

Today's Issues Readings for June 16, 2019

The Today's Issues group will not be meeting on Sunday June 9, it will resume on Sunday June 16 to discuss two essays from the June 6 issue of the New York Review of Books

Page 28, Peter Brown, "Cities that Touched Heaven," about the cities of the ancient Middle East, including discussion of a current exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum in New York
Page 33, Arne Applebaum, "The Lure of Western Europe," a review of a book about western Europe from 1950 to 2017

The group meets at 9:30 on Sunday mornings in the religious education building next to the church. Please do the readings and join our lively discussion.

A copy of the readings is attached.

Cities That Touched Heaven Peter Brown JUNE 6, 2019 ISSUE

The World Between Empires: Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East

an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, March 18–June 23, 2019

Catalog of the exhibition by Blair Fowlkes-Childs and Michael Seymour

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 310 pp., \$65.00 (distributed by Yale University Press)

The Iranian Expanse: Transforming Royal Identity Through Architecture, Landscape, and the Built Environment, 550 BCE–642 CE

by Matthew P. Canepa

University of California Press, 494 pp., \$95.00

The Last Pagan Emperor: Julian the Apostate and the War Against Christianity

by H.C. Teitler

Oxford University Press, 271 pp., \$29.95

Ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra, 2009

Dario Bajurin/Alamy

The ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra in 2009, many of which were destroyed by ISIS militants in 2015

The Metropolitan Museum has once again brought us back to the Middle East—to a cradle of civilization that, by a cruel turn of history, has become a scene of hatred, destruction, and cold-blooded pillage. It is not often that a landscape is conjured up at the very moment when many of its best-known monuments have been leveled with dynamite and its ancient ruins pock-marked with looters' pits. At Palmyra in present-day Syria, for instance, satellite photos showed the erasure of the mighty temple of Bel, once the heart of the ancient city. On August 27, 2015, it was there. On August 31, it was not. The massive platform on which the temple had stood for 1,900 years was empty: nothing remained but a gray smear of dust. A little earlier, Khaled el-Asaad, the retired director of antiquities at Palmyra, had been executed by members of ISIS for having "refused to give information as the militants searched for saleable objects."

All this was shockingly visible. But already in the 1980s, Palmyra, once acclaimed as the “Venice of the Sands,” was also the site of the notorious Tadmor Prison, where the death squads of Hafez al-Assad did their work, silently and underground, only half a mile from the temple. We should enter this exhibition gingerly—we are still walking on volcanic land.

One cannot praise enough the enterprise of Blair Fowlkes-Childs and Michael Seymour in bringing together an unrivaled assembly of objects to depict a Middle East very different from the one we now know. “The World Between Empires” covers the period from the second century BCE to the third century CE, when the Middle East was divided between two adjacent empires—Rome and Persia.

The exhibition takes us on a journey, region by region, from Yemen to the great routes across Syria that joined the Mediterranean to Mesopotamia. It is a spacious display, full of relatively small objects loaned from all over Europe and the US. It shows that, despite loose talk by modern experts, there was no “clash of civilizations,” no irrevocable conflict of East and West between the two empires. Like Sumo wrestlers pitching their gigantic bulk against each other within a narrow ring, the two superpowers stayed on the mat. Their maneuvering for position seldom escalated into total war. This happened twice, first when the Roman emperor Trajan lunged to the head of the Persian Gulf in 116 CE, and again when the cavalry of the Persian king Shapur I broke loose to ravage northern Syria in the middle of the third century. More usually, neither empire aimed at the outright conquest, and still less at the annihilation, of its rival.

On either side of the frontier, empire of some sort had existed from time immemorial—as all-embracing as the sky, and usually as distant. Accustomed to loyalty to one superpower or the other, the populations of the Middle East settled down to a period of prosperity that is all the more poignant to us because it was based on factors no longer operative in modern times. They require some leap of the imagination to understand. Fowlkes-Childs and Seymour encourage us to turn our backs, if only for a moment, on the blinding glare of those modern notions we bring to the study of the Middle East.

For instance, this was a world without the stridency of modern nation-states. Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, and Israel did not exist other than as fluid geographical terms. Great temple-cities, linked across deserts by caravans and, in fertile areas, by royal roads, sucked up the water and the food provided to each by its own ecological niche. Loyalty to their city was the nearest thing that any of the inhabitants of this network of settlements, from Antioch to Babylon, could come to “nationalism.”

Languages rose and fell without being closely tied to ethnic identities, and still less to state systems. What mattered, in this great echo chamber of old and new cities, was finding a common language in which to trade, to govern, to boast of social status, and to explore the good things of life. Ever since the days of Alexander, Greek had been the common language of the elites of western Asia, from the Mediterranean to Afghanistan. It did not penetrate deeply

below the elites, but like French in ancien régime Europe, Greek was the Stradivarius among languages—all aspects of life could resound in their full richness when expressed in it. Even under the Roman Empire, Latin remained peripheral to the Middle East. Speakers of Arabic and Aramaic slipped easily into Greek. Cuneiform tablets—the world’s most ancient documents—continued to be produced in Uruk and Babylon, but many tablets were accompanied by Greek translations and were written in a language studded with Greek loanwords.

Greco-Roman architecture, in its most refined forms, takes travelers by surprise when they visit landscapes that seem as distant from those of Greece and Rome as the face of the moon. Those who have made their way into the Nabataean city of Petra and have climbed the ridge to look down on the awe-inspiring desolation of the Wadi Arabah find it strangely disorienting to meet, in this wild place, a series of rock-cut tombs (now called the Deir, or monastery) that are carved in clean golden stone, in a classical style reminiscent of Regency Bath. Yet no prince regent, and no ladies and gentlemen from the novels of Jane Austen, have been here. Rather, these were the tombs of the tough masters of the caravans that carried the spices of India from the ports of the Gulf of Aqaba up to the Mediterranean.

Descending from the Deir to the middle of the city, we find, near a temple court that bore exquisite Greek sculptures of Venus and of Dionysus, a votive offering to al-‘Uzza, the Arab Venus, that is as stark a pattern of two great eyes, vertical nose, and pursed lips as a Brancusi. It is among the most arresting objects in the Met exhibition. It was meant to catch the attention of a goddess. The inscription in Nabataean—not in Greek—makes this plain: “The goddess of Hayyan, son of Nybat.”

For there was another aspect of this forgotten Middle East that fills us with sharp regret for the present. It was a region of remarkable religious diversity. In Dura-Europos (where the palace of the Dux Ripae, the Duke of the Roman Bank, hangs like a Rhine castle over the wide Euphrates in modern-day Syria), a peaceful pluralism seems to have prevailed. In the 1930s excavators of the Yale University expedition led by the great Russian émigré scholar Mikhail Rostovtzeff uncovered a city honeycombed with shrines great and small. They found Mithras, Hadad, Atargatis, and a trio of Palmyrene gods. Each of the three gods was punctiliously dressed in the armor of a *clibanarius*, or “boiler boy,” as they were known, because of their heavy mail (see illustration on page 29). First appearing on the steppes of Central Asia, these armored horsemen were the precursors of the medieval knight.

More surprising yet, in 1932 the Yale expedition found, at a time when it was thought by scholars that no Jewish religious art had existed in the ancient world, a large Jewish synagogue, covered from floor to ceiling with narrative frescoes (and miraculously sealed in the earth supporting the western wall of the city against Persian attack). Not far from this impressive building, a smaller house had been converted into a Christian church, with frescoes that showed the miracles of Christ.

It is worth lingering on this seemingly limitless religious exuberance. Modern persons tend to see the cities of the Middle East in terms of trade networks. Cities such as Palmyra have been described as “caravan cities.” The idea that the Middle East owed much of its prosperity to its location at the western end of a Silk Road that stretched without interruption from Syria to China attracts us. It has become something of a mantra, calculated to cast a euphoric glow—of progress, interconnectivity, and tolerance—on the regions through which this magic road is imagined to have passed.

In reality, what we moderns tend to call “caravan cities” and “trading hubs” saw themselves, rather, as temple-cities. They drew their pride (and much of their revenue) from being thought of as special places where earth was joined to heaven, and the human race partook, for a moment, in the power and happiness of a diverse population of immemorial gods. Though devoted to Jehovah alone, the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem was only one such place that rang with shouts of joy, in an air heavy with perfume and the smoke of sacrifice. To understand the Middle East up to and beyond the year 300 CE, we must think away the victories of Christianity and, later, of Islam. We must fill innumerable cities and villages with temples surrounded by heaving crowds gathered to worship the gods with billowing clouds of incense, boisterous processions, and bouts of merry drinking.

This diffuse religiosity is what made the caravans that brought frankincense from Yemen to the Mediterranean so lucrative. Created in a unique ecological niche—where the monsoon mists of the Indian Ocean swirled around resin-producing trees on the hills outside Sana’a—incense could mean different things to different people. Emperors burned it in huge potlatch bonfires to delight the citizens of Rome. Doctors used it in their remedies: Glen Bowersock, with his sharp scholar’s eye, found two hundred references to frankincense in the works of the great doctor Galen of Pergamon (129–199 CE).¹

But frankincense was more than that. Just as light or the glow of gold was thought of as the purest material reflection on earth of the spiritual world—so that a temple or a church filled with light contained nothing less than “frozen God”—so the smell of incense was matter at its most ethereal, closest to the sweetness of the gods. Incense formed a delicate bridge between the human and the divine. In a world crowded with hostile as well as with benign presences, incense acted as a repellent to drive off demons. No wonder that it rose in billows in the temples of the Middle East.

After years of work at Dura, Rostovtzeff traveled to India in 1937. He was amazed by what he found. As he wrote to his friend George Vernadsky:

What struck me above all in India is the life of that [which] I have studied all my life as a destroyed, ruined past.... In the Indian temples, especially in South India, it is all alive. Enormous temples—just like the temples of the Syrian cities—with hundreds of Brahmins, temple servants, dancing girls, musicians, temple prostitutes, beggars, pilgrims of both sexes.

Temples where incense is burning.... Temples where religious ceremonies are carried out each day....2

The sight of living temples relieved the great scholar's soul. They also challenge the historian to think more about the social and economic function of temple-cities. In the second and third centuries CE, great temples stretched in a continuous arc, from Baalbek in Lebanon to Tamil Nadu. But "temple economies" were not exotic products only of the East. As the medieval scholar Ian Wood has recently shown in a challenging monograph, in the Christian form of monasteries and pilgrim shrines, temple economies played a crucial part in the economic and social development of medieval Europe.³ How was it that the Middle East, the western half of that great continuum of ancient worship, was torn off in the years after 300 CE?

Two recent books give partial answers to this huge question. Matthew Canepa's *The Iranian Expanse* is a highly original study of the manner in which the succession of rulers of Iran, from the time of the Achaemenids (550–330 BCE) to that of the Sasanians (224–651 CE), manipulated collective memory through the creation of stunning monuments at important locations in their empires. All across the Iranian plateau, carefully sited palaces and impressive rock carvings conveyed political and historical messages that were all the more potent for seeming to grow, with un verbalized power, from the landscape itself. By making these landscapes speak, Canepa enables us to see the world not with Roman eyes (as is usually the case) but with Persian eyes, looking out over the Middle East from the immense plateau of Iran.

Relief with Three Palmyrene Gods, first century CE

Musée du Louvre, Paris/RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource

'Relief with Three Palmyrene Gods'; limestone, first century CE

Canepa is at his best when discussing the Sasanian dynasty, which did the most to challenge Rome for control of the Middle East. Under the Sasanians, man and nature were brought together to produce spectacular sites. At Taq-e Bostan (near the city of Kermanshah in modern-day Iran), great rock carvings seem to emerge of their own accord from the cliff face at just those points where the shimmer of water and a splash of vivid green break the monotony of the bone-dry land. In Firuzabad, a palace and a perfectly circular city sit, like a great compass, in the middle of a natural amphitheater, where a shimmering line of distant peaks hints at a measureless world beyond. The palace and fire temple of Takht-e Soleyman, set in the caldera of an extinct volcano in Iranian Kurdistan, take possession of the top of the world, as the foothills of the Zagros mountains descend, in great steps, to the plains of Iraq and Syria.

The Sasanians themselves saw such sites, which impress us with their uncanny sense of place, as points where the hidden will of the Zoroastrian deity Ahura Mazda (in the spirit world) was made manifest by the visible will of the King of Kings. Yet Canepa shows how the Sasanians, at the same time as they made their rule seem as solid as the timeless rocks, strove to eclipse the memory of their immediate predecessors, the Parthians, who had ruled from the third century BCE to 224 CE. Indeed, the Sasanians were, he writes, the "authors of some of the most profound caesuras in cultural memory that ancient Western Asia experienced." They replaced a

variety of local cults with a “reformed” Zoroastrian orthodoxy, defined by the king and his spiritual advisers. Altogether they brought a new, more strenuous mood to the conduct of government, war, and diplomacy in every part of their huge empire.

Shapur I (circa 215–272 CE) meant business on a truly global scale. His armored cavalry crashed into Syria as far as Antioch. The rock carvings at Naqsh-e Rostam and Bishapur show him receiving the homage of a succession of defeated Roman emperors. In 260, he even took the emperor Valerian captive with his own hands. Standing by itself at the end of the exhibition at the Metropolitan, an exquisite small cameo from the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris shows Shapur I in a moment of epic glory—at the charge, the pennant-like ribbons that represented the charisma of the king fluttering behind him, as he grasps the Roman emperor by the wrist.

But that was not all. A rock carving discovered in 2002 in Afghanistan (at Rag-e Bibi, north of Kabul off the road to Mazar-e Sharif) showed Shapur I hunting a rhinoceros. The rhinoceros stood for the kingdom of the Kushans, based in North India, whom he had driven from Afghanistan. At the two ends of western Asia, the defeat of Roman emperors in Syria and of the Kushans in Afghanistan meant, for Shapur I, the visible fulfillment of the will of Ahura Mazda on earth.

The politics of the Middle East took on a new urgency. The Roman and Sasanian Empires felt themselves to be permanently preparing for or engaging in war. Both empires were ruled by leaders who claimed direct inspiration from God. In this more streamlined world, the Big Easy of temple-cities seemed wasteful, even immoral. It was enough that divine guidance should come directly from heaven, through a ruler and his chosen cadre of priests. Shapur I had allied himself with a section of the Mazdaean clergy of Iran who claimed to be the bearers of a reformed and more authoritative version of the teachings of Zoroaster. Only a generation after Shapur, from 312 onward, the Roman emperor Constantine did much the same. Claiming to be personally preserved and inspired by Christ, he turned away from the temples and lavished privileges on the Christian clergy.

Both Shapur and Constantine were revolutionaries who claimed to be saving the ancient empires they ruled. Shapur I placed his rock carvings beside the tombs of the Achaemenids at Naqsh-e Rostam to claim a link with the deep past. But with his aggressive imperial ideology and alliance with the Zoroastrian clergy, he had already stepped across a chasm into a new world. Constantine wished to be seen as a new Augustus, but he also saw himself as the ruler of a yet better, because Christian, empire, cut loose from its pagan past.

Hence the interest of a book on the one man who thought that he could step across that chasm to bring back the age of temples and gods—Constantine’s nephew Julian. Julian ruled the Roman world from 361 to 363. He was killed when leading a major expedition into Persian Mesopotamia. Haris Teitler’s *The Last Pagan Emperor: Julian the Apostate and the War Against Christianity* is an impeccably scholarly work. It establishes in great detail, and with a certain dry

humor, the fact that most of the martyrdoms said to have been undergone by Christians during the reign of the apostate emperor were mere fairy tales invented by Christians of a later age. Julian the Apostate, despite his sinister moniker, was never a persecutor of the church.

Each bogus martyrdom receives an entire chapter of careful demolition. The reader—and especially any reader who visits the village of Saint-Élophé (near Toul, in northern France)—may rest assured: Saint Eliphios was not decapitated on October 16, 362; nor did he walk “a few hundred meters...with his severed head in his hands...to the place where Eliphios surrendered his spirit.” Such small certainties are reassuring. They show the modern scholar at work in full command of the tools of his trade—meticulous source criticism, mastery of chronology and of Roman law. But what does the book tell us about Julian?

First and foremost, an approach to Julian that no longer sees him as a persecutor of the church makes us realize how much his attitude toward Christianity was a family matter. The Christianity that he hated was no great church arrayed throughout the empire: it was the Christianity of his uncle Constantine (whom he despised as a self-indulgent show-off) and of his cousin Constantius II, who rose to power by murdering his relatives—one of whom might easily have been himself. Far from wishing to combat Christianity by turning paganism into a sort of “anti-church,” as Teitler claims, Julian’s principle concern was to out-Constantine Constantine by transferring to pagan priests the system of privileges that Constantine had lavished on the churches—tax-exempt status and generous corn doles with which, quite frankly, to buy up the population of entire cities. In the intensely hierarchical society of the later Roman Empire, the abrupt withdrawal of the privileges that had bolstered the social position of the Christian clergy was probably the most demoralizing “persecution” of all. Those who faced undramatic *déclassement* through bureaucratic rulings were likely to relish and to circulate fictional stories of blood-and-guts martyrdoms.

And what did a young man of the 340s and 350s actually know about the ancient worship of the gods? Julian’s covert abandonment of Christianity (which probably happened when he was twenty) went hand in hand with a conversion to “philosophy.” In the ancient world, conversion to philosophy did not simply mean a change of mind. It meant a change of life as drastic as conversion to a religious order in modern times. The beard and the dark cloak of the philosopher were as much a sign of a special lifestyle as the dog collar and the tonsure. And this conversion took him into more than usually esoteric, Neoplatonic, spiritualist circles for whom much of paganism itself seemed grossly “material” and in need of reformation. Whenever he met traditional paganism, he was dissatisfied with it. Crossing the Middle East in 363, he was struck, when passing Batnae, by the “fumes of frankincense...on all sides.” Far from being cheered up, he added that “it looked to me like overheated zeal, and alien to proper reverence for the gods.”⁴

Too much frankincense! I suspect that if Julian had returned from his Persian expedition, he would have spent as much time “reforming” his own pagan cults (much as Shapur I had reformed the Zoroastrian clergy) as persecuting the Christians.

But he did not return. Moving into the Middle East, Julian, for all his charisma and courage as a leader, was trapped in the logic of an ancient landscape. The bitter critic of Constantius II found himself at the head of an expedition as complicated as the Schlieffen Plan, many parts of which may have been laid down years ahead by his despised cousin. He reached Babylon only to find his army sinking into the mud of a crisscrossed system of canals that joined the Tigris to the Euphrates. Retreating north to avoid the insect-ridden swamps, Julian was struck down by a javelin, possibly thrown by an Arab from a tribe allied to the Persians. He fell a victim to the sharpened sense of confrontation between Rome and Persia that had followed the revival of Iran under Shapur I. The apostate emperor was only the most romantic, but by no means the last, of thousands of soldiers caught in the meat grinder of war, which was, alas, the other side of life in a world between empires.

The Lure of Western Europe Anne Applebaum JUNE 6, 2019 ISSUE

The Global Age: Europe 1950–2017

by Ian Kershaw

Viking, 670 pp., \$40.00

Berlin Wall, November 1989

Magnum Photos

The Berlin Wall, November 1989; photograph by Raymond Depardon

By the spring of 1952, the “iron curtain” that Winston Churchill had described as descending on the eastern half of Europe—“from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic”—already felt impenetrable, even permanent. In that year, Czech courts condemned to death Rudolf Slansky, the secretary-general of the Czech Communist Party, for alleged participation in a “Trotskyite-Titoist-Zionist” conspiracy. The East German Communist Party adopted a new economic policy, the “Planned Construction of Socialism.” Harry Truman warned the US Congress of the “terrible threat of aggression” from the Soviet Union; across the Atlantic, the brand-new NATO alliance was preparing to accept a rearmed West Germany.

But 1952 was also the moment when the concept of “the West”—the liberal democratic bloc, unified by economic ties and a military alliance, staunchly opposed to the Communist regimes—came the closest to collapse. In March 1952 Stalin made a final attempt to set West Germany on an alternative course. Unexpectedly, he made a peace offer to America, France, and Britain, the powers then occupying Germany along with the Soviet Union. He proposed to unify Germany—and to keep it neutral. He declared that this unified, nonallied Germany could be open to the “free activity of democratic parties.” A few days later, he suggested that a neutral Germany might also have free elections, and even its own army.

Kurt Schumacher, the leader of Germany’s Social Democrats, was tempted: he wanted to accept Stalin’s offer, as did many other Germans. But the man who was then West Germany’s chancellor, the Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer, refused. He had good reasons: by 1952,

it was already clear that “elections,” for Stalin, were a charade, a public relations exercise that could be manipulated or ignored. The West German economy was also several years into a boom of historic proportions, while the East German economy was falling behind. The deep contrast between the two halves of Germany—one prosperous and free, the other a poor dictatorship—was already visible. Thousands of Germans were moving across the border from east to west in larger numbers every year, an exodus that would end only in 1961, with the construction of the Berlin Wall.

The memory of Hitler, and of the recent war, haunted Adenauer and his compatriots too. The chancellor was afraid that West Germany’s new democracy might prove fragile, especially if it were put under direct pressure from the USSR. He thought that its survival required it to be bound tightly to the other nations of the West. And so Adenauer rejected the Soviet offer of unification. This decision, writes Ian Kershaw, was “highly controversial since it had a direct corollary: accepting that for the indefinite future there could be no expectation of East and West Germany uniting.” Adenauer not only accepted the division of his country, he also agreed to a permanent US military presence and to the deep integration of his country with the rest of Europe, especially Germany’s old enemy France.

In a sense, Kershaw’s *The Global Age: Europe 1950–2017*, an adept and useful synthesis of an extraordinarily complex era, is the story of what happened next. For roughly forty years, the nations of what we used to call Western Europe were all bound together by a similar decision: as a group, they chose democracy over dictatorship, integration over nationalism, social market economics over state socialism. In the name of fighting Soviet communism, and with the memory of World War II hanging over them, they accepted a set of liberal principles that some of them, most notably Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, had rejected only a decade earlier.

Although, as Kershaw writes, the political systems varied from country to country, they were “built everywhere on principles of law, human rights and personal freedom,” along with “restructured capitalist economies” that created the basis for growth as well as the welfare state. These systems were also remarkably stable, thanks not least to a “widespread desire for ‘normality,’ for peace and quiet, for settled conditions after the immense upheaval, enormous dislocation and huge suffering during the war and its immediate aftermath.” Indeed, “stability was paramount for most people. As the ice formed on the Cold War, every country in Western Europe set a premium on internal stability.”

Toward this end, together with the United States, the Europeans also created a series of Western institutions, both defensive and economic. Slowly, they learned to share sovereignty. They not only created the International Monetary Fund in 1945 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949, they also created the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and the European Economic Community in 1957. Kershaw notes that the existence of “the ‘other Germany’ provided ideological cement” for the West German republic. An awareness of the “other Europe” bound the rest of the West together too, helping to keep not only Germany but

Italy and France, both of which had powerful Communist parties and strong currents of anti-Americanism, securely within the fold.

In the early years, this gigantic and unprecedented experiment in democracy and integration brought immediate benefits for all of the members of the West. What the French called *les trentes glorieuses*—the thirty years of steady growth and expansion of social benefits from the 1940s to the 1970s—had its echo elsewhere in the bloc. Germany had its *Wirtschaftswunder*, led by Adenauer's finance minister, Ludwig Erhard; Italy had its boom economico, an extraordinary transformation that saw incomes double and triple within a generation. Even in the dictatorships of the Iberian peninsula, which did not join European institutions until the 1970s, postwar growth was remarkable: in Spain, GDP per capita rose by a factor of ten between 1960 and 1975. Growth and industrialization were accompanied by a parallel growth in social benefits: universal health care, free education, and government safety nets became the norm everywhere in Western Europe.

Economic success also inspired a cultural explosion. Kershaw devotes a chapter to postwar Western European writers, painters, designers, and directors, some of whom remained resolutely focused on coming to terms with the legacy of the war, and some of whom seemed bent on breaking with the past altogether. Listed here, country by country, it becomes clear what a powerful and diverse collection of people they were: from Günter Grass, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre to Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, the Beatles, and Christian Dior, European cultural figures gave Western European capitals a sheen of sophistication and glamour, as well as a clear identity in the cold war era that really was neither "American" nor "Soviet."

By contrast, the history of Eastern Europe, in that same period, is one of failure, as is also made clear by Kershaw's at times perfunctory summary of Eastern Bloc politics. In brief, the story of the region is the story of a series of political crises—in 1956, 1968, and 1981—followed by military interventions. Economically, the East also recovered and rebuilt, but much more slowly and much less completely than the West. Poland and Spain had roughly the same GDP per capita in 1950. By 1989, Poland's GDP per capita had doubled—but Spain's had gone up by a factor of five.

Culturally, there were many achievements too, but most of them—the films of Andrzej Wajda or István Szabó, the novels of Milan Kundera—were closely related to Western schools and fashions. The best of the Central European writers and artists influenced the Western conversation, and were influenced in turn by their Western contemporaries; certainly they did not aspire to be part of an alternative, Soviet world. On the contrary, they openly rejected Soviet models and undermined or mocked the strict "social realism" preferred by most of the region's Communist parties.

This is not to say that Western Europe, in the postwar era, was any kind of utopia. The economic model did eventually stumble during the oil crisis of the 1970s. The political model hit multiple rough patches. There were challenges from terrorism in Italy and Germany, student strikes in France, workers' strikes in Britain. There were constitutional crises, separatist movements, and bitter disputes between European leaders. Nevertheless, the lure of Western Europe, its prosperity, its culture, and the continental and transatlantic institutions built by Adenauer, Churchill, Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, and a handful of Dutch, Belgian, and Italian statesmen, did become extraordinarily powerful. By the 1970s, the myth of "Europe" was strong enough to lure Spain, Portugal, and Greece away from dictatorship, toward democracy, and into European institutions—and even to persuade a reluctant Great Britain to join the European Economic Community. And, of course, it was powerful enough to send the iron curtain crashing down for good in 1989.

Americans usually remember the end of communism as the result of a binary battle between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, while most Europeans tend to see that era through the prism of their own national memories. Almost everyone downplays one of the most important sources of the Soviet empire's collapse: the civilizational pull of Western Europe, as well as the transatlantic alliance to which it belonged. The Poles who voted for anti-Communists in June 1989, the East Germans who walked across the wall in November 1989, and the Czechs who protested in Wenceslas Square soon thereafter all wanted, as they told anyone who asked them at the time, to be "normal." And they defined "normality" just as the West Europeans had in the 1950s: social market economics, liberal democracy, and American protection. They hoped that the EU would guarantee their prosperity, and that NATO could include them in the secure zone within which they too could flourish.

That was why, in the 1990s and 2000s, the nations of the East all sought to join Western institutions as fast as they could. Although, again, no one quite remembers it that way, the European accession process was by far the most successful democracy promotion exercise in history. Over a mere couple of decades, 90 million people and a myriad of political actors accepted dramatic changes: civilian control over the army, as required by NATO, and, in order to join the European Union, the establishment of an independent judiciary, laws on human rights, and a host of economic regulations. The new member states all agreed that to reestablish their national sovereignty after years of Soviet occupation, they would have to surrender some of that sovereignty to the various European institutions. Almost nobody objected. The choice made by Adenauer in 1952—in favor of liberal democracy and the tight integration of the West, and against nationalism and neutrality—was repeated by the Central Europeans, the Baltic states, and those Balkan nations economically advanced enough to qualify for NATO and the EU.

Kershaw's book is a competent and comprehensive survey of Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, but if the book had ended in 2004, with Central Europe's entry into the EU and the reunification of the continent, it would be difficult to see why it had to be written at all. After all, Tony Judt's acclaimed *Postwar*, his 2006 history of postwar Eastern and Western

Europe, covered much the same ground. The two books have quite a lot in common, including the unfortunate decision not to include footnotes or references. But Kershaw's book has one important difference: it extends to 2017, and thus includes an additional decade—the decade during which most of the assumptions that the continent had long made about itself began to unravel. This gives him a rather different perspective.

Central to those assumptions was the belief in Western economic superiority. That was shattered by the financial crisis of 2008–2009, which had an outsized impact on Europe, destroying jobs, savings, and companies across the continent and particularly in the weaker economies of the south. Its psychological impact was just as significant: the widespread faith in Washington and Frankfurt—the belief that the bankers and the finance ministers must know what they are doing—was lost forever. Still, Europe survived it. As Kershaw writes, “The worst recession in eighty years had wrecked economies, toppled governments and brought turmoil to the European continent,” and yet “there had been no collapse of democracy, no lurch into fascism and authoritarianism.... Civil society, despite the traumas, had proved resilient.”

But the economic crisis was followed by another series of blows. Outside the cozy institutions of Europe, the world had been changing, and Europe's foreign and security thinking had not kept up. Judt wrote, in 2006, that while Russia was a “decidedly uncomfortable presence,” it was “not a threat” to Europe. But even then this was no longer true, as Russia had already embarked on a major modernization of its military. Russia's open return to old habits, including flagrant attempts to manipulate European politics, began again in earnest in 2007, with an effort to manipulate public debate in Estonia. That year saw the first use of a set of tactics that we now call “hybrid war”: a hyped-up political dispute over a Soviet-era statue of a Red Army soldier designed to enrage the Russian minority, an information war designed to unsettle Estonians, and cyberattacks on major Estonian institutions—all at the same time. The Russians would eventually use similar tactics in Georgia, Ukraine, and across a whole swath of European elections.

If Russia had returned as a foreign policy menace, the Middle East created some new threats. Europe seemed to have little ability to halt or control either the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 or the wars in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq. The latter helped feed a wave of horrific terror attacks—in Nice, Paris, Berlin, Manchester—that caused a major backlash against immigration, especially Muslim immigration, not only in Europe but all across the West. After the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, unilaterally decided to let in hundreds of thousands of refugees in 2015, the backlash intensified. The election in 2016 of the first US president since World War II to harbor an instinctive dislike of Europe solidified many Europeans' fears that their institutions were not capable of coping with challenges to their security and to their borders.

The result has been a rise in both antidemocratic and anti-European political parties all across the continent, from the UK, France, and Germany to Hungary, Poland, and Estonia. Though they all have different origins and affiliations—some are anti-American and pro-Russian, some have religious roots, some are far right, some are far left—they share an “anti-establishment”

rhetoric that is often profoundly cynical, given that many of these new party leaders are longtime pillars of the establishments they claim to hate. The leaders of the Brexit movement, which campaigned to take Great Britain out of the European Union, were anti-Europeans with long track records in British politics. But their rhetoric is now more effective, thanks both to growing fears of instability as well as new tools of social media that favor emotional and angry language over calm and reasoned debate.

In a sense, none of this is new: doubts about European values and concerns about European prosperity have haunted the continent for decades; Kershaw's book is full of them. He writes of the "rise in the politics of identity," for example, though of course this is another way of saying "the politics of nationalism," a very old European story. Yet there is something different about the current doubts, precisely because they threaten to undo Adenauer's decision to choose integration, just at the moment when the forces that shaped Adenauer's generation—the memory of fascism, the faith in America and its democracy, the confidence in market economies—seem to be fading. Nobody now in political office has any real memory of World War II. A generation that does not remember the cold war either will soon be in power.

Something about the unexpected magnitude of the current crisis, its deep roots, and its lack of an obvious solution seems to have spooked Kershaw, who ends by wondering whether "the ghosts of the past [are] likely to return to haunt the continent." But he doesn't want to give an answer, and ends the book on a bland note: "The only certainty is uncertainty." It's as if he senses that the European story that seemed to have ended so well just a few years ago—with the Europe "whole and free" that so many wanted for so long—could yet go awry in unpredictable ways. It might soon need yet another reassessment, even more thorough than this one. What will we write about the second half of the twentieth century in the second half of the twenty-first century? Or even a decade from now? If success turns to dramatic failure, we will be digging back into this story once again to look for clues.