



Cosmopolitan, Bridge-Builder and Missionary: Prof. Dietmar Rothermund, 1933–2020

Harald Fischer-Tiné

To cite this article: Harald Fischer-Tiné (2021): Cosmopolitan, Bridge-Builder and Missionary: Prof. Dietmar Rothermund, 1933–2020, South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, DOI: [10.1080/00856401.2021.1921338](https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2021.1921338)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2021.1921338>



Published online: 16 May 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Cosmopolitan, Bridge-Builder and Missionary: Prof. Dietmar Rothermund, 1933–2020

Harald Fischer-Tiné

Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

On 9 March 2020, Dietmar Rothermund, one of the leading historians of South Asia, passed away at the age of 87 at his residence near Heidelberg, Germany. He will be remembered by his friends, colleagues and students as a distinguished professor at the University of Heidelberg and longstanding executive director of the university's South Asia Institute. In addition, through countless interviews in the media and a number of non-academic publications targeted at a broad readership, he was known to a wider public in Germany as an expert on South Asia. On yet another level, Dietmar Rothermund served the cause of fostering interest in the Indian subcontinent and its history as a networker, institution builder and academic manager both in his native Germany and internationally.

A long and prolific career

Dietmar Rothermund was born on 20 January 1933, precisely at the juncture when Germany was about to enter the darkest phase of its history. He started his studies of history and philosophy in Marburg and Munich in the 1950s, during the dull, early post-War era, when the shadows of the Hitler regime were still looming large over most walks of German life—including academia—although very few people talked about it. Thus, for instance, the Nazi past of Rothermund's later mentor, the prominent social historian Werner Conze (1910–86), became a matter of public debate only in the 1990s, more than a decade after Conze's death.¹ It was from this constraining intellectual climate of the Adenauer era that Dietmar Rothermund escaped to the University of Pennsylvania on a Fulbright fellowship in 1956. While in Philadelphia, his interest in American history grew more intense, which led him to stay on and write a PhD thesis on the interplay between religion and politics in mid eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. After the publication of the book based on his thesis,² Rothermund seemed to be on track for a career as a specialist in US history. It was rather by coincidence that on his return to Germany in 1959, a stipend from the German Research

CONTACT Harald Fischer-Tiné ✉ harald.fischertine@gess.ethz.ch

1. Jan Eike Dunkhase, *Werner Conze: Ein deutscher Historiker im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).
2. Dietmar Rothermund, *The Layman's Progress: Religious and Political Experience in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1740–1770* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960).

Foundation (DFG) allowed him a protracted stay in India. Travelling budget-friendly on a cargo ship, Rothermund eventually reached Bombay (now Mumbai) in mid January 1960.³ Right from the outset, he was so impressed by the rich and diverse cultural environment of South Asia that he decided to recalibrate his research focus and henceforth concentrate on the history of the Indian subcontinent. During the three years he subsequently spent in India, Rothermund worked on his second book, which was simultaneously his *Habilitation* thesis, an important requirement to become eligible for a professorship in German-speaking academia. His research offered a novel perspective on the Indian national movement and early post-colonial nation-building by analysing the ‘formation of the political will’ in India from the beginning of the twentieth century to the Nehruvian era. When collecting materials for his study, the young German historian had the enviable advantage of being able to meet many of the protagonists of the anti-colonial independence movement in person. Thus, Rothermund conducted interviews with Jawaharlal Nehru, Zakir Husain, Jayaprakash Narayan, C. Rajagopalachari and E.M.S. Namboodiripad, to name a few.⁴ It was during this first three-year sojourn in India that he laid the foundation for an extensive academic contact network that would continue to grow constantly over the next four decades. Rothermund’s connections to India also acquired a very personal side early on: both his first and second wives were from India and his three children all carry Indian names.

When Rothermund eventually returned to Germany in 1963, very favourable developments had taken place. In 1960, the University of Heidelberg, under the aegis of Werner Conze and the theologian Wilhelm Hahn, had decided to found a new and ambitious interdisciplinary institute.⁵ It was modelled on American area studies centres, with a view to exploring social, cultural, economic and geographical aspects of South Asia.⁶ The South Asia Institute (SAI) was officially inaugurated in 1962. Although it turned out that only eight of the proposed fourteen professorships could eventually be financed,⁷ the good news for the India-returned historian was that history was among the disciplines the founders considered indispensable. Rothermund was immediately offered a lecturer position by his mentor Conze, who also served as a founding director of the new institute. After he had completed all the formal requirements for his *Habilitation*, he was appointed chair for the History of South Asia at the SAI in 1968. Rothermund held this position until his retirement in 2001, and he served as the executive director of the SAI several times (for fifteen years altogether) over this period. Indeed, such was the charisma and international visibility of the cosmopolitan

3. Dietmar Rothermund, *5 Mal Indien* (München: Piper, 1979), p. 9.

4. Dietmar Rothermund, *Die politische Willensbildung in Indien, 1900–1960* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1965), p. x; and Rothermund, *5 Mal Indien*, pp. 253–74. An exhaustive account of his encounters with no less than 133 prominent Indian politicians and intellectuals is provided in one of his last publications: Dietmar Rothermund, *My Encounters in India* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2020).

5. Werner Conze, ‘Geleitwort’, in Dietmar Rothermund, *Die politische Willensbildung in Indien, 1900–1960* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1965) p. vii f. See also Dunkhase, *Werner Conze*, p. 84.

6. Christian Wagner, ‘Die Bedeutung Südasiens in der Forschungs- und Universitätslandschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Bericht über eine Bestandsaufnahme’, in *Internationales Asienforum*, Vol. 32, nos. 3–4 (2001), pp. 275–84 [279].

7. Marcus Nüsser, ‘The South Asia Institute (SAI)’, in P. Meusburger and T. Schuch (eds), *Wissenschaftsatlas of Heidelberg University: Spatio-Temporal Relations of Academic Knowledge Production* (Knittlingen: Bibliotheca Palatina, 2012), pp. 230–3.

Heidelberg historian that in the 1980s and 1990s, Indian visitors would regularly refer to the SAI as ‘Dietmar’s institute’.⁸ Although the envisaged inter- and transdisciplinary co-operation did not always work without friction during the institute’s pioneering years, the SAI developed rapidly under Rothermund’s dynamic leadership.⁹ When he retired in 2001, Heidelberg’s South Asia Institute was acknowledged as the premier centre for South Asian Studies in Germany,¹⁰ and undeniably perceived as one of the leading institutions in the field in the world at large.

Intellectual trajectories and the promotion of young talent

Rothermund’s scholarly interests were unusually wide-ranging and multifaceted. Although he is perhaps best known in the international community of historians of South Asia for his contributions to the economic history of India, his research output is much broader. After his ground-breaking history of the Indian freedom movement and another short monograph on the history of Indo-Soviet relations¹¹—neither of which received the attention they deserved due to the fact that they were published in German—he made English his main language for strictly academic publications from the 1970s onwards. Simultaneously, he continued to cater to a growing German audience with a constant output of more popular books and articles on contemporary South Asia as well as on various aspects of the subcontinent’s history. The research monographs that built his international reputation were published from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. His analysis of agrarian relations in colonial India, published in 1978,¹² was praised by leading international scholars as ‘reflecting imagination and offering insight’.¹³ There were, however, a few critical voices, both among the more area studies-oriented scholars at the SAI as well as in the international community of South Asianists. These critics pointed to the fact that Rothermund’s work was based exclusively on English-language sources and thus privileged a government-centred interpretation while ignoring local ‘subaltern’ perspectives.¹⁴ Yet most colleagues accepted Rothermund’s restriction to sources in European languages was the price to pay for the extraordinary breadth of his work—chronologically as well as geographically and thematically.

The wide span of Rothermund’s interest and expertise became particularly palpable with his next work on Asian trade and European expansion in eighteenth-century Asia.¹⁵ The topic that would subsequently capture his attention from the early 1980s

8. Gita Dharampal, ‘Professor Dr Dietmar Rothermund: A Giant in the Domain of German South Asian History’, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 5, Vol. 30, no. 3 (2020), pp. 513–5 [515].

9. Dietmar Rothermund, *25 Jahre Südasien-Institut der Universität Heidelberg, 1962–1987* (Heidelberg: Südasien-Institut, 1987).

10. Carmen Brandt and Kirsten Hackenbroch, ‘Die deutsche Südasienforschung im Wandel der Zeit’, in *ASIEN*, Vol. 144 (2017), pp. 36–57 [48].

11. Dietmar Rothermund, *Indien und die Sowjetunion* (Tübingen: Böhlau, 1968).

12. Dietmar Rothermund, *Government, Landlord and Peasant in India: Agrarian Relations under British Rule (1865–1935)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1978).

13. Anand A. Yang, ‘Review of Dietmar Rothermund, *Government, Landlord and Peasant in India*’, in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, no. 1 (1980), pp. 179–81 [181]; and Pierre Baral, ‘Dietmar Rothermund, *Government, Landlord and Peasant in India*—note bibliographique’, in *Études Rurales*, Vol. 83 (1981), p. 176 f.

14. See, for instance, Michelle McAlpin, ‘Review of Dietmar Rothermund, *Government, Landlord and Peasant in India*’, in *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 39, no. 3 (1980), p. 798 f.

15. Dietmar Rothermund, *Asian Trade and European Expansion in the Age of Mercantilism* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1981). This book built on an earlier German-language publication: Dietmar Rothermund, *Europa und*

through the 1990s—only interrupted to write the obligatory Gandhi biography¹⁶—was the Great Depression that shook the globe in the 1930s. Naturally, Rothermund specifically scrutinised the ways in which it impacted on South Asia and its inhabitants. His engagement with this novel perspective on a well-researched phenomenon produced two remarkable monographs. The first was a volume on India in the Great Depression.¹⁷ It was hailed by reviewers for its stimulating combination of political and economic history approaches.¹⁸ The second publication was a comparative study of the effects of the depression in various regions of the Global South, with an emphasis on peasants and other non-elite groups.¹⁹ Containing chapters on China, South-East Asia and Latin America, the short book clearly transcended his usual geographical focus on the Indian subcontinent and foreshadowed its author's growing interest in transnational and global history. Amongst many other factors, this broadening of perspectives subsequently led to the publication of a handbook on the global impact of decolonisation and an edited volume on the legacies of colonialism in post-imperial nations—the latter probably being the most ambitious and most original title in Rothermund's copious post-retirement *oeuvre*.²⁰ In the last two decades of his remarkable writing career, which spanned more than sixty years, Dietmar Rothermund's unique South Asia expertise was increasingly put at the service of the wider fields of global history and what was called *außereuropäische Geschichte* ('extra-European history') in German academia.²¹

Apart from being a prolific writer of research monographs and articles, Rothermund was also a master of writing popular survey works. Apart from a comprehensive multi-authored India handbook,²² his greatest legacy in this respect is undoubtedly his tremendously successful *Geschichte Indiens (A History of India)*, co-authored with Hermann Kulke, a leading specialist on ancient and medieval India. Published originally in German in 1982, this magisterial one-volume account of subcontinental history from the Harappa culture to the latest elections was translated into English in 1986.

Asien im Zeitalter des Merkantilismus (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978). A thoroughly revised and expanded edition of the English-language version was later published as Dietmar Rothermund, *Violent Traders: Europeans in Asia in the Age of Mercantilism* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2014).

16. Dietmar Rothermund, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Essay in Political Biography* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991). This was an abridged version of one of Rothermund's best-selling books in German: *Mahatma Gandhi: Der Revolutionär der Gewaltlosigkeit: Eine politische Biographie* (München: Beck, 1997).
17. Dietmar Rothermund, *India in the Great Depression, 1929–1939* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1992).
18. See, for instance, G. Balachandran, 'Review of Dietmar Rothermund, *India in the Great Depression*', in *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (1994), p. 404 f.
19. Dietmar Rothermund, *The Global Impact of the Great Depression, 1929–1939* (London: Routledge, 1996). The final product was preceded by an earlier German-language version as well as by an edited volume: Dietmar Rothermund, *Die Welt in der Weltwirtschaftskrise* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 1993); and Dietmar Rothermund (ed.), *Die Peripherie in der Weltwirtschaftskrise: Afrika Asien und Lateinamerika, 1929–1939* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1983).
20. Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonisation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); and Dietmar Rothermund (ed.), *Memories of Post-Imperial Nations: The Aftermath of Decolonization (1945–2013)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
21. See, for instance, Dietmar Rothermund, 'Globalgeschichte, Weltgeschichte, Universalgeschichte', in *Beiträge zur Historischen Sozialkunde* (Sondernummer 1998), pp. 4–10; Dietmar Rothermund, 'Globalgeschichte und Geschichte der Globalisierung', in Margarete Grandner et al. (eds), *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte* (Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2005), pp. 12–35; Dietmar Rothermund, *Historische Horizonte: Indien, Europa und die Welt. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2015); and Dietmar Rothermund, *Aspects of Indian and Global History: A Collection of Essays* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016).
22. Dietmar Rothermund (ed.), *Indien: Kultur, Geschichte, Politik, Wirtschaft, Umwelt: Ein Handbuch* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1995).

Both versions of the book were very successful from the outset and have seen several expanded editions since then.²³ Over the years, *Geschichte Indiens* has become a canonical standard work and it has also been translated into Italian, Turkish, Romanian and Chinese.²⁴ The outstanding success of this volume has overshadowed a number of other fine survey works, at least three of which also deserve special mention. First published in 1988, Rothermund's detailed and yet readable account, *An Economic History of India*, clearly benefitted from his long engagement with this particular historiographical subfield,²⁵ while his *Rise of an Asian Giant* catered to the need for an up-to-date and accessible volume that grappled with the history of India since Independence.²⁶ Similarly themed, but more geared toward the Indian textbook market, his *Contemporary India*, published in 2013, has meanwhile also proven tremendously valuable for undergraduate teaching outside the Indian subcontinent.²⁷

Apart from these volumes in English, Rothermund authored at least a dozen books in German. His German publications in particular reveal his remarkable capacity to write about complex historical constellations and developments as well as about theoretical aspects of historiography in simple, straightforward and accessible prose.²⁸ For a professor of history of his generation—and especially for one teaching in one of Germany's oldest and most prestigious universities—it was quite unusual to adopt such a reader-friendly style and refrain from any ostentatious display of one's *Gelehrsamkeit* (erudition).

It seems plausible that it was precisely this quality that also made Rothermund immensely popular with the Heidelberg student crowd. As one of the very few places in Germany where South Asian history could be studied in its own right (and not as an appendix to the philologically-oriented curricula of the dozen or so Indology chairs that still existed in the country until the 2000s), Rothermund's courses naturally attracted many students specifically interested in the past of the Indian subcontinent. However, over the years, myriads of 'regular' history students in Heidelberg were also drawn to his well-structured (and often entertaining) lectures. I remember well that in Heidelberg during the late 1980s and early 1990s, my fellow students and I stood in awe of Dietmar Rothermund as one of the very few professors who had an aura of cosmopolitanism and grandeur about him. Back then, it was far from usual in this somewhat provincial university town in southern Germany that lectures started a few minutes late because the professor had just flown in from an international conference in Delhi or Singapore, or that a seminar session had to end thirty minutes early because he had to rush to a meeting with the ambassador of Pakistan. For us freshmen, the final proof of his 'man of the world' status consisted of the fact that Rothermund

23. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens, von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (München: C.H. Beck, 2018); and Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

24. Partha S. Ghosh, 'Greeting India's German Friend on his 85th Geburtstag', *The Tribune* (Chandigarh) (20 Jan. 2018) [<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/nation/greeting-india-s-german-friend-on-his-85th-geburtstag-531372>, accessed 25 April 2021].

25. Dietmar Rothermund, *An Economic History of India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993). The book was based on an earlier German version: Dietmar Rothermund, *Indiens wirtschaftliche Entwicklung: Von der Kolonialherrschaft bis zur Gegenwart* (Paderborn: UTB, 1985).

26. Dietmar Rothermund, *India: The Rise of an Asian Giant* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

27. Dietmar Rothermund, *Contemporary India: Political, Economic and Social Developments since 1947* (Delhi/Chennai: Pearson Education, 2013).

28. Dietmar Rothermund, *Geschichte als Prozess und Aussage* (München: Oldenbourg, 1994).

(who did not possess a driving licence) used to commute exclusively by taxi between his residence in the suburb of Dossenheim and his lectures and seminar courses in downtown Heidelberg. According to the oral evidence we could gather, he had become quite a celebrity among Heidelberg's taxi drivers.

It was not, however, because of such external glamour, but rather due to Rothermund's international renown, the stupendous breadth of his knowledge and his generous personality that over the decades, dozens of PhD students flocked to Heidelberg to write their theses under his supervision. During the course of his career, the SAI ordinarius directed no less than 44 PhD theses (the author of this obituary had the privilege of being number 43). It is therefore hardly an exaggeration to say that Dietmar Rothermund was responsible almost singlehandedly for the training of an entire generation of German historians focusing on South Asia. Predictably enough, quite a few of his former disciples currently hold history chairs in several countries. From the 1980s onwards, more and more South Asian PhD candidates also found their way to Heidelberg's SAI in spite of the considerable bureaucratic obstacles that existed. Before 2001, the regulations of the history department at Heidelberg required students to submit their PhD thesis either in German or in Latin—English was not acceptable. As a result, Rothermund had to apply (in quite a number of cases) specifically for an exemption from this general rule for his international PhD students. Occasionally, it even proved necessary to enter into argument on the issue with some of his more conservative-minded colleagues in the Faculty of History.²⁹

International PhD students aside, the chair of South Asian History at Heidelberg, and the SAI more generally, also became attractive destinations for postdoctoral researchers from the region and from all over the world. Financed by Humboldt fellowships, DAAD exchange programmes³⁰ and similar schemes, they arrived in increasing numbers from the 1980s and their presence gradually transformed the intellectual atmosphere at 'Dietmar's institute'.³¹

Spreading the gospel: Networking, association work and outreach

Apart from being an outstanding researcher, a charismatic teacher and mentor of younger scholars, Dietmar Rothermund will certainly also be remembered as a gifted and very effective academic institution-builder, networker and disseminator. Over half a century, he put his considerable managerial and diplomatic skills at the service of Indian history and South Asian Studies at large. Besides, as we have already seen, he was also committed to promoting the cause of global and extra-European history during the final decades of his exceptionally long and productive career. What is at once more remarkable, given the times and contexts he was operating in, is the fact that this engagement was not only expressed in the German academic environment but also at the European and international levels.

29. Andreas Eckert and Dietmar Rothermund, 'Indien und der Rest der Welt: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Außereuropäischen Geschichte in Deutschland', in *Neue Politische Literatur*, Vol. 48, no. 1 (2003), pp. 5–13 [12].

30. DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) is the name of the German academic exchange service.

31. C.S. Mohanavelu, 'German Indology—From Roth to Rothermund as I Observed It', in Georg Berkemer *et al.* (eds), *Explorations in the History of Modern South Asia (Essays in Honour of Dietmar Rothermund)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), pp. 1–8 [3].

One of Rothermund's lasting achievements within the German context was that he managed to move South Asian Studies out of the academic ivory tower and considerably enhance its public visibility. In 1990, he initiated and (co-)organised the annual *Südasiengespräche* (South Asia Talks) in Heidelberg, bringing German politicians and business leaders in touch with international experts on India and its neighbouring countries.³² Against the backdrop of a liberalising Indian economy in the 1990s, the series stirred quite some interest and was continued until his retirement in 2001. Around the same time, he was also a member of an Indo-German consultancy group established with a view to intensifying economic contacts between the two countries.³³ For decades, Rothermund was frequently contacted as a regional expert when Indian politicians visited Germany, and he would occasionally accompany German foreign ministers and other state emissaries on their South Asian tours. This kind of *service publique* and his relentless work on the dissemination of knowledge on South Asia was acknowledged in 2011 by the German government with the Federal Cross of Merit, one of the highest civil distinctions the Federal Republic of Germany has to offer.

Notably, his engagement with South Asian Studies was never constrained by a national optic. So it is not surprising that he was also one of the 'founding fathers' of what is now the European Association of South Asian Studies (EASAS).³⁴ It was after an international symposium in Bad Herrenalb (Germany), organised by Rothermund in 1966, that the idea was born to organise a biennial Conference on Modern South Asia in Europe. The first of these meetings took place at Cambridge in 1968, and by the third conference in 1972, European and international South Asianists congregated at the SAI in Heidelberg. This successful conference format eventually gave birth to the EASAS for which the eminent Heidelberg historian served as chairman from 1997 to 2008 and as an honorary president from 2010 to 2020. It is beyond doubt that the activities of the EASAS and especially the European Conferences on South Asian Studies put Europe firmly on the map of South Asianists around the world. The event, which will hold its 26th iteration in Vienna in July 2021, has not only grown constantly over the past half century, but it has also become ever more international. The latest conferences drew a considerable number of scholars from South Asia itself, as well as from North America and Australasia. This internationalisation was certainly in the spirit of Dietmar Rothermund. In this context, it is noteworthy that he had established an Australian connection fairly early on in his career. He spent some time at the Australian National University in the early 1970s and was instrumental in providing additional funds from Heidelberg to launch *South Asia*—the very journal publishing this obituary.

Rothermund's growing interest in transnational and global approaches to history writing has been mentioned several times. Unsurprisingly, he left an imprint in this field, too. Whilst not a few historians of South Asia have a tendency to concentrate their energy entirely on 'their' region, Rothermund displayed a genuine interest in other world regions as well as in comparative and interactional approaches from early on, and he cultivated

32. See, for instance, Dietmar Rothermund (ed.), *Erste Heidelberger Südasiens Gespräche* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1990).

33. Tilman Frasch, 'Nachruf: Prof. Dr. em. Dietmar Rothermund (1933–2020)', in *Dhau: Jahrbuch für außereuropäische Geschichte*, Vol. 5 (2020), pp. 191–4 [193].

34. Georg Berkemer et al., 'Preface', in Georg Berkemer et al. (eds), *Explorations in the History of Modern South Asia (Essays in Honour of Dietmar Rothermund)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), pp. ix–xi [ix ff].

intense contacts with other ‘area historians’. To be sure, there was also a strategic aspect to these alliances: because historians working on world regions other than Europe or North America were completely marginalised in the German academe before the beginning of the new millennium, it was essential for them to join forces. Therefore, under Rothermund’s aegis, an alliance of German historians interested in ‘extra-European history’ was initiated in 1980, with a view to lobby against the Eurocentrism prevailing in the Association of German Historians in Germany.³⁵ This circle prospered in the following years. As part of what Rothermund later described as his ‘internal mission work’,³⁶ the body launched its own publication outlet in 1991: *Periplus*, a yearbook in German devoted entirely to colonial history and the history of world regions outside the West.³⁷ Shortly thereafter, Rothermund co-ordinated a huge research project on the cultural interaction between European and non-European societies in the Age of Expansion, financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). More than half a dozen scholars who earned their stripes as doctoral or postdoctoral researchers while this umbrella project was running (1992–98) currently hold chairs in Middle Eastern, African, Chinese or Global History.³⁸

Given this pioneering role in de-provincialising historiography in Germany, it does not come as a surprise that Rothermund became an important point of reference for a younger generation of historians who were unhappy about the dominant spatial frameworks structuring historical research in Germany, and who advocated new transnational approaches as well as a stronger emphasis on regions of the Global South. Rothermund thus deservedly acquired the role of an elder statesman and godfather of sorts of global history once the new historiographical subfield had established itself in his home country from the late 1990s onwards. By the same token, and probably closer to the heart of the readers of this journal, Dietmar Rothermund’s cosmopolitan outlook, his boundary-crossing expertise and his exceptional *ouverture d’esprit* could also serve as an inspiration for working on the acceleration of a process that has only just begun, namely the ‘de-provincialisation’ and globalisation of South Asian history.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Harald Fischer-Tiné
Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, Swiss Federal Institute of
Technology Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

 harald.fischertine@gess.ethz.ch

35. Andreas Eckert, ‘Innere Mission: Dietmar Rothermund (1933–1920) und die Geschichte der Weltregionen in Deutschland’, in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 46, no. 4 (2020), pp. 750–61.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 751.

37. *Periplus* still exists, but was renamed in 2015. It currently appears annually as *Dhau: Jahrbuch für außereuropäische Geschichte*.

38. See the list of contributors to Dietmar Rothermund (ed.), *Aneignung und Selbstbehauptung: Antworten auf die Europäische Expansion* (München: Oldenbourg, 1999).