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## Collecting to the Core-Manuscripts in Medieval Studies

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# Collecting to the Core — Manuscripts in Medieval Studies



by **Dr. Susan Steuer** (Associate Professor and Head, Special Collections and Rare Books Department, Western Michigan University; Medieval Studies Editor, *Resources for College Libraries*) <sue.steuer@wmich.edu>

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**Column Editor's Note:** The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the *Resources for College Libraries* bibliography (online at <http://www.rcfweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

**R**aymond Clemens and Timothy Graham's *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* "has now enabled — for the first time — the introduction of detailed codicological study into the undergraduate classroom," declared Michael Johnston in the Spring 2012 issue of the journal *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching (SMART)*, a volume devoted to teaching the history of the book.<sup>1-2</sup> The articles in this special issue synthesize new pedagogical trends in medieval studies that advocate moving beyond the traditional "show-and-tell" approach to better utilize manuscripts in undergraduate instruction.<sup>3-4</sup> Medievalists in art, literature, history, historical geography, religious studies, and music, as well as book historians and special collections librarians, are training students to consider how the physical artifact helps contextualize the impact and meaning of a text over time by incorporating elements of book and manuscript analysis. This essay will describe the contribution of Clemens and Graham's work to manuscript studies and discuss a few individual facsimiles and how they can serve a manuscript-centered medieval studies curriculum, particularly for new programs or small institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Manuscript studies as a discipline focuses on the idiosyncratic and particular features of each artifact, which can include the date and place of production, the physical construction of the artifact, the ownership and use of the item between its production and its current repository, and a host of other details. Often, this information can only be discerned by applying analytical techniques to physical evidence within the manuscript. *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* attempts to synthesize the complex, and occasionally contradictory, field of manuscript studies for the beginner. The attractive volume includes copious photographic examples from the rich manuscript collections of the **Newberry Library**. Clemens and Graham begin with topics in manuscript production including the materials used to construct pages and bindings, the inks and tools used, the design and execution of the text and images, evidence of readership including

correction and annotation, and the structure of completed codices. They then provide a brief outline of analytical issues and techniques for working with manuscripts, including handling, punctuation conventions, damage, clues to the history of the object in the handwriting, and how to read scholarly manuscript descriptions. The final section addresses various common genres and formats of manuscripts. An extensive bibliography supports each section of the textbook.

While the images in this textbook are well-chosen and instructive, ideally, teaching a course involving manuscript study will involve the handling of manuscripts. Providing access to materials for manuscript studies can challenge librarians whose collection development focuses on monographic and serial resources. Many institutions with a program in medieval studies may not be able to leap into purchasing manuscripts or even individual leaves, which grow more costly and scarce every year, without an established curriculum to justify the expense. Digital collections, carefully-selected facsimiles, and the development of ties with libraries that might have appropriate collections can be first steps in developing a collection that can fully support manuscript-based courses.

The number and types of medieval documents available in digital forms, including transcriptions, translations, and images, are expanding rapidly. A decade ago, many digital facsimiles were produced for distribution by CD-ROM, and were wonderful resources with inventive scholarly tools. Unfortunately, a large proportion of these have been rendered obsolete by changes in technology, and the migration of these resources to new systems is complex and expensive. Web-based collections are generally a better resource for instructors and potentially for librarians to highlight in library catalogs. Many individual libraries (particularly national libraries in Europe) and important museums regularly develop virtual exhibitions and new digital facsimiles (sometimes called surrogates) that provide excellent resources for teaching and are often available free of charge. Other collections, such as *Parker on the Web*, which provides digital images of medieval manuscripts at **Corpus Christi College** in Cambridge, offer a free public interface, but additional scholarly resources can be accessed by subscribing institutions.<sup>6</sup> Finally, several major and stable collections are the result of collaboration among various archives and libraries, such as the *Europeana Regia* project, which plans to digitally reunite several dispersed medieval royal libraries.<sup>7</sup> These projects often create or re-create sources in ways that could never be done physically and include scholarly tools and features such

as zooming, which allow enhanced study. This electronic experience is very far removed from the manuscript, however, and the "magic" of direct interaction with an artifact.

Print facsimiles allow the discovery of an artifact page by page and, in contrast to digital resources, can closely replicate the physical experience of working with a manuscript. They often include scholarly commentaries that illuminate and analyze the images and the construction of the codex. Manuscript facsimiles are available in a variety of genres and at several price levels. Many individual manuscripts are often available in several formats including more deluxe publications; the various facsimile offerings for a given manuscript may range from less than \$100 to many thousands of dollars. Predictably, the most expensive facsimiles most closely replicate the experience of using a manuscript and often use special paper which "feels" like vellum, colors not available by standard printing methods, and gatherings and stitching that mimic the original, but even less expensive facsimiles provide access to the text and images. Over the course of a few semesters, the curriculum can be greatly enhanced through the purchase of individual titles chosen to complement scholarly interests and required core classes that constitute a beginning "manuscript" collection for new programs or courses. The key to developing the collection is enlisting the expertise of the faculty teaching the courses, who will need to have enough familiarity with the manuscript or the genre of manuscript to comfortably teach with a facsimile.

One of the best-documented areas of manuscript study in undergraduate education is transcribing and editing a handwritten text.<sup>8-10</sup> A professor I work with uses a facsimile of a mystery play such as *The Towneley Cycle: A Facsimile of Huntington MS HM 1*, which, despite its humble exterior and black-and-white pages, provides students with an example of a vernacular text to decipher.<sup>11</sup> A social historian, art historian, or religious studies professor might prefer *The Holkham Bible: A Facsimile*, which illustrates many noncanonical biblical texts, particularly stories of the childhood of Christ, that can be used to teach topics from the modern understanding of medieval childhood to the variations in religious experience across Europe.<sup>12</sup> *The Luttrell Psalter*, a common liturgical text for lay people lavishly illustrated with scenes of agriculture and town life, as well as a variety of grotesques and imaginative creatures, is also approachable for many disciplines and thematic courses.<sup>13</sup> These glossy color publications are superficially familiar as coffee-table books, but the images and sparse text

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can raise fruitful discussion about the choice and organization of stories and the execution of images with ample material for analysis of artistic, cultural, economic, and religious issues. Themed courses, for example, classes which use environmental studies approaches to understand the middle ages, might use several different manuscript facsimiles. *The Hunting Book of Gaston Phébus: Manuscrit Français 616, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale* both describes and illustrates hunting techniques for prized game animals or herds for feeding large groups of people.<sup>14</sup> *Medicina Antiqua: Codex Vindobonensis 93, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* is a recipe book for medicines with abundant illustrations of plants and descriptions of appropriate seasons and techniques for harvesting ingredients.<sup>15</sup> *Book of Beasts: A Facsimile of Ms. Bodley 764* is a compendium of information about animals, a bestiary, compiled from various ancient and late antique authorities with many illustrations and *Aesop's* fable-like moral conclusions.<sup>16</sup>

The editions listed above are all affordable, but these less expensive facsimiles have drawbacks and can additionally be difficult to locate. They are often radically altered from the original in size, material, method of construction, and binding, which limits the level of analysis an instructor can teach or require. Instructors will most likely have strong feelings about which manuscripts they would like to teach, but budget concerns may limit the library's ability to purchase the most "authentic" manuscript facsimiles. These facsimiles can prepare students to work with the real thing, if faculty want to arrange a capstone experience like visiting a manuscript repository. As a special collections librarian, I often work with groups from regional institutions who come to work with manuscripts in **Western Michigan University's** collections because their own schools neither have nor are likely to acquire any due to lack of funds, lack of expertise, or low priority for this type of acquisition. Knowing a class has some practice with facsimiles can be reassuring to a special collections staff, who may be concerned about unleashing a group of unknown undergraduates on the university's treasured possessions, particularly for a faculty member they do not know personally. The "home" librarian can often help reassure the host librarian of the preparation and reliability of the students involved until the faculty member establishes a relationship with the curators at the host institution.

Librarians increasingly strive to become partners in instruction, but that requires them to be aware of pedagogical innovations in the disciplines they serve and to develop creative ways to support them, particularly in interdisciplinary fields. The richness of the manuscript tradition is an integral feature of medieval studies, and these materials can intrigue students and stimulate classroom discussion, but few undergraduates have the basic skills to fully realize the benefits of working with handwritten

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**people profile**

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**Gracemary Smulewitz**

**BORN AND LIVED:** Born and lived in New Jersey but spent four years in Knoxville Tennessee. My husband and I now reside in Highland Park, NJ and have for 29 years.

**EARLY LIFE:** Raised in Fort Lee, NJ with two brothers.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Member of **NASIG, ALA,** and **NJLA.** Have participated in many programs in these organizations and given many presentations. Currently President-Elect of **NJLA/ACRL/CUS.** Also member of **ALCTS/Continuing Resource Executive Committee** as Secretary. On a personal level — Member of Board of Trustees of Highland Park Educational Foundation.

**FAMILY:** Have three children — **Marietta, Henry,** and **Jon,** all married, and among them there are six grandchildren ranging in age from 1 to 13.

**PETS:** Two adopted greyhounds — Smarty Jones, age ten, and Ben Webster, age four.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Garden, Read, and Cook.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *The Stranger* by **Camus;** *Candide* by **Voltaire.**


**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Narrow-minded thinking.

**PHILOSOPHY:** We need to understand the environment we currently live in as well as where we have come from to understand and have influence over where we are going as a society and industry and profession.

**MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Our department is recognized as a well run, productive department. Our success can be measured, in part, by the success of the staff. I try to cultivate critical thinking at all levels. It is not always easy, but it is very rewarding. As a result of our work, many of our staff have pursued MLS degrees and have mentioned that they are motivated by the work they are doing within the department. We are contributing talented librarians to the field.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** Five years from now I hope that we can stabilize some aspects of the electronic frontier, particularly fair pricing for content and increased open access with favorable business models. I hope to contribute to standards in this frontier that promote discoverability and access.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** I would like to think that libraries and librarians are acclaimed by the larger institutional bodies, for their intellectual influence in the education of their community. That the larger institutions understand and incorporate "return on investment" not only from the financial perspective but, most importantly, from the intellectual perspective. 🍀



materials in other languages, a tension which Johnston characterizes as "student resistance and attraction to using rare books and manuscripts."<sup>17</sup> Instructors want to challenge their students through this kind of study because manuscript description and analysis involve the attention to detail, interdisciplinary thinking, and analytical skills that are among the primary goals of a liberal arts education. This approach can also lead to discussions on issues such as authorial intent, cultural change, the transmission of information, and the ways in which history and its artifacts are reinterpreted by

modern scholars, which lead students to challenge their assumptions. For librarians, these new trends in teaching illustrate the vitality of library collections at a time when much of the focus of the profession has been on the growth and promise of digital resources, and this work can provide stimulating challenges. Specialized collection development is an important tool to help instructors realize their goals for student achievement and to help academic librarians stay involved with the intellectual life of the departments they serve. 🍀

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#### Collecting to the Core Endnotes

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\*Editor's note: An asterisk (\*) denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.

## Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection — Building an Investigative Culture and a Meaningful Tool

by **Gracemary Smulewitz** (Head, Distributed Technical Services, Rutgers University)  
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**Rutgers University** is a large institution with 28 schools and colleges, including New Jersey's only pharmacy school. It offers more than 100 undergraduate majors, as well as more than 180 graduate programs. Supporting these programs across three campuses are 26 libraries, with a collection that encompasses 84,000 electronic subscriptions and more than 300 databases. **Rutgers** has two major research libraries — one in science and one in humanities — six specialized libraries, and two undergraduate libraries. The **John Cotton Dana Library**, in Newark, is home to the Institute for Jazz Studies, which is the largest jazz archive in the world. And the **Paul Robeson Library**, in Camden, has a broad liberal arts collection. Our collection development serves a very large, diverse community.

To date, our usage analysis has been a progressive process, and we have found practical ways to employ our usage and performance data. As we progress, we are continuously revisiting the following questions and working toward new developments to answer them: What data are we collecting, and why? How do we interpret the value of the data we collect? How can we enhance our data?

Initially, the subscription analysis project began with developing and implementing a basic tool that has become an essential component of collection and budget analysis. A script was created to identify subscription orders for print and electronic material that were encumbered and had not been paid as the end of the fiscal year approached (the encumbrances were still committed, but nothing had been received). The intent was to implement a clean-up project to release encumbered funds, where appropriate, so that money could be used for other purchases.

We began collecting statistics to make sensible decisions about resources. We compiled these statistics into a report and named the report "Encumbered and Not Paid." It provides a list of unpaid subscriptions; many, after evaluation, were classified as poor performance subscriptions. Some of our findings included: duplicate subscriptions; ceased publications with open orders; orders that had been created, yet for which the full acquisition process had not been completed; and a myriad of other subscription irregularities — there were many in all areas.

Codes were created to group similar problems. We took action on each category: canceling duplications, closing poorly-performing subscriptions, and reinstating many that had lapsed. When looking at both print and electronic subscriptions for a single title, we incorporated statistics into the analysis. The first report listed more than 3,000 titles. Currently, the number has been reduced to approximately one thousand, but the number fluctuates because of the dynamic nature of serials. The report is processed every year and repeated as the fiscal year nears to a close. The current year is compared to previous years to further analyze performance. This work has created an investigatory culture in our department

and has enabled us to look at all of this data from different perspectives.

To survive a very large budget cut, we decided to enrich our analysis by collecting extensive statistics to inform decisions about resources. Our goals were threefold: to develop a tool to comprehensively analyze packages; to develop a mechanism for print usage analysis; and to provide more information for selectors that would enable them to compare content. (They had to be engaged in the process. Up to this point, due to the complexity of the big packages, our selectors felt they were somewhat removed from the collection development decision-making.)

At the time, we were renewing a very large package, but we felt that we didn't fully understand the structure and all contents of the package. In general, packages had been invoiced as single-line items and accompanied by title lists. The goal was to break down the package by title and apply a fund code with a subject identifier to each title. A purchase order was added in our ILS to accompany the bibliographic record for each title, and funds were encumbered. Although a single payment was sent to the provider, in the ILS each title had a payment posted using a load from a spreadsheet.

This process was carried out for all packages and group purchases. Subsequently, the titles, the package name, the funds, and the payments were captured and entered into a spreadsheet. Usage statistics were added, and cost-per-use was calculated. Staff downloaded statistics manually — going to each site and pulling data to better understand the process. The comprehensive tool allowed comparison by title. The spreadsheet could be filtered by any of the elements so that a selector had access to all titles in his or her discipline from all packages with usage and cost-per-use. Cost and use of each title from year to year, across all packages, could be analyzed. This was helpful in cancellations and in making decisions for the swapping models that many packages offer.

Our next objective was to design a tool to capture print usage so that print and online usage for the same title could be compared. Active title and subscription information was extracted from the ILS serial control records. The serial control records had a controlled vocabulary in specified fields so that terms and funds, location, and other information about each subscription could be extracted with a report. Very little free text was used in setting up the controls. For example, current loose issues shelved by title in our reading rooms had entries of "RR" in the first line labeled "shelving location." We were able to capture the reading room issues in a report using a script.

Included in the report were: the title number for easy access to the bibliographic record; ISSN; the print holdings statement; all URLs (if the title was also available online); the purchase order and fund code; and the owning library. Our Access Staff alerted us to a feature in our ILS called "Marked as Used." This term means items with barcodes could

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