

Language Variation in Latin Hagiography of the Long Tenth Century

Vacancy

The Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Ghent University is seeking a highly motivated postdoctoral research associate to contribute to the research project “Language Variation in Latin Hagiography of the Long Tenth Century”.

This unique opportunity involves a funded postdoctoral position at UGent, under the supervision of professors Steven Vanderputten and Anne Breitbarth. The successful candidate will join a dynamic interdisciplinary team dedicated to advancing the understanding of regional variation of Latin and literary production in the high medieval West, by combining innovative historical analysis with developing new methods for corpus-driven computational dialectology.

Project sketch

By the end of the ninth century CE, vernacular languages had definitively replaced Latin in everyday oral interactions throughout the Carolingian world. However, Latin remained by and large dominant in written culture. So far the assumption has been that its use guaranteed universal intelligibility across the Latin West. However, small scale case studies carried out on specific types of written evidence have revealed strong regional syntactic variation, suggesting that despite general intelligibility, regional Latin cultures were gradually drifting apart. The whole extent of this variation is not yet understood, and its potential for understanding the development of these cultures remains unexplored. Recent developments in computational linguistics and dialectometry hold the promise of mapping this regional variation and thereby substantially enriching

historians' and linguists' understanding of written culture in the High Middle Ages. At the same time, the dialectometric toolkit still requires expansion in order to adequately deal with the mapping of syntactic variation attested in corpora, so methodologically as well, there is great potential for improving the state of the art.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, the current project aims to achieve just that: combine methodological innovation with new insights into linguistic variation and medieval written culture. As a test case, it will look at a substantial corpus of Latin hagiographies (texts on the life, achievements and cult of saints) and biographies from tenth-century Lotharingia, a contact zone between the Romance and Germanic linguistic areas with a particularly high and well-researched production of such texts. The project is driven by the question of whether the cultural and social dynamics behind the production of this corpus can be linked to patterns in the linguistic variation in the texts, whether influenced by respective substrate languages or emerging (localized) communities of practice. In combining a linguistic and a contextualizing historical approach, the project will break new ground in understanding Latin culture and the circulation of knowledge and ideas in this transitional period of Western society and culture.

Environment

The project is an interdisciplinary collaboration between PIs at the Departments of Linguistics and History of the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Ghent University, and will be embedded within the Henri Pirenne Institute of Medieval Studies and the research group ΔiaLing. Medieval studies at UGent encompass diverse approaches and fields, including a vibrant tradition for the historical study of religious life and thought in the early and high medieval West and historical linguistics. Interdisciplinarity lies at the heart of the Henri Pirenne Institute's mission. ΔiaLing brings together scholars conducting research in historical and diatopic linguistics, and is known for infrastructure projects such as the parsed Corpus of Historical Low German and the parsed Spoken Corpus of the (Southern) Dutch Dialects, both led by one of the PIs of the current project.

Qualifications

- A doctoral degree in computational linguistics or historical linguistics with a strong Digital Humanities component, obtained by 1 September 2025.
- Demonstrated experience in working with primary sources written in Latin.
- A strong interest in the history and written culture of the Early and/or High Middle Ages, while not required, is considered an asset.
- Good to excellent English communication skills. Candidates from any linguistic background are welcome to apply.
- Applicants should be able to work in team as well as independently and have a critical and creative mindset.

What we can offer you

- We offer a full-time position as a postdoctoral fellow, consisting of an initial period of 12 months, which – after a positive evaluation – will be extended to a total maximum of 27 months. The PIs of the project, Steven Vanderputten and Anne Breitbarth, are strongly committed to providing quality supervision to the candidate.
- The starting date is 1 September 2025 at the latest. Candidates who are not yet holder of a doctoral degree but are due to obtain it by 1 September 2025 are welcome to apply.
- The Departments of Linguistics and History at Ghent University actively foster a safe working environment for all staff and offer substantial support to its junior researchers. Regular seminars, discussion groups, and a friendly atmosphere contribute to the quality of work and the well-being of all staff.
- The exact salary amount is determined by the Department of Personnel and Organization based on family status and seniority. Precalculated into the project budget are a range of expenses for research purposes.
- All UGent staff members enjoy a number of benefits, such as 36 days of holiday leave (on an annual basis for a full-time job) supplemented by annual fixed closing days, a bicycle allowance, and eco vouchers.

- [Click here for more information about our salary scales and staff benefits.](#)

How to apply

Applications including a full CV (including a transcript of university study results), motivation letter (detailing why you are a good fit), and the names contact information for two references should be sent electronically to Anne Breitbarth (anne.breitbarth@ugent.be) and Steven Vanderputten (steven.vanderputten@ugent.be).

The evaluation of the applicants starts on 1 April 2025 and continues until the position is filled. Preselected candidates will be invited for an (online) interview. The starting date will be determined in agreement with the selected candidate.