



Perspectives on Penflourishing in late Medieval Manuscripts

1- 2 June 2023
Senate House, University of London

Thursday 1 June 2023

15.30 – 16.00 **Registration**

16.00 – 16.10 **Welcome**

Cynthia Johnston (IES) and **Francesca Manzari** (Sapienza University, Rome)

16.10 – 17.45 **Session 1: Components and composers; penwork production and function**

Chair: Cynthia Johnston (IES)

- *Nature in penwork: penflourishers in Avignon and Rome*
Francesca Manzari (Sapienza University, Rome)
 - *Between calligraphy and representation: the “lletres florejadés” in late medieval Catalan manuscripts*
Josefina Planas (Universitat de Lleida)
 - *Figural Motives and Penflourishing*
Martin Roland (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Institut für Mittelalterforschung)
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18.00 – 19.00 **Reception**

Friday 2 June 2023

10.00 – 10.30 **Refreshments** (provided)

10.30 – 12.30 **Session 2: Penflourishing in late medieval England**

Chair: Scot McKendrick (British Library)

- *Penwork Rarities in the Luttrell Psalter*
Lucy Freeman Sandler (New York University, Emerita)
 - *Penwork Hierarchy in the work of William de Brailes and his collaborators*
Cynthia Johnston (Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, UoL)
 - *The Sources and Development of Penwork initials and Flourishing: a case for Oxford Manuscript Production in the Fourteenth Century*
Lynda Dennison (Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford)
 - *Penflourishing and the Mysteries of the Scandinavian Leaves*
Patricia Stirnemann (IRHT, Emerita)
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12.30 – 14.00 **Lunch** (not provided)

14.00 – 15.30 **Session 3: Penflourishing and professionalism**

Chair: Francesca Manzari (Sapienza University, Rome)

- *Penflourishing in Dutch manuscripts: patterns of production and demand*
Dr. Anne Margreet As-Vijvers (RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague)
 - *The Ornament of Order: Penwork in a Prayerbook for a Nun in Venice (Vienna National Library, MS 1981)*
Helena Szépe (School of Art and Art History, College of The Arts, University of South Florida)
 - *Guiniforte and Bartolomeo da Vimercate, a family of professional penflourishers in 15th century Italy*
Laura Zabeo (University of Padua)
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15.30 – 15.45 **Closing remarks**

Paper abstracts

Session 1: Components and composers; penwork production and function

Nature in penwork: penflourishers in Avignon and Rome

Francesca Manzari (Sapienza University, Rome)

Penflourishing is an understudied topic in the history of illumination, but among the most interesting, also for its potential in placing and dating manuscripts. Alongside the penwork produced by scribes and by specialized penflourishers, sometimes this type of decoration was entrusted to artists working both with brush and paint and pen and ink. The resulting freehand drawings are usually quite striking, in comparison with the painted illuminations, which were the product of collaborative teamwork. Though floral, animal, and anthropomorphic figure elements are common in many areas, I concentrate on two specific contexts, linked by the international environment produced by the presence of the Curia. The work of two penwork and tempera illuminators in particular – Bernard de Toulouse, active in mid-fourteenth century Avignon, and Stephanus de Aquila, working in Rome at the end of the century – significantly highlights a growing attention towards the representation of nature.

Between calligraphy and representation: the “lletres florejades” in late medieval Catalan manuscripts

Josefina Planas (Universitat de Lleida)

One of the most singular characteristics of medieval Catalan manuscripts is the decoration in penflourishing in the margins of the manuscripts. However, despite the aesthetic interest that these works arouse, there is no monographic study devoted to their analysis. So far, only the suggestive mention made by François Avril and his team in the catalogue of *Manuscripts enluminés de la Péninsule Ibérique*, Paris, 1982. In our study, we will approach this problem from several points of view. The first of our objectives will be to analyse the manuscripts in which this type of decoration appears most eloquently, and in one specific case, it is even the protagonist of a representative space. The second is to analyse the preserved documentation. Its interpretation will allow us to know the names of the illuminators or calligraphers who carried out these tasks and the working conditions. Finally, to raise the possibility of the existence of specialised calligraphers who carried out these tasks.

Figural Motives and Penflourishing

Martin Roland (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Institut für Mittelalterforschung)

Penflourishing has its roots in floral motives which were stylised into an ornament (to create an ornament). How floral or abstract the ‘decorum’ surrounding the letters and intruding into the corpus of them depends on the place, the individual style of the creator, his abilities and the date of production, and is thus subject of history of style (Stilgeschichte). Figurative motives are not an integral part of this concept, but intruded into the ornament as appropriate. This can happen quasi accidentally with small profile masks or dash faces (Strichgesicht), or very prominently in full colour. Historiated elements, i.e. in connection to author, content, recipient or reader of the text, are more frequent when the figurative elements (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic or representational [gegenständlich]) are more prominent, but, quite astonishingly not by no means limited to this sphere, but also part of marginal details. Many figurative elements occur as early as 13th century. They will not disappear, but reappear at more or less regular intervals. An interesting corpus of sources are illuminated charters in which figurative elements appear astonishingly early. These include a singular document by Pope Gregory IV ([1229](#)), documents of the Roman King Rudolf I ([1273/74](#)), and French charters from 1276 onwards.

It is impossible for a single researcher to compile a survey, as he or she will focus on a region or a specific period in assessing the place of manufacture of illuminated liturgical and religious texts. In order to achieve robust results, I need your help. May I ask for your collaboration?

Session 2: Penflourishing in late medieval England

Penwork Rarities in the Luttrell Psalter

Lucy Freeman Sandler (New York University, Emerita)

In *Mirror in Parchment*, his 1998 study of the fourteenth-century English Luttrell Psalter (British Library Additional MS 42130), Michael Camille mentioned several times the “superb penwork filigree initials” of one of the most striking sections of the manuscript, the series of gatherings whose brilliant marginal illustrations have been the subject of intense study before and since Camille’s time. While he praised the quality of these “lace-like” filigree initials, Camille did not observe how rare they were in design—and as far as I know—unique in English Gothic penwork. The Luttrell initials, which are aligned versals, warrant consideration by medievalists who study codicology, manuscript production, and the “whole book.” In the present paper I will discuss their design in relation to penwork in other sections of the manuscript and to other elements of the mise-en-page, and will suggest compositional parallels in other media, if not in other manuscripts.

Penwork Hierarchy in the work of William de Brailes and his collaborators

Cynthia Johnston (Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London)

William de Brailes (active Oxford c. 1240-1270) is one of England's best documented illuminators. Sixteen mss survive associated with his workshop on Catte Street, several of these contain his colophon. In this paper, I will argue that de Brailes used a hierarchical application of penwork decoration to his work which includes bibles, psalters and a university Aristotle. This hierarchy is delineated by the implied cost of the productions. The highest level of penwork decoration is clearly Italian in its derivation.

The Sources and Development of Penwork initials and Flourishing: a case for Oxford Manuscript Production in the Fourteenth Century

Lynda Dennison (Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford)

This paper builds on past research and aims to develop the hypothesis that Oxford was a major centre for manuscript production in the fourteenth century, and beyond. The study of a specific repertoire of penwork forms, flourished initials and border decoration in non-liturgical manuscripts has been fundamental in arriving at this conclusion. After establishing the decorative repertoire, this paper aims at assessing the sources of these pen forms and evaluates evidence as to the ownership and dating of these books. Tentative suggestions will be forwarded as to the likely method of this production, an enterprise which by the second half of the fourteenth century was in its heyday and clearly large in scale. The discussion will also touch on the value of this penwork in assessing the place of manufacture of illuminated liturgical and religious texts.

Penflourishing and the Mysteries of the Scandinavian Leaves

Patricia Stirnemann (IRHT, Emerita)

In this paper I will discuss a current project. This concerns the analysis of the leaves of some 50 liturgical books made in England in the first quarter of the 13th century for Scandinavia (mostly for a province north of Lund in Sweden).

Session 3: Penflourishing and professionalism

Penflourishing in Dutch manuscripts: patterns of production and demand

Dr. Anne Margreet As-Vijvers (RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague)

In the fifteenth-century Northern Netherlands, penflourishing had developed into a full-fledged form of manuscript decoration. The multiplicity of Dutch penflourishing styles has offered clues for dating and localizing manuscripts to individual regions and towns. Penflourishing was the work of specialized craftsmen, whose names are generally not known.

Copying manuscripts was a kind of work that suited members of monastic communities adhering to the principles of the Modern Devotion. On account of the word 'illumination' in colophons of monastic manuscripts and archival records, some penflourishing styles and – by expansion – painted border decorations and miniatures have been associated with monastic communities. In this paper, I will argue that 'illumination' in these contexts generally refers to penflourishing. This implies that those monastic communities which produced 'illumination' still outsourced the painted decoration and miniatures to anonymous professionals in urban workshops.

The present paper will focus on penflourishing styles associated with the city of Leiden and the surrounding region of South Holland, using a corpus of manuscripts extracted from the Byvanck Database (for which see <https://rkd.nl/en/projects-publications/projects/1161-medieval-miniatures-from-byvanck-to-the-rkd>). The different patterns of production in these manuscripts, and what they tell us about patrons, scribes, pen-flourishers, and painters-illuminators active in urban and monastic Leiden, may serve as a starting point for a discussion about patterns of production and demand in other towns and regions across Europe.

The Ornament of Order: Penwork in a Prayerbook for a Nun in Venice (Vienna National Library, Ms 1981)

Helena Szépe (School of Art and Art History, College of The Arts, University of South Florida)

In 1866 the internationally renowned art historian and museum director Gustav Waagen called attention to a fifteenth-century prayerbook, created for a canoness of Santa Maria delle Vergini in Venice, as among the most important works of art then in Vienna. The extraordinary penwork of the artist has been identified in other manuscripts, most recently by Silvia Fumian, but this prayerbook is the anonymous

artist's most exuberant work, and has not been analysed in relation to the convent culture of its destined user. In this talk I will more closely date the Vienna manuscript through analysis of its penwork, locate the book in the anonymous master's career, and characterize how the penwork and images create an inviting call to prayer that also would have indulged a desire for luxury and distinction. I will conclude with a discussion of the place of this manuscript in a series of prayerbooks made for the convent of le Vergini.

Guiniforte and Bartolomeo da Vercate, a family of professional penflourishers in 15th century Italy

Laura Zabeo (Università degli Studi di Padova)

This contribution focuses on the two fascinating artistic personalities of Guiniforte (or Boniforte) (doc. 1449), and Bartolomeo (doc. 1460-1482), possibly his son, both from the small town of Vercate, near Milano. The two artists were the authors of penflourished decorations of great beauty and elegance, with elaborate geometric and foliate motifs. They are especially known for a unique example of a penwork letter alphabet in a pattern-book (Bloomington, Indiana University, Lilly Library, ms. Ricketts 240), but also thanks to their signatures and to some historical documents. This allows us to reconstruct their activity through central and northern Italy, in Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto and Florence, in some of the most important liturgical cycles of illuminated choir books, alongside famous illuminators working "di pennello".

Although Guiniforte's responsibility as an illuminator producing figurative miniatures in brush and tempera has been debated, his signatures are all witnessed within his superb penflourished initials, in which he defines himself "ego enim sum minimus omnium miniatorum", humbly but with self-awareness of the important part he played in the embellishment of the manuscript. It is therefore possible to reflect on the significant role of these artists who specialised in the ink decoration, proving that the *littera florissa* is more than a simple calligraphic practice, sometimes with full right to the status of works of art.

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