

Handling Manuscripts in the Late Middle Ages

Masterclass with Kathryn M Rudy (University of St Andrews)

Temporal Communities Distinguished Fellow of Global Literary Studies

Winter term 2022/23

As I wrote in my forthcoming book, *Touching Skin: How Medieval Users Rubbed, Touched, and Kissed Their Manuscripts*, “Medieval manuscripts rarely survive into the modern era unscathed. Candle wax, water, and fire can disfigure books dramatically. Repeated handling can result in more subtle damage to images, parchment or paper folios, stitching, or bindings; these include applying grease or dirt through bodily contact, abrading material by repeatedly touching it, poking holes by sewing on objects, and degrading the fibers of parchment, paper, leather, and thread by repeatedly bending and unbending them. These activities leave traces that reveal how people have interacted with books. Heavy use is visible in dirty surfaces, tattered stitching, frayed edges, and deformed material.” In this masterclass we will consider those signs of wear as interpretable: they reveal aspects of books’ former use.

We will treat the manuscript as an object comprising parchment (or paper) folios, original and added text, images, decoration (including stain, ink, paint, gesso, and precious metals), a binding and sometimes a wrapper. Each of these layers divulges clues about how the manuscript was used. Some were used in public ceremonies, others in “private” devotion. We will consider such signs of wear across a variety of books (especially in class lectures), as well as across a single manuscript (especially during the visits to the Staatsbibliothek). Dirt, stains, additions, and other signs of wear not only form interpretable information, but sometimes it can even be measured. We will consider doing so with both the physical object and the digital proxy.

Programme

- ▶ Tuesday, October 25, 2022, 10 am – 2 pm: What the dirt can say
- ▶ Monday, October 31, 2022, 10 am – 2 pm: Books for people in authority
- ▶ **Friday, November 11, 2022, 10 am – 12 pm: Missals, Gospel manuscripts, and legal manuscripts
- ▶ Wednesday, November 16, 2022, 10 am – 2 pm: Books for group formation
- ▶ ** Friday, November 25, 2022, 10 am – 12 pm: Romances and books to be read aloud for entertainment
- ▶ Wednesday, November 30, 2022, 10 am – 2 pm: Books for personal devotion
- ▶ ** Friday, December 9, 2022, 10 am – 12 pm: Books of hours and prayer books
- ▶ Wednesday, December 14, 2022, 10 am – 2 pm: Technical analysis of the detritus in manuscripts

** These sessions will take place in the Department of Manuscripts and Early Printed Books of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

Please register by October 17, 2022 by sending an email with your subject area and semester to Maraïke Di Domenica (international@temporal-communities.de). A confirmation email will be sent after the registration deadline has passed. Following confirmed registration you will receive preparatory reading material and information about the location.