Global interconnectivity has its own long history. The various contributors to *Empires and Encounters* trace the myriad important connections that forever changed the world between 1350 and 1750, collectively arguing that the modern globalized world is what resulted.

Continental Eurasia, as Peter C. Perdue states, contained an astounding 27 percent of the earth’s inhabitable surface and 30-40 percent of its population from 1500 to 1800. Shared climactic conditions, geographies, agricultural and commercial practices, and sociocultural commonalities bound the region’s inhabitants together. Ming China, for example, was by far the largest political unit in the world in 1500; the dynasty lasted for nearly three hundred years “not because of autocratic rulership,” but instead, as Perdue states, “because of the routine activities of thousands of dedicated civil servants,” who helped unify an area that was roughly the size of modern-day China (p. 69). Furthermore, the completion of the Great Wall near the end of the sixteenth century exemplified the arrival of unified statehood in the region far earlier than in other parts of the world. Perhaps most insightful about Perdue’s analysis of early modern China—especially for the nonspecialist—are the ways in which he places China as well as Eurasia into a global historical context. Perdue writes convincingly that global temperatures reached their nadir during the Little Ice Age in about 1640, which reduced silver flows from the New World and interrupted market activity in China, in turn leading to revenue shortfalls for governments, political fractionalization, military uprisings, and epidemic diseases. “It seems plausible,” writes Perdue, to consider instability in seventeenth-century China as “part of a general world crisis with common causes, modulated by local conditions in each region” (p. 93). No coincidence, then, that absolutist monarchs who personally led campaigns of military expansion as well as centralizations of political power all rose to the fore around this same time period in multiple parts of the world, such as Louis XIV of France (1643), Peter the Great of Russia (1689), and the Kangxi emperor of China (1662). “Global” history, then, clearly predates the rise of the modern era. Russia under Peter the Great is a prescient example; under his authority, Russia “turned from a continental, Orthodox, inward, and Eastern-oriented society into a secular, modernizing bureaucratic empire,” thus following “Eurasian trends toward integration and consolidation in the most extreme form” (p. 130). Despite all of this, efforts to consolidate control over Central Eurasia—once under the domination of Ching-
gis Khan—met with repeated frustration for the four centuries spanning the book’s scope (1350-1750).

This volume next shifts gears with Suraiya Foroqhi’s analysis of the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic World (Perdue’s section of the book ends only on page 218—each section of the volume really stands as a series of separate book-length studies). Foroqhi informs readers that a worthy analysis of Turkish history relevant to a world-historical focus of the four centuries between 1350 and 1750 must begin with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and end with the reorganization of the Ottoman Empire in 1839. But Foroqhi also leaves no cornerstone of the empire untouched. Administering the empire presented vast challenges for its rulers. For example, granting certain privileges to Muslims was a long-established practice that remained in place through the nineteenth century, allowing for the control of diverse populations living under Islamic rule. One thing that differentiated the Ottomans from their counterparts in Christianized Europe was an absence of a constitutionally favored aristocratic class, a distinction that was not lost on European visitors during the period under study. Ottoman power was also substantially built up in the form of large stone buildings across the empire’s vast stretches, which showed all of the sultan’s claim to legitimacy over his subjects. Finally, Islamic institutions monetarily supported activities as varied as religious practices, education, and public kitchens for the poor.

Due to prodigious record keeping for the purposes of taxation, historians have widespread insight into life for everyday Ottomans going as far back as the late fifteenth century. Provincial centers in Ankara, Bursa, Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo showed significant industrial capacity as well as widespread trade beyond their immediate regions. “A modest degree of [territorial] expansion,” notes Foroqhi, characterized the first century of the empire’s existence (p. 286). The Ottomans even reached into global geopolitics, dealing with Portuguese traders in the Indian Ocean as well as competing with the Spanish, who expanded into North Africa during the sixteenth century. Ottoman and Venetian markets became intertwined in a trans-Mediterranean trade until the middle of the sixteenth century. It was also during the sixteenth century that the Ottomans began clashing with their neighbors in Safavid Iran; since that time, the dynasty of the shah declared itself a Shi’ite state, a distinction to the Sunni Ottomans that no doubt sharpened over time due to increased interactions between the two powers, who maintained “an almost permanent state of war” for nearly one hundred years (p. 345).

*Empires and Encounters* next moves to South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Stephan Conermann posits that this region during the early modern period is generally taught as a subset of European “meta-history,” but this need not be the case (p. 391). Conermann, instead, favors a multivalent approach to understanding the many connections that crisscrossed the unique mercantile world of the Indian Ocean up to the middle of the eighteenth century. The ocean’s history during the four centuries under question here unfolded in a series of great epochs. First, Muslim trading networks already expanded across the region by the dawn of the fourteenth century, unifying it for the first time. Regional agrarian as well as industrial production unified South Asia and the Indian Ocean from the fifteenth century onward. Europeans played only a subordinate role in transregional trade up until the dawn of the sixteenth century. The two-and-a-half centuries stretching from 1500 to 1750 overlap with the growing dominance of European influence in the Indian Ocean and throughout the entire world. Still, though, from the perspective of greater regional history, it would be an obvious mistake to “begin” the histories of South Asia and the Indian Ocean with the rising dominance of European trade during the early modern period.
Tribal communities interacted in complex ways with agrarian societies in medieval India. After the Muslim emperor Babur founded the Mughal Empire in 1526, integrated tribal societies became assimilated into a complex hierarchy that made up the empire's caste system. Conermann notes that records still exist that allow historians to understand the income of the empire's various social strata, leading to a fairly complete picture of how Mughal bureaucracy functioned. As in the case of other great empires that fell apart during the period under study, Conermann argues, the breakup of the Mughal Empire after the death of Aurangzeb in the early eighteenth century was a poly-causal event, elements of which coexisted within the imperial system with others coming into the empire as external forces. As a result, the concept of “Indian trade”—so common in European sources—requires a redefinition, given that “Mughal administrative control over their empire had largely dissolved” by the eighteenth century (p. 467). This last element is especially important, given that numerous specialists have noted a regional trading network in the Indian Ocean dating back as early as the thirteenth century, stretching from the subcontinent as far west as East Africa and as far east as the South China Sea (the latter by 1350). Again, regions of the world had become woven together in complicated webs far earlier than the rise of European seafaring empires. Conermann convincingly notes, though, that this Islamic World was “not so much a matter of formal adherence to a religion but rather a question of a common identity, of a trans-regional, semiotically coded nexus of commonalities of meaning and lifestyle” (p. 479)—hence European mischaracterizations of a unified Muslim world. Despite this, the Indian Ocean acted as a mercantile entity dominated by Muslim merchants for centuries, who “developed a sophisticated maritime culture that allowed them to sail their vessels safely on long ocean voyages” (p. 495). All of this is missed if the Indian Ocean is only connected with a larger global history by way of the British conquest of Bengal in 1757.

The volume next turns to Southeast Asia and Oceania, where Reinhard Wendt and Jürgen G. Nagel argue for an internal regional coherence among countless locales that makes the area distinct from the wider world. Rainy and dry seasons brought vast stretches of South Pacific islands together ecologically speaking, despite a great diversity of religious beliefs, social cultures, and geographies. Nonetheless, contacts and interactions abounded. Tropical woods, spices, resins, and other goods drew in Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and later European actors into Southeast Asia and Oceania, who left their imprints on the region. China remained the most influential nearby superpower; indeed, various Chinese imperial officials visited parts of Southeast Asia and incorporated it into its tribute systems. Wendt and Nagel next shift to mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, where they demonstrate how wet-rice growing formed the economic basis of state building, population growth, and cross-cultural transfers. Such growth, however, did not occur in isolation; culturally and economically, much of the region became integrated over the centuries into Japan and China (including the former also importing art, calligraphy, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism from the latter). Even after Ferdinand Magellan’s establishment of the Pacific as the “Spanish Lake” in the years following his famous voyage of 1519-22, Europeans largely failed to penetrate the region in significant ways until much later. Interactions among Southeast Asians, Japanese, Polynesians, and other aboriginal groups shaped regional dynamics in complex ways.

Perhaps naturally, Empires and Encounters culminates in a brief section written by the editor, Wolfgang Reinhard, on Europe and the Atlantic World. Reinhard does reorient Atlantic history during the early and early modern period as African Atlantic history, constructively obscuring nation-state driven histories or perhaps even Euro-
centric characterizations of Atlantic history itself. Reinhard rightly notes that increasing population density and trade led to a process of “empire building” in Africa from 1350 to 1750, and that “all Europeans needed to do was to tap into this existing network” (p. 770). Reinhard concludes his section—and thus, the volume—with brief overviews of Latin Europe and the rise of the new Euroamerican Atlantic worlds.

These final two elements serve as footnotes of sorts to the global elements discussed over most of the volume’s nearly one thousand previous pages, which is fitting—if Empires and Encounters tells readers anything, it is that global history is perhaps always best understood as being driven by interactions and interconnectedness, as opposed to the artificial constructs of imperial or nation-state driven histories. Empires and Encounters is thus very much a product of current popular trends in historiography. This book will find a ready audience with historians interested in human beings overcoming the social, cultural, political, ecological, or geographical borders that people (not just scholars) have long thought as naturally dividing us all. Commonalities abound throughout world history.

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