

### Sammelrez: The Cambridge World History VII

McNeill, John; Pomeranz, Kenneth (Hrsg.): *The Cambridge World History VII: Production, Destruction and Connection, 1750–Present. Part 1: Structures, Spaces, and Boundary Making*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015. ISBN: 978-1-10700-020-9; 674 S.

McNeill, John; Pomeranz, Kenneth (Hrsg.): *The Cambridge World History VII: Production, Destruction and Connection, 1750–Present. Part 2: Shared Transformations?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015. ISBN: 978-1-31630-801-1; 570 S.

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Handbooks continue to abound, at least with Anglo-American publishers, and given the recent hype around world and global history, nothing seems more obvious than the attempt to establish an authoritative survey mapping this dynamic field. While multi-volume overviews have a long tradition in world history, the ongoing boom of multi-author publications in this area only commenced around a decade ago, with the five-volume „Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History“ (2005), the „Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World“ (8 volumes, 2008) and the five-volume „History of the World“ (a joint project of The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press and the German publisher C. H. Beck, published since 2012). With its „Cambridge World History“ (2015; seven volumes over 9 books), Cambridge University Press is now throwing its hat into the ring.

Like the Harvard/Beck project, Cambridge eschews the traditional encyclopedic approach centered around a long list of short entries, which characterizes the Berkshire and Oxford encyclopedias. And like the US-German co-production, it instead opts for volumes following a chronological order. But while the contributions to the various volumes in the Harvard/Beck series amount to short books in their own right (volume V on the period from 1870 to 1945, for instance, consists of five essays, including Charles S. Maier’s signally important analysis of the in-

vention of modern statehood that fills some 250 pages; the other four are roughly the same length), the Cambridge series chooses a different approach, with some 25 to 30 pages per chapter. This permits the inclusion of a wider range of topics for any given period and easier orientation for the reader. Volume VII, the focus of this review, consists of two parts with more than 1,200 pages and 44 contributions (including the introduction). The volume combines essays scrutinizing broad processes for the full period since 1750 with pieces on a non-exhaustive list of moments. While Dirk Hoerder’s contribution on „migrations“, Peter N. Stearns on „the family in modern world history“ and Peter van der Veer on „religion after 1750“ are examples of the first group, Daniel Sargent on the „Cold War“ and Carole Fink on „1956“ belong to the second type of genre. Other chapters zoom in on phenomena with a specific chronological and spatial scope, such as the „automobile“ (Bernhard Rieger), „communism and fascism“ (Robert Strayer), and „world cinema“ (Lalitha Gopalan).

This list of entries reveals several choices with positive and negative aspects: Firstly, world history is not parceled out along nations, civilizations, or the like, as earlier works frequently did. The chosen approach allows meaningful links to be revealed and phenomena and processes to be compared as they unfolded across various parts of the world. One might say that the volume is therefore in line with the new orthodoxy in world and global history. However, it also goes beyond this approach in interesting ways. Six of the chapters revisit the place of various macro-regions. John Obert Voll’s text on the Middle East for instance does an excellent job in positioning the region in global trends and flows. Among other things, he shows that Middle Eastern movements were an early sign of the global resurgence of religion, thus challenging dated notions about secularization and the peripheral role of this area. The other essays in this section also go beyond the essentialist and monadic narratives characteristic of an older literature; having them in the collection makes the volume much richer than it would have been otherwise.

Secondly, and despite its long list of chap-

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ters, the Cambridge series does not endeavor to be comprehensive. While some contributions do cover core phenomena and processes, others mainly serve as examples for what world history seeks to accomplish. In general, this approach makes a lot of sense, but some of the concrete choices can easily be challenged. Why, for instance, highlight world cinema and not the rise of mass media and entertainment more generally, and why do 1956 and not 1929 or 1968? Unfortunately, readers learn little about the reasons for these choices beyond the pragmatic criterion of existing research; volume editors John R. McNeill and Kenneth Pomeranz want to be „content with having perhaps whetted [their readers'] appetites for more in this diverse and sprawling field“ (part 1, p. 1). Another problem is closely linked to this: Their choices target particularly the palate of contemporary historians: of the five moments singled out in the volume, four sit firmly in the twentieth century. This – as well as topics such as the automobile and the cinema – gives good parts of the volume a presentistic bent; a trend that is further reinforced by the foci within some of the chapters. The essays on genocide and music, for instance, confine themselves mostly to the twentieth century. While such a decision might help to convince a skeptical audience that world history matters, it also comes at a price: the ebbing and redirection of certain trends remains more marginal than McNeill and Pomeranz's powerful introduction would want. Besides obvious global moments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, chapters on topics such as horses, coal, jade or honor and hierarchy would have helped to correct that. In this sense, this collection could have gone further in mapping the less explored dimensions of the field and giving world history a less presentistic and possibly even teleological twist.

Thirdly, and closely related, on periodization more broadly: Like the „Oxford Encyclopedia“ and the Harvard/Beck „History of the World“ series, the CUP publication opts for 1750 as a starting point, further consolidating the date's importance as a turning point for many global processes. In terms of its end point, the CUP publication works better than the Harvard/Beck series. While convincing in

many other respects, the American-German co-production received criticism for introducing the rather artificial divide of 1945 between volumes 5 and 6. Some of the best contributions to that series simply chose to ignore the ordering principle. In their excellent volume introduction to the „Cambridge World History“, editors McNeill and Pomeranz persuasively argue that the periodization from 1750 to the present is a useful scale for a surprisingly large number of global stories. It goes beyond the scope of this review to discuss the periodization of all seven volumes; what can be said, however, is that the choice for the last is solid and fully plausible.

A fourth and final point has to deal with Eurocentrism and the volume's methodological underpinnings and approach more generally. The editors and many of the authors certainly work hard to overcome Eurocentric notions and interpretations along with diffusionist notions of links between societies – as features that characterized many older works in world history. The project also combines macro-comparisons and large-scale analyses of political and economic processes with chapters that stress the volatility and fluidity of interactions, and dynamics of cultural translation and representation. In that sense, it positively reflects the diversity of doing world history today (those who reserve the term „world history“ to traditional civilizational comparisons would therefore re-label good parts of the volume „global history“; ultimately, this shows that historiographical practice matters more than such labels). However, several chapters remain surprisingly Eurocentric, such as the contribution on sport, not least due to its strong focus on international organizations active in the field, or the essay on world technology. The volume would probably have done better without them. The regional distribution of authors is also sobering: the vast majority were based in North America at the time of publication, only two were working in Asia (one of whom has meanwhile relocated to the United States), and not a single author was based in Africa or Latin America. To be fair, other volumes in this series have a slightly more balanced geographical spread, but modern world history at least continues to be a rather biased affair. The lack of plu-

rality becomes even more striking if one considers that quite a few of the contributors also played leading roles in some of the other encyclopedia and handbook projects: The aforementioned Stearns is the editor of the Oxford encyclopedia; Hoerder, Thomas Zeiler, and editor McNeill also contributed to the Harvard/Beck project. The field of scholars contributing to the debate – at least this level of the debate – remains conspicuously small.

The series' editor-in-chief, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, opens her introduction to the whole series of seven volumes by referring to Lord Acton's „Cambridge Modern History“ (1902–1912), which launched the Press's tradition of publishing multi-volume overviews of historical topics. The „Cambridge World History“ is a worthy progeny of that tradition. Both for what it is as well as for it is not, volume 7 of the „Cambridge World History“ offers a very rich and powerful collection of chapters which can easily be deployed in classroom teaching and which fully represents the latest developments in the field. It will therefore be an indispensable work for years to come. Having said this, it also reminds us that there is still a lot of work to do before world or global history will be worldly and global enough.

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