

The Virgin Mary in Italy and Francia in the eighth and ninth centuries

Abside de l'église Sant'Ambrogio alla Rienna, Montecorvino Rovella (Salerno), IXe siècle. Cl. de Francesca Dell'Acqua

Lecture

30th April 2025 from 14:00 pm to 16:00 pm

Galerie Colbert (INHA), salle Perrot, 2 rue Vivienne, 75002 Paris

The Virgin Mary in Italy and Francia in the eighth and ninth centuries - A little explored field?

Conférence de Francesca Dell'Acqua (Università di Salerno)

This lecture will focus on the ways in which Mary's figure developed in the early medieval period between Italy and France. There, by the mid-eighth century, she came to be promoted in texts and images as the mother of all believers and of all nations, and as the main intercessor above all saints. However, she was also the object of a theological polemic on her Assumption into heaven. In the relatively scarce visual evidence, she is portrayed in different, sometimes puzzling ways.

Overall, most of the extant evidence, textual and beyond, is related to monks or monasteries. This suggests that Mary was the focus of special attention in monasteries well before the Cluniac and Cistercian orders were established. Eschewing the *lectio faciliior* hypothesis that Mary appealed to clerics and monks since they were single males who sought comfort in her as a mother substitute, we will look at monastic authors and traditions also beyond the western world, as well as to specific theological and political circumstances, to try and explain a growing interest in her as main intercessor above all saints. We will consider the possibility that a renewed interest in Mary emerged in the eighth century thanks to a network of monastic connections which linked central Italy to the regions across the Alps, England, the Iberian Peninsula, and the eastern Mediterranean.

Vierge personnifiant l'Église, Aix-la-Chapelle (?), 1er quart du IXe siècle, ivoire d'éléphant, 22 x 14,5 x 0,5 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum (Inv. 17.190.49).

Vierge, sculpture, Breedon-on-the-Hill, église St Mary and St Hardulph, vers 800. Cliché de Francesca Dell'Acqua

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