QUEESTE 23
2016/2

Introduction*

Between Stability and Transformation. Textual Traditions in the Medieval Netherlands

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Texts are subject to transformation, especially during the Middle Ages. The medieval textual culture was a *manuscript culture* that was characterised in a unique way by *variance*.[1] Every new copy offered the scribe the possibility to adapt the text to new contextual circumstances and every manuscript showed a unique combination of features, thus influencing the meaning of a work.[2] In the beginning of the 1990s, the importance of the study of these phenomena has been strongly emphasised within the so-called *New Philology*.[3] Fierce reactions made clear that this approach was not as new as its provocative, and almost self-ironically posed, name suggested.[4] In 1973, Kurt Ruh and others had already held a plea for the study of textual tradition in every respect, including the author, the adaptor, the scribe or printer, and the audience of a text.[5] Gradually the American discussion and the European tradition were connected and the merit of New Philology was acknowledged.[6] In 2002, Franz-Josef Holznagel concluded that New Philology functioned

> als eine Art Katalysator [...], der dazu geführt hat, daß die in der deutschsprachigen Forschung schon längst eröffnete Diskussion über grundlegende Probleme mediävistischer Arbeit und speziell über die Bedeutung der Handschrift in der mittelalterlichen Kultur vorangetrieben und über den engeren Kreis der Überlieferungsfachleute und Editionsphilologen hinaus bekannt wurde.[7]

Although New Philology wasn't *New*, it heavily influenced and enhanced the discussion on the importance of textual variation and manuscript tradition and tried to

1 For an overview of the development of this idea (with reference to Zumthor, Rychner, Cerquiglini and others), see Bumke 1996, 125-126.

2 Nichols 1990 and Nichols 1997.

3 See the contributions of Nichols et al. to the special issue of *Speculum* 65 (1990), issue 1.

4 See, among others, Stackmann 1994 and the contributions to Busby 1993. For the relation with other theoretical trends, see Lepper 2012, 122-129.

5 Grubmüller et al. 1973, 171-172. For a discussion on the results of this approach, see Ruh 1985. For a comparison of New Philology and German medieval studies, see Schnell 1997 and Williams-Krapp 2000.

6 The 1997 special issue of *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* on 'Philologie als Textwissenschaft. Alte und neue Horizonte' formed an explicit attempt to connect the American discussion with the European tradition. See Tervooren & Wenzel 1997, 3. In the same year, a special issue of *Editio* tried to connect Old and New Philology. See Gleßgen & Lebsanft 1997. An evaluation of the discussion and further research can be found in the volume 'Überlieferungsgeschichte – Textgeschichte – Literaturgeschichte' of *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik*, edited by Thomas Bein in 2002. See for an overview of important publications p. 100-104 of this volume, and, in the same volume, Holznagel 2002, 127, n. 3.

7 Holznagel 2002, 127.

connect it with contemporary (literary) theory. In the following introduction I will use the name *Material Philology*, introduced by Nichols in 1997.[8]

In the study of Middle Dutch literature, the discussion on Material Philology was picked up rather late. According to Herman Brinkman this can be explained by the marginalisation of philology in Middle Dutch studies.[9] From the 1980s onwards, the philological approach was exchanged for a more cultural historical approach to Middle Dutch texts. Since the international discussion on Material Philology started among philologists, researchers of Middle Dutch literature didn't participate in this debate. Material Philology was adapted in Middle Dutch studies only from the year 2000 onwards. This was the year in which Wim Gerritsen discussed the approach critically and with amazement.[10] In the following years, more and more scholars referred to Material Philology, especially Wim van Anrooij and Johan Oosterman.[11] Not surprisingly, however, it turned out that many researchers were already familiar with the practice of Material Philology before they knew of its existence. The idea of studying texts in their manuscript context has a strong tradition in Middle Dutch studies. Herman Pleij introduced this approach in the mid 1980s, and in the beginning of the 1990s Wim van Anrooij and Dini Hogenelst initiated a unique series of editions of whole manuscripts. Thus Material Philology could easily merge with the already existing interest in manuscripts and textual variation. It stimulated the further exploration of this approach.

Now that the idea of studying texts in their manuscript context is broadly accepted, the next step is to develop a more detailed and differentiated picture of textual variation. Several German scholars already questioned the possibilities of interpreting textual change and argued that not all textual differences are equally relevant. Werner Williams-Krapp, for example, stated that 'die Bedeutung, Aussagekraft und Interpretierbarkeit von *variance* stark überschätzt wird'.[12] In an attempt to develop a more differentiated idea of textual variation, Klaus Grubmüller asked how variance as an aspect of importance in text production (the author) relates to variance in the emanation of texts (scribes). He furthermore proposed to look at different layers of a text (for example the content and the formal aspects) and to study the possible differences between genre, content, language, the context in which a text originated, types of authors, and between oral and written culture.[13]

Other scholars questioned the focus on textual change as such. They argued that medieval texts do indeed differ, but that the stability of texts has to be taken into account too.[14] In his study on scribal corrections in English manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Daniel Wakelin showed that alongside all the vari-

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8   Nichols 1997, 10.
9   Brinkman 2009, 6.
10 Gerritsen 2000, 10-14.
11 Brinkman 2009, 5-6.
12 Williams-Krapp 2000, 14. See also Schnell 1997, 92-94 and Cramer 1997, 151:'die Erkenntnis, daß voneinander abweichende Fassungen nicht von vornherein sinnlos sind, erlaubt noch nicht den Umkehrschluß, jede überlieferte Fassung sei sinnvoll'.
13 Grubmüller 2001, 9-10.
14 See in general Bein 2002, 94, with reference to Müller 1999, 162 and Stackmann 1997.

ance 'textual correctness or incorrectness' played a role of importance too.[15] 'In a culture in which such changes were acceptable', he argued in an earlier article, 'the decision not to change the text was important too'.[16] In all languages we find authors who ask scribes and performers not to change their work.[17] These authors show themselves aware of the fact that texts were easily altered, but didn't take this practice for granted and clearly valued the stable transmission of texts.

An example of an author, who was concerned about the transmission of his text, is the Middle Dutch writer Jacob van Maerlant. In the prologue to his *Derde Martijn* (*Third Martin*) he warns his readers not to change any sentence, word or even a letter of his poem:

> Ic mane mannen metten wiven,
> Die dit sullen lesen of scriven,
> Upten hoghesten ban,
> **Dat si dit dicht laten bliven**
> **Rene, dat siere niet in en driven**
> **Woort, lettre, af no an.**[18]

> (I beseech everyone who will read out or write this poem, by the highest anathema, that they will keep it clean and will not add or delete a word or a letter.)

Maerlant seems well aware of the practice of textual variation. The reason for his worry seems to be the fact that he discusses a delicate matter, namely the trinity. The purpose of leaving the text unchanged is to transmit the truth on this matter faithfully. The content of a work might form one of the aspects that influence the way author and scribes deal with the text.

It is interesting to see that this idea of the 'correct text' sometimes goes hand in hand with the idea of changing the work. We find authors that encourage their readers to correct the text if they are able to do so. Frits van Oostrom has collected a number of passages from Middle Dutch literature in which scribal intervention is explicitly addressed.[19] For example, in *Alexanders geesten* (*Deeds of Alexander*) Jacob van Maerlant appears to have a much more positive idea about scribes rewriting his texts than he formulated in his *Derde Martijn*:

> Ic bidde ooc alle dien ghonen mede,
> Waer so si sijn in elken stede,
> Die in desen bouke lesen,
> Sien siere in iet bescreven wesen
> Daer iet aen te beterne es
> Jacop bidt hem allen des,
> Dat sijt beteren, hets wel ghedaen.[20]

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15 Wakelin 2014, 7.
16 Wakelin 2011, 50.
17 See for German examples Schnell 1998, Grubmüller 2001, 8-9 and Quast 2001.
18 *Van der drievoudichede,* 1-6. Verwijs 1879, 56.
19 Van Oostrom 2003, 34-35, with a short discussion on p. 18-19. See also Bouwmeester 2016, 15-17. For the English tradition, see Wakelin 2014, 19-42. For German examples: Quast 2001, 39-40.
20 *Alexanders geesten*, 1521-1527. Franck 1882, 393.

> (I also beg everyone who will read in this book – no matter where they are – in case they find something described in it that can be improved, Jacop begs everyone to improve it, it is done well.)

Passages like this one seem to form the perfect argument to show that textual change was an accepted phenomenon in medieval textual culture. But in the same work, Maerlant also warned his reader not to change the rhyme of his text, because it is all sound: *So wiere an naide enen douc / Van valscher rimen, hi mesdoet, / Want die rime es al goet* (The one who sews a rag / of false rhymes to it, he does so wrongly, / since the rhymes are all sound. *Alexanders geesten*, Book I, vs. 1401-1404). If we have a close look at these examples, we see that the encouragement to correct the work by changing it stems from the same idea that motivates authors to ask for a faithful transmission of their texts.[21]

These authors ask their readers to *correct* or *improve* the text, using Middle Dutch words and phrases as *beteren* (to correct), *verbeteren ende corrigieren* (to improve and correct)*, corigieren [...] ende setten in rechten weghe der waerheit* (to correct and adjust to the truth).[22] The reason they ask their readers to do so, is that they might have made a mistake. For example, the author of the Middle Dutch *Reis van Jan van Mandeville* (*Travels of John Mandeville*) writes that he might be *dolende [...] in minen redenen mids verghetelicheden ofte anders waer omme* (wandering in my story because of thoughtlessness/forgetfulness or other reasons).[23] These authors are not encouraging their readers to change a text in order to meet their personal needs, but to create a truthful story.[24] Moreover, correcting was also a means of honouring the work of the clerics, as Wakelin showed. A Middle Dutch example of this idea can be found in *Tondalus visioen* (*The vision of Tondalus*), where all the people who hear or read the story are asked to correct it (and not make it worse!) for the honour of all clerics:

> Oec biddich hem allen dijt horen solen ochte lesen. Vernyemense hijr in yet dat te calegieren si, dat si dat verbeteren **ende niet en ergeren** omme alre clerken ere.[25]

> (I also pray all people who will hear or read this: in case they learn something in it that should be reproved, that they will correct it and not make it worse, for the honour of all clerics.)

By correcting the text, scribes honour the literary work, the profession of writing and copying and the content that is discussed.

If we shift attention from author to scribes and users, we see that the idea of the correct text was important to them too. Not only do we see scribes copying texts accurately – sometimes even following the layout of their exemplar – we also see people

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21 See Quast 2001, 40: 'Doch auch solche Verbesserungsappelle an koproduzierende Bearbeiter zeugen davon, dass ein Bewusstsein für die ideale Textgestalt existiert [...]. Der bewegliche Text wäre aus Sicht dieser Textproduzenten als Vorstufe einer idealen Gestalt zu verstehen.'
22 Examples extracted from Van Oostrom 2003, 34-25.
23 *Reis van Jan van Mandeville*, f. 3va. Quoted from Van Oostrom 2003, 34. Full text: Cramer 1908.
24 See also Wakelin 2014, 41. He discusses English examples of authors encouraging their readers to correct the text and concludes: 'Yet the poets do not in fact give people licence to rewrite wilfully.'
25 *Tondalus visioen*, 1vb. Quoted from Van Oostrom 2003, 35. Full text: Verdeyen & Endepols 1914-1917.

correcting small details of a work.[26] The scribes of the Charterhouse of Herne corrected their copies with great effort, using more than one exemplar to correct defaults in their layer.[27] This concerns not just the meaning of the text, and there is even more at stake than the production of a perfect text. As Daniel Wakelin showed, for the Carthusians 'the process of correcting is itself fraught with moral significance'.[28] The Carthusians' philological approach stems from the Christian tradition of correcting the Bible and was explicitly prescribed as a moral deed.

Outside the context of the monastery we also find people that paid careful attention to the correctness of a text. For example, the first prayers of the Gruuthuse manuscript have been corrected thoroughly by a later scribe. His corrections, nevertheless, rarely influenced the meaning of the poem. He appears to have brought the text in line with another copy of the prayers that he valued more, thus showing a strong notion of what is correct and incorrect, and striving to transmit faithfully the text he considered best.[29] Other well-known Middle Dutch corrections are found in the Lancelot Compilation in manuscript The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, ms 129 A 10, and in the *Ferguut* in manuscript Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, ms LTK 191. A corrector made 250 corrections to the *Ferguut* text and explicitly explained his working method in a colophon, thereby increasing the value of the copy:

> Here, hier hebdi van Ferragute
> Van beghinne ten inde al ute
> Ghecorrigeert van miere hant
> Over al soe waer ict vant
> In rijm, in vers, in ward messcreven.[30]

> (Lord, hereby you have the poem of Ferragute, corrected by my hand from the beginning to the end at all places where I found it was written wrong in rhyme, in verse and in words.)

According to this colophon he corrected al the mistakes he found in rhyme, verses and words. Willem Kuiper showed that this corrector was actually polishing the text stylistically. He hardly ever changed the content of the work.[31] These examples show that medieval scribes made the effort to transmit a text faithfully and that they could have a strong notion of correctness.

Authors and scribes as well as readers seem to have valued the stable transmission of texts, and we may safely assume that scribes normally aimed at copying a text faithfully. It is, however, clear that medieval texts were frequently changed during their transmission. As we have seen, one of the reasons for changing a text might have been correcting it, but this was clearly not the only motivation for textual change.[32] Some-

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26 See for examples of scribes following the layout of their exemplar: Doyle & Parkes 1978, 164-165, Gillespie 1989, 332-334.
27 Kwakkel 2002, 107-112, 120, 122-124.
28 Wakelin 2014, 28.
29 Gabriël & Oosterman 2010.
30 *Ferguut*, 5596-5601. Rombauts, De Paepe & De Haan 1982, 224.
31 Kuiper 1989, 71-215; conclusions on p. 208-215.
32 In his 'Typologie von Schreibereingriffen' Martin Schubert classifies these changes as 'Bemühen um Wiederherstellung des Textes'. The scribes exemplar could be damaged or contain mistakes, he says, and intelligent scribes

times striking details have been changed, material has been added or deleted or even the whole story has been rewritten. For genres like songs, devotional texts, short poems and chronicles, rewriting seems to have been self-evident. This brings us to the question of what motivated people to rewrite a work more thoroughly. A contextual shift may evoke these changes, for the text had to be adapted to new readers' frame of reference. We could think of geographical changes, institutional changes, political changes, a change of medium or simply the passage of time.

To further elaborate on the motives of textual change and to nuance the idea of a textual culture characterised by variation, researchers from Ghent University and Radboud University Nijmegen organised a conference entitled 'Between stability and transformation. Textual traditions in the medieval Netherlands', which was held at Ghent University on 21-22 September 2010.[33] Central questions were: what evoked textual change in medieval culture? How did changing circumstances lead to adaptations within a text, and how can these alterations be interpreted? In our call for papers we asked participants to discuss the contextual shift from medieval texts with-in and from the Netherlands, and to elaborate on the whys and wherefores of the accompanying changes. We furthermore encouraged participants to work with the notion of stability.

A selection of the papers given at this conference is published in this volume.[34] Not surprisingly, the idea of transformation appears to be easier to address than the notion of stability: all papers take the transformation of texts as their starting point. This does not mean, however, that the notion of stability does not play a role at all. Stephen Nichols and Adrian Armstrong show that stability and transformation go hand in hand. Texts can be both stable and fluid, depending on the aspect of the work we focus on. The papers of Adrian Armstrong, Rebecca Dixon and Bram Caers illustrate how new contextual circumstances can lead to textual changes. It is interesting to see that a contextual shift sometimes does not evoke the changes we would expect, as Antheun Janse illustrates. A new context as such might not have been enough to evoke changes. The person responsible for the reworking seems to play a crucial role. Some alterations do not just involve a scribe's understanding of what he was copying; they involve someone with knowledge of the context in which a work was supposed to function, and a vision of the content of the text and of its function. It might therefore also be important to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial scribes.[35]

could correct these mistakes. Schubert 2002, 131 and 133-135. Note that the word *Wiederherstelling* implies that the text was originally faultless, whereas the colophons we discussed in this introduction show that the idea of correcting a work should include possible failure of the author too.

33 Organising committee: Youri Desplenter, Johan Oosterman, Ulrike Wuttke, and myself.

34 Originally we also planned to include a paper by Hans Kienhorst and one by Tjamke Snijders. The paper by Kienhorst grew into a book that he and Ad Poirters are currently writing, entitled *Archaeology of a Book Collection. A Study of Stratification and Interconnectedness in the Historical Library of the Canonesses Regular of Soeterbeeck. With a Catalogue of the Soeterbeeck Collection Compiled in Collaboration with Eefje Roodenburg* (expected in 2017). The contribution by Snijders is included in her book *Manuscript Communication* on p. 181-202. Snijders developed a quantitative approach to measure rewriting in hagiography in high medieval monasteries.

35 See Pouzet 2011, 238: 'Whether religious or secular, single-handed or cooperative, professional or not, each non-commercial manuscript shows that cost and effort were never so great as to preclude the practice and pleasures of scribal *otium*. It would be worth exploring whether such affective investments in the making of books are in line with the textual 'instability' and discursive 'malleability' of the written medium, compared with commercially produced manuscripts – forms of variance which the commercial logic of the printing press was to restrain to a considerable extent.'

The papers by Geert Warnar, Adrian Armstrong and Bram Caers give us a glimpse of the people responsible for more thorough textual changes.

In his contribution to this volume, Stephen G. Nichols elaborates on the tension between stability and transformation by analysing the idea of the omnipotent, unchanging divinity and discussing the medieval concepts of 'sameness' and 'resemblance' in the *Roman de la Rose*. He approaches the manuscript as a system designed to transmit a text. This system has to be able to handle the load of a new context without losing its original function. This means that the work has to change to fit the needs of new readers, while at the same time the original story with its well-known plot and characters has to be reproduced. A work's stability over a longer period thus depends on the generative force of transmission, which is its ability to move or change something for a particular end. Nichols shows that the reader of a work plays an important role in the formation of the image of the text. Manuscripts reveal this normally invisible interaction between work and viewer. For a work to be reproduced over a longer period of time there must be a very strong 'hyper concept' that attracts readers, while at the same time changes must be made for a work to still be relevant and attractive to new readers. Nichols calls this paradox of sameness and adaptation 'mutual stability'.

An approach that focuses on manuscript tradition forces the scholar to look beyond the traditional borders of disciplines. In his keynote paper on the transmission of the *Sachsenspiegel* in the Netherlands, Geert Warnar shows how literature, law and religion were interconnected in medieval textual culture. On the one hand, the *Sachsenspiegel* had to form a stable point of reference for jurisdiction and was thus copied faithfully, and, on the other hand, its meaning was fluid due to the addition of textual passages, illustrations and texts. Moral education and religious argumentation were highlighted especially by later alterations. The case of the lost books of priest and schoolmaster Pieter Pouwelsz, who also made a copy of the *Sachsenspiegel*, illustrates how educated men participated in a textual culture in which discourses, genres, interests and ideologies were intertwined.

Adrian Armstrong demonstrates the importance of studying texts in their regional context, instead of limiting research to the production and transmission of texts in one language. In his paper he discusses the textual adaptation of two works by Jean Molinet (1435-1507), namely *La Recollection des Merveileuses* and his *La Complaincte de la Terre Saincte*. Both texts underwent significant ideological changes when they were printed in Antwerp around 1510 and in 1532 respectively. Armstrong shows how these texts were adapted to new socio-historical circumstances and how cultural agents interacted in the multi-lingual region the Southern-Netherlands formed in this period. The idea of a strong and recognisable story that forms a stable concept over time also plays a role in Armstrong's contribution. He introduces the concept of 'masterplots' and shows how these familiar narrative schemas with a strong ideological charge lend themselves especially well for adaptation. Their recognisable underlying structures can easily be filled with new meaning.

An example of how a text was strategically rewritten in order to appeal to new readers is presented by Rebecca Dixon in her paper on the *Fille du comte de Pontieu* in a manuscript from the Burgundian Library (Paris, BnF, ms fr. 12572). In the prologue to this

text, the editor explicitly presents his work as an adaptation. By elaborating on passages concerning ceremony, travel and combat, the editor creates a story that could help in shaping the identity of its Burgundian audience. This ideological dimension was further developed in the nine illustrations added to the text by the Wavrin Master. By focussing on ceremony, travel and combat too, he visually underlined the themes already highlighted in the story. By looking at the interaction between text and image, Dixon illustrates that the transformation of ideas was not limited to textual production, but formed a 'multilaminated' process that could involve all aspects of book production.

Bram Caers shows us how a text could be reworked and expanded over a longer period of time by different people. Caers studies the subsequent layers of text formation in a manuscript with the Mechelen Chronicle (Mechelen, Stadsarchief MS EE VI 1). By looking at thematic patterns in the additions and alterations, he shows that the scribe of the complete manuscript was probably also responsible for the continuation of the story. Another person, Gerardus Bernaerts, reworked the text at a later moment (probably between 1560-1570). By combining the ideas of Material Philology and *critique génétique*, Caers reveals the different editorial roles of scribes. Whereas the scribe's goal was to continue the story, Gerardus Bernaerts was reworking the chronicle to meet his personal needs and interests. In his article, Caers sheds light on the people responsible for textual changes and additions and on the historical context in which they were working.

That chronicles often show a complex history of creation, is also illustrated by Antheun Janse. He discusses the textual tradition of the Gouda Chronicle – a chronicle of the county of Holland that was produced in at least three stages in the fifteenth century. The text was reproduced in a time dominated by the struggles between the Hooks and the Cod, but it turns out that the scribes did not regularly adapt the text for political reasons. In this case the contextual shift did not evoke textual changes on a large scale. More frequently Janse found what he calls *local markers*: textual changes or additions that are of particular interest to a specific town or village.

The making of this thematic issue was a process characterised by both stability and transformation. As time evolved, circumstances changed. We are happy that the editors of *Queeste* were willing to publish the articles in a special issue and thank them for their editorial work. We would like to thank the contributors for their patience and their willingness to publish their article in this issue. Over the past years, a lot of people have invested time in this project. We would like to thank them for their effort. We thank Kate Rudy for correcting the contributions of Dutch-speaking authors. A word of special thanks goes to Youri Desplenter (Ghent University), who has led the editorial process in the first years of the project. We are grateful for everything he contributed to this issue.

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