

especially xenophobic, that they lived in peaceful coexistence with immigrants most of the time, and that they were, at the very least, willing to accept foreigners into their local communities.

There is certainly room for debate here. The authors' distinction between racism and xenophobia may be too rigid to hold up to deep scrutiny, and even if economic concerns lay behind the aggression against certain immigrant groups, some kind of low-level antipathy against foreigners still seems to be part of the equation when violence erupted. But the authors deserve a great deal of credit for articulating a new and more positive vision for the relationship, and for providing such a thorough and thought provoking presentation of the evidence available for making a judgment.

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Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, eds. *The Global Middle Ages*. Past and Present Supplements 18. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 441 pp, 8 maps. ISBN 9780198837503. £28/\$45

Medievalists who have engaged with world or global history have generally worked hard to earn their right to a place at the table, against the common presumption of (early) modernists, both historians and others, that they have nothing to bring to it, by demonstrating the relevance of their specialism to the great questions about the origins and nature of modernity. This volume, which originated in a series of meetings convened by a group of Oxford medievalists to explore the problems and possibilities of teaching medieval history on a global basis, from which evolved the more focused discussions that produced the publication, does not dispute the legitimacy of such concerns. (The reviewer, to declare an interest, took part in the former but not the latter). It does, however, insist that this is not the route to understanding the world before 1500 or thereabouts, and that that world is worth understanding for its own sake and on its own terms. To this end it neither surveys nor synthesizes “The Global Middle Ages,” and does not trouble itself overmuch as to what they might have been. “However great the methodological, terminological and political difficulties associated with (the label),” say the editors, “the plentiful evidence for behaviour and interaction on a global scale in the millennium before 1500 deserves sustained and precise analysis” (1-2), and that is exactly what they offer. It would be a mistake, however, to take that resounding declaration as betokening the traditional British disdain for methodological reflection. On the contrary, both the Editors' Introduction and the individual contributions are fully aware of the (mostly present-directed) debates around the terms of their title, though for the most part they choose not to engage with them at length. Instead, conscious of “the need to resist the teleology of modernity and resist the dominant globalization narrative”, they confront the evidence for their chosen millennium head on, asking first and foremost how to shake free of the distorting burden of the present and understand in its own right a world that “did not know it was before anything.” This requires more than merely avoiding

Eurocentredness, because comparative history on a global scale, as currently practiced, is largely framed by pre-existing categories (“state formation,” “religion,” “feudalism,” and so on) which are themselves the products of European history and European social thought of the epoch when Europe was at its most self-confidently triumphalist. It is therefore necessary “to displace Europe not only as the central object of study, but also as the core of our *problematik*” (19) by describing “processes, structures, networks and so on that are captured in a medieval moment” and shape “a set of categories for our analyses that are not beholden to existing global history frameworks” (24). It follows that all the contributors are more concerned with methods and approaches than with conclusions, and that the book will be useful—indeed invaluable—especially to teachers and writers, who will find its 70 pp bibliography, together with extensive bibliographical and historiographical discussion in footnotes throughout, an immensely helpful reference resource.

Among the most pervasive of these European-based categories is Eurasia itself, so universally embedded as the frame of comparative discussion not least because it offers the written records that seem to bear on the issues in which social theorists as well as historians have been most interested, and which have been taken as the defining condition of “civilization” itself. “The (resulting) marginalization of areas outside Eurasia can all too easily turn into a reading of the millennium before 1500 as one in which Africa and the Americas fell behind Europe and Asia. . . .” Yet, “as is demonstrated in several of our chapters, regions without written records clearly had sophisticated ruling elites, were often characterized by citted cultures, and frequently had their own forms of record keeping” (14). The point is fully spelled out in Mark Whittow’s wide-ranging and provocative essay on “Sources of Knowledge; Cultures of Recording” (completed after the author’s death by Chris Wickham), the second part of which title immediately evokes a panoply of new questions and new possibilities. It typifies the volume by tackling in a distinctive and original way, without starting from abstract models but with an eclectic range of knowledge and restless questioning, a problem that everybody is conscious of and few have really faced, and in guiding the reader to more thoughtful and ultimately fruitful approaches to cross-cultural comparison.

To avoid the circularities arising from an exclusive focus on Eurasia by integrating expertise on Africa and the Americas in its discussions was key to the project’s approach from the outset, with the result that “the non-Eurasian presence often compelled (us) to think again about matters which from a Eurasian perspective could often seem settled” (21). Those, for instance, who like the reviewer have been accustomed to take the city, with its Childean corollaries of settled hinterland, surplus collection, bureaucracy, and literacy, as a common point of departure will find all those connections tellingly challenged by Conrad Leyser, Naomi Standen, and Stephanie Wynne-Jones on “Settlement, Landscape and Narrative: What Really Happened in History,” while Standen and Antonia White on “Structural Mobilities” counter not so much the Eurasian as the agrarian stereotype and its companion nomad: settler antithesis by showing how “The Global Middle Ages presented in this volume (elsewhere so regularly imagined and depicted as static—reviewer) was characterized by networks, mobility, mediation, interaction, and by

human agency at all social levels.” These, in various guises, are leading preoccupations of the volume, and appear and reappear in different contexts: the trade and traders who naturally feature prominently in that essay, for instance, appear equally naturally in several others, as supporting and supported by “Networks” (Jonathan Shepherd), finding ways to sustain “Trust in Long-Distance Relationships” (Ian Forrest and Anne Haour), and inextricably entangled with the articulation of power and culture in “Economic Imaginaries” (Simon Yarrow). By “Reworking the World System Paradigm,” on the other hand, the late Glen Dudbridge turned the whole exercise delightfully on its head by borrowing one of the most discussed of modern “teleological” terms, in an area far from his own expertise in the religion of Tang China. He asks what happens if it is applied to 600 – 900 instead of 1500 – 1600, and finds that it offers a way of exploring the connections between shared systems of thought, ritual, and belief that created enduring “worlds” across great stretches of space and time. Ranging from Tibet to Carolingian Gaul by way of Sheldon Pollock’s “formation of the Sanskrit cosmopolis” and Garth Fowden’s “Eurasian hinge,” Yarrow similarly shows the interplay of local social and economic change in the first millennium with the formation of large-scale ethnic and religious identities. By identifying the essential elements of “Politics c. 1000 – 1500: (as) Mediation and Communication” Hilde De Weerd, Catherine Holmes, and John Watt point us, in precisely scrutinized case studies from China and Byzantium in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and western Europe in the fifteenth, far beyond the familiar abstractions of top-down ordinances, imperial systems, and administrative structures to the ways in which power was actually applied to, received by, and negotiated among subordinate communities, as opposed to how it was imagined by its titular possessors. The potential for the application of such an approach to any number of topics—to clerical or military elites, or kinship systems for instance—seems almost limitless.

Periodization is not in itself an explicit concern of this volume, but every paper bears in one way or another on the relationship between this millennium and the centuries before and after. A striking conclusion, if not quite expressed in so many words, is that its beginning is much less clearly defined than its end. “Beyond the post-Roman world of western Eurasia the turn of the fifth-sixth centuries does not obviously relate to any complex of significant changes that resonate at a global level”, and as good a case might be made for starting in any century from the third to the eighth (26–27). However, several papers—notably those of Shepherd and De Weerd, Holmes and Watt—show profound changes around 1500 throughout the regions considered, in the distinctive sets of connections, relationships, and ways of doing things which had evolved over the previous millennium. That is in itself cogent evidence of long-term globalization, and together with Alan Strathern’s searching examination of “Global Early Modernity and the Problem of What Came Before” should have an important bearing on future discussion of the genesis and nature of modernity, whatever it is imagined to be. But if those are the issues perhaps most likely to attract the attention of non-medievalists, they remain secondary to the principal goal and achievement of this collection: to have shown how the world in its chosen millennium can be studied and understood in its own right, and in its own terms.

Nothing is perfect. Meticulous insistence on rethinking from first principles may occasionally try the reader's patience, and the framing can sometimes seem more novel than the picture. As will always be the case, unless a large research grant makes specific hiring possible (and sometimes even then), the selection of regions and topics for examination is limited by a degree of happenstance in the expertise of the contributors. The editors' apology for their failure to include the Pacific or give India anything like its due might have been extended to the central Islamic lands in general (still a common weakness of the Eurasian-based comparative tradition they have superseded) and Japan. Nevertheless, the extension of the area of debate is one of the volume's signal contributions, not only by the mere inclusion of sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas and the long overdue appearance of Byzantium in a leading role, but by the completeness with which they are integrated in the arguments: nobody now will be able to pass over them without embarrassment. A comparable if less obvious extension of subject matter is produced by what Yarrow describes as "the loosening of conceptual ties in which modern historiography binds the Middle Ages" (214). Thus, his economic imaginaries can recast the forms of material exchange in the context of changing religious cultures, and Shepherd can make Networks, whose essence is *voluntary* association, an analytic device as powerful as institutions have ever been.

A short review does not do justice to the uniformly high quality of these essays. Their extended genesis in intensive discussion imparts a coherence of thought and treatment rare in collective publications, so that without the table of contents few readers would guess that of ten papers three are written by two, and two by three of a team of sixteen authors. Their collective range and depth of expertise makes the interweaving discussions of many topics through several papers, far from being repetitive, constantly refreshing and surprising. "Everywhere is idiosyncratic. But everywhere can be compared" Whittow concluded his lively and informative survey (87), in resounding if perhaps unconscious rebuttal of the inevitable, dreary refrain that used to frustrate every attempt to broaden the curriculum, "There is no point in comparing things because they are never the same." Champions of that position, if any remain, should address in "Globalizing Cosmologies" the parallel descriptions by Caroline Dodds Pennock and Amanda Power of the Aztec conception of the universe and the scholastic theology of late medieval Europe. They were, indeed, not the same, but asking what they did for their respective worlds, rather than what a modern observer might imagine to be their religious content, shows how they shared a capacity to energize social action by integrating belief and practice (about which, the authors comment, there is nothing particularly "medieval", 114) and in doing so illuminates both. Starting from such juxtaposition of local studies, in which specialists interrogate the findings of their particular expertise intensively, side by side, in search of the human needs, conflicts, and aspirations from which the phenomena they have described arose, rather than from theoretical issues, is the essence of a method which the editors prefer to describe as "combinative" rather than comparative (23 – 4). It offers a real advance on our current practice of comparative history, whether by individuals stretching far beyond their primary competence or in teams of contributors assembled and editorially coordinated for the purpose, with varying degrees of success. It is

a methodology capable of wide application, here introducing the world before 1500 not as fuel for the agendas of others but in its own right, in a singularly rewarding account of the Global Middle Ages *wie es eigentlich gewesen*.

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R I MOORE

Christophe Picard, *Sea of the Caliphs: The Mediterranean in the Medieval Islamic World*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018. 416 pp. ISBN 978-0-674-66046-5. \$35.00.

Christophe Picard's new book *Sea of the Caliphs* is the translation of his *La mer de califes: Une histoire de la Méditerranée musulmane, VIIe-XII siècles* (2015). In this book Picard wants to demonstrate the crucial importance of the Mediterranean for Muslim maritime activities and power. While the dominating role of Muslim traders in the Indian Ocean has been acknowledged, the Mediterranean is still linked in our understanding with the rise of the Italian mercantile cities such as Genoa, Pisa, and Venice. Picard tries to counterbalance this picture with quite some success. He organizes the book in two parts, with more or less the same geographical and chronological scope. For those interested in the Arab perception of the Mediterranean, the first part (The Arab Mediterranean between Representation and Appropriation, 117–182) provides new evidence about how the famous geographers rediscovered/reinvented the Mediterranean as a stage for the expansion of Islam.

The shorter second part (Mediterranean Strategies of the Caliphs, 185–286) is a political history of the Arab conquests in the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, here many facts, presented in the first part, appear again. Thus readers can and should, according to their interests, either concentrate on the first or the second part. Because I myself work on the perception of seas and oceans, I find the first part more remarkable.

Al-Mas'udi, for example, a great traveler himself, highlighted the information that he received by sailors and renowned seafarers and confronted this knowledge with the ancient tradition. Al-Idrisi and Ibn Khaldun had different ways of observing maritime space. The Sicilian al-Idrisi considered the sea to be the center of the Mediterranean region, thus linking the Christian North and the Muslim South. Ibn-Khaldun went one step further when he emphasized the importance of the dominion of the seas for the power of the sultans. According to him, without shipbuilding the sultans would leave the Mediterranean to the Byzantines and the Latins. Various other authors, such as Abbasid chroniclers, perceived the Mediterranean and especially its frontier regions as an arena of Jihad.

In the second part of the book, these ideas become materialized in the political and maritime activities of the caliphates from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries. Picard shows that the sea was frequently regarded as place of military encounter, although trade was also acknowledged as maritime opportunity by the caliphs. The fundamental change in the transition process of the Mediterranean from a sea of caliphs to a global commercial arena (independent of the religion of the trading partners) could have been elaborated