

THE INSTITUTE FOR ANACYCLOSIS

EXCERPT FROM
THE HISTORY OF ROME
BY THEODOR MOMMSEN

1854 A.D.

Note: This text begins with a conception of a great cycle of civilization which swept the principal cultures of the Mediterranean Basin into a socioeconomic convergence. This socioeconomic convergence is today known as the Roman Empire. Other passages below illustrate this confluence of history through the metaphor of converging streams. Those passages connect awareness of this historical phenomenon with Polybius, the author of Anacyclosis. One of the more conceptually difficult problems in the study of Anacyclosis is the selection of the proper unit of analysis. The founder of The Institute at first naively applied Anacyclosis only against the Westphalian nation-state, but later came to realize that all peoples at a similar stage of socioeconomic development, despite differences of language, culture, nationality, etc., react similarly to similar socioeconomic stimuli. Because Anacyclosis is concerned with questions of socioeconomic causality, the unit of analysis for Anacyclosis must transcend such barriers. This does not mean that it is not important to analyze the respective histories of the various constituent cultures and nations which eventually merge together to form an integrated socioeconomic unit. But the full comprehension of Anacyclosis cannot be attained on that narrow scale. The study of Anacyclosis, as a universal history, encompasses all gradations of socioeconomic existence as they compete and converge from the smaller scale to the highest scale, from tribes to kingdoms to states to empires. The text below is a great aid in conceptualizing how the different streams of socioeconomic history in the Mediterranean Basin coalesced over time into a single dominant stream of socioeconomic history. Many different cultures having many languages, many currencies, many governments, and many enemies merge into one dominant and integrated political entity with no serious threats, one currency, and few languages, as the Roman Empire did in the past, and as Western Civilization does today. That it was Rome that became the lead power was an accident of history, but that there would be a lead power was inevitable. Mommsen uses dates according to the Varronian chronology. References to notes in text have been omitted.

Book I. The Period Anterior to the Abolition of the Monarchy. Chapter I. Introduction. Ancient History

The Mediterranean Sea with its various branches, penetrating far into the great Continent, forms the largest gulf of the ocean, and, alternately narrowed by islands or projections of the land and expanding to considerable breadth, at once separates and connects the three divisions of the Old World. The shores of this inland sea were in ancient times peopled by various nations belonging in an ethnographical and philological point of view to different races, but constituting in their historical aspect one whole. This historic whole has been usually, but not very appropriately, entitled the history of the ancient world. It is in reality the history of civilization among the Mediterranean nations; and, as it passes before us in its successive stages, it presents four great phases of development—the history of the Coptic or Egyptian stock dwelling on the southern shore, the history of the Aramaean or Syrian nation which occupied the east coast and extended into the interior of Asia as far as the Euphrates and Tigris, and the histories of the twin-peoples, the Hellenes and Italians, who received as their heritage the countries on the European shore. Each of these histories was in its earlier stages connected with other regions and with other cycles of historical evolution; but each soon entered on its own distinctive career. The surrounding nations of alien or even of kindred extraction—the Berbers and Negroes of Africa, the Arabs, Persians, and Indians of Asia, the Celts and Germans of Europe—came into manifold contact with the peoples inhabiting the borders of the Mediterranean, but they neither imparted unto them nor received from them any influences exercising decisive effect on their respective destinies. So far, therefore, as cycles of culture admit of

demarcation at all, the cycle which has its culminating points denoted by the names Thebes, Carthage, Athens, and Rome, may be regarded as an unity. The four nations represented by these names, after each of them had attained in a path of its own a peculiar and noble civilization, mingled with one another in the most varied relations of reciprocal intercourse, and skilfully elaborated and richly developed all the elements of human nature. At length their cycle was accomplished. New peoples who hitherto had only laved the territories of the states of the Mediterranean, as waves lave the beach, overflowed both its shores, severed the history of its south coast from that of the north, and transferred the centre of civilization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean. The distinction between ancient and modern history, therefore, is no mere accident, nor yet a mere matter of chronological convenience. What is called modern history is in reality the formation of a new cycle of culture, connected in several stages of its development with the perishing or perished civilization of the Mediterranean states, as this was connected with the primitive civilization of the Indo-Germanic stock, but destined, like the earlier cycle, to traverse an orbit of its own. It too is destined to experience in full measure the vicissitudes of national weal and woe, the periods of growth, of maturity, and of age, the blessedness of creative effort in religion, polity, and art, the comfort of enjoying the material and intellectual acquisitions which it has won, perhaps also, some day, the decay of productive power in the satiety of contentment with the goal attained. And yet this goal will only be temporary: the grandest system of civilization has its orbit, and may complete its course but not so the human race, to which, just when it seems to have reached its goal, the old task is ever set anew with a wider range and with a deeper meaning. ...

Book IV. The Revolution. Chapter XIII. Literature and Art. Historical Composition. Polybius

In historical composition this epoch is especially marked by the emergence of an author who did not belong to Italy either by birth or in respect of his intellectual and literary standpoint, but who first or rather alone brought literary appreciation and description to bear on Rome's place in the world, and to whom all subsequent generations, and we too, owe the best part of our knowledge of the Roman development. Polybius (c. 546-c. 627) of Megalopolis in the Peloponnesus ... seemed educated, as it were, by destiny to comprehend the historical position of Rome more clearly than the Romans of that day could themselves. From the place which he occupied, a Greek statesman and a Roman prisoner, esteemed and occasionally envied for his Hellenic culture by Scipio Aemilianus and the first men of Rome generally, he saw the streams, which had so long flowed separately, meet together in the same channel and the history of the states of the Mediterranean resolve itself into the hegemony of Roman power and Greek culture. ...

Book V. The Establishment of the Military Monarchy. Chapter XII. Religion, Culture, Literature, and Art. The Roman Alexandrinism

... the mighty streams of Greek and Latin nationality, after having flowed in parallel channels for many centuries, now at length coalesced ...

Id. Universal History. Nepos

... the conception of Helleno-Italic history as an unity, in which Polybius was so far in advance of his age, was now learned even by Greek and Roman boys at school. But while the Mediterranean state had found a historian before it had become conscious of its own existence, now, when that consciousness had been attained, there did not arise either among the Greeks or among the Romans any man who was able to give to it adequate expression. ...

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