

LES ENLUMINURES

ABC OF MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS

by Sandra Hindman



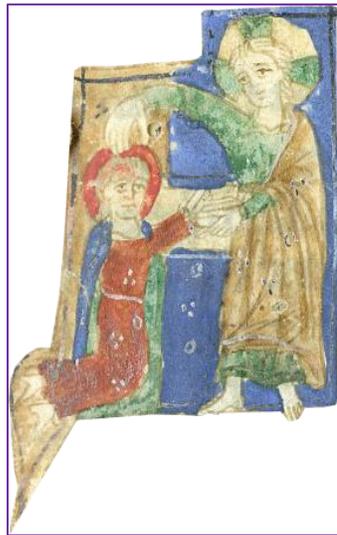
A

Antiphonal

Book containing the sung portion of the Divine Office.

Anthropomorphic (initial)

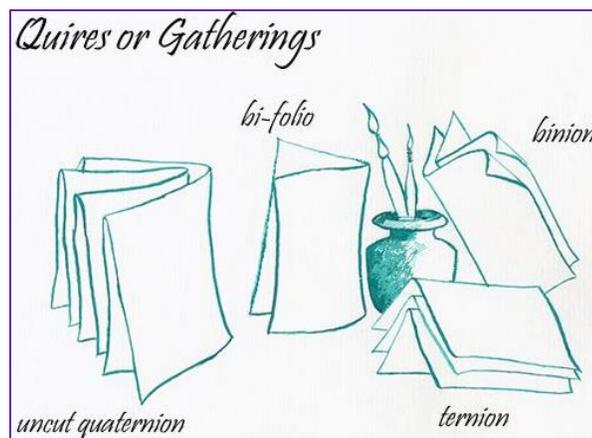
Opening letter with decoration composed of human forms.



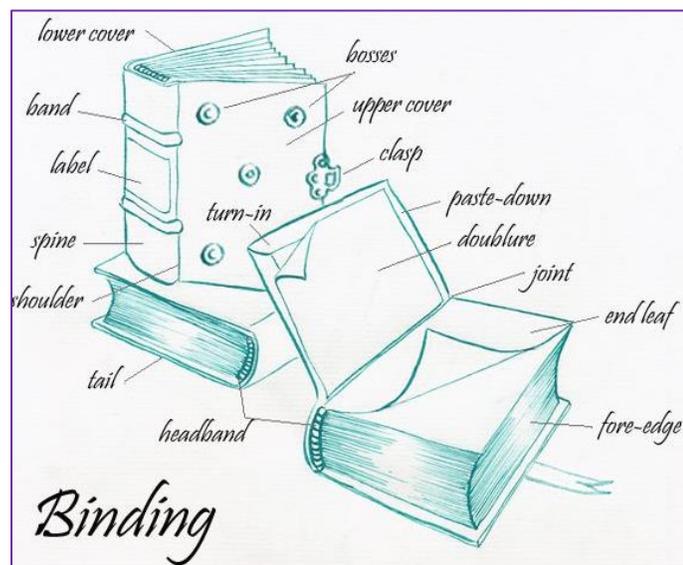
B

Bi-folium

Large sheet folded in half to make two folios (or four pages).



Binding



[Book of Hours](#)

Book of prayers for the eight hours of the day (Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline).

Border

Surround, usually decorative, around or between the columns of the written text.

Breviary

Book containing the texts necessary for the celebration of the Divine Office.

C

Catchword

The first word (or words) of the next page copied by the scribe on the last page of a gathering, often in the lower inside margin (used by the binder to keep the gatherings in the correct order).

Codex

From Latin *caudex* (for tree bark) is a book composed of folded sheets, as opposed to a roll or a tablet.

Collation

A description of the structure of a book, indicating the number and order of the gatherings and their internal composition (how many leaves, what is missing).

Colophon

Inscription (usually at the end of a book) recording the circumstances of its production (might include by whom, when, or where it was made).

D

Drollery

An amusing figure painted in the margin and usually with no relationship to the text.



E

Exemplar

A book from which another is copied.

Ex libris

An inscription with notes concerning ownership (could be included in a book plate).

Explicit

The last words of the text or a textual unit.

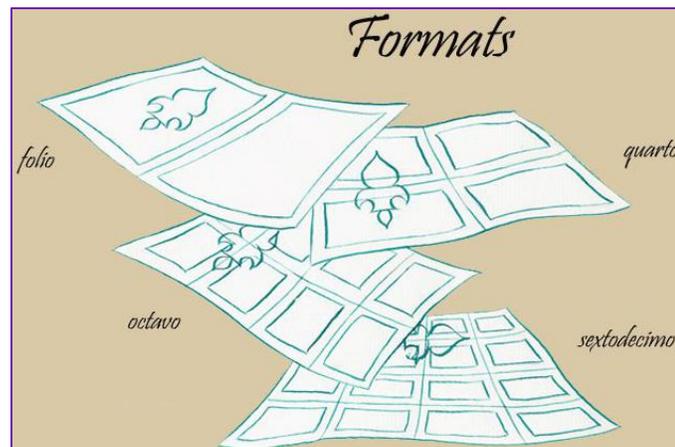
F

Flourish

Penwork emanating from an initial.

Folio

One sheet of writing material, half of a bi-folium (see Leaf).



G

Gloss

Written commentary (or translation or explanation) often in the margin or sometimes between the lines.

Gradual

Book containing the sung portions of the Mass.

Grotesque

Comical figures drawn or painted in the margins (see Drollery).

Guide letter

Small letter used to tell the scribe what capital letter or initial to write in its place.

H

Historiated (initial)

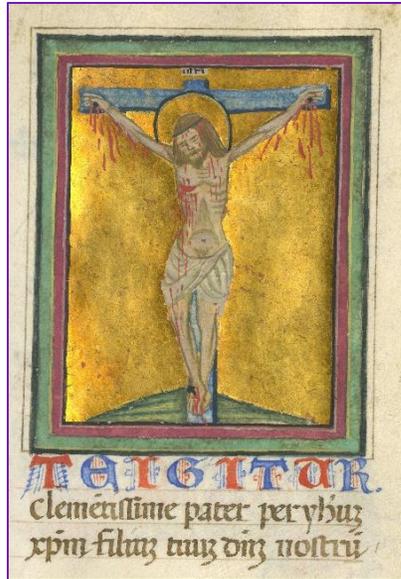
Initial that opens the text and is illustrated with a figure or a story (history)



I

Illumination

Illumination from the Latin verb *illuminare*, meaning "to light up or illuminate," in an embellishment of the page with colored paint and gold.



Illuminator

The artist responsible for the illumination, or the embellishment in a book.

Incipit

The first words of the text or textual unit.

Incunable

From the Latin for "in the cradle," an incunable is a book printed before 1501. The word never refers to a manuscript.

L

Leaf

Half of a bi-folium or two pages (see Folio).

Line ending (line filler)

Decoration that fills out the remainder of a line of writing extending it to the margin.

M

Marginalia

Decoration or sometimes text or diagrams that occupies the margins of a page.

Manuscript

Book written by hand (from *manu* = by hand and *scriptus* = to write).

Miniature

An independent illustration, as opposed to a border or an initial, the word deriving from the Latin *miniare* "to color with red." Something of a misnomer.

N

Neo-Gothic

Literally “new” Gothic and relating to the revival or adaptation of Gothic motifs and styles, especially in nineteenth-century architecture and literature but also in manuscripts and printed books.



O

Opening

The double page visible when a book lies open.

P

Palimpsest

From the Greek *palimpsestos* (“scraped again”) and referring to a manuscript or page in which the original writing has been erased and the surface reused to accommodate new text; the original text can sometimes still be deciphered.

Parchment

The animal skin (typically cow, goat, or sheep) that serves as the writing support of the majority of medieval manuscripts; the term comes from Pergamon, the city that was one of the centers of production in antiquity.

Penwork

An ornamental initial made exclusively with pen and ink.

Pricking

The system of making holes (with a knife or template) at regular intervals in the edges of a folio in order to rule the sheet for writing.

Provenance

Where the book was made and has been since; a history of the book’s production and ownership.

Q

Quire

The basic unit of book production consisting of a group of bi-folia stacked together and folded for writing and decorating, and eventually sewn into a binding with other quire (see Gathering).

R

Recto (see Verso)

The front side of a folio or leaf (designated as “r” in folio 1r, for example).

Rubric

Text such as a title, chapter heading, or instruction, usually written in red (from *rubrica* for “red”), but also sometimes in blue or green, that introduces the text that follows.



S

Scribe

The person engaged in the physical writing of a manuscript.

Scriptorium

The place, often in a monastery, set aside for the writing of manuscripts.

Signature

Numbers or letters written in sequence in a quire, usually in the lower right corner of a folio, to facilitate the arrangement of the sheets (e.g., a,b,c, or i, ii, iii, or I, II, III, and so forth).

T

Trompe l’oeil

Literally an embellishment that “deceives the eye,” such as a painting of a flower or an insect that looks real on the page.

U

Use

Refers to a rite or religious observance particular to a specific geographic region, town, or religious order (a Book of Hours for the “use of Paris” contains prayers common in Paris).

V

Vellum

Middle English word derived from Old French *velin*, meaning parchment made from young calf skin (veal).

Verso

The back side of a folio or leaf (designated as “v” in folio 1v, for example).

W

Watermark

Term used to describe the image visible in paper from designs on the wire mesh in the frame used to make paper. Every paper maker might have his own design.

White Vine-Stem

Border typical of Italian humanist manuscript production that is composed of foliage made up of vine stems usually outlined in color and left white on the parchment (from *bianchi giari*).



Workshop

Studio where various artists work together (perhaps a misnomer altogether and at the very least different for different towns and geographic regions).

Z

Zoomorphic (initial)

A painted or decorated letter composed mostly of animal forms.