

Europe and connectivity beyond Europe are the most defining characteristic of the field. A glance at the footnotes in the volume is enough to prove the transcontinental – though predominantly transatlantic – dimension of ongoing debates. The extent to which European global historians build on long-distance intellectual transfer probably outweighs regional trends, as we also read in “Global History, Globally”.⁴ In light of this consensus, the endeavour to ascertain the European character of our approaches actually feels like a step back behind the bigger endeavour to challenge Eurocentrism in both our perspectives on the past and our present research practices. After all, it might be more productive to simply encourage a more multi-sided exchange between global historians. The volume makes a valuable contribution in this direction, and as the subsequent 2017 ENIUGH congress has seen participants from not only broader Europe but also from e.g. Gabon, Hong Kong, Israel, Pakistan, and Senegal, there are yet plenty more perspectives to explore.

Notes

- 1 S. Beckert/D. Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global History, Globally. Research and Practice around the World*, London 2018.
- 2 With regard to Germany, one might think of the infamous „Kinder statt Inder“ dispute instigated by a CDU politician in 2000 as a relevant moment in such a cultural history of post-migrant demographic discourses.
- 3 Recently, Margrit Pernau spoke of global history as “still very much a boys’ network.” M. Pernau, *A Field in Search of Its Identity. Recent Introductions to Global History*, in: *Yearbook of Transnational History* 1 (2018), pp. 217–228, 226.
- 4 G. Austin, *Global History in (Northwestern) Europe. Explorations and Debates*,

in: Beckert/Sachsenmaier (ed.), *Global History*, pp. 21–44, 21.

The Oxford Illustrated History of the World, ed. by Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019, 481 p.

Reviewed by
Matthias Middell, Leipzig

When a renowned academic publisher such as Oxford University Press gathers well-known (mainly British and American) historians to write an illustrated history of the whole world, one can expect a cross between the highest erudition, light and metaphorical language and opulent visualization – and this is exactly what this volume delivers, which wants to be and indeed is a coffee table book and a serious intervention in an ongoing historiographical debate at the same time. The editor, who has proven a sense of world-historical curiosity from his earlier work on explorations across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic to his more recent Hispanic history of the USA, burns a firework of popular and amusing explanations right at the beginning, of what world history actually is, of what diversity of perspectives means for the desire for objective knowledge, of what distinguishes humankind from other species on earth (cultural diversity in constant change, among other things with the nice distinction between different lifeways and foodways) and how something like a trend

towards global convergence could nevertheless emerge.

Without using the category of dialectics, large narrative patterns are laid out in opposite directions and run through the volume as a kind of internal order, which nevertheless leaves each of the 11 authors (with Anjana Singh as the only female historians among them) room for manoeuvre for original presentation and interpretation. Divergence is narrated as a result of different adaptations to changing environmental conditions and led to the division into sedentary and nomadic, farmer and hunter, city-builder and tent dweller with all their many sub-variants. Convergence, on the other hand, comes more and more to the fore from Part 4 (i.e. from about the middle of the 14th century in the chronologically structured volume), with trade and transport between settlement areas, with contact, discovery, expansion and learning from others. While for a long-time divergence not only prevailed, but also increased, convergence – according to an assumption shared by all authors but heavily controversial with regard to dating – came to the fore at some point. Fernández-Armesto calls this convergence “globalization”, but at the same time makes it clear that it did not prevail at the expense of divergence and did not make it disappear, but merely overshadowed the trend towards divergence, so that the latter became less visible and has less impacted our historical consciousness. The fact that the dominant and hegemonic (primarily Anglo-Saxon) “West” had an outstanding function in globalizing the world connects the final vanishing point of this volume with the mainstream of the World History movement that has been expanding

since 1990. Jeremy Black has no easy task, when having the task in the final chapter to reduce the diversity of historical events since the Second World War to this one denominator.

The originality of this volume, however, lies elsewhere, namely in the conversation offered to climate and biodiversity researchers, which is not limited to discussing the man-made effects on the warming of the atmosphere over the last two centuries, but rather places the human-nature interaction in a longer perspective. David Christian provides a history of the Anthropocene, which he roughly dates to the last two centuries and clearly distinguishes from the Holocene. He reminds us that humankind’s mastery of nature is not so far off, no matter how powerful the diversion of rivers or the harvesting of energy with huge solar collector fields may feel. He points out that humanity is still unable to prevent earthquakes or predict pandemics. It’s as if he had already seen the helplessness before the Covid-19 virus rise when writing this chapter several years ago. The giant leap in population growth, rise in life expectancy, energy consumption and the volume of trade between the world’s regions since 1800 (which only in the second half of the 20th century had a visible impact across the globe) can only be explained by a huge step in innovation, which, while it is a general feature of human history (and rooted in the ability to transmit innovation through language over long distances and over several generations), has only had such enormous consequences at long intervals (such as the transition to agriculture 10–12,000 years ago and the use of fossil fuels in the 19th century). Christian refers to the enormous

adaptation efforts that succeeded in the wake of the agricultural revolution, but leaves open whether something like this is to be expected after global warming gets eventually out of control in the near future.

The last two continuous thematic threads of this illustrated world history concern “morality” and “initiative”, a peculiarly bashful formulation for the exercise of power and its legitimation. References to scandalous inequalities within or between societies and the justification of selfishness in destroying the livelihoods of others as well as humankind as a whole are not withheld from the reader. However, this is done from a peculiarly distanced perspective, which views humanity as an insect crawling irrationally through the landscape – just as the introductory metaphor of the galactic view of the Earth suggests, which feeds the illusion of objective observation. The text reads like an invitation to a kind of philanthropic engagement with this world and who would seriously decline such an invitation that something has to change here – after all, it is part of the basic equipment of the liberal promise of a better world for the future. However, the alternatives to capitalism and democracy have now disappeared from this world of the future. And this despite the fact that the attractiveness of capitalism is also dwindling in parallel with the hegemony of the West. Thus, the reader is left somewhat perplexed. The world continues to turn, inequality will probably continue to exist and the “Initiative” will return to China in the foreseeable future, where it had been for the greater part of historical development anyway. In such a way, the educated citizen who has worked

his way through this beautifully illustrated volume, even with the prospect of a manageable future, puts the work aside at the end and senses the limitations of his own possibilities to change the course of things.

**Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann /
Catherine Dossin / Béatrice Joyeux-
Prunel (eds.): *Circulations in the
Global History of Art (= Studies in Art
Historiography)*, Farnham: Ashgate
2015, 247 p.**

Reviewed by
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It is a peculiar task to review an edited volume that not only has two or three contributions, on top of an Introduction “proper”, that might qualify as further sections of the book’s general introduction but that also contains an elaborate and extensive review (admittedly a critique) of its own as Afterword. It both appears a tempting and sound choice to enter in dialogue with this built-in critical assessment in the commentary below.

The Afterword is authored by James Elkins whose keen intellect and sharp, albeit occasionally arrogant, reasoning the present reviewer greatly values. This time, however, a peculiar epistemological shortsightedness seems to prevent him from crediting the goals and achievements garnered in “*Circulations in the Global History of Art*”. Elkins self-consciously talks as a representative of the North Atlantic – and in his eyes,