

Under Pressure. Women Commissioning Manuscripts in a Time of Print

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What happens to manuscript production in a time of print? The proposed DPhil looks at how commissioning manuscripts takes on new significance in the incunabular period. The second half of the 15th century is one of the most exciting periods to study in terms of interaction of different forms of text culture. This is particularly true for Germany, where Gutenberg's invention of printing with moveable type originates. From 1450, manuscripts cease to be the default form of circulation of text. Under this pressure from the printing press, manuscripts develop in new directions and shift in shape and scope. The primary focus of the project will be on those who commission vernacular illuminated manuscripts in Germany once printing becomes the default form of text circulation. The topic is set to explore why such a high proportion of manuscript commissions come from noble women. Margarethe von Savoy, Mechthild von der Pfalz, and Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken are just three cases among a high profile network of literary interests, family relationships and linguistic prowess, with all of them speaking and writing several languages fluently.

There are different directions to this proposal which could be explored:

- The relationship between a noble patroness and a specific workshop, e.g. the Henfflin workshop in Stuttgart who produced the majority of manuscripts for Margarethe von Savoy.
- Personalisation for female ownership, looking at the status of manuscripts and their association with courtly culture. This could be done by comparing the layout, illustration and colouring in of prints and manuscripts of the same work, as it is currently done in a doctoral project on 'Pontus und Sidonia', translated by Elisabeth von Saarbrücken-Nassau from French. The German side could in turn be compared to contemporary French manuscripts and prints in the rich holdings of the Bodleian.
- Manuscripts copied from prints, such as the first printed German Bible which provided the exemplar for dozens of customized manuscript copies including a costly decorated three-volume set produced for Margarethe, which could be compared to illuminated Bibles produced directly from a manuscript source such as the huge Kun Bible in the Bodleian Library (MS. Bodley 969/970).
- Themes of extravagance and splendour which seem to come to the forefront when scribes try to compete through illuminated manuscripts with the flourishing trade in printed books; e.g. the topic of how the orient is depicted in manuscripts such as that of 'Die Heidin' and 'Die Mörin', a work written specifically for the court of Mechthild von der Pfalz. This could be linked with questions about courtly versus urban culture.

The hypothesis behind this cluster of research questions is that under the pressure of the success of the printing press, manuscripts develop new significance as representative objects of courtly culture especially for noble women.

Applicants will be expected to bring:

- Degree: MA or equivalent in Medieval Studies or German Literature
- Languages: Middle High German (essential), Latin and French (desirable, degree of knowledge depending on the exact topic chosen)

Skills: Palaeography (at least basic, further training can be provided), Encoding and editing experience.