

French Paleography

A Course on Reading 16th Century Genevan Documents

June 2 through June 13, 2008



This course, hosted by the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is intended for undergraduate and graduate students and scholars interested in reading manuscript sources in French, whether those documents are stored in French or Swiss archives, or in the Meeter Center's own collection. The Meeter Center is home to a substantial collection of original 16th Century French manuscripts and texts. Beginning paleographers will develop a basic tool set to help them read, interpret, and present the texts that they encounter in their research. The core of the course will focus on the mechanics of reading manuscripts: approaching a text, resolving abbreviations, selecting dictionaries to use, identifying persons and places, understanding the process by which the document was created, etc. It will also cover the basic editorial rules of editing governing the publication of 16th Century French texts. Finally, the course will also briefly examine the utility and pitfalls offered by each type of source with particular emphasis on its application to religious and social history.

The course will draw on a variety of documents from the Genevan State Archives, primarily from the 1540s to the 1560s. Students will have the opportunity to read as broad a range of documents as possible within the time allowed, including criminal proceedings, sermons, deliberations of the Geneva City Council and the Consistory of Geneva, wills, contracts, personal letters, and other documents. Class will be held every morning, Monday through Friday, for three hours, much of which will be devoted group reading of the texts the student has prepared the previous day. Students will be expected to devote several hours each afternoon to preparing for the next day's class, deciphering texts and consulting the Meeter Center's reference collection. The instructor will also be available to assist individuals who wish to pursue projects using the Meeter Center's considerable holdings of microfilms of Genevan sources. Though there are some particularities that are unique to Geneva, the basic skills required to read, interpret, and transcribe documents are much the same throughout the French-speaking world, and the seminar in no way requires that students have a Genevan interest. Ideal candidates will have an interest in culture of early-modern France and will have had some exposure to the language and literature of sixteenth-century France, but all students with a strong reading knowledge of French are welcome, regardless of specialty or background.

Students accepted into the course will receive a \$500 stipend to help defray travel costs, accommodations, etc. Accommodations can be arranged in Calvin College apartments for students who are not from the local area. The deadline for applications is **March 17, 2008**.

About the instructor: Tom Lambert, Ph.D., began his study of paleography under the tutelage of Professor Robert M. Kingdon in 1989. Later that year, also under Kingdon's direction, Lambert began working on the Geneva Consistory Project, which was then transcribing the Registers of the Consistory for the period of John Calvin's ministry. In 1991 he took an intensive six-week summer course from Bernard Barbiche of France's prestigious school of archival sciences, the *École des Chartes*. From 1992 to 1995 he lived in Geneva, working daily in the State Archives, finally producing a critical edition of the *Registres du Consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin*, tome I (1542-1544), with Isabella Watt in 1996. He finished his Ph.D. dissertation on daily religion in Reformation Geneva in February 1998. He is currently associate editor of the Geneva Consistory Project and is now preparing a critical edition of volume five of the Register of the Consistory.

For further information please contact:

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