The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)

announces an Informal Talk

by

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Technical Signs as a Form of Scholarly Annotation

in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Apart from the text itself, manuscripts frequently contain different types of paratextual features – glosses, marginal annotations, punctuation, accent marks and many others. Over the last decades, manuscript scholars began to study these paratextual elements with a new focus: as a reflection of scholarly activities and thus of knowledge communities and networks in particular regions and periods. Within this research direction, the most attention has been paid to textual forms of the paratext, such as glosses, simply because the text can be read and interpreted directly. It is more complicated to interpret and assess atextual forms of paratext, such as punctuation or diagrams, especially if we lack a key that would allow us to read them. My PhD research focused on one type of atextual paratext – technical signs (Latin nota, Greek semeion). Technical signs can be defined as discrete graphic symbols placed in the manuscript margins which communicated information about the text in the main window or provided an interpretative framework for its reading and use. To give an example from my research: in the early medieval Latin West, theological works could be equipped with technical signs indicating which passages were approved and which were contested. In this manner, it was possibly to circulate and use texts which were otherwise seen as problematic or dangerous. In other cases, polemical texts produced in the heat of a controversy were annotated in this fashion by the opposing party in order to undermine their argument.

In my presentation, I will first explain what technical signs are and how can they be related to knowledge communities. Then, I will chart the development of technical signs in the Latin-speaking world from Antiquity to the end of the Early Middle Ages. Finally, I will specifically pay attention to technical signs used for scholarly annotation and show that in many cases technical signs are our only way how to identify manuscripts used for scholarly purposes and track scholars who would otherwise escape our attention.

Friday, 30 October 2015 at 2 pm

Room 0001, CSMC