

## "ENGLISH" PALEOGRAPHY--Nelson

Like other geographically--or historically--defined areas of paleography, English paleography aims to understand and make available to a wider readership records and texts originally written in manuscript. Of course the phrase "records and texts" covers virtually all written works produced before the introduction of printing in the latter half of the fifteenth century. But the discipline of paleography continues to be of very great importance for the post-Gutenberg period because most of what was written and read continued to be in manuscripts of one kind or another; and because, as a rule, the later the handwriting, at least to 1650, the more difficult it is to decipher. Thus more discipline and practice is often required to read manuscripts written after 1450 than before.

The most obvious goal of the science or art of paleography is to decipher manuscript writing letter by letter (or number by number), and to understand how abbreviations have been used to represent letters and numbers not actually written down. Additional goals may include gathering evidence for dating manuscripts and texts; identifying the hands of particular scribes or schools of scribes; detecting and correcting scribal errors; detecting forgeries and authenticating legitimate texts; reconstructing damaged or "lost" texts.

Transcribing texts may seem at first sight a simple matter, but actual transcriptions are always fraught with problems and controversies. How are editorial expansions indicated? how much guess-work is permitted to the editor? how exhaustive must the editor be in describing or transcribing a text? should the print medium be a facsimile of the original? reproduce the "spirit" of the original? merely follow the original letter by letter? Does the transcription aim to substitute for the original? enable a mental reconstruction of the original? or serve as a guide for a fresh perusal of the original by future scholars? Do the same rules for transcription apply to "historical" as to "literary" documents? To what extent should technological developments be allowed to dictate, control, limit, or enhance the art of transcription (consider: hand-drawn facsimiles; record-type facsimiles; photographic facsimiles; linotype or monotype transcriptions; computer-encoded transcriptions)?

Rather than offer my own bibliography of this subject, I advise students to use Anthony Petti, *English Literary Hands from Chaucer to Dryden*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977), which has a much more complete bibliography than I can offer. The following excerpt is from the section entitled "Handwriting."

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See  
paleography  
in British  
Library  
from Brit. Mus.



Latham

Cherry

Rev'd Med Word List

Handbook of Dates  
for English Hist

Gooder, Latin for local  
History  
(place names  
etc)

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done his wyll and all her other systres diden that same  
and we of one

done his wyll and all her other systres diden that  
same: and were of one condicione for as myche as  
hem dyde thynke that they were of so hyghte mid  
crete blood and paratte they wolde not obeie these  
husbondes: the which wolde have correctyd them w  
faresnes and warned hem to be well demened to  
these bothe worship and honowres: But it was  
all for nouthre for ther was no remedy where for

~~as big?~~

S

B

u

V @ beginning  
u of word

Adore of ads

Eneas

in the olde cite of <sup>crete</sup> troye there was a myghty man  
called Eneas a man of crete power the whichs fader  
w moche people wgen the cite of troye was destroyed  
be hem of crete. & this Eneas came in to lumbardy  
wgen off the kynig was called Latyne that worryd  
w an other kynig called Euzocelyne & dyde moche harme  
and aunte and the kynig Latyne heyring of the myghte  
and wordynas of this Eneas welcomed hym w moche  
gouernize and worship and holdes w hym and this  
Eneas helpys kynig Latyne in his warres mid gualo

and th interchangeble

and a way after he had to londe all peple about  
to loundon and goeued p of constantynus  
and made hym kynig off p edudo and p  
bushops Gofflyne sette he gois on loundon  
and done anoynted hym do as ffalleth  
for a kynig to beue and he goe to loundon  
dome p kynig constantynus cegey he had  
goeued and a nono after he proued go  
ayffo proues counseyler off p cytono and  
he goe to in. fames byon her the ffirte  
men called constantynus // p seundo anzy