

# CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval  
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean  
*Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova*



UNIVERSITÉ DE LAUSANNE  
• ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF  
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## CONVIVIUM VIII/2/2021

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval  
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean

*Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova*

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# The “Middle Ages” Interconnectedness

Adrien Palladino & Elisabetta Scirocco

This issue of *Convivium* concludes a busy year in the life of the journal and for the Center for Early Medieval Studies in Brno, of which *Convivium* is the beating heart. In the slow recovery and ongoing analyses of the (post-?)Covid world, this moment is still early to assess the pandemic’s consequences and the course of things to come. Despite 2021’s disruptions in scholarly productivity on a global scale, three *Supplementa* appeared alongside *Convivium*’s two regular issues: the monographic one dedicated to the essential contribution to art history of one of journal’s founders and main mentors, Herbert L. Kessler; and the present one, which closes the eighth year since *Convivium*’s launch.

As usual, the contributions in this volume reflect a broad spectrum of disciplinary approaches, interests, and geo-cultural foci that show once again the prism through which one can look at the visual and intellectual cultures of the Middle Ages. The very concept of the Middle Ages – in itself, Eurocentric or, rather, “Mediterranean-centric” – is undergoing revision. But, as various endeavors have recently shown, the term, in its plural acceptance, remains useful for contrasting and mapping phenomena across geographies and for reflecting on networks, transfers, and dialogues in the *longue durée*.

The articles in this issue fall into sections, and, appropriately, one opens and closes with examples of circulation and crosspollinations between diverse visual and cultural traditions: in one case, the political and religious appropriation of European motifs in fifteenth-century Ethiopia; in the other, the use made by Catholic missionaries of replicas of Roman Marian images and their actual reception in sixteenth-century China. In both instances, the perspective adopted shows how profoundly dynamic are the actual mechanisms of reception and perception.

Dynamic is also the dialogue initiated elsewhere in this issue. It is not the first time that *Convivium* is the platform for the publication of (re)discovered works and monuments – on these pages, wall paintings surviving in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, one of the main centers of Syriac Christianity. The aesthetic efficacy and reception by beholders of wall mosaics in the Eastern Mediterranean are explored in Byzantine, Sasanian, and early Islamic contexts, thanks to the accounts in textual sources. Texts also play a crucial role also in analyzing Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis’s theory of color. His writings, put in dialectical relation to previous writings and to his commissions, offer new insights into the role of light and color – aspects almost always lost and difficult to reconstruct owing to erosion and restoration – in medieval aesthetics and theology. With a similar interdisciplinary approach, new perspectives on well-known monuments and their liturgical space and furnishings such as the Baptistery of Albenga or Venice’s San Marco appear alongside object-focused research, in this case, royal thrones and their agency across western Europe.

The section *chronicle & debates* reflects two interests promoted by *Convivium* and the Center for Early Medieval Studies that are currently being developed within international projects: on the one hand, a multi-authored text presents the preliminary questions raised about the “Romanesque” abbey of Sainte-Foy in Conques. The building and treasure are currently being reconsidered by an international team of scholars from France, the United States, Italy, Germany, and the Czech Republic. On the other hand, the historiography of the visual cultures of Western Asia is another line of research for *Convivium*, here represented through a reflection on young Kurt Weitzmann’s 1933 venture into Armenian book illumination.

Finally, the section of reviews is especially rich in this issue, in an attempt to present and reflect on latest stimuli and updates from the field of medieval visual and intellectual cultures. This perhaps highlights above all the increase of interactions between disciplines and geo-temporal spaces, within and *beyond* Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean. How much this is a projection of the contemporary desire for a borderless, interconnected world remains to be assessed – in the coming years, perhaps, with redoubled fervor.