



Call for papers:

‘Namque ego suetus eram hos libros legisse frequenter’: Early Medieval Practices of Reading and Writing

Place: Den Haag, The Netherlands

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This is a **call for papers** for a conference on the subject of books, practices of writing, reading, copying and studying in the early middle ages. It is organized by the research project ‘Marginal Scholarship: The Practice of Learning in the Early Middle Ages (c. 800 – c. 1000)’, which seeks to map the phenomenon of writing in the blank space of manuscripts (in the margin, in between the lines, on fly-leaves or inserted leaves) in the early middle ages, in order to gain a better understanding of the way in which books and texts were used in that period. In essence, we aim to understand the intellectual practices of the period as reflected by the manuscripts and to re-evaluate both how traditional the period was, and how innovative. Furthermore, we hope to explore how the developments of the culture of writing in this period led to developments in later periods, and also how they compare to those in other cultures, such as the Byzantine world or the world of Late Antiquity.

Confirmed speakers include David Ganz and John Contreni.

For the conference, we think of the following questions and themes for sessions:

1. Practices of annotating

Who were allowed to make annotations in manuscripts? What can we learn about the hierarchical organization of the writing process in monastic or cathedral environments, and are there ways to say something about the status of scribes and/or scholars working in manuscript margins?

Annotating practices reflect many different functionalities of the appropriation of text: they can, for example, reflect a process of text comparison and textual criticism; they can have the aim to gather information in order to facilitate the composition of a new text; they can offer guidance to the reader, either in the sense of offering explanation or interpretation, or in the sense of warning the reader and delivering criticism; they can engage in a discussion with the author of the text, or with another annotator, or create stepping stones from one text to others, in order to broaden the reading of the text by offering new and different opinions. We would like to discuss these and other functionalities, and replace the mono-dimensional 'annotated book = school book' with a richer and more accurate model of interpretation.

2. The profile of annotating practices

Can we see patterns in the relationship between textual genres and the kind of marginal activity encountered in the margin? Were certain textual genres treated differently than others? For example, do theological texts invite other types of critical reflection than scientific texts or historical texts? Are there genres with 'empty' margins, and what would be the reason for that?

Can we distinguish sets of annotating practices which are specific to certain intellectual centres or groups of scholars? Can we distinguish individual practices even, which allow us to identify the scholar who worked in the manuscript? It has been argued, for example, that the group around Florus of Lyon had a very particular set of signs to mark patristic texts, in order to prepare florilegia of patristic quotations on certain subjects. Are there other examples of such private practices, and what happened to them after the death of the scholar(s) at their centre?

Some annotating practices are particular to a certain period in history. Tironian notes, for example, seem to have been used in a specific time and space for marginal comments, and are rarely found outside that period. The Nota sign gets company in the shape of a pointing hand at a certain moment in time, is perhaps even replaced by it. Could we mark annotation practices on a chronological scale, just as we can with letter shapes or other physical features of manuscripts?

3. Cultures of writing

Manuscripts, scholars and books travelled, and thus the culture of writing is a dynamic and ever evolving field. Can we map the circles of influence from one scholar, or one school to the next through the eyes of manuscripts? Can we trace specific practices of annotating or writing in general through history, and follow their historical development? And do these practices offer us insight into the intellectual networks of the time?

What would be good strategies to map the dynamics of the lives of manuscripts, both in the sense of their actual travels, and in the sense of their changing contents?

A selection of the papers from the conference will be collected in an edited volume, to be published in 2016.

If you are interested in participating in this conference, please send us a title and abstract (ca 400-500 words), your contact information and affiliation to MarginalScholarship@gmail.com. The deadline for sending in abstracts is **15 January 2015**. You will hear back from us before 15 February 2015 whether your proposal has been accepted.

The organizers offer to cover your expenses of accommodation. No fee will be asked, lunches will be provided and one conference dinner. For your travel expenses we kindly ask you to rely on the budget of your own university or other academic sponsor. If this is a problem, please indicate this in your correspondence with us.

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