

The Written Word: Manuscript Pages and Early Prints, October 4, 2002-February 16, 2003

This exhibition brings together pages from medieval manuscripts and early printed works giving a sample of the various types of books created between 1100 and 1550. Before the invention of moveable type (ca. 1450) all Western European books were entirely handmade. The leaves of the book were made of parchment, which is treated animal skin with great durability. The text was written and decorated by hand. A new era in European book production, initiated with the invention of moveable type, allowed the manufacture of multiple copies of identical pages with relative ease. Early printed books were made from paper and if illustrations were desired, they were usually done as woodcuts, which were sometimes handcolored after the printing process.

Although most of the works seen in this exhibition were originally part of books, they entered RISD's collection as individual pages. Dividing books into individual sheets was a popular way for museums and libraries to acquire collections of representative leaves, especially in the earlier part of the 20th century.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Lucas Cranach the elder, German, 1472-1553
Nicolaus Wolrab
Title page, Luther's Das Neue Testament, 1541
Woodcut with hand coloring on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.467



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



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Bibles

The Christian Bible, originally written in Hebrew and Greek, was translated into Latin in the 4th century. This Latin version, called the Vulgate (Latin was then the commonly spoken or “vulgar” tongue) became the most widely used medieval Bible. Three manuscript versions of the Vulgate may be seen to your right. A leaf from an early twelfth-century Armenian Bible in the Armenian language represents an alternate tradition.

The Protestant reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries encouraged private Bible reading by lay Christians. The Bible was translated into vernacular languages, illustrated with lively woodcuts and made widely available through printing. The exhibition shows two printed pages from German-language Bibles. Martin Luther, the famous reformer, was responsible for a German 1541 New Testament with illustrations by the workshop of Lucas Cranach.

German

Anton Koberger, German, ca. 1445-1513

Bookpage, Ninth German Bible, 1483

Woodcut with hand coloring on paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.027

This is the ninth printed version of the Bible in German. The woodcut accompanies the beginning of the Book of Exodus and illustrates Pharaoh instructing the virtuous midwives, Shiphrah and Puah (Sephora and Phua on the print) to kill all male Hebrew babies, an act which they refuse.

Italian

Leaf from a gospel lectionary, ca. 1150

Ink and tempera on vellum

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.434

A gospel lectionary arranges the New Testament according to the liturgical schedule in which it was read in church. The clear script and large initial would facilitate this public reading.



French

Leaf from a Glossed Bible, the Book of Chronicles, 1115

Ink on parchment

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.433

A Glossed Bible includes the Bible text in the center of the page with commentaries on that text by the church fathers and other theologians in the margins. This type of Bible was used for study purposes by the clergy.



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Armenian
Leaf from a Bible, 1121
Ink and tempera on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.445



Books of Hours

The Book of Hours, a devotional volume used by lay people for private prayers, was the most commonly owned book in the later Middle Ages. They are frequently mentioned in wills, and mothers often taught their children to read from them. The small scale of the pages indicates the personal nature of the books, which could be held in the owner's hands or easily carried about. The Book of Hours began with a calendar, which was followed by the Hours of the Virgin, the core of the book, consisting of prayers that would be said at eight times (or hours) during each day. A Book of Hours in the case shows how each hour would be marked by an illustration from the life of the Virgin. The Hours of the Virgin are followed by additional hours, prayers including a litany of saints and the Office of the Dead.

The diverse geographic locations and script styles of the leaves in the exhibition indicate the popularity of this book type which continued into the era of printing, as is indicated by a page from an early printed Book of Hours published by Simon Vostre circa 1500.

English
Leaf from a Book of Hours, ca. 1350
Ink, tempera and gold on parchment
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.437



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French

Calendar leaf from a Book of Hours, ca. 1435

Ink, tempera and gold on parchment

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.441

A calendar, which begins a Book of Hours, would tell the owner on which days special prayers should be said. This calendar leaf shows the month of September with the Birth of the Virgin Mary and Feast of the Holy Cross (*Sancte Xoys*) highlighted in gold.



French

Philippe Pigouchet, French, 15th century

Simon Vostre

Leaf from a Book of Hours, ca. 1498

Metalcut on vellum

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.462

Even after the invention of printing the Book of Hours remained an extremely popular book, as this fine Parisian example suggests.



French

Leaf from a Book of Hours, ca. 1450

ink, tempera and gold on parchment

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.444

This leaf has a fine border with a pattern of leaves and strawberries which would have made it a particularly engaging possession.



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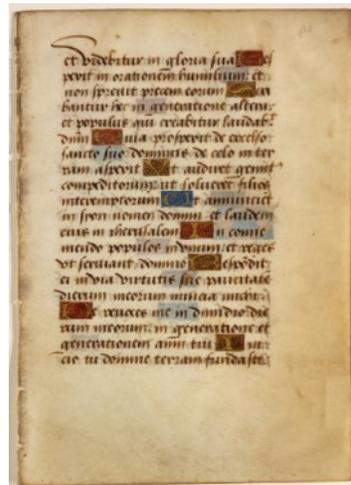
French

Leaf from a Book of Hours, ca. 1500

Ink, tempera and gold on parchment

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.450

Unlike the Gothic script employed in most of the Books of Hours in the exhibition, this manuscript is written in a *bâtard* hand, a late cursive script.



French

Manuscript Illumination, ca. 1435

Ink and gold leaf on vellum

Gift of the Estate of William E. Brigham 63.011.127

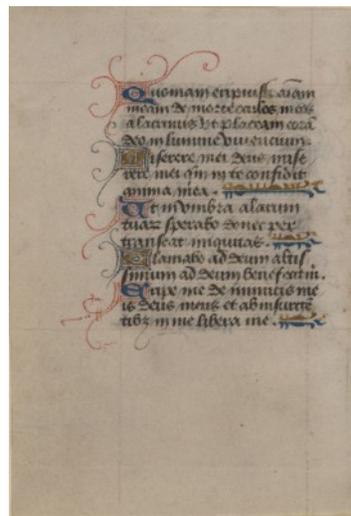


French

Leaf from a Book of Hours, ca. 1440

Ink, tempera and gold on parchment

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.442



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Case With Books

This case contains three books from the 15th and 16th centuries. Two are manuscripts and one is an early printed book. These three books give an idea of what many of the pages that are displayed as sheets in the exhibition would have looked like in their original contexts.

French

Desiderius Erasmus, Netherlandish

Paraphrasis in Epistolas Pauli, 1523

Woodcut

Museum Works of Art Fund 50.076

This commentary on the letters of Paul was written by the famous humanist scholar, Desiderius Erasmus. Although Erasmus remained in the Catholic faith, his scholarly Latin translation of the Greek New Testament became an important source for Martin Luther's German translation.

Devotional Texts

A variety of books and visual works, such as prints and small sculptures, were employed as spiritual aids in the later Middle Ages. The Virgin Mary was particularly important as an intercessor with God and appeared in numerous works such as the woodcut of *Virgin and Two Saints*. Saints were another important devotional focus. They were pictured in Books of Hours and other manuscripts. Medieval people wanted to know more about their saints and lives of saints were very popular. The lively woodcut from a printed version of Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, a well-known collection of saints' lives, shows St. Appollonia being tortured. Having a virtuous death, like those of the saints, preoccupied many people in the late Middle Ages. The image of St. John writing the Apocalypse, the last book of the New Testament, which recounts the end of the world, supported the idea of divine control of the world and human destiny.

Michael Wolgemut, German, 1434-1519

Wilhelm Pleydenwurff, German, ca. 1458-1494

Anton Koberger, German, ca. 1445-1513

Stephan Fridolin

Daniel Sees the Splendor of God, from the book *Schatzbehälter der wahren Reichtümer des Heils (Treasure Chest of the True Riches of Salvation)*, Nuremberg, 1491

Woodcut with hand coloring on laid paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 47.022

This woodcut showing St. John writing the Apocalypse was taken from a lavishly illustrated devotional guide for the laity.



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German

Anton Koberger, German, ca. 1445-1513

St. Appolonia, book page with image and text, from *Jacobus de Voragine, Lives of the Saints (Passional oder Leben des Heiligen)*, Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1488

Woodcut, hand-colored with watercolor on laid paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 44.452

Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* recounted the legends of the saints. Here we see St. Apollonia, who was tortured by having her teeth removed.



German

Erhard Ratdolt, German, 1447-1528

Virgin and Child with Saints Ulrich and Afra, ca. 1490s

Woodcut with hand coloring on paper

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 30.086



Flemish

St. Margaret and Dragon, late 1400s - early 1500s

Ink, tempera, and gold on vellum

Anonymous gift 82.190.1



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Flemish

The Penitent Magdalene in Glory, 1400s

Ink and tempera on vellum

Anonymous gift 82.190.2



Joseph C. Maillet

Decretal of Boniface VIII, 1514

Two-color letterpress on paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.464

Hartmann Schedel, German, 1440–1514

Michael Wolgemut, German, 1434-1519

Wilhelm Pleydenwurff, German, ca. 1458-1494

Anton Koberger, German, ca. 1445-1513

View of Venice, from Nuremberg Chronicle, Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1493

Woodcut and letterpress with hand-coloring in watercolor on laid paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.024



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Other Texts

Throughout the Middle Ages a large number of manuscripts were made for use in the church's liturgy. The very large manuscript leaf is from a fifteenth-century Italian antiphony, a book used by the choir for singing. The large scale allowed several singers to use the same book. A leaf from a fourteenth-century Italian missal, a book that contained the text of the mass, can be seen in the double-sided case.

Theological treatises were popular in both manuscript and printed form. The exhibition includes a manuscript leaf from Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences* (43.446). Lombard's *Sentences* was widely used as a textbook in medieval universities.

After the invention of printing there was a rapid increase in new book types, among them secular works associated with the new Humanist learning. An excellent example of this diversification may be seen in the *View of Venice*, from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*. The text was written by German humanist Hartmann Schedel and the 1493 edition contained 1,810 illustrations.

Italian

Leaf from a Choir Book, mid 1400s

Pen and ink, tempera and gold on parchment

Museum Works of Art Fund 46.056



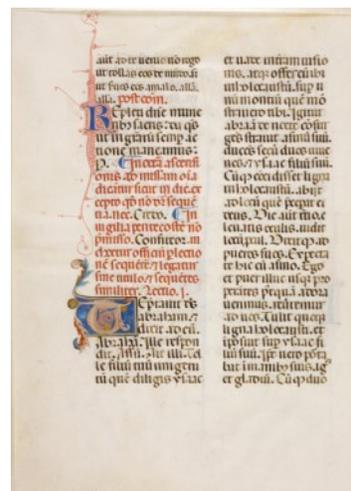
Dominican Order

Leaf from a Missal, ca. 1353

Ink, tempera, and gold on vellum

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.438

A missal contained the text of the mass and was used by the clergy. This missal has particularly accomplished pen flourishes.



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Saint Thomas Aquinas, Italian
Leaf from St. Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on the Sentences, 1470
Ink and watercolor on vellum
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.446

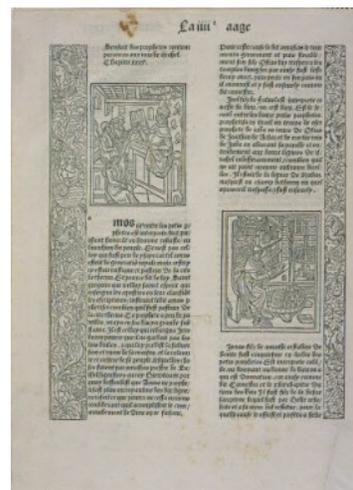
This version of Aquinas's commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* is written in a Humanistic book hand, a script that was particularly popular in 15th century Italy.



Swiss
Manuscript, ca. 1370
Ink on vellum
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.439



French
La Mer des Histoires, 1488
Woodcut on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.453



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Ulrich von Reichenthal, German, 15th century-16th century
Anton Sorg
Conciliumbuch (Chronicle of the Council of Constance), 1483
Woodcut with hand coloring on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.022

The Council of Constance, a church council which addressed the authority of the pope and ended in 1418, was considered an important turning point in church history. Johan Hus, the Czech religious reformer, was burned at the stake at this council as a heretic. Popular interest in this council is indicated by the fact that Ulrich von Reichenthal wrote an account of the council of Constance published in 1483 with numerous woodcut illustrations, including this one, which shows Count Friedrich of Austria meeting the German Emperor Sigismund at the council.

