Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis

Salvatore J. Babones, Christopher Chase-Dunn

Assessing the debate between Abu-Lughod and Wallerstein over the thirteenth-century origins of the modern world-system

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203863428.ch1_2
Elson E. Boles
Published online on: 24 May 2012

How to cite:- Elson E. Boles. 24 May 2012, Assessing the debate between Abu-Lughod and Wallerstein over the thirteenth-century origins of the modern world-system from: Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis Routledge
Accessed on: 14 Sep 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203863428.ch1_2

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Part I
Origins
1. Before the long sixteenth century
Assessing the debate between Abu-Lughod and Wallerstein over the thirteenth-century origins of the modern world-system

Elson E. Boles

Janet Abu-Lughod’s Before European Hegemony, The World System A.D. 1250–1350 (1989) caught the attention of world-systems scholars and instigated debates concerning the origins of the modern world-system. Most of her book details the vast trading circuits among “subsystems” or “world-economies and world-empires” spanning the Eurasian continent. Abu-Lughod’s two main theses are firstly, that this network was a “world-system” (or “world system”—she uses the hyphenated and unhyphenated terms without distinction) and secondly, that its rise and demise explains the formation of the West and the modern world-system in the sixteenth century. She argues, “… the Eurocentered ‘modern’ world system … was built on the ruins of the thirteenth-century world system” and that the “pathways and routes developed by the thirteenth century were later ‘conquered’ and adapted by a succession of European powers. Europe did not need to invent the system, since the basic groundwork was already in place … ” (1989: 361, 369). The decline of the East, in particular China’s withdrawal, opened a “vacuum of power” in Asia that enabled Europeans to take over established routes (Abu-Lughod 1989: 361). Abu-Lughod thus criticizes Eurocentric explanations of the West’s rise to global dominance for overlooking the existence and role of the thirteenth-century “world-system” (Abu-Lughod 1993: 22). She “rejects the facile answer that Europe had unique qualities that allowed her to. Europe pulled ahead because the ‘Orient’ was temporarily in disarray” (1989: 18). In this regard, she sees her study as a corrective “to Immanuel Wallerstein’s work on the sixteenth century et seq. world-system” (Abu-Lughod 1996: 278) because his explanation begins too late: “The failure to begin the story early enough has resulted, therefore, in a truncated and distorted causal explanation for the rise of the west” (1989: 20; 1996: 278). Causality is indeed central to the debate. It is key to the 500-year gap in historical timing in Abu-Lughod’s argument between, on the one hand, starting “early enough” to take into account the apogee of the network in the thirteenth century and its decline in the fourteenth, and on the other hand, the fact that Europeans conquered the Americas in the sixteenth century and only several centuries later came to dominate Asian societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The problem with Abu-Lughod’s first thesis begins with her assumption that the criteria by which Wallerstein defines a world-system are the same as those she herself employs.
Abu-Lughod’s principal criterion turns out to be long-distance trade, though she never makes this explicitly clear in her work, whereas Wallerstein’s main criterion is a division of labor. Both entail trade, but very different intensities of causality. The consequence of her failure to address this fundamental difference is that Abu-Lughod’s argument is un Rewarding. The debate could have been productive if Abu-Lughod addressed or attacked, rather than entirely overlooked, Wallerstein’s emphasis in The Modern World-System I (1974) on the difference of trade and causality associated with a division of labor in relation to defining a world-system. Abu-Lughod’s neglect of Wallerstein’s criteria, and her assumption that there is no difference in trade and causal relations in a division of labor and in long-distance or “global” trade, gives rise to her puzzlement as to why he “refuses to ‘dignify’ any pre-sixteenth century patterns of global trade by applying the term ‘world-system’ to them. Indeed, he defends reserving that term only for the modern world-system, with its capitalist structure” (Abu-Lughod 1993: 278). This claim is unfounded. Abu-Lughod repeats the mistaken idea that Wallerstein sees the modern world-system as the first world-system in at least two more distinct places in her text (Abu-Lughod 1989: 9; 1993: 279). In so doing, she misrepresents his argument, which is that many past world-systems existed, including within the area of the thirteenth-century trading network. However, the long-distance trade networks among them did not constitute a world-system and the modern world-system of the sixteenth century is merely the first capitalist world-system.

Abu-Lughod’s claims that the thirteenth-century trading network and the modern world-system are both world-systems rests on certain differences and similarities. One of the differences she notes (in agreement with Wallerstein) is the distinct capitalist nature of the modern world-system and that the thirteenth-century long-distance trading network was not a capitalist system, though it had nascent capitalist areas (Abu-Lughod 1996: 278). Unlike the modern world-system, the thirteenth-century network was, “organized on very different principles. Rather than a single hegemon, there were a number of coexisting ‘core’ powers…” (Abu-Lughod 1989: 364–65). By “‘core’ powers” Abu-Lughod uses the term “‘core’ powers” to refers to world-empires and world-economies. The absence of hierarchy among them is why, “this earlier world-system was organized in a very different way from the one over which Europe would ultimately exercise hegemony” (Abu-Lughod 1996: 278). The terms “world-empires and world-economies” are precisely those that Wallerstein uses in reference to two types of world-systems, not subsystems and core zones. For Wallerstein the lack of hierarchy shows a lack of integration, which logically follows from the long-distance trade relations among them. The language Abu-Lughod uses to describe the thirteenth-century trading network tends to support Wallerstein’s view. Further, Abu-Lughod acknowledges that the thirteenth-century system did not develop a division of labor as the sixteenth-century world-system did, at least eventually. According to Abu-Lughod: “Nor was the world [in the thirteenth century] the global village of today, sharing common consumer goals and assembly-line work in a vast international division of labor…” (Abu-Lughod 1989: 33).

To be sure, she goes on to argue that the modern world-system in the sixteenth century was about as integrated as the thirteenth-century network. That is true only in the sense that by using long-distance trade to define the modern world-system in the sixteenth century, she includes Asia. Wallerstein, using the criteria of a division of labor, includes only Europe and parts of the New World. Wallerstein refers to smaller and tightly integrated systems in both the thirteenth and sixteenth century; Abu-Lughod does not.

In describing the similarities, Abu-Lughod refers to similar scales and technologies of trade (1989: 10–11, 353–54) and how in her view, both systems are also uneven and socially similar (1989: 354). These similarities, she argues, indicate that, “Wallerstein tends to overemphasize the discontinuity between the new Eurocentered capitalist world-economy that began to come into being and the system of world-empires and world-economies that preceded it” (Abu-Lughod
1996: 278, italics added). But note the wording I have emphasized. As noted previously, Abu-Lughod describes world-empires and world-economies as contained within a larger system, as subsystems of a world-system. This is nonsensical in Wallerstein’s perspective since world-empires and world-economies are themselves world-systems. Abu-Lughod’s failure to debate Wallerstein on his own terms is both puzzling and misleading.

Abu-Lughod never counters Wallerstein’s claim that the thirteenth-century trade network did not entail a division of labor. Nor does she ever attack the most fundamental argument of his career, that from its beginning, the modern world-system did feature a division of labor. On the contrary, she agrees with this claim. She observes that in the earlier network, “the proportion of population and even production involved in international exchange constituted only a very small fraction of the total productivity of the societies” (Abu-Lughod 1993: 3). Regarding the European part of it, she notes that, “long-distance trade was not making a significant contribution to the internal economies [there]” (Abu-Lughod 1989: 13). Overall, “the subsystems in the thirteenth century were more self-sufficient than they are today and, therefore, less vitally dependent upon one another for common survival” (1989: 33). And yet, for Abu-Lughod, the lack of tight integration becomes the main reason to argue that the thirteenth-century network should be considered a “world-system”:

Since such production and exchange were relatively unimportant to the subsistence economies of all participating regions, I did not have to defend an unrealistic vision of a tightly entailed international system of interdependence. Clearly, this was not the case but it was also true in the sixteenth century. Thus, if it is possible to argue [as Wallerstein does] that a world-system began in that later century, it is equally plausible to acknowledge that it existed three hundred years earlier.

(Abu-Lughod 1993: 3)

Predictably, for Wallerstein, Abu-Lughod’s premise that the thirteenth-century network did not entail integrated interdependence is the very reason to reach the conclusion that it was not a world-system. This is why, based on Abu-Lughod’s own facts, Wallerstein’s description of the thirteenth-century trading network is more accurate than her own: “Abu-Lughod’s ‘world system’ represents a long-distance trading linkup, on a nonhierarchical basis, of a series of temporally coexistent world-systems, each of which was internally hierarchical” (Wallerstein, 1992: 130).

The essence of this debate is the importance in the different degrees of systemic causality associated with a division of labor and that associated with long-distance trade. Here too, Abu-Lughod’s descriptions support Wallerstein’s view. In order to explain the West’s rise, she firstly stresses how Europeans introduced in Asia new “rules of the game” of “short-term plunder rather than long-term exchange” in the sixteenth century, and how “Arab and Indian vessels proved no match for the Portuguese ‘men-of-war’ that appeared in their waters in the early 1500s” (1989: 19). However, she acknowledges that this new European approach in Asia did not result in European hegemony in Asia in the sixteenth century. She begins to concede that Portuguese and Spanish advances into Asian regions in the sixteenth century may not be so relevant to the “rise of the West” or the formation of the modern world-system. She goes on to recognize that the new European takeover of long-distance trade routes in Asia were not of comparable significance to the European conquest of entire societies in the New World (accomplished through the establishment of entirely new shipping routes). She explains:

What decisively transformed the shape of the ‘modern’ world-system was not so much the Portuguese takeover of the ‘old world’ but the Spanish incorporation of the ‘new
This geographic reorientation displaced the center of world gravity in a decisive manner.

(Abu-Lughod 1989: 363, emphasis added)

Europe’s conquest of the New World raises the fundamental question: what is the relevance of the thirteenth-century long-distance trading network if it had little to do with Europe’s conquest of the New World, which marked Europe’s rise? Abu-Lughod responds by changing her thesis: that Europe’s conquest of the Americas enabled Europe to become hegemonic over Asia several centuries later and not in the sixteenth century:

With respect to European development, it is important to recognize that it was not until several centuries later that the new globalized system incorporating the Americas yielded its full return and catapulted Europe to world hegemony. By that time, Eastern trade had revived, but under a new hegemonic system that was at first exercised by proxies (the state-supported European trading companies) but eventually by strong states themselves. But that is an entirely different story.

(Abu-Lughod 1989: 364)

It was an entirely different story indeed. According to Abu-Lughod herself, Europe’s power over Asia in later centuries derived not from Asia’s decline (a resulting power vacuum), nor from reconstructing long-distance trade routes dating to the thirteenth century. Given that Europe’s conquest of Asia occurred some five hundred years after the decline of the thirteenth-century network and Asian societies’ withdrawal from it, the relevance of the network and the “Fall of the East” for Europe’s rise to power in the sixteenth century is quite unconvincing.

The difference in Europe’s relations to the New World and to Asia in the sixteenth century relate directly to the differences in Wallerstein and Abu-Lughod’s definitions of a world-system. Because Abu-Lughod does not distinguish between the interactions and goods involved in long-distance trade and those involved in a division of labor, she has no explanation for the significant difference in Europe’s trade and power relations with the New World and with Asia. In Abu-Lughod’s view, both areas are equally part of the modern world-system in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries because the type of trade and associated relations are undistinguished. Unfortunately, Wallerstein does not rehash this theoretical-empirical issue with Abu-Lughod and the debate suffers for it. However, he does mention it in response to Frank, explaining that “the distinction between trade in ‘luxury’ goods and trade in ‘bulk’ goods or ‘necessities,’ … permits us to distinguish trade within a historical system (primarily in ‘necessities’) and trade between separate systems (primarily in ‘luxuries’)” (Wallerstein 1996: 294). Contrary to Abu-Lughod’s assumption regarding the size of the modern world-system in the sixteenth century, Wallerstein argues that:

we cannot simply include in it any part of the world with which ‘Europe’ traded … it would be prima facie hard to argue that either Monomotapa or Japan were part of the European world-economy at that time … [or] that Asian primary production was an integral part … of the European division of labor … [Thus,] Asia, or even Indian Ocean border regions, did not become part of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century. Asia was an external arena with which Europe traded, on somewhat unequal terms to be sure.

(Wallerstein 1974: 301, 332)

Abu-Lughod’s view that European dominance in Asia began well after the sixteenth century is quite consistent with Wallerstein’s own argument in The Modern World-System III, except that his
argument explains why this was the case, whereas hers does not. He describes how the Indian subcontinent remained part of the modern world-system’s external arena through long-distance trade until incorporation began in the mid-eighteenth century, at which point it became part of the division of labor at the same time that Europeans brought China into the system’s external arena and, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, into its division of labor (along with Japan it could be added) (Wallerstein 1989: 129, 168).

In other words, the basis of inclusion and exclusion of regions, of European incorporation vs. mere dominance in long-distance trade, is one of intense causality associated with the total conquest and destruction of societies that permits the establishment of a division of labor. This is in contrast to the much weaker causality associated with mere domination of long-distance trade that does not involve the conquest of societies. As Wallerstein explains:

To appreciate why we do not consider the Indian Ocean trading area to be part of the European world-economy despite the fact that it was so completely dominated by a European power, we must look successively at the meaning of this dominance for the Asian countries affected, its meaning for Europe and how it compares with those parts of the Americas under Iberian rule.

(Wallerstein 1974: 328)

How does it compare? On the one hand, in the sixteenth century, “Europe did not conquer Asia because she could not … and this military balance would only change with the Industrial Revolution” (1974: 332). By contrast, in the sixteenth century, “The Americas were easily conquered. Even the structured states, like the Aztecs and the Incas, were no match for European arms [and germs]. Asia was another matter altogether” (1974: 338). The difference in the power of the societies in the New World and in Asia, and secondarily their different distances from Europe, is what explains, as Wallerstein insightfully observes, the different capabilities of European powers in the two regions, and why Europe could incorporate the New World into its division of labor but not Asia, where it engaged primarily in long-distance trade: “It is striking how Iberian policy was roughly similar in both areas. For in the sixteenth century, Iberia establishes colonies in the Americas, but trading-posts in Asia” (1974: 335).

Yet both Wallerstein and Abu-Lughod trace, if inadequately, the dynamics of the sixteenth-century conquest of the Americas to the thirteenth century. As noted, Abu-Lughod points to Europe’s geographic reorientation toward the Atlantic and emphasizes that the dynamic behind it had little to do with the long-distance trading network: “Genoa’s move into the Atlantic was primarily motivated by changes that were occurring within the local European subsystem, rather than in the ‘world system,’ and was at first directed only toward Europe” (1989: 363). She also suggests that the “rules of the game” that she says decisively transformed the modern world-system in the sixteenth century and displaced the center of world gravity also originated in the thirteenth-century European world-economy: “In the Mediterranean, a perpetual state of naval warfare existed from the ninth century onward, and commercial ships, therefore, always traveled in military convoys. That was not true in the Indian Ocean” (1989: 275). Wallerstein had already pointed this out. Preceding the Spanish and Portuguese advances in the sixteenth century, “the technological superiority of the gunned ship … had been developed in Atlantic Europe in the two prior centuries” (Wallerstein 1974: 326, my emphasis).

Wallerstein’s arguments about those prior centuries indicate that Abu-Lughod’s claim that his analysis does not start early enough is only partially true. Like Abu-Lughod, he observes that, “From about 1150 to 1300, there was an expansion in Europe … an expansion at once
geographic, commercial, and demographic” (Wallerstein 1974: 37). This expansion was part cause and part consequence of the rise of the modern states in Europe, which he argues,

dates not from the sixteenth century but from the thirteenth century in Western Europe … It was at this period that not only were the boundary lines decided but, even more important, it was decided that there would be boundary lines. 
(Wallerstein 1974: 31–32)

Wallerstein also explains that the centralized bureaucracy, which formed the basis of the “great restorers of internal order in western Europe” in the fifteenth century following the Black Plague, was a process that:

had started already in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. With the cessation of the invasions, which had previously preoccupied and exhausted the princes, the growth of population, the rival of trade and hence the more abundant circulation of money, there was a basis for the taxation which could pay for salaried officials and troops. This was true not only in France, England, and Spain but in the principalities of Germany as well. 
(Wallerstein 1974: 29)

That is, the rise of the interstate system was tied to the conversion of domains and estates to capitalist agriculture and the rise of yeoman farmers. Both increasingly marketed their surpluses which provided taxes and fed into the creation of the town-country division of labor and the creation of two European world-economies. As Wallerstein explains: “In Europe in the late Middle Ages … there were at least two smaller world-economies, a medium-sized one based on the city-states of northern Italy and a smaller one based on the city-states of Flanders and northern Germany” (Wallerstein 1974: 37). Whereas the new states arose within the northern world-economy, it was in the South that the dynamics of overseas expansion originated. Well before Abu-Lughod, Wallerstein traced the Genoese reorientation to Iberia and the Atlantic—and Iberia to the Americas—to the dynamics of the southern world-economy:

The Genoese, the great rivals of the Venetians, decided early on to invest in Iberian commercial enterprise and to encourage their efforts at overseas expansion … K.M. Panikkar points to Genoa’s desire to capture the India trade from the thirteenth century on … once there, the Italians would proceed to play an initiating role in the Iberian colonization efforts because, by having come so early, ‘they were able to conquer the key positions of the Iberian Peninsula itself’.
(Wallerstein 1974: 49, n. 125, 50)

In fact, Wallerstein considers the rise of the modern world-system as an outcome of the linkage of the two thirteenth-century European world-economies:

I think it most fruitful to think of the sixteenth-century European world as being constructed out of the linkage of two formerly more separate systems, the Christian Mediterranean system centering on the Northern Italian cities and the Flanders-Hanseatic trade network of north and northwest Europe, and the attachment to this complex on the one hand of East Elbia, Poland, and some other areas of Eastern Europe, and on the other hand of the Atlantic islands and parts of the New World.
(Wallerstein 1974: 68)
If the strength of Wallerstein’s analysis (1974) is his reconstruction of the sixteenth-century division of labor that included Europe and parts of the Americas, the weakness lies in not detailing or following through with these thirteenth-century trajectories and instead focusing on the so-called “crisis of feudalism,” 1350–1450 as the turning point. That period now appears to be the collapse of the emergent capitalist world-economy and the long-distance trade network, while the crisis of feudalism is presented as an expansion-crisis rather than a collapse-crisis: the commercial revolution of the 950–1350 period, or what Wallerstein calls the new “classic feudalism.” In fact, he notes that, “For most previously ‘free’ laborers, this new system in fact involved a considerable increase in their exploitation, combined with a relative opportunity for some to improve their situation” (Wallerstein 1992: 583, italics added). In other words, the expansion temporarily strengthened some feudal nobility who made cash profits from selling surpluses generated with coerced labor. This is why Hibbert contends that, “Both fact and theory suggest that in earlier medieval times trade was by no means [an immediate] solvent of feudal society, but that it was a natural product of that society and that feudal rulers up to a point favoured its growth” (Hibbert 1953: 17). It is no paradox or contradiction that the new “classic feudalism” of the 950–1350 period was part of the commercial revolution, and vice-versa, and that it brought to an end, as Wallerstein explains, the older “manorial system, with its combination of slave labor on the demesne and ‘free’ laborers [that] collapsed by the end of the tenth century” (1992: 583).

In light of such developments, one can say that if the weakness of Abu-Lughod’s analysis is attributing a causality to the thirteenth-century long-distance trading network for the rise of “the West” that it did not have in the sixteenth century, the strength of her study is in revealing that the trading network factored significantly into the thirteenth-century European world-economy’s formation and expansion, and more importantly, that European world-economies seem to have already fused by 1350, if weakly. Her description of the Champagne Fairs, for example, reveals significant integration of northern and southern European capitalist activities and the conversion of aristocrats to regulators, protectors and direct participants (Abu-Lughod 1989: 58, 63–64). She sums up by citing Braudel:

Thus it was that the two major economic zones—the Low Countries and Italy—slowly and simultaneously came into being. And it was between these poles, these two potential ‘core zones,’ that the Champagne fairs had their day. Neither North nor South triumphed … in this early form of the European world-economy … [However,] all the international and above all most of the modern aspects of the Champagne fairs were controlled, on the spot or at a distance, by Italian merchants whose firms were often huge concerns.

(cited in Abu-Lughod 1989: 57, 69, italics added)

Regarding southern Europe, she explains how the leading Italian city-states dominated the most profitable activities across Europe:

[D]uring the latter part of the thirteenth century and, even more, in the early part of the fourteenth century, the port cities of Genoa and Venice expanded their reach to incorporate virtually every part of the developing European world-economy … Not only did they trade in all parts of Western Europe but they had made significant inroads into the Central Asian and Middle East–North African world-economies that continued to mediate the far Eastern trade.

(Abu-Lughod 1989: 122)

But taking all this into consideration suggests that if there was continuity between two systems, it was not, contra Abu-Lughod, between the thirteenth-century long-distance Eurasian trading
network and the sixteenth-century world-system, but between the thirteenth-century European world-economy and the sixteenth-century modern world-system. Although Wallerstein argues that nowhere prior to the sixteenth century did capitalist entrepreneurs survive countermeasures that would have permitted the transformation of a world-economy into a fully capitalist system, he acknowledges that “such a transformation seemed to be beginning … in the Mediterranean basin between 1150–1300” (1979: 142). It would seem that these entrepreneurs did survive and, following the 1350–1450 collapse, expanded that system on the basis of pre-existing dynamics. However, if Wallerstein doesn’t fully trace back the trajectories of the sixteenth century to the thirteenth, Abu-Lughod stops at 1350 without ever explaining exactly how Iberia’s military superiority and successful colonization of the New World in the sixteenth century developed out of the thirteenth-century commercial revolution.

Still, Abu-Lughod’s work poses a subtle challenge to the theoretical conception of world-systems as the largest scale unit of analysis in two ways. She demonstrates that the thirteenth-century European world-economy cannot be explained as entirely internal to itself, at least insofar as European involvement in long-distance trade both stimulated its formation and its collapse (with germs imported along with goods). In other words, if the Eurasian long-distance network reconstructed by Abu-Lughod was not a world-system, it nevertheless is a systemic network that is not accounted for in Wallerstein’s perspective. It emerged out of relatively separate world-systems. The interactions among the world-empires and world-economies did not give rise to the same degree of causal impact or integrative influence compared to the internal interactions defining them as world-empires and world-economies. This is why the world-empires and world-economies did not become, and ought not to be conceptualized as, “subsystems” contra Abu-Lughod, yet alone as a 5,000 year system as argued by Frank and Gills (1996), among others. If anything, this long-distance trade network constituted a “subsystem” of those world-empires and world-economies, for it had an epiphenomenal existence. It exhibited degrees of causality sufficient to be theoretically conceptualized as a type of systemic pattern, but not a world-system.

Beyond this, the rise of the network and those world-systems presupposed longer-run, larger-scale evolutions in the form of human social systems (see Diamond 1999; Johnson and Earle 2000; Sanderson 1995). In fact, Wallerstein’s response to the long-distance trade network is to locate it historically in the very long run, rather than deal with it theoretically. He expresses agreement that,

… world-empires entered into long-distance trade (often? regularly? this is still to be demonstrated) with each other. I agree too that these world-empires included in the trading network of the oikumene various zones that were not organized as ‘world-empires.’ I even agree that, as a consequence, there may have been some common economic rhythms between them.

(Wallerstein 1996: 293–94)

By situating such long-distance trading systems within the historical evolution and crowding of world-systems, he suggests that they also have an epiphenomenal nature. However, if the thirteenth-century long-distance network was the expression and medium of the “crowding together” [that] accounts in part for the outbreak of the malady that is capitalism” (Wallerstein 1996: 295), this idea conflicts with his earlier argument, that the governing ‘logics’ of mini-systems and world-systems “determine’ the largest part of sequential reality” (Wallerstein 1991: 244). It is less true when crowding reduces the degree of relative autonomy of such systems, or when a long-distance trade network becomes a regularized pattern that contributes to common rhythms among world-systems. Moreover, historical social systems are historical not only in having a limited
timespace existence, but also in the sense that their autocatalytic developments are part of the very long run, arrow-of-time, developments that date to the spread of humanity across the planet, and the rapid evolutions (plural) of historical social systems in different regions, the diffusions of cultures, and interactions among systems during the past 11,000 years (Diamond 1999; Johnson and Earle 2000; Sanderson 1999). In these senses, world-systems analysis becomes more historical by taking new historical evidence into account theoretically while revealing the empirical weaknesses of arguments that lump thousands of years of historical social system evolutions into a single systemic process.

References