

Building a Digital Bookwheel Together: Annotated Books Online and the History of Early Modern Reading Practices

Introduction

For historians who do not regularly work with old books, the word “marginalia” may have some unfortunate connotations. Especially for an academic culture increasingly concerned with the social relevance of the humanities, it might seem foolish to study a subject that presents itself as being distinctly peripheral. Studying the margins of early printed books may well appear to be an antiquarian pastime, revealing an obscure interest in fringes and fragments of an already esoteric scholarly field.

Early modern educators, however, would surely have thought that such a view misses the point. For them, note-taking was an essential technique for the acquisition and organization of knowledge. Writing was an integral part of the use of books; merely to read them was not enough. «Whatever you read, have ready a notebook», Guarino of Verona advised his pupil Leonello d’Este, for instance, in a letter from 1435.¹ This would help the young student to retain the most instructive and useful passages. Erasmus of Rotterdam famously explains (what he puts forth as) the most productive reading process in similar terms, urging the studious reader first to indicate an important passage «by some appropriate mark», and then to copy it in a commonplace book, preferably one that was thematically arranged.² These instruments and techniques of organizing knowledge were especially useful in the face of the explosive growth of information after the advent of print-

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1. Cited by Anthony Grafton. *The Humanist as Reader*, in *A History of Reading in the West*. Edited by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, p. 196-197.

2. Erasmus, *On the Method of Study*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1978, vol. 24, p. 670.

ing. They were useful, moreover, to a much larger group than the circumscribed community of scholars and academics. The margins of early modern books can therefore give us new information about people and groups that have traditionally received less attention. Because many of these books are still uncatalogued and unexplored, a more systematic study of the subject seems especially promising.

This essay takes as its starting point the idea that a comparative approach to manuscript marginalia will help us better understand how early modern readers appropriated the information in their books. Its purpose is twofold. First, it seeks to introduce book historians to Annotated Books Online (ABO), a new digital research platform for the study of annotated books. Second, it aims to demonstrate the potential of ABO by means of a case study about sixteenth-century readers of Homer. We hope here not only to illuminate what marginalia can teach us about early modern reading practices, but also to highlight the significance of media of communication (in this case the printed book) in the reading process.

Over the past three decades, the study of early modern literature has seen an important shift in attention: from authors and their works to readers and their appropriations of their books. This development triggered a new interest in reading practices and their material characteristics, which by the mid-1990s crystallized into a lively field of study in its own right. «The history of reading is hot», Anthony Grafton observed in 1997.³ Since then a steady stream of publications about reading practices has brought together a diverse group of scholars, including book historians, literary historians, classicists, and historians of ideas.⁴

Arguably the most important development to emerge from this trend was an increasingly rich picture of the freedom with which readers handled their books. Three scholarly landmarks illustrate this well. First, Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976) revealed the extent to which reading was an unpredictable activity, showing how one particular reader could interpret his books in completely unexpected ways.⁵ Fourteen years later, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine highlighted the purposeful nature of reading. They showed how the sixteenth-century English scholar and controversialist

3. Anthony Grafton. *Is the History of Reading a Marginal Enterprise? Guillaume Budé and His Books*. «Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America», 91 (1997), p. 139-157, at 139.

4. See the introductory overview by Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink. *The Textuality and Materiality of Reading in Early Modern England*. «The Huntington Library Quarterly», 73 (2010), p. 345-361.

5. Carlo Ginzburg. *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*. Turin, Einaudi, 1976; English translation by John and Anne Tedeschi: *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Gabriel Harvey used his reading of the classical historian Livy to prepare courtiers and diplomats to take concrete political actions.⁶ More recently, William Sherman provided a first synthesis of the traces left by English Renaissance readers. Based on a systematic investigation of thousands of books, Sherman's study resisted the temptation of a grand narrative, emphasizing instead what he termed the «ineluctable specificity of readers and readings».⁷

Now, almost two decades after Grafton's observation, the history of reading can no longer be called hot. And yet the rise of new digital media has in fact rendered it distinctly cool, if we view the subject from another perspective. Rapid changes in contemporary media culture have resulted in vastly increased access to information and the arrival of new, interactive forms of publishing—developments that have made historians more acutely aware of the cultural specificity of reading. Inspired by these developments, recent studies have begun to investigate the significance of early modern media as tools of information management.⁸

The picture that has emerged from this recent scholarship is tantalizingly protean. A rich array of individual practices is evident even within relatively circumscribed categories of readers, such as humanist scholars, a relatively well-researched group. Case studies of the reading practices of scholars such as Guillaume Budé, Thomas Cranmer, John Dee, Isaac Casaubon, and William Laud, for instance, have shown that marginalia constituted a flexible means of managing scholarly knowledge, serving highly specific situations and goals.⁹ Yet, however fruitful this discovery of variegated means and ends has been, it is also a bit of a curse. The ideas of diversity and specificity

6. Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine. «*Studied for Action*»: How Gabriel Harvey Read *His Livy*. «Past & Present», 129 (Nov. 1990), p. 30-78.

7. William H. Sherman. *Used Books. Marking Readers in Renaissance England*. Philadelphia, Penn, 2008, p. xvi.

8. See especially: Ann M. Blair. *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age*. New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2010; for information management in religious literature, see: Peter Stallybrass. *Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible*, in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*. Edited by Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer. Philadelphia, Penn., 2002, p. 42-79; Kate Narveson. *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England. Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2012.

9. For Budé, see: Anthony Grafton. *Commerce with the Classics. Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 135-183; for Casaubon, see: Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg. *I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue. Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, And a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship*. Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011; for Dee, see: William H. Sherman. *John Dee. The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, esp. p. 53-112; for Harvey, see: Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine. «*Studied for Action*», cit.; as well as: Nicholas Popper. *The English Polydaedali: How Gabriel Harvey Read Late Tudor London*. «Journal of the History of Ideas», 66 (2005), p. 351-381.

threaten to create a situation in which there is little else to say, highlighting as they do the fragmented state of the field. Although this fragmentation may seem similar to what we have experienced in other areas of historical research, it is more frustrating in this case, since the material evidence of reading practices is already highly fragmented. In other words, our appreciation of the diversity of historical reading practices also raises a formidable question: Why should scholars hunt down additional marginal snippets of individual readers, if they are only to find yet more purely specific examples?

It is unrealistic to expect a single, clear-cut answer to this question, but we would like to venture two responses that may help to clarify the potential of this field. The first argument is that while new research may not be able to formulate laws, it can actually help to delineate the existing variety more precisely. There are already some useful terms to help classify reading styles, at least to some extent. These include the level of concentration (from intensive to cursory, and from meditative to scanning forms of reading), the reading scope (discontinuous or comprehensive), the social context (solitary or collective), and the personal backgrounds of the readers (based on traits such as gender or class).¹⁰

Such characteristics correspond to how historical readers conceptualized their reading through the ages. The ancient Stoic Seneca, for example, famously preferred the high-concentration reading of one book to a wide-ranging reading that would take in many works. The latter would only cause “distraction”.¹¹ While this style is sometimes associated with the monastic reading practice of rumination, it is clear that monastic reading was not just confined to a limited number of texts. The sixteenth-century German abbot Joannes Trithemius, for one, explicitly argued in favour of a wealth of books.¹² The seventeenth-century Dutch schoolmaster David Beck, on the other hand, was aware that he adopted different reading styles on different occasions. In his diary, he used different terms to denote various reading styles, ranging from exploratory and sensory forms for reading in atlases, herbals, and bibliographies (e.g., *leafing*, *nosing*, *toying*, and *mousing*), to scrutinizing and intensive forms of reading in the case of poetry and moral literature, with the Bible forming a category of its own. He also indicated the occasions when he read with others, either reciting himself or listening

10. For a stimulating attempt to formulate a typology of reading styles in the fifteenth century, see: James Hankins. *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*. Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1990, vol. 1, p. 18-26.

11. Seneca. *Epistulae morales* 2.3.

12. Joannes Trithemius. *In praise of Scribes. De laude scriptorum*. Ed. with introduction by Klaus Arnold. Lawrence, Coronado Press, 1974, ch. 14, p. 88-93.

to a friend reading.¹³ These examples show that the classifications are more than a modern attempt to create order out of a thicket of different reading practices. They reveal that for the readers themselves, these differences made sense.

A second argument advocating that we venture beyond the daunting variety of reading styles is that in doing so, we may be able to develop novel approaches toward the uses of the book. Without being representative of more general patterns, individual reading practices can still illuminate how books were used in particular cultural contexts. For this reason, Bill Sherman and Jason Scott-Warren have proposed that we study marks in books under broader categories rather than regard them as traces of reading exclusively, suggesting terms such as “epigraphs”, “exograms”, or “graffiti”. Such terms would do more justice to the variety of marks in books, they have argued, by shifting the focus away from textual meanings and toward the book as an organizational tool or a space of storage for its user.¹⁴

Both arguments require a comparative perspective, so that the specificity of individual cases can be placed more precisely in the context of particular reading cultures. To make this possible, it would be useful to integrate evidence on a larger scale and to bring together what scholarly expertise is available. With this aim in mind, a small network of historians and librarians has recently set up an electronic platform, Annotated Books Online (ABO), for teaching and research purposes.¹⁵

Annotated Books Online: Digital Archive and Annotating Tool

ABO aims to offer full access to digitized copies of annotated books, focusing on the first three ages of print (c. 1450–1750). It seeks to bring together items that are currently housed in different collections in libraries

13. Jeroen Blaak. *Literacy in Everyday Life. Reading and Writing in Early Modern Dutch Diaries*. Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 99-105.

14. William H. Sherman. *Used Books*, cit., p. 20-24; Jason Scott-Warren. *Reading Graffiti in the Early Modern Book*. «Huntington Library Quarterly», 73 (2010), p. 363-381.

15. This collaboration started with scholars at the Universities of Amsterdam, Ghent, the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters at University College London, Princeton, Utrecht and York, coordinated by Arnoud Visser (Utrecht). The project is funded by the Dutch Research Council, with additional funding from the Centre of Editing Lives and Letters, the Ghent Centre for Early Modern Studies and Princeton University. This website was developed by a team of Computer Science students from Utrecht University, consisting of Mathijs Baaijens, Iris Bekker, Renze Droog, Maarten van Duren, Jeroen Hanselman, Bert Massop, Robin van der Ploeg, Gerben van Veenendaal, Tom Tervoort, and Tom Wennink. This is free software released under GNU General Public License version 3 and downloadable from < <https://github.com/AnnotatedBooksOnline/AnnotatedBooksOnline/> >.

throughout the world. Such a separate digital archive is especially welcome in the face of rapidly growing digital libraries. For all their obvious benefits, large-scale digitization projects such as EEBO, ECCO, or Google Books have paradoxically obscured the variety of reading that is uniquely reflected in individual copies. By displaying one copy, usually without marks of reading, these projects present books as being more stable carriers of information than historical reading practices have shown them to be. ABO seeks to correct this tendency by offering online access to individual items and their unique traces of reading. These digitized books, published with the permission of their owners, offer free use for non-commercial purposes, licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial license.¹⁶

In the first year since its launch, ABO has managed to collect more than sixty annotated books from ten different libraries around the globe. These include copies whose annotators have been identified, such as Martin Luther's annotated copy of the New Testament (in the edition of Erasmus of Rotterdam, together with his commentary) [III. 1], an incunable edition of Lucretius with annotations of Pomponio Leto and his students, and nine heavily annotated books of the English controversialist Gabriel Harvey. But there are also items of unidentified provenance, which nonetheless show highly interesting traces of reading.

We aim to expand this collection gradually on the basis of voluntary contributions from the research and library community. ABO welcomes, therefore, collaboration and suggestions from librarians and researchers. The criteria for selection are pragmatic and inclusive rather than normative. We believe that the research community can best decide collectively what items may be of interest. Apart from the historical interest of the annotator, the decision to include a book could be based on the nature of the annotations, or on the work that is annotated. ABO currently includes two copies of the same edition of Vitruvius, for instance, one annotated by Joseph Scaliger and the other by Pieter Burman, allowing scholars to compare annotations in the same text by two different scholarly readers.

In addition to allowing users to view and read these books, ABO also enables its users to transcribe and translate the marginalia on a voluntary basis. These editorial tools operate on the principle of user-generated content, similar to large-scale crowdsourcing projects or digital encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia. This means that the user community, supervised by the project administrators, is actively involved in maintaining the quality of the contributions. In this way editorial work does not depend on a single scholar, but can be carried out gradually by a group of experts within the (scholarly)

16. See <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>>.

user community. This system also can flexibly accommodate revisions and updates.

Given these tools, ABO bears a remarkable resemblance to the historical object of research. It allows historians to analyse and compare early modern reading practices as if it were a digital bookwheel: the device that allowed historical readers to read several books at the same time. It also encourages modern readers to annotate the annotations in these books, enriching our own reading in new ways by the use of the digital margins of our screens. To show the potential of this tool, we will explore one example in more detail, the two copies of Homer's *Iliad* and one copy of the *Odyssey* from the library of the Wittenberg reformer Philipp Melanchthon.¹⁷ These sixteenth-century copies bear traces of multiple readers. A first exploration will both illustrate the value of a comparative approach and highlight the flexible use of the medium of the book.

Homer and His Early Modern Readers

Our exploration must start with assessing the provenance of the books and the authorship of the annotations. ABO currently has three Homer copies that are connected to Melanchthon and his circle at Wittenberg.¹⁸ These items can be localized with any certainty only in the early twentieth century, when they were in the possession of the English engineer and book collector John Eliot Hodgkin (1829–1912). In 1914 the Maggs Brothers sold his library and the Homer copies became part of the manuscript and rare book collection of the American publisher George Arthur Plimpton (1855–1936).¹⁹ In 1936 Plimpton bequeathed his books to Columbia University; his collection also included some other fascinating items, such as a 1502 edition of Herodotus' *Histories* from the library of Erasmus.

Unfortunately, we still know little about the whereabouts of our Homer copies before they became part of Hodgkin's library. In 1902 Hodgkin was

17. *Homeri Opera Omnia, cum vita eius ex Herodoto, Dione et Plutarcho*. Venice, Aldus Manutius, 1517. See: Antoine Augustin Renouard. *Annales de l'imprimerie des Alde, ou histoire des trois Manuce et de leurs éditions*. Paris, chez Antoine-Augustin Renouard, 1825², vol. 1, p. 186, no. 2. See on ABO: < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-39-1> (*Iliad*), <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-1> (*Odyssey*) and <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-40-5> > (*Iliad*). This last item has no collation and colophon, but is probably also the 1517 edition.

18. These are currently preserved in the Columbia University Library: Columbia RBML Plimpton 880 1517 H37.

19. George McCracken. *More Marginalia Attributed to Melanchthon*. «Classical Philology», 29.4 (1934), p. 341-343, which followed his *Marginalia Attributed to Melanchthon*. «Classical Philology», 28.1 (1933), p. 53-55.

the first to publish a description of his two copies of Homer, identifying Melanchthon as the annotator of the books.²⁰ He also described Melanchthon's 1519 manuscript dedications to his friend Martin Luther on the title pages [III. 2].²¹ After Plimpton had acquired Hodgkin's books, he published a description in which he mentioned the third copy included on ABO.²² Although this book lacks explicit information about provenance, it has annotations in another hand that bear close resemblance to those in the other two copies; for that reason it was connected to Melanchthon and the Wittenberg circle.

At first sight, then, these copies of Homer appear to be of great historical interest, as they illuminate the intellectual exchange between Luther and the famous early modern professor of Greek. The date, only two years after the posting of Luther's ninety-five theses on the door of the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg, is also significant, as it comes before the period when Luther (with Melanchthon and others) embarked on his translation of the Bible into German, a project that required a solid knowledge of Greek.

On closer inspection, however, the situation is more complicated.²³ In the copy of the *Odyssey*, a first exploration suggests that apart from Melanchthon's dedication on the title page the marginalia are in at least three different hands. First, there is a reader whose hand we find throughout all three copies, which we can call the main hand.²⁴ The second reader made annotations in red or dark brown ink, both in the margins as well as between the lines. This second reader annotated only a part of the poem. He repeatedly used capital letters and wide spacing to highlight specific elements.²⁵ Then there are Greek annotations that must as yet remain unidentified. These could have been made by one of the two readers mentioned above or possibly by a

20. *Rariora: Being Notes of Some of the Printed Books, Manuscripts, Historical Documents, Medals, Engravings, Pottery Etc. Etc.* Collected (1858-1900) by John Eliot Hodgkin. London, Sampson Low, Marston, 1902, p. 5-6.

21. For his copy of the *Iliad* with a dedication to Luther in Greek, see < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-39-9> > and for another in Latin in his copy of the *Odyssey*, see < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-9> >.

22. George Arthur Plimpton. *Greek Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in the Plimpton Library*. «Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association», 65 (1934), p. 260-270.

23. The catalogue entry of Columbia University Library describes it as «[i]nscribed by Philipp Melanchthon to Martin Luther. Extensively annotated throughout, in more than one hand, probably including Philipp Melanchthon. The notes seem to be lecture notes, either Melanchthon's preparatory notes or by students.».

24. For a sample see the annotation on top on < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-9> >. Below is the dedication in Melanchthon's hand.

25. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-26> >. On the left there are two annotations with wide spacing, clearly legible: «Bonum est imperare» and «Delectus Principum».

third reader.²⁶ None of these hands seems to match the handwriting of Melanchthon's dedication on the title page.²⁷

If Melanchthon's hand indeed turns out to be present only in the dedication, why were these annotations attributed to Melanchthon in the first place? Both Hodgkin and Plimpton attributed the annotations to him, and they were probably not the first to do so. In fact, in a market where books with anonymous marginalia proved hard to sell, there had long been a tendency to ascribe any given book with Latin annotations by a German to Melanchthon.²⁸ In 1835, for instance, the library of the German physician, book collector, and freemason Georg Franz Burkhard Kloss (1787–1854) came up for auction at Sotheby's in London.²⁹ The catalogue ascribed the marginalia of no less than 601 annotated books to Melanchthon, including some Aldine editions of Homer.³⁰ Not completely satisfied with the way his books were described, Kloss wrote a letter about the catalogue, in which he distances himself from these attributions to Melanchthon, explicitly stating that he had nothing to do with this "fantasy" of Sotheby.³¹ Without conclusive evidence, attributions to Melanchthon may thus tell us more about nineteenth-century booksellers' commercial strategies than about Melanchthon's actual reading practice.

And yet, along with their provenance and evidence of varied annotation practices, our Homer books provide no less intriguing clues into how Homer was read in Melanchthon's intellectual milieu at Wittenberg. What, then, can these copies teach us about the study of books, readers, and their annotations? We can observe three characteristics. First, these annotated copies exemplify how the new medium of the printed book was used to organize

26. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-22> >. At the bottom of the page are two verses from Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

27. William Weaver (Baylor University) is currently preparing a critical edition of these marginalia. We thank Dr. Weaver for generously sharing his thoughts on these problems.

28. Anthony Grafton. *Commerce with the Classics*, cit., p. 143.

29. For Kloss, see: Wilhelm Stricker's entry in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*. Leipzig, Duncker & Humblot, 1882, vol. 16, p. 227-228.

30. *Catalogue of the library of Dr. Kloss, of Franckfort a.M., professor: including many original and unpublished manuscripts, and printed books with ms. annotations, by Philip Melanchthon which will be sold by auction, by Mr. Sotheby and son on Thursday, May 7th, and nineteen following days (Sundays excepted), at twelve o'clock each day* (London 1835), nos 1840 and 1841. Sotheby later published an academic study of the annotations in these books, see: Samuel Leigh Sotheby. *Unpublished Documents, Marginal Notes and Memoranda, in the Autograph of Philip Melanchthon and of Martin Luther with Numerous Fac-Similes. Accompanied With Observations Upon the Varieties of Style in the Handwriting of these Illustrious Reformers* (London 1840).

31. Georg Kloss. *Ueber Melanchthon's angebliche Handschriften, welche in dem Catalogue of the Library of Dr. Kloss verzeichnet sind*. «Serapeum. Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswissenschaft, Handschriftenkunde und ältere Litteratur». 2.24 (1841), p. 369-377.

and share new knowledge. In this case, the margins of the Aldine Homer were used to share information about ancient Greek and Homeric discourse, quite a sophisticated branch of knowledge at the time. More precisely, the presence of multiple hands in these copies allows us to explore how different readers used the same text for various purposes. The accumulation of annotations suggests that the book may have circulated among a group of students for whom the collection of diverse marginal annotations represented an added value, in that it facilitated a richer understanding of the original work. After all, for those new to Greek, Aldus' sober edition of the complete *Odyssey* would have seemed like a daunting textual forest, impenetrable without a roadmap or some form of (para)textual guidance [III. 3].

The sharing of books was common among early modern scholars and testifies to a wide array of scholarly practices. In this case the context in which the books may have circulated remains somewhat unclear. Given Melanchthon's reputation as a professor of Greek, an educational context seems likely, and is suggested by at least one set of annotations in the copy of the *Odyssey*.³² Among the annotations in the second hand, one finds numerous interlinear Latin translations. These notes clearly reflect a reading activity aimed at mastering the Greek language. Possibly they were added during one of Melanchthon's lectures on Homer.³³

Like our *Odyssey*, the previously mentioned annotated copy of Lucretius also contains traces of multiple readers [III. 4]. These were formerly believed to be classroom notes from students of the famous Italian educator Pomponio Leto, taken during one of his lectures at the Roman Academy or the Studium Urbis. Helen Dixon, however, has recently challenged this interpretation. Rather than placing the evidence in an educational context, she argues that it suggests that two disciples collaborated to make their own edition of the poem with the help of Leto himself.³⁴ Although such a scenario does not seem likely in the case of the *Odyssey*, both examples do remind us that interpreting these accumulations of marginalia requires a carefully contextualized analysis even when a classroom setting seems a likely candidate for

32. Cf. Paul Oskar Kristeller. *Iter Italicum*. London, The Warburg Institute; Leiden [etc.], E. J. Brill, 1990, vol. 5, p. 315 where a similar opinion is expressed about this copy.

33. We can infer Melanchthon's reasons for lecturing on Homer from his *Praefatio ad Homerum*, in which he announces his topic and also motivates his choice for these particular poems. The text is edited in: *Corpus Reformatorum*. Ed. by Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider. Leipzig, 1843, vol. 11, p. 397-413; translation in: *Philip Melanchthon: Orations on Philosophy and Education*. Ed. by Sachiko Kusakawa. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 38-53 (trans. by Christine F. Salazar).

34. Helen Dixon, *Pomponio Leto's notes on Lucretius in Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, X 2° 82*. «Aevum», 85 (2011), p. 191-216. See also: Ada Palmer. *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*. «Journal of the History of Ideas», 73 (2012), p. 395-416.

their context. At the same time they illustrate in various ways how readers could customize their books as a place to store and share knowledge.

The second lesson that this case can teach us concerns individual reading strategies. A closer look at the contents of individual annotations reveals, in fascinating detail, how the various readers understood their Homer. The main hand, for instance, seems to have belonged to a scholar who was well versed in Latin and Greek. He annotated both poems throughout, frequently highlighting or underlining specific phrases and sentences. Yet despite their profusion, the content of these annotations is rather monotonous. Apart from summarizing passages or those pointing out specific protagonists (e.g., «Humanitatis et hospitalitatis exemplum» and «Apparatus et armatura Palladis»), there are hardly any instances of in-depth interpretation, literary criticism, or Homeric exegesis.³⁵ Rather, these annotations suggest a comprehensive, continuous reading practice oriented at a general understanding of the *Odyssey*.

On another level, these annotations made by the main reader helpfully illuminate his literary horizon. They show, for instance, how he frequently used Virgil's *Aeneid* as a point of departure, reading Homeric passages through a Virgilian lens. Early modern readers were steeped in the Latin classics. They knew, of course, of Virgil's debt to his Greek predecessor, of whom Roman authors had spoken so highly. But when they could finally read Homer in Greek, or in a Latin translation, his poems fell somewhat short of their expectations. Although many considered Homer to be the ultimate source of epic poetry, others gave preference to Virgil, judging Homer to be inconsistent and repetitive. Famous examples of this more critical attitude are found in Marco Girolamo Vida's *De arte poetica* and Julius Caesar Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem*.³⁶

In the margins of our Homer we see clear traces of this process of comparison. On several occasions the main reader quotes Virgil in the margins. This could have served two purposes. Either the annotator added these references to mark parallels between Homeric and Virgilian scenes and phrases, or he offered them as translations or paraphrases. In this latter case, these references could have served as a means to make sense of an unfamiliar passage through familiar words, by understanding Homer in Virgilian terms.

35. See <<http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-16> and <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-17>>.

36. David Scott Wilson-Okamura. *Virgil in the Renaissance*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010 and Robin Sowerby. *Early Humanist Failure with Homer (I)*. «International Journal of the Classical Tradition», 4.1 (1997), p. 37-63.

A few examples may serve to illustrate this point. At the opening of the *Odyssey* our reader quotes a verse from the beginning of the *Aeneid*.³⁷ Subsequently, in the sixth book, when Odysseus meets Nausicaa, he refers at least twice to encounters between Dido and Aeneas and between Aeneas and his mother Venus.³⁸ Our reader shows a particular interest in the Greek god Hermes: he twice quotes the same passage from the *Aeneid* (4.238–241) describing how Mercury binds his golden sandals to his feet.³⁹ In the *Iliad* we observe the same pattern: the same annotator marks standard scenes with Latin equivalents, such as at 1.234*ff.*, where he adds in the margin an almost literal translation of this passage from the *Aeneid* (12.206–211).⁴⁰

These and similar annotations demonstrate the extent to which Virgil was on the minds of Homer's early modern readers. But not only Virgil was featured in the Homeric margins, but also other Roman authors such as Pliny and Ovid. In a note to *Odyssey* 1.49, for instance, our reader refers to Pliny's *Natural History* to identify the island where the Greek nymph Circe detained Odysseus.⁴¹ This goes to show that the quotations from the *Aeneid* do not point exclusively to comparisons between the two giants of epic poetry. Rather, the references to these other authors demonstrate how reading Homer also served to activate, refresh, enhance, or perhaps even challenge knowledge of the Latin literary tradition. This phenomenon, then, neatly exemplifies how the world of Greek letters was seamlessly integrated into that of Latin literature. A comprehensive analysis of these marginalia could offer a rich example of how the ubiquitous Latin frame of reference actually helped to domesticate Homer.

The third point revealed by these marginal annotations is the disciplining impact of reading traditions on individual readers. The marks of individual readers may be ineluctably specific and often unpredictable, but they can seldom completely escape the grid of traditional reading interests. A comparison of different copies shows that our anonymous reader did not place these snippets of classical knowledge as randomly as it might at first appear. Some of the annotated passages had been standard places in commentaries for ages. In these instances we should thus place our reader in a long tradition of Homeric exegesis.

37. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-13> >. The quotation is on the upper left side of the page.

38. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-110> and <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-112> >.

39. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-16> and <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-91> >.

40. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-39-21> >.

41. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-14> >.

Already in antiquity and in the Byzantine world, students of Greek sometimes read only selected highlights of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Over time this consciously or unconsciously resulted in a sort of predetermined reading guide. For instance, the first two books of the *Iliad* in particular were taught in schools, as revealed by evidence from Greek papyri. When more than a thousand years later the Greek grammarian Manuel Moschopoulos wrote a commentary on the *Iliad*, he did so on those two books only.⁴²

So when, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, humanists gradually became acquainted with Homer again, the road had in fact already been mapped out for them. One Greek word may illustrate this point. The mysterious herb moly (μῶλυ), which the god Mercury gives to Odysseus to protect him against the magic of the sorceress Circe (*Odyssey* 10.305), had intrigued Homer's earliest readers. Nearly every extant commentary or gloss on this passage tried to explain what exactly this 'moly' was, whether from a mythological, allegorical, or botanical perspective.⁴³ Homer's early modern readers were no exception. All highlighted in some way or another this particular word in the *Odyssey*. One of them was the French scholar Guillaume Budé, who added in the margins of his copy, also available on ABO, the allegorical explanation of the twelfth-century Byzantine scholar Eustathius of Thessalonica [III. 5].⁴⁴ Erasmus was similarly fascinated by the potential of Homer's herb, referring to it in an allegorical context in the *Adagia*.⁴⁵ Our main reader also underlined these verses and seemed to have been equally amazed by its potential powers.⁴⁶

That each of these three humanists referred to this mythical substance is relevant because it demonstrates that in different cultural and intellectual environments the same verses of Homer received specific attention. We can see here the impact of the exegetical tradition: these Homeric verses were precisely the important, classic passages that commentators discussed most frequently or teachers may have discussed in class. This points to a process of canonization in the reading of specific texts.⁴⁷ Such a process might be

42. Raffaella Cribiore. *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 194-197; Robert Browning. *Homer in Byzantium*. «Viator», 6 (1975), p. 15-34, at 16.

43. Hugo Rahner. *Griechische Mythen in christlicher Dichtung*. Zürich, Rhein-Verlag, 1945, p. 164-196.

44. Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics*, 135-183, at p. 181. For Budé's annotation, see < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-65-140> >.

45. Rudolf Kassel. *Erasmus on Homer's Moly*, in *Hesperos: Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry Presented to M. L. West on his Seventieth Birthday*. Ed. by Patrick J. Finglass, Christopher Collard and Nicholas J. Richardson. Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 350-352.

46. < <http://abo.annotatedbooksonline.com/#binding-38-182> >.

47. Glenn Most recently pointed in a similar direction in relation to Odysseus' dog Argus in: *A Shaggy-Dog Story: The Life, Death and Afterlives of Odysseus' Trusty Dog Argus*, in *Ho-*

regarded as a literary equivalent of the Matthew effect: passages that were read became more widely read, and those that were ignored more roundly ignored. In other words: scholars annotated specific phrases or verses because they depended on an exegetical tradition that shaped and guided their reading, whether they wanted it or not.

Conclusion

Although in-depth analyses of all the different hands in the Melancthon copies of Homer demonstrate “the ineluctable specificity” of individual readers, to use Bill Sherman’s phrase, a more comparative approach can contribute to understanding where such reading practices originated and to tracing the continuity of reading habits over time. We have tried to offer a first example of how this could work. Yet the exciting potential of marginalia lies not in differentiating between these two areas of emphasis, revealing either individual reading habits or general reading patterns. Marginal annotations more broadly offer us a point of departure for tracing how early modern readers responded to a medium that allowed them to obtain, share, and organize information.

By providing an online platform ABO seeks to contribute to the study of marginalia in a similar way. The fragmented and peripheral nature of marginalia has often been an impediment to research. By bringing together sources and experts from different backgrounds ABO aims to offer new tools for a wide-ranging, comparative study of the history of material reading practices. To make this happen, ABO welcomes new contributions and suggestions from the research community. By gradually expanding our digital book-wheel, we will be able not just to further our understanding of the history of early modern books and their readers, but also to create new opportunities for modern scholarly collaboration.

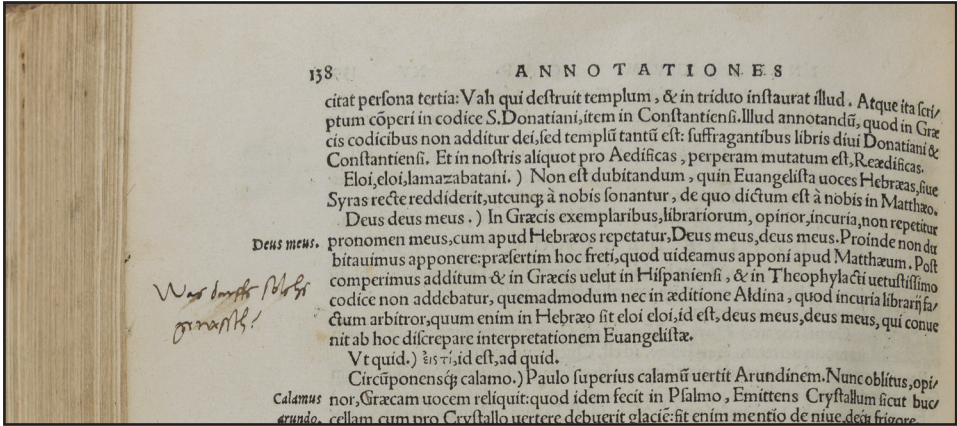


Illustration 1. Martin Luther’s annotated copy of the New Testament as edited by Erasmus of Rotterdam (Basel: Johann Froben, 1527) is kept in the University Library of Groningen (classmark HS 494). In the margin to Erasmus’ commentary to Mark 15 (p. 138), Luther has written angrily: «Was darffs solchs gewesch?» («What use is such rubbish?»). Photo reproduced with permission of University Library Groningen.

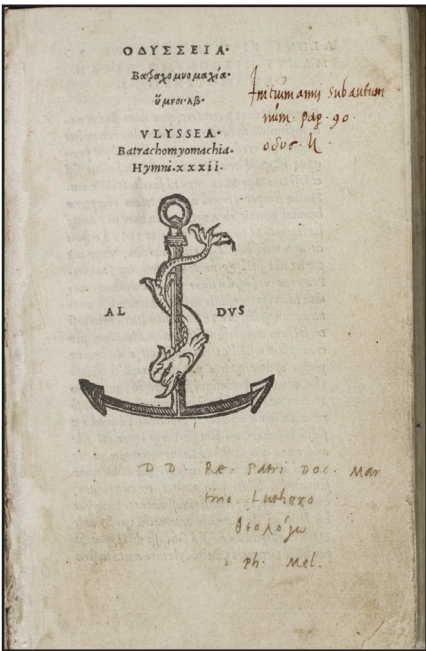


Illustration 2. Title page of Homer’s *Odyssey* (Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1517) with dedication by Philipp Melanchthon to Martin Luther (Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, classmark Plimpton 880 1517 H37). Photo reproduced with permission of Columbia University Libraries.

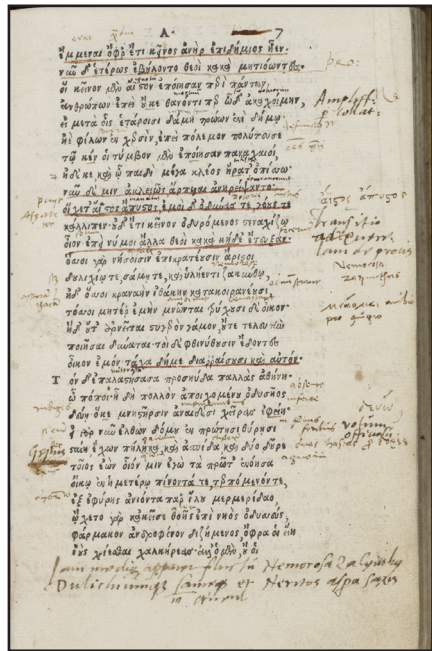


Illustration 3. Annotated page of the *Odyssey* (fol. 7r), showing several hands and a reference to Virgil’s *Aeneid* (note at the bottom of the page). Photo reproduced with permission of Columbia University Libraries.

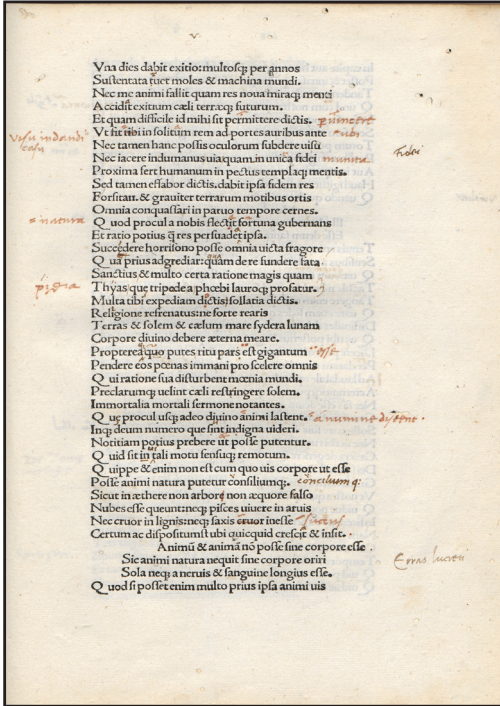
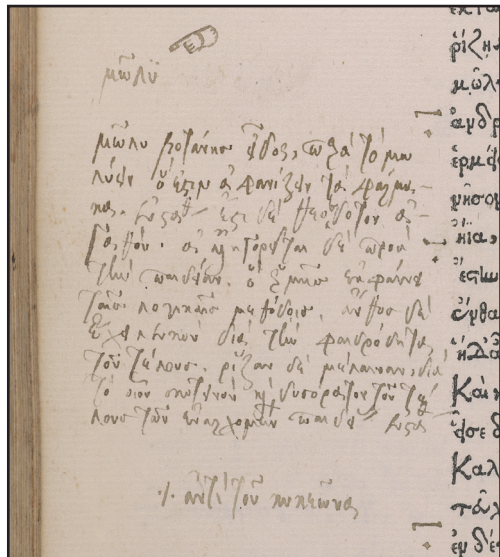


Illustration 4. Pomponio Leto and his student Sebastiano Priuli annotated this copy of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (Verona: Paulus Fridenperger, 1496). On this page (sig. [hvi-ro]) they made sure to correct Lucretius ideas about the mortality of the soul. Photo reproduced with permission of Utrecht University Library (classmark MAG X FOL 82).

Illustration 5. Guillaume Budé annotated in his copy of Homer's works (Florence: [printer of Vergilius C6061], 1488) the passage in the *Odyssey* about the herb *moly*, adding an allegorical explanation of the twelfth-century Byzantine scholar Eustathius of Thessalonica. Budé's copy of Homer's works is kept in Princeton University Library, classmark 2681.1488Q vol. 1. Photo reproduced with permission of Princeton University Library.



ABSTRACT**Costruire un leggio rotante digitale insieme: Annotated Books Online e la storia delle pratiche di lettura durante la prima età moderna**

Negli ultimi tre decenni la storia della lettura è diventata un campo di ricerca sempre più vivace. Alcune importanti analisi hanno documentato la libertà di cui i lettori hanno goduto, consultando i loro libri. Sul piano strutturale, però, la storiografia è ostacolata dall'accesso limitato ad una raccolta di prove intrinsecamente frammentata. Questo articolo introduce un nuovo progetto di ricerca, Annotated Books Online (ABO), che cerca di fornire una piattaforma per lo studio delle annotazioni manoscritte nei primi libri stampati. ABO presenta un ambiente di ricerca open access, dove gli studiosi e gli studenti possono raccogliere e visualizzare le fonti nuove, oltre a collaborare a trascrizioni, traduzioni e nuove iniziative di ricerca. Per mostrare il potenziale delle nuove ricerche su marginalia e sulle sfide da affrontare, la seconda parte di questo articolo offre un'analisi delle annotazioni manoscritte, trovate nelle affascinanti copie dei poemi di Omero, un tempo possedute dal riformatore tedesco Filippo Melantone (Columbia University Library, Plimpton 880 1517 H37).

Chiavi di ricerca: Umanesimo, Filippo Melantone, Martin Lutero, Marginalia, Omero, Iliade, Odissea, Virgilio, Eneide, Annotated Books Online, ABO.

Building a Digital Bookwheel Together: Annotated Books Online and the History of Early Modern Reading Practices

Over the past three decades, the history of reading has become an increasingly lively field of scholarship. Important case studies have documented the freedom that individual readers have enjoyed in handling their books. On a structural level, however, the scholarship has been hampered by limited access to an inherently fragmented body of evidence. This article introduces a new research project, Annotated Books Online (ABO), which aims to provide a platform for the study of manuscript annotations in early modern printed books. ABO offers an open-access research environment where scholars and students can collect and view new evidence, as well as collaborate on transcriptions, translations, and new research initiatives. To illuminate the promising potential of new research on marginalia and adumbrate the challenges ahead, the second part of this article offers a case study of three intriguing annotated copies of Homer, once owned by the German reformer Philipp Melanchthon (Columbia University Library, Plimpton 880 1517 H37).

Keywords: Humanism, Philipp Melanchthon, Martin Luther, Marginalia, Homer, Iliad, Odyssey, Virgil, Aeneid, Annotated Books Online, ABO.

Die gemeinsame Errichtung einer digitalen Bibliothek: Annotated Books Online und die Geschichte der ersten modernen Lesepraktiken

In den vergangenen drei Jahrzehnten entwickelte sich die Geschichte des Lesens zu einem immer dynamischeren Forschungsfeld. Einige wichtige Untersuchungen zeigen die Freiheit, an welcher sich die Leser bei der Auswahl ihrer Bücher erfreuen durften. Auf struktureller Ebene ist die Geschichtsschreibung jedoch durch den beschränkten Zugang zu einer schon an sich fragmentierten Informationssammlung erschwert. Dieser Artikel behandelt ein neues Forschungsprojekt, Annotated Books Online (ABO), das die Errichtung einer Plattform für die Erforschung handschriftlicher Notizen in den ersten gedruckten Büchern zum Ziel hat. ABO ist eine open-access Forschungsumgebung, die Wissenschaftlern und Studenten die Sammlung und Visualisierung neuer Quellen sowie eine Zusammenarbeit bei Transkriptionen, Übersetzungen und neuen Forschungsinitiativen ermöglicht. Um das vielversprechende Potenzial der neuen Erkenntnisse zu Marginalien und den noch zu bewältigenden Herausforderungen aufzuzeigen, widmet sich der zweite Teil dieses Artikels der Untersuchung von handschriftlichen Notizen in den Epen Homers, die sich einst im Besitz des deutschen Reformators Filippo Melantone befanden (Columbia University Library, Plimpton 880 1517 H37).

Schlüsselwörter: Humanismus, Filippo Melantone, Martin Luther, Marginalien, Homer, Ilias, Odyssee, Vergil, Äneis, Annotated Books Online, ABO.