An Underappreciated Resource: Medieval Manuscript Leaf Collections

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Produced 40 boxes of “Fifty Original Leaves from Medieval Manuscripts” portfolios

*Biblioclasty*: “book breaking”

Removal of medieval manuscript leaves for collectable reasons not popular until 1800s

Parchment from manuscript books has been removed for various reasons going back to the origin of the codex

Otto F. Ege (1888-1951)
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Removal of individual *illuminations* goes back at least to 1300s

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Fragments cut out as specimens by 1600s

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Interest in whole leaves (decoration or not) by 1800s

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“Leaf Books” go back to 1841

Sir Robert Cotton (1571-1631)
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The interest in collecting single leaves increases dramatically in the early 1900s

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In 1913 Robert Forrer of Strassburg, published a catalogue of his collection containing 38 whole manuscript leaves

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By 1956 Erik Von Scherling of Leiden was issuing catalogues containing nearly 2600 whole leaves—he sold many in the United States

Antiphonary leaf sold by Erik von Scherling, now in the Spencer Library
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Biblioclasty, the Critics:

James Dennistoun—Scottish antiquary, called Napoleon’s French troops “boors” for cutting up manuscripts

Henry M. Lucien—referred to collectors who cut up manuscripts as “vandals”

ABC for Book Collectors—states that biblioclasty should be discouraged no matter what
Ege, teacher and dealer:

Believed that medieval manuscripts could act as a source of inspiration to modern-day bookmakers

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Intended to profit financially from his collecting

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Probably sold hundreds upon hundreds of modestly priced single manuscript leaves in his lifetime

Western Reserve University, where Ege taught
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Example webpage from website produced by Greta Smith (Miami University) and Fred Porcheddu (Denison University) for Ege portfolios.
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The trade in medieval manuscript leaves continues to flourish.
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The Institute for the Study of Illuminated Manuscripts in Denmark (CHD) attempted to track and catalog manuscript leaves as they were sold through E-Bay, but their website has not been updated since 2007.

Dismembered Manuscripts

Books of Hours sold as Single Leaves 2002-2006
Collecting fragments from eBay Sellers

- Northern France c.1450: Book of Hours, use of Rome. (Probably of a much later date, c.1475-85).
  - xerox. 130 x 85 mm, 14 lines [1], written in an elegant bastard script (lettres bourguignonnes) adorned with fine penwork initials. Major initials with a decorated painted and gilded borderpiece. Provenance unknown. Only one miniature known; sold Bloomsbury Auctions 601/2007 lot 20.
  - Leaves are all in a poor state of preservation, rubbed and worn, painted borders are cropped.

- "Style of the Master of Jean Rolin II" Book of Hours, Latin and French, called 'Paris c.1450' is really use of Rouen and probably not there (see extracts from the contents).
  - 144 ff., 160 x 120 mm, 15 lines textura (92 x 60 mm)
  - Fine panel borders by all two-line initials in an unusual style of original high quality.
  - Provenance so far unidentified, in lack of miniatures (13th c. owners signature in ink F. Hubert).
  - All leaves were once foliated on recto in brown ink by a 19th cent. owner, just above the outer border of the textual area.
  - Some folio numbers have been clumsily effaced, leaving a dark spot.
  - [One gathering sold at Reiss & Sohn 105/1 lot 69, acquired by the ebay retail seller 'murille1' in Emelie].

- "Troyes c.1450 (or c.1470)" Book of Hours, use of Troyes, probably Troyes c.1475.
  - xerox. 151 x 112 mm, 14 lines textura (80 x 65 mm).
  - Painted and gilted borders by all major initials, decorated in a typical Troyes provincial style.
  - Provenance unknown. No miniatures known at present.

- "Guernier Hours", Book of Hours, use of Paris, Latin and French [Northern France, c.1475-85]
  - 141 ff., 133 x 88 mm, 16 lines (70 x 48 mm), French lettre bâtarde in dark brown ink.
The Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas is now beginning to restrict *physical* access to bound codices as they are digitized
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Cataloging Medieval Manuscripts:

1600: Thomas James, *Ecloga Oxonia-Cantabrigiensis*

1895: M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum*


M. R. James, 1862-1936
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Cataloging Medieval Manuscripts:

1937: Seymour De Ricci’s *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*

1962: Faye and Bond’s *Supplement*

- Discouraged more detailed cataloging at individual institutions

De Ricci’s *Census*
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Renewed Efforts in the United States:

Inspiration: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DDG) and N. R. Ker’s Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries

1984: Barbara Shailor, Catalog of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University


1989: Paul Saenger, Catalog of Pre-1500 Western Manuscripts in the Newberry Library

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At a number of international conferences, beginning in 1989, scholars collectively debated how best to catalog medieval manuscripts electronically.

Munich, Germany
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**APPM**: provides examples for physical descriptions such as “20 leaves: vellum” (APPM 1.5C1), or “1 item (1 leaf): parchment; 35 x 66 cm. folded to 10 x 19 cm.” (APPM 1.5D2)

**But**: with “certain pre-1600 manuscripts” and for “book-like manuscripts,” it refers the reader back to AACR2R, chapter 4 (APPM, 9)

**AACR2R**: lumps pre-modern manuscripts together with all manuscripts as a single cataloging format according to the general principle that they are all “unpublished materials.” (see also AACR2, rule 4.7B23)
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1996: The Hill Museum & Manuscript Library and Vatican Film Library begin project entitled *Electronic Access to Medieval Manuscripts* (EAMMS)

Effort was funded with *Digital Scriptorium* by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

2002, product:

*Descriptive Cataloging of Ancient Medieval Renaissance and Early Modern Manuscripts* or AMREMM
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The Morgan Library and Museum treats medieval manuscripts primarily as art objects with an emphasis on the artistic quality of their illustrations as opposed to the various texts in the manuscripts.
Example of an incipit with a rubric

“Incipit” and “explicit” refer to the opening and closing words of a textual unit

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Incipit is derived from the Latin verb *incipere* (to begin)

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Explicit is derived from Latin verb *explicitus* (unrolled)
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It is still useful to transcribe the first and last (or all) words of text on a leaf, even if they are not technically the “incipit” and “explicit”.

Antiphonary Leaf, HRC A1
Most medieval manuscript leaves and fragments in the United States originate from the 15th and 16th centuries.

Vast majority have been excised from liturgical books and Books of Hours.

We need newer related resources in English.

Some scholars have called this work more of a disservice than an aid.
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Two websites created by industrious scholars for researching Books of Hours and liturgical books
Leaves and fragments serve as specimens of medieval handwriting.

Proper identification of scripts is one of the best ways to localize and date individual leaves.

Resources that many catalogers depend on for controlled vocabulary like the Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus lack the necessary level of detail to provide sufficient analysis for late medieval scripts.

This work may help establish a deeper standardized nomenclature for scripts.
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Archives and special collections need to make an effort to increase access to their own leaf collections

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Leaves *should* be fully exploited as teaching tools within a variety of disciplines

This object presents a number of opportunities for research and teaching
Institutions in the U.S. likely hold *larger* collections of medieval manuscript leaves and fragments than bound codices.

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Great potential of the internet and current digital technologies for reuniting excised and dis-bound objects online.

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The cataloger should attempt to provide enough information to at least help the researcher know if the object deserves a more in-depth examination.

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We should make an effort to connect metadata to larger scholarly sources of information such as WorldCat.
Libraries and archives that lack specialized knowledge should consider the possibilities presented by crowdsourcing the work through online communities and image hosting sites like flickr.
Anyone can benefit from the interpretive process of examining medieval leaves and fragments