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Introduction: Material Evidence for Exegetical Practices and Intellectual Engagement with Texts

Exegetical practices usually originate in learning contexts. Manuscripts containing annotations often represent an instantiation of an educational and/or scholarly engagement with a given text in a given time and place as well as through the centuries and in different places. So, such written artefacts may offer evidence for uncovering teaching and learning contexts as they were used to store knowledge and guide readers in approaching the commented text(s) they preserve.¹

The educational and scholarly practice of explaining a text originates from various cultural needs by different users within or outside given institutions.² The manuscriptological and textual study of such annotations is therefore telling for the material, cultural and social environments in which they were produced and used. In studying this, it is also important to distinguish between individual achievements and widely attested patterns within the transmitted exegeses. Hosting annotations of different kinds and for different purposes written by one or more scribes, manuscripts mediate between tradition and individuals. They may preserve traditional exegetic materials that have been modified and can also be further modified, updated, and adapted for the different needs of user(s) in different times and contexts.³

Orality should also be taken into account when dealing with exegetical practices, and manuscripts may also offer evidence for oral modes of teaching. In those cultures in which teaching and learning practices were performed

¹ The following introductory remarks do not intend to offer either any comprehensive or theoretical analysis of exegetical activities in general, but merely to highlight common material, textual and cultural patterns among the manuscript cultures here sampled. Given their limited range, further exegetic phenomena within these and other manuscript cultures has, intentionally, not been taken into account.

² See Stefanie Brinkmann's introduction, pp. 3–14.

³ See Eva Wilden's introduction, pp. 373–377.

mainly orally, manuscripts usually preserve only scanty but still valuable traces for reconstructing the original performative contexts.⁴

The difficulty of a text, its language and/or content, its ‘curricular’ use within teaching and learning contexts⁵ are but a few aspects which may have led to comment upon a text in written form. Manuscripts are therefore precious witnesses of exegetical engagements with texts at various levels, from a rather elementary approach devoted to render the bare meaning of a given word to a more general intention toward an in-depth interpretation of a given treatise or poem. Diagrams and illustrations belong to the exegetical apparatus as well, being tools for reading and quickly grasping the content of the main text to which they refer.

The typologies of annotations vary significantly not only in the materials used, but also in their layout: manuscripts may have been prepared in such a manner for the purpose of offering a structured space for planned annotations. Such notes, be they short lexical explanations or more structured commentaries, may be placed between the lines of a text, just above, below or even next to the word to be explained. For this purpose, sufficiently wide interlinear space may have been planned. The same occurs also for the margins of a manuscript, where longer annotations may find their place. Wide marginal space may have been provided for this need and planned, for instance when ruling the page. Regarding marginal annotations, a cross-reference system can sometimes be detected for the purpose of linking each comment to the relevant word or sentence it is commenting upon. Furthermore, the position of annotations within a manuscript may have a semantic dimension, deserving of proper investigation. On the other hand, manuscripts transmitting commentaries, glossaries or lexica referring to another text(s) contained in different manuscript(s) present different layouts and are structured in different ways.

A material change may also influence the (re-)use of annotations. For instance, a user of one or more manuscripts containing a main text along with a more or less structured corpus of annotations, such as glosses and/or commentaries, can also decide to copy this exegetic material into a second manuscript without the text to which they refer. This new collection may be arranged according to different ordering criteria and a more or less planned structure: in

⁴ See Peera Panarut’s paper on Thai literature in this section (pp. 215-239) as well as those by Darya Ogorodnikova on Islamic manuscripts from Senegambia and Mali (pp. 127–150), and Simon Whedbee on teaching practices of the Latin Bible in twelfth-century Northern France (pp. 49–69).

⁵ See Giovanni Ciotti’s article, pp. 315–351.

the case of short glosses, for example, they may follow the sequence of the text originally referred to or be structured according to an alphabetic or thematic order.⁶ Once the annotations and glosses had been transferred onto a different written artefact, and after their original paratextual nature has been transformed, such exegetical texts may enjoy a wider circulation and usage than previously when they were more closely linked to a given text in a given manuscript.⁷

More specifically, the three papers collected in the present section set out to sample only few of the manifold typologies of exegetical practices – such as annotating, commenting, and glossing a text – in different manuscript cultures. The contributions deal respectively with exegetical practices in written artefacts within Greek Byzantine, Thai manuscript and medieval Latin cultures.

Stefano Valente's paper, *Annotating Aristotle's Organon in the Byzantine Age: Some Remarks on the Manuscripts Princeton MS 173 and Leuven, FDWM 1*, examines a few of the Greek Byzantine manuscripts transmitting Aristotle's logical treatises with a rich exegetical apparatus of annotations and glosses written in the margins and between the lines. The complex interactions between text, glosses and commentaries within a single manuscript as well as among two different manuscripts are investigated here according to their purposes of both personal learning and teaching activity. The progressive stratification of annotations written by different scribes and scholars over at least two centuries shows how the exegetic material in a single written artefact was constantly augmented and updated according to the needs of the owners and users. In so doing, the original bulk of annotations copied by the scribe along with the production of the manuscript has been extended by inserting excerpts of other commentaries. Furthermore, the strategies of annotating the text by adapting previous materials have also been analysed.

Peera Panarut's paper, *Scholarship between the Lines: Interlinear Glossing in Siamese Literary Manuscripts*, focuses on the not too common practice of writing interlinear annotations in Siamese literary manuscripts from late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The glossing practice displayed in some manuscripts chiefly concern lexical explanations of archaic, obscure and foreign words contained in literary texts. These glosses mostly reveal an individual character, being the product of the exegetic activity of a single teacher or scholar. However,

⁶ In the present section, the first case is illustrated in the papers by Peera Panarut and Stefano Valente, the latter in Till Hennings' contribution.

⁷ See Till Hennings' paper on this point.

in a few cases a similar or even identical corpus of annotations has been discovered in more than one manuscript, thus providing evidence for the existence of a kind of institutionalised exegetical tradition. This would also be structured later in the form of separate commentaries. Even when the manuscript evidence is limited, the extant annotations are testament to the intensive study of Siamese literature and how individual contributions may play a role in creating a shared commentarial tradition.

Till Hennings' *From Marginal Glosses to Translations: Levels of Glossing in an Early Medieval Manuscript (Munich, BSB, Clm 19410)* not only offers terminological considerations relating to the terms 'gloss' and 'glossary' in Latin medieval studies, but also investigates a further step in organising the result of exegetical practices into a new form. The glossaries in this manuscript dated from the latter half of the ninth century represent copies of previous collections produced in an educational context: in them, glosses and annotations to different texts were extracted from the original manuscript sources and arranged into a new lexicographic form. Furthermore, the sixteen glossaries collected here contain not only lexical explanations in one language (Latin) but one even approaches a literary translation from one language to another (Latin to Old High German). This collection testifies to the different usages of these explanations at various stages of the clergy's education.⁸

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In July 2017 I joined the CSMC and I was charged with directing this section that had formerly been supervised by Vito Lorusso, who had selected, structured and coordinated the work of the contributors to the present section until June 2017.

⁸ See also Simon Whedbee's paper, pp. 49–69.