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GLOBAL HISTORY, PERIODISATION AND THE YEAR 751 CE

CONNECTING WORLDS, CONNECTING NARRATIVES: GLOBAL HISTORY, PERIODISATION AND THE YEAR 751 CE

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DOSSIÊ
Toda história é história conectada?

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to propose a historiographical exercise through a Global History approach, more precisely, Connected History, trying to understand aspects of pre-modern chronology from a different perspective regarding geographical limits and Eurocentric traditions. Starting from the Battle of Talas, famous for putting Arabs and Chinese against each other, I will establish a connective narrative between East and West, highlighting how the year of 751 CE is paradigmatic regarding the formation of frontiers and patterns of political interaction. In order to demonstrate such pattern, I will analyse the presence of the ʾAbbāsids and the Tang in Central Asia, the crowning of Pippin the Short in Europe, and the destruction of the Exarchate of Ravenna and the Byzantine Iconoclasm. I hope this exercise demonstrates how synchronicity and global connections can be a viable historical approach, allowing us to understand and to relocate pre-modern periodisation beyond its Eurocentric roots. This chronological/ geographical shift has the potential to unravel wider, richer, and better-connected narratives and interpretations on pre-modern subjects, breaking with the traditional normalisation of Europe as the ruler to measure and define historical periods, especially the Middle Ages.

KEYWORDS

Talas. Connected History. 8th Century.

Imagination – that kind of imagination that favours the bold,[1] that helps the historian construct bright luminaries of time – allowed us, for the past hundred years, to divide and categorise epochs of the past (GREEN, 1992, p. 13). We imagined, through sources and historical methods, more or less homogeneous periods marked by customs, politics, religion, behaviours. We called it *periodisation*, the study of measuring time. By dividing the past into three of four big categories (Antiquity, Middle Ages, Modern History and, depending on the historiographical tradition, *Contemporary History* as well), we built an overarching framework of history, one in which objects of study could be situated, localised (GANGATHARAN, 2008, p. 862-864). Chronology and periodisation became our "laboratory", where History is tested, evaluated and even "reworked".

Structured chronology has its shortcomings. Historical eras were built upon a European foundation (GANGATHARAN, 2008, p. 863). As *historiography* developed more and more like a *science*, it emulated Eurocentric values, basing itself on events and ephemerides of Europe alone. The Fall of Rome, the French Revolution, the *Renaissance*; the West became the obvious engine of history – and if this ideological stance, even if not taken on purpose (and if we want to keep our analogy of periodisation as the testing ground of History) – has already tainted every single testing tube of our *laboratory* of the past. Periodisation became the hegemonic tool to *Westernise* historical studies (FABIAN, 2014, p. xxxviii).

One will do well to remember that *European periodisation* did not exclude the study of "foreign" topics: "exotic" history such as silk-wearing Persians, elephant-riding Indians or scimitar-wielding Arabs is – and always was – popular.[2] Does it amend the moral charge that roots our sense of chronology? No, it does not. It does not because topics that do not pertain to Europe are imbued with a sense of *otherness*, because they stem from a jigsaw whose centre is already complete, and just the *peripheral* pieces are missing (*cf*. SAID, 1979). Non-European history exists to *complement* Eurocentric discourses. They are *add-ons*, and there is no bigger proof than a quick glance over North-American and European universities: all study concerned with the "East" does not belong to History departments, but to "Near Eastern Studies" departments, to "Semitic Languages" departments, and so on. History, these institutions tell us, is Western.

Surely, there are movements – methodological and epistemological – that somehow try to break the mould and establish new or concurrent forms of looking at the past and at periodisation. Here, I would like to refer specifically to Global History. After the 1980s predominantly, Global History has tried to propose a wider, more geographically expansive view, focusing globally on patterns of cultural displays across cultures and on how these patterns change and are modified by the idiosyncrasies of human nature worldwide (HARE; WELLS, 2015, p. 371-372). This approach is not free of methodological shortcomings, but stemming from its roots we can see, be it shyly or not, the desire to break from the chains of Eurocentric historiographical outlooks. However, some historians, such as Franz Fillafer, see, deep in the intellectual

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[1] *Fortis Fortuna adiuvat*, "Fortune favours the strong" is a common idiom in many languages, present in Phormio, Terence's comedy. Here, I decided to make a word play, replacing "Fortune" with "imagination". Terence, *Phormio* 1, 203.

[2] In general terms, this is a reflection of what Said called "Orientalism": the West creates the East in exotic fashion, displaying hierarchy and relation of power in this cognitive process (SAID, 1979, p. 2).

genealogy of Global History, the DNA of European colonialism and the desire to shape past, present, and future according to a European *Weltanschauung* (FILLAFER, 2017, p. 3-4). In other words, what Global History lacks in "heuristic design" and "political functions" (FILLAFER, 2017, p. 3), it makes up in European traditions of conceptualising the past – therefore, we would still be working inside that "laboratory of History" in which our testing tubes and Bunsen burners are the periodisation of *Eurocentric* chronology.

Let us assume for a second that we do want to conceive a historical narrative that pays attention to connections and "global" patterns; but that we also want to concoct a historical narrative that does not thread on the old dusty steps of the "European Laboratory of History" and helps us to perceive different geographical and cultural protagonism. Then, we need to see the global, the *connections*, through different lenses.

For this exercise, I will put in check notions of geographical protagonism and chronology (always thought as a mirror of European or European-related events). I will start from one specific point in time and space to establish our connections and perceive *a* past that highlights different times, protagonism, centres, and peripheries. That will be our new "laboratory". The point in time is the year of 751 CE. The space will be Central Asia. In this text, we will be looking at the fabled Battle of Talas as our central node to connect history and see the past through different perspectives and periodisations.

What is my objective with this exercise? To show that *periodisation* does not have to be a Eurocentric effort, and that different spaces can be connected and included in our chronological and global analyses. Highlighting different processes starting, taking place and culminating in the year of 751 CE across a vast range of locations – as I will demonstrate below – can successfully demonstrate the plethora of stances that historians can take when building frameworks to accommodate religious, political, and cultural movements of every sort. That being said, this paper will be a *general survey* of key spaces of Afro-Eurasia in the 8th century, not necessarily bringing new evidence, but rather proposing a fresh look into periodisation, a look that takes into account global links: by connecting events across Europe, the Arabian Peninsula, the Iranian Plateau, the steppes of Central Asia and China, one will be hard-pressed not to understand the 8th century – from 751 CE onwards – as a time of change. In other words, by looking into a *connected world*, our parameters of periodisation can become more flexible, thus establishing new and diverse chronological points to our pedagogical division of epochs in History, taking into consideration not just European events, but worldwide phenomena.

THE WORLD IN 751: THE EAST

In 751, Islam was in a conquer spree for over a hundred years (KARSH, 2006, p. 21). Arisen from the dark sands of al-Ḥijāz, the Islamic faith had united groups of nomads and merchants of the Arabian Peninsula under the word of the Prophet Muhammad and his successors, the Rāshidūn, the *rightly guided caliphs*. Civil strife soon followed, and the *ummat al-Islām*, the community of Muslims, saw itself under the rule of a new dynasty, the Umayyads, named after Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, the sixth caliph of the Islamic world, from 661 to 680 (ALKHATEEB, 2017, p. 9-55). From 661 to 750, Muʿāwiyah and his descendants expanded the caliphate from the Iranian plateau to the Pillars of Hercules. Afro-Eurasia became the warring ground of the Umayyads

and their multitude of subjects (KENNEDY, 2004, p. 57-89). Rapidly, Persians, Berbers, Copts, Arameans and other groups became *mawālī*, non-Arabs converts to Islam – a clearly Arab religion in its beginnings (CRONE, 2002, p. 60). The great number of *mawālī* generals, bureaucrats, and slaves led the Umayyad world to political pressure, which culminated in revolution. In 750, after three years of rebellions, Abu al-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ became the caliph, starting the period of ʾAbbāsid rule and persecuting every member of the House of Muʿāwiyah.[3]

Abu al-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ ruled as caliph for four years. His tenure was marked by the proper inclusion of *mawālī* in the engines of the government – especially Persians (KENNEDY, 1981, p. 102-103). The ʾAbbāsid Era started as multicultural (especially if compared to the Umayyad period), but soon faced its own problems, having lost most of North Africa by the 800s.[4] At the beginning, however, ʾAbbāsid's rule seemed promising. While the Umayyads were markedly pro-Arab and had their power orbiting Damascus, the ʾAbbāsids were looking East, having their capital centred in Kūfah and, later, Baghdad, closer to the old seat of Sasanian power, Ctesiphon (AGHA, 2003, p. 7-38). The shift in focus does not come as a surprise: al-Saffāḥ himself had rebelled against Marwān II, the last Umayyad caliph from the province of Khorāsān, deep inside ancient Iranian territory, and one of his greater commanders, Abū Muslim, was a Khorasanian originally named Zadān (which, if true, is a distinctively Persian name).[5] He had political roots in the East, and, therefore, tried to enforce ʾAbbāsid rule in Central Asia (DANIEL, 1979, p. 7-8).

Arabic presence in Central Asia and along the so-called Silk Road can be traced back to the Umayyad period, but it was especially important for the newly-established ʾAbbāsids, because so much support for the rebellion against Marwān II came from Khorāsān, including Abū Muslim himself (*cf*. DANIEL, 1979; AGHA, 2003). In trying to exert control over eastward regions, the caliphate reached Ferghāna, an intermountain depression leading to the Tarim Basin, and the nearby Chach (modern-day Tashkent) (SAIDOV; ANARBAEV; GORIYACHEVA, 2011, p. 9-11). Both places, called *Ningyuan* and *Shí* in Chinese, were also under the sphere of influence of the Tang dynasty – the ruling house of China since 618 CE – due to its strategic positions (BŌ, 2007, p. 15-23). The Chinese, keen on securing "trade routes south and north of the Tianshan" (MILLWARD, 2007, p. 35), the famous mountain range of Central Asia, had defeated the local Turkish confederation of Türügesh[6] in 744 and, soon after, expelled the Tibetans from the south of the Tian Shan, that is, the Pamir mountains (MILLWARD, 2007, p. 35-36). These victories were achieved under the command of Ko Sŏnji, also known as Gao Xianzhi, a remarkable Korean who served the Chinese Tang as "Assistant

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[3] The ʾAbbāsid Revolution is a contentious subject among specialists, with the ethnic composition of societies between the ʾAbbāsid and the Umayyad period being a polemic topic within it. Here, I am fragrantly simplifying the discussion, and a good starting point to complement it is CRONE, 1998.

[4] It is an accepted view that non-Arabs had a much stronger influence in the ʾAbbāsid Caliphate, especially if compared to the Umayyad period. However, there is dissidence among specialists, and it should be noted that early Abbāsid history is complex and entangled with biased primary sources (ELAD, 2005, p. 278-279).

[5] The origins of Abū Muslim are shrouded in mystery – and neither contemporary nor later sources help diminishing the question of who Abū Muslim was and where he came from before his political and military glory (DANIEL, 1979, p. 101-105).

[6] Also called *Türgesh* (STARK, 2016, p. 2122-2127).

Protector-General of the Pacified West", and represented the last "blaze of glory" of China in Central Asia during this period (MILLWARD, 2007, p. 36). However, soon after the victories of Ko Sŏnji, a conflict broke between Chach and Ferghāna. The latter sought aid and protection of the Tang, while the former was defeated, its king was assassinated and his son fled to Samarkand, a famous city in the Sogdiana region, which was under Arab rule since 712 (JUN-DA, 2015, p. 106-110).

Locked between Ko Sŏnji and Abū Muslim, the rocky roads and tall mountains of Central Asia were in disarray. The conflict between Ferghāna and Chach represented a sudden political maelstrom whose consequences seemed optimal for both the ʾAbbāsids and the Tang. Both dynasties wanted to establish control and influence over the region, and the Chach-Ferghāna incident proved to be the perfect catalyst for the military advances of both powers. That is how, in the summer of 751, Arabs and Chinese properly met in battle for the first and last time (MILLWARD, 2013, p. 35-36).

Historiography calls it the "Battle of Talas", named after the river that flows from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan. It pitched the governor of Samarkand, Ziyād ibn Sālih – who received aid and reinforcements from Abū Muslim – against Ko Sŏnji himself (GIBB, 1923, p. 96). The Tibetans, who had suffered a defeat under the Korean general just years before, decided to join the Arabs in the ensuing fight, while the Chinese had their ranks enlarged by the presence of Turkish mercenaries from the Qarluq confederacy and by their old client, Ferghāna. During the clash, most of the Qarluq defected to the ʾAbbāsid side, while forces from Ferghāna retreated (BECKWITH, 1987, p. 108-139). Ko Sŏnji was suddenly left exposed, with Turkish forces attacking from close quarters and the Arabs pushing against a much smaller and diminished Chinese army. It was a quick and complete defeat for the Tang (BECKWITH, 1987, p. 139-140).

In spite of the crushing defeat, Ko Sŏnji was able to return East and start assembling new forces to make another advance in Central Asia. The Arabs, on the other hand, seemed to be satisfied enough with the victory and did not pursue further advances beyond Ferghāna. However, before the Tang could attack the caliphate again, the An Lushan rebellion broke out in Northern China, thus ending any ambitions that China could have in retaining major territories or influence in Western Central Asia (SKAFF, 2000, p. 23-25).

What is the overarching meaning of this bellicose encounter at the banks of River Talas? Firstly and foremost, it was the first and last major encounter of Arab and Chinese field armies, it meant the proper encounter of two different worlds and two different ways of life – in other words, both sides were under the influence of two great universal religions: on the west side, Islam, spreading like wildfire to the deserts of Central Asia, carrying its main pillar, the *šahādah* (*lā ʾilāha ʾillā llāh muḥammadun rasūlu llāh*, "There is no god but God; Muhammad is the messenger of God"); on the East side, Buddhism, growing increasingly as the main religion and philosophy of the Chinese empire, stemming from India through the translations and teachings of Xuanzang, the travelling monk.[7] Thus, Talas represented the clash between Buddha

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[7] I refer here to the influence and the historical impact of two of the three major universal religions in re-modern conception of the world: Islam and Buddhism (with Christianity being the third). This period, usually called *Late Antiquity* or *Early Middle Ages* by traditional historiography, is fundamentally marked by the rise of religions possessing universal and overarching beliefs (as said, Christianity, Islamism and Buddhism), which defined much of how life, history and humankind were conceived. The impact and, of course, the settlement of these religions in certain areas of Afro-Eurasia cannot be underlooked (*cf.* JOHNSON; JOHNSON, 2007).

and Muhammad, between East and West. Therefore, even though, there were not great consequences to neither ʾAbbāsids nor Tang, it still signified the end of eastward expansion for the Caliphate and the end of westward expansion for the Chinese Empire. It halted the world as it was, and the shape and image of Asia in 751 became the paradigm for years to come.

Secondly, Talas is a looking-glass aimed at the plethora of the historical actors who were leading the fate of Central Asia. On the surface, the battle is the encounter of Arabs and Chinese, but, actually, it is much more: Persians, Tibetans, Koreans, Turkic clans, and Iranians from Sogdiana and beyond were all forging the world in the crucible of the Tarim Basin. From the dry desert of Taklamakan to the ranges of Tian Shan and the hubs of Transoxiana, the history and the vicissitudes of the Silk Road made it the centre of the Earth – or, at least, *a* centre of the Earth. The cosmopolitan crossroad of Central Asia withstood a clash in Talas and revealed just how much was happening in this side of the planet.[8]

THE WORLD IN 751: THE WEST

The year of 751 was not just an ordinary year. Besides the wondrous bout between Arabs and Chinese, other defining events were taking place across the continent. From Central Asia, we now observe Europe to see what, if anything at all, is connected to these events in a global scale.

In the 8th century, Europe was living the institutional aftermath of the destructuring of the Western Roman Empire, a distant memory going back to 476 CE.[9] The disappearance of Roman political machines in the European provinces led to a quick spread of "Barbarian" organised societies, mainly Franks in Gaul, Ostrogoths in Italy, Vandals in North Africa, Visigoths in the Iberian Peninsula, and Burgundians in southeastern Gaul (*cf*. FRIGHETTO, 2012). It did not take long for the Franks, under the rulership of the Merovingian dynasty, to conquer most of northern Europe and become the driving force in the West. The Merovingians had their roots placed on the conquests of Clovis, the converted catholic who united all Frankish tribes and submitted all the warring chieftains under the clout of hereditary monarchy (CANDIDO, 2008, p. 46-64). His kingdom went from Belgian provinces to the conquest of Aquitaine, the Rhine Valley, to Armorica (modern day Brittany), thus covering what is now part of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. In other words, Clovis left to his heirs the heart of Western Europe (WOOD, 1994, p. 55-57).

Upon his death, Clovis' realm was divided into four: his eldest son, Theuderic, was responsible for ruling half of the kingdom, Austrasia, from Metz; the other half was given to the remaining three sons, with Childebert I governing in Paris, Chlodomer in

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[8] Regarding primary sources that address the conflict of Talas, on the Arab side we have, mainly, Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī and Shams al-Dīn ibn al-Dhahabī – while the first, much closer to these original events, wrote his *History of Prophets and Kings* (*Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*), the latter, a thirteenth/ fourteenth century scholar, wrote the *Great History of Islam* (*Tārīkh al-Islām al-Kabīr*). On the Chinese side, Beckwith has enumerated a certain amount of great historical compendia of pre-modern China that relate these events (BECKWITH, 1987, p. 13-140).

[9] I will not proceed, here, into the minefield of the "Fall of the Roman Empire", an endless debate. For our purpose, suffice it to say that the hallmark year of 476 is taken as a *de jure* event, that is, one that led to institutional changes, rather than full political, cultural and social changes.

Orléans, and Clothar I in Soissons. From 511 to 558, Clothar waged war against his brothers and became, once again, the one king of Frankia – a position that did not last long, as he divided, just like Clovis, the kingdom into four parts among his four living sons (WOOD, 1994, p. 55-76).

Problems of succession, weakened institutions and interfamily rivalry eroded the establishment of Merovingian power. Thus, the position of *maior palatii* or "Mayor of the Palace" – an office conceived to manage the household of the Merovingian kings – soon became the *de facto* force driving the kingdom (McKITTERICK, 2004, p. 126). It is not surprising, therefore, that in 687, Pippin II of Herstal became Duke and Prince of the Franks, greatly increasing his powers and officially giving him full military command, which also made his son, Charles Martel, incredibly powerful (McKITTERICK, 1997, p. 126-127). Hence, the ever-increasing authority of the *maior palatii*, especially under the House of Pippin, soon became excessive for the Merovingian (ceremonial, at this point) monarchy.

It was Pippin the Short who gave the *coup de grâce* on Clovis' heirs. Son of Charles Martel, Pippin was made *maior palatii*, together with his brother Carloman, in 741. Both men were leading the realm on behalf of Childeric III, a petty king who was under utter control of Pippin and Carloman since he was crowned in 743. Carloman retired to a monastery in 747, the same year in which their half-brother Gripho, son of Charles Martel with his second wife, Sunnichild, rebelled against Pippin (WOOD, 1994, p. 287-292). Sensing that his authority was being questioned, Pippin decided that it was time for the Merovingian to disappear and for him to become king not only *de facto*, but also *de jure*. In 751, while the Arabs and Chinese were deciding their fates in Central Asia, Pope Zacharias declared that Childeric III was not a true king, and so Pippin III, the Short, was crowned and anointed King of the Franks, the first of the Carolingian dynasty (CLOSE, 2007, p. 835-850). Childeric was tonsured and sent to a monastery, where he probably died three or four years later.

Just as it is with Talas, analysing the rise of Pippin as an ephemerid is not a straightforward task. The installation of the House of Charles Martel in the throne of Frankia had a ripple effect in Europe: 49 years after the event took place, Charles, son of Pippin the Short and grandson of Charles Martel became Emperor of the Romans being crowned by Pope Leo III – hence, *Charlemagne*. For the first time since 476, the West had someone sitting on the "Roman" imperial throne, and it happened because of the political manoeuvres of Pippin, which allowed Charlemagne to craft his own political ladder (*cf*. COLLINS, 1998). Henceforth, from 751 onwards, Europe changed, and as it happened with Asia, it was in 751 that the paradigm of power was settled, and the West became the Empire of the Franks (while Central Asia became the realm of multicultural ʾAbbāsids, and the Tang were confined to Eastern Asia).

THE WORLD IN 751: BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Sitting at the Bosphorus, the mighty walls of Constantinople were already shaken by the War of the Icons in 751. Since the first half of the 8th century, the Eastern Roman Empire was going through the *Eikonomachía*, the Iconoclastic movement

against religious icons led by Leo III Isaurian.[10] The emperor and some authorities of the church were rabidly against religious imagery, and this instance soon developed into persecution of iconodules – the faithful who still adored images (HEAD, 1971, p. 105-108). Leo's son, Constantine V *Kopronymos*, was a fervent iconoclast. His harsh position on the *Eikonomachía* led to an ever-growing rift between Eastern and Western churches (which, at this stage, were still united), and a consequential isolation of the Byzantines in relation to the Latins – a drifting movement that would only increase, later, with the coronation of Charlemagne (PELIKAN, 1977, p. 111-112).

Constantine V, named by his later detractors as the "shit-named", had to deal with the icon controversy within his empire, but also with the growing threats from East and West, North and South (VISSER, 1952, p. 33-48). To fight the Arab enemies of the Umayyad Caliphate, his father had secured a marriage between Constantine and Çiçek, the daughter of Bihar, the Khazar Qaghan.[11] They had their first son, Leo IV, in 750, while Abu al-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ was establishing ʾAbbāsid power. Worried about the growing menace of the new Arab *status quo*, Constantine named Leo IV, still an infant, co-emperor, in order to secure his succession. The year was 751, and the ascension of child Leo happened just a month before the clash between the ʾAbbāsid and the Tang at Talas (KAEGI, 2008, p. 386-388).

Meanwhile, the papacy was leaning closer and closer to the Franks and their new dynasty, headed by Pippin the Short. With the pope looking West and the emperor looking East, the gap between Rome and Constantinople, already instigated by the Iconoclastic movement, became wider. Constantine had no desire to meddle in Europe anymore, and the last Byzantine territory there, the Exarchate of Ravenna, was left hopeless. Such was the case that, in 751, the Lombard King Aistulf invaded Ravenna and killed Eutychius, the Exarch (DELIYANNIS, 2010, p. 282-286). The conquest of the city virtually ended Byzantine presence in Italy for the duration of the 8th century.

The Eastern Roman Empire, sitting between East and West – affecting and being affected by both sides – follows the same pattern as the Frankish, the Arabic and the Chinese power: 751 is the year in which paradigms were defined, frontiers were settled and major events brought lasting consequences. In the case of the Byzantines, while the *Eikonomachía* both precedes and succeeds our hallmark year of 751, it is precisely at this time that we have not only the precocious ascension of Leo IV the Khazar, but also the definite cut in the cord left by Justinian between Constantinople and Italy: with the loss of the Exarchate, the eastern Emperor turns his back to Europe, thus signalling his plan to focus on his centre of power, that is, the orbit of the Black Sea. In other words, 751 is a breaking point for the Franks, the Byzantines, the Arabs and the Chinese (not to mention all the groups and societies revolving around them).

This is why looking into these different historical narratives at the same time can be a fruitful task: through connections and wider views, we can see a world out of isolation, one in which vicissitudes in China and Central Asia will affect Islamic policies – and, consequently, reverberate throughout the Christian world.

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[10] Much has been written about the long period of Byzantine Iconoclasm. An excellent survey of the topic is given by BRUBAKER; HALDON, 2011.

[11] Çiçek, also known as Tzitzak, was baptised with the Greek name of Irene (*Eiríni*). Her father, Bihar, was the leader of the Khazar confederacy, a strong Turkic power that dominated roughly what is now southeast Russia. The Khazars were fundamental for Byzantine diplomacy because they sat between the Greeks, the Arabs, and the northern nomads (*cf*. BROOK, 2006)

A WORLD CONNECTED: FINAL THOUGHTS

Historians have the privilege – sometimes a blessing, sometimes a curse – to look at the past *retroactively*. We can isolate the year of 751 and recount, with a certain degree of precision, all that happened afterwards; we can pinpoint causes, consequences and craft our narrative like a chain. Surely, one could say that this chain is always corroded with the rust of teleology, affected by *causality* that could only exist within historiography. After all, we wish our "laboratory" to be, in a way, fail-proof because historians want all the chaos of the past to dissipate, thus turning it into the order of our present, replete with clean arguments and well-oiled descriptions. Is this the case with this brief analysis of the year 751? To a certain extent, it could be said, every year can become a catalyst, the start or the end of a great narrative hawser, one from which causes stem and consequences ensue. This is where *Connected Histories* can help us.

In terms of *direct* connection, 751 is the culminating point of a longer narrative: Islam changes the geopolitics of the Middle East, toppling the Sasanian Empire and putting the Eastern Roman Empire at bay; Arabs, imbued with their triumphant faith, keep their conquering machine going, reaching the far end of Western Europe all the way up to modern-day France, where they clash against Frankish and Burgundian forces led by Charles Martel, who would stand victorious. The *maior palatii*, already powerful, becomes an even greater figure, diminishing further the role of the Merovingian kings. The Umayyad Caliphate started showing signs of stress and would soon crumble. Meanwhile, China was ever-growing under the Tang, an imperial force keen on controlling the Silk Road and the lands beyond the Taklamakan. By 751, this story reaches its apex. The Merovingians fall, and the son of Charles Martel rises; the Umayyad fell, and the ʾAbbāsids were adamant of conquering lands further east, just like the Tang were desirous of triumphing in the west. Between these worlds, Eastern Romans, the Byzantines, were deciding where to look and which side to guard. Constantine V, *Kopronymos*, decides to leave his last Italian dominions to the Lombards on the east.. Our hallmark year comes, 751 CE, and it brings a *pattern of change and decision*. These loose threads of history are tied up: the ʾAbbāsids and the Tang do not expand further, having violently fought at the banks of the Talas River; the Byzantines decided on their diplomacy, whereas Europe becomes the battling ground of the Carolingians. The year 751 sets the table to Global Middle Ages.

Now, in terms of *indirect* connection, we have a different common denominator: the synchronicity of time. If the events of 751 are not necessarily linked by politics, by culture or by war, they follow the path of change and are united by the tide of History, allowing us to perceive, understand and craft this connected narrative. This synchronicity allows us to rethink our old periodisations: on a global scale, 751 brings with it the end of Afro-Afro-Eurasian Antiquity. Christianity legitimises the Carolingian Europe; Islam dictates the powers in the Middle East and Central Asia; Buddhism sustains China and the eastern portions of the Silk Road. These three universal religions would certainly end up affecting peoples and societies in most of Africa, India and Southeast Asia also. The world changed, and we can now see an Afro Afro-Eurasian Middle Ages.

This *connected* account shows just how much of our old *laboratory* can be changed and modified. Periodisation does not have to be a tool to *westernise*, because we can craft different metanarratives with different roots. This *connected* account

proves that specificities and frontiers are not necessarily erased or ignored if we depart from global approaches. In the case of this article, *synchronicity* is the overarching framework to connect different centres and different peripheries – that is, when talking about Global History, we must take into consideration not only space, but also time. All the ephemerides of 751 prove it. It is possible to look into different areas, understand different historical contexts, and yet, see the connection of this plethora of occurrences, in global fashion, through *time*, through *periodisation*. This is precisely the reason why this array of seemingly distinct and disconnected passages are, in fact, part of the same continuum and *can* (and should!) be seen in connection.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that looking into *time* does not exclude looking into *space*. Our understanding of time – as in, our understanding of the pedagogical value of periodisation – is somewhat dependent on our understanding of geographical scopes. Connecting different areas and concocting historical narratives can be greatly improved if we assume a "bird's-eye" approach and widen our area of analysis. How can it be possible to divide History into periods if we do not take into account large movements and global paradigms? As we saw, Franks, Byzantines, Arabs, Persians, Chinese, and many other political, cultural, and social groups can be seen through the same chain of events. Changes that happened around 751 only did so in numerous areas because we are looking into this period *globally* and can see how events can be connected and set in motion different movements that can reverberate in different places.

It could be argued that *periodisation* is, after all, an artificial exercise to better understand historical processes. As such, I used the metaphor of the *laboratory*, because periodisation is how we *try* historical narratives, looking into it through major chronological frameworks. Thus, I defend that this pedagogical exercise makes better sense when taken in a global, connected manner – which dampens the *Eurocentric* movement of traditional periodisation. That is why the year of 751 is emblematic: we can see, side by side, how universal religions and major political players reach culminating points. Not just in Europe, but across the continent.

We can go global and not go Western. We can go connected and not forget the local. Thus, 751 CE is more than a year in the world – it is a year in a *connected*, *global* world.

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