

## Historical Scripts and Cultures of Writing in the Middle Ages (A005252)

**Course size** *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

**Credits 5.0**

**Study time 150 h**

### Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2025-2026

A (semester 1)

English

Gent

excursion

lecture

seminar

peer teaching

### Lecturers in academic year 2025-2026

De Paermentier, Els

LW03

lecturer-in-charge

### Offered in the following programmes in 2025-2026

Master of Science in Teaching in Arts and Humanities (main subject History)

5

A

Master of Arts in Historical Linguistics and Literature

5

A

Master of Arts in History

5

A

Exchange Programme History

5

A

Exchange Programme Medieval Studies and Auxiliary Sciences

5

A

### Teaching languages

English

### Keywords

development of medieval Western script types, literacy and writing competences, material production of manuscripts (codicology) and records, medieval reading and writing practices, organisation of monastic scriptoria and secular chanceries, Late Antiquity, Middle Ages, Early Renaissance

### Position of the course

This course offers a cultural-historical introduction to the development of script types (letter forms and scribal hands) and writing techniques in Western Europe from the late Antiquity to the Early Renaissance, with special attention to the medieval period. With the help of many illustrations, this course will gain insight into the most striking palaeographical features of medieval scripts, as well as into the political, economic, cultural and technical-graphical factors which explain their development and mutations. Further attention will go to the material context in which manuscripts and documents were produced, medieval reading and layout practices, and the circumstances in which medieval writing activities took place. A final discussion college is devoted to the opportunities and limits of digital technologies and tools applied within the academic field of palaeography. Exchange students may take up this course unit, for which no prior knowledge of Dutch is required.

### Contents

- Development of the auxiliary sciences of Palaeography and Codicology as academic disciplines; evaluation of their position in relation to other auxiliary sciences for the study of medieval history
- Terminology and challenges with regard to the nomenclature of medieval handwritings
- Evolution of Western letter forms, with special attention to various factors which can explain processes of mutation
- Material production of manuscripts and documents

- Development of digital technologies and tools relevant for the study of medieval manuscripts and handwritings

#### **Initial competences**

- Have a referential framework regarding the history of the Middle Ages
- Have basic knowledge of the relevance of Palaeography as an auxiliary science for the study of medieval handwritings

#### **Final competences**

- 1 Have advanced insight into the use of the historical terminological framework for analyzing and evaluating new and complex ideas. Have advanced insight into the use of the terminological framework with regard to the nomenclature of medieval script types and the material features of medieval manuscripts for analyzing and critically evaluating them.
- 2 Have insight into the history of Belgium and/or Europe and/or the world that can be used for the critical analysis of complex problems and the formulation of possible research questions. Have advanced insight into the origins and development of Western script types to chronologically and geographically situate selected samples of medieval handwritings or manuscripts.
- 3 Have the ability to take a critical approach to the history of a particular period or subject. Have the ability to take a critical approach to the history of Palaeography and Codicology as academic disciplines.
- 4 Have the ability to use basic knowledge of bordering sciences in research and/or professional activities in an original and in-depth manner. Have the ability to use basic knowledge of bordering sciences (diplomats, sigillography, papyrology, epigraphy) to formulate more complex definitions of a problem with regard to the study of medieval manuscripts and handwritings.
- 5 Have the ability to employ historical scientific methodology in research or professional activities.
- 6 Have general insight into the field's literature, and the ability to use sources in an original and creative manner.
- 7 Have the ability to critically analyze the current historiographical debate with regard to the discipline of Palaeography, and translate this into a concrete research project.
- 8 Have the ability to critically reflect upon the limits of one's own skills, thoughts, and actions. Have the ability to critically reflect upon the opportunities and limits of digital tools and digitally-based methodological approaches used within the academic field of Palaeography and medieval Manuscript Studies.
- 9 Have the ability to substantiate and present (also in another language than Dutch) one's own historical research to both experts and laypersons. Have the ability to present and critically comment in group one or more scholarly articles with regard to a particular subject.
- 10 Digital competence: Have general insight into the way in which the digital turn has influenced the typology, origins, dissemination, (re)use, manipulation and findability/searchability of digitized source material.
- 11 Digital competence: Be familiar with the basic concepts and the inter- and transdisciplinary possibilities of Digital Humanities.

#### **Conditions for credit contract**

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

#### **Conditions for exam contract**

Access to this course unit via an exam contract is unrestricted

#### **Teaching methods**

Seminar, Excursion, Lecture, Peer teaching

#### **Extra information on the teaching methods**

- (theoretical) lectures
- tutorial (learning how to describe medieval manuscripts and handwritings) (University library, Manuscript reading room)
- microteaching: oral presentation of an article or online project (e.g. relative to 'digital palaeography'); students receive feedback from both the teacher and other students
- excursion to the Royal Library in Brussels, or to a temporary exhibition of medieval manuscripts

## Study material

### Type: Handbook

Name: B. Bischoff, Latin Palaeography ([1990] 2014)  
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Author : Bischoff  
ISBN : 978-0-52136-726-4  
Number of Pages : 30  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : Yes  
Available through Student Association : No  
Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : regularly  
Usability and Lifetime within the Study Programme : one-time  
Usability and Lifetime after the Study Programme : not  
Additional information: The handbook is available on Ufora (e-book) Limited selection of chapters.

### Type: Slides

Name: Bischoff, B., Latin Palaeography. Antiquity and the Middle Ages (2014)  
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Number of Slides : 400  
Available on Ufora : Yes  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : No  
Available through Student Association : No  
Additional information: Powerpoint slides (ca. 45 per class) are the main guidelines for studying the learning material. Additional learning material consists of: - selected chapters from the handbook B. Bischoff, Latin Palaeography ([1990] 2014) - reader (thematic selection of articles) - optional: a Dutch syllabus is available for Dutch-speaking students All learning material is free and online available on Ufora (slides, e-book, syllabus, articles).

### Type: Reader

Name: Thematic selection of articles  
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Number of Pages : 60  
Available on Ufora : Yes  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : Yes  
Available through Student Association : No  
Additional information: Selection of the reader may vary for each academic year.

## References

Additional literature (optional):  
- A. Petrucci, 'Au-delà de la paléographie: histoire de l'écriture, histoire de l'écrit, histoire de l'écrire', *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique* (Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques), 1-6, 1996, p. 123-135.  
- M.P. Brown, *A guide to Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600* (1990)  
- A. Derolez, *The palaeography of Gothic manuscript books : from the twelfth to the early sixteenth century* (2003)  
- *Codicology and palaeography in the digital age*, ed. Malte Rehbein, Patrick Sahle, Torsten Schassan (2009)

## Course content-related study coaching

Via Ufora, e-mail and in person after appointment

## Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

## Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment

## Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment

### **Examination methods in case of permanent assessment**

### **Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment**

not applicable

### **Extra information on the examination methods**

Oral examination (with written preparation time) (90%)

Presentation and participation during class (10%)

### **Calculation of the examination mark**

90% periodical assessment

10% non-periodical assessment

### **Facilities for Working Students**

Facilities:

1 Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance

2 Possible rescheduling of the examination to a different time in the same academic year

3 Feedback can be given by email or by appointment during office hours

For more information contact the monitoring service of the Faculty of Arts and

Philosophy: [https://www.ugent.](https://www.ugent.be/lw/nl/student/studiestudentenbegeleiding/trajectbegeleiding.htm)

[be/lw/nl/student/studiestudentenbegeleiding/trajectbegeleiding.htm](https://www.ugent.be/lw/nl/student/studiestudentenbegeleiding/trajectbegeleiding.htm)