

Manuscripts of the Latin Classics 800-1200:

An Introduction

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In his essay on the production and use of classical manuscripts in the eleventh and twelfth centuries Birger Munk Olsen raises a point that may well be taken as a reason *not* to produce a volume like the one you are holding: medieval copies of classical works do not naturally constitute a distinct category.¹ As Munk Olsen notes, there is nothing that makes them stand out as a group, at least not physically or as far as the circumstances of their production are concerned. Up to a certain point the essays presented here confirm this given. While they show that it is worthwhile to examine specific codicological or palaeographical phenomena, as shown by Mariken Teeuwen's analysis of marginal glossing in classical books from the Carolingian age and Irene O'Daly's examination of diagrams in eleventh-century copies of Cicero's rhetorical works, such physical manifestations are by no means exclusive to the classical tradition (nor do the authors claim they are). Indeed, at several points in this book, parallels will be highlighted between manuscripts of the classics and those of non-classical contents, for example with respect to the use of scrap material as writing support, as outlined in my chapter, and again in Mariken Teeuwen's discussion of the marginal apparatus in Carolingian manuscripts. In other words, this book also

1. Munk Olsen, 'The Production of the Classics', 5.

suggests that medieval scribes did not necessarily treat a copy differently just because it contained a classical text.

Still, there are reasons why it is fruitful to study classical manuscripts as a discrete group – and unite essays of this nature in a single volume. While the production method of such books may not be distinctive, the existence of certain codicological and palaeographical trends suggests that scribes did favour peculiarities – mannerisms, perhaps – when it came to copying and engaging with the classics. One of these instances is discussed in my own chapter, which inspects a type of classical manuscript that may be placed at the very lowest end of the spectrum as far as its quality of production is concerned. The essay introduces seven manuscripts made from scrap parchment: redundant material from the edge of the skin that lay on the scribe's desk when he had finished producing the regular sheets. While such offcuts were also used for the production of manuscripts containing other texts, in particular vernacular works, the classical 'scrap book' may be seen as an expression of a broader trend among classical manuscripts, at least those from the tenth to the twelfth centuries: a remarkably high number of these are of lower quality in terms of their script, writing support, and decoration. In other words, scribes resorted to the lower end of the quality spectrum when they executed the different production stages of a classical manuscript – more so, it appears, than they did when they copied other texts.

Another peculiarity that seems more popular in the classical manuscript tradition lies beyond the scope of this essay collection. It concerns the high frequency with which classical texts were copied in so-called 'holsterbooks': tall manuscripts with narrow pages that broke with the medieval rules of page design. It has been argued that holsterbooks, which

are commonly very thin and light due to the limited number of quires they contain, were ideally suited for handheld use.² This would explain, for example, why nearly all surviving Tropers and Cantatoria produced before 1200 are in holster format, since these liturgical books were held during use by the soloist, rather than being placed on a lectern.³ However, a study based on a random sample of eighty holsterbooks shows that almost half of them (thirty-five copies) contain classical works, with Horace, Statius, and Ovid topping the list. No other genre in the corpus of eighty is represented by such a high number. Indeed, the runner-up, books made for liturgical use, totals only thirteen specimens.⁴

Both the high frequency of lower grade manuscripts and the popularity of the holster format tie classical manuscripts together as a group: during their production scribes apparently *did* treat them differently, albeit not each time they copied one, nor necessarily in every physical respect. Another reason why it makes sense to study classical manuscripts as a group is their shared, almost single-focused manner of use. In the period covered by these essays, 800-1200, the Latin classics were particularly popular in the schools, as is well known.⁵ Teachers such as Gerbert of Aurillac (d. 1003), Conrad of Hirschau (d. 1150?), and Alexander Nequam (d. 1217) all stress the importance of the classics in the curriculum, a given that is confirmed by surviving booklists from monastic and cathedral schools.⁶ Popular textbooks used in the eleventh and twelfth centuries included Priscian for grammar; Cicero's *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* for rhetoric; and for dialectics Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories* and *De interpretatione* (through commentaries of Boethius), Cicero's *Topica* and Boethius' *De topicis differentiis*.⁷ While the presence of classical authors was perhaps less pronounced in the

2. Kwakkel, 'Dit boek heeft niet de vereiste breedte', 39-40 (handheld use) and 44 (limited number of quires).

3. Cantatoria: Huglo, 'The Cantatorium', 96, Table 3.1a and 99, Table 3.2; and Gamber, *Codices Liturgici Latini Antiquiores*, 2: 500-503. Tropers: Huglo, 'The Cantatorium', 97, Table 3.1b.

4. Kwakkel, 'Dit boek heeft niet de vereiste breedte', Appendix.

5. See, for example, Scaglione, 'The Classics in Medieval Education'; Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 113-6; Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology*, 19-26; and Reynolds, "Let him read the Satires of Horace".

6. Nequam: Haskins, 'A List of Text-Books from the Close of the Twelfth Century' and Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, 7-8; Conrad: Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 39-64 (esp. 40, 49, 51, and 54); Gerbert: Bowen, *A History of Western Education*, 45; Booklists: Glauche, *Schullektüre im Mittelalter*, 62-100.

7. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology*, 21-4.

8. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 5 n. 10.

9. Munk Olsen, 'The Production of Classics', 2 and the Appendix at 17. Note how the author implies that the majority of surviving codices 'were destined for the schools' (2).

10. For examples, see Munk Olsen, *L'Étude des auteurs classiques latins aux XI^e et XII^e siècles. Tome IV*, 369-94; Kwakkel, 'Dit boek heeft niet de vereiste breedte', 41; and the three main manuscripts used in Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*.

11. This is the main argument of my 'Dit boek heeft niet de vereiste breedte'; a more in depth study will appear in the monograph I am currently preparing with Francis Newton on The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 73 J 6 (Constantine the African, *Pantegni*).

curriculum of the universities, they maintained a strong presence there after 1200. This is shown, for example, by the 1431 statutes of Oxford University, which stipulate that Priscian must be used for teaching grammar, and Boethius (*Topica*) and Aristotle for logic, while rhetoric was to be taught with Aristotle (*Rhetoric*), Boethius (*Topica*), Cicero (*Nova rhetorica*), Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), and Virgil (*Poetria*).⁸

The dominant presence of the classics in the medieval curriculum is important to our understanding of classical manuscripts as physical objects. The majority of surviving copies, after all, will likely have been made for a single setting: education. As Munk Olsen points out, the most widely diffused works in his inventory of 2500 classical manuscripts written between 1000 and 1200 are textbooks, including teaching manuals like Cicero's *De inventione*.⁹ This implies, of course, that a great deal of surviving copies, perhaps even the majority, were used by instructors, who may have copied many with their own hands. After all, if we agree that education is perhaps the driving force behind their production, then we also ought to agree on the specific pragmatics of their use, namely that they were made for teachers. Indeed, from a fair number of manuscripts it has already been determined that they were used by actual teachers.¹⁰ The potentially very high number of teaching copies among the surviving manuscripts should be taken into account when we study the physical features of classical books or try to explain the trends we observe. Thus we may well relate the high number of holsterbooks with classical contents to classroom instruction: such books allowed the teacher to walk around with his teaching text held open in his hand.¹¹ In sum, the shared manner of use provides yet another justification and encouragement for studying classical manuscripts as a class apart.

It is within these two key areas of production and use that the essays collected in this volume operate. Production features perhaps most prominently in my contribution on the use of scrap material, as already discussed, but it is also part of David Gura's essay on manuscripts of Arnulf of Orléans' commentary to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The commentary was composed during the late twelfth century in the cathedral school of St Euverte, where Arnulf taught. Gura shows how the layout of the manuscripts invites us to divide the transmission into two branches: codices with a so-called *catena* format, where the commentary is turned into the primary work of the manuscript, and those that present Arnulf's commentary as *scholia* in the margins and between the lines. The *catena* manuscripts, which represent the oldest stage in the transmission, are clearly tied to education. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are reduced to short lemmata, which are often underscored and placed at the outset of commentary segments, while the commentary forms the bulk of the page's main textblock. This presentation, Gura argues, made the manuscripts particularly suitable for oral lectures. The *scholion* format, by contrast, was not so much designed as a teaching tool, but intended to facilitate clarity and understanding of Ovid's text to an individual who was educated but not necessarily an educator.

Like Gura, Robert Babcock discusses the reception of an ancient author in a specific milieu. This time it concerns Tibullus in the diocese of Liège during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Within the broader framework of the diffusion of Tibullus manuscripts in the Middle Ages, the number of which is remarkably modest, Babcock demonstrates the importance of the schools of Liège in the transmission of Tibullus and he gauges how readers there engaged with his work. After providing a first reconstruction of the

relationship between the surviving and lost manuscripts, the chapter focuses on Egbert of Liège, teacher and author of a schoolbook titled *The Well-Laden Ship*. He is brought to the stage to show how an individual from the context of the schools treated Tibullus' work and how deeply the ancient author was understood there. In his instructional text Egbert borrows from Tibullus, but at the same time he modifies his source, much like Arnulf of Orléans did with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Egbert extracts what he sees as useful and employs Tibullus' pagan text for a Christian message.

Rodney Thomson's chapter on William of Malmesbury (d. 1143) as a reader and interpreter of ancient Latin classical texts brings into view a third region: England. Thomson's previous work on William of Malmesbury is well known and in this essay he presents finds that shed new light on the author's dealings with the classics. In the first, the emphasis is on how ancient texts were used by the medieval author. Thomson shows, for example, how William of Malmesbury was familiar with Latin texts that were relatively unknown in the period, such as Apuleius' *De deo Socratis* (second century) and Ausonius' *Ephemeris* (fourth century). The manner in which he weaves the classical passages into his works shows that William of Malmesbury knew his source texts very well. Unusually, he uses them in a biblical commentary and a set of *miracula*. The second part of Thomson's essay is devoted to a set of short texts about the lives and works of three late-antique authors, Apollinaris (d. 489), Symmachus (d. 402), and Mythographus, who lived around 500. This part briefly outlines why these introductions may be attributed to William of Malmesbury, using new manuscript evidence. The third and largest section of this chapter adds to our understanding of Malmesbury as an editor of ancient texts. The manner in

which William of Malmesbury emends a text, Thomson argues, is an achievement in that it is comparable to how editors in the sixteenth century would proceed.

The final two essays, by Mariken Teeuwen and Irene O'Daly, also deal with readers' interactions with the Latin classics. Both take visual manifestations on the page as a starting point. Teeuwen's essay discusses the reception of the classics among readers in the Carolingian age by focusing on an ancient system of mark-up symbols found in classical manuscripts of the ninth century. The symbols turn out to be just as meaningful as the glosses they accompany. Resorting to ancient signs that were smaller than the nib that wrote them, readers expressed such sentiments as disagreement (prompted by the obelus) or approval (asterisk). At the end of her essay Teeuwen presents an important qualification: annotations of the kind she studies are often placed in a context of education. While some annotated books may have been used in schools, we ought to see these objects also, principally perhaps, as expressions of scholarship and scholarly debates. Marginal glosses, as well as the clever system with which they are dressed up, are tools that facilitate research of this kind.

Focusing on diagrams, Irene O'Daly presents a study of visual representations of knowledge and rhetoric within the manuscript tradition of Cicero's *De inventione*, an authoritative textbook in the medieval curriculum. The fact that these diagrams circulated in tandem with the *De inventione* in a number of cases, demonstrates that medieval readers were interested in placing the study of rhetoric in a broader intellectual context. O'Daly considers the purpose of two sets of diagrams from Leiden collections, which present a summary of the parts of rhetoric. O'Daly suggests that by summarising aspects of Cicero's text they served as a form of visual introduction to its

12. For the quote and the historiographical context in which it is to be understood, see Benson and Constable, 'Introduction', xxiv.

content. Furthermore, by identifying possible sources for their labels (Alcuin, Boethius) she demonstrates the rich textual environment within which such visual features must be situated.

Charles Homer Haskins may have overstated things somewhat when he wrote: 'From the fall of the Roman Empire down well into modern times the Latin Classics furnished the best barometer of the culture of each period in Western Europe'.¹² Still, the Latin classics are a useful instrument to inspect certain aspects of medieval culture, as is hoped that these six essays will show. The collection ultimately demonstrates the variety of ways in which medieval individuals engage with classical material: yearning for a deeper understanding of ancient texts, they exhibit an array of strategies to produce, transmit, and apply ancient knowledge.

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