

“For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought”. Manuscript terminology across languages and scientific disciplines

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Recibido: 1 de diciembre de 2020 / Aceptado: 22 de diciembre de 2020

Abstract. The complex terminology used for the description of medieval books in manuscript catalogues and other scientific contributions gives rise to a wide range of potential ambiguities and losses across languages and disciplines. Such losses become all the more evident when different resource paths intersect or overlap on the Internet. Sadly, true long-term collaborations between countries and disciplines are more the exception than the rule, a reality which also explains why the important question of terminology and its adequate translation is frequently neglected. The authors of the present contribution, an Italian codicologist and a German art historian – both of whom have contributed lexicographical work tools which have seen several translations – propose a thorough overview of the work tools currently available (theoretical reflections, dictionaries, multilingual glossaries), followed by a small but significant selection of examples of omissions, ambiguities and other problems associated with the building of a shared multilingual language in the sphere of manuscript studies.

Keywords: Manuscript terminology; codicology; manuscript illumination; palaeography.

[es] “For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought”. La terminología del manuscrito en diferentes idiomas y disciplinas científicas

Resumen. La compleja terminología utilizada para la descripción de los libros medievales en los catálogos de manuscritos y otras contribuciones científicas da lugar a una amplia gama de posibles ambigüedades y pérdidas en todos los idiomas y disciplinas. Estas pérdidas se vuelven aún más evidentes cuando diferentes rutas de recursos se cruzan o se superponen en Internet. Lamentablemente, las verdaderas colaboraciones a largo plazo entre países y disciplinas son más la excepción que la regla, una realidad que también explica por qué se descuida con frecuencia la importante cuestión de la terminología y su adecuada traducción. Las autoras de la presente contribución, una codicóloga italiana y una historiadora del arte alemana, quienes han aportado herramientas de trabajo lexicográficas que han visto varias traducciones, proponen una descripción completa de las herramientas de trabajo actualmente disponibles (reflexiones teóricas, diccionarios, glosarios multilingües), seguido de una pequeña, pero significativa selección de ejemplos de omisiones, ambigüedades y otros problemas asociados con la construcción de un lenguaje multilingüe compartido en el ámbito de los estudios de manuscritos.

Palabras clave: Terminología de manuscritos; codicología; iluminación de manuscritos; palaeografía.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Lexicographical Work Tools: State of Research. 3. Ambiguities, Gaps, and other Problems. 4. Conclusion. 5. References.

How to cite: Jakobi-Mirwald, C.; Maniaci, M. (2021). “For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought”. Manuscript terminology across languages and scientific disciplines. *De Medio Aevo* 15 (1), 95-102

1. Introduction

This short essay by a German art historian and an Italian palaeographer – both of whom have contributed lexicographical work tools which have seen several translations – outlines a number of issues and as yet unanswered questions stemming from more than two decades of scholarly exchange across language and discipline boundaries in the field of research on the medieval book. While palaeography is concerned

with ancient and medieval book scripts, art history focuses on artwork and ornament, and both disciplines make use of the results of a third, codicology, which investigates the material aspects of the medieval book: parchment, paper, quires, pricking, ruling, sewing, binding, and so on. Neither discipline can afford to ignore research carried out in other fields: history, philology, theology, etc. Still, there are many factors which cannot be neatly assigned to a single field of expertise; for instance, display scripts, par-

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agraph initials, or sentence initials straddle two disciplines, and, as a result, have often been ignored by both groups. Sadly, true long-term collaborations between countries and disciplines are more the exception than the rule, a reality which also explains why the important question of terminology and its adequate translation is frequently neglected. In the following piece, we shall introduce the relevant work tools and explore in depth some of the problems one often encounters. A summarized outlook concludes our essay.

2. Lexicographical Work Tools: State of Research

One of the earliest work tools in the field of manuscript terminology was published in 1965 by the art historian Lucia N. Valentine.³ Despite its title, the work is neither restricted to addressing ornament nor to providing an alphabetical glossary, but rather is organized as a series of chapters. Another list compiled by a manuscript scholar and art historian, Michelle P. Brown's well-known book of 1994 (recently reprinted in an updated form), is organized alphabetically, with a digitized version available on the website of the British Library.⁴ Both the book and the electronic version are amply illustrated by photographs culled mainly from that collection.

The next two works are either unpublished or incomplete. Patricia Stirnemann and Marie-Thérèse Gousset compiled a word list⁵ for the benefit of a London conference in 2002, based on a list assembled by François Avril in the late 1970s.⁶ Unfortunately, a roughly 50-page publication by the late J. P. Gumbert,⁷ *Words for Codices*, is incomplete, although two chapters of an in-progress wordlist, "Scribes and their tools" and "From sheet to page", were published online in 2015. Among the cited English-language examples, this is the only one that was not written by an art historian.

The situation in English is far from ideal. For the French community, the lack of a technical dictionary has been debated since 1953, when the project for a multilingual glossary was conceived by Charles Samaran, the doyen of Latin palaeographers. The *Comité de paléographie latine* coordinated the programme, which was originally envisaged as a uniform nomenclature for the description of the book and medieval Latin scripts. However, the palaeographic element met with insurmountable difficulties due to the highly varied, if not to say fantastical terms in use and the prevalent views of the various "schools". It took another thirty years or so for the *Vocabulaire codicologique* by Denis Muzerelle to be published in 1985,⁸ a book rooted in a context in which the scientific study of the codex as a material artefact was still in its infancy. The *Vocabulaire* turned out to be a "linguistic mirror" to a nascent science which as yet lacked its own terminology as well as rigorous organization. Consequently, it was organized thematically and not in alphabetical order, with definitions of a miscellaneous nature and encyclopaedic scope. In the absence of more specific tools, it was in fact used for many years both as a dictionary and as a handbook of codicology.

The basic features of the *Vocabulaire*, as well as its original spirit, were faithfully reproduced in the newer terminological collections in Italian, Spanish and Romanian. Some ten years after the publication of the French model, Marilena Maniaci undertook the writing of an Italian *Terminologia del libro manoscritto*, first published in 1996,⁹ which, despite inevitable aging, continues to surpass expectations in terms of its success,¹⁰ if we are to judge by the number of downloads of the version which is freely available online. The Italian text retains the organization of the French original, but includes numerous updates and important amplification, with respect to both the bibliography as well as the selection and organization of terms¹¹.

³ Lucia N. Valentine, *Ornament in Medieval Manuscripts. A Glossary* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000).

⁴ Michelle P. Brown, *Understanding Medieval Manuscripts. A Guide to Technical Terms* (London – Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1994; 2nd revised and expanded edition, 2018).

⁵ Patricia Stirnemann and Marie-Thérèse Gousset, *Recherche sur le vocabulaire technique employé par les enlumineurs médiévaux. Sources textuelles – observations archéologiques*, Etude présentée au colloque "Vocabulaire du livre et de l'écriture au moyen âge, organisé par le CIVICIMA, le Comité Du Cange et l'I.R.H.T., les 24.–26. septembre 1987". Joanna Frońska (IRHT), to whom we owe our knowledge of this list, is considering the publication of a work, cf. Joanna Frońska, "Between Medieval and Modern use of Terms. Patricia Stirnemann's Vocabulary and the Technical Terminology Relating to Illuminated Manuscripts in France", in: Ana Gómez Rabal, Jacqueline Hamesse and Marta Pavón Ramírez (eds.), *Le langage de l'art, du Moyen Age à nos jours: évolution de la terminologie spécifique des manuscrits et des textes / El lenguaje del arte, desde la edad media hasta nuestros días: Evolución de la terminología específica de manuscritos y textos* (Basel: FIDEM, 2019), 159–182.

⁶ The list was a guideline for the manuscript catalogues of the Bibliothèque nationale published since 1980: François Avril and Yolanta Załuska, *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine italienne, 1. VI^e–XII^e siècle* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1980); François Avril, J. P. Aniel, Mireille Menétré, Alix Saulnier and Yolanta Załuska, *Manuscrits enluminés de la péninsule ibérique* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1982); François Avril, Marie-Thérèse Gousset and Claudia Rabel, *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine italienne, 2. XIII^e siècle* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1984); François Avril and Claudia Rabel, *Manuscrits d'origine germanique, 1. X^e–XIV^e siècle*, avec la collaboration d'I. Delaunay (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1995); François Avril and Patricia Danz Stirnemann, *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine insulaire, VII^e–X^e siècles* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1987).

⁷ Johann Peter Gumbert, *Words for Codices*, last state May 2010 (available online: <http://www.cei.lmu.de/extern/VocCod/WOR10-1.pdf>).

⁸ Denis Muzerelle, *Vocabulaire codicologique. Répertoire méthodique des termes français relatifs aux manuscrits* (Paris: CEMI, 1985).

⁹ Marilena Maniaci, *Terminologia del libro manoscritto* (Milano – Roma: Editrice Bibliografica, 1996; 2nd ed. 1998) (https://www.academia.edu/2583583/M_Maniaci_Terminologia_del_libro_manoscritto).

¹⁰ For helpful reviews see Johann Peter Gumbert, "Words, Words, Words in Codicology", *Quaerendo* 30 (2000), 312–317; Paul Canart, "Notes de terminologie codicologique", *Quaerendo* 33, 1–2 (2003), 77–82.

¹¹ Marilena Maniaci, *Terminologia...*; Marilena Maniaci, "Verso una nuova riflessione sul lessico codicologico: tipologia e architettura delle

The Italian *Terminologia* was the direct point of departure for the Castilian version,¹² published shortly after, and the Romanian version, recently appeared as 2013,¹³ while the Catalan version of 2002,¹⁴ which is rather questionable in various respects (such as the selection and ordering of terms or wording of definitions), has not enjoyed the patronage of the *Comité International de Paléographie Latine*.

The range of available dictionaries and other terminological tools remains rather unsatisfactory in German and other European languages, including English. There are, however, exceptions in the form of a number of contributions focusing on aspects such as book-binding and decoration. There is also a mass of largely unreliable glossaries that often consist of no more than simple lists of terms¹⁵. For the various manuscript cultures that developed around the Mediterranean basin, the outlook is even more discouraging (with the partial exception of the Arab tradition).¹⁶ In the meantime, existing terminologies display inevitable signs of age: new flaws and errors have joined earlier shortcomings affecting the choice and organization of terms and the wording of definitions.

For German art history, Christine Jakobi-Mirwald's terminology book has been available since 1991.¹⁷ Its starting point was a sixteen-page word list¹⁸ intended for use in manuscript cataloguing; the list was compiled by Herbert Köllner in 1963.¹⁹ The *Terminologie* is organized by subject, in the same way as

Muzerelle's *Vocabulaire*. It encompasses general and detailed art historical terms and a summary of palaeographical, codicological and technological basics. The volume's organization as well as its use of line drawings were inspired by Lucia Valentine's book; corrections and additions were made in subsequent editions – the current version (2015) is the fourth. The most significant addition was a four-language glossary (German, English, French, and Italian) of some of the more important terms, which from the outset was expected to contain lacunae.²⁰ The fact that different languages do not provide the same sets of terms has repeatedly been stated.²¹ In first place, there is to consider the different sizes of vocabularies; in second, the difference between the objects they describe – by analogy, compare an austere Dutch church interior to a Southern German Rococo church. Finally, scientific and research approaches differ between countries and disciplines. The emphasis placed on ornament in German art history is countered by a startling lack of codicological terms. For this reason, the book was deemed untranslatable, and early requests to do so came to nothing. It was a different matter when a Swedish colleague, Patrik Åström, applied to make a translation: Swedish researchers usually write in German or English; therefore, Swedish terminology did not have to be made congruent, but instead could be newly coined, and once funding was secured, the end result was a richly illustrated volume.²²

definizioni”, *Gazette du livre médiéval*, 51 (2007): 1–15; Marilena Maniaci, “Terminologia, manualistica, bibliografia: nuove possibilità di interazione fra risorse nello spazio della rete”, in: Daniele Bianconi and Lucio Del Corso (eds.), *Oltre la scrittura. Variazioni sul tema per Guglielmo Cavallo* (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, néo-helléniques et sud-est européennes – École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), 167–214; Marilena Maniaci, “*Manuscript Terminology: a Plurilingual Perspective*”, *Manuscript Cultures* 5 (2012–2013) [2014], 3–10.

¹² Pilar Ostos, María Luisa Pardo and Elena Rodríguez, *Vocabulario de codicología. Versión española revisada y aumentada del Vocabulaire codicologique de D. Muzerelle* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 1997).

¹³ Adrian Papahagi, Adrian, în colaborare cu Cristina Papahagi, Adinel Ciprian Dinca, și Andreea Mârza, *Vocabularul cartii manuscrise pe baza lucrărilor Vocabulaire codicologique de Denis Muzerelle și Terminologia del libro manoscritto de Marilena Maniaci* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2013).

¹⁴ M. Josepa Arnall i Juan, *El llibre manuscrit* (Barcelona: Servei de Llengua Catalana – Edicions Universitat de Barcelona – Eumo Editorial, 2002).

¹⁵ See the titles quoted in Marilena Maniaci, *Manuscript Terminology...*, 3 n. 3.

¹⁶ Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition. A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2001); Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition. A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography. Supplement* (Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2008); Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts. A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2009). According to Hossein Marashi, a Persian version seems to be in preparation.

¹⁷ Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, *Buchmalerei. Ihre Terminologie in der Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: Reimer, 1991; 2. überarb. u. erw. Aufl. 1997); Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, *Buchmalerei. Terminologie in der Kunstgeschichte*, 3. überarb. u. erw. Aufl. (Berlin: Reimer, 2008; 4. erw. Aufl. 2015).

¹⁸ Herbert Köllner, “Zur kunstgeschichtlichen Terminologie in Handschriftenkatalogen”, *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie*, Sonderheft: Clemens Kötterwiesch (ed.), *Zur Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher und neuerer Handschriften* (Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 1963), 138–154.

¹⁹ Twenty years later, the Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft issued a slim volume with succinct prescriptions for the manuscript cataloguing programme funded by this society: DFG Unterausschuss für Hss.-Katalogisierung, *Richtlinien Handschriftenkatalogisierung*, 5. Aufl. (Bonn - Bad Godesberg: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1992).

²⁰ A corrected and extended version of the glossary is available at <https://jakobi-mirwald.de/glossar.html>, with sections in Swedish (by Patrik Åström), Spanish (by Marta Pavón Ramírez), and Polish (by Joanna Frońska).

²¹ Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “Lost in Translation. Manuscript Terminology between languages”, *Gazette du livre médiéval* 55, 2009, 1–8 (<http://www.palaeographia.org/glm/glm.htm?art=jakobi>); Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “Beschreiben oder vorschreiben? Terminologie zwischen Bestandsaufnahme und Normierung”, in: *Internationale Tagung der Handschriftenbearbeiter, 19.–21. September 2011, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Bibliotheca Augusta*: https://jakobi-mirwald.de/onewebmedia/2011_Beschreiben%20oder%20Vorschreiben_Christine%20Jakobi-Mirwald.pdf; Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “Initials and Other Elements of Minor Decoration”, in: Martin Bertram and Silvia Di Paolo (eds.), *Indici compilati da Marta Pavón Ramírez Decretales Pictae. Le miniature nei manoscritti delle Decretali di Gregorio IX (Liber Extra)*. Atti del colloquio internazionale tenuto all'Istituto Storico Germanico, Roma 3–4 marzo 2010, a cura di, Università degli Studi Roma Tre (Roma: ArcAdia, 2012) pubblicazione elettronica in formato pdf (<https://jakobi-mirwald.de/onewebmedia/Rom%202012%20Minor%20Decorazione%20Elements.pdf>); Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “Flourish and Blotts, or How we Name Salient Ornament Features in Manuscripts”, in: Ana Gómez Rabal, Jacqueline Hamesse and Marta Pavón Ramírez (eds.), *Le langage de l'art, du Moyen Âge à nos jours: évolution de la terminologie spécifique des manuscrits et des textes / El lenguaje del arte, desde la edad media hasta nuestros días: Evolución de la terminología específica de manuscritos y textos* (Basel: FIDEM, 2019), 183–205 (https://jakobi-mirwald.de/onewebmedia/TEMA_94_ElLenguajeDelArte_separata_ChJakobi-Mirwald.pdf).

²² Jakobi-Mirwald, Christine, *Medeltida bokmåleri. Illustrerat konsthistoriskt lexikon, till svenska av Patrik Åström* (Stockholm: Signum, 2012) – very unjustly, the translator's name does not appear on the cover. The book carries additional illustrations of outstanding manuscripts from Swedish collections.

Contrasting with the lively but varied landscape of codicological terminology, palaeographical vocabulary is still a taboo subject, with the sole exception of an interesting, albeit rudimentary attempt to collect and define the terms employed for the description of medieval Latin script in German and a number of Central and East-Central European languages (Czech, Slovenian, Polish, Hungarian, Lithuanian, and Russian)²³, which is organized in the form of a simple list of words accompanied by illustrations. Not by chance, “the participating researchers decided to shift their attention and focus solely on the terminology itself (names of characters, names of the auxiliary/witness marks, script from the point of morphology), excluding nomenclature (the names of the particular styles and types of script)”.

3. Ambiguities, Omissions, and other Problems

This summary overview glosses over the fact that in each of the aforementioned collections of technical vocabulary, there are numerous examples of terms that are either

- inadequate or ambiguous (as demonstrated in the opening discussion, a woefully frequent occurrence) or
- lacking a translation, or
- lacking a clear and satisfactory definition,²⁴ or even
- totally missing.

Since we cannot even begin to attempt a thoroughgoing overview, we shall each be presenting a single example which is illustrative of the kind of terminological conundra often encountered in our respective fields and languages.

One of the most widespread ornamental devices found in any manuscript from the 12th century on-

wards is pen-drawn, initial-related, decoration, mostly in blue and red. This is a very reliable indicator of date and origin, second only to the script itself. Yet, practically no major scientific language has come up with a satisfactory term.²⁵ In the Italian *lettera / iniziale filigranata*, the past participle adjective, derived from a noun, means “furnished with filigrans”, but the noun itself cannot be used, since in manuscript terminology, *filigrana* means the watermark left in a sheet of paper during the manufacturing process. Adjective and noun are loans from metallurgy, its components deriving from Latin “fine thread” and “grain”. Remarkably, Italian falls back on a rather distantly related craft for the denomination of not one, but two key manuscript features. The case is similar for the French *lettre à filigranes*.²⁶ In English, there are different words for the two distinct features: *watermark* for the integral motif seen in transparency, and *pen-flourishing* or *penwork*, for the graphic ornament. Both words are rather nondescript nouns that refer to the production process. By comparison, the German term, *Fleuronné*, seems ideal: a noun, albeit imported from French (“decorated with flowers”), not borrowed from unrelated crafts, and not likely to be confused with *Wasserzeichen* (cf. *watermark*), and allied to the contemporary verb *florieren*, used to refer to the execution of the ornament.²⁷ The problem is that the word is a classic “false friend”, which in French doesn’t have the same meaning, *fleuronné* existing merely as the past participle of the verb *fleuronner* (to bloom).²⁸ Hence, a French art historian would not readily understand the term “Fleuronné”.²⁹

This ornament with its divergent denominations represents one of the more telling cases of essentially random word genesis. Many descriptions can be traced back to the efforts of early manuscript catalogue authors³⁰ who trawled through vast corpuses and often had to resort to ad hoc neologisms, using associations, allusions, and loans from other crafts

²³ Juraj Šedivý and Hana Pátková, *Vocabularium parvum scripturae latinae* (Bratislava – Praha: Latin Palaeography Network, 2008 (https://www.academia.edu/3281361/Vocabularium_parvum_scripturae_Latinae_ediderunt_Juraj_%C5%A0ediv%C3%BD_et_Hana_P%C3%A1tkov%C3%A1_Bratislava_Praha_2008); following the quotation from p. 14.

²⁴ A telling example is found in the word ‘codex’, which, after years of trial and reconsideration, Patrick Andrist, Paul Canart and Marilena Maniaci have defined essentially as: “un livre constitué d’une série de folios” (Patrick Andrist, Paul Canart and Marilena Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex: essai de codicologie structural* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 47 (45–48, discussion); the same definition, with a number of additional considerations, is adopted in the newly updated and enlarged English version of the book, whose publication is expected in 2021.

²⁵ The following is also expanded on in Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “Flourish and Blotts...” (cf. n. 19).

²⁶ Gumbert’s attempt to introduce the word *floritura* in lieu of the term *en filigrane* was never pursued, cf. Johann Peter Gumbert, “Et si on dessinait des fioritures?”, *Gazette du livre médiéval* 2 (1983), 9–12. The attempt was sound, since it derives from the medieval word *florare* and its vernacular derivations for the execution of the ornament, cf. Wilhelm Wattenbach, *Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*, Dritte vermehrte Auflage (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1896), 356, 366, 372; cf. Patricia Stirnemann and Marie Thérèse Gousset, *Recherche sur le vocabulaire...* (cf. n. 3).

²⁷ Anna Bartl, Christoph Kreckel, Manfred Lautenschlager and Doris Oltrogge, *Der “Liber illuministarum” aus Kloster Tegernsee. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar der kunsttechnologischen Rezepte* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2005, 614).

²⁸ Interestingly, two major French dictionaries record the existence of the combination *lettre fleuronné*, but the term has dropped out of common usage cf. *fleuronné*, in: *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française*, 9^e ed. (<http://atilf.atilf.fr/academie9.htm>): “(XVII^e s.) Participe passé de l’ancien verbe *fleuronner*: 1. Qui est orné de fleurs, de fleurons. *Lettres fleuronnées*”; TLFi (Trésor de la langue Française informatisé, <http://atilf.atilf.fr/>): *Part. passé de fleuronner**.

²⁹ Another problem concerns orthography, since the aforementioned *Reallexikon* article has decided to eliminate the second e at the end, for the feminine ending derives from the extinct *lettre fleuronnée* and has no basis in German. But German-speaking art history circles are used to the spelling with two ees and are unwilling to change. Language use is not always logical, but it can be tenacious, and changes or corrections of a terminology seem nigh on impossible to effect.

³⁰ An interesting example is the polymath and prolific, if somewhat sloppy, M. R. James, cf. Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “To find out all that I could about various matters and to make friends – Der Wissenschaftler und Geister-Erzähler M. R. James”, in: Johanna Aufreiter, Gunter Reisinger,

and languages, etc. Concocted word usages were either adopted or rejected, and all attempts at systemizing and correcting them, none of which significantly predate the 1980s, met with little or no success.

The limitations of existing terminologies in the languages concerned are at their most conspicuous where they lack – even, or in particular, with respect to common and seemingly simple concepts. There are well-known and easily defined situations for which no term has yet been coined (such as the English *opening* or the Italian *apertura*, to describe the appearance of two pages of an opened book, which lacks a corresponding term in German), as well as features which may be crucial for the history of the book, but have not yet been afforded in-depth consideration. As strange as it may sound, even today there are instances of uncharted territories, such as the hitherto almost entirely overlooked, but recently researched parchment stitchings in medieval manuscripts, some being highly complex, for which the most basic terms are being introduced at present.³¹

The introduction of a specific set of terms must be preceded by a definition of single concepts and functions, which in turn require the breaking down of a more comprehensive phenomenon into its constituent parts. An example explored (in depth) elsewhere by Marilena Maniaci is the universal concept and terminology concerning the quire (Italian *fascicolo*), which is not an optional feature but rather one of the fundamental constituent units of the handwritten book.

In the *Terminologia del libro manoscritto*, the *fascicolo* (quire) is identified as: “a series of bifolia nested one into the other and and joined – or ready to be joined – from the same passage of the sewing thread”, a definition which was later simplified to “a series of bifolia superimposed and folded along a symmetry axis”.³² In both cases, bifolium (*bifoglio*) receives its own definition, a subject to which we shall return. In the first place, the definition of *fascicolo* in this wording clearly refers to the production process (i.e. placing one leaf on top of another and folding). But can we really refer to the resulting unit as a quire – *fascicolo* – from this moment onwards? Can a stack of loose bifolia already form a quire? If not, what

should we call a stack of bifolia, put together temporarily or for good, but as yet not bearing a script? One could be forgiven for thinking that a virgin quire, with its leaves either materially or intentionally fixed in a definite order, was already virtually a *fascicolo*. This is implied by the new definition proposed in 2013, in *La syntaxe du codex*: “un ensemble de bifolios et/ou de folios emboîtés les uns dans les autres”³³, which in the new version of the same book becomes “in a codex, a set of bifolios or of folios nested inside each other”. This definition makes it possible to include in the category of quires sets of folios and bifolios which might at first seem to fall outside it.

But even this updated formulation leaves open the role played by the text, for naturally, a quire attains its defining appearance and basic properties – numbers of double leaves (*bifogli*, see below) of which it is composed, Italian *cardinale* – only when the recto of the central one is written on.

If we consider the quire more closely, we will have to define its constituent elements, starting with the *bifoglio* (bifolium/bifolio), which in the *Terminologia* is described as follows: “Unità costitutiva del fascicolo, rappresentata da un pezzo rettangolare di pergamena, carta... piegato a metà per formare due carte”, subsequently simplified to “Quadrilatero di supporto piegato in due metà per formare due *fogli* [and not more *due carte*!]”³⁴ predisposti per accogliere un contenuto”³⁵. Today, both definitions seem wanting, since they do not distinguish between *bifogli naturali* (“natural” bifolia), created by folding a single rectangle along the shorter of the two middle axes, and *bifogli artificiali* (“artificial” bifolia), obtained by pairing two different surfaces by gluing, sewing or simply juxtaposing them); a *bifoglio artificiale*, however, is not necessary “un quadrilatero di supporto piegato in due metà”, but can also result from the coupling of two originally distinct rectangles. These considerations gave rise to the 2013 proposition, where *bifolium* is defined as “un couple de folios symétriques par rapport à un axe de pliage”³⁶. Independently, Peter Gumbert defined the ‘leaf / folium’ as “each of the rectangular pieces of writing material that, attached to the spine but otherwise mobile, constitute (or constituted) a quire or

Elisabeth Sobieczky and Claudia Steinhardt-Hirsch (eds.), *Kunst Kritik Geschichte. Festschrift für Johann Konrad Eberlein* (Berlin: Reimer, 2013), 423–442; cf. Lynda Dennison (ed.), *The Legacy of M. R. James. Papers from the 1995 Cambridge Symposium* (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2001).

³¹ Recent research has been instigated by the University of Graz, cf. Astrid Breith, Thomas Csanády, and Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “Pergamentnähte in mittelalterlichen Handschriften. Ein Tagungsbericht / Parchment Stitchings in Medieval Manuscripts. Résumé and Outlook”, in: Christina Köstner-Pemsel, Elisabeth Stadler and Markus Stumpf (eds.), *Künstliche Intelligenz in Bibliotheken*. 34. Österreichischer Bibliothekartag Graz 2019 (Graz: Unipress Verlag, 2020), 381–389, <https://doi.org/10.25364/guv.2020.voeb15.28>; Thomas Csanády, Astrid Breith and Christine Jakobi-Mirwald, “Mehr als Reparatur. Pergamentnähte in mittelalterlichen Handschriften Zentraleuropas”, in: Ephrem A. Ishac, Thomas Csanády and Theresa Zammit Lupi, *Tracing Written Heritage in a Digital Age / Auf den Spuren schriftlichen Kulturerbes im digitalen Zeitalter* (Wiesbaden 2020, forthcoming). A preliminary terminology of English and German terms is available at <https://jakobi-mirwald.de/onewebmedia/Terminologie%20PergamentnC3%A4hte%20CJM.pdf>

³² Marilena Maniaci, *Terminologia...*, 132: “serie di *bifogli* inseriti uno dentro l’altro ed uniti – o pronti per essere uniti – da uno stesso passaggio del filo di cucitura”, and Marilena Maniaci, “Terminologia, manualistica, bibliografia...”, 198: “serie di *bifogli* inseriti uno dentro l’altro ed uniti – o pronti per essere uniti – da uno stesso passaggio del filo di cucitura”.

³³ Patrick Andrist, Paul Canart and Marilena Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex...*, 50.

³⁴ The exclusively Italian-speaking differentiation between the words *carta* and *foglio* reveals different scientific schools. *Carta* should be avoided for two reasons: confusion with *carta* (= paper as writing support), as well as the lexical inconsistency of *carta/bifoglio* compared to the more logical sequence *foglio/bifoglio*.

³⁵ Marilena Maniaci, “Terminologia, manualistica, bibliografia...”, 199.

³⁶ Patrick Andrist, Paul Canart and Marilena Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex...*, 49.

a codex”.³⁷ This definition no longer depends on the definition of bifolium/bifolio, nor does it continue to focus on the quire; but the fact that the material is described as rectangular and that it is ‘attached’ does not seem indispensable, and furthermore, the existence of loose leaves included within a quire highlights the definition’s ambiguousness. In the upcoming new version of the *Syntax of the codex* the definition has been reworked again, and it now reads as follows: “in a codex, a level surface of writing material folded into two folios of equivalent size, or two surfaces imitating this arrangement.”

This new definition has the following features:

- it intentionally avoids implying that the piece of material has a more or less quadrangular shape or that it is homogeneous from a material point of view. The bifolio may also consist of several pieces of different dimensions and even of different materials;
- on the other hand, the surfaces resulting from the folding are ‘of equal dimensions’³⁸ and both must be able to accommodate content. A folio that has a stub of a centimetre or so extending from its edge, so that it can be sewn into a codex, is not a bifolio, despite the presence of a fold.

Moreover, the definition makes no reference to the notion of the quire, in order to avoid having to take into account complex quires in which not all bifolios are folded along the same axis.

The *bifoglio* being dealt with (at least, for now), adequate terms for the two sides of every bifolium (Italian *facce*) and its two halves (Italian *fogli*) are now called for, as well as the position and relation of the latter to its other half as well as to the entire quire. We will also need to establish adequately functional terms for the relation of each of the two sides of a leaf (Italian *pagine*) to the leaf itself. For instance, how do we distinguish the *recto* and *verso* pages which form a physical unity within one leaf from those which stand in succession, but belong to two successive leaves? And how do we express the difference between pages which form part of a natural bifolium from those in a comparable position forming part of an artificial bifolium? And we are still in need of many other expressions to describe the quire in terms of material (parchment or paper, or parchment plus paper in various permutations, and so on), of the

quantity of bifolia inserted into each other, of the regularity or irregularity of the structure, the descriptive modalities, and so forth.

We could continue down this path much further, and many analogous cases within codicological and palaeographical description could be cited.

4. Conclusion

These few examples should serve to amply illustrate the fact that scientists ought to make a considerable effort to establish a correct formulation and communication of the contents of their research, not only across linguistic borders, but sometimes even within a single language, or even within a field of research. Significantly, many problems occupy border zones between disciplines. There can be no doubt whatsoever that we are in need of adequate technical terminology

- to communicate with the greatest possible precision the body of technical knowledge relating to the manuscript book with a view to reducing ambiguity;
- to represent the current (advanced or lagging) state of knowledge in the field of book history;
- to respond to new demands in relation to *interoperability* in the digital world; and
- to produce new knowledge through detailed mapping of the various aspects of the study of book materials and techniques, with a focus on poorly defined issues and concepts and, if necessary, the coining of new terms to designate them, which at the same time have a coherent lexical basis.

In times of almost frenzied digitizing and database creation, Internet-powered open access and open science, we can no longer afford to stay within our habitual comfort zones; rather, we are compelled to cooperate with our fellow scholars. Better a flawed attempt than none at all. Or to quote some timeless lines drawn from Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*,³⁹ which, in an altogether different context, demonstrate the remarkable applicability that allegory can offer:

“For whatsoever from one place doth fall
Is with the tide unto an other brought:
For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought.”

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³⁷ Johann Peter Gumbert, *Words...*, no. 311.2.

³⁸ In practice, the dimensions of a bifolio’s two parts are generally adapted to the size of the volume.

³⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book V, Canto II 349–51.

Spenser, Edmund, *The Faerie Queene*, Book V, Canto II 349–51.

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