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Introduction to the volume *Fiat Pax – Desiring Peace in Medieval Literatures*

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While the Western Middle Ages were marked by profound crises that sometimes led to war, some medieval voices also criticized warfare and insisted on the pre-eminence of peace, particularly from a Christian perspective. The proceedings of the conference *Fiat Pax – Desiring Peace in Medieval Literature* focus on these voices and examine the tensions, negotiations, and reflections they generate between the desire for peace and the desire for war in medieval literature.

The Western Middle Ages have often been portrayed as a long, dark period of constant warfare, of varied forms of bloody violence and uncontrolled and uncontrollable brutality. This phantasmatic vision has largely been demystified by historians, who have investigated the medieval connections between power and violence, documented the conflicts between the clerics' injunctions for peace and the aims of the secular aristocracy, identified the mechanisms and rituals of conflict resolution and studied the slow evolution towards a society in which states and their institutions exercise control over violence.

The fact remains, however, that a great many medieval narratives, particularly in the epic realm, set out to retrace the gruesome details of warfare, to commemorate the great deeds of heroes, and to celebrate victorious battles against enemies of the Christian faith or enmities between rival clans. To praise heroes is to glorify warfare, and even the delights of warfare, according to a well-studied dynamic.

In contrast, the proceedings of the present volume examine the voices and attitudes favouring peace in literary works that often deal with war. Studies of what might cautiously be described as "pacifist" discourse remain rare: the literary voices advocating peace and the depiction of peaceful resolution of conflicts are rarely taken into account. Literary texts dealing with peace rarely describe it as a state of things (usually shattered at the beginning of the narrative), but more frequently represent it as an aim to be reached through the implementation of a series of social acts (embassies, negotiations, possible betrayals), speeches, gestures, and rituals, and to be potentially questioned, resisted, or opposed. Peace is endowed with significant narrative potential, which in some texts competes with the glorification of warfare. The present volume focuses on this narrative potential and

on the strategies (namely argumentative) of the medieval voices praising peace. In literature, as in real life, military confrontations are always preceded by deliberations in which various options are debated.

This volume results from a conference held in Strasbourg from 16 to 18 June 2022. Bringing together twenty speakers from six countries, it was organised by Peter Andersen (UR 3400, ARCHE), Fanny Moghaddassi (UR 2325, SEARCH) and Muriel Ott (UR 1337, Configurations littéraires), who are members of LETHICA, an *Institut Thématique Interdisciplinaire (ITI)* accredited by the University of Strasbourg, the CNRS and Inserm. This academic structure seeks to create new synergies between studies in the arts, literature and the humanities, natural and medical studies. The conference was part of the 'Moral Revolutions' research axis, which it tackled from the perspective of 'Historical Approaches'. The perspective of 'Historical Approaches', supervised by Enrica Zanin, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Strasbourg, is based on the idea that many issues concerning ethics, literature, and the arts can get a better understanding with in-depth analysis of their context and historical evolution. In the Middle Ages, the arts in Europe and the Middle East were considered as a part of ethics, providing pleasure and ethical profit. Moreover, ethics was not a deontological discipline, but rather a eudemonic practice: instead of giving moral rules, it aimed at explaining how to live a good life. In the medieval context, texts explicitly or implicitly advocating peace were a radical departure from the more numerous texts glorifying war, and in many ways constituted a moral revolution. The organisers and speakers paid particular attention to the ethical anchoring of the theme of peace in these two axes of LETHICA: medieval narrative texts, marked by the sublimation of honour and heroism, provide fertile ground for the analysis of the ethical stakes surrounding peace.

The scientific board was composed of the three above-mentioned members of LETHICA and of Philippe Haugeard, Professor of Medieval French Literature at the University of Orléans, Klaus Ridder, Professor of Medieval German Literature at the University of Tübingen, and Martine Yvernault, Professor of Medieval English Literature at the University of Limoges. The proceedings result from the collective work of this scientific committee, which was assisted in the publication process by Thomas Mohnike, Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Strasbourg, and Jules Piet, a PhD student in Scandinavian medieval studies at Strasbourg.

The twenty contributions presented in this volume are written in three languages, two in German, six in English and twelve in French, and analyse the medieval interest in peace through specific case studies. They tackle the topic in a wide range of linguistic and cultural areas in medieval Europe, including analyses of Arabic, English, French, German, Latin, and Nordic literatures. The contributions explore

these varied cultural contexts to delineate the complexities of medieval conceptions of peace as well as their literary variations in time and space.

The order of the contributions corresponds to that of the lectures. The conference was opened by Anthony Mangeon as coordinator of LETHICA, who presented the main lines of the research program for the period 2021-2028. The first session was then chaired by Klaus Ridder. The first half-day was mostly devoted to the German-speaking world. The first keynote speaker, Patrick del Duca, Professor of Medieval German Literature at the University of Clermont-Auvergne, opened the conference with a contribution on the alternation between peace and conflict in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm*. Dr Maryvonne Hagby, PhD in Medieval German Literature and Lecturer at the University of Osnabrück, then studied the theme of peace in Hans von Büchel's *Königstochter von Frankreich* in the context of the Hundred Years' War. The third contribution focused on the same period in the French-speaking world: Dr Gisela Naegle, PhD in Medieval History and Lecturer at the University of Gießen, analysed the work of Philippe de Mézières. The last contributions of the first half-day dealt with the same text, the *Ruodlieb*. This eleventh-century Latin poem is studied from a legal and historical angle by Dr Jenny Benham, Senior Lecturer in Medieval History at Cardiff University, while Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Professor of Germanic Philology at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität (Freiburg im Breisgau), concentrated on the mechanisms of diplomacy in favour of peace. The two lectures on the *Ruodlieb* were chaired by Isabel Iribarren, Professor of History and Medieval Philosophy at the University of Strasbourg.

The eight lectures of the second day were chaired by Philippe Haugeard and Enrica Zanin and focused primarily on the French-speaking world. Brigitte Burrichter, Professor of French and Italian Literature at the University of Würzburg, gave a keynote address on the theme of peace in Geoffrey de Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Roman de Brut*, inspired by this Latin model, which Wace completed in 1155. A few years later, Benoît de Sainte-Maure drew on another Latin text, Dudon de Saint-Quentin's *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, for his *Histoire des ducs de Normandie*. In her contribution, Françoise Laurent, Professor of French Medieval Literature at the University of Clermont-Auvergne, studied the message of peace that Norman Duke Richard I addresses to the Danes in this French adaptation of the text. Marie-Françoise Alamichel, Professor of English Medieval Literature at the Université Gustave Eiffel (Paris), examined great mythical wars in *The Siege of Thebes* and *The Troy Book*, which John Lydgate wrote in parallel with his *Praise of Peace*. The same classical topic was tackled by Dr Marie-Sophie Masse, Associate Professor of Medieval German Studies at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne, who highlighted the literary and narrative potential of peace in two German-language novels of antiquity, Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneas* and Herbart

von Fritzlar's *Liet von Troye*, both dedicated to Hermann of Thuringia. The next contributions studied approaches to peace in the *Geste des Loherains*, a French epic cycle analysed firstly by Dr Gauthier Grüber, PhD in French Literature teaching at the University of La Rochelle, and then by Jean-Charles Herbin, Professor emeritus at the Université polytechnique Hauts-de-France. Dr Claire Donnat-Aracil, PhD in Medieval French Literature and recruited since the conference as an Associate Professor at the Université Paris Cité, focused on the manuscripts commissioned by or for John the Good between 1328 and 1350 and their depiction of this prince as a *rex christianus* and *rex pacificus*. In the final contribution of the second day, Peter Andersen, Professor of Ancient German History and Literature at the University of Strasbourg, explored the evolution of the olive and palm trees as symbols of peace and victory from the ancient world to their functions in medieval German literature.

The third day, which was chaired by Peter Andersen, Jules Piet, and Fanny Moghaddassi, opened with a videoconference given by the last keynote speaker, Ármann Jakobsson, Professor of Icelandic Literature at the University of Iceland, who was held up in Reykjavik by Covid. For the same reason, two other speakers, Françoise Laurent, and Jean-Charles Herbin, had handed in their manuscripts to the organisers. In his contribution, Ármann discussed the peace efforts of historiographer Sturla Þórðarson in a context of great tension between the Free Republic of Iceland and the King of Norway. The following contributions also focused on Scandinavia. Dr Francesco Sangriso, PhD in Germanic Philology and Linguistics and Honorary Fellow at the University of Genoa, analysed the peace messages present in Scaldic poetry, particularly in that of the poetess Jórunn. Dr Pål Berg Svenungsen, Associate Professor of History at the University of Western Norway (Sogndal), then investigated the idea of peace in the Latin *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, which recounts an expedition that led a group of Danes and Norwegians to the Holy Land in the wake of the Third Crusade. The next contribution reversed the perspective and approached the crusades from the point of view of Eastern sources: Dr Aya Sakkal, Associate Professor of Arabic Studies at the University of Strasbourg, examined the Arabic accounts of Ibn Shaddād and al-Asfahānī written at the time of Saladin. The last contributions were devoted to the later Middle Ages in England. Dr Aude Mairey, Director of Research of Medieval English Studies at the Université Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne, studied John Lydgate's efforts to promote civil peace. Dr Carole Baugeion, Associate Professor of French Studies at the Université Catholique de l'Ouest (Angers), commented on the position of the bilingual poet Charles d'Orléans. The conference ended with a lecture by Martine Yvernault, who drew a parallel between Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Tale of Melibee* and John Gower's *In Praise of Peace*.

Taken together, these contributions, devoted to literary works of great generic, linguistic, and cultural variety, show the idea of peace to have been at the heart of medieval preoccupations. Thanks to this online volume, these articles will be accessible to the scholarly world, but also to a wider public, thus contributing to the discussion on peace in European medieval literature.

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[Voir ses autres contributions](#)

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