The Medieval Book

This one-semester course provides an introduction to the medieval book, and to the different ways in which texts were produced, transmitted and read, prior to the invention of the printing press. It is conceived as a more detailed, more hands-on complement to the coverage of the medieval period in the compulsory JS module on the book. Each week’s seminar will focus on a single medieval manuscript, probing its contents, construction, scribes and annotators for clues about its place in the literary culture of the time. Possible case studies include the Exeter Book, one of the four main manuscripts to contain Old English poetry, and the copy of Chaucer’s works made by his scribe, Adam. Students will receive basic training in skills like palaeography (reading medieval handwriting), codicology (describing the structure of manuscripts) and textual criticism (analysing a copy’s relationship to its authorial original) as part of the module, and it is hoped that several of the case studies will be books from Trinity’s own collections that can be seen at first hand in the library. The manuscripts studied will range in date from the eighth century to the fifteenth, so that students without expertise in earlier forms of the language will be able to chose to write on a manuscript in late Middle English, a form of the language often not more difficult to read than Shakespeare.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, students should be able to:

- Describe the basic structure of a medieval manuscript
- Show how material aspects of medieval manuscript production influenced the composition of texts
- Analyse particular medieval manuscripts for clues about their producers and readers
- Integrate different kinds of analyses – textual, literary critical, codicological, palaeographical and linguistic – to provide a holistic picture of a particular manuscript

Assessment

1. 1 x 5000 word essay on a particular manuscript, chosen by the student from among the case studies.

Lecturer

Dr Ian Sansom

ECTS

10

Semester

HT