

Women and the Book in the Germanic World, c. 900–1500



Dutch Studies Colloquium – University of Pennsylvania

Friday 30 March 2018, 9 am–5 pm

Max Kade Center, 3401 Walnut Street, Suite A, Room 329 (Entrance by Starbucks)

Program

9:00–9:30 am: *Welcome and coffee*

9:30–9:45 am: Opening remarks – Simon Richter (University of Pennsylvania)

9:45–11:00 am (Chair: Simon Richter, University of Pennsylvania)

Helene Scheck (University at Albany, SUNY) – Gisla of Chelles and her Books

Mary Beth Long (University of Arkansas) – ‘...effectueylie pryntede in mye sowle’: Margery Kempe’s [confessor’s] Bookshelf

11:00–11:30 am: *coffee*

11:30–12:45 pm (Chair: Patricia Stoop, University of Pennsylvania/Universiteit Antwerpen)

Karen Blough (SUNY Plattsburgh) – An Avenue to Glory: Women and Their Books in the *First Darmstadt Haggadah*

Alison More (University of Toronto) – Writing Religious Identity: Women’s Voices in Later Medieval Europe

12:45–1 pm: *Break*

1:00–2:15 pm: *Lunch*

2:15–3:30 pm (Chair: David Wallace, University of Pennsylvania)

Martha Driver (Pace University) – Medieval Women Writers and What They Read, c. 1200–1500

Patricia Stoop (University of Pennsylvania / Universiteit Antwerpen) – Inside the Scriptorium: Women and the Production of Books in Fifteenth-Century Brussels

3:30–3:45 pm: Concluding remarks

3:45 pm: *Belgian Beer Reception*

Abstracts

Karen Blough (SUNY Plattsburgh) – An Avenue to Glory: Women and Their Books in the *First Darmstadt Haggadah*

In this paper, I discuss two well-known but enigmatic miniatures in the *First Darmstadt Haggadah*, written before 1390 in Heidelberg and illustrated around 1430, somewhere in the region of the Upper Rhine. Both illustrations represent numerous women holding and even brandishing books while engaged in vigorous conversation with men. The images diverge entirely from standard *haggadah* illustrative norms. In the absence of a Jewish pictorial tradition analogous to the Christian image of the learned nun, the latter has been asserted as the model for these illuminations. Additional Christian visual tropes also appear in both miniatures. Here, I discuss the ways in which the Darmstadt images comment positively on Jewish literacy and learning, particularly among women, in part by incorporating common iconography of the majority culture in a humorously subversive manner.

Martha Driver (Pace University) – Medieval Women Writers and What They Read, c. 1200–1500

This talk is an overview of the analogues and sources known to several major women writers in the Middle Ages, looking at the ways in which reading shaped their work. Medieval reading practice, whether silent or heard, will be one focus, drawing examples not only from the women's own work but from scholarship on this subject over the last three decades; another is their training and facility in more than one language. Last, but not least, is consideration of the reliability of primary sources, which suggest much about women's reading practice but may also themselves be fictions.

While the work of the women troubadours is related to or sometimes written in answer to the poetry of male troubadours, there are also connections with Arabic love poetry and ideas about courtly love current in twelfth-century society (and fiction). Writing in about the same period, Marie in her *Lais* describes her process of composition; she has heard the lays, she tells us, and written them as verse, working on them until late at night. Marie was familiar with Aesop in the English translation of King Alfred which she says she used as a source for her version of the Fables and with a Latin text of *St Patrick's Purgatory* from which she made a translation. The twelfth-century abbess Heloise is said to have known four languages, Latin, French, Hebrew and Greek; her letters to Abelard show her classical training. While Julian was a fourteenth-century saint whose knowledge not only of the Bible but of contemporary mystical texts is incorporated in her Revelations, Margery Kempe, Julian's contemporary, was a wife, a business woman, and a would-be saint as well as the first author of an autobiography in English. Julian likely read some of the texts that were influential in her writing; Margery consistently claims she was illiterate but she was familiar with scripture, as well as with the writings of the Church Fathers and English mystical writers. Last but not least, the fifteenth-century poet Christine de Pizan first made her literary reputation by criticizing the well-known medieval allegory, the *Romance of the Rose*, a book that she read and absorbed nonetheless, as exemplified not only in her *Debate of the Rose* but also in *The Book of the Three Virtues* and *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

This talk will briefly examine the ways in which women's reading influenced their writing, speculate about women's access to books and libraries and discuss reading aloud (versus private reading) for entertainment or instruction in the medieval period. The case studies or sketches of each woman writer will also provide some insight into the reading of various classes, with examples of aristocratic reading, religious reading, and lay literacy in the pre-print age.

Mary Beth Long (University of Arkansas) – ‘...effectueylie pryntede in mye sowle’: Margery Kempe’s [confessor’s] Bookshelf

In choosing a Dominican confessor who mediates her access to literate culture, Margery Kempe embarks on devotional training that reflects reading from both German texts and locally produced books. Specifically, travel guides’ advice to pilgrims about engaging with liturgical art and German mystics’ metaphors of incarnation through images provide a textual foundation for Margery’s idiosyncratic (and, I’ll argue, largely arts-based) *imitatio Mariae* program. Margery’s pilgrimages—including her travels to Germany—are thus not a separate spiritual endeavor from her *imitatio mariae* or her engagement with books, but are integrally connected with each.

Alison More (University of Toronto) – Writing Religious Identity: Women’s Voices in Later Medieval Europe

Among the devout striving for religious perfection in the later Middle Ages, were a growing number of women who consciously dismissed the option of entering a monastery and sought to shape their religious lives on their own terms. Despite the lay and secular character of this movement, these women – variously known as beguines, penitents, and tertiaries – soon came to be thought of as “new” types of nuns. At the same time, they were increasingly associated with religious orders. Focusing primarily on Franciscan communities from the later medieval Low Countries, this presentation examines the ways in which female writers used books to shape and preserve their dynamic and multi-layered identities.

Helene Scheck (University at Albany, SUNY) – Gisla of Chelles and her Books

Known primarily as sister to Charlemagne, Gisla of Chelles (757–c. 811) was a prominent figure in her own right and abbess of two important royal monasteries, both with active scriptoria. More than a dozen manuscripts can be ascribed fairly certainly to the Chelles atelier; authorship of hagiographical and historiographical texts has also been assigned to Chelles and Soissons. Other sources help us to map possible library holdings and other intellectual activity. In my paper I will discuss what we can glean about the intellectual work of Gisla herself in the broader context of the books produced, authored, and enjoyed under her abbacy.

Patricia Stoop (University of Pennsylvania / Universiteit Antwerpen) – Inside the Scriptorium: Women and the Production of Books in Fifteenth-Century Brussels

In the second half of the fifteenth century, the canonesses regular of the Brussels convent of Jericho produced dozens of manuscripts for pay for wealthy lay people and (semi-)religious institutions outside the convent walls, both female and male. This work was executed in the *scrijfcamere* [‘writing chamber’] which was thoroughly renovated and equipped with writing tables and chairs in the autumn of 1466, and from that moment onwards until about 1490 provided working space for five or six scribes. In their unprecedentedly concrete and detailed accounts the prioresses Maria van Pee, Elisabeth van Poyle, Janne Colijns, and Janne Van den Velde mentioned what materials they bought to produce books and what kinds of books they wrote, but also gave detailed accounts of the prices involved in the buying and selling of these commodities. Thus they offer very valuable and for the late fifteenth century unique insight in the materiality of the production of manuscripts. In my contribution to this conference I aim to shed light on the material and economic (even commercial?) aspects of the manuscript production in Jericho, and by doing so, to provide a broader perspective for the material history of the book, by focusing on the hand-written book culture around the emergence of the printing press.