

Ancient – Medieval – Early Modern Latin & Greek Letter Collections

Methodological and thematic intersections

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- **Call for Papers: Deadline Friday 24 February 2023**
- **Please send abstracts of no more than 500 words**
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- **Papers will be 25-30 minutes**

Modern scholarship rightly distinguishes between collections of letters and 'letter collections' with literary aspirations. Students of ancient literature have fully embraced the methodological challenges and interpretative opportunities this distinction brings about. For the middle ages, a wider range of letter collections has been preserved, and the careful composition of some of them has been acknowledged in a couple of case studies. The picture in that period is complicated by the development of so-called 'artes dictaminis', letter writing manuals that sometimes hold a position between utilitarianism and literary production. If we look at Latin and Greek epistolary production from the period after 1400 (belonging to the so called Neo-Latin and Neo-Ancient Greek literature), one is overwhelmed by the sheer number of extant examples, most of which remain unedited and are rarely studied. Letter collections were a very popular genre throughout all of these periods. But what were the differences and similarities? How, for example, does the balance between political, philosophical and personal content vary? And under what circumstances does this change?

Our conference tries to connect the study of letters, and especially letter collections, in various fields. Possible topics of investigation are:

- **Methodological exchange** between ancient, medieval, Neo-Latin literary studies; e.g. how to tackle the letter collection as a distinct genre, how to analyse different editorial phases of a collection.
- **Reception of earlier letter collections** in medieval and early modern meta-discourse, as well as in new letter collections (with a focus on the less studied reception of authors such as Pliny, the Church Fathers, Peter of Blois, Bernard of Clairvaux...)
- In line with the previous point, the **influence of earlier letter collections** on later examples; e.g. how was the practice of code-switching in antiquity taken up again to fashion early modern letter collections; the structure of collections as a reference to earlier models

- **Fundamental shifts** from one period to another, and the impact they had on the creation and dissemination of letter collections; e.g. the advent of the printing press, the development of scientific letter collections
- **The role of education** in letter writing and the divergences or similarities between different periods; e.g. preferred models in classroom contexts and the medieval and renaissance *artes dictaminis*
- Findings from **languages other than Latin and Greek** will be considered, in as far as they throw light on matters relevant to one of these traditions