finds made in Denmark which by royal order were from now on to be sent to Copenhagen. Wondering how to comply with his instructions, Thomsen finally decided on a course of action that nowadays would be considered simple logic but at that time was not part of a European's mental framework: archaeological finds were mainly judged on their aesthetic merits and if they had none, were thrown away or otherwise destroyed. Thomsen, however, divided his objects according to their material and functional aspects. On the basis of this classification he concluded that the

three earliest stages of man's history should be termed the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, reflecting both growing technological skills and cultural progress. He presented this development as historically significant in itself, thus establishing the study of material culture and of man's past before the invention of writing as a topic of empirical, scientific study rather than of aesthetics.[2] Some scholars were enthusiastic but the general public could not yet share Thomsen's grand vision, deeming the objects he had analysed too primitive to be considered proof of anything that could be termed culture.

In 1847, the Frenchman Jean Boucher de Perthes published a book called *Antiquités celtiques et antediluviennes*, in which he described the findings of his excavations at Abbeville, on the Somme river. Although some acclaimed him as an original scientist, the larger public derided his ideas: how could one possibly accept that remnants of 'antediluvial man' remained and, moreover, remained in Europe?

In short, until well into the nineteenth century the above views and their implications were unacceptable, not to say repugnant, to most Europeans, even to the well-educated. 'Civilization', 'culture' – these words and concepts referred to the marble temples and the great philosophical constructions of the ancient Greeks, to the powerful, legal structures of the Romans, to the high moral standards propagated by the Christians. Cave dwellers, whose features were more ape-like than human and who worked with 'primitive' stone tools, simply did not fit into the European self-image. Yet, the progress of archaeological research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries eventually forced Europeans to drastically adjust that self-image, till the final, to many painful acceptance of the fact even that their ancestors had come from Africa, the continent viewed so long as a world of darkness, a world without culture.

Obviously, the question what distinguishes 'homo', man, from the chimpanzee – with the bonobo its nearest relative in the common 'hominid' ancestry, or pan-lineage – is much discussed, centring around such problems as what intelligence actually is, in relation to self-reflection, the ability to learn and to use that learning to improve one's existence, etc.[3] According to the latest findings and the often widely diverging interpretations that have been given to them by palaeologists, forms of the genus 'homo' who may have been the first to craft stone tools and later may have been the first to master the art of making fire and probably were also the first to engage in big game hunting, originated in Africa sometime between *c.*3,000,000 and 2,000,000 years ago, inhabiting large parts of the continent.[4]

Sometime around 1,800,000 years ago, later forms of 'homo', often called *homo erectus*, the 'upright human', moved out of the area in north-east Africa where, perhaps, migrations in search of food and a better clime had brought them, and into Eurasia, where recent finds have shown traces of him in Georgia but also in northern China. For all we now know, groups of them may have lived all over Eurasia.

Between 800,000 and 400,000 BC, some groups or perhaps only one, small group of *homo erectus* evolved into *homo Heidelbergensis* – where and when exactly is still under debate, but again Africa is a possibility – who, in turn, moved to Eurasia as well, as his name indicates, for the first fossils were found in 1908 near the German town of Heidelberg.

As late as *c.*400,000 years ago, another type of *homo erectus*, called *Neanderthal*-man, entered the scene, named after the valley near Düsseldorf, in Germany, where his remains were discovered. Actually, he too inhabited the vast stretch of Eurasia from France and Spain to Uzbekistan. Fossils give us an idea of his appearance: very robust and stocky, on average between 1.55 and 1.65 metres tall, with short legs and a long torso enabling him to cope with the dearth of food resources in winter, when he survived on fat reserves accumulated by gathering in seasons of relative plenty. Neanderthal man's brain-volume was, moreover, bigger than that of any other creature. He used these greater cranial capacities to develop a stone-based technology, consisting largely of prepared-core flaking, which indicates that he consciously planned his survival strategies.[5]

Influenced by the seasons, these earliest inhabitants of Eurasia, including Europe, travelled around their regions seeking semi-permanent shelter in caves. Gradually, 'conscious' habitation grew, especially with the coming of fire. But scholars are divided over the question of whether they already could speak, in the sense of producing distinct words with unambiguous meanings; if not, they would have lacked much of the communicative capacity that can, for instance, organize a hunter society, though, of course, sign language, that is often said to predate speech, may have served them well.

Till the 1980s and 1990s, scientists believed that none of the genetic material of these more recent representatives of *homo erectus* survived in the present population of the world; whether they became extinct through natural causes or because they could not compete with newer types of hominids was much discussed. The debates were the more confused because scholars also were discussing the origins – again out of *homo erectus*-forms – and the culture of what they called *homo sapiens*, dating back to some 300,000 years ago. This species is now understood to be the ancestor of all modern humans. Where and when did *homo sapiens* originate?[6] Also in (sub-) tropical Africa, from where groups of his species, too, started migrating in search of the kind of food that held the protein they needed. Fossils and DNA research show that small bands of them moved from present-day Eritrea to the Yemen – crossing the Red Sea, which at that time was partly dry land. From the Arab peninsula, men and women moved, gathering and hunting too, into Eurasia, reaching South Asia some 70,000 years ago. Adapting to the different climes they encountered, their skin colour took on a lighter or, conversely, a darker hue and some of them grew taller or, rather, became smaller; indeed, as recent as 2004 the remains of people of about one metre tall were discovered in Indonesia. Thus, the physical variety of *homo sapiens* was the result of multiple mutations.[7]

Only some 45,000 years ago – but again, new finds may alter this chronology – *homo sapiens* migrated from (West) Asia into Europe as well. In Europe, he is often called *Cro-Magnon*, named after the French site where he was discovered in 1868, though nowadays the description '(European) Early Modern Human' is more widely used because, anatomically and behaviourally, he belonged to the species of modern man. This migration happened at a specific 'moment' in time and was perhaps instigated or at least facilitated by it.

Periodically, the climate on earth enters an 'Ice Age'. Some 40,000 years ago, North and West Europe as well as the regions around the Alps and the Pyrenees once again were in the grip of a long period of harsh weather, with glaciers rapidly expanding from the principal mountain ranges. But during the following millennia, this Ice Age came to a climatically inevitable end, and the world gradually started to get warmer again. Precisely in these centuries, the most recent variety of *homo sapiens* slowly moved to the Mediterranean and the Balkans or into the Danube corridor, and from there entered Central and Western Europe.

There is an ongoing dispute about what occurred between the older inhabitants and the new ones. Till recently, many scholars argued that the Neanderthal people were unable to resist the newcomers, and soon disappeared entirely. We now know that for thousands of years the two groups intermingled, which accounts for Neanderthal genes still present in modern humans, today. Slowly, however, Neanderthal people did become extinct. Perhaps, in the long run, their groups – which, it should be noted, in a single generation may never have numbered more than 150,000 people, in all of Eurasia! – turned out to be less capable of surviving and were displaced, whether through natural causes or as a consequence of large-scale genocide at the hands of the newcomers, who, for example, if they had the capacity of language, may have had a definite organizational advantage. However, when this 'extinction' occurred and for how long before that the two species did live alongside one another is still being debated.

As proof of the changes that occurred in these millennia, archaeologists have found signs of a far more complex economy, society and culture. All over those regions of Eurasia where modern man now lived, big-game hunting as well as gathering clearly were the principal strategies for survival of these largely nomadic peoples; still, an early form of long-distance trade seems to have existed as well. Meanwhile, tools, both of stone and bone, and stone weaponry became more sophisticated: a more refined technology developed. Also, modern humans, including, that is, the 'new Europeans', looked for dwelling places other than caves. For example, open-air encampments with substantial huts made of wood and bone have been discovered on the plains of Bohemia and southern Russia as well as in France.

Even more fascinating is that 'early modern men' started to create symbolic representations both of themselves and of the world around them.[8] Paintings

made with natural pigments – another technological innovation – have been found on the walls of caves, concentrated mainly in southern France and northern Spain. Until 1995, the most revealing were considered to be those discovered at Lascaux by a group of adventurous boys in the summer of 1940. Others of the same kind are situated in the Pyrenees and at Spanish Altamira. In 1995, a new and even more spectacular find was made in the Ardèche: there, cave paintings depict all kinds of animals hitherto unknown in early Europe; they seem to date as far back as 30,000 years. However, the discussion over the interpretation of these artefacts is not yet settled, and probably never will be, if only because the terms used are, in a sense, not yet applicable to those times. Was it 'aesthetic', art for art's sake, or didactic, a means to instruct the young men and women of the tribe in the seasonal stages of a hunting economy, with references to the male and female elements in man and society? Then again, the caves may have been used as religious centres, where shamanistic rituals were enacted and where the paintings reflected trance-like voyages into the world of the animals that were essential to the survival of man.[9] The concentration of cave paintings in what, at that time, were apparently the most crowded areas of Europe – but again, we should realize that all people involved numbered perhaps a few thousand, only – may point to the need for ceremonial activities intended to integrate and coordinate the growing population.

However, though the fact that, from the nineteenth century onwards, such 'art' was found in Europe, only, often was interpreted as yet another sign that precisely the 'first Europeans' were unique in depicting their world, recent archaeological research has uncovered comparable and coeval forms of representation at the other extreme of Eurasia as well, thus undermining yet another claim of Europe's early superiority or, even, uniqueness.

Besides in painting, representations of humans and animals were also carved in bone and ivory, splendid examples of which, created in *c.*35,000 BC, were found in caves in southern Germany. The many so-called 'Venus' figures are especially fascinating. These female figurines, both stylized and naturalistic, have been found all over Central Europe. They may well point to the matrifocal character of these societies.

Did the early modern humans have speech, and language? As indicated above, the scholarly debate on the origins of language is fraught with vehemently expressed and often contradictory opinions.[10] Theories diverge widely, placing this evolutionary development anywhere between 400,000 and 100,000 BC. As speech preceded writing, there will probably never be any evidence for the exact period of its genesis. Yet anatomically, these people did have the apparatus necessary to produce the sort of vowels et cetera that constitute speech. Moreover, both the organization needed for hunting in a profitable way and the very complexity of the many artefacts or 'art' forms, pointing to a culture that used symbols, intriguingly suggest the possibility of forms of communication beyond mere sounds, gestures and images.

It is also noteworthy that these European/Eurasian cultures, precisely in the articulation of domestic structures and the various representational forms,

Figure 1.1 A deer's head in yellow, red, brown and black, from a cave painting at Niaux, France, dated *c.*20,000–10,000 BC. The artist has captured the animal with its head thrown back, its antlers thrust forward, preparing for attack – a scene which must have been part of prehistoric man's daily life.

Source: Centre for Art-historical Documentation/Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

already showed regional identities, which may have resulted in the formation of separate, self-conscious 'ethnic' groups. For we should not forget that Western and Central Europe's distinctive physical-geographical features must have favoured the genesis not only of culture in general – that, of course, came about everywhere – but also of incipiently diverse cultures. Unlike the vast steppes stretching from Ukraine and Russia to far-away Central Asia, these parts of Europe, a relatively small corner of the earth, showed an incredibly varied landscape: surrounded by seas on three of the four sides, criss-crossed by navigable rivers connecting the inland areas with those seas, it was a region with contrasting but congenial ecologies, with demanding and challenging climates, and with natural barriers that stimulated development through both seclusion and communication.

The advent of agriculture, temple and state

For hundreds of thousands of years, all humans were gatherers and, later, hunter-gatherers. So were the inhabitants of North Africa and the Near East until approximately 10,000 BC. In the Sahara, then not a desert but a humid and fertile region, living conditions were favourable and people continued to go on as they always had done, even developing the art of pottery. However, the Near East, the 'land bridge' that, though the Red Sea had become a real sea again, still allowed African man to move into Eurasia, was climatically and geographically somewhat less favoured, as it had been left relatively arid after the last Ice Age. People there had to start collecting wild grasses and grind them to get edible seeds; the skeletons of women found there show the spinal distortion this created. When the seeds were sown, first by chance and soon deliberately, agriculture had been 'invented'.[11]

The introduction of a cereal diet from *c.*9000 BC onwards allowed for population growth and, in turn, for the intensification of agriculture. This occurred in the Levantine region (Israel, Palestine, the Lebanon and Syria), in south-eastern Turkey, in southern Russia and in present-day Iraq. Whether similar developments took place in other parts of the world or whether agriculture spread from this one region is another of early history's great debates: many scholars hold that the 'invention' of agriculture occurred simultaneously in the Near East and in China, if only because climate and, hence, soil conditions were similar, there. Demonstrably, farming reached the western end of Eurasia from the Near East, first spreading to the coasts of the Black Sea, then still a fresh water lake. During the following millennia, it was taken up in the innumerable small coastal valleys of the eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean islands, in fact in almost all places where streams, running down from the mountains, deposited their sediment and could be used to irrigate the fields. From the eastern Mediterranean and the Danube basin, agriculture spread into parts of Italy, Spain and France, and into Central Europe.[12]

We only have archaeological evidence to document the slow transition to an agrarian economy and the changing lifestyles and new social and cultural forms that accompanied it. Still, the process can be reconstructed. It seems that soon after the introduction of agriculture in the Near East, irrigation – both natural and artificial – was used to ensure higher yields and animal husbandry, with the domestication of a limited number of crops and animals,[13] such as olives and vines, and woolly sheep. Certain nomadic or semi-nomadic groups now became sedentary, settling more or less permanently in villages, which they often surrounded by earthen or stone walls, if only to protect themselves against the hunter-gatherers with whom they competed for the use of the land.

Sometimes, these villages were quite large. Thus, for example, the ruins of Catalhöyük, in Anatolia, give evidence of what almost can be termed a town, built *c.*7000 BC by a people of Neolithic cattle breeders; it housed

a population of some 10,000 in small dwellings that were entered from the roof. Sculpture and gaily coloured frescos indicate that these people had thoughts that went far beyond mere physical survival. For reasons as yet unknown, the settlement was deserted some 2,000 years later.[14] Another famous example of an early town is the walled city of Jericho, in Palestine, which probably also dates as far back; as people continue to live there even now, it is sometimes referred to as the 'oldest inhabited town in the world'.

This settlement process was often accompanied by a transition to institutionalized private ownership of land. Although this certainly did not lead to just and humane structures as we view them, from a purely economic perspective this form of production has proven the most successful throughout human history: only if his own gain is ensured, man seems to be driven to produce a surplus that then becomes the basis for intricate social and cultural structures.

Where conditions for agriculture were particularly favourable, the most complex societies and specialized forms of organization did develop. The people of the great river valleys led the way: in Egypt, where the annual flooding of the Nile left a narrow strip of fertile mud in the desert from which farmers could reap a rich harvest; and in Mesopotamia, the 'Land between the two Rivers', namely the Euphrates and the Tigris. The latter not only provided plenty of water for artificial irrigation,[15] but, perhaps even more important, allowed for transport between another emerging food-producing area, coastal Syria. Together, these regions came to form what we now term the 'Fertile Crescent'. Soon, communities evolved which based their prosperity both on agriculture and on the manufacture of products not necessary for material well-being only, such as beautifully worked tools and weapons made of stone and later bronze, or finely crafted pottery for cooking and to store grain in. They also made added-value products that were ideologically important, to be bought and displayed by those who could afford to do so on the basis of their agriculturally produced surplus wealth: objects such as costly textiles, artful metalwork and jewellery set with precious stones. Thus, as surplus production enabled people to specialize in all kinds of manufacture, trade networks brought agricultural products and other man-made wares to those who specifically lacked or desired them.

Trade networks served as the logistic-economic context, with rivers, plied by rafts, or even sailing boats, playing a significant role, but also overland routes, plied by the newly-found forms of traction by camel and donkey. Inevitably, in these centuries, shipbuilding became one of the Mediterranean world's earliest great industries. But while ships were a means of transport, of commerce, they were also a major means of communicating other forms of culture. One of the earliest examples is the so-called Uluburun ship, a vessel constructed some 3,300 years ago, discovered in the 1980s on the Turkish south coast: it was found to carry wares from Italy, but also ivory and rhinoceros teeth from Africa, copper and tin (to make bronze) from Cyprus and spices from Asia. It probably was destined for the elites of the towns on

the Greek mainland.[16] Equally interesting, in making the trip to all the Mediterranean ports supplying or selling these products, the people aboard must have carried tales as well, telling about the peoples and cultures they encountered.

In these as yet mainly agricultural civilizations, which were entirely dependent on water and other natural resources, people were intensely interested in the heavenly bodies that determined night and day but, more importantly, governed the change of the seasons with the coming of the rains and the floods. In short, heaven held power over fertility, food, subsistence, life. Indeed, natural forces could change the existing cultures and systems entirely. When, some 4,200 years ago, one of the periodical Little Ice Ages occurred, the level of the Nile sank, precipitation dropped drastically and large parts of agricultural Egypt became deserts again. As harvests failed year after year, people probably blamed their rulers, those who, after having united the various parts of the Nile valley during the so-called Old Kingdom-period, had governed the country for many centuries. These now lost their power, to be replaced by new pharaohs only when the situation improved after some hundred years of poverty and chaos.

Natural changes could not yet be interpreted in any scientific way, at least not according to science as it is now defined.[17] Hence, people felt the situation to be a mystery both fascinating and tremendous. Consequently, religions developed that worshipped the forces of nature, especially the heavenly bodies, as magical, sacred. Soon, men who maintained they could make valid predictions of the movement of sun and moon, of winds and rain, or even claimed to be able to influence them were especially honoured. Dedicating themselves to studying and explaining these phenomena, they became magi, mediating between the divine and the human world. Farmers gladly gave them some of their surplus products hoping they would gain heaven's favour.[18] Frequently, these mediators developed into a closed caste of priests – and, sometimes, priestesses – basing their authority on hereditary knowledge. They administered the religion in which people came to express their relationship to the incomprehensible or ineffable, by creating gods. While the divine might keep its natural form – the celestial bodies or a river, a spring – it also came to be represented in man-made objects. At first, the gods were imagined, in painting and sculpture, as animals, reflecting the view of the world of a pastoralist-nomadic society. But in the agricultural communities of villages and, later, towns, anthropomorphic images were made as well. These were worshipped in ever more elaborately-built cult sites, often centred around mountains or mountain-like artificial structures to represent the idea that the gods lived on high, ruling both the skies and all that existed under them. To these sanctuaries, the faithful went with their gifts of grain or cattle. From these temples, the priests exercised a growing power over society.

In the most advanced agricultural civilizations, the first divisions of time, calendars, were created, obviously by priests, based on their thorough

scrutiny of the heavens. In the Nile delta the year was invented, consisting of 365 days divided into 12 months, each made up of 30 days with leap days to even out the differences. Thousands of years later, the Romans took over this system. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar introduced an improved version of the Egyptian calendar that, with several adjustments in later centuries, is still used in Europe and the entire Western world.

As some agricultural societies grew more complex, a more regulated form of administration became necessary, especially when the non-productive priests, no longer satisfied with periodical gifts, started asking farmers for fixed contributions in kind or in money to finance the cost of religious services, of increasingly sumptuous temples and, of course, of the clergy themselves.[19] Probably because of the bureaucratic needs of this kind of 'taxation' arising in these temple societies, the invention of some non-oral communication system to record and transmit data became a necessity. Famously, the Inca civilization of ancient Peru developed its system of knotted strings. But already at a far earlier stage, the river civilizations of India as well as, perhaps, the cultures of early China developed script. And at the same time, for necessitated by the same need for religious, economic and political-administrative communication, in the centuries between 3400 and 3200 BC complicated writing systems evolved both in Egypt, the Levant and Mesopotamia.

They were composed partly of simplified pictures (pictograms), partly of symbols (ideograms), partly of signs for syllables, and partly of one-letter signs. Egyptian 'hieroglyphics' – Greek for 'holy incisions' – were written on papyrus or inscribed in stone or clay tablets; this, and Sumerian 'cuneiform', named after the wedge-like signs used in its scripture, became the means of communication in the eastern Mediterranean. Soon, it ceased to be a 'holy' script, only; it was adapted to serve all kinds of economic needs, including the trade that connected the agricultural civilizations of Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia with, quite probably, north-western India as well.

In 1975, a team of Italian archaeologists searching the plains of north-western Syria discovered the ruins of the once-great town of Ebla. In it, they found the remains of a huge archive/library containing tens of thousands of clay tablets covered in cuneiform script, dating back to the middle of the third millennium BC. Its reconstruction shows that it is the first such ever found that was, also, systematically ordered, according to subject.[20] Thanks to the on-going research of these precious sources, we now know a lot more about the economic, political and cultural aspects of these early agricultural societies: their customs, their rituals, their food, and the way all aspects of life in this region developed through interaction with and between the other three main areas of civilization now existing in the Near East: the world around the Aegean Sea, Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Besides needing temples and priests to regulate relations between the natural and the supra-natural world, and some sort of scripture to record the obligations between mortals and gods and, soon, between men themselves, these societies also sought means of defence against internal unrest or external

attack. As the priests had done, those who took up military duties now also claimed part of the harvest and often appropriated land which tenant farmers – or more often slaves – had to work to ensure the livelihood and the military provisions of these men. A new social group who did not work with their hands was now born; they developed into a class of 'aristocrats' or 'nobles'. Soon, they competed with the priests over the exercise of power. Their leaders, sometimes turning into absolute monarchs, 'kings', often drew their authority from the interface between religious and military power. Divine faculties were often attributed to them since, like the priesthood, they too claimed to be able to comprehend and even predict the life-giving or denying forces of nature, more specifically the agricultural cycle and the prosperity it brought.

On the fertile borders of the Nile, the priestly monarch was the pharaoh, worshipped as 'son of the Sun'. The authority of these semi-divine rulers, who fused religious with military might, was such that – contrary to what was believed until recently – the peasantry built the enormous pyramids and temples erected in their name of their own free will: as paid labourers, well taken care of by an enormous organization and bureaucracy operating on the Giza plateau.

In the numerous city-states that between them possessed the fertile lands of Mesopotamia, priestly elites initially ruled all. On their initiative, the gigantic, terraced temple-mountains were built of brick tiles, the local material: the traces of these adobe structures still dot the erstwhile rich countryside, much of it now returned to a desert state. In later centuries these priest-kings had to share their power with – or even completely relinquish it to – leaders emerging from the military caste who, however, nearly always induced or forced the priests to divinely legitimize their government in all kinds of mythical stories and returning religious rituals.

On the islands of the Aegean and all around its shores, royal civilizations also flourished: in the fertile valleys of Mycenae and Tiryns on the Peloponnese as well as on Crete where, besides agriculture, sea-trade became an important source not only of income but also of contact with other cultures, as witnessed by the Cretan-style frescos with the characteristic bull-fighting scenes found in some of Egypt's palaces.[21] Since the 1970s, Cretan civilization has become a hot topic again. In the 1930s, when the English archaeologist Arthur Evans discovered and 'restored' the ruins of the palace of Knossos, he interpreted this city's culture as a matriarchy, characterized by peace, a society of youthful, elegant men and women – perhaps unconsciously recasting them in the image he had of an ideal English society. Nowadays, there is evidence of another, rather different side to the Cretan world: one wherein children were sacrificed and the followers of the various goddesses violently fought one another for supreme power.[22]

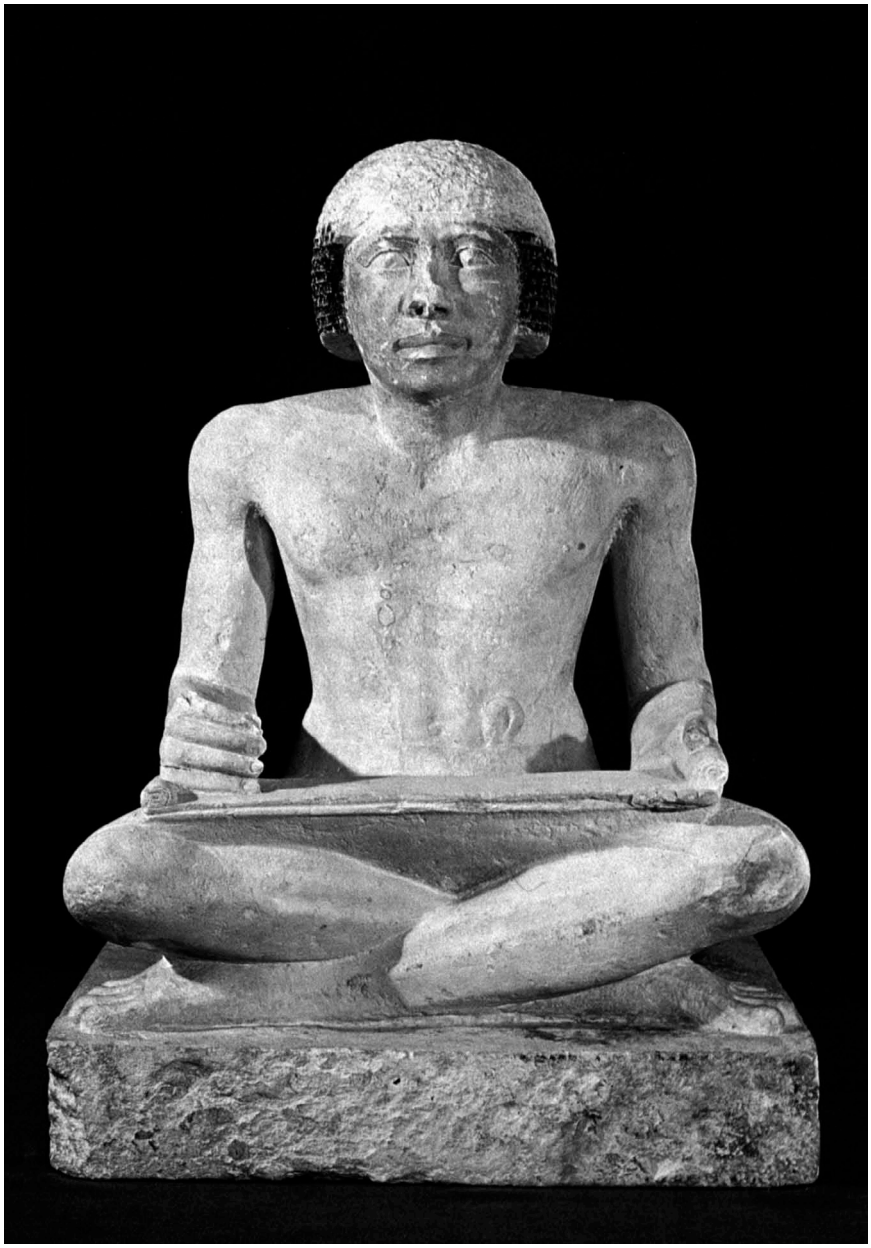

Figure 1.2 Limestone statue of the scribe Heti with a papyrus scroll, showing traces of the original painted decoration. It can be dated to Egypt's 15th dynasty, i.e. *c.*3–2000 BC. Such statues proclaim the importance of a class of literate men for the functioning of the religious and secular bureaucracy of early temple-states such as pharaonic society.

Source: Centre for Art-historical Documentation/Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

The further development of the structure we now know as 'the state' was made possible by two interconnected phenomena occurring within the partly agricultural, partly commercial temple-societies described above: the development of new writing systems – for example, the Cretans, too, devised their own script, known as 'linear A', which has not yet been deciphered – and the gradual extension of large-scale trade, together with the introduction of coinage. The former enabled the elaboration and, more important, the codification of law to regulate the inevitably increasing disputes over property and inheritance. The latter soon demanded the creation of accounting and credit facilities. Together, these formed the basis for a fiscal-administrative system that could support large armies which, aided by good communication systems and proper logistics, helped states to increase their power, both internally and externally, and thus to expand. Indeed, under Thutmosis III (r. 1479–1425 BC), Egypt became a veritable empire, conquering the Sudan as well as Palestine and Syria. But both pharaonic Egypt and the city-states of Mesopotamia and the Aegean, by their growing power and wealth increasingly attracted the unwelcome attention of outsiders from Central Eurasia, be they driven by hunger or greed. To assess the partly long-term influence of these 'migrants', we must return to a much earlier period.

Invasion, conquest and change: the first Eurasian wave

Around 5000 BC, the 'Pontic steppes', the region now comprising southern Ukraine and southern Russia, bounded by the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, were inhabited by tribal, nomadic-pastoralist peoples. After the burial tumuli they built, they are named 'Kurgan' in Russian. Their language is lost now, but scholars have hypothesized it as proto-Indo-European, to mean it was the origin of a number of languages spoken at later times both in Europe and in parts of the Near and Middle East – in present-day Turkey as well as in Iran – and in India. Linguists have discovered striking parallels between these languages, in the words used for such diverse fields of culture as kinship relations and agricultural practice, pottery and numerals. This may indicate that, over a period of two millennia, successive groups from among the Kurgan peoples migrated to the West and East, as well as southwards.[23] Other scholars claim that people much like them in culture, but perhaps inhabiting a region slightly further south, in eastern Turkey and northern Iraq and Iran, were the ones to start these migrations and the spread of the languages which resulted in the tongues now spoken in Europe and parts of Asia.[24]

These tribes were ruled by military elites who maintained their power by, among other things, the use of a new invention: their horse-drawn chariots, which altered the art of warfare. Although their economy included some agriculture and various forms of barter trade, it consisted mainly of cattle-grazing; consequently, they led a frugal life of near-subsistence on their vast tundra- or steppe-like plains. Worshipping the sun and the sky gods, they