
EDITORIAL. FIRST IRCVM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: READING AND WRITING IN THE MIDDLE AGES

SVMMA Editorial Board

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From 23 to 25 April 2018 the IRCVM held its first international conference, entitled *Reading and Writing in the Middle Ages*. The IRCVM, which has reached this major milestone as it celebrates its first decade of existence, now aims to prioritize this congress turning it into a recurring event on its agenda. The inauguration of the conference included interventions by the vice-rector of Doctoral Studies and Promotion of Research, the deans of the Faculties of Philology and Geography and History, and the director of the IRCVM. The inaugural lecture was delivered by Dr. Sebastià Serrano, and was entitled *El regal de la lectura*.

For this first conference, which we emblematically wanted to hold in the week of Saint George's feast, we chose a cross-disciplinary topic that, in accordance with the spirit of the institute, would encompass all the disciplines that the institute brings together and stimulate debate between the medieval past and the contemporary world. Writing and reading, two activities that today involve each other, were, in medieval times, well-differentiated tasks, both from a conceptual standpoint and in terms of skills, and often presented such labile contours as those that defined the ever-changing and unstable boundaries between script, voice, and image. This is the idea that we wanted to synthesize in a plastic way by choosing the miniature of MS fr 116 (fol. 688 v) of the BNF to illustrate these three days of work. This image corresponds to the passage from *Le Morte d'Arthur* in which Morgana leads the king to the chamber where Lancelot had stayed so that he can "read the paintings" depicting Lancelot's adultery with the queen ("*Ensint comença li rois a lire les œuvres Lancelot par les peintures que il veoit*" / So the king began to read what Lancelot had done through the paintings he was seeing). This idea formulates with extreme economy and with a suggestive eloquence the deep imbrication of the semiotic fields of image and script in the Middle Ages. These intertwined notions undoubtedly invite interdisciplinary debate. In fact, not only did it attract the attention of art historians such as Panovsky, but also of philologists such as P. Zumthor, for whom the function of medieval writing was not so much to transcribe sounds as to "establish an emblematic visuality." Moreover, it also lends itself to interesting comparisons with an era such as ours, marked by the hypertrophy of the visual and where phenomena such as hypertextuality have revolutionized traditional conceptions of reading and writing. Throughout the different sessions of the conference, all these dimensions of the image were addressed, and a reflection was made on the indelible link that humanities studies maintain with the written word and reading due to their historical dimension. The same can be said regarding linguistic diversity,

which characterised the conference despite the tendency towards the uniform imposition of English in this type of events, understanding language not as a mere content reservoir but as something connected to thought and to the context that generates it.

Within this general framework, the conference brought together the scientific contributions of eighty researchers from different backgrounds, structured around six monographic sessions. On the basis of the psychological, social, and cultural features of the conception and practice of reading and writing in medieval times, the processes of production, classification, and conservation of written sources were analysed, as well as the relationship between writing and the exercise of power and various other dynamics that led to profound transformations in political, social, and cultural life throughout this historical period. The analysis of the different forms of reading and writing practices also led to the study of the spaces in which these took place and to reflection on material aspects, from the relationship between writing and support media brought into play by medieval epigraphy to the configuration of book as luxury objects, often indicative of the prestige or power of their owners.

The conference came to a close with a round table of the directors of the most important Institutes of Medieval Studies in the Iberian Peninsula, moderated by the journalist Sonia Casas, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Sapiens*. This was the first time that the directors of these institutions met, and they addressed the current situation of medievalism, as well as various questions related to the tradition and renewal of medieval studies in the context of the new challenges posed by contemporary society and the scientific and technological world. Above all, they concluded that there is a need to develop joint strategies and to create synergies and collaborative networks to ensure the vitality of our disciplines. The conference programme ended with an exhibition of scientific posters of IRCVM projects and research groups in the *Pati de Lletres* of the Faculty of Philology and a concert by ARDIT Ensemble.