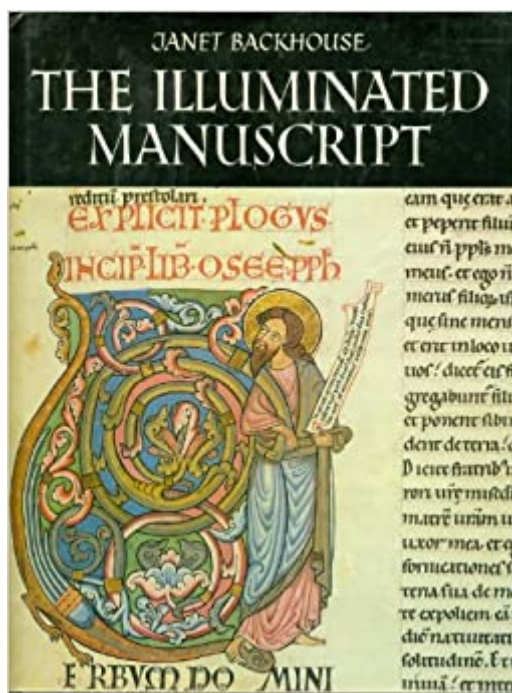


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The Illuminated Manuscript



Synopsis

The British Library houses one of the world's great collections of illuminated manuscripts, and Janet Backhouse has drawn on this resource to make a selection of examples that span over 800 years of medieval book production.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Janet Backhouse is an internationally respected manuscript expert and former Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts at The British Library. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This is a great book for someone just developing an interest in illuminated manuscripts. Its primarily a picture book, but also contains a lot of information on the how's and whys of these beautiful books and is easy to refer back to. The author is English so a good many of the plates are from English books, however she does include works from other parts of Europe as well. Worth the rather meager investment, as I'm sure this thin volume will stay on my book shelf for a very long time.

Janet Backhouse was a leading authority in this field (unfortunately she left us in 2004), but her many works about the illuminated manuscript are and will always be available to us. This introduction is probably the best book to start if you are interested in delving into the beauty of the illuminated manuscript. Not only a gallery, but also an historical overview on how they were made, who made them (not only monks), what themes they covered, who bought them, what resources were needed, what happened with the introduction of printed books, etc. Some limitations exist:

many pages are in black and white, losing considerable impact and all the displayed manuscripts are from the British Library Houses (although there are examples from almost the entire Europe, there are some absences like Scandinavian or early medieval Spanish works...obviously in an introduction we can't expect to have full coverage). The comments on each plate focus not only on the author (if known), the production place, the style and theme. You will get a fine step stone for further studies.

Covering a wide span of time and styles, from the Lindisfarne Gospels (Interlace, c 700) to Italian neo-classical revival in the early 1500s, this book provides a good overview of the subject. Written for the layman rather than the scholar, it nevertheless has an informative introduction on manuscript creation. Since there are examples from 70 manuscripts, descriptions of each are necessarily brief, but still interesting. It is a pity that not all the illustrations are in colour, but there are still many good-quality colour plates at or near full-size. This is definitely one to have on the shelf.

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