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1 Globalization beyond the Silk Road: Writing Global History of Ancient Economies

I Introduction: ‘The Global’

Ideas about premodern globalization are easily conjured when thinking about connectivity and economic development across the territories of ancient empires. Indeed, globalization has immense rhetorical power. According to evocative usage of the term, this three-volume handbook speaks to the imagination of ‘the global’ in various ways. It can be considered global in its geographical scope, spanning the vast masses of land and water of Afro-Eurasia. It can also be termed global in its temporal scope, examining 600 years of economic development across several conventional periods. In scholarship, too, these volumes have a global character, with its execution by scholars from different parts of the globe, some with global biographies, who not only work with a plethora of evidence from widely distributed regions, but also with the legacy of various historiographical traditions that developed across the globe. In all of the above, ‘global’ seems to be a convenient word that creates a powerful impression – surely, a global one – of the breadth, expansion, and immense scale of the topic and undertaking of this handbook, to the level of common wisdom. Indeed, globalization and related lexical constructions such as ‘globalism,’ ‘global connections,’ ‘global processes,’ and ‘global-local interactions,’ have become rhetorical tropes in recent practices of ancient history, in particular with regards to ‘Silk Road history.’ But some reflection on this common wisdom of the global is necessary. How global is global? What does it mean to write global history of ancient economies? How does this relate to globalization and in what way can globalization help to advance modern sense-making of ancient economies?

In assessing these questions, this chapter has two related aims. The first is to provide the theoretical context of globalization, engaging with the historiography of global writing and globalization research. Despite the increasing ubiquity of globalization rhetoric in historical studies, there is a persistent “collective unwillingness to think”¹ about what exactly constitutes globalization. Different usage abounds, with different meanings and different interpretive implications, but often without adequate engagement with the vast swathes of globalization literature.² The

¹ Osterhammel and Petersson 2005, 2.

² Important exceptions are, e.g., Pitts 2008; Hodos 2010; Versluys 2013; Vlassopoulos 2013. Additionally, theoretical engagements with globalization literature in the recent publications of Pitts and Versluys 2015; Hodos 2016; Versluys 2017; Boivin and Frachetti 2018 indicate an important change. See also the critique in Hoo 2020, 47.

second aim of this chapter, then, is to clarify what it means to write global history of ancient economies and to propose the way in which globalization may help to “globalize ancient history.”³ To these aims, I will disentangle major paradigms and paradoxes about globalization, by answering a number of questions that attend the obscurity and scepticism around the term. These are divided into questions of domain; time and space; integration and homogeneity; centrality and power; and finally, the question of inquiry. Rather than throwing the baby away with the bathwater, this chapter serves the argument that globalization is useful, not as a model that (pre)defines bodies of evidence as empirical proof of ancient globalization, but rather as a perspective – as an analytical prism that sheds light on the economic range of Afro-Eurasian connectivity, beyond the notion of the Silk Road.

II The Question of Domain

Although often used in the same breath,⁴ it is important to analytically distinguish world history from the history of globalization and from globalizing historical studies. The differences between these have much to do with their domains of research. World history, globalization history, and global history, as considered here, are three different intellectual endeavors, though with overlap and commonalities evocative of the global as described above.

II.1 World History

The first, world history (*Weltgeschichte*) in its broadest sense is a form of history writing focused on placing local experiences in a larger world context.⁵ Although world history has been practiced with diverse aims throughout time, interest in this larger context has rarely been neutral, but was rather embedded in particular (often geopolitical) power structures. Herodotos of Halikarnassos may be considered an early world historian, well-known for his sometimes fantastic ethnographies of the barbarian as a contextual, ideologically glossed prelude to the actual topic of his *Histories*, the Graeco-Persian wars in the fifth century BCE.⁶ Likewise, Sima Qian’s

³ Von Reden, vol. 1, Introduction, 1.

⁴ E.g., Sven Beckert and Sachsenmaier 2018, 1.

⁵ Universal history (*Universalgeschichte*) is treated here as part of world history. It should be noted that world history is diversely interpreted and its domain of inquiry has therefore been subject to changes and developments; see for discussion Manning 2003; 2005; J. H. Bentley 2011; M. Bentley 2011. This section in particular pertains to the origins of world history as an institutionalized field.

⁶ The literature on how his inquiry is framed by ethnographic interests is extensive. See Bakker, de Jong, and van Wees 2002 with bibliography.

Shiji consists of an accumulative history of ancient times to his present day (the second century BCE), including ethnic geographies of regions well beyond the Han empire from a distinct Sinocentric perspective.⁷ The domain of world history did not merely pertain to wider contexts of local experiences, but specifically bore on the study and ordering of foreign societies in the world to carve out and elevate one's own. Its area of interest was situated in *other* societies, those that were considered (and analyzed) as distant from one's own, be it economically, politically, culturally, or morally (though often a combination of all of the above). Practices of world history moreover tended to the premise that societies are orderly and distinct, allowing analytical compartmentalization of world areas and their respective civilizational histories: Chinese history, Egyptian history, and Indian history would each emerge from their contained geographical areas.

It is not surprising that world history, as such, became institutionalized as a professional field of scholarship in nineteenth-century Europe with the emergence of, and massive investment in the nation state as the dominant form of government.⁸ The field's professionalization through the intellectual efforts by great scholars such as Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) established the systematic use of conceptual tools to understand the past. These tools were innately linked to interests in and of nation states and national communities from a distinct Eurocentric perspective, oriented toward a past that implicitly befitted modern ideologies.⁹ As a result, societies and peoples were methodologically conceptualized as integrated nation states, while historical inquiry and the ensuing production of area-specific historical knowledge were subject to “racial and cultural stereotyping of parts of the world that did not fit into the Western political order.”¹⁰ Although world history changed and broadened its course toward new directions and agendas (“new world history”),¹¹ particularly from the 1980s onward, it is analytically relevant here to keep in mind the field's foundational methods and modes of thought.¹² Comparative research remains a core method of world history, as reflected in Peter Bang, Christopher Bayly, and Walter Scheidel's recent volumes of *The Oxford World History of Empire*.¹³ In a traditional world history analysis, then, focused on civilizations and

7 Particularly with regards to the Xiongnu; see Di Cosmo 2002, 161–311; Pines 2005; Di Cosmo 2010. See also Leese-Messing, vol. 1, ch. 12.A.

8 J. H. Bentley 2011; M. Bentley 2011.

9 See J. H. Bentley 2005 for discussion.

10 M. Bentley 2011, 22.

11 World history has experienced a radical shift away from Eurocentric and nationalist history, and has therefore been designated as “new world history.” New world history, as defined by J. H. Bentley 2002; 2011, subsumes global history as outlined in this chapter. For typology of trends within world history, including global history, see M. Bentley 2011.

12 I follow here Osterhammel and Petersson 2005, 19 to retain an analytical distinction between world history and global history. See also Mazlish 1998.

13 Bang, Bayly, and Scheidel 2021a; 2021b.

their internal dynamics, ancient economies risk to be heuristically shaped as spatially contained units defined by the political borders of empires, while information about economic activities would primarily be generated from analyzing imperial states (particularly those considered Western, i.e., the Hellenistic and Roman empires) as the principal agents of historical change.¹⁴ While making states the central unit of historical analysis can invite rigorous comparison of world areas, comparative container history is precisely what this volume does not set out to do.

II.2 Globalization History

The second field that refers to the global is globalization history. Although it can be recognized as a scholarly field on its own, globalization history is not commonly institutionalized as a distinct discipline.¹⁵ While the practices of world history have a long pedigree stretching back to antiquity, those of globalization history are fairly recent, following the global turn of the 1990s. The accelerating immediacy and social awareness of widespread effects of globalization on modern-day life was coupled with an exponential rise of new interest in the subject of globalization, first by economists, political scientists, and sociologists, followed later by historians in the early 2000s. Practices of globalization history therefore stem from a particular modern episteme. Rather than distinct world areas, the research object of globalization history is globalization of the world itself: globalization history equals the history of globalization.

Much ink has been spilled about the precise definition of globalization in debates taking place in and across multiple disciplines, from sociology and economics to geography and cultural studies.¹⁶ Indeed, a profuse number of definitions is in circulation, ranging from globalization as a capitalist economic project, to globalization being a state of internationally shared economic and political conditions.¹⁷ From the perspective of historical studies, however, it can be said that globalization history subsumes two definitions. The first defines globalization as an empirical phenomenon; the second posits globalization as a historical process or a set of processes. Both definitions generally link globalization to expanded and intensified connectivities and interactions between distant localities, but the ways in which globalization is operationalized as a research object can be quite disparate. While many social scientific studies examine globalization as a modern phenomenon – as

¹⁴ See the overview by von Reden and Speidel, vol. 1, ch. 17.

¹⁵ Instead, it is practiced across a number of disciplines, including world history, modern history, premodern history, ancient history, archaeology, anthropology, and cultural studies.

¹⁶ For good assessments that grasp major trends within these debates, see Held and McGrew 2000; Steger 2003; McGrew 2007; Robinson 2007; Osterhammel 2011.

¹⁷ For a concise analytical overview of definitions, see Nederveen Pieterse 2009, 16–18.

a consequence of modernity or a condition for modernity¹⁸ – historians and anthropologists approach globalization as a longer-term process (or a set of processes) of accelerating worldwide relations that developed over time.¹⁹ Pertaining to both definitions, globalization history can be considered as the study of markers of globalization as a historical phenomenon, by tracing developments of these markers back to their origins (whether in the modern, premodern, or ancient past), and/or determining the existence of globalization markers in distinct periods before modernity, focusing on moments of globalization (whether these are part of a linear process toward modern globalization, or occurring transversely throughout time). Earlier ancient-historical studies have fruitfully engaged with globalization history; key among them are Øystein LaBianca and Sandra Scham's *Connectivity in antiquity: Globalization as a long-term historical process*, Justin Jennings's *Globalizations and the ancient world*, Martin Pitt and Miguel John Versluys's *Globalisation and the Roman World*, and Tamar Hodos's *Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*.²⁰ These studies have successfully argued that globalization neither requires a planetary scale nor condition(s) of modernity, but that the term is best understood as a multidimensional and multiscale set of processes of increasing connectivities between distant localities. Although sharing significant analytical terrain with globalization history, it is not the intention of this three-volume handbook to assess ancient economies along criteria of globalization markers in order to substantiate evidence for globalization in antiquity. Furthermore, without firmly denying the existence of ancient globalization, this handbook also does not contend that increasing economic connections within and between distant places across the Afro-Eurasian space were precursors in a deep historical process of modern globalization. Although the research object of these volumes is connectivity, it is not within the domain of globalization history that this handbook is operationalized.

II.3 Global History

This brings us to global history which is the key to globalizing historical studies, as this chapter will further explain. Although semantically and analytically resonant with the fields of world history and globalization history, it is useful to distinguish

18 For globalization as a consequence of modernity, see Giddens 1990; for globalization as a condition for modernity, see for instance Harvey 1989; Robertson 1992; Tomlinson 1999.

19 For pioneering historical studies on globalization, see especially Manning 1996; Hopkins 2002; Bordo, Taylor, and Williamson 2003; Bayly 2004; Osterhammel and Petersson 2005; Gills and Thompson 2006; Chanda 2007.

20 LaBianca and Scham 2006; Jennings 2011; Pitts and Versluys 2015; Hodos 2016. See also Seland 2008; Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn 2011; Malkin 2011; Versluys 2013; Vlassopoulos 2013; Kardulias 2014; Boivin and Frachetti 2018.

global history in two respects.²¹ First, rather than studying and comparing world regions as separate, demarcated societies or civilizations that are largely shaped by internal factors, global history takes connectivity, interactions, and exchanges as its points of departure. Global history conceptually approaches areas as related and open parts of the same world, without assigning analytical privilege to one space over the other, and without claims to total integration or total entanglement. Accordingly, rather than focusing on comparisons of autonomous economic processes within distinct world areas and asserting their uniqueness, the volumes of this handbook transcend container history by examining Afro-Eurasia as a macroregion structured by connectivities of various natures and degrees and with diverse consequences that foster heterogeneity in economic developments. It will show that some spaces are arguably more densely or sustainably connected than others, patterned by regional and local circumstances.

Second, whereas globalization history focuses on global connectivity as a historical phenomenon, assessing the origins and developments of globalization, global history's domain of inquiry tends to the contexts and effects of connectivity toward the global, taking connectivity as loose starting point, rather than an outcome. Although these domains can overlap significantly in practice, as also within this handbook, the distinction is relevant for the analysis here.²² I follow global historian Sebastian Conrad, who convincingly argues that global history should primarily be seen as an analytical perspective on connectivity, one that sheds light on its impacts and consequences, while globalization history is a historical inquiry into distinct connectivity (namely, as globalization) that examines its causes and origins.²³ Whereas globalization history is more distinctly defined by its research object (connectivity as globalization), global history is mainly defined by its research method (a global perspective on connectivity).

In summary, while all three fields pertain to 'the global,' the ways in which this is operationalized in their respective domains of inquiry varies. The research object of world history is world areas; that of globalization history is globalization; while that of global history is connectivity toward the global, concentrated on applying a particular global perspective. Despite this analytical distinction, there is an intimate methodological dialogue between global history and globalization history. On the one hand, global history equals global thinking and global thinking is necessary for globalization history; all globalization history can therefore be considered as part of global history writing.²⁴ On the other hand, I argue that concepts and methods

²¹ The distinction made here serves an analytical purpose. I should emphasize that, in practice, the three fields can overlap considerably. Global history is now subsumed in practices of world history at large (J. H. Bentley 2002; Conrad and Eckert 2007; Conrad 2016).

²² For a combined approach, see, e.g., Pitts and Versluys 2015.

²³ Conrad 2016, 92; see also Osterhammel 2011, 93–95; Hoo 2020.

²⁴ Osterhammel 2011, 95; Conrad 2016, 92.

used in wider globalization scholarship (which includes globalization history) are particularly helpful in developing methodological strategies to write global history. Thus, while this handbook is written within the domain of global history, it is the engagement with the toolbox of globalization *theories*, developed in globalization research, that grants appropriate methodological tools to think about, investigate, and better understand Afro-Eurasian imperial connectivities and their economic consequences in terms of changing dynamics of consumption, production, and exchange.²⁵ What follows now is an explicit engagement with globalization research, addressing and clarifying common paradigms and paradoxes, before drawing out what precisely globalization theory can mean for writing global history of ancient economies.

III The Question of Time and Space

If the research object of global history is connectivity toward the global, how should this then be defined in terms of time and space? While the issues of the chronology and scale of globalization are particularly pertinent within the domain of globalization history, global history accounts for neither the roots nor the spatial threshold of globalization. Instead, global history concentrates on the contexts and impacts of *increasing* connectivity. Nevertheless, it is important to touch upon these significant debates within globalization research, before continuing onward.

The term globalization is almost rhetorically associated with planetary globality and industrialized society of modern times, which has made many a historian wary of globalization and its theoretical toolbox for ancient times.²⁶ The objection is understandable: processes in antiquity did not operate on the same geographical scale as in our contemporary “network society,”²⁷ in which dimensions of time and space have become profoundly compressed through very modern technologies such as the internet, smartphones, social media, train and airline travel, and electronic payment. This is what David Harvey, along with other globalization thinkers, has coined as time-space compression: the other side of the planet is easily ‘reached’ in a matter of clicks, swipes, calls, or physical high-speed travel, through which far-away things such as news, food, fashion, entertainment, company stocks, knowledge, ideas, institutions, and architecture, but also distant conflict, revolutionary movements, pollution, labor, and disease can be shared, experienced, spread, coordinated, and/or acted upon from up close, locally.²⁸ The local

²⁵ Globalization theory is not a grand unified theory, but it encompasses numerous disagreements, controversies, and muddled consensus.

²⁶ For critical voices, see Rosenberg 2000; 2005; Naerebout 2006; Ball 2015, 251.

²⁷ The term ‘network society’ has been coined by Castells 1996.

²⁸ Harvey 1990. See also Giddens 1990, 16–17; Robertson 1992, 8; Bauman 2000, 8–11.

experience of distant things in increasingly compressed (reduced) amounts of time, is formed through a range of complex interdependencies across vast geographical spaces, which on first sight might not seem directly related to the localities in question. These interdependencies emerge from intensified interactions by and via humans, objects, ideas, and technologies, which variously move and migrate across diverse communication networks. Although not everyone is a ‘mover,’ these interdependencies still impact and reach into the lives of ‘stayers,’ of the people who stay put, particularly in the ways they experience, structure, and coordinate social relations.²⁹

Despite that our contemporary experience with globalization processes is very much defined by modern technologies, the efforts of an increasing number of historians and archaeologists show that contexts and experiences of time-space compression resulting from intense connectivity are neither confined nor exclusive to modernity.³⁰ Though many scholars are wary of ancient globalization, it is hard to deny that complex connectivities had been developed in human history before the twentieth century, affecting people’s local experiences of time and space in various ways, without the full-fledged integration of the whole planet. This acknowledgement makes theoretical observations, concepts, and concerns raised in globalization research also relevant for the analysis of ancient economic behavior in the time and space under review in this book. The Roman Empire, for instance, provides us with a sense of how ancient intensified connectivities could unfold with local, regional, and distant impacts. Here, as Weaverdyck (ch. 12.C) will elucidate, diverse existing, novel, and aspiring elites in different parts of the imperial space thrived in a networked social system of honor, competition, and emulation, whether among peers or socially inferior people. Practices such as gift-giving, *euergetism*, and conspicuous consumption and performance, not only resulted in an increase of overall wealth, but also affected and proliferated provincial middle-group (desire for) consumption, while expanding local markets and stimulating distant trade and craft production of desired goods in far-away places such as Arabia, India, and China.³¹ These exotica needed to be transported via long-distance cross-imperial trade routes that were navigated locally – and therefore dependant on local informants and subject to regional customs duties – rather than guided imperially, as pointed out by Taasob (ch. 8.B).³²

Von Reden’s short discussion of Palmyra in the next chapter illustrates well the ways in which socioeconomic relations and their impacts were rarely limited to a certain local territory. Instead, socioeconomic relations have the capacity to expand, entangle with, and unfold into the lives and behaviors of near and distant people

²⁹ Giddens 1990, 64; Tomlinson 1999, 2; Appadurai 2000, 6; Held et al. 2000, 54–55; Woolf 2016.

³⁰ See, for instance, the contributions in Hodos 2016, but cf. Morley 2015.

³¹ Weaverdyck, ch. 12.C, II.2–3, this volume.

³² Taasob, ch. 8.B, V.2, this volume.

across time and space. Rather than only Palmyrenes profiting from commodity trade, and rather than Roman demand being the sole driver of this trade, von Reden points to the wide spatial range of mobile and nonmobile actors who contributed to, and benefited from, social network dynamics of commodity trade of products that came in, went through, or were exported from Palmyra: from local Palmyrenes and Roman traders, to caravan merchants, market sellers, urban euergetists, Roman elites in Antiocheia and beyond, and various non-Roman inhabitants of distant cities across the Erythraean sea. Rather than prioritizing macroperspectives that analyze abstract economic connections within and between geographical spaces in terms of Silk Road trade, globalization research advocates the analysis of space as a relational notion, characterized by dynamic *trans-scalar* processes: processes that affect people's behavior across various scales simultaneously, with diverse local, regional, and transregional input and impact.³³ Economic change and development can therefore be both endogenous and exogenous at the same time. Accordingly, this handbook does not give primacy to certain locales or time periods, but investigates a varied range of units of analysis that sometimes spill over conventional spatial and temporal boundaries (and sometimes not): actors, tools, and processes. This will be further explored in the chapters of this handbook.

IV The Question of Integration and Homogeneity

IV.1 World Systems

The relational notion of space is inherently tied to the question of integration and homogeneity. If space in this handbook is considered relational, to what extent does it need to be integrated? Too often are broad-scale dissemination and exchange implicitly seen to result in, and therefore to represent interregional integration. Some strands within globalization research indeed support the idea that expanding and intensifying relations cause the systemic integration of worlds (world zones), and eventually the integration of the world at large.³⁴ Such a conception of increasing interregional connections is central in theorizations of world-systems theory, a sociological theory that came of age in the late 1970s, before globalization theory became current on its own.³⁵ World-systems theory formally modelled globalization

³³ Hoo 2020.

³⁴ E.g., Abu-Lughod 1989; Frank 1993; Wilkinson, Sheratt, and Bennet 2011.

³⁵ Like globalization theory, world-systems theory is not a unified theory. It has a multidisciplinary historiography defined by lively debate (see footnote 37). World-systems theory later developed into world systems theory or world systems analysis, without the hyphen between 'world' and 'systems,' implying a renewed focus not on distinct systems existing alongside each other, but on the globe itself as a system. For the historiography of world-systems theory (and later world systems analysis), see Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993; Hall 2017.

as the progressive integration of peripheral and semi-peripheral regions into a systemic network of dependencies, dominated by a single political or societal core and a single hierarchical division of labor. In the works of foundational theorist Immanuel Wallerstein, (modern) world economies and (premodern) world empires are defined by such integrative dependency networks: complex economic and/or political webs in which macroregions are tied together, unified, controlled, driven, and constrained by state power.³⁶ Although world-systems theory has branched out in several directions throughout time, the tenet of empires as global systems has been of enduring influence in historical studies.³⁷ Indeed, it is not uncommon to refer to Hellenistic and Roman empires as integrated systems, each with regional centers and peripheries feeding back into an imperial system, especially through the role of mobile, cosmopolitan elites.³⁸

The idea of large dependency networks, densely structured by sustained integration, had led globalization to be conceptualized as a world system appealing to the analysis and explanation of macroregional exchange and its effect on economic behaviors in vast ‘international’ imperial spaces. Some scholars even consider integration as the basic premise for global history.³⁹ However, adopting a systemic frame for increasing connectivity has some heuristic limitations for the understanding of ancient economies across the Afro-Eurasian region. Firstly, treating this macro-region itself or its world empires – the Hellenistic and Roman Empires, the Central Asian Empires, the Qin and Han Empires, the Arsakid Empire, and the empire of the Xiongnu – as integrated systems, may actually result in reproducing container histories on a global scale, conceptualizing relational imperial space itself as a holistic entity in which economic behaviors are systemized interactions between functional parts of a sum total. Secondly, though world-systems theory has developed in different directions, the theory’s fundamental hierarchical notions of core, semi-periphery, and periphery semantically shape and analytically impose the direction of power and the logic of economic circulation, privileging the role and rationale of imperial actors and interests. According to such logic, desired luxury goods and high culture would be created in and exported from imperial centers to receiving hinterlands and peripheries which, in turn, would function to cultivate agricultural produce for imperial cores, where it would be centrally collected, consumed, and redistributed back to the peripheries. Although such paths of economic circulation certainly occurred, creating degrees of systemic coherence in the ancient spaces under review, they were not the only paths that characterized economic develop-

³⁶ Wallerstein 1974, 1979.

³⁷ For diverse assessments of world systems theory, see Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993; Frank and Gill 1993; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Wallerstein 2004; Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn 2011; Hall 2017; Chase-Dunn and Khutkyy 2021. See, however Woolf 1990; Morley 2007; von Reden 2015 for criticism from an ancient-historical perspective.

³⁸ E.g., Hingley 2005; Strootman 2014; Lavan, Payne, and Weisweiler 2016.

³⁹ E.g., Conrad 2016, 90–114.

ment, nor were such paths always formalized procedures subscribing to a distinct systemic function, as will be shown in the chapters that follow. Moreover, thirdly, such notion of nested core-periphery hierarchy tends to prioritize the role of state power as the primary driver, making economic developments part and parcel of deliberate top-down policies while flattening out numerous actors with diverse motivations and tools, whose complex interactions and collaborations configured the economic developments in and across imperial spaces.⁴⁰ Recent historical scholarship has reached the consensus that imperial dynamics were neither unilateral nor exclusively shaped by intentional top-down and core-periphery policies.⁴¹ As we will see, human and nonhuman actors that shaped economic dynamics ranged from kings, courts, and armies, to temples, landscapes, cities, guilds, monastic organizations, households, and individuals, some of which were highly mobile while others operated in more local circles. Lastly, a world-systems analysis of connectivity does not account for important economic actors who participated in, stimulated, and sustained transregional networks without necessarily being politically or economically integrated. This is especially the case for mobile pastoralists, market merchants, foreign visitors, and larger mobile polities such as the Xiongnu, whose role was essential in economic processes that were more organic and fluid than forceful and state-driven.⁴²

IV.2 Unevenness

Although world-systems theory actually underlines unevenness and asymmetry across macroregions within the system, there is a common tendency to relate the notion of political-economic integration to the assimilation, singularization, and homogenization of behavior. Such homogenization – captured in the term “McDonaldization,” coined by sociologist George Ritzer – is envisioned as the hyper-diffusion and consumption of global culture, the creation of a single global market, and/or the universalization of political institutions and organizations across vast distances.⁴³ Early critics have aimed attention toward the underlying implication that increasing connectivity would obliterate local and regional forms of behavior in favor of standard products, standard demand, and standard procedures across the world,

⁴⁰ See for instance Morley 2015, 55.

⁴¹ See for instance Allsen 2011 and the contributions in Morris and Scheidel 2010; Gehler and Rollinger 2014; Bang, Bayly, and Scheidel 2021a with bibliography.

⁴² For the role of mobile pastoralists and market merchants, see Fabian and Weaverdyck, ch. 3.A, VIII.1 this volume; Morris, ch. 4, this volume. For excellent discussion of the Xiongnu from a globalization perspective, see Miller 2015; Miller and Brosseder 2016; Brosseder and Miller 2018. For the imperial context of the Xiongnu, see also Brosseder, vol. 1, ch. 5.

⁴³ Ritzer 1993.

conditioned by global powers.⁴⁴ This would create distinct homogeneity in social life and with it, the loss of local autonomy and agency. Conceptualized as such, globalization indeed runs the risk of reproducing grand narratives that totalize historical experiences and societies under headers such as westernization, imperialism, Sinicization, Romanization, and Hellenization.⁴⁵

Without proper theoretical reflection and clarification, the analytical pitfall of simply equating similarities across large distances in production, consumption, and distribution patterns looms large, with the assimilation of local and regional economies and cultures into a global (supraregional) market economy. But while world-systems perspectives that commit to systemic coherence and internal scalability have become branches in later globalization scholarship, engagement with more recent globalization literature reveals increasing consensus about the distinct unevenness and heterogeneity that are inherent to expanding and intensifying connectivity. Arjun Appadurai was one of the first to theorize increasing connectivity in globalization processes as increasingly *disjunctive* processes: processes through which various sorts of flows (people, technologies, money, images, and ideas) that move across expanding social networks follow increasingly erratic paths which neither lead to common outcomes nor are driven by common forces.⁴⁶ Global flows – flows ‘between’ large distances – are rarely directly transmitted from A to B in the form of trade (or in our case from the east end to the west end of the Afro-Eurasian region), but are variously mediated through asymmetrically organized channels, actors, and situations that impact the movements and directions of flows, whether on local, regional, or transregional scales.⁴⁷ Such mediation of flows could take the form of different organizations that shaped demand, investment, and consumption across scales, such as various palace complexes, monastic communities, or professional associations of artisans and mercenaries, as well as diverse kinds of individuals, such as local elites, craftspeople, traders, farmers, and pastoralists. They mediated and negotiated flows sometimes in controlled spaces and sometimes in situations that were more contingent, prompted for instance by opportunism or competition.⁴⁸ The emphasis on unevenness in terms of local impact is shared by other globalization thinkers who dismiss homogenization as the major outcome of

⁴⁴ Barber 1995; Ohmae 1995, 38–39. For an informative discussion on imperialist understandings of globalization, see Tomlinson 1997.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Tronchetti and Van Dommelen 2005, 205.

⁴⁶ Appadurai 1990, see also Appadurai 1990. These flows, according to Appadurai, each shape a dimension – a landscape – of globalization, which he terms as ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapes, finanscapas, and ideoscapes. A classic publication to understand the material dynamics of disjunctive processes is Appadurai 1986.

⁴⁷ Hannerz 1990; Friedman 1997; Hannerz 1997; Tomlinson 1999; 2006; Nederveen Pieterse 2009. See chapters in part II: Tools, this volume.

⁴⁸ See chapters in part I: Actors, this volume.

connectivity.⁴⁹ Although degrees of standardization in production, distribution, and consumption do occur with intensifying large-scale interactions, increases in flows of goods, objects, ideas, and meanings across networked spaces are profoundly entangled with increases in local demand, local consumption and consumers, and niches of production which, in turn, feed the increase in flows. There is therefore not only unevenness in terms of local and regional impact, but also unevenness in local and regional *input*.

IV.3 Glocalization

Addressing homogenizing forces as a persistent myth of globalization, Roland Robertson coined the concept of *glocalization* in globalization research, drawing attention to the idea that global processes and local processes do not take place in dichotomous spatial spheres, but that these are mutually constitutive.⁵⁰ Conceptualizations of localism as pure, ingrained, and spatially contained, not only construe local actors as unassertive and merely reactionary to global change, but also overlook the outward and social basis of their behavior. The ways in which people experience their social environment and navigate their behavior through social relations is rarely shaped by dynamics confined to local scale only. The global (or rather, the supralocal) is not an external force or isolated structure, opposed to reactionary local actors, but is deeply embedded in the *texture* of locality.⁵¹ This is seen in early historic India, where global processes of legal standardization profoundly intersected with regional and local norms. Dwivedi (ch. 10) sets forth how, despite the lack of political cohesion, compiled treatises of religious *dharma* spread across the Indian subcontinent and were socially recognized as an overarching ethical and legal framework within which various economic activities could be held accountable, for instance when it came to property rights.⁵² Although these semi-autonomous treatises were standardized as administrative and social manuals, especially in their linguistic form, written in Sanskrit, the *dharmaśāstras* explicitly allow for local norms and could be diversely applied, intersecting with regional and local factors of influence in disputes, such as provincial laws, caste, families, and Buddhist monastic codes of behavior.

Increasing connectivity goes hand in hand with an increasing sense of compression of different scales (global, regional, and local) into the same locale, which affect the organization, coordination, and motivation of local behavior,

⁴⁹ Nederveen Pieterse 1994; 2009, among increasing others, identifies hybridization as the defining characteristic of globalization.

⁵⁰ Robertson 1995. See also Hannerz 1990; Robertson 1992, 97–115; Tomlinson 2006. For the mythology about globalization, see Ferguson 1992.

⁵¹ Tomlinson 1999, 12.

⁵² Dwivedi, ch. 10, IV, this volume.

with diverse economic consequences and economic change. In other words, actors and their behavior are not bounded to their direct vicinity, but are entangled in various circuits of exchange on different scales (local, regional, transregional) that impact their lives in disparate ways, even if they are not ‘movers’ themselves. In Qin and Han China, a private farmer and his household members cultivating a plot of hired land on the North China Plain may have worked with local tools and materials, but their motivations, living conditions, labor division, and the types, amounts, storage, and quality standards of agricultural produce, as well as perhaps the technology used, were not strictly local, but profoundly shaped by imperial demand and taxation, mediated by tax collectors from local county offices who evaluated the property and produce.⁵³ Leese-Messing (ch. 6) explains how taxation in Han China was not only collected in kind but was also demanded in the form of money, which drove local farmers to sell their produce in markets, thereby becoming themselves merchants, engaged in larger circles of market exchange.⁵⁴ This dialectic between local economic behavior and imperial demands is a wider phenomenon seen across Afro-Eurasia. Accordingly, in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East and Mediterranean, discussed by Weaverdyck and Fabian (ch. 8.A), not only imperial actors profited from monetary taxation but, indeed, various ‘middle’ and ‘lower-level’ individuals in (sometimes simultaneously held) roles of tax collectors, market merchants, temple elites, landholders, and farmers, could reap the economic benefits of imperial taxation, by mediating or participating in various kinds of economic activities that were directly or indirectly related to tax demands.⁵⁵ Consequences of imperial taxation were not merely economic, but could also have significant social and cultural ramifications. Morris (ch. 13) considers how the accumulation of wealth from revenue extraction in Bactria and Gandhāra, led to an increase in elite consumption, which in turn boosted local production of specialized luxury goods and stimulated trade to acquire imported prestige goods from distant regions across Afro-Eurasia.⁵⁶ These examples illustrate how actors’ own local behaviors of consumption and cultural expression could have extended economic implications for the lives of others, sometimes far beyond their locality. Increasing connectivity thus prompts scalar entanglement of social relations that impact the local and translocal ways in which people navigate their socioeconomic and cultural behaviors. In the chapters that follow, we will further see the different ways how economic change was brought about by diverse entanglements of imperial, regional, and local activities.

⁵³ Leese-Messing, ch. 6, this volume.

⁵⁴ Leese-Messing, ch. 6 and ch. 11, this volume.

⁵⁵ Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8.A, this volume.

⁵⁶ Morris, ch. 13, V.2, this volume.

V The Question of Centrality and Power

Defining unevenness and scalar entanglement as characteristics of increasing connectivity has methodological implications when it comes to centrality and power in economic developments. Rather than concentrating on coercive and exploitative power which capitalizes on laborers in peripheries and lower layers of society at the hand of the ruling class in imperial centers, the analytical perspective is broadened to include social power relations that stretch across various overlapping networks. These networked relations, including (but certainly not exclusive to) those between ruler and ruled, have the capacity to enable, constrain, and motivate a broad range of actors and economic activities across various localities and regions. This is what David Grewal theorized as network power: a form of informal power that is neither territorial nor necessarily conscious and coercive, but primarily operative in relations of sociability, particularly so in global processes of increasing connectivity.⁵⁷ Networks, according to Grewal, induce degrees of standardization, since standards – shared rules, practices, and behaviors – facilitate communication and coordination between actors in the network. The larger or denser the network, the higher the desires and stakes for actors to adopt certain network standards in order to gain access to and partake in network communication. It is through network dynamics between actors, therefore, that standards with network power develop, which can motivate and pressure, but also impede economic activity and development.

Standardized idioms and coined money, for instance, exerted profound network power across vast geographical space, facilitating as well as proliferating transactions and exchange of various kinds, not only those coordinated by imperial actors. This is seen in regional strategies of coin production in Bactria and Gandhāra under Greek rule. In these regions, silver coinage minted by Hellenistic kings followed different weight standards, an Attic one in Bactria and an Indic one in Gandhāra. A short experimentation with Indo-Greek coins minted with exchangeable weight standards to be used in both Attic and Indic systems further illustrates the broad network power of these monetary standards.⁵⁸ According to Morris (ch. 9), these coinages were not only used for taxation and expenditure of the kings, but also circulated through the hands of regional and local actors who participated in monetary and commercial spheres of the broader Hellenistic and Indic worlds. Language could also exert considerable power as what Grewal has termed ‘mediating standards,’ providing (easier) access to engage in social activities across various networks.⁵⁹ Fabian and Weaverdyck (ch. 8.A) consider the multiple languages such as ‘Official Aramaic,’ *koine* Greek, and Latin which gained recognition as standardized

⁵⁷ Grewal 2009, 9; see also von Reden, ch. 2, this volume.

⁵⁸ Discussed with bibliography in Morris, ch. 9, II.3, this volume. See also Dwivedi, ch. 10, III.1, this volume.

⁵⁹ Grewal 2009, 21–22.

idioms in the linguistically diverse Near East and Mediterranean. These imperial languages were used alongside numerous local and regional languages, some of which developed into ‘membership standards’ that allowed access to prestige of, and membership into certain social communities.⁶⁰

Thinking in terms of networks allows power to be conceptualized as not solely generated through, and situated in interactions between center and periphery and between ruler and ruled, but also as emergent in configurations of interstitial relationships.⁶¹ Networks have multiple centers (nodes) entangled with other centers, between which various flows in the form of objects, produce, technology, and knowledge, traverse in multiple directions across multiple ties. The idea of multi-centrality and multidirectionality analytically transforms traditionally considered focal places of state power such as the city of Rome into a center instead of *the* center, a prominent node that was connected and entangled with various other nodes across the network.⁶² Network nodes, however, need not be territorial or necessarily tied to state power. This handbook conceives various actors as nodes in overlapping networks, which include cities but also itinerant people, supralocal organizations, and landscapes. As nodes, these actors link and interact with other actors via a variety of tools (conceived of as the ties in the network) that facilitate the flows moving across the network, such as physical infrastructure, fiscal regimes, and monetary policies.

VI The Question of Inquiry

The issues discussed – the question of domain; of time and space; of integration and homogeneity; and of centrality and power – converge in the question of inquiry. In the previous sections, I explained how this handbook operates within the domain of *global history*, and how *globalization theory* provides heuristically productive observations and approaches to connectivity that allow a truly global history analysis of economic developments across the Afro-Eurasian region. Rather than a coherent framework of connectivity to embed bodies of evidence that represent ancient globalization, the merit of globalization theory for global history writing, as argued here, is its radically different conceptualizations of space and scale and the analytical implications that unfold with it.

First, the scholars in this handbook study ancient economies in terms of connectivity, rather than looking at regional economies comparatively. Taking preexisting connectivity, interactions, and exchanges as analytical points of departure, this

⁶⁰ Fabian and Weaverdyck, ch. 8.A, VI.2, this volume.

⁶¹ Mann (1986) 2012.

⁶² Versluys 2014; Nederveen Pieterse 2015.

handbook considers diverse bodies of evidence for economic developments in social and relational terms, rather than as spatial phenomena. Accordingly, this book investigates a range of regulated and unexpected economic behaviors and practices that stretch across regions and even across conventional borders of imperial territories. Although the chapters in this volume draw out the dynamics largely within supraregional imperial spaces, it is in the wider frame of the three volumes together that the potential of global history will become visible: volume one outlined the historical and historiographical contexts of large-scale connectivity across Afro-Eurasia, volume two looks at imperial and regional economic developments which increase connectivity toward the global, while volume three considers the frontier zones that are more central than peripheral to these economic processes.

Secondly, placing connectivity at the center of the research focus also changes the scales of inquiry. This does not imply a mere focus on long-distance trade relations and connections. Rather than viewing economic dynamics from either a macro or micro perspective, the idea of glocalization urges to take interpenetrative levels of human activity into account, without externalizing or privileging global space and scale over the local. A trans-scalar approach that considers the intersections of scalar practices, directs the line of inquiry toward the contexts, situations, and impacts of connectivity and how they affect the social behaviors that shape economic developments.

Scalar practices – practices and behavior taking place on local, regional, and transregional scales – are variously negotiated through uneven channels by a broad range of human and nonhuman actors. Therefore, thirdly, this volume's units of analysis are located in network thinking with heterogeneous actors, rather than places, as their nodes. The scholars in this book follow the paths and convergences of a dynamic array of local, regional, and transregional actors and tools that advanced economic developments. Rather than assessing outcomes of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange within contained spaces, this handbook assesses economic processes dynamically across open networks.

VII Conclusion: Globalization beyond the Silk Road

While global history may not suit every topic, global history provides a particularly productive perspective that illuminates the broad range of the economic consequences of Afro-Eurasian connectivity from 300 BCE to 300 CE, beyond the notion of Silk Road trade. Departing from the premise of connectivity, a global history of imperial economies raises distinct questions that reframe the analytical spectrum, focusing on economic actors and tools to investigate the contexts, practices, and processes of production, consumption, and distribution across the Afro-Eurasian region.

In so doing, global history writing can be assisted by theoretical observations and approaches developed in globalization scholarship – a broad field of research

which includes (but does not equal) globalization history. Globalization scholarship has produced critical heuristic tools and methodological strategies for the analysis of increasing connectivities. Writing global history of ancient economies requires more than a global mindset, expanding geographical scale to look for trade relations and interregional connections. Rather, theoretical observations and approaches to space, scale, and power in relation to connectivity to the global, push the analysis to the contexts and impacts of transregional mobility and connectivity on people's behavior, and the economic consequences they entail.

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