

Michele Baitieri - Sam Ottewill-Soulsby

## *Preface\**

The culture of a place and time is told through its short texts. Whether they be graffiti on the walls of first-century Pompeii, or tweets sent on the twenty-first-century internet, literate societies produce written statements whose evidentiary value is outsized compared to their length. Those texts may be excerpts of longer documents or entirely new sentiments, but attempting to understand the history of such places would be impossible without engaging with these brief messages from the past. That applies as much to early medieval Europe as anywhere else. Among the most extensive and underutilised of the short writings available for the period are the minuscule texts ('minitexts') added to manuscripts. These ephemeral notices do not tend to appear in catalogues or editions and are thus normally overlooked and poorly understood. This special issue of *Scrineum* brings these minitexts into the spotlight, drawing upon the insights of the work carried out by the ERC-funded 'Minuscule Texts: Marginalized Voices in Early Medieval Latin Culture c. 700–c. 1000' and the NFR-funded 'Voices on the Edge: Minuscule Texts in Early Medieval Latin Culture' projects at the University of Oslo, both led by Ildar Garipzanov.

The complexities and nuances of the minitext are set out by Ildar Garipzanov in the opening article of this special issue. Here he introduces the historiographical development of the concept of minuscule texts before offering a provisional taxonomy to classify and analyse the numerous varieties of writings that the term encompasses. Such an enterprise is not an end unto itself, but rather a means to using minitexts as windows into the early medieval world, as he shows in the examples with which he concludes. The other contributors have taken this example to heart, and in their work demonstrate the many different ways in which minitexts can be valuable tools for the study of the past.

The minitext is the natural home for the sort of knowledge that was not distributed through more formal or extended genres of writing. Among these we might include practical information, such as the transaction notes explored

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by Garipzanov in WIEN, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 1370 and MÜNCHEN, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 14508, in which the nuts and bolts of the early medieval Bavarian economy can be encountered. More esoteric and potentially subversive material also circulated as minitexts, as Yitzhak Hen discusses in his article looking at the transmission of early medieval magical material. His minitexts show a world where Christian priests were expected to wield unorthodox powers in the service of their flocks. Thus the minitext provides access to different kinds of knowledge that can otherwise be hard to discern.

Minitexts can also illustrate the use and reorganisation of bodies of knowledge. Sometimes they were the first draft of future masterpieces. In her contribution Rosamond McKitterick follows the development of a dossier on consanguinity which later circulated independently, showing in the process the way in which the intellectual concerns of those who used manuscripts can be traced through the texts they added. Other times minitexts reveal the after-life of new ideas. A similar attention to their situation within manuscripts and their wider intellectual environment allows Bernhard Hollick to reinterpret an apparently insignificant poem in LONDON, British Library, Add. MS 11852. Far from being a mere colophon, these verses reveal much about the reception of Greek philosophical ideas being taught in St Gall around the year 1000.

The distribution of ideas frequently relied upon ephemeral means of communication that are unlikely to survive to the present, such as *libelli*. Minitexts can offer a means of following that movement. Giulio Minniti considers these opportunities in his article which examines the troped masses added to PARIS, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Lat. 2846. He uses the gradual accumulation of these texts not only to identify specific tropes long before they are elsewhere attested, but also to explore the way they were distributed. Ideas were not the only thing that moved. Books did as well, in ways that can sometimes be hard to track. Minitexts can offer valuable information about the manuscripts that host them by providing clues about provenance or use. In this issue Gionata Brusa employs the liturgical minitexts contained in the manuscripts of the Vercelli Chapter Library to identify their places of origin and discuss their provenance. In doing so, he is not only able to fill in gaps in our understanding of the contents of one library, but also reveals a network of links connecting Vercelli to places elsewhere in Italy and beyond.

Minitexts can also be employed to counter the uneven survival of material from the early medieval past. Whether through deliberate destruction or unhappy accident, the libraries of many of the most important intellectual centres of our period have been lost or scattered. By offering a clue as to the

broadness of material available to people at the place the manuscript was kept, minitexts can reveal a much broader hinterland. In this way Arthur Westwell demonstrates in his article that the minitexts of CITTÀ DEL VATICANO, Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, MS Reg. lat. 567 can be used to shed vital light on Sens in the tenth century. The history of intellectual life in Sens in the period has had to be written by inference. By examining the rich collection of annalistic notes, classical texts and divinatory material, Westwell reveals a community that was not only familiar with a vast array of intellectual material, but deeply conscious of its own history.

While tenth-century Sens was known to be a major episcopal and political hub, the north-eastern frontier of the Visigothic world at the time of the Arab Conquests has generally been perceived as an intellectually barren place, far from the centres of Iberian culture and beset by conflict. Sam Ottewill-Soulsby challenges that perspective by looking at the Visigothic minitexts contained in AUTUN, Bibliothèque municipale, MS S 129 that were added in this period in the vicinity of Urgell. These show a lively environment where Frankish and Gothic legal and poetic cultures met and mixed. But minitexts can reveal more than just previously overlooked intellectual activity. In his contribution, Michele Baitieri uses pen trials in diplomatic script to demonstrate the existence of a flourishing chancery *milieu* in Lyon during the second half of the ninth century, thus uncovering an underappreciated centre of power. As these papers show, minitexts reveal much about the places their manuscripts stayed in.

Even this cursory survey of the papers to come speaks to the diversity of minitexts that can be identified, varying in genre from liturgical pen trials to annalistic notes, to poetic verses and any other type of writing that can be imagined. Given the multivarious nature of the minitext, it is inevitable that it should prompt debate and divergent practices amongst scholars. Within the harmonious choir of this issue, McKitterick's article raises stimulating challenges for the models set out in Garipzanov's opening gambit. The contributions that follow are not intended to be the final word in the study of the minitext, but rather to be an invitation for others to consider their possibilities for understanding the early medieval world.