

MARS 201: Medieval Encounters
Introduction to medieval manuscripts
Prof. Fleming

For your response today, you will practice a little **paleography** and try to **transcribe** a bit of thousand-year-old writing. Please do the tasks described below on a loose piece of paper that will be collected at the very beginning of our Oct 27 class meeting.

Review the video that Dr. Cody assigned for Oct 6, [Making Manuscripts](#). The details covered in that video—about the literal construction of manuscript—are generally known as “codicology” or the “study of a codex,” that is the manuscript book as a physical object.

Today we are going to practice **reading** what is in medieval manuscripts. Even if you happen to know medieval languages like Latin, reading a manuscript can be difficult, because medieval scribes wrote differently than we do today. The study of the very many different styles of medieval handwriting is known as **paleography**. On the next page, you can see a wide variety of different handwriting styles from the 6th-15th century.

The next page is a manuscript page that we will examine. Start by looking at this image of a manuscript page, and describe what you see. Don't try too hard to read it at first. Just describe the page, the handwriting, whether anything familiar jumps out, what is unusual about it.

A high-resolution image of the same page can be found [here](#). You can also flip through the entire manuscript, but we will focus on this one page today.

Paleography: Different "hands"

1. Rustic capital, Rome, early 6c.

Λ B D E G M N P R S

2. Uncial, Italy, 5c.

Λ B D E G M N P R S

3. New Roman cursive, Italy, 4c.

a b d e g m n p r s

4. Half-uncial, Italy, early 6c.

a b d e g m n p r s

5. Precaroline (Luxeuil) minuscule, late 7c.

a b d e g m n p r s

6. Insular minuscule, England, mid 8c.

a b d e g m n p r s

7. Insular half-uncial, England, 8c.

a b d e g m n p r s

8. Caroline minuscule, France, early 9c.

a b d e g m n p r s

9. Caroline minuscule, Italy, mid 12c.

a b d e g m n p r s

10. English Caroline minuscule, mid 11c.

a b d e g m n p r s

11. Protogothic minuscule, England, mid 12c.

a b d e g m n p r s

12. Gothic textura quadrata, France, early 14c.

a b d e g m n p r s

13. Gothic textura rotunda, France, early 14c.

a b d e g m n p r s

14. Gothic cursiva anglicana, England, late 13c.

a b d e g m n p r s

15. Gothic cursive, France, early 15c.

a b d e g m n p r s

16. Lettera bononiensis, Bologna, 14c.

a b d e g m n p r s

17. Semigothic cursive, Italy, late 14c.

a b d e g m n p r s

18. Lettera hybrida, Low Countries, mid 15c.

a b d e g m n p r s

19. Lettera antiqua, Italy, mid 15c.

a b d e g m n p r s

20. Humanistic cursive, Italy, late 15c.

a b d e g m n p r s

From Julian Brown, *A Palaeographer's View* (London, 1993)

odde on lande. Concha. feyll. noauna ft

Fera. pildeor. lupur. pulf. Leo. **RARV.**
 Leo. Linx. gemenged hund. 7 pulf. On con
 nyr. anhyrne deor. þat deor hafð ðine horn.
 buþan ðam tram egum. ſpa ſcraugne. 7 ſpa
 ſcaupne. þat ^{he} fýht piddone mycclan ylp.
 7 hine oþe gepundad. on ðaſie þambe oð
 deað. he hatte eac. pinoceþon. 7 monoceþon.
 ſpif. fiden pote fugel. leone gelic. onpaft
 me. 7 earne gelic. on heafde. 7 on fideþum.
 Seþ ſpa micel þat he gepýlt. horn. 7 menn. **←**
 Vulper. fox. Taxo. odde melur. bioc. equur.
 horn. equa. myne. Arinur. odde arina. aru.
 Camelur. olþeno. onagen. pilde arpa. Au
 lur. mul. Eleþan. ylp. Unur. beþa. Unpa.
 heo. Simia. apa. lutruur. oþen. fiber. be
 þon. þeruncur. meard. myrcela. perle.
 Talpa. pandepuppe. Cattur. odde munulþulur
 . odde municeþ. catt. hýnicur. odde
 em naciur. il. Glur. piremur. auur. odde
 þopex. mur. Verimur. pýþm. Lumburur.
 angelþicca. Cenuur. heort. Cenua. hind.



The first step in reading a medieval manuscript is recognizing how the scribe writes each of the letters of the alphabet. Some will be easily recognizable, and some might not be. Begin by filling out this chart, drawing an example of each letter of the alphabet as it appears in this manuscript.

a -	j -	s -
b -	k -	t -
c -	l -	u -
d -	m -	v -
e -	n -	w -
f -	o -	x -
g -	p -	y -
h -	q -	z -
i -	r -	

Look at the chart of handwriting above and note that “s” and “r” might not always look like what you’d expect (look especially at handwriting styles #5-#8).

Note these additional letters, and see if you can find examples of them:

þ is called thorn and represents the “th” sound -

ð is called “eth” and also represents the “th” sound -

ƿ is called “wynn” and represents the “w” sound -

7 is called the “Tironian et” and is an abbreviation for “et” or “and” -

Now that you have a pretty good idea what the letters should look like, transcribe the passage. “Transcribe” means to rewrite the words in your own letters. Don’t try to draw the letters like you did above, but instead write them in the way you’d normally write; you may handwrite or type. You don’t need to translate or even understand what you are writing. Here’s an example of a transcription of the first two lines on the first page:

oððe on lande. Concha. scyll NOMINA FE

Fera. wildeor. lupus. wulf. leo RARUM

Now transcribe the passage up, from “leo” in line 3 to “menn” in line 11. If you get the hang of it, try to finish the page.