

**Books and Their Readers in Anglo-Saxon England**  
**A Manuscript Colloquium**  
(27 January, 2012, 10:15 am- 5 pm – University Library Leiden)

*Abstracts*

**Rolf H. Bremmer Jr** (Leiden University)

*The Leiden Riddle or Why Does the University Library Have Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts?*

One of the many prides of the Leiden University library is its possession of a number of manuscripts produced in Anglo-Saxon England or produced on the continent but containing Old English. In my paper I shall briefly survey the library's history, notably the acquisition of Isaac Vossius's library in 1689 and the subsequent 'discovery' of the Anglo-Saxon components thereof.

**Michelle Brown** (University of London)

*What Does 'Literacy' Mean in Insular and Anglo-Saxon Culture?*

The history of Pre-Conquest Britain is, in part, one of post-colonialism and shifting demographics. As such, its cultural and social achievements tend to be measured against two artificial benchmarks: the Roman imperial entity within which it had previously been subsumed and our own times. An area in which this is particularly the case is the consideration of literacy. All too often this is restricted to a discussion of the ability to read and write - or the comparative lack thereof. And yet, interdisciplinary investigations into literacy and cognition have consistently stressed that reading and writing are but two independent facets of communication that are inextricably interwoven with linguistics, orality, visual narrative and semiotics

What then of the diversities encountered during the early Middle Ages? Is literacy the functional ability to create and decipher graphic marks that equate, either phonetically and / or ideographically to the spoken word? If so, should this ability also be deemed to extend to the decoding of other visible graphic manifestations of thought, designed to be transmitted across time and space, such as signs and images? Or should literacy be considered more broadly, to encompass the ability to retain a coherent body of cultural memory and to transmit it intact, through the spoken or written word, or images? Conversely, should it be interpreted more narrowly, as the ability to engage with high-level bodies of knowledge and literature - to be, effectively, 'well read'?

This paper will examine aspects of the evidence for attitudes towards literacy and the acquisition of literate skills in Britain, *c.* 550-1050, with particular reference to manuscript sources.

**Sandor Chardonens** (Radboud University Nijmegen)

*Textual Layout of Technical and Scientific Materials in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*

Contrary to the well-informed discussions of page-design and textual layout in later medieval manuscripts, there seems to be little incentive to examine the textual layout of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, particularly when it concerns non-literary, technical manuscripts. A recent discussion by William Schipper, 'Style and Layout of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', distinguishes a long-line layout in Old English from the more variable page-design and layout of Latin materials, which may occur in long lines or columns. A page designed in long lines, however, does not necessitate or guarantee a long-line textual layout, irrespective of language. Yes, the layout of literary texts and homilies in the vernacular is determined largely by language, but when we move to technical materials, the range of textual layout is extensive. Sometimes the textual layout correlates to page-design, e.g. for calendars, but often a long-line page design leaves plenty of room for a different textual layout, such as an entry-by-entry or tabular format that is not supported by the page-design. The choice for long line, entry-by-entry or tabular formats is almost wholly independent of page-design and language, and seems to rely on the internal order of the texts and the wider context in which the texts feature, as I will argue in this paper.

**Kees Dekker** (Groningen University)

*Encyclopaedic Notes in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: the Role of Northumbria*

Of the 947 items in Helmut Gneuss's Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 53 contain encyclopaedic notes: short passages of prose listing or explaining factual or encyclopaedic information. Of these 53 manuscripts, 28 contain one note; the others more, from two to fifteen. The origin of this tradition is obscure: notes first appear in a quire that has been attributed to both Mercia and Canterbury (now in London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian B. vi). What can this and other manuscripts tell us about the origin of the tradition of notes? In this paper I will explore the early manuscript tradition of encyclopaedic notes in England to investigate whether the interplay of scribes, texts, books and readers can elucidate the origin of this tradition. Special attention will be given to Northumbria.

**Francis Newton** (Duke University)

*Eadui Basan: A New Interpretation of His Scribal Colophon and the Theological Basis of the Miniatures in the Eadui (Hanover) Gospels*

Eadui (Eadwig) Basan is the most important scribe in late Anglo-Saxon England. It was T. A. M. Bishop's masterly study that identified his hand in a series of handsome display volumes and documents of the opening of the eleventh century. He worked at Canterbury. Hanover, Kestner Museum, MS WM XXIa 36, a Gospel Book from c. 1020, contains a colophon giving us his name and his 'cognomentum' (the mysterious 'Basan'). The colophon has never been correctly edited to show what was Eadui's original text and what he subsequently added. This paper first reedits that text and proposes an explanation of the cognomen.

The second part considers the unique miniatures of the Evangelists and Eadui's clearly intentional emphasis upon the pens held by these scribes and the remarkable culminating scene in which St. John's work results in the heretic Arius being trampled underfoot. The sequence has been correctly understood as reflecting Cassiodorus'

passage on scribes, but a mistranslation of that passage has meant that the Evangelists miniature-sequence (including also the miniature of Christ on one of the Canon-Table leaves) has not been fully explained in its amazing subtlety.