



Family languages

It is those letters again

The first medieval writing is based on the traditional Latin lettering which, on the one hand is common to all Romance languages and, on the other hand, does not yet fully reflect some diverse evolutions differentiating each one. For instance, Castilian had already lost the initial *f*- in Latin (*farina* > *harina*) but medieval papers keep reproducing it; likewise, Asturian had already reinforced the initial *l*- (*lingua* > *llingua*) but scribes usually kept the original simple graphic form (*lingua*).

However, spelling solutions such as *laue* 'key' or *lamar* 'call' show sometimes how generalized that trend was at that moment in pronunciation. This, on the other hand, had many traits which were different from what is known today so only a very rigorous philological analysis could let us know the real phonetics behind those texts. The medieval spelling of a toponym such as *Gigion* was not read in the Middle Ages with the current Castilian diction *Gijón* nor it could yet be read as the Asturian *Xixón*, but rather with the voiced pronunciation which a current speaker of Portuguese would use today when saying *Jorge* or like a Frenchman would say *George*.

Image 1. Will of the canon don Bartolomé d'Uviéu in 1275 (Archive of the Cathedral of Uviéu).

it was written...

G, J *Gigion, gente, jamás*

L- at the beginning of a word *lingua, luna, laue, lamar*

LL, LI, LY in the middle of a word in many instances *fillos, ouella, mulier* (medieval Castilian: *fijos, oueja, mugier*)

etcetera

...but it was pronounced

[ʒ], that is, like a G, J in Portuguese, French or Catalan.

[ʎ], that is, like current LL

[j], that is, like current Y

Image 2. Will of the canon don Bartolomé d'Uviéu in 1275 (Archive of the Cathedral of Uviéu). Reproduction of the original document.