

CHAPTER 4

*Decoding the material book: cultural residue
in medieval manuscripts*

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The medieval book was an object designed to be a vehicle for words and much of the effort of producing it was aimed at making these words available to a reader: quill and ink created them, parchment and paper carried them, pricking and ruling of the page gave them direction, navigational aids ensured they were found, and glosses clarified their meaning.¹ Today the words written down by medieval scribes are read, interpreted, and weighed by scholars in a variety of fields, including history, literature, religious studies, and philosophy. While this chapter may be relevant for all scholars who use the manuscript as a source for their studies, it is concerned with different information contained in the codex: data embedded in the physicality of the object itself. The aim is to show that the materials and instruments used to create, carry, guide, locate, and clarify words are a source of information just as much as the words on the page. This chapter argues, in sum, that physical traits can be meaningful too: it shows how to read and interpret the material book.

Medieval book design was principally determined by two parties: the copyist and the individual or individuals for whom a book was copied. Of particular concern to the present discussion are the choices these two parties made with regards to the paleographical and codicological features of the book, and what motivated their choices. As will be discussed, scribes left their personal stamp on the manuscript's design as a result of their training, cultural background, and geographical location. Similarly, the reader affected the design of the book through his or her own cultural background and by the intended use of the manuscript. The mannerisms of the scribe and the preferences of the reader ultimately produced the material book we hold today. The crux of this study is that some of these motivations may be retrieved, decoded as it were, from the features of a manuscript. Its script may indicate, for example, that a scribe was trained to write in the chancery, its appearance that the reader wanted a cheap manuscript, or its size that the book was designed for handheld consultation.²

While such contextual information is not always easy to retrieve from the page, especially since the most telling clues are often hidden in the smallest of details, it may add significantly to the research tools available for determining the circumstances under which a manuscript was produced and used. The challenge is that very few medieval books contain explicit data that may be used to this end. Apart from in-text references and the occasional inscription by which the scribe or reader may be reconstructed,³ the most reliable and insightful source is the scribal colophon, which can potentially supply information about the scribe, the manuscript's year and location of production, and perhaps even the book's patron and purpose.⁴ However, not only are colophons often limited to the year of production, they are exceedingly rare and appear in no more than 20 percent of surviving manuscripts.⁵ This silence on the part of the manuscript encourages us to look for additional tools to shed light on the motivation behind chosen material features. The first dynamic to be explored is that of the manuscript's production. What can material features potentially reveal about the object's maker?

READING THE SCRIBE

When a scribe picked up his quill and started to write, he did so with a significant amount of cultural baggage. How he formed a script depended to a large extent on his geographical location (country, region, city), his possible affiliation with an institution (religious house, university, court), the reason why he copied books (to produce personal copies, because it was prescribed by a monastic rule, or because it was his profession), when he was trained, and the circumstances of his training (within an institution, self-trained). The variables of time, space, training, and cultural background all contributed to the way in which the scribe formed each letter on the page, as well as the abbreviations and ligatures. The same variables also influenced how he put the book together physically: what writing support he used, what layout he opted for, and how he pricked and ruled the pages. Such ties between the manuscript's design and the background of the scribe invite us to pose queries related to the circumstances in which the book was produced.

The scribe's handwriting is a good starting point for considering what we may learn about the individual who produced the manuscript. Arguably, the best-known evidence embedded in medieval script is the approximate date of the manuscript's production. To date a scribe's handwriting, one must determine where on the sliding scale of a script's evolution the

individual's execution of that script may be placed. Medieval script was continually evolving, which makes it a useful tool for determining when, roughly, a manuscript was produced. Sometimes the evolution was slow, producing dating criteria of limited use because the shift to an observable new feature unfolded over such a broad period of time. Change could also come at a very high speed, which turns a script feature into a very useful dating criterion. Medieval script becomes particularly revealing when we track its development with the help of dated and localized material, whether manuscripts or charters. Doing so may show, for example, that a certain feature was not in use before a certain moment. A quantitative study of some 350 dated manuscripts in the *Catalogues des manuscrits datés* indicates how between 1100 and 1120 two key features of Gothic script became established in the handwriting of scribes throughout Europe: the feet of minims turned from left to right (in for example **m** and **n**) and round strokes became flattened (such as in **c** and **o**), a feature called "angularity." While around 1100 relatively few scribes included these features in their script (15 percent), two decades later the majority of scribes did so (75 percent).⁶

It is helpful when observable shifts in scribal mannerisms can be used to date a manuscript to the first or second half of the century, or better yet when they narrow down the date to a quarter century, since these time segments are often used for dating manuscripts. An example of such a useful criterion is the manner in which the **pp** combination was written in twelfth-century pregothic script. Most scribes wrote these two letters separately until c.1150, at which time they began to join them together in a process called "fusion" or "biting."⁷ Consequently, if a manuscript written in twelfth-century pregothic script contains **pp** that is consistently fused, it is likely to have been produced in the second half of the century. Another phenomenon is the emergence of one-compartment **a** in cursive script used by scribes in the Low Countries, replacing two-compartment **a**. The first cases of a one-compartment **a** occur c.1350, producing a terminus post quem for its use.⁸ As technical as these observations may be, they have value for the present discussion, demonstrating how medieval script can be a useful tool for finding contextual evidence. By writing one paleographical variant or another – fusing **pp** or not, writing **a** in one or two compartments – scribes reveal an approximate date range for their handwriting. Their choices embedded or "encoded" the manuscript's date of production in a set of features we can observe today. By learning to decipher such "hidden" information we may better understand important aspects of the book's production.

The handwriting of the medieval scribe invites us to pose another important query: where was the individual trained? Here, too, the shape of letters can be used as a tool for localization. While around 1120, 75 percent of scribes produced the minims and the round strokes in the “new fashion” (see above), the remaining 25 percent of scribes, who did not make this change, can nearly all be attributed to a single geographical space: the Germanic countries (i.e., the modern regions of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Holland, and Switzerland).⁹ Scribes from this geographical space also share other features, such as the shape of the letter *e*, which sported a square flag at the end of its tongue stroke. A sample of 100 dated and localized manuscripts produced between 1075 and 1150, as presented in the *Catalogues des manuscrits datés*, suggests that this feature is almost exclusively encountered in the work of Germanic scribes.¹⁰ Similarly, letter shapes, abbreviations, and ligatures may also reveal whether a scribe learned to write in England (because he wrote an “overhanging” *a*, the head stroke of which starts to the left side of the lower compartment), Italy (through the inclusion of the 7 shape for the “bus” abbreviation), or Spain (because of the “fa” ligature or 3-shaped *z*).¹¹ Sometimes it is even possible to deduce in what part of the country a scribe was trained. For example, scribes in southern France gave the 7-shaped Tironian note for Latin “et” a very recognizable shape – they often made the top stroke notably long and straight, and they placed it much farther to the left of the vertical stroke than scribes from other regions. They also preferred to give a flat top to their *a*.¹²

Sometimes scribes give away their geographical location even more precisely. Some individual religious houses, especially in the early Middle Ages, developed their very own style of writing, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as “house style.” While these highly localized mannerisms included codicological features, such as the preparation of parchment, the style of the quire signatures, and custom-tailored correction symbols, they more frequently affected the formation of script.¹³ In the first half of the twelfth century, individuals in the Benedictine houses of St. Andrews in Rochester and Christ Church, Canterbury wrote in a subtype of pregothic script that Neil Ker dubbed “prickly script” because of its forked ascenders, pronounced serifs, and sharp angles of normally round strokes.¹⁴ Scribes who entered these houses became trained in the local style of writing. Curiously, continental scribes entering Rochester in the wake of the Conquest (individuals from Normandy, but also from Germany, Italy, and the Low Countries) would leave their native script at the door and start writing prickly script flawlessly, showing that individuals could acquire a

new manner of writing – and a new mannerism for us to decode.¹⁵ Scribal mannerisms may also point to a particular monastic order. Well known in this respect are manuscripts made in Cistercian houses, which exhibit a striking similarity in their accentuation and punctuation.¹⁶

So far we have seen how monastic book producers exhibit mannerisms peculiar to the time when a manuscript was produced, the geographical location of the scribe, as well as his background (namely his affiliation with a certain monastic order). While many of the examples provided thus far have focused on monastic scribes, these dating and localizing methods can also be applied to books produced in a commercial setting: these “encoded” material features were also embedded in the handwriting of scribes outside monastic walls, for example those affiliated with chanceries and those operating as hired hands in the world of commercial book production. As with monks, some of these individuals included milieu-specific traits in their script, allowing us to consider the context of their work. When clerks employed by the municipal government copied books in their own time, for example on commission for a patron, they would sometimes carry over features from their daytime profession. When in 1358 a clerk in Brussels copied the manuscript that is now the oldest paper codex written in the Middle Dutch vernacular (Bruges, Sint-Janshospitaal, no shelfmark), a copy of Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden legend*, he included monetary abbreviations customarily used in account books. One such feature is the long *s* with a cross stroke for the Middle Dutch *schelling* (shilling), an abbreviation that is hardly encountered outside an administrative context. Another is a curly abbreviation that was attached to a letter in order to shorten the remaining part of a word, a practice that was particularly common in account books.¹⁷ By using such typical administrative traits in a literary manuscript, the scribe of the *Golden legend* reveals his training as a professional scribe in the chancery of the city.

The material construction or codicology of the book also provides details about the scribe. To remain for a moment with the individual who copied the *Golden legend*, the way in which he put together the manuscript’s quires also connects him to the chancery. A quantitative study shows that the majority of quires in fourteenth-century paper manuscripts contain five or six bifolia (approximately 80 percent of the total number of manuscripts produced).¹⁸ By contrast, the largest quires in the *Golden legend* manuscript are thirty-six and forty-eight leaves (eighteen and twenty-four bifolia, respectively). These high numbers suggest that the scribe was familiar with administrative practices, where thick quires

were frequently used for account books and other manuscripts of a documentary nature, especially draft texts. This is reflected, for example, by an account book of the Montepulciano loan bank from 1409–10, containing fifty-eight leaves (twenty-nine bifolia); two Chamberlain's accounts from the city of York from 1446–53, with seventy-three and 139 folia, respectively; and the accounts spanning the years 1358–61 from the Duke of Bavaria's court in The Hague, written in a single quire of 258 paper leaves (129 bifolia).¹⁹ Chancery scribes may have favored thick quires because they reduced the production time of manuscripts.

As we have seen in the study of script, the physical make-up of a manuscript (or its codicological features) can also reveal an approximate date of production. For example, during the Carolingian age, scribes ruled the page with a sharp object, which left horizontal furrows on the surface of the parchment that guided the pen as it formed words. By the middle of the twelfth century, however, such blind or hard-point ruling had been replaced by lines drawn with lead.²⁰ An even more precise codicological dating clue is the placement of the first line on the page. Until c.1240 scribes in Europe tended to write on the first ruled line, a practice referred to as writing "above topline." After that approximate date most scribes appear to have preferred to place the first line of text on the *second* ruled line (writing "below topline").²¹ Apart from being useful for dating manuscripts, these two features reflect the broader discussion in this chapter: when we observe a page and determine with what tool it was ruled and where the first line was placed, we decipher contextual information related to the manuscript's production.

READING THE READER

While the scribe produced a manuscript, the choices leading to its ultimate design were not solely his own. They were also influenced by the individual for whom the book was made. That the reader could exercise such influence is a result of the close relationship that existed between that person and the scribe. Here lies a striking (and for this essay crucial) difference between the medieval manuscript and its printed cousin: the former was commonly produced by an individual who knew the identity of the object's future reader. (That is to say, the scribe was generally familiar with the *first* reader, because many medieval books had a long and prosperous life on the secondhand market, where it was common to find books that were a century old.)²² Produced in batches of several hundreds, printed books were made for the speculative market, a domain inhabited

by anonymous readers. The printer had to guess, to the best of his abilities as a businessman, who the potential buyers of a given edition would be, how much they would be willing to pay for the book, and what material format would appeal most to them. In the age of the manuscript, by contrast, speculative book production was exceptional and limited to the fifteenth century, when, for example, it flourished in continental cities with ties to the English book market, such as Bruges.²³

Generally speaking, a medieval producer of books knew precisely who would open the pages of the finished manuscript for the first time: in most cases it would have been either his fellow monks (if the scribe was a member of a religious house), the patron visiting the artisan's workshop (if the scribe was paid to produce a book), or the copyist himself (if the book was made for personal use).²⁴ This closeness of scribe and future user, both in physical proximity and in their working relationship, significantly affected the manuscript's design. While the scribe naturally infused certain mannerisms into the book he produced (as discussed), if he copied the object for someone other than himself, the other party may have communicated to him what material features he would prefer to have included. In no other scheme of book production is the influence of the reader more apparent than in commercially produced manuscripts – a common mode of book production from the early thirteenth century onwards. Because money was transferred from the reader's pocket to the scribe's "till," it was in the interest of both parties to discuss what codicological and paleographical features would be given to the manuscript. It was in the scribe's interest to obtain such detailed information from the client because he needed to make decisions for every step in the book's production process, and each decision he made affected the look, cost, and functionality of the manuscript. The client wanted to be involved in the decision process because it was he or she who would pick up the tab and use the book.

We may therefore assume that a conversation took place between both parties, which covered such things as writing support material (parchment, paper), dimensions, page layout details (number of columns and lines), and script (type and grade of execution).²⁵ While some patrons may have voiced specific preferences, perhaps choosing an accustomed script (discussed below), others may have harbored more generic wishes. A patron could, for example, tell the scribe to economize on as many aspects as possible, thus providing a guideline that affected several stages of book production, as well as the general appearance of the codex. To keep track of the features and their cost, written agreements – contracts – were drafted, setting the terms of production and payment.²⁶ The negotiations between

artisan or artisans and reader are also reflected by two other pieces of evidence: itemized bills, which clients documented in their completed manuscripts (so much for the quires, so much for illumination, so much for binding, etc.), and temporary accounts of the different costs written in plummet on flyleaves by the artisan.²⁷ The book trade facilitated such negotiations with a jargon that was available to both parties. Professional scribes put large advertisement sheets on display outside their doors to show what kind of scripts they offered. The writing samples they presented were often accompanied by the names of the scripts, giving clients access to the professional terminology, which encouraged clarity in both conversation and contract.²⁸

It is because the recipient of the manuscript had an opportunity to voice his preferences to the scribe that we may attempt to “read the reader” and uncover the motivations that hide behind the material features of a manuscript, within both a commercial context and in other schemes of book production. The reader’s involvement in the design process implies that every observable trait is potentially meaningful and that every feature invites us to think about why it was included. A particularly telling feature, in this respect, is the writing support material chosen for a manuscript. The spectrum of choice was particularly broad for this stage of book production. Various grades of parchment were available, which had different price tags attached to them; a reader could indicate to the scribe that paper was to be used, which came at a much lower material cost.²⁹ Consequently, at a time when both paper and parchment were available in book production (on the Continent from the early fourteenth century onwards, in England likely much later) it is telling that a reader opted for a certain material, because it may say something about how affluent he or she was.

The possibility of reconstructing readers’ motivations is also demonstrated by the use of recycled parchment waste in book production, which was the very cheapest material available.³⁰ After the rectangular sheets were cut out of the skin, a thin and uneven outer rim remained. The smaller pieces were usually boiled down for glue. The larger pieces, however, could be used as a cheap material to write on. These “offcuts” were often used for notes and letters, but from time to time they also formed the basis for manuscripts (Figure 4.1).³¹ Such specimens may be recognized from some peculiarities of their pages, which may show discoloration (a stained surface with a yellow haze), a strange shape (rather than a perfect rectangle, the page may contain elongated gaps), translucent patches (fat deposits in the skin), and their small dimensions (due to the limited size

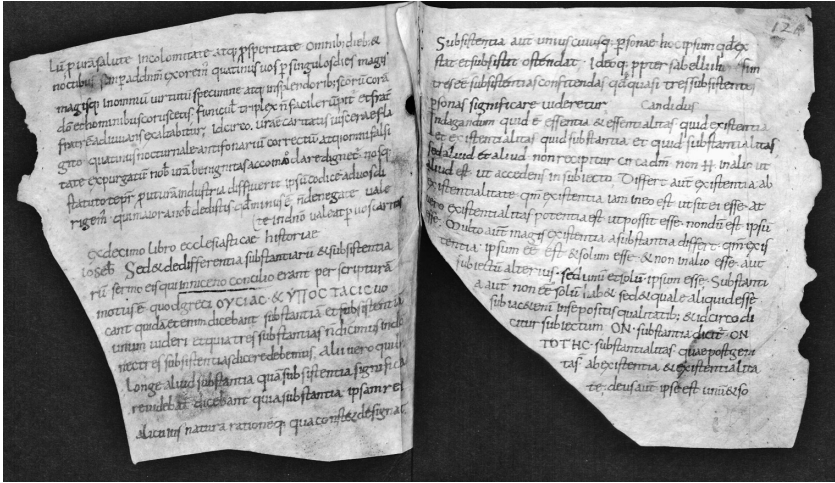


Figure 4.1. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, VLO MS 92, fols. 123v–4r (early 11th century): volume produced from offcuts.

of offcuts).³² This example of an offcut manuscript shows how observable features of the page – shape, color, and surface structure – may suggest that the person who owned the object tried to limit costs as much as possible. Interestingly, the motivation to economize often affected multiple stages of book production. Manuscripts made from offcuts, for example, are often written in a lower-grade script and tend to lack decoration. Moreover, the earliest paper manuscripts are all written in a cursive script, which was faster to write than a bookhand and will thus have helped to economize – that is, if the book in question was made on a commercial basis.³³

The chosen writing support of a manuscript may also provide other information about the reader, for example about his or her cultural or professional background. Early paper manuscripts, from the first decades of the fourteenth century, show a strong affiliation with a university milieu.³⁴ There was no need to make a textbook more expensive than necessary, which meant that paper was an obvious choice, even at a time when paper was not yet common in book production. Other early adopters of paper as a material for books were individuals who handled the paper professionally, such as notaries, in part when they produced manuscripts for themselves.³⁵ By contrast, members of religious houses appear to have been slow to adopt paper as a writing support, evidenced by the fact that

most books produced in monastic environments continued to be made of parchment.³⁶ Such milieu-specific practices – in this case determined by how quickly a social group adopted a new writing support – help to identify the cultural context of the manuscript's reader. Paper codices from the first half of the fourteenth century, for example, were unlikely to have been made in a monastic context.

Another physical feature that reflects the preferences of certain groups of readers is script. Paul Saenger has pointed out that aristocratic readers at the courts of France in the fourteenth century had difficulties with the traditional book script.³⁷ It may have been difficult for some readers to recognize letters of this style of script because of the identical minim strokes they contained: **n** and **i** written next to each other looked like **m**, while two **i**'s may appear to be a **u**. Those readers interested in literary manuscripts (and who were perhaps not interested in spending time deciphering difficult script) often favored a style of writing with which they were more familiar. Their books were thus copied in a higher-grade cursive script, which resembled the script of vernacular charters, objects with which the nobles had first-hand experience. Similarly, Malcolm Parkes suggested that some manuscripts written in England in both the French and English vernacular were copied in cursive script because their users, middle-class readers and businessmen, were used to this script, having used it professionally.³⁸

While the reader had a significant impact on the design of commercial and personal books, his influence seems to have been less of a factor in monastic book production. In the most common scenario, an in-house scribe will have produced books for the communal library and the design of these books was, to a considerable extent, fixed. This was, in part, due to the rules observed by monks, which sometimes included instructions in how to form certain elements of the book, such as script, abbreviations, and decoration. The writing practices of Cistercian monks, already discussed, illuminate how monastic regulations potentially shaped the manuscript's design, determining what abbreviations were used and how initial letters were decorated. Similarly, the Brothers of the Common Life had very specific rules related to abbreviations and letter shapes, which were written down in a treatise that was likely meant to reform scribal practice.³⁹ The design of a monastic manuscript could also be fixed in that the traditions that evolved in individual scriptoria determined, to a certain extent, what a book would look like. As demonstrated by the examples of house style discussed earlier, monastic scribes were more prone to execute certain aspects of book production habitually than their counterparts in

the commercial world. The more that was controlled by established scriptorium practices and monastic regulations, the tighter the hands of the scribe were bound, and the less influence the monastic reader had on the manuscript's ultimate design.

An exception to this rule may be special monastic book projects. From time to time religious houses in the higher Middle Ages produced magnificent books, for example to commemorate their founder. These copies looked more lavish and were usually copied with more care than regular manuscripts produced in-house. One such example is the so-called Gundulf Bible (San Marino, Huntington Library, MS 62), a twin set made in the Benedictine house of Rochester during the last quarter of the eleventh century in honor of their founding abbot, Gundulf of Bec (d. 1108), according to a thirteenth-century notation in volume two: "Prima pars biblie per bone memorie Gundulfum Roffensem Episcopum" (fol. 1r).⁴⁰ The scribe who set out to copy the book produced a sizeable object (its page dimensions are 400 × 260 mm) with rubrics written in display script. Given the importance of the book to the community, it is likely that the scribe had received instructions regarding the design of the Bible, perhaps from the abbot. The same may be assumed in cases where abbots initiated the production of manuscripts to secure their own legacy. Around the middle of the fourteenth century the dean of St. Trond Abbey, John of Myrle (d. 1355), had a batch of manuscripts made, each showcasing very similar dimensions, layout, and decoration, which indicates that John of Myrle had likely given detailed instructions to the scribe.⁴¹

DETERMINING THE MANUSCRIPT'S USE

The two dynamics highlighted so far as decisive forces behind the ultimate design of a medieval manuscript are: 1) Mannerisms related to the scribe and his cultural milieu or affiliation, and 2) the cultural or financially inspired motivations of the reader. Through the choices made by these two parties, contextual evidence became embedded (encoded, if you will) in the manuscript's design. The evidence fused itself to the page and manifests itself in script and quire, like a kind of "cultural residue" that we can identify and use as reflections of the conditions under which the book was made and used. A third dynamic must now be added. The suggestion that the reader often voiced his or her preferences with respect to a book's design implies that the object also potentially contains clues about how it was used after completion. In a commercial setting the scribe likely understood what motivated the purchase of the book from his negotiations with

the client. The artisan may even have provided suggestions as to how a manuscript could meet the reader's requirements. We may infer that the monastic scribe also knew what purpose the sheets in front of him would ultimately serve. This would have been made clear when the codex was produced in consultation with the individual who had initiated its production, the abbot or scriptorium master, because in that case the scribe likely received explicit instructions. However, even a more "generic" book made for communal use, whether for the main library or another repository, was likely shaped in a way that was fitting for its future purpose. After all, the scribe's knowledge of a book's future function, either as an object used for the monastic school or for the liturgy, affected the manuscript materially. It therefore seems very likely that a monastic scribe also embarked on a book project with sufficient knowledge about how the object would ultimately be used.

Distilling cultural residue that reflects the book's usage presents yet another opportunity to make sense of the manuscript. The degree to which the manuscript's future use affected its material features can be illustrated with an unusual category of book, those with a tall, narrow appearance, sometimes referred to as "holsterbooks."⁴² Quantitative studies show that medieval manuscripts have a relative width between 0.67 and 0.72 (the height being 1.0), which produced roughly the same page size as our modern book.⁴³ In contrast, holsterbooks may have a relative width of as little as 0.3. In such cases the book is three times as high as it is wide, which produces a most remarkable physical object. The narrow or tall character of holsterbooks not only jumps out at someone who frequently consults manuscripts today, but medieval readers also judged them to look out of sorts. Responses to the unusual shape of these books can be found scribbled on flyleaves ("this book is not wide enough") or mentioned in a chronicle ("our narrow Gospel Book").⁴⁴ Scribes producing the objects, however, had good reason to break with the medieval norm of page design. The narrow format guided the pressure of the book's weight away from fingers and thumb toward the palm of the hand, which made it easier to hold the object in one hand for an extended period of time. For this reason the holster format was a sensible choice for books used by soloists in the Mass. All surviving Tropers made before 1200, for example, are in holster format, as are nearly all Cantatoria from this age.⁴⁵

The format may also have been favored by teachers in the monastic classroom of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as some teaching scenes in decorated initials and miniatures demonstrate, including the famous scene of St. Hugh in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 409

(1190s).⁴⁶ Though not all masters used this format, a random sample of eighty holsterbooks from the eleventh and twelfth centuries shows that teaching texts are their most common contents: over 50 percent of holsterbooks are filled with such works, in particular prose and verse texts of classical authors (Horace, Statius, and Ovid being the top three).⁴⁷ Moreover, the few manuscripts that have been identified as actual teaching copies are all in holster format.⁴⁸ Like the soloists of the Mass, teachers in the classroom may also have favored a book that was designed to be held in one hand, which would allow them to move through the room while having the other hand available for gesturing or correcting pupils.

Such use was further facilitated by two other characteristics of holsterbooks containing teaching texts: many of them remained unbound and consisted of only a few quires, which reduced their weight and made them particularly suitable for handheld consultation. London, British Library, Harley MS 3859 is a collection of eight thin booklets that form the *Opera omnia* of Horace, which measure approximately 205 × 115 mm (relative width 0.56).⁴⁹ Both the shape of the page and the limited thickness of the individual parts facilitate the likely rationale behind the design of the booklets: handheld use. Similarly, this motivation may also explain the design behind other tall and narrow book types, such as the prompt-books used in theatres during the Tudor age, many of which were produced in holster format. Here, too, the user benefited from being able to consult the book while being free to move around the stage.⁵⁰

These observations show how a scribe carefully planned the dimensions of the page based on how the object was going to be used: to provide a better balance, he limited its width. Indeed, functionality was deemed such an important factor in the holsterbook's manufacture that scribes were willing to break with the medieval norm of book production and produce something they knew looked "off." Interestingly, as we saw with the attempts to economize on the production of a manuscript, the anticipated use of the holsterbook affected several stages of book production. Thus when scribes chose to use narrow pages, they often also tried to limit the number of quires they used. This was accomplished by writing in a very small style of script and by copying the teaching texts in a composite book, so that the instructor would need to hold only the segment relevant for a particular class.⁵¹ In other words, the use of the manuscript as a teaching book is embedded in two codicological traits (page size and quire construction) as well as a paleographical one (size of script). Such a broader impact on multiple stages of book production is also observed in manuscripts made for other types of use. The portable Bible that mendicant

friars carried with them on the road not only has very small dimensions, but it is also written in a minute script (to fit a large number of lines on the page) and made from the thinnest parchment available (to reduce the manuscript's volume).⁵² The three material choices combined facilitated the object's portability.

The holsterbook shows how evidence embedded in the dimensions of the page helps to place a surviving manuscript in a particular setting of use, namely one where it was necessary to hold a book in one's hand. Page dimensions thus underscore the main argument of this chapter, that book design may relate manuscripts to their milieu of production, readers, and manner of use. Through their physical features handwritten books transmit information, which may be just as telling as a scribal colophon. While distilling cultural residue from the manuscript increases our understanding of medieval book culture, its impact reaches beyond the discipline of manuscript studies alone. Manuscripts are vehicles of texts and the hidden material clues discussed in this chapter also provide contextual information related to medieval literature. Material features may assist in placing a certain text in a Cistercian library or in the hands of a reader with little money; they may show that a given translation was particularly popular in France or in the first half of the twelfth century; or they may indicate that a work was copied by a clerk or used in the classroom. The existence of cultural residue not only emphasizes the strong ties between the medieval manuscript and the society that produced it, but it also points out a stimulating research dynamic: one that complements studies related to the presence of the book in medieval society with investigations of how that society may be present in the book.

NOTES

- 1 The main thread of this chapter, how the physical features of medieval manuscripts are meaningful, was first explored in a short essay titled "The cultural dynamics of medieval manuscripts." I wish to thank the members of my research project *Turning Over a New Leaf* as well as Ed van der Vlist (Royal Library, The Hague) for their input.
- 2 All three examples are discussed below.
- 3 See for example Turville-Petre, "Some medieval English manuscripts" (in-text references identify patrons); Tracy, "British Library MS Harley 630" (in-text references identify monastic houses of origin); Stubbs, "Clare Priory" (marginal references identify patrons).
- 4 I am referring here to colophons uniquely placed in a single manuscript by its scribe, not those copied from an exemplar.

- 5 Overgaauw, "Where are the colophons?"
- 6 Both shifts are assessed in Kwakkel, "Biting, kissing and feet."
- 7 *Ibid.*, 97–9. This study is based on 367 dated manuscripts written between 1075 and 1224.
- 8 Kwakkel, "Digital eye." This study is based on 424 dated charters written between 1300 and 1399.
- 9 Kwakkel, "Biting, kissing and feet," 91 and 102.
- 10 For the sample, see *ibid.* appendix 3, nos. 1–100.
- 11 All examples are from Gothic textualis. Dozens of country-specific features are mentioned in Derolez, *Palaeography of books*, examples at p. 110 ("bus"), pp. 113–14 ("fa"), and p. 115 (z).
- 12 *Ibid.*, 116–17.
- 13 Ganz, "Book production in the Carolingian empire," 790–1 and R. McKitterick, "Carolingian book production"; reprinted in R. McKitterick, *Books, scribes and learning*, ch. 12 (house style); Mercati, "Codicci del convento," 85–6 (quire signature); Kwakkel, "Meadow without flowers," 200–1 (correction symbol).
- 14 For the script, see Ker, *English manuscripts*, 26–8 and Webber, "Script and manuscript production."
- 15 This case is presented in Kwakkel, "Hidden in plain sight."
- 16 N. F. Palmer, "Simul canternus, simul pausernus" (punctuation); and Parkes, *Pause and effect*, 38–40 (accentuation and punctuation).
- 17 For these abbreviations, see Kwakkel, "New type of book," 226–7.
- 18 Busonero, "La fascicolazione del manoscritto," 94, table 14.
- 19 Kwakkel, "New type of book," 228 n. 28, 238 pl. 3 (quire size of 1358 codex), and 237–8 (examples).
- 20 See Derolez, *Palaeography of books*, 35, who states that this shift occurs "in the course of the twelfth century." My own research based on dated manuscripts shows that the earliest examples of lead ruling are from c.1100, while the last cases of blind ruling date from the 1140s. The manuscripts used for this assessment are listed in Kwakkel, "Biting, kissing and feet," 114–25.
- 21 For the shift to writing below top line, see Ker, "From 'above top line'" and Palma, "Modifiche di alcuni aspetti materiali." For quire size, see Busonero, "La fascicolazione del manoscritto," 88 table 1.
- 22 For secondhand books, see Christianson, "Rise of London's book-trade," 132–3; and Parkes, "Provision of books," 418–19 (Oxford). A century-old book is mentioned in Christianson, *Directory of London stationers*, 82.
- 23 K. Harris, "Patrons, buyers and owners," 181, states that some 200 fifteenth-century manuscript witnesses of this trade survive. On manuscripts made speculatively ("production-line" books) in Flanders for the English market, see Duffy, *Marking the hours*, 83. Scott, "Late fifteenth-century group," discusses a likely case of speculative production in England.
- 24 Note that the workshop of a paid scribe, while being a separate physical space, was often located in his house (there is no evidence for urban scriptoria, as it were). It is unclear where books were made that came out of an ad hoc production method, whereby a manuscript was produced by a "moonlighting"

- individual whose primary source of income came from writing undertaken for the municipal government (clerks, for example). For ad hoc production, see Mooney, "Vernacular literary manuscripts."
- 25 Kwakkel, "Commercial organization," and Hanna, *Introducing English book history*, 166.
 - 26 See for example the case discussed in Croenen, Rouse, and Rouse, "Pierre de Liffol" (contract at p. 267).
 - 27 For itemized bills, see Kwakkel, "Commercial organization," 175–6. For temporary accounts written in lead, see Rouse and Rouse, *Manuscripts and their makers*, vol. 1, 30–1 and 251–2; vol. 11 pls. 17 and 35.
 - 28 For advertising sheets, see Wehmer, "Die Schreibmeisterblätter," and Derolez, *Palaeography of books*, 17–20. Van Dijk, "Advertisement sheet," discusses a specimen with twelve script types.
 - 29 Gullick, "From parchment to scribe," 151 (parchment grades and their cost); Lyall, "Materials: the paper revolution," 12–13 (paper).
 - 30 Kwakkel, "Discarded parchment."
 - 31 *Ibid.*, 246–56, providing several examples.
 - 32 *Ibid.*, 240–1.
 - 33 Kwakkel, "New type of book," 243 n. 83.
 - 34 *Ibid.*, 224.
 - 35 Petrucci, *Writers and readers in Italy*, 157 and 178–9.
 - 36 For the slower adoption of paper by monks, see Lyall, "Materials: the paper revolution," 13, and Thompson, "Paper manufacturing," 172.
 - 37 This case is discussed in Saenger, *Space between words*, 270.
 - 38 Parkes, "Literacy of the laity," 285.
 - 39 Pluta, "Quaedam regulae de modo" (reform at p. 248).
 - 40 Quotation and manuscript description at "HM 62 'Gundulf Bible':" <http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/hehweb/HM62.html>.
 - 41 Cardon, "Het mecenaat."
 - 42 Robinson, "Format of books," 54. A full study devoted to this type of book is Kwakkel, "Dit boek." An English version will be included in the monograph I am writing with Francis Newton (Duke University) on a medical holster-book from Monte Cassino.
 - 43 Bozzolo and Ornato, *Pour une histoire du livre*, 287–310; Gumbert, "Sizes of manuscripts," 279 and table 1 at p. 278.
 - 44 The first remark is from Hector of Moerdrecht (d. 1465), monk in the Utrecht Charterhouse. He placed the note in Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS ^B102⁴ and MS ^B159², measuring 0.64 and 0.63, respectively. The second remark is from Ekkehard of Sankt Gallen (d. c.1060) and regards St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 53, with a relative width of 0.58. For these cases, see Kwakkel, "Dit boek," 37 and 38–9, respectively.
 - 45 For Cantatoria in holster format, see Huglo, "Cantatorium" (esp. tables 3.1a and 3.2 at pp. 96 and 99); for Tropers, see 97 table 3.1b. Amalarius of Metz (d. 780) notes that the cantor holds the book in his hands: see Palazzo, *History of liturgical books*, 54.

- 46 See “Bodley 30” at: <http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet>. The iconographical evidence will be part of the monograph I am currently writing (n. 42).
- 47 Kwakkel, “Dit boek,” 40.
- 48 In this format are, for example, the key manuscripts discussed in S. Reynolds, *Medieval reading*, which were used by teachers: cf. 108–9 (British Library, Harley MS 3524), 110–13 (Cambridge, Peterhouse College, MS 229) and 113–16 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 8216). For further examples, see Kwakkel, “Dit boek,” 41.
- 49 Olsen, *L'étude des auteurs latins*, vol. 1, 215 (division and analysis of booklet iii); vol. 11, 500 (booklet vi) and 832 (booklet viii).
- 50 For prompt-books, see Greg, *Dramatic documents*, vol. 1, 204–5. There are also cases where it is less obvious why a manuscript was made tall and narrow, for example the English, French, and Latin manuscripts and miscellanies discussed in Taylor, “Myth of the minstrel manuscript,” 58–9 – though handheld consultation may be a possible rationale here, too.
- 51 Kwakkel, “Dit boek,” 44.
- 52 De Hamel, *The book*, 114–39 (portable Bibles and their features); Derolez, *Palaeography of books*, 100 (script).