

## THE ART OF THE MEDIEVAL BOOK (ARTH 100-302)

Dr. Lynn Ransom  
Mondays 2-5

### **Purpose and Aims of the Course**

This class will explore medieval European culture through some of the greatest works of art of the period, its illuminated manuscripts. These hand-written, decorated, and illustrated books are not just beautiful examples of medieval painting but are to the modern reader intellectual artifacts that give an insight into the intellectual, literary and visual culture of the Middle Ages. Medieval society was dominated by the Catholic Church, and much of the surviving manuscripts served the Church, either in the liturgy or in private devotion. The secular world was never far off, however, and the sacred and profane often intermingled comfortably in the decoration and illustration of these books to produce effects that served political and ideological ends, were sometimes quite humorous, and that to the modern viewer can appear shocking and at odds with what one assumes about medieval society.

We will examine book-making practices and the role of imagery in manuscripts, frequently looking at the manuscripts in Philadelphia collections for firsthand knowledge. We will delve into various case studies of illuminated manuscripts to examine how they were used and interpreted by their readers.

### **Readings**

Readings are designed to introduce topics that discussed in class for the day they are assigned. They will also serve as a starting point for research for the term project. Class discussions will be based on the readings, and your participation grade is based on your contributions to class discussion. It is therefore in your best interest to read the readings carefully prior to each class so that you will be prepared.

All readings will be available on reserve in the Fisher Fine Arts Library. It is highly recommended that you purchase the following:

Philadelphia Museum of Art. *Leaves of Gold: Manuscript Illumination from Philadelphia Collections*. Exh. cat. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001.

C. de Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Phaidon Press, 1997.

### **Course Requirements and Grading Policy:**

Your grade will be based primarily on the term project, a semester-long analysis of a medieval manuscript of your choice. Two writing assignments related to that manuscript are intended to be preparation for a final research paper due at the end of the semester and an oral presentation. In addition to this project, your participation in class

discussions is a significant part of your final grade. If you are absent, you will obviously not be able to participate. Unexcused absences will therefore lower your grade.

Grades will be calculated in the following way:

- 20% Participation, Reading Discussions
- 30% First Presentation and 2 Written Assignments
- 20% Oral Presentation
- 30% Final Paper (10-12 pages)

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### **TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

**September 12 Introduction to the Course and Visit to the Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library**

**September 19 Medieval Book Production and the Technology of Manuscript Culture  
(Meet at the Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library)**

*Readings:*

- W. Noel and A. Quandt, "From Calf to Codex," *Leaves of Gold*, pp. 14-20
- J.J.G. Alexander, Chapter 1: "The Medieval Illuminator: Sources of Information" and Chapter 2: "Technical Aspects of the Illumination of a Manuscript" *Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), pp. 4-51

**September 26 The Role of Imagery and Decoration in Illuminated Manuscripts**

*Readings:*

- E. Mâle, Preface and Introduction, part I: "General Character of Medieval Iconography", in *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Icon Editions, 1972. pp. vii-xv, and 1-22.
- J.J.G. Alexander, "Iconography and Ideology: Uncovering Social Meanings in Western Medieval Christian Art," *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 1-44.
- L. G. Duggan, "Was art really the "book of the illiterate?" *Word and Image* (1989), pp. TBA
- J. H. Marrow, *Pictorial Invention in Netherlandish Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages: The Play of Illusion and Meaning* (Paris, Leuven, Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), pp. 1-37.

**October 3 The Bible and its Books: From the Monastery to the Printing Press  
(Meet at the Free Library)**

*Readings:*

- Leaves of Gold*, pp. 21-24

C. de Hamel, Chapters 1-8 of *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2001).

**October 10 The Monastery, the Church, and the State: Ideology and the Illuminated Manuscript in the Carolingian and Ottonian Periods**

*Reading:*

De Hamel, "Books for Emperors," pp. 42-73

TURN IN WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1: PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT MANUSCRIPT

**October 17 Fall Term Break**

**October 24 The Utrecht Psalter: Recreating a Medieval Reading Experience**

Guest Lecturer: Dr. William Noel, Curator of Manuscripts and Rare Books, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD

*Readings:*

The Book of Psalms (To be read over a period of one week following the monastic devotional schedule known as the Divine Office. Details to be provided)

*Leaves of Gold*, pp. 44-45

**October 31 Books for the Laity and the Rise and Meaning of Literacy in the Late Middle Ages  
(Meet at the Free Library)**

*Readings:*

De Hamel, "Books for Everybody," pp. 168-199

*Leaves of Gold*, pp. 68-129

TURN IN WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2: ICONOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT MANUSCRIPT

**November 7 Altered Reading: Case Studies in Interpreting Image-Text Relationships in Illuminated Manuscripts**

*Readings:*

K. Smith, "The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion," *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999), pp. 93-92.

A. R. Stanton, "From Eve to Bathsheba and Beyond: Motherhood in the Queen Mary Psalter," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. J. H. M. Taylor and L. Smith (London: British Library, 1997), pp. 172-189.

**November 14 Liturgical Manuscripts**

*Readings:*

De Hamel, "Books for Priests", pp. 200-231.

*Leaves of Gold*, pp. 130-187

**November 21            Secular Traditions: Kings and Queens, Knights and Ladies,  
and a few things that you probably didn't know about the  
Middle Ages.  
(Meet at the Free Library)**

*Readings:*

De Hamel, "Books for Aristocrats," pp. 142-167

*Leaves of Gold*, pp. 191-232.

Scot McKendrick, "Reviving the Past: Illustrated Manuscripts of Secular Vernacular  
Texts, 1467-1500," in *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish  
Manuscript Painting in Europe* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum), pp. 59-78.

M. Camille, Chapter 4 "Images in the Margins of the Court" in *Image on the Edge: The  
Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.  
99-127.

**November 28 Presentations**

**December 5 Presentations**

**December 21: FINAL PAPER DUE**