



MIGRATION

A WORLD HISTORY

MICHAEL H. FISHER

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Frontispiece: Each Gold Rush attracted immigrants seeking a quick fortune, although not all arrived and few returned rich. This 1898 photograph of “women prospectors on their way to Klondike” shows some of the 100,000 Gold Rush immigrants to Yukon territory, Canada, trudging through freezing mud, past a row of saloons and hotels. Photo by Benjamin West, courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-2129

To my greatest support and toughest critic

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Editors' Preface

This book is part of the New Oxford World History, an innovative series that offers readers an informed, lively, and up-to-date history of the world and its people that represents a significant change from the “old” world history. Only a few years ago, world history generally amounted to a history of the West—Europe and the United States—with small amounts of information from the rest of the world. Some versions of the “old” world history drew attention to every part of the world *except* Europe and the United States. Readers of that kind of world history could get the impression that somehow the rest of the world was made up of exotic people who had strange customs and spoke difficult languages. Still another kind of “old” world history presented the story of areas or peoples of the world by focusing primarily on the achievements of great civilizations. One learned of great buildings, influential world religions, and mighty rulers but little of ordinary people or more general economic and social patterns. Interactions among the world’s peoples were often told from only one perspective.

This series tells world history differently. First, it is comprehensive, covering all countries and regions of the world and investigating the total human experience—even those of so-called peoples without histories living far from the great civilizations. “New” world historians thus share in common an interest in all of human history, even going back millions of years before there were written human records. A few “new” world histories even extend their focus to the entire universe, a “big history” perspective that dramatically shifts the beginning of the story back to the big bang. Some see the “new” global framework of world history today as viewing the world from the vantage point of the Moon, as one scholar put it. We agree. But we also want to take a close-up view, analyzing and reconstructing the significant experiences of all of humanity.

This is not to say that everything that has happened everywhere and in all time periods can be recovered or is worth knowing, but that there is much to be gained by considering both the separate and interrelated stories of different societies and cultures. Making these connections is still another crucial ingredient of the “new” world history. It emphasizes

connectedness and interactions of all kinds—cultural, economic, political, religious, and social—involving peoples, places, and processes. It makes comparisons and finds similarities. Emphasizing both the comparisons and interactions is critical to developing a global framework that can deepen and broaden historical understanding, whether the focus is on a specific country or region or on the whole world.

The rise of the new world history as a discipline comes at an opportune time. The interest in world history in schools and among the general public is vast. We travel to one another's nations, converse and work with people around the world, and are changed by global events. War and peace affect populations worldwide as do economic conditions and the state of our environment, communications, and health and medicine. The *New Oxford World History* presents local histories in a global context and gives an overview of world events seen through the eyes of ordinary people. This combination of the local and the global further defines the new world history. Understanding the workings of global and local conditions in the past gives us tools for examining our own world and for envisioning the interconnected future that is in the making.

Bonnie G. Smith
Anand Yang

Preface: Migration in World History and as World History

Around 1002 CE, an immigrant from Iceland, Gudrid “the Traveler,” settled in eastern Canada and gave birth to a son, Snorri. According to Norse oral tradition, she was “of striking appearance and wise.”¹ To reach her new home, she had traveled 3,000 miles in small Viking sailing and rowing vessels across the stormy north Atlantic. Because Gudrid’s native Iceland had been first populated by Scandinavian men and their mainly Irish or Scottish wives, her recent ancestors probably came from several lands.

Gudrid had first immigrated to the Scandinavian colonies on Greenland. Widowed, she had remarried with a recent immigrant from Norway, Thorfinn Karlsefn. Once having emigrated, people are more willing to do so again. So Gudrid and her husband soon set out with a few dozen followers for the region they called Vinland, which had been recently visited by her brother-in-law, Leif Erikson. From her new homestead, she occasionally traded cow’s milk and woven cloth for furs brought by nomadic hunting and fishing Amerindians. Evidence of these exchanges was discovered in 1960 at Gudrid’s homestead site at L’Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland.

Amerindians had also recently immigrated into the area, their ancestors having walked eastward from Asia over the Bering Strait to Alaska, then 4,000 miles across Canada to the Atlantic. Because America contained no cattle that could be domesticated and milked and because these Amerindians did not weave cloth, they welcomed Gudrid’s goods. Their furs from unfamiliar American animals were highly valued by Gudrid and the other Scandinavians.

Many migrations involve conflicts, however. After sporadic hostilities with these Amerindians, Gudrid and her companions departed and, in a return-migration, sailed back to Greenland. Later, she moved to Iceland and then probably on to Norway. However brief these encounters between Amerindians and Scandinavians were, human migrations had encircled the globe.



Gudrid and her Scandinavian companions, the first immigrants from Europe to settle in North America around 1000 CE, built a sod-covered homestead in the region they called Vinland. Using archaeological evidence, Parks Canada has reconstructed a replica on the site in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. Photo courtesy David Sexton

We are all the descendants of migrants and we virtually all migrate during the course of our own lives. From the origin of our *Homo sapiens* species about 200,000 BCE until today, we have expanded our range over the entire planet. We have emigrated to seek new opportunities, often driven out by deteriorating social or physical environments. As the earth's climate has changed and our societies have developed, migration has enabled us to better our lives and those of our children.

Over the course of world history, we have gradually invented new technologies that have accelerated our migrations, including domesticating horses, creating new kinds of ships, and building airplanes. We have equipped ourselves to be able to live in almost any environment and have altered the earth to satisfy our needs and wants. But migration when the world was relatively empty of people clearly differed from now when there are over seven billion of us. Increasingly, over time, immigrants have had to adapt to or expel communities already living there.

Many migrations have been peaceful, but others have been violent. Indeed, wars have caused many of the largest mass migrations throughout history. Soldiers from invading armies occupy conquered lands, while

people already living there often flee as refugees, many never to return. Environmental degradation caused by humans, as well as natural disasters, have made once fruitful lands uninhabitable and have led to whole communities emigrating as ecological refugees.

Over centuries, states have created technologies that block or control migrations. The earliest rulers built defensive walls to keep other people out. Later governments have created policed borders that require official passports and other forms of documentation of legal identities. Today, virtually all of the earth's land has been claimed by one or more of the world's nearly two hundred national governments.

While larger migration patterns describe groups and communities, each individual has a unique life history of migration, be it local or to a distant continent. Some people spend much of their lives migrating, as seasonal workers or by following a nomadic way of life. But each of us migrates to at least some degree, moving to a new place to marry or divorce, or pursuing new opportunities by going off for education, pilgrimage, adventure, community or military service, or other work. Very few people remain in their parents' home throughout life, never spending any significant time away. From the earliest *Homo sapiens* to all of us today, migration, in its many forms, has remained central to world history.

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Earliest Human Migrations, ca. 200,000 BCE to ca. 600 CE

S ometime between 3300 and 3150 BCE, during the early summer, forty-six-year-old “Ötzi the Iceman” climbed through a mountain pass in the Tyrolean Alps (now on the Italian-Austrian border). He was well equipped as a traveler, migrating hunter, or herder. But he was violently killed among the rocks. Alpine winds immediately froze his body and then an expanding glacier entombed him. More than fifty centuries later, in 1991, after global warming melted his ice tomb, climbers discovered him. His body and equipage were moved to the South Tyrol Archaeological Museum in Bolzano, Italy, where scientists have been using the latest methods to analyze his migrations.¹

Ötzi’s body was shaped by genes from each parent and composed of the foods that he consumed; their origins show ancestral and personal migration patterns. Each person’s DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) has an individual set of chromosomes, largely fixed at the moment of conception and formed from the combination of both parents’ genomes: the Y-chromosome only descends in the male lineage from father to son while mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) comes only from the mother. These sexually distinct genetic inheritances can trace a person’s ancestry separately through male and female lines. Ötzi has the oldest human DNA yet analyzed, indicating that his father and mother each shared genes with other people who moved from northeast Africa into west Asia and then into central Europe. But his particular paternal and maternal lineages are both very rare today, and he appears to be not closely related to any current Europeans.

Ötzi’s physical skeleton also contains chemical evidence about where he migrated. Food in every region has a distinctive chemical composition, including rare elements and isotopes in unique proportions.

We incorporate these at different life stages as we eat and as our bodies develop. During Ötzi's youth, he formed tooth enamel in one valley but later he moved to another valley where he lived at least a decade before he was killed. The food, ornaments, attire, and artifacts that Ötzi carried with him reveal much about the particular cultures of his own community and those with which it traded and fought.

Undigested food in his stomach shows the animals he hunted and the kinds of grain that his community grew or obtained, including einkorn, a kind of wheat not originally native to Europe. Ötzi had fifty short lines tattooed over his arms, back, and legs; their meaning is yet unexplained—like many tattoos today they were perhaps a personal choice or his community's custom. His clothing included the tanned skins of domesticated goats sewn together to make various garments: a calfskin belt, deerskin laces and shoe-uppers, and a bear-skin cap and shoe soles. His leather pouch contained flint and tinder for making fire. The four-inch-long ax head he bore was of nearly pure copper, which had to be imported from afar. The dagger he carried had a five-inch-long flint that came from the Lessini Mountains, near Verona, 150 miles away. His arrows and other gear had bloodstains from four other people. He himself had an arrowhead in his left shoulder and had received a blow to his head: he lived, migrated, and died with violence. The plant pollen and leaves and fruits found with him indicate the early summer season of his death. Like Ötzi, each of us carries in our body and in our culture evidence of human migrations.

Our own genes come from our hominid ancestors who evolved in Africa at least five to six million years ago, with a major defining physical feature being bipedalism, or the ability to walk efficiently on two legs. Eventually, hominids enhanced their capacity to migrate by inventing tools they could carry with them. They also discovered how to transport and then create fire for cooking food, providing warmth during cool nights, scaring off more powerful predators, and clearing undergrowth in the forests. Various branches of hominids used these physical and cultural achievements in order to spread out over Africa and much of Eurasia by 1.5 million years ago. Migration has always been central to human identity.

Our own distinct hominid species, *Homo sapiens*, evolved in Africa as physically modern human beings only about 200,000 years ago. Subsequent human genetic evolution has been relatively limited compared to those early fundamental changes. So, we are all the same human species, despite superficial differences among groups of people.