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*INTERCULTURAL TRANSMISSION IN THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN*,  
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There is a famous medieval Sufi quote that goes: ‘Sufism was once a reality without a name, but now is a name without a reality’. Something similar might be said about medieval ‘multiculturalism’. On the one hand, the Middle Ages were for decades understood as a homogeneous and monolithic period of time, with a Christian Western focus point to which every other reality was reduced as merely peripheral. Therefore, its multicultural dimension was broadly ignored: it was a reality without a name. On the other hand, as a consequence both of a new historiographical and philosophical insight and of the undeniable contemporary reality, nowadays ‘Multiculturalism’ has become the guest invited to every party: it may be starting to sound like a name without a reality.

As a matter of fact, what is needed, as in Plato’s *Cratylus*, is a reflexion both about the ‘name’ –i.e., its historiographical and philosophical conceptualization– and the ‘reality’ –i.e., its historical dimension– of ‘medieval multiculturalism’. And this is exactly what this volume, *Intercultural Transmission in the Medieval Mediterranean*, offers. It might certainly be said that in this book there are three parallel levels of analysis. Firstly, this book is mainly a text-based research which focuses on the transmission of worldviews in the Mediterranean Rim between Late Antiquity and the Renaissance. Secondly, it is also a reflexion about how to deal with this ‘multicultural’ landscape; this self-reflexion might be an important contribution to the further development of a ‘method’ for the study of medieval ‘multiculturalism’. Thirdly, this volume also aims to deal with the contemporary interpretation of the multicultural dimension of medieval texts.

The volume falls into four main parts, each one containing a number of chapters devoted to their specific issue: 'Faith and Spirituality' (pp. 1-59), 'Chivalry' (pp. 61-116), 'Love and Literature' (pp. 117-162) and 'Material Culture' (pp. 163-213). In the first chapter –'Thomasine Metamorphosis: Community, Text and Transmission from Greek to Coptic'– David W. Kim focuses on the Thomasine community, emphasizing the mutual influence between its developing religio-political identity and its writing project. Analyzing the Thomas Gospel, the author studies the unfolded meaning of the process through which the Thomas people made its teachings into writing, probably between CA 45 to 68. Although the set of approaches that sustain Pella, Antioch or Edessa as possible geographical locations for the Thomasine community are considered, the hypothesis that the group was a Jerusalem based mega-church is seen as the most plausible explanation. As other nascent groups, the Thomasine community needed its own version of the Jesus tradition, sieved by their own memories and experiences. Looking to reach a huge number of people, they decided, among the possibilities that their multilingual context offered to them, to put their Gospel into Coptic. As a matter of fact, this written result was profoundly linked to its circumstances: both its form and content express the way in which the community saw itself and its mission in the contextual environment of the Graeco-Roman world. In this sense, their texts are vehicles not only for the ideas that the Thomas people wanted to express through them but also for the history and framework of these ideas.

The second chapter has as its title 'St Michael of Chonai and the Tenacity of Paganism'. His author, Alan Cadwallader, focuses on a very popular tale in the Byzantine world: the story of the miracle of St Michael, the archistrategos of Chonai. The story is a remarkable example of how –despite Imperial laws and the Christian tenacity– in country communities the alienation between the different religious groups was far from complete in the fourth and fifth centuries. In that context, the Christian faith, in its first steps, achieved adherence through retaining significant elements from the previous hegemonic sacrality. In a very interesting analysis of the complexity of the interaction between different cultural worlds in the Middle Ages, this study shows how paganism was used in the mentioned story both as a negative backdrop and a positive contribution, especially with regard to the portrayal of the main figure, St Michael. Even when the story celebrates the victory of Christianity over pagan religious practice and theology, Michael is characterized in terms of the old pagan deities. The evolution of the story –through its different versions– shows the conflictive symbolic 'negotiations' between the 'old' and the 'new' comprehensions of the reality.

In 'The Cultural Repository of Persian Sufism: Medieval Chivalry and Mysticism in Iran', Milad Milani focuses on the history of chivalry in Iran, tracing its origins prior to the emergence of Islam and highlighting the relevance of the Iranian backdrop for the further developments of chivalry among the Middle East and Western Europe. This chapter develops the path through which chivalry evolved from a primal martial notion –mainly reduced to a set of battle rules– to an ethical conception –a more sophisticated social code of gentility and gallantry– and finally to a more spiritual comprehension. Sufism, which stresses the importance of the inner greater struggle over any external lesser effort, transcends the first two perspectives towards the deeper one. This may be especially said of the Iranian Sufi understanding of chivalry, in contrast with the Arabic perspective on the same issue. The author explores different texts in order to develop this contrast, and, furthermore, to show how the spiritualization of chivalry made by Sufism finally goes beyond chivalry itself, towards what is called 'meta-chivalry'.

In the fourth chapter –titled 'From Knight to Chevalier. Chivalry in the *chanson de geste* Material from Aquitaine to Germany'– Stephanie L. Hathaway concentrates on the transformation of the material of the *chanson de geste Aliscans* to its Middle High German version *Willehalm*. In these two texts –both of which represent the battles at Aliscans between Christians and Muslims in which Guillaume d'Orange fought– the author studies the transformation of the character of Rainouart/Rennewart from buffoon to knight to chevalier. Chivalry is described not only as a result of the multicultural encounters between different Mediterranean worlds but also as the bridge between them: as it is said, the means and manner of interaction between Christians and Muslims –the paradigmatic 'Other' of the Christian Europe– was precisely chivalry. This chapter analyses the historical evolution of the chivalric ideal in Europe – following the same path of refinement described in the immediately preceding chapter– both studying the understanding of chivalry in the mentioned texts and contextualizing these changing comprehensions in the landscape of the cultural exchanges in which they emerged.

The fifth chapter –'Humour and Sexuality. Twelfth-century Troubadours and Medieval Arabic Poetry', by Jerónimo Méndez– states the hypothesis that several Arabic poets –such as Abu Nuwās and other exponents of the *khamriyyat* poetry and the *mujūn* literature– and troubadours –like Guilhem de Peitieu, Bernart Marti, Raimbaut d'Aurenga, Arnaut Daniel– configure some thematic antecedents of the *fabliaux*, the Italian *novellini* and the Catalan satirical narrations of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Firstly, the author analyses a group of Arabic texts highlighting its most important motives and how these hedonistic verses,

full of references to wine, sexual profligacy and homoerotic love, fascinated important religious and political figures of the Abbasid ninth and tenth centuries Baghdad. Secondly, some poems written by the mentioned troubadours are studied, showing how they represent love in physical terms, exalting sexuality through motives far away from any romantic and idealized perspective about love. With regard to the relationship between the Arabic poets and the troubadours, even though there were important differences between them, they shared what is defined as a 'poetic *modus operandi*': a specific way of conceptualizing the desired object and the inversion of social and literary conventions.

In 'Ladies, Lovers and *Lais*. A Comparison of some Byzantine Romances with the Anglo-Norman *Guigemar*', Andrew Stephenson presents a preliminary study about the relation between a group of medieval Byzantine romances and the courtly French literature of the twelfth century. Of the eleven extant Byzantine verse romances, all of which are concerned with romantic love, the author focuses on the three which are usually referred to as Greek in origin but with Western elements incorporated. Although the relation between Eastern and Western literature is said to have been generally seen only on the background of the major episode of contact between East and West –that is, the Crusades and the consequently settlement of Latins and Franks in Byzantium– this chapter summarizes different theories that defend a process of influence and transmission from East to West or from West to East and also those theories that sustain the existence of common sources from Antiquity. The author points out that the path to follow in order to continue with the ongoing research should be to analyze the themes, motifs and structure of the three mentioned Byzantine romances in comparison with the French *lais*.

The seventh chapter –'Performance and Reception of Greek Tragedy in the Early Medieval Mediterranean' by Amelia R. Brown analyzes the manuscript tradition of the plays of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. By doing so, she studies the history of tragedy itself showing that it was not a frozen institution but, on the contrary, a living result always dependent on its different historical contexts. The chapter goes through a vast temporal landscape studying the many different ways in which the performance of tragedy muted, from fifth-century BCA Athens to Early Medieval audiences across the third- to sixth-century Mediterranean. These changes affected many different aspects of the way in which tragedies were performed, from the characteristics of the stage to the importance of the chorus or the actors. Interestingly, the author refers to the relationship between many of these changes with the political and religious context and to the way in which theatrical performances were seen –and used– by the different authorities over

the time. Nevertheless, although all these changes tragedy continued to be a recognized form of drama for centuries. With the exception of Constantinople, where they might have continued for some more time, tragic performances seem to have ended in the rest of the Later Roman Empire in the sixth century.

The eighth chapter –‘The Urban Language of Early Constantinople. The Changing Roles of the Arts and Architecture in the Formation of the New Capital and the New Consciousness’, by Gordana Fontana-Giusti– focuses on the status of architecture and its related arts in early Constantinople (c. CA 324-c. CA 337). Through its long history, Constantinople always remained a bridge between the self and the other and between the past and the present. The city drew from the myths, arts, knowledge and technology of the ancient Greeks and Romans, incorporating all of them into the new urban project. The author highlights the relevance of architecture –in the many times in which the city redefined itself– as one of the bridges through which the ancient knowledge recovered by Constantinople was at the same time preserved and transformed. In doing so, the architecture of the city is understood as the ‘objective’ manifestation of the ‘subjective’ living experience of their inhabitants.

The last chapter, written by Timothy Dawson, is titled ‘There and Back Again: Cross-cultural Transmission of Clothing and Clothing Terminology’. In his work, the author focuses on how the contact between Western states and the Eastern Roman Empire over the Middle Ages influenced material culture and language. As this chapter says, material culture carries a symbolic dimension. When Westerners adopted Levantine fashions they were not only thinking in their practical benefits but mainly in their ‘meaning’. However, the meaning of their material goods –in this study, clothing– was mediated both by the multiple cultural influences that affected the societies and by the way in which they conceptualized those meanings; that is, by the language they used to refer to it. Consequently, the author of this chapter studies several examples of mutual influence between the East and the West, highlighting the importance that the mercantile activity had in culturally sharpening the societies involved in that activity. Finally, at the very end of the book, an ‘Index’ lists the most important terms and author’s names mentioned all over the book.

As G. Fontana-Giusti says, the way in which the past is understood is always in relation with our understanding of the present and our view of the future (p. 191). Therefore, it is good news to realize that ‘by now a critical mass of scholars and ideas is available for constructing a new interpretive ‘model’ that is rich in historical, geographical, cultural and social data, sophisticated in its methodological foundations and representational choices, and reflexive in its

values and analytical techniques and methods'.<sup>1</sup> This volume is undoubtedly a capital step in this path.

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<sup>1</sup> Sonja Bretnjes, Alexander Fidora and Matthias M. Tischler (2014), 'Towards a New Approach to Medieval Cross-Cultural Exchanges', *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 1 (1), p. 30.