

Boundaries and Connections. Producing, organizing and sharing knowledge on medieval Iberian art

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Texto recebido em / Text submitted on: 18/06/2022

Texto aprovado em / Text approved on: 18/11/2022



Abstract. To what extent and how are today's increasingly interconnected and porous real and virtual worlds conditioning and even determining research in Art History? Several art historians have pointed out that, as the globe becomes hyper-connected, the discipline is shifting its focus from local and national questions to global or worldwide issues. This paper aims to analyze this shift in the historiography of medieval Iberian art. I argue that research is indeed being reshaped by the removal or the crossing of physical, epistemic and virtual boundaries as well as by pushing forth an increasing interest in connectivity. Additionally, I propose to cross or remove surviving rigid boundaries still further, to construct more flexible and fluid epistemic limits, and to establish additional connections at several levels.

Keywords. Medieval Art Historiography, Methodology, Iberian Peninsula, Boundaries, Connections.

Introduction

The traditional notion of boundary – “a real or imagined line that marks the edge or limit of something” – relies on geographical and intellectual/metaphorical lines¹. In all scientific disciplines, both concepts have been essential to conduct research and produce, organize and share knowledge. The physical dimension proves to be relevant on issues regarding space and place (e.g. country borders, monastic walls) whereas the epistemological dimension, which implies mental models, offers ways of categorization and classification. However, one of the greatest contributions of 20th-century scholarship was to problematize rigid boundaries and put forward combined models of knowledge production. In the Humanities and the Social Sciences, examples go from French historian Marc Bloch's manifesto on comparative history early

¹ “Boundary.” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed February 17, 2022. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/boundary>.

in the century to the scape-suffix model and the ideas on disjunctive global cultural flows proposed by Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai as the century drew to an end (BLOCH 1928; APPADURAI 1990, 1996).

Over the past two decades, the above-mentioned traditional notion of boundary has greatly evolved. On the one hand, the real world has removed many boundaries and has turned into a global village with its advantages, deficiencies and challenges. While geographical and intellectual boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred, a hyper-connected world is prevailing. And once connections – “the state of being related to someone or something else” – multiply, communications, interactions, exchanges, imbrications and circulations reach another level². On the other hand, the emergence of the virtual world, even more fluid and dynamic than the real world, has led to the crystallisation of a third dimension of boundary (JACOB AND ZHANG 2013; ZHANG AND JACOB 2013). Indeed, in the online world, the so-called virtual boundaries are much more easily crossed, broken, constructed and reconstructed. At the same time, connections grow exponentially.

To what extent and how are today’s increasingly interconnected and porous real and virtual worlds conditioning and even determining research in Art History? Following James Elkins’ seminal work on whether art history could be global (ELKINS 2006), several art historians have pointed out that, as the globe becomes hyper-connected, the discipline is shifting its focus from local and national questions to global or worldwide issues (DACOSTA KAUFMANN 2009: 72-74; JOYEUX-PRUNEL 2014; VAN DAMME and ZIJLMANS 2012). In a paper delivered at the 33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art in 2012, Hans Belting analysed Global Art History from the point of view of current global conditions of art production (BELTING 2013: 1511-13; DACOSTA KAUFMANN 2016: 23-24). The same premise was adopted more recently by Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, who argued that the globalization of the art market was even more important than postcolonial theory in encouraging art historians to push for a global shift in the discipline (JOYEUX-PRUNEL 2019).

The historiography of medieval art, particularly from the work of scholars such as Wilhem Vöge at the turn of the 20th century (VÖGE 1894), has always been attentive to connections, exchanges, circulations, *métissage*, transfers and encounters. Michel Espagne has even defended that “the history of medieval art, particularly with its most eminent German representatives, is a history of transfers and encounters” (ESPAGNE 2016: 115). However, the

² “Connection.” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed February 17, 2022. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/connection>.

field also established very rigid epistemic boundaries, which include artistic styles, a focus on European territories, and canonical narratives mainly based on architecture, sculpture and painting. In the 21st century, the historiography of medieval art is progressively abandoning these paradigms and taking important steps to construct more fluid and dynamic boundaries, as well as to consider connectivity as a pivotal issue (FLOOD 2009; KEENE 2019; NORMORE 2018; HOURIHANE 2007; WALKER and LUYSTER 2009). As argued by Alicia Walker, today's global approach to medieval art is guiding scholarship to move beyond boundaries that were previously limiting research. The knowledge of medieval art is thus being changed from a quantitative point of view but also in the way such knowledge is produced and disseminated (WALKER 2012).

This paper aims to analyze this shift in the historiography of medieval Iberian art. I take into consideration the work carried out by any scholar interested in Iberian Studies, regardless of her/his nationality, the academic system to which she/he belongs, and her/his local, regional, international or global approach. Additionally, I not only consider work carried out within academia but also at any cultural institution engaged in the production, organization or dissemination of knowledge about medieval art. Particularly important in this regard are museums, owing to their relevant contribution to the formation of (national) identities, but which are also spaces where epistemic canons are created and/or maintained. It is not my intention to undertake an exhaustive survey of all the knowledge that has been produced through publications, projects or exhibits. In turn, disciplinary, chronological, geographical, categorical and academic boundaries are considered, so that a better understanding as to how and to what extent there is a turn in the production, organization and sharing of knowledge. The main issues with research based on rigid, normative boundaries are raised and the opportunities generated by creating connections are explored. Ultimately, I argue that research is indeed being reshaped by the removal or the crossing of physical, epistemic and virtual boundaries as well as by pushing forth an increasing interest in connectivity. Additionally, I propose to cross or remove surviving rigid boundaries still further, to construct more flexible and fluid epistemic limits, and to establish additional connections at several levels.

Although I assume that it would be important to analyze the current reshaping of boundaries, hiperconnectivity, porous episteme, in a broader analytical framework that would provide a precise notion of the meaning and importance of this reshaping within all the production of scientific knowled-

ge about medieval art in the Iberian Peninsula, that task would be virtually impossible and would exceed the space available for this article.

The need to cross disciplinary boundaries

The 19th century witnessed the consolidation of the discipline of Art History; its object of study, methodology and pedagogic dimension were clearly outlined, and this naturally led to the formation of disciplinary epistemic boundaries (MICHAUD 2005). Owing to this, the discipline managed to gain a firm footing in the European academic and professional system, with France and Germany in the lead.

In the case of the history of medieval art, it progressively occupied a specific area within the discipline but, at the same time, established close – and sometimes strained – ties to Archaeology and History. In 1905, a course on “histoire de l’art chrétien au Moyen Âge” was assigned to Émile Mâle, who a few years earlier had called for the incorporation of the history of medieval art in the university syllabus (MÂLE 1894). In the following decades, the study of medieval Iberian art would gain a great impetus thanks to scholars who occupied chairs in outstanding European and US-American universities, for instance Elie Lambert and Georges Gaillart at La Sorbonne, Marcel Durliat at Toulouse-Le Mirail, Arthur Kingsley Porter first at Yale and latter at Harvard, and Meyer Schapiro at Columbia.

In the Iberian Peninsula, however, Art History did not enter the academic system until the early 20th century and the professional and academic weight of the discipline was smaller than in other European contexts throughout most of the century. As far as Spain is concerned, a chair in the History of Fine Arts was granted to the *Universidad Central* in 1904, as part of the doctorate in Philosophy and Humanities (CENDÓN FERNÁNDEZ 2011; PASAMAR ALZURIA 1995). It was held by Elías Tormo and, in 1913, it was relabelled a chair of Art History, that is, a century later than other chairs created, for instance, in Germany. Little by little, seminars and specific departments of Art History were created, although in many cases they had to share with such areas as Archeology or History. This was the case with the Department of Art History at the University of Valladolid, one of the earliest. It was originally created as an Art and Archeology Seminary and it began operating in the 1932-1933 academic year.

In Portugal, Art History also began to be taught within the framework of the teaching of Fine Arts at the turn of the 20th century, with three courses at

the Escola de Belas Artes in Lisbon and, later, in the faculties of humanities of the Universities of Lisbon and Coimbra. In addition, a specialised internship program for the curators of museums and national monuments began operating in 1933 at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon (GONÇALVES 1960: 55). In 1957, the Estado Novo dictatorship carried out a program of university reform, which led to the separation of the History and Philosophy degrees and led to important changes in the teaching of Art History. Aesthetics and Art Theory began to be taught as part of the Philosophy degree, while Art History came to be included in the history degree syllabus. As far as the production of knowledge is concerned, it must be pointed out that the first *História da Arte em Portugal* (History of art in Portugal) was not published until 1942 (LACERDA 1942; BOTELHO 2011). Regarding the study of medieval art, it must be taken into account that many of those involved in its study were essentially dilettante scholars, for instance Manuel Vieira da Natividade – an agronomist –, and Reynaldo dos Santos – an urologist.

This situation only began to change in the 1970s, during which major political regime change took place in both Portugal and Spain. The Carnation Revolution in Portugal in April 1974 and the death of Francisco Franco in Spain in 1975 triggered the transition to democracy in both countries, which became a republic and a parliamentary monarchy, respectively, and the accession of both countries to the European Economic Community in 1985. In the Spanish academic system, the last decades of the 20th century witnessed the implementation of an independent Degree in Art History and its consolidation as a three-year degree after its very existence was challenged with the adoption of the Bologna system in 2004, when it almost disappeared (ANGUITA CANTERO 2007). In Portugal, a specialisation in Art History was created in 1981 within the History degree in all four Portuguese public universities: Coimbra, Porto, University of Lisbon and NOVA University, the latter of which was founded after the 1974 Revolution (CALADO 2001). This was a first step towards the consolidation of Art History as an autonomous degree, something that did not happen until 2003, when the degree in Art History was created, before being integrated into the Bologna system.

Despite the obvious difficulties faced by the discipline to consolidate professionally and academically during the 20th-century, and despite the concerns expressed by disciplinary guardians, who worry about it losing its identity if disciplinary boundaries are crossed, transgressing those limits has always proven to be essential for medieval art historians. Indeed, their work cannot only be ascribed to the field of Art History but also to the broader field of Medieval Studies, a cross-disciplinary research field with a strong tra-

dition both in Europe and North-America. Throughout the 20th century, art historian-medievalists working on the Iberian Peninsula have toiled side by side with archaeologists, codicologists, paleographers, musicologists and literary scholars, thus collectively enriching the field of Medieval Iberian Studies. Proof of this is their active participation in conferences on medieval studies, such as the two largest annual world events dedicated to the Middle Ages, the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo (USA) and the International Medieval Congress at Leeds (UK); their membership of organizations such as the SEEM (Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales); their integration in research centers which specifically focus on the study of the Middle Ages; and the publication of papers in journals which also focus on this historical period.

However, it is true that the turn of the 21st century brought with it a new impetus for the joint study of questions raised by medieval art. Broadly speaking, transgressing disciplinary boundaries might occur through relational ontology – broadening the conceptual core of the discipline –; engaging in meta-disciplinary paradigms; and resorting to dialogic practices which include multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary collaboration³. Dialogic practices have been particularly important for medieval Iberian art historians over the past two decades. Especially relevant are collaboration with research disciplines that combine the use of scientific techniques with methods, perspectives and theories from the humanities. These include archaeometry, the history of material culture and technical art history.

One example may be used to illustrate this major shift. It is the interdisciplinary research and restoration project of the *Pórtico de la Gloria* (CIRUJANO GUTIÉRREZ et al. 2012; PRADO VILAR 2020). The project was undertaken between 2006 and 2018 and was followed up by a series of public outreach initiatives. These include an app which provides the public the opportunity to view the portal through a super-high-resolution digitalization gigapixel image. This illustrates the potential of virtual environments to erase physical boundaries, playing a decisive role in the dissemination of scientific knowledge, public outreach and the construction of the much-needed bridge

³ Multidisciplinary collaboration implies the joint work of experts from several disciplines who carry out research independently or sequentially. In any case, they stay within their own disciplinary boundaries and juxtapose their work with that of others. Interdisciplinary research, on the contrary, does not amount to the sum of various parts but to creating a common space to address a problem. There, methods and perspectives coming from several disciplines converge and scholars necessarily cross their discipline boundaries. A step further is taken by researchers engaged in transdisciplinary dialogic practices. They usually work together for a long period of time and together construct a conceptual framework in which the perspectives of their own disciplines are diluted, thus enabling a paradigm shift (MADANIPOUR 2013).

between science and society⁴.

Additionally, the need to cross disciplinary boundaries and the kind of projects carried out in recent decades have put works, objects and artifacts that twentieth-century historiography regarded only secondarily under the limelight, for instance jewelry (LABARTA 2017; PEREA 2001, 2009); textiles (BORREGO DÍAZ et al. 2017; CASTIÑEIRAS GONZÁLEZ 2012; FELICIANO 2014; RODRÍGUEZ PEINADO and CABRERA LAFUENTE 2013, 2020; RODRÍGUEZ PEINADO and GARCÍA GARCÍA 2019); altarpieces (ALBAR et al. 2017; KROUSTALLIS et al. 2016); glass (COUTINHO et al. 2016; GOVANTES-EDWARDS et al. 2016); illuminated manuscripts (MELO et al. 2014; MIRANDA and MELO 2011; MIRANDA and MIGUÉLEZ 2014); and, in the case of Portuguese historiography, mural paintings (AFONSO 2010) and tomb sculpture (CANDEIAS et al. 2019).

Furthermore, the formation of work teams in which specialists from such different areas of knowledge converge meant that not only the type of work to be analyzed but also the problems they raise are very different. In this sense, it can be argued that the historiography of art has taken a significant turn, since the felt need to cross disciplinary boundaries has far exceeded expectations. It has been possible to advance in questions of a specific nature concerning the production of knowledge about medieval art, but a new twist to the intrinsic value of the work of art can also be argued for. In this regard, the recent study of the so-called *Cancioneiro da Ajuda* (Ajuda Songbook) might be paradigmatic. An example of Galician-Portuguese medieval lyric poetry, the manuscript was rediscovered in the 19th century and, since then, has been subject of a vast number of studies by literary scholars. Few art historians paid attention to this manuscript, as its sixteen illuminations, depicting musical scenes, were left unfinished (STIRNEMANN 2016). In addition, they are not particularly outstanding from the stylistic and formal points of view, in contrast to other similar manuscripts that contain the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. More recently, an interdisciplinary research team carried out an in-depth study of this manuscript, crossbreeding the methodologies of art history, technical art history, literary studies, musicology, chemistry, and conservation and restoration (NABAIS et al. 2016). The first in-depth study of its musical iconography, particularly the instruments depicted, helped to contextualize the production of the manuscript. Even more importantly, the chromatic palette revealed in the laboratory proved to be unexpectedly rich and showed the use of materials such as lapislazuli, brazilwood and mosaic gold. In addi-

⁴ <https://porticodelagloria.fundacionbarrie.org/en/>.

tion, the techniques used to apply dyes to the manuscript were also found to be surprisingly complex.

These results lead scholars to start considering not only the sponsors' desire to produce luxurious manuscripts, but also the practical possibilities of such a production. This includes economic resources and the very availability of raw materials, some of which came from outside Europe. The richness of the techniques and materials used stands in sharp contrast, therefore, with a simple normative art history approach. Indeed, artworks that are unfinished are highly valuable for what they reveal about production processes. This opens the door to reconsider the very concept of artistic value in a medieval object, work or artifact. Concerning research conducted by teams formed not only by art historians but by scholars coming from many different disciplines, the artistic value of the object might not even be discussed, as researchers focus on making the object speak, as well as on finding the best ways to disseminate and share the knowledge so generated. But within Art History, art historians may find themselves faced with a dilemma: embrace the ideas advocated at the turn of the 20th century by Alöis Riegl on the *Kunstwollen* and the work of art as a historical document (RIEGL 1901, 1903), or, alternatively, advocate crossing the epistemic limits of the work of art and embrace other terms and categories such as visual culture or material culture, common to several research areas within the Humanities and Social Sciences, including Archaeology and Anthropology. The choice might depend on the kind of narrative each scholar aims to construct and the method that she/he intends to apply.

In any case, the benefits that medieval art historians reap for crossing disciplinary boundaries are so many and so varied that their future seems doomed to permanently dwell in this environment. This raises the issue of post-disciplinarity, which is indeed the kind of knowledge model towards which many sciences and disciplines have been moving recently; being problem- or issue-oriented rather than field-specific. Particularly, intellectuals within the Humanities have been advocating for this shift in order to better connect with other scientific domains⁵. The term itself seems to align with the post-era terminology (post-structuralism, post-colonialism, post-communism, post-modernism) but as any term including a prefix or a suffix, this is rather proble-

⁵ The post-disciplinary approach crystallises in clusters which are beyond the scope of departmental, faculty or university structures. The work is carried out through collaboration that is usually temporary, but allows scholars to come together and solve a given problem or issue. In addition, this working model simplifies and encourages research beyond academia, providing scholars the opportunity to develop joint projects with cultural institutions, social agents and stakeholders (BIAGIOLI 2009; DAVIDSON and GOLDBERG 2004; PERNECKY 2019).

matic. As argued by Dominique Kalifa, the “post-” nomenclature betrays the inability both to name our time and to imagine what will follow (KALIFA 2020). This presents us with a twofold challenge: to continue working on more appropriate terms that better define the new way of producing, organizing and sharing knowledge, and to continue engaging in dialogical practices and joint work.

Categories and Classification. Issues and Problems

Throughout the 20th century, medieval Iberian art historiography based its methodology on epistemic boundaries that either assumed the stylistic categories and classification imposed by European historiography (e.g. Romanesque art, Gothic art, Islamic Art) or applied a series of categories shaped in the 19th century to define and parcel out a significant set of artistic productions that were considered original of the Iberian context, as well as characteristic of Spanish and/or Portuguese, Catalan and Galician identities. Outstanding examples of this include the Visigothic, Suevic, Asturian, Mozarabic and Mudejar art categories.

At the turn of the 21st century, however, a historiographical paradigm shift began to take shape, following the efforts of medievalists who questioned the relevance and appropriateness of some of the stylistic categories linked to Iberian identities. Their emergence and later use as historiographical constructions at the service of legitimizing political and ideological narratives were unraveled⁶. They can, therefore, be now regarded as evidence of the methodological nationalism that characterized the history of art built during the nineteenth century⁷. This is the case, for instance, with Mozarabic and Mudejar, which have by now been completely deconstructed and desmitified (BANGO TORVISO 2007; RUIZ SOUZA 2009, 2016a, 2016b, 2018;

⁶ These studies can be framed in the more general context of the art-historical discipline and, specifically, of the history of medieval art which, in recent decades, has made very significant efforts to thoroughly analyze the origins of Art History as a discipline and, particularly, the aims and uses to which it has been directed. They highlight, for instance, art-history connections with intellectual debates on issues such as race, identity or the origin of nation-states (JARRASSÉ 2004; MICHAUD 2015). In turn, this process of deep self-reflection within Art-History is part of a more general phenomenon also affecting other humanistic disciplines from the close of the 20th century. Cultural historians, archaeologists etc. have made commendable efforts to dismantle the filters set before the medieval past during the 19th century in the context of the consolidation of nation-states (ANDERSON 1983; GEARY 2002; HOBSBAWM 1990; KOHL and FAWCETT 1996).

⁷ The notion of methodological nationalism (*nationalisme méthodologique*) has been coined and discussed by sociologist Blaise Wilfert-Portal (2010, 2012).

SALIDO LÓPEZ 2014)⁸. This herculean task of historiographical revision undertaken by art historians must be analyzed alongside those carried out in the fields of Archaeology and History. This is the case with Visigothic art, culture and kingdom, which was used to build the theory of “La primera España” (“Earliest Spain”), as a way to legitimize Francoism and its links with the Nazi regime, a link which began to be addressed by archaeologists the closing years of the 20th century (QUIRÓS CASTILLO and TEJERIZO-GARCÍA 2019).

Concerning the artistic categories imported from European historiography, namely Romanesque, Gothic and Islamic, the situation is rather different. Recent decades have witnessed a widespread intellectual debate in the field of European medieval art history regarding these stylistic categories and their evolution as historiographical constructions, as well as their boundaries, problems of classification, geography and timeline. However, all of them are still regularly used in both academic and non-academic contexts. The historiography of medieval art in the Iberian Peninsula mirrors this general context, since researchers who have problematized them and thus removed them from their work coexist with others who argue for their continued use.

As far as Romanesque is concerned, a broad transnational intellectual debate must be pointed out (BARRAL I ALTET 2012a; NAYROLLES 2005; RUDOLPH 2019; SEIDEL 2006; SAUERLÄNDER 2004). Here, the valuable contributions of several medievalists working on the Iberian Peninsula are to be highlighted. The category as a whole, as well as the use of particular terms and theories, such as “First Romanesque” and the presence of lombard masters in Catalonia in the early 11th century, have been discussed (BARRAL I ALTET 2004; DURAN-PORTA 2008, 2009a, 2009b). Despite this, the truth is that the Romanesque category continues hovering over Iberian Studies, and a large number of medievalists continue to organize their research and produce knowledge based on the Romanesque paradigm. Additionally, the category still predominates in teaching and training at all levels – from secondary school to PhD programs –, as well as in the organization and classification of museums collections, exhibitions, and other public outreach initiatives, such as summer courses, touristic itineraries or digital databases⁹. Furthermore, chrononymes such as *Los siglos del Románico* (the Romanes-

⁸ The role played by the Center for Mudejar Studies in Teruel for the studies of Mudejarism should also be highlighted. <https://www.ieturolenses.org/cem/index.php/>.

⁹ One of the largest exhibitions over the past two decades was *El Románico y el Mediterráneo. Cataluña, Toulouse y Pisa (1120-1180)*, on display at the Museu Nacional d'art de Catalunya from 28.02 to 18.05 2008. <https://www.museunacional.cat/es/el-romanico-y-el-mediterraneo-cataluna-toulouse-y-pisa-1120-1180-0>.

que centuries) have become common places among both scholars and popular culture¹⁰. The Romanesque is still considered as an “emblem” of national identities in the Iberian Peninsula (CANAVILHAS 2010).

The situation with the Gothic is similar. The history and appropriateness of, and the epistemological problems and challenges associated with the category have been largely addressed by medievalists from various historiographical traditions over the past two decades. Particularly important have been the studies that focus on the use of the Gothic style as a legitimating tool in the context of nation-state building processes during the 19th century, as well as the in-depth studies on the interventions carried out on heritage items that are today designated as Gothic but that, in many cases, rather reflects nineteenth-century additions and transformations (PASSINI 2012; TIMBERT 2018). Nevertheless, this artistic category, strongly rooted in European culture, has not yielded an inch of ground in many contexts. Chrononymes such as *The Age of Cathedrals* are widespread and exhibitions lure visitors in with slogans such as *The splendor of the gothic*. For their part, art historians have turned their eyes to subcategories coined a century ago. If at the turn of the 20th century, studies on *Spätgotik* betrayed an attempt to endow Germany with its own national “Gothic”, at the turn of the 21st century, the same sub-category has acquired a new vigor, its progressive and transforming nature, its role in facilitating the transition to modernity being stressed¹¹. Iberian historiography has indeed contributed to the revival of this sub-category through the creation of the *Red Temática de Investigación Cooperativa sobre el Arte Tardogótico (Siglos XV-XVI)*, a trans-national research network that aims to define the cartography of European Late Gothic. Furthermore, Gothic art is being invoked and instrumentalized as a means to attract tourists or capture funding. This is the case with the slogan *Santarém. A capital do Gótico* (Santarém. the Gothic capital) in Portugal and the Gothic Quarter in Barcelona.

Concerning Islamic Art, over the past two decades the category has been largely questioned by scholars and museums from all over the world (CAREY and GRAVES 2012; REY 2022). Iberian Studies also mirror this development. On the one hand, the canonical category of Islamic art, especially linked to processes such as the *Reconquista* or “Muslim rule”, still prevails in society at

¹⁰ A chrononym is a simple or complex expression used designates a time period that is perceived as, and associated with certain features that allegedly lent it internal consistency. For instance, the Golden Twenties or the Gilded Age. The term was coined by linguist Eva Büchi (1996: 271) and later developed by Danièle Van de Velde (2000).

¹¹ That was precisely the argument of the recent exhibition *Spätgotik. Aufbruch in die Neuzeit*, on display at the *Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* from 21.05 to 03.10 2021. See: <https://www.spaetgotik.berlin/>.

large – museum collections display, exhibitions, touristic narratives¹². On the other hand, a large number of intellectuals have made great efforts to unravel the reality behind the creation of categories such as *Reconquista*, its use by historiography in the 19th and 20th centuries, and its suitability to approach the study of Medieval Iberia (GARCÍA SANJUÁN 2013; RÍOS SALOMA 2011, 2013).

Scholars have also taken important steps to construct a historical narrative that aims to open a third way of analysis by not falling into mythical and idealized notions of Al-Andalus, or underestimating the “Muslim” as something alien and marginal (MORENO MANZANO 2010). Historiography tends to place under the same focus and, at the same time, processes of confrontation and dialogue, conflict and convivencia. Significant efforts have been made towards a better understanding of the cultural and artistic connections between the north and the south, the east and the west of the Iberian Peninsula, as well as towards analyzing the multicultural medieval Iberian society as a whole, by considering the existence of multi-layered contexts in artistic production. Ultimately, categories such as the “Arts of Islam” and the “Arts of Al-Andalus” are beginning to find a space in the study of medieval art in the Iberian Peninsula –both at universities and other cultural institutions such as the Mértola’s Archaeological Site– (CALVO CAPILLA 2001, 2014, 2017; GÓMEZ-MARTÍNEZ 2020), coexisting, in addition, with the use of other analytical categories such as Islamic material culture and Islamic visual culture (ANDERSON AND ROSSER-OWEN 2007).

The very remodeling of the rooms and collections of the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid, carried out in recent decades, reflects this change, since today it houses several rooms dedicated to the Medieval World: Al-Andalus. Even so, it must be considered that the museological narrative of medieval art in this institution still opposes Al-Andalus and the Christian Kingdoms, which are displayed on different floors. A desirable commitment to avoid narrative confrontation has not met in practice (GARCÍA-CONTRERAS RUIZ 2015)¹³.

Finally, although quantitatively less historiographically significant, owing to the reduced number of researchers implied as well as the smaller room allocated to them in museological narratives, the categories of Byzantine art,

¹² A major recent exhibition is *O gosto pela arte islâmica. 1869 — 1939* (the title in English was *The raise of islamic art*), on display at the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon from 12.07 to 07.10.2019. See: <https://gulbenkian.pt/agenda/o-gosto-pela-arte-islamica/>.

¹³ The exhibition *Las Artes del metal en Al-Andalus*, on display at the Museo Arqueológico in Madrid from 17.12.2019 to 26.04.2020, also reflects this shift. See: <http://www.man.es/man/exposicion/exposiciones-temporales/historico/2011-2020/2020/artes-metal.html>.

the “1200 style/art”, and Jewish art must nonetheless be taken into account. Both of these categories persist in medieval Iberian art historiography as they seem to be enjoying a revival in some academic circles (AFONSO and MIRANDA 2015; AFONSO and MOITA 2019; CASTIÑEIRAS GONZÁLEZ 2014)¹⁴.

While in the 21st century the historiography of medieval Iberian art historiography has moved beyond the epistemic limits set by certain stylistic categories which are specifically related to the Iberian identity(ies), it is still somehow dependent on stylistic and formal classifications originating in European historiography. During the 20th century, Islamic, Romanesque and Gothic turned into such rigid boundaries that, despite notable efforts by certain intellectuals who have exposed their weaknesses, they have proven to be extremely resilient epistemological hierarchies. However, two major shifts may be stressed. One concerns research that revolves around disciplinary dialogic practices, as noted above. Here, the study of medieval artistic heritage is being approached from an issue- and problem-driven perspective, for which boundaries created according to artistic styles and movements are no longer useful. For researchers who come from other disciplines, those traditional art-history categories do not contribute much when it comes to analyzing problems and finding solutions, so in this type of research, these limits are disappearing.

The other major shift is internal to the field of Iberian medieval art. Here, more and more researchers and cultural institutions are adopting a work methodology based on issues and problems, which naturally makes them remove those surviving boundaries. These are no longer needed to address some of the most debated topics over the past two decades: gender (JASPERSE 2020; MARTIN 2006, 2012; WALKER 2005); race (PATTON 2016); religion, beliefs and interfaith relationships (AFONSO and PINTO 2014; ROSSER-OWEN 2015); authorship and patronage (PAULINO MONTERO 2020; POZA YAGÜE and OLIVARES MARTÍNEZ 2017; TEIJEIRA PABLOS et al. 2014); the center-periphery/margin structures (ANTUNES et al. 2019); circulation of people, ideas, models, raw materials and goods (BILOTTA 2018, 2021; BROUQUET and GARCÍA MARSILLA 2015; CARVAJAL GONZÁLEZ 2022; MIGUÉLEZ CAVERO and VILLASEÑOR SEBASTIÁN 2018); cross-cultural exchange (AFONSO 2016; AFONSO and HORTA 2013; MARTIN 2020); and the use of techniques and materials and

¹⁴ In the case of Byzantine Art, research conducted over the past two decades has led to the gradual removal of Byzantine artistic space boundaries, which are being replaced by a more complex definition of the interaction, exchange and imbrications between different Mediterranean cultures (BACCI 2012).

processes of material degradation over time.

Recent historiography proves also that a growing number of medieval Iberian art historians are tending to replace the epistemic boundaries of traditional artistic categories for those based on periodization by years and centuries. A tendency to approach questions by taking into account “medieval” or the “Middle Ages” as a whole category is also observable. Additionally, scholars are pushing forth the connection(s)-oriented paradigm, as is also happening within other disciplines, such as Music Studies (FERREIRA 2016).

Time and Space

In June 1905, in his Inaugural Lecture at Cambridge University, Lord Acton encouraged students to study problems in preference to periods:

Learn as much by writing as by reading; be not content with the best book; seek sidelights from the others; have no favourites; keep men and things apart; guard against the prestige of great names; see that your judgments are your own, and do not shrink from disagreement; no trusting without testing; be more severe to ideas than to actions; do not overlook the strength of the bad cause or the weakness of the good; never be surprised by the crumbling of an idol or the disclosure of a skeleton; judge talent at its best and character at its worst; suspect power more than vice, and study problems in preference to periods; for instance: the derivation of Luther, the scientific influence of Bacon, the predecessors of Adam Smith, the medieval masters of Rousseau, the consistency of Burke, the identity of the first Whig (ACTON 1906: 24).

Similarly, during the 20th century, many intellectuals, like those linked to the Annales school, took similar positions subordinating historical periodization to problem-oriented perspectives. However, the truth is that the historical sciences have regarded this methodological perspective as the most accurate. This is the case of art history, which, taking as a reference the traditional timeline of the Middle Ages provided by historians, framed the study of medieval art within a set chronological bracket (5th-15th centuries). This limitation, especially in its most rigid takes, not only caused problems related to the position of beginnings and ends, but had a reductionist effect on the material under study, leaving out works, buildings and artifacts that did not fit into the “approved” chronological bracket. Additionally, it also promoted a truly reductive vision that excludes more often than it includes, discards

more often than it adds, and stresses disconnection rather than connections.

In the specific case of Iberian historiography, these chronological boundaries still present some inconsistencies. In Portugal, a key date is 1415, when Ceuta was conquered, which marks the beginning of Portuguese maritime expansion. In Spain, on the other hand, the key date is traditionally set to 1492, when the Catholic Monarchs entered the city of Granada, Christopher Columbus arrived to the American continent, and the Jews were expelled. This means that, while for Spanish historiography most of the fifteenth century is regarded as medieval, in Portugal the same century is frequently approached from an early-modern perspective. Moreover, during the reign of Manuel I, a relevant figure during this century, Portuguese art historiography traditionally identifies the emergence of a recognizable artistic style, which is, to boot, intrinsic to Portuguese culture. The so-called Manueline style, a term coined in the 19th century, was systematically promoted as a symbol of Portuguese national identity by the Estado Novo dictatorship during the 20th-century, and it remains strong today as an analytical category (AFONSO 2005, 2022). If these two divergent Iberian perspectives are compared with those prevailing in other regions, a pending task, the inconsistencies grow even wider. For Italian historiography, the 15th century represents the height of the Renaissance, whereas in the eastern Mediterranean, the key date is 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottomans.

Along with these inconsistencies, the rigid chronological limits set for the medieval period have also reduced the possibility of carrying out in-depth studies on specific aspects related to continuity, constancy, transformation, influence, survival, reception, diffusion, or temporary migration. *Longue durée*-inspired analyses, which stand aloof from the chronological limits forced by the “medieval” label, allow all these issues to be analyzed. It is a much more demanding approach, however, asking for vast masses of information, primary sources, works and objects, as well as various political, economic and social contexts, to be taken into account. However, in the long run they result in a deeper understanding of the medieval art object and, at the same time, also feed the bigger art history picture at a much more general level.

In this sense, the historiography of the last two decades has made a qualitative and quantitative leap in the production of knowledge, based on overcoming normative chronological limits. Following the pioneering studies of art historians such as Serafín Moralejo (1976, 1977), a significant group of researchers has contributed to overcome the cracking boundaries between the ancient and medieval worlds in the Iberian Peninsula, analyzing processes of continuity, transformation, mutation, and survival (CASTIÑEIRAS

GONZÁLEZ 2004, 2008; MORÁIS MORÁN 2011a, 2011b, 2013; PRA-DO VILAR 2009, 2011; TRINKS 2008, 2012; TRINKS and BREDEKAMP 2017; WALKER 2016). Scholars such as Xavier Barral even recognize that the study of Antiquity is the right path to understanding medieval art (BARRAL I ALTET 2012b: 71).

In the same way, it has become essential to analyze these same phenomena regarding the Middle Ages and the periods that followed. In fact, a very significant number of case studies carried out in recent years allow us to perceive that the alterations suffered by items of artistic heritage labeled as “medieval” have, in many cases, very little that actually belongs to that historical period (BOTO VARELA 2015; COCOLA-GANT 2013; CHAPAPRÍA and GARCÍA CUETOS 2007; GARCÍA BLAS 2013; GARCÍA CUETOS 2016; NETO 2001). An in-depth study of the filter that the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century set upon medieval artistic heritage has been undertaken, revealing a wide range of factors that led to far-reaching transformations: the use of medieval art as an element of political legitimacy; collecting and the creation of the first museums; the degradation of heritage itself; or the production of knowledge by local scholars and intellectuals without training in the field of art history.

In recent years, artistic historiography has also begun to challenge spatial boundaries. Geographical and political barriers in the Iberian peninsula, both in medieval times and today, are now analyzed not only as barriers, but also as a medium of exchange, connectivity and interaction. These include geographical borders such as the Pyrenees, the political boundaries between the medieval Iberian kingdoms, or the current border between the Spanish and Portuguese states. Furthermore, scholars have tried to gain a broader understanding of Iberian reality(ies), analyzing connections with the Mediterranean basin, Africa, and Asia (BLOOM 2020; DÍEZ JORGE and NAVARRO PALAZÓN 2015).

The recent significant progress in our knowledge about the use of raw materials for the production and use of colors in artistic practice can illustrate the extent to which spatial limits have been permeated by scholarship. For instance, high quality deep blue obtained from lapis-lazuli has been identified in 11th-century plasterwork in Toledo (GONZÁLEZ PASCUAL 2014); in 12th-century monumental sculpture in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (CORTÁZAR GARCÍA DE SALAZAR and SÁNCHEZ LEDESMA 2017); and in 12th- and 13th-century manuscripts illuminated in the monastery of Alcobaça (MIRANDA and MELO 2014). This means that a primary source coming from the deposits at Sar-e-Sang in Badakhshan (Afghanistan), was reaching the Iberian Peninsula through long-distance Asian trade routes (PARODI 2015;

NASH et al. 2010; WYART et al. 1981). It also means that this lapis-lazuli was circulating across the Iberian Peninsula in aloofness of political, cultural and religious boundaries. Furthermore, the same raw material has been found in other European contexts. In France, for instance, the study of the 12th-century polychromy in Senlis Cathedral has revealed that it was used there too (STEYAERT and DEMAILLY 2000). Future research may bring to light more data that will allow us to know what was the role played by the Iberia in the routes through which this material from Asia, as well as other materials from Africa, including ivory and gold, reached the ultra-Pyrenean territories¹⁵.

Nearer future major challenges: The Middle Ages in the Media Age

Over the last twenty years, the phenomenon of globalization has brought about a significant change in the mobility patterns of academics, who have travelled more easily from one place to another to carry out their research, field work, and participate in scientific conferences and forums. This increased mobility also applies to academic systems, which have become more permeable and have progressively opened up to the incorporation and attraction of talented researchers from abroad. As Xavier Barral has argued, it is extremely difficult to find a common denominator when it comes to establishing where the work of emigrant art historians who have continued their work in a country far from their land of birth is rooted. Their vision is largely dependent on the convictions and their personal circumstances (BARRAL I ALTET 2012b: 58). However, it is true that scholars who develop their careers in another country naturally acquire a perspective that, on a personal level, makes them more critical and aware of the reality of their countries of origin and, at a professional and scientific level, leads them to approach the artistic object with different eyes. Concerning the historiography of the medieval Iberian Peninsula, this also applies to researchers working on Medieval Iberia although not being born in either Spain or Portugal. They have provided a fresh look free from historiographical heritage, approaching specific problems or objects with the advantage that a certain distance grants. The greatest challenge for the near future is for the contributions of national and

¹⁵ The routes connecting African territories with the Mediterranean basin were put under the spotlight by the exhibition *Caravans of Gold. Fragments in Time. Art, Culture, and Exchange across medieval Saharan Africa*, which was on display at the *Block Museum of Art* (Northwestern University, Chicago) from 26.01 to 21.07 2019. <https://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/exhibitions/2019/caravans-of-gold-fragments-in-time-art-culture-and-exchange-across-medieval-saharan-africa.html>.

foreign researchers to be received in the same way, debated with respect and assumed by historiography in the same way.

Along with physical mobility, technology has played an especially crucial role in the way scholars on medieval Iberia have been working in the past twenty years. It has provided scholars with the opportunity to access primary and secondary sources at a click gesture. It has also offered new ways to organize material, data and information more effectively and share vast masses of information in a virtual world that knows of no barriers of time and space. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown to what extent technology has facilitated production, organization and dissemination of knowledge to continue taking place despite the conditions imposed by the sanitary crisis. This notwithstanding, the future will present scholars with a major challenge: to avoid all the knowledge produced, organized and shared as a result of the creation and use of e-resources becoming lost or forgotten knowledge. Strategies and solutions to make knowledge discoverable and usable by researchers and society at large will thus be on our priority tasks list.

Indeed, one of the long-range goals for the coming years is closely linked to the dissemination of the knowledge produced but also of the new ways of working. The gap between scientific research and higher education needs to be bridged. Art history study plans both in Portugal and Spain need to reflect the paradigm shift that has taken place in the last two decades by offering cross-disciplinary plans, updated courses and seminars. Additionally, the academic world still needs to become more open to society and to build bridges which allow the dissemination of scientific knowledge quickly and efficiently.

Finally, as far as the production of knowledge is concerned, the significant advantages brought about by the dilution of epistemic boundaries in Iberian historiography should be followed up. Here, the need to reflect on the terminology used to define, classify and interpret medieval art in the Iberian Peninsula remains as a major challenge for the nearer future. After all, as Hans Belting pointed out, “terminology provides a key to understanding the underlying intentions” (BELTING 2013).

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