***The Felton Illuminated Manuscripts in the National Gallery of Victoria*, by Margaret M. Manion, published by Macmillan Art Publishing and the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2005**

This excellent publication is ostensibly a scholarly commentary on six illuminated manuscripts in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria acquired through the Felton Bequest, but is in effect a *summa* of the author's longstanding and distinguished involvement in the study of Medieval and early Renaissance manuscripts in Australian and New Zealand collections. Margaret Manion's Master of Arts thesis was completed at The University of Melbourne in 1962 on the subject of the fourth manuscript in this book, the *Wharncliffe Hours* (named after the first Earl of Wharncliffe who owned them during the nineteenth century). Subsequently, she forged a trail for Australian scholars to Bryn Mawr College in the United States to undertake her PhD, where she was followed by Jaynie Anderson and Roger Benjamin, currently professors of art history at Melbourne and Sydney universities respectively. It is understandable that the sumptuously illuminated *Wharncliffe Hours* would be the siren call to a career in art history, so richly is the text embellished with enchanting narrative scenes, intricate historiated initials and witty marginalia. The artist responsible for the principal illuminations is known only as 'Maître François', who was head of one of the leading Parisian workshops producing illuminated manuscripts in the latter part of the fifteenth century. Some seventy-eight colour reproductions in this book show the breadth of his imagination and skill. Following her return to Melbourne, Manion published on illuminated manuscripts in Australian and New Zealand collections, taught students and supervised theses at The University of Melbourne, eventually to become Herald Professor of Fine Art. She also became a Trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria, and was then appointed Honorary Curator of its Medieval and early Renaissance collections - a stellar career.

The Gallery's manuscripts are discussed in chronological order, with the exception of the intriguing single *Leaf of a Universal Chronicle*, which is left to last. Manion methodically catalogues each manuscript, identifying the text or program, recounting what is known of the works' patrons and subsequent owners, discussing issues of style and attribution, analysing the iconography of certain images, and ending each entry with a bibliography for each manuscript and a physical description of it. Information about the early owners of manuscripts can help bring their history alive in the imagination. The late fourteenth-century copy of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (*The History of Rome from its Foundation*) bears on one of its pages the motto of Antoine of Burgundy, the illegitimate son of the Duke of Burgundy, amusingly known as the

Great Bastard of Burgundy. Although Manion does not refer to it, a portrait of Antoine painted by Rogier van der Weyden is in the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (a variant of the portrait painted by a talented assistant in Van der Weyden's workshop was acquired for the James Fairfax Collection in 1999). The painting in Brussels shows a young man holding an arrow, possibly a symbol of his membership of a military order, but certainly an emblem of his interest in an active life and it can easily be imagined that he enjoyed reading his book of Livy's stories from Roman history with its illustrations of (anachronistic) knightly jousts.

The circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the manuscripts for the Felton Bequest can be revealing of the history of public collecting in Australia. The *Wharncliffe Hours* were recommended to the Bequest by Frank Rinder, the London adviser from 1918 to 1928. Although he is best remembered for his spectacular recommendations of paintings, including works attributed to Van Eyck, Memling, Titian, Tintoretto, Van Dyck and Turner, his personal taste was for prints. He wrote a respected catalogue of D.Y. Cameron's prints, and his important collection of books and prints by William Blake was sold at Christie's in London in 1993. The jewel of the collection was a book of relief etchings called *Jerusalem* that sold for more than $1 million Australian. The *Wharncliffe Hours* cost the Felton Bequest the princely sum of £4,725 in 1920, which raised some criticism in the Australian press where it was felt that so much might have been spent on a more easily accessible work, physically and culturally. Manion's publication will certainly play a role in making images of the Gallery's manuscripts available and comprehensible to a wider audience.

The intriguing problem of identifying the artists and scribes who made manuscripts is raised in Manion's introduction, where she notes that manuscripts could be produced under highly varied circumstances: the scribe was not necessarily the rubricator (the person who wrote instructions to be followed by the various hands that made the manuscript), different illuminators might be employed on a single manuscript, even the artist responsible for the more menial border decoration might not be the same throughout a book, and the various contributors might not even have worked in the same city. In these circumstances describing a manuscript as the work of a single artist becomes problematic, even when an individual has taken credit for both text and images, as in the case of the twelfth-century *Gospel Book of Theophanes*. This manuscript has acquired near legendary status in some Melbourne art history circles for containing one of the earliest self-portraits in the Western tradition. The text on the frontispiece unusually states that the monk depicted presenting the manuscript to the Virgin and Child as its donor was responsible for both the writing of the text and the illuminations. Manion reasonably allows a doubt as to whether the monk actually wrote and illuminated the manuscript himself or whether he oversaw

others who did so, noting that stylistic evidence suggests that whomever was responsible for the production of the manuscript belonged to an *équipe* jointly responsible for a number of other surviving manuscripts.

Manion does a great service in bringing readers up to date on the literature for the fifteenth-century *Leaf of a Universal Chronicle*, one of nine surviving leaves from a manuscript that was probably originally much larger, recording (indirectly) a series of famous historical figures in mural paintings that once decorated a cardinal's palazzo in Rome. Early studies of the leaves identified the anonymous artist responsible as Italian, due to the manuscript's formal similarity to one by the Italian artist Leonardo da Besozzo. However, (simplifying the process of discovery somewhat) the recognition that the manuscript carries French inscriptions, had previously belonged to a French speaking owner, that a copy of it existed in Paris, and that the style is close to manuscripts with French origins suggested that the manuscript originated in a French milieu. Most recently, it has been noted that the close stylistic similarity to manuscripts made for King René I of Anjou, whom documents show had a painter in his service by the name of Barthélemy d'Eyck, suggests that the chronicle could be attributed to that artist, even if there is no signed or documented work to confirm his style.

One opinion concerning Barthélemy not cited by Manion is particularly intriguing. While rejecting the attribution of any surviving work of art to him, Albert Châtelet acknowledged archival evidence showing that he was an artist with artistic family origins, and proposed that his father may have been none other than Hubert van Eyck. The name Eyck holds a great deal of significance for the National Gallery of Victoria, since its most internationally famous painting, the Ince Hall *Virgin and Child*, had been believed to be by Hubert's brother Jan for over a hundred years when it was downgraded to a copy and possibly a forgery in the late 1950s. Between 1998 and 2000 the present writer demonstrated that this de-attribution was based on unfounded scientific claims that the materials and technique were not Flemish. The small painting has since been exhibited twice in Europe as a product of Van Eyck's workshop, although the attribution of the work to Jan himself has always had important supporters, and still does.

The link between manuscript illumination and panel painting is one of the most fascinating and in some ways difficult areas of recent research in the field of early Renaissance art, and it is one of particular relevance to the National Gallery of Victoria's collections. There was clearly a cultural continuum rather than a definitive line between the artforms. Panel painters made allusions to books in their paintings, such as the Eyckian diptych in the Louvre whose panels are carved in the form of an open book, and manuscript illuminators raised the level of their art to occasionally equal the intensity of colour and marvellous detail more readily

achievable in oil paintings, such as the so-called 'Hand G' illuminator who painted a number of brilliant scenes in the *Turin-Milan Hours*, now housed in the Museo Civico in Turin. It is probably correct to say that a majority of specialists accept that 'Hand G' was in fact Jan van Eyck. The Ince Hall *Virgin and Child* may yet play an important role in the discussion of the authorship of the 'Hand G' illuminations, since aspects of its composition and execution are closely related to both the 'Hand G' illuminations and Jan van Eyck's panel paintings. Similarly, the small *Virgin and Child* painting attributed to Simon Marmion in the National Gallery of Victoria's collection points to the closeness of illumination and panel painting in the early Renaissance, notably in the chalky, matte quality of the colouring in the landscape, more closely comparable with effects achieved in manuscript illumination than the saturated colours usually seen in oil paintings on panel. Indeed, Marmion and Jan van Eyck were singled out by the writer Jean Lemaire de Belges in the early sixteenth century, together with Jean Fouquet, as artists who excelled in the allied arts of panel painting and manuscript illumination.

Even a humble Medieval diptych attributed by the Gallery's current label to an anonymous Italian artist has something to reveal about the influence of books in other arts. The art historian Irene Hueck has demonstrated that it is the creation of one Pietro Teutonico, a Franciscan of German origin active in Assisi in Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The work's small dimensions, diptych form and numerous inscriptions make it highly reminiscent of a prayer book; the pervasiveness of book culture in Medieval and early Renaissance devotional art no doubt reflects veneration of Christ as the Word incarnate. Small though the National Gallery of Victoria's collections of Medieval and early Renaissance artworks may be by European standards, they provide entrée into the study of a formative period in Western culture and are richly deserving of investigation as Margaret Manion has amply demonstrated for its manuscripts.

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