Defining the Global Middle Ages
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This report sketches the goals and findings of a research network involving some thirty UK-based academics, charting the development of our collective thinking from efforts to establish parameters to our ›breakthrough‹ into new findings and approaches, over the course of three workshops.[1]

What was ›global‹ in the Middle Ages?

Our project begins from the premise that the medieval period has the potential to shape central debates within the broader field of global history while at the same time being enriched itself by global perspectives. Rather than relying on interpretative frameworks borrowed from scholars of other historical periods, we feel that the pressing task is to analyse the global as it was experienced in the Middle Ages. We are looking for a global Middle Ages that makes sense in its own terms, and seek to define the scope, limits and nature of the global in the period (c. 300 to 1600)[2] characterised by multiple centres, porous boundaries, and plural societies.

Until very recently ›global history‹ has tended to focus on the origins of the modern world and has only rarely strayed before the sixteenth century. Yet it is now abundantly clear that features associated with ›modern‹ global history, such as long-distance trade, voluntary and forced migration, multi-ethnic empires, and the transmission of cultural forms, were also present in a number of locations many centuries before 1600. The surviving evidence, textual and material, illuminates innumerable connections and comparisons, but requires careful handling if the scope, nature and significance of these relationships are to be properly understood. Central to any picture of a global Middle Ages is communication: how did ideas, products and people move within and across cultural traditions, and what was the range and volume of such transmissions? Everywhere we find that medieval communications simultaneously expressed local as well as long-distance characteristics. This tension is integral to any assessment of the nature and extent of global communication in a medieval context, and has important implications for our understanding of other periods when the long-distance and the localised were (and continue to be) engaged in complex and dynamic relationships.

This research takes place in a context of change. In 1989, Janet Abu-Lughod made an examination of a short-lived but powerful late-medieval world system facilitated by the mid-thirteenth century expansion of the Mongols, which for a decade remained an isolated

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contribution.[3] As readers of this journal will know, interest in the ancient and medieval dimensions to the global is now mounting,[4] but medieval global history is still a fledgling field. Eurasia dominates discussion, leaving little space for Africa or the Americas. Medievalists have yet to establish the most basic definitions of what may be involved in globalising the Middle Ages. We have yet to decide what ›the Middle Ages‹ can or should mean in a global context, or the extent to which our presumed chronological range from 300 to 1600 is ›medieval‹ in any part of the world beyond Europe. The scope of the field, methods, treatment of evidence, and the potential and limitations of adopting a global perspective remain sketchy. Instead those who study this period often draw on methods and perspectives offered by other historical timeframes or look for medieval examples or phases in subjects for which the parameters have been established by others: for example empire-building, state-formation, migration and long-distance trade in precious commodities. Yet the unquestioning application of theories and models from other contexts runs the risk of occluding and distorting medieval globalisms, particularly the creative tension between the global and the local. We need to define a new field of historical inquiry within which to give serious attention to the global dimensions of history in a period all too often dismissed as a mere precursor to the modern world.

Accordingly our project has three main intellectual goals. First, we want to establish medieval history on a truly global footing, and we are particularly concerned to ensure that the new field does not simply become another form of Eurasian history shaped by primarily Eurocentric debates borrowed from other periods. Instead, we are actively seeking to integrate Africa and the Americas on their own terms, and put effort into drawing on perspectives from the study of these world regions in our considerations of the global. Second, we are trying to analyse the global as it was experienced in the Middle Ages themselves. This means that we pay close attention to material as well as written evidence, but international luxury trades are not our chief concern. Rather we seek out non-elite contexts and focus on the regional and local. Third, our explorations rest upon chronological and geographical specificity. We do not begin from top-down theories about global processes and phenomena and then seek regional case studies. Rather, we begin from regional expertise and then seek to establish what might be global about local situations. By addressing these objectives we aim to generate questions, analyses and theories that come from our understandings of the pre-modern world and which will offer new approaches to both later and earlier periods.

In 2012 we obtained funding from the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to create a network of thirty-three UK-based scholars, each with different regional specialisms who could investigate these objectives under the banner question: ›What was ›global‹ in the Middle Ages?‹[5] The group included those with expertise in Africa, the Americas,

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3　Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*.

4　See, for example, for comparative studies of the medieval and ancient worlds: Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*; Haour, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics*; Scheidel, *Rome and China*; and for in-depth studies of medieval maritime worlds, Green, *Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,* as well as ›The Copper Plates from Kollam. Using a 9th Century Legal Document to Explore the Medieval Indian Ocean World‹, an AHRC network project (2011-13) organised from De Montfort University by Elizabeth Lambourn (http://849ce.org.uk/; retrieved on 06 June 2015). Resources for studying a more global Middle Ages are becoming increasingly accessible: see, for instance, the International Dunhuang project, which makes available the texts and materials from Dunhuang and the eastern Silk Road (http://idp.bl.uk; retrieved on 06 June 2015).

5　We also received funding from The John Fell Fund, The History Faculty of the University of Oxford, and The Centre for the Study of the Middle Ages at the University of Birmingham. Our workshops of 2012 to 2014 were prefaced by a pilot event held in Oxford in 2011 (sponsored by the John Fell Fund).

eastern Eurasia and western Eurasia, thus breaking down traditional barriers between European medievalists and specialists in world regions beyond Europe. The network met four times between 2012 and 2014 to discuss approaches to the global Middle Ages. We met on a fifth occasion to develop publication plans. The network also organized an outreach event which presented our findings to an audience of early career academics, museum curators and high school teachers. In this report we offer thoughts from our first two meetings, which tackled the almost impossible to handle, and yet unavoidable, themes of historiography and periodisation. Their value was to clarify the parameters of our project. We also include some findings from our third workshop, on networks, where our discussion and conclusions point to a tool of substantial significance for studying what was global about the Middle Ages.

Locating parameters

The **historiography** workshop was divided into four thematic sessions that each questioned how far historiographical models borrowed from the study of other periods or regions can facilitate or inhibit research into the global Middle Ages. The themes selected were empire, divergences and transformations, religion, and resources. All four themes were found to include useful elements but we also discovered that we needed to eliminate, adjust and winnow quite substantially to make them productive for the medieval period.

›Empire‹ seemed an obvious category to investigate, and we found it easy to see how this theme was global, with network participants offering many comparisons and parallels from across the medieval globe. That said, we found the utility of the concept of ›empire‹ limited for our period. This was in part because it proved difficult to disentangle ›empire‹ from other political units. A kingdom-empire distinction, for instance, did not seem especially helpful. Nonetheless wrestling with the scope and criteria of ›empire‹ led to an issue which really engaged the group during this workshop and continued to shape discussion across subsequent meetings: the question of praxis. How do you do things (as a ruler) and what is it like to have things done to you (as a subject)? But questions of what rulers *do* generated in turn questions about what they are *for*, and about how much of an impact they really have on their subjects. During periods of slow transportation and little mass communication, as in the Middle Ages, the top-down roles of coercion and persuasion mattered, but so too did bottom-up impulses to associate as followers in various guises with those who were deemed to be attractive, useful and efficacious, a set of ideas which the group felt we could distil into the formula of: ›the empire as umpire‹. While there was an evident lack of congruence between what ›empire‹ means for the Middle Ages and for other periods, some parallels did emerge that suggested the study of a global Middle Ages has the potential to contribute to the study of more ›modern‹ phenomena. These might include the important role in imperial states played by collaborating elites, especially as hinges between remote imperial authorities and local populations, and the desire for rulership or leadership. Perhaps the most useful conclusion to come out of our study of empire was that we clearly need to conceive of the political in the medieval world in terms of entangled units, units that were themselves rarely neat and discrete but were typified by the most fluid of boundaries.

Our second historiographical theme was ›Divergences and Transformations‹, and here again we saw limitations but also potential. The group was wary of grand comparative history that was overly reliant on the model of divergence, largely because of its tendencies to efface specificities, to adopt a teleology focused on modernity and to offer an essentially ›western‹ cultural perspective. Nonetheless large-scale change was not rejected out of hand. In particular the group felt we would not want to abandon the notion of a transformation characterised

by common dynamics or patterns of causation that might then precipitate regionally-specific outcomes: in this way, a concept such as a Eurasian ›transformation‹ around 1000-1200 could be rendered historically plausible. The group saw potential for thinking about causes of parallel transformation – climate, disease, neo-Malthusian constraints, technology – while also being drawn to the study of the moments at which processes of change (often long drawn-out and caused by different pressures) were recognised by different societies. In short, large-scale hypotheses were thought to be productive if founded on strong enough empirical bases. We were reminded that as historians we are constitutionally set up to look sceptically at theories and insist on local differences, but if we want to engage in large-scale analysis or develop some kind of conception of the global, we will have to find ways of creating acceptable generalisations.

In our analysis of our third theme, of ›Religion‹, we were keen to see whether there were patterns or problems in regional historiographies that could point us towards new models with global reach. We approached religion through several different lenses including those of ›encounter‹ between different confessional groups, and practices and beliefs that were potentially comparable, such as sacrifice. Despite these efforts, ›religion‹ simply seemed to be too large a category for coherent investigation. Certainly we could see that issues connected to exchange of beliefs and practices, shared space, competition, and co-existence were all potentially fruitful avenues to pursue globally. Equally it was clear that to make headway with religion as a medieval global theme, scholars in this field will need to overcome the dominant focus on Christianity, and to avoid or refine the terminology that goes with that focus. The topic will need engagement, for instance, with a more capacious category such as ›clerisy‹ rather than the predominantly Christian term ›clergy‹; or the weaving of conflicts between Church and State into a broader story of tensions between ruling powers and religious specialists, rather than taking that western Christian binary as the standard for other comparisons. The group also felt that material culture, particularly objects, could prove to be an asset to the study of global medieval religions, not least because objects can help to shrink the distance between official pronouncements by rulers and religious experts and lived, on-the-ground practice. Nonetheless, given the vastness of religion as a topic, we thought it better pursued as an integral element of other themes rather than as a theme in its own right.

Our final historiography workshop theme was ›Resources‹, in which the network's approach of comparing specialist regional historiographies to generate more global ideas proved extremely successful. It seemed a theme with the capacity for enabling the global to be seen in both comparative and connective terms. We could, for instance, compare states, institutions and socio-economic organisations by examining their relationship with and control over resources. We could alternatively use resources to focus on connectivities between disparate parts of the medieval world through trade and forms of non-economic exchange (e.g. gift-giving). This is a theme which would allow material culture to take centre stage by consideration of the use, reuse, adaptation and transformation of objects or resources as they moved through space and time. ›Resources‹ have an obvious connection to ecology: the role that access to natural resources (woodland, fossil fuels, animals, fertile lands etc.) had in determining parallel and divergent social, economic and political developments in otherwise unconnected parts of the globe. Equally this is a theme susceptible to cultural readings, including the comparative study of the non-material resources on which societies drew, such as stories, texts, memories, images and symbols, and on the connections, exchanges and adaptations made in different locations and contexts. Above all, ›resources‹ is a category which is concerned with both local and global scales of experience.

Our second workshop, on **periodisation**, was inspired by the problem of using the term ›Middle Ages‹ in a global context. This seemed important given the essentially western context to that label. More generally, we were keen to think about what we gain or lose from periodisations that are used by those writing about a history they claim as their own (whether those writers are western or otherwise) and by those looking in from outside. At the heart of the discussion was the question of whether we can improve on the term ›Middle Ages‹.

In a session we called ›Beginnings and Endings‹ we considered whether it was possible to distinguish a global Middle Ages from what came afterwards and (to a lesser extent) what came before; a consideration that forced us to question whether any such ›before‹ and ›after‹ distinctions made any sense at all and, if they did, whether they did so merely in a Eurasian context or could be applied over a wider geographical canvas. Should historians seek to identify a single global Middle Ages distinct from other periods, or should we instead be pluralising our period into more finely-cut and overlapping segments, and be more sensitive to the idea of gradual globalising (and de-globalising?) steps? Should we accept the arguments of early modernists that the first truly global world only emerged in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, characterised by the spread and strength of connections? And should we thus see a (global) Middle Ages as essentially less connected, in the sense that direct links between regions as far apart as as China and western Europe were almost non-existent? If this was so, should the global Middle Ages by definition be more about looking for useful comparisons rather than seeking to uncover connections? Or might we want to use connectivity in a more nuanced way that could then redraw period boundaries? Might we think about how different parts of the world ›brushed against‹ each other on an intermittent basis rather than in terms of suddenly intensifying connection? With this outlook could we then think, for example, less about a big bang of contact across the Atlantic during the fifteenth century and more about an earlier northern Atlantic system gradually giving way to a south Atlantic one, an approach which would erode the standard medieval-early modern distinction? More radically, should we give airtime to ideas of ›big time‹ periodisation? To do so might break down distinctions between antiquity, medieval and early modern and we could then think about the Middle Ages as the end phase of a much longer period that was characterised by large scale agrarian empires in Eurasia, which had emerged in the Neolithic and only ended when Eurasians reached out beyond Eurasia.

 Although our group in fact thought the ›big time‹ idea too huge for useful explanatory frameworks, we agreed that ›going global‹ has the potential to relativise what may seem to specialists like obvious periodisations, and may make us more sensitive to the fact that very early processes usually considered typical of and confined to one age may still be playing out at a much later date. We also saw a place for attending to how contemporaries periodised themselves in the centuries between 300 and 1600, especially to the ways in which they marked key transitions and transformations. We thought that placing contemporary conceptions at the heart of our discussion could allow us to escape from key dates such as 1492, the significance of which may be overstated, especially to contemporaries. Sensitivity to contemporaries‹ views may also enable new key dates or processes to emerge, especially if we can detect resonances across cultures, which might be in the form of shared expressions and responses rather than physical connections.

Contemporary conception was a theme developed by a guest lecture from one of the network's international visitors, Professor Nile Green (UCLA), who encouraged us to see a global Middle Ages in terms of a history of contemporary cultures or orderings of time.

This would generate an inherently plural, subjective and yet also collective scholarly exercise which could shift the focus of global history away from economies (as with the standard world time of early modernity) to mentalities. In this context, time according to different calendars, diverse concepts of time in different scriptural traditions, and genealogical times might all have their place. Time orderings – and times – are, after all, social creations. They overlap, come and go, succeed and fail, and compete. And they become part of the history we are examining.

Contemporary conceptions of periodisation were also opened up later in the workshop particularly with regard to the relationship between the construction and reproduction of periodisation and legitimation strategies. One crucial difference between modern and medieval periodisations which struck network members was that the latter were typically connected to large cosmological systems, whereas those of today are not. The focus on the contemporary perception of time(s) and use(s) of time-systems also drew out a distinction between the multiplicity of time-systems available to medieval contemporaries and the far more limited set of ways in which modern society measures both present and historical time.

In another session, which seemed to follow on naturally from beginnings and endings, we moved to ›Shifts and Transitions‹, to discover that conventional European periodisation markers, such as the ›Renaissance‹ and ›medieval‹, clearly do not travel well or easily into other cultures, such as those in China, the Islamic world or India. Indeed we noted that conventional periodisations are often recognised as problematical, contested and distorting even within their ›home‹ historiography; in this context using such periodisations in the discussion and description of other parts of the world seems particularly hazardous. Surely, network members asked, it should be possible to synthesize new theories from bottom-up, evidence-based studies, which are then compared around specific issues, instead of through the use of overly general periodisation categories? This session also pointed to the dangers of nominalism: of something becoming real simply because it is labelled and named. Thus ›Silk Road narratives‹ often leave out central Asia and India, given their primary concern with the eastern and western ends of the routes. Clearly we need to make the periods we choose to use more complex and wide-ranging than sticking to the overly simplistic stories, whether of ›Renaissance‹ or ›Silk Roads‹. Central Asia, for instance, should not be defined simply by the fact that people crossed it on particular occasions, but rather by the significant historical developments that occurred there.

Rather than abandoning the notion of periodisation altogether, however, the network thought it important to pin down crucial and genuinely transformative shifts between periods, in contrast to what might be termed ›motion‹, i.e. the regular changes that all societies experience. In addition, even if we wish to avoid nominalist over-simplifications such as ›Silk Road‹ and ›Renaissance‹, we decided that we wanted to leave open the possibility of broad comparison of processes such as secularisation or state-formation and collapse.

In as much as shifts and transitions were thought to matter greatly, at least at times, the network was also keen to think about how standard periodisations gloss over or ignore phases which do not always ›fit‹. In a session on ›Blanks and Gaps‹, the case of Eastern Eurasia was used to explore this point: namely that certain transitional phases in this region's history were often relegated relative to others that more conveniently slotted into official historiography (the Yuan in the case of the Song-Yuan-Ming period, for instance). In a similar way certain political units, such as the nomadic empires or the kingdoms of central Asia, have been ignored or marginalised because of their unclear, awkward (or in the nomad case, overschematised and thereby static) relationships with political institutions the continuity

of which dominates the way historians periodise. More attention to these ›marginal‹ entities would open the subject up to new layered and overlapping schemes of periodisation in parallel with the more familiar dynastic model.

Throughout the workshop we returned to the question of whether or not we should worry about using the terms ›medieval‹ or ›Middle Ages‹ at all, given their historiographical baggage. Some felt these were unavoidable, and harmless within our particular group, given that none of us was using them to imply or assume that other parts of the globe shared the particular characteristics of medieval Europe at the same time. Others were conscious that these terms have been very deliberately rejected by prominent practitioners of pre-modern global history and were more uncomfortable about their use. This was a debate which resurfaced from time to time in subsequent workshops, but given that we tended to find ourselves making most headway when looking at the rich contexts that shelter underneath big labels such as these, we have learned to live with ›medieval‹ and ›Middle Ages‹, provided they are used in value-free ways, and always in hope that a more suitable label will emerge in due course.

Networks

Having established some theoretical parameters for our field of inquiry in our first two workshops, our next meeting took up the themes of networks, an approach which proved to be creative and flexible for analysing the polycentric and permeable medieval world. This theme enabled us to get closer to our goal of working out how the global Middle Ages were actually experienced. Networks are a familiar idea and we wanted to continue to break down traditional categories by focusing not on what things or ideas a network carried but on what communicative work it did in cutting across time, space or activities. How and what did different communities communicate with each other over space and time? But also what were the physical and cultural limits on communication?

Our first two sessions, both on ›Networks and Their Functions‹, brought us to questions about what different kinds of network might be identified, *how* networks work and *what* work they do that is not provided by other social relationships. The value of ranging beyond Eurasia was demonstrated by analyses of East and West African networks that focused on the people as much as on the objects involved. These analyses generated the idea of the ›spindly‹ network, applicable in both coastal and hinterland contexts and characterised by relatively small numbers of agents, who linked these African ›small worlds‹ through just a few nodes to reach as far as East Asia. These agents were ›strangers‹ who ›belonged‹ to the routes rather than the local communities through which they passed, but the objects (and ideas) they carried were integrated into local worlds in ways that might have been unrecognisable to the originators, as when Chinese pottery was incorporated into house walls on the Swahili coast. A very similar pattern was subsequently observed in circuits identified as running around Europe from c. 950 until c. 1100. The key point to emerge from these comparisons was the importance of understanding the relationship between global networks and local conditions. Discussion covered whether the specialised local knowledge of agents was more critical in network functions than their characteristics as ›strangers‹; the romanticisation of the pre-modern as less bounded and less scrutinised; and our preference for ›pulses‹ of network activity rather than linear development. We considered the need for a typology of networks that should differentiate types of routes and nodes, and the functions of global and local networks.

This discussion did not elaborate on whether the traders travelling these spindly networks formed a community with each other, but those who interacted with relics in Orthodox con-

texts do seem to have created community by means of shared participation, in sometimes discrete locations, in a set of devotional practices involving ›contact relics‹ (oil, clothes, water) that linked believers physically with the holy person at the centre of a cult and could offer the potential to challenge established authorities. Meanwhile, travel accounts that described the long-distance routes between the sinitic and the Islamic worlds had afterlives in which the texts were valued for elements other than their practical information, which is indicative of waves of connectedness followed by periods of greater disconnect. Two peaks of connectedness may have been the seventh to ninth centuries and Janet Abu-Lughod's mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth centuries. The latter prompted a reminder that the concept of ›world system‹ would be worth keeping on hand as a reminder that larger connectivities may be built from indirect links. This in turn raised questions about the spatiality and fluidity of networks, about if, when and how networks can become communities, and about the benefits that induce people to pay the cost of becoming a member of a network.

A related point arose from our discussions of ›Networks and Borders‹, and concerned the evident need for traders and travellers in networks or circuits to develop common points of reference to enable the solemnising of the agreements which long distance exchanges required. This could generate a sense of commonality transcending political and sectarian boundaries, but the free movement and exchange of ideas along these circuits could also have prompted a reaction from religious authorities fearful of challenge. Such reactions may help to explain some of the boundary-maintenance activities of the eleventh century, such as advocating warfare against the enemies of Christ and the liberation of Jerusalem. This then points towards an area of possible comparison with the circumstances in other parts of the world in which the boundaries of belief and ideology also hardened in the eleventh century.

Continuing with ›Networks and Borders‹, a presentation on the Americas reinforced the value of bringing non-Eurasian regions into our considerations. The search was for a new narrative to transcend the hegemonic account of Western European-Mesoamerican links focused on 1492. Hence the emphasis lay upon seafaring networks predating Columbus that ranged not only across the North Atlantic but also involved the movement of people, goods and ideas from Mesoamerica into Europe c. 1400-1700. This would also have the effect of decentering the ›Atlantic‹, so that what is normally seen as a spiderweb network might be reconfigured as a matrix in which sensitivities at one node set off vibrations across other diverse nodes.

In the session on ›Network Dynamics‹ we heard about the ›apostolic networks‹ of thirteenth-century Christian friars, personalised political networks in north China and Inner Asia in the seventh to ninth centuries, and trade and distribution networks in early medieval Europe, each with its own particular dynamics. The friars formed a diachronic and partly imaginary network by linking themselves to the original apostles, while in Asia they created real networks of helpers and believers. The latter, sustained by the sense of being God's agents on earth, were able to survive periods of dormancy between one friar's departure and another's arrival, suggesting that even intermittent contact could be enough to maintain networks as virtual entities through periods of physical attenuation, particularly if supported by a powerful cosmology. Meanwhile, the highly dynamic political networks of northern China and Inner Asia emerge as a single system[6] in which networks of elites formed and re-formed around those perceived to offer effective leadership for managing persistent military and ecological challenges. The constant dynamism of northern networks contrasts with the more stable hierarchies of the new society centred on the Yangzi valley from around the tenth century.

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6   Skaff, Sui-Tang China.

Networks arising for different purposes also interacted with each other. In the European Early Middle Ages extensive networks typically engaged in long-distance trade, and often necessarily intersected with intensive networks that distributed resources in local communities. While it is difficult to reconstruct trading networks from archaeological evidence, in this case material and textual evidence combine to show how long-distance networks thickened and faded according to opportunities and competition, and how local demand could set the agenda for long-distance traders. The nodal points of medieval networks were broadly equal, and we noted here a contrast with the hierarchies of nodes in later periods. At such times networks such as the Hanse or the East India Company had the upper hand over local networks partly because they offered new opportunities to local interests that were willing to comply. Some people were apparently more willing to engage with ›otherness‹, risk and distance than others, leading them towards long-distance rather than local networks.

This session set the dynamics specific to each network alongside both their ›internal‹ roles within recognised political spaces and their ›external‹ capacity for crossing temporal and spatial boundaries to link far-flung places. Discussion also noted that we need to place the useful flexibility and informality of networks, and their commonplace emergence from inter-personal relations, against the utility of institutions, with their reliability, standardisation and implication in formal structures of authority. We also noted the importance of considering what written, graphical or mnemonic resources contributed to sustaining networks – particularly if highly extended or intermittent – over time. Finally, we pondered whether networks existed in all forms of society and whether they were merely another Eurocentric way of understanding other parts of the world.

A presentation by our international visitor, Professor André Wink (University of Wisconsin-Madison), reinforced our thinking about the generative quality of the medieval period by replacing the idealisation of India's ancient period with an argument that in many regards India was the product of the Middle Ages. Particularly germane to our endeavours were his observations of a dearth of archaeological research; that India, while exposed to the steppe world, was conquered not by nomads but by sedentary peoples with origins in the nomadic world; and that ›conversion‹ is a less helpful idea than slow cultural transformation in which saints, tombs and relics were integral to the gradual adoption of Islam.

We came to the end of the workshop feeling that, despite some scepticism, most found the concept of networks useful, perhaps especially as a description of personalised contacts rather than of systems. We would, however, henceforth wish to use the term ›network‹ with more precision than previously, because network, community, connection, contact, communication and world system are not the synonyms they are often taken to be, with some concepts less useful than others. Also important are the concepts of nodes, centres, starting points and the ›gatekeepers‹ who exact a price for entering or moving around a network. Since the individual is always the centre of a network in their own mind, so our focus should be more on the individual experience of networks, especially at the level of choice.

New directions
With this third workshop we felt that the project had come of age. Without ignoring the difficulties created by mismatches in historiography and periodisation, we had nevertheless found a vocabulary and method for investigating commonalities, contrasts and connections around the medieval globe. While some medievalists argue that ›medieval‹ is a specifically European concept, so specialists in world regions beyond Europe may make claims to uniqueness that require their region to be studied *sui generis*. Bringing together European medie-

valists and regional specialists has done what we hoped it would to undercut traditional scholarly boundaries, question longstanding assumptions and open up the ›home‹ fields of network members to new questions and issues. We end up with many more questions rather than answers, but at least the lines of enquiry are opened up.

Network members
Lesley Abrams (Oxford) – W Eurasia: Scandinavian world, conversion
Scott Ashley (Newcastle) – W Eurasia: Vikings, W Europe
Sergei Bogatyrev (University College London) – W Eurasia: Russia
John Darwin (Oxford) – British Commonwealth
Hilde de Weerdt (Kings College London/Leiden) – E/S Eurasia: China institutional
Kent Deng (London School of Economics) - E/S Eurasia: China economic
Caroline Dodds Pennock (Sheffield) – Americas: Aztecs, Spanish America, Atlantic
Glen Dudbridge (Oxford) – E/S Eurasia: China
Ian Forrest (Oxford) – W Eurasia: England institutions, religion and society
Anne Gerritsen (Warwick) – E/S Eurasia: China
Anne Haour (East Anglia) – Africa: Sahel, W African archaeology
Catherine Holmes (Oxford) – W Eurasia: Byzantium
Tim Insoll (Manchester) – Africa: sub-Saharan, W African, Islamic archaeology
Andrew Laird (Warwick) – Americas: Spanish America
Elizabeth Lambourn (De Montfort) – E/S Eurasia: Sri Lanka
Jay Lewis (Oxford) – E/S Eurasia: Korea
Conrad Leyser (Oxford) – W Eurasia: W Europe
Neil McLynn (Oxford) – W Eurasia: later Roman
Bob Moore (Newcastle) – clerical elites and social transformation
Andrew Newman (Edinburgh) – E/S Eurasia: Islamic world
Arietta Papaconstantinou (Reading) – Africa: Egypt, Rome, Islam
Amanda Power (Sheffield) – W Eurasia: Mediterranean world
Andrew Redden (Liverpool) – Americas: early modern Latin/Central Americas
Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge) – W Eurasia: Russia, Byzantium
Naomi Standen (Birmingham) – E/S Eurasia: China, Inner Asia
Alan Strathern (Oxford) – E/S Eurasia: Sri Lanka, global religious encounters
John Watts (Oxford) – W Eurasia: Europe politics
Monica White (Nottingham) – W Eurasia: Russia and Byzantium
Susan Whitfield (International Dunhuang Project) – E/S Eurasia: China, Central Asia
Mark Whittow (Oxford) – W Eurasia: Mediterranean archaeology
Chris Wickham (Oxford) – W Eurasia: W Europe
Stephanie Wynne-Jones (York) – Africa: E African coastal urbanism
Simon Yarrow (Birmingham) – W Eurasia: W Europe, global

International visitors (first three workshops)
Nile Green (UCLA) – E/S Eurasia: Islamic S Asia
André Wink (Madison) – E/S Eurasia: S Asia

Workshop contents
Historiography (10-12 September, Oxford)
Empire: presentations by Alan Strathern, Andrew Newman, Anne Haour

Divergences and Transformations: presentations by Hilde de Weerdt, Bob Moore, Caroline Dodds Pennock
Religion: presentations by Conrad Leyser, Andrew Redden, Catherine Holmes
Resources: presentations by Monica White, Anne Gerritsen, Stephanie Wynne-Jones

Periodisation (19-20 January 2013, Birmingham)
Beginnings and Endings: presentations by Alan Strathern, Scott Ashley, Glen Dudbridge
International visitor: Nile Green
Shifts and Transitions: presentations by John Watts, Susan Whitfield
Blanks and Gaps: presentations by Naomi Standen, Mark Whittow
Contemporary Notions of Periodisation: presentations by Hilde de Weerdt, Simon Yarrow, Amanda Power

Networks (16-18 September 2013, Newcastle)
Networks and Their Functions: presentations by Anne Haour, Stephanie Wynne-Jones, Monica White, Glen Dudbridge
International visitor: André Wink
Networks and Borders: presentations by Jonathan Shepard, Kent Deng, Caroline Dodds Pennock
Network Dynamics: presentations by Amanda Power, Naomi Standen, Scott Ashley

References

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