
Editorial

Natural Sciences and Technology in Manuscript Studies

Dear Reader

In recent years, the emerging field of manuscript studies has come to provide a platform for dialogue between the humanities and the natural sciences, helping to define issues to be tackled by non-destructive technologies developed in the natural and applied sciences. The analyses of visual, physical and chemical properties of manuscripts provide important data for answering questions that cannot be solved by historical and philological methods alone. Multispectral imaging, for example, is already being widely used to recover erased text in palimpsests. Non-destructive material analysis contributes to the classification of writing materials and provenance studies and can potentially be employed to determine the age of manuscripts as well. Finally, image-processing techniques are also gaining recognition in the field of palaeography and codicology.

Growing recognition of the potential of physical and chemical diagnostics for a wide range of applications from conservation and restoration of artefacts to scholarly disciplines from archaeology to philology has led to an increasing number of meetings and publications by researchers. To the best of our knowledge, however, there has not yet been any attempt to assemble experts using and developing methods from the natural and applied sciences that focus exclusively on manuscripts.

The first International Conference on Natural Sciences and Technology in Manuscript Analysis was held at the premises of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures in Hamburg on 4–6 December 2013. It brought together

scientists and scholars engaged in this field of research and provided a forum for discussion and for presenting new methods and results.

This special issue of *manuscript cultures* contains a selection of the papers presented in Hamburg. The articles were solicited for original research work illuminating the role of the natural sciences and technology in manuscript analysis and covered areas such as:

- the recovery of lost writing.
- image analysis of visual manuscript features.
- material analysis of writing materials and writing supports.
- cutting-edge techniques.

All in all, this special issue represents the state of the art, illustrating how different techniques and varying methodologies can be successfully applied to analytical investigations in the field of manuscript analysis. We hope that it will help to integrate the natural and applied sciences into the field of manuscript studies.

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