

Peter Bang, C. A. Bayly † & Walter Scheidel (eds.)

The Oxford World History of Empire

Motivation

It was for a long time part of received wisdom that humanity has entered a post-imperial era. As decolonization saw the dismantling and collapse of European colonial overseas possessions, empire seemed to be a thing of the past. This judgement, we can now see, was premature, a dream belonging to a brief interlude in recorded history. During the last decade imperialism has made a resounding come-back on the agenda of politicians, pundits and scholars as well as the public in general. Their concerns, however, are not merely restricted to the topical debates about the exercise of American unilateralism or “hyper-puissance”; they range much wider. Empire continues to inform and lend shape to a whole series of urgent problems and important developments of our times. Humanitarian military interventions, the European Union, neo-colonialism, ethnic conflicts in former imperial territories are but some of the issues that reveal the legacy of empire in the present. Undoubtedly, the continuing relevance of empire owes a great deal to the enduring heritage of European colonialism. But this is only part of the explanation. Increasingly it is clear that other forms of imperialism have influenced the modern world in no less important ways. Extensive land-empires or their heritage, once thought of as irrevocably buried in a traditional past, have proved surprisingly resilient. The modern Chinese nation-state effectively lays claim to the wide-ranging, multi-ethnic empire of the Qing dynasty. A resurgent Russia clings to its imperial past while the Middle East is hardly understandable without reference to Ottoman rule, nor India without the Mughals. Even a residue of Roman imperialism still leaves its indelible mark on the world in the organisation and teaching of the Catholic Church.

Empire and imperialism, in short, is protean; the phenomenon is characterised by great diversity, wide geographical reach and extraordinary historical depth. With a track-record reaching back to the third millennium BCE, empire as a form of political organisation is almost as old as civilised society; it calls for treatment within a world history context. In this collaborative project, we seek to cover, for the first time, the entire imperial experience within a single global-history framework. At the heart of all understandings of empire is power and dominance: hegemony exercised by one society or group over others. This relationship has, however, been articulated through a whole range of forms. At one end of the spectrum we find military conquests of territories acquired with a view to taxation, at the other end, lean establishments, often focused on commercial profits with a minimum of intervention. Usually empires have been studied within three major separate traditions, roughly speaking: 1. Roman and ancient imperialism, 2. The great Asian Empires (Ottomans, Mughals, the Chinese, Mongols, Arab Caliphate), 3. European commercial and colonial empires. Within each tradition, most studies are only concerned with single empires, and most of these only deal with specific aspects or time-periods of these. If comparison is pursued, it is normally kept within each separate group. This project seeks for the first time to bridge these separate historiographies and offer a comprehensive study of empire in world history, both in its chronological depth and its geographical and cultural variety.

Structure

The work will be divided into two main parts. 1) a basic comparative and synthetic section which sets out an analytical framework for understanding the formation of empire in world history through

a set of chapters treating, in the *longue durée*, the most important parameters, constraints and aspects of the imperial experience. We see this as one of the novel attractions of the project; and it will play a key role in enabling us to bridge the different historiographical and theoretical traditions which currently shape the study of empires. It is thus important that the individual chapters include discussion of cases and material from different chronological, geographical and cultural contexts. 2) A chronological or historical part, divided into subsections, i.e. chronological phases, with chapters dedicated to describing the individual histories of the more important empires. Each subsection will be headed by a comparative chapter synthesising the most important developments in the world history of imperialism characteristic of each particular chronological phase. These “editorial” chapters will be written jointly by the editors and serve to bring about a greater degree of coherence and unity between the separate histories than is often achieved in such projects, both synchronically and diachronically. They enable the editors to paint on a broader world historical canvas against which the treatments of the individual empires will appear in sharper relief and more meaningful context. This also includes discussion of cases not given a separate chapter and identification of similarities as well as differences to previous chronological periods.

Content

Part 1

The Imperial Experience in world history

Thematic and comparative chapters of the *longue durée* (written by single authors, or pairs as things turn out). Themes have been selected to reflect the different main theoretical strands dealing with empire. No single theory of empire commands universal consent. The field is characterised by a number of schools, often competing. But, in fact, what these alternative theories do most of all, is to call attention to different dimensions in the operation of power and the imperial experience. Recent interest in the construction and negotiation of cultural and gender identities, for instance, does not so much supplant as complement earlier interests in economic exploitation etc. There is no single chapter on “provincial” societies, or the (hidden) voice of the subaltern. This is not because the editors consider the topic insignificant; on the contrary, it is because the problems raised by these issues are integral to most of the themes in this section. Modern studies of imperial power frequently emphasise its limitations, constraints and weaknesses. The chapter on political elites will, for instance, not just deal with the central cadres of imperial government. Equally or even more central to the chapter will be the need of empires to forge links with local elites and men on the frontier with considerable independence to follow their own agendas, appropriate imperial resources and divert them to their own purposes. Law need not just be seen as a tool of central authority, it may also be strategically employed by provincials to facilitate their own strategies; the development of cosmopolitan discourses does not necessarily result in unequivocal support for central government, it may also help provincials formulate alternative and critical debates about imperial rule. In other words, we have attempted to avoid treating metropolitan and local as clearly distinct entities, but rather see them as interacting, an aspect of imperial power which is clearly brought out by constant attention to the logistics, constraints and failures of empires as much as on their ability to control and dominate.

1. Peter Fibiger Bang (Copenhagen): A basic typology and chronology of imperial power
2. Walter Scheidel (Stanford): The scale of empire
3. Ian Morris (Stanford): Military organisation

4. Chr. Chase-Dunn (University of California Riverside) & Dmytro Khutkyy (Kiev): Geopolitics, world systems and frontiers
5. John Haldon (Princeton): The political economy of Empire: plunder, taxes, trade and the formation of political elites (central as well as local).
6. Law, bureaucracy and the practice of government and rule
7. Laura Hostetler (UIC): Mapping, registering and ordering: Time, space, and knowledge
8. Amira K. Bennison (Cambridge): Empire and religion
9. Javed Majeed (Queen Mary): Cosmopolitan literatures and ideologies, provincial discourses and anti-imperialism
10. Jane Burbank & Frederic Cooper (New York): Social hierarchies, cultural identities and the politics of difference: Race and Gender, city- and country-dwellers, metropolis and colony, polyethnicity and cultural hybridity
- 10b. Kim Wagner (Queen Mary) Resistance, Rebellion and the subaltern
- 11.a Alf Hornborg (Lund): Imperial metabolism. Empire as a process of energy transfers
- 11.b Rohan Deb Roy (Berlin), The ecology of empire: Plants, animals and landscapes
12. Cecily Hilsdale (McGill): Imperial monumentalism, pageantry, styles of comportment and forms of consumption
13. Phiroze Vasunia (Reading): Memories and debates of empire (literature, art, reception)
14. John Hall (McGill): The end of empires

Part 2

A History of Histories

A chronological history of empire(s) divided into subsections of world-historical time. Each of these subsections will be headed by a comparative chapter, written by the editors to provide structure and unity to the volume, detailing the broad features of the period, before a number of central empires are treated in separate chapters by individual specialists. The comparative chapters serve both not only to strengthen the unity of the history, they also allow analytical points and common trends to emerge with much greater clarity.

In making the selection of specific cases, several considerations have to be taken into account. At the heart of the project is the wish to combine the three main areas of empire studies: ancient, Asian land empires and colonial European. These empires are central, not only because of disciplinary conventions, but because in terms of extent, durability and types of rule, their histories have affected the lives of more people than other empires and decisively shaped the course of much of human history. Using such “blunt” criteria of centrality has the, perhaps, unexpected advantage of making it easier to organise a less Euro-centric history of the imperial experience. Even the early-modern period, frequently seen as primarily characterised by the formation of European colonial and commercial imperialism, perceptively changes in shape when this is done. During the same

period Asia was not in the grip of historical stagnation, on the contrary this was a period of vigorous and dynamic formation of new empires and dynasties (the Ottomans, the Mughals and the Qing), in between them governing far larger populations than anything the European entities could aspire to in this period and they therefore head off this section (see below). However, at the same time, it is an important function of these volumes to document the sheer variety of empires. Pre-modern empires were not always ruled by monarchs, sometimes we also find city-states acquiring empires. In the pre-“Vasco da Gama” Indian Ocean world, in pre-colonial Africa and in Pre-Columbian America, we also find the formation of empires taking place. Examples of these, often less well-known cases, have also been included in the history.

As the history charts the emergence and development of several kinds of imperial polities through different historical and technological phases, it would be unreasonable to force each chapter into a single, narrow mould. Such a uniform template would rather function as a straight jacket, than an efficient means of ensuring coherence. Nevertheless a minimum framework and base-line should inform and help structure individual chapters. Fundamentally we wish to approach the problem of empire as one of the logistics of power and organisational capacity (cf. Mann 1986). From that basis each chapter will contain:

- a short historical overview charting the historical course of each empire
- analysis of its military and economic base
- analysis of the political organisation of government and administration
- analysis of social and cultural history

Themes treated under these broad headings may obviously vary. But we wish chapters generally to be informed by and reflect the broader set of issues indicated by the thematic chapters of Part 1.

2.1: Bronze to Iron Age, the Near-Eastern ‘invention’ of empire. (3000-323 BCE)

- 16.- Juan Carlos Moreno García (Paris): Egypt
- 17.- Piotr Steinkeller (Harvard): Sargon and Ur III
- 18.- Gojko Barjamovic (Copenhagen), Old Babylonian, Mitanni, Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian
- 19.- Matthew W. Waters (University of Wisconsin/Eau Claire): Media/ Persia, and the unification of the ecumene
- 20. Walter Scheidel (Stanford): Ancient Mediterranean City-State Empires

2.2 The Classical Age, culminating in the formation of large world empires on the margins of Eurasia: the Mediterranean and China (323 BCE —600 CE).

- 22.- Christelle Fisher (University of Southern California):The Hellenistic Empires
- 23.- Himanshu Ray (New Delhi): Ashoka and the Maurya Empire
- 24.- Mark Lewis (Stanford): Qin and Han China
- 25.- Peter Bang (Copenhagen): Rome
- 26.- Matthew Canepa (University of Minnesota): Persia/Iran under the Parthian and Sasanid dynasty
- 27.- Craig Benjamin (Grand Valley State): The Kushana Empire

2.3. Eclipse of the old world and the rise of Islam (600-1200)

- 29.- Andrew Marsham (Edinburgh): The Arab Caliphate
- 30.- Mark Lewis (Stanford): The Tang Restoration
- 31.- John Miksic (Singapore): Srivijaya
- 32.- Michael Coe (Yale): The Khmer Empire

- 33.- Anthony Kaldellis (Ohio) Byzantium – the dismembered Empire
 34.- Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge): Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire

2.4. The Mongol Moment: the rise of Ghengiz Khan and the central Asian steppe followed by regional reassertion.

36. Nikolay Kradin (Vladivostok): The Mongol Empire and the unification of Eurasia
 37.- David M. Robinson (Colgate University): The Ming Dynasty
 38.- Sunil Kumar (Delhi): The Delhi Sultanate - Timur Lenk
 39.- Jacob Tullberg (Copenhagen): Caliphs, Popes, emperors, kings and sultans: the imperial commonwealth of medieval Islam and Western Christendom.
 40. – Luciano Pezzolo (Ca' Foscari, Venice), The Venetian Empire
 41. – Bruce S. Hall (Duke): The Mali and Songhay Empires

2.5: A separate, but parallel path: imperial formations in the precolonial Americas

- State-and empire formation in the Americas, general comparative chapter on the separate, but in many respects parallel routes of civilisation which developed in the “new” world independently of state-craft in the Eurasian ecumene.

- 43.- Michael E. Smith (Arizona State University) & Maëlle Sergheraert (Paris): The Aztec Empire
 44.- Alan Covey (Southern Methodist University): The Inca Empire

2.6. Gunpowder, postnomadic empire and the conquest of the New World: agrarian consolidation and the rise of European commercial and colonial empires (1450-1750)

- 46.- Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (Warsaw): The Ottoman Empire
 47.- Rajeev Kinra (North Western) The Mughal Empire
 48.- Josep Fradera & Josep M Delgado (Barcelona): The Habsburg Empire 16th-18th century (Spain & Austria)
 49.- Pamela Crossley (Dartmouth): The Qing Empire
 50.- Francisco Bethencourt (London): The Portuguese
 51.- Leonard Blussé (Leiden): The Dutch
 52.- Nicholas Canny (Galway) The English

2.7 The global turn: The age of European colonialism and national revolutions, subjection of old agrarian empires to the European-led world economy and nationalist secession (1750-1914)

- 54.- C. A. Bayly (Cambridge): The British Empire
 55.- David Todd (King's College/London): The French Empire
 56.- Dominic Lieven (LSE): The Russian Empire
 57.- Josep Fradera (Barcelona): The collapse of the Spanish Empire
 58. - Amy S. Greenberg (Penn State): 19th-century US expansionism
 58B. – Pekka Hamalainen (Oxford), The Comanche empire
 59.- Rana Mitter (Oxford)/Michael Reynolds (Princeton): Ottoman and Qing response and decline
 60.- Murray Last (UCL): The Sokoto Caliphate

2.8 The 20th century: The collapse of colonial empires and the rise of super-powers

- 62.- Moritz von Brescius (Konstanz) and Daniel Hedinger (München): Great power competition and world wars (failed empires: Germany, Japan)

- 63.- Stuart Ward (Copenhagen): De-colonisation, failed states, and resurgent imperialisms
 64.- Geoffrey Hosking (UCL): The Soviet Union – The Soviet Empire
 65.- Andrew Preston (Cambridge): The American Empire

Concluding essay:

2.9 Frederick Cooper (New York): The enduring presence and future of empire

3.0 Bibliography, index

About the editors:

Peter Fibiger Bang, PhD (*Cantab*), Associate Professor in the Saxo Institute at the University of Copenhagen, is a Roman comparative historian, interested in political economy, the sociology of power, state-formation and world history. He was chair of the COST research network *Tributary Empires Compared* 2005-09 (<http://tec.saxo.ku.dk>) pioneering comparison between the Roman, Mughal and Ottoman Empires. He has published *The Roman Bazaar. A Comparative Study of Trade and Markets in a Tributary Empire* (Cambridge 2008) and 8 edited volumes, including with Walter Scheidel (Stanford) *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (2013), with Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (Warsaw), *Universal Empire* (Cambridge 2012) and with C. A. Bayly, *Tributary Empires in Global History* (Palgrave 2011).

C. A. Bayly † was Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge. His many books on late Mughal and colonial Indian as well as global history include *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars* (1983), *Empire and Information* (1996), *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004) and with Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars* (2007). In 2007 he was knighted in recognition of his scholarship. He was a trustee of the British Museum and a fellow of the British Academy.

Walter Scheidel is Dickason Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University. His interests span from ancient social and economic history to historical demography and global history. His many books include *Death on the Nile* (2001), (ed.) *Rome and China* (2009), and, with Richard Saller and Ian Morris as co-editors, *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (2007).