

FEATURES

IN SEARCH OF A NINETEENTH CENTURY

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I.

Looking for a century, inquiring after it, investigating its whereabouts—that sounds like an odd idea. Who ever lost a century? Two different perpetrators come to mind: A century may have sunk into collective oblivion. This happens every now and then. Large chunks of time, deserted by posterity, can disappear from the memory of anyone but a small coterie of antiquarians and professional record-keepers. Sometimes, very long periods of time are erased from national consciousness. Thus, the Chinese—many historians among them—hate to be reminded of the nineteenth century, an epoch devoid of glamour and achievement, a time, or so it seems, of imperialist humiliation, abortive modernization, and cultural sterility. Whole peoples may prefer to forget parts of their own past.

The second potential mislayer and mishandler of a century is the historian. As an individual, he or she may fail to grasp their object of study, be unsuccessful in framing a narrative, an adequate research design, or even a good argument. Collectively, historians as an organized discipline neglect certain periods in favor of others. This is natural and not to be regretted. The cumulative choice of topics always reflects broader tendencies of public interest and academic preference. In the long run, periodic re-evaluations tend to do justice to forgotten centuries.

The hidden or purloined century in question here is number nineteen after the birth of Jesus Christ or of the “Common Era,” and it is difficult to believe that it was ever lost—China and a few other traumatized countries aside. True, historians seem to get a little tired of the time between the death of George Washington and that of Queen Victoria. The eighteenth century is dearer to current sensibilities, and, the twentieth century, after its calendric close, is now the focus of intensive study. Yet, a final reckoning would presumably arrive at the result that no other

period in world history has been more thoroughly explored by later generations than the nineteenth century. Historians have turned over almost every stone of the German *Kaiserreich* or the American Civil War, and the Victorians have never relinquished their powerful hold on the English imagination, just as the Meiji Period after 1868 is still being considered the fountainhead of all subsequent Japanese history.

In addition, much more survives of the nineteenth century outside museums than of any earlier period. Numerous great cities on every continent still bear the stamp of nineteenth-century planning and building. We still live on that epoch's great scientific and technological breakthroughs: Photography, the motor car, and the radio still rest on the principles discovered by their original inventors. Sociologists, linguists, psychoanalysts, physicists, logicians, and the handful of historically-minded economists revere the pre-1914 founders of their fields. If anything of Western classical literature is still alive today, the masterpieces of the novel from Jane Austen through Flaubert, Melville, and Tolstoy to the early Thomas Mann belong to that heritage. Nineteenth-century operas from Rossini to Puccini continue to dominate the repertoire in North and South America, Europe, and Japan.

The nineteenth century may no longer be the most propitious launching platform for a historian's career, it may even be—as Suzanne Marchand (a great expert on nineteenth-century German intellectual history) has recently characterized a fashionable attitude—“an embarrassment.”¹ But it remains vividly present in terms of the broader culture—an often strange, yet seldom alien element of modernity. Once in a while, great historians and biographers bring it to life again.

II.

What is there left to be searched for?

First, we need a plausible chronology: What do we mean, chronologically speaking, by “the nineteenth century”? This is, as I shall try to show, neither a trivial nor a pedantic question.

Second, one should try to look for a global definition: Can the nineteenth century plausibly be construed as a period in world history? And if it can, how might it be done?

Third: Is it possible, after having put up all the necessary defences against essentialism and woolly speculation about various *Zeitgeists*, to identify a few characteristics and basic tendencies of the age?

Curiously enough, the nineteenth century is a century without a name. How pleasing it would be to endow it with a personal name! *Schnitzler's Century*, as Peter Gay has called his latest book,² or—we have to choose a long-lived personage—“Gladstone's century,” or perhaps

“the age of Verdi.” Not even a major intellectual current—such as the “Age of Enlightenment” for an earlier period—has been agreed upon to express the quintessence of the nineteenth century in its entirety. Eric Hobsbawm, taking *almost* a global view, divides it into three “ages”: The Age of Revolution (1789 to 1848), the Age of Capital (1848 to 1875) and the Age of Empire (1875 to 1914).³ Other suggestions include “the age of industry,” “the age of improvement,” or “the age of nationalism.” None of them have found general acceptance. Even as far as Europe is concerned, there is no agreed terminology. National periodizations follow the caesuras of political and military, sometimes of dynastic history. They converge in the cases of France and Germany where 1815, 1848, 1871, and 1914 are dates of common destiny. Just across the English Channel, 1848 and 1871 are not of major importance. The term “Victorian Britain” continues to be popular among British historians, indicating less the personal impact of a long-lived head of state than the feeling that various slow-moving changes happened to accelerate in the late 1830s and again around the turn of the century.⁴ But none of these national periodizations leads to a more general one and to a denomination for the epoch as a whole.⁵ Nor can the nineteenth century (unlike the eighteenth) take shelter within a larger segment of time, something like a “late modern period.” It remains a nameless, free-standing century.

The most simple and elegant way of demarcating a century is to use its calendric boundaries as a formal frame—almost in the visual sense of a cinematographic “still.” This offers no principal difficulties. “Centuries,” of course, are mere conventions and constructions. And defining the nineteenth century as the temporal distance between the years 1801 and 1900 might be just as helpful as any more tortuously argued alternative. Cutting through the tissue of history at any given time allows startling insights into the much-quoted “simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.” When I recently did this for 1837, Year One of the Victorian age and the year when Samuel Morse took out a patent on the telegraph, but otherwise of little significance, I discovered in New York, of all places, a very old gentleman, still alive at the age of eighty-eight, Lorenzo da Ponte, decades earlier a libertin with a powdered periwig, friend of Mozart’s and librettist of his best operas, now bankrupted by a failed attempt to provide New York with an Italian Opera House⁶—a man born earlier than Robespierre and Mozart, witness to more than one bygone epoch. The world is full of such minor and major, personal and structural survivals and *Ungleichzeitigkeiten*, made visible by historical cross-sectioning.

So, why not be radically constructivist and define “the nineteenth century” as the sum total of all that happened between 1801 and 1900 as far as it possesses relevance in view of clearly stated values and perspec-

tives? This is not how historians really work. A small number of them believe that reflection on periodization is worth a sustained effort, that it produces valuable historical knowledge, that it is a principal way for historians to impose order upon and give meaning to the past. Among our classics, Lucien Fèbvre, R. G. Collingwood, and Ernst Troeltsch took such a view. A majority of historians treat periodization as a necessary evil, without, however, being content with the pure formalism of calendric centuries.⁷ Some even flatter themselves that they are able to grasp the “world-historical significance” of events not just in the past, but also in the present.

Thus, there is an overwhelming dissatisfaction with a purely mathematical or mechanical treatment of time. A century is expected to begin and end with meaningful caesuras. This also conforms to everyday experiences and expectations. Turns of centuries, like any other progress of physical time, tend to disappoint those who trust in the magic of round numbers. The world was still the same on January 1st, 2000 or 2001, and the day after one’s fiftieth birthday is very much like the day before. In many cases, the advent of a new calendric century went unnoticed. This was very much the case in 1800. The Western calendar spread with the extension of Christianity, it did not spread further—and it spread slowly. It had taken England 170 years to adopt the allegedly “Popish” Gregorian calendar in 1756 and an even longer time to introduce it to the colonies. In France, the powerhouse of political change, 1801 (or 1800), did not mark a new *siècle* according to the revolutionary calendar, decreed in 1792 and officially in use until 1805. The new Muslim century, the thirteenth since the flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, had already begun in 1786. In Bangkok, January 1st, 1800, was an ordinary day: the 6th day of the waxing moon in the 6th month of the year 2342 of the Buddhist era. China counted the fourth year of the Emperor Jiaqing’s reign.⁸ Few Chinese, even among the literati class, had ever heard of the French Revolution and of that remarkable man Bonaparte. The Japanese, busy with a far-reaching reform of their education, cared little, and many peoples in remoter corners of the world cared even less and completely missed the dawn of a new century. To the Australian Aborigines, something ominously new had already arrived on the 18th of January 1788 with the landing of about seven hundred chain-loaded individuals of strange appearance and rough manners. On that day began the Australian nineteenth century.

III.

The powerful urge for a meaningful order of time has led historians and their audiences to prefer substantive to formal periodizations. A

great number of historians believe that the so-called “long” nineteenth century from 1789 to 1914 is the most suitable frame of reference—at least for Europe. Many textbooks perpetuate this scheme. The arguments in favor of such a solution are too strong and too obvious to require reiteration. But do they hold good for a periodization in terms of world history?

War and revolution are still the most frequently used criteria of historical periodization. Even social and cultural historians often adopt, for the sake of convenience, the temporal structure of *l'histoire événementielle*, regardless of the fact that it does not derive directly from their own concept of history. Mega-events like the fall of Constantinople, the Declaration of Independence, or the military collapse of Germany and Japan in 1945 rest on the weight of their own evidence. The same is true for 1789 and 1914. Even if one peels away all sorts of later myth-making, the shock or relief experienced by the contemporaries reverberates through the ages. Such dates are seemingly precise, they provoke little controversy, they are much easier to pin down than the more intricate shifts in the social and cultural fabric of life with their infinitely finer chronologies. Still, those mega-events invite a kind of reflection that looks at them from two sides. A “long” nineteenth century automatically means “short” neighboring ones.

What about 1914 as the cut-off point for a period in world history? It would be silly to dispute that the First World War marked the end of an era for those who had lived in the security of a *belle époque*. In structural terms, it overturned a specific distribution of power in the world. The deeper meaning of the War became apparent when civil society began to disintegrate in various European countries from about 1916 onwards. The war was a global one long before the United States entered it, since Britain mobilized resources in all parts of its multi-continental Empire. The war in the Pacific and in Africa began almost at once, Turkey and Japan became active participants early on, and Germany embarked upon a global strategy of subversion.⁹ No continent was spared. The human losses incurred by the Dominions were greater than in the Second World War, and Sub-Saharan Africa was affected much more deeply than in the later conflict.

The postwar settlement, more than the beginning of the war, inaugurated a new epoch. It redrew the maps of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East and sparked movements for independence in Egypt, India, Korea, and several other colonies. In China, it provoked the true start of a long-term process of social and cultural revolution, soon to be pushed ahead by Bolshevik agents. Within little more than a decade—from the fall of the Chinese monarchy in 1911 to the ultimate demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1923—monarchies disappeared from the greater

part of Eurasia. At the same time, however, European and Japanese colonial rule survived its great postwar crisis and showed few signs of weakness. The truly earth-shaking consequences of the First World War were limited to parts of Europe and the Middle East. For the United States, the War was perhaps too brief to have a deeply transformative effect on American society.¹⁰ Mexico experienced its own bloody revolution, unrelated to the events in Europe. For Africa, South and Southeast Asia the Great War was an *intermezzo*, partly disturbing, partly raising hopes for a post-colonial future.

African history and that of many parts of South East Asia is still best treated within the frame of an ongoing “colonial period” lasting from about 1880 to 1940¹¹—a very tenacious nineteenth century, or else, and less plausibly, a very precocious late modern period. The same time bracket makes sense for India, with an earlier caesura conventionally placed in 1857, the year of the Great Sepoy Rebellion. Many historians of South and Central America see the Great Depression of the 1930s rather than the year 1914 as the true end of the post-independence age, inaugurated more than a hundred years before.¹² We may conclude that only the end of the Second World War was an epochal event affecting every corner of the world. 1914 was of major, but not generally of overwhelming importance.

A different set of arguments, more attuned to social and cultural change, points to the *fin-de-siècle*—the years between, roughly, 1890 and 1910—as a period of concentrated innovation in social development and also in the arts and sciences. The case has been made persuasively for Europe.¹³ For the United States, different historiographical tendencies emphasizing the turn to imperialism, the rise of progressivism, or the emergence of corporate capitalism, highlight the *fin-de-siècle* as a time of the transcendence of earlier forms of politics, world-view, and social organization. The same is certainly true, for independent reasons, in the cases of Russia, China, and Japan. Throughout Africa, the period saw an advance from the turbulence of conquest to more peaceful and orderly forms of rule and colonial exploitation. Underpinned by a worldwide export boom for goods and capital after 1896 (Kondratieff’s “third upswing”),¹⁴ by intercontinental migration of an unprecedented magnitude, and by the large-scale provision of “international public goods,” the integration of the global economy took a leap ahead. In many ways, therefore, the years between about 1890 and 1910 transformed the world much more dramatically than any other previous twenty-year segment of time. In this light, the First World War can be seen as the first crisis of a new age rather than as the culmination of long-term tendencies.

IV.

The question of when a nineteenth century could plausibly be said to have begun is no less difficult to answer. Unless one focusses on the philosophical novelty of the *Declaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, the French Revolution was not an event of explosive significance. In terms of immediate and tangible effects, 1789 and the next couple of years did not change Europe a great deal. Even the execution of a king—no novelty in Europe—did not turn the world upside down.¹⁵ Only military expansion made a real difference. When Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt and thereby rocked the entire Ottoman Empire, when insurgent ex-slaves repelled a French expeditionary force in Haiti, when Prussia and Austria collapsed, when the Portuguese court fled to Brazil, the Spanish crown disappeared from the scene, and the British conquered large parts of India in order to pre-empt a (highly unlikely) French take-over—only then did the potential of “1789” unfold with an almost global reach.¹⁶ And when, for once, Napoleon made a voluntary retreat, this was also of enormous consequence: The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 established the United States as a continental power with one stroke. Thus, Thomas Nipperdey was right not only for Germany with the famous opening sentence of his trilogy on nineteenth-century German history: “In the beginning there was Napoleon.”¹⁷

Political history marks out the Napoleonic period as a watershed for all of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Latin America with Haiti, those regions of Africa which were to be affected by the British ban on the slave trade in 1808, and finally for all those parts of the world where Britain used the contest with revolutionary France to establish dominion, above all India, Sri Lanka, and the Cape of Good Hope.¹⁸ In a few cases, new political developments happened to occur at the same time without being caused or even influenced by the European turmoil. The reunification of Vietnam under the formidable emperor Gia Long in 1802 is a good example for such a home-made effort at early nation-building. I leave it to further discussion to include the United States in this picture. Here, the older concept of the “revolutionary” generation, much refined by Ira Berlin in his magisterial work on the first two centuries of slavery in North America, seems to be immensely helpful.¹⁹ The control of that generation over national affairs bridged the chronological divide between the centuries and ended, at the very top of politics, only when the sixth President, John Quincy Adams, left office in 1829.

As an alternative to an early beginning of a nineteenth century with the assault on a prison in Paris, one can, therefore, postulate a transitory age of crisis and renewal, lasting from the 1760s to the early 1830s and encompassing the revolutions in North America, France, and Saint-

Domingue (the future Haiti), as well as the destruction of the Spanish Empire on the American mainland. The European revolutions of 1830, the British Reform Bill of 1832, the legal abolition of slavery in the British empire two years later, and the onset of Jacksonian democracy in the United States are among the developments that signal the end of the eighteenth-century order. It is of some symbolic interest that five of the greatest minds who crystallized the experience of the transitory age died within months of one another: Hegel, Clausewitz, Bentham, Goethe, and Raja Rammohun Roy, the Bengal polymath with his unique vision of a cultural synthesis between East and West.²⁰

The suggestion put forward here is not entirely new. It pulls together at least three earlier proposals: first, the idea of a “revolutionary Atlantic,”²¹ second, Reinhart Koselleck’s characterization of that very age as an extended *Sattelzeit* when, under the impression of an acceleration of life and history, many of the concepts that still dominate the political language of today were formed,²² and third, the notion of a “first age of global imperialism,” during which “fiscal-military” states, based in Britain, France, and Russia, conquered large empires in Eurasia.²³

This periodization conforms with further observations of world-wide significance: 1830 approximately indicates the time when industrialization spread appreciably beyond the British Isles. Angus Maddison, perhaps the foremost authority on historical statistics today, sees the 1820s as a threshold between world-wide economic stagnation and “intensive” development.²⁴ In a similar vein, environmental historians consider the 1820s to mark the onset of a “fossil fuel age.” For the first time, the replacement of organic energy (that is, humans, animals, wood, peat) by mineral energy made a mark in the most advanced economies.²⁵ Coal powered steam engines, and steam engines drove machines and pumps, ships and locomotives. The real acceleration of life commenced with the railroad, not with the experience of revolutionary change alone. The following decades saw the entrenchment and extension of that new energy regime. “In terms of usable energy,” says John R. McNeill, “fossil fuels overshadowed biomass from the 1890s forward, even though the great majority of the world’s population used no fossil fuels directly.”²⁶ Thus, our idea of a “short” nineteenth century receives support from environmental history.

V.

In between the terminal dates of a century, however demarcated, individual national histories follow their separate trajectories. Some of the key dates in national histories have a stronger meaning than the temporal bracket in which they are encapsulated. For the United States, the year

1865 is probably more important than any other date since independence. For Japan, the beginning of the Meiji Restoration—in fact a “revolution from above”—in 1868 possesses a comparable founding significance.²⁷ For Italy and Germany, the unification in 1861 and 1871 of these countries and the ensuing construction of more or less integrated nation-states serves a similar function. None of these are, of course, dates of global significance.

What about the revolution of 1848/49? It was of central significance for a number of European countries, first among them perhaps France, where the revolution achieved a measure of success, and Hungary where it was dramatically defeated.²⁸ At the same time, it meant little to the only two European world powers, Britain and Russia. In contrast to the revolutionary decades of the 1770s to 1790s, the European crisis of the mid-century was not a transatlantic crisis. The United States at this time was much more inward-looking, or rather westward-looking, than it had been in the age of Franklin and Jefferson. It fought a war with and in Mexico and began to settle and develop its Pacific coast. At the other end of the world, the disastrous Taiping Revolution in China of 1850 to 1864, though involuntarily stimulated by missionary propaganda, was in no way initiated by revolutionary tendencies abroad.²⁹

What we see, then, in terms of political history, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, is not a world-wide coincidence or even convergence of revolutionary movements.³⁰ World revolution was confined to the fantasies of a few revolutionaries. The major episode of domestic violence in nineteenth-century European history, the Paris Commune of 1871, remained isolated and unique.

But something quite different happened: a series of almost simultaneous crises of *ancien régimes* and the subsequent creation of large-scale territorial units through the application of rationalizing state-power. It is still too early to move beyond mere description. Comparative history has yet to discover the subject.³¹ Whether after close scrutiny it will emphasize differences rather than similarities between the various individual cases remains to be seen. At any rate, the 1860s and 1870s were pivotal decades in the political evolution of the nineteenth century. The old sociological concept of “nation-building” still offers perhaps the best general characterization. The institutional build-up of a united Italy after 1861, the transformation of Japan from a feudal mosaic into a rigidly centralized and bureaucratized polity after 1868, the *innere Reichsgründung* in Germany after 1871: they all conform to the model.

Within the same narrow time-bracket several other momentous developments occurred: After Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War, Tsar Alexander II launched an ambitious and quite successful program of legal and administrative reform. In 1861, eleven million serfs on crown estates

and noble latifundia were liberated—whatever that may have meant in practice. Other reforms in the Russian empire touched the military, the bureaucracy, education, and the administration of justice.³² Comparable reforms in the Ottoman Empire had begun as early as the 1830s. The results were noteworthy, but the reforms did not strengthen the empire enough so that it would have been able to withstand its modernizing neighbor to the north. The Ottoman defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1878 was much more dramatic than the Russian failure in the Crimea more than twenty years before.³³ China suffered a similar fate when its cautious efforts at reform, also launched in the early 1860s, were annihilated by a Japanese military victory in 1895. Among the more successful state reforms of the period was the reorganization of the Habsburg Empire in 1867—yet another response to a military fiasco. The same year saw the federation of the British colonies in North America—the constitutional birth of modern Canada. A few months later, King Chulalongkorn acceded to the throne of Siam—one of the most appealing monarchs of the nineteenth century.³⁴ He continued and extended the modernizing policies of his father Mongkut and managed to preserve Thailand's independence in the midst of a cockpit of competing European powers. In India, an early movement towards colonial reform was cut short by the great Sepoy Rebellion (so-called Mutiny) of 1857. The British reacted in a paradoxical fashion by tightening their grip on the instruments of coercion, while at the same time reducing their interference in Indian society.

These momentous transformations have a few points in common: First, they were projects of “modernization from above,” inspired by the enlightened self-interest of rulers and elites and were only indirect responses to popular pressure. While some of them advanced “civil society” in the sense of legal equality and the rule of law, the widening of political participation, to say nothing of democracy, was of secondary importance or, as in Russia, China, Siam, and India, was not at all a consideration. Second, they took account of growing international rivalry and aimed at military self-strengthening. Third, they were part of a tendency toward the internal integration of large political units through the development of territorially rooted bureaucracies, the rationalization of state finances, and the construction of nation-wide networks of communication. In each case, the new technologies of railroad and telegraph were powerful instruments in the hands of the reformers.³⁵

An internal periodization of the nineteenth century according to criteria of political evolution, state-formation, and nation-building reveals the 1860s and early 1870s to be a turning point. Several national (and imperial) histories are deeply marked by the concentration and redeployment of state-power taking place in those years. This is true, above all, for the United States, Russia, Japan, Italy, Germany, and the Habsburg Em-

pire. In a few cases, social institutions of a quintessentially “early modern” character survived well beyond the middle of the nineteenth century and disappeared only in what could be called the Great Cleaning-Up of the 1860s. American slavery (which in Brazil lasted until 1888), Russian serfdom, and the feudal order of Tokugawa-Japan are prominent examples. All these changes took place within fluid international contexts and were influenced by them in varying forms and degrees. They differ in the extent to which nation-building reforms were conscious responses to external pressures. All the modernizing projects in the “East,” from St. Petersburg, Istanbul, and Cairo to Peking and Tokyo, were basically defensive. They were deliberate attempts to ward off danger from imperial Britain and to catch up with the dynamic forces of capitalism and military-bureaucratic rationalization.

Returning to the question of periodization, it should have become clear that a complete congruence between global, continental, national or even regional chronologies is undesirable and elusive. Being aware of co-existing “layers of time” (*Zeitschichten*, as Reinhart Koselleck calls them)³⁶ with their specific rhythms and speeds is all that can reasonably be achieved. On a global scale, the two “very long” turns of centuries—the revolutionary age from 1760 to 1830, and the unfolding of full modernity between 1890 and the postwar realignment of the early 1920s—stand out as distinct periods. That leaves a kind of “Victorian” rump-nineteenth century, from 1830 to 1890, with the 1860s and 1870s forming a political center of gravity, or else a long overarching age of “emergent modernity” from around 1760 to 1920, following a truncated “early modern” epoch. This suggestion receives some backing from recent attempts to recast early modernity. Heinz Schilling, for example, considers 1250 to 1750 to be a viable unit for the periodization of European history.³⁷

VI.

After all this juggling with dates and leap-frogging across space and time, a strong desire may be felt to turn to the “real” nineteenth century. However we envisage the shape of the century—is there anything to be said about it that is not just an extension, an enlargement, or perhaps a trivialization of what is already known from the study of, say, Germany or the United States? In a recent survey of Germany during the “long” nineteenth century, forming part of the tenth edition of Bruno Gebhardt’s venerable handbook, Jürgen Kocka has identified four secular trends: It was the century of industrialization, of demographic explosion (and large-scale migration), and of the nation-state. Professor Kocka’s fourth trend is the rise of the *Bürgertum*, but with a cautionary question-mark

added.³⁸ His conclusion is that the bourgeoisie, though a “small minority,” “put its stamp” on the age.³⁹

I will leave aside the question of whether these tendencies apply equally to Europe as a whole, and move on to the problem of their validity for the world. Each tendency possesses its proper chronology. But enough has now been said about periodization.

(1) The age of industrialization? Jürgen Kocka’s own way of putting it provides a first answer. Those countries where a transition to industrial society was accomplished remained “a small minority,” but they “put their stamp” on the world at large. By 1890, the greater part of the surface of the earth was completely untouched by engine-driven industry; this is also true for several countries on the European periphery. A second wave of industrialization, with Japan and Russia in the lead, was just beginning.⁴⁰ None of these late-comers really caught up, in quantitative terms, with the early industrializers. At the same time, goods from the factories of the industrialized countries—Britain, the United States, Germany, and France foremost among them—penetrated the remotest quarters of the globe. Industrialization was accompanied by an equally important process: the construction of an international economy, consisting of overlapping networks of transport, trade, and (more and more importantly) finance. These networks were largely dominated by the City of London, a cosmopolitan clearing house of mobile wealth which maintained its paramountcy even after the relative decline of Britain’s industrial strength. Although the industrializing countries formed the core of the international economy, this economy also integrated newly emerging nuclei of agricultural and mineral export production everywhere in the world. Thus the Antebellum South, Egypt, South Africa, Argentina, New Zealand, Malaya, and other regions turned into important participants in an asymmetrical division of labor. The first secular trend may, therefore, be rephrased as: industrialization of a North Atlantic core within expanding structures of global exchange.⁴¹

(2) An age of a “demographic explosion”? The sensational rates of population growth experienced in the twentieth century must not be projected back into the earlier period. Moreover, the dichotomy between high growth in the “Third World” and slow increases in the rich societies is a fairly recent phenomenon. The population of huge countries like India and China increased throughout the nineteenth century on a level only slightly above stagnation and comparable to that of France, Europe’s slowest-growing country. Germany’s population growth was in a medium class where we also find Italy, Sweden, and Egypt. “Explosion” is the right word to characterize what happened in Great Britain, Java, and Latin America as a whole—an interesting trio of cases, since the population increased in Latin America largely because of immigration, in Java

in the absence of it, and in Britain despite an enormous loss of emigrants. The winners of the demographic race, however, were what used to be called the “countries of white settlement” and are nowadays in OECD parlance “Western offshoots”: the United States, Canada, Australia, and Argentina. All this adds up to a remarkable redistribution of demographic weight among the continents. By 1900, if we follow the best available estimates, Asia’s share of world population had dropped sensationally from 66 percent in 1800 to an all-time low of 55 percent in 1900. During the same 100 years, Europe’s proportion (Russia excluded) rose from 15 to 18 percent and that of the Americas from 2.5 to 10 percent.⁴²

The second tendency in its enlarged reformulation is, therefore, not really a “demographic explosion,” but the demographic ascendancy of the Occident, especially of the Neo-Europes in the New World. Long-distance movements of temporary or definitive emigration across the Atlantic, but also in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean decisively contributed to this outcome. One additional result—extremely important for social history—was the proliferation of an age-old type of social discontinuity: the diaspora.

(3) A century of the nation-state?⁴³ Giving a responsible answer to this question would presuppose the critical sifting of a mountain of theoretical approaches to nationalism, the nation, and the nation-state. I can only sketch a few conclusions. Not any political form adopted by a community that defines itself as a nation is a nation-state. The nation-state merges ideals of equality, elementary citizenship, cultural homogeneity, independence in a pluralist international system, superiority over others, and a common destiny with the organizational legacy of the early modern European territorial state. Moreover, the fully-articulated nation-state requires the integrative potential of modern communication technologies, above all printing for mass consumption (which in turn demands a certain level of literacy), railroads, and the telegraph. For all these reasons, the nation-state is a modern invention. Invariably, it comes about through lengthy processes of nation-building, welding together a multitude of smaller units—tribes, principalities, local communities, and so on—into a larger, bigger, and greater whole. This is what happened in Germany, in Italy, and in the United States after the Civil War.

Most nation-states in the contemporary world emerged from the disintegration of empires. There have been four waves of the post-imperial formation of nation-states:

- the revolutionary period in the Western hemisphere from the independence of the 13 American colonies to that of Bolivia in 1825;
- the immediate aftermath of the First World War (when Ireland and Egypt achieved autonomy);

- the peak period of Asian and African decolonization between about 1946 and 1962;
- and finally the crumbling of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Few cases of newly-won sovereign independence are recorded during the latter three quarters of the (calendric) nineteenth century, none of them in the non-western world. Quite to the contrary: The establishment of post-imperial republics in Latin America was more than offset, numerically, by the destruction of hundreds and perhaps thousands of independent polities in the course of colonial expansion. By 1913, the number of independent political units on the globe had reached a world-historical minimum.⁴⁴ The British Empire alone included one quarter of humanity, a trifle more than the Chinese Empire. China was a prenational agrarian empire, the Imperium Britannicum an empire with a modern nation-state—more precisely, an imperial nation-state—at its center. The United States, bent on the course of westward expansion, could probably be seen as yet another such imperial nation-state.⁴⁵

In short, the nineteenth century was an age not of nation-states proper, but of old-style empires (the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Romanov Empires) persisting alongside modernized and much more resourceful *imperial* nation-states. The fact that Germany joined the club of the latter rather late and with limited success, has, incidentally, lead German historians to underestimate the aspect of empire.

(4) A “century of the bourgeoisie”? Again, semantic difficulties are hard to overcome. The finer shades of meaning separating “Bürgertum” from “bourgeoisie” are by themselves a frightful challenge. National paths of societal evolution render difficult the transfer of concepts. It makes an enormous difference, for example, whether a bourgeois class emerged alongside an entrenched aristocracy (as it did in Western Europe and in Japan) or whether such an aristocracy did not exist—as was the case under widely differing circumstances, in China, the United States, or Australia. Still, a few general points can tentatively be made. Everywhere in the world, commercialization, itself a global trend, opened up social spaces for groups specializing in mercantile services. Their rise went parallel with a relative decline of landed property as a source of income and power. Prominent among these groups were ethnic minorities, for example, the Greeks and Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire or the Chinese in South-East Asia. In other words, “middling ranks” did not always grow from local and internal roots; they often had the vulnerable status of alien “guests.”⁴⁶ In each case, they were somehow touched by a parsimonious, rationalizing, and expansive “spirit of capitalism.”⁴⁷

A second tendency of almost world-wide scope was the rise of the “professions.”⁴⁸ Medical doctors and teachers in European-style institu-

tions of higher education proliferated. Wherever the British Empire gained a foothold (or more than that), it exported the rule of law and the instruments of litigation. By 1920, few major countries in the world were without lawyers—many of whom were to play leading roles in movements of national emancipation.

Thirdly, the nineteenth century saw the rise of a transatlantic, cosmopolitan bourgeoisie with close ties to an equally cosmopolitan aristocracy: a class of global operators, many of them in finance, and of wealthy rentiers. This class formed a thin layer above the various national bourgeois classes or *milieux* with whom it was linked in a multitude of ways. It had its offshoots in Latin America, in the richer colonies and in cities like Istanbul, Alexandria, or Shanghai.⁴⁹

A most interesting question is, finally, whether a *bürgerlicher Wertehimmel* (a “firmament of bourgeois values”) existed and spread independently of locally based bourgeois strata and *milieux*. There were strong impediments to such a globalization of values beyond the crude imperative of enrichment. Forms of the family, so important to *bürgerliche* attitudes towards the world, are highly culture-bound, and visions of the self are culturally encoded to no lesser degree and not at all easy to change. On the other hand, the quintessential bourgeois world-view—liberalism—found adherents on each continent, conspicuously so in the Americas, but also in India, Japan, and the Middle East.⁵⁰ If the nineteenth century is, on a world scale, not an age when the bourgeoisie became dominant socially and politically, it certainly saw the universalization of a central bourgeois creed.

Let me, by way of conclusion, add two more features of the nineteenth century to Jürgen Kocka’s list.

(5) It was a century of frontier expansion and of the assault on nonsedentary ways of life. Chris Bayly, the leading British historian of modern India, has pointed out that during the revolutionary period between the 1770s and the 1830s, “tribal break-outs” originating in Central Asia and Afghanistan caused serious trouble for the agricultural populations of the Eurasian lowlands for the last time in history. Much of the turmoil that facilitated the British conquest of India had been triggered by mounted warriors from the North.⁵¹ That, however, was the last gasp of pastoral power. Thereafter, the sedentary majority of mankind got the upper hand. President Andrew Jackson’s policy of Indian removal broke the military might of the Indian nations. At nearly the same time, the Russian state stepped up its offensive against the nomadic peoples of the Kazakh steppe—previously an independent force kept at bay by a string of fortifications.⁵² In several places in the world, mobile ways of life were pushed back by armed settlers with the help of an obliging state and, coming later, of the railway. The frontier was to be found almost every-

where outside Western Europe: in North America, Brazil and the Argentine Pampas, in Australia and New Zealand, in the Eastern parts of the Tsarist Empire, in South Africa, in India, colonial Burma and in Qing China, where the once-dreaded Mongols succumbed to the onslaught of land-hungry Han-Chinese peasants, money-lenders, and the bottle. By 1890 (the year when Sitting Bull was shot) all these processes had run their course. The heroes of indigenous resistance had gone down fighting or had been bought off. The frontiers were—in the idiom of the day—“closing.”

(6) Finally, the nineteenth century was a century of emancipation and new exclusion, of liberation, and of a retreat from cosmopolitanism and tolerance. The hardening of exclusive identities set in early in the century. Ira Berlin has traced “the degradation of black life in mainland North America” back to the revolutionary period.⁵³ In world-historical terms, the overthrow of systems of servile labor in the Atlantic sphere and in Eastern Europe (and a little later in many Muslim countries) counts as one of the signal accomplishments of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ It ranks with Jewish emancipation and the disappearance of religious persecution from Western Europe. However, the celebrated century of progress—in this case my “short” nineteenth century—ends on a different and more somber note. It ends with the failure of Reconstruction in the United States and the rise of segregation in the South, with similar attempts to draw deep racial lines through South African society, with anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese exclusion in the United States, Canada, and Australia after 1882, with anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia from 1881 onwards, with the framing of Colonel Dreyfus in 1894 and an anti-Semitic groundswell in Germany and Austria, with the germs of a racist literature even in Japan and China.⁵⁵

Again, as so many times before in this lecture, I have merely arranged events instead of speculating about the reasons for their clustered occurrence. Unless one feels comfortable with world-system approaches or mono-causal models, be they of an economic, demographic, or environmental kind, explanations for the simultaneous appearance of similar phenomena in different contexts are very difficult to find. World history as a special way of looking at the past has long had, not undeservedly, a bad name for offering premature answers to questions little understood and less investigated. So, let us stay a while with the questions. At least the initial one: “Where is a nineteenth century to be found?” though far from being solved, has perhaps been shown to make a minimum of sense.

Notes

¹ Suzanne Marchand, “Embarrassed by the Nineteenth Century,” unpublished manuscript, 2002.

² Peter Gay, *Schnitzler's Century: The Making of Middle-Class Culture, 1815–1914* (New York, 2002).

³ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (London, 1962); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848–1875* (London, 1975); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London, 1987).

⁴ See a long series of major historical syntheses from G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (London, 1936) to A. N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London, 2002). On twentieth-century responses to the Victorians, see John Gardiner, *The Victorians: An Age in Retrospect* (London, 2002).

⁵ In his magnificent textbook on nineteenth-century Europe, Jörg Fisch opts for a caesura around 1850 and characterizes the age through the dynamic polarity of “growth” and “equality”: Jörg Fisch, *Europa zwischen Wachstum und Gleichheit 1850–1914*, Handbuch der Geschichte Europas, vol. 8 (Stuttgart, 2002).

⁶ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford, 1999), 585. Da Ponte wrote his memoirs between 1823 and 1827; their first complete edition was published in 1915. See Lorenzo da Ponte, *Mein abenteuerliches Leben: Die Memoiren des Mozart-Librettisten*, ed. Walter Klefisch (Reinbek, 1960); *Memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte*, translated by Elisabeth Abbott (New York, 1988).

⁷ Historians' views on the relevance of periodization are sampled in Johan Hendrik Jacob van der Pot, *Sinndeutung und Periodisierung der Geschichte. Eine systematische Übersicht der Theorien und Auffassungen* (Leiden, 1999), 52–57.

⁸ On the plurality of calendars and concepts of time, see Louis Gardet et al., *Cultures and Time* (Paris, 1976); Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago and London, 1987); G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: The Evolution of Our General Awareness of Time and Temporal Perspective* (Oxford and New York, 1988); Ákos Östör, *Vessels of Time: An Essay on Temporal Change and Social Transformation* (Delhi, 1993).

⁹ Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1 of *To Arms* (Oxford, 2001), chapter 9.

¹⁰ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York, 1980).

¹¹ Rudolf von Albertini, *European Colonial Rule, 1880–1940: The Impact of the West on India, Southeast Asia, and Africa*, translated by John G. Williamson, Contributions in Comparative Colonial Studies, no. 10 (Westport, CT and Oxford, 1982).

¹² *The Cambridge History of Latin America* follows such a periodization: Volumes 4 and 5 (1986) go as far as 1930, volume 6 (in two parts, 1994) takes over from there.

¹³ Paul Nolte, “1900: Das Ende des 19. und der Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts in sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive,” in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 47 (1996): 281–300.

¹⁴ Peter Hall, “The Intellectual History of Long Waves,” in *The Rhythms of Society*, Michael Young and Tom Schuller, eds. (London and New York, 1988), 37–52.

¹⁵ Still a valuable survey: Rolf Reichardt und Eberhard Schmitt, “Die Französische Revolution—Umbruch oder Kontinuität?” in *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 7 (1980): 257–320.

¹⁶ For Europe, see Stuart J. Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London and New York, 1991); Michael Broers, *Europe under Napoleon 1799–1815* (London, 1996); for wider repercussions, see Stig Förster, “Der Weltkrieg 1792–1815. Bewaffnete Konflikte und Revolutionen in der Weltgesellschaft,” in *Kriegsbereitschaft und Friedensordnung in Deutschland 1800–1814*, ed. Jost Dülffer (Münster and Hamburg, 1995), 17–35.

¹⁷ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866. Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich, 1983), 11.

¹⁸ See Michael Duffy, “World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793–1815,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford and New York, 1998), 184–207.

¹⁹ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998). See also Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago and London, 1974), 176 seq. on the impact of “the generation of 1789.”

²⁰ On Rammohun Roy, the least known of that illustrious group, see *The Essential Writings of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Delhi, 1999).

²¹ The classic proponent of this view was Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959–64); its leading German advocate was the late Manfred Kossok who had a keener sense of Latin American history than Palmer. See numerous references in his *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Matthias Middell, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 2000). On cultural transfer across the Atlantic, see Roger G. Kennedy, *Orders from France: The Americans and the French in a Revolutionary World, 1780–1820* (New York, 1989); on differences between the respective revolutionary outcomes, see Patrice Higonnet, *Sister Republics: The Origins of French and American Republicanism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1988). See also the ambitious research program of Horst Pietschmann, *Geschichte des atlantischen Systems, 1580–1830: Ein historischer Versuch zur Erklärung der “Globalisierung” jenseits nationalgeschichtlicher Perspektiven* (Hamburg, 1998). A full picture would have to include the revolution in Saint-Domingue (Haiti). See Franklin W. Knight, “The Haitian Revolution,” in *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 103–115.

²² See Reinhart Koselleck, “Einleitung,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1972), xv.

²³ See C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (London and New York, 1989), 164–192; C. A. Bayly, “The British Military-Fiscal State and Indigenous Resistance: India 1750–1820,” in *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815*, ed. Lawrence Stone (London and New York, 1994), 322–354; C. A. Bayly, “The First Age of Global Imperialism, c. 1760–1830,” in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25 (1997): 28–47.

²⁴ Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* (Paris, 2001), 27.

²⁵ E. A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth* (Oxford, 1987), 10–11; John R. McNeill, *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York and London, 2000), xxiii, 298.

²⁶ McNeill, 14.

²⁷ An authoritative interpretation is Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2000), 333–70.

²⁸ *Europa 1848: Revolution und Reform*, ed. Dieter Dowe, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, and Dieter Langewiesche in *Forschungsinstitut der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Reihe Politik- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte* 48 (Bonn, 1998).

²⁹ On the Christian sources of the Taiping leader’s prophetic inspiration, see Vincent Y. C. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Sources, Interpretations, and Influences* (Seattle and London, 1967), 147–164; Jonathan Spence, *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York and London, 1996), 30–33, 56–68.

³⁰ Similar in its argumentative design is a cross-cultural study of state breakdowns during the early modern period: Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1991).

³¹ For the development of the “Verwaltungsstaat” in Europe, we have at least Lutz Raphael, *Recht und Ordnung: Herrschaft durch Verwaltung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M., 2000).

³² See *Russia’s Great Reforms, 1855–1881*, ed. Ben Eklof (Bloomington, Ind., 1994).

³³ A masterful survey of the Ottoman reforms is Roderic H. Davison, *Turkey* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968), 67–90.

- ³⁴ See Niels P. Petersson, "König Chulalongkorns Europareise 1897: Europäischer Imperialismus, symbolische Politik und monarchisch-bürokratische Modernisierung," *Saeculum* 52 (2001): 297–328.
- ³⁵ See Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," in *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 807–31.
- ³⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt a.M., 2000).
- ³⁷ Heinz Schilling, *Die neue Zeit: Vom Christenheitseuropa zum Europa der Staaten 1250 bis 1750* (Berlin, 1999). Hagen Schulze, contributing to the same series of books, has "modern" Europe begin around 1740: *Phönix Europa: Die Moderne. Von 1740 bis heute* (Berlin, 1998).
- ³⁸ Jürgen Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert. Arbeit, Nation und bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 2002).
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.
- ⁴⁰ On the three phases of industrialization (1760–1880; 1880–1950; since 1950), see Peter N. Stearns, *The Industrial Revolution in World History* (Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford, 1993); see also Sidney Pollard, "The Europeanization of the International Economy 1800–1870," in *Europe in the International Economy 1500–2000*, ed. Derek H. Aldcroft and Anthony Sutcliffe (Cheltenham, 1999), 50–101.
- ⁴¹ For a superb sketch of the world economy in the nineteenth century, see Wolfram Fischer, *Expansion, Integration, Globalisierung. Studien zur Geschichte der Weltwirtschaft* (Göttingen, 1998), especially 36–48.
- ⁴² Calculated on the basis of data from Massimo Livi-Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1997), 31, table 1.3.
- ⁴³ See also Jürgen Osterhammel, "Der europäische Nationalstaat des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine globalhistorische Annäherung," in Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats. Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Göttingen, 2001), 322–41.
- ⁴⁴ See also Charles Tilly, "Geography of European Statemaking and Capitalism since 1500," in *Geographic Perspectives in History: Essays in Honor of Edward Whiting Fox*, ed. Eugene D. Genovese and Leonard Hochberg (Oxford, 1989), 158–181.
- ⁴⁵ D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, vol. 2, *Continental America, 1800–1867* (New Haven and London, 1986), 170–188.
- ⁴⁶ Christine Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities: Conjoint Communities in the Making of the World Economy 1570–1940* (Richmond, 1996).
- ⁴⁷ This aspect is missing from a new treatment of the subject which emphasizes the close proximity of capitalism and national development: Liah Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2001).
- ⁴⁸ It should be noted, however, that nowhere outside the Occident did the expansion of a non-capitalist segment of the middle-classes assume such a significance as to speak of a "professional" or "corporate" society in the sense of Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989).
- ⁴⁹ There are as yet few studies of this social group. An early, and still valuable, outline was provided by Charles A. Jones, *International Business in the Nineteenth Century: The Rise and Fall of a Cosmopolitan Bourgeoisie* (Brighton, 1987), following in the footsteps of still earlier pioneers such as Henrietta M. Larson, *Guide to Business History* (Cambridge, 1948).
- ⁵⁰ In Japan, 1881 saw the founding of a "Liberal Party" (Jiyūtō); in India, the Indian National Congress, established in 1885, confronted the colonial state in a spirit of critical liberalism. At least for the Middle East there is a first-rate intellectual history: Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (London, 1962). The story of how Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* or John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* were translated into a great number of languages provides insight into cases of world-wide intellectual dissemination and adaptation. See

Adam Smith Across Nations: Translations and Receptions of the Wealth of Nations, ed. Lai Cheung-chung (Oxford, 1999).

⁵¹ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 33–54.

⁵² Andreas Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (Munich, 1992), 158–159.

⁵³ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 96.

⁵⁴ Seminal studies of comparative scope include Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1987); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988); Seymour Drescher, *From Slavery to Freedom: Comparative Studies in the Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery* (Basingstoke, 1999); M. L. Bush, *Servitude in Modern Times* (Cambridge, 2000), 177–99.

⁵⁵ These developments are well documented in many works. Another question would be *when* the tide began to turn. As Catherine Hall has recently argued for Britain, the 1850s may have been a crucial time for the spread of “a form of racial thinking which assumed hierarchy and inequality”: Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002), 436; see also Hall’s contribution to Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000).