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Concerning the (Re)discovery of French Scriptoria

The Contribution of the 'Catalogue of Dated Manuscripts'

Abstract: By paying special attention to the manuscripts' places of origin, the French *Catalogues of Dated Manuscripts* have engendered substantial changes in what was previously known about the 'palaeographic geography' of France, as surveyed in Émile Lesne's authoritative work (published in 1938). These advances are exemplified with the help of several maps. Historical reasons are posited for the massive imbalance between Northern and Southern France. The conclusion is drawn that there were active scriptoria not only in the principal monastic centres, but in practically all the minor institutions as well.

The honour that falls to me to open the proceedings of a meeting dedicated to French scriptoria carries with it a great scientific responsibility, given that the said theme occupies a central position in the world of palaeographers and codicologists. Instead of embarking on a theoretical preamble, which would only constitute a needless reiteration of the conference's call for papers (and would therefore not be of much benefit to anyone), I would prefer to introduce the topic in relation to an experience that dealt me a stinging blow in my 'palaeographic infancy', and which is the reason why I have been intensely preoccupied by the subject of the scriptorium for many years since. It seems to me that the anecdote in question rather effectively illustrates the nub of the problem.

The said episode took place at the beginning of the 1970s, when I had been freshly recruited as a collaborator on the *Catalogue des manuscrits datés*. While examining the collection of the *Nouvelles acquisitions latines* at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), I happened upon a small manuscript of rather poor

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quality containing a collation of different texts. An initial perusal of its content led me to conclude that the book could only have been copied in a certain second rank monastery located in Normandy, which at the time of the work's transcription was perhaps only a priory.[1] Being quite proud of my discovery, I submitted the description I had drafted to my superiors and was rather surprised to see it rejected. This was not because my reasoning was judged to be unsound; the chief objection was that I could not demonstrate that the establishment concerned was equipped with a scriptorium. Well, I was convinced that proof of the historical existence of a scriptorium at that institution was in my hands!

So, what exactly was—or is—a scriptorium? How can one determine the historical existence of scriptoria? Is it possible to compile a list of them, and to evaluate them?

1 French scriptoria according to Émile Lesne (1938)

At the time that the 'Comité de Paléographie' launched its programme, the concept of a scriptorium was still rather fresh and somewhat vague. It was only after the Second World War that the concept and the word started to be substituted with expressions such as 'école calligraphique' (employed by Léopold Delisle),[2] or 'Schreibschule' (used up until quite recently by Bernhard Bischoff),[3] terms which testify to an approach that tends towards the qualitative dimension, not to say the essentially artistic aspect.

The concept that was commonly agreed on in France, and which I adopted when I was a student at the École Nationale des Chartes, stems directly from Émile Lesne's *magnum opus*, published in 1938.[4] The work constitutes volume IV of the monumental work *Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique en France*, and bears the title *Les livres: scriptoria et bibliothèques*. It should be noted that the author was the first in France to include the word scriptorium in the frontispiece of his work.

1 If memory serves, this may have been the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Victor-en-Caux (in the diocese of Bayeux), the presumed origin concerning just one of the elements of a random miscellany. Unfortunately, the archival material relating to the associated cataloguing campaign was not retained, and the summary catalogue that only describes the fund in a very superficial way did not enable me to track down the manuscript concerned.

2 For example, Delisle 1875, if we confine ourselves to the titles of the publications.

3 On the same basis, we must above all cite Bischoff 1940. Volume II, published at a much later date (Bischoff 1980) obviously retains the same title.

4 Lesne 1938: the work constitutes volume IV of the monumental work *Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique en France*.

In doing so, he had only been pipped to the post his fellow scholar, Albert Bruckner,[5] by three years.

A fellow scholar, rather than a colleague *per se*, since Émile Lesne cannot rightly be described as a palaeographer:[6] as the title of his work rather clearly conveys, just as well his bibliography, he was fundamentally a historian of the ecclesiastical institutions of the Late Middle Ages; but he was also a very learned multidisciplinary scholar, highly methodical in his approach and impeccable in his documentation.

By the same token, he was equally far from being limited to playing the role of a mere compiler; indeed, his introduction presents a robust critical analysis of the subject and the way in which it had been approached by his predecessors. For example, he reproaches Lowe for the laxity of his criteria for determining the origin of manuscripts, adjudging that the mere presence of a volume in an establishment's library from time immemorial does not provide a sufficiently solid argument. Similarly, he puts forward a rather novel idea when he suggests that the imperatives of ecclesiastical life would have called for the operation of scriptoria in many places about which we know little or nothing—thereby opposing a widely held view in the preceding century, according to which the production of manuscript books was concentrated in the elite circle of religious institutions. He would go on to put this idea into practice elsewhere in his work by meticulously citing a large number of institutions—episcopal, in particular—which lead one to believe that they played a certain role in religious, political, administrative or intellectual matters, although no testimonial evidence of these has survived.

However, Lesne had no choice but to depend entirely on previous works. Now, the interests of 19th-century authors and those of the early 20th century were for the most part centred on intellectual history, the history of art, and the history of libraries—or at least, the development and spread of a script style, as it were. Back then we were still a long way from establishing a specific field of study that addresses the history of the production and distribution of books, in the sense that we understand it today.[7] It therefore follows that there frequently exists a significant difference (positive or negative) between the importance assigned in his work to each centre

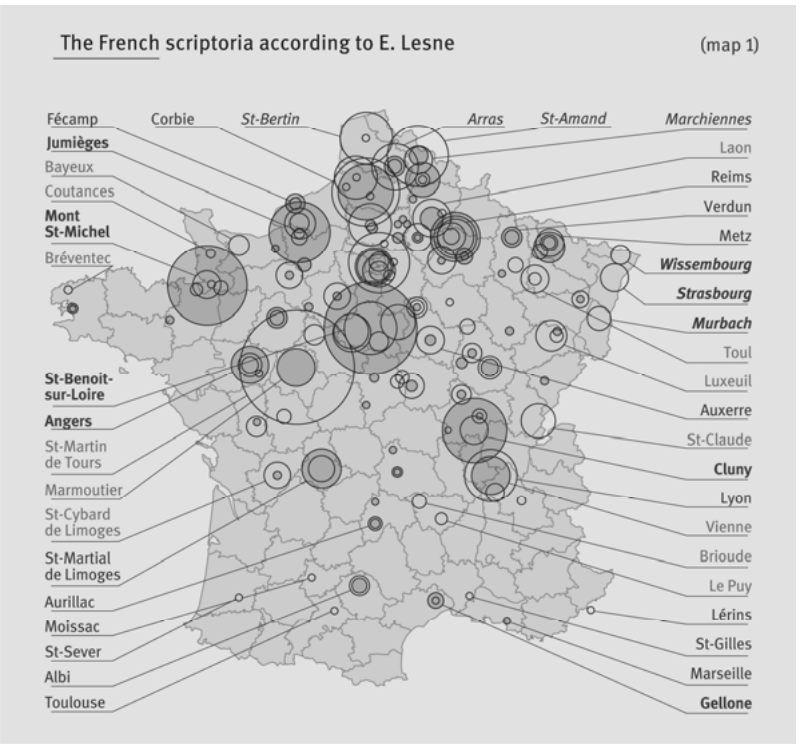
5 Bruckner 1935–1974.

6 Émile Lesne, Chancellor of the Catholic Faculty of Lille, produced a thesis titled *La hiérarchie épiscopale, provinces, métropolitains, primats, en Gaule et Germanie, depuis la réforme de saint Boniface jusqu'à la morte d'Hincmar, 742–882* (Lesne 1905).

7 The emergence of codicology, especially with respect to the quantitative approach, needless to say has played a major role in this transformation. The overall concept of evolution in production was introduced by Bozzolo / Ornato 1980.

and the quantitative testimony that the number of manuscripts attributable to each of them provides, according to the *CMD*'s survey.

Map 1 sets out to present the 'codicological picture' of France which emerges from Lesne's work. The black circles are proportionate[8] to the number of lines dedicated to each centre by the author;[9] the grey shadow surrounding each circle represents the number of manuscripts which beyond doubt originated from the centre concerned.



Map 1: The French scriptoria according to É. Lesne

8 Nevertheless, a logarithmic adjustment had to be applied in order to obtain a satisfactory representation.

9 This, of course, is a very approximate evaluation method. But a close study of the footnotes in which the author lists the manuscripts—with numerous duplications and splits owing to the fact that he considered texts rather than volumes—proved to be out of proportion with the aims of the present research.

One is immediately struck by the conspicuous 'swelling' of certain centres.[10] This is clearly because the author did not confine himself to a quantitative level, nor to a strict palaeographical one, and also because his presentation frequently dwells on the cultural role played by each institution, its history, and the illustrious figures associated with it. But more than anything, his representation is to a great extent fed by attributions which had been made by his predecessors on a very shaky basis, or even on a purely hypothetical one. The most outrageous case of overestimation is that of Tours, to which Lesne dedicates no fewer than fifty pages. It is quite obvious that he was very well informed—and heavily influenced—by the magisterial work that Edward Kennard Rand had just published.[11] But the difference can also be explained in part by the huge losses that the collection held at the municipal library suffered at the beginning of the 19th century.[12] Similar losses, owing to various circumstances, are met with in many other instances, and it is precisely here that one comes up against a fundamental methodological aporia: it is impossible to reconstruct the activity of a scriptorium without ensuring that the volumes ascribed to it were actually produced there; and one can only do this if the volumes still exist.

Corbie—to which only twelve pages are dedicated—is treated in a more realistic way. That being said, one is immediately struck by the minimisation of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, which is afforded only half that number of pages. However, this represents a sort of optical illusion, since the bias is largely offset by the neighbouring centres, with which the abbey had close ties (chiefly Orléans, Ferrières and Micy).[13]

The other instances of obvious underestimation cannot be explained in the same way. This is true of Cluny and the other two great players in Norman production: Mont-Saint-Michel and Jumièges. There is only one possible explanation for this, namely the boom in production that took place at these centres in the 11th century. Now, even if this period is, in principle, covered by his study, Lesne remains above all a specialist of the Carolingian age and therefore tends to skim over the succeeding periods.

The considerable overestimate of the number of scriptoria in Alsace-Lorraine is only partly spurious. In fact, following the conquest of this region by Prussian

10 These tally, in the diagram, with the labels positioned on the shaded area. The negative labels (white on black) represent the opposite case (i.e. underestimation).

11 Rand 1929–1934.

12 See *CMD*-F, VII, XXIX–XXXII.

13 It proved impossible for me to label the latter two localities on the map, if a minimum of legibility was to be preserved.

forces (in 1870), a good number of manuscripts that were held there were transferred to Germany. This explains why one can no longer find any trace of them in the funds held by French libraries—which are the only ones considered in our comparison.[14] This is particularly true of the manuscripts originating from Weissenburg Abbey, the majority of which are kept in the Wolfenbüttel library. However, it certainly would not suffice to include these witnesses in the tally in order to wholly reduce the overestimate. This appears in large part to be due to the particular context of the period in which Lesne conducted his study—in fact, the scholar carried out his work in the days immediately following the end of the First World War, while the dogged diplomatic negotiations vis-à-vis war reparations and the return of looted treasures were in full swing. Here, one suspects the influence of a certain vengeful patriotism, characterised by the elation of the people of the provinces newly recovered from the former foe.

In any event, it was this map that was more or less embedded in the minds of palaeographers when the cataloguing of dated manuscripts got off the ground.

2 The exploration of funds through the *Catalogue of Dated Manuscripts* (*CMD*)

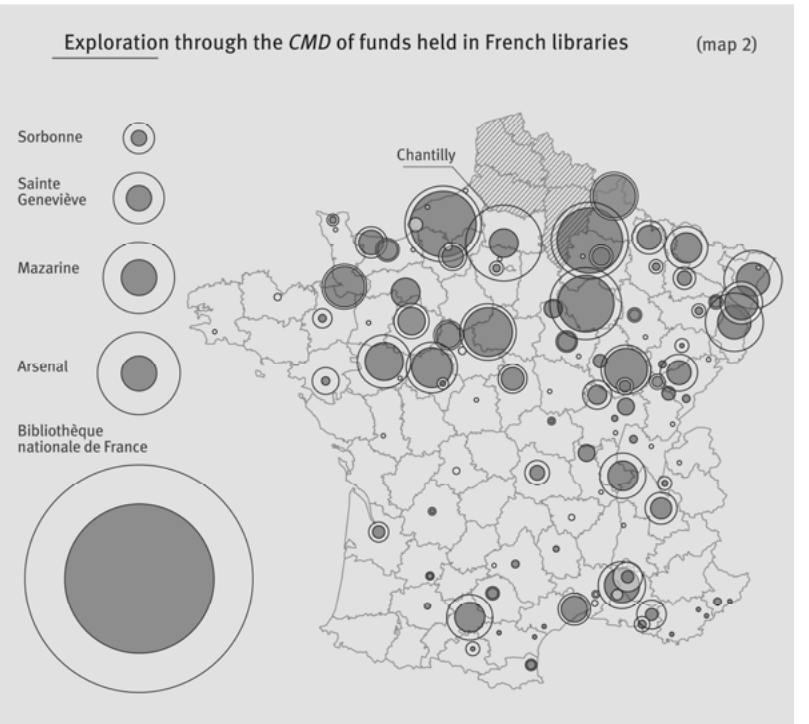
One of the concerns of the 'founding fathers' was to compare the palaeographers' reconstructions with the reality of the surviving witnesses, with the aim of systematically verifying, on the basis of concrete clues, the validity of attributions. For quite some time now it has been suspected that the natural tendency to pay attention only to the most precious works might have resulted in some very evident distortions.

The intention was also—indeed, perhaps primarily—to extend the reach of the investigation up until the end of the Middle Ages, so as to discover new horizons, which up until that point had been entirely overlooked. And it immediately became clear that the taking into account of the copious output of the monasteries in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries[15] would inevitably change the shape of the inquiry in many ways, in particular with respect to scriptoria.

14 This biased result is rather regrettable. Unfortunately, at the present time statistics on the manuscripts of French origin held in foreign collections remain a wish to be fulfilled.

15 This is not to speak of the Late Middle Ages, on which palaeographic works were still quite rare at the time.

In this connection, it should be emphasised that, among the various national series of catalogues of dated manuscripts, the French series is the one that accords the most attention to the origin of manuscripts—to the extent of having adopted a special disposition towards those whose origin alone is known. With respect to the official title of the series, we would necessarily have to speak of 'dated and localised manuscripts', rather than just 'dated manuscripts'.



Map 2: Exploration through the *CMD* of funds held in French libraries

The results of the survey carried out over a period spanning half a century on funds held in French libraries are presented in Map 2. Each of the funds examined is represented by two concentric circles:[16] the outer circle is proportionate to the number of manuscripts which are the subject of an entry in the catalogue, whilst

16 As is customary, it is the surface area of the circles that should be considered, rather than their diameter.

the inner circle (shaded in grey) is proportionate to the number of manuscripts whose origin could be established. Two important points merit our attention; on the one hand, the data represented in this way cover the entire duration of the Middle Ages: the vast bulk of the output produced after the 'golden age of the scriptoria'[17] is as a result very noticeable, which renders a direct comparison with the previous map a rather tricky proposition.[18] On the other hand, these statistics only cover the original series of the catalogue and therefore do not include the far north of France (the Picardy and Nord-Pas-de-Calais regions).[19] This caveat is relatively formal with respect to the phenomena that I intend to draw attention to, since we already know what is held in the libraries of these regions, namely particularly rich and homogenous funds that bear witness to the existence of very active scriptoria whose ample production is well preserved.

Overall, what emerges from this map is that the potential of designating an origin to a manuscript is very much lower than that of determining its date, but that this 'rule' is applied in a rather different way depending on the nature of the funds and the way in which they are composed. As regards provincial libraries, the proportion of 'localised' manuscripts among the manuscripts surveyed by the *CMD* amounts to 58% overall, rising to more than 80% in the case of particularly homogenous funds (Alençon: 94%; Charleville-Mézières: 86%; Avranches: 84%; Dijon: 83%). Conversely, some libraries clearly stand out from the ensemble, reflecting very low values (Nantes [Musée Dobrée]: 17%; Carpentras: 18%; Aix-en-Provence: 25%). Now, it turns out that the funds of the latter places mostly originate from collections assembled in the modern era. The same explanation applies when we consider the group of funds held in the Parisian libraries (excluding the BnF), which attain a value of 21%. Surprisingly, with a value of 48%, the Bibliothèque nationale de France represents an average situation.[20]

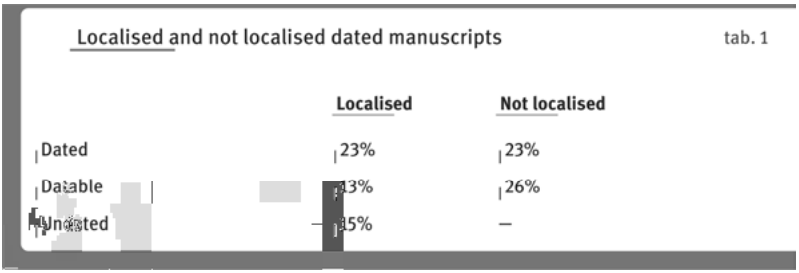
17 This can be fully appreciated by studying Chart 1 (below).

18 It should be added that here one is speaking of places of conservation, and not places of origin, as before.

19 The two volumes published in the new series (Cambrai and Laon) will in any event be taken into account in the graphs that follow.

20 Nevertheless, one can detect a considerable difference between 'old funds', represented by the old royal collections (36.8%), and 'new funds', composed in large part by items seized during the French Revolution (53.4%).

This reality can be neatly conveyed through the following synoptic table of values (Tab. 1).



Tab. 1: Localised and not localised dated manuscripts

In the ensemble of manuscripts identified by the *CMD*, the localised manuscripts only achieve a value of 51%, as opposed to 85% for the dated or datable ones.

The 15% of manuscripts which are only localised, without any indication of dating, demonstrate the clear benefit of including the origin of works among the catalogue's admissibility criteria.

Even so, we must reiterate the word of caution expressed earlier on: the figures presented here correspond to the entire period covered by the Middle Ages. If we confine ourselves to what might be termed 'the golden age of scriptoria', which is to say to the period that stretches from the 11th century to the 13th, a drastic change can be seen in the proportions: as Chart 1 clearly shows, the proportion of dated or datable manuscripts, but ones which are not localised, is considerably greater in later periods.[21] This paradigm change is quite abrupt and occurs very distinctly in the middle of the 13th century.

21 In the graph, the phenomenon is partly obscured by the logarithmic scale that the exponential growth of surveyed manuscripts made it necessary to adopt.

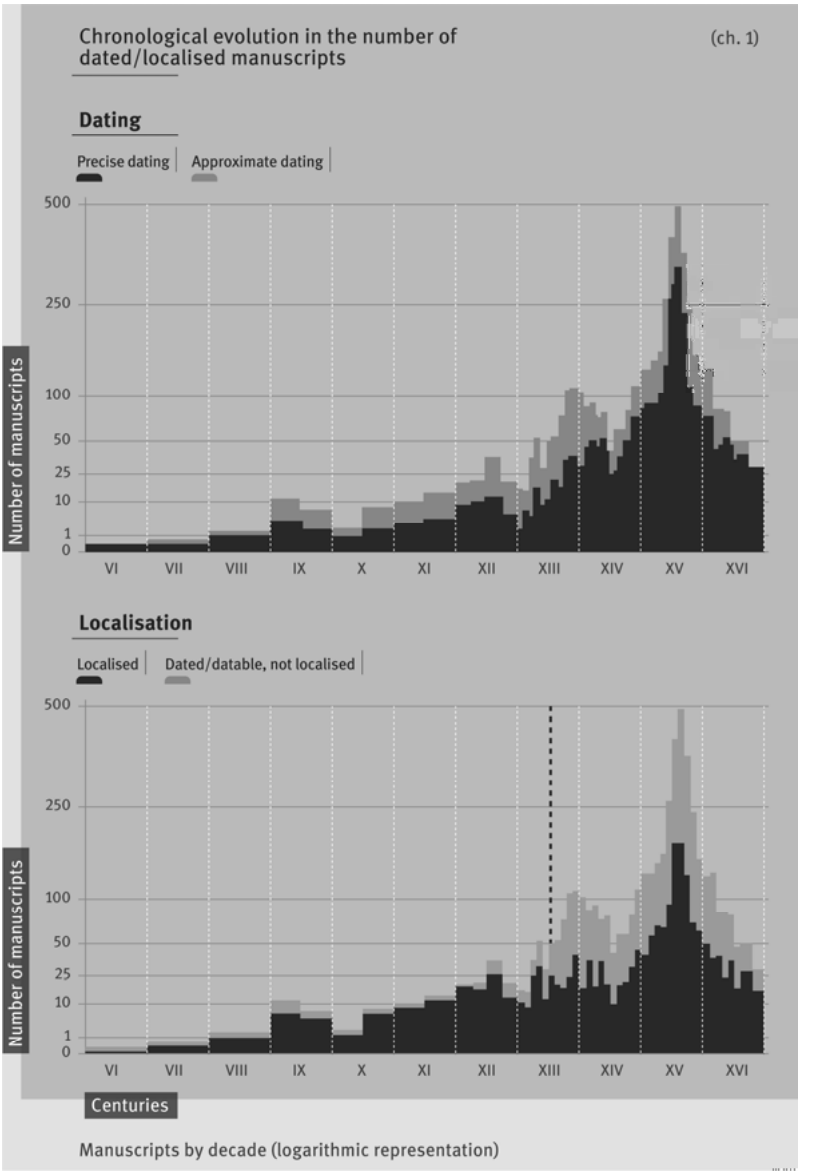


Chart 1: Chronological evolution in the number of dated/localised manuscripts

3 The French scriptoria according to the *CMD*

Map 3 plots the number of manuscripts that pre-date the middle of the 13th century deemed to be 'localised' by the *CMD*, correlated to their place of origin. One can take it that this map shows all the French scriptoria known today.[22] The increase in circles that did not appear on Map 1 is striking and provides a good indication of the gain made, but at the same time renders the overall ensemble rather difficult to decipher.[23] Unfortunately, this represents an insurmountable problem, given that in order to be workable and meaningful, this form of representation must be exhaustive, and we cannot content ourselves by merely indicating the 'most important' phenomena. The rough and ready results that we see here can therefore seem rather chaotic and difficult to interpret, above all to those who have a limited knowledge of France's geography.

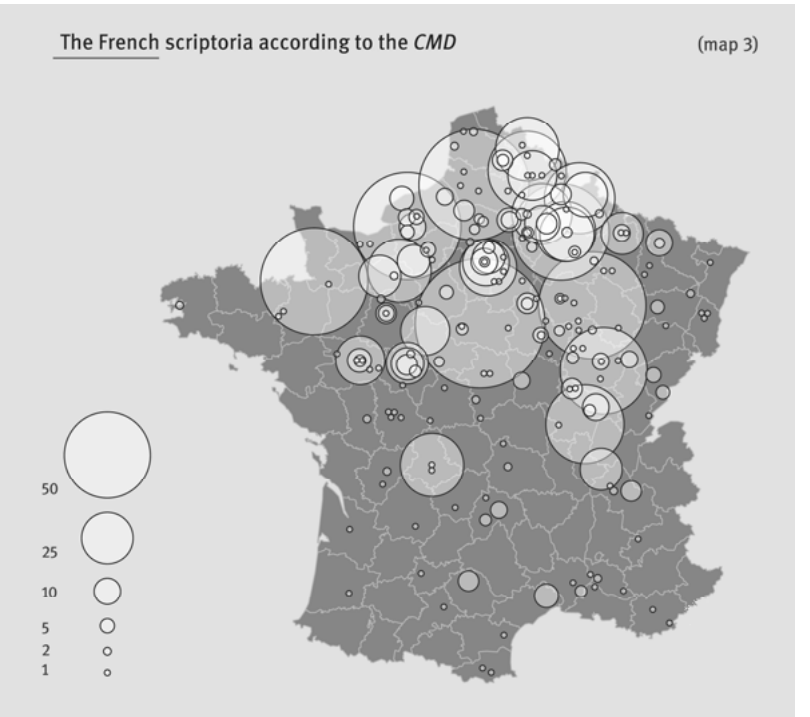
The first thing that leaps off the page is that the production of manuscripts—at least to the extent we are able to apprehend through the surviving funds—is very heavily concentrated in the north of the country, and in the north-east quadrant in particular. However, even if this portion of the territory is thoroughly and generously covered, it is in a way that is very different from the other regions. In the east-central area (corresponding to the Lower Champagne and Burgundy regions) and the north-west (that is to say Normandy), one finds oneself looking at an effectively rather limited number of production centres of outstanding calibre, in whose orbit 'flutter' a multitude of less important centres.

In the north-eastern region—corresponding very roughly to the ecclesiastic province of Reims in the Middle Ages[24]—we instead see a large number of circles of average diameter. The Parisian region follows more or less the same pattern.

22 Albeit with the proviso already stated above with respect to the north of the country.

23 It proved impossible to provide each circle with an identification label.

24 The Cambrai province only became detached from this area in 1559.



Map 3: The French scriptoria according to the *CMD*

Interpreting this situation is no easy task. It would seem that, through a sort of gravitational effect, the large clusters which represent the most important centres created a void around themselves, 'phagocytising', as it were, the productive potential of the neighbouring areas. With respect to Clairvaux and Cîteaux, easily found on the map, such a scenario would fit rather neatly with a widely held notion in relation to Cistercian manuscripts—namely that of production being heavily concentrated in the principal mother houses of the order. Now, the fact that one observes a similar distribution pattern in Normandy, where an affiliation network of the same kind did not develop, makes it necessary to pose questions about the soundness of the basis for such a vision. On the other hand, and most importantly, the campaigns carried out within the framework of *CMD* brought to light a certain number of cases which do not tally too well with this point of view: this is particularly true with respect to the abbeys of Vauclair and Signy—I will take a further look at the latter in due course—both located in the

north-eastern part of the map,[25] and which, despite their modest size, generated a substantial output. Therefore, it would appear to be necessary to undertake some new research in order to determine the extent to which this theory remains valid.

More than anything, though, we should remain conscious of the fact that what is illustrated here does not represent what was actually produced, but instead what has come down to us, or rather what, among surviving volumes, can be attributed with sufficient certitude. Nevertheless, for the period that particularly interests us here, the incidence of factors that determine the existence of date or origin indications do not appear to tally with loss factors. In any event, this is simply the price to pay for a long and rather tricky interpolation task that makes it possible—in the best of cases—to infer one from the other.[26] It therefore follows that the view we can obtain of the facts is largely speaking conditioned—if not to say entirely distorted—by the fates of the libraries of the institutions concerned. Unfortunately, this thoroughly distorted view is all that we have available to us today.

In this perspective, the case of the abbey of Mores, located not far from Clairvaux,[27] provides an excellent example. Founded by Saint Bernard in 1153, the abbey had a lively history throughout the Middle Ages.[28] When, in 1732, the

25 These are located, respectively, in the departments of Aisne and Ardennes.

26 The problem with respect to the representativeness of dated manuscripts has been the subject of discussion for a considerable time. See, in particular, the various interventions in *Les manuscrits datés: premier bilan et perspectives* / *Die datierten Handschriften: erste Bilanz und Perspektiven* 1985. In any event, this is essentially a question of the relationship (qualitative and quantitative) between dated manuscripts and any other manuscripts that have been considered up till now, rather than one of the relationship between the mass of material produced and what survives today. Without a doubt, this has less to do with a deficiency than with a methodological aporia, given that classical statistics do not offer the means of tackling the problem directly. In fact, the laws of probability are such that, regardless of the contents of an 'urn' (i.e. the total number of manuscripts produced) and the number of random drawings made from the said 'urn' (i.e. the surviving manuscripts), it is impossible to infer the number of manuscripts in the 'urn' based on the result of the drawings. In a sphere where matters are considerably less complex, the incunabulists ran up against the same 'wall of the unknown' when they tried to extrapolate the number of editions of which not one witness survives by starting out from the surviving copies held (see, for example, Neddermeyer 1977). It nevertheless remains true that a systematic study of cases where old collections have come down to us (in which, therefore, the contents of the 'urn' are known) would help to shed some light on this issue.

27 Municipality of Celles-sur-Ource, near Bar-sur-Seine, Aube (about 30 km from Clairvaux).

28 It was ruined for the first time in around 1216–1222, during the war of succession for the rule of Champagne (pitting Blanche de Navarre, regent in the name of her son Thibaut IV of Cham-

abbey ceded its library to Clairvaux, it contained just fourteen volumes dating from the 12th century. Half of these appear to have been copied at Clairvaux, and represent an initial gift from the mother abbey to its affiliate; the remainder are of unknown origin. Indeed, a hypothesis has been put forward which suggests that the Saint Bernard abbey never possessed its own scriptorium.[29] Nonetheless, the extensive chartulary it left[30] makes it clear that along with the various catastrophes it suffered, the institution enjoyed some periods of prosperity. It is astonishing, then, that during these periods of prosperity there is no sign of copying activity to be seen.

We can also revisit the case of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, which puzzled us on the previous map. The jealous care that the monks took of their library led them to cram their volumes, at the time they were copied, with conspicuous *ex libris,* often in the most unexpected places (margins, intercolumnar spaces, etc.).[31] Consequently, the collection of witnesses is particularly abundant.

4 The 'codicological desert' in France's Midi

By contrast, the southern part of the country[32] is marked by a singular paucity of manuscripts; indeed, in certain areas one can speak of a veritable 'codicological desert'. This dearth has been known of for a long time. But the opinion that prevailed at the time work was started on the catalogue was that numerous southern manuscripts were dispersed amongst various libraries (particularly those which hold the funds of the great collectors of the past) and were often not recognised. A thorough and painstaking search would (it was believed) rectify this situation and re-establish a degree of balance. Well, unfortunately that hope has been cruelly dashed, as southern manuscripts remain woefully rare.

pagne, against Érard of Brienne, husband of Philippa of Champagne), and a second time during the wars between Louis XI and Charles the Bold (1440–1447).

29 See *CMD*-F, V, XXXVIII.

30 Published by Lalore 1873.

31 See *CMD*-F, VII, XXXVII–XXXIX.

32 See, as an annex to Map 4, the confines assigned here to the southern and northern areas of France. These conform to the old ecclesiastical divisions, with the exception of the province of Bourges, whose metropolitan diocese has been incorporated into the northern area.

In the introduction to the volume that covers the whole of southern France,[33] the pillaging of abbeys that occurred during the religious wars is more than once cited to explain the disappearance of some funds presumed to be important. However, it would be a mistake to generalise and see in this phenomenon the sole cause of the overall shortfall,[34] because such abuse is far from being uniquely characteristic of this region and historical period. In the same era, the north-eastern provinces, from which many manuscripts have come down to us, were also brutally ravaged by the Huguenots. And that is not to speak of the military campaigns, which have been fought one after the other, practically without interruption, from the earliest times in our national history up until scarcely fifty years ago.

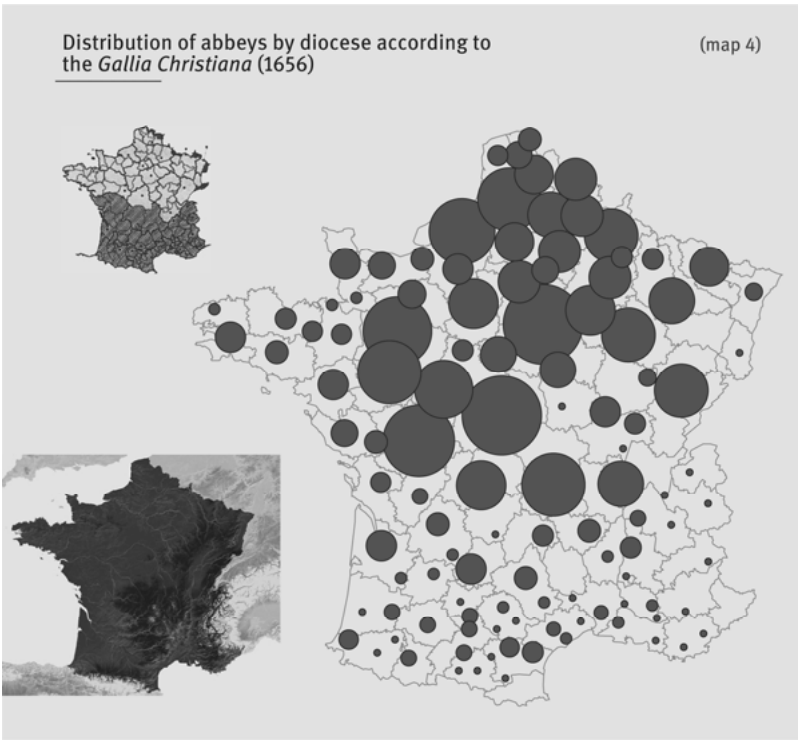
In order to try to better understand this state of affairs, the first thing to do consists in comparing what has come down to us with the geographical distribution of production centres—or at least of abbeys, to which they are assumed to correspond. However, this task is not as simple as one might imagine. In fact, even if many meticulous works have been dedicated to the history of monasticism, and despite the fact that abbeys' inventories have been the subject of monumental catalogues,[35] there scarcely exist any tools which make it possible to have at one's disposal a table showing their distribution. Irrespective of its imperfections, one can nevertheless utilise to this end the map titled *La France divisée en archeveschés, eveschés, abbaïes… pour servir au livre de Gallia christiana*, published around 1656 by the Sisters of Saint Martha.[36]

33 *CMD*-F, VI. The shortfall is such that Burgundy had to be attached to this group to compensate for the deficiency.

34 *CMD*-F, XXVI, onwards. One must bear in mind that the sources which report the pillages are generally works of propaganda and do not fail to exaggerate the enemy's atrocities. See, for an analogous case, the clarification required with respect to the sack of the library of the College of Navarre in 1418 (CMD-F2, t. I, XV, footnote 44).

35 In particular, concerning France, the massive work by Baunier / Besse 1905–1920.

36 This is the first edition, in four volumes, of the said repertoire. The work was revisited and expanded (starting in 1712) by Denis of Saint-Marthe (it is the 'new' edition that is commonly used today). Despite being of superior quality from a cartographic standpoint, the map published by Bernard-Jean-Hyacinthe-Jaillot in 1736 (*La France ecclésiastique divisée par archevêchez et évêchez, dans lesquels se trouvent toutes les abbayes d'hommes et de filles à la nomination du roy*), 'on which one can locate all the monasteries and convents warranted by the King', is not very helpful to our cause for reasons that can readily be deduced from its title.



Map 4: Distribution of abbeys by diocese according to the *Gallia Christiana* (1656)

Map 4 shows the number of abbeys identified in a census of each diocese in that primitive version of *Gallia christiana*. Its similarity to the previous maps immediately strikes the eye. But just as evident is the relationship of this distribution with the map of France's physical geography. It is clear that some geographical features explain, to a large extent, the difference seen in the codicological map: the most mountainous areas are concentrated in the southern part of the country, where the climatic conditions are often arid. Such conditions are not very favourable for the establishment of monastic settlements. To be sure, it is possible to mention a certain number of highly prestigious monastic centres located in these regions: we can start with Gellone, Aniane and Lérins, to cite only the most ancient among them. Even so, we are still a far cry from the level of proliferation of institutions that one observes in some of the northern regions.

The mid-Atlantic seafront is clearly less inhospitable, particularly with respect to Poitou and its neighbouring provinces. It is here that the shortfall is at

its most paradoxical; it is here, too, that the explanation offered appears to be most admissible.[37]

But there can be no doubt that some additional factors of another kind combine with the purely geographical causes. Well before the wars between the Catholics and Protestants, another religious cataclysm—as we well know—rattled the south of France, namely the Cathar Heresy and the crusade that followed in its wake, with the subsequent retaking of the ecclesiastical structures by the mendicant orders (the Dominicans, in particular), whose attitude vis-à-vis the book was very different from that of the traditional monastic orders.[38]

More than anything, the very structure of the ecclesiastical institutions radically polarised northern and southern France—indeed, this had been the case since time immemorial. The most ancient regions, under the yoke of Rome's dominion (the ecclesiastic provinces of Aix, Arles and Narbonne) were highly fragmented into a multitude of microscopic dioceses.[39] Now, the scantiness of the diocesan territory can be considered a sort of 'brake' on the development of monastic institutions, inasmuch as the necessary human and economic potential was monopolised by the secular ecclesiastical structures.

In this perspective, Aquitaine and the Toulouse region, which had eluded the parcelling up of land inherited from ancient times, were ruthlessly returned to the same model in the age of the Avignon papacy—an episode that strongly contributed to disrupting the local ecclesiastical fabric. The territorial reform imposed by Pope John XXII between 1317 and 1318 led to their being broken up into a multitude of small dioceses endowed with barely sufficient resources and placed under great pressure from pontifical taxation.[40]

If, informed by these considerations, we return to the map that provided their pretext, we will still have to take into account the fact that it only reflects the state of affairs which prevailed four or five centuries after the period that interests us. In the absence of a better one (or of being unable to dedicate a large amount of time to compiling one), we can try to gain a better understanding of the situation by examining the evidence provided by a similar source, but one for which production and conservation factors are markedly

37 It is precisely in this geographical area that the professed pillages were attested to.

38 See, as regards Italy, Bartoli Langeli 1994; Paolazzi 2004; Pellegrini 1999; and as regards France, Vernet (ed.) 1989, 125–146.

39 See Mirot 1948–1950, II, 314–345. By way of an example, one can cite the diocese of Agde, which, at the end of the 18th century, consisted of a grand total of eighteen parishes.

40 The most spectacular case is that of the diocese of Toulouse, where the dismemberment spawned no fewer than seven new bishoprics.

different. Here, we are speaking of chartularies, almost all of which are kept in archival depositories, for which reason they escaped the attention of the *CMD*.[41]

With respect to this source, it is appropriate to think not in terms of the number of volumes conserved, but rather in terms of the number of institutions which conserve at least one, given that the range of archival uses is highly varied. Whilst some abbeys endeavoured to assemble the entire sweep of their titles in one volume, by contrast others preferred to divide their documentation among several specific books, based on a several criteria (geographic, administrative, etc.).[42]

By carrying out a rapid, though exhaustive, overview of the corpus of French chartularies,[43] one can generate the statistics presented in Chart 2.[44] Expressed as percentages, the results of the counts remain independent of the fact that the number of abbeys concerned are very unequal in each of the two parts of the land. The differences observed between the two areas are not massive, but they are clearly significant from a statistical perspective, and all the more so given that they coincide perfectly.

Among the abbeys indicated on the map in the *Gallia christiana*, the proportion of those which hold at least one cartulary is 65% in the northern area, in contrast with only 55% in the southern area. This difference can be read as an indication of a greater loss of funds occurring in the south.

41 The few that are still held in libraries were even deliberately excluded from the investigation (in the early series), on the pretext that they are 'diplomatic' documents, and not sufficiently 'book-like'. I have previously criticised (in *CMD*-F2, I, IV) the negative effect of this exclusion.

42 The Abbey of Saint-Denis provides the most satisfactory example: it holds no less than 18 chartularies, of which a good number particularly concern one of the abbey's numerous domains, or the beneficiary office of certain kinds of revenue (i.e. chantry, chaplaincy, pittancery, and so on).

43 This is the catalogue that revises and completes the one by Stein 1907, put online by the Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes (http://www.cn-telma.fr/cartulR/; last access 07/09/2021). I should clarify that these statistics take into account the entire contents of this catalogue, without drawing a distinction between the various types of document included in the census (i.e. chartularies, rental agreements, etc.).

44 In order to avoid a surfeit of images, in the present contribution I am choosing not to reproduce the corresponding map. As one might expect, it closely resembles the previous ones.

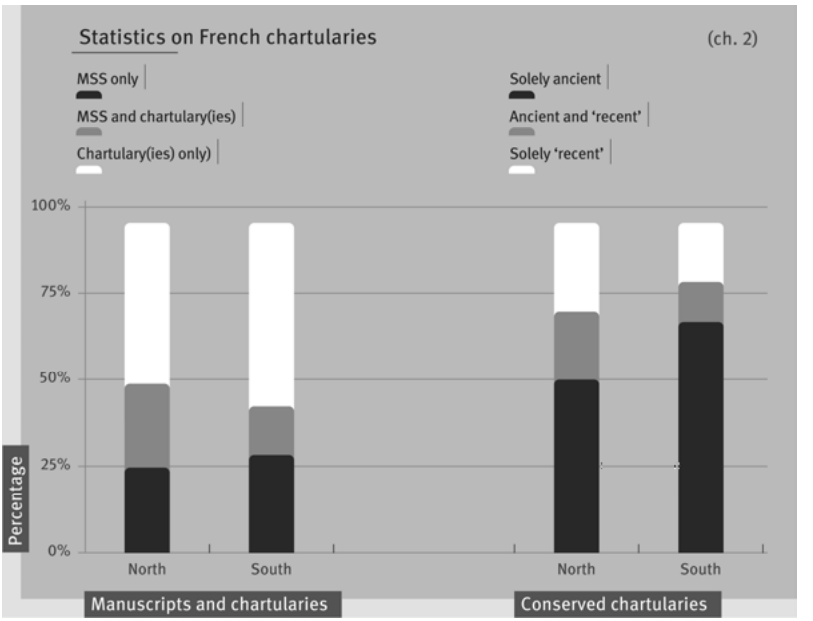


Chart 2: Statistics on French chartularies

On the other hand, the proportion of abbeys that simultaneously hold a certain number of manuscripts and at least one cartulary increases to 26% in the north, in contrast to 15% in the south. This time the difference can be explained by a greater number of documents having been dispersed than have survived.

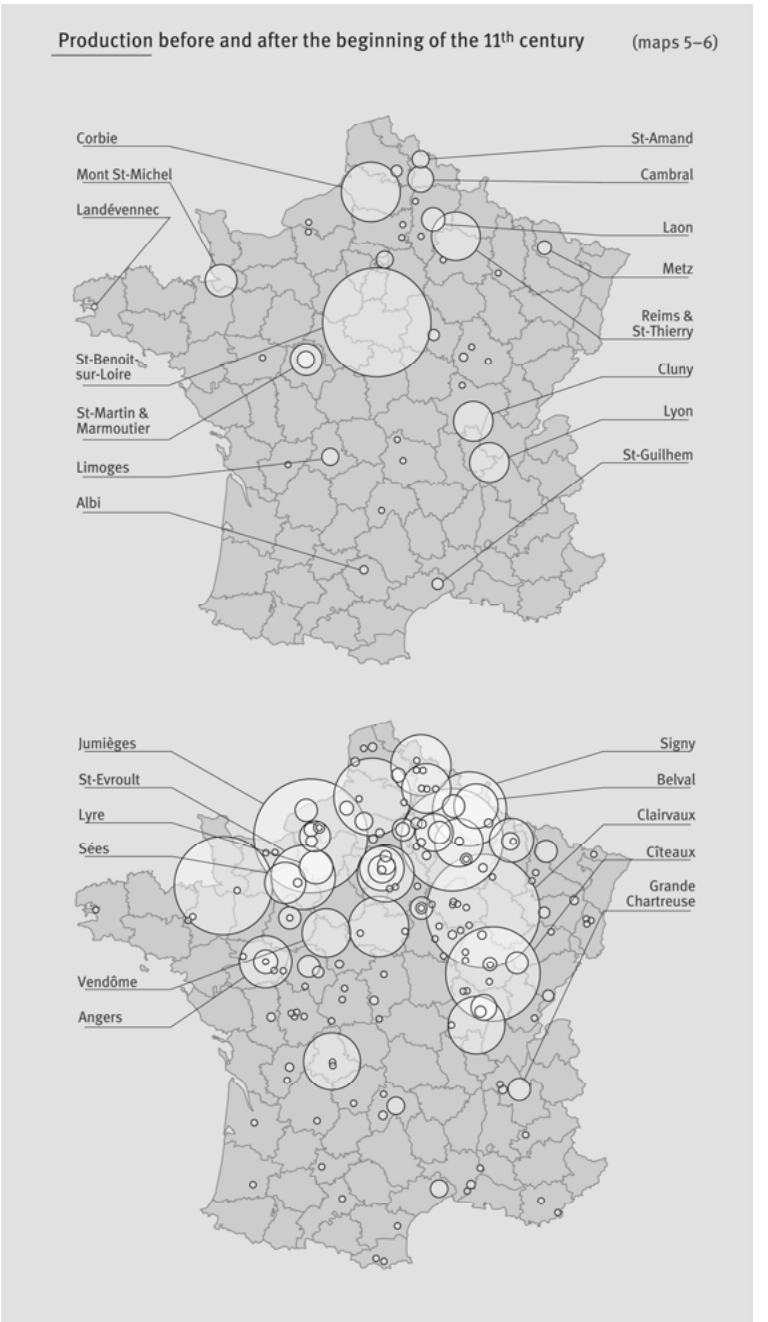
The analysis can be further refined by distinguishing between 'old' cartularies, datable from the origins to the 13th century, and 'recent' ones, belonging to 14th and 15th centuries. Once again, the situation is marked by a strong contrast: in the northern half of the country 31% of the abbeys which have conserved some documents provide us with 'recent' witnesses, as opposed to only 15% in the southern half.[45] Now, the need to compile a new cartulary serves as an indicator of the vitality and prosperity of an institution: those which scrape by on their past achievements have to settle for their ancient archives. One must therefore conclude that, overall, the southern abbeys underwent a degree of decline in the Late Middle Ages.

45 One will notice that it is in relation to this parameter that the difference is at its most conspicuous.

Clearly, these rather general considerations ought to be expanded on through some more detailed analyses, although they would lead us to stray quite far from our initial objective. In their current state, the considerations at least allow us to make a rough assessment, which broadly speaking factors in the dearth of manuscripts observed in the south. This assessment combines natural geographic causes, the structuring of ecclesiastic institutions (which is very different from that which held sway in the north), a less dense network of monasteries, and a succession of historical and economic events which led to the progressive deterioration of monasteries (and likewise bishoprics), starting in the 13th century.

5 The impact of the monastic boom in the 11th–12th centuries

Having completed this necessary *excursus*, we can now return to the interpretation of Map 3, from which we started out. Maps 5 and 6 present precisely the same content but differentiate between two chronological periods, which helps to bring a little clarity. Above all, though, this division aims at rectifying the problems raised by the chronological framework chosen by Lesne: by covering uniformly the period that stretches from the earliest times to the 11th century, we place on an equal footing production originating from significantly different systems. On the one hand, episcopal scriptoria and those of urban monasteries dating to the earliest times; on the other, the scriptoria of abbeys identified through their ruins, or ones which were newly founded, beginning in the 11th century. The overall picture is somewhat muddled and does not enable us to distinguish this new stratum, which underwent extraordinary growth in the following century.



Maps 5–6: Production before and after the beginning of the 11th century

At the same time, when we place these two maps side-by-side we get an idea of all the advantages that could be gained by creating a century-by-century series of maps, or series based on other criteria, such as production centre type, manuscript typology, etc. Thanks to the digital technologies available to us today, it is not difficult to imagine being able to produce a 'palaeographic atlas', in the title of which the word 'atlas' would find its full sense.[46] Here, I would like to take the opportunity to underscore how regrettable it is that such little importance is placed on the spatial distribution of historical phenomena. Palaeography and codicology are far from being the only disciplines where one encounters this deficiency, and it is paradoxical that history and geography, even if they are closely associated in secondary school curricula, are entirely 'divorced' from each other as soon as one reaches higher education and research programmes.

To return to our discussion, if the changes brought to light by comparing the maps are undoubtedly due to the boom in the establishment of monasteries in the 11th to 12th centuries, it would be erroneous and naïve to imagine that by crossing the boundary between the 10th and the 11th century, one passes from a world where production is exclusively the realm of episcopal scriptoria to another where it is monopolised by monastic scriptoria. The quantitative relationship between the two modes of production (secular and regular, in accordance with the standard terminology) is more complex and can be illustrated with the aid of Chart 3.[47]

46 This is a suggestion that I have been putting forward for a long time; see Muzerelle 1993.

47 These figures are not open to immediate interpretation. Indeed, owing to the vertiginous growth in production, it is necessary to use a logarithmic scale to read the main graph: in fact, between the 8th and 12th centuries this increased one hundred-fold. The supplementary charts (3B and C) should assist the reader in understanding the size of the numbers involved.

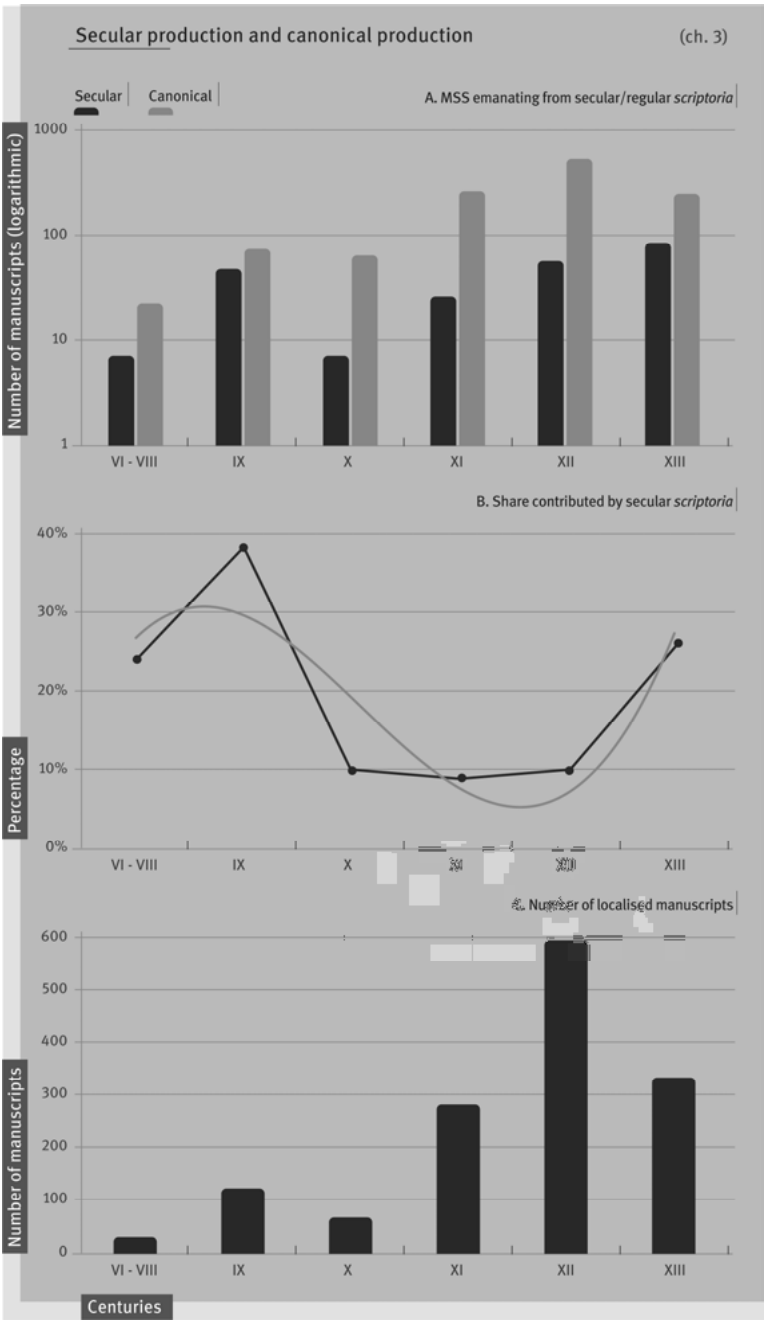


Chart 3: Secular production and canonical production

One can see that throughout the era the two production modes coexist, and that monastic production consistently remains higher than secular production. It is only in the 9th century that the latter succeeds in approaching the level of productivity achieved by its competitor, with a ratio of 40% versus 60%. After collapsing in the 10th century, output only began to recover a degree of significance in the 13th century, in the period that we can term 'pre-academic'.[48]

This analysis, which stems directly from information furnished by the *CMD*, would of course merit being re-visited and studied in greater depth. In fact, experience shows us that—for a succession of reasons which I cannot go into here—it is easier to ascertain a monastic origin than a secular one. The proportions would without doubt change; but the historical development of the phenomenon would certainly remain the same.

5.1 Examples of some major discoveries

Up to this point, the contribution of the *CMD* has only been considered from a quantitative standpoint. Without doubt, it would be advantageous to shift to an assessment mode more in keeping with the working methods normally employed in our field of study. However, because the quantity of material is so vast, a synopsis would be practically impossible. Indeed, one would have to review the cases of Saint-Vanne and Saint-Airy de Verdun, Saint-Thierry-au-Mont-d'Or, Saint-Serge and Saint-Aubin d'Angers, Saint-Pierre-de-la-Couture du Mans, the Trinity Abbey of Vendôme, the Mont-Saint-Michel, Notre-Dame de Lyre..., to cite just a few of the most important funds held in the most favoured regions. Given that I cannot undertake a full exploration of such a seemingly endless litany,[49] here I shall make do by presenting three cases that I consider to be particularly enlightening.

5.2 Scriptoria of the Ardennes: Belval and Signy

In the realm of discoveries, beyond a shadow of doubt the first prize has to be awarded to the library of Charleville (today Charleville-Mézières), in the Ar-

48 The astonishing diminution in production that appears to occur during the 13th century (which can be seen in Chart 3B above), is due to the fact that only the first half of that century is taken into account (but this has no bearing on the overall reasoning).

49 For those who would like a complete picture of the situation, I can only recommend a systematic reading of the introductions to the various volumes which have been published.

dennes. Holding around 350 medieval volumes, this library constitutes a rather noteworthy collection. But it has never attracted the attention of experts, and the Ardennes—generally considered a rather peripheral and culturally disadvantaged region—have not exactly gained a reputation as a 'hotspot' of medieval monasticism, and even less so of palaeography. Charleville, a town of relatively recent founding,[50] has never been an episcopal seat and no monastic centre of any importance has ever developed within its administrative domain. Paradoxically, there can be no doubt that the cultural privation of this region worked to its advantage by obscuring it in the shadows when the voracious appetite of amateur manuscript collectors led to the dispersion of so many other funds.

The Charleville collections are essentially composed of two monastic funds that originate from quite modest establishments, but which have been conserved in a truly exceptional way—indeed, one could almost say that they have been 'fossilised'.

The first of these abbeys is that of Beval, of the Premonstratensian Order. Of the approximately 120 manuscripts included in the inventory of 1732, 110 are still in place, 60 of which date to the 12th century. Most of them are so similar in appearance, writing and decoration that they are clearly the output of one and the same scriptorium, and the references to origin borne by 26 of the volumes serve as unequivocal proof that they were indeed produced at Beval. In addition, 11 are dated, thereby allowing us to ascertain that it was between 1148 and 1170 that the scriptorium enjoyed its most active period.

The volumes are not remotely sumptuous in their appearance and are therefore well in keeping with the characteristic modesty of the institution. In essence, they are study books of rather small format, and predominantly the products of multiple hands. They were copied on to a support of very poor quality, and it is plain to see that every effort was made to make the most it. The artisans did not hesitate to use defective skins—indeed, even mere scraps of parchment were utilised. However, the layout, writing and decoration bear witness to a very characteristic style.

The second abbey is that of Signy, of the Cistercian Order. This comes as less of a surprise when one is aware of the amount of importance that the order placed on books. The fund was also reported during the *Ancien Régime*, and in 1727, the abbot Bignon, Secretary of the King's Library, considered acquiring it. Fortunately—one could say—the project was never realised. Of the 150 manu-

50 The town was founded by Charles Gonzaga (1580–1637), Duke of Nevers and Rethel, in 1606, as the capital of his sovereign Principality of Arches.

scripts mentioned in this era, 146 are still in place. As at Beval, more than half of them (86, to be precise) date to the 12th century.

Even so, the degree of homogeneity is less marked than in the previous case, and where it does manifests itself, it seems less convincing. Just like all the affiliate branches of Clairvaux, Signy received books originating from kindred institutions, and in the volumes that bear its earliest *ex libris* the Cistercian 'look' more often than not dominates among the regional characteristics. In addition, in line with the general trend of the order, references to dates or copyists are exceedingly rare. Any proposed attributions should therefore be viewed with much caution. Twenty-eight volumes that bear clear indications with respect to their origins have nevertheless been taken into consideration, to which we can add another 30 or so that bear all the hallmarks of a local style, very similar to that of Beval.

In this way, then, an 'Ardennes School' has been discovered, which until now was unknown to palaeographers and art historians alike. The investigations carried out at the library of Laon,[51] which also conserves, in equally good condition, the fund of another small Cistercian abbey, that of Vauclair, have demonstrated that this style prevailed across a slightly wider region, where Picardy, Champagne and Lorraine meet.

6 The scriptorium at Jumièges

The case of the Abbey of Jumièges, in Normandy, is very different. This is a 'big name' in the history of monasticism and the history of Normandy.[52] The importance of the number of manuscripts originating from this abbey has already been highlighted (in 1966) in Geneviève Nortiers's work on the libraries of Normandy.[53] Its artistic (and palaeographic) qualities were showcased during an exhibition staged at Rouen in 1975, curated by François Avril.[54] But in both cases, the manuscripts of Mont-Saint-Michel are the ones that steal the limelight. It is without doubt the unsurpassable glory of the Mont—as much for its touristic appeal as for its architectural and palaeographic interest—that eclipses the fund

51 See *CMD*-F2, II, 48–52 and 63–70. A very similar style also emerges at the Abbey of Cuissy, of the Premonstratensian Order, whose fund is also held in the library at Laon (see *ibid*., 55–54).

52 See Loth 1882–1885.

53 Nortier 1966 (1971[2]).

54 Avril 1975.

at Jumièges and discourages scholars from taking an interest in it. Indeed, up to the present no specific research has been dedicated to the Jumièges fund.[55]

In this context, then, it is less the existence and excellence of the scriptorium than the chronology of its development that constitutes the importance of the discovery made through the *CMD*. In fact, a systematic examination of manuscripts has led to what historians have previously speculated about the intellectual history of the institution being challenged. According to them, the abbey experienced two phases during which it flourished: the first occurred immediately following its foundation, in the first half of the 11th century; the second, after a period of stagnation, towards the end of the 12th, thanks to the celebrated teaching of Master Alexandre. Now, for these two periods the listings in the *CMD* are essentially insignificant. Conversely, the abbacy of Gontard (1078-1095), which despite its rather pious reputation scarcely left a trace in the annals, has provided us with a very homogenous group of 26 volumes of certain date or origin, to which a further 14 can be linked, so it is very obviously this date that marks the apogee of the scriptorium*'s* activity. This difference therefore leads one to challenge the equivalence—which is often thought to exist—between the intellectual blossoming and the period of book production. Unfortunately, it often is impossible to avail oneself of sources which include both of these aspects. The instances where it is possible to study the temporal and intellectual development of an institution in parallel are also few in number and little exploited.

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Naturally, the *CMD* in its current form was not the sole player in the renewal that took place between the mid-1950s and the end of the 1980s. There are many other publications dedicated to individual scriptoria which sometimes prepared the ground, as it were, or in other instances took immediate advantage of the fruit harvested from them.[56] Here, I shall limit myself to citing, rapidly and in no particular order, the works of Jean Vézin on the scriptoria of Angers,[57] of Jean Dufour on Moissac,[58] of Françoise Gasparri on Corbie[59] and Saint-Victor of Paris,[60]

55 This lacuna will soon be filled, thanks to the recent work of Gurrado 2015.

56 It is impossible to report all the publications stemming from this movement in the present contribution. For further details, the interested reader can consult (in addition to the usual research materials): Muzerelle 1991; Muzerelle 1992.

57 Vézin 1974.

58 Dufour 1972.

59 In particular, Gasparri 1966; Gasparri 1991.

of Marie-Pierre Laffitte on Saint-Thierry,[61] of Simone Collin-Rozet on Belval,[62] of Monique-Cécile Garand on Cluny,[63] and Nogent-sous-Coucy,[64] and of Denis Escudier on Saint-Evroult d'Ouche,[65] and this list is far from exhaustive. Publication dates are occasionally misleading, sometimes being earlier, or later, than the publication date of the corresponding catalogue. However, it can safely be said that everything that was achieved in the field of palaeography in France during this period was accomplished within the ambit of the programme initiated by Charles Samaran.

Largely speaking, Cistercian monasteries escaped this, so to speak, 'gravitational' attraction. However, the studies relating to them developed with a similar degree of vigour throughout the period, although they were focused on the abbeys' libraries rather than on their scriptoria—and this represents a clearly different standpoint, since the exact origin of volumes is only considered a secondary concern. In fact, the studies benefited from another impetus: that of the reconstitution of the library at Clairvaux and the library heritage of the order, instigated by André Vernet.[66] Even so, it is obvious that this parallel undertaking greatly profited from the investigation of dated manuscripts.[67]

At the (albeit still provisional) conclusion of this undertaking, the 'palaeographic landscape' of France finds itself profoundly reshaped—even if only on account of the influx of new witnesses. Some lofty places have been cut down to more reasonable proportions; a few new summits have been drawn; and what previously appeared as scattered islets occasionally find themselves at the centre of an archipelago, or sometimes even form a small continent. But above all, the perception we formerly had of production conditions has substantially changed.

The major palaeographic studies (which focused chiefly on the most ancient manuscripts) carried out up until the outbreak of the Second World War created the impression that a rich and thriving intellectual life was concentrated in a few centres, in each of which an effort was made to develop a unique artistic and graphic style. The investigation has revealed that in reality writing was produced everywhere, and that the output of establishments that we can legiti-

60 In particular, Gasparri / Stirnemann 1991.
61 Laffitte 1979.
62 Collin-Roset 1974.
63 In particular, Garand 1977; Garand 1978.
64 Garand 1995.
65 Escudier 1999.
66 On this subject see, especially, the introduction in Vernet 1979.
67 See, in particular, Bondelle-Souchier 2006.

mately call minor was (unwittingly) conserved. Such output, if not particularly impressive, was at least significant, although quality, homogeneity and originality were not always present.

Can we therefore say that the scriptorium concept has been clarified? The answer to this question can only be partially affirmative. The large number of small institutions which are represented by only a few scattered and rather modest witnesses in any event demands that questions be raised about the position occupied by the copying of books. If the intellectual needs of such institutions were probably limited to the indispensable, it is clear that the communities found it necessary to at least produce their own liturgical material, and above all to maintain it and keep it up to date. At a minimum, one person would have sufficed, and the work would not have consumed all his time. Now, he who is able to transcribe a Mass can also copy a missal; indeed, if necessary, he can also transcribe an Augustinian treatise or, come to that, one by Virgil or Ovid, should the need arise. Can one, in this scenario, really speak of a scriptorium? It is here, indeed, that one finds the meaning assigned to the word, at the end of the 11th century, in the ancient customs of Chartreux:[68] a table, some parchment, and the necessary tools and materials for ruling sheets and writing on them—nothing more. Thus, the scriptorium is reduced to no more than a mere corner in a monk's cell. To be sure, some scholars have remarked on this source and limited the compass of the term scriptorium, specifying that in this instance it was interpreted in a particular way. But, on the contrary, would it not be more reasonable to define the scriptorium as a centre of operations that produced a large quantity of consistent, aesthetically pleasing and original material that has come down to us through the ages, and which provides a worthy subject for a scientific publication?

Lying somewhere between the two extremes, it should to be possible to settle on a suitable term—a sort of halfway house—which is compatible with what the major investigation of dated manuscripts and the new approach to medieval written output has taught us over the last fifty years or so. However, there is no question that it is still not possible to propose a concise and prescriptive definition which is at one and the same time both limiting and all-encompassing. I think we can wager, then, that the papers presented within the framework of this meeting will help to guide us towards some important answers to this question.

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68 Guigues 1st, Prior of Chartreuse, (1083–1137), *Consuetudines Ordinis Cartusiensis*, chapter 28, § 2, *Acta Santorum*, Jun. 2, p. 495; PL, 153, col. 631–757; etc. The passage has been commented on many times.

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