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The Written Word

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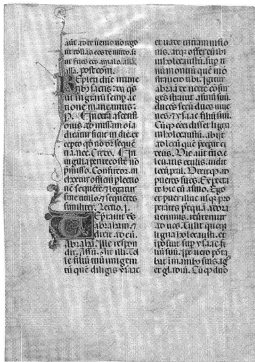
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The Written Word: Manuscript Pages and Early Prints



Cover and Fig. 1
Attrib. to the Dominican
Order, Perugia, Italy
Leaf from a Missal,
ca. 1353
Ink, tempera, and gold
on parchment
Sheet size: 12 3/4 x 9 1/4"
(32.5 x 23.3 cm.)
Museum Works of Art
Fund. 43.438B

The *Written Word* brings together pages from medieval manuscripts and early printed works, giving a sample of the various types of books created between 1100 and 1550. Individual pages were a popular way, especially in the earlier part of the 20th century, for museums and libraries to acquire representative collections, and many of The RISD Museum's manuscript leaves were acquired as such a group in 1943.

Technique

Before the invention of movable type (ca. 1450), all Western European books were entirely handmade, and each represented considerable effort and expense. The leaves of these books were of vellum or parchment, treated animal skin with great durability. The text was written with a quill pen in ink made from lampblack or iron and oak gall. Different scripts, such as Caroline, Gothic, and Humanist, were employed during the Middle Ages and provide important information about the date and location of a manuscript's production. Letters that introduce major sections of the text frequently received special treatment and were written in colored or gold ink and sometimes placed on a colored or decorated background, as in several examples on view. Some manuscripts had additional elaboration in colored ink, such as the pen-flourished initial that extends from the letter into the margins of the page from an Italian Missal of the mid-14th century [fig. 1].

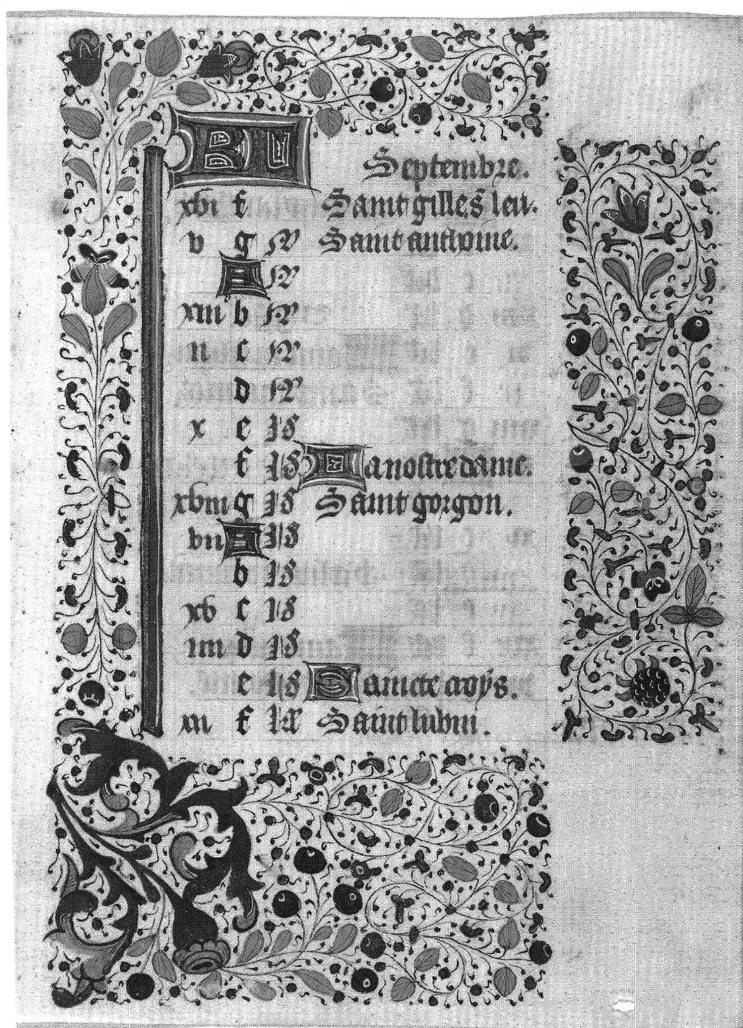
Deluxe manuscripts had initials, ornament, or miniatures painted with animal-hair brushes and pigment suspended in egg white and other binders. Pigments were derived from a variety of mineral and vegetable sources. Gold leaf was added to enhance many illuminations, and some manuscripts also displayed elaborate borders, such as the charming composition of strawberries seen in the page from a mid-15th century French Book of Hours (acc. no. 43.444). Although in earlier medieval times manuscripts were made predominantly in monasteries, after 1250 they were more often created by lay people in urban workshops.

A new era in European book production – initiated with the invention of movable type around 1450 and traditionally ascribed to Johannes Gutenberg – allowed the manufacture of multiple copies of identical pages with relative ease. This exhibition presents several pages from incunabula, books predating 1501 (acc. nos. 43.024; 43.027a, b; 44.452). Early printed books were typically made from paper rather than vellum or parchment; and if illustrations were desired, they were usually done as woodcuts, which were then sometimes hand-colored after the printing process. A number of early woodcuts were issued as single sheets without text and formed an important type of devotional imagery, such as the *Virgin and Two Saints* (acc. no. 30.086).

Bibles

The Christian Bible, originally written in Hebrew and Greek, was translated into Latin by Jerome in the 4th century. His version, called the Vulgate (Latin was then the commonly spoken or “vulgar” tongue), became the predominant form of the Bible in medieval Europe. During this period the Vulgate was primarily used for reading in church services and for study by the clergy. This exhibition presents leaves from two early 12th-century Bible texts that show the way a book's appearance may reflect its use. An Italian Gospel Lectionary (acc. no. 43.434), which organizes the readings from the New Testament gospels in liturgical order, was made to be read in church services. It has a large format with a very big initial *I* in the phrase “*In illo t[em]p[or]e*,” which introduces the reading for the day. The highly legible script is derived from Caroline minuscule, developed in monasteries under the patronage of Charlemagne (742-814). The RISD Museum's French Bible (acc. no. 43.433) was used to study





Above: Fig. 3
 French
Calendar page from a Book of Hours, ca. 1435
 Ink, tempera, and gold on parchment
 Sheet size: 6 1/2 x 4 7/8" (16.7 x 12.2 cm.)
 Museum Works of Art Fund. 43.441

Left: Fig. 2
 Armenian
Leaf from a Bible, ca. 1121
 Ink and tempera on paper
 Sheet size: 10 x 15" (38.4 x 25.0 cm.)
 Museum Works of Art Fund. 43.445

both the actual text and the commentaries (glosses) written by church fathers. A section from the Book of Chronicles is seen in the center section, written in Gothic book hand, and commentaries are appended in smaller script to the sides. An additional 12th-century Bible leaf [fig. 2] is a translation into Armenian and represents a tradition distinct from the Latin Vulgate.

Access to the Bible through its translation into vernacular languages was a central issue in the Protestant Reformation, a far-reaching movement that was given impetus in Germany by Martin Luther's doctrines during the critical period of 1520 to 1550. Johannes Gutenberg's Bible (printed at Mainz not later than 1456) was a version of the Latin Vulgate, but printed Bibles in the vernacular became popular in the late 15th century. In Germany the Bible was actually translated from the Latin eighteen times before Martin Luther's famous version of 1534. The exhibition presents a leaf from Nuremberg printer Anton Koberger's ninth High German translation of 1483 (acc. no. 43.027b), in

which a woodcut appears at the start of the Book of Exodus showing Pharaoh confronting the virtuous midwives Shiphrah and Puaah (Sephora and Phua on the print), who refused to kill male Jewish infants. A frontispiece from Martin Luther's German New Testament of 1541 (acc. no. 43.467) is surrounded by woodcuts of the Life of Christ designed by the school of Lucas Cranach. The use of woodcuts in these early Bibles suggests a broadened audience, including the laity, who would have already been acquainted with the visual depiction of Biblical scenes.

Books of Hours

Before the Protestant Reformation, the Bible was primarily experienced by the laity during the Mass; however, people frequently owned Books of Hours, personal devotional volumes. In fact, there are many more extant Books of Hours from this period than there are Bibles. Books of Hours were used for private prayer and were important personal possessions. They were frequently mentioned in wills, and mothers often taught children to read from them. Books of Hours usually began with a calendar showing the days of different saints' feasts. In a page from a French mid-15th century Book of Hours [fig. 3], the feasts of September – the Birth of the Virgin Mary and Holy Cross Day (Sanctæ Xoy's) – are highlighted in gold. Short gospel lessons preceded the Hours of the Virgin, the core of the book, which began with prayers and psalms for Prime (the first of the eight canonical hours), most often illustrated with a scene of the Annunciation to the Virgin. Such a volume continued through the other seven hours of daily prayer times. The Hours of the Virgin are followed by additional sets of hours for particular occasions and prayers, including Litanies of the Saints (see acc. no. 63.011.127) and the Office of the Dead. The Book of Hours did not lose its popularity with the invention of movable type and was one of the most common early printed books. See the leaf from a Book of Hours printed in Paris by Philippe Pigouchet for Simon Vostre around 1500 (acc. no. 43.462).

Other Devotional Books and Prints

The Book of Hours was just one manifestation of a great rise in personal devotion that took place in the later Middle Ages. A variety of other books and visual works, such as prints, small sculptures, and paintings, were also employed as spiritual aids. The Virgin Mary was particularly important as an inter-



Fig. 4
Flemish
St. Margaret,
illumination cut
from a manuscript leaf,
1400-1500
Tempera and gold
on parchment
Sheet size: 2 5/8 x 2"
(7.8 x 5.2 cm.)
Anonymous Gift.
82.190.1

cessor with God, and in addition to her role in the Book of Hours, she appeared in many painted and printed images, such as the woodcut of the *Virgin and Two Saints* (acc. no. 30.086). The saints were also important devotional focuses, as their presence in the Litanies suggests. They were pictured in Books of Hours and other manuscripts, as can be seen in an exquisite small image of St. Margaret standing on the dragon [fig. 4]. This image was cut from an illuminated manuscript and made to look like a "picture," a collecting practice especially common in the 19th century.

People of the late Middle Ages wanted to know more about their saints. *The Golden Legend*, a collection of saints' lives compiled by Jacobus de Voragine around 1260, satisfied some of this longing. Although originally written in Latin, Voragine's work was very popular and widely translated. The lively character of saints' lives and deaths may be seen in the woodcut illustrating the martyrdom of St. Appolonia (her teeth were knocked out) from a German translation of Voragine's work printed by Anton Koberger in 1488 (acc. no. 44.452). The narrative image exhibits vivid action with the torturers brandishing their dental equipment and wearing stylish parti-colored clothing, painted in after printing.

Other Texts

Bibles, Books of Hours, and works used in devotional contexts were not the only types of late medieval books. A large group of manuscripts was made to be used in church rituals. Such manuscripts include Missals (books containing the text of the

Mass), such as the Italian Dominican example with the splendid pen work [fig. 1], music books for sung portions of the Mass, called Graduals (acc. no. 43.439), and music books for the Divine Office, called Antiphonaries.

Theological treatises in both manuscript and printed form were popular. Examples in the exhibition include the late 15th-century Italian manuscript of Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (acc. no. 43.446), executed in a fine Humanist script; and the *Decretal of Boniface VIII* (1294-1303), printed in 1514 (acc. no. 43.464). The woodcut image of the Council of Constance, printed by Anton Sorg (acc. no. 43.022), presents a picture of this significant church event held from 1414 to 1418 and suggests the importance of theological debates in public consciousness at this time.

After the invention of printing, there was a rapid increase in new book types. An excellent example of this diversification may be seen in a sheet depicting the city of Venice from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (acc. no. 43.024). The text was written by the Nuremberg physician and humanist Hartmann Schedel, and the 1493 edition contained 1,810 illustrations created by the workshop of Michael Wolgemut and printed by Anton Koberger, who also produced the *Ninth German Bible* (acc. no. 43.027b). The printing of recently authored illustrated texts in the vernacular suggests the profound societal changes taking place in a culture that had previously produced the written word in manuscript form.

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Other participants in *The Written Word* project are Curators Clare Rogan and Jan Howard and Paper Preservation Specialist Linda Catano, The RISD Museum.

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