In the spirit of David Wallace’s 2016 two-volume work *Europe: A Literary History, 1348-1418* (forthcoming at the time of this work), Aidan Conti, Orietta Da Rold, and Philip Shaw have compiled a collection of essays which assess aspects of textual and manuscript studies from a “pan-European perspective” (p. xiv). The nine essays range in topics from Bible use and circulation to German linguistic distinctions to multimedia collections underway for European scripts, providing an array of information on medieval texts and manuscripts as well as the continued efforts to study them effectively.

The opening essay by Da Rold and Maniaci offers an in-depth and helpful analysis of the different areas associated with broad, and often vague, field of manuscript studies. Their discussion of how manuscript studies developed, the geographic differences in medieval manuscript production and modern scholarship alike, and recent changes to manuscript assessment leads to a breakdown of the disciplines within the larger field. Throughout their discussion, Da Rold and Maniaci emphasize the distinction between the British and Continental traditions, which are often compared, and call for a larger, interactive approach amongst international scholars. Their notes are extensive as they summarize codicology and palaeography (unable to discuss the nuances of each), and the section on the influence of digitization and cognitive investigation on manuscript studies provides a possible look at the future of the field as a whole.

This look to the future through digital means is a fascinating topic taken on by Stewart Brookes, Peter Stokes, Matilda Watson, and Débora Marques de Matos as they discuss the DigiPal project. The *Digital Resource and Database for Palaeography, Manuscripts and Diplomatics*, or DigiPal, “provides a web-based framework for annotating digital images, interrogating the data, and ordering and presenting results” (p. 26). With a tool that seeks to compile and spread palaeographic knowledge and tackle continued problems of subjectivity, the DigiPal project team is playing a key role in the internationalization of manuscript
studies. As testaments to DigiPal’s usefulness and potential, Watson provides an account of her ScandiPal, compiled by using DigiPal on her Scandinavian sources, and Marque de Matos discusses SephardiPal, which she compiled by using DigiPal on Hebrew manuscripts. Both scholars describe their processes and results as well as contribute to the cautions about objectivity and responsible use of the framework. This essay, in particular, contains interesting ideas about opening up the field of paleography to new students that are useful to instructors and academic programs as well as having potential implications for interdisciplinary studies.

The remaining seven articles comprise a geographical tour of sorts of European writing, language, and manuscripts. Nadia Togni’s look at Italian Giant Bibles and their characteristics, purpose, and use during the eleventh and twelfth centuries highlights the uniformity of reformed ideologies as they were disseminated in Christendom through these texts. Togni also points out how the Italian Giant Bibles provide not only a source of textual history but also insight into canonical and liturgical religious practice and belief in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. George Younge also looks at written culture with his assessment of anti-Jewish hostility in early English literature. Younge focuses on the use of the term hæðen (the Latin equivalent of paganus, p. 125) from the Anglo-Saxon period forward, finally arriving at its apparent first uses to describe Jews during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Young surveys how the term broadened in meaning from “pagan” to “degenerate” or “immoral” and influenced anti-Jewish sentiment in the whole of England (p. 141). Annina Sieler surveys three digraphs used in written Germanic languages, reviewing their orthographical development and use and their relationship to Latin, Old English, and other European languages.

Four articles assess aspects of language and writing in often overlooked areas of Europe and connect them to a larger Continental context. Aidan Conti discusses efforts to compile and assess Latin works and the use of the language in Norway, while Helen Fulton looks at the translation of Continental works into Welsh and how the linguistic and literary influences associated with these efforts shaped the regional identity in Wales as well as its connection with Europe. Svetlana Tsonkova examines verbal charms as they were preserved in Bulgarian manuscripts and the possible implications for the use of verbal magic in Christian practice and, finally, Rolf H. Bremmer Jr. explores literacy and scribal knowledge of Continental conventions in Frisia around the end of the thirteenth century.

Writing Europe is a unique work covering several areas of manuscript and textual studies across a wide chronological time frame. The individual essays in Writing Europe appear to be disjointed but are necessarily so, as the wide geographic scope lends itself nicely to the larger argument of the collection. On its own, each essay includes information that can be applied to an individual branch of manuscript studies and textual analysis and could be incorporated into syllabi used in highly topic-specific, upper division courses. Overall, the essays provide a broad collection of works that convincingly argue for the interconnectedness of European manuscripts, language, writing, and the like. There are several areas of future research, as well as some tools with which to conduct this research, discussed, which makes this work an important contribution to the field.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
https://networks.h-net.org/h-teach

Citation: Melissa Sartore. Review of Conti, Aidan; Da Rold, Orietta; Shaw, Philip A., eds. *Writing Europe, 500-1450*. H-Teach, H-Net Reviews. August, 2016.

URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=47235

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.