



Panofsky, unexpected

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Panofsky, Unexpected

Aden Kumler

IN THE SPRING OF 2003, SITTING AT A COMPUTER TERMINAL IN THE FINE Arts Library, I came across an unexpected record in HOLLIS.⁵ I'd conjured this result by searching for the name "Panofsky, Erwin," the legendary German émigré art historian who had revolutionized the study of the art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. My library catalog search on that spring day was itself the panicked last gasp of a feverish campaign of studying for the general exam required of doctoral students in the Department of History of Art & Architecture.

A student of western illuminated manuscripts, I'd often wondered why there was no Panofsky opus devoted to manuscript painting in the medieval period. Manuscript illuminations played an important part in his Norton Lectures at Harvard (subsequently published as *Early Netherlandish Painting* in 1953), they peppered the pages of his *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (1960), and there was even a 1949 article dedicated to Harvard's de Buz Hours, published in the *Harvard Library Bulletin*.⁶ And yet, nowhere, as far as I knew, had Panofsky focused his powers of observation and synthesis on the tradition of European book painting. The computer screen in front of me told me otherwise. The Panofskian study of Gothic and "late mediaeval" illuminated manuscripts I had imagined was no chimera; it was sitting two floors below me in the Fine Arts Library.

In point of fact, the Fine Arts Library has three copies of the work: each mimeographed onto thin typing paper and hand-corrected to reflect the list of corrigenda "limited to mistakes of fact" included in each copy. One copy in particular, the "c copy," has further manuscript annotations, made by its original owner Frederick B. Deknatel (1905–1973), who, after taking his doctorate at Harvard, had spent the rest of his career in Cambridge, serving as Associate Dean of the College during World War II before chairing the Department of Fine Arts in 1944.

Deknatel's copy of the 1935 lectures is covered with his handwritten queries, corrections, and observations. In the fifth lecture, Panofsky draws a rather strong distinction between French and English thirteenth-century Gothic painting: "In England, on the other hand, we have either a continuation of the pre-Gothic forms, or

5 Harvard Fine Arts Library, FA3706.301.15: Erwin Panofsky, "Gothic and Late Mediaeval Illuminated Manuscripts: (with special reference to manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library)" [Lecture notes for Fine Arts 336]. [New York]: New York University, 1935.

6 Erwin Panofsky, "The de Buz Book of Hours: A New Manuscript from the Workshop of the Grandes Heures de Rohan," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 3 (1949).

FINE ARTS 336 - NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

GOTHIC AND LATE MEDIAEVAL ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

(with special reference to
manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library)

by

PROFESSOR ERWIN PANOFSKY

New York University

1935

DD

Erwin Panofsky, "Gothic and Late Mediaeval Illuminated Manuscripts,"
(unpublished, but New York, 1935). Title page. FA3706.301.15.

a slightly stiffened and formalized aspect of the Gothic forms which had developed in France in the meantime. In other words, England had simultaneously a ‘manneristic’ Gothic style and a late Romanesque style.”⁷ Deknatel registers an immediate response by drawing an emphatic vertical line accompanied by a “?” in the margin by these sentences. A rapid, slanted inscription on the facing blank page amplifies this graphic interjection, “This leaves out the Westminster Psalter and things related to it (Harley 157 [*sic*])” and in more tidy horizontal lines adjacent Deknatel adds “What are examples of English manneristic Gothic?”⁸

Frantic to know more than I did about my chosen period of art history as the general exam approached, the pages of Deknatel’s copy of Panofsky’s lecture notes comforted me with their frequent corrections, questions left unanswered, and querying of occasional enigmata. As Panofsky himself observed at the close of his twelfth lecture, “If a good man commits an error, there is likely to be ‘something in it . . .’”⁹ A very wise and humane lesson that I learned from Panofsky, via Deknatel, in the depths of the Fine Arts Library.

It is impossible to reflect upon the many happy hours I have spent in the Fine Arts Library without acknowledging the lively intelligence and erudition of Mary Clare Altenhofen, who has done so much to make the library an intellectual home for students of art and architecture at Harvard. This brief note is dedicated to her, with sincere gratitude and affection.

7 Panofsky, “Gothic and Late Mediaeval Illuminated Manuscripts: (with special reference to manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library),” (Lecture notes for Fine Arts 336) , ([New York]: New York University, 1935).

8 Ibid., [32b]-33.

9 Ibid., 79.

Contributors

JAMES S. ACKERMAN is Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Fine Arts Emeritus, Harvard University.

GLAIRE D. ANDERSON is Associate Professor of Art History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

SUSAN ANDERSON is Curatorial Research Associate for Dutch and Flemish Drawings, Harvard Art Museums.

PERSIS BERLEKAMP, PHD 2003, is Associate Professor of Art History, University of Chicago.

FRANCESCA BEWER is Research Curator in the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Harvard Art Museums.

KATHRYN BRUSH is Professor of Art History, Department of Visual Arts, University of Western Ontario, Canada.

ELLEN P. CONANT is an independent scholar.

HARRY COOPER, PHD 1997, is Curator of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art.

JAMES CUNO, PHD 1985, is President and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust.

WALTER B. DENNY, PHD 1971, is Professor of Art History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

EMINE FETVACI, PHD 2005, is Assistant Professor, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Boston University.

SHIRIN FOZI, PHD 2010, is Assistant Professor, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, University of Pittsburgh.

WOLFGANG FREITAG was Librarian of the Fine Arts Library from 1962 to 1989.

JEFFREY L. HORRELL was Librarian of the Fine Arts Library from 1992 to 1998 and currently is Dean of Libraries at Dartmouth College.

ADEN KUMLER, PHD 2007, is Assistant Professor, Department Art History, University of Chicago.

MELISSA BECK LEMKE is Image Specialist for Italian Art, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art.

MEGAN R. LUKE, PHD 2009, is Assistant Professor, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, University of Southern California.

KATHARINE MARTINEZ was the Librarian of the Fine Arts Library from 1998 to 2010 and currently is Director of the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

CHRISTINE MEHRING, PHD 2001, is Associate Professor in the Department of Art History, University of Chicago.

JOHN E. MOORE, PHD 1992, is Professor of Art, Smith College.

ALEXANDER NAGEL, PHD 1993, is Professor of Fine Arts, New York University.

PETER NISBET is Chief Curator at the Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

LISA PON, PHD 1999, is Associate Professor, Department of Art History, Southern Methodist University.

SCOTT REDFORD, PHD 1989, is Professor in the Department of Archaeology and History of Art, Koç University, Istanbul.

MELISSA RENN is Senior Curatorial Research Associate, Harvard Art Museums.

CLAIRE ROBERTS is Senior Lecturer in Art History, University of Adelaide.

WILLIAM W. ROBINSON, PHD 1996, is Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings, Harvard Art Museums.

ERIC M. ROSENBERG, PHD 1992, is Associate Professor of Art History, Tufts University.

JOHN M. ROSENFELD, PHD 1959, is Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of East Asian Art Emeritus, Harvard University.

HAO SHENG is Wu Tung Curator of Chinese Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

SEYMOUR SLIVE is Gleason Professor of Fine Arts Emeritus, Harvard University.

MIRIAM STEWART is Curator of the Collection, Division of European and American Art, Harvard Art Museums.

DENİZ TÜRKER is a PhD candidate in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University.

MICHELLE C. WANG, PHD 2008, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Art History, Georgetown University.

HENRI ZERNER is Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University.