1   Introduction

Micol Long and Steven Vanderputten

Abstract

While medieval learning has long been the object of scholarly attention, 'horizontal learning' – that is, knowledge transmitted and acquired in a context of informal interactions, to which traditional categories such as 'teachers' and 'disciples' do not necessarily apply – remains little studied. To fill this gap, this volume builds on ideas formulated by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger to approach learning as a situated phenomenon that can never be decontextualized from the social and even physical environment in which it took place. The contributions collected here will exemplify various means of learning, considering the interplay between literate and non-literate modes as well as the problems posed by the necessity of using written sources as attestations of non-literate forms of learning.

Keywords: Medieval/Middle Ages, knowledge, community, historiography, teaching, learning

Medieval learning – understood here as both the acquisition of knowledge and the content of this acquired knowledge – has long been the object of scholarly attention, even though an ever-growing bibliography shows that recent years have witnessed a surge of interest.[1] Approaches have of course evolved over time: a major shift in focus can be observed from traditional approaches, which were strongly centred on educational techniques and institutions, to a gradual acknowledgement of the individual agency of masters, who relied

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1   Ferzoco and Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Education*; Società internazionale di studi francescani, *Studio e «studia»*; Vaughn and Rubenstein, *Teaching and Learning in Northern Europe;* Riché and Verger, *Des nains sur des épaules de géants*; Anheim and Piron, 'Le travail intellectuel au Moyen Âge'; Mews and Crossley, *Communities of Learning;* Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation*; Steckel, Gaul, and Grünbart, *Networks of Learning*.

on a range of informal methods and approaches to transmit knowledge and skills.[2] Still, the majority of these studies share a top-down perspective on the learning processes, where the transmission of knowledge is considered a one-directional transfer from a master to one or several disciples. And yet there is evidence that not everything medieval men and women learned during their lives was transmitted through hierarchical and vertical teaching: many skills and a great deal of knowledge – from cooking to singing, from adopting behavioural patterns to acquiring certain mindsets – were transmitted and acquired in a context of intense 'horizontal' interactions, to which traditional categories such as 'teachers' and 'disciples' do not necessarily apply.[3] This kind of horizontal learning has received little scholarly attention so far, and this volume aims to provide a stepping stone towards filling this gap. In doing so, it refers to recent sociological and anthropological theories, according to which learning can be approached as a social process that changes the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of all of those who participate in it.[4] Building on ideas formulated by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger,[5] learning is approached here as a situated phenomenon that can never be decontextualized from the social and even physical environment in which it took place.

This volume uses two different but interrelated angles to contribute to our understanding of the contextual situatedness of medieval learning.[6] On the one hand, newcomers in a medieval community can be viewed as being gradually transformed into full members through continuous interaction with the other members, from whom they learned not only factual knowledge or specific skills, but also the behavioural patterns and mindset expected of them. In this sense, horizontal learning can be considered a process of socialization, during which members of a community co-constructed knowledge by interacting with and influencing each other, creating a shared repertoire of practices, knowledge,

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2   For example Paré, Brunet, and Tremblay, *La renaissance du XIIe siècle*; Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation*; Riché, *Éducation et culture*, to be compared with Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie*; Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels,* Filoramo, *Maestro e discepolo;* Münster-Swendsen, 'The Model of Scholastic Mastery', 318-356; Steckel, 'Charisma and Expertise*'*, 641-680.

3   Leclercq, 'La communauté formatrice'. More recently, see Long, 'High Medieval Monasteries as Communities of Practice', 42-59.

4   See Bandura, *Social Learning Theory.*

5   Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning.*

6   Among the studies which acknowledge the importance of the context of medieval learning, see Drijvers and MacDonald, *Centres of Learning;* Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*; Mews and Crossley, *Communities of Learning*; Steckel, Gaul, and Grünbart. *Networks of Learning*; Lutter, 'Geistliche Gemeinschaften', 145-160 and the 2013-2017 research network COST Action IS1301 'New Communities of Interpretation:Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe', led by Sabrina Corbellini.

and beliefs. On the other hand, if instead of focusing on the community level we look at the individual level, we can observe the exchanges of knowledge that took place between two people or within a small group. Although this could take place outside of a community too, and such exchanges can be analyzed in themselves, the exchanges acquire an even greater significance when we consider them as part of a sequence of interactions that make up the broader process of horizontal learning within a community.

By using this two-angled approach, this volume stands at the convergence of two historiographical tendencies, the first one focusing on the personal and often affective quality of interpersonal relationships between people engaged in learning exchanges,[7] and the second one analyzing non-literate ways of communicating and learning in medieval culture. With regard to the first current, relationships between masters and disciples received most of the attention, but the personal and affective dimension is important as well for understanding the interactions between co-learners. In fact, the important role played by affections and emotions in learning processes[8] confirms that learning in the Middle Ages was perceived as a highly individualized process of personal improvement, where the learner played an active role rather than being simply a passive recipient of a body of knowledge transmitted from above. At the same time, because it looks at the many forms of learning interactions, including non-literate ways of communicating, this volume also places itself within the wave of studies that have highlighted the plurality of ways in which learning took place, from behavioural and even physical imitation to the educational role of mural paintings and liturgy.[9] The contributions collected here will exemplify various means of learning, considering the interplay between literate and non-literate modes as well as the problems posed by the necessity of using written sources as attestations of non-literate forms of learning.

High medieval religious communities of the 'long twelfth century'[10] are particularly suitable and well-attested environments to study horizontal

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7   See first of all Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*. Among other studies see Depreux, 'Des liens noués lors des années de formation', 303-314.

8   See Lutter, *Zwischen Hof und Kloster*, 49-75; Münster-Swendsen, '*The Use of Emotions*', 161-181.

9   There is a vast bibliography on teaching by example in the Middle Ages, from Walker Bynum, Docere verbo et exemplo, to the already mentioned works of C. Stephen Jaeger, Sita Steckel, and Mia Münster-Swendsen. With specific reference to the monastic environment see Cochelin, 'Beside the Book', 21-34; Boynton, 'Training for the Liturgy', 7- 20; Gill, 'Monastic Murals and *lectio*', 55-71, and Bruun, 'Wandering Eyes, Muttering, and Frowns', 337-363.

10   Benson, Constable and Lanham, *Renaissance and Renewal;* Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century;* Noble and Van Engen, *European Transformations.*

learning. The spread of literacy and the growing attention on the preservation of written documents that characterize this period[11] resulted in an abundance and variety of sources being preserved. These sources attest to a vivid interest in the theme of learning, or at least an urge to record written descriptions of learning processes and reflections on learning, as also shown by the appearance of the first treatises on monastic formation.[12] The growing diversity of forms of religious life[13] prompted interest in the distinctive nature of religious communal identities and how they were transmitted, and therefore to the processes of socialization and learning.

In addition, many scholars have remarked that the period in question was characterized by a renewed attention to the self,[14] although examples of self-expression, self-representation, and introspection can be found in the Early Middle Ages as well.[15] The fact that reflection on the self was often linked to reflection on the relationship between the self and others (especially in the context of friendship and love) and on the role of the individual within the group often created the right conditions for recording horizontal knowledge exchanges. It may even be possible that this renewed attention to the self, together with what has been described by Richard Southern as 'medieval humanism' of the twelfth century (with its relative optimism about the position of man in the universe and about mankind's potential to progress spiritually through a personal path of self-analysis and commitment to self-improvement),[16] encouraged the development of models of learning where the learner played an active role and where the learning processes could be reciprocal. However, until the presence and spread of horizontal learning in the Early and Late Middle Ages has been studied, no conclusion on the peculiar character of horizontal learning in the High Middle Ages can be drawn.

11   Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*.
12   Leclercq, 'Textes sur la vocation et la formation', 169-194; Riché, 'Les traités pour la formation', 371-377.
13   Bligny, 'Un aspect de la vie religieuse', 279-283; Constable, 'Cluny – Cîteaux – La Chartreuse', 93-114.
14   Chenu, *L'éveil de la conscience*; Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*; Benton, 'Consciousness of Self', 263-95, although more recent studies have offered necessary corrections to the formulation of the question of the existence of a notion of 'individual' in the Middle Ages: Walker Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?', 82-109; Aertsen and Speer, *Individuum und Individualität*; Bedos-Rezak and Iogna-Prat, *L'individu au Moyen Âge*, and Jean-Claude Schmitt even called the 'discovery of the individual' a historiographical fiction (Schmitt, '"La découverte de l'individu"', 241-262).
15   Rosenwein, 'Y avait-il un "moi"', 35-52.
16   Southern, 'Medieval Humanism', 33-37.

The arrangement of the essays in this volume will help to bring out the shared themes, such as the interplay between horizontal and vertical forms of teaching and learning (Giraud, Kinsella, Jaeger), the glimpses of oral and informal learning that can be inferred from written texts (Diehl, Saurette, D'Acunto), the role played by the physical environment (Saurette, Kinsella) and by dynamics of gender (Hellemans, Jaeger) in learning exchanges, and the educational effect of participating in shared activities within the community, from liturgy to storytelling (Şenocak, Saurette). The two opening chapters set the stage for the subsequent essays by providing an overview of two key elements of the theoretical framework: namely, the notion of community and the place of horizontal learning in monastic culture. Tjamke Snijders's 'Communal Learning and Communal Identities in Medieval Studies: Consensus, Conflict, and the Community of Practice' traces the *status quaestionis* of the use of the notion of community in medieval research and beyond, and it concludes by setting forth the model of the 'community of practice', which appears particularly useful to study horizontal learning. Micol Long's '*Condiscipuli Sumus*: The Roots of Horizontal Learning in Monastic Culture' offers some methodological remarks on how the presence of horizontal learning can be traced in monastic sources, and concludes with a reflection on the extent to which horizontal learning can be associated with the monastic world in comparison with the world of canons who practiced communal living.

In the following essay, '*Ut Fiat Aequalitas*: Spiritual Training of the Inner Man in the Twelfth-Century Cloister', Cédric Giraud presents three examples of twelfth-century spiritual literature offering insights into how a cloistered monk or canon was supposed to learn how to live with himself, with his neighbour, and lastly with a particular neighbour, that is, a spiritual friend. Subsequently, Jay Diehl, in 'Truth as Teaching: Lies, Deceit, and the Ethics of Learning in Twelfth-Century Monastic Culture', analyzes two twelfth-century manuscripts as evidence of the links between discourses about teaching and discourses concerning deceit and truth-telling in eleventh- and twelfth-century monastic culture. He argues that the manuscript intended to situate truth-telling not only as the result of good pedagogy but also as a form of teaching and learning in itself. Marc Saurette's 'Making Space for Learning in the Miracle Stories of Peter the Venerable' looks at the use of a particular kind of storytelling to establish the physical space of the monastery as a site of narrative remembrance, with the ultimate goal of inculcating monastic *disciplina*. The attention to the use of the physical environment as a learning tool

is shared by Karl Patrick Kinsella in his 'Teaching through Architecture: Honorius Augustodunensis and the Medieval Church', which analyzes Honorius Augustodunensis's (d. 1140) description of the medieval church and its typological qualities in his *Gemma animae*. This work attests to an important development in twelfth-century pedagogy, one that sought to incorporate aspects of the tangible world to anchor abstract concepts or imperceptible events and sought to grant an active role to the educated learners. Horizontal and vertical forms of teaching may even coexist in the same text, as illustrated by C. Stephen Jaeger's 'Men and Women in the Life of the Schools: In the Classroom of Herman of Reichenau'. While the exceptional opening section of Herman's didactic poem makes use of bantering and even insults to set the tone of the relationship between the teacher and his (female) students, who are granted a very active role, the rest of the poem constitutes a vertical transmission of knowledge. Gender differences clearly affect the dynamics of teaching and learning in this case, as in the famous letters attributed to Heloise, analyzed by Babette Hellemans with an anthropological approach in her 'Heloise's Echo. The Anthropology of a Twelfth-Century Horizontal Knowledge Landscape'. Conflicts linked to the transmission of knowledge and authority are also hidden behind the lines of the chronicles of Saint Gall, according to Nicolangelo D'Acunto's reading. His 'Forms of Transmission of Knowledge at Saint Gall (Ninth to Eleventh Century)' looks at the important role played by informal collaborations between members of aristocratic circles within the monastery, which managed the informal training of selected members for leadership roles. Informal training is also at the centre of Neslihan Şenocak's 'Horizontal Learning in Medieval Italian Canonries', which shows how communal living facilitated horizontal learning among canons: those beginning their clerical career acquired the various skills required by their role by participating in the liturgy and in chapter meetings. Lastly, Sita Steckel pulls all the contributions together in her 'Concluding Observations', where she reflects on the potential of the horizontal learning approach, connects it to extant research paradigms, and sets out some further questions prompted by this juxtaposition.

The primary purpose of this collection is to function as an incentive for further enquiries into various dimensions and aspects of horizontal learning. Many themes that are touched upon in this volume deserve to be studied in more detail, such as the interplay between horizontal and vertical learning and the (imagined or actual) risks of horizontal learning. The editors hope that the notion of horizontal learning will prove useful to broaden and nuance our understanding of how learning took place in

the Middle Ages, calling attention to the need to take into account not only master/disciple interactions, but also the learning exchanges that took place between peers, as well as the potential for reciprocity inherent to any intellectual interaction. Furthermore, the view of high medieval religious communities as the product of a continuous process of education and integration of new members through various forms of vertical as well as horizontal learning may offer a contribution to both the field of medieval religious history and the ongoing debate on the use of the notion of community in medieval studies and beyond.

About the authors

Steven Vanderputten is a full professor in the History of the Early and High Middle Ages at Ghent University's Department of History. His research deals primarily with the development and culture of religious groups in Western Europe between c. 800 and 1200. It covers a wide range of subjects, including memory and collective identities, conflict management, rituals, leadership, institutional development, gender, and discourses and realities of ecclesiastical reform. His work has been widely published in international peer-reviewed journals and collective volumes; his key monographs are *Monastic Reform as Process: Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders* (Cornell University Press, 2013); *Reform, Conflict and the Shaping of Corporate Identities: Collected Studies on Benedictine Monasticism, 1050-1150* (LIT Verlag, 2013); *Imagining Religious leadership in the Middle Ages: Richard of Saint-Vanne and the Politics of Reform* (Cornell University Press, 2013), and *Dark Age Nunneries: The Ambiguous Identity of Female Monasticism, 800-1050* (Cornell University Press, 2018). In addition, he has co-authored an edition of the *Acta Synodi Atrebatensis* (Brepols, 2014), and is the editor of published and forthcoming volumes with Brepols, Leuven University Press, and Brill. Vanderputten's fellowships include Clare Hall (Cambridge University, 2003), IAS Princeton (2005), FOVOG (Eichstätt, 2008), NIAS (Wassenaar, 2009-2010), Flemish Academic Center (Brussels, 2011-2012), and IAS Bloomington (2012). In April 2012, Germany's Humboldt Foundation awarded him the prestigious Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award; and in October 2013, the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts proclaimed him Laureate in Humanities. He is also the vice-chair of Ghent University's Henri Pirenne Institute for Medieval Studies.

Micol Long is a Senior Postdoctoral Researcher of the Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO) at Ghent University, where she joined the Department of Medieval History in 2014 to work on 'Learning as shared practice in monastic communities of the High Middle Ages'. In 2013 she had obtained her PhD in history at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa (Italy), with a dissertation on epistolary autography in the High Middle Ages, which was published in 2014. She spent research stays in Munich (Monumenta Germaniae Historica), Paris (École Nationale des Chartes), Rome (Academia Belgica), and Odense (Centre for Medieval Literature). From October 2018 she is working on a new research project about intra-religious mobility in the twelfth century.