

DISCUSSING GRAPHIC CHANGES AND THEIR CONTEXT:
STUDIES IN THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF IBERIAN SCRIPTS

*DEBATIENDO SOBRE LOS CAMBIOS GRÁFICOS Y SU CONTEXTO:
ESTUDIOS SOBRE HISTORIA CULTURAL DE LA ESCRITURA
EN LA PENÍNSULA IBÉRICA*

Writing cannot be dissociated from the message it transmits, in the same way as that message cannot, or should not, be alienated from the context it represents. After all, a manuscript has many forms and can be interpreted from a myriad of perspectives; it can be a coded text from an author to a recipient or an object conveying a message through an image to all those who cared to look at it, transcending the text itself. In all its variants, in the end, what the manuscript reflects is an idea, a thought, which comes, purposefully or not, from an individual and is dependent on all their intricate personality configured by their social context. And it is the people and the society that used writing to transmit a message that this monographic volume aims to address. We invite the reader to reflect upon the social groups that managed writing, configured it in the form of texts, and on how script, image and message represent them throughout the centuries. To that end, we particularly focus on the periods in which writing has more to tell us about changes in ideas and people's lives, such as moments of graphic transition, for we understand writing not only as a means to an end but also as a mirror of cultural idiosyncrasies that affected everyone's lives, from peasant groups to nobility, from ecclesiastics to kings.

In these pages, we propose to explore the life cycle of medieval Iberian scripts and their context from a novel perspective, and to reconsider current scholarship on manuscript production. We will dig deeper into the links between graphic systems and the individuals who created them, and will discuss how political, religious, socio-economic, and cultural changes in medieval Iberia can be followed and best understood by analysing writing, written communication, archival practices, and modes of pictorial and musical representation. The articles here included re-examine two major turning points concerning medieval manuscript culture in the Iberian Peninsula: the change from the traditional Hispanic writing system, Visigothic script, to the European one represented by Caroline minuscule, and the distinct transformation of the

latter to the Iberian Gothic scripts, which brought about graphic particularism to the peninsula once again. We explore each transitional period through intertwined case studies covering a timeframe that extends from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, complemented by specific articles on the parallel changes experienced in artistic practices, music, and liturgy reflected in manuscript sources, and on the effective change of scripts employed by literate people from different cultural communities.

This constitutes the first collaborative initiative on the topic of the evolution of medieval Iberian scripts, gathering leading experts of Iberian manuscript studies, in the fields of palaeography, epigraphy, religious history and visual and musical culture. The contributors to this volume were selected both for their expertise in conducting research on peninsular manuscript sources, and for their capacity to identify and explore existing gaps in published scholarship. The topic of change in Iberian writing systems has been previously assessed; however, not yet systematically. The specifics of each of the scripts used in the Iberian Middle Ages have been discussed¹, but how each was replaced or evolved into the other, how the practical change took place, and what it entailed for scribes and users of writing in general is yet to be adequately explored. Moreover, research to date has focused on the scripts rather than on how they came up to develop their graphic model and how this model reflects the specific cultural context in which the scripts were used. This volume therefore offers a much-needed synthesis to the field of Iberian manuscript studies, presenting a new approach to manuscript evidence, firmly anchored on the study of cultural and social practices, necessary for filling the several gaps in scholarship to date. Inevitably, there are limitations to the research here proposed. The period between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages (sixth to the eighth century) could not be dealt with due to the scarcity of witnesses in this context prior to the eighth century. Not even the analysis of manuscript and epigraphic testimonies collectively would enable a detailed analysis. Each of the eight articles in this special issue offers state of the art analysis in each of our periods and fields of expertise, and introduce an open debate on new research paths that, from our perspective, ought to be explored in the coming years.

This monograph begins with five core articles on how the pressures of the European routes of cultural exchange, combined with the political interests of the monarchy and elites, led to the introduction of a new writing system,

¹ Millares Carlo, Agustín (1983), *Tratado de Paleografía Española* (con la colaboración de José Manuel Ruiz Asencio), 3 vols.: I Texto, II y III Láminas, Madrid, Editorial Espasa-Calpe; Galende Díaz, Juan Carlos; Cabezas Fontanilla, Susana; Ávila Seoane, Nicolás (coords.) (2016), *Paleografía y escritura hispánica*, Madrid, Editorial Síntesis.

in order to substitute Visigothic script: Caroline minuscule. This is considered against the broader political panorama of the peninsula, in which a group of dissimilar Christian kingdoms –anchored to their past and focused on their own political survival– changed to a more uniform set of political structures that became fully integrated into Europe, thereby marking a transition from isolation and peculiarity to Europeanism and globalism.

The first article, *Leaving the Past behind, Adapting to the Future: Transitional and Polygraphic Visigothic-Caroline Minuscule Scribes*, by Ainoa Castro, deals with the historical context in which all things Visigothic were, at a significant quick pace, out of place in medieval European politics and culture. Following the graphic change from Visigothic script to Caroline minuscule as witnessed in manuscripts, it relates its periodisation from ninth-century Septimania and Catalonia to the westernmost areas of the Iberian Peninsula, such as Galicia and Portugal, already in the early thirteenth century. The specific dates of those written sources in which innovation was first introduced let us ponder how the change must have been received by the scribes who were behind them. Their personal thoughts on the matter, and those of their contemporary readers, is a subject that must be left open due to its speculative nature. Yet, from a practical perspective, there is more to be said. The last part of the article focuses on the cases of scribes who reflect the change first-hand not by combining both graphic systems, but by consciously practising one or the other when the texts they were recording required it. They are the very few, but highly significant, polygraphic scribes we know of from this period of graphic transition, and about whom the article proposes further study that will open a new research agenda on medieval written practices.

The second article, *Los centros escriptorios en el reino de León y Castilla: la transición de la visigótica a la carolina a través de la escritura epigráfica*, by María Encarnación Martín, stresses the importance of the extant epigraphic material for the understanding of general graphic practices, and aims at a global view of the “Visigothic-to-Caroline” change. This is a much-needed reminder of the sometimes-overlooked prerequisite of establishing a firm collaboration between epigraphy and palaeography in order to obtain a more accurate outline of a given context. In this respect, the reader will find the chronological parallel between manuscript and epigraphic sources, and the fact that even in inscriptions there was a clear indication of scripts being much more than “a means to an end”, of particular interest. As in the case of manuscript sources, epigraphic inscriptions were imbued with cultural implications that the social groups in which they were used clearly acknowledged.

The following article *De la escritura visigótica a la carolina. Pasos hacia la nueva producción epigráfica en La Rioja*, by Irene Pereira, presents

a comparative analysis of writing styles in La Rioja employed in manuscripts and stone inscriptions. This article emphasises the need to develop this kind of research for understanding such a complex graphic phenomenon as the emergence and implementation of Caroline minuscule in this region. Despite the resistance to the change of liturgical rite that took place in La Rioja at the end of the eleventh century, this did not prevent writing from displaying an early Uncial influence. The Caroline minuscule alphabet born from the reform was finally introduced from the southwest of the region to the rest of the territory in a very short time.

For over a century, it has been accepted that the use of the Caroline minuscule system of abbreviations predated the introduction of the script in Leon and Castile. The fourth article, *Las abreviaturas por letra sobrepuesta: su llegada y uso en documentos y códices de León y Castilla*, by Francisco Molina, analyses one aspect of such phenomenon: abbreviations by suprascript letter incorporated into charters and codices from the late eleventh and the early twelfth century. Aside from statistical factors, readers are led to consider why Visigothic script scribes resorted to it, and what factors could contribute to both its slow and uneven spread and its final and overwhelming triumph. While there is no single or overarching answer to this question –neither monasteries nor individuals followed a set rule– it is possible to find some clues to understand better the process. In this sense, the “ideographic nature of abbreviations” seems to have played an important role in the adoption of the Caroline minuscule system by Visigothic script scribes, since they could use abbreviations almost as an icon to represent a single syllable without much effort.

In the same vein, Concepción Mendo’s contribution, *De escribas y escrituras en documentos del monasterio de San Salvador de Oña (1187-1215)*, assesses how the new exogenous writing system faded, and how the script gained back its peculiarity when adapted to the Iberian soil. In particular, Mendo analyses the handwriting of six scribes whose names appear in the charters of the monastery of Oña during the chronological period 1107-1215, which marked the final phase of the pre-Gothic style and the flowering of the documentary Gothic. This period was also characterised by shifts in scribal duties, who henceforth also became notaries.

In addition to the discussion on graphic change, our volume proposes an interdisciplinary approach to manuscript culture and therefore other contexts relating to the world of book production and reception are explored in this volume. The articles by Ana de Oliveira Dias, Elsa De Luca and Rose Walker consider wider cultural and religious transformations that can be observed in tandem with changes in writing systems across the period covered in this volume. These studies offer new perspectives on Iberian visual and musical

culture and spirituality, and how they can be explored and better understood through the detailed examination of manuscript sources. Despite their main focus on peninsular phenomena, they also look beyond the peculiarities of Iberian visual arts, musical annotations and liturgical readings to explore how these practices ought to be interpreted against the broader panorama of medieval western culture, in particular in relation to neighbouring France.

In *The Iberian Peninsula and the trans-Pyrenean World: Assessing Cultural Change through the Representations of Dress and Horsemanship in Manuscript Illumination*, Ana de Oliveira Dias considers how images preserved in illuminated manuscripts produced between the tenth and the thirteenth century can offer new perspectives into broader cultural transformations in the peninsula in the aftermath of liturgical reform. In particular, she examines depictions of key elements of Iberian material culture through a comparative analysis of the pictorial programmes of illuminated Bibles and of the *Beatus* manuscripts, discusses how they changed over time and in relation to manuscripts produced elsewhere. This study considers not only the work of illuminators and their understanding of real-world practices, but also the ways in which the pictorial evidence they offer shed light onto critical breaks with the past and the adoption of new (and foreign) cultural paradigms. Here, the reader is presented with representations of dress and horse-riding techniques –the two pictorial elements analysed in this article as significant cultural markers through which these ideas can be tested, as they evince not only the emergence of new visual idioms and material realities but also, importantly, the fostering of a new identity.

In *From Old Hispanic to Aquitanian Notation: Music Writing in Medieval Iberia*, Elsa De Luca discusses the more common scripts employed to convey musical meaning in Iberian liturgical manuscripts from the ninth to the fifteenth century. Music was one of the main contents of liturgical codices, along with texts and decoration and, as such, it was an important element of the Iberian medieval book culture. Music scripts were written by clergymen trained in the same scriptoria where Visigothic, Caroline, and Gothic scripts were also learned and copied. As in the case of text script, changes in music writing were the consequence of political, sociological, liturgical, and/or cultural changes. In the case of Iberian music writing, the first main change was the replacement of the local Old Hispanic notation with the imported Aquitanian notation, which was triggered by the replacement of the Old Hispanic liturgy with the Franco-Roman rite at the end of the eleventh century. Another crucial change was caused by the introduction of the Gothic script. The gradual diffusion of new tools for writing such as broader nibs led to changes in the graphical appearance of Aquitanian notation, whose font became larger and more easily readable. Changes in music writing need

to be investigated and discussed along with changes in text script as they both are by-products of their cultural context and era.

Lastly, Rose Walker's article *Expressing Liturgical change in Eleventh- and Twelfth-century Iberia through the Feast of the Holy Innocents*, takes a particular liturgical element and traces its progress across the main period of ecclesiastical change, from the Old Hispanic to the Roman liturgy. This study is rooted in manuscripts that record its development. These books present detailed changes in the choice of chants and readings, not only through textual substitution but also in structure and in new approaches to display. The feast of the Holy Innocents is an especially informative case study, because it evolved significantly over these decades from a minor feast in the shadow of Epiphany to one that presented a dramatic narrative. From the mid-twelfth century this narrative emerged from its liturgical context to appear also in wall-paintings and sculpture.

Thus, in considering fields beyond the disciplines of palaeography and epigraphy, this special issue aims to explore the cultural history of medieval Iberian scripts holistically, highlighting how their history and evolution cannot be dissociated from wider socio-cultural change.