

Interconnection and Separation: Medieval Perspectives on the Modern Problem of the “Global Middle Ages”

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Abstract

This article argues that “global” is both too vague and too misleading a term to help conceptualize the Middle Ages. It is used for too many diverse phenomena, and criticism of the term by modernists has not been taken on board. Instead of borrowing and distorting this concept to make it fit, we should look at the nature and range of both interconnection and separation in our period, and create concepts based on our source-material. The medieval evidence shows that through the narrow channels, through the segmented and broken-up chains of communication, knowledge and objects can still flow. Superficial similarities to modern connectivity (for example trade) may hide real divergence, such as the motivation for the spice trade, which was related to searching for earthly paradise. Remoteness and separation were seen and described by medieval authors, but in reality both separation and connection were more ambiguous phenomena. Limited interconnection between areas of the globe did not dampen universal aspirations for the spread of Christianity. Finally, the mechanism of declared Christian religious superiority contrasted with the way in which Christianity gobbled up other traditions, ingesting and transforming them in its own image, while refusing to acknowledge this incorporation. This creophagous attitude characterized Christian relations to Judaism, Arabic science and pagan philosophy: strong interconnection coexisted with explicitly stated separateness.

Keywords

Global Middle Ages – connection – separation – Christianity – relations to non-Christians

The global Middle Ages is everywhere; it is tempting to use the term “global” to look at connections between different parts of the world and rid ourselves of European bias, it is appealing as an antidote to nationalist approaches, and increasingly as a corrective to right-wing appropriations and fantasies of a racially pure medieval Europe. But “global” is a concept that has been divorced from the context which gave rise to it in the first place, and it is used in many different ways, none of which is conceptually helpful to understand real medieval processes. I propose that interconnection and separation serve us better to think about medieval experiences.

The notion of global history comes from our globalized world. There is nothing surprising about that: historians have always been inspired by contemporary realities in choosing topics and conceptual frameworks for analysis. As Marc Bloch said, “Le bon historien, lui, ressemble à l’ogre de la légende. Là où il flaire la chair humaine, il sait que là est son gibier.”¹

“Global,” however, moved away from “globalization” more strictly understood as the economic process of integration with its attendant social, political and cultural aspects, although the definition of globalization itself is debated. According to the International Monetary Fund, globalization refers to the “increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows. The term sometimes also refers to the movement of people (labor) and knowledge (technology) across international borders.”² While acknowledging broader cultural, political, and environmental dimensions, the focus is squarely on the economy. Sociologists and historians, on the other hand, define globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away”;³ or “processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society”;⁴ or, as a final example, “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or inter-regional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.”⁵

1 Marc Bloch, *Apologie Pour L'histoire ou Métier d'Historien* (Paris, 1993), 83.

2 “Globalization: Threat or Opportunity?” last modified on January 2002, last accessed 22 February, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2000/041200to.htm#II>.

3 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, 1990), 64.

4 Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King, eds., *Globalization, Knowledge and Society* (London, 1990), 8.

5 David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: politics, economics and culture* (Stanford, 1999), 16. For a discussion on debates concerning the meaning of globalization, see 1–28.

In contrast, global history is a looser form of non-national methodology. David Armitage has distinguished four types of non-national approaches, that all aim to transcend the histories of states and nations: international history (inter-state relations, diplomacy, migration, cultural exchange), transnational history (processes, movements, institutions that overflow territorial boundaries, such as epidemics, or religions), comparative history (comparison may or may not be based on actual historical connection of the objects studied), and the study of globalization, including histories of objects that have become universalized and links between different sub-global arenas such as the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans.⁶ Others, however, more loosely include mobility, mixing, networks, as well as non-Eurocentric work as part of global history. Thus historians' interest turned towards the shaping of historical events – that used to be understood in a local context – by processes of movement and exchange, calling them global connections. “Connection was in; networks were hot: global history would show the latticework of exchanges and encounters.”⁷ Those most attuned to current trends have pointed out that global conflict as well as global warming and other looming environmental disasters are the truly global issues.⁸

The global came to be challenged as a novelty associated with contemporary society, and the proposed starting point of the globalization process moved ever earlier: the discovery of America or the industrial revolution; the self-consciously supra-national Republic of Letters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the circulation of intellectual ideas or early modern empires; and the Middle Ages. In some schemes, the medieval becomes the first phase of globalization. According to Janet Abu-Lughod, the second half of the thirteenth century witnessed the formation of a global system: never before had so many regions of the Old World come in contact with one another.⁹ They began to be integrated in a system of exchange; the apogee of this “first global system” was the end of the thirteenth and first decades of the fourteenth century, by which time even Europe and China established direct contact.

Yet the pre-modern period produced merely an extended trade network, with goods and services exchanged more or less based on equality, rather than an integrated and hegemonic division of labour, even while it lasted: therefore

6 David Armitage, “The International Turn in Intellectual History,” in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (New York and Oxford, 2014), 232–252.

7 Jeremy Adelman, “What is Global History Now?” *Aeon* (2017) <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>, last accessed 24 February, 2019.

8 Nick Bostrom and Milan Cirkovic, eds., *Global Catastrophic Risks* (Oxford, 2008).

9 Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, 1250–1350 A.D.* (New York and Oxford, 1989).

its designation as a world system has been rightly criticized.¹⁰ Abu-Lughod herself acknowledged that even in the period between 1250–1350, Europe and China had decidedly limited contact with each other. This connection meant a significant increase in trade, and united many developing areas, but there was no single hegemonic power directing the interaction. Moreover, in this Western European – Chinese narrow network of exchange, manufactured goods were central, with all units producing surplus, although raw silk imported from China to Italy also started to be processed, then sold to the rest of Europe. Finally, economic links also allowed cultural contact. None of this, however, had profound transformative power, nor did these links result in the integration of a world economy. Whatever we prefer to call it, the system collapsed after the mid-fourteenth century with the weakening of Mongol power.

Others also see a first phase of globalization historically, although they envision it more as characterized by gradual growth, rather than by the existence of an early, separate world system. Some scholars suggest globalization developed in several phases, the first of which was medieval, although the precise periodization varies. For example, the phases in one scheme stretch from the beginnings up to the late fourteenth century, from the late fourteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, and since the mid-nineteenth century; in another scheme, the phases are pre-modern globalization; early modern globalization (1500–1850), modern globalization (1850–1945); and contemporary globalization (after 1945).¹¹ Thus large historical empires such as that of the Mongols, or the spread of religions is included in the first phase of globalization. A recent critic of Abu-Lughod suggested that while “movement across different parts of the globe” was enabled in many different ways from trade to warfare, “the movement itself conveyed different things, in different ways, and with

10 Immanuel Wallerstein, “Review of Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, 1250–1350 A.D.*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 1 (1992): 128–131. Similar point: Immanuel Wallerstein, “World System Versus World-Systems: A Critique,” *Critique of Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1991): 189–194 at 191 (arguing against Frank rather than Abu-Lughod). On debates about the world system: Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, eds., *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (London and New York, 1993).

11 Ulrich Pfister, “Globalisierung/ Globalization,” <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/globalization#AnOverviewofthePhasesoftheHistoryofGlobalization>; Held McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, *Global Transformations*. Cf. mostly on modern globalization, Adam McKeown, “Periodizing Globalization,” *History Workshop Journal* 63, no. 1 (2007): 218–230, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbm008>. Diego Olstein, “‘Proto-globalization’ and ‘Proto-glocalizations’ in the Middle Millennium,” in *Cambridge World History. Volume 5: Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conquest, 500–1500 CE.*, ed. Benjamin Kedar and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge, 2015), 665–684.

differing effects in the short and the long term.”¹² Accordingly, it is not trade, but the circulation of non-commodity assets such as books, ideas, technologies, ritual practices, and religious tenets across political boundaries in the medieval period that created lasting change, giving a foretaste of the current globalized world.

But mostly the medieval global turn wishes to globalize the study of medieval society, rather than see it as a first phase in the (multi-)millennial story of integration. This is, for example, the explicit contention of Peter Frankopan in the first issue of the new *Journal of Medieval Worlds*, who argues against the Eurocentric focus of medieval studies.¹³ The medieval global turn, however, has happened at a time when the historical profession is beginning to question the global. With unerring sense, we tend to get on the bandwagon just as others are getting off it; similarly, we made frontiers our own when Americanists started to call it the “f-word.”¹⁴

Modernists studying non-European history have drawn attention to “lumpiness,” that is, uneven globalization, and to the limits of globalization, pointing out that processes that cross borders are not necessarily universal, that the long-distance networks and social fields they create are not on a global scale.¹⁵ Such re-evaluation suggests we should be more careful about “a concept that seems to be about space, but which ends up glossing over the mechanisms and limitations of spatial relationships.”¹⁶ Others are rightly critical of the practical impact of doing global history, which has contributed to the decline of multilingualism: “Global history would not be possible without the globalisation of the English language. ... It is one of the paradoxes of global history that the drive to overcome Eurocentrism contributed to the Anglicising of intellectual lives around the world.”¹⁷ We are asked to consider the limits to the usefulness of the global turn: “Perhaps the ‘global turn,’ for all of its insights and instruction, has hit a point of diminishing returns. The fact that contemporary

12 Glen Dudbridge, “Reworking the World System Paradigm,” *Past & Present* 238, Supplement 13 (2018): 297–316, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gty024>, quotation at 306.

13 Peter Frankopan, “Why We Need to Think about the Global Middle Ages,” *Journal of Medieval Worlds*, 1, no. 1 (2019): 5–10.

14 Patricia N. Limerick, “The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1994), 67–102 at 72.

15 Frederick Cooper, “What is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian’s Perspective,” *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 189–213, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/100.399.189>.

16 Cooper, “What is the Concept of Globalization Good for?” 190.

17 Adelman, “What is Global History Now?” Similarly, for medieval studies, Simon Gaunt, “Philology and the Global Middle Ages: British Library Royal MS 20 D 1,” *Medioevo Romanzo* 40 (2016), 27–47.

technology, economics, and politics have made us so acutely aware of global connections in our own day does not mean that past events are always best dealt with by setting them within a similarly vast context.”¹⁸

That we medievalists overwhelmingly borrow concepts from historians of other periods and try to adapt them to our field of study is perhaps not surprising, since our discipline has not even been able to divest itself of the demeaning name first invented as a Renaissance rejection of the whole period. There is also a strong impetus to make ourselves “relevant” for the present by borrowing concepts and frameworks from modernists against a backdrop where medieval history is used a synonym of the useless, with the associated funding cuts.¹⁹ While the motivation is understandable, there are more productive ways to engage with the issue of relevance. I suggest that instead of exporting that albatross of a term, “Middle Ages,” to the entire globe, which alone raises significant problems, we would do better to find ways of analyzing specifically medieval mechanisms of connection and separation, because various medieval phenomena, including networks, intellectual connectivity and the fusion of diverse elements, are not best investigated under the global label.

Global, in fact, is used by medieval historians to denote a wide range of very different aspects of both historical development and methodological approaches. Thus the coexistence of long-distance and localized relationships has been called the creative tension between global and local.²⁰ Studying the transmission of literary motifs and skills over long distances; analyzing patterns of travel or trade; doing comparative history; and studying non-European history or replacing the Eurocentric focus of medieval history have all been

18 David A. Bell, “This is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network,” *The New Republic*, October 26, 2013 <https://newrepublic.com/article/114709/world-connecting-reviewed-historians-overuse-network-metaphor>, last accessed 20 February 2019.

19 On attacks against medieval history, see Chris Jones, Conor Costick, Klaus Oschema, “Why Should We Care About the Middle Ages? Putting the Case for the Relevance of Studying Medieval Europe,” in *Making the Medieval Relevant: How Medieval Studies Contribute to Our Understanding of the Past*, ed. Chris Jones, Conor Costick, Klaus Oschema. *Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung* 6 (Berlin and Boston, 2020), 1–29 at 22; arguing for the loss of medieval history’s ideological function in society: Julien Demade, “The Contemporary Delegitimization of (Medieval) History – and of the Traditional University Curriculum as a Whole,” in *Making the Medieval Relevant*, ed. Jones, Costick, Oschema, 135–150. In the UK, the Chair of the Commons select committee on education singled out medieval history as useless, that should not receive governmental financial support: Peter Wilby, “Robert Halfon: ‘The Tory Party Should Change its Name to the Workers’ Party.’” *The Guardian*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/apr/17/conservatives-workers-party-robert-halfon>.

20 Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, “Defining the Global Middle Ages,” *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015): 106–117 at 107; DOI 10.1553/medievalworlds_no1_2015106.

called the global Middle Ages.²¹ Even when authors explicitly consider what “global” would contribute to the study of the medieval period, the answer remains equally diverse; thus in one volume, “global” variously means a totalizing cosmology, long-distance connections, and comparative history, including the comparison of differences.²² In another example, connectivity, especially the mobility of objects, medieval people’s own understanding about the globe through T-O maps and exclusionary stereotypes, as well as the study of extra-European areas come under the “global Middle Ages” label, with the aim to dismantle Eurocentrism in the analysis of world-making strategies.²³ Such diversity in itself shows that the “global” label is not particularly helpful in providing an analytic focus. “Global” even hides differences within the medieval period; while many historians consider that the period after 1000 witnessed more forms of interconnection, a less intensive intellectual connectivity is no impediment to applying “global” to the early medieval period.²⁴

Connectivity, especially long-distance connections crop up very often in definitions of the global Middle Ages, underpinning claims of a connected world before modernity. It is true, architectural forms, know-how, ideas, and individuals travelled even very long distances in the medieval period. For example, the Frankish settlers of the crusader states created a pointed-arch, rib-vaulted Gothic choir in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in the 1140s.²⁵ The game of chess, originating in India, arrived in Europe via the Muslim world.²⁶ Thirteenth-century merchants and missionaries travelled to the ends

21 Some examples: Kim M. Phillips, “Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages,” *History Compass* 4 (March 2016): 81–92 <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12301>; the journals *The Medieval Globe*; *Medieval Worlds*; the series Transcultural research: Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a global context; Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, eds., *The Global Middle Ages, Past & Present* 238, Supplement 13 (2018), https://academic.oup.com/past/issue/238/suppl_13?browseBy=volume; Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2021).

22 Holmes and Standen, *The Global Middle Ages*.

23 Bryan C. Keene, ed., *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World Through Illuminated Manuscripts* (Los Angeles, 2019).

24 Erik Hermans, ed., *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages* (Leeds, 2020).

25 Jaroslav Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1098–1187* (Cambridge and New York, 1995), 177–245, see 213. Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art: The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1099–1291* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2008), 39. For an overview, Jaroslav Folda, “Art in the Latin East, 1098–1291,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford and New York, 1997), 141–159 and Denys Pringle, “Architecture in the Latin East, 1098–1571,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. Riley-Smith, 160–183.

26 Luc Bourgeois, “Introduction et Mutations du Jeu d’Échecs en Occident (x^e–xiii^e siècles),” in *Échecs et Trictrac Fabrication et Usages des Jeux de Table au Moyen Âge: Catalogue*

of the then-known world.²⁷ The name of 'Antara b. Shaddād, a sixth-century pre-Islamic African-Arab hero, diffused through Arabic romance literature, was transmitted to a middle English Charlemagne romance, the Sultan of Babylon, where it appears as the word shouted by the Saracen army.²⁸ The life of Siddhartha Gautama, usually known as the Buddha, was transformed into medieval Christian legend: the originally fifth- and sixth-century Sanskrit and Pali tales ended up as the story of the Christian saints Barlaam and Josaphat. The tale traveled from India (with the exact stages of transmission to Europe debated) through Central Asia via an eighth-century Manichean version, it was translated into Arabic and from that into Georgian in the tenth century, thence to Greek in the early eleventh century, and finally into Latin. Barlaam and Josaphat were celebrated as saints in both Orthodox and Catholic Christianity, and numerous vernacular versions of the story circulated within Europe.²⁹ In 1446, the anonymous editor of a Venetian version of Marco Polo signaled that Marco's account of the Buddha "is like the life of Saint Iosafat."³⁰ My contention, however, is that "global" does not help us to understand the processes behind such phenomena: the decontextualization, and changes in meaning and function. Thus, for example, the apparent rib vaults in the Hospitaller fortress in Acre are, in fact, mere decoration, to satisfy the European taste, but were not functional weight-bearing parts of the structure; and the game of chess was invested with Christian moral values.

de l'Exposition Présentée du 23 juin au 18 Novembre 2012 au Musée du Château de Mayenne, ed. Mathieu Grandet and Jean-François Goret (Paris, 2012), 23–32.

- 27 See, for example, Jean Richard, *La Papauté et les Missions d'Orient au Moyen Âge (xiii^e–xv^e siècles)* (Rome, 1977) Collection de l'École Française de Rome 33; Annalia Marchisio, ed., *Odorico da Pordenone, Relatio de mirabilibus orientalium Tatarorum* (Florence, 2016).
- 28 Geraldine Heng, "A Global Middle Ages," in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. Marion Turner (Chichester – Malden, MA – Oxford, 2013), 413–429, see 416–417.
- 29 Marlène Kanaan, "Le Roman de Barlaam et Josaphat: Transmutation d'un Conte Bouddhique en Légende Hagiographique," *Parole de l'Orient* 30 (2005): 199–210; research questioning traditional ideas on relationship of Arabic and Georgian version: Marion Uhlig, Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, ed., *D'Orient en Occident: les Recueils de Fables Enchâssées Avant les Mille et une Nuits de Galland (Barlaam et Josaphat, Calila et Dimna, Disciplina Clericalis, Roman des Sept Sages)* (Turnhout, 2014); on various vernacular and Hebrew versions in Europe, see Constanza Cordoni and Matthias Meyer, eds., *Barlaam und Josaphat: neue Perspektiven auf ein europäisches Phänomen* (Berlin – Boston, 2015). On even the material base on which the text was transmitted being different in each stage: Christian Høgel, "The Authority of Translators: Vendors, Manufacturers, and Materiality in the Transfer of Barlaam and Josaphat along the Silk Road," *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds* 8, no. 3 (2012): 221–241.
- 30 Heng, "A Global Middle Ages," 426.

Not only stories and texts travelled along the Silk Road, so did merchandise. Trade routes connected China to western Europe from antiquity. Yet Valerie Hansen showed that Silk Road trade in the early medieval period was not a single integrated continuous road, but a chain of markets engaged in modest transactions over relatively short distances.³¹ Neither this, nor the later combination of maritime and caravan trade, were global, but can rather be seen as transregional processes; not merely because this trade did not literally cover the whole globe, but also because the mechanism was very different from the deep integration of contemporary globalized trade: high-value luxury goods transmitted by merchants in the former case, versus a click of the mouse on Amazon, and “made in China” goods in stores around the world, in the latter.

“Global” is now also used for comparative history, that is, history that does not necessarily focus on connections, but compares either Europe to some other part of the globe, or non-European areas to each other. Adding “global” to “comparative” in these instances does not sharpen our analytic focus. Such comparatism in itself is neither new, nor linked to the global turn. Already Marc Bloch drew attention to similarities between the societies of Europe and Japan.³² Of course similarities, such as the existence of a warrior class or monastic communities, are worth investigating, as are the differences hidden behind seeming equivalences. Such comparative topics indeed have been studied: the status of religious minorities in Muslim and in Christian lands; warrior elites in Japan and Europe; and the entrenchment of learned elites in medieval China and Europe.³³ While comparative history is of great merit, I would suggest “global” is a misnomer for such comparisons that look at specific phenomena in two disconnected locations, however distant from each other. Moreover, if we want to engage in such comparative research, “global” should

31 Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (Oxford, 2015).

32 Marc Bloch, *La Société Féodale* (first published 1939–40) (Paris, 1982), digitized version <https://vdocuments.site/blochsocietefeodale.html>, 418–419.

33 The website of the project “Relmin: Le Statut Légal des Minorités Religieuses dans l'Espace Euro-Méditerranéen (v^e–xv^e Siècles),” <http://www.cn-telma.fr/relmin/index/?langue=eng>; the series Religion and Law in Medieval Christian and Muslim Societies, general ed. John V. Tolan, Brepols, since 2013. Stephen R. Morillo, “Cultures of Death: Warrior Suicide in Medieval Europe and Japan,” *The Medieval History Journal* 4 (2001): 241–257; Stephen R. Morillo, “Milites, Knights and Samurai: Military Terminology, Comparative History, and the Problem of Translation,” in *The Normans and Their Adversaries at War: Essays in Memory of C. Warren Hollister*, ed. Richard Philip Abels and Bernard S. Bachrach (Woodbridge, 2001), 167–184, and on similar sixteenth-century changes, Stephen Morillo, “Guns and Government: A Comparative Study of Europe and Japan,” *Journal of World History* 6, no. 1 (1995): 75–106; Robert I. Moore, “The First Great Divergence?” *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015): 16–24, DOI 10.1553/medievalworlds_no1_2015s16.

not be used as dispensation from the need to read primary sources (as well as relevant scholarship) in the original.

There has also been a move in the name of the global Middle Ages to analyze Africa, the Americas, to integrate non-Eurasian lands into the study of the Middle Ages. One can raise the objection that somebody working on the pre-Columbian history of the Americas is no more global than someone working on thirteenth-century France. A more serious problem is that neither chronology, nor the name, both taken from European periodization, match historical processes elsewhere, so why should we label such an approach “global Middle Ages”? The issue of periodization and naming is often acknowledged, but then set aside.³⁴ In what way do we advance knowledge by exporting “medieval” to non-European areas? By imposing our – in themselves flawed – categories, are we not, in fact, carrying out a form of intellectual colonization? I do not mean to imply that scholars should not do early non-European history, nor that they should not aim for inclusivity; indeed “global” claims often spring from an entirely respectable desire to create more inclusive meta-narratives. Yet the outcome of such efforts have already been criticized: “It is hard not to conclude that global history is another Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues. Sort of like the wider world economy.”³⁵

Global history’s main merit according to many of its practitioners is that it supersedes the national framework (which includes international history as well, since its essential building blocks are still nations) for history writing, and instead, focuses on connections. It is an antidote against the “methodological nationalism” of historians.³⁶ While such an antidote is indeed welcome in a world that yet again is increasingly poisoned by nationalism, global history is not the only one to highlight non-national (and, from a medieval perspective, pre-national) frameworks, against the dominant national model, as local and regional histories, comparative history, and the analysis of non-national trends

34 For example, Holmes and Standen, “Defining the Global Middle Ages,” 110–112, and further in Catherine Holmes, Naomi Standen, “Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages,” *Past & Present*, 238, Supplement 13, November 2018, Pages 1–44, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gty030>; Heng, *Global Middle Ages*, 18–32.

35 Adelman, “What is Global History Now?” On periodization, naming, and the use of English, see also Thomas Ertl and Klaus Oschema, “Les études médiévales après le tournant global,” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 76, no. 4 (2021): 787–801; English version, “Medieval Studies after the Global Turn,” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, First View, 1–14, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/ahsse.2022.11>.

36 Armitage, “The International Turn in Intellectual History,” 232.

serve the same goal. Whether the label “global” adds to the efficacy of such an endeavour is questionable.

One can also study the environment, the non-human, but in that case, why privilege the Middle Ages specifically? Closest to being a global phenomenon in our period, the plague ravaged populations in the Caucasus, Asia Minor, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe, and recent research is extending its scope to China and India.³⁷ Yet the intercontinental spread of pandemic disease was not novel, but had already existed in Late Antiquity.³⁸

Medieval global history also entails focusing on mixing, hybridity, and the integration of different elements, that sometimes involved connections over long distances. Such intermingling indeed took place, for example in the crusader states. Thus the capitals in the crusader church at Nazareth have been characterized as reflecting a mixing of Romanesque style, Byzantine iconography, and Islamic *muqarnas*.³⁹ Queen Melisende (r. 1131, died 1161) of Jerusalem’s Psalter is another famous example of the mixing of eastern and western elements characteristic of Crusader art. It includes illustrations by artists who variously drew on Romanesque and Byzantine art, but also combined western iconography with Byzantinizing style, “Anglo-Saxon decorated initials combined ... with Islamic geometric sophistication,” a calendar whose text includes many English saints’ names and resembles the type produced in Winchester, and the ivory covers with a Byzantine-attired prince engaged in works of mercy, a western iconographical concept.⁴⁰

37 Monica H. Green, “Taking the Pandemic Seriously: Making the Black Death Global,” in *Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death*, ed. Monica H. Green, *The Medieval Globe* 1 (2014): 27–61.

38 Michael McCormick, “Rats, Communications, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 1 (2003): 1–25; Kyle Harper, “Pandemics and Passages to Late Antiquity: Rethinking the Plague of c. 249–70 Described by Cyprian,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 28 (2015): 223–260.

39 Jaroslav Folda, *The Nazareth Capitals and the Crusader Shrine of the Annunciation* (University Park, Pa.–London, 1986); Folda, *Crusader Art: The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1099–1291*, 60–65.

40 Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1098–1187*, 137–159; Folda, *Crusader Art: The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1099–1291*, 32–36 (quotation from 33); Jaroslav Folda, “Melisende of Jerusalem: Queen and Patron of Art and Architecture in the Crusader Kingdom,” in *Visualising the Middle Ages 7: Reassessing the Roles of Women as Makers of Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. Therese Martin, 2 vols (Leiden – Boston, 2012), 1: 429–477. See also “Ivory Plaque from the Lower Binding, of the Six Vices and Six Works of Charity, illustrating Matthew 25:35–36, from the Melisende Psalter, Eastern Mediterranean (Jerusalem), 1131–1143, Egerton MS 1139,” last accessed 22 February 2019, <https://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/.a/6a00d8341c464853ef01901eb57cac970b-popup>. On the history of the cover, see also Janet Backhouse, “The Case of Queen Melisende’s

There's also the well-known mid-twelfth century tombstone from Sicily for Anna, mother of Grisandus (or Grisanto), a royal priest under Roger II. The hexagon-shaped stone may have been the end of a sarcophagus. It is inscribed in four languages: Latin, Greek, Judeo-Arabic (Arabic written in Hebrew letters), and Arabic, with a Greek cross in the middle, within a circle, accompanied by the letters IC XC NI KA (Jesus Christ conquers). The inscription talks about Anna, who died in 1148, was buried in the great jami (mosque) that was turned into the cathedral of Palermo, and whose body was transferred from there in 1149 by her son to a specially-built chapel named after St Anna in the Church of San Michele Arcangelo. Not only are four languages used: the date is also given according to the respective calendars, 1149 in Latin, 4909 in Judeo-Arabic, 6657 in Greek, 544 in Arabic.⁴¹

One could continue to list such combination of elements of diverse origin. Sicilian Norman rulers borrowed administrative practices from Fatimid Egypt.⁴² Islamic architectural elements were adopted and used in new Iberian Christian buildings; Iberian Christians also integrated a large vocabulary from Arabic to designate officials, taxes, and a range of inherited and adopted practices.⁴³ While such examples could easily fit within the "global" framework proposed by definitions of the global Middle Ages that are based on connectivity, I would suggest we detract from, rather than enhance, our understanding of these phenomena by labelling them "global." They are actually the outcome of very specific local interactions, enabled by the historical processes of conquest and migration.

Large-scale migration also existed in the Middle Ages, both due to military conquest and for economic reasons. Yet in this respect as well, "global" would imply similarities to current realities that are misleading. As an example, "economic migrants" were sought after, and Central European rulers invited

Psalter: An Historical Investigation," in *Tributes to Jonathan J. G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, Art and Architecture*, ed. Susan L'Engle and Gerald B. Guest (London and Turnhout, 2006), 457–70.

41 Dirk Booms and Peter Higgs, ed., *Sicily: Culture and Conquest* British Museum exhibition Catalogue (London, 2016), 220–221.

42 Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Diwan* (Cambridge, 2002).

43 Edgar C. Knowlton, "Spanish Words from Arabic," *Linguist* 22 (1960): 97–100; María del Carmen Lacarra Ducay, ed., *Arte mudéjar en Aragón, León, Castilla, Extremadura y Andalucía: Actas del X Curso de la Cátedra « Goya » (marzo de 2005)*, Institución Fernando el Católico (C. S. I. C.) (Zaragoza, 2006); Miguel Cortés Arrese, "Andalusí y Mudejar," in *Arte en Castilla-La Mancha*, ed. Miguel Cortés Arrese (Toledo: Añil, 2017): 177–202.

western settlers to cultivate the land and to bring their expertise in mining, and gave them significant privileges in writing.⁴⁴

The well-known text from the Admonitions of King Stephen I (r. 997–1038) of Hungary explicitly extolled the usefulness of immigrants: “For as guests arrive from different parts and provinces, so they bring with them different tongues and customs, different examples and weapons, and all this adorns the royal court while deterring foreigners from overweening contempt. For a country of one single language and one set of customs is weak and vulnerable. Therefore, I enjoin on you, my son, to nurture them [newcomers] benevolently and to hold them in high esteem so that they should stay with you rather than dwell elsewhere.”⁴⁵ The Admonitions refer to the elite at court. The fourteenth-century Hungarian Chronicle more broadly lists “Bohemians, Poles, Greeks, Spaniards, Ishmaelites or Saracens, Pechenegs, Armenians, Saxons, Thuringians, those from Meissen and the Rhine, Cumans and Latins” among the immigrant settlers in Hungary.⁴⁶

Yet there is good evidence from Hungary of hostility that erupted in violence when locals were confronted by substantial mass migration. A significant number of Cumans, who were refugees from the Mongols as the latter took control of the steppe, entered Hungary prior to the Mongol invasion of 1241–42, replacing the Cumans as the dominant power. Tension ran high, as nobles resented the new rivals for royal favor.⁴⁷ As the news of the Mongol approach to Hungary itself broke, Cumans were accused of being spies for the invading Mongols. The Cuman leader was killed, a contemporary chronicler

44 Nora Berend, ed. *The Expansion of Central Europe in the Middle Ages* The Expansion of Latin Europe, 1000–1500, vol. 5 (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2012), Part 1. The question of German Expansion and colonization in Central Europe.

45 *Libellus de institutione morum*, ed. Iosephus Balogh, in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, ed. Emericus Szentpétery, 2 vols. (Budapest, 1938, reprint 1999), 2: 611–627 at 625. “Sicut enim ex diversis partibus et provinciis veniunt hospites, ita diversas linguas et consuetudines, diversaque documenta et arma secum ducunt, que omnia regna [variant: regiam] ornant et magnificant aulam et perterritant exterorum arrogantiam. Nam unius lingue uniusque moris regnum inbecille et fragile est. Proptereo iubeo te fili mi, ut bona voluntate illos nutrias, et honeste teneas, ut tecum libentius degant, quam alicubi habitent.”

46 *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, ed. Alexander Domanovszky, *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, 2 vols (Budapest, 1937, reprint 1999), 1: 217–505 at 303. “Bohemi, Poloni, Greci, Spani, Hismahelite seu Saraceni, Bessi, Armeni, Saxones, Turingi, Misnenses et Renenses, Cumani, Latini.”

47 On Cumans in Hungary: András Pálóczi Horváth, *Pechenegs, Cumans, Iasians: Steppe Peoples in Medieval Hungary* (Budapest, 1989), 39–119; Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and ‘Pagans’ in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000–c. 1300* (Cambridge, 2001).

describing the lynch-mob demanding “moriatur!” (he should die).⁴⁸ His severed head was thrown out the window into the crowd.

On the surface, we can detect similarities to the global refugee crisis of our own days. A large number of refugees with very different customs and ways of living entering, leading to short-term problems and violence. Yet we must look beyond the surface to significant differences. No idea (or practice) existed of a common framework to deal with refugees: they were admitted to Hungary because the ruler sought to make use of their military skills against external as well as internal enemies. The entry of the Cumans is not best understood as an instance of global history; rather, in the matrix of royal power versus elites defending their privileges, which also triggered xenophobia and violence. As medievalists with hindsight, we may also be able to offer something to modernists: the possibility to analyze processes over the *longue durée*. Unlike the fate of contemporary refugees, we do know what happened long-term to the Cumans. After the end of the Mongol invasion, the king invited them back, and over the next centuries, Cumans integrated into Hungary, converting, intermarrying, and becoming part of the local population. Integration led to a reversal of attitudes, a pride in being Cuman, to the claim that the Cumans had always been Hungarian, and to the inhabitants of a particular area of Hungary identifying as “Cumans” even though they were not descendants of the thirteenth-century Cuman settlers.⁴⁹

Networks, mobility, interconnection existed in the medieval world, and some people travelled very long distances. But this was far from a globalized world: a typical lord in Normandy would not be affected by what happened in Latin America. For every Marco Polo, we have countless people who never set foot outside their village. Many parts of the globe had no connection, indeed, no awareness of each other. More importantly, even at the height of connections between Europe and Asia, when Europeans were able to travel to China, the contact this brought about could not be further from that characteristic of our globalized age of mass travel and technology. As historians, we should be alert to the need to distinguish phenomena that are vastly different in scale and impact in different periods; our vocabulary should reflect such differences.

48 Rogerius, *Epistola in miserabile carmen super destructione regni Hungarie per Tartaros facta*, ed. János M. Bak and Martyn Rady, in *Anonymus and Master Roger Central European Medieval Texts 5* (Budapest and New York, 2010), 132–227 at 158, 172.

49 Nora Berend, “Cuman Integration in Hungary,” in *Nomads in the Sedentary World*, ed. André Wink and Anatoly Khazanov (London, 2001), 103–127; and “Forging the Cuman Law, Forging an Identity,” in *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medievalist Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-century Europe*, 2, ed. János M. Bak, Patrick J. Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 109–128.

Can we truly claim the term “global” for the endeavors of medieval missionaries, who, although they indeed traveled even to the ends of the known world, had precious little impact there?⁵⁰ Do we not in fact blunt our analytic ability by blurring the distinctions between medieval and contemporary connectedness by applying the “global” label? Consider for example the Franciscan Giovanni da Montecorvino (1247–1328), who became the first archbishop of Khanbalig (Beijing) in 1307. He was in China from 1293/94, and in his letter from 1305 reported thus:

I made my way to Cathay, the realm of the Emperor of the Tartars who is called the Great Khan. ... I, indeed, was alone in this pilgrimage without confession for eleven years, until Brother Arnold, a German of the province of Cologne, came to me last year. I have built a Church in the city of Khanbalig, where the king has his chief residence. And this I completed six years ago; and I also made a bell-tower there, and put three bells in it. I have also baptized there, ... about six thousand persons. ... Also I have bought, one after another, forty boys, the sons of pagans, of the age of between seven and eleven years, who so far knew no religion. And I have baptized them and taught them to read Latin, and our ritual; and I have written for them thirty Psalters with Hymnaries and two Breviaries, with which eleven boys now know our office and attend services and take their weekly turn of duty as in a convent, whether I am present or not. ... I strike the bells at all the hours, and with the congregation of babes and sucklings I perform divine service. But we sing by ear, because we have no service-book with the notes. ...

If I had had also two or three comrades to aid me, perhaps the Emperor the Khan too would have been baptized. I ask for such brethren to come, if any are willing to come. ... As for the road, I tell you that the road through the land of Toctai, Emperor of the Northern Tartars, is the shorter and safer, so that they will be able to come with the envoys in less than five or six months. But the other road is very long and most dangerous, ... with two sea voyages. Because the first way has not been safe for a long time on account of wars, it is consequently twelve years since I have received any news of the Roman Court and of our Order and the state of the West.⁵¹

50 Religious mission is listed as one of the “global topics” in Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, “Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages,” in *The Global Middle Ages*, ed. Holmes and Standen, 1.

51 English translation with a few changes after Arthur C. Moule, “Documents Relating to the Mission of the Minor Friars to China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1914): 533–599 at 576–581, with Latin text, 546–551, and

Should we really apply the term global to Giovanni da Montecorvino, more or less single-handedly trying to convert China to Christianity? We must consider the nature of medieval connection underpinning his mission: a few lonely figures toiling to convert the population of China; the long and dangerous voyage to get there; the interconnectedness being so sparse that many years could pass with no news. Indeed, when friars were sent to join Giovanni, many never reached their destination. This is a very far cry indeed from “global” in any meaningful sense. No wonder that by the sixteenth century, when the Jesuits reached China and started their missionary activity, all traces of the Franciscan mission had been wiped out.

If we turn to economics, a comparative example will illuminate the difference between even the most interconnected system of medieval production, and contemporary globalization. As Bart Lambert and Jan Dumolyn showed, a commodity chain straddling different continents existed already prior to 1500.⁵² It was not yet a world system in its extent, but in so far as it existed, it had some of the characteristics of the sixteenth-century world economy,

a second letter from Friar John: Latin text, 551–557, English translation 581–585. Variants of the Latin texts Arthur C. Moule, “The Minor Friars in China,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1921) 83–115. “Et ego ulterius procedens perveni in Kathay regnum Imperatoris Tartarorum, qui dicitur magnus Cham. [...] Ego vero solus in hac peregrinatione fui sine confessione annis undecim, donec venit ad me frater Arnoldus Alamannus de provincia Colonie, nunc est annus secundus. Unam ecclesiam edificavi in civitate Cambaliech, ubi est precipua residentia regis, quam ante sex annos complevi, ubi etiam feci campanile et ibi tres campanas posui. Battizavi etiam ibidem ut existimo usque hodie, circa sex millia personarum. [...] Item emi successive XL pueros, filios paganorum etatis intra VII et XI annorum, qui nullam adhuc cognoscebant legem et battizavi eos et informavi eos licteris latinis et ritu nostro, et scripsi pro eis psalteria cum ymnariis xxx et duo breviaria, ex quibus XI pueri iam sciunt officium nostrum. Et tenent chorum et ebdomadas sicut in conventu, sive sim presens sive non. Et plures ex eis scribunt psalteria et alia opportuna. [...] Campanas ad omnes horas pulso et cum conventu infantium et lactentium divinum officium facio. Tamen secundum usum cantamus quia notatum officium non habemus. [...] Si habuissem etiam duos vel tres socios coadjutores meos forte Imperator Chaam fuisset battizatus. Rogo ut tales fratres veniant, si venire aliqui volunt [...]. De via notifico quod per terram Cothay Imperatoris aquilonarium Tartarorum est via brevior et securior, ita quod cum nunciis intra v vel vi menses poterunt pervenire; via autem alia est longissima et periculosissima, habens duas navigationes [...] Quia prima via secura non fuit a multo tempore propter guerras, ideo sunt XII anni quod de Curia romana et de nostro Ordine et statu Occidentis non suscepi nova.” Anastase van den Wyngaert, O.F.M. *Jean de Mont Corvin O.F.M., premier évêque de Khanbaliq (Pe-king), 1247–1328* (Lille, 1924), with Latin ed. of letters 47–56 at 48–51. See also Karl-Ernst Lupprian, *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu islamischen und mongolischen Herrschern im 13. Jahrhundert anhand ihres Briefwechsels* Studi e Testi 291 (Città del Vaticano, 1981), 80–81.

- 52 Jan Dumolyn and Bart Lambert, “A Chemical Compound in a Commodity Chain: The Production, Distribution and Industrial Use of Alum in the Mediterranean and the Textile

since one stage of the commodity chain was dependent on another, creating a hegemony. North European luxury textile production became dependent on a far-distant place for raw material: “rock alum” from Asia Minor. Good quality natural alum was found in few places and was the necessary raw material for the alum that was used as a mordant in the production of high-quality woolen cloth: cloth was immersed in an alum-tartar bath, the alum adhered to the fiber, and this fixed the dye. North European textile production of high quality textiles was focused in the Low Countries: in Ghent alone, 38,000 people were employed in the textile sector by the mid-fourteenth century, and the Low Countries produced hundreds of thousands of pieces of cloth annually. Those who had control over alum sites gained a hegemonic position: Genoese merchants imported rock alum from Asia Minor, and some families established control over both its production and distribution. This system brought together economic actors across different political jurisdictions and different continents. It created an integrated division of labor, until around the middle of the fifteenth century alum was discovered in the papal states and different commodity chains developed, with the Medici gaining an important role in the alum trade.

The case of the commodity chain based on alum was exceptional, due to the strong, inflexible demand and limited supply. Yet even this phenomenon, the closest to “global” in the period, was a far cry from economic globalization today. Parts of the globe are not merely connected by free trade, but capital is invested across the globe, and banking and industry became multinational. For example, western European, American, and Asian states invest in central and eastern Europe, and 87% of investment in the central European banking system comes from outside the region,⁵³ while China seeks to build a fast

Centers of the Low Countries (Thirteenth–Sixteenth Centuries),” *Journal of Early Modern History* 22 (2018): 238–258.

- 53 On foreign direct investment: Nicole Lindstrom and Dóra Piroska, “The Politics of Privatization and Europeanization in Europe’s Periphery,” *Competition and Change* 11, no. 2 (June 2007): 117–135, see 119; Roberto Basile, Davide Castellani and Antonello Zanfei, “Location Choices of Multinational Firms in Europe: the Role of National Boundaries and EU Policy,” last accessed 15 February 2019, <https://ideas.repec.org/p/wiw/wiwsa/ersa04p37.html>; András Bethlendi, “Foreign Direct Investment in the Banking Sector,” *Development and Finance* 5, no. 1 (2007): 12. Stephany Griffith-Jones, “The Growth of Multinational Banking, the Euro-currency Market and Their Effects on Developing Countries,” *Journal of Development Studies*, 16, no. 2 (January 1980): 204–223; on banks and industry: Geoffrey Jones and Harm G. Schröter, ed. *The Rise of Multinationals in Continental Europe* (Aldershot, UK, 1993).

train line between Piraeus and Budapest.⁵⁴ Industrial production is globalized: Airbus is a good example.⁵⁵ Wings, fuselage, and other sections of any model are produced over many sites in Germany, France, Spain, and the UK and then assembled. From rivets and bolts, to seats and engines, an A380 is made up of about four million individual parts produced by 1,500 companies from 30 countries around the world. No medieval product came even close. Modern globalization creates real limitations regarding autonomous economic policies and standards. Even those positing a first, medieval, stage of globalization emphasize the qualitative difference between this medieval phase and the period following World War II, with the arrival of global integration.

I suggest that we can only call the medieval the first global period by stretching “global” into a uselessly blurry category to make it fit; economically, clearly, we will never compete with the truly global. But even if we focus on interaction and long-distance trade or the flow of ideas, what do we have to offer that is so new, so qualitatively different compared to Antiquity? It would be hard to claim that either the Mongol empire or the medieval Silk Road trade was significantly different from what was possible under Rome.

To discover what was truly characteristic of connections in our period, we need to find a framework other than “global.” Paul Freedman’s work for example demonstrated that what is truly specific in the medieval craving for spices is not that Europeans managed to import spices from far-away places, even if demand drove innovations to make it possible to arrive at the source of production, but the motivation that caused that craving in the first place. There was only the vaguest understanding of where India, the great source and entrepôt of spice, was located, and no knowledge at all until the fourteenth century about other lands where spices grew, such as Java, Sumatra, or the Moluccas, yet the desire of European consumers for spices was strong enough to draw precious aromatic commodities from distant and unknown places; it fuelled attempts to find the lands of origin and take over control of their trade. Instead of being a sign of globalization, however, the medieval desire for spices

54 Wade Shepard, “Another Silk Road Fiasco? China’s Belgrade to Budapest High-Speed Rail Line is Probed by Brussels,” *Forbes*, February 25, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2017/02/25/another-silk-road-fiasco-chinas-belgrade-to-budapest-high-speed-rail-line-is-probed-by-brussels/#7744d2a33c00>, last accessed 22 February 2019.

55 “Production: Building Aircraft on Time and at Top Quality,” Airbus <https://www.airbus.com/en/products-services/commercial-aircraft/the-life-cycle-of-an-aircraft/production>; “Four Million Parts, 30 Countries: How an Airbus A380 Comes Together,” CNN Travel January 24, 2018 <https://www.wingborn.com/how-an-airbus-a380-comes-together/>, last accessed 22 February 2019. See also Wayne Sandholtz, *High-Tech Europe. The Politics of International Cooperation* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), 99–103.

was tied to the yearning to catch at least a faint whiff of the otherworldly: it was fuelled by the fantasy that they came from the foothills of Paradise.⁵⁶

The various phenomena deemed “global” in analyses of the Middle Ages are clearly entirely different from those involved in processes of contemporary globalization based on the movement of capital and investment; I would argue that even the flow of ideas, people, and symbols which did happen in the medieval period followed different mechanisms from their modern global counterparts. Not simply because such medieval movements were more restricted geographically; but also because without the economic and communication-technology basis that undergirds contemporary globalization – it is enough to think about McDonaldization or the ubiquity of Madonna – there are fundamental differences in the ways in which medieval flow worked: the travel of a very small segment of the population and the passage of stories and knowledge through multiple translations, piece-meal, over centuries. Finally, entirely different triggers existed for the medieval pursuit of the far away.

The globe, of course, was present: nearly all medieval scholars conceived of the earth as a globe. Yet even the medieval globe differed from ours.⁵⁷ The simplest, most common T-O Map, the form of which was inherited from antiquity, was divided into three parts, with Asia twice the size of Europe and Africa. This was quickly amalgamated with Christian understandings of creation and history, and thus the Middle Ages superimposed the T shape of the map on the cross (in the ninth century at St Riquier) and the crucified Christ (the thirteenth-century Ebstorf map). So the “world map” consisted of a schematic Asia, Europe, and Africa, and it was amalgamated into the Christian world view.⁵⁸

Not only the whole world, but even Europe itself was conceptualized in a rather non-global way. One can for example consider this description by the chronicler Cosmas of Prague:

1.1. After the effusion of the Flood, after the confusion of evil-minded men building a Tower, in divine revenge for such illicit and audacious deeds, the human species, which then consisted in about seventy-two men, was divided into as many diverse kinds of languages as there were heads of

56 Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven and London, 2008).

57 Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World* (London, 1999), 4–5, 18–25, 44–46, 135–139.

58 While the capacity to develop a coherent world view has been called “globalizing cosmology,” every civilisation does that: Caroline Dodds Pennock and Amanda Power “Globalizing Cosmologies,” in Holmes and Standen, *Global Middle Ages*, 88–115.

men – as we learned from the historical account. Each and every man a fugitive and a wanderer, they roamed throughout various regions of the earth, dispersed far and wide. And even while weakening in body from day to day, they multiplied, in generations and generations. Whence the human species, with God arranging everything according to his will, was so dispersed throughout the sphere of the earth that after many ages it came even into these regions of Germania. For this whole region, located under the north pole, extending from the Thanay [River Don] and into the west, is called by the general term “Germania” (although each of the places in it has its own name). [...]

1.2. In the division of the globe according to geometricians Asia comprises half of the world and Europe and Africa half. In Europe is situated Germania, in whose regions, across the northern plain, is a place spread very wide, girded everywhere by mountains in a circle. They are stretched in a marvelous way around the whole land, so that to the eye, it is as if one continuous mountain circles and protects all that land.⁵⁹

Thus the medieval approach to the global is through the Biblical story, the spread of humankind all over the earth after the Flood, and within this global, Cosmas situates Bohemia according to the geographical division of the T-O map, in Europe and within that in Germania, expressing ideas of remoteness within Europe. As Cosmas talked about a part of Europe as out-of-the-way, so did the anonymous chronicler of the Poles, who declared that “as the territory

59 *Cosmas of Prague, The Chronicle of the Czechs*, tr. Lisa Wolvertson (Washington, D.C., 2009), 33–34. English translation of *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Boemorum*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 166 (Paris, 1894), 57–59: “Post diluvii effusionem, post virorum maligna mente turrim aedificantium confusionem, humanum genus, quod tum fere constabat in 72 viris, pro tam illicitis et temerariis ausis cum divina ultione quot capita virorum tot in diversa linguarum genera dividerentur, sicut historica relatione didicimus, unusquisque eorum vagus et profugus, longe lateque dispersi, per diversa spacia terrarum errabant, ac de die in diem corpore decrescentes, in generationes et generationes multipliciter crescebant. Unde humanum genus, Dei nutu omnia disponente, in tantum diffusum est per orbem terrae, ut post multa secula tandem has etiam in partes deveniret Germaniae; cum enim omnis illa regio sub arctoo axe Thanaylenus et usque ad occiduum sita, licet in ea singula propriis loca nominibus nuncupentur, generali tamen vocabulo Germania vocatur. [...] In divisione orbis secundum geometricos Asia nomine sub suo dimidium mundi obtinuit, et dimidium Europa et Affrica. In Europa sita est Germania, cujus in partibus versus aquilonalem plagam est locus late nimis diffusus, cinctus undique montibus per gyrum, qui mirum in modum extenduntur totius terrae per circuitum, ut in aspectu oculorum quasi unus et continuus mons totam illam terram circueat ut muniat.” On Cosmas and his chronicle, see Lisa Wolvertson, *Cosmas of Prague: Narrative, Classicism, Politics* (Washington, D.C., 2015).

of the Poles is far from the routes of travelers, and known to few apart from persons crossing to Rus for the purposes of trade, let no one think it out of place if this subject is briefly discussed.”⁶⁰ A curious paradox faces us: while even parts of Europe were considered to be remote, at the same time, universal pretensions abounded: the Roman Empire that we call Byzantine; the other Roman Empire that eventually even added “holy” to its name to make a dual claim to globality; the papacy; and of course both Christianity and Islam were based on universalist claims.

Rather than using this to stake out the medieval claim to the global, I would suggest we reconcile ourselves to some notions being non-adaptable for the Middle Ages. What do we gain by grouping together diverse phenomena – connection through trade, mission, the diffusion of stories, knowledge, or objects, and comparative history – under the “global” label? Instead of illuminating some crucial aspect of either medieval history or interaction, we blur our analysis: merging different, distinct phenomena under one umbrella term hinders research. Instead of borrowing concepts and distorting them beyond recognition to make them fit, we should theorize based on what we find in the era we study. The nature of connections, the way medieval knowledge exchange worked, can be conceptualized based on the characteristics of the period itself.

We can for example note that the paucity of connection, the very few individuals involved in very long-distance travel, was no obstacle to a relatively large flow of knowledge, ideas, and luxury goods. In other words, without globalization, through the narrow channels, through the segmented and broken-up chains of communication, knowledge and objects can still flow. That perhaps is one of the lessons we can offer to historians of other periods.

In order to understand medieval knowledge transfer, we also need to consider the nature of medieval Christianity. Medieval Christianity was avowedly universal in its outlook, positing that only Christian faith was truth, actively evangelizing to spread Christianity, expecting to transport it to the ends of the world. Violence and conquest came to be associated with that drive, and while neither are uniquely medieval, how they shaped both connection and separation should also prompt us to start thinking about conceptualizing

60 *Gesta principum Polonorum. The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, tr. annotated Paul W. Knoll and Frank Schaer *Central European Medieval texts* 3, 2nd ed (Budapest and New York, 2007), 10. “quia regio Polonorum ab itineribus peregrinorum est remota, et nisi transeuntibus in Rusiam pro mercimonio paucis nota, si breviter inde disseratur nulli videatur absurdum.” English translation based on p. 11, with some changes. On the author and text, see *Gallus Anonymous and his Chronicle in the Context of Twelfth-Century Historiography from the Perspective of the Latest Research*, ed. Krzysztof Stopka (Cracow, 2010).

separation, and expressions of separateness. The papacy declared just war against Muslims, and in the name of God massacre was not only condoned, it was glorified. Raymond d'Aguilers, chaplain of Raymond IV of Toulouse, recounted the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 during the First Crusade. Whether or not correct in substance (and he clearly drew on Biblical imagery), the point I should like to emphasize is his unequivocal celebration of mass murder.

But now that our men had possession of the city walls and towers, you could see marvelous works. Some were decapitated and this was more merciful; others, pierced by arrows, plunged from the towers. Yet others, tortured for longer, were burned to death in the flames. Piles of heads, hands, and feet were to be seen in the city quarters and streets. Indeed there was a running to and fro of men and riders over the corpses. However, what we have said so far are few and small matters. But let us come to the Temple of Solomon. There they [Muslims] were accustomed to chant their rites and services. What happened there? If we tell the truth, it will exceed your powers of belief. So let it suffice to say this much, that in the Temple and porch of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and up to the bridles of their horses. Without a doubt, it was a just judgment that this place should receive the blood of those, whose blasphemies against God it had suffered for such a long time. The city having been filled with corpses and blood, some fled to the tower of David [...].⁶¹

It might be tempting to suggest that the case of Jerusalem and the First Crusade is atypical because of the highly charged nature of the event, but it is not. We

61 *Le «Liber» de Raymond d'Aguilers*, ed. John Hugh Hill and Laurita L. Hill (Paris, 1969), 150–51. “Sed cum iam nostri mēnibus potirentur civitatis et turribus, tunc videres mirabilia. Alii namque quod levius erat obtruncabantur capitibus alii autem sagittati de turribus saltare cogeabantur. Alii vero diuitissime torti, et ignibus adusti flammeriebantur. Videbantur per vicos et plateas civitates aggeres capitum, et manuum atque pedum. Per cadavera vero publice hominum et equitum discursus erat. Sed parva et pauca quę adhuc dicimus. Sed ad templum Salomonis veniamus. Ubi suos ritus atque sollempnitates cantare solebant. Sed quid ibi factum est? Si verum dicimus, fidem excedimus. Sed tantum sufficiat, quod in templo et porticu Salomonis equitabatur in sanguine ad genua, et usque ad frenos equorum. Iusto nimirum iudicio, ut locus idem eorum sanguinem exciperet, quorum blasphemias in Deum tam longo tempore pertulerat. Repleta itaque cadaveribus et sanguine civitate, confugerunt aliquanti ad turrem David[...].” English translation with some changes after Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem*, tr. John Hugh Hill and Laurita L. Hill (Philadelphia, 1968), 127–128. On up to bridles in blood cf. Revelation 14:20. Thomas F. Madden, “Rivers of Blood: An Analysis of One Aspect of the Crusader Conquest of Jerusalem,” *Revista Chilena de Estudios Medievales* 1 (2012): 25–37.

can see the glorification of violence in eliminating the enemy, espousing this ultimate form of separation as a Christian virtue, also in the Iberian peninsula in the thirteenth century. The panegyric tone of the exploits of Rodrigo Díaz, better known as el Cid, leaves no doubt about extreme violence being part of what the author celebrates about his hero:

“My Cid wielded his lance and then drew his sword;
he killed Moors beyond reckoning,
as their blood flowed down to his elbow.”⁶²

In one instance, Rodrigo dispatched one Muslim warrior in battle thus:

[he] “... dealt him a mighty blow
he cut through the gems of the helmet;
passing through the helmet and cutting everything else away,
the sword sliced through him down to the waist.”⁶³

Christian churchmen participated in eliminating the enemy in war (one can cite Bishop Jerónimo in the *Cantar de mio Cid*, who asks to strike the first blows in battle, as well as Archbishop Absalon of Lund⁶⁴); they also insisted on separating Christians from non-Christians, Jews and Muslims in peace-time. Erecting an ever-growing legal fence, they wanted to ensure such separation by prohibitions against intermarriage, eating or bathing together, and the introduction of distinguishing clothing and distinguishing signs. While community boundary-maintenance was also often a concern for non-Christians themselves who lived in Christian realms, the power balance meant that negative

62 *Poema de Mio Cid*, 95, lines 1722–1724: “Mio Çid enpleo la lança, al espada metio mano, / atantos mata de moros que non fueron contados, / por el cobdo ayuso la sangre destellando,” *Poema de Mio Cid*, ed. Colin Smith (Madrid, 1985), 200; Peter Such and John Hodgkinson, *The Poem of My Cid*, 2nd corr. edn (Warminster, 1991), 144, English translation 145.

63 *Poema*, 118, lines 2421–2424: “... un grant golpe dadol ha, / las carbonclas del yelmo tollidas gela[s] ha, / cortol el yelmo e – librado todo lo hal – / fata la çintura el espada legado ha.” Such and Hodgkinson, *The Poem of My Cid*, 184, English translation 185. *Poema*, ed. Smith, 224. On medieval violence, Warren C. Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe* (Harlow, 2011) and Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel E. Thiery, Oren Falk, eds., “A Great Effusion of Blood”?: *Interpreting Medieval Violence* (Toronto, 2004).

64 *Poema de Mio Cid*, 94, lines 1706–1710, *Poema*, ed. Smith, 199; Such and Hodgkinson, *The Poem of My Cid*, 144, Eng. tr. 145; Karsten Friis-Jensen and Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, *Archbishop Absalon of Lund and his world* (Roskilde, 2000).

views associated to Christian policies could, and did, translate into the persecution of human beings.⁶⁵

Yet we also know that in fact declared separateness was not the same as separation in practice. Even at the height of enmity between crusaders and Muslims, Usamah Ibn-Munqidh tells us, he would be allowed to enter the Aqsa mosque, occupied by the Templars, to pray there;⁶⁶ and Jean de Joinville, taken captive during his crusade with king Louis IX, was healed by his Saracen captor of a tumour in his throat.⁶⁷ While, according to his account, the victorious Saracens decapitate those who refuse to abjure their Christian faith, and show off those who apostatize, one of them can agree with Jean on the futility of such enterprise: “one never saw a bad Christian [turned] good Saracen, nor a bad Saracen [turned] good Christian.”⁶⁸ The existence of connection in spite of declared separation and the complexity of what is connected and what is apart is another lesson that would not be out of place in our own world.

Christianity had a paradoxical relationship to belief systems that predated it. While it incorporated earlier traditions from its very beginning, and was based on Judaism and the integration of classical antiquity, Christianity was nonetheless defined through the rejection of both. Christianity made the Hebrew Bible

65 See for example Anna Sapir Abulafia, “Medieval Church Doctrines and Policies,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, 6 *The Middle Ages: The Christian World*, ed. Robert Chazan (Cambridge, 2018), 32–53; Daniel J. Lasker, “Polemics,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, 6, 813–835; Marisa Bueno Sánchez, “Les murs de la foi: les frontières identitaires dans les quartiers musulmans et juifs de la Castille médiévale,” in *Religious Minorities in Christian, Jewish and Muslim Law (5th–15th Centuries)*, ed. Nora Berend, Youna Hameau-Masset, Capucine Nemo-Pekelman and John Tolan (Turnhout, 2017), 233–257; Elisheva Baumgarten, “Minority Dress Codes and the Law: A Jewish-Christian Comparison,” in *Religious Minorities in Christian, Jewish and Muslim Law*, 289–299. On Muslim boundary maintenance, Kathryn A. Miller, *Guardians of Islam: Religious Authority and Muslim Communities of Late Medieval Spain* (New York, 2008).

66 *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh*, tr. Philip K. Hitti (Princeton, NJ, 1987), 163–164.

67 Jean de Joinville, *Livre des saintes paroles et des bons faiz nostre roy saint Loos (Vie de Saint Louis)*, ed. Jacques Monfrin, Classiques Garnier, *Livre des saintes paroles et des bons faiz nostre roy saint Loos LXIV* <http://users.skynet.be/antoine.mechelynck/chroniq/joinv/JV064.htm>, last accessed 19 February, 2019.

68 “Il me fist amener mes mariniers devant moy, et me dist que il estoient tuit renié; et je li dis que il n'eust jà fiance en eus; car aussi tost comme il nous avoient lessiez, aussi tost les lairoient-il, se il veoient ne leur point ne leur lieu. Et li amiraus me fist response tel, que il s'accordoit à moy; que Salehadins disoit que on ne vit onques de mauvais crestien bon sarrazin, ne de mauvais sarrazin bon crestien.” Jean de Joinville, *Livre des saintes paroles Livre des saintes paroles et des bons faiz nostre roy saint Loos LXV*. <http://users.skynet.be/antoine.mechelynck/chroniq/joinv/JV065.htm>. See edition and modern French translation: Jacques Monfrin, ed. *Vie de Saint Louis* (Paris, 2002).

its own, calling it the Old Testament; it insisted that Christians replaced Jews as the chosen people. Early Christian churchmen aggressively opposed Judaizing by their co-religionists, even while they modelled Christianity on Judaism.⁶⁹

The invective against Jews remained so strong that it was even incorporated into letters of papal protection for them. One of the most famous such letters begins: “Licet perfidia Judaeorum sit multipliciter improbanda, quia tamen per eos fides nostra veraciter comprobatur, non sunt a fidelibus graviter opprimendi, dicente propheta: Ne occideris eos, ne quando obliviscantur legis tuae.” (“Although in many ways the perfidy of the Jews must be reproved, since nevertheless through them our own faith is truly proved, they must not be heavily oppressed by the faithful, as the prophet says: Do not slay them, lest they be forgetful of Thy Law [Ps. 59.11]”).⁷⁰ “They” here refers to Christians: the true reason for not slaying Jews is to remind Christians of their own law (Christianity). This paradox of the deepest connection through incorporation, simultaneously with insultingly arrogant rejection describes the medieval better than the term “global.”

This creophagous attitude did not merely characterize the formative period of Christianity. While Christians continued to plunder objects, and in a similar vein, decontextualize and appropriate knowledge, they also continued to insist on the sharp separation of Christianity, as the only truth, from the very traditions they were despoiling: pagan Antiquity, Judaism, and Islam. Thus even anti-Christian polemic could be transformed into Christian theology. The pagan philosopher Proclus in the fifth century, an opponent of Christianity, believed that paganism would survive Christianity and wanted to transmit the Hellenic heritage. He wrote a work on metaphysics in Greek, the *Elements of Theology*, that was adapted by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (himself thought to be a disciple of St Paul in the Middle Ages), and was several times translated into Latin. An Arabic translation-adaptation, also translated into Latin, the *Liber de causis* became a key text in medieval Christian tradition from the twelfth century and was far more used than the *Elements* during the

69 Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009), especially 21–45. Of the many works on medieval Christian attitudes to Jews, see for example Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley, CA, 1997); Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia, 1999); Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York, 2014).

70 Innocent III's version. Edward A. Synan, *The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York and London, 1965), text 229–230, English translation after 230 with some changes. See the Latin text, French translation and commentary also on the RELMIN website: Notice n°103876, projet RELMIN, “Le Statut Légal des Minorités Religieuses dans l'Espace Euro-Méditerranéen (v^e–xv^e siècle)” <http://www.cn-telma.fr/relmin/extrait103876/>.

Middle Ages, since it was better adapted to monotheism. Proclus influenced Christian philosophy and theology, as his ideas were transmitted through the reworking, multiple translations and many commentaries of his work over the centuries. These continued to exert an influence at the University of Paris even after the late thirteenth century, and had a major influence on German mysticism in the later Middle Ages.⁷¹

Another example is Ibn Sina, better known as Avicenna, whose canon (kanûn) of medicine was the most important medical work in medieval Europe.⁷² The work itself was heavily based on Galen, thus incorporating the classical Greek tradition. The translation from Arabic to Latin was made under the patronage of the archbishop and archdeacon of Toledo by Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187), with the help of others. The translation process probably followed that known from other contemporary works of translation, entailing two stages: first the Arabic text was translated by Jewish scholars into Romance vernacular, and then from the vernacular Christian scholars translated it into Latin. The translation was repeatedly revised and improved over the course of the Middle Ages. Emendations, commentary, and in the late medieval and early modern period new translations of parts of the text both from Arabic and Hebrew complicated the textual tradition of Avicenna in Latin. Gerard's translation, as the work of Raphaela Veit has shown, encompassed religious matters: thus where the original invoked Allah, the Latin had *Deus*. Yet where the Prophet Mohammad was mentioned, this was merely omitted in the Latin translation. Thus Ancient Greek knowledge, together with Arabic learning, was transmitted through Arabic, vernacular and Latin to medieval Europe, but it was Christianized in the process, and elements incompatible with ideas on Christian truth were ignored.

71 Recently, with further bibliography: Dragos Calma, "The Exegetical Tradition of Medieval Neoplatonism. Considerations on a Recently Discovered *Corpus* of Texts," in *Neoplatonism in the Middle Ages*, I. *New Commentaries on Liber de Causis* (ca. 1250–1350), ed. by Dragos Calma, SA 42–1 (Turnhout, 2016), 11–52; DOI: 10.1484/M.SA-EB.5.111557. This ongoing project is adding significantly to the understanding of how Proclus influenced medieval thinkers.

72 Raphaela Veit, "Avicenna's Canon in East and West: A Long History of Editions," in *Texts in Multiple Versions – Histories of Editions*, 5, *Variants*, ed. Luigi Giuliani, Herman Brinkman, Geert Lernout, Marita Mathijssen (Amsterdam and New York, 2006), 331–339; Raphaela Veit, "Latin translations of Avicenna's *al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb*" forthcoming in *Medical Encyclopedia of Islam and Iran*, ed. the Iran Academy of Medical Sciences, which includes a thorough bibliography (I thank Dr Veit for allowing me to consult her unpublished manuscript); Raphaela Veit, "Materia Medica in a Multilingual Context: Avicenna's Canon of Medicine and its Latin Translation of Book 11," in this Special Issue. See also Helena M. Paavilainen, *Medieval Pharmacotherapy Continuity and Change: Case Studies from Ibn Sīnā and Some of His Late Medieval Commentators* (Leiden, 2009).

Not only texts, but objects were absorbed as well: for instance, Islamic artifacts even with religious inscriptions were often repurposed for Christians, including their transformation into reliquary covers and ecclesiastical vessels. That is how an Arabic textile with an inscription about good luck, glory, exaltedness and magnificence ended up as part of a dalmatic (ecclesiastical vestment) worn on St Valerius's feast day in thirteenth-century Spain.⁷³ Today housed in the museum at the monastery of Santa María La Real de Las Huelgas in Burgos, Queen Berenguela's pillow and various other textiles used by members of the royal family in the thirteenth century feature Arabic inscriptions. The monastery of Santa María La Real de Las Huelgas itself, founded at the very end of the twelfth century for Cistercian nuns, was not just decorated with motifs from Islamic art, but featured Arabic inscriptions. The stucco decoration c. 1275 in the Claustro de San Fernando was even made to imitate Islamic textiles.⁷⁴ The many reliquary covers that are textiles with Arabic inscriptions and reliquary boxes that include Arabic scripts, even Islamic religious texts, that one can find in museums scattered around Spain, testify to widespread reuse of Islamic objects by Christians. The coronation mantle of King Roger II of Sicily, also with an Arabic inscription, is well known. Containers such as rock crystal bottles with Arabic inscriptions were used as reliquaries.⁷⁵ Even in areas where Christian rhetoric against Muslims was prevalent, Islamic objects could be deprived of religious significance and incorporated in Christian display as symbols of prestige and of royal power. In parts of Europe that were less familiar with Arabic script, it could also be mistaken for a sign of the object's provenance from the Holy Land in Biblical times, a guarantee of authenticity of alleged relics from the period of Christianity's origins.⁷⁶

73 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1946, accession number 46.156.10 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/450727>.

See also the exhibition "Making the Invisible Visible: Conservation and Islamic Art," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/invisible-visible-under> "Featured Textile: Fragment from the Dalmatic of San Valerius."

74 Patricia Blessing, "Weaving on the Wall: Architecture and Textile in the Monastery of Las Huelgas in Burgos," *Studies in Iconography* 40 (2019): 137–182.

75 Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasures of the Latin West*, 2nd rev ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1998); Mariam Rosser-Owen, "Islamic Objects in Christian Contexts: Relic Translation and Modes of Transfer in Medieval Iberia," *Art in Translation* 7, no. 1 (2015): 39–64; Anna Contadini, "Translocation and Transformation: Some Middle Eastern Objects in Europe," in *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformation*, ed. Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch and Anja Eisenbeiß (Berlin, 2010), 42–64.

76 Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, 129–137, especially 137; Péter Tamás Nagy, "Islamic Art and Artefacts in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Hungary," (M. A. Thesis, Central European University, 2015), 55–57.

While we cannot know for certain what motivated a king of Hungary to wear and even be buried with a ring that contained a stone bearing an Arabic inscription, it was most likely a similar idea, which decontextualized the object and reincorporated it in a Christian vision. This golden ring with an engraved Arabic inscription on its purple almandine stone, found on the right index finger of the king indicates that its wearer held it in high esteem.⁷⁷ The royal grave is identified by most scholars as the burial of Béla III (r. 1172–1196). Although one researcher argued that the grave belonged to Coloman (r. 1095–1116), both the dating of the grave-goods and the skeleton are a better match for the later period and what we know about the physiognomy of King Béla from medieval descriptions. The engraved almandine was originally a seal, as the inscription is in the negative, and it is the name of the original owner of the stone, ‘Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad. However, it no longer fulfilled that function when it was mounted on the ring, because one of the nails used to fix it in place would have impeded such a use. An examination also showed that the stone was recut to be used in the ring. The ring itself was altered to fit a larger finger. Why the ring was so important for the king is plausibly explained by the fact that it can be opened by pulling out two nails from the side of the bezel, revealing an internal cavity, which, it has been argued, probably held a relic. The provenance and date of the stone has been debated, one scholar proposing the twelfth century and another, based on comparison to a larger corpus, eighth- or ninth-century Iran. When the stone was placed in the ring, and whether the ring was made or only altered for Béla III cannot be determined. That the king had no idea of the meaning of the inscription is obvious; whether he thought it was authenticating a Holy Land relic that he wore cannot be proven but seems likely. This ring is not evidence of a “global” Middle Ages, but rather of the complex mechanism of separation (decontextualization) of the stone from its original Islamic context, and integration into a new Christian sphere. Through what channel the stone arrived in Hungary we cannot tell, but its journey is a clear signal of interconnection between possibly far away locations, although this connection was not direct or immediate, but may have been due to a number of smaller dislocations over the centuries. In Hungary at the latest, the stone was divested of its original function as a seal, and of its original meaning. It was repurposed, probably understood as a guarantee of a purported Holy Land relic. Local reinterpretation happens in the modern globalized world as well, but medieval evidence for it seems much more pervasive. How pieces of knowledge and objects were cut off from their original context and meaning

77 Éva Kovács, “III. Béla és Antiochiai Anna Halotti Jelvényei,” *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 21 (1972): 1–14, especially 3. Recent analysis with a good bibliography: Nagy, “Islamic Art and Artefacts in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Hungary,” 26–32.

and vested with a different significance is not best conceptualized through the terminology of the global.

I do not believe the opaque concept of the “global Middle Ages” best serves the many purposes it has been used for; merging different, distinct phenomena under one umbrella term hinders research. Nor does it help us to detect chronological changes in connectivity and other phenomena that occurred during the medieval period itself. With Dante, “non men che saver, dubbiar m’aggrata.”⁷⁸ We can look at areas that had tenuous, short-term connections; we can chart the trajectory of objects and know-how; we can explore parallels of unconnected development, such as the rise of literati in China and Europe or the rise of a warrior elite in Japan and Europe. If we wish to create a non-Eurocentric, inclusive narrative or curriculum, we will not accomplish that by thrusting other areas into the problematic straightjacket of the “Middle Ages,” a Eurocentric term if there has ever been one. True comparatism includes conceptualizing areas on their own terms and creating periodizations that fit their trajectory of change.

Global history as a way to understand connections, their scale and, most of all, how they produce integration, does not work for the Middle Ages, neither for scale, nor for integration. “Global” to designate connectivity, even over long distances, is not particularly helpful; it hides, rather than elucidates, the actual processes that played out when far away geographic points were connected by trade or mission for example. We must stretch and distort it to make it fit. Key types of interconnection that characterized the medieval period, such as mission and conquest, were different from the phenomena that make up modern globalization. Even when on the surface, we find similarities to modern forms, such as trade, the underlying key motivation could be different: seeking not just profit, but connection to earthly paradise. If there was a “global” in the Middle Ages, it was the aspiration for a universal Christianity, to be spread to the entire known world, that even sanctioned the most horrific violence.

If we wish to study interconnectedness, how does the global label acknowledge that only a relatively small part of the world was interconnected and by a very small number of people in our period? Moreover, while we should indeed challenge the modernist assumption that interconnection as such is a distinctive attribute of modernity, we cannot claim it as a novelty born in the Middle Ages, since it already predated the medieval period. On the other hand, while our contemporary globalized world has in part been the outcome of the gradually increasing density of interconnection over the previous centuries, it is qualitatively different from what came before, and therefore the

78 Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia* (Rome, 2019), Inferno, Canto XI, 93. Not less than to know, to doubt pleases me.

terminology should express that. If we dilute the term “global” to mean any form of interconnection or comparison, it becomes meaningless. Instead, the range and nature of interconnection can be characterized and, if we want, used to create periodization. Thus we can look at the related themes of interconnection and separation – their relative weight and sphere for different epochs. The Middle Ages itself will not be a unified period in this light; we can see the growth of interconnectedness, the development of trade and commodity chains for example. Analysing mechanisms and structures, we can think about the specificities of the medieval period: “whether the changing meaning over time of spatial linkages can be understood in a better way than globalization.”⁷⁹ I would prefer to mark clearly qualitative differences, and argue that our period can be used to offer conceptualizations of how interconnection and separation worked.

In that way, we can diagnose how some medieval European authors chose to emphasize remoteness and separation, even though in reality connections did exist. The reality of limited interconnection between areas of the globe did not dampen universal aspirations for the spread of Christianity. Interconnection could hit the wall of rival claims, such as the correspondence between popes and Mongol khans, the former asking the Mongols to convert to Christianity’s universal truth, the latter demanding submission in the name of the supernatural universal mandate given to the khan. We can see the major role of conflict in creating interconnectedness, from crusader aggression to warfare in the Iberian peninsula, from the subjugation and conversion of Baltic Europe to the repeated conquests of Sicily. And we can see the mechanism of declared Christian religious superiority to and separation from pagans, Jews, and Muslims, contrasting with the way in which Christianity gobbled up other traditions, ingesting and transforming them in its own image, refusing to acknowledge the real processes of incorporation. Condemning, rejecting, or declaring to supersede, in order to separate itself from what it was in fact incorporating, medieval Christianity left a very long shadow, one that perhaps we now see globalized in our times.

Acknowledgement

The basis of this article was the keynote lecture “Interconnection and separation: medieval perspectives on a modern problem,” I gave at the 94th Annual Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America, Philadelphia, USA in 2019.

79 Cooper, “What is the Concept of Globalization Good for?” 195.