



## Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years

*Felipe Fernández-Armesto*

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Traces the progress and regress of the world's civilizations over the past thousand years and shows how the capacity of one people to influence another has shifted geographically.

## Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years Details

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Fernández-Armesto**

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## From Reader Review Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years for online ebook

### David says

picked it up a while ago. got through 40 pages. picking it up again. might have go through it in doses.

kinda dull at moments--surprising given the subject: the last 1,000 years. Not a big reader of non-fiction, but I prefer a more engaging, narrative approach to non-fiction, like Ross King.

to be continued...

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### Steve says

I love reading history, and this epic challenges many of the things I've learned over the years by focusing on the big picture. In the big picture, China has been the most successful empire not just for the last 1000 years, but for the last 2000. In the big picture, the Atlantic nations (what we think of as the West) had a short day in the sun, but are being upended by the Pacific nations (Asia, and in Fernandez-Armesto's mind, California). He's a Conservative scholar, and some of his ideas are anathema to me - he's not sympathetic to indigenous peoples replaced by more outward-seeking cultures, for example. But his research is intensive, and his sweeping coverage of history is an interesting way of looking at things. I remain wedded to the lives of individuals in history, but there are always more ways to look at things.

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### Jeffrey David says

Apparently, there are many approaches to creating a world history. Armesto (who got arrested last summer at the American Historical Association convention for jaywalking and ripping up his ticket in front the police officer) is big into looking at the connections between societies in order to create a master narrative about how cultures interact and disseminate ideas between one another. basically, no one group is isolated; and he explains this with a unique approach, looking at the peripheral regions of societies, whether they be geographic (he does a great thing on California, arguing for it to be included as part of Asia) or sectors of society (Giesha women in shogun Japan responsible for the novel "Tales of Genji), Armesto traces one thousand years. If you are into the "decline of the west" and want to decenter European dominance of world history, you will like this book. I don't even know what that means!

(see Armesto's "The Americas" for a hemispheric view of North and South America. He argues quite convincingly that the Haitian Revolution--and not the American "Revolution"--was a more defining moment for the Americas. He is really big into the idea of connections between societies, the similarities groups share and how ideas are transmitted.)

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### Cary Giese says

At the end of the book when Armesto is introducing his Epilogue, the future it's subject, he says therefore; "the strain of preserving academic detachment and stifling moral judgements can be forgotten," because it

involves my predictions of the future not my historical reportage.

But my observation is that he was not all that diligent about detachment in the history part of the book. I don't think I read a page that he did not express his opinion, often expressed as fact. But having said that, many of his opinions were maybe, even probably, but not surely correct! That hurt his credibility.

Another example; he thought Elvis was a symptom of the low culture in America,. He quoted a wag as saying the Elvis's death was his best career move! Amazingly he never said that the Beatles were also "low culture!" He must have believed "that culture came with leather patches on their jacket and a British accent!" For that quote, Google "How the Beatles changed Britain," written in 1991, and then ask why he singled out Elvis but didn't mention the Beatles in his book published in 1995. Academic detachment?

His view in general is Eurocentric, a bit pompous, with references to impoliteness and personal manners in other cultures! I wish he had not done that! Further evidence of his bias.

He oozes elitism. He went out of his way to use obscure words and to, cleverly, but without necessity, combine nouns into words to be used as adverbs and/or adjectives.

And lastly, he criticized frontiers as being "settled by flotsam of the last." Some snobbery there! But, also a commentary about those with secure positions who's situation satisfied them more their striving to build something new, to the detriment of the advantage of growth of the human experience! Flotsam strives to all our benefit!

So, did I learn anything?

Yes I did:

I learned about many cultures and their strengths and weaknesses. And his book illuminates the massive changes that humanity have experienced in the millennium (.333% (1,000/300,000) of Homo Sapiens' existence); that these changes are happening at an accelerating pace! Eye opening, and portending a challenging future, exemplified by the risks associated with artificial intelligence, the potential of genetic changes to the human genome, global warming, the political risk of social networks, etc.

The book is arranged by vignettes, by chapter, that are illustrative of particular histories or cultural descriptions! There are references to philosophies and their effects on governance and causes of war but without descriptions of those wars and their long term effects!

It is a dense history and not as clear as his "Civilizations" book, where he proposes and persuasively argues a clear thesis!. See my review of that book!

I gave it three stars because it is dense and hard to read but without a particularly clear thesis to understand or debate.

History buffs should probably read it though! Maybe??

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## Alan says

I cannot be objective in my assessment. When I first read this one, I had previously read his Columbus, a ground-breaking biography, and I then heard Prof Fernandez-Armesto lecture--or rather, entertain and

enlighten. I could not believe that such thorough knowledge could be put to such delightful use. I find his writing close to Edward Gibbon, whose under-argument is always the conflict between ideals and action, rhetoric and action. Fernandez-Armesto entertains while he instructs, a rare talent. Learning in his writing becomes a delight.

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### **Chris Brimmer says**

The book is faultless in writing style and scholarship. Deeply researched and rich in new insights. If it has a flaw it is the deeply anti-american, asian-phobic decline and fall of euro-civilization slant that comes through often. In that aspect it may be the best book out there that sets out the intellectual argument for Euro-antiamericanism.

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### **Kåre says**

Stopper på side 100. På mig virker bogen slasket, løs på den dårlige måde. Der fortælles lidt poetisk og med mange detaljer og hurtige vurderinger og uklare sproglige billeder. Det understøtter fornemmelsen af en forfatter, som gerne vil fortælle om alt muligt, men som ikke har en klar plan. Det kan jeg ikke lide her

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### **Lisa says**

I ended up reading this during the Olympics and I really wanted to like it. I wanted to learn the history of some of these countries I was watching at the Olympics. However the author made a major mistake of injecting too much of his own opinion. It was clear he is not a fan of the west, he really really loves the east, he likes the Catholic church and went so far as to say they "promote human dignity" , he is a pro-lifer, he reduced the biggest discovery in biology, natural selection to a reason for continued racism in the west and compared the duality of light to Taoism.

Another major problem was the fact that it left out women, it glossed over the atrocities to women over the last millennium.

I originally thought that it was going to be good a non-Eurocentric look at world history but too many problems make me not recommend this book.

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### **Lora Shouse says**

It's another history book – what can I say?

However, this one is specifically a history of the time from approximately 1000 C.E. to approximately 2000 C.E. (a few references to back to around 980, and I believe the book was finished around 1997). This seems an unusual time period for a history book (inspired by the approach of the year 2000 at the time), because usually you get the history of a country (say the U.S. or the Roman Empire), or a particular event (World War II or the Crusades), or a century (the 1700's). Or else a book will attempt to give the history of the world.

The approach is different in another way too. The author has specifically sought out some of the less well-

known aspects of history to write about. In most of the chapters, he begins by selecting a cultural artifact of a certain period to describe – a work of art or literature, or a building or ruin of a building or area – and expands the tale of whatever historical element he is elucidating from there. He is mostly less concerned with particular people or incidents, except as they may be indicative of an age or idea and more concerned with large entities of history like empires (the Mayan empire, or certain African empires, or China) or cultures (Eastern vs. Western Christianity, Pacific Rim, etc.).

At the end, he includes his guesses about where these cultures will go in the near future (as seen from 1997 or so).

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## Terence says

Closer, actually, to 2-1/2 stars.

I was very impressed by the first book I read from this author, *Civilizations*, where he argued that a "civilization" was any human society that altered its environment. Which lets him cover quite a wide range of topics. However, that initial conceit kept the book focused.

I couldn't find such a focus in this book. The chapters read like mini-essays that jump from topic to topic, never dealing with any one for any length of time. Many of the ideas he presents are fairly provocative, certainly forcing one to rethink conventional, European-oriented histories, but just when things get interesting, he's off to another country.

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## Alejandro Teruel says

This is a difficult book evaluate, for me at least, it was, by turns, fascinating, infuriating, superficial, insightful, polemical and haphazard, so I am torn between giving it two, three or four stars.

It is, to put it mildly, very difficult to write a history of the world. Fernández-Armesto explicitly disavows a grand framework: "Cosmic explanation -attractive but glib- is eschewed here [...] I have never met a determinist scheme which arises from the evidence or a model of change which does not sit on the subject like an ill-fitting hat [...] I propose that shifts of initiative cannot be understood wholly or primarily in terms of the movement of resources, of quantifiable data, of cyclical conflicts, of patterns or laws, or of the grinding structures of economic change." Thus, historians like Vito, Hegel, Marx, Spengel, Toynbee and McNeil are all banished. The author prefers to leap forwards and backwards in time and place with the dizzy dexterity of an erudite Cirque du Soleil acrobat and "...speckle the broad canvas with a pointillist technique, picturing the past in significant details rather than bold strokes or heavy impasto." In this sense, he is closer to the approach favoured by another oxonian scholar, Theodore Zeldin whose *France 1848-1945* covers almost a hundred years of history, shuttling back and forth in time and place in order to convey a (very moot) sense of a French sociological personality.

Fernández-Armesto dazzles with an ever-open eye for effect and the possible television multi-part documentary, which CNN obligingly filmed but botched, since its Millenium series while ostensibly based on this book, actually provides an overarching theme for each of the ten centuries it covers in as many episodes -which is precisely the sort of framework the author vowed to keep away from...

In general, the less I knew about a topic, like Russian, Mongol or Chinese medieval history, the more I enjoyed the threads he unravels in the book, but the more he treaded on more familiar ground, the uneasier I felt with his interpretations. Sometimes the acrobatics become too much and his pointillist technique feels merely flashy, like his gratuitous section on a “dynasty” of Irish merchants specializing, among other products in madeira or his delight in informing you that the British short story writer known as Saki’s “collateral ancestor” (an uncle? A cousin twice removed?) was mauled to death by a tiger and that Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore comissioned a mechanical automaton simulating this unfortunate event. His treatment of the Portuguese empire and his characterization of the British conquering India as the “last conquistadors” are fascinating, but his characterization of the mayan, aztec and inca empires as “shy and retiring empires”, are baffling unless meant as rather pompous humour.

In general, he argues convincingly that, given enough time, the West’s apparent dominion of the world from, say, the seventeenth to the twentieth century, will eventually prove to be ephemeral, modest and more of a delusion than a reality. From a distant enough perspective, for Fernández-Armesto, the millenium will probably prove to have been dominated by China’s shadow and the growth of Islam.

All in all, a book worth reading for its sheer bravado and excellent show sense, but which must be consumed with a salt cellar at hand and balanced by reading something along the lines of William McNeill’s *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*.

The Scribner paperback version includes many (unnumbered) illustrations in black and white; interesting though many of them are, unfortunately some seem like mere padding and others have too low a resolution to be helpful.

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### **Mary J Starry says**

Took me a while to get through this one. Definitely learned a lot about the non-European part of the world, which was very interesting. Author approaches from big themes and moves from one area of the world to another. Sometimes I lost track of what had happened previously with this approach. Not an easy read, but enjoyed author's ideas on what occurred between 1000 and 2000 that would be noted by an alien species searching through our rubbish. Some of what Americans think would be important did fall within his parameters.

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### **Lily says**

Meshes together a lot to tell the story of history over the past thousand years. However, in all it is a fairly pessimistic view, with its examples chosen to reinforce that position. One doesn't want Pollyanna, but somehow just briefly perusing this has been enough for me to date, rather than truly "reading" it. I will return to it from time to time, because Fernández-Armesto is an erudite writer that it is fun to encounter from time to time. It has apparently been used as an AP textbook; my own reaction is that it would be quite inappropriate for such a function, unless one was on a bash dead Western white men mission -- which I don't think is necessary for high school AP students. Awareness is one thing, tirade quite another.

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### **Beth Kakuma-Depew says**

I love popular histories. But something about the author's writing style annoyed me.

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### **Paul De Belder says**

This book had been sitting in my library for about twenty years - too "scared" to start on a 700+ pages history book. I have never learned so much from a history book, not facts - the book assumes you already know all important facts of world history, but the stories of lots of fascinating people in the most diverse parts of the world.

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