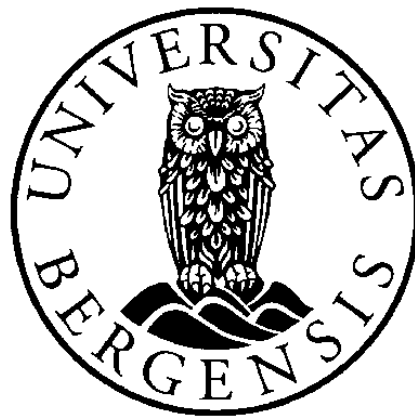


GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON WORLD  
TRADE, 1500 - 1750

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June 2011

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## SAMMENDRAG

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Global historie er en historisk sjanger som har en lang og omfattende historie, men det er først utover etterkrigstiden at den virkelig er begynt å bli virkelig oppdaget innenfor store akademiske miljøer. Sjangeren skal se på de lange linjene og utviklingstrekkene i menneskenes historie enn den fokuserer på enkeltbegivenheter. Der den fokuserer på enkeltbegivenheter skal sjangeren fortsatt plassere de enkelte begivenhetene i en større, global kontekst.

Global historie kan deles opp i tre undergrupper; teoretisk, historio-grafisk og fokus på enkeltbegivenheter med bredt perspektiv. Den teoretiske undergruppen som domineres av sivilisasjonsanalyse og verdens-systemanalyse har lagt et viktig grunnlag for fremveksten av sjangeren, men det vil argumenteres at mangelen på empirisk grunnlag innen den teoretiske undergruppen av global historie gjør at det er fokus på enkeltbegivenheter i et bredt og globalt perspektiv som har størst mulighet til å takle utfordringene historiefaget står ovenfor i fremtiden; f.eks. politisk press og fremveksten av partier på den ekstreme høyresiden.

Testet opp mot verdenshandel som tema blir det gitt en gjennomgang av hvordan to bøker som var resultatet av konferansen *Rise of Merchant Empires* i 1987 holder seg til de globalhistoriske teorier og om de faktisk klarer å unngå å falle i fellen som eurosentrisme er.

Det blir identifisert tre feller som globalhistorikere kan gå i; (i) Orientalisme, (ii) generalisering og (iii) eurosentrisme og andre former for "sentrismer".

Global historie er viktig da det har en evne til å føre til økt forståelse for kulturer og områder som for mange fremstår som fremmede. Global historie kan bryte ned fordommer, og sjangeren har muligheten til å være en viktig brems mot den økte oppslutningen om det ekstreme høyre og økte nasjonalistiske tendenser. Det er derfor også ønskelig at man benytter seg av lærdom fra global historie også når man skriver lokalhistorie ol. Globale perspektiver kan gi nye syn på godt etablerte historiske modeller; alle kan ta lærdom av å plassere den historiske forskningen sin i en global kontekst.

*The terrible reductive conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like “America”, “The West” or “Islam” and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse cannot remain as potent as they are, and must be opposed*

— Edward W. Said

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This thesis is the result of not only many hours of study and writing, but also the support and help from many people.

Many thanks to my supervisor Ståle Dyrvik and the rest of the seminar in early modern history at the University of Bergen.

I would like to extend my thank you to Nick Mariette and Andre Miede for great help with the the finer programming in regards to L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X. The British Museum and their image service for study and non-commercial projects deserve a honourable mention for giving access to photographs.

This could not have been done without the support from my family, who have supported me through all my studies. A big thank you to my brother, Martin Kronen, for making me laugh even when the deadline was getting closer and closer.

And then we have Tonje A. Gjøystdal, dearest of all and my companion in life. She has been a great support, and none of this would have been possible without her.

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## ACRONYMS

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EIC	English East India Company
VOC	Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie
WHA	World History Association
HBC	Hudson Bay Company

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## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 BACKGROUND

Today there is a massive amount of historical writing available to both the general public and professional academics alike, and this literature ranges from the use of “mainstream” theoretical perspectives such as political history and biography to more specialised fields such as quantitative history and psychohistory. Most historical writing seeking to explain the development of our world over longer periods of time, as for example most textbooks used in schools and introduction courses on universities do, usually apply a wide range of these different theoretical perspectives while never using the full range of possibilities these different perspectives can bring to historical writing in terms of a global approach to the field of study. As the methodology and theories within the field of history have developed over the years, so has the growing concern for eurocentrism; the act of viewing the world from a European perspective, downplaying or forgetting the role non-Europeans might have played in the course of history. These concerns have inspired the fields of postcolonial history and global history, and global history has developed to make attempts in avoiding all forms of “centrism”, not only eurocentrism. Global history is also called world history and universal history, and the terms are often used as if they were interchangeable, with the notable exception from a group of scholars led by Bruce Mazlish, who sought to define global history in contrast to world history by linking global history solely to the contemporary concerns of globalisation.<sup>1</sup> Global history is the term that will be used here, as although both world history and universal history might sometimes be used when citing other historians.

In our globalised world, the field of global history has seen increased popularity during the last decade, and it has found its way into the universities as own courses and graduate programs. I was first introduced to the concept of global history through a course at the University of Bergen which provided an excellent overview over the ongoing debates and recent developments within the field. The purpose of the course was to give a detailed look at the development from many separate and local networks of society, exchange and contact to one truly global network where people, ideas and goods crossed the globe while keeping some critical question in mind; can the global perspectives applied within the field truly define global history as a separate historical genre? And do the different approaches to global history all stick true to their manifesto of avoiding eurocentrism and not downplaying the role of non-European societies? Important questions to keep in mind, especially considering the major divisions among global historians, most

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<sup>1</sup> P. Manning, *Navigating World History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 171 - 172.



notably between civilisationists and world-system historians. As global history keeps developing and the debates between the different divisions within the field are still going strong, more and more universities are debating if and why they should create undergraduate and graduate programs in global history; a step that, if taken, requires significant innovation in the curriculum and dependable interaction among faculty members and students.<sup>2</sup>

Several aspects of our globalised world have led to the increased popularity of global history. On one side, there is the increased awareness of global interaction as we on a daily basis interact with people from all over the world through our jobs, through the internet and through the news. This often leads to curiosity about global interactions in the past. On the other side, there are the international aspirations of organisations, nations and industry. Some turn to history to do good, like the UN and their affiliated organisations, while others turn to history to find a basis for the exploit of people and natural resources or to justify occupations of foreign states. History, as always, is a double-edged sword with its uses and misuses.

The purpose of this text will be to take a closer look at the field of global history to find out if it manages to stick to its intentions of a truly global narrative and criticism of the Eurocentric and other centric views that all too often is applied within the historical field of research. Reaching this goal by looking at the vast number of topics history and global history can cover would be a time-consuming and next to impossible task; therefore the focus here will be on the growth of world trade and how world trade as a subject is handled by historians of global history.

## 1.2 METHODS AND THE LIMITS OF TIME AND SPACE

This is mainly a work of historiography which means that it will aim to give a summary and critique of historical interpretations. Focus will be on historians looking at the world through the lens of global history. Taking a historiographical approach there will be a focus on the *why* and *how* of decision making; the decision makers here being mainly the historians. *Why* and *how* did the global historian in question reach his or her conclusions? *Why* did the global historian focus on exactly those subjects, areas or topics? And *how* did he or she come to create his or her theory of choice?

The growth and development of world trade is a particular good subject in which to test whether or not global historians truly stick to their program. World trade is a global phenomenon, and historians working with the subject need to focus on vastly different areas of the world. Thus; when looking at the growth of world trade through the lens of global history, making a strict limit in space would be a paradox. No areas of the globe will, or should be, be left out, but some areas will receive more attention than others due to the key subjects historians tend to focus on when it comes to world trade. Examples here include the Indian Ocean due to the well established commercial networks and maritime trade and the great number of different participants involved. Africa and the Trans-Saharan trade route and their contribution to world trade also feature regularly.

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<sup>2</sup> Manning (as in n. 1), p. 333.

The focal time period here will be the early modern era (roughly 1500 - 1750). The period between 1500 and 1750 is of special interest when it comes to world trade, as from 1500 and onwards, more and more parts of the globe connected, thus influencing the established trade routes and merchant networks of each other. It is an era with an increased use of long-distance trade and changes in the well-established caravan routes of Africa and Asia. Also, it is an era with a great continuity and increased vitality in old commercial hubs like the Indian Ocean and its flourishing maritime trade.

It is beyond any dispute among historians that the early modern era witnessed a great increase in the integration of trade on a global scale.<sup>3</sup> The era is worth studying as there are several unanswered questions and ongoing debates regarding the growth world trade experienced. The subject is thus often explored by global historians, and there is a wide range of literature within global history regarding the subject.

As mentioned above, this is mainly a work of historiography, and most of the works that will be given a critique on the historical interpretation applied are works written after 1945 and most notably the last 20 years, but to truly understand global history as a historical subject, lines will be drawn back in time to the works of ancient historians so a clear understanding of the developments within global history can be made.

### 1.3 AVAILABLE LITERATURE

The literature available and ready to use for historiographical research on global history is a wide variety of books, ranging in topic from grand narratives and historical theories to single subjects like trade in the Indian Ocean, and articles from various journals detailing a wide range of different topics. Of particular importance are the *Journal of World History* and the *Journal of Global History*, although various other journals also feature global history regularly. Works within global history is, as all historical writing, characterised by a wide number of different literary forms and the three basic techniques of description, narrative and analysis<sup>4</sup> are all applied within global history, where the technique of analysis can be said to be most widely used due to the large number of works written on global theories of historical development. In most cases, literature within the field of global history is all about *interpreting* the past. The subject of a article or book written with global history in mind might very well be narrow, but there will always be a focus on long-term consequences or broad patterns well outside the area of the article's or book's subject that the contemporaries were only dimly or not at all aware of. As historians from all disciplines must know, any action taken by individuals will often come into conflict with<sup>5</sup> or sometimes be entirely opposite to the results they themselves intended.<sup>6</sup>

Fully realising the truthfulness of the above statement, the Center for Early Modern History at the University of Minnesota sponsored a conference called "The Rise of Merchant Empires" in October 1987. The conference had been in planning for three years, and it was to address

<sup>3</sup> J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade In the Early Modern World 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 2006, p. 147.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>6</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 44 - 49.

*The Journal of World History is published quarterly by the World History Association and University of Hawai'i Press. The Journal of Global History is published three times a year by London School of Economics and Political Science and Cambridge Journals. See Chapter 2 for more on these journals.*

topics that were truly global in scope.<sup>7</sup> Realising how difficult it could be to have a complex subject as global perspectives on world trade handled by individuals adherent to a single ideological perspective, the planners of the conference invited a wide range of historians to contribute with essays, where each essay should be “limited to a given region but informed by an awareness of larger questions.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1993, another conference focusing mainly on global history was arranged by the ISCSC. Among the members of the ISCSC were civilisationists and world-system theorists; followers of the two dominant theoretical perspectives within global history. United in a common contention that human history has long-term and large-scale patterns<sup>9</sup> and with a focus on whether long-term human development was a gradual and incremental change or a more cyclical change<sup>10</sup> there are still major differences between the two theoretical perspectives. Despite these differences, or perhaps because of them, it was suggested by the editor of ISCSC’s official journal that a special issue of the journal should be devoted to a dialogue between civilisationists and world-system theorists, drawing on ideas presented in a paper at the conference by world-system theorist Thomas Hall.

ISCSC:  
International  
Society for the  
Comparative Study  
of Civilizations.

Global history was also the subject of the 19th International Congress of the Historical Sciences held in Oslo between the 6th and 13th August 2000. The theme of the congress was the status and future of global history, divided into five sub-themes: *Perspectives on Global History: Concepts and Methodology, Millennium, Time and History, The Uses and Abuses of History and Responsibility of the Historian and Past and Present*.<sup>11</sup> Keeping a global perspective was important on all five sub-themes, and most papers from each theme dealt with the use, status and future of global history.

“The Rise of Merchant Empires” conference in 1987 resulted in two books; *The Rise of Merchant Empires* and *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*; each containing papers from participants of the conference. As mentioned above, their goal was to address topics that were global in scope, but they chose not to use a theoretical approach relying on grand narratives and the use of systems. They instead chose to focus on a single phenomenon with truly global consequences; the growth of world trade in the early modern era. A phenomenon that touched the lives of people living in all corners of the world, and also a phenomenon affected by cyclical movements in more local economies.<sup>12</sup> In other words; a phenomenon that affected history on a global scale, but also were affected by regional developments. Thus, the two books which were the result of the 1987 conference stands as representations for what can be dubbed the *single topic approach* within global history with a focus on quantitative and empirical studies.

Common for all three conferences is that they resulted in one or more publications. And each of the publications stands as representations of the dominant types of literature to be found within global history. The 1993 ISCSC conference resulted in a book, *Civilizations and World Systems*, including all papers that were presented in the ISCSC’s official

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7 Tracy (as in n. 3), p. vii.

8 Ibid.

9 S.K. Sanderson, editor, *Civilizations and World Systems*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1995, p. 9.

10 Manning (as in n. 1), p. 257.

11 S. Sogner, editor, *Making sense of global history*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001, p. 9.

12 Tracy (as in n. 3), p. 4.

Table 1: A brief overview over the different types of literature within global history and their fields of study.

LITERATURE	FIELD OF STUDY
Theoretical	Systems
Single Topic Approach	Limited studies with a broader perspective
Historiography	Methods and concepts

journal after the conference. The book stands as a representation for the theoretical approach to global history; the contributors to the book seek to explain the development of history by using common patterns and a few select structural explanations in a truly grand narrative, often spanning thousands of years, while trying to respect the unlimited diversity of human society, culture and perspective. They often aim to explain history through the use of systems; be it world-systems, civilisations or other means to categorize historical development, which are often based on the ideas of either world-systems or civilisations.

*Making Sense of Global History*, the book which was the result of the Oslo conference, is a strong representation of the *historiographical approach* on global history. Its focus is on the current status and future perspectives of global history and the various articles presented in the book has a emphasis on the methods and concepts used by global historians, and also how history has been used by historians and others alike.

Literature used in this paper will mostly fall into the *single topic approach*, although literature from the *historiographical approach* will also be used, primarily in the first chapters.

#### 1.4 AIM OF STUDY

Using the theme of world trade, which has been established as an excellent theme to test global history on due to the increased contact and exchange that followed it, select works from the *single topic approach* to global history will be looked at. By giving reviews on select works from the *single topic approach*, problems and discussions within the genre will be identified. How global historians treat the theme of world trade during the early modern era and to what extent they stay true to the the intentions of global history will be tested. This will lead up to a discussion on the present status of global history and the future of the field.

# 2

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## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITIONS AND THE PAST AND PRESENT OF GLOBAL HISTORY

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It is only in recent years that global history has seen a renaissance of sorts, but the concept of global histories is an old one, with roots back in time to ancient Greece, the Middle East and Asia. It has indeed been dubbed a genre of history that is both old and new.<sup>1</sup> As there is a trend among many global historians to focus on the roots of their field of study when writing their global histories, I will here give a brief overview of the historiographical traditions common within global history, and how these have been developed, ending in an assessment of the present status of global history.

### 2.1 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITIONS FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE RANKEAN REVOLUTION

Global histories can be traced as far back as Herodotus (c. 495 - c. 425 BCE) who included large parts of areas outside the Hellenic world in his writing; for instance Egypt, India, Arabia and Persia. Herodotus claimed that his task in his still widely popular work *The Histories* was to inform about the great deeds of both the Greeks and the non-Greeks.<sup>2</sup> It has been said that global historians will applaud the work of Herodotus due to its scale and scope, as well as his reflexive interest in “barbarian” virtues and Greek vices.<sup>3</sup> He was, however, one of the few with such wide perspectives in his time, and his rival Thucydides (c. 471 - c. 400 BCE) claimed that Greeks should avoid the history of other cultures. Who of the two rivals became more dominant among contemporaries is hard to say, but what follows after Herodotus is a time with few attempts on global histories. Even historians living in the expanding Roman Empire, an empire that influenced and got influenced by an wide array of cultures due to commerce and military expansion, cared little about anything else than the politics of Rome. This is a puzzling phenomenon to modern-day global historians, and a phenomenon that would continue within the European historiographical tradition for over a thousand years after the fall of Rome<sup>4</sup> seeing as medieval historiography was mostly influenced by theology and constructing histories for and about the Christian community. This occurred also after the European discovery of the Americas. Although the discovery challenged the fundamental ways of writing history at the time and raised questions regarding whether or not to write histories that stretched over large geographical spaces, historical writing was still

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<sup>1</sup> Sogner (as in n. 11), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bentley, editor, *Companion to Historiography*. New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> P. O'Brien, *Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history*. *Journal of Global History*, 1 2006:1, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

influenced partly by religion. An example here is the French historian Jean Bodin who in 1566 wrote a history with a truly broad perspective both geographically and in time, and his global history was broad and eclectic. Divine Providence, however, was the force behind the historical process.<sup>5</sup>

Despite a steady flow of information into Europe regarding other parts of the world, an information flow that increased greatly during the sixteenth century, a secular historiographical tradition did not emerge again until Voltaire's writings. He emphasized non-theological themes like economics and politics in his writing, and with his *Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of the Nation* he attempted a history written in a global context. The major flow of information coming to Europe from other parts of the world during the Enlightenment era gave Voltaire and other Enlightenment thinkers a well laid foundation for the writing of histories breaking free from what was the norm in European historiography at the time, and China and Islam became alternative models favourably contrasted to the Western model in much of this writing.<sup>6</sup> By coining the changes occurring in the course of history as progress, a positive term, the Enlightenment writers could easily fall into the pit trap of dubbing all past aspects of human civilisation as worse than their present. They were, in a way, dismissing the past. Historicism would later develop partly as a response to the Enlightenment view on history. There were also occurrences of censorship from the royalty on the historical writing in the Enlightenment era; a good example is the project called *Encyclopedie* lead by Denis Diderot. The *Encyclopedie* was supposed to address issues from art history to mechanical history, but due to royal censorship it ended up focusing heavily on European history. Some slipped past the censorship, and Guillaume Thomas Francois Raynal managed to publish a global history of the East and West Indies with a critique of French colonial policy.<sup>7</sup> The secular tradition evolved soon into a showcase of western triumphalism, however, and cultural arrogance fuelled by the aftermaths of the American, French and Industrial Revolutions lead to a belief leaning on Hegel's assumptions that "the history of the world travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, and Asia the beginning."<sup>8</sup>

Chinese histories emerged at the same time as the Greek and Roman ones, and the Chinese developed their historiography mostly by itself due to its comparative geographical isolation.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese traditions of writing history would later spread to Korea, Japan and Vietnam, creating an East Asian historiographical tradition.<sup>10</sup> Chinese writing of history had close ties to Confucianism and it has been suggested that history was often written as a guideline telling how to fit into the Confucian way of life, and it owes much to the influences of Sima Qian (ca. 100 B.C.E.) who compiled large quantities of historical documents.<sup>11</sup> The focus of the historiographical tradition in its early years were often on the rise and fall of a person or a state, and although most of the events focused on were within China's geographical space there were occasionally historians focusing on people and places on the edges of

Divine Providence:  
*The belief that all that occurs in the universe occurs under God's sovereign guidance and control.*

<sup>5</sup> Manning (as in n. 1), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, *Journal of Global History* 1 [2006] (as in n. 3), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Manning (as in n. 1), p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> B. Mazlish, *The Riddle of History*. New York: Harper Row, 1966, p. 132-163.

<sup>9</sup> Sogner (as in n. 11), p. 338.

<sup>10</sup> Bentley (as in n. 2), p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Manning (as in n. 1), p. 33.

or well beyond the expanding Chinese empire. The coining of other societies as “barbaric” took place in Chinese writing, just as it did in Greek and Roman histories, but through commerce and exploration into Central Asia and South-East Asia China developed a recognition that some groups of people was more civilized than others. This recognition probably helped spread the historiographical developments made in China to other East Asian peoples, as mentioned above. Despite the recognition of some other societies as less barbaric than others, the societies most readily accepted were East-Asian societies who wrote in Chinese characters and had cultural norms and moral codes in common with the Chinese empire; the Chinese looked on the world in sinocentric terms.<sup>12</sup> Attempts on writing less sinocentric histories were made, most notably by Chang Hsüch-ch’eng (1738 - 1801) who wished to write a history with a broader view and part from the traditional look on historical writing the East Asian historiographical tradition. His ideas had little impact, but were revived in modern times.<sup>13</sup> A similar development as in China also occurred in Japan, with a focus on political developments on the Japanese islands. Common for all participants in the East Asian historiographical tradition is that their historical writing has left behind all the genres and styles that modern historians are familiar with, for instance large collections of official documents, biographies and chronicles.

The contribution of written histories from India and the rest of South Asia are considerable less than from the East Asian tradition. Hindu Civilization did produce official records and genealogies, but a modern Indian historian has observed that “historical writing was one of the least developed areas of ancient Indian culture”<sup>14</sup>. It has been suggested that they already had a superior knowledge about the Asian world and the system of commerce in the Indian Ocean that they did not need to refer to works of history or geography.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, there is no doubt that the people of Ancient India had a sense of history, and this sense of history would be improved with the coming of Islam and the growth of the Mughal Empire. Most notable here was Abul Fax, court historian to the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) who became known for his strict adherence to chronology and details. His writing was of course influenced by his position as court historian; his chief concerns were dynastic and political history and a type of writing patriotic to the current regent.<sup>16</sup>

The Islamic historiographical tradition is perhaps the most significant one, both in terms of the amount of history written and the universal, or global, aspirations some of its historians showed. With the rapid expansion of the Islamic faith, Arabic historians were forced to take into account the past deeds and present customs and laws of more and more people, triggering a broadening of their historical outlook. Although it has been stated that the Qur’an itself was a motivation for global views on the writing of history<sup>17</sup> there is no doubt that the massive geographical space of the Dar al-Islam contributed to a histori-

12 O’Brien, *Journal of Global History* 1 [2006] (as in n. 3), p. 18-19.

13 Bentley (as in n. 2), p. 35.

14 T. Raychaudhuri, *Indian Historiography*. in: J. Cannon, editor, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Historians*. Blackwell, 1988, p. 205.

15 O’Brien, *Journal of Global History* 1 [2006] (as in n. 3), p. 16.

16 H. Mukhia, *Time, Chronology and History: the Indian Case*. in: S. Sogner, editor, *Making Sense of Global History*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001.

17 H. Yucesoy, *Ancient imperial heritage and Islamic universal historiography: al-Dinawari’s secular perspective*. *Journal of Global History*, 2 2007:2, p. 135-136.

Table 2: A selection of notable works with global perspectives in the Islamic historiographical tradition, before ca. 1800

TITLE	AUTHOR
Histories of Prophets and Kings	Tabari
Longer Narratives	al-Dinawari
Meadows of Gold	Mas'udi
Muqaddima	Ibn Khaldun

cal writing acknowledging the contributions a wide range of peoples had to historical development. It is also likely that support from the ruling dynasties on the translation of documents into Arabic might have helped create a strong foundation for historical writing in general. Even among the global historians of the Islamic historiographical tradition, it was theology that influenced their writings; history ended with the expansion of the Dar al-Islam, and as such the historical writing might have been a way of “community building”, gaining unity within the expanding lands of the Islamic faith by acknowledging the contributions other civilisations had made to the Islamic culture. This helped place the Islamic tradition in a wider religious and imperial context and highlighting the Islamic umma as a representative of monotheism and imperial authority (kingship)<sup>18</sup>, two themes treated as universal phenomena by contemporary historians. The location of the Dar el-Islam and the contact it maintained with the rest of the world through trade, exploration and conquest placed its intellectuals in a unique position to acquire geographic, cultural and political knowledge about foreign lands, enabling them to write these universal narratives as early as they did.<sup>19</sup>

Among the most notable works with global aspirations to have been produced in the Dar el-Islam is Histories of Prophets and Kings by Tabari , Longer Narratives by al-Dinawari, Meadows of Gold by Mas'udi, and the Muqaddima by Ibn Khaldun (see Table 2). Although Ibn Khaldun received little attention from his contemporaries, his works became commonly discussed by Ottoman historians during the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup> This was a direct consequence of the Ottoman Empire encouraging the writing of histories and this encouragement also made the *Book of Travels* a reality; Ottoman diplomat Evliya Celebi's accounts from his travels in the then vast Ottoman Empire. Although he clearly exaggerates and misinterprets in his work, he showed some broad perspectives, and he recorded both Islamic and non-Islamic texts, and even gained the aid of Christian priests in translating Greek texts.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.2 THE RANKEAN REVOLUTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR GLOBAL HISTORY

The Hegelian presumptions about Europe being the end of history and the result of a progress taking place from the east to the west could be

<sup>18</sup> Yucesoy (as in n. 17), p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> O'Brien, *Journal of Global History* 1 [2006] (as in n. 3), p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Bentley (as in n. 2), p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> R. Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: the World of Evliya Çelebi*. Leiden: Brill, 2004, p. 195.



seen in most European historians in the nineteenth century. Despite this, history as a discipline became more mature, and imported theories from other fields of study, including sociology and economics. The intellectual movement called historicism called for more documentation of the arguments of historians, and urged the historians to recognise that time has passed and possibly altered the mentality of mankind and the conditions of life. The supporters of historicism also believed that their present day society and culture were a result of historical development. History held the key to understanding the world, and to find the key, the historian had to properly analyse available documents to recreate history “wie es eigentlich gewesen” as Leopold von Ranke put it.<sup>22</sup> Historicism and its ideals started in the German universities but spread to the rest of Europe quickly during the nineteenth century as an academic version of Romanticism.

The Romantic focus on the past led to an increased interest in times as far back as the medieval ages, and soon the supporters of historicism produced large multivolume works on both regional and world history. Historicist focus on documents led to a wide range of local studies on history. The quality of the methods used had increased and history continued to mature into a subject for professional teaching and research much thanks to the historicists, but the Romantic focus often led to patriotic histories. The world histories written often left out the world outside Europe and North-America entirely or spent precious few pages on it. The British historian Henry Buckle wrote a three-volume *History of Civilization* which was heavily biased towards England and his assumption was that civilization could be broken into a European division in which “Man is more powerful than Nature” and a non-European division “in which Nature is more powerful than Man”. Historians with aspirations to write secular and global histories were few and far between.<sup>23</sup> For the most part, the study of areas outside Europe was left to various colonial administrators, missionaries and geographers travelling the world. These groups all produced huge amounts of information, but this information was not put to use before the writing of global histories in modern times.<sup>24</sup> After the first world war, a time when the meticulous analysis and working methods of the historicists was widely accepted as the proper way to study the past, western triumphalism was maintained by incorporating the European overseas settlements and countries in Australia, New Zealand and Latin America into what the contemporaries called “western civilisation”.

The increased quality of the methods used resulting from the Rankean revolution and its aftermath was important for the development of history as an academic discipline, but it left development within the writing of global histories almost at a standstill, with no major progress from the Enlightenment writing. The increased availability and focus on national and local archives most likely made national and local histories a safer and more prestigious choice for the historians of the Romantic era.

There were some who distinguished themselves from the norm the Rankean revolution created for historiography and the most notable among these might be said to be Karl Marx. Marx said that the only objective view of history was based on material conditions. He put

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<sup>22</sup> Tosh (as in n. 4), p. 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> O'Brien, *Journal of Global History* 1 [2006] (as in n. 3), p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> E.R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.

himself apart from his contemporaries by avoiding the normal themes such as nationalism or religion, and instead focusing on what has been dubbed historical materialism and a focus on the growth of human productive power and accused Ranke and his followers of imprisoning themselves within the dominant ideologies of the subjects they studied thus focusing too much on the dominant class and its interests.<sup>25</sup> The themes Marx choose for his historical theory can be said to be universal, and in talks about human society in broad and general terms in most of works, e.g. his summary of social structures throughout history: “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production.”<sup>26</sup> Despite his focus on material conditions, he believed that people could make historical changes (e.g. acting against the capitalist system): “Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand.”<sup>27</sup> Marx’s periodisation of history is however based upon European ancient times, the feudal era and his contemporary, western society.

Marx’s thought and ideas would later become important in shaping the world system approach to global history. (See 2.7.2)

### 2.3 A GENRE DIVIDED: THEORETICAL DEBATES, PRESSURE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE RIGHT AND CRITIQUE FROM THE LEFT

When parts of the globe far away from Europe became included into the constructed “western civilisation” after World War One, it forced many historians of world history to broaden their view slightly for a better look on historical development. Civilisations and other systems in which to organise the past became increasingly important, while larger parts of the population gained access to historical writing due to an increasing number of universities being established offering courses on history following the development of history into a professional academic discipline in the end of the nineteenth century. The genre of global history would get its renaissance, but the increased level of education among the world’s population would lead to increased pressure and critique towards global history.

#### 2.3.1 *The Birth of the Theoretical Approach to Global History*

In the wake of the destruction left by World War One, and later World War Two, scholars everywhere were left in a cultural shock. The abrupt ending of almost a century of relative peace lead to a climate of pessimism and the writing of global histories to help Europeans comprehend the decline and relapse into barbarity by the west.<sup>28</sup> The main focus within global history became civilisations in an attempt to weave tales of human development through their rise, fall and coexistence.

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<sup>25</sup> Tosh (as in n. 4), p. 227-233.

<sup>26</sup> K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Rockville: Arc Manor, LLC, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> P. O’Brien, *The Status and Future of Universal History*. in: S. Sogner, editor, *Making Sense of Global History*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001, p. 20.

Between 1918 and 1922 Oswald Spengler released *The Decline of the West* where he criticised the focus on Europe within historiography. He was heavily influenced by philosophy and Roman and Greek classics<sup>29</sup>, and he treated civilisations, and the western one in particular, as a philosophy in and of itself.<sup>30</sup> His influences from philosophy can easily be seen in the introduction where he asks: “Is there a logic to history? Is there [...] something that we may call a metaphysical structure of historic humanity...?”<sup>31</sup> He treated civilisations as living entities, and thus focused on their birth, growth and death as well as speculation on the future of the current civilisations. Spengler started a trend here, as contemporary and future global historians would also abandon the limits professionalism set forth and speculate in the destiny and future of our civilisations.

Arnold J. Toynbee followed up on Spengler’s ideas and released his multivolume work *A Study of History* between 1933 and 1948. Like Spengler, Toynbee criticised the focus on Europe and the European nation states which dominated the historiography at the time. He starts his *Study of History* by testing whether English history is in itself self-explanatory or not as an example on how no nation has a history that is not, in one way or another, influenced by developments, ideas and people from other parts of the world.<sup>32</sup> Toynbee also focuses on the birth, growth and death of civilisations, but strays away from the “civilisations as living organisms” metaphor more than Spengler, and instead uses a wide variety of metaphors in his work.

Within the civilisational approach to history, the main focus is on culture, religion and other internal developments within the various civilisations. A civilisation is cyclical in nature as it can go through various periods of rise and decline, which both Spengler and Toynbee agree upon. But Toynbee’s *A Study of History* was the first major work focusing on cyclical changes in world history and within civilisations, and especially important for the development of the civilisational approach to history is how he looks at the contact between civilisations, instead of merely focusing on internal developments within the civilisations he define:

“...we have found that, though a civilisation proves to be an intelligible unit so long as we are considering its genesis, growth and breakdown it ceases to be so in the phase of its disintegration. We cannot understand this last phase of a civilisation’s history without extending our mental range of vision beyond its bounds and taking account of the impact of external forces.”<sup>33</sup>

Toynbee’s idea was that contact, be it trade for economic gain or mere exchange of goods and more importantly ideas, can be a catalyst for change within a civilisation, especially if this comes from external forces. New research within the civilisational approach to history has shown more and more focus on external forces and contact between different civilisations. Spengler and Toynbee laid the foundation for a long range of civilisationists, and one of the major contemporary civilisationists, David Wilkinson, has also shifted the view from culture to something of

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29 Manning (as in n. 1), p. 38.

30 P.K. Crossley, *What Is Global History?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, p. 111.

31 O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 3.

32 A.J. Toynbee; D.C. Somervell, editor, *A Study of History, Abridgement of Volumes I-VI*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 1-3.

33 Idem, *A Study of History, Abridgement of Volumes VII-X*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 144.

a more socio-political one. Discussions are still going strong, however, about what truly defines the civilisational approach to history. The same holds true for the number of civilisations in the world; various historians work with widely different numbers. Wilkinson works with a roster of fourteen civilisations while Toynbee originally operated with twenty-three. Other historians of note using forms of civilisational approaches in their historical writing are Pitrim Sorokin and Carroll Quigley.

Despite their importance for the development of global history, the civilisationist approaches to history are less than ideal to represent global history and its modern intentions, as most civilisationist's use of sources, be they primary or secondary, are lacking at best due to their heavy focus on mainly theories about historical developments, often over very large periods of time and the grand scale social theorising and the heavy influence from sociology the civilisationist approach have. Indeed, a majority of the contributors to the ISCSC (see Chapter 1) have a background from sociology. They are however excellent at seeing and conceptualising patterns in historical change.<sup>34</sup>

### 2.3.2 *The Theoretical Approach Evolves; World Systems*

The world system approach to history has a greater focus on material conditions, economy, cooperation and exchange. The theory on world-systems was first launched by Immanuel Wallerstein in 1974, but he was borrowing a few basic principles from Fernand Braudel's famous work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the age of Philip II*. While Braudel's work (which was a breakthrough in the Annales School of history and a brave attempt at "total history") certainly can be seen as to treat the Mediterranean area as a type of world system, Wallerstein extended this system so its focus became the whole of Europe. From there he set out to "see capitalism as a historical system, over the whole of its history and in concrete unique reality"<sup>35</sup>. He treats the world system as self-persistent, based on a division of labour and as something that contains several different cultures and draws heavily upon the Marxian notion of class struggle. What he does not, however, is to look at potential world systems before about 1500. Thus, Wallerstein only includes one world system in his theory, as the capitalist world system he operates with eventually encompasses the whole of the globe. What define this as a world system is three things; it is autonomous, it has a complex division of labour and it contains different societies and cultures.<sup>36</sup>

A more recent development within the world system approach has been to develop "pre-capitalist" world system theories which can be used for times before 1500 and for greater parts of the world than just Europe. Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall has pointed out the benefits of both operating with a larger selection of world systems and defining world systems before the early modern era and that comparing these world systems to look at similarities and differences between them will greatly help research on world system

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<sup>34</sup> Sanderson (as in n. 9), p. 11-15.

<sup>35</sup> I. Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization*. London: Verso, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> S.K. Sanderson and T.D. Hall, *World System Approaches to World-Historical Change*. in: S.K. Sanderson, editor, *Civilizations and World Systems*. AltaMira Press, 1995, p. 96.

theory.<sup>37</sup> French historian Philippe Beaujard recently used the world system theory to propose possible world systems as far back as the Bronze Age, and that a multicentered world system encompassing the Mediterranean basin, Egypt and western Asia existed as far back as the late Bronze Age.<sup>38</sup> The breakthrough for looking further back than the early modern era within the world system approach came in 1989 when Janet Abu-Lughod published *Before European Hegemony*, a work focusing on the Dar al-Islam and its surrounding regions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>39</sup>

Bronze Age:  
Roughly 3000 BCE  
to 600 BCE

Just like the case is with the civilisationist approach to global history, the world system approach is too heavily influenced by the focus on grand scale social theorising and it has, indeed, also major influences from sociology. It has slightly more focus on sources than the civilisationist approach due to the increased attention given to material conditions and economy.

### 2.3.3 *The Transition From Systems to Economic Developments and the Single Topic Approach*

Influenced by the theoretical approach and its focus on broader patterns, historians started to approach global history by focusing on economic developments, their relation with cultural and technological progress and the global interactions and forms of exchange that followed. This transition started slowly in 1963 when William McNeill published *The Rise of the West*, and his project of spinning a “analogue world wide web” culminated in 2003 with the release of *The Human Web*, in which the usage of systems (“webs”) from the theoretical approaches is still used, but it has a greater focus on sources and on empirical research in general.<sup>40</sup>

McNeill’s work from the 1960s and onward influenced other historians, most notably Eric Wolf, K.N. Chaudhuri and Philip D. Curtin. Eric Wolf released his *Europe and the People Without History* in 1982 as a work showcasing Europe’s impact on the rest of the world. The title is meant ironically, as he makes clear in his introduction that he will show the readers that wherever European explorers and traders went, they encountered societies and cultures with rich and complex histories.<sup>41</sup> Wolf leans heavily on political economy and anthropology and his units of analysis throughout the book are social classes and ethnic groups as he focuses on linking a narrative of the world market to and a theory of capitalist development to processes of local development.<sup>42</sup> Two years later, K.N. Chaudhuri published *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, focusing on social, cultural and economic developments by using world trade as the great catalyst for historical development in the region.

In 1990, as a result from a conference the year before, *The Rise of Merchant Empires* is released, the first of two books focusing solely

37 C. Chase-Dunn and T.D. Hall, *Cross-World-System Comparisons*. in: S.K. Sanderson, editor, *Civilizations and World Systems*. AltaMira Press, 1995.

38 P. Beaujard, *From Three Possible Iron-Age World-Systems to a Single Afro-Eurasian World-System*. *Journal of World History*, 21 2010:1.

39 J. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250 - 1350*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

40 J.R. McNeill and W.H. McNeill, *The Human Web*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003.

41 Wolf (as in n. 24), p. x.

42 Manning (as in n. 1), p. 69.

on the growth of world trade in the early modern era. The same year, Phillip D. Curtin published *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, stating that “. . . history can not include everything; selection is necessary” and that “the most valuable questions are often those that cross cultural boundaries.”<sup>43</sup> It’s all about asking the right questions regarding the right subjects and avoiding the broader theoretical models put forth by Wallerstein and Toynbee. The stage was set for the *Single Topic Approach* to global history.

#### 2.3.4 1990 - Today: Teaching of Global History along with Increased Political Pressure and Misuse of the Genre

Global historians increasingly started to think on themselves as a group, and from about 1990 and onwards, organisations and journals were established and the teaching of global history at universities became more and more widespread, starting in the USA, but also spreading quickly to European universities. Following the professionalising of the genre, political pressure against global history increased rapidly.

##### *Global History at Schools and Universities*

As global history became a more professionalised genre it soon spread to the universities in the form of fields of teaching, research and study. Although fields of study addressing issues in global history can be traced back to the later 1960’s and the start of the 1970’s, it was only during the 1990’s that the popularity of global history made it spread rapidly from university to university. In 1994, Northeastern University became the first American university to offer a Ph.D. in global history.<sup>44</sup>

The University of Hawaii offered programs in global history since the later 1980’s, and in 1990 the university participated in creating the *Journal of World History* and the *World History Association* (WHA). Both the journal and the association became important resources for both students and teachers within the field of global history. The WHA quickly took an active role in promoting the teaching of global history, and they offer guidelines, teaching material and suggestions for curriculum. Teaching of global history is still an important subject for the WHA and one of the themes for their 20th annual conference set to be held in Beijing is teaching and research of global history in China.

Global Historians themselves had opinions regarding how courses in global history should be arranged. George E. Brooks, then a historian at the University of Indiana, published an article in 1991 detailing how a modern curriculum in global history should be organised. But perhaps more importantly, he focused on the fact that the students themselves should be contributed for much of the growth of global history by becoming more and more demanding regarding the learning of neglected parts of the world. He called for more organised and structured courses in global history where the contributions from minorities in the historical development of our world were properly incorporated into the curriculum and the course, not just merely added as an afterthought.<sup>45</sup>

43 P.D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. ix-x.

44 Manning (as in n. 1), p. 80.

45 G. E. Brooks, An Undergraduate World History Curriculum for the Twenty-First Century. *Journal of World History*, 2 1991:1, p. 66-68.

In 2006, London School of Economics and Political Science established the *Journal of Global History* as well as a Masters programme in global history. The focus of the first issue of the journal were on the modern imperatives for a restoration of global history to meet the needs of our globalised world,<sup>46</sup> while the major themes of the Masters programme include globalisation, economic history and the consequences of the global integration of commodity and factor markets upon states, societies and cultures in many regions.<sup>47</sup> The heavy focus on economic aspects is a trend within global history in the later years.

#### *Political Pressure and the Clash of Ideologies*

With the increased popularity of global history in schools and universities, the genre came under massive pressure from the political right and critique from the political left. The conservative right in USA, with its massive influence in many areas of the American society, argued that global history was politically biased and that it was undermining American patriotism. Oblivious to the fact that a global history supporting American patriotism would also be politically biased, the conservative right pressured for the creation of a patriotic global history, celebrating contemporary American values, even invoking the tragic events of September 11th 2001 to promote their views.<sup>48</sup> Other conservatives argued that textbooks in global history focused too little on the development of democracy and freedom of speech and other values that are important to our modern society. And therein lies the problem; by merely focusing on what is important for us today, the conservatives actively dismisses the past and ignores the contributions other values then contemporary American or European has had to historical development. Patriotic global history showed its dangerous potential in India between 1998 and 2004 when the Hindu nationalist government replaced the textbooks on history used in schools and universities with books constructing a mythic and zealous Hindu past for India<sup>49</sup>, downplaying the role of the Mughal Empire and the Muslims in the history of the Indian sub-continent. The Indian case is not unique, as religious undertones can often be found in much of the rhetoric used by the conservative far-right all over the world.

The political left soon followed with their critique of global history; aiming it mainly towards its very roots, claiming it has developed in the last years from a mainly western historiographical tradition. Global history, some claim, is tied to the Eurocentric modernity that produced it and that the genre is a tool used to legitimise contemporary globalisation and the capitalist system.<sup>50</sup> While the agenda of the conservative right clearly show that global history can be used to legitimise the capitalist system, there is no reason to coin all historical analysis of globalisation and world trade as propaganda for an ideology. The concern from the left reaffirms, however, the need for a global history that rejects pressure from ideologies, whether this pressure come from the right of the political spectrum or the left.

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<sup>46</sup> O'Brien, *Journal of Global History* 1 [2006] (as in n. 3), p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> LSE.

<sup>48</sup> J. Bentley, *Myths, wagers and some moral implications of world history*. *Journal of World History*, 16 2005:1, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

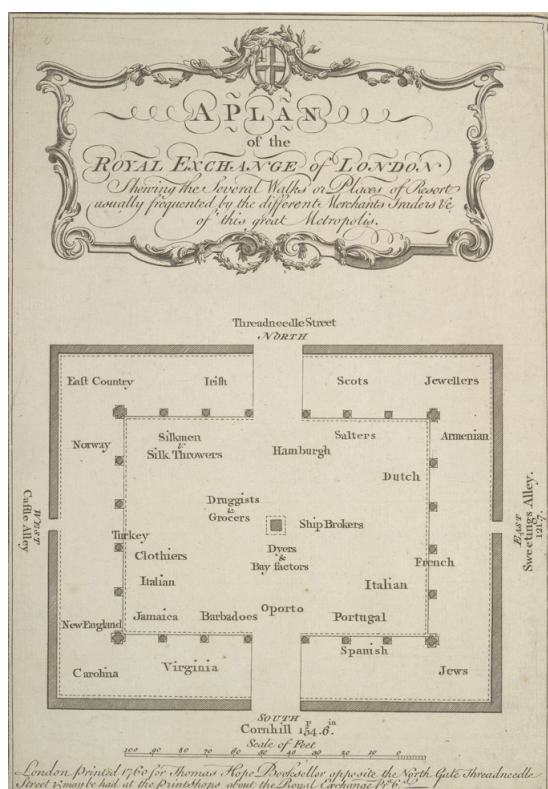


Figure 1: Example on a source. The Royal Exchange on the plan above was opened for traders in 1669. Notice that several strong merchant communities of the time, like the Armenians, are present. (Photograph courtesy of the British Museum.)

#### 2.4 SOURCES ON WORLD TRADE; THEIR NATURE AND USE

During the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the art of recordkeeping became more and more widespread, and trade in of itself is a process that generates written records, due to intent from all affected parties in a trade deal to have as much control as possible over what is traded, where it is traded, and when. It was, unless one had to deal with the odd scoundrel, in all parties' interest that a trade deal was fair, at least when it came to legal matters. It is no surprise then, that most of the sources available to historians working with the growth of world trade are written sources; trade deals, charters, trade and maritime law and the odd travel account from a merchant detailing his journeys.

Many of the sources still available from trade around the world either belonged to the state, local merchant guilds or large companies. Archives and libraries are thus the primary places to conduct research on the growth of world trade. With the increased usage of digital archives, large amounts of business correspondence, account books, trade manifests and even laws regulating trade and taxes from all over the world are easily available. Maps can also be a valuable resource, as can plans over exchanges and market places as their layout and the placement of goods and the different merchants can tell us much about the types of goods and its importance.

There are not only the written sources that are easily available to historians. Archaeologists' writings on ships and cargo found can be a valuable asset, and one can thus treat the very "tools of the trade"



as sources. Access to a ship's trade manifest and data on the actual ship itself can lead to information one easily could have missed by only having one piece of the puzzle.

An important question to ask when confronted with a trade manifest or any other source is "why did this source survive?" As stated earlier, the art of recordkeeping became more and more important during the sixteenth century, rising from the need of governments to keep an accurate record on the income and expenses of the state, and it also made it easier for officials to keep track on what their predecessors had done. And what was true of governments where also true for merchants, the great trading companies and the financial houses.<sup>51</sup> Political stability plays a vital role, as do warfare. Occupations, acts of war and sacking of towns often led to the loss of whole archives. In Europe, the survival of documents can partly be credited to the Renaissance and its antiquarian mentality which lead to a systematic conservation of books and manuscripts.<sup>52</sup> This also was the age of increased use of ambassadors and diplomatic practice, which also called for the need to preserve written records and reports.<sup>53</sup> The survival of documents from the Middle East can be credited to the Arabic scholars' early interests in historiography and universal history. Al-Dinawari is a strong representative for the beginning of this era, which can be dated back to ca. 800 C.E. Surviving records from India owes much to the influence from the Islamic world. The surviving written records from China are not as many as from Europe and the Middle-East, but for historians studying world trade there is a treasure trove of information in the Ming Veritable Records, in particular for the sixteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Sources from the Americas are more elusive prior to the coming of the Spaniards, but there is no doubt a city like Tenochtitlan must have been a true urban centre and relied massively on trade in a wide variety of goods. Especially as the city grew, it required high levels of economic support from surrounding areas.

Many sources from the early modern era are reprinted in newer editions, with additional information added by historians and archivists. Printed sources like this are transcribed, and usually some information is "lost in translation". In many circumstances, the historians and archivists only provide a selection of the material. An example here is the pound-toll registers from the town of Elbing. Parts of the Elbing archives were destroyed in a fire in 1777, but the remaining entries are now stored in the National Archives at Gdansk.<sup>55</sup> Elbing was an important town for merchants trading in the Baltic, and especially the English and the Dutch had a noteworthy presence there. The English even had a merchant company with a royal charter, the Eastland Company, who for a brief time had one of their offices in Elbing. Despite this, the only recent transcribed copy of the entries in the pound-toll registers of Elbing is a Dutch book; a result of the State Commission of Netherlands History deciding that the Elbing data should be made

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<sup>51</sup> Tosh (as in n. 4), p. 77.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> For more on this, see G. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*. New York: Dover Publications, 1988, p. 132-140.

<sup>54</sup> R. Huang presents his research on the Ming Veritable Records in R. Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> J.Th. Lindblad, *Dutch Entries in the Pound-Toll Registers of Elbing 1585-1700*. The Hague: The Institute of Netherlands History, 1995, p. XI.

available to students of Dutch trade with the Baltic.<sup>56</sup> Following this, the only transcribed entries from the Elbing archives are the Dutch ones.

There's still more to keep in mind when reading the sources. When taking into account what is said above, one can still not simply read the documents and accept its information as the one and only undeniable truth. E.H. Carr puts it's elegantly in his now famous work, *What is History?* where he says that:

*No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought – what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought [...] The facts [...] have to be processed by the historian before he can make any use of them...<sup>57</sup>*

The contents of documents are shaped by their authors; even something as simple as a trade manifest or a manifest detailing the cargo of a ship may include human error, or ways of writing and expressing details that differ from what we are used to in our modern world.

A large selection of both sources and literature will help in achieving the different viewpoints and the connections and patterns that cross over both time and space that is needed for a truly global perspective. This is as true for works presenting theories on civilisations and world systems as well as works focusing solely on world trade; the lack of use of sources in the theoretical works can thus be said to not be justified, as it brings problem in the use of a truly global perspective.

#### 2.4.1 *An Example on the Use of a Source In Regards to World Trade - The Hudson Bay Company and the Royal Charter*

In 1670 Charles II of England procured a royal charter granting substantial rights over huge areas in North-America to a small and diverse group of people exploring the areas around Hudson's Bay. This charter is called the Royal Proclamation Charter for the Company of Adventurers and lead to the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company (henceforth HBC), a company that would have a huge impact on British exploration and trade in North-America and also a huge impact in the history of Canada. As will be pointed out, the document can tell us a lot regarding trade and desire for profit among the explorers and merchants themselves, but also from the British crown and parliament.

Of particular interest to historians in the charter is a list of names showing all persons involved in the exploration, some financially, some as explorers and some both:

*WHEREAS Our dear and entirely beloved Cousin, Prince Rupert, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Bavaria and Cumberland, etc. Christopher, Duke of Albemarle, William, Earl of Craven, Henry, Lord Arlington, Anthony, Lord Ashley, Sir John Robinson, and Sir Robert Vyner, Knights and Baronets, Sir Peter Colleton, Baronet, Sir Edward Hungerford, Knight of the Bath, Sir Paul Neele, Knight, Sir John Griffith and Sir Philip Carteret, Knights, James Hayes, John Kirke, Francis Millington, William Prettyman, John Fenn, Esquires, and John Portman, Citizen and Goldsmith of London, have, at their own great Cost and Charges, undertaken an Expedition for Hudson's Bay in the North-west Part of America, for the Discovery of a new Passage into the South Sea, and for the finding some Trade for Furs, Minerals, and other*

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<sup>56</sup> Lindblad (as in n. 55), p. VII.

<sup>57</sup> Carr (as in n. 6), p. 10.



Figure 2: First page, Royal Proclamation Charter for the Company of Adventurers. Photograph courtesy of the Canadian Conservation Institute

*considerable Commodities, and by such their Undertaking, have already made such Discoveries as do encourage them to proceed further in Pursuance of their said Design, by means whereof there may probably arise very great Advantage to Us and Our Kingdom.*<sup>58</sup>

One of the first things to take note of here is the mix of nobles and non-nobles, and the first one listed is Prince Rubert of the Rhine, the cousin of Charles II. Thirteen of the ones listed in the charter were also royalists during the civil war and three of them were influential enough to be granted a ship from Charles II during the initial expedition in 1668.

From the part of the charter referenced to above one can identify the following goals with the expedition:

- Find a passage to the southern seas (the North-West Passage)
- Find potential for trade in fur and valuable minerals
- And finally look for possibilities for trade with other valuable resources

Further on one can read from the charter that this group of persons are being granted:

*... the sole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas, Streights, Bays, Rivers, Lakes, Creeks, and Sounds, in whatsoever Latitude they shall be, that lie within the entrance of the Streights commonly called Hudson's Streights, together with all the Lands, Countries and Territories, upon the Coasts and Confines of the Seas, Streights, Bays, Lakes, Rivers, Creeks and Sounds, aforesaid, which are not now actually possessed by any of our Subjects, or by the Subjects of any other Christian Prince or State.*<sup>59</sup>

What is special here is the enormous amount of territory granted; it estimates to roughly 40% of modern day Canada. One must keep in mind however, that the charter and the power it grants is in line with the politics of the mercantile age which saw a huge economical expansion.

<sup>58</sup> S. Barrett and C. Franks, editors, *Royal Proclamation Charter for the Company of Adventurers*. Project Gutenberg, 1670, p. a.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. b.

The grant of wide territory and rich resources that occurred under the Charter was no mere favouritism as its purposes fitted in perfectly with the objectives of colonial and economic development in the period: trade policies was directed in a way that would allow private investors to minimize their risks and maximize their profits.<sup>60</sup> The mercantilist system used in large parts of Europe at the time did however only favour the few chosen ones, and The Merchants of London trading to New York and New England, among others, protested against the vast rights given to the HBC. The powers granted to the HBC was common knowledge, as the charter was made patent, thus making sure it was easily available for the public. Despite the protests, Parliament was fully in line with the wishes of Charles II and his council, and the privileges were confirmed in an Act of Parliament in 1690. The validity of this Act was questioned several times, and was still debated in 1849.

The Charter granted to the HBC not only tells us much about how HBC was founded, their rights and what they based their authority over large parts of North-America on, but it also tells us a lot about what charters given to merchant companies can tell about their authority, their rights, the reasons for the Crown or other legislative authority to grant the charters and also a valuable look into the political climate.

## 2.5 REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST AND PRESENT OF GLOBAL HISTORY

Although the genre of global history is as old as historical writing itself, it is only in recent times it has seen increased popularity. It is beyond doubt that the developments that started with Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* was of great importance to the early development of the modern genre of global history. Despite their lack of qualitative research, the early proponents of the civilisation approach to history laid solid foundations on which to base future theories and approaches to history.

More importantly however, are the single topic approach with its focus on limited subjects with broad perspectives. And the focus on economic developments and world trade that seem to dominate the single topic approach makes it the ideal way of weaving truly global narratives. It has become increasingly popular in the later years, and among the articles published in the *Journal of World History* and *Journal of Global History* in 2010, 14 had the subject of trade and commerce in global perspectives. And as will be established in the following chapters, the many developments within the genre has shaped and contributed to the writing of the contemporary global historians. I mention above that "the contents of documents are shaped by their authors", and one might very well add that the authors are shaped by their past.

A work regarding world trade with a global perspective should rely on literature from historians from an extensive selection of countries and historical disciplines, to better let different views be put forth, and better get an active discussion before reaching new conclusions. But a large selection of both sources and literature will help in achieving the different viewpoints and the connections and patterns that cross over both time and space that is needed for a truly global perspective. This is as true for works presenting theories on civilisations and world

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<sup>60</sup> T. Burns, *The Royal Proclamation Charter for the Company of Adventurers*. *The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists*, 1 1998:45, p. 172.

systems as well as works focusing solely on world trade; the lack of use of sources in the theoretical works can thus be said to not be justified, as it brings problem in the use of a truly global perspective.

# 3

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## WHY WORLD TRADE MATTERS IN GLOBAL HISTORICAL WRITING: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF WORLD TRADE IN THE EARLY MODERN ERA

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Trade and exchange of goods has in all times had an important role in the relationship between individuals, organisations, states and civilisations. Trade is a dynamic phenomenon that is always changing; even in our modern times as something that is truly global. If we could take a snapshot of the world at any time during the early modern era we would be able to locate vast trade networks leading to contact between culturally diverse regions of the world. This contact would not only lead to exchange of trade goods, but also ideas, inventions and plants to be used in farming and the production of luxury articles. How sugar spread from Asia, via the Middle East to Europe, and then later on to the Americas and gained an important role in world trade is a good example on this phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Sugar spread along an ancient trading network stretching from Northern Europe, via the Mediterranean and the Middle East to the Indian Ocean and China. Trade networks even developed in America and the isolated parts of the Pacific and if we change the date of our snapshot to 1750, we would see an advanced network of trade making connections between all continents. Historians has generally given long-distance trade by sea most of the credit for this vast trading network, but the role of caravans should not be downplayed.

I will here give a brief overview over the development of the background of world trade in the early modern era and its developments up to about 1750 and suggest why it has become such an important field of study among global historians.

### 3.1 MERCHANTS AND GLOBAL ASPECTS OF TRADE

Before one can give a brief overview of world trade one have to define what a merchant is and what the most basic goals members of the merchant class tried to achieve in the early modern era. A basic principle is that a merchant have to travel over short or long distances to sell his goods. He can travel personally, or make his agents undertake the journey. For optimal profit, the merchant need to buy his goods where it is cheap, and sell it where it is expensive. Goods often went through several merchants before reaching its final destination, but as seafaring vessels became capable of longer distances during the early modern era it became increasingly common for goods to be sent straight to its final destination. Merchants in the early modern era can be defined as intermediaries of goods that others produced.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Curtin (as in n. 43).

<sup>2</sup> S. Bagge, *Europa tar form*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2004, p. 231.

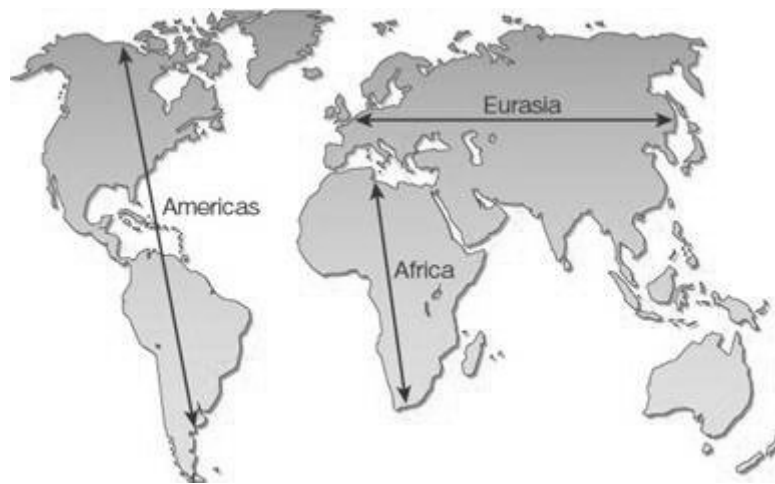


Figure 3: Continental Axes. (Source: Knutsen, G.W. *Lange Linjer i Historien*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2006)

When goods had a high price difference between the areas they were produced in and the areas they were sold in, they were often sold at their final destinations as luxury articles. In many cases, only upper class in society had the means to buy luxury articles. These articles were often used as a symbol showing sovereignty or power; with the use of luxury articles the ruling elite could easily distance themselves from the lower social classes. One of the most commonly used luxury articles in Europe was spices transported to the Mediterranean by Muslim merchants, and then re-exported to the rest of Europe by the Italian merchant republics.<sup>3</sup> In Central America, feathers and special trinkets carefully produced from stone and gold had a similar function as spices had in Europe. Central America had a complex system regarding who could and could not use the luxury articles. This created a marked for merchants dealing in luxury articles.<sup>4</sup> Similar phenomena can be found all over the world through the early modern era.

Important global traits of trade acknowledged by most historians include the exchange of ideas and research and increased connections between culturally different groups of people. The most important side-effect of world trade can be said to be the transfer of plants and animals. This phenomenon became mostly widespread in Eurasia, due to Eurasian trade featuring along a west –east axis. The exchange of plants and animals in the Americas and Africa featured among a north-south axis, thus crossing different climate zones, making it less ideal for adapting animals and plants to their destinations. Exchange of plants and animals played a more vital role in Eurasia than elsewhere due to the continental axis.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that the phenomenon didn't occur outside Eurasia, but its impact had greater potential and consequences there than in Africa and the Americas.

Merchants often belonged to a own social class during the early modern era in most societies and cultures. Historians often focus on the privileges the merchants had, and how much influence they had in society compared to other social groups.

<sup>3</sup> McNeill and McNeill (as in n. 40), p. 118-119.

<sup>4</sup> R. Tignor, *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> G.W. Knutsen, *Lange Linjer i Historien*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2006, p. 18-20.

### 3.2 AN EARLY CONNECTION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST - THE INDIAN OCEAN

From ancient times the trading networks in the Indian Ocean played a major role both for trade itself but also culturally. In the early days of the Roman Empire, there were trading networks by sea between the eastern Roman provinces and the Indian Ocean area.<sup>6</sup> When we move towards the beginnings of the early modern era the Indian Ocean feature as the major connection making it possible to transport goods from China to the marketplaces along the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, thus enabling the re-export trade from Southern to Northern-Europe. At the start of the early modern era, the trade networks west from the Indian Ocean was dominated by Muslim merchants transporting the goods to the Red Sea and towards Cairo and Alexandria, where the Italian merchant republics transported the goods further on west and north. To the east, extensive contact between South-East Asian merchants, Chinese merchants and the Muslim states further west was the norm and due to this nature as an early connection between East and West the Indian Ocean feature prominently among global historians.

Global historians have established several reasons as to why the Indian Ocean already from ancient times had a major role in the development of world trade. Geographical features has a prominent role. As a trade route, the Indian Ocean remains unchanged over time. With good knowledge about local conditions, or local guides among the crew, and knowledge about the monsoon appearing on set periods each year one could easily sail a ship from one end of the Indian Ocean to the other. The trade in the Indian Ocean evolved into a season based trade due to the monsoon making it easier to reach certain ports at certain dates. The monsoon winds come from the south-west between April and August, and from the North-East between December and March. These unique geographical conditions has made historians call the Indian Ocean as the most important rival to the Mediterranean as the most important trade network in the early modern era and even before.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the conditions mentioned above, there were a huge rate of exchange in goods and knowledge between the different cultures in the Indian Ocean area and this in turn lead to increased understanding between the various nations in the area. "The seaborne trade [...] created a strong sense of unity. The idea of a common geographical space defined by the exchange of ideas and material objects was quite strong, not only in the minds of merchants but also in those of political rulers and ordinary people."<sup>8</sup> The sense of unity and the increased understanding among the participants in the Indian Ocean trade lead to most ports being open and welcoming of merchants from foreign lands. There were few laws and regulations limiting the participation of foreign merchants, and the few laws and regulations that were in place were being acknowledged as just and fair. If the local authorities in a port or city acted in an unfair manner, both local and foreign merchants would be quick to move their operations elsewhere.

Due to the monsoon and other meteorological conditions, trade in the Indian Ocean was focused on three major areas on an east-west axis.

<sup>6</sup> Wolf (as in n. 24), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Knutsen (as in n. 5), p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean - An Economic History From the Rise of Islam to 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 21.



The western area stretched from the Red Sea and the Gulf of Persia to the western coast of India. The central area stretched from the coast of India, into the Bay of Bengal and onwards to Malacca. The eastern area stretched from Malacca and east towards Indonesia and north-east to the coast of China. Markets and trading ports featured prominently in all three areas. A merchant's journey along the east-west axis was thus divided into three stages. The most important ports in the were Aden and Suhari in the western area, Khambhat and Calicut in the central area and Malaca and Cantoni in the eastern area.

The status of merchants in the Indian Ocean society has been deemed a difficult theme by global historians. In the start of the early modern era, before the Europeans entered the trade networks, there were three different major participants in the Indian Ocean trade; Muslim merchants, Hindu merchants and Chinese merchants. Merchants featured a strong social status among the Muslims due to religious and geographical conditions. The prophet Muhammad came from a family of merchants and thus the Quran features lots of praise to the merchant class. The Muslim faith also had a large geographical spread, which created a need for good merchants and the Muslim faith spread to the eastern regions of Asia along with Muslim merchants. It has been said that Muslim faith and trade went hand in hand.<sup>9</sup>

Hindu merchants had a weak position compared to the Muslim merchants, due to the strict caste system. Merchants belonged to the third category from the top of the caste system which gave them a weak position in society compared to the upper classes of the caste system. Parts of the Indian Ocean were under Muslim control, however, and the Muslim faith became a way out of the caste system for many Hindu merchants.

Chinese merchants had a special position in society due to many changes in the time leading up to the early modern era and global historians have given these changes importance in understanding China and its attitude towards trade in the early modern era. During the Song dynasty (960 – 1279) China underwent a major commercialising due to Confucianism modernising their view on trade and merchants. Because of this, merchants gained a stronger position in Chinese society. This in turn led to increased usage of Chinese coins and most of the tax payments in China was carried out with coins, not goods which was the norm elsewhere. The commercialising came at the same time as knowledge of the world outside China became widespread in Chinese society and the wealth of the citizens living in urban centres increased.<sup>10</sup> During the Song dynasty, the authorities had huge incomes from tax and regulations on trade and this probably led to the authorities promoting trade actively. The Chinese mainland also had well developed infrastructure in the form of good roads and canals which made internal trade in China to be successful, thus acting as an incentive for trade outside the borders and increased specialisation in the modes of production for the farmers.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, the Chinese authorities insisted on regulations on trade, and this increased after the Mongol government ended and the Ming dynasty took power. The Ming dynasty ruled with a clear isolationistic line of politics which would lead to a withdrawal of Chinese merchants from the Indian

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<sup>9</sup> Wolf (as in n. 24), p. 234.

<sup>10</sup> Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean - An Economic History From the Rise of Islam to 1750* (as in n. 8), p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> McNeill and McNeill (as in n. 40), p. 123.

Ocean and increased governmental control of internal trade in China. Debates within global history focus on whether increased isolation by the Chinese government led to room for a fourth major player in the Indian Ocean; the Europeans, due to the decreased official support to the Chinese merchants.

### 3.3 EUROPEAN MERCHANTS AND THE ROLE OF URBAN CENTRES

It is important to note that it is established that already in the start of the early modern era, before direct European participation in the Indian Ocean trade networks, Europe had an indirect connection with the trade networks. Goods from China and the Indian Ocean area was transported to Europe in several small legs and entered the hands of European merchants in the Mediterranean where Italian merchants played a major role with re-exporting the goods further north and west. . The European trading network relied on two important parts: (i) the major waterways in the form of the rivers and the European coastal provinces and (ii) the European urban centres. In addition, European merchants could benefit from the extensive European road network which the ruling class many places set as an priority to maintain in good condition.

Europe was split as to where luxury articles had the largest impact. Most of the luxury articles ended up in Southern-Europe, most likely due to the huge difference in population between northern and southern Europe. The re-export trade in spices and textiles lead to some goods gaining an impact in Northern Europe further into the early modern era.

On a global scale, Europe did not have the likes of the sprawling huge cities that were found in the Middle East and Asia. There was however a large amount of smaller cities in Europe and due to political conditions in medieval times these cities had relative free positions within the European political framework. Historians have noted that free cities might have led to politics that was advantageous for merchants. Their free positions often led to the cities having little to say in the major conflicts between kings and dukes, and internal politics in free cities was often dominated by conflicts between the ruling families and wealthy merchants. Despite these internal struggles, the cities managed to maintain their free positions through the middle ages and towards the early modern era. In many cases, this was the result of a wish from the authorities to keep the cities freer than the villages and the countryside. There was often a difference in how kings treated cities and the countryside, as can be seen in the law called Byloven, passed by King Magnus Lagabøte of Norway in 1276.

If a city was too weak to keep up resistance to increased political pressure from the authorities, or if it felt threatened, it could join up with other cities in a federation. One example from medieval times is the Hanseatic League which gained an important position in the European trade network from the late 12th century onwards. The Hanseatic League at its peak included cities like Lübeck, Novgorod and Bergen. Similar federations were incorporated among the Flemish cities and in the Rhine-area. It is up to debate as to how important these federations were in the development of the European trade networks, but the larger ones which were active over large periods of time are sure to have left their mark on history. The fact that cities had the power



Figure 4: Coat of Arms for the City of Lübeck, capital of the Hanseatic League  
*Source: Wikimedia Commons, image is in Public Domain and may be used for any purpose*

to enter federations and resist pressure against the central authorities might have led to increased developments in regards to technology and trade in Europe.<sup>12</sup> A strong merchant class and the federations between cities might have had a direct influence on the developments of states within Europe in the time leading up to the early modern era. Eric R. Wolf argues that “one can visualize the growth of states during the European Middle Ages as a contest between political blocks that rested upon agricultural cores and military power, on the one hand, and mercantile networks along riverline and maritime routes of traffic on the other.”<sup>13</sup>

### 3.4 A GLOBAL TRADING NETWORK – FROM AMERICA TO ASIA

At the end of the 15th century, two major happenings contributed to the creation of a global trading network; the discovery of America and the direct participation of Europeans in the eastern trading networks. Christopher Columbus arrived in America in 1492 that had been isolated for a long time, thus making America come into contact with the trading networks in Eurasia and Africa. Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut on the Indian sub-continent in May 1498, which marked the beginning of a long period of European intervention in the Indian Ocean trade, as well as trade in China and the eastern reaches of Asia and the Pacific area. The ending of the isolation of the American continent got major consequences, especially for the population. The direct consequences are not the subject of this chapter, and are well documented elsewhere: America was over time incorporated into various European colonial empires and the population was reduced due to sickness brought to the continent by the Europeans. The consequences this had for world trade were however extensive. Following America gaining a role in the trading networks criss-crossing the world there existed for the first time a global trading network extending around the globe from the Americas to Asia.

<sup>12</sup> McNeill and McNeill (as in n. 40), p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> Wolf (as in n. 24), p. 106-107.

The first American areas to gain major importance in world trade were the Caribbean, Central America and South America. The Portuguese brought the sugar plant to Brazil, meaning to use it as a export goods meant to be traded back to Europe. The Caribbean would gain its fair share of sugar production later in the early modern era, but it was the Portuguese who were the pioneers in sugar production on the American continent. In addition to sugar production in Brazil, they also had extensive production on several Atlantic islands, including Madeira and Sao Tome. The Portuguese were only the producers however; The Dutch quickly gained control over the financing and transport of sugar. Large quantities of sugar were transported to Antwerp and after 1590 also to Amsterdam.<sup>14</sup> Later into the early modern era, the Dutch would also become directly involved in the production of sugar on the Caribbean islands and they also occupied the northern areas of Brazil for a short time when Portugal was in a royal union with Spain. Due to these conditions, the Dutch transported huge amounts of goods from the Americas to Europe, but almost no Dutch goods from Europe was bound for the Americas. Not all focused on sugar, however, as Spain is a clear example of. Spain's focus quickly turned out to become gold and silver. During the first twenty years after the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire and the Inca Empire the Spanish mined more gold from Mexico and the Andes than every other European nation combined.<sup>15</sup> During the 16th century, this totalled to about 20 000 tons silver and 300 tons of gold. It is acknowledged among many global historians that these vast amounts of precious metals would gain far reaching consequences for world trade, and would influence developments not only in Europe but also in China.

The trading network between America and Europe was not just limited to the exchange of goods between the two continents. Africa would develop to become an important third participant in what some historians has dubbed the Atlantic system or the triangle trade. The need for workers in the European colonies in the Americas led the Europeans into established trade networks on the African continent, where slaves were an important commodity long before the European participation. Parts of the western and south-western African trading networks was based on routes westwards from the desert and to the coast where salt featured as an important trade goods. There were also some networks from the south of the continent, where gold featured prominently. In addition, several other types of commodities were transported along the busy African trade routes. The African trade routes were based upon several stops along the route, making goods sometimes change hands several times before reaching its final destination. In a way, this was a land based version of the early trade in the Indian Ocean. Slaves transported along the African trade routes were often prisoners of war and they were often transported vast distances away from their place of capture as a way of preventing escapes. In many cases, this meant that they were transported to the coast.<sup>16</sup> It was already an established network in place when the Europeans approached Africa looking for slaves to be used in their colonies. In the early days of the slave trade the slaves went to the Portuguese holdings in the Atlantic, but by the end of the 16th century focus shifted to

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<sup>14</sup> Wolf (as in n. 24), p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Tignor (as in n. 4), p. 102.

<sup>16</sup> Curtin (as in n. 43), p. 35-38.

America. This incorporated Africa in the trading network between America and Europe and led to what some historians has called the triangle trade (see above). The triangle trade consisted of a north-south axis between Europe and Africa, an east-west axis between Africa and America and an east-west axis between America and Europe. The flow of goods was both ways on all three axes. There were no changes in what states controlled the trade in Africa, despite Africa taking on a more active role in the extensive global trading network growing forth. Many historians treat the Africans as being inferior to the Europeans and that all trade between Europeans and Africans were based upon the premises of the European traders. A narrow and Eurocentric view and thus many global historians focus on how European nations had to adapt to the laws and regulations of the African states. In most cases, the European fortresses along the African coast operated more as trading stations and as a mean to keep competition away. It has been argued that the African states worked actively with regulations to avoid European nations gaining monopolies, and it is reason to believe that European nations seldom managed to gain monopolies along the African coast.

The Europeans entered existing trading networks in the Indian Ocean as well. The Indian Ocean trade continued as it had done for centuries in the first part of the early modern era when the Europeans first entered the trade. Towards the end of the 16th century however, the Europeans managed to influence the ancient trading network. The Portuguese wished to monopolise the trade in the area, and tried to achieve this through superior military strength on the sea. Blockades and attacks against port cities featured among the Portuguese tools of the trade. Important examples are the blockade of Bab al-Mandep and the attacks against Diu and Goa in India.<sup>17</sup> European powers also established trading stations in the Indian Ocean area, most notably the Portuguese, the British and the Dutch. European powers did not manage to gain control over large land areas in the early modern era; only the sea was within the grasp of European control. This control was limited however, as merchants from the Middle East and India with time easily managed to slip through the blockades. At the same time as European powers tried to wrestle control over the sea, the Mughal Empire secured control over the core areas of the Indian sub-continent. A ruling elite grew forth within the Mughal Empire, and it is reasonably to say that such an elite led to increased demand after luxury articles and thus helped promote a new, strong class of merchants in Indian society. The growth of a strong merchant class was also supported by the increased usage of coins in the Mughal controlled areas. The Mughal Empire had some limited regulations and laws on trade, but central authority was a times weak and local administrators often initiated contact with foreign merchants on their own initiative. The weak central state made it possible for England to engage in the political struggles in on the Indian sub-continent towards the end of the 18th century and the start of the 19th century.<sup>18</sup>

The incorporation of America into the global trading network left its mark on both the Indian Ocean area and China. Cloth from the Indian sub-continent became a wanted commodity along the African coast,

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<sup>17</sup> Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean - An Economic History From the Rise of Islam to 1750* (as in n. 8), pp. 71, 75.

<sup>18</sup> Wolf (as in n. 24), p. 244.



Figure 5: A silver rupee to be used in the Mughal Empire minted by the English East India Company. Under the rulership of the Mughal emperors the use of coins increased, and imported bullion had to be converted to the Mughal coinage. *Photograph courtesy of the British Museum.*

and Europeans exploited this by using Indian cloth when purchasing slaves. Consequences were even larger in China due to the increased amount of gold and especially silver brought into the Chinese area (see Chapter 5 for more on this phenomenon). It is established above that China entered an isolationist phase during the 15th century and onwards. China was self-supplied with most important resources and this created no incentive from the central authorities to establish colonies. However, the expeditions carried out by Zheng He show that China had advanced knowledge in regards to ship building and navigation. The expeditions were cancelled by the central authorities, but Zheng He most likely reached as far as the south-eastern coast of Africa. It is reasonable to conclude that the information gathered on his journeys became of importance as other explorers and cartographers got their hands on it through the ever-growing global trading networks. Chinese authorities continued the isolationistic policy, however, and it even survived the change from the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty in 1644. While the central authorities held true to the policy of isolation, it is no doubt that some merchants and local administrators went up against orders and engaged actively in trade. The Chinese emperor told a British ambassador in 1793 that “China has no interest in a small country cut off from the world by intervening wastes of seas.”<sup>19</sup> Such a statement clearly shows how powerful the Chinese state was, but it also shows how the isolationist policy lived on, well past the early modern era.

Following the success of the *single topic approach* after the Rise of Merchant Empires conference (see Chapter 4) global historians started to seek an answer to a more precise date as to when a truly global trading network became established. Building upon the developments within global history from the past years, the time was ready for the single topic approach to develop further. Historians were ready for a new take on what was starting to become old ideas within a genre in constant development.

<sup>19</sup> McNeill and McNeill (as in n. 40), p. 167.

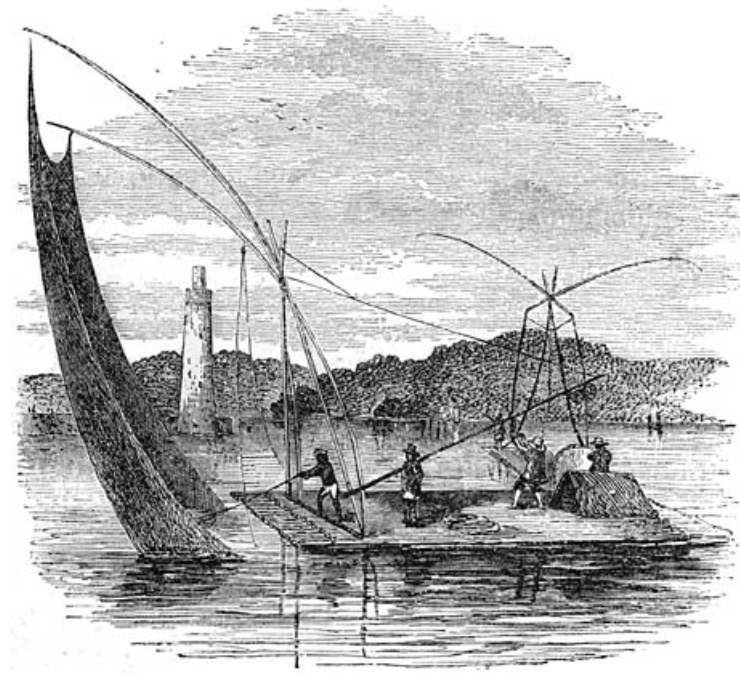


Figure 6: Fishermen from Manila. Spain's establishment of a port in Manila is deemed as the creation of global trade by Flynn and Geraldez. Manila was under Spanish rule from 1581 to 1898, apart from a brief two year period with British control during the Seven Years War. *Source: Wikimedia Commons, image is in Public Domain and may be used for any purpose*

In 1995, Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez published *Born With a Silver Spoon: The Origin of World Trade in 1571*. While the Rise of Merchant Empires conference explained the various different aspects of world trade on a global scale, Flynn and Giráldez seek to find the most important reason for the creation of a truly global trading network in addition to a single event that started it all. In 2002 they reinforced their theories in *Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity Through the Mid-Eighteenth Century*.

The two articles share some fundamental premises. Truly global trade is defined as the exchange of products continuously between all populated continents in values sufficient to generate crucial impacts for all trading partners.<sup>20</sup> Such a situation was created when the port of Manila was opened in 1571, thus leading to direct contact between Asia and America for the first time in history. They credit silver as the single most important product for the birth of global trade.

The following is identified as key subjects by Flynn and Giráldez:

- The role of silver in creating a truly global world market
- China's role in the creation of the global trading network
- Asian scholars and how they perceive the Philippines trade
- That powerful, interconnected economic, demographic and ecological forces have affected global economic development

<sup>20</sup> D.O. Flynn and A. Giraldez, *Born with a Silver Spoon: The Origin of World Trade in 1571*. *Journal of World History*, 6 1995:2, p. 201.

The two articles by Flynn and Giraldez are worth noting due to the way they show in a straight manner how world trade matters to global history.

### 3.5 THE GLOBAL TRADING NETWORK AND ITS CONSEQUENCES – WHY WORLD TRADE MATTERS

Increased exchange of knowledge, research, ideas and goods and increased contact between different cultures are all important consequences of the global trading network that grew forth during the early modern era. Merchants had an influential role in most early modern societies and their will to explore and finding new markets led to people from culturally different areas to become connected through exchange. The biggest question global historians has to answer is (i) whether the most important consequences of the global trading network were the direct economic consequences, (ii) the indirect consequences following the exchange of goods, plants, animals or ideas or (iii) long-term economic consequences.

All of the above mentioned consequences did leave its mark somewhere on the globe during the early modern era. Examples include the large amount of plants, animals and microbes moved across the globe and the fatal consequences they brought with them to the native population in America, and in some cases also to native population in isolated parts of Eurasia and Africa.

With the three consequences mentioned above, it is no doubt that world trade matters and it explains why world trade is an important subject among global historians. This also explains why the *Single Topic Approach* slowly gained more popularity then the less empirical *theoretical approaches*.



# 4

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## THE RISE OF MERCHANT EMPIRES: WORLD TRADE IN THE AGE OF COMPETITION

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The conference “The Rise of Merchant Empires” sponsored by the Centre for Early Modern History at the University of Minnesota in October 1987 was an attempt to address topics of a universal scope and to bring together several different historians with different views to gain a broad perspective and different views on these topics of universal scope. The topics chosen by the planners of the conference were all related to the growth of world trade in the early modern era, thus acknowledging the importance of trade and contact over long distances for historical development. The result of the conference would be two books, *The Rise of Merchant Empires* and *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*. This chapter will consist of a general overview of the themes and methods used by the contributors to the two books, discussions regarding their influences, the impact of the conference and the two books on the field of global history and finally an assessment as to whether it follows the doctrine of global perspectives.

### 4.1 RECONSTRUCTING THE TRADE ROUTES OF THE EARLY MODERN ERA: THEMES, METHODS AND A GENERAL OVERVIEW

The fundamental premise for the two books is the statement that “it is beyond any dispute that the early modern era (roughly 1500-1750) witnessed a great increase in the integration of trade on a global scale.”<sup>1</sup> One does not need to debate whether or not new trade routes were discovered or whether there was an increased number of goods, people and ideas being exchanged over larger distances than before. The critical question to ask is what the contemporary impact and significance of the new configurations of long-distance trade were.<sup>2</sup> During the conference, the following key subjects were established:

- The contemporary impact and significance of increased long-distance trade
- The impact by, and profit and loss, by organisations such as the EIC or the VOC
- The development in the well-established Asian networks of commerce during the early modern era
- The developments in the well-established and centuries old caravan routes in Asia and Africa

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<sup>1</sup> Tracy (as in n. 3), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- How trade is affected by cyclical movements in the larger economies of various regions<sup>3</sup>

Each of the two books were given their own broad theme. The first volume focus primarily on the effects the new linkages had on the volume of trade and composition of trade in various regions, while the second volume focus on how Europeans fared in competition with the trading nations of Asia.<sup>4</sup>The two books are in total divided into 23 chapters where each chapter has its own theme and/or area of focus and each chapter has been authored by a separate historian. The purpose of the first book is to give a general overview over long-distance trade in the early modern era, as well as the changes in growth and composition of world trade. The second book focus on how state power (or lack thereof) influenced the growth of world trade in the early modern era, and how Europe achieved a dominant position in world trade at the expense of well-organised rivals such as the ones located in Asia.

#### 4.1.1 *The Rise of Merchant Empires - General Overview*

Herman van der Wee starts with a look on the re-export trade within Europe, from the south to the north (see Chapter 3). He defines re-export trade as “the exporting of previously imported goods without additional processing”<sup>5</sup> and this is where his global perspectives become of relevance; most of the goods re-exported from southern Europe were goods produced in and imported from the Middle East, Asia and later on the Americas. van der Wee also focus on the changes that the discovery of alternative sea routes to Asia brought with it to the Italian merchant republics’ role in the re-export trade. Changes that Asian and American produced goods influenced in Europe are thus one of his main topics.

Carla Rahn Phillips continues with a look at the practical and quantitative aspects of trade in the Iberian empires, both in their European holdings and in their overseas colonies.<sup>6</sup> She briefly mentions the theoretical approaches made by Wallerstein and Braudel in historical writing, but argues that an empirical approach is best suited for the complexity of the Iberian empires. Her global perspectives come from her approach to trade; she looks at trade as a phenomenon linked to the broader economy, not just internally in the Iberian empires but also globally. To further enhance her focus on the quantitative aspects of trade, Phillips incorporates several tables showing the number of ships used in trade by the Iberian empires, as well as the quantities of tobacco, sugar, hides and cacao imported to Europe from the Spanish and Portuguese overseas holdings. She uses mostly secondary sources for her quantitative research.

The next chapter is authored by Niels Steensgaard and his focus is on quantitative aspects of the English and Dutch long-distance trade. He

<sup>3</sup> Tracy (as in n. 3), pp. 1 - 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> H. van der Wee, *Structural changes in European long-distance trade, and particularly in the re-export trade from south to north, 1350-1750*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> C.R. Phillips, *The growth and composition of trade in the Iberian empires, 1450 - 1750*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

trace the composition of both the Dutch and English trade back to the medieval times and notes that the changes in the composition during the early modern era was slow, and consisted mostly of the addition of colonial goods. He thus concludes that colonial trade is important for world trade in the early modern era as it showed growth compared to the traditional trade goods which was low due to few changes in modes of production and consumer habits.<sup>7</sup> Paul Butel follows along the same lines in his treatment on France's expanding foreign trade in chapter 4; using French foreign and colonial trade to show the same type of growth in colonial goods as Steensgaard.<sup>8</sup>

The three next chapters (chapters 5, 6 and 7) focus on specific aspects of the European long-distance trade. Jaap R. Bruijn looks at the costs and profitability of ship owning, both among merchant companies and privately owned ships and uses Dutch overseas trade as an example showing that the costs of maintaining regular shipping to Asia eventually would rise and spiral out of control.<sup>9</sup> Larry Neal brings us into the world of economic history with his comparison between the English and Dutch East India companies<sup>10</sup> and Ward Barret makes an assessment as to how European merchants participated in the flow of gold and especially silver from the Americas, via Europe to China.<sup>11</sup>

Chapter 8 is an essay on merchant communities across the world between 1350 and 1750 written by Frederic Mauro as a way to represent the sociological dimension of research on merchant empires.<sup>12</sup> He starts with short overviews on the Hanseatic League, the British merchant guilds and the merchant communities of Antwerp and Lyons to show that the great charter companies, like EIC, VOC and the *Companie Francaise des Cent Associès* were extensions of the merchant communities, and that without the merchant communities, the charter companies could not have gained the strong position some of them ended up having. Mauro then compares these European merchant communities to the Jewish and Armenian communities, and concludes that the Jewish and Armenian merchant communities stood strong in the early modern era due to internal solidarity. Focus is then shifted to Asia, and the strong Muslim merchant communities in the Indian Ocean area, most notably merchants residing in Malacca. He draws upon findings from French historian Jean Aubin in concluding that transformations within the Muslim merchant communities was in progress at the time of the arrival of the Europeans in the Indian ocean, and that the transformations was neither triggered or interrupted by European interference.<sup>13</sup>

Mauro's article is clearly meant to be a transition to the last part of the book, as focus now shifts from the European lands and merchants to Africa and Asia for the rest of the book (see Table 3). Herbert S. Klein contributes with an article on how Africans themselves dominated several structures of the Atlantic slave trade, while Ralph A. Austen has a quantitative study of the trans-Saharan caravan trade; comparing

*The Companie Francaise des Cent Associès was a trading company chartered in 1627 to explore and establish trade in North-America*

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- 7 N. Steensgaard, *The growth and composition of the long-distance trade of England and the Dutch Republic before 1750*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- 8 P. Butel, *France, the Antilles, and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: renewals of foreign trade*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- 9 J.R. Bruijn, *Productivity, profitability, and costs of private and corporate Dutch ship owning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires:*

Table 3: Point of View in the Chapters of Rise of Merchant Empires

CHAPTERS	POINT OF VIEW
1 - 7	European
8	Transition
9 - 13	Non-European

transportation via caravans with transportation via ship.<sup>14</sup> Austen base much of his numbers and figures on research done by French administrators during the colonial era.

The article on the trans-Saharan caravan trade is followed by an article on the central Asian caravan trade written by Morris Rossabi. Rossabi claims that competition from oceangoing vessels was not the most important factor in the decline of the central Asian caravan routes, but that political disruption and social and religious changes should be given much more focus when researching trade over the central Asian routes. He also calls for consideration that the short-distance caravan trade did not diminish and that the cost of the caravan transport often were regarded as a trade secret by the participants; thus it was hardly ever written down. This makes the information available to historians difficult to interpret correctly.<sup>15</sup>

Chapter 12 brings us back to the sociological dimension of research on merchant empires. Irfan Habib focuses on two major mercantile communities in pre-colonial India; the Banjâras (long-distance transporters) and the Banyas (village and town merchants). Habib draws on a wide variety of sources from both Muslim merchants and travellers and also from European explorers. There is also a great deal of attention given to the role the Banyas and Banjâras had in the society, and also some information regarding the social position of the merchant class in general.<sup>16</sup>

The last chapter in *The Rise of Merchant Empires* is written by Wang Gungwu and is yet another article focusing on the sociological aspects of trade. Gungwu gives attention to the activities of Chinese merchant communities overseas, and most notably the Hokkien merchant community which he claims were the most active in overseas trade in the

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Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

- 10 L. Neal, *The Dutch and English East India companies compared: evidence from the stock and foreign exchange markets*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- 11 W. Barret, *World Bullion Flows, 1450 - 1800*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1450 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- 12 F. Mauro, *Merchant Communities, 1350 - 1750*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge Uni, 1993.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 14 R.A. Austen, *The trans-Saharan caravan trade in the era of European expansion, 1500 - 1900*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- 15 M. Rossabi, *The "decline" of the central Asian caravan trade*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern Era, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 351 - 352.
- 16 I. Habib, *Merchant Communities in Precolonial India*. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

South-East Asian area. He also focus on the lack of support to the Hokkien and other communities from the Chinese authorities, due to the isolationistic policies of the Chinese state.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.1.2 *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires - General Overview*

The Political Economy of Merchant Empires begins with an article on the creation of institutions that enabled merchant empires to exist and how these institutions could make a merchant empire profitable. Special attention is given to transaction costs, taking into account how military technology, politics and financial instruments could influence the costs of transaction. The author, Douglass C. North, concludes that Europe gained a persistent economic growth in comparison to other continents due to a gradual growth in specialisation and division of labour due to the institutions and financial instruments put to use by European states.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 2, Merchants and States by M. N. Pearson, focus on the effects politics had on economic behaviour. It is a work in economic history, and also a comparative study between economic politics in Europe and in Asia in addition to comparisons between several states within both continents. He concludes that during the early modern era the Asian states could have chosen the European way of building up institutions and financial instruments, but due to internal political conditions, the Asian nations ended up losing against the European powers in the long run.<sup>19</sup>

Thomas Brady tells the tale of the European background of the growth of world trade in the early modern era, and he argues that the fragmented political situation in areas of southern and central Europe led to the growth of both commercial classes and commercial strategies that would later on aid the larger European powers in their overseas trade. His article also includes a brief survey as to how Europeans reacted to for them exotic goods and plants being transported to Europe during the early modern era.<sup>20</sup>

Geoffrey Parker's contribution is a treatise on the military balance in Europe and the rest of the world, and seeks to explain why some areas fell easy to European control, while others remained scarcely influenced by European political and military pressure. Parker does this by breaking "the rise of the west" into a number of distinct geographical and chronological components.<sup>21</sup>

Chapter 5 is maritime history with a global twist, focusing on how state power was enforced on the seas. Anne Pèrotin-Dumon's argument is that the Europeans dubbed all their adversaries as pirates; criminals

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<sup>17</sup> W. Gungwu, Merchants without empire: the Hokkien sojourning merchant communities. in: *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> D.C. North, Institutions, transaction costs, and the rise of Merchant Empires. in: *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Tracy, J.D., 1997.

<sup>19</sup> M.N. Pearson, Merchants and states. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>20</sup> T.A. Brady, The rise of merchant empires, 1400 - 1700: A European counterpoint. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> G. Parker, Europe and the wider world, 1500 - 1750: the military balance. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

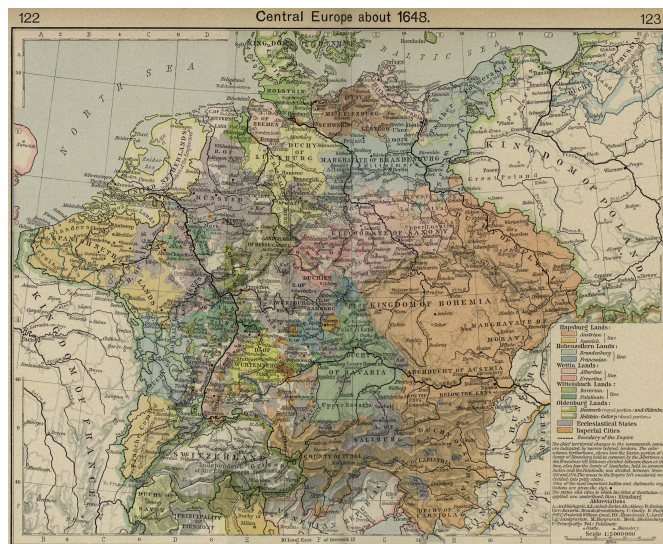


Figure 7: Thomas Brady credits the fragmented political situation in central Europe for the growth of European commercial practices and a strong merchant class. Many of the central European states participated in the Holy Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire's authority was at times weak, and consisted of a multitude of warring duchies and kingdoms. Voltaire argued that it was neither holy, nor roman, nor an empire. Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas. Map is in Public Domain and may be used for any purpose.

and honest traders alike. Focus is also given to the political implications of piracy, and how states could use pirates to their advantage in their want for political and military control over the seas and the trade lanes. She moves against the established notion that piracy existed anywhere commerce was active, as that notion fails to consider what she calls the crucial political factor.<sup>22</sup>

With chapter 6 we are brought back to economic history and the focus on transaction costs. Russell R. Menard gives a broad survey of shipping costs in long-distance trade during the early modern era and asks whether or not there was European transport revolution happening. When comparing the eighteenth century with the High Middle Ages, he concludes that the case for a European transport revolution vanishes due to freight charges being just slightly lower in the end of the early modern era than they were in the High Middle Ages. He achieves mostly through a comparison of freight charges on selected types of goods, most notably wine.<sup>23</sup>

Jacob M. Price's contribution comes in the form of a chapter on the smaller private firms active in the Atlantic trade, and his focus is on the financial practices and forms of merchant credit that helped these smaller firms stand on their own ground against the much larger chartered companies,<sup>24</sup> while the article co-authored by Sanjay Subrah-

22 A. Pèrotin-Dumon, *The pirate and the emperor: power and the law on the seas, 1450 - 1850*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

23 R.R. Menard, *Transport costs and long-range trade, 1300 - 1800*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

24 J.M Price, *Transaction costs: A note on merchant credit and the organization of private trade*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

manyam and Luis Filipe F.R. Thomaz incorporates the themes of the abovementioned authors and use them to make an assessment of the Portuguese activity in the Indian Ocean during the early modern era.<sup>25</sup>

Chapter 9 is authored by Dennis Flynn and he comparative study between the Tokagawa Shogunate and Hapsburg Spain and their role in the flow and use of silver. Flynn argues that silver should not just be treated as a means of payment, but also as a commodity in its own right; with production centres and a demand structure. He concludes that the Tokagawa Shogunate used its profits from silver in a wise and responsible manner while Hapsburg Spain wasted its silver profits on countless European wars and power struggles.<sup>26</sup> For more on Dennis Flynn and his focus on silver in global history see Chapter 5.

Chapter 10 is a thorough economic study of the profitability of colonies, focusing mostly on the Luso-Brazilian Empire. José Jobson De Andrade Arruda concludes that the Brazillian province and its trade were profitable for the colony itself while not necessarily profitable for Portugal in the long run. He also mentions the British as one of the winners when it comes to the profitability of Brazil and includes an important part on what types of goods were re-exported and traded internally within colonies.<sup>27</sup> The last chapter is a reflection on the social and political impact of world trade written by K.N. Chaudhuri and it acts as a conclusion to both books.

#### 4.2 RECONSTRUCTING TRADE ROUTES BUT DECONSTRUCTING UNITY: THE STRUGGLE FOR GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

It is no doubt that the two books that was the result of the 1987 conference is a broad and remarkable study with some truly global perspectives on world trade. As one can see from section 4.1, the two volumes host a wide variety of different historians from an even wider variety of different specialisations. What brought them together was the longing for the creation of a global narrative explaining world trade and the early modern era itself.

There is one area that receives more attention than others in the two books, and that is the Indian Ocean. As established in Chapter 3, the Indian Ocean was remarkable in that the trading networks in use during the early modern era had roots far back in time. The Indian Ocean also hosted a strong sense of unity, a vast amount of different participants in the trading networks and also connections to the overland caravan routes in Central Asia. It is obvious that an area with so many participants in the political and economy aspects stands as an excellent subject for use in global historical writing on both world trade and other subjects.

The focus on Asia also comes from the influences from K.N. Chaudhuri's work regarding Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean. Edi-

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25 S. Subrahmanyam and L.F.R. Thomaz, *Evolution of empire: the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean during the sixteenth century*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

26 D.O. Flynn, *Comparing the Tokagawa Shogunate with Hapsburg Spain: Two silver-based empires in a global setting*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

27 J.J. Andrade Arruda, *Colonies as mercantile investments: The Luso-Brazilian empire, 1500 - 1808*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 - 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Table 4: Area of Study in *The Rise of Merchant Empires* (R) and *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires* (PE).

AREA OF STUDY	CHAPTERS
America	2 R to 4 R, 7 R, 9 R, 10 PE
Europe	1 R to 5 R, 7 R, 8 R, 1 PE to 7 PE, 9 PE
The Indian Ocean	1 R to 8R, 11 R, 12 R, 2 PE to 6 PE, 8 PE, 11 PE
East Asia	2 R, 7 R, 11 R, 13 R
Pre-colonial America	None
Middle East	Treated as a part of the Indian Ocean Trade

tor of the two books, James D. Tracy, state that the success of ambitious works such as Chaudhuri's *Trade and Civilisation* as well as attempts on universal syntheses by using Wallerstein's world system theory encouraged the organisers of the conference to bring together historians of various fields of specialisation and nationalities to discuss a universal theme such as world trade.<sup>28</sup> Chaudhuri treats the seas surrounding India, the Middle East and East Asia as a civilisation in of itself; and by focusing on the sea and the exchange finding place across it, one can recreate not only the economic aspects of historical developments in the area of study, but also the social, cultural and geographical aspects of the historical development. Combine the 17 chapters in the two books from the Rise of Merchant Empires conference into a single entity and the result will be a full treatise on the early modern era in the Indian Ocean with focus on the economic, social, cultural and geographical aspects of the historical development in the area.

The large amount of focus on political influence on trade in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empire* is of great interest. The conclusions drawn from the chapters including the Indian Ocean tend to focus on European financial and legal practices and how these practices led to European dominance in the Indian Ocean at the end of and after the early modern era. The political aspect is also borrowed from Chaudhuri, but they only briefly mention the regulations and laws put in place by the states surrounding the Indian Ocean and the vast Mughal Empire. While some events of abuse from the local authorities happened, the security of foreign merchants and their rights were very well respected by the central authorities in the Indian Ocean. A document from the early fifteenth century clearly states that the officials should have a welcoming and positive attitude towards foreign merchants, both "Muslim and Frankish" because the "profits accruing from them are very great."<sup>29</sup> While the often fragmented political situation in the Indian Ocean area made the local authorities unable to defend merchants properly against pirates (thus placing the consequences of a fragmented political here in sharp contrast to the beneficial consequences of the politically frag-

<sup>28</sup> Tracy (as in n. 3), p. vii.

<sup>29</sup> Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean - An Economic History From the Rise of Islam to 1750* (as in n. 8), p. 13.



mented central Europe), it is clear that the foreign merchants arriving in the Indian Ocean would have been a lot less successful without the welcoming attitude and basic securities given by the authorities. More attention to the political situation in the Indian Ocean area, the laws and regulations made by rulers and the correlation between state power and trade in the area are thus sorely missed.

One of the criticisms put forth against works such as Wallerstein's and Chaudhuri's by the conference is that complex and global subjects such as world trade is of great difficulty for a single person with his or hers single ideological influences to properly process.<sup>30</sup> A valid point given the lack of empirical research and huge amount of ideological influences found in the grand syntheses within the theoretical approach to global history and the conference has been applauded for moving away from the theoretical models and as a consequence becoming more likely to portray the actual structure and mechanisms of the early modern global economy.<sup>31</sup> The huge amount of contributors to the two books lead to some disagreements and some giving discussions and also a huge amount of breadth and huge amounts of information easily available, but in most of the cases the authors merely state they might disagree with the author in the previous or following chapter, never properly explaining where and why. All kinds of ideologies and views on historical development are clearly present among the authors, and this leads to huge amount of fragmentation. The books has indeed been dubbed schizophrenic in nature.<sup>32</sup> More cooperation in the authoring of chapters with similar themes would have been greatly welcomed, and enabling the authors to draw upon their diverse skillsets and fields of knowledge. Less fragmented, the book would have been a better read, but it would have been also easier to spot an overriding theme in the writing. The fragmented style of writing also takes away from the unity and similarities between regions of the world that constitutes one of the core principles of global history.

Both books operate with a timespan from 1350 to 1750 according to their titles, but many authors go beyond these timespan or stay safely within them. The book thus lacks a clear definition of the early modern era. In addition, the number of historians from outside Europe and America could have been increased to gain more chapters with a clear focus on non-European conditions. There's also some usage of geographical terms that should be avoided in the global historical genre, such as Far East and the Orient.<sup>33</sup> Terms like that carry with them, willingly or unwillingly, traces of Eurocentrism and Orientalism.

#### *Identifying Problems in Global History: Orientalism*

Orientalism is the European tendency of looking at Eastern culture as something exotic and truly foreign. The term was first coined by Edward. W. Said, an Arab Palestinian who lived in the "west", and he looked at orientalism as an European ideological creation used by the writers, philosophers and colonial administrators of the European powers. Critique of Orientalism as a phenomena dates further back then

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<sup>30</sup> Tracy (as in n. 3), p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> G.K. Brunelle, *Early Modern International Trade and Merchant Empires: A Review Article*. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 23 1992:4, p.792.

<sup>32</sup> L. Earns, *The Rise of Merchant Empires - Review*. *Journal of World History*, 3 1992:1, p. 139.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

the publication of Said's book, however. In the concept of orientalism, the Orient as a term is a western creation, and usage of the term brings with it an ideological and political baggage. Both the term Orient and the concept of the West are made up from human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other. It is important to note that Said does not pit the West and the East against each other in a clash of civilisations as some other historians do. Orientalism is merely the phenomenon when European, and in modern times American powers talk about the "Orient" as a place where borders, people and cultures can be moved and rearranged so the exotic otherness of the East can be made easier for the European powers to understand. In other words; in the mindset of the "West", the "Orient" is place that can be made "our"; "our" East and "our Orient" to possess and direct.<sup>34</sup> This is not to say that all, or even most, authors using the term Orient has some greater ideological crusade or political and ideological agenda against the Middle East. It merely show that even historians are shaped by historical development and that they are not free from political and ideological influences, however subtle they may be. But it is still worth noting the phenomenon of Orientalism, as it belongs in the group of things global historians should avoid. It is also interesting to note that the Ottoman Empire, one of the major powers in the early modern era, is only briefly mentioned in the two books.

Edward Said and the followers of his ideas has been criticised for being too general in their treatise on the Middle East, and lacking coverage on important subjects such as economics and the actual societies and their politics.<sup>35</sup> It has also been criticised for being influenced by left-wing politics.

#### 4.3 RISE OF MERCHANT EMPIRES AND ITS IMPACT

Despite the shortcomings mentioned above, the conference and the following books gained some important impact on the study of world trade and for the genre of global history. Most notably, the book show in a clear manner how more and more historians move towards what we have identified as the single topic approach while still drawing upon the work of past historians who belonged to the theoretical approach. Carla Rahn Phillip even draws upon Wallerstein's world system when explaining the role of the Ottoman Empire in the early modern era; up until the time after the early modern era the Ottoman Empire was a separate world system from Europe, uniting an economic and trading network with political authority and distributive power.<sup>36</sup>

In Section 4.1, five key subjects were established. What follows is a brief overview as to what the conference and the following books managed to contribute in regards to research on the established key subjects.

##### *The Contemporary Impact and Significance of Increased Long-Distance Trade*

The books establish that a global system influenced by, but necessarily determined by trade became established during the early modern era. The most powerful impact of this new, global system was the ability it

<sup>34</sup> E.W. Said, *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003, p. xiv.

<sup>35</sup> F. Halliday, 'Orientalism' and Its Critics. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20 1993:2, p. 150.

<sup>36</sup> Phillips (as in n. 6), p. 34.

had to conceptualise space and make people aware of the many dissimilarities and contrasts that were to be found within the early modern world.<sup>37</sup> Financial institutions were established, and both central and local authorities became more aware on the effects and importance of trade. Some authorities established strong regulations and rules, while others moved towards more free trade. Few of the articles focus directly on contemporary impact on social aspects, however.

Increased access to luxury articles might have led to more status for the upper classes, but the social status of merchants most likely increased as well.

#### *The Impact By, and Profit and Loss, By Organisations Such As the EIC and the VOC*

All aspects of the profits, loss and impacts by the EIC and the VOC are well covered in the articles by Niels Steensgaard Larry Neal. The organisation of stock exchanges and the development of company practices went hand in hand with the rapid expansion of the EIC and the VOC. Larry Neal concludes that the European merchant communities managed to respond to global economic developments due to the growth of the chartered companies and the modernity of the financial markets at the time.<sup>38</sup> Chaudhuri concludes in his closing chapter that due to the importance the EIC and VOC gained as banking institutions and their large profits at the height of their commercial career lead to one of the essential conditions of capitalism: separation between income-streams, ownership of capital and professional management.<sup>39</sup>

The other chartered companies only have brief or no mentions. I miss a detailed account on the profits or loss and impacts by the chartered companies operating in North America, for instance the Hudson Bay Company, which played an important role in the exploration of Canada, and even played an important political role at times. French chartered companies. Paul Butel concludes in his article that it was America that guided French commercial growth<sup>40</sup>, which leaves much being desired regarding information on the French chartered companies and merchant societies.

#### *The Development in the Well-Established Asian Networks of Commerce During the Early Modern Era*

As mentioned above, most of the chapters in the two books include developments within the Asian trading networks in one way or another. The authors all stress the fact that the Europeans and Asians were on equal terms due to the well-established nature of the networks, practices and cities in the Asian area. The authors call it an “age of partnership” or “age of competition”. Some European powers tried to break the status quo in the area, but these attempts did leave results for long. Some claim that the land-based trade in the area went through a period of decline, but Morris Rossabi claims that only a shift of priorities occurred, leading to increased use of land-based transportation for

<sup>37</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *Reflections on the organising principle of premodern trade*. in: J. D. Tracy, editor, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 441.

<sup>38</sup> Neal (as in n. 10), p. 221.

<sup>39</sup> Chaudhuri, *Reflections on the organising principle of premodern trade* (as in n. 37), p. 440.

<sup>40</sup> Butel (as in n. 8), p. 170-171.

shorter distances. The caravan trade in Asia was not inefficient, and the growth of transport costs was the result of political turbulence, not any innate traits of the caravan trade.<sup>41</sup>

*The developments in the well-established and centuries old caravan routes in Asia and Africa*

The developments in the caravan routes in Asia have been covered above. In regards to the developments in the caravan routes in Africa, only one article focuses specifically on these, despite it being established as a key subject within the growth of world trade on the conference. Ralph A. Austen stresses the fact that the caravan trade did in fact survive well into the early modern era and even through it, despite the increased usage of sea-based transport. He concludes that the African caravan system could not become a competitor economically with Europe due to environmental reasons. The Guinea forest formed a natural barrier for competition from Europeans, however, and he mentions that it is reason to believe that European opening of new sea routes actually preserved and improve the economic basis for a continued caravan trade. The African environment itself this supported continued growth for the caravan trade through the early modern era.<sup>42</sup>

*How trade is affected by cyclical movements in the larger economies of various regions*

Although not answered in a straight manner, some answers can be found by looking at the conclusions on the other key subjects. The increased usage of financial institutions in the era most likely made the merchant classes able to prepare properly to times of stagnant economic growth. The increased use of coins in the Mughal Empire and their regulations regarding imported bullion made a secure environment for merchants from Indian sub-continent to operate in. The usage of an officially sanctioned coinage also made it easier to reach agreements on the price of goods and transportation costs.

The chartered companies eventually built up an enormous amount of economic power and the stock exchanges and large cash reserves worked as a buffer in case of great losses due to political or environmental accidents causing a decrease in trade within a region. As the global trading network grew forth towards the end of the early modern era, it also became possible for cyclical movements in the economy of regions to affect other regions, even regions across the globe. Cyclical movements could turn out advantageous to some and disastrous to others. As silver became increasingly important due to a situation of increased supply available in America and increased demand in China, Hapsburg Spain did not gain any huge economic advantages due to decisions made by the central authorities. The Tokugawa Shogunate's central authorities gained an economic advantage due to wise decisions from the central authorities. This shows the increased importance decisions made by the central state got for the growth of world trade and economic developments.

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<sup>41</sup> Rossabi (as in n. 15), p. 370.

<sup>42</sup> Austen (as in n. 14), p. 348-350.

#### 4.3.1 *Closing Remarks*

The two books resulting from the conference *Rise of Merchant Empires* in 1987 stand as a work of tremendous breadth and scope and is a great aid in understanding the economic relationship between different parts of the world during the early modern era. Combined, all the articles deliver a global, albeit fragmented, perspective. More cooperation between the authors and more expertise from outside Europe would have aided in broadening the perspectives even more. More background on the various regions would also be welcome, and some information on trade in the Americas before the European colonial powers established their own trading networks would have given some insight on often forgotten traders and systems of exchange.

The origins of commercial systems has been presented as an important historical question to answer<sup>43</sup>, and the two books might be used to give an overview on the beginnings of the Atlantic system and to an extent the Pacific commercial system spearheaded by Spain. Background on the Mediterranean, the caravan routes and the Indian Ocean is lacking however, and force the readers to turn to other works for more information. One can argue that perhaps a third volume, focusing on important background factors could be an important addition to the series.

#### *Identifying Problems in Global History: Generalisation*

Smaller political communities could very well have received more attention. I applaud Thomas Brady who credits the parts of Europe consisting of many small political entities for the growth of a strong merchant class and economic practices. Generalisation can often be a problem when writing grand syntheses on global phenomenon such as world trade, and some degree of generalisation is unavoidable. But it is important to note that generalisation of geographical areas can lead to the historian not focusing on the role of smaller political entities in historical development. It is important to remember that the Europe of the early modern era is different than the modern Europe, and any use of the terms Germany and Italy should refer to geographical spaces, not political entities. The contribution to history from the Electorate of Saxony can very well turn out to have been vastly different than the contribution from the Prince- Bishopric of Würzburg or the Duchy of Florence.

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<sup>43</sup> Manning (as in n. 1), p. 184.

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## REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL HISTORY - REDUX

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Through looking at the two books resulting from the Rise of Merchant Empires conference and the two articles by Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez there's been given details on two distinct ways of presenting world trade within the single topic approach to global history. The Rise of Merchant Empires and The Political Economy of Merchant Empires are, when put together, an comprehensive and truly global perspective on all aspects regarding trade in the early modern era; be the direct or indirect consequences of the growth of world trade. The two articles by Flynn and Giráldez take a more focused approach in regards to one particular phenomenon with the subject of world trade; the flow of silver and the silver flow led to all continents finally being directly in trade with each other. Through the reviews of two articles and the two books as well as the historiographical chapter one should be able to make an assessment of the present status of global history.

### 5.1 THE IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS OF GLOBAL HISTORY

During the course of the study, three problems within the field of global history has been identified; Orientalism, Generalisation and the "centrisms".

#### *Orientalism*

In present day historical writing there is still some ideological, historical and political assumptions being made in regards to the East and the otherness that is often applied to the Eastern cultures and societies. While the term Orientalism has received its fair share of criticism since it was coined in 1978 by Edward W. Said, there are still factors that influence how historians treat the East.

European and American historians can easily fall into the pit trap of prejudging the entire Eastern region, and especially the Middle East, due to what is perceived as political instability and/or extreme religious movements in the area. While historians surely are equipped with the skills and knowledge to know that the present situation in the Middle East is not only a result of developments internally in the region, historians both from the region and elsewhere are influenced by the present day situation and the flow of information from modern day media. It is important to note that even people from the East can have Orientalist thoughts on their own history.

Orientalism has been explained as a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts and a wide collection of interests to maintain an alter-

native world and it is produced.<sup>1</sup> I will add to this that it is produced either willingly or unwillingly.

### *Generalisation*

Generalisation is needed when writing larger syntheses, there is simply no way around that fact. The amount of generalisation applied, and which subjects it is applied to, have an impact however. As is being established in chapter 2, the major theoretical works surfacing within global history starting with Spengler's writing and then evolving slowly as one get closer to the 1980's, is lacking when it comes to empirical research, and the theoretical approach tend to fall into the pit trap of generalisation due to the lacking use of sources. Global historians must be careful when it comes to generalisation, as one suddenly might end up downplaying the role of a state, county, city or person that could have contributed important findings to the historian's work.

### *"Centrisms"*

Even global historians fall prone to Eurocentrism or other types of centrisms. While it can take the normal form; applying some sort of righteous historical virtues to a region of the world, it can also take the form of a less conscious way of falling into the pit trap of centrisms. An example here is a global historian from Europe being intent on avoiding Eurocentrism. The seek to acknowledge the important role of other continents in the historical development, and unwillingly he starts to downplay actual European progress or feats of strength, and applying more credit to for instance Africa or Asia in global historical development. By believing that the regions outside Europe need some sort of great justice; that their achievements should be more worth then achievements that Europeans actually have the credit for, the historian takes a Eurocentric approach, despite good intentions. When writing global history, one cannot dismiss historical facts; if Europe actually were the first to do something then this does not need to be downplayed. Credit should be given where credit is due.

## 5.2 A TRULY GLOBAL NARRATIVE

Does the genre of global history offer truly global narratives? The answer to this would be yes. The books from the Rise of Merchant Empires conference and the articles on silver within world trade do indeed offer a truly global narrative. Other subjects then world trade will potentially be available to offer the same, but as the situation is now, and has been established here, the field of world trade is best suited for global narratives due to trade influencing not only economic aspects, but also social and technological aspects. Trade means contact between regions, and by focusing on trade the global historian can better gain the broad perspectives applied within the global historical genre.

It is important to note that one does not need to write a history of the whole world to gain a truly global narrative. The important thing is to keep a broad perspective regarding the subject in study. By placing the field of study within a broader context, important influences and

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<sup>1</sup> Said (as in n. 34), p. 12.

connections can readily be found where a more narrow perspective would have led to the past being placed out of context, potentially distorting the results of the study.

I will give honourable mention of the theoretical approach, because due to its shortcomings in regards to empirical study and use of sources the theoretical approach laid the foundation for the more specialised works within the single topic approach, and with the theoretical approach still evolving due to the debates between world system theorists and civilisationists it will no doubt be done important breakthroughs within that approach to global history. The participants of the Rise of Merchant Empires conference in 1987 acknowledged the inspiration they had received from the theoretical approach, most notably Wallerstein's world system approach.

Some areas are underrepresented in global historical writing on world trade however. More information regarding trade practices and merchants in pre-colonial America and Africa would be welcome. Regarding Africa, there are some important sources that could aid greatly in writing global history based upon Africa. The first is the *Tarikh al-Sudan* (henceforth TS) written by Abd al-Sadi ca. 1655. The title translates to "History of the Sudan" and TS is a valuable source regarding the Mali Empire, Songhay Empire and the caravan trade in Africa. A good English translation of TS is available in *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sadi's "Tarikh Al-Sudan" down to 1613 and Other Contemporary Documents*.<sup>2</sup> Of primary importance to the subject of world trade are the accounts regarding the Moroccan invasion of Songhay that occurred in 1591 and culminated at the Battle of Tondibi 13th March the same year. The Battle of Tondibi ended in a victory for the Moroccan forces. One of the main reasons for the invasion was a desire from the Moroccan leadership to gain control over the Sahara and the Sudan because of these areas pivotal role in the trans-Saharan trade in North-Africa's economy.<sup>3</sup> A stronger economy would in turn make Morocco able to stand against the Ottoman Turks stationed in Algeria. Of interest here is the possibility that the Moroccan invasion did not lead to a stronger economy for Morocco but instead weakened the trans-Saharan caravan routes, perhaps even to a stronger degree than the increased usage of trade by sea.

### 5.2.1 *Why Global Narratives Matter*

In chapter 2, the political pressure towards global history is briefly mentioned. The political right and the political left try to influence historical writing to further their own goals, some which are more extreme than others, and there is also the usage of historical writing by international organisations such as the UN. There's been a trend in recent years by the extreme right to use their views on history to further their politic and influence the electorate.

In recent years, there's been an increased support to the extreme right all over the world. The Hindu Nationalist party and their attempts to construct a mythic and zealous Hindu past for India have already been mentioned as have the attempts from the conservative right in

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2 J.O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sadi's "Tarikh Al-Sudan" down to 1613 and Other Contemporary Documents*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

3 L. Kaba, Archers, Musketeers, and Mosquitoes: The Moroccan Invasion of the Sudan and the Songhay Resistance (1591-1612). *The Journal of African History*, 22 1981:4, p. 460.



the USA to create patriotic histories. Last year, the school-board in the state of Texas took an active step towards creating a right-wing, patriotic history when they actively removed persons and events from the history curriculum. It was said that they white-washed history and wanted to create an American history that ignores or marginalizes African-Americans, women, Latinos, immigrants and popular culture.<sup>4</sup> Increased scepticism to immigration in Europe has led to what has been called a normalisation of the far-right in the politics as European conservative and far-right parties invite neo-fascists and racists into their organisations; groups that earlier have been kept outside the political establishment as well as an attack on multiculturalism from many conservative political parties.<sup>5</sup> Rhetoric used to stigmatise immigrant groups are often based on nothing but generalisation and preconceived notions, and the need to find groups to blame for internal political struggles or economic problems. There's clearly a connection between the increased support for the extreme right and the problems left in the wake of the financial crisis.

Patrick O'Brien argues that the commitments and agendas of modern global history should not be claims to scientific objectivity and personal impartiality, but to moral purposes connected to the needs of a globalising world.<sup>6</sup> Jerry H. Bentley agrees and argues that global history must be more honest and inclusive than the patriotic history promoted by the far right and more constructive and pragmatic than the critical versions lobbied by the left.<sup>7</sup> That some have the intent to write global history is important, as global history lets us see the process that history is, and also makes us aware of the many similarities within the human experience. As John Tosh puts it; "No human practice ever stands still; all demand a historical perspective which uncovers the dynamics of change over time".<sup>8</sup> And the same goes for human practices over space; they are not completely the same, but neither are they completely different. We need to keep in mind the global perspective; the connections and patterns, in all historical writing. Let us all be global historians, whether we look on the growth of world trade or local demographics. The patterns and connections are important, always.

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4 Czitrom.

5 M. Margaronis, *Normalisering av det høyreekstreme*. *Aftenposten Innsikt*, 4 2011.

6 O'Brien, *Journal of Global History* 1 [2006] (as in n. 3), p. 38.

7 Bentley (as in n. 48), p. 77.

8 Tosh (as in n. 4), p. 12.

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