12 Concluding Observations

Horizontal, Hierarchical, and Community-Oriented Learning in a Wider Perspective

Sita Steckel

Abstract

These concluding observations aim to discuss the potential of the horizontal learning approach, connect it to extant research paradigms, and set out some further questions prompted by this juxtaposition. After showing how the existence of 'horizontal' bonds is approached differently by different contributors to this volume, the text illustrates how the findings of this volume complement and combine with recent approaches to the history of learning, especially as it is currently transforming into a 'cultural history of knowledge' or an 'anthropology of knowledge transmission' during the pre-modern period. It concludes with three hypotheses concerning the growing role of horizontal learning during the High Middle Ages, which future research may want to develop or contradict.

Keywords: Medieval/Middle Ages, knowledge, community, historiography, teaching, learning

Horizontal Learning: What Have We Learned?

With their scrutiny of the phenomenon of horizontal learning, the conceptual observations and case studies offered in the present volume pursue a 'road not taken'.¹ In showing the potential of this avenue of investigation, the contributions assembled in this volume put horizontal learning on

I would like to thank the editors of this volume, in particular Micol Long, for finding a way to allow me to participate in this project. Though the following concluding observations could not be based on first-hand experience of the conference, they very much retain the character

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the agenda, and at the same time remind us that many social contexts – hierarchical and horizontal, formal and informal – should be routinely investigated in studies dealing with practices of knowledge transmission. While the investigation of horizontal learning diverges in interesting ways from typical approaches within the history of learning, we also encounter intriguing convergences. In my concluding observations, I will therefore discuss the potential of the horizontal learning approach, connect it to extant research paradigms, and set out some further questions prompted by this juxtaposition. Invariably selective and coloured by personal research interests, my comments are formulated from the point of view of a scholar invested in a cultural history of medieval knowledge transmission, including but also looking beyond religious communities and horizontal learning.

As a starting point for a short summary, it may briefly be underlined how remarkable the documentable prominence of horizontal learning in religious communities is – for, of course, strictly speaking, there could be no equals in the monastery. As we know, the *Rule of Saint Benedict* organizes the monastic community according to a continuous *ordo* established by seniority and merit: ‘he who enters in the second hour of the day shall know that he will be junior to the person who entered in the first hour, whatever his age or dignity’.² As Cédric Giraud remarks at the outset of his discussion of horizontal relationships, concepts of religious formation developed within religious communities were indeed highly ‘attentive to the hierarchy of merits and to the theme of spiritual birth’.³ We are thus confronted with a significant conceptual overlap and a certain tension between hierarchical and horizontal relationships.

It is therefore interesting to see that the classification of ‘horizontal’ bonds is approached differently by different contributors to this volume – a divergence at least somewhat indebted to the high degree of ambiguity and flexibility in the sources. First, there are horizontal relationships among individuals within religious communities that can roughly be considered ‘peers’. Second, there are horizontal relationships conducted in informal settings, mainly between religious houses, where no clear hierarchy could be established. Third, there are forms of horizontal learning within community settings in which existing hierarchies were pushed into the background.

of conference-style concluding thoughts in their essayistic nature and less than complete bibliography. Further thanks go to Christina Lutter.

1 See Giraud, ‘*Ut Fiat Aequalitas*’, p. 65 (in this volume).

2 *Regula Benedicti*, ed. de Vogüé and Neufville, chap. 63, 644–646: ‘qui secunda hora diei uenerit in monasterio iuniorum se nouerit illius esse, qui prima hora uenit diei, cuiuslibet aetatis aut dignitatis sit [...]’.

3 Giraud, ‘*Ut Fiat Aequalitas*’, p. 65 (in this volume).

Knowledge Exchange Among Peers

The first and most narrow understanding of ‘horizontal learning’ – as knowledge exchange among peers within a community – is highly intriguing and, as the editors of the volume rightly assert, not as well researched as it should be. The contributions focusing on this type of horizontal learning also provide us with some indication of the underlying reasons: tensions exerted by the hierarchical bonds within religious communities appear significant, and within the convent, ‘peers’ are hard to spot. The contributions nevertheless manage to find them: Micol Long’s introductory chapter rightly draws our attention towards the two concepts of co-discipleship and of friendship within religious communities. She also, importantly, highlights instances of practical co-operation among roughly equal-ranking inmates of religious communities, such as scribal cooperation. With a discussion of Honorius Augustodunensis’s *Gemma spiritualis*, Karl Patrick Kinsella’s chapter actually contributes the example of a text written for the author’s *condiscipuli* but presented in the format of a didactic dialogue, a format that disguises its intrinsically horizontal structure. Nicolangelo D’Acunto discusses the complex patterns of scholarly alliances and contested hierarchies visible in the exceptionally well-documented case of the monastery of Saint Gall. He shows that alliances such as the intellectual companionship among Notker, Tuotilo, and Ratpert in ninth-century Saint Gall could draw enmity and, consequently, criticism that described such groups as illegitimate *conventicula*. Cédric Giraud’s contribution finally engages with the emerging literature of spiritual self-formation and thus with medieval theoretical discourses on the subject, highlighting that forms of equality and of friendship imagined as horizontal nevertheless became more prominent during the high medieval period.

Learning in Informal Situations

A second group of contributions offers a slightly different take on horizontal learning by focusing on situations of knowledge exchange taking place outside of and between religious houses. The paradigm for this, discussed by Babette Hellemans and C. Stephen Jaeger, is knowledge exchange involving both male and female religious, who necessarily communicated across the boundaries and, hence, across the hierarchies of the respective all-male and all-female religious communities to which they belonged. Interestingly, these approaches define the ‘horizontal’ more generously and include nominally hierarchical constellations. Hermann of Reichenau, discussed

by Jaeger, was actually called a master, and classing this relationship as horizontal might seem problematic at first glance. But it actually has considerable merit: when a respected scholar like Hermann of Reichenau engaged in exchanges with nuns of a neighbouring convent, there was no institutional relationship between them that established any sort of sanctionable hierarchy, but even so, both sides chose to label this as a master-student relationship with all the attendant social gestures and literary tropes. Hermann may thus have been the *scholasticus* set over the pupils at Reichenau, but the magisterial authority ascribed to him by the nuns of a different community was socially negotiated, not institutionally defined. The nuns accorded him high status and authority based on his intellectual qualities, his social and institutional rank, and his gender.⁴ But a relationship to such a distant interlocutor necessarily remained negotiable, as did the respective authority one abbot or abbess might accord another. Babette Hellemans's contribution shows us the rather protean nature of such informal bonds, especially where negotiated in the genre of letters. As the two monastic leaders Peter the Venerable and Heloise corresponded, they engaged in a round of negotiation of their mutual rank and intimacy by merging the terminology of friendship with overlapping references to their spiritual and institutional relationships, referring to each other, for example, as *magistra* and sister, or, correspondingly, as servant, father, lord, and brother.⁵ Micol Long and Marc Saurette also discuss instances of such negotiated multi-level relationships, in which individuals encouraged interlocutors to understand their relationships as horizontal in spite of an existing hierarchy, at times as a gesture of humility and esteem for the other and at times as a gesture of intimacy and friendship.

Learning Within the Community

Several case studies discussed in the present volume finally apply the concept of horizontal learning in a broader sense. They point to situations in which groups, or shifting constellations of individuals within a group setting, facilitated the acquisition of knowledge. While this form of learning remains close to basic patterns of group socialization in everyday interaction, highly specific types of knowledge transmission could be embedded in it. In spite of its focus on monastic silence, Saurette's contribution, for example, takes

4 On such practices in this milieu, see Lutter, '*Mulieres fortes*'.

5 See Hellemans, 'Heloise's Echo', at n. 28 (in this volume).

us on an intriguing tour of the monastery as a 'didactic space' for different types of spoken formative exchanges and narrations that took place in both formal (chapter, liturgy) and informal situations (discussion of hagiography). Taking up themes also discussed by Giraud's observations on the literature of formation of the self, Jay Diehl points to processes of (shared or individual) reading as a 'de-personalized' – and thus also de-hierarchified – channel for knowledge transmission within monastic communities. Kinsella and Neslihan Şenocak discuss types of community-oriented texts, such as the didactic works of Honorius Augustodunensis or the liturgical handbooks of Italian priestly or canonical communities, and suggest understanding them as knowledge archives shaped by and actively shaping the everyday religious practices performed by inter-generational groups.

The term *community* emerges as central for the concept of horizontal learning in these contributions, and Tjamke Snijders's discussions of its many dimensions therefore provides an important point of departure for the volume.⁶ Her insistence on the construction of 'communities of practice' is especially *à propos* as the contributions discussing this type of learning situation focus strongly on the acquisition of wholly or partially practical knowledge. In particular, we often deal with formations of religious knowledge that amalgamated implicit/practical and explicit/propositional knowledge, for example ritualized forms of behaviour or speech organized around texts, which carried specific meaning or symbolic connotations that needed to be explicated or performed. Learners had to habitualize the relevant practices while also acquiring the relevant knowledge about their underlying norms and ideals, typically by studying written traditions intended to shape and interpret such practices.

Beyond the 'Monastic': Re-integrating Religious Communities into a Dynamized Approach to the History of Learning

These observations complement and combine with recent approaches to the history of learning in a rather intriguing manner and seem to provide several impulses for this field. The study of medieval learning – in the past, often a highly tradition-oriented field focused on big men, big

6 On the concept of communities, see also these recent publications: Hovden, Lutter, and Pohl, *Meanings of Community*; Gingrich and Lutter, *Visions of Community*; Breitenstein, Burkhardt, Burkhardt, and Sonntag, *Identität und Gemeinschaft*; Melville and Ruta, *Potency of the Common*.

ideas, and big institutions such as schools and universities – is currently transforming into a ‘cultural history of knowledge’ or an ‘anthropology of knowledge transmission’ during the pre-modern period.⁷ This sea change has allowed researchers to harness the full potential of the methodological toolkit provided by cultural history approaches. It has also allowed them to question the traditional grand narratives underlying nineteenth- and twentieth-century research, such as the typical orientation of most older intellectual histories towards the perceived ‘origins’ of the most appreciated forms of knowledge within Western modernity, such as the ‘scholastic’ and ‘humanist traditions’.

Research on knowledge transmission within religious communities, which became labelled as ‘monastic’ culture or theology during the twentieth century, has in a way found itself on the wrong side of such meta-narratives geared towards modern identities. As most researchers are well aware, the idea of a ‘monastic’ culture of learning received important impulses from Jean Leclercq’s pioneering study *L’amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu* of 1957.⁸ This study belonged within the context of the revival and modernization of Catholic Church history in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council, and it originally spoke to an audience of modern religious orders and Catholic scholars of the 1950s, often intent on spiritual renewal of their orders and modernization of the Church. In this context, Leclercq, a Benedictine, serendipitously redefined monastic scholarship, describing it as a felicitous combination of genuine learning and lived spirituality. In highlighting the twelfth-century revival of ‘monastic’ culture and theology, he implicitly positioned his vision against the secular research paradigm of medieval ‘Renaissances’ that focussed on the reception of Aristotle and the modern sciences.⁹ He also moved away from the more conservative forms of Catholic Thomism, whose foundational narratives cast the

7 Tendencies within medieval history are reviewed in Steckel, ‘Wissensgeschichten’, 9–58. Several works which pioneered this trend focused on the early modern and modern period, such as Cetina-Knorr, *The Manufacture of Knowledge*; Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*; Burke, *A Social History*; and Jacob, *Lieux de savoir*. For the medieval period, see e.g., Verger, *Les gens de savoir*; Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*; Anheim and Piron, *Le travail intellectuel*, containing e.g., Mews, ‘Communautés de savoirs’, 485–507. In the German-speaking area, several pertinent appraisals of the history of knowledge have been published, see e.g., Sarasin, ‘Was ist Wissensgeschichte?’, 159–72; Zittel, ‘Wissenskulturen’, 91–109; Holzem, ‘Die Wissensgesellschaft’, 233–65.

8 Leclercq, *L’amour des lettres*. For a brief appraisal, see Ferzoco, ‘The Changing Face’, p. 1–7; Köpf, ‘Monastische und scholastische Theologie’, 96–135. For a more in-depth analysis see e.g., Penco, *Dom Jean Leclercq*.

9 Pioneered by Haskins, *The Renaissance*; see Colish, ‘Haskins’s Renaissance’, 1–15; Brentjes, Fidora, and Tischler, ‘Towards a New Approach’, 9–50.

thirteenth-century universities and the period of high scholasticism as 'their' origin of modernity.¹⁰

Yet the idea of monastic culture was soon absorbed into other grand narratives. Under the influence of sociological modernization and secularization theories of the 1960s and 1970s, and through the filter of Thomas Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm shifts', non-monastic historians soon appropriated the concept of a monastic culture of learning as a backdrop for their own versions of modernization narratives. Scholars such as Richard W. Southern, the rising doyen of Anglophone intellectual history of the High Middle Ages, quickly integrated the idea of 'monastic culture' into a new supra-national meta-narrative of a high medieval 'rise of the West', seen as an essential paradigm shift towards modernity.¹¹ In the wake of such visions of history, various scholars between the 1970s and 1990s recounted how the High Middle Ages witnessed a paradigm shift by which 'traditional' monastic learning, whose intellectual roots went back to the earliest Middle Ages, was replaced by the new scholastic learning of the coalescing schools and universities, which brought a more rational, scholarly, and ultimately secular outlook to society. A personification of this paradigm shift was constructed by pitting two monks, Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Abelard, against each other in a seeming clash of opposites.¹²

As many scholars have by now remarked, this vision of a high medieval paradigm shift is a modern fable.¹³ Yet this recognition has not been able to unseat the narrative in itself: the meta-narrative of a paradigm change from monastic to scholastic – with its implicit opposition between religious and secular, traditional and modern – helped to create boundaries (and attendant hierarchies) between the affected sub-fields of research, which are still making themselves felt today. Even today, most scholars are either invested in the history of religious orders *or* the history of schools and universities more broadly, in the religious side of the history of learning (focusing on early and high medieval learning, on monastic learning, or on female communities) *or* in the secular side (the history of universities, of philosophy, of theology, of 'hard' science, of anything to do with the

10 See del Colle, 'Chapter 18: Neo-Scholasticism', 375-94. See also the appraisal in Arnold, *Kleine Geschichte*.

11 See Southern, *Medieval Humanism*; and Southern, *Scholastic Humanism*. The research concept of the paradigm shift (see Richards and Daston, *Kuhn's Structure*) is clearly apparent in the latter.

12 See e.g., Verger and Jolivet, *Bernard – Abelard*.

13 See e.g., Godman, *The Silent Masters*; Giraud, *Per verba magistri*, 11; Steckel, 'Deuten, Ordnen, Aneignen', 211-213; Diehl, *The Grace of Learning*, 20-47.

Renaissance or, lately, with transcultural knowledge exchange between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, which can be associated with the modern concept of religious tolerance).

As a result of this fragmentation of the research field, several problems of the paradigm of medieval 'monastic culture' have long been diagnosed but remain to be tackled in a systematic fashion. As several researchers have pointed out, the very act of distinguishing a 'monastic' culture of learning from others is misleading in several respects.¹⁴ It suggests a coherent set of forms of learning tied to monastic settings, which remained substantially unchanged across the Middle Ages and could be distinguished clearly from other forms. In reality, learning within religious communities was, of course, as diverse as these communities themselves. While a basic foundation for analogues exists in the reality of communities living together and transmitting knowledge across the generations with a religious intent, we know today that the practices of knowledge transmission that developed within religious communities across the Middle Ages (or even just from the eleventh century to the thirteenth) were sweepingly diverse. Similarly, the idea of an unchanged, constant tradition of monastic learning obscures the fact that we actually witness deep-seated transformations – though these often took the form of reappraisals of tradition labelled as 're-formations', obscuring their own innovativity.¹⁵ Such forms of change do not, of course, fit especially well with the visions of progress towards projected modernities so popular among twentieth-century historians. Instead, transformations often appear as repeated conjunctures, or renegotiations, of specific cultural issues, which we may understand as episodic reconfigurations of patterns of learning for our purposes.¹⁶ But they should most certainly not be ignored.

Finally, religious communities engaged closely with other communities of learning rather than isolating themselves. The new reformed monastic and canonical communities of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were particularly interested in developing forms of knowledge transmission that were optimally suited to the needs of monks and nuns, canons and canonesses, resulting in a broad array of forms of learning that might be

14 See the overview in Köpf, 'Monastische und scholastische Theologie'; and see for particular aspects Goetz, *Das Geschichtsbild*, 81; Ferzoco, 'Changing Face of Tradition', 1; Diehl, 'Grace of Learning'.

15 See Constable, *The Reformation*.

16 See Walsham, 'Migrations of the Holy', 251-265; Steckel, 'Differenzierung jenseits der Moderne', pp. 78-79.

called 'monastic'.¹⁷ Yet paradoxically, the very wish to transmit the most apt and essential parts of knowledge, and to institutionalize their transmission within the community, typically led members of monastic communities (just like other religious orders) to search beyond the convent's walls, opening religious houses to the intellectual and religious currents of schools and universities, courts and administrative centres, and even urban and rural pastoral care.¹⁸ As monasteries ultimately remained closely tied to the world of lay religiosity throughout the Middle Ages, they also remained centres that gave impulses to these other institutional settings.¹⁹

To accommodate these tendencies, recent scholarship has developed more dynamic models for the description of the resulting intellectual links as well as the constant productive irritations between the worlds of the courts, the ecclesiastical and urban centres, and the rural or urban religious communities that emerged and transformed across the medieval centuries. Rather than looking for schools or other sites of neatly classifiable 'monastic' or 'scholastic' education, recent research has taken a broader view and investigated interrelated communities of learning, knowledge communities, networks of learning, *communautés de savoir*, *Wissenskulturen*, and so on.²⁰ These approaches typically converge in highlighting aspects of learning processes that are also central to the investigation of horizontal learning; they focus on the relationship between different societal settings for formalized or informal learning processes and on the dynamism generated where such different, heterogeneous communities engaged in transfer and exchange, or divergence and boundary-setting.²¹

As these studies have shown, we find medieval individuals and groups engaging with specialized textual traditions in a variety of formal and

17 For a number of different perspectives, see e.g., the contributions in Melville and Breitenstein, *Innovationen durch Deuten und Gestalten*; Carmassi, Schlotheuber, and Breitenbach, *Schriftkultur*; Poirer, *L'école de Saint Victor*; Beach, *Manuscripts and Monastic Culture*; Ferzoco and Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Education*. A thriving sub-field of research concerns religious women; see e.g., Griffiths and Hotchin, *Partners in Spirit*; Griffiths, *The Garden of Delights*; Lutter, *Geschlecht & Wissen*.

18 See e.g., Lutter, *Zwischen Hof und Kloster*; Lutter, *Funktionsräume – Wahrnehmungsräume – Gefühlsräume*.

19 This has been underlined for late medieval Observant Reform lately; see e.g., Roest and Uphof, *Religious Orders*, but see also e.g., Ramakers, Corbellini, and Hoogvliet, *Discovering the Riches*; Jamroziak and Burton, *Religious and Laity*.

20 See the literature cited by Snijders in this volume and see particularly Lutter, 'Normative Ideals'; Id., 'Social Groups', 45–61; Corbellini, 'Beyond Orthodoxy', 33–54; Mews and Crossley, *Communities of Learning*; Mews, 'Communautés de savoir'; Muessig, 'Communities of Discourse', 65–81.

21 For this model, see (with further references) Steckel, 'Networks of Learning', 191–195.

informal settings, and not just in schools. It has also become accepted that the learning processes may concern various types of knowledge.²² In addition to intellectual, discursive knowledge in the form of sets of propositions (as, for example, the *ars grammatica*) we encounter many forms of practical knowledge and embodied, habitualized *savoir-faire*. Additionally, it has been made clear that such 'communities of learning' should not be misunderstood as homogeneous or static.²³ These perspectives of course merge seamlessly with the observation on communities and their dynamics made by Snijders in this volume.

More importantly, however, these approaches have also generated new observations that have the potential to help us rewrite the older narratives of the 'rise of the modern West', which so clearly marginalized the knowledge transmission of religious communities. One result of research has been to show that the new learning of the schools emerging from c. 1050 onwards and the new learning generated within the many new religious communities within Latin Europe were closely related and interlinked.²⁴ For example, I have argued that new religious communities of the High Middle Ages provided such an important 'market' for new forms of learning and new knowledge compendia during the earlier twelfth century that they might very well be called the most important driving factor underlying the emergence of professionalized schools, at least where theology was concerned.²⁵ More importantly for this volume, it has also been shown that religious communities – including monastic houses but also houses of regular canons and eventually mendicant convents – were one of the most important venues for transmitting religious knowledge to the laypeople. This tendency becomes highly visible and incontrovertible during the later Middle Ages, but it has clear roots going back to the high medieval period.²⁶

This latter observation is highly relevant when we ask how the outdated master narrative of the 'rise of the modern West' might be rewritten. To explain the transformation from medieval to modern, twentieth-century

22 For this point, a pioneering influence within Medieval Studies was that of Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*. For a systematized view, see e.g., Zittel, 'Wissenskulturen', 101-105.

23 This is the point of Mews, 'Communities of Learning'; developed in Mews and Crossley, *Communities of Learning*.

24 See especially Mews, 'Monastic Educational Culture', 182-97; Mews, 'Scholastic Theology', 217-239; Giraud, *Per Verba Magistri*; Giraud, 'Isaac de l'Étoile', 193-204; Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*, 863-1196; Diehl, 'Grace of Learning'.

25 Steckel, 'Deuten, Ordnen, Aneignen', 248.

26 For the later medieval period, see Roest and Uphoff, *Religious Orders*. For the foundational importance of the high medieval period, see e.g., Constable, *Reformation*, or recently Cédric Giraud, *Spiritualité et histoire*.

research has traditionally focused on growing rationality as a sign of modernity – but another important marker for long-term transformation processes might be seen in a broader distribution of knowledge within society.²⁷ Already within nineteenth-century paradigms of secularization and rationalization, mastery of literacy, of the written authorities, and particularly of scholarly expertise, were seen as tools enabling individuals to emancipate themselves from the thought patterns imposed upon them by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.²⁸ But in this sort of research, the accent on secularity typically directed the gaze of scholars towards the world of the intellectuals, the schools and the universities, often causing them to highlight certain movements and periods labelled ‘humanisms’ or ‘Renaissances’ as the earliest instance of secular elites asserting themselves through learning.²⁹ Yet if we look towards religion as a primary source of societal norms during the medieval period, the clear distinction and segregation between priests and increasingly professionalized scholarly experts on one side, and merely educated or uneducated laypeople on the other, underwent multiple renegotiations during the medieval period: laypeople increasingly became members of new communities of interpretation engaged in the transmission of religious knowledge, either in mixed groups including scholarly or priestly experts (and often, one notes, *religiosi*) or in horizontal groups led by lay ‘active readers’.³⁰ In particular, laypeople appropriated practices and expertise developed for the cloistered religious, learned to choose among the different religious ‘options’ on offer,³¹ and learned to criticize forms of religious power with which they did not agree.³² This transformation of power relations, which several scholars have described as a ‘monasticization’ of the laypeople,³³ put considerable pressure onto the ecclesiastical hierarchy and led to a gradual and partly subcutaneous renegotiation of the status

27 See Corbellini, Duijn, Folkerts, and Hoogvliet, ‘Challenging the Paradigms’, 171–88.

28 The classic example would be Burckhardt, *Die Cultur*.

29 See the overview in Treadgold, *Renaissances*, and the re-appraisal of Colish, ‘Haskins’s Renaissance’.

30 This dynamic was recently the subject of the 2013–2017 interdisciplinary research network COST Action IS1301 ‘New Communities of Interpretation: Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe’, led by Sabrina Corbellini.

31 See Van Engen, ‘Multiple Options’; Jaspert, ‘Communicating Vessels’, 389–424; a theoretical appraisal is offered in Steckel, ‘Problematische Prozesse’ and Pohl and Steckel, *Über Religion entscheiden*.

32 On this phenomenon, see the literature on anti-clericalism and anti-fraternal traditions, e.g., Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism*; Dykema and Oberman, *Anticlericalism*.

33 An overview on this theme is presented in Caldwell Ames, *Crusade, Inquisition, and Monasticization*.

difference between priests/religious and laypeople. This contributed to the far-reaching transformations of the late medieval religious landscape and was an important factor in the epochal reconfigurations of the late medieval and early modern reforms and Reformations.³⁴

Seen from this angle, it was not, or not only, the new knowledge of the schools that proved conducive to the transformation of medieval society. The forms of knowledge transmission coalescing in medieval religious communities – not least during the High Middle Ages as a sort of ‘incubation period’ for many late medieval developments – were equally transformative, and substantial societal shifts may be sought in the monasteries with as much legitimacy as in the schools.

Potentials for an Integrated History

To arrive at a better understanding of the dynamics of knowledge transmission within pre-modern societies, forms of learning inside and outside of religious communities should – in fact, need – to be reintegrated. As the concept of ‘monastic learning’ in fact flattens out all differences between monastic, canonical, or mendicant intellectual traditions and their gendered sub-types, it is becoming a hindrance and should be scrapped. It should be replaced by a more differentiated approach to interrelated, dynamic communities of learning and by a practical approach to research, which consistently crosses the boundaries between monasteries, courts, schools, urban spaces, and private homes.

To arrive at such a more differentiated understanding of different forms of knowledge transmission inside and outside of religious communities, the concept of horizontal learning may prove highly valuable. Asking in more detail how different communities of practice engaged in knowledge transmission – how they managed to include and exclude members, how they structured their social hierarchies, and how they imagined learning processes on a practical and theoretical, epistemological level – would help us pinpoint the complex dynamics of medieval worlds of knowledge.

As a first step, asking what exact forms of learning may have been present in given settings – horizontal, hierarchical, and communal, related to concepts of ‘school’ or ‘community’ or both, or neither – may give us a welcome push to describe the settings of knowledge transmission in a more precise

34 See the appraisals of the relevant historiography in Van Engen, ‘The Christian Middle Ages’, 519–552; van Engen, ‘Multiple Options’ and Walsham, ‘The Reformation’, 497–528.

way. At first glance, the contributions in the present volume, for example, seem to suggest that a focus on horizontal learning, or more precisely on mutual edification in the community, might be a fairly distinctive characteristic of knowledge transmission in religious communities, perhaps even particularly in monastic communities. As Saurette's and Long's contributions show, we do indeed see monasteries being reconceived as 'didactic spaces' during the High Middle Ages.³⁵ Given their combination of a symbolically charged community structure and great need to acquire ritualized, regulated religious behaviours resting on particular written discourses that had to be appropriated, religious communities were extremely likely to develop a strong emphasis on forms of community-oriented learning.

Yet this is not the whole story. Other contributions in this volume, notably Şenocak's, immediately show that the mentioned combination was not, in fact, restricted to monastic houses. It was common in religious communities understood more broadly, and especially included communities of clerics and regular canons. If we open the horizon towards late medieval lay religiosity, similar forms of learning can be found there.³⁶ It may thus be that rather than the institutional setting, it was the transmission of the particular cultural formation of religious knowledge – combining strands of discursive, practical, emotional, and symbolic elements and a strong insistence on community – which generated the emphasis on horizontal, group-oriented learning.

To test this hypothesis, and to determine how strongly high medieval religious communities engaged with patterns of horizontal learning and what particular, distinctive twists they brought to it, a long-term comparative approach would be needed. Such an approach, which would necessarily imply cooperation among scholars specializing in different areas, might be a very apt way to develop the current approach to medieval communities of learning and to ask how different communities instituted or debated intellectual, symbolic, and physical 'regimens of schooling' (to use Mia Münster-Swendsen's apt phrase³⁷). As community-oriented learning was highly important throughout the medieval period, collaborating scholars might write a multi-focal, entangled history of knowledge on this subject, making use of many different building blocks already present.

To give just a quick sketch: Detlef Illmer's pioneering research of the 1970s sketched the huge importance allotted to the *vita communis* as a

35 See Saurette, 'Spaces of learning', p. 131 (in this volume).

36 See. Corbellini, *Cultures of Religious Reading*.

37 See. Münster-Swendsen, 'Regimens of Schooling', 403-422.

pedagogical framework within monastic education during the earliest heyday of monasticism in the sixth and seventh centuries. As Illmer argued in terms borrowed from Max Weber, 'knowledge remained closely linked to the charisma of the community as a whole, and as a result, could not be transferred, but only "awakened" [within the student] by shared practice'.³⁸ Current research is revisiting these early connections between religion and education and is beginning to establish a transcultural and comparative perspective on them as well.³⁹ As I have discussed in my own research, such ideas were then reformulated and appropriated for the larger ecclesiastical community within the context of the Carolingian reforms of the late eighth and ninth centuries, where scholars such as Alcuin of York developed far-reaching educational ideals.⁴⁰ Alcuin and his contemporaries reached towards the monastic world to find ideals of learning that could complement and enhance those transmitted through the crumbling institutions of ancient pedagogy. Yet they adapted monastic material to describe learning in the universal Church. Alcuin in particular fused the idea of knowledge transmission with that of apostolic succession, prompting the development of concepts of sacralized mastership as well as forms of communal inter-generational learning imagined as a 'long series of ecclesiastical erudition', in which the members of each successive generation linked their local church back to their spiritual 'fathers' and 'mothers' through their teaching and learning.⁴¹ In a next step, C. Stephen Jaeger's research shows that such ideals were gradually replaced within the eleventh-century cathedral schools, whose community ideals shifted from inclusive and universal concepts of the Church towards rather exclusive networks of noble elites preferring ancient virtue ethics to the broad, heavily spiritualized ideals of the earlier centuries. When professionalized schools emerged during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a further weakening of community bonds was caused by highly mobile students switching from one centre to the next and relying much more on horizontal bonds, such as their friends and relatives, than on high-ranking ecclesiastical patrons.⁴²

38 See Illmer, *Formen der Erziehung*, 181.

39 See e.g. Tanaseanu-Döbler and Döbler, *Religious Education*; Gemeinhardt, 'Bildung und Religion', 165-179 (the latter sketching the research programme of the Sonderforschungsbereich 1136 'Religion and Education' at the University of Göttingen).

40 Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*, 77-240.

41 Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*, 161 (quotation taken from Alcuin of York, *Epistolae*, ep. 83, 126).

42 See (with further references) Steckel, 'Submission to the Authority'.

When the reform movements and new monastic orders of the twelfth-century subsequently reformulated ideals of learning within the community, they often reached back towards Antiquity or the early medieval period and redefined their religious identities against such trends. But so far there has been little comparative work on this *longue durée*, and none that has asked for concepts of communities or practices of horizontal learning in a thorough, comparative fashion. It would be highly interesting to ask whether horizontal and communal learning practices (including their different epistemologies, social and material settings and practices) can tell us something about transfer, adaptation, or divergence between different institutional settings during this period. We might bring out the scope of divergences within different monastic communities (not least between male and female houses) and within the developing networks of regular canons as well as clerical schools in much more detail. As set out above, such research might be especially productive if we also keep the later medieval centuries in view and establish ties to a research field where transmission of knowledge between religious networks and laypeople is at the centre of attention.

Further Questions on the Intellectual and Social Transformations of the Long Twelfth Century

As the contributions in this volume suggest, however, the high medieval period, and especially the eleventh and twelfth centuries, also hold particular interest. As many contributions clearly illustrate, they indeed constitute a period when 'traditional institutions and attitudes were stretched to the maximum and made to accommodate new forms of life and new sentiments'.⁴³ As we know, many contemporaries commented in unusual detail and emphasis upon patterns of learning, and though there has been in-depth and critical research on many aspects of learning, there have been few recent efforts to synthesize.⁴⁴ A second avenue to follow in future research might thus be to integrate the investigation of horizontal learning into a broader reappraisal of the long twelfth century and its many intellectual reconfigurations. Based on the contribution to this volume, I have three suggestions or hypotheses concerning the growing role of horizontal learning, which future research may want to develop or contradict.

43 Constable, *Reformation*, 5.

44 But see Noble and Van Engen, *European Transformations*; and more importantly in this context, Giraud, *Brill's Companion to the Twelfth-Century Schools*.

Materialities of Learning

A first observation is that it might be interesting to review many of the innovations of the long twelfth century from the point of view of the mediality and materiality of knowledge transmission. In his contribution on the newly emerging literature of self-formation, for example, Giraud engages with the traditional assumption that the High Middle Ages witnessed a 'discovery of the individual'. Though it might indeed be stressed that the high medieval period witnessed a new premium on interiority, scholars familiar with early medieval sources have typically rolled their eyes at this claim.⁴⁵ As Giraud clarifies, however, the religious 'self' was not invented during the eleventh century. Rather, it was thrown into high relief by the emergence of a whole literature devoted to it. The same could be said for the theme of the individual's conscience, which was also, otherwise, far from a new concept but generated a new literature during the High Middle Ages.⁴⁶ This important role of new textual genres as markers of the transformation of practice is also highlighted in Şenocak's contribution, as well as other recent research, for example on the emergence of the theoretical *ars dictaminis* from earlier, practice-based training in letter-writing.⁴⁷ With her focus on the actual manuscripts used by inter-generational groups, Şenocak exemplifies that one of the most important ways forward for the history of knowledge may be to integrate our conceptually driven perspectives much more closely with the materiality – more precisely, with the manuscripts, images, diagrams, and architecture surrounding medieval learning processes.

Such an approach could also take up impulses from the study of medieval manuscript culture, which has recently intensified the scrutiny of the materiality of knowledge archives, be it in the analysis of the layout, annotation practices, and user traces visible in book manuscripts⁴⁸

45 See the discussion in Corradini, Gillis, McKitterick, and van Renswoude, *Ego Trouble*; Kramer, *Sin, Interiority, and Selfhood*; on the overall debate on the individual see currently Lutter, 'Conceiving of Medieval Identities'.

46 See Breitenstein, *Vier Arten des Gewissens*.

47 See Hartmann, *Ars dictaminis*.

48 See e.g., the different approaches in van Renswoude and Steinová, 'The Annotated Gottschalk', 243-270; Steinová, *Notam superponere studui*; Snijders, *Manuscript Communication*; Angotti Fournier, and Nebbiai, *Les livres des maîtres de la Sorbonne*; Schuh, *Aneignungen des Humanismus*; Poleg and Light, *Form and Function*; François and den Hollander, 'Wading Lambs and Swimming Elephants'; Kwakkel, McKitterick, and Thomson, *Turning Over a New Leaf*.

and of didactic images⁴⁹ or in the study of individual and institutional libraries.⁵⁰ As Kinsella's contribution on the role of the church building shows, medieval architecture and the material surroundings of religious life should also be investigated as changing didactical frameworks. There had been church buildings (and architectural metaphors) long before the eleventh century, of course. But possibly due to the many institutional innovations within high medieval religious communities, and especially reform communities, which often built their convents and libraries from scratch, there was an unprecedented window of opportunity to shake up established didactic genres and to include concepts such as architectural space into new knowledge compendia. As we attempt to reflect and rewrite traditional narratives, which invariably projected modern ideals of learning back towards the Middle Ages, and transform them against a changed horizon of transcultural intellectual history,⁵¹ it might be a helpful corrective to actually build the periodization of the history of knowledge transmission on the concrete materiality, media, and genres of learning.

Transformation of Social Networks: Inside, Outside, Between

A second observation concerns the transformations of social networks during the High Middle Ages, in which horizontal learning was invariably embedded and implicated. Several contributions in this volume highlight the overlap and tension between descriptions of social ties as horizontal on one side, and hierarchical on the other. As mentioned above, Hellemans's contribution for example mentions how Abbess Heloise was addressed as both the sister and daughter of Abbot Peter the Venerable. This certainly shows us that hierarchical ties were superseded and fused with horizontal ones during the High Middle Ages. But how to explain this phenomenon? The question has already been asked in a dense body of research on medieval friendship

49 See e.g., Cleaver, *Education in the Twelfth-Century*; Mersch, *Soziale Dimensionen*; Hamburger and Bouché, *The Mind's Eye*; Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*.

50 See e.g. Becker, Licht, and Weinfurter, *Karolingische Klöster*; Carmassi, Schlottheuber, and Breitenbach, *Schriftkultur und religiöse Zentren*; Embach, Moulin, and Rapp, *Die Bibliothek des Mittelalters*.

51 On this process, cf. the contributions (by myself and others) in the forthcoming volume by Kellner, Hugon, and Lutter, *Rethinking Scholastic Communities*, which will appear as an issue of the journal *Medieval Worlds*.

networks.⁵² As this research has shown, forms of *amicitia* underwent a marked surge in popularity during the High Middle Ages, not least because of changes in communication patterns: for example, a new emphasis on personal letters as a medium that favoured the nuanced expression of mutual relations. Such observations can be developed into a more expansive argument: as the summary of contributions above showed, most examples of ambivalent relationships actually cut across community boundaries and therefore lacked a clear definition of mutual status. Jaeger's and Hellemans's contributions look at horizontal knowledge exchanges taking place in the undefined space *between* religious communities. In this communicative space, shared by different religious communities, *amicitia* had actually long had the particular function of creating links and postulating imagined communities – a task to which it was particularly suited, as it established a status of mutuality without describing the relative status of each partner too closely, as this might lead to rivalry and conflict.⁵³ Letters, as the medium *par excellence* of this communicative in-between, were especially tailored to the negotiation (or the smooth glossing over) of such complex relationships, a fact that is already visible in early medieval letters. The correspondence of Alcuin of York, who left a collection on a par with the twelfth-century 'Golden Age' collections, for example contains many instances of letters addressed to recipients apostrophised as 'father, friend and brother', or 'sister and daughter', similar to those found by Long, Hellemans, and Saurette.⁵⁴ As one notes upon analyzing Alcuin's technique in detail, his layering of the semantics of friendship, shared learning, and (spiritual) kinship often reacted to actual changes within a given relationship – for example, the fact that former students might have grown up and reached high offices themselves. But it was also, and often, applied to the space between communities.⁵⁵

From this diagnosis, it is only a short step to the observation that this communicative space between communities – and hence also the areas

52 With an eye to twelfth-century religious communities, see especially McGuire, *Friendship and Community*; Brian Patrick McGuire, *Brother and Lover*; and several relevant studies by Julian P. Haseldine, such as 'Friendship and Rivalry', 390-414 and 'Monastic Friendship in Theory and in Action in the Twelfth Century', 349-94. Generally, see Haseldine, *Friendship in Medieval Europe*; Ysebaert, 'Medieval Letter-Collections', 285-300; Nederman, 'Textual Communities of Learning', 73-83; Julian Haseldine has summarized the work of the interdisciplinary research network 'Medieval Friendship Networks' (2005-2010) in 'Medieval Friendship and Friendship Networks', ix-xii.

53 See Haseldine, 'Friendship and Rivalry'.

54 Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*, 166-169. For an in-depth analysis of Alcuin's correspondence, see Garrison, *Alcuin's World*; Garrison, 'Les correspondants d'Alcuin', 319-331.

55 Cf. Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*, 148-191.

in which relationships could not be defined by institutional hierarchies – increased exponentially during the High Middle Ages. We simply seem to observe much more communication in this space, as several tendencies converged to give us a stronger source base. There was an overall increase in the density of communication networks because of social and economic growth processes. Personal letter collections came to be *en vogue*, and the *ars dictaminis* became professionalized, yielding a rich crop of extant documents. There were also religious and political movements that led to the formation of new social networks with increased internal mobility and communication frequencies, and it has already been pointed out that both the world of politics⁵⁶ and the world of learning were affected by this.⁵⁷ Yet in the case of religious communities, we witness an even more relevant phenomenon: religious communities were increasingly organized in supra-local structures, predominantly in those institutionalized networks we call religious orders, but also in communities and networks cutting across orders.⁵⁸ Whether we think of reform movements and observances of the type spearheaded by Cluny or Hirsau, of the new religious orders like the Cistercians, Carthusians, and many congregations of regular canons, or, finally, of various semi-permanent affiliations of male and female communities for pastoral and didactic purposes, we always encounter an internal communication network where communication was necessary while fixed hierarchies were impossible to define. How else but in a somehow horizontal manner could one Cistercian address a *co-religiosus* from a different Cistercian house? How else were partners in a reform alliance encompassing different religious houses to refer to each other? As a hypothesis, one might thus formulate that the reorganization of institutional identity within high medieval religious networks caused the typical forms of communication prevalent between communities to become mirrored on the inside of such communities, generating new emphases on horizontality. Put differently, in a community made up of many different communities, horizontality would necessarily gain ground over hierarchy. In following up this hypothesis, future research might actually cut across existing research on communication networks, on specific relationships such as *amicitia*, and on the bonds underlying knowledge transmission in a very fruitful manner.

56 See Robinson, 'The Friendship Network of Gregory VII', 1-22; Robinson, 'The Friendship Circle', 185-198.

57 Steckel, 'Submission to the Authority of the Masters'; Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*, 803-813.

58 See e.g., Andenna, Herbers, and Melville, *Die Ordnung der Kommunikation*.

Tensions between the Hierarchical and Horizontal

A third and final observation takes this line of enquiry into a complementary direction. In his highly intriguing contribution, Jay Diehl introduces the notion that learning processes may have become ‘depersonalized’ during the high medieval period.⁵⁹ In his specific instance, the discussion of texts about lying, he links this to the problems engendered by the many crises and schisms that gripped monastic houses during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As he argues, such ‘crises of trust’ might actually have undermined the functioning of learning processes, as learners could no longer be asked to place unquestioning trust into authority figures and were encouraged to engage with texts instead.

While this intriguing hypothesis may prove to be very hard to substantiate, it very credibly suggests that we might do well to explain an increase in horizontal learning as a decrease in hierarchical learning. Having engaged with master-student relationships from the ninth to the twelfth centuries myself, I would strongly support this line of questioning. As several scholars have argued, there was a specific culture of religious teaching and an ideal of sacralized mastership pervading the communities of learning of the early and high medieval Latin Church.⁶⁰ This ideal set a high premium on the hierarchical relationship between master and disciple and actually charged this relationship with many of the qualities that have been emphasized for horizontal learning here: master and student constituted the nucleus of a religious community by engaging in a mutually binding religious relationship. Rather than just filling the student’s head with sets of propositions, masters acted as exemplars, teaching in word and deed and engaging in shared practices meant to hone the student’s innate potential. Though the hierarchy of these relationships was based on religious norms and community rules, their success depended heavily on the voluntary (or perhaps sometimes calculated) engagement of the students with their master or *magistra*, as

59 Diehl, ‘Truth as Teaching’, p. 104 (in this volume).

60 For research on master-student-relationships during the high medieval period (within Latin Christianity), see Cleaver, *Education in Twelfth-century Art*; Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*; Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, chapter 5; Münster-Swendsen, *Masters and Paragons*; Mia Münster-Swendsen, ‘The Model of Scholastic Mastery’, 306–342; Münster-Swendsen, ‘Medieval “Virtuosity”’, 43–64; Münster-Swendsen, ‘Regimens of Schooling’; Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens*; Steckel, ‘Submission to the Authority’; and Steckel, ‘Charisma and Expertise’, 641–679. The topic has also been explored with a broader, cross-cultural approach recently; see Speer and Jeschke, *Schüler und Meister*; Lee-Kalisch and Renger, *Meister und Schüler*; Georges, Scheiner, and Tanaseanu-Döbler Ilinca Scheiner and Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Bedeutende Lehrerfiguren*; Renger, *Meister und Schüler*; Van Engen, *Educating People of Faith*.

it was ultimately the students who made and transmitted his or her fame and authority. As Mia Münster-Swendsen has pointed out, close emotional ties and 'selective affinities' often developed in such constellations, which always remained based on complex and volatile negotiations of power.⁶¹ But this set of cultural patterns had never been totally coherent and was transforming and eroding by the eleventh century. Under the onslaught of several different institutional innovations of the long twelfth century, it dissolved into many new configurations.

One factor, already briefly mentioned, was that ecclesiastical education was pluralized with the emergence of a higher number of schools. In an earlier world with fewer centres of learning, these could still function as a gate-keeping system, where influential masters and dignitaries chose to enable the careers of a few select disciples and were in turn celebrated as patrons, often in communication accenting the hierarchy of their relationships, even where the student was long emancipated. Once educational possibilities multiplied, this social field developed features of a market instead: learners might choose their schools and often relied on family ties or horizontal networks to help raise the money necessary to study. They thus no longer needed to call on patrons to the same degree, whereas masters had a greater incentive to treat their (now paying) students as friends and *socii*.⁶²

But the pluralization of schools and monastic centres, resulting in a highly dynamic landscape of communities of learning during the long twelfth century, also led to the deconstruction of hierarchical ties in other ways. In a pluralized setting in which there was invariably some disagreement and debate – between masters in different schools but also between the leaders of different religious observances – authority figures could no longer aspire to represent and embody absolute Christian truth, in a way that had still been possible during the early eleventh century. During that period, masters had still been portrayed as shining exemplars of all the virtues, possessing all the learning necessary for an ecclesiastical life.⁶³ Given the pressures of professionalization and specialization, this became unrealistic during the twelfth century. The new theologians of the schools insisted that they held the specialized expertise to interpret Scriptures – but they no longer aspired to represent Christian perfection in their personal life and to teach it in word and example. As a corollary, the authenticity and authority of the knowledge they transmitted became lodged in texts.

61 Münster-Swendsen, 'Model of Scholastic Mastery', 308.

62 See (with reference to further literature) Steckel, 'Submission to the Authority'.

63 This point is made by Jaeger, 'John of Salisbury', 499–520.

The religious leaders of the period, in contrast, pioneered new ways of modelling Christian exemplarity in lived practice. However, after a brief period of contestation, they left the handling of specialized textual discourses such as canon law and some forms of theology to the schools. Religious communities also, and more importantly, began to apply patterns of conflict resolution and norm-enforcement that relied on these emerging new normative frameworks. As Diehl's contribution correctly reminds us, this was much more urgent and necessary in a world in which almost every community was or had been shaken by conflict and when the religious customs of new monastic or canonical communities had to withstand the pressure of emerging alternatives. A shift towards the textual may thus also be explored as one of the reasons for other transformations within community and network structures.

About the author

Sita Steckel is junior professor at the University of Münster. She received her doctorate in medieval history in 2006 from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich. Her dissertation dealt with the networks and authority of scholars before the universities, when their role and importance was defined by religious rather than just learned expertise (published as *Kulturen des Lehrens im Früh- und Hochmittelalter. Autorität, Wissenskonzepte und Netzwerke von Gelehrten*, Böhlau). She continues to be interested in the role of scholars in the Middle Ages and in medieval scholarly networks. Currently, she is engaged in a study of the clashes between the secular clergy and the Franciscan and Dominican orders in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century France, not least in the social microcosm of the medieval university of Paris. Perspectives and questions connected to this research project concern the role of conflicts as catalysts for long-term developments and the role of intra-ecclesiastical religious polemics for the shaping of religious identities. Another research interest which arose over the course of the last ten years is the modern historiography of medieval religion, with its conflicting master narratives of secularization and religious radicalization in the Western Middle Ages. From 2012 to 2017 she has held a Diltthey Fellowship, granted by the Volkswagen and Fritz Thyssen Foundations.