

ALEXANDRA BANEU

WHAT IS A MEDIEVAL NOTEBOOK? CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING A PRAGMATIC DEFINITION*

INTRODUCTION

Since the general aim of the project in the framework of which the present article is being written, namely the ERC Starting Grant NOTA, “Note-taking and Notebooks as Channels of Medieval Academic Dissemination across Europe”, is to reunite a *corpus* of medieval notebooks, the question of how to define a medieval notebook needs to be addressed. The general aim of the project is to assemble and study a corpus of multi text manuscripts stemming from the medieval Faculties of Theology of 14th and 15th century Europe, which are witnesses to the practice of note-taking in the late Middle Ages. Two methodological issues thus need to be taken into consideration: the possibility of an operational/pragmatic definition for the concept of “medieval notebook” and a possible set of criteria that could be applied to recognize such artefacts and include them into a coherent corpus.

A good point to begin the discussion is Friedrich Lindemann’s characterization of the notebooks of Ademar of Chabannes, which are preserved in the manuscript Leiden, University Library, Vossianus Latinus Octavo 15. Lindemann is the editor of Priscian’s *Opera minora* and one of the witnesses he used when editing the *Praeexercitamina* is precisely this Leiden manuscript. The quote from Lindemann is mentioned in the book of Ad van Els, *A Man and His Manuscripts. The Notebooks of Ademar of Chabannes (989–1034)* and the translation of the following passage is his:

“For there are found in this manuscript so many inconsistencies, so many worthless things, so many trivialities, so many distortions and so much that is worn-out that one hardly knows where to find the patience to examine it all painstakingly. (*Nam tot varia, tot discrepantia, tot vilia, tot parva excerpta, tot male habita et detrita, in eo inveniuntur, ut nescias, qua animi patientia omnia perlegas.*)” (van Els 2020, p. 106).

Although these notebooks are not directly interesting for the project, they are useful in sketching a possible definition for the concept of “notebook”. One can already see that an internal chaos characterizes the materials and that they also tend to be very personal, making the task of the scholar studying them very difficult.

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However, the question remains: What do we call a notebook for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and, most importantly, why is it useful to use this term. Before presenting some criteria for recognizing medieval notebooks and for establishing a corpus, let's take the time and see what words were used in the actual Middle Ages to name notebooks and then look at four cases where the word "notebook" is used by our contemporaries to refer to medieval manuscripts¹.

The article consists of three parts, sketching answers to three questions:

- (1) What words were used in the Middle Ages to name notebooks?
- (2) What kinds of manuscripts are called notebooks in contemporary literature?
- (3) What criteria can be used to distinguish notebooks from other composite manuscripts?

1. WHAT WORDS WERE USED IN THE MIDDLE AGES TO NAME NOTEBOOKS?

There are some words which are used in the Middle Ages to refer to notebooks. *Quaternus* and *libellus* seem to be the most common. Both of them also have a strict codicological meaning, but every now and then one finds them to have the meaning of sheets of paper bound together (at least temporarily) used for notes (this is probably the easiest definition for a medieval notebook). *Quaternus* or *caternus*, according to *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages*, is "a gathering of several folded bifolia used for notes". This has led to the expression *caternos scribere* which means "to take notes from a lecture". There are some diminutives *quaternulus*, *quaterniunculus* and *quaterniolus* that also named loose quires and small booklets (Teeuwen 2003, p. 190). Another medieval word used to name what we would call a notebook is *volumen*. It is the fourteenth century theologian Étienne Gaudet who uses this term in the tables that organize his collections of notes. This might not be generalized, but a *volumen* is formed from several *quaterni*, so it is a collection of quires. (On Gaudet and his library of notebooks see: Glorieux 1966, Kaluza 1978, 1983, 1989, 2010)².

Libellus, *libellulus* and *liberculus*, on the other hand, are more than just the diminutives of *liber*. They seem to have the same meaning as *quaternus*, at least in pragmatic terms. Just to give one example of when *libellus* is used by a medieval

¹ From the very beginning, it should be established that there are studies dedicated to medieval notebooks that struggle to address the same issues as the present contribution. See, for instance the seminal volume Brnzei 2022, where the author defines the notebook of Henry of Rheinfelden, the manuscript Basel, Universitätsbibliothk, A X 44, as a *rapularius* (Brnzei 2022, p. 2–5).

² There are also two forthcoming publications dedicated to the library of Étienne Gaudet: Alexandra Baneu, *The Retrieval of Notes. Use of Tables the Manuscripts of Étienne Gaudet*, De Gruyter, Berlin (forthcoming) and Alexandra Baneu (ed.), *Medieval University Notes in the Library of Étienne Gaudet*, De Gruyter, Berlin (forthcoming).

author. It is found in the manuscript Frankfurt, Staats und Universitätsbibliothek, ms. praed. 102. In fact, the Cologne student that assembled it, Servatius Fanckel, says that he is the collector of that notebook: *Frater Servatius Fanckel, ordo predicatorum, Thomista, collector huius libelli* (“Brother Servatius Fanckel, from the order of preacher, a Thomist, the collector of this notebook”) (Frankfurt, Staats und Universitätsbibliothek, ms. praed. 102, f. 31v (26v); Hoenen 2011, p. 99; Löhr 1926, p. 31). The notebook has 250 disputes on 176 folios, registered between 1475 and 1488. Among disputes, the manuscript also catalogues names of doctors and students active in Cologne during that period. The lists are annotated with biographical information, such as the doctrinal orientation, when the people named disputed certain questions, when they became masters, etc. It is on this list that Servatius names himself, specifies that he is a Thomist and the one who has collected this *libellus* (Hoenen 2011, p. 98). There is yet another term used by medieval authors to name notebooks, common mostly for the University of Vienna, namely *rapularius* (Brînzei 2022, p. 2–5).

Although the presence of these words might indicate that a manuscript, or at least part of it, is a notebook, their use is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition. It is not necessary, since there are notebooks out there that are not explicitly called *quaterni*, *libelli*, *volumina* or *rapularia* by their compilers or by successive medieval owners. It also does not constitute a sufficient condition, because these words can have other meanings.

2. WHAT KINDS OF MANUSCRIPTS ARE CALLED “NOTEBOOKS” IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE?

Our aim here is to showcase that it is necessary to name certain composite manuscripts “notebooks”, mostly due to their more personal nature, even though they are not called so by their owners and sometimes even if they don’t come from an academic milieu.

Let us circle back to the notebooks of Ademar of Chabannes who collected some material during his studies that he considered he could reuse to teach his own students (van Els 2020, p. 21). The manuscript VLO 15 has 65 texts and some drawings and allows one to observe a tangible witness of the reception and transmission of knowledge (van Els 2020, p. 89). The definition that Ad van Els works with is that given by James O’Donnell in his article “Retractions”, where a notebook is defined as “an open-ended collection created and arranged for its usefulness to the owner/author, making sense purely in terms of the owner’s/author’s needs” (O’Donnell 1999, p. 171–172). This better explains Lindemann’s difficulties when dealing with this manuscript. And actually, our own difficulties when faced with this kind of manuscript. These notebooks have three main characteristics: they come from scholarly activities (register what was happening in the classroom), they are personal – organized according to the interests of their owner – and they say something about the circulation of knowledge. They do not all come

from notes that Ademar took in the classroom, some of them have full texts that he copied in the libraries that he visited (such as that of Priscianus' *Praeexercitamina* which was mentioned at the beginning of the presentation).

The next manuscript that is worth looking at is mentioned by Pavel Soukup, in the article *Anti-Hussite Texts in the Miscellaneous and Other Manuscripts. The case of the Erfurt Charterhouse* (Soukup 2018, p. 83–98). It is described among a series of mid 15th century personal miscellanies that reflect the interests and efforts of a single person and it is called a *raparium*. A *rapularius*, *raparius* or *raparium* is a manuscript that reunites excerpts from works that monks considered useful. It can also name a collection of sentences jotted down by pupils, under dictation (Schoengen 1898, p. 100). There is also the explicit mention of *rapularia* with the meaning of notebooks in the Viennese milieu, as signalled by Brînzei (2022, p. 2–5). Among these *rapularia* from the Erfurt Charterhouse, Soukup mentions the *Rapularius* compiled by Heinrich Toke in the 1420s and 1430s. The only copy of this *rapularius* that has made its way to us comes from the 1450s and was enriched by someone else. The volume is alphabetically organized, it contains excerpts from other authors. It presents itself like a lexicon, but unlike a lexicon it also records Heinrich's memories and travel records. Pavel Soukup calls this a personal notebook and remarks that personal miscellanies are both personal and, paradoxically, communal (Soukup 2018, p. 90). They are meant to be accessible to other members of the community – thus the alphabetical organization. The manuscript referred to is Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 139b.

Another interesting example is mentioned by Ota Pavlíček in the article '*Ipsa dicit, quod sic est, ergo verum.*' Authority of Scripture, the Use and Sources of Biblical Citations in the Work of Jerome of Prague:

"During his lifetime, Jerome of Prague was known to record important authorities and arguments – encountered in his studies at Oxford, Paris, and elsewhere – in a notebook, specially acquired for that purpose" (Pavlíček 2015, p. 71–72).

This volume of his is mentioned, as Pavlíček illustrates, in an explicit of the manuscript Wien, ÖNB 4483, f. 77v and this reference was published in the edition of Jerome of Prague's *Questio duplex*³.

Finally, let's look at the notebook of Servatius Fanckel. This notebook is presented by Hoenen as being the result of the student's obligation to attend disputations and take notes. The intention is presumably so that these students have their own arguments for when they have to engage in disputes (Hoenen 2011, p. 87). Hoenen also mentions several similar manuscripts, that he calls notebooks, and which are the result of a student taking notes from disputes. The notes from

³ Hieronymus de Praga, *Quaestio duplex de formis universalibus et de universalibus extra signa*, 68, l. p. 576–581: *Explicit de positione Jeronimi, ut audivi hoc dici, quam positionem dicitur extraxisse de magno quodam volumine, quod aggregavit Parisius, Anglie et in aliis studiis, ubi fuit, de materia universalium realium.*

Fanckel's notebook are "second-order notes" (*Nachschriften*), the quires were not in the classroom, but it is argued that they were recorded in a short time after having been disputed, being written down initially on some provisional sheets (Hoenen 2011, p. 100). The fact that they were written down shortly after having been disputed applies at least to the *quaestiones vacantiales* that are recorded in the notebook, because these were held every week (between the 28th of June and the 15th of September) and it seems that Servatius tried to write one disputation down before having to attend another one. What is the specificity for this notebook? It belongs to a student and gives evidence of the university life in late fifteenth century Cologne, it is personal, since Servatius makes it for himself, and its contents are varied.

What do these four examples have in common and how come they can be in the same category? This is possible if we create some subcategories: student notebooks that register the disputations from the perspective of a student who took part in them are different from miscellanies that we can call notebooks only because of their personal nature. The subcategories should pay attention to the contents of the manuscript.

3. SOME CRITERIA TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN MEDIEVAL NOTEBOOKS AND OTHER TYPES OF COMPOSITE TEXTS

Some of the composite texts that could be confused for notebooks are: miscellanies (which do not have a personal character), *florilegia*, or even medieval encyclopaedias, some *reportationes* also do not count as notebooks if they are heavily reworked. Here are some traits, that taken together might indicate that the researcher is in front of a notebook.

3.1. First of all, notebooks are characterized by heterogeneity. They contain multiple texts and fragments of text, a large variety of notes, or, sometimes, a longer continuous lecture jotted down over an entire academic year. The fact of the matter is that they bear witness to how an individual understood a lecture and the events surrounding it, thus offering researchers a better grasp of the pedagogical practice at medieval universities. We must, however, keep in mind that it is the reduced length of the fragments that helps us differentiate between a simple miscellany and a notebook. Most medieval notebooks that we are studying record multiple disputed questions and other academic rituals (such as vesperal disputations, *aulae* and *principia*): these are naturally shorter than a treatise or a full commentary. Some good such examples can be found in the manuscripts Frankfurt, Staats und Universitätsbibliothek, ms. praed. 102 (the notebook of Servatius Fanckel), Eichstätt, Universitätsbibliothek, cod. st. 688 (the notebook of Georg Schwarz) and Paris, BnF lat. 16408 (one of the notebooks of Étienne Gaudet).

3.2. Secondly, notebooks tend to be personal, reserved for personal use, not for publication, nor for simple collection within a library. So, they will be either autographs, partial autographs, or texts copied for an author. The only condition is

that their main purpose is not that of enriching somebody's library, but that of helping a scholar with some university work. Even in cases where the notebooks are written by a secretary, the individual interested in them usually intervenes by making corrections or adding marginal notes.

3.3. Thirdly, the page of the manuscript is divided into zones: allowing for lengthy remarks, additions and even counterarguments to what is being said in the main body of text. This only happens in some cases, but when it does come about, it represents one of the stronger indicators that this is a notebook.

3.4. Finally, they show signs of being produced in the classroom, or of being a byproduct of studying. There are two manners in which this can happen. First, a manuscript or part of a manuscript can be proven to be an original *reportatio* of a lecture. The signs that this is the case include: at the beginning of each lecture the writing is more compact and it becomes more loose as the lecture goes on; the text has multiple corrections, but none of them are related to mistakes that come from *homoioteleuta*, they do however often complete arguments; blank spaces are left for the titles of questions or, more generally, for anything that could be filled in after the lecture; there are corrections that stem from orality, from how words were pronounced; the abbreviations chosen are generally those that require the least effort (Duba 2017, p. 35–40). Second, there is a thematic indicator that a manuscript or part of it is a result of what happens in the classroom or, in a larger sense, of the university requirements. This is generally the case with notebooks that record the disputations attended by their compiler and written down so that he might have arguments for his own disputations (as is the case with the notebook of Servatius Fanckel). From our experience thus far, these are usually second order notes. Not all of these conditions are necessary at the same time, but we can say that a manuscript is a notebook and can be included in the corpus if it fulfils most of these conditions.

CONCLUSION

The present article summarizes some criteria for defining a notebook. Although it does not pretend to have once and for all established the characteristics of a medieval notebook, it does put together some of the elements that could serve in establishing a pragmatic definition. We take into consideration both how and when medieval students referred to their notebooks and how the secondary literature has spoken about them, so as to deduce some particularities that could be applicable to a larger group of such manuscripts. Although by its nature a notebook is elusive, to think about how those who compiled a certain notebook named it and then how later literature referred to it, means to already engage with the difficult task of understanding what the study of such an instrument of transmission of knowledge entails.

MANUSCRIPTS

Basel, Universitätsbibliothk, A X 44.
 Eichstätt, Universitätsbibliothek, cod. st. 688.
 Frankfurt, Staats und Universitätsbibliothek, ms. praed. 102.
 Leiden, University Library, Vossianus Latinus Octavo 15.
 Paris, BnF, lat. 16408.
 Wien, ÖNB 4483.

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CE ESTE UN CARNET DE NOTE MEDIEVAL?
CRITERII PENTRU STABILIREA UNEI DEFINIȚII PRAGMATICE
(Rezumat)

Articolul de față abordează problema definirii pragmatice a unui caiet medieval. Aceasta înseamnă, mai precis, oferirea unei caracterizări a obiectului de studiu, prin enumerarea unor trăsături ale acestuia, în locul unei definiții prin gen proxim și diferență specifică. Pentru a atinge acest obiectiv, articolul urmărește mai întâi modul în care autorii medievali își numesc caietele. Terminologia este variată și complexă: *libellus*, *quaternus*, *volumen* și *rapullarius* sunt termenii întrebuințați cel mai des. În articol, multitudinea de termeni folosiți este asociată cu exemple pertinente. În al doilea rând, ne uităm la ce fel de manuscrise au fost numite caiete în literatura secundară. Acest lucru ne permite să ilustrăm abordările contemporane ale acestor tipuri de manuscrise. Într-o ultimă secțiune prezentăm unele dintre trăsăturile caracteristice ale manuscriselor care pot fi catalogate drept caiete.

WHAT IS A MEDIEVAL NOTEBOOK?
CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING A PRAGMATIC DEFINITION
(Abstract)

The present article engages with the pragmatic definition of a medieval notebook. That is to say, not with a definition through genre and specific difference, but a characterization of the object of study by means of enumerating some of its traits. In order to do so, the article first follows how medieval authors themselves named their notebooks. The terminology is varied and complex: *libellus*, *quaternus*, *volumen* and *rapullarius* seem to be the most commonly employed. In the article, the plethora of terms used is associated with pertinent examples of usage. Second, we take a look at what types of manuscripts have been called notebooks in the secondary literature. This allows us to showcase the contemporary approach to this type of manuscript. Finally, we present some traits that manuscripts that can be categorized as notebooks exhibit.

Cuvinte-cheie: *caiet medieval, rapullarius, libellus, quaternus, volumen.*

Keywords: *medieval notebook, rapullarius, libellus, quaternus, volumen.*

*Institutul de Lingvistică și Istorie Literară
„Sextil Pușcariu” al Academiei Române,
Cluj-Napoca, str. E. Racoviță, 21
alexandra.baneu@yahoo.com*