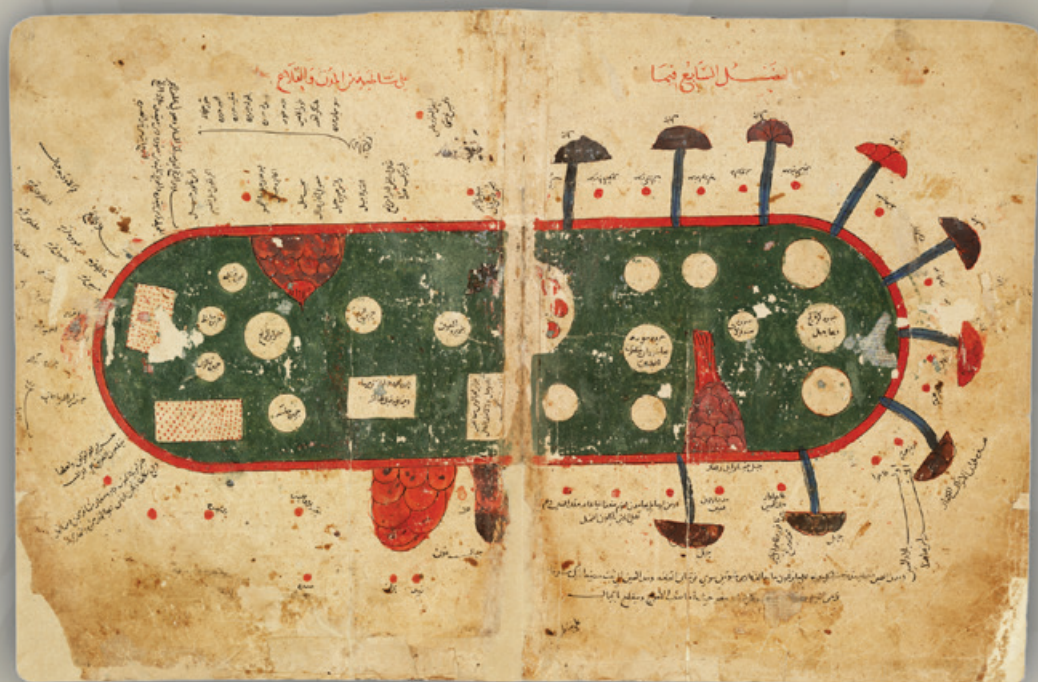


A COMPANION TO THE GLOBAL EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Edited by

ERIK HERMANS



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A COMPANION TO THE GLOBAL EARLY MIDDLE AGES



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For my Sezgi



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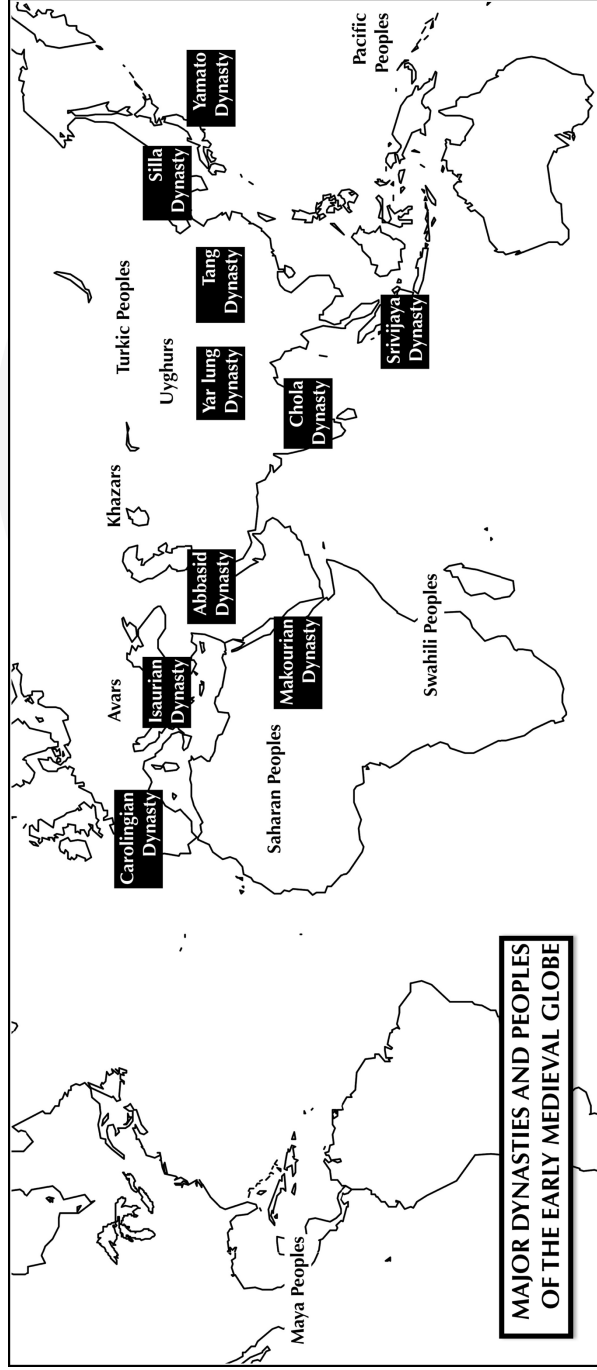
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Erik Hermans

West Suffield (USA) and Alkmaar (NL), 2018/2019



Map 1. Major dynasties and peoples of the early medieval globe.
© Sezgi Hermans.

INTRODUCTION

Erik Hermans

LOCAL EXPERIENCES OF human beings have always been influenced by large-scale processes. In pre-modern societies, the ripple effects of distant events were in general not as immediate and clearly palpable as in today's world, but they were no less present. This companion aims to lay bare the extent to which societies across the globe were connected during one phase of the pre-modern era: the Early Middle Ages, which are defined here as approximately the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. This period witnessed important historical developments, such as the establishment of the Srivijaya, a Southeast Asian thalassocracy; the expansion of the Frankish polity under Charlemagne on the far ends of Afro-Eurasia; and the consolidation of the 'Abbāsid and Tang empires in between (see Map 1). Historical developments such as those have not yet been integrated into a global perspective. In some cases, the historical record has left clear evidence of long-distance connectivity, such as Persian artefacts stored in an imperial storehouse in Japan during the eighth century or coins from the 'Abbāsid caliphate found in northern Europe and East Africa. However, structural connectivity across different regions is often not immediately visible and has to be deduced from a deep understanding of multiple societies. The purpose of this companion is therefore first and foremost to expand the knowledge of anyone interested in the history of the period in question. While most professional historians have expertise in the history of one or a few regions of the globe, the following nineteen chapters provide a panorama of the early medieval world from the Pacific Islands via the major regions of Afro-Eurasia to Mesoamerica. The individual chapters aim thus to satisfy the curiosity of early medieval historians who want to know more about regions that influence the ones that they specialize in. The panorama of all chapters taken together, moreover, aims to contribute to a more inclusive narrative of early medieval history.

Macrohistorical Narratives

Every narrative of the past is shaped in part by the experiences of its historiographers. The interest in a global context of historical developments, the so-called "global turn" that many historiographical fields have experienced in recent decades, is an example of this phenomenon, since the latest generations of historians grew up in a world where global connectivity permeates their everyday lives more so than ever before.¹ This

¹ For discussions of the global turn in historical studies, see: Manning, *Navigating World History*; Surkis et al., "Historiographic 'Turns.'"

companion is no exception to that rule, and if the editor had lived half a century earlier, he might not have conceived of a global panorama of early medieval history. This work is thus part of the ongoing global turn of medieval studies, which is itself a historically conditioned phenomenon.² However, aside from these accidental circumstances, there is also a deeply held theoretical stance: the premise that macrohistorical narratives matter. This premise does not oppose or contradict the micronarratives that abound in medieval scholarship today. Rather, it aims to complement and integrate them.

For scholars of the Early Middle Ages, the local context of historical individuals is arguably the most important one. The vast majority of people living in this period, including members of the educated elite, were either bound by or gave meaning to their lives inside local or regional contexts. Let us take an example from the best studied region of the globe: western Europe. The ninth-century monk Hrabanus Maurus cared about fellow monks in other monasteries in northwestern Europe and about the civilizational sphere where Latin literature and Christianity played an important role. Contemporaneous events in distant places like Tang China were both unknown and seemingly irrelevant to him. To be able to understand someone like Hrabanus well, modern historians have focused mostly on his immediate context: where he lived and travelled to, the monastery where he wrote, whom he was in touch with, what texts he had read, which of the debates circulating in Latin Christendom interested him, etc.³ However, as historians, we also have the option to take a bird's-eye view and look at the larger processes that may have indirectly affected the life and work of this monk. Such an approach reveals a plethora of processes which are all correlated: our monk lived and worked in a climate of cultural efflorescence; the underpinning of this efflorescence was the monetary wealth and economic activity of the Carolingian realm, which had increased since the middle of the eighth century; that economic intensification partly depended on a demographic upswing, which was itself dependent on the fact that epidemic outbreaks of the bubonic plague subsided in the middle of the eighth century for the first time since the sixth century (see Chapter 18); Carolingian economic activity was also dependent on trade with the caliphate (see Chapter 14), the economy of which had started to flourish in the middle of the eighth century as well; finally, one

² Since the global turn reached medieval studies much later than the fields of early modern history or modern History, this scholarly movement may not yet have experienced its apogee. However, while the groundbreaking works of Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, and Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, were relatively isolated studies, in recent years the global turn among medievalists has already led to the following developments: the founding of the new journals *The Medieval Globe*, *Journal of Medieval Worlds*, and *The Encyclopedia of the Global Middle Ages*; "The Global Turn in Medieval Studies" as the theme for the 2019 annual meeting of the Medieval Academy of America; the American research network *The Global Middle Ages* (based at the University of Texas at Austin), and the British research network *Defining the Global Middle Ages* (based at the University of Oxford). The editor of this companion was unfortunately not able to consult the special issue in the journal *Past and Present* (vol. 238, issue supplement 13: *The Global Middle Ages*) that the latter group has published.

³ See, for example, Felten, *Hrabanus Maurus*.

of the factors behind the economic upswing of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate was trade with Tang China (see Chapter 16). Albeit very indirectly, large-scale processes in a faraway place like Tang China thus influenced the historical conditions in which a Carolingian monk lived and worked. Moreover, a global approach can also put historical evidence in different perspective. For example, a historian who contrasts the production of culture by ninth-century Carolingian monks with the scarcity of sources from previous centuries in western Europe observes an astounding intensification of intellectual output. On the other hand, a historian who compares the Carolingian world with the wealth of sources from the contemporaneous manuscript cultures of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate and Tang China realizes that most of the intellectual output of this period actually did not take place in western Europe. In short, macrohistorical narratives provide a frame of reference in which the relative significance of micronarratives can be ascertained.⁴

Macrohistorical narratives are not merely a product of the current global turn in historical studies. Already Enlightenment historians developed notions that can be seen as antecedents to such narratives. In the twentieth century, scholars like Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee developed philosophical models to which they adapted their own macrohistorical narratives. From the 1960s onwards, a more objective approach of historical narratives that encompass the whole globe was developed, which became known as the discipline of world history. In the past several decades similar fields have emerged under the names of global history, transnational history, connected history, entangled history, comparative history, big history, and others.⁵ The exact methodologies of these new fields have not been fully crystallized. The chapters of this companion do not claim to follow any of these fields in particular. What unites them is an exploration of macrohistorical contexts of regions across the globe. For the purposes of this companion, that exploration will be referred to with the umbrella term “global history,” without implying any specific methodology.⁶

Eurocentrism

Modern historiography oscillates. The global turn that historical disciplines have experienced in recent decades started partly as a response to the local turn in which individual and local sources were considered to be the only knowable subjects in history.⁷ The local turn itself was a response to the metanarratives of history that had prevailed since the nineteenth century. These metanarratives assumed that Europe was the standard of all historical development and historians that followed these narratives viewed all regions

4 See also Weinstein, “World Is Your Archive,” esp. 65–67.

5 The genesis of the field of world history and its offshoots has been discussed abundantly. For good overviews, see: Manning, *Navigating World History*, 3–120; J. Bentley, “Task of World History”; M. Bentley, “Theories of World History”; Pomeranz and Segal, “World History.”

6 For a recent, very thorough, attempt to define the methodology of global history, see Conrad, *What Is Global History?*

7 See, for instance, Geertz, *Local Knowledge*; Muir and Ruggiero, *Microhistory*.

of the globe through the prism of analytical standards that were derived from European history.⁸ The appreciation of macrohistorical narratives throughout this companion does not in any way imply that the authors or the editor try to oscillate back to such Eurocentric metanarratives. On the contrary, the ultimate aim of this work is to create a narrative of the early medieval globe that integrates the knowledge of those who have received a traditional training of “European” medieval history and those who specialize in one of the “non-Western areas” of the world.

Nevertheless, in the attempt to transcend a Eurocentric approach lies an inevitable shortcoming. The following nineteen chapters are written by nineteen different scholars who were each educated in an academic world where institutional boundaries have not caught up with intellectual debates. While Eurocentrism has been condemned for at least half a century, academic degrees, departments, conferences, and journals still follow the boundaries as they were set in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While not all those boundaries are hindrances to open historical debates, many of them are. The division of the globe into different “areas,” for example, is often more related to twentieth-century agendas than historical realities. Similarly, the only periodization that is commonly known across disciplines and institutions is the tripartite one of ancient–medieval–modern. Yet for the history of Tibet, for instance, the whole notion of Middle Ages is meaningless.⁹ However, as misleading or outdated as some terminology might be, making newly introduced terms widely accepted is hard, if not impossible. The editor of this companion has chosen not to fight that battle. Instead, “European” categories of time and space are adopted throughout this book, including the title of the companion itself. In some cases, such as the title of Chapter 9, a more neutral designation of a certain regions is used: “West Asia” instead of “the Middle East.” Nevertheless, dividing the Afro-Eurasian land mass into discrete, and conventionally modern, territories runs the risk of reifying modern constructs and may seem to suggest a series of parallel worlds which coexist but are not really connected. However, the semantics of the conventional terms are not strictly followed: after introducing the reader to rudimentary knowledge that has been accumulated within a conventional “area study,” all the chapters take the reader to aspects and themes that do not fit the mould of Eurocentric narratives. If even only one reader feels inspired to devise better geographic and chronological categories for this period of history, then this companion will have been a useful catalyst.

Chronology

Any chronological division of the past is inherently a flawed construct imposed on a continuous course of events. However, looking at the globe from the perspective of human connectivity, the most compelling chronological boundaries of the early medieval

⁸ J. Bentley, “Task of World History,” 4–7 (with further references).

⁹ Foundational discussions about the application of the medieval period to the history of non-European regions of globe can be found in the first issue of the first volume of the *Journal of Medieval History* (1998), which consists of eight articles entirely devoted to this topic. See also J. Bentley, “Hemispheric Integration” and Kulke, *Das europäische Mittelalter*.

period are probably the eruption of the Ilopango volcano in Mesoamerica in 536 CE (see Chapter 18) and the landing of Norse Vikings in Newfoundland around the year 1000 CE.¹⁰ The former event had long-term climatic ripple effects across Afro-Eurasia and thus had an indirect but fundamental influence on the history of large parts of the early medieval globe. The latter event is the first instance of archaeologically attested human contact between the continents of the eastern and western hemisphere since the Palaeolithic era.¹¹ However, the danger of covering 500 years of global history in one companion is that the scholarly analyses become thin and superficial, especially for regions with much historical evidence. Therefore, this companion focuses on a core period of 300 years, from 600 to 900 CE, with some chapters (such as Chapters 4 and 18) venturing into the sixth and tenth centuries. The seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries have been chosen as a core period due to a substantive reason and due to a practical reason. This period roughly coincides with two relatively cohesive phases in the political history of the two largest polities of that world at that time: the Chinese empire (Tang dynasty, 618–904 CE; see Chapter 7) and the caliphate (from the Arab conquests in the seventh century to the political disintegration in the second half of the ninth century; see Chapter 10). The practical reason is the fact that this companion has grown out of a symposium that discussed the global history of the eighth century.

The fact that the Early Middle Ages are approached as a phase in global history does not imply that all societies around the world were either united or characterized by distinctively early medieval patterns or phenomena.¹² There definitely were regional patterns and large cultural zones that only become clear if one adopts a global perspective, such as the cultural sphere of Sinitic and Confucian traditions stretching from Southeast Asia to Japan (see Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8), or the simultaneous end of the Justinianic Plague in western Eurasia in the middle of the eighth century and the subsequent demographic upswing and political consolidation in the Frankish, Byzantine, and Caliphal polities (see Chapter 18). One can also list superlatives of human achievements that date from this period, such as the largest wooden structure ever built (the Tōdaiji in Japan) or the largest Buddhist temple ever constructed (Borobudur in modern Indonesia). However, the wider the spatial reach of one's historical inquiry becomes, the harder any meaningful generalizations become. Like in all other eras after the Neolithic Revolution, some parts of the world contained sedentary and complex societies, while others were inhabited by nomads or hunter-gatherers. The disparity of societal complexity was as large as it could be across the early medieval globe: while the Chinese civilization had already been stratified, institutionalized, and literate for so long that its educated elite could draw on millennium-old intellectual tradition, some islands of the Pacific Ocean were settled by humans for the first time in the tenth century. Europe,

10 Barrett, *Contact, Continuity and Collapse*.

11 The recent volume by Cosmo and Maas (*Eurasian Steppes*) makes an interesting case for the applicability of the period of Late Antiquity, ca. 250 to 750 CE, to large parts of Eurasia (as opposed to just the Mediterranean world of western Eurasia), but not to the whole globe.

12 For discussions on the period 500–1500 as a relatively distinct phase in world history, see J. Bentley, "Hemispheric Integration"; Kedar and Wiesner-Hanks, "Introduction."

India, and Japan were part an interconnected web of trade, migration, and diseases, but these regions did not follow a similar pattern during the early medieval centuries. Demographic patterns in Japan, for example, are in many ways opposite to those in Europe in this period.¹³ Similarly, while much of political history can be summarized as an oscillation between imperial conquest and integration on the one hand and fragmentation and disintegration on the other, all pre-modern centuries are characterized by the fact that there was not one polity or civilization that conquered or influenced the whole globe. As a result, during the seventh century, West Asia experienced a period of imperial integration and expansion under the new caliphate, while Europe and India experienced a period of fragmentation. In other words, these examples show that the notion of global Early Middle Ages does not fit the mould of a particular phase in the grand sweep of human history since there is not one specifically early medieval cultural, political, or socio-economic pattern that applies to all regions of the globe. Nevertheless, such disparity and pluriformity did not prevent human communities from being connected over long distances. The one phenomenon that thus did take nearly global proportions was connectivity.

Connectivity

Connectivity is a fluid concept, and the level of integration of different human communities can vary greatly. In discussions of the globalization of today's world, the notions of connectivity and integration are widely used.¹⁴ In those contexts, two factors are often seen as important indicators of connectivity that are actually irrelevant for the Early Middle Ages, as they are for the whole pre-modern era. The first factor is global awareness. Although some early medieval merchants, travellers and members of the intelligentsia had some knowledge about neighbouring societies, hardly anyone had more than legendary knowledge of far-flung regions, and nobody had knowledge of the geography and civilizations of the entire globe (see Chapter 19). This was a result of the second irrelevant factor: the distant places visited by individual humans. In the modern world, the more people travel between, say, China and western Europe, the more these places are seen to be connected. In the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, few people travelled such long distances. Instead, most long-distance exchange happened through local or regional trade circuits, which linked up with adjacent circuits (see Chapter 16). If many regional trade circuits are connected to each other, then an exchange network emerges in which objects travel much farther than people.

There needs to be more than a sporadic attestation of objects from a distant region to be able to speak of connectivity. For example, a single find of cloves originating in the Maluku Island of eastern Indonesia found in a house in Mesopotamia from 1700 BCE does not constitute enough evidence to assert that these two places were truly integrated

¹³ Farris, *Population, Disease, and Land*, 50–73.

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of the notions of connectivity and integration, see Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 90–114.

with each other or that there was pan-Eurasian connectivity in that period.¹⁵ From the early medieval period, however, there is abundant evidence for such long-distance connectivity (see Chapter 16). The countless regional trade circuits all taken together created a network of exchange of truly global proportions, ultimately connecting the large empires in the centre of Afro-Eurasia with western European monasteries, oases on the southern edge of the Sahara, harbours on the Swahili coast of East Africa, nomadic communities in the Central Asia steppes, local kingdoms on the Indian subcontinent, polities on the Malay and the Korean peninsulas, and merchants from the Indonesian and Japanese archipelagos. While the origins of this vast network of exchange were commercial, it also facilitated the exchange of soldiers, of diplomats, missionaries, intellectuals, and the texts and ideas that they brought, and, finally, of germs. The Justinianic Plague, which emerged in the sixth century and did not truly subside for two centuries afterward, was able to affect people from East Africa to eastern Europe and beyond because the early medieval world was so connected (see Chapter 18).

Early medieval connectivity also had its limits. While the Afro-Eurasian network of exchange included areas as far apart as the Sahel in West Africa and the Mataram of Central Java, it did not extend beyond them. The most important regions that had already been inhabited by humans for centuries or even millennia, but which were excluded from the global exchange of this period were large parts of Oceania, central and southern Africa, and northern Siberia. That exclusion did not entail a sudden end of trade routes. Connectivity is a gradual process, and a trade network does not end abruptly. Compared to, for example, Baghdad, oasis settlements like Agadem (in modern Niger) were plugged into global trade only to a limited extent, via the trans-Saharan trade routes and the Mediterranean hinterland. The routes that connected West Africa with the wider world of Afro-Eurasia did not go further south than Agadem. At least, there is no archaeological evidence for regular interactions with communities to the south (see Chapter 13). Absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence, especially when parts of Central Africa, such as the Central African Republic, are largely *terra incognita* for archaeologists. But it is unlikely that future research will unearth not just sporadic finds but enough evidence to be able to speak of connectivity. The same is true for interactions with communities north of the central Eurasian steppes and south and east of the Indonesian archipelago.

The primary explanation for the limits of long-distance connectivity is probably a combination of geography and human demand. Crossing the Siberian tundras, the central African mountainous jungle, or the Timor Sea towards Australia was difficult and dangerous.¹⁶ Merchants and travellers needed a specific reason to regularly make such journeys, like the West African gold that drew them to cross the Sahara. Apparently, such reasons did not exist for central and southern Africa. The lack of (knowledge of) valuable resources and products was probably compounded by a third factor: relative underpopulation of the distant regions in question, which entailed a more limited production of goods and knowledge and thus fewer pull factors that might attract foreign

15 Buccellati and Buccellati, "Terqa"; Manguin, "Protohistoric and Early Historic Exchange."

16 Summerhayes, "Island Southeast Asia."

merchants.¹⁷ Finally, technological difficulties for transporting people across difficult terrains and waters must also have been a contributing factor. Such difficulties are particularly clear for maritime connections on the West Africa coast, which are remarkably absent in early medieval and other pre-modern centuries—a stark contrast with the vibrant communities on the East African coast (see Chapter 1). Only in the fifteenth century, with the Iberian innovations in naval technology, did it become possible to regularly navigate the strong currents on the West African coast and to integrate its hinterland into a global trading network.¹⁸

Not merely the West African coast but the whole Atlantic Ocean forms the largest limitation of global connections in the Early Middle Ages. There is no evidence that any human crossed this ocean in this period, and the Atlantic coasts of Europe, Africa, South America, and North America were not integrated into any global network. The continents of eastern and western hemispheres were thus not connected. However, although the climatic ripple effects of the volcanic eruption of the Ilopango in Mesoamerica did not follow the pathways of human trade networks, they did influence the course of history across Afro-Eurasia to some extent and thus constitute a form of hemispheric integration. Finally, the Americas as a continent, from Alaska in the north to the Magallanes of modern Chile in the south, did not develop the same kind of long-distance connectivity as Afro-Eurasia between the sixth and the tenth centuries.¹⁹ The trade network of the Mayas did span large parts of Mesoamerica, as did less complex societies in North and South America on a smaller scale, but these networks never added up to a pan-American web of early medieval exchange.²⁰

Global History vs Globalization

It is tempting to see all of human history since the last Ice Age as a slow process of macro-social integration in which humans and their communities have become increasingly connected over the course of 10,000 years. If one looks at intervals of millennia, such a process seems to emerge from archaeological and historical records, but when the intervals are narrowed to centuries, this approach turns out to be problematic. The Afro-Eurasian world of the ninth century was definitely less integrated than it would be

17 For an introduction to the pre-modern history of Central Africa, see Denbow, *Archaeology and Ethnography*.

18 Foundational treatments of the navigational difficulties along the West Africa coast can be found in: Mauny, “La Navigation sur les côtes du Sahara”; Devisse, “Les Africains, la mer et les historiens.”

19 Comparisons of continental integration are rare. One widely discussed, but strictly environmentally determinist, theory is Jared Diamond’s continental axis hypothesis, which argues that humans interacted more easily along the east–west axis of Eurasia than along the north–south axis of the Americas because climates change more rapidly along lines of longitude, which made it more difficult for humans to adapt, see: Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, 176–91.

20 For discussions on pre-modern trade networks in the Americas, see Hirth and Pillsbury, *Merchants, Markets, and Exchange*.

in the thirteenth century after the Mongol conquests,²¹ and it also was more integrated than around the year 600 CE. However, it is difficult to argue that Afro-Eurasia was more integrated by the year 600 than by the year 100 CE.²² More importantly, looking at global history as a slow process of integration and connectivity makes it tempting to see every epoch in history as part of the process of globalization. Herein lies the danger of a modernocentric bias by overemphasizing the exceptional instances of imperial integration and long-distance exchange in the pre-modern centuries, when local and regional connections were actually much more pervasive. While this companion can be grouped together with other works on pre-modern global history, it is *not* another history of globalization.²³ The synchronic connections that the following chapters will elucidate do not imply that they are yet another chain in the linear process that ultimately leads to the globalized world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Jürgen Osterhammel has argued, it makes sense to talk about globalization only after all three main oceans of the world were integrated into one trading network, a convenient starting date for which would be the year 1571, when Manila was founded as a Spanish entrepôt.²⁴ During the Early Middle Ages, only the Indian Ocean had already been integrated into a wider trading network for several millennia. The Pacific Ocean was probably crossed for the first time in the ninth century, and the Atlantic was not crossed at all: both oceans were thus effectively excluded from any process of global integration.²⁵ In short, this companion aims to reveal the web of connections across the globe during the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, but it does not support the teleological retrojection of globalization.

Organization of Chapters

The areas of the globe that the following nineteen chapters discuss reflect the historical connectivity of the early medieval world. Regions that are excluded are those that were hardly or not at all plugged into global networks of exchange: central and southern Africa, northern Siberia, Australia, North America, and South America. The first fifteen chapters each discuss a region that was in one way or another connected to such networks. Starting from East Africa, these chapters take the reader around the globe eastward via Southeast Asia to Japan and then westward via Inner Asia to the Sahara and western Europe. Although the oceanic world was not connected on a regular basis with Southeast Asia and thus to the Afro-Eurasian world, Chapter 4 discusses the various archipelagos of Oceania, since it not only provides a panorama of connectivity between communities

21 See Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*.

22 For recent introductions to Afro-Eurasian connections in antiquity, see Kumar, *History of Sino-Indian Relations*; Scott, *Ancient Worlds*.

23 For a recent discussion of pre-modern “globalizations,” see Jennings, “Distinguishing Past Globalizations.”

24 Osterhammel, “Globalizations,” 95.

25 Buschmann, *Oceans*.

that are scattered across far-flung islands but it also includes the first instance of interaction between Eastern Polynesia and South America. Finally, Mesoamerica is the only region from the Americas to which a chapter is devoted since the Mayas created the largest regional network in that continent and since the eruption of the Ilopango in modern Mexico is the only connection of the early medieval Americas with Afro-Eurasia. The final four chapters incorporate material from all previous chapters and provide integrated and thematic investigations that transcend any particular region.

Complex, sedentary societies with social stratification and written traditions receive more attention than non-sedentary societies: only the chapters on Oceania (Chapter 4) and Inner Asia (Chapter 9) discuss nomadic communities in detail. Each chapter discusses the region in question over a period of approximately 300 years, but within that framework the authors have made certain selections. Since this companion has grown out of a symposium on the global eighth century, some scholars have chosen to focus on that century; others have made different selections based on case studies that represent this period best. Similarly, within the regions that each chapter discusses certain selections have been made. As a result, some parts of the world receive little attention, such as northern Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, the southern littoral of the Mediterranean, and the Gangetic plain in northern India. However, despite such lacunae, all the chapters give an extensive overview of the regions in question. Each chapter is written with two aims in mind: to introduce non-specialist readers to the most important developments of the region in question and to provide an overview of the current state of scholarly research. For some regions, like western Europe or China, these overviews provide new approaches to earlier synopses. The chapters on East Africa (Chapter 1) and Oceania (Chapter 4), however, include the first syntheses that have ever been written of the archaeological research on the early medieval period of these regions.

Any overview of global history inherently invites the reader to connect and to compare different phenomena and cultures. While this companion does both, the explicit emphasis is on connectivity. Similarities between the power struggles of the aristocracies in Silla Korea and in the 'Abbāsid caliphate, for example, can be drawn after reading Chapters 6 and 10, but they are not discussed in the text. Both chapters do discuss the connections that the Silla state and the caliphate had with other cultures and how those connections shaped their own polity and culture. In doing so, all the chapters of this companion aim first to inspire medievalists to look beyond their own intellectual horizons. More importantly, they also aim to demonstrate to anyone interested in pre-modern history that the early medieval phase of nearly every region of the world was part of a web of human connections that had global proportions.

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