

**EDITORIAL. WE ARE MEDIEVALISTS, AND WE ARE INTERDISCIPLINARY: THE SPIRIT OF SVMMA****Comitè Editorial de SVMMA**e-mail: [revistasvmma.ircvm@ub.edu](mailto:revistasvmma.ircvm@ub.edu)doi: 10.1344/Svmma2016.7.9

---

A few days ago, the Institute for Research on Medieval Cultures (IRCVM) organized an event entitled “We are medievalists” that aimed to reflect on the role of medievalism in the University of Barcelona (UB) and in society. IRCVM researchers from diverse fields of study explained the theoretical foundations that guided the creation of a master’s programme, a research institute, and a doctorate in Medieval Cultures; an ambitious project born of the conviction that the Middle Ages can only be approached through an interdisciplinary perspective and with a firm determination not to understand the divorce between teaching and research towards which academic authorities want to drag us. The real proof that we are on the right track was provided by young researchers. Three bright young people—who come from various areas of study and are now embarked on different professional and research adventures—shared their enthusiasm for the advantages of being able to access the master’s and doctoral interdisciplinary training, an experience they had only rarely encountered before. The event ended with a roundtable where various specialists addressed the multifaceted figure of the *infant* Pere of Aragon and Anjou—courtly knight, musician, and poet—from different angles.

Although he was never king, the *infant* Pere is not only an emblem of an era where kings wrote history books, studied astronomy, composed poems, and played musical instruments—we lament that the, at best, dull monarchies of the twenty-first century are not anachronistic in this sense as well!—but also the emblem of the interdisciplinary approach that our object of study, the medieval period, demands. For instance, a medievalist may well be analysing the work of an Italian author who studied in Latin and wrote in French; their work has probably survived in fragments scattered in several manuscripts that need first to be deciphered with the help of paleographic expertise, and then classified and reconstructed applying the principles of textual criticism. Often, the meaning of the work is complemented by miniatures that bring a certain iconographic code to the table; sometimes things get complicated because the manuscript contains musical notation and always, to reach a full understanding of the text, we have to reconstruct a system of thought that is no longer ours. Although academic and research structures not always seem to suggest it, in the case of medievalism interdisciplinarity comes with the territory.

SVMMA’s present issue is a clear example of what has been said so far. That is why we would like to draw attention to the interdisciplinary nature of this collection, which includes articles

about literature, philosophy, medieval history, and art history. The themes are most diverse and the gaze researchers cast on each of their topics is kaleidoscopic. The authors of the census of fourteenth-century Catalan bankers do not hesitate to complete the strictly economic data with information relating to their social function and their impact on public life; the discourse on the physical signs of death in medieval times involves the history of medicine, the stereotypes of hagiographic literature, and the history of private life; allegory, symbolism, and the categories of medieval thought are analysed in terms of scholasticism in the study of the Thomistic reception of Aristotle, and from an artistic perspective in the paper devoted to the paintings of Moissac; the paper on the conception of love in *Jaufre* builds on philosophical and literary sources, but can also be read through the iconographic programme of the manuscript. In short, the new issue of SVMMA, a polyhedron whose faces are themselves small polyhedra, could well pass for a Borgesian artifact.

This comprehensive aim, this spirit of SVMMA—which has always been our obsession—begins to appear as a necessity of our time at the hands of several authoritative voices in the field of the humanities. Precisely now, the Castilian translation of James Turner’s book, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton University Press, Princeton-Oxford, 2014) is displayed in the “novelties” section of the bookshop *La Central*, in Barcelona. It is an essay in which the author calls for a return to an epistemological paradigm based on the comparative method and the forced interdisciplinarity of research, after a time of parcelling out and fragmentation of knowledge. Although the privilege of occupying the highest place in the “novelties” section of *La Central* does not guarantee the end of amnesia, the truth is that some things have changed in academia, and a return to cross-disciplinarity and comparativism can now be perceived. Unlike in the case of historical studies—perhaps due to the indelible mark of the *Annales* School—the paradox for literary studies is that in recent years it has witnessed the creation and proliferation of university studies in “comparative literature” that, appealing to the fathers of comparativism (Vosler, Spitzer, Auerbach, Curtius, etc.), systematically banish medieval literature from their programmes. They act as if Auerbach was not the author of *Figura*, as if Spitzer had not written the most beautiful pages that have ever been written about the troubadour Jaufré Rudel, as if Curtius had not devoted the best of his work to draw the solid line linking the Middle Ages and modernity, and as if the authors that have generated the most advanced critical paradigms of the twentieth century (Zumthor, Dragonetti, Jauss, Avale, Segre ...) had not been medievalists themselves.

We are interdisciplinary, we are medievalists, and we are modern to the extent that our search of the past is, as all the aforementioned researchers showed, the best tool for understanding the present, and for that reason the best investment for the future. Amid this multicultural, complex, and “under construction” reality that is Europe, our object of study, which is none other than the space where European awareness, values, and emotions have been forged is therefore called to

play a leading role. One of the challenges of the new millennium is probably that of building an adequate response to an emerging need that we could define as a need for identity, the need to know who we are, to discover and preserve our cultural roots in order to find our place in our own time. This legitimate need, which, as we know, is dangerous and susceptible to more than a few manipulations, grants university and scientific debate a major role to avoid falling into the trap of simplifications and mystification. In short, we are talking about the construction of this critical spirit that Dr. Carles Mancho claimed in last issue's editorial, which he exceptionally authored to close his years as Director of SVMMA. We do not want to conclude these lines without expressing Dr. Mancho our deep appreciation for his work as head of the IRCVM and, in this particular context especially, for his work as Director of SVMMA.

