

# NIGEL PALMER

Nigel Fenton Palmer

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1997

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Nigel Fenton Palmer, who was Professor of German Medieval and Linguistic Studies in the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at Oxford and Professorial Fellow at St Edmund Hall from 1992 until his retirement in 2017, is widely regarded as having been one of the world's leading experts on medieval German culture and language. Nigel was particularly interested in religious writing, in Latin as well as in German, from the German-speaking lands. An important strand of his research concerned the relationship between text and image, notably in the iconography and layout of blockbooks and prayer books – and one of his most spectacular publications is an edition and commentary on an illustrated prayer book, the 'Prayer Book of Ursula Begerin' from Strasbourg (now in Berne). He was also extremely interested in book ownership and its impact on cultural practice, often in a regional context. He was co-founder of the international research project 'Literary topography of South West Germany in the later Middle Ages', which aims to establish a literary history of this region on the basis of manuscript sources and library history. He was thus exceptionally well placed to bring together German philology with Anglophone scholarship on materiality. His broad intellectual curiosity and collaborative mindset also meant that he was able to bridge different academic cultures and disciplines more generally. He was profoundly convivial and loved nothing more than to enjoy food, drink and conversation with medievalists of all ages and national backgrounds.



Photograph taken by Henrike Lähnemann in October 2001 in front of the Ashmolean Museum.

Nigel Palmer

## Personal and professional life

Nigel Palmer was born in Ashton under Lyne, the only child of Constance May Fenton and James Terence Palmer (known as Terry). He grew up in the village of Woodley just outside Stockport. Both his parents were academically inclined, but missed out on formal higher education – in Constance’s case because of financial pressures, and in Terry’s case because of family complications.

Constance’s father died young and she had no option but to leave school when she was 18 to take up a clerical position. However, when Nigel was six, she went to training college to become a primary school teacher, later going on to teach children with special needs. Teaching was very much her vocation – the same could also be said of Nigel, albeit in a different context. Constance was also extremely interested in theosophy, even attending international conferences on the subject. Whilst Nigel did not hold any religious beliefs himself, his mother’s enthusiasm may have influenced his academic interest in spirituality and devotional practice.

Terry’s father was an Argentinian Sephardic Jew who came to Europe to start a new life after experiencing pogroms in Buenos Aires in 1919. However, Terry was unofficially adopted by his mother’s sister and grew up with a lack of full clarity about his actual parentage. Furthermore, because the adoption was unofficial, he did not have the requisite paperwork to go to grammar school. He eventually started his own firm as a cargo surveyor. Despite not having been educated to the level that his abilities would have warranted, he was obsessive about learning and taught himself many languages: Irish, Gaelic, Spanish, German, Czech and especially Russian. Because he worked often on Russian ships around Liverpool, he developed a lifelong interest in all things Russian – and Nigel too would later put great effort into learning Russian and to fostering ties with his Russian medievalist colleagues. Terry also became a self-taught mycologist and was even given an honorary position in the field at the University of Liverpool. Mycology brought him into contact with many Eastern Europeans and he sometimes took Nigel with him on trips to Eastern Europe to study fungi. He also used his Spanish on foraging expeditions in Mexico and developed a strong interest in cacti – which he passed on to Nigel. Generations of students will remember the numerous pots of cacti competing with books for surface space in Nigel’s office.

Nigel thus grew up in a household that placed enormous value not just on academic initiative and endeavour, but also on fostering international contacts and on exploring the world. Constance and Terry were also both lifelong liberals and would go canvassing for local candidates. These values too played an important part in shaping Nigel’s outlook.

Nigel was academically very able and was put a year ahead of his age group in school. His parents really wanted him to go to Manchester Grammar, but he would have

needed a scholarship for that and it was difficult to win one while also being a year ahead of the age group. Instead he went to Hyde County Grammar School in Cheshire. Here Nigel had the enormous advantage of having as his German teacher Hans Seelig, a Jewish emigré who had left Germany on the Kindertransport in 1939 and had travelled to the United Kingdom via Sweden. Hans Seelig had read French and German at Worcester College in Oxford before gaining a teaching diploma and becoming Head of the German Department at this school. He was deeply intellectual and passionate about culture: for example, he insisted that any pupil who wanted to learn German also had to learn about music and attend classical concerts in Manchester – and he went along himself to check that the boys really were there. Nigel was deeply inspired by Hans Seelig and stayed in contact with him for decades after leaving school. It is hardly a coincidence that he too applied to Worcester College to read French and German. Ironically, however, music was the reason that Nigel only got a B for his German A-level; he was so engrossed with playing his flute that he entirely forgot to go to one of the German exams. After elaborate explanations from the school, Worcester College nonetheless agreed to take him.

Before coming up to Oxford, Nigel spent a year as a classroom assistant and teacher of English at the Stiftung Louisenlund, a boarding school in Schleswig-Holstein. This very much improved his spoken German, but also introduced him to a different social milieu; whereas most of the pupils at his Grammar School were working class, this boarding school catered for the German aristocracy. After the end of the school year, he spent the summer at the family home of one boy, providing remedial instruction. Nigel often commented on the social *mores* of that household. For example, as a male, he was not allowed to peel his own oranges: the daughter of the house had to peel them for him.

Nigel was an undergraduate at Oxford from 1965 to 1969. Although initially accepted for French and German, he dropped French after one year in order to concentrate on German. This was a productive time for the forging of intellectual connections. At Worcester, Nigel's German tutor was Francis (Frank) Lamport, a distinguished modernist and translator of Schiller; however, Nigel also embarked on the study of medieval German under the guidance of Ruth Harvey (at St Anne's College) and of Peter Ganz (then at Hertford College, later to precede Nigel to the Chair of German Medieval and Linguistic Studies associated with St Edmund Hall). One of Nigel's undergraduate contemporaries at Worcester was Anthony (Tony) Hunt, who later became an eminent scholar of medieval French literature. He became Nigel's friend and colleague for many years at Oxford, and a member of the same section at the British Academy. Nigel spent his year abroad in Vienna, relishing the opportunities not only to speak German, but also to enjoy concerts and operas.

After gaining a First in the Second Public Examination at Oxford in 1969, Nigel embarked on a DPhil, supervised by Peter Ganz. The relationship between the two was

positive and productive. Peter Ganz, another Jewish emigré, combined academic brilliance with a certain prickliness and he could be notoriously harsh towards people who were in any way frightened of him. Nigel, however, was not intimidated; they had a similar sense of humour and got on well.

The topic of Nigel's thesis was the German and Dutch transmission of the *Visio Tnugdali*, the 'Vision of Tundale' – a 12th-century religious text, originally composed in Latin, which recounts the experiences of an Irish knight who is granted visions of hell and heaven during a three-day period of unconsciousness. This text enjoyed an extremely widespread transmission across Europe, with the German and Dutch versions representing only one of numerous reception strands. The thesis, completed in 1975, was finally published in the prestigious series *Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters* (MTU) in 1982. Frank Shaw described this book as 'a work of scholarship in the finest tradition'.<sup>1</sup>

Bringing the doctoral project to fruition was no easy feat, given that in 1970, only a year after his final examinations in Oxford, Nigel had taken up a Lectureship in German at Durham University, which he continued to hold until 1976. He was thus working as a full-time academic for most of his years of graduate study. He also had to complete his research without the advantage – normally taken for granted by graduate students – of close geographical proximity to a supervisor. Each summer, however, when the teaching year in Durham was over, Nigel would come to Oxford to use the libraries and to see Peter Ganz (who was not, however, the most hands-on of supervisors). On these visits, Nigel stayed in Norham Road with a landlady (Mrs Harris) whose house turned into a flourishing graduate community during the summer months.

Whilst at Durham, Nigel met his future wife Sue (Susan Patricia Aldred); he was her first-year tutor for general essay-writing. They married in 1974, and had two children: Rachel Louise (born May 1975) and Rupert (born January 1979).

In 1976 Nigel and Sue moved to Oxford because Nigel was appointed as University Lecturer in German and Fellow of Oriel College. Nigel remained in this post until 1992. Oriel was permeated by a deeply conservative culture; it was, for example, the last Oxford college to vote to admit women (in 1985). This environment did not fully align with Nigel's progressive values and in later years he often expressed frustration at the many aborted attempts to gain the requisite number of votes at Governing Body for the College to go mixed. However, Nigel also very much enjoyed the positive things about the community, including the camaraderie, the quirks and eccentricities of individual fellows, and the pleasant dining culture. Despite having a heavy teaching load, he was

<sup>1</sup>Frank Shaw, 'Nigel F. Palmer, "Visio Tnugdali": The German and Dutch Translations and their Circulation in the Later Middle Ages' (book review), *Modern Language Review*, 80:2 (1985), 489–91 at 491.

active and energetic within college. In particular, he was amongst a small group of fellows who travelled to Australia to recruit Sir Zelman Cowen (then Governor-General of Australia) to the Provostship of Oriel (which he held from 1982 to 1990).

In any case, of course, Nigel's academic world was not restricted to Oriel. Across the university, he had a relatively large number of colleagues specialising in medieval German: his former supervisor Peter Ganz; Leslie Seiffert at Hertford; Christopher Wells at St Edmund Hall; Jonathan Bartlett at St Anne's; and Olive Sayce at Somerville (succeeded by Almut Suerbaum in 1990). Nigel also taught medieval German language and literature to undergraduates across the university, and started supervising graduate students. A number of his graduate students carried on to hold academic posts in the United Kingdom (Nigel Harris at Birmingham; Annette Volging at Oriel; Sebastian Coxon at UCL; and Stephen Mossman at Manchester). From an early stage, he did a lot to foster a sense of cohesion between students and academics interested in medieval German. For example, together with colleagues at the University of Bonn (initially Christoph Cormeau and Peter Kern, later Elke Brüggem), he set up a series of colloquia in which graduates and undergraduates from both universities could present academic papers alongside established academics.

This Oxford–Bonn initiative was just one example of the way in which Nigel was building a powerful network of academic relationships with colleagues in the German-speaking world. Somewhat unusually for a British Germanist of his generation, he started to publish extensively in German and to work collaboratively with a number of different German colleagues. Through the 'Bertau Kreis' set up by Karl Bertau and Peter Ganz, Nigel also came into contact with a large number of younger academic colleagues, some of whom became lifelong friends.

These social and professional ties were strengthened by various sabbaticals, when Nigel and Sue were able to take their young family with them to Germany. In 1980, they spent nine months in Würzburg (where Sue had previously spent her year abroad), making friends with Kurt Ruh and Werner Williams-Krapp. Three years later, they repeated the experience, this time for a whole year and funded by Humboldt money. In the academic year 1987–88, they spent the year in Berlin with another Humboldt. On a familial level, this had various advantages: the children gained fluency by attending German school, and the location enabled Nigel and Sue to take them on a number of trips into Eastern Europe. In personal and professional terms, the year in Berlin also was particularly important for Nigel. This is when he came to know Hans-Jochen (Hajo) Schiewer, a crucially important future friend and collaborator. At the time Hajo was a research assistant working for Volker Mertens and finishing a Habilitation on medieval German sermons; however, he would go on to hold a Chair at the University of Freiburg and then to become Vice-Chancellor of that university. Through Hajo Schiewer, Nigel also met Wilhelm Krull, future Secretary General of the Volkswagen Foundation. Hajo Schiewer

and Wilhelm Krull were later to play a pivotal role in obtaining funding to ensure the release of Nigel's Oxford Chair after his retirement.

As the children grew older, it became more difficult to move the whole family for longer periods, but Nigel continued to use his sabbaticals to immerse himself in German academic life, with prolonged stays in Tübingen and later in Freiburg. In 1999–2000 Nigel spent a year as a DAAD-Professor in Tübingen; his lecture series in English was immensely popular with the whole department and the emeritus professor Walter Haug attended as well as the then two chair holders, Burghart Wachinger and Christoph Huber. Equally popular were Saturday excursions to castles and monasteries with the younger medievalists organised by Henrike Lähnemann and driven by Michael Rupp in the old VW-bus of the 'Komediävisten', the Tübingen medievalist theatre group, which often started with a stop at the factory outlet of RitterSport. Nigel's engagement with students from all stages was exemplary and strengthened by the exchange set-up that allowed students from Tübingen and other partner universities to come to Oxford for the year-long MSt – an arrangement that continues even today.

In 1992 Nigel was appointed to the Chair of German Medieval and Linguistic Studies previously held by Peter Ganz – and on 4 March 1993 he gave his inaugural lecture in the Taylorian on 'German Literary Culture in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries'. This promotion necessitated a change of college, from Oriiel to St Edmund Hall. Here he became an equally esteemed member of the community, serving for a while as Steward of the Senior Common Room, and being as Library Fellow instrumental in securing a donation for an in-depth cataloguing of the Old Library; his grandson was baptised in the Chapel there. Well beyond his retirement, he was a formative influence in the College as friend and advisor to younger colleagues and convivial companion at SCR lunches and dinners.

The appointment to the Chair also brought about a change in duties, with Nigel no longer having direct pastoral care for undergraduates or any obligation to undertake undergraduate tutorial teaching. However, whilst graduate students came to be his primary concern, he still took considerable interest in any promising undergraduates showing enthusiasm for medieval German – and he set up a medieval seminar just for undergraduates.

On the graduate side, Nigel supported two important international schemes. One was an annual graduate colloquium, set up with colleagues at the universities of Freiburg, Fribourg and Geneva (with Berne and Lausanne joining later). The other was an International Training Network for doctoral students, involving colleagues in Leiden, Antwerp, Freiburg and Lecce. The scheme ran from 2014 to 2018. Entitled 'Mobility of Ideas and Transmission of Texts', its objective was to bring together graduates investigating aspects of intellectual transfer between convents and urban communities along the Rhine. In addition to these schemes, Nigel was also keen to involve graduates in the

international research project ‘Literary Topography of South West Germany in the Later Middle Ages’, which he had set up with Hajo Schiewer and Jeffrey Hamburger.

Nigel was enormously supportive of the medievalist community in the United Kingdom and abroad. He regularly attended the Anglo-German colloquium, the main conference for UK-based German medievalists. He was on the editorial board of the MTU, the series in which his thesis had been published. He was also editor of *Oxford German Studies* (together with Jim Reed) until 2016 and of *Medium Aevum* (together with Corinne Saunders and Sylvia Huot) until his death. *Oxford German Studies* dedicated issues to Nigel Palmer on the occasion of his 60th and 70th birthdays: *OGS* 36:2 (2007) on the topic of ‘friendship’, and *OGS* 46:2 (2017) on medieval German manuscripts in Oxford.

Nigel’s career was marked by numerous academic accolades. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy as early as 1997; he later became a corresponding fellow of the Medieval Academy of America (2008) and of the Academy of Sciences in Göttingen (2010). In 2007 he was awarded the Research Prize of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. In 2013 he was awarded a honorary doctorate by the University of Berne; and in 2022, a short time before his death, he was awarded the inaugural Meister-Eckhart-Forschungspreis.

In retirement, after he had been succeeded by Henrike Lähnemann in the Chair, Nigel was possibly even more productive: once he had been freed from administrative responsibilities, he had even more time to dedicate to pursuing his own research and supporting the research of others. The last ten years of his life were marked by a gradual decline in physical health, and the pandemic made things more difficult for him and Sue. However, he retained his mental clarity and academic enthusiasms right to the end, keeping up lively correspondences with his friends and colleagues, many of whom had not even realised that he was ill. His life and achievements were celebrated in a memorial colloquium held in Oxford in May 2023.

### Research overview

Whilst it is not possible to include discussion of all aspects of Nigel’s research output, the following section will seek to provide an overview of his most important achievements.

Nigel’s doctoral work on the *Visio Tnugdali* stimulated his interest in visionary and eschatological literature more generally. Even before the thesis was completed, he completed a more broadly-based article entitled ‘Die Letzten Dinge in Versdichtung und



Prosa des späten Mittelalters' (1975).<sup>2</sup> Later, in collaboration with Christoph Gerhardt, he set out to establish the traditions associated with the fifteen signs supposedly preceding the Last Judgement. This resulted in two studies: the first of these exploring a range of texts that feature this motif (1986),<sup>3</sup> and the second one devoted specifically to the *Münchener Gedicht von den 15 Zeichen vor dem Jüngsten Gericht* (2002).<sup>4</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, Nigel developed a number of further research strands. These typically related to the reception of Latin learning into German, or to the cultural multilingualism of the Middle Ages. Titles such as 'Latein, Volkssprache, Mischsprache. Zum Sprachproblem bei Marquard von Lindau' (1983),<sup>5</sup> 'Zum Nebeneinander von Volkssprache und Latein in spätmittelalterlichen Texten' (1984),<sup>6</sup> or 'Latein und Deutsch in den Blockbüchern' (1992), all testify to this preoccupation.<sup>7</sup> Within the context of pragmatic literacy, medical texts were of particular interest to Nigel. His collaboration with Klaus Speckenbach resulted in a study focusing on the interplay between medieval medicine and the interpretation of dreams in vernacular *Traumbücher* (1990).<sup>8</sup> This was followed by an article analysing the ways in which Graeco-Arabic medical thinking found its way via Latin not only into Konrad von Megenberg's *Buch der Natur*, but also into Heinrich von Mügeln's 'Spruchdichtung', a body of poems with overtly aesthetic aspirations (1992).<sup>9</sup> In a subsequent article, he examined the 'Berliner Nativitätsprognostik'

<sup>2</sup> 'Die Letzten Dinge in Versdichtung und Prosa des späten Mittelalters', in Wolfgang Harms & L. Peter Johnson (eds), *Deutsche Literatur des späten Mittelalters. Hamburger Colloquium 1973* (Berlin, 1975), pp. 225–39.

<sup>3</sup> (with Christoph Gerhardt) *.xv. signa ante iudicium: Studien und Texte zur Überlieferungsgeschichte eines eschatologischen Themas* (private printing, Oxford and Trier, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> (with Christoph Gerhardt) *Das Münchener Gedicht von den 15 Zeichen von dem Jüngsten Gericht. Nach der Handschrift der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek Cgm 717; Edition und Kommentar* (Texte des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 41; Berlin, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> 'Latein, Volkssprache, Mischsprache. Zum Sprachproblem bei Marquard von Lindau, mit einem Handschriftenverzeichnis der "Dekalogerklärung" und des "Auszugs der Kinder Israel"', in James Hogg (ed.), *Spätmittelalterliche geistliche Literatur in der Nationalsprache*, vol. 1 (Analecta Cartusiana 106; Salzburg, 1983), pp. 70–110.

<sup>6</sup> 'Zum Nebeneinander von Volkssprache und Latein in spätmittelalterlichen Texten', in Ludger Grenzmann & Karl Stackmann (eds), *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit. Symposium Wolfenbüttel 1981* (Germanistische Symposien: Berichtsbände 5; Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 579–600.

<sup>7</sup> 'Latein und Deutsch in den Blockbüchern', in Nikolaus Henkel & Nigel F. Palmer (eds), *Latein und Volkssprache im deutschen Mittelalter 1100–1500: Regensburger Colloquium 1988* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 310–36.

<sup>8</sup> (with Klaus Speckenbach) *Träume und Kräuter. Studien zur Petroneller 'Circa instans'-Handschrift und zu den deutschen Traumbüchern des Mittelalters* (Pictura et poësis 4; Cologne and Vienna, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> 'Von den natürlichen troyen. Zur Integration griechisch-arabischer Medizin in die mittelalterliche Enzyklopädie und deren Umdeutung bei Konrad von Megenberg und Heinrich von Mügeln', in Johannes Janota, Paul Sappeler, Frieder Schanze, Konrad Vollmann, Gisela Vollmann-Profe & Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (eds), *Festschrift Walter Haug und Burghart Wachinger* (Tübingen, 1992), vol. 2, pp. 769–92.

(1994);<sup>10</sup> again, there are connections between the quasi-medical sub-genre featured in this manuscript and the teachings of *Natura* in Mügeln's allegorical poem *Der meide kranz*.

This link between medicine and allegory would have been particularly appealing to Nigel, who also worked on aspects of Latin philosophical allegory. He analysed the relationship between Latin and vernacular languages in the reception of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* (1981).<sup>11</sup> Together with Margaret Gibson and Danuta Schanzer, he produced a substantial overview of the manuscripts of Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* in the British Isles (1987).<sup>12</sup> He examined plant names in the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris (1994);<sup>13</sup> and in 1997 he devoted an article to a 1473 print of a German Boethius translation.<sup>14</sup> This interest in allegorical writing partly overlapped with another research strand related to the reception of Latin mythography (e.g. John Ridewall's *Fulgentius metaforalis*) into the vernacular. In 1983 Nigel published a very substantial article on the iconography of Death and Misfortune in Johannes von Tepl's late medieval dialogue poem *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen*.<sup>15</sup> This was followed by a broader study of the iconography of Death in the context of the *Ars moriendi* and the Dance of Death (1993).<sup>16</sup> In 2005, Nigel returned to mythography in relation to the figures of Bacchus and Venus.<sup>17</sup> This focus on the reception of images – and of writing about images – tied in with his deepening interest in the wider relationship between the textual and the visual, not only in medieval manuscripts, but also in blockbooks and incunabula.

<sup>10</sup> 'Die lateinisch-deutsche "Berliner Nativitätsprognostik"', in Josef Domes, Werner E. Gerabek, Bernhard D. Haage, Christoph Weißer & Volker Zimmermann (eds), *Licht der Natur: Medizin in Fachliteratur und Dichtung. Festschrift für Gundolf Keil zum 60. Geburtstag* (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 585; Göppingen 1994), pp. 251–291.

<sup>11</sup> 'Latin and Vernacular in the Northern European Tradition of the *De consolatione philosophiae*', in Margaret T. Gibson (ed.), *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 362–409.

<sup>12</sup> (with Margaret T. Gibson and Danuta Schanzer) 'Manuscripts of Alan of Lille, "Anticlaudianus" in the British Isles', *Studi Medievali*, Serie 3a, 28 (1987), 905–1001.

<sup>13</sup> 'Plant Names in the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris', *Scientiarum Historia*, 20 (1994), 39–56.

<sup>14</sup> 'The German Boethius Translation Printed in 1473 in its Historical Context', in Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen & Lodi Nauta (eds), *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the *Consolatio philosophiae** (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1997), pp. 287–302.

<sup>15</sup> "'*Antiquitus depingebatur*": The Roman Pictures of Death and Misfortune in the *Ackermann aus Böhmen* and *Tkadlecek*, and in the Writings of the English Classicizing Friars', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 57 (1983), 171–239.

<sup>16</sup> 'Ars moriendi und Totentanz: Zur Verbildlichung des Todes im Spätmittelalter. Mit einer Bibliographie zur "Ars moriendi"', in Arno Borst, Gerhart von Graevenitz, Alexander Patschovsky & Karlheinz Stierle (eds), *Tod im Mittelalter. Konstanzer Kolloquium 1990* (Konstanzer Bibliothek 20; Konstanz, 1993), 313–34.

<sup>17</sup> 'Bacchus und Venus: Mythographische Bilder in der Welt des späten Mittelalters. Mit einem Textanhang', in Eckart Conrad Lutz, Johanna Thali & René Wetzel (eds), *Literatur und Wandmalerei II: Konventionalität und Konversation. Burgdorfer Colloquium 2001* (Tübingen, 2005), 189–235.

Nigel also produced some important pieces of mainstream literary interpretation. He wrote about poverty and mockery in Hartmann's *Erec* and about modes of address in Frauenlob's *Marienleich* (both 1988).<sup>18</sup> In 1992 he published a compelling article on the significance of the image of the book in Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*.<sup>19</sup> In an article from 1995 (based on a paper delivered at an Anglo-German Colloquium), he challenged the idea that *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* was essentially an autobiographical text recounting the author's own experience of spousal bereavement.<sup>20</sup> Using archival evidence, Nigel proved that on the date of death mentioned in the text, Johannes von Tepl's (second) wife was already married to him – and very much alive. The fact that this detail in the text is demonstrably not based on 'real life' paved the way for a discussion of fictionality and of the literary function of the motifs selected by the author. In an article resulting from another Anglo-German colloquium, he examined the topos of the heart containing the beloved across courtly and religious literature (2008).<sup>21</sup> This article is unusual in reading some key passages from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* alongside the works of authors such as Hugo von Langenstein and Gertrud von Helfta.

As his career progressed, Nigel became increasingly preoccupied with mystical, devotional, and theologically-orientated writing, often in the context of manuscript transmission, or book ownership. He had a liking for liturgical manuscripts, producing an early article on German pericopes (1991)<sup>22</sup> and later, whilst holding a Wolfgang Stammer visiting professorship in Freiburg in Switzerland, a book-length study on a Freiburg pericope manuscript from 1462 (2007).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> 'Poverty and Mockery in Hartmann's *Erec*, v. 525 ff. A Study of the Psychology and Aesthetics of Middle High German Romance', in Timothy McFarland & Silvia Ranawake (eds), *Hartmann von Aue: Changing Perspectives. London Hartmann Symposium 1985* (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 486; Göppingen 1988), pp. 65–92; 'Duzen und Ihrzen in Frauenlobs *Marienleich* und in der mittelhochdeutschen Mariendichtung', *Wolfram-Studien*, 10 (1988), 87–104.

<sup>19</sup> 'Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Wolfgang Harms & Klaus Speckenbach with Herfried Vögel (eds), *Bildhafte Rede in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Probleme ihrer Legitimation und ihrer Funktion* (Tübingen, 1992), 217–34.

<sup>20</sup> 'Der Autor und seine Geliebte: Literarische Fiktion und Autobiographie im *Ackermann aus Böhmen* des Johannes von Tepl', in Elizabeth Andersen, Jens Haustein, Anne Simon & Peter Strohschneider (eds), *Autor und Autorschaft im Mittelalter. Kolloquium Meißen 1995* (Tübingen, 1998), pp. 299–322.

<sup>21</sup> 'Herzliebe, weltlich und geistlich. Zur Metaphorik vom "Einwohnen im Herzen" bei Wolfram von Eschenbach, Juliana von Cornillon, Hugo von Langenstein und Gertrud von Helfta', in Burkhard Hasebrink, Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Almut Suerbaum and Annette Volting (eds), *Innenräume in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters: XIX. Anglo-German Colloquium Oxford 2005* (Tübingen, 2008), pp. 197–224.

<sup>22</sup> 'Deutsche Perikopenhandschriften mit der Glosse: Zu den Predigten der spätmittelalterlichen Plenarien und Evangelistare', in Heimo Reinitzer & Nikolaus Henkel (eds), *Deutsche Bibelübersetzungen des Mittelalters. Beiträge eines Kolloquiums im Deutschen Bibel-Archiv* (Vestigia Bibliae 9/10; Berne, 1991), pp. 273–96.

<sup>23</sup> *Bibelübersetzung und Heilsgeschichte. Studien zur Freiburger Perikopenhandschrift von 1462 und zu den deutschsprachigen Lektionaren des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Wolfgang Stammer Gastprofessur 9; Berlin and New York, 2007).

Cistercian culture held a particular appeal for him, and a substantial volume from 1998 catalogues the manuscripts from Kloster Eberbach, with particular focus on those which are now to be found in Oxford and London.<sup>24</sup> In an article from 2005 he also foregrounded the Cistercian abbey of Kaisheim as a literary centre.<sup>25</sup> He brought the study of Cistercian literary culture out of the constraints imposed by the historiographical traditions of the order and into dialogue with questions of wider and more current scholarly import. A study in 2010 of near monographic length, which took its point of departure from the apparently recondite subject of Cistercian punctuation, unfolded into a panoramic consideration of the oral performance of religious texts across the entire Middle Ages.<sup>26</sup> This subject, the material evidence for the oral recitation of medieval literature, was one that Nigel came frequently to address, and on which he had previously assembled the totality of the extant evidence for medieval German secular texts.<sup>27</sup>

Where his first study of Eberbach had dealt with a male institution, his subsequent work on Kaisheim located it as the nodal point within a larger network of both male and female institutions, and when he wrote in 2007 on the 'Daughters of Salem', he turned his attention to the literary and artistic survivals from the female convents connected by their formal dependence upon the abbey of Salem entirely in their own right.<sup>28</sup> His concern to uncover the contribution of women to medieval German literary culture, already evident in his groundbreaking studies of Mechthild von Magdeburg and later manifest in these articles on Cistercian nuns, found its fullest expression in a systematic treatment of

<sup>24</sup> *Zisterzienser und ihre Bücher: Die mittelalterliche Bibliotheksgeschichte von Kloster Eberbach im Rheingau unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der in Oxford und London aufbewahrten Handschriften* (Regensburg, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> 'Deutschsprachige Literatur im Zisterzienserorden: Versuch einer Darstellung am Beispiel der ostschwäbischen Zisterzienser- und Zisterzienserinnenliteratur im Umkreis von Kloster Kaisheim im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert', in Anton Schwob & Karin Kranich-Hofbauer (eds), *Zisterziensisches Schreiben im Mittelalter. Das Skriptorium der Reiner Mönche. Beiträge der Internationalen Tagung im Zisterzienserstift Rein, Mai 2003* (Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik, Reihe A: Kongressberichte 71; Berne, 2005), pp. 231–66.

<sup>26</sup> 'Simul cantemus, simul pausemus. Zur mittelalterlichen Zisterzienserinterpunktion', in Eckart Conrad Lutz, Martina Backes & Stefan Matter (eds), *Lesevorgänge. Prozesse des Erkennens in mittelalterlichen Texten, Bildern und Handschriften* (Medienwandel – Medienwechsel – Medienwissen 11; Zurich, 2010), pp. 483–569.

<sup>27</sup> 'Manuscripts for Reading: The Material Evidence for the Use of Manuscripts Containing Middle High German Verse', in Mark Chinca & Christopher Young (eds), *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green* (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 12; Turnhout, 2005), pp. 67–102.

<sup>28</sup> 'Daughters of Salem: The Literary and Visual Culture of Cistercian Nuns in South-West Germany', in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Carola Jäggi, Susan Marti and Hedwig Röckelein (eds), *Frauen – Kloster – Kunst. Neue Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters: Beiträge zum internationalen Kolloquium vom 13. bis 16. Mai 2005 anlässlich der Ausstellung 'Krone und Schleier'* (Oostkamp, 2007), pp. 85–97 and 425–26.

female authorship in medieval Germany that had ultimately to be published posthumously.<sup>29</sup> That was an article that had, given the restrictions enforced by the pandemic, to be written essentially from the resources that Nigel had available to him at his desk. These were very considerable resources, given the scope and breadth of his private library, but this was not his normal working method, which involved the forensic scrutiny of the extant evidence in its entirety. That method had allowed him in 2016 to challenge the conventional, but fundamentally unsubstantiated, association of the name ‘Magdalena Kremerin’ with the authorship of the famous Kirchheim Chronicle, a narrative of a late medieval monastic reform so contentious that it had led to war: instead, he explained that the text presented itself as the collective voice of the Dominican nuns of Kirchheim, and that if any one was to be considered its author, it could only be Barbara von Speyer, the scribe of the principal manuscript, whose hand he had identified by palaeographical comparison after extensive consultation of the Kirchheim archivalia in Stuttgart.<sup>30</sup>

Palaeography was a discipline of which Nigel was a master, but in which, as that last example illustrates, he was not interested for its own sake. He sought to bring its potential to bear on the contours of German literary history, which he had fundamentally reshaped on the basis of palaeographical evidence through a seminal study published in 1991 as a book review, across some forty pages, written in response to Karin Schneider’s palaeographical conspectus of German-language manuscripts copied prior to 1300.<sup>31</sup> It is often found deployed in his work alongside the analysis of dialect and, where later medieval manuscripts were concerned, of the watermarks present in the paper stocks. With incontrovertible evidence impeccably marshalled, he was able to set aside old assumptions and ‘relocate’ works across time and space into their proper historical contexts, no more spectacularly than in his 2009 study of one of the most significant monuments of German mysticism, the *Paradisus anime intelligentis* sermon collection: its two manuscripts were not written in a Thüringian dialect and thus the product of Dominican ‘Eckhartists’ in Erfurt, as had always been said, but from the other side of the country altogether, written in a form of the west central German dialect characteristic of Frankfurt am Main.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> ‘Deutschsprachige Autorinnen vor 1300’, in Eva Schlotheuber & Sigrid Hirbodian (eds), *Zwischen Klausur und Welt. Autonomie und Interaktion spätmittelalterlicher geistlicher Frauengemeinschaften* (Vorträge und Forschungen 91; Ostfildern, 2022), pp. 247–83.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Die Chronik der Nonne von Kirchheim: Autorschaft und Überlieferung’, in Sigrid Hirbodian and Petra Kurz (eds), *Die Chronik der Magdalena Kremerin im interdisziplinären Dialog* (Schriften zur südwestdeutschen Landeskunde 76; Ostfildern, 2016), pp. 118–49.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Von der Paläographie zur Literaturwissenschaft. Anlässlich von Karin Schneider, *Gotische Schriften in deutscher Sprache, Bd. 1*, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 113 (1991), 212–50.

<sup>32</sup> ‘In kaffin in got. Zur Rezeption des “Paradisus anime intelligentis” in der Oxforder Handschrift MS. Laud Misc. 479’, in Burkhard Hasebrink, Nigel F. Palmer & Hans-Jochen Schiewer (eds), *Paradisus anime*

All of these approaches – palaeographical, philological, and material – were on full display in the last major project that Nigel was able to bring to completion just prior to his death: a collaborative edition (for which Nigel was principally responsible), with an extensive set of commentaries, of the ‘Bardewik codex’, the outstanding medieval instantiation of Lübeck law, long thought entirely lost, but recently rediscovered in Russian provincial obscurity.<sup>33</sup> This involved a geographical turn far away from his favoured south-western corner of the German-speaking lands, and a very different genre to those on which he had worked previously in his career. His command of Russian and the excellent academic contacts that he had cultivated with Russian academics enabled him to go in pursuit of blockbooks known to have entered Russian collections in the 18th and 19th centuries (one was known to have been purchased for the new library of Tsar Peter the Great), but long since lost from the sight of western European scholarship – and then to find them.<sup>34</sup> Nigel was recognised as the principal authority in the world on blockbooks (books printed from texts and images cut into wooden blocks). His catalogue of the blockbooks in the Bodleian Library set the international standard.<sup>35</sup>

The German prayers that were written and interleaved to accompany the much earlier pictures when the ‘Prayer book of Ursula Begerin’ was remade in the 1470s had been the work of an anonymous Strasbourg Carthusian.<sup>36</sup> Nigel had had strong grounds to suspect that the author was actually the Carthusian prebendary (not professed monk) Engelin Becker von Braunschweig, but no conclusive proof.<sup>37</sup> His study of this prayer cycle drew

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*intelligentis’*: Studien zu einer dominikanischen Predigtsammlung aus dem Umkreis Meister Eckharts (Tübingen, 2009), pp. 69–131.

<sup>33</sup> Natalija Ganina, Albrecht Cordes & Jan Lokers (eds), *Der Bardewiksche Codex des Lübisches Rechts von 1294*, 3 vols to date (Oppenheim am Rhein, 2021–22); note the essay by Nigel F. Palmer, ‘Schriftlichkeit und Paläographie: Der Bardewiksche Codex im Kontext’, vol. 2, pp. 126–93.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Der “Beichtspiegel”’: Zu einem bisher unbekanntem Exemplar des Blockbuchs in Sankt Petersburg’, in Natalija Ganina, Klaus Klein, Catherine Squires & Jürgen Wolf (eds), *Deutsch-russische Kulturbeziehungen in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Aus abendländischen Beständen in Russland* (Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt. Sonderschriften 49; Deutsch-russische Forschungen zur Buchgeschichte 4; Erfurt, 2017), pp. 17–48; ‘Das Blockbuch Peters des Grossen: Die heute Moskauer ‘Biblia pauperum’ und ihre Rolle in der Diskussion um die Entstehung des Buchdrucks’, in Natalija Ganina, Daniel Könitz, Catherine Squires & Jürgen Wolf (eds), *Deutsche Kultur in russischen Buch- und Handschriftenbeständen. Beiträge zur Tagung des deutsch-russischen Arbeitskreises vom 16./17. April 2018 an der Lomonossov-Universität Moskau* (Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt. Sonderschriften 52; Deutsch-russische Forschungen zur Buchgeschichte 5; Erfurt, 2022), pp. 38–72.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Blockbooks, Woodcut and Metalcut Single Sheets’, in Alan Coates *et al.* (eds), *A Catalogue of Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century Now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford*, 6 vols (Oxford, 2005), vol. 1, pp. 1–50.

<sup>36</sup> (with Jeffrey F. Hamburger) *The Prayer Book of Ursula Begerin*, 2 vols: vol. 1, Art-Historical and Literary Introduction (with a conservation report by Ulrike Bürger); vol. 2, Reproductions and Critical Edition (Zurich, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> *The Prayer Book of Ursula Begerin*, vol. 1, pp. 481–3.

him in his last years to a new field: major authors of the German-speaking lands, writing in Latin and in German in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, all Carthusians, and whose often monumental oeuvres had gone unregarded because they had not written for the print market. He treated two of these figures in the papers that he read to the last two meetings of the ‘Literary Topography’ research group that he had founded. The first of these, on the Basel Carthusian Heinrich Arnoldi von Alsfeld, was published; Nigel understood it as a study preparatory to a complete edition of Arnoldi’s twenty-seven *Meditationes et orationes* addressed to holy women that he intended to undertake, but was, alas, unable to realise.<sup>38</sup> The task of writing up his paper on the second such figure, Thomas Finck – a Carthusian monk who had had several prior lives, including as a Benedictine monk and a medical doctor – and author of what is probably the longest German Passion narrative of all, remained incomplete on Nigel’s desk at the time of his death, which came only a few days after he had finished the task of editing the other articles that were to appear in the same volume.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Der Basler Kartäuser Heinrich Arnoldi und seine an heilige Frauen gerichteten *Meditationes et orationes*: Mit einer Textausgabe der Katharina von Alexandrien und Odilia gewidmeten lateinischen Gebete’, in Nigel F. Palmer & Johanna Thali (eds), *Raum und Medium: Literatur und Kultur in Basel in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Kulturtopographie des alemannischen Raums 9; Berlin/Boston 2020), pp. 315–72.

<sup>39</sup> Nigel F. Palmer (†), Peter Rückert & Sigrid Hirbodian (eds), *Württemberg als Kulturlandschaft: Literatur und Buchkultur an Klöstern und Höfen im späteren Mittelalter* (Kulturtopographie des alemannischen Raums 12; Berlin/Boston, 2023).

