

# Conference Report

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**CONFERENCE TITLE: LIMINAL NETWORKS: WESTERN PALAEOGRAPHY TO C. 1100**

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The idea for this conference emerged with the hope of creating a platform for speaking opportunities for postgraduate students, specifically in palaeography, that are otherwise lacking. This one-day conference, organized by Colleen Curran (KCL) and Chris Voth (Cambridge), focused on the state of present postgraduate research in palaeography, and posed questions of where the field might be heading with this new generation of scholars. The conference featured seven postgraduate papers that covered an extremely broad range of methodologies, disciplines, geographical locations, and time periods, which reflects the multifaceted interests of this new generation of palaeographers.

## **SESSION 1: SCRIBES AND THEIR WORK**

The first session of the day began with **Don MacGabhan** (School of Advanced Studies, University of London) speaking on 'The Division of Hands in the Book of Kells'. Taking on the established scholarship of Henry (1974) and Meehan (1990) who concluded that four scribes (A, B, C, D) were responsible for copying the text and for minor artwork in the Book of Kells, MacGabhan's research

shows that variation in letter forms with curved/concave elaborations lack the necessary uniformity to confirm these scribal boundaries. Where certain patterns have been purported to be attributed to scribe A, the same features can be found in a later stint of scribe C, and so on. In all, MacGabhán set forth a convincing argument that the elaboration in these letter forms was, in fact, the result of a single scribe.

This interesting analysis of various letter-forms was followed by **Simon Thompson's** (University College London) paper on 'Scribal Control over Old English Poetic Texts'. Thompson has created a paradigm of scribal control to categorise the ways that scribes interact with the texts they are copying, including, but not limited to: orthography, divisions within sections and manuscripts, punctuation, spacing and pointing. Scribes, of course, were not the only people who interacted with a text, and Thompson illustrated this by identifying drypoint pointing in the Exeter Book that indicates readers may well have had their own idea of metrical readings of the poetry. Thompson provided a numerical breakdown of the ways scribes organised the layout of their manuscripts and other visual cues for reading.

The third paper of the session was by **Ben Guy** (University of Cambridge) on 'The Prehistory of the Welsh Texts in Harley 3859: Some Palaeographical Hints'. London, British Library Harley 3859, is a historiographical manuscript comprised of a number of individual booklets each containing a completed text. Guy believes it was likely produced at St Augustine's in Canterbury at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth centuries. According to Guy, the two Welsh texts in this composition, *Historia Brittonum*, and its accompanying genealogy, likely originated at St David's in Wales, as the genealogical records include bishops of St David's. The tenth century was a period in which a number of Welsh manuscripts were copied and used at St Augustine's, and he believes it is possible the *Historia Brittonum* and genealogy may have been transmitted in that period. The exemplar of the *Historia Brittonum* used for this manuscript appears to have been incomplete, transmitted without *litterae notabiliores* or rubrics. The scribe who copied both the *HB* and the genealogy did not add these in, and also had some difficulty with the spelling of Welsh names in the genealogy. Guy pointed out that the scribe copied what would appear to have been orthographic updates made to the exemplar from Old to Middle Welsh, but copied rote names missing their rubricated initials. Although the scribe was responsible for copying the Welsh genealogy, he was clearly not familiar with the Welsh language to realise his mistakes.

## SESSION 2: SCRIPTS AND MANUSCRIPTS

**Ainoa Castro**, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at the University of Toronto, started this session with her paper titled, 'Visigothic Script: What's Known and What Isn't', in which she explored how previous scholarship has labelled and defined Visigothic script and the problems that such definitions have created for the future study of this particular script. Ainoa also delved into some of the political implications about the spread and then decline of

the script in the ninth to eleventh centuries, especially in the region of Galicia. In her closing comments, she remarked on how the lack of access to Visigothic manuscripts in Spain has hindered the field, and hopefully this issue will be rectified as more scholars become interested in this script's remarkable history. Currently, Ainoa is working on a project that will re-catalogue and re-explore the history of this script completely.

**Michael Gullick**, an independent scholar, presented a paper titled 'English Caroline in Norway and Sweden' in which he explored some of the nearly 5,000 fragments of English Caroline script that survive in Norway and Sweden. In his presentation, Gullick focused on the question of how these, certainly English-made, fragments arrived in Scandinavia and postulated the movement of scribes between England to allow for such high quality Anglo-Caroline being produced so far away. Gullick also postulated the Norwegian origin of some of these fragments, as opposed to other scholars who have labelled them as of English origin in the past. From these postulations, Gullick proposed that there was a greater movement of both scribes and books between England and Scandinavia in the twelfth century than previously realized.

### SESSION 3: KEYNOTE LECTURE

Prof **Winfried Rudolf**, a professor at Gottingen University, delivered the keynote lecture of the conference entitled 'Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and the limits of philology'. Prof Rudolf commenced his address by exploring how Germanic schools of philology had previously rejected palaeography in favour of philology pursuits, with the most infamous example being of C. Maier, who destroyed the first folio of the Vercelli book by applying a reagent to see several letters despite knowing that the reagent would destroy the folio. From there, Prof Rudolf explored how a strictly philological approach to the surviving four Old English poetical codices can lessen our understanding of the texts that they contain. To elucidate his point, Prof Rudolf used examples from the Exeter Book riddles and compared how they appear within the manuscript to how multiple editors have decided to present them in their editions. Prof Rudolf argued that due to the editors' desires to present a 'standardized' Old English, many modern editions have missed out on the visual play that the spelling variants in the riddles present multiple solutions of which their scribes were likely cognizant. By re-reading the riddles as they physically appear on the page, Prof Rudolf demonstrated how Riddle 45, which is most commonly solved as male genitalia, could also be solved to mean a pregnant woman or Christ by simply re-interpreting several of the words, their positions, and not correcting to a 'standardized' Old English.

### SESSION 4: DIGITAL PALAEOGRAPHY AND EDITING

**Kathleen Walker-Meikle**, a postdoctoral fellow working on the Tradamus and T-Pen projects based at St. Louis University, presented a paper titled, 'The Antidotarium magnum: A Digital Edition of a Late Eleventh-Century Pharmaceutical Compendium', which focused on her digitization efforts of one of the oldest manuscripts in this tradition. A relatively overlooked text, the Antidotarium magnum contains Arabic medical recipes that were circulated widely throughout Europe, including Germany, France, Italy, and England from the beginning of the twelfth century through the fourteenth. In addition to her research on the oldest Italian manuscript, Walker-Meikle also presented elements of the T-Pen project that improve the efficiency of her research, such as transcription tools, especially for recognizing graphs serving as measurement tools.

**Tony Harris**, a PhD student at Cambridge University, delivered the last paper at the conference titled 'Palaeography in the Digital Age', in which he explored basic techniques to enhance attendants' personal photography of manuscripts by explaining technical differences between types of photography and which methods prove the most useful for everyday use in scholarly work. Harris explained what resolutions are best for personal photography, and how to maintain the quality of these images over time. He then discussed his involvement with the AHRC-funded project to digitize parts of the Hart collection at the Blackburn Museum, and provided advice to attendants in case they would be part of such a project by covering advice on how to employ photographers, how to manage copyright restrictions, and how to disseminate any photographs from such digital projects.

## SESSION 5: POSTGRADUATE ROUNDTABLE

The conference closed with a postgraduate roundtable, which included Colleen Curran (KCL), Anna Dorofeeva (Cambridge), Myriah Williams (Cambridge), and Chris Voth (Cambridge). During the roundtable, Curran announced the launch of the London Graduate Paleography Group (<http://londonpaleographygroup.weebly.com>), which is a new network based at King's College London that will provide resources and a seminar series with postgraduate speakers. Dorofeeva talked about the newly created Network for the Study of Caroline Minuscule, which is based at Cambridge University, and aims to connect scholars of all levels working with Caroline minuscule in any capacity (<http://carolinenetwork.weebly.com/>). Williams commented on her research with the Black Book of Carmarthen and where Welsh paleography, a rather overlooked topic, is currently heading. Lastly, Voth commented upon her experience teaching palaeography as a post-graduate, particularly with engaging sixth-form students in outreach projects to stir excitement in them about manuscripts at a younger age.

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