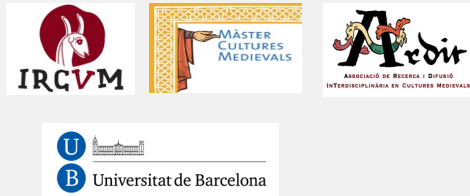


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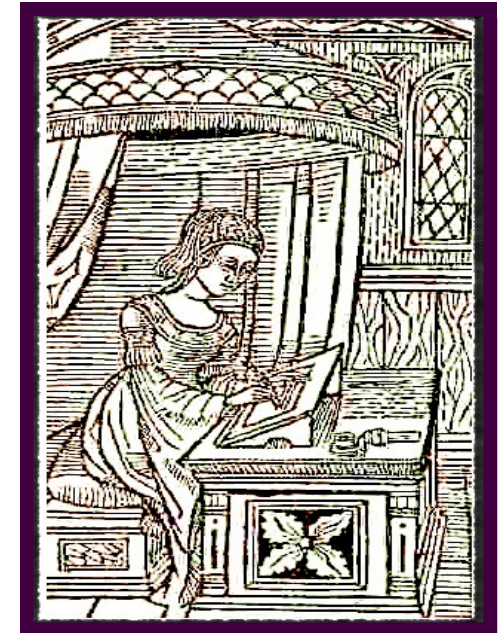
COL·LABORA:



The Communalty of Death in the Late Middle Ages

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Dimecres, 11 de febrer de 2015 - 16:00h
Aula Gran de seminaris (1^a planta)
Institució Milà i Fontanals

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The Communalty of Death in the Late Middle Ages

In Medieval Studies death and dying have been seen as a communal situation. Philippe Ariès (1981) declared that death was always a public situation up until the 19th century. Also, many contemporary medievalists have found out that during the Middle Ages family and neighbours used to gather around the dying.

However communal the medieval death seems to be, there is at least one source material which indicates the opposite. *Ars moriendi*, i.e. the art of dying-guides, were the “bestsellers” of the 15th century. In these guides the medieval theologians gave instructions to clerics and laymen on how to act at the moment of death. When reading these guidebooks one finds out that the communalty of the death bed scene is not as clear as it seems. Family and relatives are depicted as harmful for the dying person. According to these books, the dying should be left alone with a trusted friend who takes care of the soul of the dying.

Ars moriendi-guides are normative sources that don't tell us how people actually acted. They only demonstrate the attitudes of the late medieval theologians. In this presentation I am not trying to revoke or deny the common agreement of the communal aspect of medieval death. Nevertheless, I want to point out that however communal death in reality was, the ideal death was perhaps not seen as a crowded occasion. Through three different *Ars moriendi*-guides I will show that according to the Roman church the best way to enter the afterlife was to die accompanied by only one friend. This way the dying had the best chances to avoid the temptations of Devil and the perils of hell.

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