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Editing Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures

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Editing *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures*

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Abstract

As part of a continued conversation about academic publishing, the editors of *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures* reflect on the founding and early years of this open access publication.

Origin and Mission

We began planning [Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures](#) ten years ago and published our first issue three years later in 2015. Our goal was to promote comparative and connected approaches to the study of the literary cultures of a broadly conceived medieval Europe. This linguistically complex Europe extends across geographies now denoted as Western Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Southeastern Europe, and is set within wider Afro-Eurasian contexts. Looking at the landscape of excellent journals that published articles on medieval literature, we saw them as largely language-based, or focused on a specific country or region within Europe, or with a broader interdisciplinary focus. None were aimed specifically at shaping the study of medieval literature on a fully European scale through the development of comparative and connected methodologies. Across Europe – and the wider world of which it was a part – and across the medieval millennium, its literary cultures were marked by the interactions of the supraregional languages of Latin, Greek, Arabic, Church Slavonic and Hebrew (which enabled mobility and exchange across cultures, geographies and faiths) and also increasingly French and German, and local or vernacular languages. These dynamics, a focal point for *Interfaces*, are less studied in journals focused on one language or region (for this vision see especially our introduction to *Interfaces* 1 [2015]). The scope of *Interfaces* reflects clear political commitments to a vision of a wide and open Europe in the twenty-first century.

What we had in mind was a journal that covered medieval literary cultures across the breadth of Europe, with an emphasis on work that was engaging and relevant to scholars working within and across more specific medieval literary fields. In other words, we aimed for a profile that would foster literary scholarship that was driven by a desire to create scholarly exchange and conversation across specialisms. As we will discuss below, we saw [Diamond Open Access \(DOA\)](#) publishing as a key element in creating a space for these exchanges and conversations. We thought that the combination of a capacious view of literature produced across supraregional and local languages would create a space dedicated to formulating new agendas. Ideally, every article in such a journal would offer a perspective that points beyond the usual linguistic or country-based boundaries, whether or not it was strictly speaking working comparatively or connectedly.¹

This idea gradually emerged as Lars Boje Mortensen, Elizabeth Tyler and Christian Høgel collaborated on an application for a ten-year Danish Center of Excellence, with one node in Odense (University of Southern Denmark, SDU) and another in York (University of York, UK). The Centre for Medieval Literature (CML), which was funded by the Danish National Research Foundation for the years 2012-22 (and continues to flourish beyond the grant period), became the firm structure for launching and maintaining the journal. At this stage we three brought together different perspectives and types of expertise on European literature: working on early and high medieval England, with substantial work on both English and Latin, and on connections to France, Flanders and Germany, Tyler focused on Northwestern Europe; Mortensen was a medieval Latinist with main interests in the Nordic realm and the German-Roman Empire, including their vernacular languages; and Høgel a

¹ The brief of [New Medieval Literatures \(1997-\)](#) shares its aims with *Interfaces*, quoted here from their website: “Its scope is inclusive of work across the theoretical, archival, philological, and historicist methodologies associated with medieval literary studies.” While more theoretically oriented than *Interfaces*, the journal is linguistically and geographically less diverse.

Byzantinist who also had expertise in Latin and Arabic (and was extending into Georgian). Although our range did not extend directly to Central and Eastern Europe, Occitania or Iberia, and their many languages, we worked through our wide networks to establish an editorial board that covered a broadly conceived Europe well.

Another strong dimension was our concern to showcase a more dynamic relationship between Greek and Latin, the two main supraregional languages of Europe, and local languages, as well as including Church Slavonic, Hebrew and Arabic as languages of Europe. In nationalizing literary history, Greek and Latin are often reduced to a background level in studies engaged with biblical and hagiographical adaptation or classical reception, marked as elitist, as distinct from vernacular authenticity, or relegated to specialist publications of Byzantine studies and Medieval Latin studies. In terms of sheer numbers, it is clear that Greek and Latin dominated in the world of European books throughout the Middle Ages. This position of Latin and Greek remained even in early medieval Britain and Ireland where book cultures flourished in local languages, and after the rise of vernacular languages in the high medieval period. Church Slavonic literature, meanwhile, was first and foremost an adaptation of authoritative Greek books. But in spite of the preeminent positions of Latin and Greek in the European Middle Ages, the preoccupations of nationalizing literary histories with the local and vernacular canons spanning the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries has sidelined their roles (even though Latin and Greek also expanded in this period). Similar observations can be made for Arabic in Iberia, Sicily and in Latinized domains in the Levant. Conversely, Greek and Latin studies have often closed their eyes to the new dynamics created by other literary languages, whether the extensive writing in insular local languages centuries before the twelfth, or the much wider prevalence of vernacular literatures from the High Middle Ages onwards (e.g. Old Norse, French, Middle High German, or Czech). In several ways our shared experience with and interest in Latin and Greek has laid a chronological, geographical and multilingual foundation that would have been difficult to achieve coming exclusively from one or more local or vernacular language(s).

We were also committed, from our first steps, to open access publishing, so these plans became realizable when the three of us became four with the addition of Paolo Borsa to the group of editors. Borsa is a medieval Italianist who brought a new network and new expertise to the journal.² He was at the time working at the University of Milan (UNIMI) where, critically for *Interfaces*, he had already gained comprehensive knowledge of the scholar-led online and open access platform led by Paola Galimberti. The recently developed but formidable free software [Open Journal Systems](#) (OJS, currently in its third version, from the Public Knowledge Project) has provided amateur editors a priceless professional tool for managing and publishing an open access, peer-reviewed journal. It has also provided good dissemination and visibility for the journal contents through compliance with the [Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting](#) (OAI-PMH). All these pieces – both the academic range and now Borsa's experience with open access publishing – made an excellent foundation for an initiative that was full of uncertainties but had the ambition to find its own space and identity in the world of medieval studies.

With the geographical and linguistic scope and the technical solutions lined up, and with the Danish Excellence grant in hand for some initial investments, as well as with the prospect of hiring

² See e.g. *Interfaces* 2 (2016).

CML postdoctoral fellows whose training would include collaborating on the journal, we made the following decisions about the journal's framework:

— The journal would come out at least once a year with a flexible number of articles. Each issue could either be open or thematic, the latter following on from a conference, a workshop or a project.

— The journal would be published as what was at the time loosely termed Gold Open Access but is now more appropriately, and unambiguously, called Diamond Open Access (DOA): there would be no payments or fees for processing and publishing (APCs or Article Processing Costs) or for accessing published articles (for the real costs of production see below).³ We were committed to equal access to scholarship for anyone who is interested. We consider open access to scientific knowledge a public good that we aim to pursue in a way that creates a level playing field for scholars working in non-research-intensive universities, or in less well-resourced countries, or independently, while being freely available to wider audiences beyond academia. There is a close link between our wide vision of medieval Europe and its connections, and our commitment to open access publishing. To our delight it turned out that this commitment was strengthened by Plan S, a European initiative by [cOAlition S](#) in 2018. Plan S, though not uncontroversially, has strong support from major European funders, including the EU, many national research councils and charitable foundations. More recently [Plan S](#) has strongly promoted Diamond Open Access (Ancion et al. 2022).

— Authors who publish in *Interfaces* would retain copyright to their works. Articles would be published under a Creative Commons license: of the many possible solutions, we opted for the [Attribution-ShareAlike International license \(CC BY-SA 4.0\)](#). Despite the recent recommendations of many funding bodies to choose the most permissive Attribution license (CC BY 4.0), after the experiment of *Interfaces* 6 in 2020 we decided to return to the more restrictive BY-SA license, with the belief that this choice contributes to the de-commodification of knowledge.⁴

— We would invite articles in five languages: English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. Ideally it would be fairer if scholars could publish in their own language – not least when writing about literature where nuance is so important – but this is not realistic for many reasons. As many medieval scholars read several or all five of these languages, we felt this was a feasible compromise, also with regard to finding reviewers for submissions. Still, language continues to be an issue as many scholars prefer to write in English – even if, for instance, German is their mother tongue – and we have so far only published a few contributions in German, French, Spanish and Italian. English is not, furthermore, straightforward as most contributors are not native speakers, and their articles must go through language checks (for which we can often offer help or advice). This represents another way of levelling the playing field, in this case by helping scholars access Global English. We aim to develop *Interfaces* into an excellent venue for publishing in one of these major European languages, or in English as a non-native speaker.

— The journal would support the work of early and mid-career researchers.

³ Gold Open Access denotes the model in which the publisher makes all articles and related content available for free immediately as part of the process of publication. Although the “author-pays” model is not intrinsic to Gold OA, it is a fact that many Gold OA journals charge APCs. Our journal is Diamond, clearly indicating that *Interfaces* is not published by a commercial publisher and that the publication process is open at both ends, with no costs for either submission or access.

⁴ On this issue see Pivatolo (2020). See the two licenses, [CC BY 4.0](#) and [CC BY-SA 4.0](#);

— Each article would undergo two double-blind reviews.

— The visual appearance of the journal would be professional and suited for on-line publication only. We hired the award-winning typographical designer Carl Zakrisson (Copenhagen) to create the page layout and define the typographical style. The result included sidenotes instead of footnotes (in view as you scroll) and a typography accommodated to many alphabets and special characters. The design of the journal's visual identity, as well as of its website, was likewise commissioned from a professional designer, SHIROI Studio in Milan.

When all these aspects were settled and *Interfaces* 1 was published, we addressed the crucial issue of indexing the journal. The first step was applying to the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) (DOAJ), the internationally authoritative directory of OA journals, in order to be included in its index. The journal was later registered for regular aggregation and indexing also in [OpenAIRE](#), the EU-coordinated initiative for Open Science).

A European Journal

Interfaces is a European journal in its academic scope as well as in its production. During the 2010s the pressure mounted through the European funding bodies to publish publicly-funded research in open access. Both the EU funding schemes and the national academies and research councils inside and outside the EU began to enforce an open access policy more stringently. This is still an ongoing issue in the humanities. It began with journal articles; discussion (and argument!) continues to include the question of the extension of open access to monographs and collected volumes. Many established journals, especially within Europe, had to devise various initiatives to meet these demands, although this did not happen in a timely or consistent manner. In some countries (for example, Denmark) funds could be obtained specifically for making already established journals open access (and for supporting new initiatives, but this was not the main target). Unfortunately, the EU (and other) funding bodies allowed APCs to be charged. This is when Gold Open Access became costly and only meant that access – not necessarily submission – was free (as mentioned above, Plan S is now working to rectify this). This development had two main effects. It hugely disadvantaged independent scholars or academics whose research was not part of a funded project or who work in less well-funded institutions. Furthermore, it slowed down and softened the ongoing cultural transition to a new model of scholarly publishing, favoring major commercial publishers that had been given time to adapt their business to the new model so as to profit both from funds for publications of some articles and for access to other articles.

Another route was found by a number of journals that came into being around the same time as *Interfaces*, helped by OJS and by the great reduction of costs in circumventing commercial publishers. While this approach was often scoffed at in the beginning, the model has been gaining momentum. Some of the key findings of the thorough report published by Science Europe in 2021 (Becerril et al.) show how *Interfaces* is part of a trend: by far the largest part of new DOA journals are in the social sciences and humanities (60%); they have mushroomed in Europe, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, and in South America (very little in Asia and North America); as a rule, they are multilingual, unlike those demanding APCs.

As has often been pointed out, in the established humanities journals, the real burden of the work was carried by the editors, who were often only modestly remunerated, if at all.⁵ With the technologies in place for feasible production and effortless on-line distribution, it was now clear to many startups that commercial publishers demanded profits but did not contribute adequately to support the editorial side. *Interfaces* was, together with *Medieval Worlds* (Vienna), among the first in medieval studies to capitalize on this situation. Both journals were supported by a large public university with an on-line publishing platform, underscoring the importance of structural change, here in the form of infrastructure ultimately funded by governments, to the success of DOA.

Most European regular journals in the humanities, however, have been either owned by commercial publishing houses or reliant on subscriptions by members of historical/cultural/literary societies. That meant that a new journal like *Interfaces* had great freedom to design its outlook and profile, but of course also had to face all the uncertainties that come with being a new name without an already existing constituency. In our first years we have very often had to explain that publishing on-line for free did not mean that we did not have rigorous standards or that the editing was not meticulous.

By providing one-click open access we are also trying to reach readers worldwide with quality content on medieval Europe, not least those with fewer library and academic resources than is sometimes taken for granted in the leading universities of Western Europe or North America.⁶ Part of this mission is also to convey a large and multifaceted Europe as it is reflected in the literary record. This includes the differences and tensions between linguistically and politically strong entities such as the German or the Byzantine Empire, or the later English and French kingdoms and some of the culturally less-empowered regions that they dominated. It also includes publishing work on texts from outside Europe where they connect to or can be compared to European literature (as we have on Persian and Indian literature). Hence it is part of our mission to attempt to transmit this more complex, multipowered, multilingual Europe to our potentially global readership – and this is supported by our DOA policies and our choice to publish in languages other than just English.⁷

Costs and Workload

As we are generously hosted by the successful and growing UNIMI platform for OA journals,⁸ we have no costs for basic infrastructure, archiving and distribution. As discussed above, we made initial investments in the design of the journal's visual identity and in our website design, a shell on top of the UNIMI platform, made by SHIROI studio for c. €7000. In addition, we paid the typographical and layout designer c. €3000. In the first few years, the review process, copyediting and the typesetting were done entirely by the editors themselves (some of whom had knowledge of InDesign, a software

⁵ Some journals, especially Anglophone ones (with their wider audience), do remunerate editors and copyeditors to some degree, while many continental European journals offer little or no remuneration whatsoever.

⁶ A statistic for downloads from the Milan website is appended at the end of the article (*Fig. 1*). It should be noted, of course, that articles have also been freely archived and distributed by authors and readers in ways that is not measurable so the total traffic is unknown.

⁷ Our first programmatic issue (2015) attempts to give a partial tour of European medieval literatures from this perspective.

⁸ All of them DOA; in 2019 the platform reached the milestone of one million downloads.

we could license for a small annual fee through SDU) and by some postdoctoral fellows at CML whose training program was linked to the journal, providing them with valuable experience as OA publishing expands in Europe. This gave us an in-depth understanding of all the steps and difficulties of our systems but was of course also labor-intensive. In the last few years, we have hired outside editorial assistance for copyediting and typesetting. But these have been rather modest annual costs for running the journal after its establishment. We still have all the skills necessary for OJS, for typesetting and for handling the final PDFs within the core group plus a couple of close CML colleagues, so should the funds dry up for a year or two, we will not be out of business. For the years 2021-23 we have the additional editorial support of a postdoctoral fellow for whom we have secured a grant to help another group to set up a journal on the UNIMI platform; this has eased the four editors' workflow. We will make use of similar funding opportunities in the future. Usually, one or two of the four editors take the lead for each issue, and for them the workload is considerable, but again no different from what you would have in a similar (usually non-remunerated) position for a journal under a commercial publisher. By far the most time-consuming aspect remains the editorial work of soliciting, assessing and rejecting submissions, communicating with peer reviewers and authors, and working closely with early-career scholars. Setting up everything ourselves exactly as we want it has, however, been great motivation.

Looking Ahead

One of the major challenges of a new journal is to establish name recognition and to feature in rankings, that is, to uphold both qualitative and quantitative standards used, informally and formally, in different countries (and an international journal must keep an eye on both) in order to evaluate and reward academics. Recognition and rankings are especially important to attract excellent scholarship from early- or mid-career researchers. Thus far the majority of articles in *Interfaces* have been the work of more established scholars, though we have worked hard to make the journal a supportive environment for younger researchers as well. We can only move forward, by consistently publishing work of significance and quality in order to accumulate more academic prestige with the aim of attracting more unsolicited work from younger scholars. In some European countries (e.g. Italy, or the Nordic countries) there are government-administered lists that reward (in terms of salary and promotion) academics according to the category of journal in which they publish. It is very difficult to enter into the top tier, in part because the group of top journals work to a fixed number (if one is added, one must be subtracted). We have, however, successfully done so in Italy and are working to achieve this in other countries. An additional challenge lies in the area of teaching, where European medieval literature in our broader sense is rarely the focus of a course or module, thus limiting the impact of the way the curriculum can shape research that feeds into the journal. We do, however, see strong opportunities here that make *Interfaces* more relevant to the practice of teaching national literatures. As more and more work on medieval national literatures seeks wider connections and comparisons beyond Europe, we hope that this global turn will also stimulate more interest in the complexity and diversity found within Europe. This diversity was itself essential to Europe's place in a wider Afro-Eurasian world. Accordingly, we also think that it is vitally important that the medieval

literature of Western Europe not come to stand in for European medieval literature as a whole in a schema that embraces global perspectives.

Our small organization will make it possible in years to come to gather the modest annual funds required to produce a meticulously edited journal led by hands-on and accessible (pun intended!) editors. We think that there is a direct link between our wider, more connected vision of medieval European literature and open access publishing – which places no financial barriers to who publishes and who reads. As a result, distribution and use figures show that *Interfaces* is being read and valued as the easy-to-access, high-quality publication we set out to produce. We are pleased that our early venture into open access is now part of a more structural change in European publishing, which we hope will expand rapidly.

Fig. 1

Article Details		30 of 82 articles				
Title	Abstract Views	File Views	PDF	HTML	Other	Total
Borsa et al. What Is Medieval European Literature?	3377	2691	2691	0	0	6068
Borsa et al. Histories of Medieval European Literatures: New Patterns of Representation and Explanation	1228	4154	4154	0	0	5382
Fenzi 'Translatio studii' e 'translatio imperii.' Appunti per un percorso	2242	2868	2868	0	0	5110
Baldissera Ways of Presenting Love in Ancient Sanskrit Literature	953	2507	2507	0	0	3460
Guðmundsdóttir "How Do You Know If It Is Love or Lust?" On Gender, Status, and Violence in Old Norse Literature	1248	2110	2110	0	0	3358
Lembke et al. Biblical Creatures: The Animal as an Object of Interpretation in Pre-Modern Christian and Jewish Hermeneutic Traditions	656	2601	2601	0	0	3257
Cross The Many Colors of Love in Nizāmi's 'Haft Paykar:' Beyond the Spectrum	1147	2014	2014	0	0	3161
Agapitos Contesting Conceptual Boundaries: Byzantine Literature and Its History	1770	1013	1013	0	0	2783
Gaunt French Literature Abroad: Towards an Alternative History of French Literature	1811	877	877	0	0	2688
Borsa et al. The Theory and Phenomenology of Love	559	1830	1830	0	0	2389
Ricklin Der Philosoph als Nekromant: Gerbert von Aurillac (Silvester II.) und Vergil im europäischen Hochmittelalter	1225	1017	1017	0	0	2242
Borsa et al. Rediscovery and Canonization: The Roman Classics in the Middle Ages	527	1660	1660	0	0	2187
Kragl Deutsch/Romanisch - Lateinisch/Deutsch: Neue Thesen zu den Pariser Gesprächen und zu den Kasseler Glossen	1055	1125	1125	0	0	2180
Kretschmer L' "Ovidius moralizatus" de Pierre Bersuire. Essai de mise au point	1281	818	818	0	0	2099
Larsen From Comparatism to Comparativity: Comparative Reasoning Reconsidered	1332	705	705	0	0	2037
Wallace Nation/Translation: An Afterword	690	1202	1202	0	0	1892
Weitbrecht "Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns:" The Biblical Unicorn in Late Medieval Religious Interpretation	928	870	870	0	0	1798

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