

Foreword

The essays in this catalog provide more extensive background and

case studies on themes that could only be touched

on in the display. In some cases, they also include original research into individual manuscripts or types of manuscript. They largely speak for themselves. Therefore, I have chosen to view the Foreword as an opportunity to create a pendant for the colophon on the last page.

Medieval colophons (sometimes called explicits) often gave the scribe, and sometimes the illuminator, an opportunity to insert his or her personal voice. Most medieval books showcased either the word of God or the words and ideas of famous theologians and scholars. The scribe and illuminator were considered craftsmen, serving these higher purposes by virtue of their skill and out of their hope for salvation. Their experiences or thoughts in making a manuscript usually appear only in small and indirect glimpses, often in mistakes or pages left unfinished

for reasons we cannot know. The colophon offered essentially the only opportunity for the artisan to identify and express him or herself.

The colophon at the end of this catalog expresses, in a medieval format, the feelings of the exhibit team about the project. Here I will speak about our experiences in more modern terms. For me as curator, and I think for all of us, the process of crafting the exhibit and the accompanying catalog has been a source of special pleasure. In ways both anticipated and completely unexpected, it has been inspiring, intellectually creative, aesthetically rewarding, educational, and just plain fun. It has also posed challenges to our humility as we learned from one another, to our tolerance for sleep deprivation, and to our ability to deal with the unexpected. Above all, putting together the exhibit has been a wonderful collaborative experience, rather like the making of medieval manuscripts themselves.

Our shared goal was to make the treasures on display, and medieval book arts in general, accessible and exciting to as many viewers as possible. Rather than focus on breaking new scholarly ground, we have sought to provide the opportunity for members of the University and greater Houston communities to enjoy and learn about medieval books. We have strived particularly to evoke these luxury objects' sensuousness as well as their spirituality, aspects fundamental to the medieval idea of books but all too often lacking from our own attitude in the "information age."

Professor Judith Steinboff

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