

Paratexts Seeking Understanding: Aesthetic Cognitivism, Manuscript Cultures, and Knowledge

Request for Proposals

Drs Garrick Allen, Christoph Scheepers, and Kelsie Rodenbiker, directors of the *Paratexts seeking Understanding* project at the University of Glasgow, invite applications for grants to fund subsidiary research that contribute to the broader goals of the project. *Paratexts seeking Understanding* investigates the cognitive functions of paratextual elements found in ancient manuscript cultures, especially those of religious literatures, working to understand the ways that these ubiquitous features contribute to processes associated with the acquisition of knowledge and understanding through engagement with literary and visual artwork (aesthetic cognitivism).

We seek applications to carry out philological research combined with empirical analysis on specific manuscripts or manuscript cultures, using the traditions preserved at the Chester Beatty, Dublin as a shared basis of analysis. Applications can engage Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist texts, particular manuscript cultures that reflect these traditions, or other manuscript cultures represented in the Chester Beatty collection.

Subsidiary projects are expected to explore the paratextuality of a particular manuscript or manuscript culture through philological research **and** through at least one empirical or experimental study, to be designed in consultation with the project's Scientific Team, led by Christoph Scheepers. Applicants must agree to work with the project's core Scientific Team based in Glasgow to execute the study and demonstrate an ability or willingness to work across disciplines.

Applications should (1) identify a particular manuscript, manuscript culture, or tradition that will form the focus of the subsidiary project, (2) describe the paratextual features of that tradition that lend themselves to empirical study in the context of aesthetic cognitivism, and (3) clearly articulate a concrete research question (related to the project's Guiding Questions) that lends itself to operationalization by the Scientific Team. Subgrantees will agree to work with the project Scientific Team to participate in the project's public experimental space at the Chester Beatty in 2026.

A background in the empirical sciences is **not** a requirement to apply. We seek philologists with a concrete research question relating art, knowledge, paratextuality, and manuscript cultures, who demonstrate an openness to collaborate across disciplines.

Projects run for 36 months (from 1 October 2023). All subsidiary projects must be completed by 30 September 2026. Project activities can be allotted across the 36 months as necessary.

In addition to executing their proposed project, successful applicants must budget to travel to Dublin for two project meetings and Glasgow for one meeting and commit to giving one public lecture at the Chester Beatty as an output.

Project Description and Guiding Questions

Paratexts are the features of all literature that extend beyond the main text itself, including items like marginalia, titles, cross-reference systems, artworks/illustrations, and lists, and

they are the first items that supplement the scriptural traditions from all religions. *Paratexts seeking Understanding* tests the function and aesthetic valence of paratexts through science-engaged philology and philology-engaged cognitive science, leveraging the complex paratexts found in the manuscripts of Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist texts and other manuscript cultures from across the globe. Revolving around the world-renowned collection of the Chester Beatty in Dublin, we seek to fund six subgrantees to carry out work on specific manuscripts or manuscript cultures, using the paratexts of these traditions as vectors to test hypotheses concerning the role and function of paratexts in perception and cognition, the nexus between paratexts and interpretation, and paratexts as graphic forms of knowledge production.

Put simply: we seek experts in multiple manuscript cultures to work with our Scientific Team to craft empirical/experimental studies that test the assumptions of aesthetic cognitivism. Applicants need not have any experience or expertise in empirical research, but must demonstrate a willingness to work with the project's Scientific Team. Each subgrantee will use the particularities of their tradition as variables in at least one empirical study that tests hypotheses related to the project's Guiding Questions. This collaborative approach embodies a new way to do theological and philological scholarship, offering the opportunity to embed science-informed approaches in the discipline as a new strand of evidence for our enduring questions. Studies will take place in multiple contexts, including labs and "real world" spaces where people engage art and manuscripts, like the Chester Beatty where we will turn the museum into an experimental space.

We invite applicants to design projects that address at least one of the following Guiding Questions:

1. How can the assertions philologists and/or theologians regarding the function and significance of various kinds of paratexts in religious literature be tested using the tools of cognitive psychology?
2. Which forms of paratexts (images, layout, commentary, segmentation, titles, etc.) are optimal for instilling knowledge, understanding, and/or aesthetic appreciation?
3. Does a higher aesthetic valuation of paratexts improve their ability to impart knowledge? Is perceived beauty a factor in knowledge acquisition?
4. How do expert and novice readers differ in their perception of paratexts? Do these differences impact the ability of paratexts to imbue knowledge?
5. How are textual and paratextual features integrated into artwork appreciation in "real time" as people view the work? In short: how does the presence or absence of paratexts alter artwork appreciation and the encoding of knowledge?

Application Documents

To apply, send the following documents to paratexts@glasgow.ac.uk by **15 April 2023**.

- Project Application Form [*document name*: Application_applicant last name]
- Completed budget template [Budget_applicant last name]
- CV for each named team member (2 pages maximum) [CV_last name]

- A headed and signed letter of Support from Host Institution, detailing any in-kind contributions (1 page) [LoS_applicant last name]

Budget Parameters

For the budget, please complete the *TRT Full Proposal Budget Template*. Budgets must not exceed £121,328.50 (GBP). Budgets must include funds for travel to two project meetings in Dublin, Ireland and one meeting in Glasgow, Scotland for the PI. Indirect costs (overheads) must not exceed 10% of total project cost. Travel for people not employed by the host institution must not exceed 10% of total budget. A budget that is high value for money and fully justified is considered a major strength of the application.

Non-eligible costs: teaching; basic equipment (laptops, books, software); experiment participation fees (covered by main project budget); cost toward the production of artworks; open-access costs (covered by main project budget).

Applications are significantly strengthened by **in-kind contributions** made by the applicant's host institution. Examples include (but are not limited to) additional PI time allocations to project, consumables for laptops, books, or travel, access to equipment, workshops, and PhD scholarships for project personnel.

Eligibility

Any person who will have successfully completed their PhD examination by 1 October 2023 is eligible to apply if they have the support of a host institution that agrees to employ them for the life of the project.

Resources for Applicants

Templeton Religion Trust is a relational funder. The Directors of *Paratexts seeking Understanding* are committed to cultivating exceptional sub-projects during the pre-application process. Please contact paratexts@glasgow.ac.uk with any informal queries.

We have also created a website with resources for applicants on aesthetic cognitivism, the relationship between manuscript cultures, art, and knowledge, and the experimental process, including an annotated bibliography on aesthetic cognitivism, articles, a sample application, and evaluation criteria. These resources can be found at <http://gla.ac.uk/paratexts>. We recommend that applicants familiarize themselves with these resources.

Review process and timeline

Outcomes of the applications will be communicated by 15 May 2023 and are evaluated by the project team, representatives of the University of Glasgow, and the project's advisory board, and external referees. Please know that we are unable to provide feedback on rejected applications. It is likely that reviewers will suggest minor alterations to project/budget to bring proposals into line with larger project goals as conditions of successful applications.