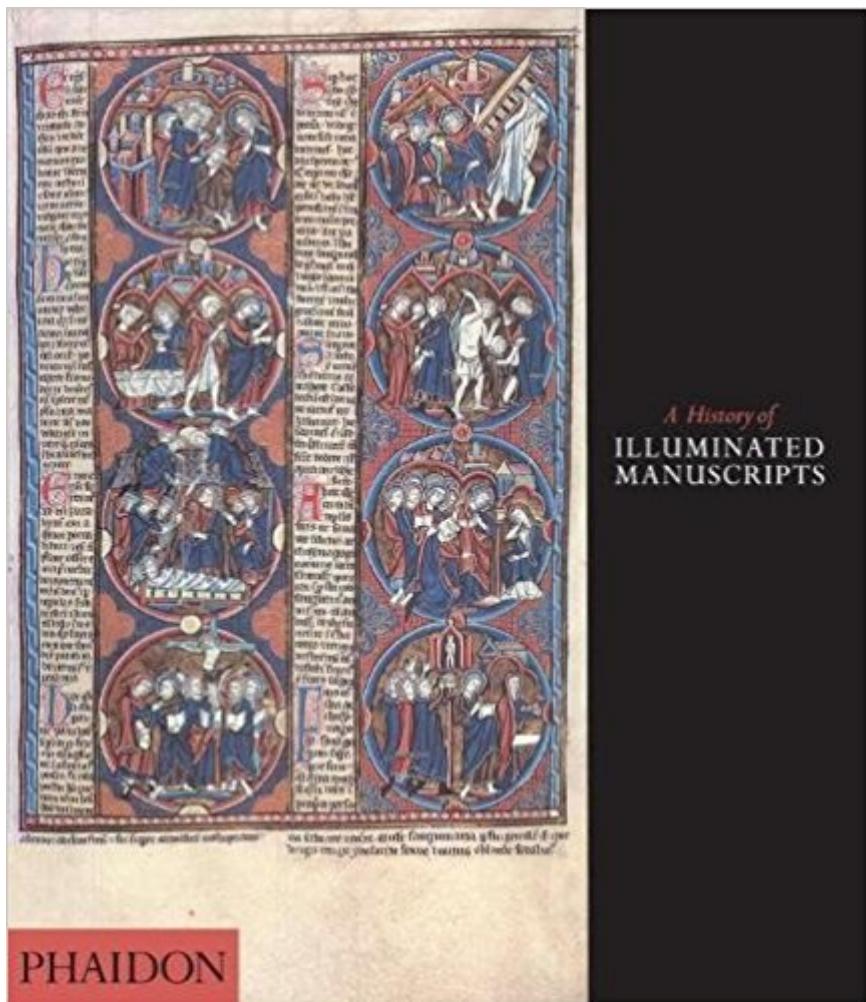


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# A History Of Illuminated Manuscripts



## **Synopsis**

Illuminated manuscripts are perhaps the most beautiful treasures to survive from the middle ages. This authoritative volume provides a comprehensive introduction to the medieval world of books, their production and their consumption. The text divides this world into different groups of readers and writers: missionaries, emperors, monks, students, aristocrats, priests, collectors and the general public. De Hamel is both informative and immensely readable, and the sumptuous illustrations render this book too good to be missed.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This 1986 title throws light on the world of illuminated manuscripts, which function as works of both art and literature. De Hamel provides a full history of the illuminated manuscript through text and dozens of glorious color illustrations. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"It is no mere history, but an original, lively and richly illustrated commentary."-Times Literary Supplement "Gorgeous and informative. A wonderful introduction to handwritten books from the Dark Ages to the invention of printing in the fifteenth century."-Houston Chronicle "Lavish, beautiful and sweeping look at the beginning of the printed word."-Graphic Arts Monthly "Along with excellent illustrations, this large volume includes a bibliography and index of manuscripts."-The Good Book Guide

After purchasing and perusing *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* by Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, I purchased the book under review, Christopher De Hamel's *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*. The former book is wonderful and prepared me for De Hamel's, but De Hamel is so thorough that he includes much of the same information that is in the book by Clemens and Graham. To explain this review's title: I was expecting to find a strictly chronological study, but instead found a work divided into chapters according to the reasons for making manuscripts in the Middle Ages, or, to put it another way, a work organized...as the author himself states in his introduction..."from the point of view of the people who needed them." The result is a felicitous one...and one which ends up, whether in spite of or precisely because of the author's approach, being basically chronological after all. The best way to give a prospective reader an idea of what he or she has in store, I believe, is to quote the chapter headings in order: "Books for Missionaries," "Books for Emperors," "Books for Monks," "Books for Students," "Books for Aristocrats," "Books for Everybody," "Books for Priests," and, finally, "Books for Collectors." De Hamel's reputation in the field, I would say, is well-earned. The volume is packed with information, written in a lively style, and filled with breathtakingly gorgeous color reproductions that enable one both to experience the full impact of a complete illuminated manuscript page and to examine such in detail. Phaidon Press has again done a marvellous job. This book would be worth the price even if one intended only "to look at the pictures."

Christopher De Hamel's "*A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*" (now in its second edition) is certainly the definitive history for lay readers, but it is probably the best starting place for aspiring professionals as well. It is well-written, faultlessly researched, and copiously illustrated. I happily use it in my university course on illuminated manuscripts together with Ingo Walther's "*Masterpieces of Illumination*" (published by Taschen)--in my opinion, the perfect companion piece. The second edition of De Hamel's book is structured as was the first: an informative introduction is followed by chapters which divide and discuss the manuscripts according to their intended users (missionaries, emperors, monks, students, aristocrats, everybody, priests, and collectors); an extended bibliography precedes several useful indexes. This Phaidon paperback edition is a beautiful book, with a white paper cover adorned with a full-color dust-jacket. Many new illustrations have been added, and there are many more color illustrations than there were in the first edition. More importantly, the text has been updated to reflect ongoing research in the field. My only complaint about this edition is that many of the important full-color and full-page illustrations in the first edition

(to which I often referred in my classes) have either been reduced in size or eliminated entirely in the new edition. There are also significant (and inexplicable) differences in the color reproduction of illuminations between the first (David R. Godine, Publisher) edition and this second (Phaidon Press) edition--sometimes the differences are so radical that only a close inspection (or a familiarity with the actual documents) reveals they are photographs of the same manuscript. And since many of these manuscripts are from private collections (to which Mr. De Hamel apparently gained access by reputation or through associations established during his tenure at Sotheby's), it would be impossible for most readers to know which of the differing reproductions are the more accurate. My own experience would suggest that not all the changes in the new Phaidon edition are indeed improvements. Publishing faults aside, this is a fine book by a scholar with impeccable credentials and a gift for clarity and sensibility in his writing. I highly recommend it.

This book is simply beautiful to just sit and turn the pages and drool over the images. You can do that over and over because the images are so complex and so stunning. And there are so many of them!But once I managed to calm down and start reading the text, I fell in love with the book even more. It is clearly written, yet technical enough to give a full understanding of the astounding illuminated manuscripts. Putting them in a historical context added so much more to my understanding and therefore appreciation. I have quite a few books on the topic. This one draws them all into a single fabric.

First, let me admit that I have not yet read the text of this book. I have been so overwhelmed with the sheer beauty and quality of manuscript photos that I haven't been able to drag myself away from ogling them to focus on the text. Some of the photographs are so detailed that you can see the individual brushstrokes and the colors are incredibly vibrant. This is by far the best book on illuminated manuscripts I have seen. Other books simply pale in comparison to the beauty, detail and color of this one. As others have stated, there are prints of manuscripts in this book that have rarely been seen before. For those interested in re-creating manuscripts, there are several "unfinished" examples which allow you to see the sketches behind the color. The book is divided into sections covering "books for students", "books for clergy", "books for everybody" etc. It is quite interesting to see the differences between the quality of the various books as well as Latin vs vernacular languages. I would highly recommend this book for anyone interested in art, illuminated manuscripts or medieval history.

An excellent conspectus of the subject matter, well ordered and charming. Some print was too small so difficult to enjoy and I wondered about the colour chosen for the material on which the mss were reproduced. Some of the 'snippets' I felt could have had more surrounding them but on the whole a joyous volume.

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