

## **Report of the External Advisory Committee, Instituto de Estudos Medievais (IEM), Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal)**

**July 12, 2022**

### **Meeting**

The meeting of the advisory committee took place on Tuesday, 28 June 2022, at the premises of the IEM in the Colégio Almada Negreiros of the Campolide Campus of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, in the presence of the new director (Dr. Maria de Lurdes Rosa) and subdirector, Rita Sampaio da Nóvoa, along with other affiliated faculty members, doctoral students, and post-doctoral students.

### **Committee members present**

Prof. Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho, Universidade de Coimbra  
Prof. Simon Doubleday, Hofstra University, New York  
Prof. Silvia Maddalo, Università degli Studi della Tuscia-Viterbo  
Prof. Denis Menjot, Université de Lyon 2  
Prof. Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, Universidad del País Vasco  
Prof. Harvey L. Sharrer, University of California, Santa Barbara

### **Background**

By February 2020, the date of our last report, the IEM had already become a nationally and internationally recognized hub of research into medieval studies with an impressively active program of interdisciplinary research (in Archaeology, Art History, History, Literature and Musicology) and a deep commitment to the dissemination of scholarly knowledge among the broader public, including involvement in public “cultural heritage” programs across Portugal. The previous director, Maria João Branco, had helped to guide the institution to a position of great intellectual prominence and strength. During the 2017-2019 period, the IEM moved to new offices, employed an efficient technical staff benefitted from new financial resources.

In our last meeting, we underscored the fact that the IEM has “a fine democratic organizational structure which the committee believes is fully capable of tackling the challenges of the coming years”. By open democratic process, a new director (Maria de Lurdes Rosa) has now been appointed. The IEM continues to remain organized around two coherent research groups: “Territories and powers: a global perspective” and “Images, texts, and representations.” The challenges with which the IEM has been presented have, of course, been far greater than we could have anticipated. Within weeks of the last meeting, the world was afflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This had profound effects on academic life across the world, including Portugal, and presented a multifaceted crisis for research institutions. Nevertheless, the IEM has faced the circumstances of the pandemic years with competence and resilience, as we will articulate further in our report.

In advance of the meeting, the management team sent the committee members several reports, although a number of committee members felt that these reports were not always sufficiently detailed, for instance in regard to the changes that had been—or were to be—instituted by the new Director.

We will divide the rest of our report into three sections: Strengths, Challenges, and Areas for Reflection.

### 1. Strengths

- Academic resilience. The IEM has navigated the pandemic with only modest interruptions, and has successfully adapted to the new academic environment in which both virtual and in-person meetings take place.
- Continuity seems to be a hallmark of the IEM: there is an ongoing commitment to maximizing exceptional intellectual resources of the institute and to attracting foreign researchers, for instance through grant opportunities.
- The IEM has shown a continued capacity for high-quality academic production, both collective and individual.
- Researchers have undertaken a wide range of new projects in archaeology, literature, art history, and history.
- There has been heightened involvement of new academic communities abroad (for instance in Brazil), as well as with local communities in Portugal. One high point of public engagement is forging relationships with local town councils, such as that of Castelo de Vide, with which the IEM organizes each year an autumn doctoral school and a Congress whose proceedings are published in the year. There have been numerous workshops and open courses. The IEM has continued its efforts to disseminate knowledge to a broader public and pay particular attention to the articulation between research and teaching. Ongoing efforts have been made in regard to the training of tourist guides, teacher education and other dissemination activities.
- There is strong commitment to publishing books in Open Access, in line with the policies of the European Union.

### 2. Challenges

- The IEM journal *Medievalista Online* (now *Medievalista*) is extremely important. The first issue appeared in 2005 and its editors have regularly produced two issues a year since 2008. It

continues to be the only Portuguese journal dedicated entirely to medieval studies, adhering to a rigorous process of double-blind peer review. It offers, as an important regular feature, detailed presentations of completed doctoral theses relevant to the study of medieval Portugal. This section of the journal tends, perhaps inordinately, to favor masters and doctoral theses directed by Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (FCSH) professors. While some attention is given to dissertations from other Portuguese and foreign universities, the committee would encourage even greater representation of dissertations of merit from outside the FCSH and the IEM's sphere of foreign contacts. The journal deserves to be center of focus in coming years. Challenges include a) inclusion in international indexes b) creating cutting-edge special issues, and c) broadening the audience for the journal through the inclusion of reports on sessions in international congresses and the results of projects undertaken outside Portugal.

- The website—a key instrument for diffusing research, and news—is evidently being redesigned, and it will be important for the IEM (in order to enhance its image) to think about how to organize the contents, and to clearly represent purpose of the IEM. The committee encourages continuing attention to social media—in particular, Facebook and Twitter—, and suggests that a regular blog and a YouTube channel be created. A priority should be placed on making the site user-friendly to facilitate access to the catalog of publications, an updated agenda of activity, and direct access to *Medievalista* and a directory of current IEM members with their research lines, and projects in progress, with an eye to establishing new international collaboration and networks.

### 3. Areas for further reflection

- The functions of the research groups may need further internal reflection. It is currently not clear if the purpose of each RG is managerial or intellectual. There are apparent asymmetries in size and composition of research groups – does this have implications for research agendas? Would it make sense to have a larger and more cohesive number of research groups?
- What new opportunities has the pandemic presented? Should there, in the light of our current moment, be more focus on social history, or on public health? Should there be a special journal issue on “Medievalism after the Pandemic”? And might there be a higher profile to the historical experience of ‘minorities’, including Jewish and Muslim cultural history.
- Digital humanities need to have higher profile. The new digitization initiatives are exceptionally impressive, but might benefit from further strategic reflection.
- It would be advisable to make better known the publications of the IEM by informing (for instance, by e-mail) international scholars and research centers, and by sending copies of new books to relevant journals in Europe and North America.

- It would also be wise to prioritize the participation of young IEM researchers in major international conferences such as European Association of Urban History, the Congr s des Soci t s Savantes in France, or Semanas de N jera, as well as the congresses in Leeds, Kalamazoo, and Lleida, taking advantage of the fact that many current doctoral and postdoctoral students are bilingual or trilingual.

## Conclusion

The IEM has achieved maturity as an increasingly recognized institution in the European academic panorama. It has a wealth of human, intellectual, and financial resources that should be sufficient in coming years to make it even more internationally relevant. The strategic plan 2023-30 will be an appropriate occasion for taking the IEM to a new level of prominence.

*Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho*

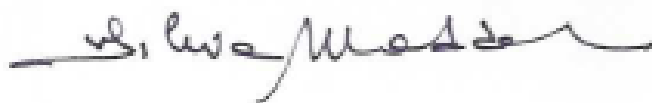
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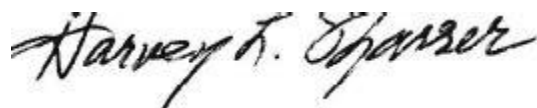
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