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## Scientific Report: International Conference “Medieval Europe in Motion”

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## **Scientific Report: International Conference "Medieval Europe in Motion"**

*Alicia Miguélez Caveró; Maria Alessandra Bilotta*

### **Organization**

The International Conference “Medieval Europe in Motion” took place in Lisbon in April, 18-20 2013. It was organized by Dr. Alicia Miguélez Caveró and Dr. Maria Alessandra Bilotta, being the initiative directly linked to their current postdoctoral research projects. It was also related to other on-going investigations on cultural and artistic circulation during the Middle Ages carried out by the Research Group “Medieval Texts and Images”, coordinated by Prof. Maria Adelaide Miranda at the

Institute for Medieval Studies of the Nova University (Lisbon)

The main objectives of this initiative were to analyze the influence of circulation, motion and mobility of people, forms and ideas on the artistic creation during the Middle Ages and to conduct a critical and constructive revision of these matters, proposing new questions to be discussed.

The Conference had an international scientific committee: Prof. Christian Heck (Univ. Lille); Prof. Gerardo Boto Varela (Univ. Girona); Prof. Maria Adelaide Miranda (Univ. Nova of Lisbon); Prof. Alison Stones (Univ. Pittsburgh); Prof. Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx (Univ. Libre Bruxelles); Prof. Etelevina Fernández González (Univ. León); Prof. Michelle Fournié (Univ. Toulouse-le-Mirail); Prof. Alejandro García Avilés (Univ. Murcia); Prof. Miguel Calleja Puerta (Univ. Oviedo).

It took place in four host institutions: the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Nova University, the French Institute of Portugal, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the National Library of Portugal. It also received the support of several public and private, national and international institutions: FACC (Scientific Community Support Fund of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology), Corte Inglês, Hotel Sana Executive, the Camões Institute and the Officina di Studi Medievali of the Palermo University.

## **Program**

Up to thirty speakers were involved in the programme, which consisted in five sessions, a round table and a workshop.

### **Session 1: The Phenomenon of Circulation and Mobility in Medieval Europe**

The first session of the Colloquium contextualized the topic from a historical point of view. Thus, the phenomenon of mobility in medieval times was approached as follows: Why did it happen? What kind of “products” used to travel? Who did travel? Where did

people travel? What reasons motivated the circulation of people? How did the phenomenon of mobility influence the artistic production?

## **Session 2: Patrons and Promoters**

Regarding the figures of clients and promoters, both individual and institutional, this session focused on the following issues: how did fashion and taste influence the promoters' choices? To what extent did their own travels and vital experiences influence their decisions when ordering new works?

## **Session 3: Artists and material authors**

How did their itinerant lives influence their creations? To what extent was conditioned the production of new works by the presence of foreign artists in specific geographical contexts? How did artists transfer models to new places/media? To what extent were they influenced by the models they saw when passing through other cities and by the artistic tradition they found when arriving to new places?

## **Session 4: The circulation of models**

Regarding the models themselves, the following issues were analyzed: the concepts of copy, reinterpretation, reuse and re-elaboration of artistic languages, the confluence of several graphic languages in the same work and, finally, the influence of old models in later works.

## **Session 5: Circulation of works**

Regarding the postproduction process, that is the sale and circulation of already finished works, several matters were approached, such as the artistic market, the existence of a

luxury market in medieval times, the act of collecting in the Middle Ages and the process of recently produced works becoming models for new works.

### **Round Table: "Causes and Driving Forces of the Artistic and Cultural Movement in the Middle Ages"**

The Round Table, chaired by Prof. Gerardo Boto Varela, was organized with the aim to approach four main issues:

1. When an architect projects a church, he or she seeks to carry out the correspondence of the idea of the church he or she has in his mind on executing it. The success lies on the appropriate progression of the ideal church (cause) into the actual church (effect). How can we really understand the causes and finalities of the authors, promoters and receivers of texts and artistic works in the Middle Ages?
2. Seneca pointed out in a letter which has not had much repercussion that, above the four causes accounted by Plato and Aristotle, creation is produced through the will to create of the creator, of the author who is the efficient cause and responsible for conjuring up matter, thinking form and being motivated to achieve an objective or finality. But in Seneca's view, the will to create is located above everything. Is this, in fact, the prime motor in medieval artistic and literary production?
3. Contemporary Science and the modern conception of History reject the idea that natural realities and historical events are to be understood –and not even examined– according to their finality, to their accomplishment of a default ordered project, from their efficient causes to their final causes. If, from our epistemological current position, we reject those teleological principles ruling Aristotle's and Hegel's thought, can or must we conceive a transformation of artistic forms and the interests of promoters-artists throughout the centuries by rejecting this causal and finalistic concatenation? In other words, do we accept to study the cultural productions and transformations of the past without wanting to acknowledge the accomplishment of a pre-established project of linear cultural progression or of uninterrupted historical continuity?

4. Christian theological thought is essentially teleological. Humankind, converted into Christendom from the expansive success of Christ's message (the efficient cause of our redemption), progresses in time towards its terminus. That is actually its finality, the triumphant Church awaiting the return of Christ, which will entail the extinction of time and history. Christian time is not eternal. Christian artistic and cultural works will not exist forever – they are realised against the consummation of time and, therefore, against the extinction of the work itself. Catechetical images were elaborated from each present moment (e.g.: 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries) to instruct those who lived and were able to see in the following present moments. The works are perdurable (while there exist time and movement) but perishable (like all the world we know). The works that illustrate eternity and converse with it will see their message transmitted only when they have disappeared and their anticipatory image has been replaced with immutable (immobile) reality. Then, were artists working not in motion (moving around or transferring information or solution), but for their present moments and, simultaneously, for a time which is moving towards its actualisation, which is ultimately its extinction?

### **Workshop: "Materials in Motion"**

The Workshop "Materials in Motion" took place at the National Library of Lisbon on Saturday 20 April 2013. The study of colour was approached from two perspectives: art history and molecular analysis. Evidence that blue was produced with the precious lapis lazuli imported from Afghanistan or, that the deep red was obtained from an insect parasite that colonizes a bush in India, contributed to detect the legacy of the three medieval cultures which forged together Portugal, that is the Jewish, Arab and Christian cultures.

As a way to share findings, in this workshop the modern computer interaction technologies were also explored. An installation simulated the illuminations' creation process in the medieval period, addressing several aspects from the materials' origin and production methods to the painting process. It also showed users the historical and social context of that time and revealed the meanings of the colours and images depicted.

This workshop also included the exhibition of illuminated manuscripts of Alcobaça and participants observed and manipulated the pigments that were used to produce colour in these manuscripts.

## Events

Besides the official program, three main additional events were organized within the Conference. The first one was a Book Fair with a selection of titles published by Brepols Publishers, Textiverso and the Institute for Medieval Studies (FCSH-UNL).

The second one was a guided visit through the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum. It was conducted by Prof. Jorge Rodrigues, curator of the Islamic and Oriental collections. The visit was divided into two parts. Firstly, several pieces from the Islamic and Oriental collections were analyzed to show the cultural relationships and artistic exchanges among the several cultures coexisting in the Mediterranean basin during the Middle Ages. Secondly, the visit included the presentation of the medieval ivory collection of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum.

The third additional event that took place during the Conference was the lecture generously given by Prof. Christian Heck at the *Instituto Francês de Portugal*. The title of the lecture was "From Grünewald to Huysmans and Picasso: The Isenheim Altarpiece, creation, interpretation and rediscovery of a masterpiece". The Isenheim Altarpiece is one of the absolute masterpieces of all European painting, today preserved at the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar, a small town in southern Alsace. It was painted by Grünewald in 1511-1516 and is one of the highlights of the Renaissance north of the Alps. Prof. C. Heck started his lecture by explaining the exceptional international operation license which was given in 1984 to return to the altar two of its sculptures, disappeared after 1823. Thanks to this transaction, all known and preserved elements of the work were finally reunited. A significant research conducted on the occasion of the Conference "Medieval Europe in Motion" helped to better understand the history of the work and its disposal in its original context. But the lecture given by Prof. C. Heck also highlighted the role of the writer Huysmans, in the early twentieth century, whose

exalted texts on Grunewald discovered French language. Finally, Prof. Christian Heck presented how Grunewald was seen and reinterpreted in contemporary art, among other artists by Odilon Redon, Matisse, Francis Bacon, Saura, and Picasso in 1932.

## **Release**

In what the spreading of the conference is concerned, a website and a facebook profile were created. The website included a presentation of the conference, the program and abstracts, additional events and useful information concerning location, accommodation and info about the city of Lisbon.  
<https://sites.google.com/site/medievaleuropeinmotion2013/>

The facebook profile allowed the organization committee to update information about the conference and reached the public very fast.  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Medieval-Europe-in-Motion-International-Conference/440630712671800?ref=hl>

Thanks to these two media, the conference got a continuously worldwide spreading. Up to fifty specialized blogs, websites, research centres and groups around the world echoed and praised the initiative.

## **Conclusion**

The final balance of the Conference "Medieval Europe in Motion" is therefore strongly positive. The outputs not only of papers but also of the roundtable and the main contributions of the workshop will become a book, which will be published thanks to the collaboration of three institutions: the Institute for Medieval Studies of the Nova University of Lisbon, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Officina di Studi Medievali of the Palermo University, whose press will be in charge of the edition. The work is expected to come out in late 2013 or beginning 2014.



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