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Assembling the archaeology of the global Middle Ages

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ABSTRACT

Responding to recent developments in archaeological theory and growing interest in the ‘global Middle Ages’, an approach to exploring relations between local and global processes in the medieval world is proposed. The World-systems approach, applied by some historians to these kinds of macro-paradigms and questions, can expose significant challenges regarding social and economic development at a global scale. However, here it is suggested that the ‘assemblage thought’ of Deleuze and Guattari, developed by DeLanda, might offer a more productive approach for assessing the multi-scalar interactions that defined the lives of communities in the Middle Ages. Here consideration is given to the character of the Middle Ages and its relation to modernity; the implications of the multi-scalar approach are also exemplified using a brief discussion of the Anglo-Italian wool trade in the Late Middle Ages.



KEYWORDS

World-system; medieval; global Middle Ages; assemblage theory; wool

Introduction

Medievalists working across a range of disciplines have increasingly sought to engage with the concept of a ‘global’ Middle Ages (Davis 2011 ; Heng 2013; Campbell 2016; Purcell 2016; Moore 2016; Belich 2016). This concept is necessarily broad. It has emerged out of concerns with the practice of medieval studies in the modern world, and the need to overcome the Euro-centric focus of scholarship, to explore the medieval past in relation to contemporary global concerns such as climate change and economic globalization, and the realization that understanding long-distance connections is critical to building a rounded picture of medieval societies. Three strategic reasons for pursuing a global perspective on medieval archaeology can be proposed: analysis of regions which have been neglected in scholarship; comparative analysis of the Middle Ages in different regions; and consideration of the connections and relationships which transcend the local. It is this last concern which is the main focus of this paper. By transcending the local and understanding the multi-scalar nature of medieval existence, we can explore the interconnected yet larger questions, for example, how climatic systems affected developments in Europe and North America (Campbell 2016), or how a macro-view of flows of goods and money can reveal the dispersed nature of the medieval economy.

Within medieval history, attempts at global studies are not unusual. Important examples include Janet Abu-Lughod’s (1989) analysis of medieval World-systems (discussed below), studies of the early medieval economy by Michael McCormick (2001) and Chris Wickham (2005) and Bruce

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Campbell's (2016) analysis of global change in the Late Middle Ages. In contrast, archaeology has been considerably more localized in its outlook, although there are important examples of studies which look beyond the local: Richard Hodges' (1982) analysis of the early medieval north European economy and Christopher Loveluck's (2013) recent analysis of North Sea economies are two such examples.

It might be argued that theoretical perspectives within archaeology over the last two decades have inhibited global analyses. Whilst processual archaeology emphasized systems, the post-processual turn can be characterized by a turn to the local, with emphasis on bottom-up processes, individualism and personal experience. However, important work on the economic and social networks associated with the Hanseatic League (e.g. Gaimster [2005]; Gaimster [2014]; Naum [2013]; Naum [2014]; Immonen [2007]), and the relationships between urbanization, religious change and economic development in East Africa (e.g. LaViolette [2008]; Fleisher [2010]; Fleisher and Wynne-Jones [2012]; Fleisher [2013]; Wynne-Jones and Fleisher [2016]), are just some examples of how such approaches can be used to write a global medieval archaeology from the bottom up, rather than falling into the pattern of creating an homogenizing 'grand narrative' of medieval experience.

This paper assesses the utility of current developments in archaeological theory, namely so-called assemblage approaches (see Hamilakis and Jones [2017] for an overview), for exploring the global Middle Ages. The benefits of this approach are examined within the context of World-systems theory which have found utility in the archaeology of other periods (see Kardulias and Hall [2008]; Orser [2009]; Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn [2011]; for overviews). The paper falls into three sections. In the first I critically assess the concept of the Middle Ages and attempt to overcome the problems of homogeneity brought about by periodization, and emphasize temporal non-linearity. In the second part I contrast two approaches: World-systems analysis and assemblage theory. In the final section I explore the utility of assemblage theory for building a more complex understanding of the cross-scalar relationships which constituted the medieval world.

The Middle Ages and beyond

The medieval period in Western European terms is typically characterized chronologically. In Britain it is broadly defined from the withdrawal of Roman rule to the Reformation, but characterized differently elsewhere in the world (see Moore [2016]). This periodization has implications for how we approach the medieval past: it imposes a sense of linear progression towards a post-medieval modernity (Immonen 2012, 7–9). This is problematic for several reasons. On the one hand the idea of the medieval is homogenizing, implying that something is shared across spaces and times which can be identified as medieval, and yet this is somewhat incompatible with the variation and processes of change which actually characterize the period (Murray 2004; Moore 2016). Secondly, the medieval is defined in relation to modernity: the Middle Ages becomes an 'object of knowledge' (Immonen 2012, 17), a representation of a pre-modern past built in a modern present, which struggles to be alive to the possibilities of the 'otherness' of the past. Archaeology is suggested by some to be a discipline saturated with modernity (Thomas 2004) which in turn serves to colonialize the medieval past (Van Oyen 2013). If this is taken further, then we find ourselves presenting a medieval past that is the product of contemporary engagements with medieval things, which we attempt to order and place into chronological or typological schemes – a process which then affects how scholars and the public understand the period. Furthermore, the wide use of the term medieval, including to describe societies outside of the

Western world in which the term has developed with a distinctive genealogy as a means of describing a particular period of 'in-between-ness', has had a colonializing impact. By describing societies outside of Europe as medieval they are understood through their relation to a Western European chronological and cultural framework, rather than being understood in their own terms, imposing systems of values and cultural expectations on to societies which were in contact with Europe in this period, but were not defined by it. Finally, by seeing the medieval as a time that seamlessly progresses into the early modern and modern ages, a sense that the medieval period existed prior to our intervention in it is engendered, the implication being that we know what it looks like and that it has some form of intrinsic essence or shape which gives it a secure ontological status (Immonen 2012, 15). Finally, the focus on linearity reduces our ability to imagine other medieval pasts and to understand historical contingency and emergent, affective unfoldings of action. This historical contingency is well demonstrated by Belich (2016) in an analysis of the ongoing impacts of the Black Death, which were not simply immediate, but resonated in the long term, giving rise to the processes of European expansion: plague enabled the processes of demographic and economic transition. Gavin Lucas (2017) calls on us to retain a naivety about the past, and not to focus on travel to a defined destination, but to be alive to the possibilities which action afforded (Lucas 2015).

We can take the role of the past in English early medieval or 'Anglo-Saxon' society as an example. The withdrawal of Roman administration in Britain can be seen as a process of de-stratification (DeLanda 1997, 267; see; Dark 2000; Faulkner 2000; Wickham 2005; Esmonde-Cleary 2013; Gerrard 2013; for debates on the end of Roman Britain), removing bureaucracy and allowing more fluid relations to occur. However, processes such as trade and communication did not cease entirely, but persisted at a different intensity, a classic example being the persistence of long-distance exchange to western Britain from the Mediterranean and Atlantic Europe, as seen through the presence of imported pottery (Duggan 2016). Furthermore, the past irrupted into contemporary practice, for example in the relationship between prehistoric monuments and Anglo-Saxon settlements and burials (Williams 1998; Crewe 2012; Semple 2013), in the re-establishment of Roman towns as diocesan centres (Loveluck 2013, 170–7) and via the presence of Roman artefacts in Anglo-Saxon graves (Eckhardt and Williams 2003). Not only do these objects implicate the past in the present, be that as mediators of persistent relations (in the case of imported pottery) or irruptions from the past (in the case of burial monuments or re-used Roman artefacts); they constitute engagements in multiple places, and they have complex itineraries which come to bear on their enrolment in practice (see Joyce and Gillespie [2015]). Therefore, as Lucas (2005, 48) states: 'The key point is that the archaeological record encompasses a multi-temporality.'

This multiplicity is somewhat at odds with archaeologists' preoccupation with standardizing archaeological time (Lucas 2005, 26). Periodization can be seen as a way of 'stratifying' the past, of sorting things, buildings and events in a scheme rooted in linear time (DeLanda 1997, 269). Terms such as 'medieval' become what Manuel DeLanda (2016, 14) termed 'reified generalities': that is, a term used to flatten and simplify complex relations.

What, then, is medieval, and what is not? And, more importantly, does it matter? Our role as archaeologists is not to simplify the past by imposing generalizing labels, but to explore how the remains of past action reveal relationships, which might crystallize as useful, specific, concepts which can be used for their explanatory, rather than synthetic, value. The period which identified as medieval is ill-defined, being the 'inbetween' separating the Classical and Renaissance eras. But more importantly, it is not separable from these worlds; just as elements of Roman life irrupt into

early medieval life and society, so elements of the ‘medieval period’ irrupt within ‘post-medieval’ modernity.

All of these arguments and statements are not deployed here with the aim of denying the existence of something called ‘the medieval period’, but instead have value in reinforcing the suggestion that we need to rethink the concept, and move away from temporally and spatially anchored absolutes, towards a bricolage, of things, knowledge, ideas and people, drawn from multiple times and places. By focusing on relations in this way we can create a more textured and realistic understanding of the constitution of the medieval world and the effects of these relations. Objectivity should be targeted at empirically reconstructing relations, rather than divorcing analysis and interpretation through setting the medieval up as an ‘other’ in contrast to the modern. As Visa Immonen (2012, 26–7) suggests, we can draw on the traces of the past and the modern uses of the period to bring out this ‘otherness’ and expose alternative ways of being medieval. Just as we cannot bound the medieval period temporally, we cannot bound it spatially. Our Western ‘medieval’ society is a leaky composition: it exceeds the boundaries that scholarship has imposed in space and time, through interconnectedness and via localized interactions (Callon 1999, 188). I argue here for a new way of thinking about the formation of relationships in the past which is predicated on exploring diversity and overcoming traditional scholarly constraints; I propose that an archaeology of the global Middle Ages can help medievalists achieve new directions.

Approaching the global Middle Ages: from World-systems to assemblages

One of the earliest attempts at undertaking an analysis of global relations in the Middle Ages, rather than producing a synthetic grand narrative, is Abu-Lughod’s (1989) study of the thirteenth-century ‘World-system’. Within archaeology, World-systems have been applied to prehistory and the classical world, but have had limited applications within historical archaeology (see Orser [2009]). Abu-Lughod’s study defines World-systems as self-contained networks, formed of core–periphery relations, providing a robust approach to understanding the implications of economic activity (see Kardulias and Hall [2008]). The principal aim of her thesis is to understand how hierarchies emerge, as the core economically exploits the periphery, for example through the manipulation of labour or resources. World-systems approaches were developed as an explanatory model for the modern economic system, meaning that their application to archaeological evidence is inherently problematic (Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn 2011, 236). Their application to the study of past societies has led to their adaptation in response to criticisms, with the result that we now accept that peripheries might ‘act back’ and that the boundaries between core and periphery might be fuzzy and gradual (Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn 2011). Rather than providing a specific set of theoretical tools, World-systems theory provides new questions about the ways in which regions in past and present were integrated with each other and how the balance of economic power is, and was, constructed between them (Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn 2011, 250).

Abu-Lughod’s study aims to redress a Eurocentric bias, by emphasizing the role of Asia in the world economy of the thirteenth century. She proposes a system of sub-systems, dominated by nodal points – ‘world cities’ such as Venice – and the critical gateways between east and west – such as Baghdad and Peking. Her study cogently demonstrates the complexity of the medieval economy and the ways in which the sub-systems affect each other. Abu-Lughod’s second aim is to argue that the ‘modern’ World-system that is focused on Europe from the sixteenth century (see

Wallerstein [1974]), was not the first, nor the only, form that a World-system might take. She argues for dynamism and adaptability being important components in these systems. Bruce Campbell's (2016) analysis of the late medieval world builds empirically upon this work, showing how the rise of Europe was closely related not only to economic relations, but also to environmental factors, particularly global climatic conditions. What both of these studies reveal is that the modern globalized system was contingent upon developments in the medieval period, but, crucially, there is no linear progression: global climate in the long-term, local political traumas or processes of urbanization, entangle and coalesce in the emergence of modernity. This is also a concern in Manuel De Landa's (1997) *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History*, in which an approach is developed in which developments which might be termed 'social' are shown to be more-than-human. He explores, for example, the implications of microbial life for town dwellers arguing that socio-economic developments were not anthropocentric, but came into being as lifeways that developed contingent on a world of volatile materials and organisms. Here 'scale' is challenging and means thinking about relations rather than the more classic macro- and micro-scale divisions of interaction and effect. This latter idea is progressed further later in this paper, through a discussion of the concepts of 'molar' and 'molecular' entities, which provide an alternative means of thinking about scale to ideas of 'micro' and 'macro'.

Elson E. Boles (2012) criticizes Abu-Lughod's analysis, because her World-system is based solely on long-distance trade, whereas in the World-systems theory developed by Wallerstein it is the division of labour, which is critical to the establishment of core and periphery. For Immanuel Wallerstein (1992, 130), each of Abu-Lughod's sub-systems is a World-system, internally hierarchically structured. It is these internal changes, such as the breakdown of feudalism, which create the opportunity for Europe to develop a capitalist and expansionist economy. The question at stake in Abu-Lughod's work is not to what extent the world was connected in the thirteenth century, but what the causal factors were behind the emergence of a capitalist economy. Did these factors grow in Europe, or result from wider, longer-standing and more geographically disparate connections? I propose that neither of these extreme positions is realistic. Recent approaches in both history and archaeology (Howell 2010, 300–2; Immonen 2012, 26) show that it is anachronistic to talk about modern capitalism in a medieval context and that it is equally problematic to think about medieval capitalism as an embryonic form of its modern incarnation. Rather, a third approach is required in which the implications of capitalist relations (that is, the acquisition and disposal of capital) can be considered in terms of the relations which constitute the medieval world – as a set of historically grounded and transformative processes which are constrained by, and serve to break down, existing economic and social structures, creating locally specific forms of interaction which have wider implications (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 288–91).

Rather than becoming embroiled in debating whether or not the medieval period was constituted by a single or multiple World-systems, we can apply alternative theoretical tools to explore the relations which World-systems approaches bring to the fore. Such tools can be found within the assemblage theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972; 1987) and, particularly, in its subsequent development by DeLanda (1997; 2006; 2016). DeLanda (2006, 118) criticizes World-systems theory as conceived by Wallerstein as reductionist: if everything is reducible to the system, the system is monolithic and becomes a reified generality – an explanatory apparatus rather than something requiring explanation in itself. In an alternative approach, systems can be considered as assemblages – as fluid, affective and open-ended bundles of associations, which, nonetheless, emerge from past practice.

World-systems and assemblage approaches are both concerned with questions of power. The former are grounded in an exploitative relationship between core and periphery; in the latter the structures of power are emergent from relations and may take a variety of forms, creating the potential for alternative articulations of power to emerge: making the 'existing power structure ... vibrate to a new rhythm' (Buchanan 2008, 10; Bryant 2012, 534–6). Therefore an assemblage approach sits in contrast because power is not perceived to exist prior to action, but to emerge from it. To understand this position it is necessary to reflect briefly on what an assemblage actually is.

Assemblages were initially termed by Deleuze and Guattari (1972) as 'desiring machines' (see Massumi [1992, 82]); they are processes through which flows (of matter, energy, people or anything else which flows through space and time) are brought together by 'desire' (a productive force which drives interactions; see Gao [2013]¹) into an 'arrangement'. The assemblage is a process through which these flows are sorted, and sediment, creating what are termed strata, defined as historically contingent structures which 'code' 'flows', limit the ways in which power might be actualized (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 257).² The metaphor of flows moving across a smooth plane, which becomes striated by these coding structures, limiting how these flows can move and flow into each other, is useful for visualizing this concept (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 551–81). Assemblage is a process of territorialization, in which heterogeneous components are brought together, but because these components may simultaneously be a part of other assemblages they are also de-territorialized; they overflow their bounds and are implicated in other assemblages. For these reasons flows which remain unformed retain the potential to be drawn in as they combine with flows entangled in assemblages elsewhere. A model such as a World-system, therefore, is a territorialized assemblage – a particular process of the gathering of flows into an entity, in which relations are cemented into a hierarchy (DeLanda 2016, 23–6). Yet it is open to de-territorialization and de-stratification, as peripheries act back on the core, or as factors outside of the system are brought to bear upon it.

While coded and territorialized strata relate to continuity and a present grounded in the past, but always immanent; the process of de-territorialization can break down the strata, over-coding them and creating the potential for new structures to emerge. For example, Deleuze and Guattari (1972, 254–62) describe a process of over-coding as flows of money and capital broke down feudal structures in medieval Europe, manifesting as new forms of power. From an assemblage perspective, therefore, we can see systems as persisting, but always having the capacity to be broken down or transformed as the relations which constitute them change. For DeLanda (2006, 10) assemblages are defined through relations of exteriority: that is how they are de-territorialized. Assemblages are processes of becoming and through de-territorialization they may become something else, whilst maintaining their internal coherence. It is in the interplay between these relations that we might identify entities as persistent or ephemeral: the more intense the de-territorialization the higher the potential for over-coding and de-stratification. This is usefully illustrated by DeLanda's (2016, 23–6) re-conceptualization of the strata not as something different to the assemblage (see n. 2), but as a highly coded and territorialized form of assemblage which might become de-stratified through de-territorialization. We might think, for example, about how cultural change appears amplified in places of intense de-territorialization such as ports, when compared to inland towns which might appear more highly coded and more strongly territorialized (and therefore stratified), with such changes being slower to take hold, a contrast highlighted by DeLanda (1997) in his discussion of how inland towns can be seen as hierarchies (fixed

and stratified) – whereas ports or ‘gateway’ settlements are more fluid, being meshworks (less territorialized and more loosely coded assemblages).

The concept of a system therefore creates an illusion of permanence, but an assemblage approach reveals the potential for transformation. In this way, we can see that modern capitalism is not an inevitable end point for medieval economic growth, but rather we can explore how the potential for capitalist interactions was actualized in some performances and not in others, how some became enfranchised by opportunities provided by links with distant centres, and others became marginalized by the incremental shifts which occurred as persistent strata were broken down and over-coded (DeLanda 2016, 116–9; Crellin 2017; Harris 2017). Such an approach allows us to counter the reductionist tendencies of the World-systems approach. By thinking about the system not only as a stratification of exploitative control, in which interactions are coded through the emergence of a core/periphery model, but as an assemblage, we can potentially reveal alternative sources of power and pluralistic narratives.

The fundamental difference between the way in which World-systems and assemblages are defined is one of perspective. A World-system is defined at the macro level; it is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would call a ‘molar’ entity. Assemblages, in contrast, are best viewed at the molecular level, as processes formed of small-scale interactions (DeLanda 2016, 20–1). While territorialized assemblages are, themselves, molar, they are not stable, as at the molecular level interactions are always on-going. Jervis (2017a) shows, for example, how whilst later medieval ports can be considered molar entities, as a knowable category of place, their responses to traumas such as the Black Death varied as they were constituted of a variety of molecular processes, including interactions within the marketplace, the household and within urban administration. Furthermore, each component at the molecular level, the household, for example, is also a molar entity, itself formed of unstable relations. Kardulias and Hall (2008) effectively characterize this distinction as a contrast between a ‘scientific’ (objective and generalizing approach, operating at the molar level), and the unscientific privileging of ‘unique developments’, effectively operating at the molecular level. We can find parallels perhaps with the contrasts between the top-down approach of processual archaeology and the ‘bottom-up’ post-processual response. However, to return to the preceding discussion of the Middle Ages as a concept, a molecular approach becomes vital. To focus on the molar – the system – is to seek a ‘medieval’ that is ‘out there to be found’, whereas to focus on the molecular is to realize that our medieval assemblages are formed not only in the past but in the present, in the coming together of things from multiple places and times, with varying affects (see Jones and Sibbesson [2013]; Harris [2014]; for similar discussions regarding prehistoric periods). Therefore, these two approaches lend themselves to different ways of handling the archaeological evidence.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 11–13) define two ways of exploring the constitution of society. The first of these is ‘tracing’, in which representational links are drawn between known points. We can find analogy here in the tracing of power from the core to periphery in a World-system. The second is mapping, in which we follow these flows, to explore where they are intense and how they are entangled. Whereas tracing requires the social context to exist prior to analysis, mapping creates the context, allowing us to transcend perceived boundaries. These terms find parallels in Ingold’s (2007, 78–81) concepts of wayfaring (mapping) and transportation (tracing). From an archaeological perspective, tracing might be the process of identifying pottery distributions as representative of trade networks, whereas mapping would allow us to understand the affect and implications of that trade for the related processes of medieval life and the building of knowledge about the medieval past.

Two examples help illuminate this. Studies of the distribution of medieval pottery in northern Europe allow us to trace the extent of the Hanseatic trade network, with particular products such as stoneware and highly decorated redwares having distributions reflective of Hanseatic exchange. A tracing approach reveals the expansion of Hanseatic power over peripheral areas of the Baltic region and, perhaps, the spread of Hanseatic culture or identity (Gaimster 2005; Gaimster 2014). If we take a mapping approach, however, we can see that interactions with these objects had varying affect; in Novgorod (Russia) they were actively resisted (Gaimster 2005), whereas elsewhere they actualized different forms of power through mercantile activities and the negotiation of ethnic identities (Naum 2013; Naum 2014; Immonen 2007). Mapping interactions, rather than simply tracing flows, allows us, in this case, to see the Hanseatic network not as simply exploitative but as productive of new forms of identity and power, which emerge from local interactions rather than being imposed by a core. A second example is presented by a recent analysis of the emergence of urban settlement on the Swahili coast (LaViolette 2008; Fleisher 2010; Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2012; Fleisher 2013; Wynne-Jones and Fleisher 2016). Authors critique prevailing narratives that argue that urbanism was the result of Islamic colonization and instead focus on mapping the ways in which spatial relations unravelled in the emergence and on-going constitution of urban communities. These studies show how urbanization was a cross-scalar process, formed from a mixture of local practices and longer distance trading and cultural relationships. Towns are reframed as emergent unravellings, in which relationships of religion, economy and power intermingled in affective ways, to form distinctive urban communities. Whereas a tracing of urbanism and Islam would represent a spread of Islam, a more cartographic approach, in which the performance of urban life is mapped at varied scales and mediated through engagements with archaeological objects in the present, reveals the importance of localized action.

In both cases complex and multiple medieval pasts emerge – pasts which will never be fully formed due to the fragmentary nature of archaeological evidence, and which did not exist prior to engagement with archaeological remains. That is not to say that they are a fiction, but that they are the result of processes that homogenize some experiences and identify differences elsewhere. As there is no defined end-point and because we are seeking to map process rather than trace progression, we can develop a perspective on the Middle Ages which embraces its unboundedness and is not constrained by temporality, spatiality or models, and which acknowledges that agency and causality emerge from relations. Furthermore, whereas World-systems theory is a primarily economic model, by exploring assemblages we are able to make space for other concerns to surface and move from an economic model focused on hierarchy, to one which explores distributed processes and relations.

Assemblage and global medieval archaeology

The advantages of taking a ‘wayfaring’ or assemblage-based approach are now demonstrated in a brief case study. As Carl Knappett (2011, 47) highlights, a network, or tracing, approach is most suited to an analysis undertaken at a molar scale. It is at this general level that we might identify broad systems of interaction. If we look, for example, at the distribution of Italian pottery in later medieval England we can observe a focus in ports such as Southampton, London and Bristol, providing a means to trace trading links between Italian cities and these ports (Hurst 1991; Thomson and Brown 1992). We can see occasional items being traded inland, often being consumed in higher status contexts, suggestive of a trade in luxury goods. Historical evidence can allow us to trace these networks further, showing, for example, the overland trade in dyestuffs,

oil, soap and other materials from Southampton into southern and western England (Hare 2015). We can identify extensive social and economic relations, which are generalized through tools such as distribution maps, the focus being on the transport of goods and resources from one place to another. Such an approach might lead to us seeing England as at the periphery of a World-system focused on Italy. However, in light of the rethinking above, a core–periphery dichotomy can be proposed as a far too simple lens through which to examine the effective relations which coalesced in the performance of this trade. As Roslund (2017) states, ‘dichotomies such as “core” and “periphery” can be tempting; however if we accept that people were perceptive actors, [by] employing analyses based on packages of short temporal sequences and close studies of artefacts chosen in social negotiations’... (what we might term assemblage), we will gain a better understanding of the complexities of affective relations in the past, that is, the ways in which power and affect might emerge in unpredictable ways from unlikely places.

An assemblage perspective provides a deeper, more textured and multi-scalar perspective. Something as seemingly straightforward as the use of dyestuff reveals complexity. The urban places where cloth manufacture (see Hare [2001]; Hare [2011]; Yates [2007, 81–98]; Youngs, Clark, and Barry [1985, 180] for archaeological evidence) took place were themselves assemblages, not containers for this activity, but processes which coded the flow of dyestuffs, labour and money into the hands of urban communities and lords, with the performance of cloth manufacture also having implications for these places. This commercial activity over-coded, or broke down, earlier economic structures, while other factors such as the Black Death of the later fourteenth century had further implications for the organization of labour. Microbial infection de-territorialized labour into an assemblage of disease, further fragmenting and over-coding structures of labour exploitation (see DeLanda [1997, 110–12] for a discussion of the role of microbes). As some areas in north Hampshire focused on wool production, villages shrank or were deserted and towns were repopulated (Broadberry et al. 2015, 83; 144–6; Hare 2001; Jervis 2017b). Demesne farms (land attached to a manor and maintained for its own use rather than granted to tenants) were leased out, creating opportunities for a wider range of people to engage directly in commercial activity (e.g. Dyer [2005, 194–7]). The routes of flows of capital, money and labour were altered by these over-coding processes, stimulating the changes in architecture and an emerging capitalist ethos (discussed by Johnson [1996]). Despite these new articulations of power emerging out of local interactions, hierarchical elements also persisted – certain striations remained as elements of this assemblage of cloth production and were implicated in other assemblages. The organization of the landscape extends back to the Anglo-Saxon period along with the division of land into estates. In Hampshire this included the granting of vast swathes of prime sheep pasture to the Bishop of Winchester (Figure 1), who developed a network of towns and markets for the marketing and processing of wool, animals and produce (Beresford 1959; Hare 2006). This industry was driven by domestic demand, but also by demand from markets in Flanders, Italy and beyond and regulated by hierarchical structures of royal and mercantile power (see Oldland [2014] for an overview). Simultaneously the cloth industry, financed in part by Italian merchants and facilitated in part by their importation of dyestuffs, was itself contingent on processes of urbanization and the formation of city-states, and commercial growth in Italy from the early medieval period (see McCormick [2001]; Abu-Lughod [1989]). The persistence of land tenure suggests that it was hierarchical, or stratified, in character. Relations with the land were defined through past processes and these persisted through the enrolment of documents (charters) and customs (modes of inheritance) which striated the landscape, limiting the ways in which people could interact with the land. However, processes such as the leasing of demesne land gradually and commerce, which drew

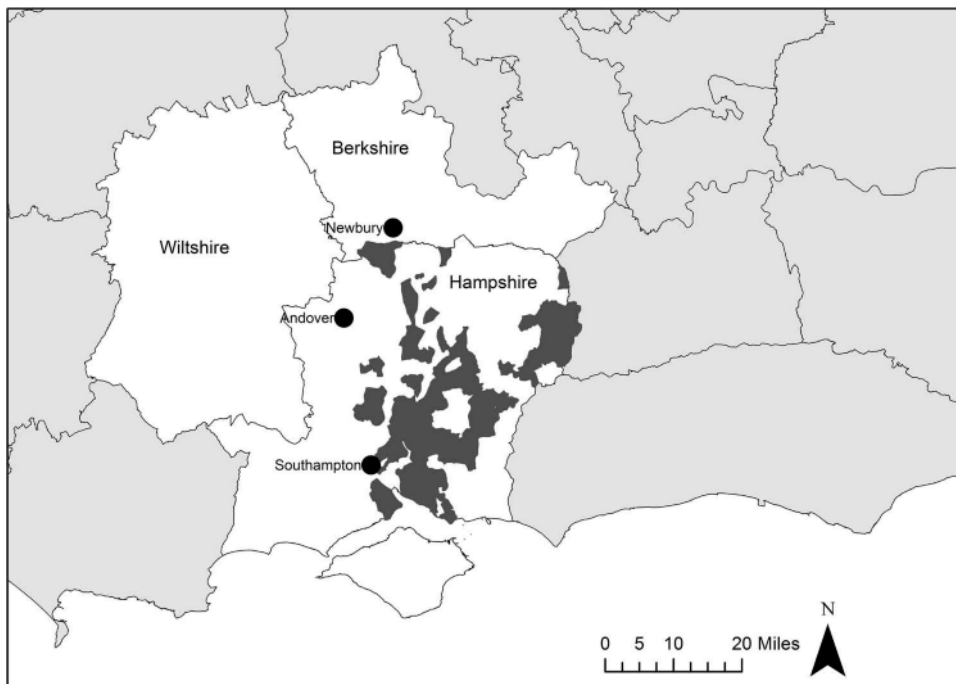


Figure 1. Map showing the location of sites in southern England mentioned in the text and the extent of the Bishop of Winchester's medieval landholding in Hampshire (in dark grey).

small rural settlements into international networks of production and exchange, caused these striations to be smoothed, or over-coded, manifesting as varying processes of persistence and transformation. As the local and global collide we reveal that cross-scalar relations between local structures of land tenure, labour organization and urbanization (in a range of places in England, Italy and Flanders), environmental factors such as the spread of plague and long-distance exchange networks were productive, having implications for what persisted and what was over-coded and transformed.

It is not possible here to explore these relations in detail, but the point I wish to make is that a wayfaring approach reveals the complexity of change and the ways that incremental interactions, dispersed across space-time, drive transitions. A tracing approach would reveal increasing commercial links with the Mediterranean and the role of merchant capitalists in this trade (e.g. Ruddock [1951]). A steady progression to capitalism would also emerge, rooted in medieval commercialization, but continuing onwards towards the agricultural and industrial capitalism of the modern period through the exploitation of rural resources by a mercantile elite, ultimately based in the core of a World-system focused on Italy and the Mediterranean. An assemblage approach provides a different perspective. A focus on small-scale local interactions does not reveal a linear progression, but the emergence of small-scale capitalist relations – the acquisition of dye stuffs, wool stocks or land, for example – a bricolage of small-scale interactions in different places which have multiple effects. The spread of plague (in part through trade), environmental change, existing commercial activity, long-term processes of land division, individual interactions with sheep flocks, wool and other materials, all combined in ways which enfolded time, surfacing past processes and decisions and drawing action across scales, as well as breaking down seemingly persistent social structures. Change was continuous

and driven not only by an economic core, but by local interactions which resonated outwards, as new forms of power and wealth were actualized through these performances. In this way the medieval World can be understood, not as composed of hierarchical systems, but as a mixture of hierarchical elements and meshwork (that is, more free-flowing entanglements of flows) (see DeLanda [1997, 32]). Goods and resources might be seen as 'assemblage converters' (Bennett 2010, 42), a means of pulling otherwise dispersed action together across scales. When we think of capitalism as more than a mode of production, assemblage theory is helpful, as it shows that commercial interactions had a range of affects: the development of wealth and the ability to act freely to acquire land, goods or money were emergent from these small-scale interactions which incrementally built up and affected other practices, gradually bringing about a 'phase transition' in which the relations which constituted society reached a critical transformational point (see DeLanda [2016, 116–19]; Crellin 2017). These were not commercial interactions in the modern sense, but particular articulations of exchange, all of which had affect (Howell 2010, 300–1). Gradually, traditional bonded tenure gave way to the leasing of farmland and merchants and landowners were able to acquire capital (see Britnell [1996] and Dyer [2005] for overviews). However, it is problematic to see this as a chronological transition from medieval to modern. Elements of the medieval persisted – there was no complete over-coding. Instead the medieval past continually irrupts; economic, social and technological processes are all historically contingent and are re-articulated through practice.

Capitalism does not explain the transformations of the Late Middle Ages, but by studying things from the medieval past we can come to terms with the process through which capitalist relations emerged in ways which were both historically contingent (constrained by the past) and also transformative, creating alternative futures and actualizing alternative structures of power and wealth. Early modern capitalism emerged, not as a generalization but as an accumulation of local processes, which actualized capitalist relations and caused them to emerge through interaction across scales. This is evident in the relations that emerged across differing scales of interaction, from individual acquisitions of pottery to the bulk exportation of cloth, the transfer of knowledge from distant places to the passing down of intimate interactions with a local farming landscape. An understanding of the Middle Ages can be built from connected histories (Davis 2011; Purcell 2016, 72). It was these molecular interactions which enfolded space-times, forming a molar whole, which, in turn, had implications for its constituent parts, as they were de-territorialized into other assemblages. While it is inappropriate to apply a modern concept of globalization to the medieval economy (de Vries 2010), assemblage theory provides a means of thinking about the effective, more-than-local, relations between people and things, which allowed local processes to resonate widely and the molar whole to code certain elements of these relations. Globalization need not take a single form: a focus on different types of interactions can reveal multiple trajectories and varying processes of intensification and abatement (Purcell 2016, 78).

Conclusion

Thinking about global relations in the medieval period offers opportunities for archaeology. Purcell (2016) states that 'specializing in globality can sometimes be relatively unrewarding when it avoids the crucial mix of scales which makes history interesting. Global history, however wide its embrace, needs to operate with micro-histories.' Such an approach requires us to focus not on generalities but on specifics: the ways in which local actions cross scales can accumulate to bring about change. Assemblage theory offers a means of conceptualizing these relations. By mapping relations we can begin to think about the unexpected and unintended effects of this

action, how it had wider implications, how it was historically contingent and drew on multiple pasts, and how these irrupted in the emergence of unpredictable futures. It is proposed that whilst World-systems approaches are valuable for the questions that they pose, assemblage theory provides greater potential for addressing these questions through the ways in which they are not pre-empted by broader models and systems, allowing the implications of difference to be embraced. This is demonstrated through a brief consideration of the way that capitalist relations emerge as an articulation of commerce, and gradually accumulated as a patchwork of relations, bringing about a transition towards a more capital-oriented system of production and exchange. Moore (2016) cautions against using the homogenizing and Euro-centric term 'the global Middle Ages', instead arguing for the period to be considered as an 'age of intensities'. Assemblage theory might help us to achieve this, by placing to one side the reified generality of the medieval, and instead facilitating focus on the ways that different flows came together and, as they accelerated and intensified, stimulated change.

Notes

1. In fact, the unformed flows (or Body without Organs) equate to desire itself, simultaneously being 'that which one desires and by which one desires' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 192).
2. Note that two distinct concepts of strata exist within the assemblage literature. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987) strata are different to assemblages, being the sedimented relations emerging from a process of assemblage. DeLanda (2016) has re-imagined the strata as a form of highly coded and territorialized assemblage, as a means of describing the characteristics of arrangement.

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