

Fragmentology

A Journal for the Study of Medieval Manuscript Fragments

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Fragments and Fragmentology

Editorial



Manuscript fragments, that is, the physical objects of partially-surviving medieval manuscript material, have long attracted scholarly interest. Early philologists collected and studied them: Jacques Bongars (1554–1612) was one of many French humanists of the time who gathered not just manuscripts, but also fragments. Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) hunted for the oldest testimonies of Icelandic literature and found them in fragments. For the architects of paleography, such as Jean Mabillon (1632–1707), fragments held the oldest scripts. The founders of what is now the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Colbert and Baluze, collected not only books, but fragments of books.

Since the establishment of modern academic disciplines in the nineteenth century, fragments have been an integral part of many research fields. For instance, the liturgical texts that make up the majority of *in situ* fragments worldwide are a major interest for musicologists. Cuttings and leaves from books broken for antiquarian interests have attracted art historians, especially in North America. Historians working on regions where few medieval manuscripts remain, such as Scandinavia and Hungary, have been compelled to use fragments as the surviving pieces of the written record. The study of fragments extends beyond the Latin world; for Hebrew fragments, for example, the Cairo Genizah alone has spawned a century of research, publication, and analysis, culminating in several web-based projects.¹ Similarly, papyrus texts, almost all preserved in fragments, created in the late nineteenth century a new discipline, papyrology, that is still very active today, with a community of researchers served by its own web platforms.²

Collectors and researchers have worked with fragments for as long as they have used manuscript books, and thus they rarely even asked the question: “Do we need a separate discipline for fragment studies?” When the question did arise, it was dismissed immediately. Such is the case for the first mention of ‘Fragmentology’, made by Anscari Mundó in a 1985 article on identifying the provenance of detached fragments:

With these notes I do not pretend anything other than to systematize the codicological domain of manuscript studies. Far be it for me to turn it into a special branch that would be called

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- 1 See in particular the websites run by the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society (<https://fjms.genizah.org/>) and the Princeton Geniza Project (<https://geniza.princeton.edu/pgp/>). For Hebrew manuscript fragments *in situ* and detached from bindings, see the Books within Books project (<http://www.hebrewmanuscript.com>).
 - 2 See, for example, <http://papyri.info/>.

“Fragmentology”. In reality, it just concerns a concrete and fortuitous state of a dismembered manuscript, but which, by its writing, material, and state of conservation remains the formal object of paleography just as much as codicology.³

More recently, Elisabetta Caldelli has echoed this sentiment in her excellent study of the fragments from the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome. The book provides an unparalleled introduction to fragment studies, although the author follows Mundò, claiming that “one should shrink from the temptation to make this type of study into an independent discipline, ‘Fragmentology’, ... because otherwise, one would lose sight of the essential point of departure: the codex in its entirety.”⁴

By definition, fragments are fragments of *something*. The study of that *something*, therefore, must include fragments. When that *something* consists of manuscripts, then the methodology applied to fragments should be exactly the same as for other manuscripts. Insofar as fragments are considered from the perspective of the whole from which they came, there cannot be a separate field of Fragmentology. This, however, amounts to a reductionist view of fragments.

Fragments are not just fragments of an entire codex. Fragments cannot be the exclusive domain of codicology and paleography, because no discipline claims to include all fragments. Collections of fragments include not just fragments of books, but also of documentary material: charters, registers, and similar items; material that requires expertise in the field of diplomatics. Fragments break the barrier between libraries and archives: they are found in both, and they pertain to both.

Fragments not only relate to the whole they originally belonged to, but also to a whole that the history of fragmentation created. They can be found in the bindings of printed books, and thus book history must also come to terms with manuscript fragments.

By starting with fragments as such, shifting the focus from fragments as fragments of *something* to fragments as *fragments of*, we can investigate a range of historical phenomena beyond simply the entire codex from which (some) fragments were separated. We can explore phenomena of reuse, such as the binding of fragments into host volumes, the circumstances of a broken book, or

3 A.M. Mundò, “Comment reconnaître la provenance de certains fragments de manuscrits détachés de reliures”, *Codices manuscripti* 11(1985), 116–123, at 116: “Avec ces notes je ne prétends pas d’autre chose que de systématiser en quelque sorte le domaine codicologique des fragments de manuscrits. Loin de moi que d’en faire une branche spéciale qu’on dénommerait ‘fragmentologie’. En réalité il ne s’agit que d’un état concret et fortuit d’un manuscrit dépecé, mais qui par son écriture, sa matière et son état de conservation reste l’objet formel autant de la paléographie que de la codicologie.”

4 E. Caldelli, *I frammenti della Biblioteca Vallicelliana. Studio metodologico sulla catalogazione dei frammenti di codici medievali e sul fenomeno del loro riuso*, Rome 2012, 13: “si deve rifuggire dalla tentazione di fare di questo tipo di studio una disciplina a se stante, la ‘frammentologia’, ... perché altrimenti si perderebbe di vista il punto di partenza imprescindibile, il codice nella sua interezza.”

the interest that moved someone to excise an initial. We can thus move beyond looking at fragments as evidence of a prior whole, now scattered and lost, and start considering the fragment as an historical object in its own right, capable of serving as more than a second-class manuscript.

Fragmentology can never be wholly independent. Its transdisciplinary nature requires the collaboration of specialists trained in a range of fields, not just paleography, codicology, and diplomatics, but also the history of the printed book, the history of libraries, musicology, art history, intellectual history, digital humanities – in sum, most historical arts dealing with content on a page. Our hope is that this journal, *Fragmentology*, will serve as a place to bring together scholars from across the spectrum of the humanities to focus on the manuscript fragment as a subject of research in its own right.

The name ‘Fragmentology’ implies a field of study, with a subject matter and a methodology of its own. This journal, *Fragmentology*, aims to serve that field, and, through its publications, document how fragment studies fit in the humanities. Regardless of whether Fragmentology constitutes a discipline, we apply this neologism for a very practical reason. The act of giving a name to a scholarly undertaking endows it with an air of legitimacy. Applying this name to our field allows researchers to organize their study, recognize the connections between their work and that of others, and present the subject as a coherent field.

The Rise of Fragmentology

In 2014, Christoph Flüeler organized a Planning Meeting in Cologne, near Geneva, to plan *Fragmentarium*, a research project dedicated to building an online laboratory for scholars and students of medieval manuscript fragments. That meeting proposed for the first time (as far as we are aware) the study of ‘Fragmentology’. Since then, manuscript scholars have embraced the term wholeheartedly, notably through the tireless work of Lisa Fagin Davis.⁵ In his blog, Dr. David Rundle (University of Essex) announced, shortly after *Fragmentarium* started, the “Age of Fragmentology”.⁶ Publications around the world now herald Fragmentology as “the new manuscript studies”.⁷ Since 2015, the number of articles, books and conferences on Fragmentology has grown enormously.

5 <https://manuscriptroadtrip.wordpress.com>.

6 <https://bonaelitterae.wordpress.com/2015/07/26/age-of-fragmentology>. This movement echoes the saying (falsely) ascribed to Theodor Mommsen, that the twentieth century would be the “Century of Papyrology”. See A. Martin, “Das Jahrhundert der Papyrologie?”, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 46(2000), 1–2 (DOI: [10.1515/apf.2000.46.1.1](https://doi.org/10.1515/apf.2000.46.1.1)).

7 E.g., C. Steyn, “Fragmentologie, die nuwe manuscriptstudie – met verwysing na manuskrip-fragmente in Suid Afrika”, *LitNet Akademies* 13:2(2016).

This growing interest in what is in itself an old research topic finds a ready explanation. Digitization has not only revolutionized manuscript research, it has also made Fragmentology possible for the first time. With few exceptions, traditional fragment research has been characterized by chance finds. In terms of time, money, and methodology, it was hardly possible to conduct systematic research on extensive collections of fragments, especially in collections where a large part of their complete codices have been poorly researched. The identification of texts alone required an inordinate amount of time from persons with spectacular knowledge of a wide range of literature. Now, however, advances in digital tools and the Internet have greatly facilitated this task, and a student armed with an Internet browser can quickly achieve similar or better results.

Not just have search methods and research tools changed and improved, the entire approach to this complex research subject has changed, in some cases becoming possible for the first time. Databases facilitate a more efficient and accurate description and networking of research data. Digital photography makes it possible to visualize faded or damaged scripts. Digital tools for the recognition of page layouts and handwriting are making major advances, and, perhaps in the near future it even will be possible use them to identify medieval scribal hands consistently and reliably. Interoperable digital manuscript libraries permit the reuse of research data. For Fragmentology, Big Data is particularly attractive, as it has the potential to permit the systematic research – search, comparison, and reconstruction – not of hundreds, but of hundreds of thousands of fragments.

The pace of study is increasing, and fragments are becoming a major topic for research projects large and small, for teaching, and for individual study. To support this field, we have created this Open Access journal, *Fragmentology*.

A Journal for the Study of Medieval Fragments

The journal *Fragmentology* is founded as part of the Swiss National Science Foundation Project, *Fragmentarium*. *Fragmentology* is dedicated to publishing scholarly articles, research notes, guidelines and reviews concerning medieval manuscript fragments. It focuses on physical fragments as opposed to literary fragments, such as quotations of authors, or cases where a scribe only copied part of a work.

Many of the articles and research notes published in this volume pertain to research conducted via the *Fragmentarium* web application (<http://fragmentarium.ms>). *Fragmentology* aims not just to be the publication organ of the *Fragmentarium* project, but a double-blind peer-reviewed journal for medieval fragment studies. It welcomes submissions on a range of themes, such as:

- ❖ Detailed studies of individual fragments and collections

- ❖ The history of manuscript fragmentation
- ❖ Applying digital technologies to fragments
- ❖ Studies of bookbinding and early print, with respect to fragments
- ❖ Studies on methodology, scope and scholarly description, with respect to fragments
- ❖ Conservation issues, including how to handle fragments in restoration
- ❖ The legal and ethical aspects of fragmentation and the fragment trade
- ❖ Research notes, including the announcement of new discoveries
- ❖ Reviews of publications on manuscript fragments

We welcome submissions on these and related themes.

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