

A Scintillating Synthesis

Osterhammel's *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* taught me more than any other book of comparable size (1167 large pages with small print) that I have read in the last two decades. The long 19th century began in 1776 or 1789 and ended in 1919 and until empires prevailed over national states.

Well balanced, it combines some of Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean in the Age of Philip the Second's* techniques with those of Neo Marxists such as Eric Hobsbawm, and Marx's most profound critic, Max Weber. This is not surprising because O's doctoral supervisor was a Mommsen, who was related to Max Weber.

Organised into three parts: *Approaches, Panoramas* and *Themes*, this synthesis first appeared as *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte 19. Jahrhunderts* (C.H. Beck, Munich) in January 2009, now being translated into Chinese, French, Polish and Russian. The tome is particularly strong on O's own earlier research: the final phase of British 'Informal Imperialism' in China, and the role of Asia in the thinking of the European Enlightenment. The British historian J.R. Seeley in 1883 stated: "We seem to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind." But I believe that he is wrong in the case of Hitler, Napoleon, Genghis Khan or Attila the Hun.

Unlike John Darwin's *After Tamerlane*, O. subscribes to Admiral Mahan's theory about the influence of seapower in history. Believing that national greatness is inextricably associated with the sea, with its commercial usage in peace and its control in war, the Admiral's works are omitted from O's bibliography.

Unfortunately, neither the index nor the bibliography is complete. Astoundingly there's no mention of Homer, Sigmund Freud, Isambard Kingdom Brunel (who appears as the second most famous Briton to Churchill in a recent poll), or Karl Marx. Osterhammel's most glaring error is his insistence that no more slaves were imported into the US after January 1808, unfortunately commonly repeated by many so-called experts in American history. In fact over 250,000 were. On page 251, O. confuses the 4th with the 1st Crusade.

On page 277, he claims that seaports were rarely centers of culture, forgetting not only Boston and New York but Tyre, Athens, Alexandria, Byzantium, Edinburgh, Venice, Antwerp, Amsterdam, London and now even Shanghai. O., for a 21st century historian, is prudish and squeamish about sex and homosex. He also, mercifully, doesn't say much about feminist and LGBTTTQ theory.