

A Global History of the Reception of Ancient Egypt



A Global History of the Reception of Ancient Egypt

Edited by
José das Candeias Sales and Susana Mota

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Cover: Image from the wall decorations of the “Salão Egípcio” (Egyptian Hall) located in Braga, Portugal. The scene depicts Horemheb’s triumph and victory procession following military campaigns in Nubia and is part of a vast pictorial ensemble, created in 1937, that once adorned the lounge of the Braga Cashiers’ Union and currently belongs to the Hotel Senat. See more in the paper: “*Café Oriental* in Guimarães and *Salão Egípcio* in Braga: Egyptian-themed venues in Portugal” (Section IV). © José das Candeias Sales.

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Daniel Rafaelić, PhD (1977) is a film historian, Egyptologist and diplomat. He worked for Croatian Cinematheque as a Head of film preservation and

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Jean-Marcel Humbert is a French Egyptologist and art historian, holder of a national doctorate *dès lettres et sciences humaines*, and a doctorate in Egyptology from Paris IV-Sorbonne University. Now retired as an honorary general curator, he was curator and then director of several French national museums, ending his career as general inspector of museums for the French Museums Directorate (Ministry of Culture). Alongside his professional career, he began studying Egyptomania in the late 1960s, at a time when he was one of the few people in the world interested in the subject. He became one of the leading specialists in the field and made his knowledge available to the general public through several blockbuster exhibitions (including *Egyptomania*, 1994, Paris-Ottawa-Vienna) and numerous books, catalogues, and articles. He still works as an independent researcher, scientific advisor for exhibitions, and lecturer.

John J. Johnston (†) was born in Glasgow in 1965 and brought up nearby. He became interested in Egypt at a young age, through visiting the Kelvingrove Museum, and then went to study Egyptology at Liverpool University in 1982. He completed his BA at the Open University, before taking an MA at University College London. He then began a PhD at the same institution, which was not complete at the time of his death, but was Vice-Chairman of the Egypt Exploration Society from 2010 to 2016. He was particularly interested in the modern reception of ancient Egypt, particularly in the cinema, and wrote, lectured and appeared on television to share his knowledge. He was also an expert on the British science fiction show *Doctor Who*, and was an enthusiastic, larger-than-life figure, whose death after a short illness on 28 August 2025 was a huge shock to his numerous friends and colleagues.

(Text written by Aidan Dodson)

Juan José Castillos is a Uruguayan Egyptologist and a Canadian citizen, who has been working on the subject of predynastic Egypt for the last 50 years. He studied four years of Chemical Engineering and then three years of Ancient History at the state university in

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Judit Garzón Rodríguez studied Sciences and Languages of Antiquity and Egyptology in Spain and Germany. She is currently a research associate at the Leibniz Institute of European History in Mainz, where she coordinates the HERMES data competence centre, and a postdoctoral researcher affiliated at CHAM, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. For the academic year 2025-2026, she has been appointed visiting professor for Egyptology at the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations, Northeast Normal University. She has taken part in numerous archaeological campaigns across Spain, Greece, and Egypt and continues to be actively involved in fieldwork in Egypt. Trained in an interdisciplinary research environment, she integrates philological, archaeological, historical, and theoretical approaches in her research to explore how ancient communities understood and articulated their world.

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Khnumhotep, Irukaptah, Kagemni, Mereruka, Mehu (Kemet Edizioni, 2025).

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Ross Conway is a Doctoral Researcher in the Department of English Literature at the University of Birmingham. His doctoral project, completed in September 2025, examines the receptions of ancient Egyptian mummified bodies in American, British, and European literature and culture of the long 19th century. His research situates the figure of the mummy within wider discourses of Egyptomania, the Gothic, and cultural anxieties around consumption, corporeality, and human/non-human interactions. He is particularly interested in how imaginative literature and historical discourse operate in tandem, shaping one another to negotiate questions of mortality, materiality, and cultural identity.

S.J. Wolfe has an MLS from SUNY Albany and a doctorate 'by acclamation' for her work in validating the myth of 'mummy paper'. From 1975 to 1982 she worked in museums and public libraries where she also lectured on ancient Egypt. In 1982, she joined the staff of the American Antiquarian Society where she

had unprecedented access to early American original published sources and continued lecturing and writing on Egyptian mummies in America. In 2009, she published her study *Mummies in Nineteenth Century America: Ancient Egyptians as Artifacts*. Since her retirement in 2019 she has continued to research and study Egyptian mummies in America and presents her findings in articles and at conferences.

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Stephen Ficalora has an MA in Arts in History with a focus on ancient Egypt at the University of Memphis in 2013 and an MA in Arts in Egyptology at the University of Toronto in 2014. He is currently completing his PhD in Egyptology at the University of Toronto, focusing on textual analysis of wisdom literature and tomb autobiographies. He participated on the 2013 season of The Karnak Great Hypostyle Hall Project, a joint mission of the University of Memphis and Université de Québec à Montréal. He has presented for the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities in Canada and the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale in Cairo.

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Presentation: Project and collection of global histories: Multipolarisation and the construction of knowledge from a global perspective

José Eduardo Franco

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The 21st century has put on the agenda, in all sectors of culture, reflections about the phenomenon of globalisation that affects us in the most diverse areas and forces us to reconsider the way in which we learn to construct our knowledge about people, civilisations and the cosmos. The revolution of the old worldviews that hyper-globalisation is carrying out at full speed, through the new digital technologies of communication, started 600 years ago, with Iberian travel making its way through unknown seas. Thus, ‘the world opened to the world itself’, as António Vieira said, and the planet became known as a single unity and as the globe it is. Today, after six centuries of planetary relationships, the ‘Global Village’, as Marshall McLuhan called it in the 1960s, is a reality that is not only globalising trends, behaviours, and ways of acting, but also changing the classic paradigms of construction of knowledge.

There are two key concepts crucial to understanding the globalisation process: mobility and exchange. In light of these two concepts, we can, as Edgar Morin states in his book *Penser Global*, see the roots and the evolution of globalisation far beyond its contemporary perception and experience. In fact, the perception of globalisation is the result of the knowledge of the globe and the cosmos in relation to the projection movements and the establishment of human communities, since humanity’s earliest days in different territories in the world.

If the dynamics of globalisation favour exchange processes, which are transformers on a broad spectrum in the present and at an increasingly rapid pace, the experience of the Global Age in which we live today also has epistemological implications for how knowledge is constructed and reconstructed in various scientific areas, and, in this context, also for the past of cultural, political, and economic legacies.

Hence, one of the areas where this transformation is starting to emerge and being tested is in the way in which we look at the past of people, culture and civilisations. In our old school textbooks, we learned knowledge of the History of our country, as did people did everywhere, from a national perspective, having as a starting point the territorial configuration that encompassed the state, the nation, and the diverse elements that were part of that territory, limited to the physical, symbolical, cultural, mental, spiritual, etc., plans. In this perspective, first we studied the nation, and the rest of the world was seen through a national lens.

In this sense, the brand-new school of ‘Global History’ draws its conclusions from the global worldview, which is ours today, to construct a new hermeneutic framework for revisiting and systematising historical knowledge in the various areas of human action, in light of the ‘global’ scope.

The major challenge of the ideology of global histories about the pasts of the most diverse territorial units – compartmentalised by classical history, in terms of construction of knowledge, within the perspective of countries and nations, in a logic that is, more or less, closed in itself – is to break with the idea of isolated ‘identities’ and

show the transparency of borders. It has the intention of showing that the global dynamics of interinfluence in various domains of human action in the relationship with the natural environment, which are exceptionally evident nowadays, have always existed, although subject to other rhythms than the ones of today. As Chloé Maurel (2014: 111) says:

[...] l'histoire globale implique l'idée que les échanges, les influences entre sociétés et cultures, ne se font pas seulement à sens unique mais souvent à double sens et qu'il y a des circulations culturelles, des circulations de savoirs, qui s'établissent entre espaces dominés et espaces dominants. Un dernier élément important de l'histoire globale est la dimension interdisciplinaire [...], qui était à la fois historien, économiste, sociologue, anthropologue et géographe, associe volontiers plusieurs disciplines.¹

In this perspective of the construction of history, which was in effect practically until our days, each nation assumed itself to be the navel of the world, and the world became a secondary panorama, with which relationships of cooperation, transaction, influence, domain, conflict, separation, denial, or, in some cases, reception were established. History was apprehended in a dualistic logic: 'us' and 'them', where 'them' could be either friends or enemies. Thus, the surrounding panorama was known from a national perspective, only considering the nation's values, stages and goals, achieved or not. Often, 'national history' was taught as an autonomous reality from world history, disconnected from it, with an independent existence, which may, for simple and ideologically constrained explanations, be presented as if nothing else existed or, if it existed, its existence was not important.

In several countries, a sharp reflection on global history has begun to emerge, implying the need to review our construction of history from a national perspective. This epistemological reflection has given rise, in the field of historiography, to new global histories, either through a critical revisiting of the knowledge of the countries' past in light of a hermeneutic key that reveals the shaping power of global interactions, or through the study of cross-cutting processes of reception of ancient cultural heritages over the long term and on a planetary scale. In this epistemological ideology, countries are no longer considered as closed spaces, where the horizon is defined by a national perspective, from which their history is constructed, but rather as a territorial platform taken over in the extensive duration of the humanising process, from the first human communities that left their mark in terms of culture and memory, up to the most recent migratory waves that transcend borders and disregard the limits that have compartmentalised humanity, as if within national chessboard squares.

Roughly speaking, the country-nations, as a way of organising, have existed for, approximately, only 500 years. But the so-called national territories thus limited set the stage from where, throughout the millennia, people, ethnicities, clans, tribes, landlords, kingdoms and empires passed and acted, floated around and settled without taking into account the actual borders, whose stability is still recent.

Our research and editing project entitled 'Global Histories' intends to invite experts from different locations and scientific backgrounds to produce, in an interdisciplinary dialogue, critical knowledge decentred from the national perspective from which we are used to looking into our past. With the results from this project, we want to identify and understand the transversalities and how much they helped in constructing the culture-world that is today the result of multiple intersections, understanding history as a process, a place of encounter of other worlds and different movements (of interinfluence, interfertilisations, appropriations, metamorphosis, shocks, and exchanges that have shaped new realities), which contributed, with relevant material, to an understanding of the global history of our planet.

¹ Global history implies the idea that exchanges and influences between societies and cultures are not merely one-way but often two-way, and that there are flows of culture and knowledge that take place between dominated and dominant spaces. A final important element of global history is its interdisciplinary dimension [...], which readily combines several disciplines, as exemplified by figures who were at once historians, economists, sociologists, anthropologists and geographers.

In the wake of projects of global histories that have been conducted in France, England, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, and USA, and, more recently, with the publication of *The Global History of Portugal*, we are deepening this historiographical ideology across sectors amongst the comprehensive project called ‘Global Histories’.

Thus, it is our intention to contribute a work of reference – under the aegis of the UNESCO Chair of Global Studies/ Centre of Global Studies of Universidade Aberta, in cooperation with international academic entities – to consolidate an innovative venture from Portugal, in line with what has been developed abroad, with the elaboration of works around the emerging epistemological ideology of global histories.

This present work, led amazingly by José das Candeias Sales and Susana Mota, dedicated to the reception of ancient Egypt, perfectly fits the construction of knowledge in light of the epistemological ideology of global history considering the temporal and spatial transversality of the approach, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of the different perspectives of analysis. Ancient Egyptian history, culture and imagery have, since Napoleon’s time, and on an even larger scale over the last 100 years, attracted global interest – interest from scholars in the fields of archaeology, architecture, political history, religion and arts, but also from collectors and treasure hunters.

That interest in antiquity in general, and in Egypt in particular, became almost a trend, with peaks of greater expression that have contributed important archaeological discoveries, books, academic courses, ‘blockbuster’ events, on top of everyday tourism, which have brought people to Egypt from all over the world to visit the surviving remains from the glorious Egyptian past, in particular its iconic pyramids and temples. The continued existence of this fascination for ancient Egypt has seen recent exponential growth with the international celebrations linked to the 100th anniversary of the discovery of Pharaoh Tutankhamun’s tomb, now one of the most famous tombs in the world, if not the most remarkable of them all, being a monument of immense curiosity.

Therefore, the processes, derivations, and metamorphosis of the reception of ancient Egypt in different fields, from art to politics, from the media to fashion, to the range of tourist offers, are relevant themes to approach and systematise within the hermeneutical perspective proposed by global history.

Consequently, the cultural heritage, in the broader sense, of Egyptian antiquity has raised scientific, cultural, artistic and tourism interest across different continents. The critical systematisation of our knowledge of the reception of ancient Egypt – its metamorphoses and expressions, its uses and meanings over the centuries, in different political and cultural settings, and in different parts of the world – would provide a valuable scientific service to help with our understanding of the worldwide fascination sparked by this ancient civilisation.

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General introduction

José das Candeias Sales, Susana Mota

Centre for Global Studies of Universidade Aberta (CEG-UAb)

In a time when the studies of reception of ancient Egypt and its different branches have increasingly established themselves as known and renowned research fields, with growing interest and true global expression, it was captivating and exciting to think about making available an ‘overall synthesis’ that simultaneously brought together the important work already done – which has enabled us to achieve the wellspring and the level of knowledge we have available today – and the researches that are currently in progress which point out for future paths.

Thus, it was the deep sense that it is necessary and possible to give special attention to the reception of ancient Egypt as a theme that has gained status amidst academic studies, and which has already a true global dimension, that has motivated us at the Centre for Global Studies of Universidade Aberta (Lisbon, Portugal) to publish this *Global History of the Reception of Ancient Egypt*, which has, in good time, relied on the helpful and enriching cooperation of the renowned academic publisher Archaeopress.

Understandably, the main objective behind this release was, thus, to gather contributions that allow us to give justice to the concept of ‘global history’, showing, on one hand, how global the reception of ancient Egypt is, and, on the other hand, how global the perspectives, approaches, objects of analysis, and research experiences are.

The concept of ‘global’ can be equally applied to the authors who contribute to this project, as we made sure to guarantee the cooperation of various experts and researchers from different origins, with different experiences, academic backgrounds and from different institutions. To this end, it was possible to ensure direct contributions from 56 authors, linked to more than 40 different institutions, and from different countries of origin, who, due to their research and work produced, are renowned experts in the field, but also some who are now building and shaping their promising paths.

The 100 nano-chapters in this book, which intentionally cover different dimensions and perspectives on the theme of the reception of ancient Egypt, were organised in ten different sections previously established by us: Theoretical and Terminological Frameworks; Reception of Ancient Egypt Throughout History; Performing Arts; Architecture and Decorative Arts; Museums and Collecting; Literature and Comics; Entertainment; Icons; Others; and Geographies.

Each section includes an introductory text, the purpose of which is not to provide a summary of each of the texts that make up the section, but rather to give a general approach to the theme, thus allowing for a contextualisation, and even an explanation for its pertinence and inclusion. Therefore, in total, the book is composed of 110 texts.

The first section, ‘Theoretical and Terminological Frameworks’, which has nine texts, as its name suggests, aims to produce a framing reflection about the concepts, terms and expressions with which we usually deal in the field of the reception of ancient Egypt. And there are many! The goal is to try to understand their uses, origins, distinctions, articulations, relationships, complementarities, overlaps, and even ambiguities, with the clear intent of outlining them and making that outline evident as a prerequisite of the paramount and structural theoretical-methodological-epistemological importance that the conceptual clarity plays in the academic study, especially in a multidisciplinary, kaleidoscopic and ever-changing field such as reception.

The seven texts included in the section ‘Reception of Ancient Egypt Throughout History’ seek to illustrate how the fascination for Pharaonic Egypt has established and materialised itself in different cultures, spaces and through time, making it unique and paradigmatic amongst the ancient civilisations. Be it for its more spiritual or material dimension, with examples coming more from the world of ideas, the artefacts or symbols, or be it from the visible appropriation in popular manifestations, it becomes clear that the reception of ancient Egypt is an all-time phenomenon, almost as old as Egyptian civilisation itself, with the inherent dynamics and explanations that each historical example naturally entails.

The ‘Performing Arts’, an aggregating designation for the third section, composed of five texts, is an assembly of expressive examples of the reception of ancient Egypt. The example that comes to mind immediately, originating from opera (a theatrical form of art that combines music, singing, theatre, scenography and costumes), is the famous ‘Egyptian opera’ *Aida*, by Giuseppe Verdi, debuted in Cairo in 1871 and, from then on, frequently performed all over the world. However, as it will become clear from some texts in this section, it was not a one-off example, and there are many accounts of the presence of Egypt in the field of opera, theatre, and opera-theatre. The echoes of Pharaonic times in the historical imaginary, the sensuality, and the aesthetic splendour that the Egyptianising scenes recreate, the dreamlike and fantastic configuration given off by the exotism from the East, make ancient Egypt, its characters, creations and landscapes extremely attractive for the performing arts and, consequently, for the production of ‘Egyptian-styled’ performances. This is another pathway present in the landscape of the reception of ancient Egypt.

There are many notions associated with Pharaonic Egypt, in general, as a refined, aesthetically and artistically evolved civilisation, with a considerable domain of artistic techniques and an undeniable lasting prestige of its manifestations and productions, as exemplified by the grandiose monuments, temples, tombs and sculptures that survive up to the present day. The impact in the creation and recreation of architectonic and sculptural shapes (pyramids, obelisks, sphinx, columns, sculptures), with its own contexts and adapted to public spaces and funerary fixtures, but also in painting (the example of Cleopatra VII), or as ornamental elements, are treated with great variety of detail in the 13 texts in the section ‘Architecture and Decorative Arts’. The aesthetical revivalism and the survival of Egyptian motifs are flattering signs of the reception this civilisation has been garnering globally.

The material conservation of the original Egyptian artefacts, and even the forgeries, is a generalised phenomenon virtually all over the world, with its archiving and exhibition in collections (public and private), antique shops, and museums. In the eight texts that make up the section ‘Museums and Collecting’ the importance becomes clear of the role played by memory and learning in the process of conservation, knowledge, adaptation, and the recreation of those elements of the Egyptian past, and also in its popularisation. The artefacts in museums and collections, exhibited permanently or temporarily, which are the focus of attraction for thousands of visitors, are open windows to the past, contributing to the fame and perpetuation of the memory of Egyptian civilisation and its agents, while they also act as strong stimuli and sources of inspiration for many artists and creators. These ancient artefacts also communicate with modern artists. The reception of ancient Egypt blossoms and spreads in different ways.

Reception in the ‘Literature and Comics’ section features ten texts, with particular attention given to how fiction approaches mummy(ies) figure(s) – ‘mummymania’, as it were. There are countless traces of the recreation of Egyptianising motifs in literature and in comics that show how ancient Egyptian history, culture, religion, and archaeology have, and continue to influence writers, poets, and artists in different media. By revisiting the main literary works and comics, the texts in this section allow an evaluation of the importance and reach of this output in terms of the construction of creative models of approach to the Pharaonic past. Bringing to life, or bringing back to life, real or mythical characters of ancient times creates links and connections with the past, bringing it into the present or, at least, making it more so.

In the ‘Entertainment’ section, impossible to omit on account of the huge range of global expressions of contemporary popular culture and mass media (i.e. cinema, television, music, computer and video games, podcasts, social networks,

internet platforms, etc.) it encompasses, we have gathered 11 texts with different approaches, narratives and aesthetics about more conventional (or disruptive) segments amidst 21st-century society, now increasingly digital and connected. We are facing powerful forms of popularisation in the history of ancient Egypt. Amongst these, also stands out the analysis of the representation of mummies, which are always leading protagonists in cinema, television, and even in social media. In fact, mummies are some of the most consistently represented characters from ancient Egypt, with a global resonance, much due to the entertainment industry in its different sectors, as well as audiovisual sources.

For popular contemporary culture, pharaohs and queens of ancient Egypt are true worldwide 'icons'. In this section, with six texts, we emphasise some of these celebrities (Tutankhamun, Nefertiti, Akhenaton, Cleopatra) who, in different forms, incarnations, and appropriations, are now renowned superstars in global pop culture, evoking, with various meanings, the country of the Nile, its powerful institutions, its unique art, and its omnipresent spirituality. Accessible and appealing references, capable of seducing and moving consumers, are easy prey for merchandising, advertising, and leisure industries, who, by appropriating them, contribute to the continuous processes of nourishing and enhancing their status as iconic figures. Their popularity brings back the imagery of ancient Egypt and instils it in the contemporary collective imagination. More mythical than real, more symbolic and emblematic than historical, these icons of Egyptian nature are eloquent and active testimonies to the reception and perception of Pharaonic antiquity in our time.

In the section 'Others', in which we have 16 texts, we have quite a significant number of indicators that point to the use or contribution to the composition and re-composition of lasting narratives and images of ancient Egypt, be it photography, travel literature written by women, bookplates, jewellery, everyday language, hieroglyphic writing, fashion, advertising, or tourism. For some, these might seem like minor themes, but, in reality, they are significant extensions of the fields of the reception and perception of ancient Egypt that are well worth considering in light of their repercussions in the kinds of connections they suggest with the world of ancient Egyptians and their manifestations. The incorporation, reproduction, and evocation of Egyptian motifs in these different categories, in a stereotyped and/or symbolic, esoteric, mystical way, all emphasise the massive interest generated by Egyptian civilisation, and how permeable and fertile the reception soil is. The popularisation and massification of some of these motifs, and how they can still seduce millions of consumers and others exposed to them, reinforce the civilisation's importance in the global collective imagination and the need for us to pay attention to the effect they have in the present and how the Egyptian past is shaped.

Lastly, in the 15 texts of the 'Geographies' section, we seek a general/exemplary perspective of the reception of ancient Egypt in a certain geographical context. In fact, with examples coming from China, New Zealand, Canada, United States of America, Argentina, Uruguay, Scotland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, Croatia, Serbia, and Ukraine, more than establishing common denominators and characteristics, it appears that the reception of ancient Egypt is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that transcends geographical, cultural, and time boundaries, even if it is not evenly distributed and understood. However, the 'global' and universal character of this field of study and of how ancient Egypt was imagined, adapted, and reinterpreted is indisputable. Even accepting the supremacy of the Western perspective – that is to say the colonial and Eurocentric paradigms, and the sub-representative of certain cultural areas of the globe (mainly of the African continent) in the academic discourse and in public awareness – it is no exaggeration to claim that the reception of ancient Egypt is a global phenomenon.

When editing this book, *Global History of the Reception of Ancient Egypt*, we believe that the reflection gathered here will be an important step in broadening the horizon of the reception of studies of ancient Egypt, decentring the narratives and highlighting even more its global resonance, without disregarding, nonetheless, that each region/location can relate to ancient Egypt differently, with distinctive motivations, with specific goals. It is always key to consider the historical, political and cultural contexts to understand better perceptions of ancient Egypt, and even

the preferences for certain approaches and researches which can also result from a certain tradition, school, or simply a cultural habit.

If the greater potential of reception studies lies in the profound and dynamic interactions between ancient Egypt and contemporary culture, it is necessary, therefore, to operate, at the same time, within a pluralistic scope, with regional and local contexts, and to recognise that interaction is manifold and nuanced and, thus we can even talk not about contemporary culture but about ‘contemporary cultures’ which receive, appropriate and interpret ancient Egypt. The ‘glocal’ approach is decisive to the full comprehension of the phenomenon, and this articulation between local and global is also Global History. It is our conviction that this volume fulfils that goal.

If, as fully expressed, the key idea that has guided all aspects of this *Global History of the Reception of Ancient Egypt* was the ‘global’ aspect of it, in the sense of comprehensiveness, roundness and wholeness, we are, nevertheless, aware that its absolute accomplishment was utopic, and thus, impossible to fulfil. As a result, we are aware of the absences, of everything left out, of what, for one reason or another, could not be included, although, in some cases, they were part of our initial intentions. However, we do not consider these absences reasons for lament or discouragement. We rather see them as challenges for the future; a door left ajar and which will allow the continuity of reception studies on an even more global scale.

In fact, we see the work accomplished as a conquest and a contribution. A conquest and a contribution that is not only ours, but of everyone who embarked on this great project with us and to whom we owe our grateful appreciation.

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And, although this work is published in English, with the objective of being as global as possible regarding its targeted audience, we are Portuguese and it is mandatory to thank the relentless work of the translator and proofreader Carla Mota who, with her invaluable dedication, allowed us to reach the required technical rigour this field demands.

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A massive thank you to all of you, and a fraternal and global hug.