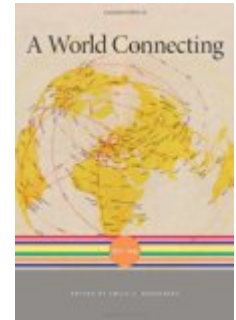


**Emily Rosenberg, ed..** *A World Connecting, 1870–1945*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012. 1168 S. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-04721-1.



**Reviewed by** Michael Goebel

**Published on** H-Soz-u-Kult (February, 2013)

What until not long ago went by the name of “world history” was primarily the history of discrete “civilizations”, or of distinct world regions. As this impressive volume highlights, the seemingly unstoppable rise of a “global” history of more recent vintage is changing our sensibilities, perhaps for good. The watchword of “interconnectedness”, which editor Emily Rosenberg repeatedly mentions in her programmatic introduction (pp. 3, 9, 10, 19 and 25), is now making any self-respecting historian’s day. In this focus on global connections, rather than on separate geographical units, the monumental six-volume “history of the world” that Akira Iriye and Jürgen Osterhammel are currently editing jointly in English and German for Harvard UP and Beck—and of which the volume reviewed here is the first to be published—follows on the heels of Christopher Bayly’s and Osterhammel’s own monographs of nineteenth-century global history. Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford 2004 (reviewed by Sebastian Conrad, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 20.10.2004, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2004-4-047>> [31.01.2013])

and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 2009 (reviewed by Friedrich Lenger, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 13.03.2009, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2009-1-210>> [31.01.2013]).

That this is a collaborative effort makes all the difference, however. Assembling a crowd of internationally renowned historians (though mainly based in the U.S. and Germany) allows for more specialization, a greater breadth of topics and more variety in viewpoints and theoretical angles; as well as a lot more printed pages. For all these reasons, the new series promises a more thoroughgoing renewal of how future historians approach their discipline than the monographs by Bayly and Osterhammel could have achieved, however path-breaking they were. Collaboration also requires coordination, to be sure, and the well-known dangers of inconsistency loom large behind any such undertaking. After all, notwithstanding the most recent globalization, some academic customs, historiographical approaches or stylistic conventions still travel uneasily even be-

tween the U.S. and Germany. In the light of such hazards, this first volume, covering the period from 1870 to 1945, bodes remarkably well for the series as a whole.

The volume consists of a short introduction and five almost book-length contributions. They deal with modern statehood (Charles Maier), imperialism and colonialism (Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne), migration (Dirk Hoerder), commodity chains (Steven Topik and Allen Wells) and the intersection of technological innovation, science and global cultural and intellectual exchange (Emily Rosenberg). Doing justice to these five contributions, which stretch over more than one thousand pages, is as difficult as it is easy to quibble over the choice of topics. Would it have been better to include a chapter on capitalism or on the economy tout court instead of singling out commodity chains? Should there have been a chapter on gender? Does environmental history not deserve a more eye-catching place in such a broad survey? Perhaps. All told, however, the volume's thematic division serves well to underline the world's growing connectedness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Rosenberg's introduction promises, the authors do show the (often unforeseen) consequences that developments in one place had in another, without privileging Europe or "the West" as the sole driving force of momentous changes.

The volume's periodization is slightly unusual. The title of the German translation ("Weltmärkte und Weltkriege" Emily Rosenberg (ed.), *Geschichte der Welt. Band 5: 1870–1945 Weltmärkte und Weltkriege*, Munich 2012. ) explains the rationale behind choosing the frame of 1870–1945 better than the English original. If connectedness constitutes the common thread, then most historians would intuitively opt for 1914 or 1930 as endpoints. The choice of 1945, in turn, puts those writing on certain topics, such as trade, under some strain. In an otherwise excellent chapter, Topik and Wells' answer to the problem—that

"disputes between liberalism and protectionism, industrialism and agrarianism, and public and private interests" persisted into the 1940s (p. 595)—did not strike me as an urgent reason for revising the more customary time frames. Ballantyne and Burton face a similar dilemma. Keen to challenge Eurocentrism, they argue against an older interpretation of the Second World War as the decisive engine of decolonization, but then eschew the obvious consequence of their argument, namely that 1945 is not a good endpoint for their story. Hoerder, who finds himself in the same predicament when writing on migration, offers a more convincing solution. Pleading to shift attention away from the mass transatlantic migration of 1870–1914/1930 and towards Asian migration systems as well as to European refugees after 1930, his argument sits surprisingly comfortably with the dates advertised on the book cover.

Maier is the most direct and thoughtful in addressing the issue of periodization, though also the most nonchalant. Looking back to the Westphalian system and ahead to the Cold War, his chapter charts the global advance of states against "doomed spasms of spontaneity" in the 1870s (p. 162), via the early twentieth-century "warfare states" (p. 200) to their subsequent denouement, thus defining the century beginning around 1870 as a distinct period in terms of the growing territorial and legal reach of states. The chapter's effortlessness in moving between different world regions—including those neglected by recent global and postcolonial histories, such as Eastern Europe and Latin America—without ever losing sight of the specificity of place is admirable, exemplarily showing how a multi-centered global history that nonetheless accounts for asymmetric power relations can look like. As erudite and elegant as it is accessible and informative for non-specialists, Maier's is clearly the volume's outstanding contribution. Every modern historian should read it.

But the other chapters are important additions to their respective fields, too. Ballantyne and Burton provide a good overview for anyone interested in the discursive aspects of colonialism and imperialism, giving due credit to gender and sexuality, even if some passages are heavy-going for readers not at home in the language of postcolonial studies. Hoerder's penchant for short sentences, sociological terminology and bullet-point typologies makes for an interesting stylistic contrast. Following Adam McKeown in stressing the importance of Asian migrations Adam McKeown, *Global Migration, 1846–1940*, in: *Journal of World History* 15 (2005), pp. 155–189. , he excels at discussing the theoretical implications of the geographic reorientation away from the North Atlantic, for instance on the classic dichotomy between free and forced migrations. Topik and Wells demonstrate in some detail how the study of commodity chains, rather than merely of industrialization, can be a creative way of overcoming Eurocentrism in economic history. Rosenberg, finally, though arriving at the rather banal conclusion that the early twentieth-century world was marked by “differentiated commonalities” (p. 961), is very effective in weaving together the histories of science, technology and culture, which still too often are looked at separately.

In sum, this volume has set a high standard for Iriye and Osterhammel's series. It masterfully summarizes, and is certain to promote, a novel approach to the “history of the world”—a title that its first publication forecasts will not prove too grand for this project.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

**Citation:** Michael Goebel. Review of Rosenberg, Emily, ed. *A World Connecting, 1870–1945*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. February, 2013.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38354>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.