

The Medieval Networks in East Central Europe

COMMERCE, CONTACTS, COMMUNICATION

Edited by

BALÁZS NAGY, FELICITAS SCHMIEDER, and ANDRÁS VADAS



THE MEDIEVAL NETWORKS IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

Medieval Networks in East Central Europe explores the economic, cultural, and religious forms of contact between East Central Europe and the surrounding world in the eighth to the fifteenth century. The sixteen chapters are grouped into four thematic parts: the first deals with the problem of the region as a zone between major power centers; the second provides case studies on the economic and cultural implications of religious ties; the third addresses the problem of trade during the state formation process in the region, and the final part looks at the inter- and intraregional trade in the Late Middle Ages.

Supported by an extensive range of images, tables, and maps, *Medieval Networks in East Central Europe* demonstrates and explores the huge significance and international influence that East Central Europe held during the medieval period and is essential reading for scholars and students wishing to understand the integral role that this region played within the processes of the Global Middle Ages.

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*Edited by Balázs Nagy, Felicitas Schmieder,
and András Vadas*

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INTRODUCTION

History writing has always been influenced by the biases historians apply automatically – necessarily taking the perspective of their own time and place. Scholars have usually treated East Central Europe, if at all, as somewhere between three regions (the West, Byzantium, and Russia/the Central Asian steppes), a dead end, a road or, at best, a region of passage. In the second half of the twentieth century, not the least due to the influence of the Cold War, the medieval East and West were judged to be completely separate from each other. What can historically be defined as Central Europe – the regions between the Rhine (with its German urban culture) in the West and the rim of the expansion of Latin Christianity on the east – was torn apart politically and its role in historical processes was not considered. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, shortly before the regime changes in East Central Europe and the fall of the Iron Curtain around 1990, both historians and the general public inside and outside the region began to devote increasing attention to East Central Europe, that is, east of the cultural region of Central Europe.

This has helped the region reinforce its identity in the European context; scholarship in Western and West Central Europe has benefited from a broadening of the framework of investigations.¹ Now, half a generation later, the framework has shifted once again and European history is seeking its place within a new conceptualization of the “Global Middle Ages” that is on the agenda worldwide. One trend is that specific attention is turning towards regions that are usually considered somewhere on the margins. Researchers are using different conceptual frameworks – frontier regions, interregional, and global contacts – instead of national histories. They are focusing more and more on spaces in between and looking for regions that serve as bridges.

Among the first attempts to broaden the focus were those looking at seas: the Mediterranean Sea, the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, but also the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea as centers of cultural regions instead of barriers between them.²

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Scholars began to examine vast lands such as deserts and steppes with seemingly few cultural achievements. This has led most importantly – for the topic of this volume – to utilizing the benefits of comparative Eurasian history and demonstrating contacts between (Western) Europe, the Middle East, and China, mostly through the vast network usually called the “Silk Road”. Nevertheless, East Central Europe – neither a cultural center nor a typical transition zone in the sense just mentioned – continued to be ignored and global historians seldom took into account the results of research on the region.³ It is time that the region is examined seriously as a contact zone between global regions, and at the same time as a microcosm of the contacts that enabled global contact and the resulting exchange. What kinds of persons, ideas, institutions, cultural and material goods found their way to other parts of the world from East Central Europe or through the mediation of this region? What motivated such transfers and interactions?

In the past few years, new initiatives have aimed at understanding how much historians of the Middle Ages can benefit from engaging in global history.⁴ A number of research fields – climate and disease history, material culture studies, the history of communications, the history of symbols and gestures, migration history, frontier studies, and others – have benefitted from integrating the results of research on Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, and Australia in comparative studies.⁵ In most of these works, however, East Central Europe never took on major importance, perhaps because of the variable national historiographies and regional languages. So how can considering this region contribute to or challenge a new interpretation of the Middle Ages beyond its traditional limits in space and time and beyond the established conceptual schemes?

As this volume aims at demonstrating, in the past decade, thanks to a growing number of written sources accessible to scholars as well as numerous archaeological excavations and new techniques, significant results have been achieved in better understanding the relationships between medieval East Central Europe and the rest of the world as well as the connections within the region itself. In order to communicate the research results of recent decades a new network was founded in March 2014, the Medieval Central European Research Network (MECERN).⁶ The aim of the MECERN is to create a common platform for historians of medieval Central Europe to think in non-national narratives, to integrate the research results of neighboring countries. The first conference of the new initiative was held in Budapest in 2014, organized by the Central European University. The conference – *A Forgotten Region? East Central Europe in the Global Middle Ages* – demonstrated that there is considerable interest in the region and the need for a better understanding of the region in the context of the Global Middle Ages. The first step in this process was to develop a clear picture of East Central Europe as a historical region. A number of papers were dedicated to this issue at the conference, and many of them have been published recently in the volume edited by Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende (*Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective: From Frontier Zones to Lands in Focus*. New York: Routledge, 2016).

The other main problem the conference addressed was briefly noted above: the problem of East Central Europe as a region of transfer in the Middle Ages, a contact zone. The essays in this volume apply the theoretical framework provided by the studies of the volume edited by Jaritz and Szende to discuss this issue and show that the region was anything but a no man's land in the Middle Ages. It had a wide range of connections – cultural, political, economic, religious, and many others – with all the surrounding regions. These studies not only touch upon external connections, but also aim to illuminate the intraregional connections and demonstrate how close these connections were in different periods of the Middle Ages.

János M. Bak, in his short reflections written as an epilogue to the volume by Jaritz and Szende, came to the conclusion that “it is to be hoped that the alleged special character of the region will vanish and merge into an all-European (or even global) view of the past.”⁷ The entanglement of the polities and economies of East Central Europe with other powers of Eurasia leaves little doubt that in the long term the histories of East Central Europe will be organic parts of the histories of medieval Europe, Asia, the Mediterranean, Eurasia, and so on. The different chapters of this volume move towards understanding the nature of these economic, cultural, and religious connections.

The papers are grouped in four main thematic units. The first group deals with the problem of the region as a zone between major power centers in the Middle Ages. This group of essays can be understood as an introduction to the area as a contact zone. Based on different sources, they all argue that East Central Europe and Europe as regions have to be constantly reconsidered and re-conceptualized. In different forms and based on diverse evidence – both written and archaeological – these papers argue that what was outside and what was inside Europe has changed constantly not only in the modern scholarly and political perception but even in the perception of the medieval West.

In his paper, Christian Raffensperger re-thinks the static understanding of medieval Europe. He emphasizes the need for a more dynamic conceptualization of medieval European history with borders open to other regions, ideas, and cultures. His paper calls for looking towards the East in order to ‘create a larger medieval Europe.’ Expanding what medieval Europe is also means that historians have to open their eyes to areas and periods without literacy. Due to the lack of written sources, the early medieval history of the Carpathian-Danube region has to be written based solely on archaeological material and has therefore not been written in its own right at all until very recently. Sergiu Musteață has assembled a synopsis of the results of settlement archaeology and started constructing a map of a “region without history” that still shows gaps to be filled by further research. The Slavs have always been considered one of the “youngest” European peoples, not the least because they started to produce their own written sources only relatively late in the High Middle Ages, and also because they seem to have been mostly overlooked by Western contemporaries.⁸ Sébastien Rossignol shows the prominent place Slavic groups had on the mental map of an early ninth-century world chronicle written in southern Gaul, demonstrating that medieval Europe was not as divided as is

4 Introduction

conceived by many modern historians. The steppes, especially the steppes “beyond” East Central Europe, have been considered a cultureless region where civilization ends and where no one wants to go anyway. By re-evaluating this bias among Western historians and showing the nomadic lifestyle of medieval Westerners as well as the cultural achievements of nomads, Felicitas Schmieder tries to enhance the meaning of Central Europe as a transmitter of modern world historical research.

The second thematic group offers case studies on the economic and cultural implications of religious ties. If East Central Europe is not only a region of passage but a region where traditions (from having been inside or outside the Roman Empire) and influences from all sides formed a distinct culture worth looking at, then it is especially interesting to look at traditional Christianity or Christianization between East and West and the cultural, social, and technological changes that came with it. Daniel Syrbe looks at the transition period between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, examining letters that Pope Gregory the Great, as bishop of Rome, sent to the region (Dalmatia and Illyricum) in order to understand the means by which Rome tried to bring its bishops under control. The role of legal arguments as well as customs and tradition can be identified as tools not necessarily effective immediately, but important for later periods that referred to Gregory’s authority. Florin Curta and Matthew Koval examine radical changes in the burials of children and possibly funeral rites in two different regions of East Central Europe with different traditions and different outside influences – Hungary and Poland – in a period when Christianization took place. While it is difficult to pinpoint the influence of Christianization on social structures, the burials show that the very notion of family changed in both Poland and Hungary in the period of the appearance of Christianity. Medieval monasteries have generally been considered transmitters of civilization in the regions where they were established. András Vadas reviews material that seems to indicate that water mills came to East Central Europe together with Christianity around 1000 and shows that there is reason to doubt in principle whether the establishment of monasteries also brought water mills to the kingdoms of Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland. Mária Vargha is interested in the same period (the eleventh and twelfth centuries), the social basis of the organization of the network of parochial churches in Hungary, and looks specifically at their correlation with castle buildings. Mapping parish churches and castles shows a clear correlation that is worth comparing with what was called the *Eigenkirchen* system in the German-speaking lands of the Early and Early High Middle Ages.

The third group of essays addresses the problem of trade during the processes of state formation in the region. These studies argue that despite the relative shortage of written evidence, archaeological sources can significantly broaden the knowledge of contacts among the peoples of East Central Europe as well as between the region and outside polities in the fifth through the eleventh century. The authors of the third unit look at different ways the connections of East Central Europe with the outside world can be investigated during the period of state formation. Historians of East Central Europe, depending on the different political regimes in

modern times, have emphasized different directions that seem to have had strong historical economic and political ties.

Dariusz Adamczyk looks at a direction perhaps the least emphasized in the national historiographies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the link with the Islamic world. Adamczyk argues, based mostly on archaeological evidence, that a sophisticated and well-organized network was created among the tribal leaders of East Central Europe and Islamic merchants which contributed to the establishment of new elites in the states of East Central Europe. Matthias Hardt's contribution also touches on a rarely discussed area. He shows that Slavic princes and the Moravian Principality exchanged their subjects for silver through trade connections from North Africa to Central Asia. Bence Péterfi's paper also deals with the period of state formation. He looks at regional trade connections based on a rarely investigated type of evidence – pottery. Graphite pottery, a regional trade item not produced locally, has been recovered in great quantities at Óbuda (on the edge [or periphery] of present-day Budapest), one of the most important early economic and political centers of the Kingdom of Hungary. Péterfi shows that despite the lack of written sources on Hungary's trade relations at the time, archaeological data can contribute to understanding the relations of Hungary with other regions of Central Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The last group of essays makes use of the significant amount of written evidence available on the inter- and intraregional trade of the countries of East Central Europe after the state foundation processes. This source material is somewhat different than those of the earlier periods; up to the twelfth or thirteenth century, as demonstrated by the essays in Part 3, most researchers use primarily archaeological evidence when discussing inter- and intraregional trade connections. From the thirteenth century onwards, however, with literacy increasing in East Central Europe, written sources come to play a key role in the study of these connections. The essays in this section use mostly economic history sources – account books, customs registers – to provide an image of the connections Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary had with each other and the surrounding polities such as the Hanseatic towns, the Italian city-states, and the Ottoman Empire.

Roman Zaoral's paper discusses the effects of precious-metal mining and administration in Bohemia and the roles Italian businessmen played in its formation. He argues that, on the one hand, Italian businessmen tried to get interests in mining and/or coinage of the precious metal extracted in the country, and, on the other hand, tried to collect taxes for the Papal Curia, which also proved to be a major source of income for some Italian families. Beata Możejko focuses on the role of one city, Gdańsk, as an intermediary between the Western, Hanseatic and East Central European areas, covering not only commercial but also political and diplomatic links. She argues that King Kazimierz Jagiellończyk (1446–1492) played a crucial role in the formation of these contacts. She demonstrates clearly the potential of sources traditionally exploited by political history in the study of late medieval trade connections. Grzegorz Myśliwski also discusses the trade connections of a Polish town, Wrocław. He focuses on the town's links with Hungary in the Late

Middle Ages. Wrocław, one of the leading urban centers of the region, created a key hub of commercial contacts in the region. Myśliwski accessed a whole set of archival sources not utilized previously to reconstruct trade routes and lists of the most significant commercial goods. He shows that the town had extensive connections with Hungary and that merchants from all over the country frequented Wrocław for both buying and selling; the town's merchants entered Hungary on a regular basis to trade with different goods. In the last paper of this part Mária Pakucs-Willcocks investigates the appearance of two commercial goods, textiles, and spices, in the customs registers of Braşov and Sibiu at the turn of fifteenth century. Both towns, situated at the southeastern corner of medieval East Central Europe, played important roles in the transit trade with the Middle East. Pakucs-Willcocks demonstrates that these connections did not cease to exist later, when the Black Sea trade was controlled by the Ottomans.

In the final essay of this part, Balázs Nagy takes a historiographical approach. It is an often-repeated point in recent scholarship that the integration of this region into a wider European framework depended partly on its commercial contacts. Nagy reviews the historiography of the last decades on the trade contacts of East Central Europe with special attention to the approaches of the main handbooks that cover the economic history of this region. These perceptions vary from complete disregard through limited discussion to detailed analysis.

Balázs Nagy, Felicitas Schmieder and András Vadas

Notes

- 1 See most recently the excellent overview of Nora Berend on the problem: eadem, "The Mirage of East Central Europe: Historical Regions in a Comparative Perspective," in *Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective. From Frontier Zones to Lands in Focus*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende (New York: Routledge, 2016), 9–23.
- 2 E.g., *Across the Mediterranean Frontiers: Trade, Politics and Religion, 650–1450* (International Medieval Research, 1), ed. Dionisius A. Agius and Ian Richard Netton (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997) and *Travels and Mobilities in the Middle Ages. From the Atlantic to the Black Sea*, ed. Marianne O'Doherty and Felicitas Schmieder (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).
- 3 See, e.g., one of the pioneering attempts at a Eurasian history: Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). See here 34, Fig. 1.
- 4 See the Defining the Global Middle Ages Research Network led by the University of Oxford (<http://globalmiddleages.history.ox.ac.uk/>) and the European Network in Universal and Global History organized at the Centre for Area Studies at the University of Leipzig (<http://research.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/congress/about-eniugh/>) and the workshops of both associations (both last accessed: 19 January 2017). See the thoughtful report of Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, "Defining the Global Middle Ages (AHRC Research Network AH/K001914/1, 2013–15)," on the Global Middle Ages Networks main research questions. Online document: www.medievalworlds.net/0xc1aa500e_0x00324b69.pdf (last accessed: 21 January 2017).
- 5 To name but a few important titles that indeed take a global approach in medieval studies: Bruce M. S. Campbell, *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the*

- Late-Medieval World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), *Universal Empire. A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Grenzräume und Grenzüberschreitungen im Vergleich* (Europa im Mittelalter 7), ed. Klaus Herbers and Nikolas Jaspert (Berlin: Akademie, 2007), and *Migrationen im Mittelalter. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Michael Borgolte (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2014).
- 6 On MECERN (Medieval Central European Research Network), see <http://mecern.eu> (last accessed: 23 July 2017).
- 7 János M. Bak, “What did we learn? What is to be done? Some insights and visions after reading this book,” in *Medieval East Central Europe*, 254–256, here 255.
- 8 See most importantly: Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700 A.D.* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series, 52) (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and idem, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, ca. 500–1250* (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks, 39) (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).



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PART ONE

East Central Europe – No
Man's Land or Historical
Region?



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1

REIMAGINING EUROPE

An Outsider Looks at the Medieval East–West Divide

Christian Raffensperger

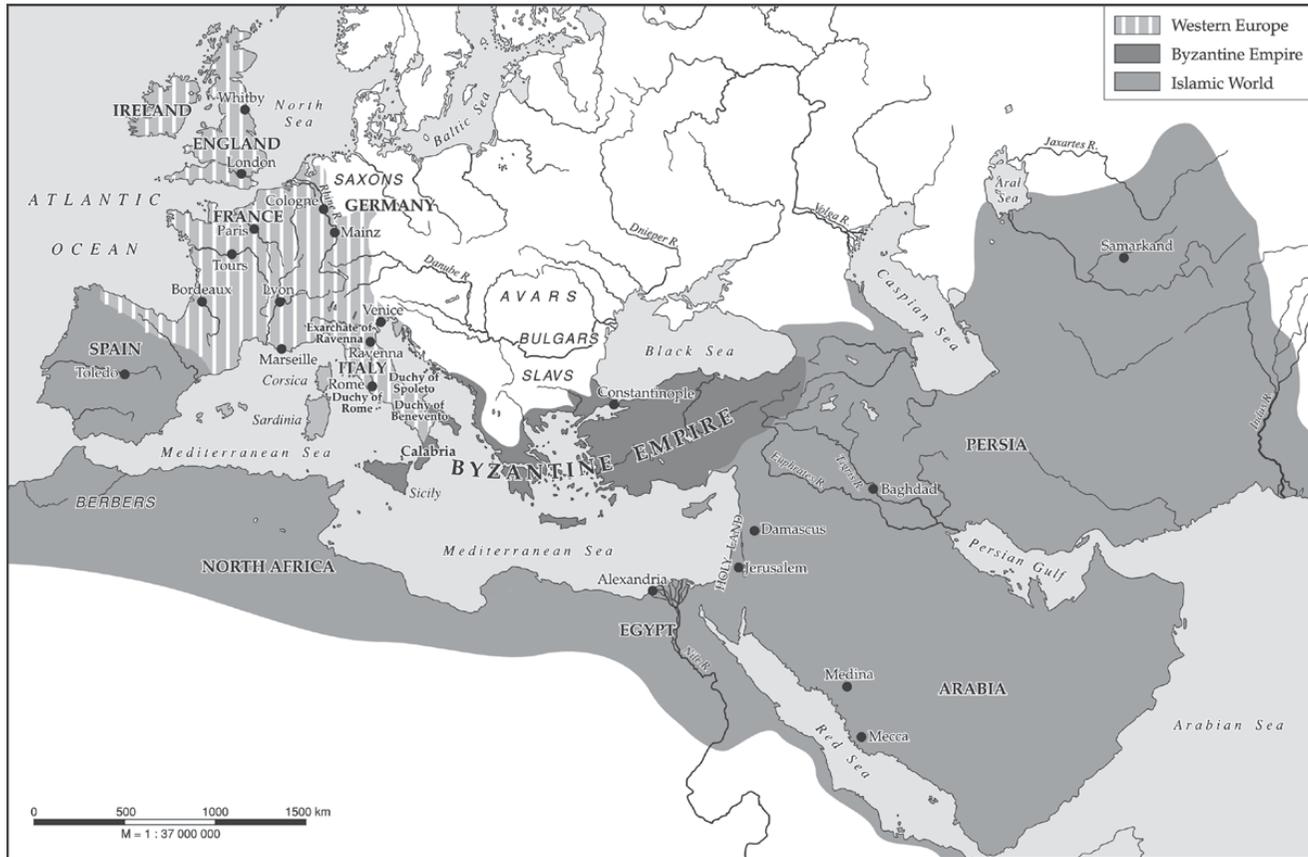
As the subject of this article is bias, intentional and otherwise, the best way to begin is to be open about my own identity and the perspective from which I am approaching the topic. Though it is possible to take such postmodern ideas too far, in this case, appraising one's audience of one's identity seems to be only good sense when discussing such fraught issues as those related to modern identity and the creation of historical narratives and regions. This particular framing of the article will result in often returning to a first person narrative that is rare in academic writing, but which better suits the points discussed here. First off, I am an American, though one who speaks more than one language and does care about history. This means that I am divorced in not just time but also space from the medieval past. None of the places where I lived or grew up had cathedrals built in the High Middle Ages or historic battlefields marking resistance against the Turks, Mongols, French or Russians. Second, but related, my roots as an American stretch back to the eighteenth century, thus despite my name I have no connections to Germany or Austria or any European kin. Third, I am comparatively young – I remember the Soviet Union, but it fell before I was in high school and I never visited there. I teach classes about Eastern Europe but I never experienced it, I have only read about it. By the time I got to college and then graduate school to begin my studies on medieval Europe there was no reason to think about a divided Europe and certainly no reason to project one back into the past. I offer all of this personal clarification by way of introducing my topic – an outsider (in many different ways) looking at the medieval European past and especially the medieval East–West divide.

My identity and the time in which I have lived have shaped my scholarship immensely. When I read Dimitri Obolensky's *Byzantine Commonwealth* in graduate school in the early 2000s, I found its framing completely obsolete.¹ It was clear to me then that he was using a Cold War mentality to project an East–West divide into the past. I wrote this in an article and subsequently it developed into the first

chapter of my book, *Reimagining Europe*.² In *Reimagining Europe* I talked about a new way to envision Byzantium's influence on Europe as an ideal empire, hence the title of the chapter – “The Byzantine Ideal.” Byzantine art, architecture, titulature, etc. was appropriated by people throughout medieval Europe, not just those who happened to fall to the east of Obolensky's medieval Iron Curtain. But even there I referenced, but did not pursue, the idea that it was not just medieval Europeans of East and West who appropriated from Byzantium, but others as well including the Turks, especially the sultanate of Rum.³ Removing the idea of a divided Europe did not change the history of appropriation from Byzantium, but it did change the way I talked about it; moving from Obolensky's idea that it impacted solely Eastern Europe to seeing how Byzantium affected all of Europe. From this early engagement with the idea of projecting an East–West divide back into the past came my academic cause – to introduce to American medieval scholarship the idea that there was a kingdom of Rus' and that it (and the rest of eastern Europe) was part and parcel of the larger medieval world.

This is particularly a challenge because of the normative classroom portrayal of medieval Europe in higher education in the United States. The vast majority of medievalists are teaching survey classes that deal primarily with western Europe, and rarely (if ever) with anything to the east of the Rhine or Elbe Rivers.⁴ One can examine this portrayal in a variety of ways, but here I will simply look at one textbook in some detail and then two others quite briefly to make the point. In 2012 the third edition of William Cook and Ronald Herzman's *Medieval World View* came out from Oxford University Press. This is a major university press, and is the third edition of a popular medieval history textbook for classroom use. Cook and Herzman do not deal with eastern Europe in the book in any specificity, instead continuing to perpetuate the idea of Obolensky's Byzantine Commonwealth and reading an East–West barrier back into history. For instance, in one mention they say that, “When we think of problems and misunderstandings within Europe today, we in large part think of tensions and conflicts that exist along the lines of Western and Byzantine spheres of influence, for example, the line between Poland and Russia or that between Croatia and Serbia.”⁵ Continuing the theme, they ascribe the violence in the Balkans to its place between Byzantium, the Latin world, and the Islamic world in the Middle Ages.⁶ But even with these brief tidbits, this is virtually all there is to say about interactions with anything east of the Rhine River. Perhaps this lacuna is better illustrated in the maps that they provide in the book (included here as Maps 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3). The first map depicts that same divide between the Byzantine, Islamic, and “Western European” worlds (see Map. 1.1).

What defines “Western Europe,” and what period this covers is in fact difficult to determine and is not clarified. One might guess roughly Merovingian due to the exclusion of Saxons from “Western Europe,” but then the situation in the Italian peninsula is wrong, as is the situation in the Balkans. However, despite these still relatively major problems, the biggest problem is the gaping white space east of the Rhine, north and east of the Danube and north of the Black Sea. This does not improve in more detailed maps such as the one showing the Early Middle Ages (see Map 1.2).



MAP 1.1 Europe, Byzantium, Islam (after Cook and Herzman, *The Medieval World View*; drawn by Béla Nagy)