



INTRODUCTION

Connecting the ancient Afro-Eurasian world

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Abstract

This introductory article sets out the global historical approach adopted by the articles in this special issue, focusing on the circulations of goods, peoples, and ideas in ancient Afro-Eurasia (300 BCE–700 CE). Special attention is given to the overland Silk Road and Indo-Pacific networks of maritime exchange. Our aims are to apply globalization thinking to a wider (macro) frame than has arguably been done in existing ancient world studies, to ensure that sufficient focus is maintained on how the local and global intersect, and to demonstrate the analytical utility of concepts connected to globalization and glocalization. Ultimately, we seek to go beyond merely applying theories of globalization to new data, but to use these data to offer an alternative approach to the study of global Antiquity.

Keywords: Globalization; Glocalization; Antiquity; Indian Ocean; Silk Road; Maritime Silk Road

The articles in this Special Issue (henceforth SI) are principally interested in the study of the circulation of goods, peoples, and ideas across the Afro-Eurasian world in Antiquity (300 BCE–700 CE). Special attention is paid to importance of ancient Silk Road and Indian Ocean (or so-called Maritime Silk Road, inclusive of the South China Sea) networks of exchange. In particular, we seek to demonstrate how a global historical approach, and more specifically the adaptation of concepts deriving from globalization, can help us understand the wider significance of these movements.

As such, the contributions presented here have a number of overlapping aims. The first of these is to apply globalization thinking across a wider (macro) frame than has arguably been done for many studies related to the ancient world. This is coupled with the second aim of maintaining a key interest in how the local and global intersect. The third aim is to demonstrate the analytical utility of concepts connected to globalization and glocalization. Our intention here is to modulate current theories and approaches taken to study global history in Antiquity. That is to say, we seek to go beyond merely applying theories of globalization to new data; rather, we aim to use these data to challenge some existing approaches to global historical studies. This includes challenging the centre-periphery dichotomy and de-emphasizing empires, while also shifting the focus towards nodes of cultural interconnectivity and the issue of local agency in a global context.¹

With some notable exceptions, such as Vandkilde's work on Bronzization (which examines developments across Eurasia), many attempts to apply globalization to the study of pre-modern

¹At its most basic form the term 'connectivity' concerns the level of 'connectedness within a system, and corresponds to a structural set of relationships between spatially and/or temporally distinct entities'; see Laura Turnbull, et al., 'Connectivity and Complex Systems: Learning from a Multi-disciplinary Perspective', *Applied Network Science* 3, no. 11 (2018): 1. For a discussion of connectivity in the *longue durée*, see Oystein S. LaBianca and Sandra Arnold Scham, eds., *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as a Long-Term Historical Process* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

cultures have tended to be quite regionally bounded.² Indeed, it has been observed that many of the case studies offered by Jennings are confined to an area of about 1,000 kilometres.³ Similarly, many of the contributors to *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization* largely restrict themselves to a specific region, such as the Aegean, or a major (imperial) entity, like the Achaemenid or Roman empires.⁴ The focus on empires can also lend itself to a quite internal framework, with a concentration on the subject of integration between territories *within* an empire.⁵

It is not our intention to criticize such scholarship, since globalization thinking is expansive enough to allow for varied approaches. Indeed, our chief concern here is with the analytical utility of concepts derived from globalization, rather than the defunct idea of trying to identify 'planetary globality'. As such, any study of varied geographical and chronological extent can be encompassed.⁶ Furthermore, it should be stressed that in seeking to utilize these concepts we are not attempting place earlier eras of human history within the 'history of globalization'. Nor is it our purpose to identifying discrete instances of past *globalizations* (these issues are outlined further below). For us, the use of globalization as a descriptor or label (as opposed to a framework for analysis) is of secondary concern. The chief value of globalization and glocalization thinking, to our mind, lay in the collation of useful concepts such as deterritorialization, unevenness, standardization, and cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity.

In the following sections, I will discuss the justification for the geographic and chronological parameters adopted in this SI and the ways in which the contributors seek to address the issues outlined above. Before that, however, it is worth considering how the application of globalization thinking fits into longer term scholarly approaches to the Silk Road and Indian Ocean trade/ Maritime Silk Road.

Historiographic developments

World history, as a genre of historical literature, can be arguably traced back to Antiquity. For example, Herodotus (fifth century BCE), Polybius (second century BCE), Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE), and Sima Qian (latter second to early first century BCE) all wrote about an increasingly interconnected world and the various cultures and peoples that inhabited it.⁷ However, it is not merely in traditional 'historiography' that we find expressions of interest, concern, and anxiety about different societies. These can also be identified in legends and folktales (such as in the eleventh-century *Kathāsaritsāgara*) or in artistic depictions (like those seen in

²On Bronzization, see Helle Vandkilde, 'Bronzization: The Bronze Age as Pre-Modern Globalization', *Præhistorische Zeitschrift* 91, no. 1 (2016): 103-23; Helle Vandkilde, 'Small, Medium and Large: Globalization Perspectives on the Afro-Eurasian Bronze Age', in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, ed. Tamar Hodos (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 509-21.

³Carl Knappett, 'Globalization, Connectivities and Networks', in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, 32. Justin Jennings is a prominent proponent of applying globalization thinking to pre-modern societies; see Justin Jennings, *Globalizations and the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Justin Jennings, 'Distinguishing Past Globalizations', in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, 12-28.

⁴Tamar Hodos, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*.

⁵See, for example, various case studies in Martin Pitts and Miguel J. Versluys, eds., *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶On the dubiousness of attempting to identify complete planetary connectivity, even in the modern world, see Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 95-7.

⁷For a discussion of ancient proto-ethnography and conceptions of the 'Other', see, among other scholarship, Siep Stuurman, 'Herodotus and Sima Qian: History and the Anthropological Turn in Ancient Greece and Han China', *Journal of World History* 19, no. 1 (2008): 1-40; and Eran Almagor and Joseph Skinner, eds., *Ancient Ethnography: New Approaches* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Pharaonic Egypt).⁸ In part, these depictions reflect expanded conceptual horizons resulting from new networks of communication and exchange, as well as imperial expansion. These representations can be understood as a form of proto-ethnography, a means by which a society could be contrasted with the ‘Other’; sometimes in a negative sense, but also potentially idealizing the ‘Other’ as a form of critique of the perceived flaws within one’s own society.⁹

This interest in comparisons between peoples, civilizations, and empires formed an important basis for the development of macro-historical studies from the eighteenth century onwards. Frequently this was done with an eye to finding links between these civilizations and explaining them in terms of processes of diffusion.¹⁰ A model that has since been critiqued for appearing rather reductive, not least because it supposes that a ‘weaker’ culture (wholesale) adopts elements from another culture, implying a degree of passivity on the part of the former. Acculturation, which at least allows for more of a two-way process, has similarly been criticized for its under-recognition of the agency of the ‘recipient’ culture.¹¹ This traditional diffusionist model is also problematic since it can presuppose an original core emanating out concepts, practices, and beliefs that might subsequently be ‘corrupted’ by the ‘recipient culture(s)’. The flaws of these sets of assumptions are clear from Signe Cohen’s article in this SI, where it is demonstrated that Buddhist expansion should not be understood as a unified tradition that emanated out of India to Central, Eastern, and Southeast Asia. Instead, there was a continuous negotiation of Buddhist canons and identities in each local community, and over time an idea of a cosmic multiverse lacking a centre was developed, albeit one tied together through various *bodhisattvas* (the *bodhisattva* model of globalization).

The emphasis on ‘great’ civilizations and empires was the basis for much early scholarship on the so-called Silk Road and the pre-modern Indian Ocean world. Studies of the early or ‘First Silk Road’ tended to focus (and many still do) on how stable corridors of communication were facilitated by the formation of large territorial empires, like the Han, Roman, Parthian, and Kushana. Furthermore, much of this activity was viewed through the lens of the desire to acquire ‘luxuries’ at eastern and western extremes, with less attention being given to local merchants and communities in Central Asia and the Tarim Basin (see Høisæter’s article in this SI).

Similarly, much of the early discourse on the Indian Ocean trade in Antiquity was written within a colonial and imperial framework which emphasized the primacy of the Roman Empire and its demand for ‘luxuries’, a paradigm that continued to be influential even for later scholarship (outlined in Cobb’s article). Diffusionist ideas were also popular, for example, in explaining the spread of cultural, linguistic, religious, intellectual, and technological ideas

⁸The narratives in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* often take the vantage point of the ‘mainlander’ as opposed to the islander, in the context of travel, exchange and adventure across the Indian Ocean world. On this, see Tara Sheemar Malhan, ‘Gendered Spatialisation of the Ocean in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*’, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge Traditions of the Indian Ocean World*, ed. Himanshu P. Ray (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 37–55. On depictions of ‘others’ in Pharaonic Egypt, see Gerald Moers, ‘The World and the Geography of Otherness in Pharaonic Egypt’, in *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Richard J. A. Talbert (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 169–81; and Mu-Chou Poo, *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes Towards Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005).

⁹For examples of idealizing the ‘Other’ as a means of (subtly) critiquing aspects of one’s own society, see Pliny the Elder’s (*HN* 6.24.81–91; see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. W. H. S. Jones, with A. C. Andrews (Harvard: Loeb Classical Press, 1956)) account of Taprobane and the *Hòu Hànshū* (ch. 88; see Fan Ye, *Hòu Hànshū*, trans. John E. Hill (Charleston, SC: BookSurge Publishing, 2009)) on Da Qin. Also, Matthew A. Cobb, ‘Conceptualising the Far West: Early Chinese Notions of Da Qin and the Indian Ocean Trade’, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge Traditions*, 56–78.

¹⁰Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 63–4.

¹¹Victor Roudometof, *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 63; Miguel J. Versluys, ‘Roman Visual Material Culture as Globalising Koine’, in *Globalisation and the Roman World*, 144–6.

from India to Southeast Asia, often referred to as Indianization;¹² a notion that proved popular in later historical studies of Southeast Asia—as seen in Benda’s tripartite division of the region into Indianized, Sinicized, and Hispanized zones.¹³

Even in the context of developing post-colonial scholarship from the latter half of the twentieth century, an interest in empires remained important (both in world history and in more regionally bounded historical studies); albeit perspectives often shifted to that of the native or indigenous against the ‘imperial power’ (nativist turn), with an emphasis on issues of dominance and resistance, and exploitation.¹⁴ Models such as creolization and hybridity, as well as Middle Ground thinking, were developed to nuance discussions of economic and cultural developments which resulted from these interactions.¹⁵ However, these theories themselves have been subject to their own criticisms: hybridity for being potentially vague (almost all cultural developments could be seen as a hybrid); creolization stands accused by some of being a thinly veiled substitute for colonialism, and, more broadly, some scholarship produced as part of the nativist turn has been attacked (fairly or unfairly) for ignoring or writing out external (imperial, colonial, or commercial) influences.¹⁶

In the case of ancient Indian Ocean and Silk Road studies, models such as creolization and hybridity have not featured so heavily compared to scholarship on the later medieval, early modern, and modern periods. One reason may be that the nature of colonialism and imperialism was qualitatively quite different from that seen in the early modern to modern periods, with ancient empires often having weak bureaucratic structures, more pronounced transportation hurdles, and lower intensity networks of exchange.¹⁷ Thus, such models simply proved less suitable for analysis, especially in dynamics where differentiations of power did not so evidently impact on the exchanges (commercial and cultural) taking place.

This is not to say, however, that broader post-colonial thinking failed to have an impact, at least with regards to studies on Indian Ocean/Indo-Pacific connectivity.¹⁸ For example, with the study of ancient Indian Ocean trade, earlier (colonial) notions which saw the Romans as the primary movers of goods in the Arabian Sea region began to be challenged (see both Cobb and Simmons in this SI). Similarly, in more recent scholarship, greater emphasis has been given to the activity and agency of communities in Southeast Asia in their relationships with South Asia, as opposed to older concept of Indianization (as noted above). Additionally, World Systems Theory, which considers the exploitation of peripheries (especially for ‘raw materials’) by a core or cores, became

¹²On the problem of Indianization and more recent shifts away from this concept, see Peter G. Johansen, ‘Recasting Foundations: New Approaches to Regional Understandings of South Asian Archaeology and the Problem of Culture History’, *Asian Perspectives* 42, no. 2 (2003): 192-206; Tom Hoogervorst, ‘Tracing Maritime Connections Between Island Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean World’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, 751-67.

¹³Harry J. Benda, ‘Political Elites in Colonial Southeast Asia: An Historical Analysis’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7, no. 3 (1965), 235-41.

¹⁴For a discussion in relation to the Roman Empire, see Miguel J. Versluys, ‘Understanding Objects in Motion. An Archaeological Dialogue on Romanization’, *Archaeological Dialogues* 21, no. 1 (2014): 1-20. Greg Woolf, ‘Romanization 2.0 and its Alternatives’, *Archaeological Dialogues* 21, no. 1 (2014): 45-50.

¹⁵For an overview of creolization and hybridity, see Roudometof, *Glocalization*, 13-15; on Middle Ground thinking, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁶For these criticisms, see Louise A. Hitchcock and Aren M. Maeir, ‘Beyond Creolization and Hybridity: Entangled and Transcultural Identities in Philistia’, in ‘Archaeology and Cultural Mixture’, ed. W. Paul van Pelt, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 28, no. 1 (2013): 55; Adolfo J. Domínguez, ‘Local Responses to Colonisation. Some Additional Perspectives’, *Ancient West & East* 11 (2012): 205-18; Tamar Hodos, ‘Stage Settings for a Connected Scene. Globalization and Material-culture Studies in the Early First-millennium B.C.E. Mediterranean’, *Archaeological Dialogues*, 21, no. 1 (2014): 29.

¹⁷On these qualitative differences, see Chris Gosden, *Archaeology and Colonialism: Cultural Contact from 5000 BC to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Gill J. Stein, *Rethinking World-Systems: Diasporas, Colonies, and Interaction in Uruk Mesopotamia* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1999), 55-62.

¹⁸Arguably in the case of Silk Road studies, however, narratives focusing on the importance of great empires have continued to persist. On this issue, see Justin M. Jacobs, ‘The Concept of the Silk Road in the 19th and 20th Centuries’, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, 2020. DOI: 10.1177/0376983620922431.

popularly adapted for the study of the pre-modern Indian Ocean. Abu-Lughod's work on the Indian Ocean world of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is a seminal example.¹⁹ This was followed by its wider chronological application by Beaujard, and by Fitzpatrick for the Indian Ocean world of the early first millennium CE.²⁰

World Systems Theory, like creolization and certain post-colonial discourses, has fallen victim to shifting fashions. The model stands accused of failing to go beyond economic factors in explaining the development of relationships between 'periphery' societies and the 'centre' (although for a more expansive understanding of world system, see Cohen's article in this SI), for giving too much attention to the macro-scale at the expense of localized responses, and downplaying the issue of agency in both centre and periphery.²¹

Certainly, some applications of World Systems Theory can lead to peculiar results. In Fitzpatrick's use of this model, he argues that the Roman Empire was the periphery, which 'lacked the capacity to act as the "core" of the global economy'; much of its surplus (in the form of the export of gold and silver coins) being leached out to Axumite Africa, Arabia, and India.²² While the inversion of the more traditional Romano-centric perspective is welcome, there are a number of problems with this assumption of a core-periphery dynamic, especially the notion of raw materials being extracted by a core (or cores). As both Cobb and Simmons demonstrate in this SI, the evidence reveals that a more complex and multidirectional flow of 'raw materials' (plant products, metals, precious gems, coral, and pearls, etc.), processed goods (wines, incenses, and perfumes) and crafted items (metal, ceramic and glass wares, terracotta figurines, textiles, etc.) was taking place. These patterns of exchange defy any reductive identification of producer regions (manufacturers of crafted goods) and supplier regions.²³ Moreover, the frequently repeated notion that Rome haemorrhaged gold and silver 'bullion' to India and other regions is simplistic and unhelpful.²⁴ Finally, it is not evident that the power differentials, which are a key feature of World Systems Theory (in this case inverted, with the more territorially powerful Roman Empire being the periphery), were of much significance either to merchants from the Tamilakam (southern India) operating in the Egyptian Red Sea region, or for Mediterranean merchants operating in the Tamilakam.

¹⁹Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁰Philippe Beaujard, 'The Indian Ocean in Eurasian and African World-Systems Before the Sixteenth Century', *Journal of World History* 16, no. 4 (2005): 411-65; Matthew Fitzpatrick, 'Provincializing Rome: The Indian Ocean Trade Network and Roman Imperialism', *Journal of World History* 22, no. 1 (2011): 27-54. See also, more recently, Philippe Beaujard, *The Worlds of The Indian Ocean: A Global History*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²¹Greg Woolf, 'World-systems Analysis and the Roman Empire', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3 (1990): 55; Martin Pitts, 'Globalizing the Local in Roman Britain: An Anthropological Approach to Social Change', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 27 (2008), 493; Joseph Maran, 'Lost in Translation: The Emergence of Mycenaean Culture as a Phenomenon of Globalization', in *Interweaving Worlds: Systemic Interactions in Eurasia, 7th to the 1st Millennia BC*, ed. Toby C. Wilkinson, Susan Sherrat, and John Bennet (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 282-3. For a recent defence of the use of World Systems Theory and its application to the study of the pre-modern Indian Ocean, see Beaujard, *The Worlds of The Indian Ocean*, 2: 657-60.

²²Fitzpatrick, 'Provincializing Rome', 48, 53.

²³See Eivind H. Seland, 'Archaeology of Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 300 BC – AD 700', *Journal of Archaeological Research* 22 (2004): 367-402; Matthew A. Cobb, *Rome and the Indian Ocean Trade from Augustus to the Early Third Century CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

²⁴Matthew A. Cobb, 'Balancing the Trade: Roman Cargo Shipments to India', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 34, no. 2, (2015): 185-203; Rebecca Darley, 'Self, Other and the Use and Appropriation of Late Roman Coins in South India and Sri Lanka (4th-7th centuries A.D.)', in *Negotiating Cultural Identity: Landscapes in Early Medieval South Asian History*, ed. Himanshu P. Ray (New Delhi: CRC Press, 2015), 68-75.

Global history, globalization, and glocalization

If earlier models such as creolization and World Systems Theory have proved less suitable for the study of long-distance exchange (both cultural and commercial) via the ancient Silk Road and Indo-Pacific exchange networks, what better alternatives exist? The articles in the present SI adopt a global historical perspective and, as noted already, argue that concepts connected to globalization and glocalization offer a more fruitful avenue for studying long distance exchange in Afro-Eurasia.

The circulation of peoples, things, and ideas is a key feature of global history, while the importance of roads and ‘maritime highways’ has also become something of a fashion (especially in recent scholarship on globalization).²⁵ The articles in the present SI give attention to these aspects of circulation and exchange. However, this is not merely in terms of the abstract mechanism of human mobility, greater emphasis is given in this SI to *human actors* themselves. In the case of the articles by Cobb and Simmons, focus is placed on the movement of peoples; for Høisæter and Liu on the movement of peoples, goods, and skills; and for Cohen on the adaptation of Buddhist ideas and beliefs. This is in contrast to earlier world historical studies which, as we have seen, tended to focus on comparing civilizations and notions of cultural diffusion. The latter is particularly problematic as it can often lead to a form of ‘container thinking’ which sees cultures as static and clearly defined.²⁶ As Cobb highlights in his article on identifying the presence of ‘Indian’ merchants and sailors abroad, we need to be careful about being overly prescriptive in ascribing identity and should remain cognizant of the porous nature of culture.

With regards to globalization and glocalization, both have as their *raison d'être* an interest in the impact of wider ‘global’ phenomena—economic and cultural—on different societies; the latter giving special attention to the ‘local’ or ‘glocal’ response, but, necessarily, keeping the wider picture in mind. This emphasis on local agency in the context of global influences avoids the criticisms that have been levelled at World Systems Theory: namely, for focusing too much on the macro and ignoring issues of agency. It also avoids those levelled at some post-colonial scholarship, which has been accused of downplaying colonial, imperial, and commercial influences. Instead, globalization and glocalization encourage a greater focus on the negotiation, adaptation, amelioration, or rejection/resistance to external influences in a given location, and the manner in which local practices might be reinforced or (re)invented in response to wider global influences.²⁷ Høisæter’s article provides a good example of glocal responses to wider networks of exchange. In particular, by analysing the valuable information provided by a set of Kharosthi documents (mid-third to mid-fourth century CE) from the Kingdom of Kroraina, he is able to situate this polity, among others in the Tarim Basin, into the wider context of Silk Road activity, considering how this community adapted economically and culturally.

²⁵On circulation, see Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 5. The fashion for the study of ‘highways’ is notable among those interested in looking for historical depth when studying globalization. See, for example, Alan Chong, ‘The Silk Roads: Globalization Before Neoliberalization: Introduction to the Special Issue’, *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 3, no. 3 (2018): 189–93; Jean-Paul Rodrigue, ‘Transportation and Globalization’, in *Encyclopedia of Globalization*, ed. Roland Robertson and Jan Aart Scholte (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

²⁶Versluys, ‘Understanding Objects in Motion’, 12; Versluys, ‘Roman Visual Material Culture as Globalising *Koine*’, 145–6; Martin Pitts, ‘Globalization, Consumption, and Objects in the Roman World: New Perspectives and Opportunities’, in *Pervading Empire: Relationality and Diversity in the Roman Provinces*, ed. Vladimir A. Mihajlović and Marko D. Janković (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020), 158–61. More broadly on challenges to the use of material culture to construct identities, see Peter van Dommelen and A. Bernard Knapp, eds., *Material Connections in the Ancient Mediterranean: Mobility, Materiality and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

²⁷Tamar Hodos, ‘Globalization: Some Basics. An Introduction to The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, 8.

There is no single, authoritative list of all the concepts imbued in globalization and glocalization.²⁸ Those historians and archaeologists who have engaged with them have tended, quite reasonably, to adopt and adapt ideas from the social sciences to suit their own disciplinary needs.²⁹ One of the most popular amalgamation of concepts comes from the work of Justin Jennings. He has identified eight hallmarks or features of globalization which he suggests should be present to identify occurrences of it in the past.³⁰ These include:

- 1) time-space compression (how peoples in these ancient societies conceived of their world becoming a smaller or more interconnected place—the practical element of faster communication and the spread of ‘capital’, production, distribution, and consumption is relevant, but less pronounced in pre-modern societies);
- 2) deterritorialization (a culture increasingly permeated by external social networks, and at a more individual level, the sense of strong links or bonds with others outside one’s immediate locality);
- 3) standardization (groups starting to share similar ideas, practices, and technologies);
- 4) unevenness (potential military and economic disparities, and varying degrees of connectivity between multiple regions);
- 5) cultural homogenization (the interpretation, transmission, mutation, adoption, and indigenization of foreign concepts);
- 6) cultural heterogeneity (differences resulting from the greater circulation of foreign ideas, products, and practices, a hallmark that could also fall under the rubric of glocalization);
- 7) re-embedding local culture (potentially as a reaction against supposed negative external influences);
- 8) vulnerability (places becoming increasingly impacted by events occurring elsewhere in the world).

Cohen’s article in this SI provides a good example of the two faces of globalization (and glocalization): standardization and cultural homogenization on the one side and cultural heterogeneity on the other.³¹ In her study of the Buddhist concepts of *cakravartin* (a benevolent ‘world’ monarch) and *bodhisattva* (an enlightened being who has chosen to be reborn out of compassion for the suffering world), she notes that Aśoka (an embodiment of the *cakravartin* ideal) greatly facilitated the spread of a new type of translocal identity. A non-denominational Buddhist-inspired ideology was expressed in his edicts in a manner designed to transcend religious differences. This initial stage in the spread of a Buddhist global system, in its very wide-ranging appeal to a ‘standard’ or commonly held set of moral value, was easily adaptable by the local communities to which these ideas had spread (notably via Silk Road and Indian Ocean networks of exchange). This vernacularization meant that Buddhism in the Early Historic period

²⁸On the lack of a singular definition of globalization or glocalization, see James Barrett, Roland Robertson, Victor Roudometof, Noel Salazar, and Susan Sherratt, ‘Discussion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Glocalization’, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 33, no 1 (2018): 12; Jürgen Osterhammel, ‘Globalizations’, in *The Oxford Handbook of World History*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 90; Eivind H. Seland, ‘The Indian Ocean and the Globalisation of the Ancient World’, *Ancient West & East* 7 (2008): 68.

²⁹Among the authors who have been influential are John Tomlinson, Roland Robertson, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, George Ritzer, and Victor Roudometof. See John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999); Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); George Ritzer, ‘Rethinking Globalization: Glocalization/Globalization and Something/Nothing’, *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 3 (2013): 193-209; Roudometof, *Glocalization*.

³⁰Jennings, *Globalizations and the Ancient World*; Jennings, ‘Distinguishing Past Globalizations’, 12-28.

³¹Earlier notions which viewed globalization as essentially synonymous with Westernization, only applicable from the sixteenth century onwards and mostly concerned with processes of standardization and homogenization (to the exclusion of local variations), have largely been debunked over the last decade or so; see Hodos, ‘Globalization: Some Basics’, 3-4.

avoided being tied to a specific language, script, or geographic location, but instead centred on a shared ideology, and ultimately led to the spread of multiple glocal forms of Buddhist practice. In particular, Cohen notes how the concept of the *bodhisattva* allowed for ‘a new model for understanding cultural diversity’ in a context without a unified political empire. The world had become a network of interdependent cultures with a shared Buddhist identity running across political (and even cosmic) boundaries.

The concepts of time-space compression and deterritorialization are relevant to the articles by Cobb and Simmons, who both consider the presence of merchants and sailors abroad, and the development of merchant diaspora communities across the wider Indian Ocean world. These activities were import to the creation and operation of nodes and networks of exchange, albeit ones of uneven patterns and intensities, that developed across Afro-Eurasia. We see individuals who needed to integrate themselves into new contexts in order to gain local contacts and develop social networks—with the aim of lowering transaction costs, gaining more familiarity with the local political and administrative requirements, establishing relationships with suppliers—all the while maintaining links and sharing information (obviously allowing for time lags) with family and associates that were often many hundreds or thousands of miles away.

As Høisæter demonstrates, time-space compression and deterritorialization are also applicable to our understanding of the oasis-polities of the Tarim Basin. They were not merely middlemen along the east-west, and north-south (links with northern Indian and the Indian Ocean world) routes of the Silk Road, but played a vital role in creating and maintaining these networks. The complex social, political, and commercial links which resulted is evident from both the material and documentary evidence in this wider region. For example, we see diverse material assemblages in Kroraina, including Chinese silks and mirrors, ornaments of pearls and corals likely from India, and decorative weapons in styles shared amongst ‘steppe’ cultures to the north and west (all the way to Anatolia).

The article by Liu considers how Formosan society was impacted both by earlier Austronesian trade routes (developed from roughly 2000 BCE) and the later Maritime Silk Road into which the island was integrated from around 500 BCE. He employs a trade diaspora model to analyse how the movement of material goods and craftspeople led to shifts in decoration systems, changing patterns of subsistence, and technological leaps. In particular, he notes how the intertwining of material cultural elements deriving from both the Austronesian and Maritime Silk Road networks led to various culturally heterogeneous outputs. One such example was the development of a distinctive, glocalized form of nephrite craftsmanship on Taiwan. These objects become more widely popular from 500 BCE to 200 CE, finding demand across Mainland and Island Southeast Asia. However, this nephrite craftsmanship seems to have become vulnerable to wider developments resulting from the Maritime Silk Road, notably the rise of Indian-inspired cultural forms (particularly connected with the rise of various Champa polities on the eastern coast of Mainland Southeast Asia). The green nephrite decoration systems came to an end around the period 500 CE.

Of course, Jennings’ ‘hallmarks’ are not the only ones that have been developed in relation to globalization thinking—others can and do use their own variant, but overlapping, criteria.³² Moreover, since our concern is with their use as analytical tools and as a means of elucidating various phenomena that resulted from interaction and integration across ancient Afro-Eurasia (rather than identifying a specific ‘instance’ of past globalization), there is greater flexibility in their application; a flexibility that allows for the development of variant models, such as Simmons’s ‘players and the game’, Cohen’s ‘*bodhisattva* model’, and Liu’s ‘trade diasporic’ model. There is no requirement to identify these hallmarks in all contexts, but rather to selectively apply

³²See for example, a list of six qualities highlighted by Pitts and Versluys in a collaborative work relating to globalization theory and the Roman world: Martin Pitts and Miguel J. Versluys, ‘Globalisation and the Roman World: Perspectives and Opportunities’, in *Globalisation and the Roman World*, 11.

certain of these concepts when it proves suitable. That is to say, these concepts can help us to frame and articulate the evidence, as opposed to attempting to make the evidence fit a specific model. Furthermore, these concepts allow us to evaluate the intersection between the local and the global, as well as the agency of the different actors involved (avoiding the overly binary dichotomies of active agents from sophisticated ‘core’ societies, dominating or imposing themselves on receptive and passive ‘periphery’ communities).

Characterizing Afro-Eurasian connectivity in the period 300 BCE to 700 CE

So far it has been suggested that a global historical framework—and within this framework concepts attached to globalization and glocalization—offers a better means of analysing the movements of peoples, goods, and ideas across the Afro-Eurasian world in Antiquity (roughly 300 BCE to 700 CE). It allows us to keep the broader, global picture in mind, while also being mindful of glocalised responses to these wider developments, allowing for a multiplicity of perspectives at the macro, societal, and individual level. It also encourages us to consider the agency of the various actors involved in these commercial and cultural networks of exchange.

The next step is to outline the reasoning for the geographic and chronological parameters adopted in this SI—namely the Afro-Eurasia world around the period 300 BCE to 700 CE. What was occurring within this timeframe, across a diverse array of overlapping regions, that allows us to think of it as an interrelated whole? What characterized the connectivity we see developing across the wider Indian Ocean/Indo-Pacific region and Silk Road?

These are not straightforward matters to address since the legacy of national histories and assumptions about bounded cultures and civilizations (which can certainly be traced back to the nineteenth century) has resulted in numerous chronologies, often tied to political-military or dynastic events. This is further complicated by the fact that we clearly have complex networks of interaction between societies that were literate and non-literate; the chronological parameters in those latter cases are often constructed based on changes in material culture. Thus, temporal boundaries that might be better suited to limited regional areas are less appropriate for our wider geographic scope.³³

Despite these challenges, we argue that a unifying feature of the period 300 BCE to 700 CE is the growth of interconnectivity (albeit with uneven variations). In particular, this is as a result of the increasing exploitation of the monsoon winds for cross-oceanic voyaging by peoples along the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal littorals. It is a phenomenon directly attested in literary works such as the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, as well as indirectly through a range of iconographic representations, epigraphs, and material culture (notably, ‘coarse wares’ for food consumption purposes that tie to particular groups; see Cobb in this SI). Moreover, in this period we see the integration of polities in the South China Sea region into the wider Maritime Silk Road, stretching from East Africa and the Mediterranean to Southeast and East Asia (see Liu). Similarly, the traditional narratives often connect the development of the ‘first Silk Road’ to political, military, and diplomatic activity by the Former Han (third to first centuries BCE), followed by a brief interruption during the Wang Mang Interregnum, and then a flourishing during the first few centuries CE (see Høisæter in this SI).

This connectivity, in turn, lead to a hitherto unprecedented volume of goods being transported between regions (especially by the early to mid-first millennium CE).³⁴ Despite earlier narratives that such long-distance exchange was merely one of ‘luxuries’, it is, in fact, clear that many of these items were incorporated into an array of social and ritual practices (from clothing, perfumes, and jewellery, to medicines, and religious and funerary rituals). Thus, they became important

³³This is apparent, for example, in the web of connections across the Indian Ocean (see Cobb, Simmons, and Liu), which included pre-literate societies in East Africa and Southeast Asia (in the late first millennium BCE to early first millennium CE).

³⁴See Seland, ‘Archaeology of Trade in the Western Indian Ocean’; Cobb, *Rome and the Indian Ocean Trade*.

components of habits, meaning making and identity formation.³⁵ For example, an array of goods imported via the Silk Road formed key parts in the funerary assemblages of particular members of Krorainan society (see Høisæter, in this SI).

The potential volume and variety of goods exchanged is also clear, for example, from the textiles trade—including cloth made of coarse and fine materials, dyed pieces, and varied styles—that were being exchanged across the Indian Ocean world in the early centuries CE.³⁶ Even items traditionally considered as ‘luxuries’ in certain regions, like black pepper in Europe, might seem to defy this label given the scale and spread of its consumption across the geographic and socio-economic spectrum within the Roman Empire during the early centuries CE.³⁷

Arguably, some of this activity could be characterized by what Belich, Darwin, and Wickham label *circulation*, if not potentially *integration*.³⁸ Certainly, at least, these processes of increasing connectivity—the movement of peoples, goods and ideas—led to greater degree of interdependence between different communities (often taken as a key feature of ‘globalization’).³⁹ This is highlighted in a number of the contributions to this SI. Liu reveals that Taiwanese nephrite craftsmanship was able to sustain itself in the period 500 BCE and 200 CE due to demand across various communities in Southeast Asia; an activity that might have otherwise withered due to a dwindling local demand. In a similar vein, Høisæter notes the dependency of travellers and traders on the willingness of local ‘Silk Road’ polities to provide supplies.

Indeed, in order to operate these vibrant networks of exchange, a range of ‘corporate’ or ‘business’ structures became established, and we see the growth of diasporic merchant communities (see Simmons and Cobb). These had the purpose of lowering transaction costs, enhancing knowledge on the ground and facilitating commercial interests. These groups did not act in isolation, but sought to gain connections with local networks in order to facilitate their business arrangements; activity which necessarily required cross-cultural engagement and linguistic (and intellectual) comprehension of the other. Contrary to earlier notions of the primacy of certain groups, like ‘Roman’ merchants, it is clear that no single group (cultural-ethnic or otherwise) dominated this trade. Rather, individuals from a vast array of backgrounds spanning impressive geographic distances were engaged in differing capacities.⁴⁰

Additionally, ruling elites in various societies sought to exploit, as well as facilitate, these growing networks of exchange. As Høisæter demonstrates, the small Tarim kingdoms, far from being peripheral to the greater workings of the ‘Silk Road’, actually provided a range of physical infrastructure, legal protection, and monetary systems that were impactful on these ‘global’ exchange networks. Moreover, Simmons notes that some ruling elites might rely on merchants and other specialists for the collection of trade revenues. The revenue potential of this trading activity is reflected in a diverse array of literary and documentary evidence for this period, from

³⁵Matthew A. Cobb, ‘The Reception and Consumption of Eastern Goods in Roman Society’, *Greece & Rome* 60, no. 1 (2013): 136–52. Besides the movement of ‘trade items’, fauna and flora might also spread through transplantation; see Suzanne Amigues, ‘Végétaux et aromates de l’Orient dans le monde antique’, *Topoi. Orient-Occident*, 12–13, no. 1 (2005): 359–83.

³⁶Eivind H. Seland, ‘Here, There and Everywhere: A Network Approach to Textile Trade in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*’, in *Textiles, Trade and Theories: From the Ancient Near East to the Mediterranean*, ed. Kerstin Droß-Krüpe and Marie-Louise Nosch (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 211–20.

³⁷Matthew A. Cobb, ‘Black Pepper Consumption in the Roman Empire’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, no. 4 (2018): 519–59. See also Jeremy A. Simmons, ‘Pepper Consumption and the Importance of Taste in Roman Medicine’, *Ancient Society* 50 (2020): 277–324.

³⁸Belich, Darwin, and Wickham suggest that exchange might be understood as going from mere *contact* (occasional and indirect trade) to *interaction* (regular and on-going contact, which they suggest is exemplified by luxury trade), followed by *circulation* (bulk trade), and finally to *integration* (at least part of the global system is mutually dependent, forming part of a single economic or cultural whole). See James Belich, John Darwin, and Chris Wickham, ‘Introduction: The Prospect of Global History’, in *The Prospect of Global History*, ed. James Belich, John Darwin, Margret Frenz, and Chris Wickham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5.

³⁹On this, see John Darwin, ‘Afterword: History on a Global Scale’, in *The Prospect of Global History*, 178.

⁴⁰On the methodological challenges involved in identifying diasporic merchant communities, see Cobb in this SI.

various Indian *shastric* texts (recommending the levying of 15–20% taxes on ‘imports’) to the *tetarte* (25%) levied in the Roman Empire (see Simmons). In the case of the latter, some have even tried to argue that the tax on Red Sea trading activity generated somewhere between 200 to 270 million sesterterii in revenue (maybe a quarter of the total Roman state budget),⁴¹ although the reality may be closer to the 75–120 million sesterterii for the early centuries CE.⁴² As such we could characterize this period as reflecting a growing complexity in private and ‘state’ organizational and administrative capacities, as well as the increasing importance of long-distance trade revenues for many polities (and as such, greater ‘vulnerability’ to the vagaries of exchange across the wider Afro-Eurasian world).⁴³

Intimately bound up with the movement of peoples and goods, is the flow of skills and ideas which became adapted and repurposed in different societies. Linguistic habits, scripts and skills like metallurgy and bead-working spread between difference regions (see Cobb and Liu in this SI), as did religious ideas connected to Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism.⁴⁴ In the latter case, a significant contributor to the ‘movement’ of these ‘portable’ (i.e. universal rather than locally bounded) religions was their potential to offer social cohesion among its adherents (potentially transcending ethnic and linguistic differences).⁴⁵ Something that would be extremely useful to diasporic merchants, sailors, and craftsmen. Buddhist *sangha* communities, in particular, played an important role in facilitating both overland (Central Asian) and maritime (South and Southeast Asian) trading activity in the early to mid-centuries CE, as noted by Simmons, Cobb, and Cohen. Acts of pilgrimage, trading, the establishment of *stūpas*, donations to Buddhist *sangha* and the loaning out of money from these same institutions, all intertwined in a complex mix of cultural and economic phenomena.

A further implication of the increased connectivity across Afro-Eurasia in this period was an expanded knowledge of the extent of the world (even if the edges were still ill-defined). At an individual level this might require traders and agents who travelled to distant regions to engage in ‘code switching’ (see Simmons)—potentially adopting different names, utilizing different languages and attempting to act appropriately in particular (‘foreign’) context (acts tying into the aforementioned concept of deterritorialization). Conversely, an awareness of ‘foreign’ communities within one’s own territory is seen in a range of literature, from the Sangam poetic corpus of the Tamilakam to the plethora of poetic, geographic, and encyclopaedic literature from the Mediterranean world.⁴⁶

⁴¹200 million sesterterii: Michael Speidel, ‘Wars, Trade and Treaties: New, Revised and Neglected Sources for the Political, Diplomatic, and Military Aspects of Imperial Rome’s Relations with the Red Sea Basin and India, from Augustus to Diocletian’, in *Imperial Rome, Indian Ocean Regions and Muziris*, ed. K. Mathew (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 83–128; 230 million sesterterii: Andrew Wilson, ‘Red Sea Trade and the State’, in *Across the Ocean*, ed. Federico De Romanis and Marco Maiuro (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 13–32; and 250–270 million sesterterii: Raoul McLaughlin, *Rome and the Distant East* (London: Continuum, 2010), 164–8, 171–2; Raoul McLaughlin, ‘Indian Ocean Commerce in Context: The Economic and Revenue Significance of Eastern Trade in the Ancient World’, in *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity: Political, Cultural and Economic Impacts*, ed. Matthew A. Cobb (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 117–34.

⁴²See Matthew A. Cobb and Troy Wilkinson, ‘The Roman State and Red Sea Trade Revenue’, in *Networked Spaces: The Spatiality of Networks in the Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean*, ed. Caroline Durand, Julie Marchand, Bérangère Redon, and Pierre Schneider (Lyon: MOM Éditions, 2022), 213–26.

⁴³There has been some debate over whether conflict among the polities of the Tamilakam (southern India) was occasionally motivated by a desire to control the sites frequented by foreign traders. For an overview of this issue, see Rajan Gurukkal, *Rethinking Classical Indo-Roman Trade: Political Economy of Eastern Mediterranean Exchange Relations* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 270–81.

⁴⁴For a brief discussion of the spread of certain scripts and languages in relation to South Asian integration into Indian Ocean networks of exchange, see Cobb’s article in this SI. On the spread of religious ideas, see also Cohen’s article (this SI), as well as Himanshu P. Ray, *The Winds of Change: Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Eivind H. Seland, ‘Trade and Christianity in the Indian Ocean during Late Antiquity’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 5, no. 1 (2012): 72–86.

⁴⁵Eivind H. Seland, ‘Early Christian in East Africa and Red Sea/Indian Ocean Commerce’, *African Archaeological Review* 31 (2015): 643.

⁴⁶See Matthew A. Cobb, ‘Introduction: The Indian Ocean in Antiquity and Global History’, in *The Indian Ocean Trade in Antiquity*, 3–4.

At a wider societal level, the spread of ideas and knowledge about other regions and peoples compelled different communities to reassess their sense of place within the world (or attempt to 're-embed' traditional notions). This conceptual adjustment often involved reconciling new information with existing cultural, geographic, ideological and cosmological paradigms. For example, 'Western Regions' sections increasingly appear in the Chinese court histories of the early to mid-centuries CE, like the *Hòu Hànshū* (fifth century) and *Weilüe* (third century). These provided geographic and ethnographic descriptions of peoples in central and western Asia, as well as the semi-utopian land of Da Qin (often understood as a reference to the Roman Empire). Increasing awareness (if not necessarily full understanding) of these regions required an expanded sense of the inhabited world, albeit one heavily framed through Chinese ideological and cosmological conceptions.⁴⁷

Overall, one could characterize this period as one of growing interconnectivity, especially as a result of greater transoceanic voyaging in the Indo-Pacific, as well as increased movement across the so-called (First) Silk Road. This not only led to an increased variety and volume of goods being moved between different regions, but their integration into an array of culturally significant consumptive and ritual practices within different societies. In order to facilitate these movements, merchants, sailors, and others developed increasingly complex organizational networks, as well as the establishment of diaspora communities. Various ruling authorities responded to this activity, both through taxation (or predation), and the establishment of supporting physical, legal, and administrative infrastructure. These movements of peoples also led to the spread and adaptation of a range of skills, practices, artistic forms, and beliefs, with various implications at individual and societal levels for lifestyles and the way in which individuals and groups comprehended the world they inhabited.

Identifying an end point to this phase is potentially arbitrary, not least because many political-military and cultural transformations took place within this period, and it is possible to identify various phases of growth, decline, and alteration within certain parts of the networks which spanned Afro-Eurasia. For example, while there may have been a relative decline in the importance of Mediterranean-Red Sea links (though, by no means, a cessation) at the southern Arabian port of Qana' by the second century CE, there appears to be a relative growth of links with the Mesopotamian-Persian Gulf sphere and India (second to fifth century CE).⁴⁸ Additionally, the decline in pepper reaching the Mediterranean world from the Kottanarika region (Kuttanad) during the third century CE did not lead to a collapse in pepper harvesting in the region. But rather we see an increasingly eastward shift during the third to sixth centuries, where this black pepper was transported overland and then traded across the Bay of Bengal.⁴⁹ In the case of the so-called First Silk Road period, we also see a decline in the importance of the 'Southern-route' (which passed south of the Taklamakan) and a shift to greater prominence of the two 'Northern routes' through the Tarim Basin around the mid-first millennium CE.⁵⁰

Given this 'messiness', it could be asked: what is sufficient to substantiate an 'epochal change' for Afro-Eurasian interconnectivity? It is suggested here that the seventh century CE is a plausible transition point. In this period we see the start of the profound cultural, religious, political, and economic consequences that would permeate across Afro-Eurasia, including in Indian Ocean trading activity, due to the rise of Islam. Around the same time, a new golden age of the Silk Road is usually thought to be ushered in with the formation of the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE).⁵¹ There

⁴⁷For a discussion, see Matthew A. Cobb, 'Conceptualising the Far West: Early Chinese Notions of Da Qin and the Indian Ocean Trade', in *The Archaeology of Knowledge Traditions of the Indian Ocean World*, 56-78.

⁴⁸Alexander Sedov, 'Stratigraphy and Development of the Site: Preliminary Remarks', in *QANI' Le port antique du Hadramawt entre la Méditerranée, l'Afrique et l'Inde*, ed. Jean-François Salles and Alexander Sedov (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 374-5, 379.

⁴⁹Federico De Romanis, *The Indo-Roman Pepper Trade and the Muziris Papyrus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 120-24.

⁵⁰On these developments, see Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵¹The earlier 'First Silk Road' is conventionally regarded as falling into decline by the third century CE.

are, of course, caveats, such as the deep religious, literary, and political consequences of sustained links between South and South East Asia in the latter half of the first millennium CE (often problematically referred to as the Indianization of Southeast Asia) which blurs the demarcation offered in this SI.⁵² But any periodization is potentially nebulous and permeable (including those based on political-military criteria). The one outlined here has a reasonable degree of coherency when viewed through the frame of connectivity and its impacts (rather than on traditional ‘civilizational’ or dynastic chronologies).

Globalization or globalizations

Despite the fact that the contributors to this SI seek to demonstrate the analytical utility of concepts connected to globalization (and glocalization) for the study of ancient Afro-Eurasia, rather than the inherent applicability of the label globalization itself, it is still worth briefly considering the debate over the ‘history of globalization’. This is because a number of the insights offered in the present SI might prove informative for those who adopt such a framework. The ‘history of globalization’ debate surrounds the question of whether we should think about a singular globalization or globalizations in the plural. That is to say, whether we should see earlier instantiations of globalization as part of a lineal process (with fits and starts) that ultimately led to today’s contemporary globalization—archaic (pre-industrial), proto (1600–1800 CE), modern (1800–1950 CE), and post-colonial (1950s onwards)—or a set of distinctive, discrete (cyclical) occurrences of globalization.⁵³

The lineal point of view is problematic as it might seem to advocate for a progressive or evolutionary march towards modernity, and potentially (inadvertently) the ‘peopling of early civilizations with modern capitalists’.⁵⁴ Conversely, we need to be cautious about going to the other extreme of seeing overly discrete cycles that had no lasting impact or formative development on later periods. Hopkins’s notions of ‘a set of overlapping sequences (not stages)’ may be a better means of articulating a balanced middle ground between the two models.⁵⁵

What we demonstrate in this SI is that at the macro scale (Afro-Eurasia), any sequences need to be viewed in as flexible a manner as possible. It is vital to avoid a schematized view of growth, apogee and decline, since there were lots of developments in different parts of the wider Indian Ocean/Indo-Pacific and Silk Road networks during this epoch (300 BCE to 700 CE). This does not mean we need to restrict ourselves to regionally specific ‘civilizational’ or political boundaries (although, as noted in the first section, this is one approach that can be adopted). Rather, it is important to recognize the unevenness of these overlapping networks, which were necessarily fluid and changed over time.

We can see this demonstrated, for example, in the strong links between the northern Red Sea region and southern India in the early centuries CE that seemed to decline by the mid-centuries CE (in favour of more internal Red Sea trade and some links with Sri Lanka), whereas those between Persian Gulf and northwest India remained strong (see Cobb). The spread of Buddhism via Silk Road and Indian Ocean networks of exchange had a more profound impact in Central, Eastern, and Southeast Asia in this period than in the west (see Cohen). Furthermore, the importance of Southern Arabia links with Rhapta (along or near the coastline of modern

⁵²On this issue, see Hoogervorst, ‘Tracing Maritime Connections Between Island Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean World’, 751–67.

⁵³For the lineal view, see Ino Rossi, ‘Globalization as an Historical and Dialectical Process’, in *Frontiers of Globalization Research: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches*, ed. Ino Rossi (New York: Springer, 2008), 27–63. For the cyclic view, see Jennings, ‘Distinguishing Past Globalizations’. More broadly, see Antony G. Hopkins, ‘Introduction: Globalization – An Agenda for Historians’, in *Globalization in World History*, ed. Antony G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), 1–10.

⁵⁴Jennings, *Globalizations and the Ancient World*, 12.

⁵⁵Antony G. Hopkins, ‘The Historiography of Globalization and the Globalization of Regionalism’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1–2 (2010): 26.

Tanzania) was greater than any others for the early centuries CE (see Simmons). As such, if one is interested in seeking to ‘identify’ past instances of globalization across Afro-Eurasia, it may be better to try identifying different gloc/globalizing trajectories.

Conclusion

Up until now, many applications of globalization thinking to Antiquity have tended to focus on smaller regions, ‘civilizations’, or empires. The present SI seeks to expand this scope by considering how globalization thinking can help us to study the wider Afro-Eurasian world in the period 300 BCE to 700 CE. In particular, we are concerned with the use of concepts from globalization as analytical tools to help us frame and articulate the phenomenon of increasing interconnectivity. These concepts can help us avoid the binary dynamics of the core-periphery model which had been popular in earlier World Systems Theory approaches. Instead, greater emphasis is given to all the historical actors involved (itinerant craftsman, merchants, sailors, local elites, tax farmers, monks, urban residents, peasant farmers, etc.), and the responses, adaptations and transformations that took place within various communities as a result of this wider interconnectivity. These concepts also allow for a much greater recognition of activity and agency at the macro, societal, and individual level—the local intersecting with the global.

For the contributors of this SI, attempts to label this activity as globalization or to place it within the ‘history of globalization’ are of secondary concern (though this is not to suggest that we decry attempts by others to do so). Rather, the analysis offered here suggests that anyone interesting in taking such an approach might be better off identifying different gloc/globalizing trajectories, instead of seeking to identify a collective, ‘globalized’ ancient Afro-Eurasia.

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