

Research Group on Manuscript Evidence

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Professionals' Views of Manuscript Writing: A Workshop

We plan to hold a workshop on Monday, 1 November, devoted to calligraphic techniques in medieval manuscripts and their modern descendants. We hope that the workshop might provide a chance to gather the professional expertise of both manuscript scholars and practicing calligraphers. We will mainly concentrate upon early medieval Latin scripts produced in England in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and some modern counterparts. We hope you might attend to give your advice and help.

We aim to run the workshop on informal lines, as a round table. This will give plenty of opportunity to respond to the speakers and ask questions. Michael Gullick will discuss changes in English scripts and scribal techniques between the late eleventh and late twelfth centuries (as in Corpus MSS 2–3, 86, and 270). Tessa Webber will comment on the development of Canterbury scripts during the period, concentrating upon the question of the hand of the author Eadmer as a younger and older man (as in MSS 371 and 452). Mildred Budny will survey images of scribes at work in Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman manuscripts (as in MSS 389 and 4), to assess their value either as accurate witnesses to contemporary practice, copies of earlier models, or expressions of artistic licence. Leslie Webster will be on hand to comment on the archaeological survival of scribal materials.

There will be a demonstration of calligraphic techniques and modern examples based on medieval models, including work by Gareth Colgan, Gaynor Goffe, Gerald Fleuss and Emiko Kinebuchi. Emiko Kinebuchi will speak about her experience of studying medieval Western scripts from a Japanese point of view, through copying their models and developing modern examples for professional use. Gareth Colgan will be on hand to describe his interest in calligraphy and its medieval tradition, including the Book of Kells.

A discussion session will consider questions about scribal materials and practices, including parchment making, pens, inks, pigments and their uses. We would like to ask for advice on certain problematic passages in the manuscripts, better to understand the specific processes which produced their features. The session might consider, for example, such questions as: 1) What criteria identify the beginning or ending of a scribal stint? 2) How long might trained scribes take to write scripts of different degrees of formality and complexity? 3) What distinguishes a casual blob of ink from a deliberate dot? 4) How long would medieval inks take to dry on parchment? 5) How often would pens need to be sharpened? 6) What degree of precision is possible — or necessary — for taking measurements of medieval scripts, nib-widths and the like? 7) Which types of quills were used for different functions, including punctuation marks, flourishes and decorative elements? We hope that participants might contribute to the discussion from their expertise and interests.

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A number of manuscripts from the Corpus collection will be available for examination during the workshop. They will include MSS 2, 44, 86, 130, 139, 173, 197B, 270, 371, 389 and 452. Other manuscripts may emerge for inspection as they occur to us in the course of the session.

The workshop will meet in the Parker Library. We will begin at 11 a.m., break for lunch and continue until about 4:30 p.m. Alas, we must ask our participants to contribute to the cost of lunch, as our Research Group funds cannot cover it. To let us know whom we may expect, please fill out the enclosed form and return it to me as soon as possible.

Invitations are sent to: R.I. Page, Mildred Budny, Tim Graham, Catherine Hall, Leslie French, Nigel Wilkins, Nicholas Hadgraft, Michael Gullick, Tessa Webber, Michael Borrie, Andrew Prescott, Nigel Ramsay, Michelle Brown, Christopher de Hamel, Toshiyuki Takamiya, James Carley, Jenny Sheppard, Christine Fell, Alex Rumble, Malcolm Godden, Richard Gameson, Peter Kidd, Leslie Webster, Gareth Colgan, Gaynor Goffe, Gerald Fleuss, Ieuan Clayton, John Winterbourne, Carole Hough, Emiko Kinebuchi, Tomio Yanagisawa, Yoko Horiuchi, Kazuko Nemoto, Elaine Treharne.

Mildred Budny