



THEMES IN WORLD HISTORY

# GLOBALIZATION IN WORLD HISTORY

FOURTH EDITION

Peter N. Stearns



# Globalization in World History

In this fully revised fourth edition, this book treats globalization from several vantage points, showing how these help grasp the nature of globalization both in the past and today.

The revisions include greater attention to the complications of racism (after 1500) and nationalism (after 1850); further analysis of reactions against globalization after World War I and in the 21st century; more discussion of student exchanges; and fuller treatment of developments since 2008, including the role of the Covid-19 pandemic in contemporary globalization.

Four major chronological phases are explored: in the centuries after 1000 CE, after 1500, after 1850, and since the mid-20th century. Discussion of each phase includes relevant debates over the nature and extent of the innovations involved, particularly in terms of transportation/communications technologies and trade patterns. The phase approach also facilitates analysis of the range of interactions enmeshed in globalization, beyond trade and migration, including disease exchange, impacts on culture and consumer tastes, and for the modern periods policy coordination and international organizations. Finally, the book deals with different regional positions and reactions in each of the major phases. This includes not only imbalances of power and economic benefit but also regional styles in dealing with the range of global relationships.

This volume is essential reading for undergraduate and postgraduate students of world history, economic history, and political economy.

**Peter Stearns** is Distinguished University Professor of History at George Mason University. For several decades he has regularly taught world history and globalization courses at the undergraduate and graduate level. He has published titles in the *Themes in World History* series, on subjects including time, human rights, and happiness, with his latest release *Punishment in World History*.

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# **Globalization in World History**

Fourth Edition

**Peter N. Stearns**

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# Part I

## Context

Globalization is one of those phenomena that begin well before they are clearly named. The word globalization was first used in English in the 1930s, but its meaning was not clear. It was mainly an English equivalent of a French term, *mondialisation*, that had been introduced to describe the increased speed of global communication and transportation after the mid-19th century. (A Japanese word for the process was introduced in the 1960s.) In English, use of globalization ticked up a bit in the 1980s, with some application to international business, but its real birth was only in the 1990s. At that point, the term soared in popularity, mainly to define the increased linkages of the post-Cold War world that scholars and journalists thought, or hoped, were beginning to open up. By the early 21st century, many Americans were familiar with the term and could offer a reasonable definition, though they disagreed on whether they approved or disapproved of the process it described.

This book focuses on the development of the framework for globalization, arguably over a considerable span of time and in some fairly clear phases – but including the 20th–21st century surge that the word itself was invented to describe. The argument is simple. Grasping the longer history of globalization, and even spending a bit of time deciding when it “really” began, improves an understanding of what the process is all about, why and how it is complicated by different regional reactions, and why it continues to provoke considerable controversy. Arguably, as some historians have contended, globalization has been the most important single process in world history over the past decades or even centuries, changing human life in many ways. Figuring out its dimensions goes some way to grasping one of the basic characteristics of the modern world.



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# 1 Globalization and the Challenge to Historical Analysis

Globalization, which as recently as the 1990s seemed destined to link the world's regions in ever-tighter connections, has unquestionably hit a number of speed bumps during the past two decades. The recession of 2008, the most serious international downturn since the 1930s, caused second thoughts in many quarters. Growing concerns about racism raised questions about globalization's role in furthering the exploitation of some groups of people by others. Increasing realization of the environmental crisis and the inadequacy of measures to address it – though this might argue for more global controls – set off another set of warning bells about the overall process that had brought humanity to this point. Great power tensions, including the desire of countries like China, India, and Brazil to shake free from Western dominance, introduced another set of questions about global arrangements. Responses to the Covid-19 pandemic that surged in 2020 not only disrupted international contacts temporarily but highlighted clear limitations to more general global arrangements, as many frightened societies largely ignored wider coordination. Globalization was not dead; indeed, the technologies for interconnection advanced steadily. But it was clearly entering a new and less predictable phase.

In fact, globalization has always been a historical process, evolving, changing, and sometimes retreating over a long stretch of time. To be sure, it is possible to jump into the connective framework at any given point – as in the 1990s, when the term itself began to become commonplace for the first time – and talk about the structures involved and debate the advantages and disadvantages of the whole phenomenon. But a fuller grasp of globalization and its impact, and patterns of regional response, requires a deeper examination of changes and continuities over the past several centuries. At the same time, globalization has never been a predetermined process, destined for inevitable advance: it has always involved human choices and resistances, as is so clearly the case today. Historical analysis does not predict the precise

## 4 *Context*

contours of globalization in the future, but it plays a vital role in evaluating what the phenomenon is all about, and why it provokes such intense – and contradictory – reactions.

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Globalization has long been a subject for dispute. Some observers have seen it as an engine for economic growth and prosperity, or a framework for the protection of human rights and even a peaceful global community. Others have blasted it as a source of corporate control and impoverishment, a threat to cultural integrity, a terrible and destructive force.

Specific debates also involve globalization's regional impact in a "post-colonial" but still very unequal world. From a British journalist, Martin Jacques: "At the heart of globalization is a new kind of intolerance in the West towards other cultures, traditions and values, less brutal than in the era of colonialism but more comprehensive and intolerant." From Tadashi Yanai, a Japanese businessman: "Globalization is criticized from a Western perspective, but if you put yourself in the shoes of people in the developing world, it provides unprecedented opportunity." Here too, contradictory arguments flourish.

In recent years, hostile takes on globalization have been gaining ground in many different countries and from many different angles. From the left: globalization promotes economic and political systems that "threaten progressive goals, and should be recognized as such and fought at every level." "It does not serve the interests of the vast majority of the people on the planet and is both economically and environmentally unsustainable." Its menace is "self-evident."

From the right: globalization has "left millions of our workers with nothing but poverty and heartache" "We reject globalism" (Donald Trump). Globalization tears down the precious values of the nation, making Europe, for example, a "standardized cluster" open to influences from all over the world (Viktor Orban, the authoritarian Hungarian leader): "Globalization, by aggravating the crisis of meaning, has led to the enhancement of fundamentalist entities like the ISIS (terrorist) group."

From a variety of angles: globalization is "harming us more than helping us. Why are so many horrors happening at once in the world?"

And finally, along with the attacking chorus, another important note. While some people, whether for or against globalization in principle, argue that the process is irresistible – as the Vietnamese president recently stated, "rejecting globalization was like rejecting the sunrise" – critics now argue that the process can be successfully opposed. The aura of inevitability may have faded in favor of beliefs that new nationalism, or new radicalism, can turn the tide.

Is globalization entering a dramatic new phase? And would this be a good thing? How can the history of globalization help sort out the surprising array of contradictory judgments on what the phenomenon is all about?

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Globalization is quite simply the intensification of contacts among different parts of the world and the creation of networks that, combining with more local factors, increasingly shape human life. The process is a blend of economic, technological, sociocultural, and political forces, though globalization terminology is often used to focus primarily on economics – the integration of national economies into an international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology.

Globalization is no mere abstraction: it has real human meaning. It refers (in the financial crisis of 2008) to Americans who woke up at 3 in the morning to check Asian stock markets because they knew these would influence and foreshadow Wall Street later in the day. Globalization refers to global McDonalds, with 31,000 locations worldwide, all with common emphasis on fairly greasy food served quickly and (in principle at least) cheerfully. Or to Starbucks, with 22,500 sites including 10,000 outside North America – often challenging local coffee house traditions that go back over 400 years. It refers to a quarter of the world's population (regardless of time zone) glued to televised accounts of World Cup soccer. It refers to the millions of American kids playing with Japanese toys like Hello Kitty or (not too long ago) Pokémon, or the charitable contributions from around the world pouring into disaster areas like tsunami-hit Southeast Asia or Katrina-devastated New Orleans. It refers ... – the list is long indeed, with an impressive range of arenas and activities.

The concept of globalization was not coined by historians but rather by other social scientists, economists in the lead. These theorists in turn, implicitly or explicitly, argued that globalization identified a phenomenon whose nature and consequences were quite novel, leading to very different interregional interactions and human experiences from anything that had occurred before. Most of them also initially contended that this global innovation was largely a good thing, producing not only a different but also a better world; yet it was also clearly possible to make the same claims about novelty and conclude that the results were unfortunate – the world is indeed changing dramatically but getting worse. Either way, globalization has always had historical meaning in suggesting a significant movement away from earlier frameworks.

And this, of course, is where historians and historical perspectives come in. How new is globalization compared with previous patterns of contact among societies in different regions of the world? What's the difference between a multinational corporation – one of the bearers of globalization today – and the

international corporation of the late 19th century, or indeed the international trading company of the 16th century? No one can contest that contemporary globalization harbors unprecedented features – the Internet is purely and simply new; the capacity for a quarter of the world’s population simultaneously to watch the same sports event is purely and simply new. But claims about globalization as a huge departure in the human experience go beyond these narrower examples, and they should depend on a very careful analysis about how the recent globalization process stacks up against earlier changes in contacts and their results.

The historical assessment becomes all the more crucial if we are in fact entering a significant new globalization phase, in which resistance and retreat will take center stage. How new is this kind of tension over globalization, and are there any revealing precedents?

Evaluating the origins of globalization – when the process really began – also opens the question of what caused it. Some discussions of globalization seem to assume that it dropped out of the sky, with at most a few generalized references to changes in technology. In fact, of course, a variety of human decisions are involved, for example in determining not only what technologies to use (some societies in the past have in fact resisted global devices) but how local policies coordinate, or fail to coordinate, with larger global forces like epidemic disease or the popularity of global sports. One way to ask about globalization’s origins, in fact, is to determine the point at which the motivations to accelerate global exchanges became so compelling that further expansion of actual contacts was virtually assured. It’s at least possible that more careful attention to causes and motivations must push chronology considerably back in time, without ignoring the importance of more recent developments, like the Internet, in shaping an additional stage in the globalization process. Root causes, in other words, may pre-date important but more surface manifestations.

Clearly, globalization and its current uncertainties cannot be fully understood without historical context that will trace when the various strands of the process first took shape and why, and that will also evaluate results and resistances in the past as well as the present. The goal is to use a discussion of how globalization relates to prior patterns of interregional contacts to determine more precisely what is really new about the recent developments, particularly beyond specific technologies, and whether the current changes constitute in fact a huge jolt of the unexpected or, rather, an acceleration of experiences to which many societies had already adjusted.

To be sure, historians (like most scholars) like to argue, and globalization has already provoked some sharp debates. Thus, one group, calling themselves the “new global” historians, urges that recent globalization is indeed a huge change, perhaps one of the greatest in human history. The group tends to opt for a slightly more generous time span than some non-historians prefer, pointing back to the 1950s or so for the onset of the contemporary current. But they’re adamant about seeing the phenomenon as a great gulf between present and future

conditions, on the one hand, and the bulk of the human past on the other. Indeed, they like to distinguish themselves from world historians, arguing that their “global” history alone captures the uniqueness of recent change instead of burying it in the catalogue of centuries. Against this, though somewhat less fiercely, another cluster of historians has begun to urge that it’s the later 19th century, not the later 20th, that should be seen as the true globalization seedbed. Against both, one eminent world historian, David Northrup, contends that it’s around the year 1000 CE that human history divides between largely separate or regional experiences (before) and increasing contact, imitation, and convergence (after); and if this is true, more recent changes associated with globalization form merely the latest iteration of this basic and long-standing momentum. This last approach calls attention to the contributions of major societies like China or the Arab world in creating the initial conditions for globalization, rather than placing disproportionate emphasis on Western initiatives.

Finally, and fairly recently, a number of historians have begun to argue that globalization should be seen as emerging in phases (one of the major studies is in fact entitled *The Three Waves of Globalization*), rather than trying to pinpoint one burst of innovation. These books have the great merit of moving our vision away from an exclusive focus on essentially contemporary developments, as in the new global history approach. Whereas the globalization of sports clearly begins in the late 19th century, the globalization of trade arguably goes back much farther. We may be better able to evaluate the impacts of globalization on the human condition more accurately if we look for a more gradual accumulation of new patterns rather than just debating about the origins of the whole process.

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This book rests on the claim that globalization has become one of the defining features of world history – indeed, probably the most important single feature – but that it emerges from a more complex and longer-standing process of change. It picks up on the idea of stages or waves of particularly important change, but adds careful attention to chronologically earlier precedents and to the idea of a sequence of key steps. It also notes earlier patterns of resistance, which can place current attacks in clearer perspective. In dealing with globalization historically, the book also places the process, appropriately enough, in a clearly global context. Modern globalization has been disproportionately connected to Western norms, at least until very recently, but the basics clearly pre-date Western leadership just as the process, today, is at least partially escaping Western control. Finally, as against any single schema, the book urges the need to recognize the complexities involved in figuring out how globalization has emerged over time.

Can a historical approach also help us sort out the advantages and disadvantages of globalization, cutting through some of the passions about gains and losses? Certainly, when globalization is seen unfolding over time, it is possible to note changes in the winners and losers and in the aspects of the process that



are most contestable. History does not say, conclusively, whether contemporary globalization is on balance bad or good, but it can suggest why evaluation has become so complicated and also why different regions, as well as various political factions, take different positions on the subject.

### **Potential Turning Points**

In dealing with major changes in global contacts and processes from 1000 CE onward, the chapters that follow pay particular attention to four major turning points: around 1000, around 1500, around 1850, and of course in recent decades (with attention to a few other partial transitions as well, particularly in the 13th and then the 18th centuries). This approach also highlights attention to periods in which globalization had to retreat – for example, after World War I and arguably today – another reminder that globalization has never been an automatic process.

Very few historians have really argued for globalization before 1000 (though as we will see there are some diffuse gestures in this direction), but even here there are a few issues to consider and certainly a need to establish a backdrop for the greater complexity in trading and contact patterns thereafter. The goal is to show how globalization in part flows from prior change – to see it as part of a sequence of developments, with some ongoing motives and impacts attached – but also, through the same approach, to highlight features that are demonstrably and significantly novel. Each stage of globalization, including the most recent one, involves a combination of continuity and change from past patterns, rather than some inevitable march toward greater world integration.

This approach will also open some other kinds of discussion that an all-or-nothing approach to globalization – either dramatically new or old hat – tends to obscure. In the first place, it can help sort out regional experiences. Every serious analyst of globalization, even the most enthusiastic, urges recognition of the interaction between regional and global factors. And it's quite clear that different societies have different reactions to globalization, as a whole process and in terms of some of its constituent parts (like immigration or consumer culture). A more explicitly historical approach shows how these differences develop, and even suggests that some societies formed basic commitments for or against globalization at different points in time. Japan, for example, made key decisions on relationships with the rest of the world after 1868 that have clearly conditioned its responses to the more recent rounds of globalization later in the 20th century. Parts of the Middle East or Africa, in contrast, have probably faced core issues more recently, whereas China arguably postponed full consideration of globalization until 1978. Regional issues around globalization are not modern alone: each of the following chapters on stages of globalization or “preglobalization” will include specific discussion of the major regional variants involved in that time period.

The historical approach also assists in dis-aggregating globalization in terms of constituent parts, each with a somewhat different historical background. This is where the importance of seeing globalization in terms of the accumulation

of different patterns of contact, rather than as a single framework, emerges strongly. Migration and disease exchanges, for example, are important parts of contemporary globalization, and as such they should be analyzed in terms of how they contribute to change; but as basic processes they go way back in human history. Global environmental impact (as opposed to more purely regional results of human activity), on the other hand, and global movements to protect the environment, are much newer. Definable global political arrangements (in contrast to more traditional relationships among nations) fall a bit in between, older than global environmentalism but far younger than disease exchange.

For globalization is both an intensification of the range and speed of contacts among different parts of the world and an expansion of the kinds of activities intimately involved in global interactions. Both aspects help explain why global developments play an increasingly active role in shaping human lives, which is the key reason to study the phenomenon in the first place. They explain also why globalization, even if ultimately judged to be a novel force, is not entirely new – and why resistance has historical precedents as well.

Contacts among different societies have increasingly become the key focus in world history scholarship and teaching, for they commonly involve such interesting tensions and attractions and so often produce changes in all the societies involved. Globalization connects this core interest to the present by forcing analysis not just of specific contact episodes but of how contact patterns built up into durable systems and motivations. Globalization today is partly the result of conscious planning, but it also reflects the ambitions and daring and greed of many people in the past who knew they wanted to reach out for new goods or new ideas or new conquests without having any idea that what they were doing would someday amount to a new world system. By the same token, explicit hostility to globalization also builds on the past, on earlier efforts to argue that too much contact risked loss of identity and loss of control.

### **Isolation and Contact**

The pull to separate but also the pull to connect both go far back in human history.

Separation resulted from the wide dispersion of human bands, in turn a function of the demands of a hunting and gathering economy. Hunting and gathering groups, generally about 60–80 strong, usually required upward of 200 square miles to operate – depending of course on climate and other conditions. This in itself tended to create substantial open space between one group and the next, which in turn could encourage the development of distinct habits and identities.

Furthermore, the same conditions impelled frequent migration, a pattern that took shape among early human species, well before the advent of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, and then applied to this latest species as well. For every relatively small expansion in population would force some members of a hunting and gathering group to move beyond current territory, to look for additional sources of food. By the time *Homo sapiens sapiens* began to move out of its original home in

East Africa, dispersion through migration developed quite quickly, as the species moved not only to other parts of Africa but to the Middle East and thence to other parts of Asia and Europe, to Australia (using a land shelf extending from Southeast Asia, that has long since been submerged but that for a time allowed a relatively small journey over water), and (by 25,000 BCE) across the then-existing land bridge between Siberia and Alaska and surprisingly rapidly onward to other parts of the Americas. By 10,000 BCE, right before the advent of agriculture, the roughly 10 million people in the world had populated virtually all inhabitable areas. Several Pacific islands still lay vacant, including Hawaii; New Zealand was untouched; Bermuda would not be discovered until European voyages in the early modern centuries. But there were small bands of people almost everywhere else. This meant, obviously, that huge distances began to separate different groups. A few, like the Aborigines of Australia, would be cut off entirely from other population centers until modern times. Others were less isolated, but could easily find contacts with people outside a specific region unusual and possibly threatening.

The isolation emphasis should not, of course, be overdrawn. Few small hunting and gathering bands were entirely separated from larger regional networks. While local languages might develop (there used to be far more different languages in the world than there are today), most of them related to larger language groups, like Bantu, or Indo-European, which in turn meant that communication among many groups was not forbiddingly difficult. Within a single region, certain hunting bands might regularly come into contact for purposes of self-defense (or aggression), mate selection, or other social and trading purposes.

It remains true, however, that it is not entirely inaccurate to emphasize the decisive quality of dispersion and differentiation of the world's human population on the eve of agriculture. Sheer distance was challenge enough, in the long centuries when people could move about only on foot (even granting the superior walking ability of earlier humans compared with their contemporary counterparts) or on crude boats. But distance also combined with dramatically different habits, localized religions, and linguistic patterns to make contact and communication extremely difficult, often promoting proudly separate small-group identities and considerable fear of strangers as well. Larger contact networks – even far short of globalization – would have to contend against these localizing factors.

In certain ways, agriculture could make aspects of these localizing tendencies even worse, for it tied groups not just to a general locality but to very specific property, often an individual village. Hunters and gatherers, after all, had to move around at least within a circumscribed region, which could facilitate impulses toward wider migration. Agricultural villagers, in contrast, were often linked to specific properties passed from one generation to the next through inheritance and a family cottage. Deep cultural attachments to particular villages could readily develop, making even the next village down the road slightly suspect, and strangers from greater distances truly ominous. To be sure, some villagers traveled at least a bit in order to market some goods or seek temporary employment elsewhere; and

when crowding impinged, some would move away altogether. It's important not to overdo the localized parameters. It remains true, even in the present day with busses and other modern amenities facilitating travel, that some villagers (often, particularly women) rarely if ever get more than a few miles from their home turf, seeing no purpose and possibly some real threat in exploring further.

Scattered populations and highly regional habits and cultures could thus be confirmed by the advent of agriculture. It would take much time and effort to build regular contact networks simply within larger regions (like China's ultimately fabled Middle Kingdom or India's subcontinent), not to mention inter-regional connections. World history, in a real sense, began on a local level, and even today has not entirely escaped these confines.

On the other hand, reasons for wider contacts existed early as well, and at least some individuals pursued them even before we have any clear record of how they moved around. At the most basic level: regional isolation never introduced so many genetic modifications within the species *Homo sapiens sapiens* that interbreeding could not occur, as happened with so many other species that were more locally defined. We do not always know the nature or specific timing of some early contacts – for example, when basic foods were exchanged from one region to another – given lack of precise records, but it is clear that some daring initiatives were involved.

The most obvious lure to pull people away from purely regional interactions involved goods that could only be obtained through more distant ventures. Rare decorative materials might be a lure, like gold or precious stones. The advent of the use of bronze, after 4000 BCE, forced considerable travel in search of tin, one of the key alloys of this composite metal. People in the Middle East ventured into Afghanistan and possibly as far as Britain to seek regular supplies. Soon also, knowledge of valuable spices that could only be obtained from certain localities drove considerable long-distance trade. Once it was established that goods of this sort were worth the risk and cost of travel, other specializations could develop, including ultimately manufactured goods based on the traditions and ecologies of particular regions, which would expand this motivation still further.

Contact could also generate knowledge of food products that might be imported to the benefit of local populations. We know that somehow foods native to parts of Southeast Asia (bananas, yams, and coconuts) were brought to Africa very early in the agricultural phase of human history, and once planted in Africa, possibly via Madagascar, they became vital food staples. This means that there was some major interregional contact, at least occasionally, several thousand years ago: precise dates and certainly precise mechanisms are unclear. Similar kinds of benefits could result from learning about, and exporting, domesticated animals. China's knowledge of horses, and for a considerable time an ongoing source of supply, came from contacts with Central Asia; a Southeast Asian pig was brought to Madagascar. The opportunity to learn about basic goods, beyond trade items, could easily spur a quest for wider ventures.

Ultimately, it became obvious also that other kinds of learning could result from long-distance ventures, when particular regions became known for particular kinds of cultural strength. It's hard to pinpoint when student and scholarly travel began – and patterns would long involve only a few individuals, not larger cohorts – but Greeks were visiting Egypt to learn about mathematics early in Greek history, and it was not too long after that when individuals from places like China began to go to India to seek Buddhist wisdom. Knowledge, in other words, added to trade and products in motivating outreach.

Harder to calculate, but attached to these more specific spurs, could be simply a quest for adventure and new experience, without a precise calculus of what social or personal gains would result. The confines of life in villages or even early agricultural cities could seem limited, sometimes even stifling, and a few individuals undoubtedly looked to wider horizons for personal reasons. Details here are hard to come by, for almost none of the most ambitious early travelers left any record of their motivations. We know, for example, that in the 5th century BCE a Phoenician named Hanno, with a crew, sailed through the Mediterranean and down the first part of Africa's Atlantic coast to Sierra Leone and possibly as far as Nigeria – but we don't know why he did it, and what kind of personality would push him into what, for him, must have been the real unknown. The fact that fanciful beliefs developed about many less familiar parts of the world, populating them with mythical beasts and bizarre human habits, might convince many people that it was best to stick close to home, but it might also have challenged a few to go out and see for themselves.

Finally, of course, purely local conditions could generate pressures to reach beyond conventional confines. Population crowding, exhaustion of local resources, and military ambitions could push groups into patterns of migration or invasion that, in some instances, could move them considerable distances and produce a host of new (and often unwelcome) contacts for local populations. Nomadic herdsman from places like central Asia were often the sources of these new connections, spilling over into incursions into the Middle East, India, China, or Europe, as with the movement of Indo-European peoples into India and the Mediterranean before about 1200 BCE or, a bit later, the surge of Slavic migrations into Russia and east central Europe. These migrants might ultimately settle down, but for at least a considerable time they would challenge existing cultural and political conditions and provide new linkages with more distant regions.

Early contacts, whether for trade or scholarly discovery or adventure, could easily begin to trigger other changes, which in turn would encourage additional ventures to reach beyond the locality and region. This further process developed slowly, however, as so many people were enmeshed in local concerns that the motives and benefits of more extensive ventures remained simply out of reach.

It remains true that a real pull to develop some connections among relatively far-flung parts of the world emerged early on, and it recurrently tugged against the dispersion and localism of the initial world history framework. Neither the motivations nor the institutions or technologies existed to create a truly global

outreach through the initial millennia of human development, but they could certainly produce experimentation and change. Localism long predominated, but not without recurring and sometimes productive tensions with people who saw benefits in exploring wider horizons. This was the context from which globalization would ultimately emerge.

### Further Readings

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Excellent histories of globalization include A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York, 2002); Bruce Mazlish, *The Idea of Humanity in a Global Era* (New York, 2008) and *A New Global History* (New York, 2006); Diego Olstein, *Thinking History Globally* (New York, 2008) and *A Brief History of Now: the past and present of global power* (New York, 2021); Robbie Robertson, *The Three Waves of Globalization (L: A History of Developing Global Consciousness)* (London, 2003); Jurgen Osterhammel, Niels Peterson, and Dona Geyer, eds., *A Short History of Globalization* (Princeton, 2005); Jeffrey Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization* (New York, 2020).

See also Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge, 1986); Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1985).

On world systems:

Robert Denemark, J. Friedman, B.K. Gillis and G. Modelski, eds., *World System History: The Social Science of Long Term Change* (London, 2000); Christopher Chas-Dunn and Eugene N. Anderson, eds., *The Historical Evolution of World Systems* (New York, 2004); and Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gillis, eds., *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (London, 1993). See also Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Structures* (Newbury Park, CA, 1992).

For an important alternative to a globalization approach to current history, Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate* (New York, 1996)

On fairly recent patterns, Alfred Eckes and Thomas Zeiler, *Globalization and the American Century* (Cambridge, 2003); and Akira Iriye, *Global Community: the role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 2004); Barry Gills, ed., *Globalization in Crisis* (New York, 2011); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2020).

## **2 Emerging Patterns of Contact, 1200 BCE–1000 CE**

### **A Preparatory Phase**

Historians take great delight in finding evidence that crucial aspects of the human experience started earlier than experts once thought. This is part of their effort to bring the past alive by making it unexpectedly relevant to more recent interests, and also to counter a modern tendency to exaggerate the extent that most of what we see around us is brand new. Thus historians of medieval Europe, intrigued by the popularity of the Renaissance, long ago began to find “renaissances” in the 12th century. Modern mass consumerism, once thought to be a product of industrialization later in the 19th century, turns out to have started in Europe in the 17th–18th centuries, well before industrialization, and now historians are discovering consumer revolutions as early as the 14th century. The sexual revolution hailed or lamented in the 1960s turns out to have started in the 1940s and 1950s – and so it goes. Even the industrial revolution is now preceded by an “industrious revolution” that began more than a century earlier (not only in Europe but possibly in Japan as well). The list of topics where historians have revised initial beliefs about the origins of a phenomenon is a long one. Sometimes the resulting findings are superficial or debatable; sometimes (as with consumerism) they seriously reorient the ways we think about the past and about the causation of major change.

It is not surprising, then, that a few historians have argued not only that globalization is not brand new – many would agree here – but that it goes back as far as 5,000 years ago, the point at which one scholar, Andre Gunder Frank, has claimed to find the origin of the modern world economy. And indeed, soon after the advent of agriculture, merchants from the Middle East or the Indian subcontinent did begin to engage in some bartering, for example seeking precious stones; this was the case when tradesmen from Mesopotamia, in present-day Iraq, reached out to their counterparts in what is now Pakistan. But to go from firm evidence of an interest in trade to a claim of globalization is too far a stretch – one that ignores those aspects of globalization that depend not just on the existence of occasional exchange but on significant and regular levels of trade and accompanying contacts even beyond trade.

This chapter tackles the first set of issues in the effort to put globalization into historical perspective: the distinction between undeniable and interesting interregional contacts emerging early in the agricultural phase of human history, and the fact that these contacts cannot be construed, by any plausible stretch of the imagination, as constituting a preliminary form of globalization. If we push globalization back to the first emergence of regular trading patterns, we risk losing any distinctive meaning for the phenomenon – and that’s the case with the undeniably interesting developments up to about 1000 CE. While hardly constituting even a primitive form of globalization, early commerce did generate important precedents and motivations that can provide a backdrop to the more decisive changes that globalization involves, and these precedents form the focus of this chapter. Indeed, in discussing the important preliminaries that had indeed been established early in the Common Era, we can also begin to clarify what additional innovations globalization would involve.

World historians, with their deep and growing interest in contacts, have devoted impressive energies to uncovering and highlighting trade and other connections relatively early in human history. The effort can be complicated by problems of evidence: we know about early contacts mainly on the basis of products from one region that have been found in another. For example, cowrie shells collected in the Indian Ocean as early as 1400 BCE have been found in China, where they were greatly valued and ultimately used as a form of money. Less surprisingly, a number of precious stones from India and Afghanistan, again dating well before the Common Era, have been unearthed along the Mediterranean coast of the Middle East. So it is clear that trade was occurring, in some cases over fairly long distances – but there is no real record beyond the remaining artifacts, which inevitably raises questions about whether some other early trade patterns existed but have yet to be discovered. Similar uncertainties are attached to the clear evidence of food exchanges, where products native to one area – like present-day Indonesia – were brought to places like Africa early on, and adopted into local agriculture. We know this happened, but specifics are lacking.

By the 2nd century BCE, however, the situation clearly began to change, and there is evidence to match. Long-distance trade started to occur with greater regularity, leaving records not only through surviving products but also through contemporary commentary on the delight that some exotic goods caused for their upper-class consumers, along with some criticism of the waste and frivolity involved. One trading artery has won particular attention: the Silk Road (more properly, Roads), generating understandable fascination with the exchanges and trade centers that linked producers in Western China with buyers ultimately as far away as Mediterranean Rome. Indeed, the Silk Road has arguably won disproportionate attention to the detriment of awareness of other, equally important, contact routes that also sprang up well before modern times. Not surprisingly, a few historians have gone on to argue that these early exchanges became so



entrenched that they virtually guaranteed further and intensifying contacts later on – in some cases suggesting that the result already added up to the first form of globalization. Though more plausible than the claims of 5000 years of globalization, this still goes too far, and can in fact be needlessly confusing. However, the establishment of Silk Road trade but also regular exchanges in the Indian Ocean did provide an active backdrop to what would later emerge as globalization's first definable phase, providing precedents and motives that would be picked up and elaborated several centuries later. Without overdoing the range or intensity of the contacts involved, the precedents do deserve a closer look.

The big challenge for most regions before 1000 CE, amid the predominant localism of early agricultural societies, was to build networks *within* larger regions – like the Mediterranean basin or the Middle East or China – that would facilitate trade and cultural and political exchange. Efforts to reach beyond the major regions, though they did exist, had virtually no significance for the vast majority of the human population. The principal focus of the great classical civilizations, like Persia, India, or Rome, centered on expanding internal regional contacts, not in building connections further afield. These connections did emerge, rather tentatively, but they must be sketched carefully, without exaggerating their importance and without so eroding an understanding of later, more decisive changes that globalization becomes a process virtually coterminous most of recorded world history. A case can be made that globalization was becoming inevitable by 1000 CE (though even here there are serious objections), but not before. Indeed, a key reason to sketch previous patterns is to provide a backdrop against which to measure later change, not to encourage a premature identification of globalization.

### **Migrations and Trade**

Migrations were surely the earliest human encounter with long distances. Undoubtedly, most migrating groups initially moved just a few dozen miles away from their place of origin, and the long distances were achieved over time as a result of movement by many successive generations. There were, however, examples of apparently rapid moves over many hundreds of miles. It seems likely that some groups of Native Americans migrated swiftly down the Pacific coast, from the Siberia–Alaska land bridge and Northwest, by using coastal vessels, reaching various parts of South America surprisingly quickly, possibly within a few centuries. Even long-distance migrations, however, did not set up structures of exchange. They brought people to new places and sometimes mixed different groups of people, but the migrants did not usually return – so no durable patterns of regional interaction developed beyond encounters between residents and migrants on the spot. Many migrant regions soon returned to considerable isolation. The contrast with the later patterns of migration that would form part of globalization, to be discussed in subsequent chapters, is obvious.