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MEDIEVAL TEXTS AND THEIR SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Performance, Performativity, Agents and Genres

Thursday and Friday 13–14 November 2025

Ghent, Belgium

Performance and performativity have proved to be highly productive concepts for understanding the social worlds of medieval texts in diverse literary, linguistic and historical contexts. Through associable notions of orality, aurality, gesture, ritual, materiality, and agency, they have provided fresh ways to historicise texts. This conference seeks to build on such work through a comparative lens, bringing together case studies from different settings, languages and genres, to ask how texts functioned in social contexts, considering their written manifestations as only one part of their lives. What new insights can be gleaned from comparison of, say, Old Norse praise poetry, Latin charters, Arabic letters and Greek hagiographies? What commonalities unite performances in differing medieval literary cultures? What elements are distinct? And to what extent are performances conditioned by the language, genre and physical form of a text?



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We invite scholars to consider this theme through a variety of questions and perspectives, including but not limited to:

- *How were medieval texts shaped by the performative context in which they were embedded?*
- *What role did memory, gestures, facial expressions, clothing, music, dance and procession play in performances?*
- *What social roles did texts offer individuals in their presentation and reception?*
- *What can we deduce about the spatial and temporal conditions in which texts were performed?*
- *How can we use tentative reconstructions of performances in social contexts to rethink genre designations?*
- *How did a text's social performance contribute to the production, reproduction or challenging of social and societal norms and hierarchies?*
- *What was the disruptive potential of literary performance?*

Range of the conference

Our focus is the period c. 450–c. 1450 CE, which in a European context is conventionally referred to as the Middle Ages. We welcome studies on literary and cultural traditions from this timeframe, including those that follow different periodization systems. We encourage proposals engaging with literary cultures from across the globe, approached through any possible methodology.

Please send your abstract of ca. 300 words, together with a short bio, to info@relicsresearch.com. **Deadline:** 16 May

We can offer catering, up to three nights of hotel accommodation, and a limited reimbursement of the travel costs (ca. 200 euros).

Organisers:

Jeroen De Gussem, Universiteit Gent

Robert Gallagher, University of Kent

Gowaart Van Den Bossche, Universität Zürich

Dinah Wouters, Universiteit Utrecht and Rijksuniversiteit Groningen



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