Introduction

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This volume comprises the publication of a one-day conference held at the University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies) on 19th November 2005. The conference carried the same title as this volume, *Incipient Globalization? Long-distance contacts in the sixth century*, and was designed to bring together a selection of papers dealing with both material culture and theoretical issues and to represent as many geographical regions of the sixth-century world as possible. The idea of holding a conference on this subject grew out of an increasing realisation that analysts within International Relations Theory and International Political Economy had become deeply interested in the long-term history of the process of globalization, and that the transition from the Roman to the Medieval periods is often characterised as a significant change within the scholarly field of International Relations.[1] Studies on the formation of new, contemporary 'globalized' international orders have made reference to the evolution of the Roman and medieval international systems; yet archaeologists of Late Antiquity have largely remained apart from this debate.[2] This volume is offered as a contribution to the discussion on the origins and process of globalization; it is hoped that it will prompt further work on this subject within Archaeology and the cross-fertilisation of ideas across Archaeology and International Relations.

The title of this volume is borrowed from Jan Aarte Scholte, who uses 'incipient globalization' to describe what he sees as the second historic stage of globalization: the period between the 1850s and 1950s, when means and modes of communication such as the telegraph, radio, television, aeroplanes and cars were developed.[3] The period of incipient globalization follows a period of 'global imagination' from 1600 onwards, in which world religions burgeoned and scientific revolutions had global reach in their implications. These stages are preliminary to the stage of 'full-scale globalization' which the world is in the throes of today, with global institutions, banking, markets and production. For Scholte, a growth of supraterritorial spaces underlies these stages, which has transformed (and is transforming) social geography, although the process remains an uneven one. This for him is at the heart of globalization, and thus he rejects some previous understandings of the term – as either the spread of Western control, of 'global' culture, increased trade links and cross-border activities – as unsatisfactory.

Although Scholte's work is concerned with the modern period, these analytical categories have much import for late antiquity, too. Archaeologists have long been interested in long-distance exchange and the collapse and formation of international systems.[4] In terms of its place in any putative globalization process, the sixth century AD can be seen as beyond the stage of 'global imagination' insofar as it had already seen the spread of Christianity and Buddhism as 'world religions' beyond regional borders, and technologies such as weapons manufacture, silk production and architectural expertise had also taken on a supranational dimension. Instead, it might be argued that the sixth century AD witnessed a period of 'incipient globalization', where modes of communication (such as pilgrimage) and means of communication (such as ships capable of deep-sea / ocean-going voyages) became more plentiful, not less, as the political and administrative structures of the Roman state diminished in reach. This increase in complexity was, in many cases, born out of (and took place alongside) the spread of world religions and newly refined technologies. The analytical categories outlined here are, it must be remembered, an impetus to a deeper understanding of the origins of globalization, rather than a stricture.

The first paper in this volume, by Ken Dark – one of the few scholars who has written both on the archaeology of this period and on International Relations theory – introduces and explores many of these themes and demonstrates that Archaeology is ideally placed to engage with the questions surrounding globalization. Dark's paper is the only theoretical paper in this volume; the rest aim to offer case-studies of long-distance contacts in the sixth century, showing what types of transnational and international relations are available for study, what characterised these linkages and what material objects

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[1] This field was opened up by scholars working with a World Systems Theory approach to International Relations, such as J. Abu-Lughod, *Before European hegemony: the world system A. D. 1250-1350* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989) and A. G. Frank and B. K. Gills (eds.), *The world system: five hundred years or five thousand?* (London, Routledge, 1993). Since then, key work outside World Systems Theory has included K. R. Dark, *The Waves of Time: Long-term change and International Relations* (London, Continuum, 1998); B. Buzan and R. Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000); S. Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006).

[2] Recent notable exceptions are M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications* and Commerce *AD 300 – 900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006). These scholars write as historians, yet engage with archaeological data and interpretation.

[3] J. A. Scholte *Globalization: a critical introduction* (2^{nd} ed.) (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2005), pp. 65-74.

[4] Most recently, C. Bell, *The Evolution of Long Distance Trading Relationships across the LBA/Iron Age Transition on the Northern Levantine Coast* (Oxford, British Archaeological Reports International Series 1574, 2006), with bibliography of earlier work.

travelled along them. Thus, Dark's paper is followed by two papers on two different types of artefacts – gold bracteates and pottery ampullae, respectively. The former, as Charlotte Behr demonstrates, have proved excellent diagnostic tools for the sixth century, in terms of dating and in terms of long-distance contacts. The latter have been much more problematical, for reasons that Susanne Bangert examines, yet potentially provide a key insight into religious politics of the sixth century. The fourth paper, by Kate da Costa, serves as a deliberate 'counter-balance' by focussing on local and regional exchange in the sixth-century Arabian peninsula, and provides a reminder that long-distance contacts must be considered in the context of shorter-range exchange. Two more papers on artefacts then follow: Mei Ling Chen examines Byzantine and Sasanian glass imports in China, while Jörg Drauschke contributes an important paper on 'eastern' imports into the Merovingian Empire, arguing that scholars now need to be more critical of the criteria by which archaeological finds are deemed to be evidence of long-distance contacts. This is followed by Niall Finneran's paper on the role of Ethiopia in the sixth-century *oikoumêne*, in which Ethiopia is demonstrated to occupy a crucial place in religious, political and economic dynamics, with links to both Byzantium and India. The volume concludes with a comparison between the archaeology of sixth-century Britain and China, using the numismatic evidence to analyse various points of commonality and of difference.

All the papers given at the conference are published here, with the exception of Geoffrey King's paper on the Sasanian Empire. It is with great sadness that I record that Mei Ling Chen fell seriously ill during 2006 and so her paper is published here largely as it was presented at the conference.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Françoise Le Saux, the editor of *Reading Medieval Studies*, and other members of the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies at The University of Reading for suggesting that I publish these papers as a special volume of *Reading Medieval Studies* and for supporting me throughout. I hope that its subscribers will enjoy this issue and its focus on a crucial century on the crux of late antiquity and the early medieval period.

The conference was held during my tenure of a Paul Mellon Foundation Post-doctoral Fellowship at the School of Oriental and African Studies. I am grateful to the School for its sponsorship of the conference and for its generosity in permitting me, an archaeologist principally of Europe and the Byzantine Empire, to spend time studying the East. In particular, I would like to thank Professors Colin Bundy, Stephen Chan and Craig Clunas at SOAS for their support, and Professors Xu Jia-Ling and Zhang Xu-Shan for discussing the Chinese evidence with me at length. For help with translation and access to Chinese-language sources, I am grateful to Xu Jia-Ling, her PhD students at Northeast Normal University, Changchun, as well as Wang Tao at SOAS. Rebecca Naylor and Zoë Harris helped enormously with organisation on the day of the conference and also deserve grateful thanks.