



THE NEWBERRY

*Center for Renaissance Studies*

Graduate Seminar at the Newberry Library

**Latin Paleography**

Instructor: Michael I. Allen, University of Chicago

Fridays, 2:00-5:00 pm, September 28 – December 7

The course will emphasize the development of Latin handwriting, primarily as book scripts, from its origins to the waning of the Carolingian minuscule, ca. A.D. 1100. By mastering the foundational types of writing, you will develop skills for reading all Latin-based scripts, including those used for vernacular languages and the subsequent Gothics and their derivatives down to the sixteenth century.

Class goals include:

- to learn how script developed during this period
- to acquire ocular flexibility for reading writing of all eras
- to become familiar with abbreviations and editorial practice
- to read samples of Classical and Christian Latin texts in facsimiles

Along with the survey of the foundational types of Latin script, which you will learn to identify and read, we shall also have an exercise in the continuous transcription of a straightforward Gothic hand. So students will acquire practical skills in reading and presenting a text preserved in this type of writing. We shall work with a delightful and important medieval source, Jocelin of Brakelond's *Chronicle of Bury St. Edmunds*, in the lone surviving medieval copy, London, British Library, Harley 1005, fols. 128–70 (saec.xiii med.).

The course presupposes a working command of Latin. Transcription properly entails an effort to understand the exemplar (model for transcription), and the raw verbal content of some exemplars can only be deciphered through expanding abbreviations in accord with both graphic conventions and knowledge of grammar (vocabulary, morphology, and syntax). You are expected to work at understanding the texts assigned for transcription (with a dictionary as necessary), and to show understanding by imparting your own coherent word-separation and punctuation. Some of the exercises will be quite challenging. We shall, of course, attend to the special difficulties in class and practicum. I shall be available for additional sessions of practicum each week for an hour (exact limits to be determined) between 11:30 and 1:30 on Fridays of class (2-5 p.m.)

I also suggest that you **buy and read Stanislas Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain* (Penguin, 2009)**. This is a wonderful, up-to-date book about the cognitive-neural process of reading. There are neurobiological processes behind the skills we are going to learn, just as writing itself is a neuro-mechanical operation. Otherwise, no books are required for purchase. I will, however, distribute various sets of photocopies in class. We shall also use digital resources and images.