

Permanence and Continuity in Medieval Art (Paris/Lille, 24–25 Nov 25)

Paris-Lille, Nov 24–25, 2025

Deadline: Apr 15, 2025

Max Hello

"Continuity is undeniable; the first Gothic master builders or architects were raised in the Romanesque world. They naturally drew inspiration from it, but this continuity is a living and dynamic one; it is similar to life itself, where heredity, education, and the past weigh on each individual without compromising the emergence of freedom."

— Jacques Henriët

By questioning continuity and its intentionality in medieval production, Jacques Henriët highlights a widely observed process whose parameters have rarely been examined. Indeed, art history often analyzes its subject through the lens of innovation. This epistemological bias has led to the marginalization of the issues of permanence in the historiography of medieval artistic production, despite their essential role in understanding this period.

The study of this theme has also suffered from an almost exclusive focus on the legacy of antiquity in medieval art. While this question is crucial, it limits our overall perception of conservative forms and practices. An interest that may have seemed novel twenty years ago now appears to be a central concern in medieval studies.

These study days aim to explore the relationship between permanence and continuity in the use of models and forms specific to medieval culture. In particular, his perspective seeks to examine the existence of a genuine aesthetic conservatism, understood as a fertile artistic dynamic. We will address these notions through the lens of innovation, dissemination channels, creative contexts, and the various intellectual processes at work.

Theme 1: Permanence, Continuity, and Innovation

During this period, creation was often developed and justified by clerics according to a principle of continuity—one may recall the expression "dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants" which John of Salisbury attributed to his master Bernard of Chartres, and which he claimed as the only worthy path to intellectual creation. Therefore, we must question the originality of medieval works through the notion of borrowing from older formulas and the reactivation of past models. This unique relationship with temporality may be explored through the process of creating an artwork, such as an illuminated book or the reinterpretation of monumental works. This approach aims to critically assess the singularity of certain continuities, such as the Franco-Insular style of the Second Bible of Charles the Bald (BnF, Latin 2, c. 871-877), which may invoke notions of archaism and conservatism or even historicism, and reaction, whose relevance to the Middle Ages needs to

be interrogated.

Theme 2: Networks and Agents of Dissemination

Understanding the phenomena of continuity requires analyzing the cultural context of these artistic productions. Indeed, continuity may find expression in the long-term realization of artistic programs, as seen in homogeneous projects spanning decades. Another approach involves questioning the notion of tradition; whether it is linked to a specific artistic practice, a defined space, or a particular milieu. Tradition may also exist within a network of actors, particularly institutional ones, that facilitate the dissemination of models, such as repertoires of forms within monastic orders, like the model books circulated in the Cistercian context. Therefore, we will examine the means of transmission and circulation of models and expertise among these various agents, particularly through apprenticeships...

Theme 3: Modalities of Reception

Were these phenomena as prominent to medieval contemporaries as they are to contemporary art historians? This final theme will explore the intentionality behind the use of forms or processes perceived as representative of an earlier period of creation. More specifically, it will examine the role of heritage, understood as the unconscious reproduction of knowledge acquired through education, and that of tradition, considered a deliberate citation of an ancient form, comprehensible only within a given context—such as the memorial project of Saint-Louis de Poissy (c. 1297-1331), for example. This element of intentionality invites us to refine the definition of aesthetic preferences in the medieval era, when the past was considered an aesthetic category in itself.

Keywords: practice; materials; tradition; heritage; recreation; canons; models; coherence; continuity; homogeneity; taste; aesthetics.

Submission Guidelines and Timeline

These study days aim to explore these transmission pathways through original case studies. Our intention is to bring together presentations covering all media of the medieval period (5th–15th centuries). Presentations should be 20 to 25 minutes long. A publication is planned.

Proposals for conference contributions may be submitted in French or English. They should take the form of a summary (approximately 300 words) with a title and be accompanied by a short biography.

Submissions should be sent to jepl.medieval@gmail.com by April 15, 2025. Feedback to authors will be provided by June 30, 2025.

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Call for papers in English revised by Allyson Tadjer, PhD, Georgia State University, Professor of English at the University of Lille.

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