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**ВИЗАНТИЙСКО
И ПОСТВИЗАНТИЙСКО ИЗКУСТВО:
ПРЕСИЧАНЕ НА ГРАНИЦИ**



**BYZANTINE
AND POST-BYZANTINE ART:
CROSSING BORDERS**

ART READINGS

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Essay on a Visual Perspective of Medieval Writing¹

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Abstract. This paper aims to explore the visual and epigraphic properties of medieval writing as well as considering writing medium, technique, and communicative status. The boundaries between different auxiliary disciplines in Medieval Studies (paleography, epigraphy, numismatics, sigillography) have created separate categories of writings and scripts within the writing culture of the Middle Ages, even if the letterforms, functions, and types of writing actually do not differ from one medium to another. A strong case for removing the disciplinary boundaries rests on the facts that writing was executed by scribes sharing training, tools and know-how, and that the iconic value of script and its visual aspects were activated primarily in the display of letters regardless of the variations in the content of the text, in its location, or its linguistic form. “Epigraphic” forms are used in manuscript *tituli*; “manuscript” abbreviations are found in stone inscriptions; seals show “epigraphic” *mise en page*; calamus-like features are inscribed on coins... Beyond the obvious inaccuracy of terminology, what do those commonalities between written objects show? How could we address the porosity of medieval literacy?

Key words: Paleography, Epigraphy, Literacy, Digital Humanities, Jean Mallon, Medieval Studies.

1 This text summarizes the talk given in Sofia, in April 2017. It is based on my exploration of the two footages of Jean Mallon’s movies quoted in the last section of this article. I wish to express my gratitude to Marc Smith for providing me with a copy of these movies.

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Introduction

Medieval writing possesses a fundamental visual dimension that is evident both in the forms and shapes of lettering in manuscripts or inscriptions, and in the content of the texts³. Thus, the products of writing must always be considered as objects, *i.e.* material entities defined by their form, area, location, material, and technique⁴. While such an approach does not preclude the need for a paleographic analysis, inscribed objects also belong to medieval visual culture. Moreover, we should bear in mind that these two categories, *written culture* and *visual culture*, have been produced by heuristic necessities of medievalism and that, as such, they do not necessarily correspond to medieval practices that often mixed and merged one with the other. Following in the footsteps of Augustine, who established the “first semiotics” of letters as essential elements⁵, Isidore of Seville states that each letter possesses a sound, but also a name, as well as a form⁶. According to this grammarian, none of these three components is arbitrary; rather, they can be explained by the meaning of the letter and the function of the alphabet in the shaping and knowledge of the world as it has been created by God *in principio*⁷. Viewed in this way, writing in the Middle Ages, and especially during the Carolingian times, signified a visual and material *forma* generating the content of language and its capacity to reproduce knowledge, wisdom, and the divine will. Such a visual dimension of writing can be clearly observed for example in the cloister of Moissac (France, ca. 1100) where a complex epigraphic composi-

3 The bibliography on the *visuality* of script is abundant. See, among others, *Kendrick*, Laura. *Animating the Letter. The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Columbus, 1999; *Sparrow*, John. *Visible Words: A Study of Inscriptions in and as Books and Works of Art*. Cambridge, 1969.

4 The word “object” is used here in a very simple definition of “something tangible”. On this concept, see *Bartholeyns*, Gyl. “Objets”, *Dictionnaire Tolkien*. Paris, 2012, 455-457; *Bartholeyns*, Gyl. *Quand l’objet donne l’exemple. La vie d’un moine au Moyen Âge, une spiritualité toute matérielle*. – *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, 2016, No. 174, 149-168; *Bonnot*, Thierry. *L’ethnographie au musée: valeur des objets et science sociale*. – *Ethnographie.org* 11 (october 2006) [online]; *Harman*, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester, 2011.

5 *Vecchio*, Sebastiano. *La parole como segni. Introduzione alla linguistica agostiniana*. Palermo, 1994.

6 On these questions, see *Treffort*, Cécile, *De inventoribus litterarum. L’histoire de l’écriture vue par les savants carolingiens*. – *Summa*, 2013, No. 1, 38-53; *Treffort*, Cécile, *Tissages textuels et transcendance du signe: autour des poésies visuelles du Haut Moyen Âge*. – *Revista de poética medieval*, 2013, No. 27, 45-59.

7 *Stiernemann*, Patricia. *L’inscription alphabétique: de la consécration de l’église à l’apprentissage de la lecture et autres usages*. – *Bulletin monumental*, 2011, No. 169-1, 73-76.



Fig. 1. Moissac (France), cloister. Alphabetic capital (c. 1100). © CIFM/CESCM

tion has been inscribed on the abacus of a capital decorated with vegetation representing an image of nature created by God (Fig. 1)⁸. The inscription forms a “string of letters” by first reproducing a complete Latin alphabet, then a graphic construction combining the first letter of the alphabet with the last one, the second letter with the penultimate one and so on (AX, BV, CT...), and finally the beginning of a psalm (DEUS IN DOMINE TUO SALVUM). The visual features and the location of the inscription on the vegetal sculpture

⁸ Cazes, Quitterie. *Le cloître de Moissac, chef-d’œuvre de la sculpture romane*. Toulouse, 2001; *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale* [from now on CIFM] 8, TG 28, 153-154, ill. 152-155.

harmoniously merge the concepts of Creation and writing, and produce a synthetic image of the two modes of existence in the world: 1) the form, and 2) its translation in written language.

The alphabetical capital in Moissac challenges the disciplines of Medieval Studies in their ability to analyze such visually and textually rich objects. How can we define what is displayed in the cloister? How can we characterize the actions that have shaped this piece of stone? Has the capital been inscribed? Has it been sculpted? Should one distinguish the act of writing from that of decorative carving? In what follows, this paper will briefly discuss medieval objects, considering both their decorative and epigraphic features, in order to measure the indomitable character of writing during the Middle Ages and its propensity to escape modern methods of analysis. Such a focus does not shed any new light on the material under scrutiny but instead points out to the methodological constraints of modern medieval scholarship. Ultimately, it invites a return to, and focus on, the evidence provided by the objects themselves.

Material and image

Medieval manuscripts are filled with vivid compositions showing the blurring of semiotic boundaries between letters and iconic signs. Many initials depicting animal or vegetable figures cannot be described by the traditional vocabulary of paleography and their ductus, i.e. the sequence of lines and curves designing the letter, cannot be viewed in isolation. As a matter of fact, these initials rather belong to the field of art history; they are studied by scholars working on miniature and illumination (and generally not by paleographers), without questioning the semiotic nature of these signs that “look like” images, and are studied as such. Scholars often omit to note that the implementation of color, the in-depth treatment of the surface of the parchment, and a meaningful relation of the letter with the entire page produce a visual and material trace as the result of the writing process: that by engaging in this process, medieval scribes and illuminators compose a *form* designed, staged, and set in motion on the writing surface (Fig. 2).

Tracing alphabetical signs consists either of adding material onto a surface (producing chromatic shifts or contrasts, in most cases) or of removing material from a surface (in the case of inscriptions, for ex-



Fig. 2. Lichfield (England), cathedral, St Chad Gospels (c. 730), fol. 5r. © Lichfield Cathedral

ample). Thus, alphabetical traces should not be considered only as drawings that do not alter the surface, but also as forms and products of mechanical actions transforming blank or virgin materials into inscribed objects⁹. The visual and formal dimension of writing is not, therefore, derived from the fact that the letter can be formed

⁹ On these important aspects, see the seminal work of *Christin, Anne-Marie*. *Poétique du blanc. Vide et intervalle dans la civilisation de l'alphabet*. Paris, 2009.

from images or that it can itself receive images, but rather that it resulted from shaping and modeling material, and thus from changing its nature. For example, the initial *B* in the opening words *Beatus vir* in Carolingian psalters is often traced with a compass matching geometric proportions employed in the contemporary, often illuminated, manuscripts of music theory. (**Fig. 3**)¹⁰. Such a mechanical and theoretical display shows the highly graphic and visual design of the *B* in the psalter, and more generally of alphabetical signs; it also demonstrates how well trained the scribes were, and how and closely engaged in such complex writing processes. If text and image merge within the same composition, both share the physical and visual dimension. The letter does not only allow the fixation of language but also gives it a meaningful shape.

Such a formal conception of writing and the subsequent attribution of aesthetic properties to its shape go a long way towards explaining why many medieval works of art combine alphabetical and iconic signs, letters and images¹¹. This rarely happens for the sake of explaining or commenting on the image by means of words – names and sentences – but more frequently as a way to build a single visual object in which writing crosses the border of linguistic constraints to serve the narrative and sense of the image. This is the case, for example, with the inscription on the outer edge of the tympanum of the old church of Mervilliers (France, 12th century)¹². The sculpted group above the door is a donor scene with the patron, who is a knight, and St George (**Fig. 4**). On the right-hand side, a scribe is also showed recording a transaction on a piece of parchment placed on a writing table. The inscription, carved in relief, gives the identity of the characters and describes the legal action as it is represented in the sculpture: RENBAULDUS MILES MICHI CONTULIT EJUSQUE HERES GAZAS PRESENTES UT HABERET SINE CARENTES¹³. The end of the text is placed on the scribe's ta-

10 *Marchesin*, Isabelle. *L'image organum: la représentation de la musique dans les psautiers médiévaux, 800–1200*. Turnhout, 2000.

11 On this topic, see *Debiais*, Vincent. *La croisée des signes. L'écriture et l'image médiévale (800–1200)*. Paris, 2017.

12 *Voyer*, Cécile. *Le geste efficace: le don du chevalier au saint sur le tympan de Mervilliers (XII^e siècle)*. – *Aurell*, Martin (dir.). *Chevalerie et christianisme aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*. Rennes, 2011, 101–122.

13 Translation: Renbauldus the knight and his heir, brought me these treasures, so he can himself obtain unlimited treasures.



Fig. 3. Paris (France), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Vivien Bible-BnF, ms. lat. 1 (c. 845), fol. 216v. © BNF Paris

ble and his stylus touches the last letter, as if he were rendering it in both media, stone and parchment. The inscription recording the legal process relates to the very structure of the image: it closes, delineates, and separates the scene just as the official document issued at the time served as a legal framework for the act of donation. There is thus a deliberately wide-ranging semiotic arrangement on the tympanum: the record of the act of donation as it is fixed in



Fig. 4. Mervilliers (France), tympanum of the old church (12th century). © CIFM/CESCM

the sculpture references the composition of the document as it is represented in images and in writing. Here, it is impossible to distinguish between the visual and verbal aspects of writing, and it would be futile to attempt any such distinction. Carved in stone, they act in unison to convey the complex message of the legal process of donation.

Medieval writing thus functions as a “system”, evoking all the aspects of the material display of the word (its shape, sound, location, meaning...). This is the reason why similar formal arrangements and *mise en page* can be found on very different media in the visual culture of the Middle Ages. These similarities should not collectively be considered as the products of copying, influence or imitation¹⁴; they also reflect the existence of shared graphic practices mobilizing the verbal and material elements of writing regardless of the surfaces on which they feature, but according to the demands of communication in diverse contexts and the choices of the *scriptores*. Many examples could be listed here, such as: epigraphic lettering in the titles of manuscripts; manuscript layout in the epigraphic domain

14 On the phenomena of imitation and copying, see *Smith, Marc, Stiernemann, Patricia. Forme et fonction des écritures d'apparat dans les manuscrits latins (VIII^e-XV^e siècle).* – Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes, 2007, No. 165, 67-100.

and *vice versa*; mandorla-shape of writing in sculpture and in seals... These similarities will remain difficult to notice and study as long as different scholarly disciplines examine them separately, and work independently using their respective tools and methods. Today, it seems appropriate – and, more importantly, possible – to consider that a global science of writing could assess these phenomena, not only in terms of their similarity/dissimilarity, but in terms of what they mean within medieval literacy. This idea is by no means new: already in 1982, the great paleographer Jean Mallon called for such an approach by stressing the fundamental importance of the ways in which writing has been displayed in a physical space, as evidence for such a universal practice¹⁵. At the point where visibility and materiality meet, writing transcends the limits of our respective disciplines and invites a consideration of the letter as a *forma*, such as it has been defined by Isidore of Seville.

Letter as a forma

In the top most register of the scene of donation on the tympanum of Mervilliers, Christ holds in his right hand an open book inscribed with the letters alpha and omega. According to the ontological definition of God in the Book of Revelation, in which the Judge defines himself as a *littera* (*Ego sum alpha and omega*), the two Greek letters should not be written on the Book of Life containing the name of the elected ones¹⁶. It is, however, a common feature of Western art, of which Mervilliers is but one example. This placement and distance from what should be a “literal” image of the Apocalypse strip the alphabetic signs of their linguistic essence. The letters are no longer meant to be pronounced. They become an iconic sign, a formal attribute participating in the visual constitution of an iconographic type. In the *maiestas Domini*, the book, the mandorla, the throne, the clouds, and the letters constitute the visual index of the divine, and its ethereal presence in this world¹⁷.

The formal dimension of such letters emphasizing their visual and

15 Mallon, Jean. *De l'écriture*. Recueil d'études publiées de 1937 à 1981. Paris, 1986.

16 Rev 3:5: He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

17 Poilpré, Anne-Orange. *Majestas Domini*. Une image de l'Église en Occident (V^e-IX^e siècle). Paris, 2005.

symbolic value has been more thoroughly studied in historiography in relation to the insular production of manuscripts and luxurious liturgical books in the Carolingian period; here, the alphabetic component of the sign seems to disappear into the ornamental ensemble. The letter is above all a geometrical or floral composition; blurred in the abundance of colors, patterns, motives, and shapes; it becomes a monumental living object, fixed in a form marking and harmonizing the entire manuscript. When deployed on parchment, the letter is both a sign and an object in its own right, both subtracted from and included in the book. In many well-known manuscripts of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* by Beatus of Liebana for example¹⁸, Greek letters alpha and omega frame the text of John's vision and his gloss by Beatus. The Girona Beatus (copied and illuminated in the monastery of San Salvador de Tàbara, Spain, ca. 975) shows undoubtedly the most monumental version of these letters¹⁹. In folio 19, Christ sits on a throne placed on the horizontal bar of a gigantic alpha drawn in the form of a capital A (Fig. 5). The letter is richly embellished with tree, plant and flower motifs: it is the letter of life. Two birds feeding on the stem placed vertically above the throne reinforce this reading. The letter thus provides a structure for the page. On both sides of the monumental A the quotation is inscribed from Rev 1: 8: *Ego sum alpha and omega*. In the inscription, the A has the same form as the monumental letter. There are therefore three complementary, rather than redundant, modalities to represent Christ on this page: the image of the enthroned king, which anticipates the image of the f. 107r, the form of the monumental letter, and the quotation of Rev 1:8. In the Girona Beatus, the monumental omega is placed in f. 284v, after closing paragraph, on the page of the colophon. Just as the omega concludes the alphabet, it marks a boundary between the end of John's Vision and the beginning of the commentary. In the five manuscripts of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* showing monumental versions of the alpha and omega, the two letters scale the definition of Christ's alphabetic dimension down to the manuscript: the book is Christ himself, as the exegesis of the Book of Revelation constantly reminds the reader²⁰. Writing should therefore

18 Williams, John. *The Illustrated Beatus: A corpus of the illustrations of the Commentary on Apocalypse*. London, 1994.

19 On this manuscript, see *García Lobo, Vicente, Williams, John. Beato de Tàbara*. Madrid, 2005 (facsimile and introduction).

20 On the exegesis of the Book of Revelation, see *Christe, Yves. L'Apocalypse de Jean. Sens et*

not only be considered as an image because it possesses a strong visual dimension, as, for example, in Irish manuscripts or in the copies of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, but because its visual and formal qualities comprise the meaning of what has been written. In liturgical books, the initial *T* of *Te igitur* has the shape of a cross because it opens the Canon of the Mass in which Christ's sacrifice is commemorated (Fig. 6); the initials *V* and *D* of *Vere dignum* combine an open form (*V*) and a closed ductus

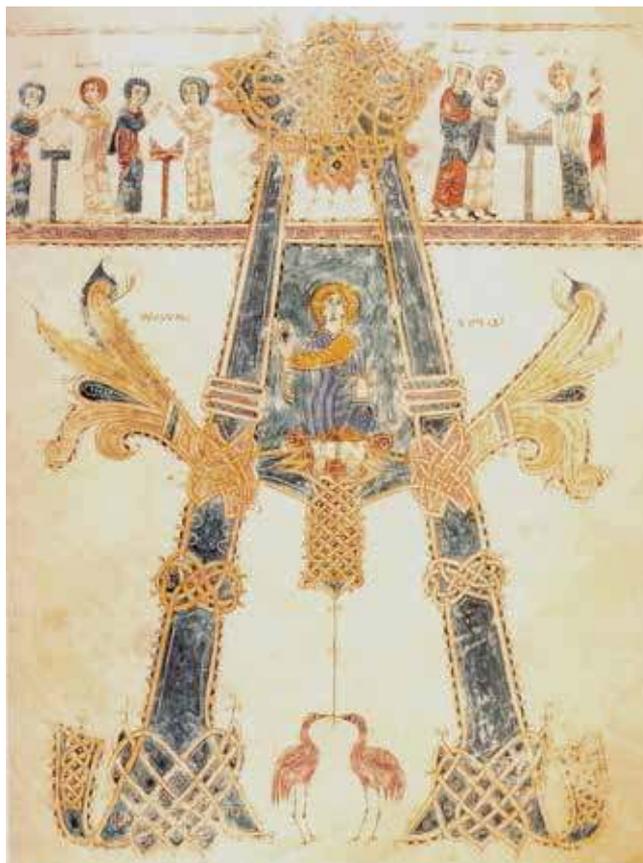


Fig. 5. Girona (Spain), cathedral, Beatus (c. 975), fol. 19r.
© Girona Cathedral

(*D*) because this design brings together the two natures of Christ²¹. In this context, writing becomes iconic and its meaning emerges from the form of letters.

The fact that a figurative capacity lies in the form of the letter implicitly suggests that the iconography of writing exists; it also implies a fruitful and necessary synergy between art history and paleography. The potential to extract additional linguistic meaning from a graphic composition is obvious, particularly if focusing on the choice of graphic types and fonts. The use of imperial Roman capitals in the epitaph of Pope Hadrian I (died in 785) – remarka-

développements de ses visions synthétiques. Paris, 1996.

21 Recently, Herbert L. Kessler renewed entirely what we knew about this letter plays: *Kessler*, Herbert L. *Dynamic Signs and Spiritual Design*. In: Jeffrey Hamburger, Brigitte-Myriam Bedos-Rezak (eds.). *Sign and Design. Script as Image in Cross-cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)*. Washington, 2016, 111-134.

ble evidence of antiquarian palatine tastes – produces a Carolingian “image” in the heart of Rome²². The iconography of writing can also be seen in the choice of colour: the use of gold for the angel’s words in *The Annunciation* by Van Eyck (dated 1434–1436) associates the salutation of the Incarnation with the light coming from outside the painting²³. It can be based on the layout of the text on the page: the format of the stone slab, the density of lines, and the number of abbreviations transforms the inscription mentioning the rights granted to the city of Étoile-sur-Rhône into a true diplomatic document. Although it has no actual legal function or effect, it imprints the image of a stone charter into the visual landscape of the city (Fig. 7)²⁴. The content of the text, its vocabulary and prosodic features do not disappear in the above-listed examples; nor can they be said to be secondary in the perception of the objects in so far as the conditions of their reception in the Middle Ages are largely unknown. We must however note that this attachment to the image of the text – the *form* of writing, created by its *visual* effect – is at the heart of the epigraphic choices made by medieval patrons, scribes or stone cutters who always consider the interaction between the form and the character of writing and its surroundings. Consequently, medieval writing often crosses the boundaries of the alphabetical system by which it is governed.

On the cover of book held by the apostle Thomas carved on the façade of the church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard (France, c. 1180), an inscription gives the following Biblical quotation (Fig. 8)²⁵: NISI VIDERO IN MANIBUS EJUS FIXURAM CLAVORUM AND MITTAM DIGITUM MEUM IN LOCUM CLAVORUM AND MANUM IN LATUS EJUS NON CREDAM²⁶. The text is inscribed in the space between the apostle’s fingers, just as on the books engraved at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. In the last line, however,

22 On this epitaph, see recently *Treffort*, Cécile. *Mémoires carolingiennes. L'épithaphe entre célébration mémorielle, genre littéraire et manifeste politique* (milieu VIII^e – début XI^e siècle). Rennes, 2007.

23 *Ferrari*, Simone. Van Eyck. Munich, 2013, 88-89.

24 CIFM 16, D 30, 135-137, ill. 88.

25 CIFM 13, G 67-73, 76-82. On the façade of the abbey church, see *Hartmann-Virnich*, Andreas. La façade de l'abbatiale de Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. – Congrès archéologique de France. Gard, 1999, No. 157, 271-292; *Fishhof*, Gil. Reconsidering the Sculptural Program of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. – *Verzar Bornstein*, Christine (dir.). *Liber Amicorum Nurith Kenaan-Kedar*. Tel Aviv, 2006, 93-118.

26 Jn 20:25: Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.



Fig. 6. Paris (France), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gélone Sacramentary-BnF, ms. lat. 12048 (8th century), fol. 143v. © BNF Paris



Fig. 7. Etoile-sur-Rhône (France), church, stone charter (1245). © CIFM/CESCM

the alphabetical signs are inscribed on the cloth covering the hand holding the book (this is the only sculptural evidence of such an iconographic feature). It is tempting to interpret the inscription on the cloth as a sign of incompetent *ordinatio*: by failing to write on or between the fingers of the figure, the sculptor would have lacked epigraphic space at the bottom of the book. It would be tempting, but probably not convincing, to offer the management of space as an explanation for this composition. It would, however, be difficult not to link the *forma* of the inscription and the visual importance of the gestures of touching and gripping with the contents of the text. How could we not consider that the device of the book is here as a means of combining writing, as the narrative of a dramatic event, and the anatomical details of the fingers? How can we not recognize in the motif of the book the figure of Christ seized by Thomas's left hand near his body, and venerated by his right hand in his yearning of the divine? In the case of this sculptural composition, writing only acts as a system in its material, object-like, and formal dimension, and in the content of the text and the image. In Saint-Gilles-du-Gard and in every other medieval sample of lettering, writing produces an artefact, a product of the encounter between a surface and a gesture.

Writing as gesture

When considering the Middle Ages, the relationship between gesture and writing – between a letter and a body – can be approached in many ways. The content of the colophons in which the scribes describe the suffering endured during copying, the pain of their muscles, the fatigue of their bodies, constitutes a promising and exciting dossier²⁷. The form of the letter results from the trace left by the movement of a writing instrument, from a kinetic relationship between the surface and the actor, and from a choreographed embellishment of the language. The ductus, the order and the direction of each stroke makes up the index of this movement

binding the product, the actor, and the process of writing in one shape (*forma*) of a letter. This creative and anthropological dimension takes writing outside the limits of the auxiliary sciences of Medieval Studies (epigraphy, paleography, heraldry...), and institutes it as a historical object, and therefore a historical subject.

Jean Mallon, a French paleographer, who died in 1982, was the first to draw our attention to the ductus as a fundamental product of writing gestures. In addition to his vast scholarly output, Jean Mallon wrote and directed two documentaries: *La Lettre* in 1937, a visionary account of the evolution of writing seen through the scribes'



Fig. 8. Saint-Gilles-du-Gard (France), abbey church, Thomas sculpture (c. 1180). © CIFM/CESCM

²⁷ Reynhout, Lucien. Formules latines de colophons. Turnhout, 2006; Caramello, Eva. Si tu ne sais pas ce qu'est l'écriture. La corporalité de l'acte d'écrire à travers l'iconographie romane. – Revue d'Auvergne, 2014, 161-173.

body and gestures; *Ductus* in 1976, a kind of testament summarizing all his thoughts on the subject. The two films show an evolution in Mallon's thinking, but also in his understanding of the concept of the written form. If in *La Lettre*, the written trace is ontologically linked to the hand producing it (Fig. 9), *Ductus* offers a vision of the "life of the letter", a life on its own terms, in which the sign is autonomous, independent from the surface and gesture (Fig. 10). It becomes a pure object, and Mallon's movie makes the letters move and live in the same way the scribes' hands in the Middle Ages did. Between the two documentaries, there is an undeniable aesthetic shift that departs from the realm of paleographic discipline and its approaches. The letter as a product of an ancient *ars*, as an object of history, returns to its artistic dimension because it is a *forma* shaped into a material: what the parchment or the stone were for the Middle Ages, the medium of film was for Jean Mallon. In this shift, which resembles a restitution of the semiotic essence of the letter, writing persists as a visual work of art. Paleography, on the other hand, disappears as a goal in its own right; it is only a tool. In the preface to the collection of his articles, a few months before his death, Jean Mallon called for the creation of a universal science of writing not to advance paleography but to replace it, because all these objects, all these letters are "pure history"²⁸.

Conclusion

Ultimately, medieval writing could be the subject of a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach. Specific methods would then have to be applied to facilitate the study of letters, and the specialists of different fields would pass the texts through the sieve of their own research questions. It would give us all the opportunity to know more or understand better what writing meant in medieval culture, and to find new words or concepts to describe the shape of letters and the scribal gestures. The development of Digital Humanities and computer-based paleographical

28 Mallon, Jean. *De l'écriture. Recueil d'études publiées de 1937 à 1981*. Paris, 1986: "It is essential to lay the foundations for another science, the science of all external characters of all the monuments which, without any exception nor distinction of language, show some written records, on any sort of materials, whether hard, soft, flexible, or stiff, long-lasting in every case where they lasted [...]. We should stop quarantining the objects of this science with no name, somewhere in between epigraphy, papyrology, paleography, and codicology."



Fig. 9. Screenshot of Jean Mallon's documentary *La Lettre*

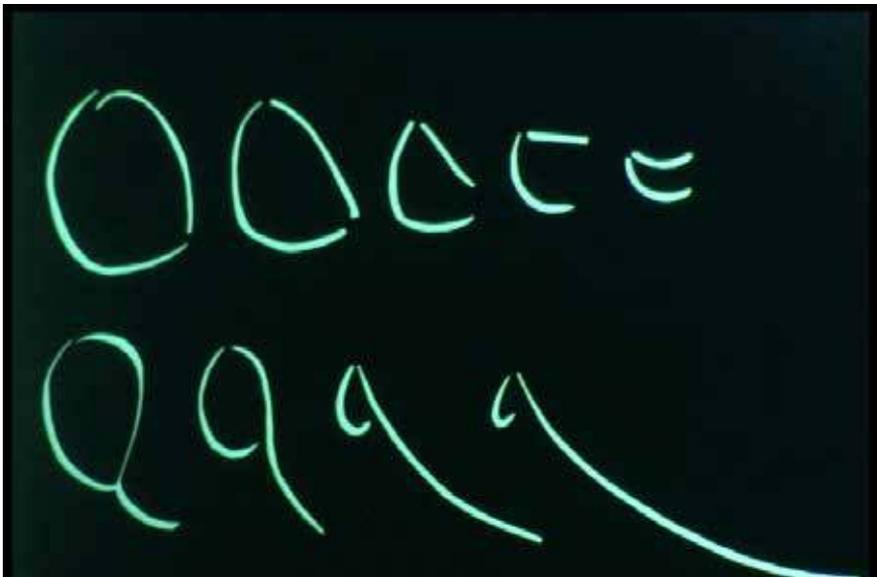


Fig. 10. Screenshot of Jean Mallon's documentary *Ductus*

analysis in the last ten years have completely transformed this field of research, making descriptions more objective and accurate, and finding beyond the variation of shapes and scripts some constants in medieval literacy²⁹. Simultaneously, the interpretation of scripts by optic recognition systems and factorial approaches have led paleographers to elaborate on the forms of letters according to their textual or cultural contexts, taking them as shapes or visual objects and not only resulting from particular gestures. This trend makes Jean Mallon's intuitions so modern, and it helps us to perceive writing as it was perceived during the Middle Ages, *i.e.* as an object. In Christian Orthodox practices that define God as *logos* and *littera*, writing is a matter of theology; its use, however pragmatic, contains some transcendence; its result, whatever the content, always includes the essence of the sacred that links scripture and the Scriptures. The crossing of boundaries results from insubordination and breaching of discipline. Medieval scholarship, especially when it questions the ultimate practices of medieval culture, such as writing, art or liturgy, must also exhibit the same noncompliance. Only in that way would we begin to understand the true status and deep meaning of complex graphic objects.

29 The bibliography on this topic is vast. See, among others, *Stokes, Peter*. Digital Approaches to Palaeography and Book History: Some Challenges, Present and Future. – *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* 2:5 (2015); see also the websites presenting the purposes and results of the ORIFLAMMS project (<http://oriflamms.hypotheses.org/>) and the DigiPal project (<http://www.digipal.eu/>).

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Опит върху визуалната перспектива на средновековното писане

Венсан Дебие



Тази статия изследва визуалните измерения на средновековните писмени практики в Западна Европа. В нея се предлага тезата, че буквите са възприемани от писачите и като азбучни знаци, но най-вече като форми, появяващи се в резултат от конкретен жест върху или в материала. Подобна формална и материална концепция за писането предразполага към „размиване“ на границите между отделните дисциплини в медиевистиката – палеография, кодикология, епиграфика, сигилография (сфрагистика)..., което подпомага разбирането на уникалния и сложен подход към феномена на писането. Съчетавайки прозренията на големия френски палеограф Жан Мало и методите на дигиталната хуманитаристика, статията предлага някои нови разсъждения върху средновековната визуална и писмена култура.



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CROSSING BORDERS**

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