

Foreword

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This miscellany is a workaround, a bypass, a fallback solution... Indeed, the initial plan was to organise a conference, and then to publish proceedings, as we would normally do. It would have been a closing conference for a great project, my Marie Skłodowska Curie project *RASCIO. Reader, Author, Scholar in a Context of Information Overflow. How to Manage and Master Knowledge When There is Too Much to Know?* (grant agreement no. 749180). The call for papers and the invitations were sent in February 2020, for a conference to be held in Venice, 10-12 December 2020. But February 2020 was when the COVID-19 pandemic began and no one imagined that an event scheduled nearly a year in advance would be impacted by this global health situation. However, in October 2020, after an entire spring and summer confined at home with my children, I had to resign myself to postponing the conference to spring of 2021, 13-15 April - and everyone was, or tried to be, confident that the situation would be over by then, and that COVID-19 would simply be part of our collective bad memories... We all know now that in Europe, even in spring a year later, we could not live, travel, and go about daily life as we used to, not at all: schools were closed again in several countries, including Belgium; the Veneto vacillated between an orange and a red zone; more or less severe lockdowns came one after another in all European countries... Winter 2022 looks the same and we still cannot see the end of this hardship...

A virtual conference could have been possible. Nevertheless, a conference without the chats at coffee breaks, the informal lunches, a farewell dinner, the human contacts and meetings seems terri-

bly sad to me. I have taken part in conferences as a remote speaker, and it has always been a very strange experience. Even if I am convinced that for environmental reasons, it is often better not to travel and to take part in conferences while at home, I could not imagine that the social apex of this project, in which I invested so much personally, intellectually and emotionally, would come to a close when I was sitting alone, at home; this was not an option. I decided to publish these “non-proceedings of a non-conference” in a surrealist – maybe surrealist – way, instead. If we are missing the conviviality of the conference anyway, we will at least want to have a written trace of the contributions from which more people can benefit and have the chance to read and reread.

And so here is the result. A journey from Antiquity to the nineteenth century across authors’ tricks and habits, tastes and methodology; a journey through the Arab-Turkish world and Europe; a journey passing by belles-lettres, medicine, correspondence, theology, and history; in brief, a wide spectrum of authors, genres, and epochs, deepening our understanding of the peculiar readers that are authors, and showing us that reading habits of people who write are often similar across the borders of place and time.

This pluri- and inter-cultural approach is comparable to that of Jürgen Paul and David Durand-Guédy, in their interesting workshop *By One’s Own Hand - for One’s Own Use* at the CSMS (Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg University): in February 2020, they gathered specialists of Europe, the Arab world, the Iranian world, and the Turkish world, as well as of Chinese and Japanese cultures, of Hebrew manuscripts, and of Old Babylonian texts, for this interesting event. The workshop focused on manuscripts and texts for one’s personal use, whether utilitarian or for pleasure, and the proceedings, which promise to be very rich, are forthcoming (*Writing for oneself*. Berlin: de Gruyter. Studies in Manuscript Cultures); if you are reading this, you may well find their book interesting and I encourage you to seek it out.

I would like to thank all the authors who have replied positively to my request despite the tight schedule and who appear in the table of contents of this book: Frédéric Bauden, Mehdi Berriah, Yehoshua Frenkel, Michèle Goyens, Jaakko Häameen-Anttila, Stefan Leder, and Nazlı Vatanserver. I am very grateful for their participation and I very much hope to meet in person in the near future. I would also like to express my gratitude to those who had planned to take part in the conference, but had to decline my offer to include their paper: Olly Akkermann, Thomas Bauer, Fozia Bora, Caterina Bori, Roger Chartier, Carine Juvin, Ahmed al-Rahim, Adam Talib, Gowaart Vandenbossche, Tania van Hemelryck, Dirk Van Hulle, and Güllü Yıldız. I appreciate their frankness, understand their difficulties and hope to meet soon, in person.

Since this book is also the tangible conclusion of my Marie Skłodowska Curie research project *RASCIO*, this is the place to thank all the individuals and institutions who have given their support at one stage or another of the project: all my gratitude goes first to Antonella Ghersetti, my dear Supervisor; I would also like to thank Frédéric Bauden; Lisa Botter and Andrea Rudatis, both very efficient and understanding administrative support for researchers of the DSAAM (Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University of Venice); the late Maria Pia Pedani and her husband Antonio Fabris; Maxim Romanov; Daniela Meneghini, pleasant colleague and editor of the oriental section of Edizioni Ca' Foscari's series *Filologie medievali e moderne*; Marius Suciu, excellent Project Officer; Vicente Martí Tormo, my dear office coworker; the Ca' Foscari Research office, and in particular Silvia Zabeo, a model of efficiency and accuracy with a great deal of humanity; Stefano Patron and Alessandro Busetto, kind and attentive librarians; Carlo Volpato; Marina Buzoni; Eugenio Burgio; Claudia Simonelli; Alessandro Rizzo; and last but not least, my dear Aimee Kelley. I am grateful to the University of Liège Oriental Languages and Literature Department for their ad hoc support and welcome during some of the strange months of the pandemic. I extend my deepest thanks to The European Union 2020 Research Programme and Ca' Foscari University Venice.

