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## Introduction: The Matter of Manuscripts and Methodologies

Over the last twenty years, the study of medieval manuscripts has flourished on an unprecedented scale. Once considered to be ancillary disciplines, codicology or palaeography were studied as part of historical, classical, and literary fields, and taught as part of a regime of foundational training for medievalists. Now these core components of Manuscript Studies have been further developed as part of a field in its own right. Manuscript Studies has become, then, a capacious field with such a multitude of research possibilities, practices, trajectories, and potential that it is difficult to trace a full survey of its scholarly reach across continents, languages, and geographical locales.<sup>1</sup> Different methodologies – ranging from quantitative to qualitative approaches – different terminological systems for scripts, and distinctive ways of displaying dates have created a notable set of issues for manuscript specialists, particularly as we move through the digital era, when metadata is created without focused regard for consistency and interoperability. Still, rightly, medieval Manuscript Studies is a major area of research, scholarship, teaching, and public outreach. In the case of the former, tens of thousands of curious and informed citizens engage in browsing manuscripts through social media and the internet; and one of the most successful and widely publicized heritage events in recent years has been the ‘Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms’ exhibition held at the British Library in the winter of 2018–19, in which manuscripts from all over Europe were reunited, some for the first time in centuries.

As knowledge of manuscript collections grows through improved and more discoverable cataloguing, through increased access to library and online materials, and through the impact of the flourishing field of Book, Cultural and Social History, the study of the medieval manuscript itself takes on greater import both in university curricula globally and in the consciousness of a more popular appreciation of cultural heritage. In order to provide a scholarly foundation for this interest in manuscripts, this volume, comprising new specially commissioned texts, offers a sequence of thoughtful

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overviews of key areas of investigation in the field. Each chapter gives substantial information about its topic, and can be regarded as an initial theoretical training in or introduction to the specialized areas of investigation that make up Manuscript Studies. Case studies anchor the descriptive and analytical research, so that readers can see the application of approaches.

In our work with students and colleagues in Medieval Studies (as in other disciplines), scholars have recourse to that most critical of reflections: ‘What methodology are you thinking of using in order to answer your research question?’ For all researchers, at every stage of our academic exploration, there is a clear need to be explicit about the process or processes which underpin our study, and it is essential that we identify, understand, and discuss our approach early on in our work on manuscripts.

Working with manuscripts is an inductive experience, although it is possible, of course, to work deductively with the objects of study from a set of assumptions or hypotheses. Inductively, we begin with the evidence in front of us and scrutinize it for what it might reveal in the light of our specific topic. But the matter is not as simple as it may appear. What evidence do we look up? How do we gather the evidence? How do we make sense of what we are looking up?

Multiple potential methodologies present themselves to manuscript scholars and book historians, ranging from the specifically textual to the principally material. Methodologically, for example, it is possible to study only the text – the words on the page – from the perspective of textual dissemination. One might gather every witness to a literary work, like the later fourteenth-century English text *Piers Plowman*, and transcribe every manuscript version of this complex alliterative poem to see how each instantiation differs, and what the relationships between the versions might be. There is little doubt that the answers to these questions are generated by the type of research questions which a student has identified. But then *method* has to be informed by a clear *methodology*: two slightly different processes. Of course, the methodology is what guides the principles underpinning the research. It can include the chosen approach, which can be interdisciplinary in scope and can be borrowed from other cognate or non-cognate disciplines. The method is the practical application of that methodology – the tools which are employed to carry out the study.

The contributors in this book show that there is not one set of tools which may be considered above any other; they demonstrate that a codicological, palaeographical, art historical, or textual understanding of the object under discussion is a good starting point. If codicology can be defined as a branch of scholarship which studies the manuscript book in its structural as well as in its broader cultural and historical contexts,<sup>2</sup> then palaeography is the

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discussion of scripts and all that is entailed in scribal practice broadly.<sup>3</sup> Manuscript Studies itself as a field extends beyond the realm of books;<sup>4</sup> a manuscript is something handwritten, and such source materials include historical records which are not held together in books, such as charters, inventories, and letters, and also handwritten material in rolls, fascicles, and loose quires.

Historically, this interest in the materiality of books started with the interest in editing classical texts and philological investigations into language and the morphological make-up of all kinds of textual production. The study of the book as a cultural manifestation of literary, social, and historical synergies was also developed from this interest. Friedrich Ebert, in his *Zur Handschriftenkunde* (1825), ambitiously argued for this contextualized approach to Manuscript Studies. Henry Bradshaw, Librarian of Cambridge University Library, also adopted similar ideas in shaping the way in which scholars ought to study books. Richard Beadle has demonstrated how influential the work of this humble Cambridge librarian has been on the development of the study of books in his Sandars Lectures, and returns to some of these issues in the following chapter.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars have written copiously on the relation between manuscripts and disciplinary specialism. A close perusal of the ‘Guide to Further Reading’ at the end of this book will offer many possible directions of research within the study of medieval manuscripts, and invites students of manuscripts not to compartmentalize one approach against the other, but instead to reflect on the significance of each of them.

This *Companion* thus aims not only to engage students in a well-established field of enquiry, but also to challenge expectations. The combination of different threads offers the opportunity to create innovative dialogue within the core paradigms of medieval Manuscript Studies. This *Companion* also proposes different ways of looking at the primary material; that is, it provides detailed analysis of a manuscript’s significance from its moment and place of production, its subsequent history and use, its place within a broad textual and generic dissemination, its collection and description, to its contemporary display and reception, including as photographic and digital media.

The production and use of medieval manuscripts in Britain are particularly notable, because of the significant concatenation of major events and historical processes affecting the manuscripts’ creation and interpretation: in early England, the rise of the English vernacular in the ninth and tenth centuries created a precocious body of texts alongside the Latin textual tradition; the Celtic manuscript tradition, already so important by the eighth century, the Scandinavian influences on language, literature, and ornament, and the

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tremendous impact of the Norman Conquest all combined to create a dynamic and rich culture of textuality and literacy from the late sixth to the late fifteenth centuries. This history brought about a truly multicultural turn in the written word, supported by different agencies from secular and monastic institutions, to royal households, to heterogeneous lay audiences. Traditionally, scholars look at these phenomena of place, time, and context of production *within* disciplinary, temporal, and linguistic boundaries. The *Companion* brings together scholars from different disciplinary and linguistic backgrounds to enhance what can be learned by looking at British Manuscript Studies *supra-partes*. Contributors have worked on case studies and textual examples that contain English, French, Latin, Welsh, and other languages; that is, the focus is the manuscript copied at any centre in Britain, and not simply the language in which the text is written.

The chapters have been grouped in sections that encourage the reader to think further about ‘How do we study the manuscript?’ ‘Why do we study the manuscript?’ and ‘Where do we study the manuscript?’ These recognizable labels aim to provide a clear sense of direction. Within this organizational structure, contributors offer both a survey of their field and a clear statement of how their own topic can be challenged and advanced by new research in the future. Naturally, some of these areas of investigation complement each other very closely, and not every conceivable aspect of Manuscript Studies has been covered, but what is in the chapters should offer a very good start as an introduction to the field.

In Chapter 1, Richard Beadle and Ralph Hanna provide a detailed account of the process of manuscript description, demonstrating that descriptive analysis ‘is now recognized as capable of being a sophisticated type of hermeneutic activity in its own right’. Their checklist – covering shelfmarks, dating, contents, and materials, for example – reminds scholars that each manuscript is unique and should be an accurate reflection of scribal production, and, for each element of manuscript description, best practice is recommended. This chapter is fundamental reading, too, for the methods of membrane preparation; uses and arrangement of medieval paper manuscripts; how to collate quires; how to describe decorative features of the *mise-en-page*; scribal characteristics, including abbreviation and correction; and binding practices.

Donald Scragg’s Chapter 2 shows how scholars can interpret a manuscript from the way in which it is described in a catalogue, with a particular focus on the booklet as the key unit of manuscript production. Using an early English manuscript as his main example, Scragg demonstrates the complexity of collation formulae, and the care and attention that is required to reconstruct the physical manuscript from the details provided by

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cataloguers. He shows that close reading of descriptions can provide sufficient evidence to re-evaluate the history and transmission of early medieval manuscript books.

Julia Crick and Daniel Wakelin's Chapter 3 on how we are to understand script methodologically also sees in the evaluation of written materials the potential for greater apprehension of culture and society. They comment on the idiosyncrasy and craft of scribal hands, irrespective of the model script; on the uniqueness of each instantiation of a scribe's endeavour; and on the ways in which scripts spread across geographical space and through time. Various scripts' biographies are overviewed, showing the diversity of possible scripts in early medieval Europe: their longevity and functionality. A focus on Insular, Caroline, and Welsh minuscules emphasizes the variety of writing styles and the prevalence of one over the other demonstrates the ideological and cultural roles that script plays. In the later period, too, the uses of particular scripts for particular functions indicate not only the significance of nuance in considering handwriting in this long period, but also how teams of scribes operated, how important the patron or commissioner of a volume of texts would be, and how scribal production was so often a commercialized activity, where motivations for particular choices can reveal a tremendous amount about attitudes to books and textual communities.

Beatrice Kitzinger's focus in Chapter 4 is on the art historical component of the manuscript: how we can describe images; what materials and techniques were used; the limitations of facsimile and digital editions; and how images affect our perception of the manuscript and its contexts of production. Concerned particularly with what *method* can reveal, Kitzinger discusses one major case study in detail – the Arundel Psalter – to illustrate that there are many levels upon which one can investigate the artistic component of the medieval codex. Here, the images of the Crucifixion represent different artistic choices, with significant consequences for theological and intellectual strategies and traditions, and these are traced through a number of their most important networks and contexts.

In Chapter 5, Ryan Perry considers the physical make-up of manuscript books: their divisions into quires and booklets, and the manner of putting the parts of the book together. Ranging from pre-Conquest books to late medieval books, and complementary to Scragg's chapter, Perry assesses the evidence for the manufacture of flexible assemblages of texts, considering the portability of loose-bound or unbound booklets and the independent circulation of works in these formats. Evidence of stationers' sales of *pecia* – books copied in 'pieces' – in the later medieval period suggests the commercialization of manuscript facture, and Perry discusses the

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important phenomenon of professional scribes, whose work was in great demand from increasingly literate consumers. Perry also offers timely comments on how modern scholars are meant to classify manuscripts produced – perhaps over time – with a wide variety of genres, complex networks of transmission, and potential uses, well beyond their own period of production.

Continuing the theme of networks and transmission, in Part II, ‘Why Do We Study the Manuscript?’, Chapter 6 leads with Elaine Treharne and Orietta Da Rold adding to Perry’s discussion of historical manuscripts by focusing almost entirely on that longstanding genre to show how writers worked with a broad and important sense of their place within a tradition. From Bede to Brut, they show the complex relationships of writers and readers of history in English, Latin, and French. Issues of known authorship and anonymity are raised alongside institutional and collective programmes of manuscript production to show that what was copied, adapted, translated, and rewritten both contributed to and reflected particular forms of writerly identity.

Translation and adaptation inform Chapter 7 by Jane Gilbert and Sara Harris, who discuss the prominence of multilingual expertise and practice in the written record, problematizing obvious classifications, such as ‘What constitutes an *English* manuscript?’ The questions they raise of the nature of linguistic skillsets in the later Middle Ages are critical to understanding the appearance of particular vernacular and Latin texts – often incorporated in manuscripts as additions or glosses – and categorized by scholars in ways that do not fully recognize the broad spectrum of linguistic possibility and permeability in this period. By considering the changing nature of what constituted ‘book languages’ and what did not, Gilbert and Harris reveal the dynamic and rich linguistic environment of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, ranging from liturgical texts, to Orm’s lengthy poetic homilies, the *Prophecies of Merlin*, to the later *Treatise on the Astrolabe* by Chaucer. Throughout the chapter, the significance of translation for indicating knowledge transfer becomes clear, while the ostensibly simple task of labelling linguistic presentation within medieval manuscripts is shown to be complicated and worthy of a great deal more research.

A major movement, inspired by John Wyclif, had important repercussions in the High Middle Ages for the English vernacular and the copying of manuscripts, and Elizabeth Solopova elucidates the history and tradition of the Wycliffite Bible in Chapter 8. The origins, dissemination, and nature of this English Bible and its many manuscripts – especially in the first half of the fifteenth century – can be shown to be, in part, supported by the nobility, certainly aimed at erudite readers, who were interested in complex

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explication in the commentaries and paratext that accompanied the biblical text, and meticulously produced, often within major centres.

In Chapter 9, Helen Fulton deals with the history and major movements in the editing of medieval texts, with a detailed case study that permits a step-by-step explication of how one can go about editing a text that exists in more than one instantiation. Acknowledging the profound complexity of the editorial role, especially in relation to the often-perceived dominance of the author-figure, Fulton reveals the various modes of engagement that are available to editors, from the re-creation of an *ur*-text that pre-dates the earliest extant textual witnesses to the intentional privileging of the work of scribe-copyists themselves. At the heart of all medieval scholarship is mediation – whether because of the necessity of translation, or because of access to texts only through the work of traditional and digital editors. Fulton’s chapter makes clear the significance and influence of this editorial role, and also demonstrates how readers can approach the edited text, understanding the decisions, methods, and components included in the publication.

In Chapter 10, Teresa Webber addresses the nitty-gritty of book production: when, where, and why books were produced. Her examination of the field of research reminds us all about the tenuousness of a great deal of the evidence upon which assumptions are made and theories constructed. Deeply cognizant of the limits and variety of the evidence offered by the medieval manuscripts themselves, Webber discusses how palaeographers date and localize books, introducing the complex make-up of specific case studies to show how every piece of information must be folded into the assessment of a manuscript’s history, and that speculation and hypothesis do not constitute proof. This chapter also tackles the core question of where books were produced in the long medieval period: explaining terminology, such as ‘scriptorium’ and ‘workshop’, Webber highlights the difficulties encountered by manuscript specialists in ascertaining places of origin, a difficulty that extends to localizing book production based on script or contents or *ex libris* marks of ownership. Still, so much more research remains to be done, and Webber’s chapter provides the foundation upon which students of manuscripts can build.

From studying manuscripts to accessing manuscripts, Part III, ‘Where Do We Study the Manuscript?’, introduces the places and sites where manuscripts can be discovered. Siân Echard and Andrew Prescott begin Chapter 11 with an account of what it is like to order a manuscript in one of the largest and most significant manuscript repositories in the world: the British Library in London. Brief accounts of how these institutional manuscript collections and archives emerged, and how some of the idiosyncratic systems in place within these establishments were created, will help to anchor the new



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manuscript scholar. These accounts, together with the information provided here revealing the complicated and non-standardized manner of describing the books and documents in repositories, and detailing the staff who conserve and curate them, remind readers of the sometimes rarefied world in which medieval textual materials reside. Echard and Prescott aim to demystify the process of description, cataloguing, accessing, and exhibiting manuscripts for scholars, students, and interested citizens alike by recounting the processes involved in discovering and examining manuscripts both in person and at a distance. Indeed, distance from primary sources is less significant now – or seemingly so – given the benefit of access via photographic reproduction of many manuscripts, and, latterly, digitization, even though so much more remains to be done, particularly with regard to imaging and the provision of standardized metadata.

Suzanne Paul offers a curatorial perspective on the current state of digitization and the implications for scholars of digital mediation of manuscript holdings in Chapter 12. From highlighting the professionalization of the procedure for photographing and processing images, Paul also evaluates the international initiatives afoot to create images that are interoperable, with linked data that enhances discoverability, and seeks to ensure sustainability. The choices informing what gets digitized and the concomitant costs create pressure on textual heritage providers, but the benefits to scholarship are shown to be inestimable. Paul surveys the new tools, new approaches, and new discoveries that are emerging from the accessibility of the literary and historical record (despite the fact that many scholars do not acknowledge their online resources).

A. S. G. Edwards closes the volume in Chapter 13 by investigating a fundamentally important aspect of Manuscript Studies that is rarely the subject of sustained research: the trade in and commodification of medieval books and fragments, both in the Middle Ages and through to the present day. Careful examination of the meagre evidence shows books, especially, were often highly valued from the fifteenth century onwards, for example, and collecting began in earnest in the sixteenth century leading to the development of catalogues, the foundation of major repositories, and, by the seventeenth century, the sale of books at auction. Modern auctions are analysed here, including the processes and personnel involved, as well as pertinent advice about why it is important to know about the sale of medieval books, and where to obtain the scattered information that does exist.

The editors and contributors hope that these chapters will facilitate students', interested citizens', and scholars' understanding and interpretation of the medieval British manuscript, no matter how it is accessed. The Guide to Further Reading section, together with all the embedded links to sites and



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resources on the internet, will assist in consolidating and augmenting the introductions provided throughout the volume. Studying medieval manuscripts is a deeply rewarding pursuit, and it is our aim to encourage an appreciation of, and interest in, these unique textual objects.

### Notes

1. See O. Da Rold and M. Maniaci, 'Medieval Manuscript Studies: A European Perspective', in A. Conti, O. Da Rold, and P. Shaw, eds., *Writing Europe 500–1450, Essays and Studies*, 68 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), 1–24.
2. O. Da Rold, 'Codicology', in S. Echard and R. Rouse, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Medieval British Literature*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 531–38.
3. D. Wakelin, 'Palaeography' and E. Treharne, 'Manuscript Studies', in S. Echard and R. Rouse, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Medieval British Literature*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).
4. L. M. J. Delaissé, 'Towards a History of the Mediaeval Book', *Miscellanea André Combes* (Rome: Pont. Università Lateranense, 1967), 28–39; E. Treharne, 'Manuscript Studies', in S. Echard and R. Rouse, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Medieval British Literature*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), IV, 2071–8.
5. R. Beadle, *Henry Bradshaw and the Foundations of Codicology: The Sanders Lectures 2015* (Cambridge: Langham Press, 2017).