

7th Ardit International Congress

INTO THE VOID

Reconstructing the Medieval Past through Absence

•BARCELONA•

May 13th • 15th 2026

•CALL FOR
PAPERS•

Open until
February 14th 2026
arditcongress2026@gmail.com



UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA



7th ARDIT International Congress **INTO THE VOID**

Reconstructing the Medieval Past through Absence

•CALL FOR PAPERS• BARCELONA 13TH-15TH MAY 2026•

At the end of the 11th century, Guilhem de Peitieu inaugurated troubadour lyric poetry with a verse of *dreit nein*, that is, a composition about absolutely nothing, pushing the boundaries of language under the sign of paradox, enigma, and emptiness. In this way, the first troubadour echoed a problem that obsessed medieval theology: the *creatio ex nihilo* described in the first verse of Genesis. Surely, the most famous example of this controversy is the treatise *De substantia nihili et tenebrarum*, in which the Carolingian cleric Fredegar of Tours (9th century) defended the existence of Nothingness as an ontological entity from which God had created the world. In illuminated bibles, this primordial emptiness could be represented, as in the Kaisheim Bible (c. 1275), as an unpainted, empty, and perfect medallion that stands out amidst the folio's decorative profusion and inevitably draws the reader's attention. This absence, paradoxically, is full of meaning, for it exists between silence and word, between emptiness and substance, between aniconism and figuration.

Absence, therefore, is not a fatality. Today, historians, philologists, and archaeologists have found in absence a valuable element for studying and understanding the Middle Ages. Far from being an obstacle or impediment to research, absence has boosted our knowledge of the material culture, visual and textual discourses, mentalities, social organization, and documentary production of this period. Besides, absence is not a neutral concept, since it can be the result of chance or deliberate intent. Thus, gaps intentionally left in manuscripts and works of art reveal the artistic sensibility of their creators, while the destruction of documents in medieval archives betrays a subtle construction of a particular narrative.

On the other hand, the groups that are absent, rendered invisible, or marginalized in official sources allow us to delve into the deep inequalities of medieval society, its prejudices, and its identities. Likewise, the omission of certain genres, themes, or languages in the great songbooks and literary manuscripts offers a new perspective on the textual transmission of medieval literature, which is never a neutral process nor detached from hegemonic ideologies. In this sense, the presence of "vestiges" or *traccie* in known texts has led some scholars to reconstruct lost or poorly preserved literary traditions, a process not without risks and controversies. Finally, absence is a problem that also affects the contemporary world, since medieval heritage is continually threatened by processes of destruction and manipulation driven by political, economic, or identity-related motives. Ultimately, absence serves to create new meanings, new clues, and new ways of understanding the past and the present.

The organizers of the VII ARDIT International Congress welcome submissions of papers related to the uses, effects, and meanings of absence in the Middle Ages. Participants are encouraged to submit proposals on Medieval History, Art History, Archaeology, Philology, and Philosophy. Proposals may relate to the following thematic areas:

•THEMATIC AREAS OF THE CONGRESS•

THE VOID IN ART AND LITURGY	THE DOCUMENTARY GAPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representing absence through images or gestures.• Meanings of empty space.• The contrast between absence and presence.• Holes and their uses.• Silence in musical compositions.• Seeing the invisible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voluntary and involuntary destruction of documents.• Accidental loss of documentary sources.• The silence of the sources.• Gaps and representativeness of the documentation.• Medieval censorship.• Constructing one's own narrative from the destruction of documentation.• The consequences of absence on the historian's work.
ABSENCE AS A CONCEPT AND FEELING	HISTORIOGRAPHICAL GAPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Longing and absence in literature.• Marginal genres and themes.• Lost or poorly preserved literary traditions.• The concept of horror vacui.• Creation narratives.• Sensing the invisible (mystical experiences).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Groups absent from historiographical narratives and official discourses.• Topics forgotten by historiography.• Erased themes.• Modern and contemporary censorship.
THE DESTRUCTION OF HERITAGE	GAPS AND ABSENCES IN ARCHAEOLOGY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ideology and the destruction of heritage.• Decontextualization of objects, documents, and works of art.• Abusive practices of the art market.• The Civil War and heritage management.• Consequences of the lack of information on sales, acquisitions, and restorations of works of art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Looting.• Decomposed materials.• Meanings of the absence of certain materials.• Empty spaces in archaeological sites.• Empty spaces in urban planning.

·INSTRUCTIONS·

Proposals must be submitted by February 14, 2026, in Word format, to the following address: arditcongress2026@gmail.com. All proposals will be reviewed by the scientific committee, and presenters will be notified by the end of February 2026 whether their proposal has been accepted.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSALS

- Name and surname
- Academic affiliation
- Contact information (email, phone)
- Brief presentation of the researcher (50-75 words)
- Title of the communication
- Abstract of the proposal (150-200 words)
- *This abstract should include a specific description of the topic to be addressed and should clearly explain how it relates to the theme of the conference.
- Keywords (maximum 5)

MODE

All presentations will be held in person at the University of Barcelona. They will last 20 minutes. Online presentations will not be accepted.

LANGUAGES

English, Catalan, Spanish, French, Italian.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTACT

CONTACT

arditcongress2026@gmail.com

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Marianne Blanchard, Carla Ferrer Mir, Jordi Saura Nadal, Abel Vázquez Márquez.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Marianne Blanchard, Pol Bridgewater Mateu, Xavier Costa Badia, Carla Ferrer Mir, Jaume Marcé Sánchez, Jordi Saura Nadal, Maria de la Pau Serrat Adell, Abel Vázquez Márquez.

WITH THE SUPPORT OF:

IRCVM (Institut de Recerca en Cultures Medievals de la Universitat de Barcelona), Institut Milà i Fontanals de Recerca en Humanitats (CSIC-Barcelona), Màster en Cultures Medievals de la Universitat de Barcelona, Doctorat en Cultures Medievals de la Universitat de Barcelona, Facultat de Geografia i Història de la Universitat de Barcelona, AGAUR (Agència de Gestió d'Ajuts Universitaris i de Recerca de la Generalitat de Catalunya).