Valerie Hansen. *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World –and Globalization Began.* Toronto: Scribner, 2020. Pp. 320. $26.00 (paper).

Aaron Molnar
PhD Candidate, Department of History
University of British Columbia

Globalization and interconnectivity have become bywords for the digital age, synonymous with the human mobility, commercial exchange, and intellectual cross-fertilization that form the texture of lived experience. This global reality is often posited as emerging out of (early) modern imperialisms and colonialisms. Valerie Hansen in *The Year 1000* challenges us to look beyond these familiar colonial and post-colonial modernities toward the medieval global circa 1000 CE.

The book is divided digestibly into chapters both thematic and episodic. Chapter one outlines agricultural surpluses, demographic shifts, knowledge exchange, voyages of exploration, and increased trade that undergirded 1000 as a watershed in globalization. Chapters two and three challenge Eurocentric Age of Discovery (AofD) globalization narratives by arguing that earlier Viking voyages first linked European and American trading networks and "kicked off globalization," while trans-American networks themselves were both indigenous and pre-Columbian (52). Chapter four then breaks to discuss how European networks were tempered and expanded as plundering chieftaincies transformed into monotheist monarchies through the example of the Rus. Chapter five resumes the argument for pre-AofD connectivity in Africa by linking the spread of Islam, material exchange and the trans-Saharan gold trade along mature continental and maritime routes. Chapter six pivots to Central Asia, arguing Eurasian material and cultural exchange persisted despite the Islamic-Buddhist ecumene split, while seven weaves Indian Ocean merchants and Polynesian navigators into the argument for intensified material and cultural mobilities. These themes culminate in the final chapter on Song China where the concentration and maturity of networks of exchange made China "the most globalized place on Earth", challenging previous Yuan-Ming periodization (1271-1644). Therein, Hansen highlights the Song's globally linked maritime network, vastly exceeding Columbus', and its proto-industrial ceramics export industry.

A key strength of this narrative, and overdue historiographical corrective, is Hansen's inclusion of the Americas, Polynesia, and Australia in the story of pre-Columbian globalization. Previous studies treated these territories as marginal to larger politics that served as antecedents to modern nation-states, a discourse still geographically anchored in Eurasia.[1] However, the inclusion, for instance, of Vikings as capable navigators of the North Atlantic, and Mayans as both intensely commercial and expansionary, even possibly enslaving Vikings, allows the shedding of that vestigial husk of Eurasia-centric historiography. Hansen's medieval globalism is thus decidedly multi-polar and regionally dynamic (53-80).

Accordingly, this work serves as a watershed in the periodization of globalization and historiography of Afro-Eurasian exchange. To date, studies have focused on Mongol Eurasia (1206-1368) as the pivot point to globalization processes across Afro-Eurasia. Janet Abu-Lughod's oft-cited study emphasized how the Mongols linked discreet global regions of

[1] Thomas Allsen, *The Steppe and the Sea* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 2019); Peter Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

interaction and exchange, broke down barriers and intensified interaction.[2] Hansen, rather, demonstrates that by at least 1000 human society was already experiencing a surge in these processes. Thus, the Mongol Empire was not so much a radical departure from previous historical trajectories, but their culmination. Here geographical knowledge is instructive: Arab, Indian and Chinese traders accumulated knowledge of coastal seas and routes that informed the intensification of maritime trade under the Mongols and further, made European explorations possible (113-142).

However, pushing back the start of globalization comes with risks. If global connections and cross-fertilizations with impacts down to "ordinary people" are the benchmark for globalization (1-8), why not start earlier? David Christian's call to contextualize trans-Eurasian exchange as subject to steppe nomad mobilities since the Bronze Age and archaeolinguists' mapping of language onto the prehistoric global spread of agriculture complicate any specific inception date for globalization.[3] More recent research shows the first iteration of the Silk Roads (100BCE-250CE) witnessed the transformation of an exchange system from small-scale and regional to trans-continental. For example, Chinese silk and weaving technology spread all the way to the Syrian city of Palmyra where raw silk from tribute payments to the Xiongnu Empire ended up woven into textiles for the local market or transshipment.[4] This too meets the criteria for diverse, vast linkages broadly affecting locals. Admittedly, these were slower mobilities, but if intensity and speed is the primary metric, then does that mean geography at scale is immaterial? That would be counterintuitive, rendering, for instance, archaeobotanical histories explaining the unhurried diffusion of foodways across Afro-Eurasia as non-global. Perhaps the solution lies in a big-tent approach to histories of globalization that remains tolerant of diverse manifestations, chronologies and outcomes.

Hansen has provided yet another highly readable work on the medieval world of global exchange circa 1000. Its challenge to the boundaries of pre-modern globalization and intuitive use of richly detailed historical episodes make it of interest to specialists as well as an accessible and well-designed teaching resource for global history. As with her work on the Silk Roads, *The Year 1000* too will be a guidepost for future research on globalization and human mobilities.

---

[2] Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 154 and 182-183.

[3] David Christian, "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History," *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000): 1-26.

[4] Craig Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1 and 133-137.