

# Introducing World History, to 10,000 BCE. On CWH volume I

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The *Cambridge World History* is a chronological synthesis of the history of mankind from its beginnings until the present day. Accordingly, the first volume covers the origins of our species. But it is of interest to more than just those seeking an interpretation of the Palaeolithic within the history of the world (something to which I will return), for it begins with a 300-page overview of the subject as a whole, namely world history as a sub-discipline of history, in which approaches and themes that have shaped and defined scholarship in world history are presented. As David Christian, the editor of the volume, writes, readers not yet familiar with the field are introduced to the diversity of approaches, while for practitioners of world history, major themes are recapitulated, and less familiar aspects highlighted. David Christian's excellent introduction to this volume is recommended to everyone, since it offers far more than an extended table of contents or a distillation of the chapters to come. In particular, he outlines the central themes and arguments of each chapter in a larger context, and fittingly summarizes, compares, and connects them. The explicit objective of making the chapters authoritative without striving for completeness is clearly apparent.

The eleven chapters of the first volume provide an introduction to the development of world history research, questions of periodization, the relationship between world history and anthropology, and six thematic fields.

The decision to place the genealogies of today's world and global history at the beginning of the volume in two separate chapters (instead of mentioning them in passing) is firmly programmatic. Understanding the trajectories of one's own field is a less trodden path of self-reflection in English-language historiography than in say, European historiographies, and even among world historians, only a handful have addressed the manifold precursors of today's interest in global interpretations. Two of them are Marnie Hughes-Warrington and Dominic Sachsenmaier, who condense extensive research of their own here, and also

introduce a significant learning process within the field: namely that whoever creates new, contemporary world histories takes a different tack from earlier interpretations, and that the historicization of such conceptual changes can be extremely illuminating owing to the more precise understanding of which views of history are demolished and which futures the new narratives are aimed at.

A broad understanding of historiography is central to the two surveys on the genesis of world history. Attention is paid no longer just to research and teaching at modern-day universities, but also to the whole range of earlier traditions, including oral forms such as legends, myths, and songs. In addition, we assume today that at all times world history “could only possibly mean the history of one’s own world, that is, the world one was exposed to”, and that we can find world histories in any culture and time (p. 56). World history exists in plural and in parallel variants. Oral and religious traditions still thrive to this day; ignoring them would imply reproducing the Eurocentric outlook that world historiography has long been imbued with.

In her chapter (“Writing world history”), Marnie Hughes-Warrington introduces world history as the “one of the oldest, most persistent and most pliable forms of history writing” (p. 41). Since all history is world history (as searching for one’s own origins entails thinking about others), histories only differ in terms of the degree to which the purpose of making sense of the world is made explicit. Indigenous communities around the world made sense of their past, if not in writing, then in painting, song, or dance. Regarding ancient times, we know of rich traditions of Chinese, Islamic, and Mediterranean universal history writing which continued to flourish. As exchange between different countries and peoples increased, knowledge about the wider world increased, prompting revisions of earlier views and narratives. As of the fifteenth century, universal histories thrived, especially (but not only) in Europe, while later on, interest in the genre was spurred again by both the philosophical turn and the spread of literacy. Multi-authored and multi-volume universal histories as well as some single-authored works continued to be written in the centuries to come right up to the present day. Yet universal history was also increasingly criticized for being speculative and out of step with the professionalization of historiography, the emergence of history as an academic discipline, and the demand for rigorous analysis as well as the usage of primary sources. Although interest in the trajectories of civilizations and their interactions did not cease, during the twentieth century new efforts focused increasingly on relations between people(s) across the globe. Indeed, at the latest since the 1970s, a “relational shift” has characterized world history research, which consolidated relatively rapidly due to the founding of organizations, journals, conferences, and internet discussion forums devoted to world history. Offering much food for thought, the chapter by Marnie Hughes-Warrington is especially recommended to those seeking an overview of the formative authors and books from these different times. The same goes for the chapter by Dominic Sachsenmaier (“The evolution of world histories”), which drills down into some of the lines of development outlined above, yet also complements the chapter by Hughes-Warrington. For one thing, he outlines how Eurocentric world historical narratives, which became more pronounced in the context of co-

lonialism, travelled and were shared around the world in the course of the global reception of “Western-originating” education and research in history. The spread of academic historiography with its inherent hierarchies, including ordering the world in centres and peripheries of development, influenced how world history was thought and practised in different societies. However, it is interesting to note that whereas in Europe, world history written from the postulate of its own superiority and with little interest in other self-directed developments became more and more marginalized while the study of other regions was delegated to specialist disciplines, elsewhere – especially in the Ottoman Empire and Asia – the genre gained prominence. Western history writ large as world history served different purposes: it became a source of efforts towards modernization and a background against which alternative historical interpretations could be put forward, whether aiming at national formation efforts or Marxist-based historical interpretations. Overall, Sachsenmaier draws attention to local, regional, and national factors as well as differing political contexts influencing world historical research wherever it was and is practised. But this is not to say that we are dealing with monolithic, closed national or cultural traditions in which the history of the world is interpreted. Exchange in this field has been on the rise for some time, and today specificities are “enmeshed with an increasingly pluralistic and transnationally entangled landscape of border-crossing historical studies” (p. 76). Since the field is not identical all over the world and differences are likely to remain, Sachsenmaier argues that bringing these different traditions into sustained dialogue with each other is vital.

In both chapters, the spirit of optimism prevailing in the 1990s and early 2000s, when more and more historians from different branches of historiography turned against Eurocentrism and the prime focus on the nation, is apparent.

On the one hand, a broad alliance of all those interested in cross-border transfer, other cultures, and global processes arose during this period. Marnie Hughes-Warrington rightly points out that world history was and is written under very different labels – as universal, ecumenical, comparative, big, new world or global history, or as world-system studies. Her chapter, which is based on an essay in the *Encyclopedia of World History* (2010) edited by William McNeill, also takes in more recent approaches devoted to transnational, imperial, and post-colonial processes. Indeed, all of these perspectives aim to construct “a meaningful ‘world’ [...] taken from an entire meaningful system of existence or activity by historians and people in the past” (p. 41). My impression is, however, that this alliance is much less visible today than it was ten or fifteen years ago. World/global history, the new imperial history, and transnational studies have been institutionalized as separate fields; in many national research landscapes they are in sometimes fierce competition with each other, and it is not yet apparent that common answers to today’s challenges – such as the national backlash and the rising populist movements in many societies and in international politics – are being found again. Perhaps here, as in other chapters of the volume, we read about methodological innovations, about disciplinary and interdisciplinary coalitions, which are formative for an ending period of world historiography. At any rate, in view of developments in the years since the *Cambridge*

*World History* was written, the conditions for researching and teaching world history have changed, maybe more fundamentally than it is apparent.

On the other hand, many of those who began to anchor world history at universities with verve in the 1990s shared the hope and ambition that they would be able to transform general academic historiography with strong research into world history. Does this ambition still exist today? When transnational and global history became centres of innovation in historiography, many argued that this new role should be used to establish balanced exchanges and relations between historians from different parts of the globe. A “more decentred network of collaboration around the world [is] still a project for the future” according to Sachsenmaier (p. 78). How the lasting worldwide integration of the historical sciences can be achieved alongside a sustained global field of world historical scholarship is a question that is rightly posed here. Finding answers to it will doubtless influence future trajectories of world historical thinking.

These two contributions are followed by two chapters on periodization questions. Michael Lang (“Evolution, rupture, and periodization”) invites us to tackle the challenge – or rather the perhaps insoluble dilemma – that national lines of development can no longer be regarded as a natural framework for general historical periodization. However, narratives which depict the history of humankind as an evolutionary process bear the risk of universalization. In addition, world historians are increasingly re-perspectivizing human history as a history of the Anthropocene. In neighbouring fields such as post-colonial history, by contrast, there is a tendency to continue the history of colonialism and decolonization into the present day as well as to think in terms of the ongoing and current challenges of the postcolonial situation. Both sides may be reacting to similar or linked phenomena, but they are moving apart from each other. What will it take to start a conversation about how these two tendencies can be combined or at least related to each other?

David Northrup in his chapter (“From divergence to convergence: centrifugal and centripetal forces in history”) proposes dividing the history of mankind into two phases: a long period marked by processes of divergence and diversification, and a shorter period of the last 1,000 years, during which a trend towards convergence dominated. As Northrup points out, a watershed around 1500 could also be assumed, while other turning points are under discussion, too. Since good reasons are cited for each of these temporal divisions, it is rather unlikely that a *single* periodization will prevail. In my opinion, however, the question remains whether the new, more complex narratives developed of late are compatible with periodizations based on singular, detached dynamics, or whether multilayered, dialectical constellations, such as the co-constitution of difference and integration, are of greater analytical value.

Assessing all six articles that present individual thematic fields would go beyond the scope of this review. They differ from each other in various respects, from their conceptual framing to reader guidance. Some are also easily accessible to students, while others are more research-based. What they have in common is that they all consider a historically formative phenomenon over a long period of time on the basis of recent secondary

literature. We can read about the history of human thought, belief, and knowledge from its beginnings (Luke Clossey) as well as about the long history of technological innovation as a defining feature of humanity and a driver of historical change (Daniel R. Headrick). And we can see the many issues arising at the intersection of gender history and the history of mankind (Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks). Therefore, allow me to introduce three of these thematic chapters in some detail.

In his chapter “Fire and fuel in human history,” Johan Goudsblom discusses the bonds between humans and fire. Here, as in other chapters, particularities of the human species are underlined: “no other animal species has acquired the capacity to control fire and exploit the energy released by it.” This special bond is not only unique but also universal, and in fact, as Goudsblom writes, it is also the result of collective learning. All in all, the “human relationship to fire is unique, universal, and cultural.” (p. 185) This relationship led to the development of new technologies associated with fire and entailed a great deal of destruction as well as mankind’s serious vulnerability due to its increasing dependence on fire and fuels. One does not have to accept Goudsblom’s subdivision into five phases (a time before the domestication of fire, the fire regime, the agrarian regime, the industrial regime, and a current phase of transition) in its entirety to appreciate the long-term account he offers. His plea to recognize continuities between the different regimes in view of ongoing learning processes and to link the foundational changes in modes of production with the basic ability to use fire provides connecting points for many historians working on other topics. The same is true for the interrelation between the management of fire control and emerging forms of city government, which can be observed for example in fire protection measures, as well as in the changing relationship between urban and rural areas, the latter being the main providers of wood and other fuels. The author ends with a brief discussion of the situation nowadays. People often forget that electrification was based on fire, and that fire is still a central source of energy today. As the remaining fossil fuels are finite, “our present burning practices will have come to an end” and “if global trend to electrification should continue, we have to sever the bondage to fire and fuel.” This is undoubtedly the case. In view of this, however, we can also ask whether a world history of the human usage of fire, which starts at the beginning, is sufficient for an understanding of the present situation. What would be revealed if, instead of starting in the Palaeolithic, we contextualised the present threshold period in earlier phases of resource scarcity and associated learning processes?

Mary Jo Maynes and Ann Waltners chapter entitled “Family history and world history: from domestication to biopolitics” provides an insight into the intersections between family history and world history. Domestic life and families are a foundational theme for a history of humankind, if only because domestic life and families are basic settings in which individuals locate themselves. In their description, the authors refer to an expanded understanding of domestication, which includes not just the trend towards agriculture and herding, but also cognitive, social, and cultural processes characterizing early human settlement. This directs our attention to the cultural invention of human domestic life, which becomes apparent as a previously largely ignored driver of early

human history. Citing Clive Gamble, it is also argued here that “the world’s earliest village communities were also the first to develop fully modern minds and fully symbolic culture” (p. 208) including domestic culture, which has been a site of history ever since. Global history can gain a lot from the perspective of family history, Maynes and Waltern argue. Power was exercised and transmitted through dynastic inheritance; global business networks operated on trust within merchant houses and were connected to imperial control; household labour played a crucial role in economies; and legislation regulating families was used to strengthen the state. Biopolitics, the second conceptual tool used in the chapter, highlights the nexus between political control over the human body and the regulation of fertility and family structures. Indeed, as we can see, the family and politics are closely intertwined. The chapter offers a tour de force by illustrating the crucial role of the domestic throughout history and the far-ranging revisions that a global approach can offer. For example, the Palaeolithic was long regarded as a man’s world. But the notion of “men as the hunter” and main provider of food is misleading; even during early human history, women were responsible for not just reproduction but also production. Families and domestic dynamics also played a key role in the transition to agrarian societies, while the question of how to bring up children always influenced social structures and their development. By the early modern era, different forms of marriage and kinship had emerged across the globe, and they continued to multiply in the course of cross-cultural encounters. Colonial exchange appears to be a separate chapter in this trajectory, as marriages and other forms of sexual unions between colonizers and indigenous people were of importance for the racial ideologies underpinning colonial government (pp. 222ff). The family entered the realm of global politics, and in the centuries to come the domestic and the political became more and more closely connected. State authorities interfered strongly with family matters and viewed the management of their populations as their responsibility, as the conscription of young men, abortion legislation, the one-child policy, and the population politics of fascist regimes and eugenics remind us. Biopolitical considerations gained new momentum in the post-war period, for example in the United Nations, which is not mentioned in this account. The Cold War rivalry intensified the politization of gender relations and domestic life as competing models were advocated and juxtaposed. As in other chapters, current trends are discussed very briefly at the end, and a readership interested in contemporary circumstances would enjoy further excursions in this regard. The issues currently at stake are numerous, including new forms of regulating sperm donation and international adoption. Global historical research on them could be a promising relevant field attractive to younger generations of historians, I believe.

As with any selection, it can be asked whether there are any other thematic fields that are fundamental to world history as the history of mankind, and as a reader I would have liked to see an explanation of why these phenomena and processes were chosen. It seems that they are presented here as authoritative themes because they have been foundational conditions and drivers of historical change throughout the ages. The examples chosen are definitely convincing, but they also encourage us to consider how the individual

elements relate to each other. Is this an argument for a history of mankind which comprises multiple aspects (technology, gender, etc.) and can be additionally supplemented by topics such as health, political orders or the economy? Or is a kind of basic structure developed here that stands on its own? In other words, are we reading a world history of the family, or a contribution to a world history in which the family is one of the central dimensions? In any event, the topics selected have only been on the agenda of world history research for a few years. Reference to more traditional areas of world historical reflection which are now also being examined from the perspectives of encounters, transfers and entanglements would have underlined the innovative capacity of the field. There is no question that migration is a genuinely world historical process, and Patrick Manning has written an impressive chapter on “Migration in human history” based on decades of research with insightful maps. Using a dense empirical approach, he shows basic patterns in human migration in a transepochal synopsis. People left their home regions for various reasons and along many routes, and moved to a destination where the landscape, culture and language were different. Some returned, some stayed, some moved on. In comparison with other species, the characteristics of human migration can be seen in cross-habitat migration and the reliance of humans on movement across water. This enabled *Homo sapiens* to occupy any territory on the Earth and remained a basic style of movement despite changing conditions (p. 279). Cross-community migration transformed the ecologies which were entered and involved adaptation. Migration has always been “connected with learning a new language and exchange of customs, technologies and innovations.” (p. 280) Migration thus has a foundational social function: it creates and spreads innovation from one habitat to another, and therefore facilitates social evolution. The realization that migration accounts for most of the changes in human societies (*ibid.*) and that the study of migratory processes is crucial for understanding how learning was transmitted from generation to generation is groundbreaking. Furthermore, the findings of global migration history are paradigmatic for world historiography. First, they show that communities of all kinds “are all best studied not as discrete social groupings but as permeable groups linked to each other through voluntary and involuntary movements” (p. 277). Migration-related approaches illustrate heterogeneity, connections, and processes of interaction, and “facilitate an understanding of the multiple levels and scales at which human experience enfolds.” Scales are specific to space and time, to the groups which migrate, and to the resulting social processes. Migration is not limited to the movement of people, but includes the spread of technology, ideas, goods, and of animals and plants. The fact that such an elaborate understanding leads to historical migration processes being studied with a wealth of methods, including genetic analysis, is an aspect that affects other areas of research. At any rate, as the chapter clearly shows, migration is a continuity in the history of mankind and will probably also shape the future. Patrick Manning’s remarks can be taken further in many directions. In fact, much is already known about recruiters, dispatchers, supportive networks, gate keepers, mechanisms of maintaining contacts, and shifting identities, and there is some evidence that migration has increased over the millennia, even though there have been periods of



decreasing mobility. This makes it all the more interesting to look at moments of qualitative change in migration beyond the major phases that Manning identifies, and to embed them in the interplay of flow and control. What consequences does it have for global networking, for example, that people today are less inclined to move from densely into sparsely populated areas, but increasingly migrate from rural areas to cities, and therefore most urban settlers arrive from the hinterland rather than from far-flung places (p. 307)? Manning gives us one possible consequence to think about: migration between cities is continuing to increase, creating multilingual cities. We might therefore have “a multilingual rather than an English-only future” (p. 309).

Finally, there is the inspiring chapter by Jack Goody entitled “What does anthropology contribute to world history?” For a long time and for many practitioners, both fields had their place at opposite ends of the academic spectrum. Although anthropological research is not restricted to early and non-literate communities, beginning with the works of Bronislaw Malinowski, general interest shifted to particular societies with their peculiarities studied through observation while comparative and historical reflections were relegated to the margins of the discipline. Anthropologists who gravitated towards sociological research during the post-1945 period increased the divide between an interest in other cultures and macro-studies of development based on Western experience.

However, anthropology and world history are not as far apart as one might think, and in fact they have enormous potential to enrich each other, as Goody argues. Historians are trained to work in archives and libraries, mostly with written documents from the past. Only contemporary history uses oral sources and first-hand observations. Yet scholars from both fields have to reconcile explaining particular constellations, patterns, and developments with embedding them in wider contexts. For Goody, anthropology is of paramount value for historians as it helps make the study of the past less ethnocentric, and the history of the “West” less focused on Europe. It can do so in several ways. Studying other societies and early human communities can counter the bias in favour of one’s own culture. It can encourage usage of observational evidence in addition to written sources. And it helps historians abandon diffusionist perspectives that see other cultures as recipients of Western ideas, institutions etc. Changes are of course occurring in historical studies, perhaps especially within world history. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that pre-literate societies cultures “had their own story, or prehistory from the standpoint of writing, a life of their own, and this too is often misunderstood by historians.” The warning that historians “tend to neglect or misinterpret evidence from earlier times” and “to attribute uniqueness to the institutions of one’s own society, or to the west” (such as democracy, law, religion, even family) is rightly placed in the first volume of the *Cambridge World History*. As shown above, it offers a set of chapters which depict their subjects from earliest times up to the present. They are compelling examples of histories that do not regard other cultures as “savage.” Goody suggests an additional shift, namely to explain “the differences that existed between “us” and “them” [...] in more concrete terms, rather than by means of questionable developmental sources” (p. 266).



World historians can also profit from regional interests developed by some anthropologists. Studies of Africa as whole, for example, addressed broader questions and paved the way for comparison. They cut the cake in a different way, though. The broader perspectives did not aim primarily at taking the “East” into account, but at re-evaluating the boundary between the supposedly modern “West” and presumably traditional “East,” as well as at re-equilibrating the pre-conceived imbalance between the two. That is to say, “[t]aking the world into account was not itself enough, unless one balanced the assumed disparity” (p. 268). This perspective facilitates the challenge in world history to be met that our task is not only to extend ranges and scopes (from the national to the world), but to follow the historical widening of worlds and rebalance our comparisons – up to the point of seeing “Western primacy as essentially contextual and alternating” (p. 272). For anthropology, world history has a lot to offer, too. It reminds us that some early cultures developed writing. Its long-standing ignorance as well as regarding China or India as part of other cultures, despite their substantial written traditions, reinforced the tendency to see anthropology’s subject as dealing with “primitive,” “simple,” and “oral,” and ignoring anything modern. Replacing the distinction between “simple/complex” or “modern/traditional” societies with differentiation into literate/oral enables consideration of for example “Eurasia with its written history [...] as a whole analytically, making ‘world history’, or at least Eurasian history of the written variety, more manageable”. (p. 268) Above all, a historical perspective adds dynamic context to static observation.

Jack Goody died in 2015, and this chapter must have been one of the last pieces he wrote. A scholar left the stage who like nobody else connected anthropology and history for their own sake. Reading Goody’s emphatic argument for world historical scholarship that listens to its neighbouring discipline kindles the hope that joint debates and collaborative research will intensify.

The second part of the first volume deals in seven chapters with the earliest and longest period of human history. The Palaeolithic period, which began more than 2.5 million years ago and ended about 10,000 years ago with the last ice age, was the age of the origin and worldwide dispersal of our species; here we also see it as a period of migration, innovation, and a strong formative force for today.

After all, David Christian and a team of authors with different disciplinary backgrounds (African studies, historical linguistics, human palaeology, and prehistoric anthropology) argue fundamentally for the integration of “Paleolithic history as a foundational phase in the development of mankind more fully within modern world historical teaching and research” (p. 37). They write from an understanding of world history that starts with the very beginnings of mankind and which, in the search for the first human traces and migratory movements, pays particular attention to the role of nature, the environment, and climate. One senses the proximity to Big History (which was largely established by David Christian) as well as the aim of the *Cambridge World History* to embed world historical fields of research that have developed over the last two or three decades in a new synthesis. It is therefore astonishing that hardly any reference is made to the research presented in the first part of the book on the history of the use of fire, the family, technol-

ogy, or migration. It seems that two largely separate scientific communities are writing here: one developing the Palaeolithic for world history, the other exploring questions of general history. A more intensive dialogue would certainly be of mutual benefit; it would help to integrate the Palaeolithic from ongoing research *and* received knowledge into world historical narratives, providing an appropriate place for the beginnings of human history.

Although the chapters stand on their own and can be read very well individually, it is the shared guidelines and the interpretation of the period in a world historical perspective which make them interesting and worthy of discussion, and which also speak to historians dealing with other historical periods.

Firstly, the Palaeolithic is presented as a phase which laid the foundations for the rest of human history. “Paleolithic lifeways shaped us psychologically, physiologically, and genetically” (p. 22). In this early period, a cultural and ecological creativity emerged combining new knowledge and techniques (especially tool-making methods with prepared-core, later with blades), leading to increasing power over the environment. This set the course for later developments. Accordingly, archaeological traditions are also interpreted as records of thought which as well as providing information about how early humans stored and collected non-genetic information are also a source of evidence on their capacity for creating novel structures out of this information (see for instance John F. Hoffecker on “Migration and innovation in Paleolithic Europe”). This includes in particular the emergence of language, which enabled knowledge to be preserved and passed on, the formation of larger communities, and contact to be established with other communities. A prerequisite for this was the formation of the modern vocal tract, in which the neck is at right angles to the head, facilitating the wide range of speech sounds that characterize our languages today. This process was accompanied by the cerebral consolidation of the ability to make syntactic connections, allowing people to speak about things they have not seen or experienced themselves, with far-reaching consequences. “Syntax is essential to be able to be abstract, to classify things and experiences, and to organize one’s knowledge [...] and it allows for planning, for thinking of consequences, for cooperative activities” (Christopher Ehret: “Early humans: tools, languages, and culture,” p. 346). It is most illuminating to follow the authors when they show, using a wealth of examples, where and how these new skills for communication, cooperation, planning and reasoning can be identified. At the same time, as in the volume as a whole, there is a tendency here to portray humans as special. Is this an expression of an anthropocentrism which is not exactly new or undisputed?

Secondly, the authors invite us to take a fresh look at the relationship between mankind and nature. There are probably only two periods in human history when mankind shaped nature: during the transition to a sedentary way of life and an agriculture-based diet (the agrarian revolution), and in the comparatively short period since industrialization; both followed the Palaeolithic and were comparatively short. At all other times, nature and climate change set the course of development. This finding from recent research has been broadened from various angles into the thesis of environmental determinism, to which

the chapter by Felipe Fernández-Armesto (“Before the farmers: Culture and climate from the emergence of *Homo sapiens* to about ten thousand years ago”) is devoted. It offers a broad general survey of the complex relationship between human lifeways and climate change in the Palaeolithic. However, the author not only traces the climatic fluctuations that occurred during the Palaeolithic and how human communities reacted to them, but also takes a stand in the debate on how far the environment explains or determines culture. Fernández-Armesto vehemently disputes determination through the environment, arguing that the most distinctive feature of human culture is its “relative flexibility in adapting to a variety of environments relative mutability” (p. 314). He offers two proofs that humans did not simply adjust to environments: for one thing, the continuous migrations into and appropriation of unfamiliar, new environments, and also the different ways in which human communities reacted to similar or identical environmental conditions. The author explains cultural diversity with the human capacity for imagination. It is the power of imagination that “freed human cultures to respond with extraordinary elasticity and diversity to the environments they confronted” (ibid.). Imagination is associated with two further human characteristics, namely anticipation and memory. “[O]ur ancestors had a theory of mind, consciousness of their own consciousness [...] they had the mental equipment necessary to be able to imagine themselves in changed circumstances and new environments (p. 319). For this reason, “climate [is] the context of our story, and the experience of *Homo sapiens* is its subject.”

As in other chapters, the position being argued against is vague, and this leaves a divided impression, because it would be interesting to know more about the pros and cons of both sides. At least those keen to read more about Fernández-Armesto’s thesis that culture is exempt from evolution can do so in the book he wrote alongside his chapter for the *Cambridge World History*. In it, he sets out in detail the argument presented in a nutshell in the chapter that “Ultimately, no environmental conditions, no genetic legacy, no predictable patterns, no scientific laws determine our behaviour. We can consequently make and remake our world in the freedom of unconstrained imaginations.”<sup>1</sup> How does this relate, we might ask, to the above-mentioned finding that “Paleolithic lifeways shaped us psychologically, physiologically, and genetically”?

Thirdly, the authors position themselves in the discussion about where humanity originated. Until 48,000 years ago, we read, human history was African history. It was in Africa that the fully modern human ancestors of us all today evolved, along with the first blade-based toolkits, bone tools, and works of art. From there, our ancestors spread first into southwestern Asia, from there into Europe and Asia, and later into the Americas, slowly replacing other species that had lived there. “We are an African species” is a core finding which is of course of great importance to world historians. It supports the attempt to give an open, decentralized perspective to the older narratives of world history, which focused on Europe and attributed an initial role to it. A reflection on

1 F. Fernández-Armesto, *Foot in the River. Why Our Lives Change and the Limits of Evolution*, Oxford 2018, back cover.

the European origins of archaeology does not come as a surprise, but is certainly worth reading: “European scholars dominated early attempts to describe human evolution, and the Paleolithic evidence from Europe was so rich and diverse that it seemed natural to assume that our species evolved in Europe” (p. 29, pp. 395f.). This is why it took so long for the African origins of humanity to be recognized.

With the African origins now clear, it can be shown (according to the authors) that Africa at the beginning of the Holocene was not a place apart. The same trajectories of human change emerged in Africa as in several other parts of the world, including the trend towards agricultural ways of life, which can be observed around 9000 BCE in groups of grain collectors from Niger-Congo, and a little later in Nilo-Saharan peoples in eastern Sahara, who herded cattle for the first time in world history (see Christopher Ehret’s chapter “Africa from 48,000 to 9500 BCE”). That African humans were able to adapt to almost every terrestrial climate reaffirms the interest of recent world history in tracing how communities and societies around the world responded to all sorts of global circumstances.

The most recent research in this field seems to be less convinced about the African origins and established genetic genealogies, and it would have been interesting to read how the authors respond to the proponents of genetic determinism (as well as to questioning the tree model in historical linguistics, which is another recent debate left untouched).

More important, however, is a discrepancy between the usage of the term “modern” in this part of the volume, and a shared understanding of modern/modernity by historians working on periods since the seventeenth century. For the latter, the term signifies the changes in the course of the Enlightenment and the coming of specific socio-cultural practices, whereas David Christian and his co-authors use it to denote a qualitative difference in developments during the Palaeolithic. Chris Ehret in particular argues in chapters 14 and 15 that we see first in Africa the “evolution of fully modern humans with modern forms of language, followed by a slow accumulation of new skills, new social relationships, and new cultural forms” (p. 27). How can this be squared with, say, Frederick Cooper’s debunking of different uses of the term modern in his book *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (1991)? Although the fact that far-reaching developments occurred during the Palaeolithic is immediately obvious, the interpretation of this as the emergence of a *modern* human will be less accessible to modern historians. In my opinion, consideration of how the use of “modern” relates to its uses in the first part of the volume as well as in the later volumes would have been appropriate. What are the advantages and disadvantages of expanding the common understanding of “modern” in this way? Moreover, answering these questions would have been important seeing as how the authors attempt to build bridges to modern times and argue for the integration of Palaeolithic history as a foundational phase “more fully within modern world history” (see quotation above). Since this different use of a key term of (world) history is not resolved, the Palaeolithic period appears to a large extent as a separate, somehow isolated period. It is a pity that reconciling the individual volumes played such a minor role in the

preparation of the *Cambridge World History*, for this would have resulted in a number of further questions and tasks for the field.

The fourth central idea of this part is the emphasis on migration, mobility, and nomadism in the Palaeolithic period, unfortunately without reference to the arguments and broad contextualization offered in Patrick Manning's chapter. In contrast to previous narratives, the spread of mankind across the globe is not described as a linear event. Instead, it is stressed that, not least due to climate change, periods of further settlements alternated with periods of contraction; there must have been in practice many different periods of advance and retreat (p. 33). The directions and routes of dispersal are also presented as an open process. Several routes are currently emerging in research, and those wishing to learn more about the ongoing debates are well served by the chapters on migrations in and from Africa (Chris Ehret), to Asia (Robin Dennell), to Australia (Peter Hiscock), and to the Americas (Nicole Waguespack). More than elsewhere, questions are raised here: Why did migrations spanning all parts of the world happen when people are reluctant to leave their homes? Why did people settle in strange and often completely different environments (in colder zones, in deserts, or by the sea) where the habits from the African grasslands were of little use and new diseases were encountered? Why did the human population slowly increase despite a nomadic lifestyle in which more children don't facilitate mobility? The fact that these questions are largely left unanswered, and that various possible reasons are mentioned, is for me one of the most convincing parts of the overall account, and also illustrates why the term "migration" instead of "dispersal" is frequently mentioned. Just as important as the reasons for continuous migrations are the preconditions. This aspect is also treated with caution by the authors, who refer to different arguments and what cannot yet be explained – for example, that although migrations lead to new technologies, the practice of, say, preparing food over a fire developed without demonstrable migration. There is general agreement that migrations and trans-regional migrations had consequences: they changed social relations, the size and organization of groups and their interactions with other, food-gathering strategies, and also spread art – all of which, we read, originated in Africa.

One significant merit of the overall account of the Palaeolithic is that although much space is devoted to questions of dating (an important theme for this period), this is done in a pleasingly unorthodox manner. Fluctuating and diverging classifications are openly admitted, and the reader is repeatedly reminded that this or that is disputed. This also applies to the question of the end of the period, the transition to a sedentary lifestyle and agriculture-based forms of nutrition. This is described as a slow transformation characterized by the combining of planting and foraging with hunting and herding. For a long time, the transition to agriculture was seen as a revolution; here, the shift is presented much less drastically. The lives of agricultural settlers seem to have been so much like the lives of the early farmers who succeeded them that it is difficult to draw a clear dividing line. This makes the reader even keener to continue and reach for the second volume of the series. It is also a strength of this part that the research techniques on which the

findings and arguments are based (such as radiometric dating, genetic comparison, and better ways of tracing climate change) are continuously described.

All in all, the 167 pages, which probably take the majority of (world) historians into new territory, are highly worth reading, since in addition to a wealth of empirical findings, they present new interpretations of the period which actually offer links to general discussions in the field of world history and open up new perspectives. When David Christian begins by emphasizing that only 12 per cent of the approximately 80 billion people who have populated the world since the emergence of our species lived during the Palaeolithic, and that therefore just half a volume for this period is justified – just as two volumes deal with the period after 1750, because 80 percent of humans lived between these two phases – one is forced to agree with him not only on the basis of the figures, but also because this part makes it clear that the Palaeolithic was of fundamental importance in all kinds of ways.

As a reader, I would have liked to see more space given to the consequences and questions stemming from the syntheses of thirty years of research presented here, because this would have outlined the future topics that world historiography still needs to address.

And as a historian specializing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I found one aspect unconvincing: namely the Ice Age being described as an era “what we would now call a kind of globalization” – with the understanding that “key elements of culture were similar all over the inhabited world.” (p. 329) An understanding of globalization is propagated here without considering alternative, less homogenizing interpretations. This may correspond to the concept behind the series, but at the same time it shows that this account is a variant of a world historical overview which encourages reflection without being authoritative. We also read here syntheses that are materialistically oriented, but in which the material is almost always seen and thought of as universal and ahistorical. As a result, we lose sight of conflicts regarding distribution and power, and so we must turn to other books to learn about social, economic, and political struggles in the history of mankind.