

Call for Papers: DEADLINE 12 NOVEMBER 2021

Short, Swift, Secret: Writing and Reading the Shorthand Manuscript

A virtual conference hosted by

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg

4–5 March 2022

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Variously identified as an art, a technology, and a professional prerequisite, forms of shorthand have been in use from antiquity to the modern day. From Tironian notes to Latin abbreviations, from the surge in early modern England to the ensuing spread as far afield as Russia and Japan, shorthand and adjacent systems of speedy writing occupy a complex and multifaceted position in manuscript culture. Shorthand has been widely employed for verbatim transcription – in sermons, parliamentary debates, courts, and offices. Authors such as Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Astrid Lindgren, and Erich Kästner employed shorthand in their writing, while others such as Fyodor Dostoevsky employed a stenographer to take dictation. Countless others have used shorthand to keep private diaries, taking advantage of the feature of shorthand that proves most frustrating to modern scholars: its difficulty to decipher. Although shorthand may be defined by certain basic parameters – as a method of speedy writing by means of the substitution and contraction of letters, words, and syllables – even the systems and systematics of shorthand varied drastically depending on the intended use.

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It is that variety that makes shorthand manuscripts such a compelling subject of investigation. United by the writing system and its materiality, conference participants will engage in a comparative, interdisciplinary conversation on the under-researched history of shorthand. Papers will incorporate reflections on the writing practices of their given period and place, therefore allowing the production and use of shorthand systems from different periods and cultures to stand in relation or in contradiction to each other.

Abstracts are invited for an online conference in which we will explore the development, contexts, and functions of shorthand with manuscripts as our starting point.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- the perceived role and practical use of shorthand within its cultural context, in both public and private settings;
- the conditions of the production and circulation of the shorthand manuscript;
- the coexistence of shorthand among other scripts, writing systems, and technologies, as well as the competition between different systems of shorthand vying for prominence;
- the relation between shorthand system and language, and how the former may be adapted to accommodate the latter;
- social, intellectual, and physical experiences of shorthand writers (and readers);
- socio-political implications of shorthand;
- learning and teaching practices of shorthand;
- analogue and digital methods of decipherment;
- and the boundaries of shorthand, materially and conceptually.

Papers will be approximately 20 minutes in length with 10 minutes for questions, and will form the basis for an edited volume published in the series *Studies in Manuscript Cultures (SMC)*.

Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words/2000 characters and a short CV (max 2 pages) to Hannah Boeddeker (hannah.boeddeker@uni-hamburg.de) and Kelly McCay (kmrafey@g.harvard.edu) by the 12th of November, 2021.