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Medieval and Renaissance Galleries 2008, December 8, 2008-April 1, 2010

Medieval Manuscripts

Before the invention of moveable type in Europe around 1450, specialized craftsmen produced books entirely by hand (Latin: *manus*, hand). Each leaf was fashioned from scraped, stretched, and whitened animal skin (parchment) and arranged into a codex format (a book bound into sheets). Scribes then wrote the text with a quill pen in black, brown, or red ink. Thereafter, an illuminator added historiated initials or miniatures with color washes and gold leaf. Until around 1200, book production took place in ecclesiastical *scriptoria* (writing rooms); thereafter, many laypersons made manuscripts.

Types of manuscripts range from those used during Catholic liturgical rites to private devotional books and secular, scholarly texts. Throughout the Medieval period, most texts were written in Latin, the commonly spoken language of the Roman Catholic Church. The beauty and intricacy of manuscript leaves reflects the desire of ecclesiastical communities to glorify the sacred character of the liturgy and the Holy Scriptures.

Individual manuscript leaves such as those on view in this gallery originally formed a part of full codices; over the centuries many codices were separated to enable individuals and institutions to acquire representative collections.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Mariotto di Nardo, Italian, fl. 1394-1424; Active ca. 1394 - 1424
Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, ca. 1408
Tempera and gold on panel
Museum Appropriation Fund 17.520

Mariotto di Nardo, Italian, fl. 1394-1424; Active ca. 1394 - 1424
Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata, ca. 1408
Tempera and gold on panel
Museum Appropriation Fund 17.521

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French
Stained Glass Window, ca. 1225-1235
Glass with lead
Gift of William A. Viall and William C. Dart 19.044

Burgundian (Migration period); French
Saint Peter, ca. 1106-1112
Limestone with traces of gesso and polychromy (colored paint)
Museum Appropriation Fund 20.254

This figure of St. Peter comes from the great abbey of Cluny, the wealthiest monastery in Europe during the Middle Ages. He is identified by the key he holds, symbolizing authority over the Catholic Church. Peter was one of the patron saints of the abbey, and his image would have represented the communal and spiritual identity of the monks. Like other known Cluny figures, St. Peter is characterized by long fingers extending from small palms and by the angular, parallel drapery folds typical of sculpture from Burgundy. This sculpture may have been located on the west façade of the abbey church in a spandrel over the great portal; that is, in the roughly triangular wall area formed to the side of the arch as it curves to its highest point.

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Lippo Memmi, Italian, Active 1317- ca. 1350; fl. 1317-1347
Mary Magdalene, ca. 1330
Tempera and gold on panel
Museum Appropriation Fund 21.250

French
Virgin from a Coronation, 1450 - 1475
Stone; paint
Museum Appropriation Fund 21.443

This sculpture was most likely displayed with a group of figures from a scene of the Coronation of the Virgin or an Annunciation. The cult of the Virgin was one of the most important devotions to develop during the Middle Ages. Usually displayed in the niches located in choir screens or on the walls of churches and also as parts of tombs, sculptures like this engaged devout Christians to reflect upon the Virgin's role as intercessor with God.

In this depiction, the Virgin Mary sits with her hands folded in a gesture of humility as she gazes downward. Traces of original paint are still visible on the surface of the figure. Most sculptures in the Middle Ages were brightly colored to make them more lifelike. Their appearance deeply moved their viewers, who would see such objects not merely as representations of holy figures, but as points of access to the Divine.

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Jacopo di Cione, Italian, ca. 1330- 1398
The Taking of Saint Peter, 1370-1371
Tempera and gold on panel
Gift of Manton B. Metcalf 22.047

English
Coronation of the Virgin, 1400-1420
Alabaster and gilding
Museum Appropriation Fund 23.089

French
Double Capital with grape leaves, 1200s
Marble
Gift of André Séligmann 23.349

English
St. James the Great, ca.1400 - 1500
Alabaster
Museum Appropriation Fund 25.144

The cousin of Christ, St. James, is shown wearing the typical pilgrim's hat with upturned brim. It is pinned by a scallop shell, the badge of those who made the journey to St. James's supposed grave at Compostela in northwestern Spain. The figure to which this head belonged may have been among a group of apostles decorating an English church. This sculpture reflects the vitality and pervasiveness of the cult of St. James. Thousands of pilgrims made the difficult

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journey to Compostela from all corners of Europe during the Middle Ages.

Italian
Screen, ca.1130-1300
Iron
Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr. 38.018

This grille, probably the top part of a much larger ensemble, may have been used as a gate to enclose and protect holy relics or to screen off a side chapel in a church. A hingelike segment is welded to the top left corner. Grilles appeared after 1130 and were produced for many centuries as church furnishings. This one displays an intricate pattern of paired scrolls. These tightly curled tendrils are anchored on central stems, possibly symbolizing the Tree of Life.

French
Stained glass window, ca.1800 - 1900
Stained glass, lead
Museum Appropriation Fund 38.055

These stained-glass windows were installed in the gallery around 1940 by then director Alexander Dorner as part of a program to create an “atmospheric” presentation of medieval objects. They are a combination of glass made at several different moments in time. Some segments show the rippled surface typical of glass from the Middle Ages; others are flat and smooth, suggesting more recent origins. The recreation of the precious character of medieval stained

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glass was a common practice in the workshops of 19th-century restorers. They kept fragments of old glass from their repair work and combined them with newly made pieces to fashion often-faithful reproductions of the Gothic style.

Tall, narrow, pointed (lancet) windows such as these would have originally been located in the upper level (clerestory) of a Gothic church. The stories depicted in the windows and their jewel-like light were important to the idea of the church as an earthly symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Elements of the Gothic style in art and architecture first appeared around 1140 and continued to be used well into the mid-1400s. Combining spiritual devotion with an elegance of design and ornament, the style's complex pointed arches and spires direct the mind and eye upward toward the heavens, while its colored windows and sculptural ornament are meant to record a human vision.

French
Stained glass window, ca.1800 - 1900
Stained glass, lead
Museum Appropriation Fund 38.056

Lorraine
Standing Apostle, ca. 1340
Sandstone
Museum Appropriation Fund 38.057

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Egyptian period
Portal, ca. 700
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 39.040

The ornamentation of all the parts is consistent with architectural motifs from Egypt, but the arch, capitals, and columns are not necessarily elements from a single portal.

Egyptian
Corinthian Capital, 200s CE
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 39.132

French
Romanesque Portal, ca. 1150
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 40.014

This portal is too small to have been the main entrance of a large church. It may have flanked a main entrance on the west façade or served as a side doorway. Although the portal is largely intact, it is likely that some of its components were reoriented in its present installation. The term "Romanesque" was coined in the 19th century to refer to an architectural style that employed heavy, Roman-looking columns, rounded arches, and stylized sculptural decoration. It is now generally used to describe both the art and architecture of Western Europe from around 1050 to 1200.

This French Romanesque portal, like the other architectural elements that form the gallery's doorways, was installed in 1940 by Alexander Dorner, the Museum's director at that time. It was previously owned by William Randolph Hearst and was dismantled from his Long Island estate before being sold to the RISD Museum.

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French
Tracery Arch, ca. 1300
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 40.156.1

The ornamental stone patternwork (tracery) filling the upper part of this doorway comes from the city of Avallon, near Vézelay, in the mid-eastern region of Burgundy, while the column shafts and capitals are from the city of Rennes in northwestern Brittany. The physical condition of the pieces suggests that they were interior architectural elements kept in a well-sheltered location through the centuries. It is unlikely that they were meant to be part of a ground-floor portal. The upper section probably rested on column shafts similar to those on view here, but they would have been above the ground-floor arcade at the triforium (middle) level of a cathedral or abbey church, where the series of arched openings served decorative and structural purposes on the side walls below the clerestory (upper level).

French
Engaged columns with capital, ca. 1300
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 40.156.2A

French
Engaged columns with capital, 1200s
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 40.156.2B

French
Romanesque Capital, early 1100s
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 40.166

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French
Apostle, ca. 1110
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 41.045

The limestone apostles on either side of this portal were part of a medieval sculptural composition from a church in central France. Seven other figures from this group are also in American museums. Their upward glances and dramatic gestures are meant to communicate something wondrous. They may have surrounded a representation of the Ascension of Christ, a popular scene found in many churches of the period. Both apostles feature stocky proportions, large, rounded hands and faces, and drapery rendered in three curved, parallel ridges. The abstract forms of the body, the long fingers, and the drilled pupils are characteristic of sculpture of the Romanesque period.

French
Apostle, ca. 1110
Limestone
Museum Appropriation Fund 41.046

The limestone apostles on either side of this portal were part of a medieval sculptural composition from a church in central France. Seven other figures from this group are also in American museums. Their upward glances and dramatic gestures are meant to communicate something wondrous. They may have surrounded a representation of the Ascension of Christ, a popular scene found in many churches of the period. Both apostles feature stocky proportions, large, rounded hands and faces, and drapery rendered in three curved, parallel ridges. The abstract forms of the body, the long fingers, and the drilled pupils are characteristic of sculpture of the Romanesque period.

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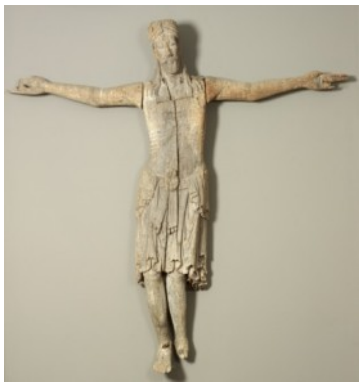
Spanish
Figure of an Apostle, later 1200s-early 1300s
Wood, polychromy
Gift of John Nicholas Brown 42.009

Spanish
The Crucified Christ, ca. 1150-1200
Oak with traces of polychrome (colored paint)
Museum Special Reserve Fund 43.195



This carved figure of the crucified Christ was originally attached to a cross. Its impressive size, which is equal in width and in length, indicates that it would have hung in a large church or in a monastery dining room, or refectory. The figure conveys a stoicism that is common in Spanish Romanesque sculpture. In denying the pain of crucifixion, Christ demonstrates his divine nature and displays triumph over death.

The body of Christ is nude, aside from a loin cloth that is wrapped around his torso and tied in a geometric knot. Nail holes can be observed in the hands and feet. Like much medieval sculpture, the figure would have been painted. The sword wound below Christ's right ribs still bears traces of the original color.

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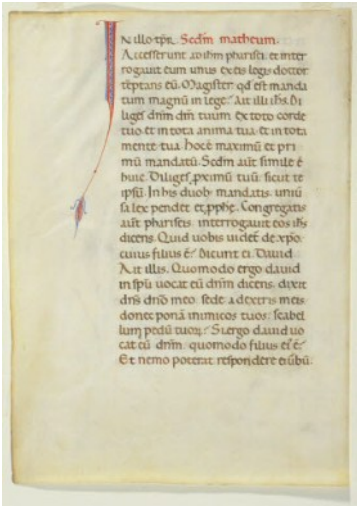
Italian
Leaf from a gospel lectionary, ca. 1150
Ink and tempera on vellum
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.434



A gospel lectionary played an important role in the celebration of the Mass by arranging New Testament texts according to the strict liturgical calendar, to be read aloud on pre-determined days. This leaf's clear script and large initial "I," with its elegant pen flourish, aided readers in finding their place and following the text in a dimly lit church. The passage is from the Book of Matthew.

Dominican Order
Leaf from a Missal, ca. 1353
Ink, tempera, and gold on vellum
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.438

A missal is a composite book that unites all of the texts of the Mass to be read throughout the year. This elegant leaf is from a missal made for use by the Dominican Order; its structure and text follow rites specific to that mendicant order. The passages of black and red ink differentiate rubrics, or instructions for the orator (red) from canonical text (black).

German
Leaf from a Bible, ca. 1450
Ink, tempera, gold and silver on parchment
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.443

The Bible occupies a singular place in the history of the book. It is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian religion and thought by believers to be the divinely inspired Word of God. In the Middle Ages, biblical texts were objects of intense study by scholars; they provided sources for moral instruction; they also formed the basis for many of the liturgical texts used in church rites. Bibles thus dominated manuscript production in many periods and centers.

This German leaf shows the prologue to the Old Testament Book of Joel, a minor prophet. The prophet is depicted within an historiated

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initial. While not a lavish example, as evidenced by the spare application of gold leaf, the illuminator used bright and lively pigments. The scribe's ruling lines are visible, as is a short gloss, or commentary, on the left border. The double column format and truncated script allowed the scribe to fit more text onto each leaf.

French
Leaf from a Book of Hours, ca. 1450
Ink, tempera and gold on parchment
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.444

A book of hours is a small, private devotional text that was used in the daily prayers of one individual. Such books were in fact more plentiful than Bibles from the 14th through 16th centuries, when laypersons became the primary patrons of manuscripts. Common elements in books of hours include calendars, which list the principal holy days of the year, and the Hours of the Virgin (selections of psalms, hymns, and prayers to be recited at eight different times of the day in honor of the Virgin Mary). Such books were often owned by women.

The refined border of leaves and strawberries in this example would have made it a particularly engaging personal possession. The script is punctuated by line fillers, a common scribal ornament meant to maintain the visual unity of the text block.

Italian
Table, ca.1500-1600
Walnut and mahogany
Gift of Mrs. Murray Danforth 45.073

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French; German
Hinged container (in form of a tower), ca. 1200-1220
Gilt metal with filigree and semiprecious stones
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 48.411

Decorated boxes, or caskets, were used throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to hold precious items of either religious or secular nature. The earliest of the boxes in this case is a marble reliquary in the form of a Roman tomb (sarcophagus). Engraved with a cross, it might have held fragments of bones or clothing associated with a saint. The small enameled pyx, whose conical lid is surmounted by a finial in the shape of a cross, was used to hold consecrated communion wafers or holy oil for baptisms or last rites. The unusual hinged container in the form of a tower is also likely to have been used for religious purposes. It is lavishly decorated with gilt and filigree and includes carved gems in cabochon settings. Although lacking its base, it appears to have been free-standing, and like the enameled pyx may have been used to hold communion wafers or holy oils.

During the Renaissance, elaborate boxes were used in the celebration of marriage. A small casket, known as a cassetta, was often given as an engagement gift and would have been used to hold jewelry or fine domestic items such as combs or mirrors. Two Italian caskets on the top shelf are made of wood and are decorated with reliefs made of carved lead paste, called pastiglia. At top right, the gold and white casket shows the capture of

Roman general Marcus Atilius Regulus during the First Punic War (264 – 241 bce). Such scenes from classical antiquity were meant to show the culture and learning of the jewel box's owner. Equally common were scenes of courtship and courtly life. On the cassetta at upper left, a procession of figures surrounds a male suitor who offers a box to his betrothed.

Among the most costly caskets were those carved from ivory and bone and embellished with inlaid geometric patterns. In Venice, the workshop of Baldassare degli Embriachi was renowned for containers of this type, decorated with courtly or historical subjects. The six-sided casket from the Embriachi workshop is decorated with pairs of figures and solitary warriors set against a landscape of pines. Angels encircle the lid and display a shield on which a family coat of arms would be inscribed. The knob at the top is a replacement for the original finial, and may have been carved for a cane or dagger.

Courtly figures are also featured on the iron strongbox whose most striking feature is an elaborate locking mechanism. Like the sides of

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the box, the patterns and imagery on the lock are highlighted through a technique known as niello. A metallic alloy was applied to an engraved surface and then heated so that it ran into the channels formed by the incised dots or lines. Once the metal was polished, the contrast of the black niello against the bright surface produced an attractive decorative effect.

Spanish
Head of Christ or a Saint, ca. 1220-1240
Walnut with polychromy (colored paint)
Museum Works of Art Fund 59.131

This sculpture is from Sahagún, one of the important towns along the medieval pilgrims' route to Santiago de Compostela (the famous shrine in northwestern Spain supposedly containing the relics and grave of the apostle St. James). Images of this scale were unusual in the European Middle Ages, except for representations of St. Christopher, to whom tradition ascribed prodigious size. The saint was the patron of travelers, an appropriate subject for an image located along a pilgrim route.

Spanish
Christ in Majesty, ca. 1090-1100
Limestone
Gift of John Nicholas Brown 69.196

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French
Pyx, 1200s
Enamel and copper with gilding
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 30.011

Northern Italian
Casket, ca. 1550
Iron; gilding
Museum Works of Art Fund 49.315

Italian
Casket, ca. 1500
Wood with pastiglia and gilding
Museum Works of Art Fund 51.272

Italian
Casket, ca. 1520
Painted and glit wood with carved pastiglia ornamentation
Museum Works of Art Fund 52.531

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Byzantine
Sculpture; reliquary box, 400s CE - 500s CE
Marble
Museum Works of Art Fund 60.049

German
Casket, ca. 1600
Steel, niello
Gift of Mrs. Henry D. Sharpe 63.046.6

Baldessare degli Embriachi, Italian; Venetian, ca. 1393-1409; fl. late 14th century-early 15th century
Casket, ca. 1400
Bone, wood and horn
Gift of the Estate of W. Phelps Warren 85.075.8