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Encounters, Interactions, and Connectivities from an Art Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Transcultural encounters, interactions, and connectivities have been among the core interests of the discipline of art history in recent years. Focusing on the premodern period, this image series addresses these issues through a number of case studies ranging from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean world, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Pacific. By no means exhaustive, the following case studies are analyzed paying equal attention to diverse materials, media, and their intersections from architecture and objects of material culture to maps and paintings. Approached from an empirico-historical perspective and addressing some methodological problems, this image series thus aims to introduce readers to and sharpen our understanding of the current reflections within the field of research.

Keywords: transcultural art history, premodern artistic dynamics, short- and long-distance connectivities, artistic creations and negotiations of space, intersections between visual and material culture



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Encounters, Interactions, and Connectivities from an Art Historical Perspective

»The world is an inn, and you are as it were a caravan: how many days does the caravan stop at the inn? This is a caravanserai, a place of earnings: whatever you gain here, consign it there. Send ahead the baggage train, for you will soon resume the journey ...«. ¹ When Yusuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib advised his prince in the 11th century with these words, ² he drew on a well-known type of building for his characterization of the world and human life. In the premodern period, thousands of caravanserais were scattered across Asia Minor, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and Central Asia. They functioned as roadside inns, lodgings, supply stations, restaurants, and sometimes even as small marketplaces for merchants, pilgrims, and other travelers traversing these routes, each caravanserai being a microcosm of encounters, interactions and connectivities between those engaged in long-distance travel.

The Selim or Orbelyan's caravanserai in Armenia, located on the mountain pass along the old road from Gegharkunik leading south to Siunik and Persia from one side and to Lake Sevan, Northern Armenia and Georgia on the other, shows how levels of transcultural connectivity could be expressed in the architectural complexes themselves (Fig. 1). ³ Commissioned by Prince Chesar Orbelyan in 1332, the caravanserai was built closely to an overshadowing hill within the mountain slopes. Safely hidden in the landscape, it is only visible when approached from very nearby. Only then does an elaborate entrance gate, with high reliefs of a bull and a sphinx as well as the *muqarnas* (stalactite) decoration and vaultings, become apparent. *Muqarnas* are an architectural device commonly associated with the Islamic world, which, however, was also appropriated in a number of medieval churches in the western- and easternmost parts of the Mediterranean including Armenia, Georgia, and Eastern Turkey. ⁴ Furthermore, dedicatory inscriptions in both Armenian

and Persian appear in the caravanserai's vestibule, another indicator of the medieval Caucasus, and this specific site, as transcultural contact zones. ⁵

In the discipline of art history, scholars are now more and more trying to consider issues of premodern mobility and transcultural interactions and hence to overcome traditional sub-categorical divides between Islamic, Byzantine, Western, Asian, African, or Latin American art history, to mention but a few. These approaches led both to a reassessment of the field and its historiography as well as to a reassessment of the visual and material culture of the premodern period itself. Works of art and architecture are newly studied on micro-, meso-, and macro-levels: be it architectural ornamentation, certain motifs, or artistic techniques; be it the role of traveling artists, portable artifacts and materials, as well as transmedial and transmaterial dynamics; be it single buildings or entire cities and regions as spaces of encounters. This image series provides but a small glimpse into the wide spectrum of artistic encounters, interactions, and transcultural connectivities in the premodern period, addressing some methodological problems from an art historical point of view.

In the premodern period, transcultural dynamics could be at play in a variety of ways: they could concern the role of patrons, political, mercantile, and social interrelations; the bonding to religious practices; and the role, collaboration, and competition of artists. The high appreciation of excellent craftsmanship in a transcultural context of people of various religions living together becomes apparent, for example, in Wilbrand of Oldenburg's description of the palace of Jean d'Belin in Beirut in 1211–1212, which had been created jointly by Eastern Christian, Muslim, and Byzantine craftsmen. Wilbrand, praising the marble pavement, walls, and vaults, the interior decoration and paintings of this palace, exclaimed: »In all these things

1 ḤĀJIB (ed. 1983) 84; FRANKLIN (2014) 20.

2 Common Era dating is used throughout this text.

3 FRANKLIN (2014) 62 f. and 91 f.

4 FRANKLIN (2014) 65; BLESSING (2016).

5 EASTMOND (2014). For Arabic inscriptions on Seljuk caravanserais, see REDFORD (2016).

Syrians, Saracens and Greeks glory in their mastery of their arts through a delightful competition of workmanship.⁶

A metal canteen sheds further light on such processes of transfer and artistic interactions. Created in Syria or Egypt between 1230 and 1250, the vessel not only displays vegetal motifs, ornamentation, and a style typical of Ayyubid metalwork but also Mary and the Christ Child enthroned in the center, surrounded by the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, and the Entry into Jerusalem – scenes common in Christian iconography (Fig. 2).⁷ Scholars have argued that these motifs might indicate a Christian patronage of the object, but they also emphasized that these scenes (the infancy and life of Jesus, who is also a prophet in the Islamic world) appear to have been carefully chosen as ones that would also have been acceptable for a Muslim patron.⁸ Rather than being identifiable as an object from the »Islamic« or the »Christian« world, the canteen questions these very categories and points to a more multi-layered context of a shared visual and material culture of Muslims and Christians in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 13th century, when also the Crusaders were present and active in this region.⁹

Similar problematics are also at play in medieval Iberia, where the transcultural setting of the Peninsula during the Middle Ages has been at the kernel of debates around the term »convivencia«.¹⁰ Interestingly enough, buildings such as the synagogue of El Tránsito (Fig. 3) and the contribution of the Jewish minority to the monumental landscape have been mostly overlooked.¹¹ The synagogue of El Tránsito, built around 1360 in Toledo,¹² can help us to nuance reductionist scholarly practices in which »Islamic« and »Christian« have been perceived as stable and closed cultural entities, associated with specific aesthetic categories.¹³ The Toledan synagogue, built by Samuel ha-Levi, treasurer of the Castilian King Pedro I, needs to be

contextualized both in the local artistic milieu of the city in Toledo at the end of the 14th century and in the courtly architectural development of the Kingdom of Castile, where artistic exchanges crossed back and forth over the border with the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada.¹⁴

The formal similarities between the Tránsito synagogue, the palaces commissioned by the king, especially Tordesillas and the Alcázar of Seville, and the artistic enterprises of the Nasrid court are evident. Beyond the formalistic approach that has focused on the evolution of the stucco decoration in Castilian architecture, attributing connections with al-Andalus to a vague idea of »influence« or »admiration«, one has to take into consideration the consistent aesthetic choices of the kings of Castile and their courtiers over the 14th century, including, of course, those of Samuel ha-Levi. Moreover, the presence of multilingual epigraphy (Hebrew and Arabic) in this palatial synagogue – including religious statements, claims of fidelity to the Castilian king, and praise for the patron as well as the presence of the coat of arms with the Castilian badges over the main wall – are highly significant. These artistic choices clearly went beyond the identification of specific aesthetics with individual religious identities and pointed towards a conscious selection of forms and contents by ha-Levi, who incorporated his private foundation into the royal and courtly architecture that was being developed in the artistic landscape of medieval Castile.

In the premodern period, transcultural dynamics were not least enhanced by the mobility and migration of artists and by the transfer of knowledge (of certain artistic techniques, the dissemination of patterns and visual formulae) from distant locations. Sometimes these migrations happened by force. When the Spanish envoy Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo visited Samarkand in 1405, he noted how the capital of the Timurid Empire was sur-

6 The English translation is quoted from PRINGLE (2012) 65 f. See also IMMERZEEL et al. (2011) 225; HUNT (2015).

7 BAER (1989); HOFFMAN (2004).

8 HOFFMAN (2004) 132.

9 HUNT (1998–2000); FOLDA (2008), IMMERZEEL (2009); IMMERZEEL et al. (2011).

10 The debate, inaugurated by the publications of Castro and Sánchez Al-

bornoz, is not closed, as several historiographical analyses and critical studies of the term show (see GLICK [1992], SOIFER [2009] and MANZANO [2013] for an overview of the criticism). In the context of medieval Iberian art, see ROBINSON/ROUHI (2005), DODDS/MENOCAL/BALBALE (2008).

11 The main exceptions would be DODDS (1992) and RUIZ SOUZA

(2002). Interestingly enough, both are contributions in exhibition catalogues.

12 RUIZ SOUZA/RALLO (1999).

13 DODDS (2005); ROBINSON/ROUHI (2005).

14 RUIZ SOUZA (2002).

rounded by suburbs named after defeated cities. Bagdad, Damascus, Cairo, Shiraz, and Sultaniyya were not only among the names of these suburbs, they were also the origins of the artists and craftsmen whom Timur and his army had resettled to Samarkand. As Clavijo wrote, »trade has always been fostered by Timur with the view of making his capital the noblest of cities: and during all his conquests wheresoever he came he carried off the best men of the population to people Samarkand, bringing thither together the master-craftsmen of all nations«. ¹⁵

Some artists, architects, and craftsmen, however, migrated also voluntarily, particularly when they hoped for better working conditions or when new opportunities emerged. A prominent example is Abū Ishāq al-Sāḥilī, a poet and expert of law from al-Andalus, who met the ruler of the kingdom of Mali, Mansa Musa, in 1324 during his pilgrimage to Mecca. ¹⁶ Invited to follow Mansa Musa to West Africa, al-Sāḥilī soon made a career there as the king's architect and built, among other structures, the Great Mosque of Timbuktu. Migrating artists were often highly cherished in other locations because their skills could differ from the ones practiced locally. Regarding a domed audience chamber, which al-Sāḥilī erected for the king and which was described by Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, scholars speculated whether its layout and design could have been inspired by Andalusian architecture. ¹⁷ Sometimes, however, newly arrived artists also adapted to local traditions, and the Great Mosque of Timbuktu was in fact built in local style and with local materials (sun-baked earth bricks, sand, earth-based mortar, and mud (the latter of which was also ascribed a sacred meaning)). ¹⁸

The itinerary of al-Sāḥilī, born in Granada, but then traveling from the Iberian to the Arab Peninsula before moving to Mali, is reflected in works such as the Catalan Atlas, attributed to Cresques Abraham, a Jewish book illuminator, and composed on the island of Majorca in 1375 (Fig. 4). The

map – comprising the Mediterranean as much as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Far East – gives us an idea of the premodern conception of the world characterized by encounters, interactions, and long-distance connectivity. ¹⁹ Even Mansa Musa, who was part of the Mediterranean imaginary as a powerful and wealthy ruler, and a source of gold, appears on the map (Fig. 5). In the Catalan Atlas, Mansa Musa is holding a gold nugget up in the air, thus accentuating the crucial necessity of access to raw materials and the trans-Saharan trade routes leading from Inner Africa to the Mediterranean coast, where Genoese and other merchants acquired and shipped off the precious metal. ²⁰

Yet as vital as the mobility of people was in the premodern period (caravan trails are shown on the Catalan Atlas traversing the terrain and ships and nautical devices appear in the oceans), so too was the mobility of artifacts. Formerly categorized and marginalized as »minor« or »applied arts« within the discipline of art history or classified as »material culture«, portable objects have received a great deal more attention from art historians in recent years, not least by taking up a transcultural perspective. As diplomatic gifts, booty, or prized commodities, artifacts connected diverse regions, and their appropriations, adaptations, alterations, representations, and evocations in other media and materials are increasingly being taken into account. ²¹ Even the changing semantics intertwined with such artifacts are receiving more attention – not least from various legal perspectives – when incorporated into new environments.

A key group among these mobile goods in the premodern period were ceramics. They migrated both in their function as containers for other commodities (Greek and Roman amphorae, for example, served as storage and transportation jars for foodstuffs such as wine and olive oil), and as appreciated objects themselves. Given their imperishability, ceramics are crucial finds in archaeological contexts that testify to transcultural exchange.

15 CLAVIJO (ed. 1928) 287 f.

16 HUNWICK (1990).

17 HUNWICK (1990) 62.

18 APOTSOS (2011).

19 For the cultural background of the Catalan Atlas and further 14th-century portolan charts, see BRENTJES (2015).

20 FAUELLE-AYMAR (2013) 248. On Trans-Saharan trade routes, see also GUÉRIN (2013).

21 SHALEM (1996); SAURMA-JELTSCH/EISENBEISS (2010); SCHMIDT ARCANDELI/WOLF (2010); FINDLEN (2013); GERRITSEN/RIELLO (2016).

What is more, the high appreciation of certain types of ceramic objects and techniques also led to conscious imitations, ceramics thus being significant objects of study for premodern transcultural connectivity.

In the Middle Ages, lusterware from Málaga was particularly famous and exported throughout the Mediterranean basin.²² The lusterware technique, which achieved a metallic sheen, was highly sophisticated and very complex, and its elevated production in Málaga (but also Murcia and Almería) responded to patterns of consumption, the circulation of objects, and commodification that transcended the political and religious divisions of the Mediterranean. Appreciation for these vessels can be observed in material remains as well as in medieval inventories in places such as Majorca, one of the main medieval crossroads.²³ However, the mention of »Malaga ceramic« in those documents can be misleading, since imitation for export was a common practice. That is the case regarding the ceramic plate found in Majorca during an archaeological excavation of a pit in the area of Santa Catalina, and which is currently exhibited at the Museu de Mallorca (Fig. 6).²⁴ The context of its production has been linked to workshops in Valencia, specifically from Paterna, and the commission of ceramics from there to Majorca is sufficiently attested to by both written and archaeological sources. However, the plate on display at the Museu de Mallorca was designed to imitate the lusterware production of Málaga, thus transcending the local and short-distance circulation of objects; it needs to be seen within a context of general appreciation for specific aesthetics and techniques in an interconnected sea.

Textiles – pliable, lightweight, often of high quality materials and very valuable – were another key group of highly mobile artifacts in the premodern world. The extensive use of Islamic textiles with epigraphic decoration in religious and funerary contexts in the Iberian courts, for example, opens up possibilities to analyze different modalities of connection, exchange, and reception.²⁵ In the Northern monastery of San Zoilo, in Carrión

de los Condes, two large pieces of textile, one red and one blue silk weaving (Fig. 7), were recently found.²⁶ These, and other examples, need to be reconsidered within the context of the importance of textile trade in sociocultural life, both in the Iberian Peninsula and its Mediterranean connections. While the textiles were found with the relics of the main saints of the monastery, their size (204 × 268 cm for the blue silk) indicates that they might have been used as wall coverings or altar frontals. Imported in the 11th century, probably from al-Andalus, their iconographic motifs and their kufic inscriptions were by no means problematic for their reception and reuse, as also happened in other monasteries and churches throughout the Iberian Peninsula and beyond.²⁷ The sophisticated technique and aesthetics of these silks made them suitable for such sacred uses and solemn rituals, but they were also able to generate new meanings in local contexts.²⁸ In the case of Carrión, the blue silk was associated, by the end of the Middle Ages, with the countess, who was the founder of the monastery and played a central role in her local saintly cult. Far from being merely anecdotal, the newly acquired associations of the textile show how these sumptuous pieces could convey ideas of sacredness and need to be understood in their own specific historical and geographical contexts, as Maria Judith Feliciano has pointed out.²⁹

For art historians, portable artifacts are crucial objects of study also when it comes to their processes of production. Scholars argued, for example, that the inlay technique might have flourished in the Islamic world to such an extent because of the religious disapproval of gold and silver vessels, according to Muslim *hadith* (collected traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad).³⁰ Metal artifacts such as the Ayyubid canteen or Mamluk metal trays (Fig. 8) are made of brass or bronze, which have silver and gold inlays applied to their surfaces to highlight the designs. This could thus have been a way to avoid making a golden vessel while, at the same time, creating sophisticated metal objects that could even mimic the appearance of gold.

22 BERTI/TONGIORIGI (1981); BROUQUET (2015).

23 ROSELLÓ BORDOY (1986); BAUER/PALINO (in press).

24 ROSELLÓ BORDOY (1986).

25 FELICIANO (2014); FELICIANO (2005).

26 SENRA (2014).

27 YARZA et al. (2005); similar problematics in ROSSER-OWEN (2015).

28 FELICIANO (2014) 58–59.

29 FELICIANO (2014).

30 WARD (1993) 14.

No less important, however, was the aesthetic appreciation of certain techniques such as metal inlay, not least when people came across objects that were new to them as well as the artistic responses to their techniques, materiality, and visual effects. Having visited the Holy Land in 1384 and 1385, the Italian pilgrim and traveler Simone Sigoli described the markets of Damascus: »Here also is made a great deal of brass basins and pitchers and really they appear of gold, and then on the said basins and pitchers are made figures and foliage and other fine work in silver, so that it is a very beautiful thing to see«. Impressed by the beauty and quality of the merchandise, he exclaimed at another point: »Verily if you had money in the bone of your leg, without fail you would break it off to buy these things.«³¹

Mamluk metal artifacts were also imported into the Apennine Peninsula,³² where they not only spurred imitations but also inspired painters to such an extent that they were even evoked as haloes of the Madonna and other saints. In the case of Masaccio's San Giovenale Triptych, both the Arabicizing inscriptions and the lotus blossom, a chinoiserie motif very common in Mamluk art, are modelled after metalwork from Syria and Egypt (Fig. 9).³³ Masaccio's San Giovenale Triptych is an example of artistic creativity regarding the reception of imported artifacts; in this case, the use of metal plates and trays as the most precious of luxury objects, worthy of serving as models even for the haloes of Christian saints. The detail of the nimbus of the Madonna in this Italian altarpiece inspired by a Mamluk metal plate shows the problematics of traditional art historical hierarchies of painting and metalwork as »high« versus »minor« or »applied arts« and the problematics of the separated categories of »Italian«/»Western« and »Islamic« art. It leads to a more nuanced understanding of transcultural and transmedial interactions in the premodern period, to a reconsideration of the medium of the gold ground in late medieval and early Renaissance Italian panel painting, and it points, just as the presence of Arabic-inscribed silk weavings in Carrión de los Condes or the stucco decoration in the synagogue

of el Tránsito, to Arabic and Arabicizing inscriptions transgressing diverse geographical and religious realms. But other reactions are also known. When the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos was presented sweets on a Mamluk plate as an imported luxury item in 1279 by the patriarch in Constantinople, the patriarch's enemies pointed out to the emperor that the plate was »not only inappropriate for blessing, but inflicted the extreme measure of defilement« because of the Arabic inscription glorifying Muhammad's name.³⁴ As a result, the plate was no longer allowed to be used at the Byzantine court.

When approaching encounters, interactions, and connectivities from an art historical perspective, interdisciplinary dialogues are crucial. That the means of importation and the transcultural mobility of artifacts can potentially present challenges regarding their everyday uses in new contexts becomes evident, for example, in a set of legal questions about *šimī* (i.e. »Chinese«) vessels that the Jewish community in Aden posed to a rabbi in Fustat (Old Cairo) in the mid-1130s. Drawing on interpretations by Shlomo D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman of this letter from the Cairo Geniza, Elizabeth Lambourn and Phillip Ackerman-Lieberman could show that the objects in question were a new type of Chinese ceramic ware, *qingbai*, which were characterized by a particularly translucent surface and thus confounded and destabilized the material taxonomies of Jewish law (Fig. 10).³⁵ In order to derive clear rules for the proper use and purification of these Chinese vessels in their households, the Adeni Jews preferred to consult a rabbi in Fustat, sending him, together with the letter, a number of *qingbai* objects for inspection and comparing them with already legislated »neighboring« substances, such as earthenware and glass.

Just as crucial, however, are issues of terminology: not only a reconsideration of the role of scripts and languages in the premodern period, but also a reconsideration, historiographical discussion, and reflection of the languages of art history itself. Particularly transcultural interactions emphasize the need to constantly reassess the dis-

31 The English translation is quoted from AULD (2006) 215. See also RITZERFELD (2011).

32 MACK (2002) 139–147; SPALLANZANI (2010).

33 LEEMHUIS (2000); SCHULZ (2016).

34 SHUKUROV (2015) 176; NELSON (2005) 81.

35 LAMBOURN/ACKERMAN-LIEBERMAN (2016).

cipline's own vocabulary – not least when in contact with other disciplines. Terms such as »hybridity« or »syncretism«, with their biological and religious implications, are highly problematic – presupposing »purity« – and are challenged by the evidence of transcultural encounters exhibited in premodern artifacts, art, and architecture.³⁶

In the scholarly literature focusing on the Iberian strive for worldwide expansion at the end of the 15th century, this terminology has been consistently used as an analytical tool to study different objects produced after the brutal encounter among Europeans and the indigenous population from the Americas. But mobility and interactions profoundly altered the contexts of production, with circulation of new material and the incorporation of new meanings in much more complex and pluridirectional ways than such terminology implies. Moreover, these changes and incorporations of meaning did not occur without tension, conflict, or resistance, and they developed in a context of highly asymmetrical power relations.

The first experiences of transformation of the pre-Hispanic cultures took place very quickly, and Alessandra Russo has shown how the production of objects and artifacts was immediately altered with specific commissions of »pre-Hispanic« objects by the new conquerors in order to be sent to the Peninsula as proof of the new territories.³⁷ The Taino *zemí*, today at the Pignorini museum in Rome (Fig. 11), clearly shows the worldly dimension of these objects. Although it is today classified as a »zemí« (idol) of the Taino culture, it incorporates not only local materials (cotton, shells, gold, etc.) but also mirrors, Venetian glass, and even African rhinoceros horn in a new shape that highly differs from other »zemís« from the island,³⁸ probably due to a later »reinterpretation« of the object in European hands.³⁹ The compelling argument that probably even the word »zemí« came from an Arabic word meaning »sky«, or at least could resonate in the previous linguistic experiences of the Spaniards,⁴⁰ shows us how mixed and complex, both in geographical and temporal aspects, these first experiences were.

In the premodern period, multi-layered objects and materials migrated across lands and oceans,

and in the context of the Iberian expansion such exchanges certainly helped to create a sense of territory. But the very concept of territory was also created and transformed through the production of visual material. That is the case, for example, regarding maps at the beginning of the 16th century in the context of the so-called Spanish imperial cartography. In 1529, Diego Ribeiro, a Portuguese cartographer working for the Spanish crown, made a map in the context of the Spanish claim over the Moluccas islands in the Pacific (Fig. 12). This map can be understood as a highly sophisticated effort to make legal and scientific arguments, combining new geographical data with the scientific tradition, to ground diplomatic claims. But in order to do so, the map could not rely exclusively on geographical knowledge and had to display different visual strategies.

As Ricardo Padrón has shown, Ribeiro's map clearly tried to dissociate the Asian part claimed by the Castilians from its own continent and to associate it with the Americas, visually creating a new bounded and coherent territory.⁴¹ In doing so, several visual strategies were followed. On the one hand, the world was divided by the Tordesillas antimeridian, separating the mass of land into two opposed territories marked with standards of Castile and Portugal at the foremost right and left borders, and thus visually reconfiguring such core concepts as what is east and what is west. On the other, the Pacific, which maritime explorations had proven to be wider and emptier than expected, was not only depicted narrower but also filled with elements associated with oceanic navigation and cartouches with geographic information, stressing the proximity and physical connection between the two shores.

It was not just people and objects that (were) moved in and across old and new territories, including the American continent, but also knowledge, techniques, and materials. They all circulated and interacted with one another to create a new and complex reality. The so-called *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano* is an herbal medicine treatise, written in 1552 in the School of the Saint Cross of Tlatelolco, which was founded for the education of the indigenous people (Fig. 13).⁴² For the creation of the

36 DEAN/LEIBSOHN (2003); WOLF (2009); FLOOD (2009) 5.
37 RUSSO (2001).

38 TAYLOR/BISCIONE/ROE (1997).
39 OSTAPKOWICZ et al. (2017).
40 RUSSO (2013).

41 PADRÓN (2009); PADRÓN (2016).
42 EMART (1964); SANTA CRUZ/BADIANO (1992).

book, mixed materials were used, for instance, paper, cotton, and ink from Europe and organic pigment that can be related to pre-Hispanic contexts.⁴³ Moreover, pictorial traditions mingled. While the general concept of the book and the majority of images illustrating the text followed the well-known conventions of European herbals, some images followed pictographic representations linked to the visual pre-Hispanic tradition of the illuminator. The knowledge collected in the book also presented a multilayered and more complex reality than one could imagine at first sight. While traditionally it has been considered as a compendium of indigenous medicine, composed first in Náhuatl and then translated into Latin under the supervision of the Franciscan friars, different studies identified the incorporation of a minority, but highly significant part of European *materia medica*, which had already integrated much Islamic medical tradition.⁴⁴ The incorporation of the local and the foreign, the different materials, technological knowledge and practices, the active participation of indigenous people not only in the compilation but also in the writing process (in-

cluding the Náhuatl elaboration and the Latin translation), as well as the illuminations make this codex a rich example of the complex world of encounters, interactions, and connectivities that proliferated across the seas and the oceans in the premodern world.

Art history has but begun to confront the challenges that premodern transcultural interactions are posing to the field. Given the new emphasis on works of visual and material culture in the humanities and social sciences, art historical analyses of these dynamics can be fruitful in an interdisciplinary context. Above all, the case studies discussed in this series of images highlight the fact that works of art and architecture were much more than illustrations or mere reflections of political or social processes. Rather, they were at the core of the creation, articulation, and negotiation of societies, memories, and identities that were always inherently complex, multi-layered, imbued with a manifold of significations, and in dynamic tension. ■

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The numbers in brackets refer to the pages with the larger image.



Fig. 1. Selim or Orbelyan's caravanserai, entrance gate, 1332, Armenia, Photo and rights: Vera-Simone Schulz (69)



Fig. 2. Canteen, brass, silver inlay, Syria or Northern Iraq, Ayyubid period, mid-13th century, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C., Photo rights: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C. (90)



Fig. 3. Main wall of the Synagogue of El Tránsito, c. 1360, Toledo, Photo and rights: Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza (161)



Fig. 4. Abraham and Jehuda Cresques, »Catalan Atlas«, ca. 1375, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Photo rights: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (220–221)



Fig. 5. Detail of Fig. 4 (221)



Fig. 6. »Escudella« (plate) from Paterna, Valencia, c. 1350. Found in the pit nº 7 of Santa Catalina, Museo de Mallorca, Palma de Mallorca, Photo rights: Museo de Mallorca (233)



Fig. 7. Silk textile (detail) from the Monastery of San Zoilo, Carrión de los Condes, 11th century, Monastery of San Zoilo, Palencia, Photo rights: Antonio García Omedes (263)



Fig. 8. Inlaid tray, brass, silver and gold inlay, Syria or Egypt, 1330–1360, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Photo rights: Victoria and Albert Museum, London (298)



Fig. 9. Masaccio, San Giovenale triptych, detail of the head and halo of the Madonna, 1422, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Photo rights: Galleria degli Uffizi (299)



Fig. 10. *Qingbai* bowl, China, 12th century, British Museum, London, Photo rights: British Museum, London (312)



Fig. 11. Zemi from the Islad of la Hispaniola ca. 1510–15. Museo Nazionale Preistorico ed Etnografico »Luigi Pigorini«, Roma, Italia, Photo rights: Museo Luigi Pigorini, Turin (338)



Fig. 12. Diego Ribeiro, World Map, 1529, Carte Nautiche Borgiano III (facsimili Griggs, 1887), Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, Photo rights: Biblioteca Digital de la Real Academia de la Historia (353)



Fig. 13. Illustration from the *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis*, Mexico, 1552, Codex Martin de la Cruz-Badiano, fol. 8v, Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, Rights: INAH. Photo: www.codices.inah.gob.mx (508)