Globalism

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The standard definition of "globalism," which first entered English usage in 1943, emphasizes the term's long history in the language and methodologies of economics and politics. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, globalism is "The belief, theory, or practice of adopting or pursuing a political course, economic system, etc., based on global rather than national principles; an outlook that reflects an awareness of global scale, issues, or implications; spec. the fact or process of large businesses, organizations, etc., operating and having an influence on a worldwide scale, globalization" (*OED*, s.v. "globalism"). The ongoing contemporary relevance of the concept is ensured by the ever-growing interconnectedness of cultures through international trade, diplomacy, tourism, population migration, and war. These current phenomena have in turn directed the perspective that scholars today cast upon the medieval past.

It must be acknowledged from the outset that the medieval world did not witness a truly global network, with all continents of the earth linked through economic, political, and cultural relations. Yet globalism need not require a total system; it can instead be productively understood as relative, manifesting in "thick" or "thin" and complete or partial degrees. Janet Abu-Lughod, for instance, argues that the thirteenth century saw the emergence of eight overlapping spheres of commercial interaction (Fig. 1), which together represent an Afro-Eurasian economic network as sophisticated and extensive as that of the early modern era. Although limited in their global scope, these interconnected zones bespeak a "world system" that demands the consideration of local histories in relation to larger patterns of exchange. According to her model, individual regions can be fully understood only through consideration of their broader interactions. Unlike nineteenth-century "universal" history (which sought comprehensive patterns across time and space) and twentieth-century "world" history (which focused on local histories in comparative terms, with only secondary attention paid to connections among regions), global history of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century foregrounds linkages among cultures. As aptly summarized by the eminent historian of the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel, "Globalism [la globalité] is not the pretension to write a total history of the
It is simply that beyond limits in a systemic scholarship outlook that prioritizing, even systemic impact common themes and issues in history, globalization serves as concepts can be grouped, including transmission, interchange, tism; multiculturalism; transportability; exoticism; costs conceptual borders and from common goal: to shift scholarly as the defining factors of historical boundaries traditionally defined.

The most explicit major scholarly publications that example, Graeco-Arabica, historical phenomena that link particularly the connections that The interdisciplinary journal Culture in Confluence and reformulate the traditional study of the medieval world study of medieval art, as strategies also attest to a growing strategies and structures of enter Mappa Mundi: Global Mia Austin, was founded in 20 publications on the Middle decade begins, a spurt of thing of a milestone for global studies has now moved beyond sh to large-scale explorations reconfigure our understandings of.

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It is simply the desire, when one approaches a problem, to move beyond limits in a systematic fashion.\textsuperscript{4}

In its adaptation to medieval studies, globalism has come to stand for a scholarly outlook that prioritizes the interactions between cultures; the far-reaching, even systemic impact of contact and exchange; and the comparative study of common themes and issues across distinct cultural groups. Within medieval art history, globalism serves as a productive rubric under which a wide variety of concepts can be grouped, including: intercultural or cross-cultural relations, exchange, transmission, interchange, contacts, encounters, translation, and networks; syncretism; multiculturalism; transculturation; hybridity; appropriation; expropriation; portability; exoticism; cosmopolitanism; and the transgression of both actual and conceptual borders and frontiers. These diverse concepts and methods share a common goal: to shift scholarly approaches away from a focus on origins and localities as the defining factors of history and toward the consideration of movement across boundaries traditionally defined by language, religion, ethnicity, and geography.

The most explicit manifestation of these global approaches can be found in scholarly publications that take cross-cultural connections as their premise. For example, Graeco-Arabica, first published in 1982, focuses on cultural and historical phenomena that link discrete regions or groups of the medieval world, particularly the connections that existed between the Byzantine and Islamic spheres. The interdisciplinary journal Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue, first published in 1995, aims to transgress and reformulate the traditional disciplinary and cultural categories that have shaped the study of the medieval world. Thematic issues of other periodicals related to the study of medieval art, as well as independent collections of essays and anthologies also attest to a growing commitment to medieval globalism.\textsuperscript{5} New technologies and structures of enterprise have been brought into play too; for instance, the Mappa Mundi: Global Middle Ages initiative, housed at the University of Texas at Austin, was founded in 2007 to promote interdisciplinary teaching, research, and publications on the Middle Ages from an intercultural perspective.\textsuperscript{6} As the new decade begins, a spurt of monographs on cross-cultural interactions marks something of a milestone for globalism in the discipline of medieval art history, which has now moved beyond short-length and discrete studies in dispersed periodicals to large-scale explorations of how intercultural artistic relations fundamentally reconfigure our understanding of the field.\textsuperscript{7}

Given the origin of “globalism” in ambitions for commercial and political hegemony, and the frequent association of the term in popular thought with practices that seek economic and political domination, it is somewhat ironic that in medieval studies globalism has come to represent intellectual engagement with and valorization of cultural fluidity, and an attitude of parity toward disparate world. . . .
groups. This new perspective is shaped in part by postcolonial discourses on power and identity, which seek to destabilize systems of cultural and political hegemony, replacing them with a plurality of identities and authorities. Inherent in postcolonial theory is the questioning of simple binaries between East and West, center and periphery, and the rejection of the a priori supremacy of one cultural or political entity over another. Globalism may reveal its greatest usefulness in this respect, for it provides a way to resist the casting of intercultural relations in reductive, bilateral terms, instead laying the ground for the recognition of the diverse, complex, and multidirectional networks that shaped the distribution of goods, movements of populations, and traffic in ideas and works of art. Globalism also offers a means of breaking down the artificial divides of eighteenth-century and later nationalisms that have so deeply shaped the modern disciplinary organization of medieval studies and art history. A global geography for medieval art history defines artistic phenomena and mentalities by means other than an object’s or monument’s point of production or its coordination with modern geographic, national, or ethnic territories and identities, introducing new possibilities for delimiting the investigation of medieval works of art and architecture.

No single trajectory of development organizes the diverse methods and publications that together fuel the scholarly engine behind the “global turn” in medieval art history, but certain themes and perspectives can nonetheless be distinguished. One approach, which might be termed the “clash of cultures” model, is generated largely from a Eurocentric perspective on cross-cultural interaction, typically taking the Crusades as a departure point. Within this polemical discourse can be situated the artistic phenomenon of spoliation, through which objects claimed as war trophies generated new meanings when transported to and situated within new contexts. Spoliation can also be understood in conceptual terms to explain instances when visual motifs are appropriated from a foreign source and adapted to local artistic programs. Other studies of medieval globalism have turned to multicultural nexus points of distinct medieval visual traditions. Norman Sicily, Armenia, Iberia, the Morea, and the Crusader states each produced hybrid artistic and architectural languages that drew from multiple cultural sources, usually preserving an understanding of the nature of original forms, while simultaneously creating new systems of meaning through the assimilation or strategic juxtaposition of disparate sources.

A related approach for interpreting artistic globalism perceives an interregional common culture, which is often situated at elite echelons of medieval societies but can also be traced at more popular levels, especially through particular media, such as ceramics, glass, and textiles. This model is often found in scholarship produced by specialists in Byzantine, Islamic, and Crusader art history, who deal with contexts in which long-standing and often intimate relations between distinct religious, political, and economic groups have contributed to a shared visual vocabulary. Intact trade ships that sank centuries ago offer evidence of this shared material culture, and economic groups and flemish gifts represent analogies for the conceptual applicability to medieval art of signs of common culture, through the articulation of objects and monuments that are transported across the medieval world, documented in the textual record.

To the extent that art is a domain for the expression of shared visual vocabularies, the field shares much with a global approach that has been particularly fruitful for illustrated manuscripts—such as the fictitious cross-cultural exchange of diplomatic gifts as signs of common culture, through the articulation of objects and monuments that are transported across the medieval world, documented in the textual record.

Perhaps the most distinctive approach is the concept of “routes, not roots” in the dominance of a single cultural focus on “routes, not roots” in the dominance of a single cultural focus on a global approach. This model focuses on the movement of creative force behind artistic forms, on “routes, not roots” in the conceptual applicability to a visual field. A set of four Byzantine relief scenes of a box and are known to depict a series of vignettes that explore how a global approach may be applied to this field. These small-scale relief scenes currently housed in the Hermitage depicting events in the lives of Christ and Alexander the Great are known. Each scene follows the canonical
By postcolonial discourses on power of cultural and political hegemony, authorities. Inherent in postcolonial discourses on power of cultural and political hegemony, the recognition of the diverse, complex cultural relations in reductive terms, can nonetheless be distinguished. Perhaps the most distinctive medieval art historical articulation of a global approach is the concept of portability as defined by Eva Hoffman. She promotes basic tenets common to globalism in its disciplinary variants by insisting on a "pluritopic" understanding of production in the medieval Mediterranean, which rejects the dominance of a single center in the establishment of artistic models and instead focuses on the movement (rather than origins) of objects and ideas as the generative force behind artistic form and meaning. The particular appeal of these models is their conceptual applicability to a variety of medieval artistic phenomena and contexts.

A set of four Byzantine ivory plaques, which originally formed the walls of a box and are known today as the Darmstadt Casket, provide an opportunity to explore how a global approach shifts the way medieval works of art can be assessed. These small-scale relief carvings, which likely date to the twelfth century, are currently housed in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, Germany. They depict a series of vignettes framed by columns and canopies (Figs. 2 and 3a). Six of the eight scenes can be directly related to narrative events in the lives of Herakles and Alexander the Great as recorded in late antique and medieval texts. A seventh scene follows the canonical middle Byzantine iconography of medieval military
saints and most likely depicts St. George. In contrast, an eighth scene, distinctly non-Byzantine in origin, depicts a figure sitting cross-legged on a dais and playing a lute (see Fig. 3b). At least two possibilities exist for the source of this foreign motif. It has much in common with the iconography of Islamic princely courts and may represent a Byzantine adaptation of medieval Islamic art (compare Fig. 4). Alternatively, it may recall a more distant cultural zone, reflecting medieval Indian religious iconography (compare Fig. 5).²⁵

The exotic character of the scene has long been noted, yet the cross-legged figure is often illustrated and discussed separately from the other seven vignettes, such that the relation of the Byzantine and non-Byzantine motifs is rarely explored.²⁶ The object has been labeled a “gallimaufry” (hodgepodge), and its
Fig. 3. a. Side panel depicting the ascension of Alexander. Ivory, ca. 9.5 x 17 cm; Byzantine, Constantinople (?), 12th century. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Germany, Kg 54:215a-d. (Photo: Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt.)

b. Side panel depicting the assassination of Darius. Ivory, ca. 9.5 x 17 cm; Byzantine, Constantinople (?), 12th century. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Germany, Kg 54:215a-d. (Photo: Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt.)

program has been pronounced indecipherable. As a result of a supposed deficiency in narrative consistency or thematic specificity, the casket’s images are interpreted as a loose grouping of “mythological” scenes, which lack a coherent meaning. In a rare effort to account for the motivation to include foreign iconography, it has been suggested that the object may have served as a diplomatic gift intended for a Muslim recipient who would have been familiar with the non-Byzantine iconography. In short, earlier investigations of the object have
recognized its iconographic alterity but have read this difference as an obstacle to any decipherable, programmatic meaning, placing the object outside middle Byzantine cultural practices and historical reality.

A global approach to the object instead sees the foreign iconography as an entry point to investigation, prompting the interpreter to move beyond the conventional boundaries of Byzantine artistic identity articulated in the other scenes so as to explore what the foreign motif meant in its source culture, and how an understanding of this original significance might shed light on its redeployment in a Byzantine context. Although drawing from different narrative sources, the eight vignettes coalesce around the theme of models and antimodels of rulership. Herakles and Alexander were recognized in middle Byzantine imperial encomia
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tial toward spiritual improvement). Sandstone, 130.8 cm high x 80 cm wide, 28 cm
and historical accounts as ideals of imperial prowess (or in some instances as insufficient forerunners to be rejected and surpassed). Military saints also figured as important emblems of imperial might. In contrast, the cross-legged lute player can be understood as an antitype embodying the dissolute “eastern” ruler, here rendered in the mode of medieval Islamic or Indian iconography. In this way the foreign motif is expropriated from its original context of Islamic royal or Indian religious meaning and repositioned to serve a distinctly Byzantine program that casts a disparaging gaze upon a cultural “other.” Indeed, the figure likely depicts either the Persian King Darius (in the guise of an Islamic princely figure) or the Indian sage Calanus (in the form of a Jain saint), each of whom features in medieval narratives about the adventures of Alexander the Great and was positioned in early Christian and Byzantine literature as an antithesis to ideal values of rulership and morality. The exoticizing plaque was originally positioned on one of the short sides of the box, strategically contrasting the opposite end on which Alexander, dressed in the conventional attire of the middle Byzantine emperor, is depicted in triumphal apotheosis.

The Darmstadt Casket not only illustrates a Byzantine awareness of foreign artistic forms and iconography but also the intention to translate these motifs into terms that mesh with Byzantine systems of representation and meaning. Indeed, a global view on the object could push this interpretation into deeper intercultural terms by casting the more distinctly Byzantine motifs in a wider perspective. For instance, Alexander, Herakles, and the military saints, especially St. George, featured as ideal—and in some cases less than ideal—royal and courtly emblems throughout the greater medieval world. The first what at first appear to be canonically Byzantine references may instead also reflect an intercultural vocabulary of heroic power.

Of course challenges exist for this model of scholarly practice. The most obvious is the expansive knowledge and skills required of individuals attempting to work simultaneously in multiple cultural traditions. Often this broadening of scholarly range is achieved at the loss of depth, requiring those who pursue a cross-cultural trajectory to rely on the focused, localized research of others. This is a reasonable working method in subfields for which a critical mass of documentary scholarship exists, but will be less practical in areas where such foundational work is yet to be accomplished. Another approach promotes collaborations between specialists in disparate fields, either through the collation of individual studies that together create a comparative view on a specific theme or through more directly cooperative coauthorship. Institutional and disciplinary practices—including curriculum requirements, the organization of academic departments, and the mechanics of publishing—are only now responding to the particular demands generated by a global approach to the Middle Ages.

Certainly this expanded perspective should not be endorsed to the exclusion of more traditional, localized scholarly training and investigation; yet the globalization of medieval art history beyond and ultimately investigation, thus altering the encyclopedic publication, exhibitions, and thematic and transregional methods of inquiry might include pilgrimage art across multiple medieval urban centers not emerging points of complex raphy and ideology of ruler all its consistency and various was made in a specific place that moved through a delineation questions such as these that goals of individual, compre diences. These intentional our recognition of knowledge presupposing a degree of intercultural collaboration. The larger process to form a collective and coll and transformation. Global history, expanding not only go about producing and dis

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ization of medieval art history has much to offer. It raises the possibility of moving beyond and ultimately reconfiguring boundaries that have limited previous investigation, thus altering the very nature of the field. Courses, qualifying exams, publications, exhibitions, and even departments are already reorganizing around thematic and transregional designations.32 Topics generated from such new methods of inquiry might include seeking the common denominators of reliquaries or pilgrimage art across multiple religious and geographic groupings; investigating medieval urban centers not as the embodiments of singular identities but as the merging points of complex social and economic networks; analyzing the iconog­

raphy and ideology of rulership or a specific saint across the medieval world in all its consistency and variety; or grouping and mastering not “everything” that was made in a specific place during a specific period, but instead “everything” that moved through a delineated space during a particular time. Broadly bounded questions such as these demand a set of ambitions different from the traditional goals of individual, comprehensive mastery that still quietly linger within our disciplines. These intentionally unanswerable research problems allow, even force our recognition of knowledge as something that is piecemeal and shared, thereby presupposing a degree of intellectual humility and requiring extensive scholarly collaboration. The larger project then becomes a cooperative negotiation of parts to form a collective and contingent configuration, which anticipates reappraisal and transformation. Globalism can—indeed is—changing the face of medieval art history, expanding not only what we know about the medieval world but how we go about producing and disseminating this knowledge.

NOTES


9. This dichotomy persists even in revisionist analyses of Eurocentrism, such as Edward Said’s seminal study *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), which, despite its many contributions to unraveling the cultural hegemony of the “West,” maintains an insistently bilateral dynamic. For critique of this East-West dichotomy and the “undifferentiated” Other in Said’s model, see Paul Freedman, “The Medieval Other: The Middle Ages as Other,” in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 1–24, esp. 12. Also see Lucy K. Pick, “Edward Said, Orientalism and the Middle Ages,” *Medieval Encounters* 5, no. 3 (1999): 265–71, and additional essays in that volume.

10. For example, global sensibilities are at play in the more nuanced understanding of intercultural contacts and encounters that have emerged from recent reconsiderations of real and imagined borders in the medieval world. See David Abulafia and Nora Berend, eds., *Frontiers in the Middle Ages* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002); and Outi Merisalo, ed., *Frontiers in the Middle Ages* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération internationale des instituts d’études médiévales, 2006).


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22. For example, see Cynthia Robinson and Simone Pinet, eds., “Courting the Alhambra: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to the Hall of Justice Ceilings,” special issue, Medieval Encounters 14, nos. 2–3 (2008).


25. A connection with medieval Indian, specifically Jain, iconography is suggested by the Darmstadt lute player’s nudity, which is not a typical characteristic of medieval Islamic courtly figures but is a standard attribute of Jain tīhānśkara (saints), who are often depicted sitting cross-legged, facing frontally, and flanked by attendants who raise fly whisks. See Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, “Icons in the Manifold: Jain Sculpture in Early and Medieval India,” in Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection, ed. Phyllis Granoff (New York: Rubin Museum, 2009), 111–27, and 166–67.

26. For example, see John Beckwith, “The Influence of Islamic Art on Western Medieval Art,” Apollo 103 (1976): 270–81, esp. 270–72.


30. This discussion of the Darmstadt Casket draws from my extended analysis of the object in Walker, Emperor and the World, chap. 4.


32. One can note, for example, a growing trend in job announcements seeking scholars of the “art and architecture of the medieval Mediterranean,” and a burgeoning of academic conference panels and symposia organized around cross-cultural themes and concepts.