

Beyond Words

Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections



Edited by Jeffrey F. Hamburger, William P. Stoneman,
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The Boston area is home to one of the most important ensembles of medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts and early printed books in North America. In large measure, however, these treasures remain unknown to scholars and the wider public alike. *Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections* documents the first exhibition to showcase highlights from local libraries and museums. Like the exhibition itself, which was spread over three venues—in Cambridge, at Harvard University's Houghton Library, and in Boston, at Boston College's McMullen Museum of Art and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum—the catalogue is divided into three principal parts, each conceived as an idealized library for a particular group of readers. Part I considers Manuscripts from Church & Cloister, addressed primarily to clerics, monks, and nuns. Part II turns to Manuscripts for Pleasure & Piety, made first and foremost for a lay audience, including a generous selection of richly illuminated books of hours. The catalogue culminates with Italian Renaissance Books—both manuscripts and early printed volumes—which exemplify humanist culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the transformations in reading habits and social practice they both embodied and enabled.

Drawing on the collections of nineteen Boston-area institutions, the catalogue charts the development of the book arts from Late Antiquity right through the Renaissance, with the focus on the Latin West: in all, more than a millennium of cultural history. Produced for the communal use of religious institutions as well as the educational, professional, and spiritual needs of individuals, the books documented within these pages testify to reverence for the written word, belief in the eloquence of images, and the power and cultivation of Renaissance rulers. In addition to essays that locate the material within the context of cultural history, this volume contains 249 contributions by eighty-three international experts from Europe and North America on outstanding manuscripts and printed books dating from the ninth to seventeenth century. Among the numerous masterpieces included in the catalogue are works by such well-known artists as Lippo Vanni, Jean Poyer, Jean Bourdichon, Benedetto Bordone, and Simon Bening, as well as many others like the Boucicaut and Rohan Masters, no less notable for being anonymous. Identifiable patrons and owners include renowned figures Charles V of France, Jean de Berry, Borso d'Este, Isabella d'Este, and Pope Julius III—to name just a few.

