

Medieval Manuscripts in Motion

Lisbon, 4–6 March 2015

‘Medieval Europe in Motion’ is an initiative of Maria Alessandra Bilotta and Alicia Miguélez Cavero of the Institute of Medieval Studies of the Nova University of Lisbon. The first conference in this series was convened in Lisbon in April 2013 and focused on the influence of circulation, motion and mobility of people, forms and ideas during the Middle Ages. Manuscripts and related ways of mobility were a major theme of that conference already. The second edition of ‘Medieval Europe in Motion’ followed almost two years later and this time incorporated ‘medieval manuscripts’ in its title. From March 4 to 6, 2015, *Medieval Manuscripts in Motion* was held at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the National Library of Portugal, Lisbon. Alicia Miguélez Cavero and Fernando Villaseñor organized this year’s conference. The three-day program was structured in six blocks, each of which started with two keynote lectures followed by one paper session or two parallel paper sessions. Lectures and papers were delivered in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and in Spanish.

The lectures and papers given demonstrate that the concept of motion in relationship to medieval manuscripts can be approached in diverse manners. Pilgrimage was among others an important way for the transportation of manuscripts, but the actual or spiritual journey as concern of manuscripts’ texts and their illustrative paintings became widely addressed as well. Textual and pictorial motifs moved between manuscripts, which might be traced back to travelling (book) artists and concomitant exchange. Owners made the manuscripts move between collections but they also turned their pages and for instance witnessed the changing appearance of gold illumination caused by different exposures to light. Most papers and lectures delivered dealt with manuscripts from Europe, especially from the Iberian Peninsula. Mobility though also involved Oriental locations, manuscripts, and motifs.

In her paper *The Swing of the Page: Dynamic Interaction in the Act of Reading*, Marina Garzón Fernández pointed at a fascinating congruence between East and West. The cutting of paper is well known from Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman manuscripts. This technique of *qiṭ‘a* (or *kati* in Turkish) resulted in the pasting of cut-out motifs onto carriers, or negative forms got to shape letters and words. This talk started off with an ode composed by the fourteenth-century Hebrew writer Sem Tob in Castile. He describes a writing technique of paper cutting in which scissors remove the letters from the paper and leave words made of air. Showing examples of this technique, Marina Garzón Fernández considered what the handling of decoupage manuscripts

means for their aesthetics and how negative shapes got to be filled with light, caused shades, and were set in motion by the act of reading.

Luís Urbano Afonso traced the impressive routes of a Hebrew Bible (BnF Hébreu 1314–1315), probably produced in Seville around 1470, in his lecture *The Intercontinental Journey of a Late Medieval Andalusian Hebrew Manuscript*. He considered the aniconism of Sephardic Bibles and the similarities of their decoration with Islamic and Mudéjar patterns and motifs. The wide travels of the Hebrew Bible—across the Mediterranean to North Africa or the Ottoman Empire, and via Egypt to Yemen—were contextualized and visualized in maps. In Yemen, a place of exile for Sephardic Jews, the Andalusian manuscript became a model for other Bibles.

The movement of an Oriental fable into the European tradition was the central concern of the talk *Mobile Fables: Cross-Cultural Animals and their Representations in the Kalila wa Dimna* delivered by Anna D. Russakoff. Originally, this collection of fables was composed in Sanskrit. In later translations, it became named after the two Jackals Kalila and Dimna that figure in some of the stories. Besides into Arabic, Syrian, Persian, Hebrew and Spanish, the fables were translated into Latin too. Concerning the lavishly illustrated manuscript BnF Latin 8504 of 1313, Anna Russakoff investigated the question, which models might have been at the disposal of its Parisian illuminator(s). The comparison of some of the depictions in the Latin manuscript to illustrations in their Oriental counterparts led to interesting insights. For instance, multiple places and various moments became depicted in single images in the Latin manuscript. Paintings from the Orient turned out to focus on one specific moment or action as described in the lines of text in its direct vicinity.

In my own paper *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in Motion*, I considered the wandering of a certain iconography—the jointly enthroned Solomon and the Queen of Sheba amid wondrous and partly mythical courtiers—in Oriental manuscripts. The development of this image was reconstructed in comparing it with pictorial frontispieces and with illustrations of various texts about Solomon. The conclusion could be drawn that in the course of the fifteenth century, multiple visual sources and well-known narrations jointly came to form this iconography without relying on one specific textual description. At the end of the fifteenth century, this image travelled further and came as a frontispiece to precede texts in Persian manuscripts that make no mention of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba at all.

The complete program of the conference *Medieval Manuscripts in Motion* is available online at <<http://medievaleuropeinmotion2015.weebly.com/program.html>> (last accessed 10 October 2015). The publication of the Con-

ference Proceedings is currently in preparation and can be expected in 2016. The third edition of 'Medieval Europe in Motion' is planned to take place in Lisbon from February 25 to 27, 2016. It is entitled *Juridical Circulations and Artistic, Intellectual and Cultural Practices in Medieval Europe (13th–15th Centuries)* and manuscripts will again be a strong focus.

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