

## **Selling mankind: UNESCO and the invention of global history, 1945-76**

Poul Duedahl

### ***Into the history business***

“UN goes into the history business,” an American newspaper announced in December 1951, when it became official that a commission under the global umbrella of the UN would undertake the task of writing a history of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

It was far from the first attempt at producing such a work. Edward Burnett Tylor, J.B. Bury Oswald Spengler, H.G. Wells and Arnold J. Toynbee are only a few of the many names who had taken on the daunting task. But from a post-war perspective these writers had a tendency to write history on Western premises, or – in the case of Spengler and Toynbee – of describing the world as a number of separate civilizations pursuing essentially independent careers.

A major objective of the new undertaking was to distinguish it from the ethnocentric and especially the Eurocentric world histories of the past by producing a history with no particular geographical orientation and to deal with the Spengler-Toynbee view by arguing that human cultures interacted at every stage of their history.

This makes it appropriate to regard the project as the earliest expression of a new trend of writing so-called global history – the history of globalization – that came in the wake of World War II. The most obvious explanation for the fact that the final product, *History of Mankind*, has never come to play that role in historiography is, that recurrent delays prevented the work being published until the 1960s and 1970s – years after the project was initiated. Therefore almost as soon as it appeared it came across as an antiquated left-over from past decades and was better known for its other major objective of grounding its content on the consensus of the more than a thousand scholars who were involved – leaving an impression of a work that was a monument to the “commonwealthization” of history.

The archives of the International Commission for the Writing of the History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind and the papers left behind by some of the scholars involved give a more varied impression of the work and of the often very difficult process leading up to it – including a rare and fascinating glimpse of global history in the making.

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<sup>1</sup> “UN Goes Into the History Business”, *Chicago Tribune*, 24.12.1951.

### *Leaving Euro-centrism behind*

In a world devastated by war there was a widespread recognition among national leaders of the need for political leadership on a global level and of the need of uniting mankind, and as one of the founding fathers of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1945, the English biologist Julian S. Huxley was preoccupied with identifying the tasks that could ensure peace in the long term.

For that purpose he involved his old friend Professor Joseph Needham, the eccentric biochemist from Cambridge University, who was in charge of British scientific assistance to China at the time. Needham had become deeply interested in Chinese culture and history and had just published a book on the history of Chinese technology, in which he demonstrated the enormous and underestimated importance of Chinese inventions on developments in other parts of the world, and he suggested to Huxley that the new organization took on the task of writing a history of mankind stressing cultural interchange – as an antidote to the kind of history taught in many schools focusing on military and political events and based on ethnocentric biases and preconceptions. This would be a work that could be used as a source for classroom textbooks for schools in all countries and could contribute to UNESCO’s mission of education for peace.<sup>2</sup>

Huxley included Needham’s idea in his inaugural address as Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for UNESCO in London in March 1946. In the speech, Huxley claimed, the first and “chief task before the Humanities today would seem to be to help in constructing a history of the development of the human mind, notably in its highest cultural achievement”.<sup>3</sup>

Needham was the first person Huxley invited to join the staff, and in March 1946 he returned from China to take office in one of the Preparatory Commission’s two adjoining small terrace houses at Belgrave Square near Victoria Station in London. Needham had already been largely responsible for having the S – for science – put into the name of the new organization, and now it was his job to build up a division for the natural sciences.<sup>4</sup>

Watching the barrage of unread documents piling up on delegates at that time, Huxley decided to wait a couple of years before initiating the process of constructing a collective memory of mankind. But he and Needham discussed the idea whenever they had time. They knew, of course, that it would require a rather drastic selection to accommodate the history of the entire world in a few

<sup>2</sup> Julian Huxley: *Memories*, Vol. 1, New York: Harper & Row (1970), p. 54; Letter from Julian Huxley to F.J.H. Stratton, 5.9.1950, Box 19, The Julian Sorell Huxley Papers, Fondren Library, Rice University, Texas (RU).

<sup>3</sup> Julian S. Huxley: *UNESCO: Its Purpose and its Philosophy*. London: Preparatory Commission for UNESCO (1946), p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Winchester: *The Man Who Loved China*, New York: HarperCollins (2008), p. 165 and Gail Archibald: “How the ‘S’ came to be in UNESCO”, *Sixty Years of Science at UNESCO, 1945-2005*, Paris: UNESCO (2006), pp. 36-40.

volumes. They thus stuck to the conviction of Huxley, this grandson of Charles Darwin's loyal defender, T.H. Huxley, that history was a continuation of the general process of evolution, leading to some kind of social advance, even progress, and to Needham's supposition that the major unifier between people of various cultures over time had been scientific knowledge and technology.<sup>5</sup>

In November 1946 UNESCO moved to Paris, where it established its new headquarters in a former hotel in Avenue Kléber near the Arc de Triomphe – a beautiful old building full of elegance and gilded ceilings and chandeliers – with Huxley as its first Director-General and Needham as the first head of its Natural Science Department. At about this time they hired the Portuguese historian Armando Cortesão as consultant on the project under Needham's guidance. In the following months Cortesão investigated the impact of science on the history of mankind.<sup>6</sup>

During the first two months of 1947 the project began to take shape and was the subject of lengthy discussions with prominent scholars mainly from France about science as the prime mover in history. Looking at the notes that were the immediate outcome of these meetings, the plan still seemed fairly Eurocentric in the choices of the names and events that the work was to cover.<sup>7</sup>

In that sense the project was – for all its good intentions – a reflection of the fact that UNESCO's principal contributors at all the various levels of the organization were at the time still primarily from France, United Kingdom and USA. The reason for this was that the USSR and several other Communist countries had refused to join the organization, while significant portions of other continents were under colonial rule.

As the General Conference approached, Huxley and Needham ordered a report by Professor V. Gordon Childe, Head of the Institute of Archaeology in London. The report was supportive of Huxley's evolutionistic approach and of Needham's emphasis on the history of science. It therefore fulfilled its main function, which was for Huxley and Needham to add to their supporters the name of one of the greatest archaeological and historical authorities at the time before selling the project to UNESCO's Member States.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy was partially successful. The UNESCO General Conference in Mexico City from in November and December 1947 adopted a resolution that welcomed the idea of producing a history of mankind with an emphasis on the “understanding of the scientific and cultural aspects of the

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<sup>5</sup> Julian Huxley: “Notes on the History of Mankind: Cultural and Scientific Development”, December 1961, p. 2, SCHM 1, UNESCO Archives, Paris (UA).

<sup>6</sup> “The History of Science and its Relation to Philosophy, Humanities and Social Sciences” [Report], 22.1.1947, SCHM 7, UA.

<sup>7</sup> Memo, 14.11.1947 and “Cultural and Scientific History of the World: Suggestions by JSH – 1947”, Box 118, RU.

<sup>8</sup> “Cultural and Scientific History of Mankind: Draft Proposal by Prof. Gordon Childe” [Undated], Box 118, RU and “UNESCO General Conference. Second Session. Working Paper on the Project of a Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind” [by Joseph Needham and Julian Huxley], November 1947, SCHM 8, UA.

history of mankind, of the mutual inter-dependence of peoples and cultures and of their contributions to the common heritage".<sup>9</sup> But the delegates also demanded a thorough study of how the more practical sides of the project were to be tackled before recommending its execution.

Shortly after this the project faced a major blowback. UNESCO had long been under suspicion from the US of being a cover for espionage, and the CIA had warned President Harry S. Truman that the organization was being infiltrated by communists. Joseph Needham attracted particular attention due to his interest in science and to the fact that he was a member of the Cambridge University Communist Group.<sup>10</sup>

Needham felt under pressure to resign, and in the beginning of 1948 he moved back to Cambridge, where he began working on what was to become his masterpiece on science and civilisation in China.<sup>11</sup>

With Needham out of the picture Huxley and Cortesão had to take on the task themselves, and in May 1948 Huxley presented a plan of a work consisting of three volumes to be written by a single author whose immense task would be eased by having at his disposal so many resources that he would be able to draw on all the best scholars in the world. The work should be elaborated along the lines described in Gordon Childe's report with its emphasis on science as the prime mover in the evolution of human history. Huxley had even placed the world's cultures in various evolutionary layers – primitive, barbaric, intermediate and advanced – not much different from the hierarchy to be found in Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man*. It was obviously a tough job to abandon well-established Eurocentric perceptions of the existence of dominant and subordinate cultures.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Approaching globalism***

In the light of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 and of the organization's debates on decolonization, the world was about to change, and this was soon to be reflected in UNESCO's work, too.

In late October 1948 Huxley and Cortesão had meetings and correspondence with European scholars to discuss Huxley's plan and its execution in order to sell it at the coming General Conference. Among the invitees were his friend Joseph Needham and his own brother, the author Aldous Huxley, now based in US. Also invited was the French historian Lucien Febvre, Professor

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<sup>9</sup> *Records of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization, Second Session, Paris, UNESCO, 1947, resolution 5.7.*

<sup>10</sup> "Evaluation of Communist infiltration of UNESCO. Report. Central Intelligence Agency. Top Secret", 7.2.1947, Declassified Documents Reference System, Ohio University.

<sup>11</sup> Winchester (2008), p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> "Notes on the Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind", May 1948, Box 118, RU.

at the Collège de France, who was already a living legend among fellow historians for his journal commonly known as the *Annales*, with its emphasis on social rather than political and diplomatic themes, and for his own agenda of organizing the past in accordance with present needs.<sup>13</sup>

Febvre stressed that the History of Mankind project should in his eyes attempt truly to integrate all cultures in the new world civilization. Thus the final plan wiped out cultural hierarchies and emphasized the “exchanges” between all cultures. To ensure this global approach, the work was to be written by an entire group of specialists representing all continents. Huxley the evolutionist insisted, however, that the interactions should only be chosen when they indicated a direction that pointed forward towards greater unification and integration. The plan’s “universal character and the factors which it will take into account will invest it with a new meaning and a new scope,” Huxley concluded, fully content with this outcome.<sup>14</sup>

But Huxley’s term as Director-General was soon over, as the Americans, for various reasons, did not support his continued candidacy. and Huxley describes in his memoirs how his last and most difficult task at the General Conference in Beirut in Lebanon in November 1948 was to persuade the delegates to implement his proposals for a history of mankind. He managed to get the plan approved and entrusted to a sub-commission under UNESCO, but at the same time the delegates demanded that the views of the various national commissions and non-governmental organizations should be taken into account by this sub-commission before the project got underway.<sup>15</sup>

On his return to Europe, Huxley had been replaced as the organization’s Director-General by the Mexican writer and diplomat, Jaime Torres Bodet.

### *Selling Febvre*

Suddenly and unexpectedly thrown open to national commissions and non-governmental organisations, the project was all at once at the mercy of a welter of new inputs. Huxley tried desperately to set the direction of the project by quickly sending Torres Bodet a revised and expanded version of his plan, but the former Mexican minister, well-known for his educational reforms and effective fight against illiteracy, did not pay attention, more occupied as he was with projects that had an immediate impact.<sup>16</sup>

One of the first non-governmental organisations to intervene was the newly founded and UNESCO-sponsored International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies, whose bureau

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<sup>13</sup> “Comments by Aldous Huxley”, October 1948, Box 118, RU.

<sup>14</sup> “Draft Document for the General Conference. SCHM” [Undated], p. 1, SCHM 7, UA.

<sup>15</sup> Huxley (1970), p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum from Huxley to Jaime Torres Bodet, 17.1.1949, Box 118, RU.

was dominated by French scholars. This Council asked Lucien Febvre to write a report presenting his personal views on the project. Febvre immediately undertook the task in close collaboration with Paul Rivet, Director of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Indeed the collaboration was so close that members of the UNESCO staff criticized Febvre and Rivet for appropriating the collective project by refusing Huxley's cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

The report was finalized in May 1949. According to Febvre the overarching theme should be "the history of peaceful relations" based on the conviction that communication and exchange of knowledge, products and values between cultures had occurred for centuries, that all cultures had contributed, and that only cultural loans could explain the sudden appearance of large arrogant civilizations. This approach was not only directed against Euro-centrism, but also against what, in Febvre's eyes, appeared to be the one-eyed evolutionism characterizing Huxley's plan, and Febvre imagined a work consisting of six volumes of a more encyclopaedic appearance that should clarify "everything that had been subject to circulation" such as technical knowledge, systems of ideas, beliefs, material objects, animals etc. "From this picture would emerge the idea that separations in the world are mere illusions, and that the earth never ceases to diversify, to enrich, to mutually fertilize with streams of peaceful exchanges".<sup>18</sup>

But even Febvre's plan received only minimal attention from Torres Bodet, and immediately before the General Conference the new Director-General ordered his own report, written by the Brazilian physiologist, Professor Miguel Ozorio de Almeida, which was supposed to bring together the diverse wishes and ideas of those interested in the project.

Huxley saw Almeida's sudden intervention as a chance of reintroducing his idea of history as a continuation of biological evolution and looked forward to a visit from him. But it turned out that Almeida felt uncomfortable with the idea of the history having an underlying doctrine or philosophy and thought that Febvre's plan had a better chance of getting the approval of the coming General Conference. For these reasons he stuck to a repetition of Febvre's main points and his encyclopaedic approach in presenting his plan in June 1949.<sup>19</sup>

Fortunately for Huxley, Almeida's report turned out to be somewhat hazy in nature. It contained no timetable or economic perspectives, and as a result the delegates of the various member states

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick Petitjean: "Needham, Anglo-French Civilities and Ecumenical Science" in: S. Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina: *Situating the History of Science: Dialogues with Joseph Needham*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press (1999), p. 177.

<sup>18</sup> "Rapport de M. Lucien Febvre" [May 1949], Box 118, RU.

<sup>19</sup> "Memorandum by Julian Huxley on the Report of Professor Ozorio de Almeida", July 1949, SCHM 8, UA.

could only confirm the request of the previous General Conferences for a more detailed and accurate plan before recommending the project's execution.<sup>20</sup>

Huxley worked hard to be on the sub-commission that was supposed to carry out the project, but now the British UNESCO National Commission, which did not like his evolutionary approach, passed him over as their representative, while the French immediately asked Febvre and Rivet to be theirs.<sup>21</sup>

Needham only just managed to be accepted onto the sub-commission in his capacity as a scientific advisor for UNESCO. He was the organization's last choice, but "by the mercy of God the names they [UNESCO] suggested were all unable to go."<sup>22</sup>

### ***Making a deal***

In December 1949 the new sub-commission or group of experts, including Febvre, Rivet and Needham, met at the UNESCO House in Avenue Kléber, and within a few days they held a further 10 meetings to finalize the plan.<sup>23</sup>

Febvre and Needham, whose views of history were not as different as Huxley's and Febvre's, soon found a common understanding, which included an opposition towards strictly positivistic, evolutionistic and Eurocentric approaches. Highlighting the "exchanges and borrowings between peoples and countries" would be plenty in their eyes, and throughout the days that followed terms like "culture contacts", "interrelations of cultures", "interchange between peoples" and "cultural exchanges and transmissions" were used frequently in the spirit of the Febvre plan.<sup>24</sup>

As soon as Needham returned from Paris he enthusiastically explained to Huxley that Rivet and Febvre had been "at the top of their form and very helpful", and in all secrecy provided Huxley with a detailed plan of the more or less topic-based work in six volumes.<sup>25</sup>

Huxley was not surprised but rather disappointed, and sent Cortesão, who was in charge of the daily affairs of the project at UNESCO House, a handful of objections, in which he appealed for a chronological approach. "I would like you to see," he almost commanded Cortesão, "how best you

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<sup>20</sup> [A. Cortesão]: "Committee of Experts Responsible for Preparing the Plan of the Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind [26.1.1950]", SCHM 8, UA.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Jean Thomas to Huxley, 9.12.1949, Box 18, RU.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Joseph Needham to Huxley, 17.12.1949, Box 18, RU.

<sup>23</sup> "Report of the Committee of Experts Responsible for Preparing the Plan of the Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind" [12.-16.12.1949], SCHM 23, UA.

<sup>24</sup> Summary records [12.-16.12.1949], SCHM 23, UA.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Needham to Huxley, 17.12.1949, Box 18, RU.

can get in, at the outset, the evolutionary idea, and that the book is a natural history of the evolution of man, from the evolutionary (historical or developmental) angle.”<sup>26</sup>

Cortêsão had no authority to change a word, and soon the various national commissions also welcomed the new Needham-Febvre plan, especially the fact that “cultural exchanges” were going to be the central pillar of the entire work. The objections centred rather on whether the results would justify the great expenses or related to details that were supposed to take national demands and wishes into account, all of which Febvre characterized as the result of “the obstinacy with which so many representatives of so-called ‘European’ or ‘Western’ civilization regard the latter – their own – as the only true civilization”.<sup>27</sup>

In London, however, Huxley still refused to give up and managed to convince the hostile British UNESCO National Commission that it should at least create a small committee with the sole purpose of reconsidering the plan. Besides Huxley and Needham this committee consisted of a few other scholars including the infamous British historian, A.J. Toynbee. It turned out to be a relatively difficult task to agree on much, including Huxley’s evolutionistic approach. Instead they decided to recommend a more open approach in order to give the individual writers more freedom, and the National Commission was asked to work for a complete separation of the History of Mankind project from UNESCO’s control at the forthcoming General Conference.<sup>28</sup>

That was intended to pave the way for Huxley’s comeback.

### *None of UNESCO’s business*

At the General Conference in Florence in May and June 1950 around 800 delegates were sitting with their headphones on, listening in silence and unsmiling to an update of the organization’s various projects. All the arguments for and against the history project arose once again, but having secured the support of each national commission, its progress was considered a formality.

This at least was how it appeared, until the philosopher Benedetto Croce, in his capacity of Italian delegate, delivered a surprising and unprecedented attack in which poured scorn on the whole organization, which he characterized as an association of Western scientists, who were invited to support the organization’s apparently worthy cause while failing to address the world’s real problems. As an example he drew attention to the many appealing phrases in the outline for the project, such as “the need” for an “objective and dispassionate” history of mankind, though it

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Huxley to Cortêsão, 13.1.1950, Box 19, RU.

<sup>27</sup> “Comments on the Plan”, 1950, SCHM 8 and Report 5C/PRG/2, SCHM 7, 2.225, UA.

<sup>28</sup> “Report of a Special Panel of the U.K. National Commission set up to Consider the UNESCO Project for a SCHM”, March 1950, and “Notes by J.S. Huxley”, March 1950, SCHM 8, UA.



seemed clear to him that all history was written by men of passion. Unless UNESCO openly declared that it was a Western organization and that its work would follow the tenets of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this large and expensive project would be stillborn due to the lack of an unifying idea or vision and be the ultimate expression of UNESCO's uselessness.<sup>29</sup>

It would have been comfortable to regard Croce as a grumpy old man, whereas he was in fact one of the most influential intellectuals in Europe at that time, and news stories soon started appearing, lampooning the History of Mankind project as an illustration of how the huge hydra, UNESCO, could spawn countless numbers of useless projects.

The criticism had to be faced one way or another, and the delegates responded by giving their blessing to the position of the British UNESCO National Commission, accepting their claim that history-writing was not UNESCO's business and should be handed over to a commission totally independent from anything resembling pressure from the outside. With this adjustment the delegates asked the Director-General to proceed immediately with the project's execution. Altogether "the resolution accepted at Florence was largely drafted by us", as one of the British delegates later with some slight exaggeration recalled the event.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Dealing with the delicate***

The academic cockfight between Huxley and Febvre was a fair indication that the question of choosing the representatives for the new Commission would be "sans doute la plus délicate".<sup>31</sup> Therefore a small working group was formed with the sole purpose of dealing with this issue. Besides UNESCO staff it included representatives of the International Committee of Historical Sciences and the International Council of Scientific Unions.

"Your name is mentioned by practically everybody with whom I have so far discussed the question," Cortesão told his old protégé, Huxley, "but I have met with some sort of resistance somewhere in this same floor of the House. As you know, I think it essential that you should represent the UK in the Commission, and eventually become its President, of course".<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Il Mondo* (Rome) 8.7.1950; *Manchester Guardian* 19.7. and 27.7.1950.

<sup>30</sup> Charles K. Webster in *Manchester Guardian* 10.8.1950; "Scientific & Cultural History of Mankind. Approved at Florence, 9.6.1950", SCHM 1, UA.

<sup>31</sup> "Memoire: Conférence avec M. Thomas", 20.7.1950, SCHM 1, UA.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Cortesão to Huxley, 25.7.1950, Box 19, RU.

Huxley now knew that he had Cortesão's full support, and by pulling a lot of strings he also managed to convince the International Council of Scientific Unions to appoint Joseph Needham as their representative.<sup>33</sup>

The small working party met in October 1950, and the support of Cortesão and Needham made it impossible to maintain Huxley's continued exclusion from the project. On the contrary he was appointed as the very first member of the new committee.

The group also considered Febvre and Rivet but could not agree on them – officially due to their advanced age – and ended up appointing Febvre's co-editor of the *Annales* journal, Charles Morazé, Professor at the Université de Paris.<sup>34</sup>

Other appointments went more smoothly, though it proved hard to find "suitable" names from non-Western countries. This was partly because of the lack of knowledge of and partly because China, the USSR and other Communist countries failed to respond to any requests sent to them. The final Commission thus consisted of ten scholars from France, United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, USA, Brazil, Mexico, India and Syria. They were joined by representatives of the International Committee of Historical Sciences and the International Council of Scientific Unions. As a form of consolation to the non-Western countries, the new Commission would be obliged to co-opt a large number of correspondents from all parts of the world, so that all interest groups would have a voice and would be able to provide specialist advice on the project.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Huxley back in business***

In December 1950 the new International Commission for the Writing of the History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind met in Paris.

The American member, Professor Ralph E. Turner from Yale University immediately insisted on taking the floor. During the war Turner had written *The Great Cultural Traditions* in which he had developed his own ideas on the history of mankind and he was thus the only member of the commission, who had a working knowledge of the task ahead.

Turner proposed making an entirely new plan for the project. Given the many previous unfinished plans, the other committee members only reluctantly agreed to give this a try.

Turner worked all night and returned next morning with his plan. It included a strict timetable for the elaboration of the six volumes without changing much at the heart of the Needham-Febvre plan with its emphasis on cultural exchanges and its global scope. There was one noteworthy exception.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Ronald Fraser to Huxley, 28.9.1950; Letter from Needham to Huxley, 14.10.1950, Box 19, RU.

<sup>34</sup> A. Cortesão: "Draft. Introduction to the special document requested by Mr. Maheu on 2nd Jan. 1951", SCHM 1, UA.

<sup>35</sup> "Geographical Distribution of Persons Associated to the International Commission", 19.11.1952, SCHM 1, UA.

Turner reintroduced Huxley's idea of a clear chronological line of development from prehistory to the present time, which through a selective progress had reached its preliminary climax in – as the French representative, Charles Morazé, bitterly described it – “the American way of life”.<sup>36</sup>

Huxley was deeply impressed with Turner's “knowledge and clear-cut points of view”, and immediately proposed him as the Commission's President, a suggestion that got only a luke-warm reception.<sup>37</sup> Morazé, in particular, voiced his discomfort, and Turner, who, albeit an energetic man, had worked all night and could barely tolerate criticism, began shouting at Morazé. The atmosphere turned aggressive, and the session was postponed.

Over dinner Huxley and Morazé agreed to approve Turner's plan but to propose the biochemist Professor Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro from the University of Brazil for President for the Commission. Carneiro, being Brazil's permanent delegate to the organization, knew UNESCO from within, and this could prove to be an advantage when it came to selling Turner's new plan to Torres Bodet and the national commissions. This would not be an easy job considering that the plan demanded considerably more time and money than had been envisaged by Torres Bodet in his report to the Florence conference – five years instead of three. Then Turner, who obviously had flair for the practical work, could get the post of chairman of the editorial committee to ensure that the editors and authors followed his own schedule. In this way Huxley kept his evolutionistic approach, while Morazé got Huxley's support for his idea of publishing an additional journal called “World History”.<sup>38</sup>

Huxley felt that the meeting had been the most constructive of all the dozens he had had to take part in over the years, and he returned from Paris well satisfied with the outcome. Not so Morazé, who, when the Turner plan became known, immediately came under severe attack from the French UNESCO National Commission and from several French historians. Mostly because the plan favoured Huxley over Febvre.<sup>39</sup>

The Commission feared that the Franco-British differences would cause problems when trying to get the new plan adopted by the General Conference. At least until Carneiro for the first time displayed his obvious flair for diplomacy and ensured that the plan would pass even with French support. “You will have heard that a story blew up in the French Commission, largely over Febvre,” Huxley wrote to Turner. “However, Carneiro reported that Febvre would be extremely happy to

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Morazé: *Un historien engage: Mémoires*. Paris: Fayard (2007), p. 181; “Plan of the History of Mankind” [January, 1951], SCHM 24, UA.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Huxley to Luther H. Evans, 25.1.1951, Box 19, RU.

<sup>38</sup> Morazé (2007), p. 181-182.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Huxley to Needham, 19.12.1950, Box 19, RU; Letter from Charles Morazé to Ralph E. Turner, 20.12.1953, SCHM 2, UA.

take over the editorship of the Cahiers [the new journal]... and this I am sure would remove the difficulties.”<sup>40</sup>

In February 1952 the Commission was officially made an independent association under contract to UNESCO and had to establish its own secretariat in three rented offices at UNESCO House with the Swiss-American historian Guy S. Métraux as Secretary-General and in charge of the daily affairs of the project in stead of Cortesão.<sup>41</sup>

Shortly afterwards the Commission managed to get the Turner Plan with its rather extended budget approved by the General Conference in Paris. But Torres Bodet, who was shocked by the enormous amount of money offered to the project by the General Conference, only gave his approval with the sarcastic remark that UNESCO intended to sponsor “a” history and not “the” History of Mankind.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Febvre’s compensation***

In early 1952 Lucien Febvre began a new chapter of his life as editor of the new magazine that the Commission had created for him, as a kind of retirement scheme for the man whom Morazé considered to be the intellectual father of the History of Mankind project.<sup>43</sup>

The journal was to serve as a forum for discussion for scholars throughout the world about materials to be used in the History of Mankind volumes, and Febvre immediately received such a huge number of articles that the Commission had to hire a young historian, Professor François Crouzet from the Université de Lille as Febvre’s Editorial Assistant.<sup>44</sup>

In the early days of July 1953 the first issue of the *Journal of World History, Cahiers d’Histoire Mondiale* or *Cuadernos de Historia Mundial*, to give it the names of the three editions, hit the streets.

The journal inspired a mixed bag of commentaries. A French journal criticized the articles for appearing almost inaccessible to non-specialists, while other reviews showed great interest in the many new themes it brought up.<sup>45</sup>

In the following years Febvre and Crouzet printed about 1,000 pages of original contributions annually, published on a quarterly basis, and made it possible for researchers of all kinds to help

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Huxley to Turner, 5.2.1951, SCHM 17, UA.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Cortesão to Huxley, 16.10.1951, SCHM 17; Letter from Cortesão to Guy S. Métraux, 21.1. and 17.2.1952, SCHM 2, UA.

<sup>42</sup> Contract between UNESCO and the International Commission for a SCHM, 21.1.1952, SCHM 9; Letter from Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro to Huxley, 26.5.1952, SCHM 17, UA.

<sup>43</sup> Petitjean (1992), pp. 174-176.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from R.C. Mujumdar to Métraux, 6.5.1953, SCHM 1, UA.

<sup>45</sup> *Revue de Paris*, April 1954 and “Press Review, March-April, 1954”, 17.5.1954, SCHM 2, UA.

shape discussions on the design of the plan. Several did. And as time passed, thematic issues were added, often treating themes and parts of the world that had previously not been given much attention, such as the history of Africa.

The journal proved to be a success due to its content but despite the Commission's subsequent press campaigns the journal never managed to become a publication with a broad readership. It appeared however in bookshops and in libraries all over the world for as long as the Commission worked on the project, with Guy S. Métraux and François Crouzet as the editors after Febvre's death in September 1956.

### *Turner's temper*

Within the Commission two members set the agenda: Turner and Morazé. Both were energetic, eloquent and proud historians, and these similarities brought them onto an increasingly confrontational course.

Turner's enthusiasm for the project and immense knowledge of early history on a global scale was a thorn in the side of Morazé, because Turner's arguments often proved to be decisive when giving the volumes their definitive form and selecting the editors and authors. It was, for instance, Turner's idea to avoid national biases by appointing authors who were experts on periods that were different from the heyday of their own culture. It was also at Turner's initiative that the Commission was enlarged to comprise additional members, to widen its geographical and cultural representation – which had a positive impact on the project and gave it the much needed and enthusiastic support of countries like India, Pakistan and Iraq.<sup>46</sup>

But Turner's ideas were never adopted without intense clashes with Morazé. Each and every time these two men met there were thunderstorms, and, in addition to the difficult task of screwing additional money out of UNESCO Budgetary Commission, a second equally difficult duty soon fell to President Carneiro, namely to smooth ruffled feathers and maintain order whenever these disagreements occurred.<sup>47</sup>

Turner's occasional outbursts of temper when his ideas were opposed soon became legendary and gained plenty of attention within UNESCO House. The most dramatic meetings attracted so many spectators from all parts of the organization that even its great hall could not hold them all, and people from outside were eventually banned from entering the doors to listen.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Huxley (1970), p. 70; "The Seventh Session of the General Conference of UNESCO", 18.12.1952, SCHM 2, UA.

<sup>47</sup> Huxley (1970), p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> Morazé (2007), p. 182.

Morazé felt that his position in the Commission continued to deteriorate. “And particular through your doing,” Morazé later accused Turner. “My letters left unanswered, your evident desire not to have me replace you, even for a single year, as chairman of our committee, your failure to inform me of your consultations with our colleagues on the editorial committee and with the directors of volumes, have ended by creating around me an isolation which the slightest incident could transform into open hostility.”<sup>49</sup>

By October 1953 Morazé had had enough and sent in his resignation from the Editorial Committee.<sup>50</sup>

### ***The Russians are coming***

In the early 1950s the Cold War was a harsh reality. Until the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953, the Soviets had refused to have anything to do with UNESCO, but the Khrushchev administration inaugurated a reappraisal of USSR’s foreign policy priorities and the country joined the organization in April 1954.<sup>51</sup>

That was bad news for Turner, who certainly wanted the Commission to be international but never missed a chance of depicting politicized Marxist history-writing as the image of what the History of Mankind project was not. Now he feared that these historians would ask to join the Commission, and it was far from helpful for him to have Carneiro express his eagerness to cooperate with anybody willing to participate in making it a truly international undertaking. This inevitably led to a clash between Carneiro and Turner. During a meeting at which feelings ran high over the Soviet question, Carneiro flung down his napkin on the table and stormed out of the room, leaving Turner very much inclined “to drop the whole business”.<sup>52</sup>

But Turner, whose life had become more or less synonymous with the project, was no longer capable of taking such a drastic step, and he was still chairman of the editorial committee in November 1954, when the Commission received commitments from the Soviet delegates at UNESCO that the Soviet scholars were prepared to take “an active part in this important, interesting and valuable undertaking of UNESCO.”<sup>53</sup>

The Soviet representative, A.A. Zvorikine [Зворыкин Анатолий Алексеевич] who was a professor at the Institute of History at the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow, arrived in Paris

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Morazé to Turner, 20.12.1953, SCHM 2, UA.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Carneiro to Huxley, 21.10.1953, SCHM 17, UA.

<sup>51</sup> Ilya V. Gaiduk: “L’Union soviétique et l’UNESCO pendant la guerre froide”, *60 ans d’histoire de l’UNESCO*. Paris: UNESCO (2007), p. 282.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Turner to Métraux, 19.10.1954, SCHM 2, UA.

<sup>53</sup> “Fifth Plenary Meeting [UNESCO]”, 15.11.1954, SCHM 2, UA.

in January 1956 and was – despite Turner’s objections – appointed Vice-President of the Commission.

Zvorikine proved to be a pleasant man, liked by all members of the Commission but, of course, very much influenced by the system that had sent him. He explained that he and his Soviet colleagues had already been working on a series of detailed, in-depth comments on the plan, and he intended to return to Paris as soon as possible, at his own expense, to present them.<sup>54</sup>

Turner, who feared that an alternative philosophy of history would change the basic approach of the entire project, informed Zvorikine that he and his colleagues could only expect the Commission to accept minor modifications at this advanced stage of the process. When Zvorikine later returned to Paris, it did also appear as if the Russian threat had been exaggerated, since the corrections only involved the inclusion of a few extra Russian names and reference works in the various volumes. Furthermore, during the months that followed Zvorikine proved to be a highly efficient addition to the workforce, ensuring that any request was promptly granted and meeting all discussions, corrections and challenges with laudable openness.<sup>55</sup>

But the Soviet scientists would soon manage to remove the shine from the miracle of a truly international history of mankind that the Commission was in the process of compiling. In November 1956, addressing Western ambassadors at a reception at the Polish embassy in Moscow, the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, made his dramatic claim. “Like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you.” This was a shock to everyone present. Khrushchev later claimed that he had not been talking about nuclear war but about the historically determined victory of communism over capitalism.<sup>56</sup>

At almost the same time as this was happening, Turner received the first full manuscript of one of the volumes. The Commission circulated it to their members and consultants, from where the authors then would receive comments that would be incorporated before the volume was prepared for publication in September 1957. But this time the Soviet comments were so voluminous that they verged on the absurd. The Commission realized that there was no way that the authors could possibly comply with the deadline, and Carneiro once again had to go to UNESCO to ask for additional funds.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Letter from Carneiro to Huxley, 31.1.1956, SCHM 17, UA.

<sup>55</sup> Answers from Louis Gottschalek and Caroline F. Ware on A.A. Zvorikine’s comments, 1.6. and 10.7.1956, SCHM 1, UA; Morazé (2007), p. 183-184.

<sup>56</sup> John Lewis Gaddis: *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin Press (2005), p. 84.

<sup>57</sup> “Notes made by G.S. Métraux in the course of several meetings held with Mr. R. Williams of Little, Brown & Co. (February-March 1957)”, SCHM 1, UA.

Of course the manuscripts also provoked other comment. Israel was riled by passages highlighting Arab objections to the State of Israel. A number of Muslim countries were provoked by the interpretation of the Christian crusades. The Catholic Church did not like the representation of religion as something that had a tendency to divide rather than unite people. There were also objections to the lack of priority given to African and South American history. And so on and so forth. But most of these disagreements could be solved by quiet diplomacy, by removing the more sensitive phrases in the text or by inviting more non-Western scientists to take part in the editorial work. However, when these had been dealt with what remained were the more fundamental ideological differences, and there was nobody on the Commission who had a clue how to overcome these.

### ***“That damned Commission”***

As UNESCO moved into its new headquarters of cement and glass on la Place de Fontenoy at the foot of the Eiffel Tower in November 1958, the History of Mankind project was in decline.

Turner, this man of vigorous opinions and unbound energy, was furious at the sheer quantity of mainly Soviet objections and at the prospect of repeatedly having to ask the authors to change and reshape their contributions. Several authors had already died or resigned by this stage, causing severe delays to some of the volumes, and there were rumours that the early death of one of them had been provoked by the overwhelming amount of comments flooding his mailbox.<sup>58</sup>

Eventually even the physically strong Turner was laid low by work and in late January 1959 he suffered two heart attacks and was hospitalized.

In February and March the work came to a complete standstill, while Turner’s health slowly improved. His mind soon proved to be perfectly clear, but the attacks had caused a considerable slurring of his speech, he couldn’t walk and he also had problems with writing. “It’s a difficult situation because we suppose that the UNESCO history and its progress is what our friend is living for,” a colleague from Yale University told the project’s Secretary-General, Guy S. Métraux. “To take it away would be a considerable responsibility”.<sup>59</sup>

But there was also a job to be done, and as soon as it was clear that Turner would not be able to accomplish the work of editing the final texts, Carneiro, the diplomat, solved the problem. It involved Turner remaining the editor, but his work load being greatly reduced. In practice Métraux

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<sup>58</sup> Morazé (2007), p. 183; Memo from Métraux to the International Commission, 14.10.1964, SCHM 2, UA and letter from Huxley to Métraux, 6.11.1964, Box 37, RU.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from George W. Pierson to Métraux, 17.3.1959, SCHM 2, UA.



would take over some of his duties, while a number of eminent historians were appointed as special consultants with the task of going through the entire manuscript.<sup>60</sup>

With Turner out of the picture the Soviet objections to the manuscripts reached their culmination point. This happened when the Commission received the final manuscript for Volume 6, covering the 20th century. Only a few days after the manuscript had been handed over to the Soviet scholars, Zvorikine and his colleagues returned a comprehensive critical review – a total of 500 pages of objections to the treatment of Communism, of technological developments in the USSR, of the Soviet economy and political system – not to mention a very detailed guideline for the re-writing of the entire manuscript.<sup>61</sup>

Several attempts at reaching a compromise failed, and once again Carneiro had to face UNESCO's Director-General with a demand for additional money.

It was difficult to see how to reach agreement. The American author-editor felt obliged to incorporate into her text “contra-notes” to her Soviet colleagues' notes, which they tried to prevent, and when they failed they demanded space for notes to the author's notes.<sup>62</sup>

From the sidelines Turner could only watch the conflict escalate without being able to take action himself. He remained chairman until his death in October 1964, and his old rival, Charles Morazé, was sure that it was the project that ultimately cost him his life. One of Turner's last words, allegedly had been: “That damned Commission!”<sup>63</sup>

### ***“A great story left untold”***

In June 1963 the first volume of the work was published simultaneously in London and New York. To UNESCO and the members of the Commission it was a great relief, and even more so as it turned out that the reviewers treated the volume kindly.

Behind the scenes the Commission was still awaiting half of the final manuscripts, of which one was way behind schedule. Only in 1965 was the second volume released, and this was accompanied by positive reviews in some newspapers, but this time also by rather more critical comment. This was particularly the case in the influential *New York Times*, whose reviewer characterized the volume as a history with no soul, a mistaken enterprise with a lot of distracting notes. “The total effect is of an encyclopaedia gone berserk, or resorted by a deficient computer,” the reviewer

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Huxley to Carneiro, 27.5.1961, SCHM 17, UA.

<sup>61</sup> “Resolution adoptée par le Bureau au Cours de sa XVème reunion”, 27.-28.2.1961, SCHM 2; Letter from Huxley to Carneiro, 17.4.1961, SCHM 17, UA.

<sup>62</sup> Letters from Métraux to Carneiro, 18.3. and 30.3.1965, SCHM 2, UA.

<sup>63</sup> Morazé (2007), p. 183; Memo from Métraux to the International Commission, 14.10.1964, SCHM 2, UA; Letter from Huxley to Métraux, 6.11.1964, Box 37, RU.

claimed, concluding that it was altogether “a great story left untold”.<sup>64</sup> The review surprised the members of the Commission, and, according to Métraux, some American scholars regarded it as “one of the most savage reviews ever published in the *New York Times*”.<sup>65</sup> The review had the immediate and negative consequence that a number of publishers in various countries withdrew from their initial agreement to publish the entire work in their respective languages.

In the following years volume by volume was published, and the criticism grew no less trenchant as time went, despite the fact that reviewers could never agree on alternative approaches to the writing of a global history of mankind. Nevertheless the Commission managed to have the volumes published in translation in several languages. In 1967 the first volume in French appeared, and one year later came the first versions in Serbo-Croat, Slovene, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic, Dutch and Japanese.

The Commission was dissolved in September 1969, while Métraux and the publication of *History of Mankind* became officially incorporated into UNESCO. The last volume of the *History of Mankind* was published in 1976.

### **Conclusion**

For its time – not the time of its publication but that of its long preparation – the *History of Mankind* stands as an intellectual landmark. It was the first coordinated attempt to involve experts from around the world to reach agreement on a common understanding of history and thus the first truly international account of the history of mankind.

It was, however, precisely the ambition to achieve international uniformity that also proved a major obstacle towards the other ambition – that of analysing global cultural diversity and its mutual influences. The priority of universalism over cultural diversity caused a number of problems that undermined the value of the work. Achieving “truth” through majority voting and relying on the ponderous movement of official envelopes to and from the far reaches of the globe, involving more than 1,000 sometimes unwilling scholars, caused major delays, and, when the work was finally released, it had already passed its own sell-by date.

At the same time the focus on consensus history – especially after the involvement of the USSR in the work in 1956 – turned its content into an extensive, highly complex and diverse text dissected by marginal annotations and additions. And where that was not the case, the texts tended to follow the lowest common denominator, i.e. a harmless, smooth and harmonized history that did not really

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<sup>64</sup> J.H. Plumb: “A Great Story Left Untold”, *New York Times*, 1.8.1965.

<sup>65</sup> Memo from Métraux to the members of the International Commission, 5.10.1965, SCHM 2, UA.

bring satisfaction to anyone – not even to the authors, who in several cases found it necessary to distance themselves from parts of their own text.<sup>66</sup>

The hard work therefore barely had a fraction of the impact that some of them had envisioned in wake of Turner's claim that it was going to be the most influential history book ever written. This can be illustrated by focusing on three individuals. Louis Gottschalck, Marshall G.S. Hodgson and William McNeill were the names of three historians at the time, all from Chicago and all with the same ambition, to write a truly global world history. Of these three Hodgson prepared materials on Islamic culture for the *History of Mankind* and launched a wide-ranging debate in 1954 about world history in *Journal of World History*, while Gottschalck was preoccupied for years with writing and editing an entire volume of the *History of Mankind*. And that might just be the very reason why the names of Hodgson and especially Gottschalck today appear to have been buried in the long list of faceless UNESCO historians.

McNeill on the other hand received all the attention he could ever wish for when in 1963 – same year as the first volume of the *History of Mankind* – he released his major work, *The Rise of the West*, a work which had a similar evolutionistic approach, even with a Eurocentric focus, and which was also employed with the Spengler-Toynbee approach, namely that various civilizations had undergone essentially different and independent lines of development. McNeill's work immediately reached the American bestseller list and has sold in great numbers ever since. It was, therefore, not the UNESCO concept of “cultural exchanges and transmissions” but McNeill's idea of “cultural encounters” that became the cornerstone of the new genre focusing on the history of globalization. This became even more evident after yet another historian from Chicago, Professor Leften Stavrianos, popularized the concept of global history.<sup>67</sup>

Today the final version of *History of Mankind* does not play a role in historiography as an example for imitation but rather as a monument of a universalism that did not quite succeed. But it would be unfair to regard the entire process leading up to the publication in that perspective, groundbreaking as it was as the first trial of Euro-centrism after World War II. It is rather meaningful to characterize the process as the starting point of the post-war trend of writing global history due to the early start of the entire project and its ambition of focusing on “cultural

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<sup>66</sup> Caroline Ware etc.: *History of Mankind: Cultural and Scientific Development*, Vol. VI. London: Allen & Unwin (1966), p. XII, XIV and XVII-XX.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Mazlish: “Global History and World History”, in: Bruce Mazlish og Akira Iriye (red.): *The Global History Reader*, New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 16-20 and Gilbert Allardyce: “Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the World History Course”, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1990), pp. 40-45 and 23-75.

exchanges and transmissions”, but also due to the fact that UNESCO maintained the ambition of writing history with global approach in wake of this first major attempt.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> For instance the revised and updated edition, *History of Humanity* (1994-2205) and *General History of Africa* (1985-1995).