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**THE SCRIPTORIUM**  
NATURE – FUNCTION – SPECIFICS

The holding of the conference in the setting of the ancient abbey of Saint-Gall, whose famous ninth-century plan is one of the few witnesses to the physical existence of a scriptorium, provides an opportunity to engage upon consideration of the meaning cloaked by this word.

The term was introduced into the scholarly vocabulary only relatively recently, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it replaced other expressions that have appreciably different connotations ('école calligraphique', for instance). The publication of Albert Bruckner's pioneering work, *Scriptoria Medii Aevi Helvetica* (1935-1974, 12 vols) and the founding of the journal *Scriptorium* by Camille Gaspar, Frédéric Lyna and François Masai in 1946, contributed greatly to the popularity of the term.

Its meaning, however, has remained rather vague. Some would extend it to any kind of centre of manuscript production, and are happy to refer to lay *scriptoria*, or even private *scriptoria*. Others, by contrast, use it in only a very restricted sense to apply just to those centres that are famous for the quality and quantity of their production. In most cases it remains an abstraction, failing adequately to shed light upon the practical realities to which it refers.

Some closer definition is therefore required.

One possibility is to define a *scriptorium* as **a unit of production** (possibly just a group of individuals) **operating at the heart of an ecclesiastical institution and intended to fulfill its need for books, completely independent of any commercial context**. But is such a definition satisfactory or adequate? What are its implications?

The list of issues set out below are intended to elicit various kinds of response to these questions, whether based upon the analysis of a body of evidence or drawn from especially significant examples.

### 1. The word and its meaning

a) The use and usage of the word *scriptorium* (and its synonyms); the evidence of different kinds of source (literary, iconographic, etc.) for its existence as an institutional entity.

b) In what ways have scholars and writers of the classical, post-medieval and contemporary periods used the term or expressed the same concept?

### 2. Practice

a) Ecclesiastical requirements with regard to books for study, the liturgy and archives.

b) The location of scribal activity within monastic, conventual, university and any other communal settings.

c) The personnel and organisation of copying in scriptoria.

- d) Collaborative production within the centralised orders (Cluniac, Cistercian, etc.).
- e) The production of books in relation to teaching activity.
- f) The copying of texts as a spiritual exercise.
- g) The production of charters and other forms of administrative or diplomatic document (cartularies, etc.) within *scriptoria*.
- h) Other forms of writing (inscriptions, in particular) that might be related to the activity of a *scriptorium*.
- i) The coexistence of scriptoria and other forms of scribal organisation of a commercial kind (writing-offices, workshops)

### 3. Interpretation

- a) How can one prove the existence of a *scriptorium*?
- b) How can one demonstrate the attribution of a manuscript to a particular *scriptorium*?
- c) How might the products of a scriptorium be evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively?
- d) What factors (institutional, economic, political, social, cultural) shape the development or decline of a *scriptorium*?
- e) What combination of historical factors are required to sustain the productivity of *scriptoria*?
- f) What changes can be observed in the nature and function of *scriptoria* across the medieval period?
- g) To what extent have palaeographical, codicological and art-historical typologies been based upon the assumed existence of *scriptoria*?

*Proposals for papers, with details of current position and/or status, should be sent to D. Muzerelle, General Secretary of the Comité (dm2@palaeographia.org) before June 1, 2012, together with a synopsis of between 1000 and 2500 characters (not counting spaces).*

*Proposals and papers should be given in one of the approved languages of the Comité: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish (Castilian).*

*Prospective contributors are invited to indicate which issue or issues itemized above will be addressed. Preference will be given to papers that intend to examine one or two issues in depth rather than to surveys of a large number of them. Some indication of the visual material that authors intend to support their papers is also desirable.*

*Prospective contributors will be informed whether their proposals have been accepted on or after July 1, 2012.*

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