



# Piecing together the picture: fragments of German and Netherlandish manuscripts in Houghton Library

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# Piecing Together the Picture: Fragments of German and Netherlandish Manuscripts in Houghton Library

FRAGMENTS PROVIDE AMONG THE MOST FRUSTRATING, YET MOST rewarding, challenges to scholars of medieval manuscripts. Lacking virtually all of the aids to identification that modern readers take for granted, whether indications of authorship or place of publication, let alone title pages and ISBN numbers, medieval books are enigmatic to begin with, even when they have not been dismembered, a process that began in the Middle Ages itself and that, unfortunately, continues into the present. From the pre-Carolingian era, nearly all extant manuscripts survive only in the form of scraps, rather than complete codices. In the later Middle Ages, common causes for the destruction of manuscripts included everything from simple wear and tear and the reuse of precious scraps for palimpsests to the deliberate dismemberment of outmoded books. Service books sometimes were destroyed on account of liturgical reforms. The introduction of printing made certain works obsolete, and bookbinders used discarded manuscripts for binding scraps.

One person's trash, however, is another person's treasure, and, over time, medieval fragments have come to be prized for what precious testimony they can yield up on a wide range of topics, only some of which are explored in this special issue of *Harvard Library Bulletin*. Each fragment has a story to tell: stories that are often all the more riveting on account of their taking as their point of departure seemingly unpromising, if often beautiful, remnants of what, in each case, was once a more comprehensive whole. The essays in this collection serve as reminders that any relic from the past, no matter how seemingly complete, itself remains no more than a fragmentary trace of a larger picture that will always elude us in its entirety. They demonstrate how a command of context and a mastery of historical materials can flesh out a bare skeleton, restore membra disjecta to a broken body, and even lend them a voice and, in some cases, a name.

The study of leaves and fragments requires precision and patience, in part because so much has to be made of every available piece of evidence. It also opens itself up to the exploration of a wide range of intellectual issues. With one exception, the leaf from a late fifteenth-century Flemish manuscript commissioned by the great bibliophile, Raphael de Marcatellis, identified and discussed by Peter Kidd, all of the fragments

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presented here come from manuscripts made in German-speaking lands between 1100 and 1500. Kidd's findings come as a welcome reminder of just how much remains to be discovered in the bowels even of oft-visited collections. Other leaves analyzed in these pages also come from well-known manuscripts or groups of manuscripts and hence take their place in the larger topography of medieval manuscript illumination. For example, the leaf described by Gude Suckale-Redlefsen can be associated with a group of Bavarian psalters first identified by Hanns Swarzenski and hints at the existence of a manuscript, of which, at present, no further trace has been found, but that was structured along the same lines as the famous Bamberg Psalter, one of the high points of thirteenth-century German manuscript illumination. In turn, the leaf from a liturgical book identified by Robert Suckale as coming from a large set of dispersed pages adds to our knowledge of manuscript illumination in Regensburg, one of Germany's most prolific centers of manuscript painting throughout the Middle Ages. Felix Heinzer considers another liturgical leaf in terms of its content, function and iconography, all of which turn out to reflect a particular set of Praemonstratensian liturgical customs. Given their often lavish decoration, liturgical manuscripts were among the favorite targets of the collectors of leaves, for reasons that leap to the eye when one looks at the leaf commemorating St. Ulric of Augsburg painted by Conrad Wagner, an illuminator of the same city, discussed by James Marrow, whose essay enlarges with yet other examples what is known to survive from this once magnificent manuscript made for Johannes von Gitlingen. Less opulent, but no less interesting, is the pair of leaves presented by Jeffrey Hamburger, which comes from an unusual illustrated copy of the *Meditations on the Passion* by Jordan of Quedlinburg that most likely was illuminated at the Dominican convent of Unterlinden in Colmar and that can be attributed to the same artist and scribe who collaborated on another manuscript in Houghton Library, the *Matutinale* (MS Richardson 34).

With Jeffrey Hamburger's essay on a previously unpublished *Regimen mensis* or regime of the months, a miniature medical manual offering advice over the course of the calendar, we turn towards manuscripts whose interest is as much textual as it is visual. The Latin hexameters that provide the backbone of this text turn out to be linked to an early vernacular medical regime known as the "Grazer Monatsregeln." A further contribution by Jeffrey Hamburger, together with one by Nigel Palmer, completes the shift in focus from Latin to vernacular manuscripts. Hamburger places a leaf with elegant, if economical, pen and ink drawings in the context of other leaves from a dismembered set of devotions to the Sorrows and Joys of the Virgin derived from the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, one of the most popular and influential typological picture books of the later Middle Ages. The illustrations to this manuscript represent a much wider trend in German illumination of the later Middle Ages, namely, pen drawings executed with relative speed on paper, rather than on parchment, to produce less expensive versions of largely didactic works for a much broader audience than they

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previously enjoyed. Nigel Palmer's contribution focuses on the exacting comparison of the surviving witnesses of a secular text derived from French models. His study thus offers an exemplary case study, not only of the transmission and transformation of prestigious cultural models of French origin within the German-speaking world, but also, more generally, of how the right questions can wring new information and insight from even the most seemingly unpromising fragment.

Houghton Library holds many more fragments far more diverse in origin, but in this case, the common provenance of all the manuscripts studied here stems from the coming together of a group of colleagues, most of them from Germany and all interested in German materials, for a colloquium held at the Radcliffe Institute in March 2010 on German manuscript illumination in the age of Gutenberg. As part of that event, the speakers visited Houghton Library, where, with the generous assistance of William Stoneman, Florence Fearington Librarian of Houghton Library, and Hope Mayo, Philip Hofer Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts, they were able to pore over virtually all of the German illuminated manuscripts in the library's collection. So productive was our visit that it was decided spontaneously on the spot each participant would choose one of the fragments laid out on the table as the subject of a short essay. This special issue of *Harvard Library Bulletin*, in which the fragments are presented in chronological sequence, presents the results. Contributions submitted in German were translated by Jeffrey F. Hamburger and edited with the welcome assistance of Dennis Marnon. To William Stoneman, whose enthusiastic support of scholarship made this collection of essays possible, go our collective thanks. Houghton Library's shelves have many more such surprises in store, and it is to be hoped that in the future similar scholarly gatherings can generate comparable outcomes.

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## Contributors

JEFFREY F. HAMBURGER is the Kuno Francke Professor of German Art and Culture in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, as well as the Chair of the Medieval Studies Committee. A specialist in German art of the Middle Ages, especially manuscript illumination, he has also published widely on the art of female monasticism and the history of attitudes towards imagery in the medieval period.

FELIX HEINZER, former curator of manuscripts at Wurttemberg State Library (Stuttgart), is since 2005 professor of medieval Latin at Freiburg University. Among his research interests are monastic libraries and manuscripts, especially liturgical books, as well as medieval liturgical poetry.

PETER KIDD resigned as curator of medieval illuminated manuscripts at the British Library in 2006 to become a freelance researcher and cataloger of medieval manuscripts. Much of his own research focuses on English psalters from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, but his publications on illuminated manuscripts range from the ninth to the sixteenth century, and encompass most European countries.

JAMES H. MARROW, a noted expert on medieval manuscript illumination and Northern Renaissance art, is professor emeritus of art history at Princeton University. A member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, he also serves as honorary curator of manuscripts at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England.

NIGEL F. PALMER is Professor of German Medieval and Linguistics Studies at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of St Edmund Hall. He is a specialist in Medieval German and Latin literature, with special interests in paleography and codicology, medieval religious literature, early printing, and the literary topography of the South-West of the German lands in the later Middle Ages.

ROBERT SUCKALE, emeritus professor of art history at the Technische Universität, Berlin, has voyaged from island to island along the archipelago of European art history. The major islands are art of the Gregorian Reform movement, French Gothic sculpture and architecture, southern German and Bohemian Gothic painting and sculpture, the art of female monasticism, Early Netherlandish painting, manuscript illumination

in Regensburg, Balthasar Neumann and his time, French painting of the nineteenth century, art historiography of the Nazi era, and Paul Klee.

GUDE SUCKALE-REDLEFSEN worked as an art historian in the research project “The Image of the Black” of the Menil-Foundation. Later she published catalogs of the medieval illuminated manuscripts in the State Library of Bamberg. Author of numerous articles and essays on German manuscript illumination of the eleventh through thirteenth century, she has contributed to several facsimile-editions and exhibition catalogs.