

# THE



# TIMES

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## A literary favour to world culture

**L**anguage and love are intertwined. Scientists argue that the brain's erotic and linguistic centres are the same. Experience dictates that affairs of the heart lead to letters, books and poetry. On April 23, St George's Day, Catalonia's erudite version of Valentine's Day, lovers will not be swapping chocolate but books. Champion Casanovas should give a Moleiro manuscript.

Moleiro publishers, set up in 1992 by Manuel Moleiro, provide an invaluable service to the academic world from Barcelona, the publishing capital of the Spanish speaking world. While most publishers offer a simple material support on which detailed photographs of pages are printed, Moleiro makes a new manuscript.

Moleiro calls these "quasi-originals". The entire object is borrowed from a library and

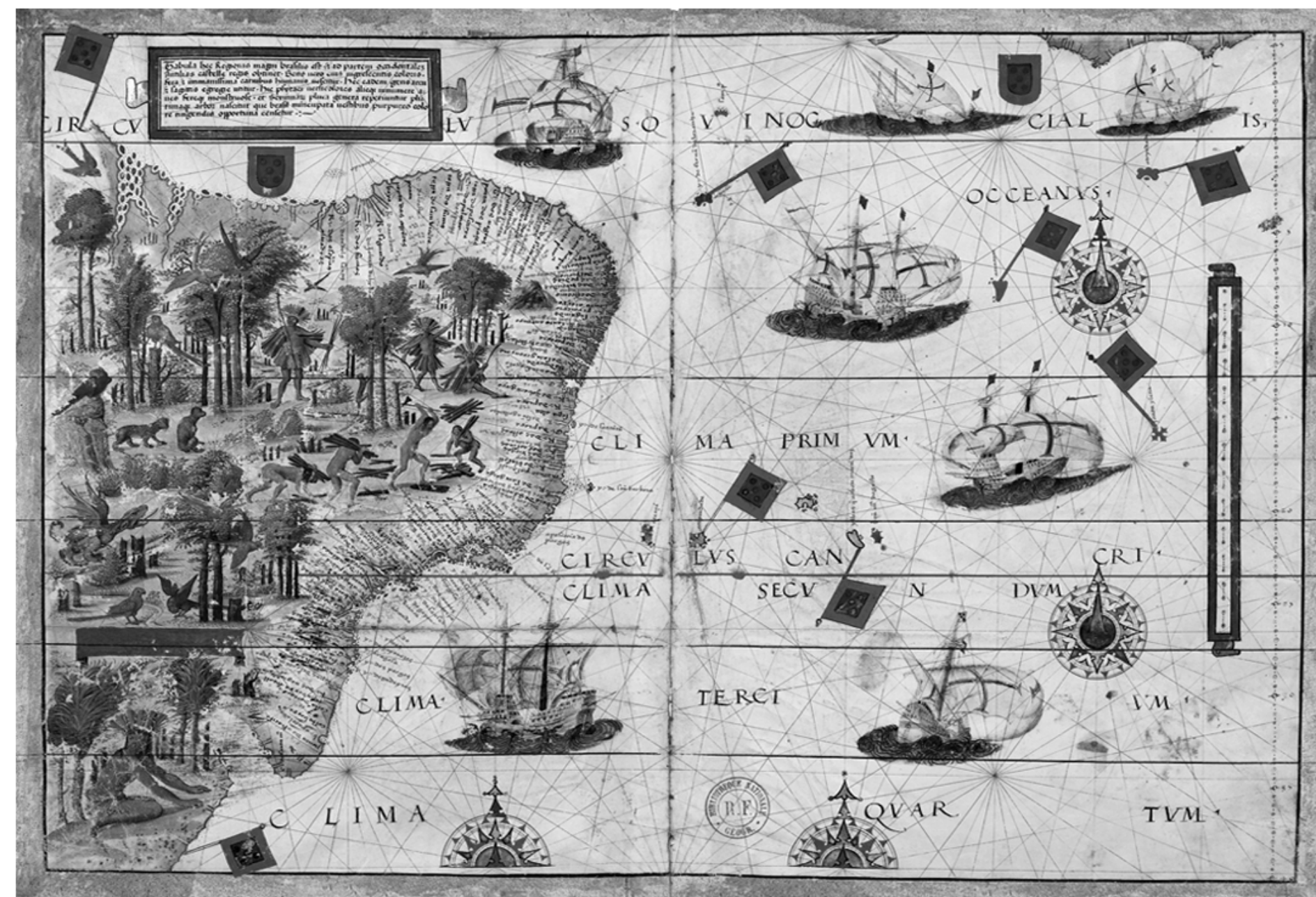
### BOOKS

**Even the Pope keeps a Moleiro manuscript next to his bed, says Allegra Stratton**

reproduced as faithfully as possible, beginning with handmade parchment or paper. Each of the pages is trimmed to the size and shape of its prototype. The image is then beamed on with special printing techniques that utilise inks chosen by experts to be true to the original. Colours, wear, wax stains and moth holes are all replicated in the printing process, and silver and gold are all added by hand.

Only 987 are made of each and all are signed by notarial deed, making them attractive to investors. Moleiro manuscripts are so highly regarded that when President George W. Bush visited Madrid last year, the Spanish Government presented the American First Lady, Laura Bush, with a *Book of Hours*. The Pope, another loyal fan, keeps his copy of Moleiro's *Martyrologies* by his bed.

The real benefits, however, are felt in academia. While some may regard anything so expensive (prices range from £300 to £9,000) as the antithesis of the academic process and yet others may believe that rarity and expense is the correct context in which to study a manuscript, most see academia as revolutionised by such techniques. "It is our favour to world culture," says Ana Maria Suarez of Moleiro Publishers.



The art of illustrators cannot be appreciated while shut in museums. Now there are nearly 1,000 copies of manuscripts such as *The Bible of St Louis*, and maps such as the *Portolan Chart of Christopher Columbus*, which previously existed in separated sections split across the world's libraries and analysed as poor-quality microfiches.

The British Library owns all three of Moleiro's maps and

Oxford's Bodleian has just bought the £9,000 St Louis Bible; of which Moleiro has already sold 500.

Another reproduction revealed a Byzantine manuscript, a luxury item from the capital's best cryptoria, to be of poor paper quality, impossible to see from the microfiches and indicative of greater social differentiation within the elite of Byzantium than previously recognised.

All manuscripts are accompanied by such academic analysis.

The feel and texture of the paper and burnished gold between the fingers is convincing.

On the anniversary of the birth of Miguel de Cervantes and the death of William Shakespeare, what better way to honour their memories than to prove the book is not dead and buy a Moleiro. Of course, chocolate hearts might be cheaper.