
BUCHBESPRECHUNGEN

**Douglas Northrop (Hrsg.): A
Companion to World History,
London: Wiley-Blackwell 2012, 617 S.**

Rezensiert von
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For many years now, Wiley-Blackwell has been publishing highly useful companion volumes for a wide variety of historical fields and subfields. These one-volume texts have covered topics in American, European, and global history. Now comes perhaps the most ambitious volume of all: *A Companion to World History* under the editorship of Douglas Northrop. Although world history has become an introductory course in many colleges and universities and in more than a few high schools, it is, in many ways, the most conceptually challenging of all historical fields. Anyone who has taught a course in world history quickly realizes that there are always a number of strategic and intellectual choices to be made. What is the chronology of world history? What themes or topics should one use to drive a course on world history? Can one give adequate treatment to various regions of the world and still maintain a

compelling and convincing core narrative to a world history class or textbook? From whose perspective should world history be taught?

This volume addresses all of these questions and issues and much more and should serve as a good guide to world history for both the novice in the field and those who have labored in it for quite some time. Indeed, Douglas Northrop and the editorial staff at Wiley-Blackwell have brought together many leading figures in world history (Michael Adas, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Ken Pomeranz, Heather Streets-Salter, Xinru Liu and many others) to contribute to this volume. Thus, many of the essays in it are not only good statements of past developments in world history, but also good indications of where the field is likely to go in the next decade or so.

The book is also smartly divided into thematic parts, each of which tackles difficult questions about world history. Moreover, Northrop provides a good overall introduction to the volume, which simultaneously leads the reader into the various parts and surveys important developments in the evolution of world history, especially in the United States. In the introduction, Northrop either discusses or references such foundational figures in the field as William McNeill, Jerry Bentley, Patrick Manning, and Peter Stearns. Northrop is

right to emphasize that world history has come a long way in the last thirty or forty years, but that many difficult conceptual issues still remain to be addressed and that this volume, while extensive in its approach, does not claim to have resolved all of the issues in the field. It sees itself rather as making important contributions to ongoing debates in world history.

Part I is titled “Trajectories and Practices.” The essays collected here are of great value as they survey the state of world history teaching and training. For example, Streets-Salter discusses graduate training in world history and placement in the academic world. In North American colleges and universities there is sometimes the assumption that every academic, regardless of training or background, can shift from teaching western civilization or regional history courses to teaching world history. This is, of course, not always a good assumption and the results of this type of approach can be highly mixed. Streets-Salter, on the other hand, has been hard at work for several years now preparing students at the graduate level specifically for careers in world history and she shares her experiences and insights in her contribution to the volume. Its pragmatic, practical advice should be taken very seriously.

Barbara Weinstein tackles an equally difficult issue in her piece on the sources for world history. Because academic historians are always trained to do research in primary materials and especially in archives, critics of world history have sometimes challenged the field by suggesting that it is difficult to know what the sources should be for research projects in world history. How does one do original work in a field as global and seemingly abstract as world

history? Weinstein takes this perspective on in her contribution to the volume and discusses the myriad sources, narrative choices, and research strategies available to the world historian without diminishing the challenges inherent in the field. She is almost certainly right that genuinely collaborative or collective research in the field remains elusive. At the same time, she points out that world history as a research field has served to correct many Eurocentric narratives.

It is difficult to even summarize the parts of a volume as rich and challenging as those in *A Companion to World History*. In other sections of the text, leading scholars take on questions such as the relationship between ecology and environmental studies to world history; the emergence of “big history” that argues that human activity can best be understood in a long historical continuum that looks at topics such as evolution, geology, and even astronomy; the importance of regional studies to world history; and the interaction between global and local events.

Further, the volume explores crucial dimensions of comparing and connecting topics in world history. For example, Adas takes on the issue of doing comparative history within a convincing and accessible grand narrative. Xinru Liu looks at race and linguistics in nomad cultures and Mrinalini Sinha discusses the way power is formed, maintained, and projected among empires and colonies. There is much rich material for the student of world history in all of these essays.

Equally interesting are the essays collected in the section called “Connecting” in world history. These essays focus on issues such as the spread of objects, peoples, reli-

gious ideas, and diseases. Some very fruitful suggestions about conceptualizing and eventually teaching world history topics and courses emerge from these contributions.

The final section of essays takes on the crucial issue of perspective and asks the provocative and fundamental question of whose view or vantage point is used in fashioning any world history narrative. Scholars examine global narratives as they might look from Oceania, China, North-east Asia, Africa, the Islamic world, Latin America, and Europe. These studies are all well done and challenge the student and teacher of world history to consider and reconsider the underlying assumptions we all make in trying to write persuasive historical accounts. Finally, Douglas Northrop writes a concluding essay that highlights the complexity but also the rewards to be won in considering changing perspectives on the global past.

All in all, *A Companion to World History* is a first-rate and cutting-edge contribution to the field of world history. It also contains a large and up-to-date bibliography. Serious scholars in the field will want to add it to their collection of basic reference books. It also belongs in every research library. The one drawback to the book is the rather hefty price (120 British pounds) for the hardcover edition. Paperback versions of the text can be purchased, however, at a substantially lower price.

Dierk Walter: Organisierte Gewalt in der europäischen Expansion. Gestalt und Logik des Imperialkrieges, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, HIS Verlag 2014, 414 S.

Rezensiert von
Herfried Münkler, Berlin

Der Historiker Dierk Walter ist in Deutschland sicherlich der beste Kenner der imperialen Expansionskriege, die von den europäischen Mächten zwischen dem 15. und 20. Jh. geführt worden sind. In seiner Berner Habilitationsschrift hat er nunmehr die Summe seiner jahrelangen Beschäftigung mit diesem Thema gezogen. Dabei hat er dieses halbe Jahrtausend kriegerischer Expansion nicht in diachroner Perspektive dargestellt, sondern nach Maßgabe systematischer Fragestellungen analysiert. Das verlangt einiges an theoretisch-methodischer Sensibilität, denn die Eroberung der neuen Welt durch die spanischen Conquistadoren erfolgte mit anderen Mitteln und unter anderen Imperativen als das langsame Vordringen russischer Pelzhändler in Sibirien, oder die Errichtung von *seaborn empires* durch Portugiesen und Niederländer, oder die Durchsetzung einer Globalökonomie auf Grundlage des Freihandels durch die Briten. Alle diese imperialen Mächte bedienten sich der Gewalt, aber die Gewalt hatte jeweils einen anderen Stellenwert bei der Errichtung der (Kolonial-)Imperien: Bei den Conquistadoren war sie das zentrale Element und die unabdingbare Vor-