

TRANSLATIO

TRANSITION, SHIFT AND CHANGE IN MEDIEVAL CULTURE

EDITED BY
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FOREWORD

At some point in the early years of the decade of 1190, the troubadour and juggler Gaucelm Faidit reached the Western shores (most probably in the port of Marseille) after his long sojourn to the Holy Land. He celebrated his arrival not with a solemn or transcendent song, but with a lighthearted piece, entirely devoid of any devotional elements (“Del Gran Golfe de Mar...”) in which his pilgrimage is evoked in a gay, almost comic manner. And yet this was the same journey about which Gaucelm had composed some of his most rigorous epic crusade songs just a few years before, and which he would reference again in the most serious terms in later years. A physical displacement is signaled by an aesthetic, even ideological, displacement. All through the varied work of Gaucelm, the notion of “crusade” adopts a bewildering variety of incarnations, which allow for spiritual transcendence, political discussion, feudal rivalry or simple tomfoolery. What we face in this process is the transformation of a concept which, not by coincidence, seems to correspond to the bodily and psychological mobility of the author who keeps re-adapting it at various moments and places, through his career and his travels. Such a multiplicity of uses of one concept, along with the ideological (and often physical) dynamism that it entails, should be seen not as exceptional but as entirely representative of the Middle Ages as they are understood by the academic world of today.

The movement of bodies, of texts and ideas across the culture and geography of the West (and through its uncertain limits) is a major aspect of the sense of re-location, or *translatio*, that the present volume will concentrate upon. Transfor-

mations in religious doctrine, shifts in the definitions of body and soul, exchanges between East and West, or between different languages: all of these meanings are suggested by the notion of *translatio* in our title. The various changes within Medieval culture are available to us through traces left on texts or on objects. In the case of texts, they correspond to an original movement from voice to writing, or from one language to another; in the case of objects, they speak to us of modifications in their use, of the social world that gave them meaning. Our work as researchers in the culture of the Middle Ages implies a capacity for identifying these forms of change. Medievalism is today, more than ever, a shifting academic field, because it knows that its focus is placed on a shifting object of study.

It is true that, in the last decades, we have grown suspicious of major historical or conceptual demarcations within the various disciplines in medieval studies. The growing specialization (some would call over-specialisation) in all of these areas has allowed for a richness of detail that discourages any clear-cut periodisation. If we have become skeptical of the supposed barriers between Romanic and Gothic, between Medieval and Renaissance, between religious and secular, it is because each attempt to examine these sets of opposite characteristics has revealed the continuities existing between them. And yet, precisely because of that complexity and that richness, what emerges when we step back and look at the whole cultural-historical space of the Middle Ages is an image of movement, of dynamism, of unpredictability. What emerges is a world in which political and cultural stability was possible only on the condition of constant transitions, re-interpretations and re-locations: on the condition, therefore, of an ongoing sense of *translatio*.

The brief essays gathered in the present volume (a monographic annex of the journal *Medievalia*) fully testify to this consciousness. To that extent, they are also representative of the work that the Institut d'Estudis Medievals (IEM) of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona is engaged in, since it re-started its activity only a few years ago. Most of the contributors to this collection were also contributors to a one-day symposium on the same subject of our title, which took place at the Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres in Barcelona, on the 28th of June, 2013. That encounter laid the groundwork for the present volume: what we present here, however, is an independent collection of pieces where the contributors have been given the opportunity to concentrate on aspects of medieval *translatio* that have been hitherto ignored, or insufficiently explored, in the previous bibliography. The essays that we present here, then, have been selected according to their capacity for opening new paths, or for suggesting new ways in which we can look at well-travelled ones, in the study of *translatio*: to that extent, they are fully representative of the wide scope that the journal *Medievalia* strives for.

The Institut d'Estudis Medievals is strongly committed to inter-disciplinarity. Within their variety, all of the pieces gathered in this volume share a common characteristic: each of them offers an insight into a moment, an event or a that branches out into other possible fields of study. History cannot ignore the contribution of textual studies, philosophy cannot do without theology, art history must integrate the findings of anthropology; none of them, in the end, will progress without a fruitful dialogue with the others. Ultimately, and beyond their individual contributions, all of the studies gathered here showcase the need for an academic culture of *translatio* that must be preserved and practiced at all costs, as the basic condition for any present-day understanding of the Middle Ages.

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