

Introduction

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Although the expression plays an important part in the title, this book is not about the “Global Middle Ages”. Rather this volume is an attempt to contribute to the debate on how the studies on complex mobilities, contacts and scales of action and interaction can be major players in the discussion surrounding the identification of those principal elements feeding the idea of globality in the Middle Ages.

In recent years, the expression has become so much a part of the medievalist’s academic jargon, and the field has acquired such status, that today we encounter references to the “global turn” in Medieval Studies, the term frequently used lightly, without much concern for what is really meant by that expression.

Indeed, at present, there is scarcely a field of research more difficult to define, characterize, circumscribe, and uncover, either in its theoretical and methodological components or in practice. Those working directly on topics that may be assumed as straightforwardly “global”, like those attempting to define the scope, levels, layers, lines, and limits of the “Global Middle Ages” never cease to caution the rest of the academic world against such snares. The dangers derived from assuming this field of research lightly are just as detrimental to it as those issuing from the belief that there is a single strict definition for what we describe as ‘studying the Global Middle Ages’.

The present volume originated in a conference which, back in December 2017, gathered scholars from all over the world in Lisbon, in order to discuss further the

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topic that was by that time, beginning to attract a good deal of attention, a question, simultaneously a *problématique* and a possibility, the “Global Middle Ages”.³

Although since the Conference, the Global Middle Ages has become established as a new field in its own right, the publications and websites devoted to it having become impressively numerous, it is still, as it was then, a research field far from achieving an ontological consensus.

In 2016, the Introduction to *The Prospect of Global History*,⁴ by Wickham, Belich and Darwin, raised this very question. How can such diverse approaches to Global History, and their respective usefulness in cross chronological /cross geographical / cross thematic approaches, effectively be combined? Indeed, the organization of the volume reflects the complexity of the problem. It turns around three tentative conceptual frameworks for the understanding of Global History across the centuries: the pursuit of the meaning of *Globalization* as a term that needs to be “rescued from the present and salvaged for the past”, the “pursuit of historical problems across time, space and specialism”, and the ways in which “connectedness” might become a focal point for the better command of a more inclusive idea for the expression *Global History*. These three parts into which the editors have divided the volume reflect not only their concerns about defining and widening our perception of Global History, but also their attempt to establish a theoretical structure within which the main principles driving the idea of the Global Middle Ages would be clear and comprehensive: (1) the definition of the concept, (2) (Global) Circulations, and (3) (Global) Networks.

The notion that *Circulations* and *Networks* were terms apt to carry the appropriate operative concepts for the definition of a research field intended to include non-European realities and narratives in the equation presented, and continues to present, a serious challenge. Now, five years after the publication of that thought-provoking book, the notion remains relevant in the contemplation of what exactly is, or could be, the concept of the Middle Ages as “Global”. It is also fundamental in setting out a bevy of questions and problems capable of defining the still contested nature of the idea and in the establishment of frameworks for its development.

³ This volume derives from a thorough reworking of a very selected number of the papers presented to the 4th International Meeting of the “Medieval Europe in Motion” Conference series, on the theme “The Middle Ages: a Global context?”. Hosted by the Institute of Medieval Studies of the NOVA FCSH University, it gathered almost 90 scholars from 17 countries for three days. The Organizing Committee members were Alicia Miguélez, Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa, Catarina Fernandes Barreira, Dolores Villalba, João Luís Fontes, Maria João Branco and Mário Farelo.

⁴ BELICH; James; DARWIN, J.; FRENZ, M.; WICKHAM, Chris – *The Prospect of Global History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 3-23.

Scholars continue to labor under a plethora of problems when it comes to determining the ways in which the question of how and what would be the definitive criteria for the potential inclusion of the Middle Ages in a framework of globalization. The chapter on “A Global Middle Ages?”, by Robert I. Moore in that same volume⁵ played with the use of concepts like periodization, the expression “Middle Ages” and its use in Eurasia and Eurasian historiography in order to try and experiment with some grounds for considering the Global Middle Ages as global, just as James Belich did, when he addressed The Black Plague and European Expansion.

But the “global turn” was already unstoppable for the Middle Ages, and the years between 2016 and 2020 saw the appearance of various movements, websites, networks and publishers embracing the idea and concept with great enthusiasm even if the resulting publications do not always share the same concept of what makes or can make the “Global Middle Ages”, a state of affairs reminiscent of the difficulties affecting comparative, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary studies as they developed and proliferated.⁶ Edited volumes that attempt to combine perspectives from different geographical regions around one subject in order to have a “global” perspective remain very different from those studies dealing with, for example, a global phenomenon such as the Black Death. The end results are equally very diverse.

Perhaps the most influential and critical approach to the topic, the one that tried to debate and discuss every single concept and its relation to the diversity and multiplication of meanings, institutions, cultural and religious conceptions, power and even techniques and materiality, by testing and experimenting with those same concepts across a trans-cultural, trans geographical and trans-chronological period, was the special issue dedicated to The Global Middle Ages in *Past And Present*.⁷ The

⁵ MOORE, Robert I. – “A Global Middle Ages?” and BELICH, James – “The Black Death and the Spread of Europe”. In BELICH, James; DARWIN, J.; FRENZ, M.; WICKHAM, Chris – *The Prospect of Global History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 80-92, 93-107.

⁶ A quick glance at the available materials should suffice to understand the diverse scale and fundamental differences between concepts and frameworks involved in the study of such a wide topic. Visiting websites and portals like “The Global Middle Ages Project – G-MAP” (<http://globalmiddleages.org> – consulted 15.12.2020) where “all” Global Middle Ages research projects are proclaimed to be listed, and comparing it to the drastically different approaches of the “Global Middle Ages in Sidney” Studies Centre (<https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/global-middle-ages-in-sydney.html> – consulted in 15.12.2020) or the “Defining the Global Middle Ages” Project (<https://globalmiddleages.history.ox.ac.uk/> – consulted 15.12.2020) is substantially enlightening as to how undefined many issues still remain. Publishers have been very interested in this novel approach too and have quickly come to appreciate its relevance. The *Journal of Medieval Worlds* edited by University of California Press, and currently in its second issue, may be said to be running along parallel lines to those of the Global Middle Ages, seeking out a model perhaps less controversial, but conceding nothing to the originality of the approach. Nevertheless, the option of Cambridge University Press, was to promote, in its *Elements series*, only one on *Elements in the Global Middle Ages*. ARC Humanities Press, in most of its series devoted to the Middle Ages, have created space for quest for a plural Middle Ages, voicing the unvoiced, outside the mainframe. And that means “Global” too, in many respects.

⁷ *The Global Middle Ages, Past and Present*, vol. 238, issue suppl_13, ed. Catherine Holmes and Naomi

article synthesizes the results of several workshops and meetings led by the Network of British scholars involved in the “Defining the Global Middle Ages Project”.⁸ Here, definitions, fields of action, and working concepts were worked and reworked, and, in 2019, it provided another landmark for the perception of, and critical thinking about, ways of looking at the Global Middle Ages. The principal virtues of this stimulating approach subsist in the supply to scholars of open-ended innovative insights and leads on how to use the same frameworks as experimental tools, yet at the same time keeping the topic open to debate and change.

Scholars of very different provenance and subject areas, have arrived at the conclusion that studying the Middle Ages from a globalized perspective means embracing diversity and plurality not as a weakness but as the only possible option, and one that really can lead the debate further and deeper, in very original terms.

In such a rich and permanently evolving debate, it would have been impossible to imagine that the present volume would offer a new approach to the “Global Middle Ages” as such. Rather the rational has been to attempt to put to the test some of the ideas involved in this debate and to seek to understand how some of the most grounded operative concepts and examples, mainly viewing the Medieval World as the geographical and geopolitical heir of the Roman World, operate in confrontation with the concept of globality in the Middle Ages.

It is thus from these underlying considerations that this volume has come into being. With an opening chapter on the new ways now opened by the Global Middle Ages, the second part is devoted to experimentation with concepts of “Global” in the Middle Ages, top-down and bottom up, and finally a third part devoted to case studies focusing on the more traditional area of wider circulations of peoples and models, ideas and lives, in the medieval world.

The first chapter, *Options and Experiments: Characterizing the “Global Middle Ages”* by Naomi Standen, sets out the state of the art in the concerns and questions faced by those deeply involved in the making of the Global Middle Ages in their daily work, applying their efforts directly towards defining the range and scope of *The Global Middle Ages* as a discreet area of study, and reinforcing the exceptional importance of comprehensively embracing diversity and plurality, whilst reshaping and renewing a new vision of the almost old fashioned world of the intense circulation of people and artifacts, beliefs, techniques, networks and polities in a much wider and globalized World than the one conceived of hitherto.

Standen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, November 2018).

⁸ PI- Katherine Holmes (Oxford University), co-PI Naomi Standen (University of Birmingham), *Defining the Global Middle Ages*. <https://globalmiddleages.history.ox.ac.uk/> – consulted 15.12.2020

The following two chapters, are authored respectively by Dominique Iogna-Prat and Jean-Phillipe Genet, distinguished scholars requiring little by way of introduction who, in their individual specialist areas, have revealed the medieval period to be a venue for broad networks of circulation, contact, and exchange, their research on these encounters being responsible for a reshaping of notions of both “Church” and “State” in all their minute declensions, and in their internal and external functioning. Each have, in their respective articles, taken on the challenge of seeking out the idea of “clusters of globalization” in specific institutions throughout the Middle Ages. *The Empire of the Church* and *The Spread of the Model of the “Modern State”* (and its critique) are each an important attempt to examine two of the most complex socio-political edifices with a view to defining the ways in which they might serve the purposes of contemplating “globalization” from the top-down.

Meanwhile, the bottom-up approach is represented in the three articles by Ana Pairet, Astrid Kelsner and Carlos Eduardo Amorim. Ana Pairet examines the prodigious dissemination of the medieval work of prose fiction, *Paris and Vienna*, and its global success prolonged over successive generations, proving popular in geographically, linguistically, and religiously diverse regions, kingdoms and empires. Astrid Kelsner presents a parallel approach in her exposition of Fibonacci’s *Liber Abaci* and its wide and contested circulation as a means to promote a certain idea of globalization. Meanwhile, Eduardo Amorim, in his reflection on the innovative results of genomic approaches to the study of Migration and Demography, leads us into a dynamic world in which genetic traits help elucidate the broad-ranging movement of peoples and their particular social and economic characteristics. The data, obtained from a small sampling in a Lombard cemetery, forms part of a wider project and highlights several key factors in the study of these complex and intriguing movements of peoples in the medieval world.

The remaining articles are devoted to individual case studies which endeavour to deepen our understanding of particular movements of models and ideas, through scrutiny of those responsible for the dissemination and combination of visual culture, related techniques, and transfer of knowledge, or the influence of preeminent classes of people, such as notaries, or perhaps one particular diplomat/cleric, whose agenda and influence went far beyond his own individual importance.

With a strong focus on visual culture, this section features Claudia D’Alberto’s synthesis on the Pope’s image as a vehicle for the transmission of signs intended for universal application, and additional chapters on the mutual influence of “global actors”. Examples of the latter are highlighted in Federica Volperra and Elsa Espin’s studies of pictorial models circulating in the Mediterranean area, revealing a world of intense relations resulting in the transference of the techniques of the

Ars Nova from North to South, both by artists whose extensive travels took them from Catalonia to Holland whence they brought home the new modes and models of painting, and also by Dutch painters applying their trade in Catalonia. This panorama of inter-regional exchange is complemented by Silvia Marin Barutciëff's review of Romanian Iconography, particularly related to St Christopher, which further exemplifies a transmission of medieval models and iconographic programs where the images and their meanings are not significantly altered in the process.

The two closing articles address case studies concerning people. Stephano Santarelli examines the case of English and Portuguese notaries during the late Middle Ages and confirms the contacts, practices, techniques and interchanges between very specialized group of men who although influential only at a comparatively modest level, were fundamental in the conception of how powers formulate themselves. Finally, Paulo Lopes narrows the focus to a single individual, the famous D. Gomes Eanes, a Portuguese diplomat in a Florentine abbey, whose agency and influence went far beyond his personal interests and cut across the two geographical areas and the two powers he served, the King of Portugal and the Papacy.

Ultimately, this volume is the product of a profound reworking of a substantial number of contributions and, whilst it aims not to be about the "Global Middle Ages", it does strive to contribute to the debate by suggesting different approaches to the theme through essays that hopefully will spark discussion and a reevaluation of the more traditional studies devoted to circulation, contact and exchange, and those dealing with cultural encounters and differing mental worlds. Here, possibilities may be activated by taking a view through the unsettling lens of global/local analysis and by aspiring to meet those challenges that thereby come into focus.