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Editor's note:

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ISBN: 978-1-78042-088-2

"The gilding [of the illumination], the brightness of its colour are not the result of a 'medieval naivety' but they are the means of creation of another world."

– André Malraux



Avicenna and the Translator of his Work, Represented by a Monk Below (Initial of book 3)

> Canon, Ibn-Cina (Avicenna), 1343 Parchment, Latin, 42 x 26 cm, Italy

Chronology

15th Century B.C.E.: First illuminated manuscripts of papyrus in Ancient Egypt.

2nd Century: Creation of the codex (bound book). The codex that will not truly

supplant the *scroll* (a roll of parchment or paper) until the 4th century. More hard-wearing, the parchment, elaborated with animal skin, will

replace the papyrus.

6th Century: First illuminated manuscripts in the codex of Western monasteries.

 $\hbox{ 6th Century-8th Century:} \quad \hbox{ The "insular art" ("of the islands of" Ireland and Northumbria) stands }$

out by the creativeness of its Gospel adornements, with designs of plants and mosaics. The Merovingian manuscripts of linear style are modelled on Antiquity and Byzantine art to illustrate prayer books and lectionaries. The main centers of production are the monasteries of Fleury, Tours (Val de Loire), Luxeuil (Burgundy) and

Corbie (Picardy).

8th Century: The work of the first British historian, Bede the Venerable (c. 673-735), entitled Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum

introduced for the first time an historiated initial in a manuscript.

8th Century-10th Century: Carolingian Renaissance: setting of the main principles of the art of

illuminated manuscripts. Rationalising the decor (naturalistic figural art), focused on the initial capital and a few miniatures. Enriching of the material: prepared manuscript with purple background, decor of gold and silver (*The Purple Gospelbook*). The thematic of the codex spreads to profane texts (*Bestiary*). Flourishing art at the court of Charles the Bald (*Sacramentary* of Saint-Amand), but in other places

as well as the Rhine Valley, Tours, Rheims and Metz.



St Thomas Aquinas Teaching

Summae Theologiae, Thomas Aquinas Mid-15th century, Parchment, Latin, 30 x 20.5 cm France (Paris?) 13th Century:

The French illuminated manuscripts set the laws of the Gothic style for the whole Western world. Keen interest on architectural forms, brights colours (blue, red, white), quest for the volume and movement (*Psalter*, 1218-1242). Creation of full-page miniatures. The ornementation gains margins which become populated with ivy, grotesques and drolleries. The era of monastic fabrication declines with the advent of urban workshops run by laymen.

14th Century:

Refinement of the silhouettes and elegance of the Parisian School, under the direction of Jean de Pucelle. Flourishing of the illuminated manuscript art in Provence and Catalonia, strongly influenced by oriental taste (Lo Breviari d'amor). In Italy, the illuminated manuscripts of Bologna are done according to the teaching of Giotto: coloured tints, details and perspective (Story of the Trojan War). Straightness of the Germanic-style figures (Book of Chess). Famous Flemish artists (such as the Limburg Brothers, The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry) are drawn by the enlightened patronage of Charles V, the Dukes of Burgundy, the Dukes of Berry and of the Valois Princes.

15th Century:

Immersed in the Hundred Years' War, France loses its creative dynamism. The Duchy of Burgundy of Philip the Good welcomes French artists (Simon Marmion, the presumed author of the Chronicles of France of Saint-Bertin) and Flemish artists as well (Universal Chronology). The Italian illumination develops with the spread of humanist books under the patronage of the Sforza and of the Medici (Canzoniere of Petrarch). Creative turmoil at King Rene's court, he was a lover of art and humanist principles. Jean Fouquet restores the prestige of French illuminated manuscripts in a Renaissance language (Book of Hours of Etienne Chevalier).

16th Century:

Diffusion of the printed book: decline of the manuscript production and the art of illumination. Surviving of the *Instructions* and *Portulans* of Venice. Books illustrations gradually gave way to the principles of easel painting.







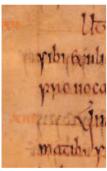
nyone fortunate enough to have actually held a medieval manuscript in his hands must have felt excited at this immediate contact with the past. Both famous and unknown authors wrote philosophical, natural scientific and theological treatises; romances about knights and courtly love; humanists and theologists translated and commented upon the classical literature of antiquity; travellers wrote descriptions of their incredible journeys and ascetic chroniclers recorded and kept alive the historic events of their times for future generations.

St Jerome (Frontispiece)

Epistles of St Jerome (Hieronymi Epistolae) c. 700 Parchment, Latin, 20.9 x 15.2 cm France (Corbie)









One can imagine a scribe constantly at work in a shop in some quiet narrow street of a medieval town, or a monk diligently reproducing the words of Holy Writ over and over again in a monastery scriptorium.

Even in those rare cases when a building decorated with frescoes has survived without having been damaged and having had its murals painted over in the course of successive ages at the whim of changing tastes, fluctuating temperatures and the effects of the atmosphere have substantially altered the original colour of the works.

Opening Page with Historiated Initial (probably Pope Gregory the Great)

Ecclesial History of the English People (Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum) The Venerable Bede 746 Parchment, Latin, 27 x 19 cm Northumbia within pertind her political of

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The fate of easel paintings is seldom much better: their colours have changed as a result of the effects of light and air, their paint cracks and chips off or they have been painted over or "renewed". The colours of gorgeous tapestries have also faded, while fragile stained-glass windows have seldom survived historical cataclysms. Only miniatures, protected to a large extent from damp, air, light and dust between the covers of the book, convey the true, unchanged colours of medieval painting.

Opening Page of the Gospel According to St John (In Principio)

Evangelistary
(Tetraevangelium)
Late 8th century
Parchment, Latin, 34.5 x 24.5 cm
Northumbia









The skill and care with which the miniatures were painted also explains why they have remained in such good condition. The monks working in scriptoria were inspired with a profound veneration for the texts with which they worked. Secular masters were motivated by the prestige of their workshop, further orders depending on the perfection of their technique. Commissioned by the aristocracy,

Canon Table

Evangelistary
(Tetraevangelium)
Late 8th century
Parchment, Latin, 34.5 x 24.5 cm
Northumbia









the clergy, or the growing financial and mercantile bourgeoisie, illuminated manuscripts became luxury items whose skilful execution and expensive materials made them as valuable as precious pieces of jewellery.

Illuminated manuscripts were mainly intended for the social elite. Illiteracy, and the tremendous cost of handwritten books, limited the number of people to whom the artist could address himself.

Matthew the Evangelist

Evangelistary
(Tetraevangelium)
9th century
Parchment, Latin, 31.8 x 27.5 cm
France

Ex Mufa Peter Dubrowsky





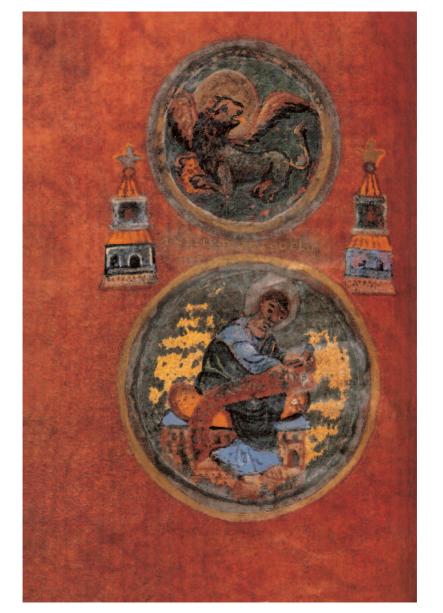




This exclusive character of illuminated manuscripts, however, did not lead them to become hackneyed. When manuscript production shifted in the thirteenth century from monasteries to city workshops, it was there that the artistic discoveries having an impact on art in general appeared. The new artistic idiom, that is the treatment of space, the rendering of mass, volume and movement etc., was largely worked out in illuminators' ateliers. The illustrative function of miniatures accounts for their being narrative and detailed, and it made their authors attempt not just a representation of space,

Mark the Evangelist

Evangelistary, called the Purple Gospelbook (Tetraevangelium) Third quarter of the 9th century Parchment, Latin, 28.5 x 19.5 cm France









but one that would show the duration of time as well. "Early French painting," the French art expert Greta Ring wrote, "is bolder on parchment than on panel."

Miniatures also played a significant role in the appearance of new genres, primarily landscape and portrait painting. Given the freedom in the treatment of subject-matter and the broader variety of themes used in illumination compared to easel painting, this is not at all surprising.

Opening of the Canon of the Mass

Sacramentary (Sacramentarium Gregorianum) 9th or 10th century Parchment, Latin, 27 x 20.5 cm France (Saint-Amand)





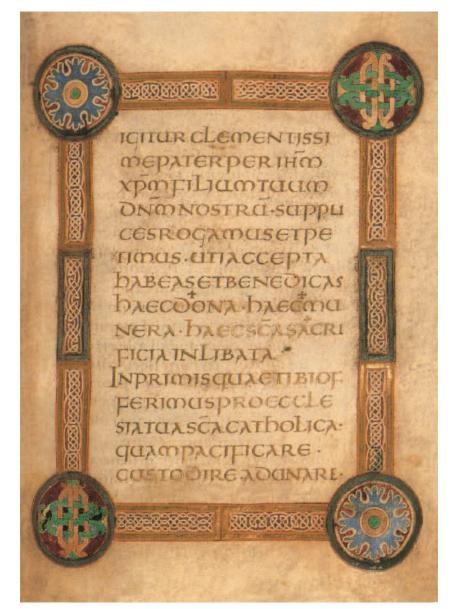




One cannot help admiring the boldness, creative energy and ingenuity of miniaturists who propelled art forward, in spite of the rigid limitations of tradition. Gradually, they introduced new elements in drawing, colour scheme and composition, widening the scope of scenes, objects and decorative motifs by increasingly employing their observations from life. When assessing the role of illuminated manuscripts in the history of art,

Opening of the Canon of the Mass

Sacramentary
(Sacramentarium Gregorianum)
9th or 10th century
Parchment, Latin, 27 x 20.5 cm
France (Saint-Amand)





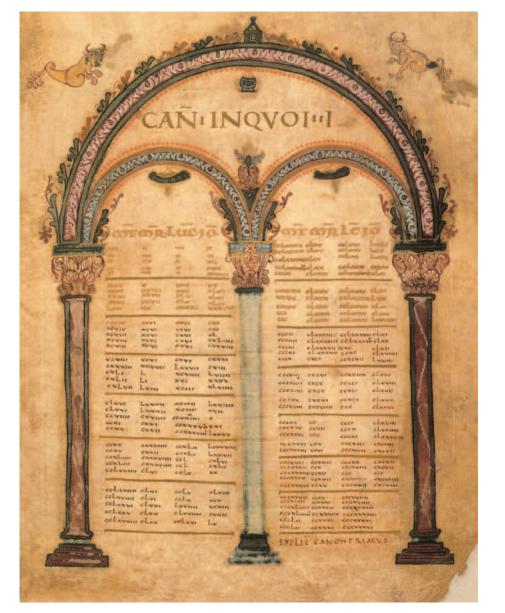




it should not be forgotten that an illustrated book, like many works of applied art, could be easily carried from place to place. Upon marriage, princesses took with them the works of their country's most famous miniaturists; men of noble birth who settled in to new lands received them by inheritance; they could be given as trophies to a victor. Illuminated manuscripts circulated all over Europe, introducing new tastes, ideas and styles.

First Canon Table

Evangelistary
Tetraevangelium
10th century
Parchment, Latin, 29.7 x 22.5 cm
France (Tours)









There is no doubt that the influence of Parisian art on many countries in the second half of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries can be largely explained by the spread of illuminated manuscripts.

Strong and mutually enriching ties can be traced with easel painting and with sculpture. In developing the sculptural decorative scheme of Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals, manuscripts served as a source of themes, images and iconography.

Adam Naming the Animals

Bestiary (Bestiarum) Late 12th century Parchment, Latin, 20 x 14.5 cm England