

## Syllabus: Medieval Manuscripts and the History of Script

Course website: <https://ruffnotes.org/olli>

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Fridays 11:45-1:15  
March 11-May 13, 2022

Visit and bookmark <https://ruffnotes.org/olli> for course resources, links, handouts, and more. As of Feb. 15, the website is up and running, but I will be adding to it and tweaking it up to our start date and throughout the term.

### Overview of meetings and topics

#### WEEK 1: March 11

Introduction and overview. Orientation to the geographical and chronological scope of the course. Terminology for describing script. A taste of the digitized riches that are out there to be explored.

#### WEEK 2: March 18

The book in Roman antiquity. Ancient Roman scripts. Ancient books and writing surfaces. The emergence of the codex. Introduction to the structure of medieval codices. (1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE-5<sup>th</sup> c. CE)

#### WEEK 3: March 25

Scripts of Christian late antiquity. The origins of our lower-case alphabet. Introduction to abbreviations. (3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries)

#### WEEK 4: April 1

Books and script in England and Ireland in the early Middle Ages: the great Insular Gospel books (Lindisfarne, Kells, and more). Recognizing and navigating biblical manuscripts online. (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries)

#### WEEK 5: April 8

Manuscripts in pre-Conquest England, continued. The importance of translation. Vernacular manuscripts, including *Beowulf*. Translating and illustrating scripture. (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries)

#### WEEK 6: April 15

Script on the Continent after the breakup of the Roman Empire. Where the earliest manuscripts survive. Manuscripts of Gaul (Francia) before Charlemagne and the emergence of Caroline Minuscule. (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries)

## WEEK 7: April 22

More on Caroline Minuscule. Scripts outside Carolingian influence: Spain and Southern Italy. (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries)

## WEEK 8: April 29

The transformation of Caroline Minuscule to Gothic script. The rise of the universities and the urban book trade. (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries)

## WEEK 9: May 6

New kinds of books for new reading audiences. Gothic cursives and humanist scripts. (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries)

## WEEK 10: May 13

Printing with movable type: what did Gutenberg invent and what were the limitation of his invention? How are early printed books similar to and different from manuscripts? (15<sup>th</sup> century)

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FURTHER READING

There is no required reading for class, but if you are intrigued by what we cover and would like to read more, here are some starting points that are reliable, accessible, up-to-date, in print, and affordable:

Christopher de Hamel, *Making Medieval Manuscripts*. Bodleian Library, 2018.

A short guide to the techniques of manuscript book production by one of the world's great manuscript experts. A \$25 paperback.

Christopher de Hamel, *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts: Twelve Journeys into the Medieval World*. Penguin, 2017.

An engrossing travelogue as de Hamel visit and investigates a dozen famous manuscripts, including several we will discuss in class. A good read and a remarkable value at only \$25 or so, and widely available used for \$15-\$20.

Michelle Brown, *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms*. Revised Edition. J. Paul Getty Museum, 2018.

This is an illustrated glossary of terms used in manuscript studies by a longtime British Library curator of manuscripts. \$20 in paperback; also available in Kindle edition.

Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*. Cornell UP, 2008.

This is an in-depth guide to manuscripts as physical objects, beautifully illustrated with photos of objects in the Newberry Library's collections. It's geared towards students learning to work with manuscripts for research, but it's very accessible.