

THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

MASTERWORKS FROM THE MORGAN: MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE MANUSCRIPTS

Although Pierpont Morgan acquired medieval and Renaissance manuscripts only during the last dozen years of his life, his collection of some six hundred manuscripts was world renowned. His son, J. P. Morgan, Jr., added two hundred more that matched those of his father in terms of quality and importance. The collection currently numbers nearly fourteen hundred books and leaves. Written by hand and often sumptuously painted or illuminated with gold leaf, these manuscripts reflect the religious, intellectual, and artistic life of their time. Often commissioned by leaders of church and state, they were frequently made of rare and precious materials, requiring the combined skills of parchment makers, scribes, editors, illuminators, and binders. Protected by their bindings, the vivid colors of their miniatures have changed little, making them the best preserved of all medieval and Renaissance paintings. The icons of illumination shown here were selected because each, in some way, is the best of its kind and part of the core of masterworks upon which the Morgan's international reputation is based.

Nativity, in an initial P, leaf from a Gradual (I), in Latin.

Italy, Florence, 1392–99, illuminated at Santa Maria degli Angeli by Don Silvestro dei Gherarducci for Paolo Venier, abbot of San Michele à Murano.

This large historiated initial and four others in the Morgan come from the same two-volume Gradual, a choir book containing the sung portions of the Mass. The initial *P* begins the Introit for the Christmas Mass, taken from Isaiah (9:6): *Puer natus est nobis* (A child is born to us). The prophet Isaiah, who predicted the Virgin birth, may be the upper figure of the two heads on the shaft of the *P*, witnessing the fulfillment of his prophecy; the lower head may be a shepherd. The Nativity, in the oval part of the letter, is set before a cave with the ox and ass. The Virgin nurses her child while Joseph kisses his foot. At the bottom is the Annunciation to the Shepherds.

MS M.653.1. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909.

Ascension, in an initial V, leaf from a Gradual (II), in Latin.

Italy, Florence, 1392–99, illuminated at Santa Maria degli Angeli by Don Silvestro dei Gherarducci for Paolo Venier, abbot of San Michele à Murano.

The Virgin and Twelve Apostles are contained within the letter *V*, while Christ appears to ascend through the upper and thinner part of the letter. The initial begins the Introit for the Mass of the Ascension: *Viri Galilaei quid admiramini aspicientes in coelum?* (Men of Galilee, why wonder you, looking up to heaven?). Decorative patterns have been punched on the gold leaf, especially in the halos, a common practice in panel painting. The gold leaf was always applied before the colors because the burnishing or polishing procedure could damage the paint surface. Colors could then be placed over the rough edges of the gold leaf, creating a clean line.

MS M.653.3. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909.

Trinity and Three Angels Appearing to Abraham, in an initial B, leaf from a Gradual (II), in Latin.

Italy, Florence, 1392–99, illuminated at Santa Maria degli Angeli by Don Silvestro dei Gherarducci for Paolo Venier, abbot of San Michele à Murano.

The upper part of the large initial *B*, which begins the Introit for Trinity Sunday, *Benedicta sit sancta Trinitas* (Blessed be the Holy Trinity), depicts the three persons of the Trinity, who all look alike, behind an altar. The Holy Spirit has a dove over his head, and the Father an armillary sphere representing the universe. The Son holds a wafer and chalice, and above his head is an open book containing the words he spoke at the Last Supper: *Ego sum via, et veritas, et vita* (I am the way, the truth, and the life). In the lower part of the initial three angels appear to Abraham, an event that was regarded as a prefiguration of the Trinity.

MS M.653.2. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909.

Last Supper, in an initial C, leaf from a Gradual (II), in Latin.

Italy, Florence, 1392–99, illuminated at Santa Maria degli Angeli by Don Silvestro dei Gherarducci for Paolo Venier, abbot of San Michele à Murano.

In this Last Supper, Judas is singled out because he receives food and has a red purse and a black halo with scorpions. The last were likened to Judas because of his treacherous kiss. John, the beloved apostle, is fast asleep as his master's hand is raised in blessing. The blessing gesture, similar to that of consecration, connects the Last Supper with the institution of the Eucharist. The initial illustrates the Introit for the Mass of Corpus Christi (the Body of Christ, symbolized by the host): *Cibavit eos ex adipe frumenti* (He fed them with the fat of the wheat). The initial was apparently cut from the choir book twice, first in a crudely cut square format and then as part of the whole leaf.

MS M.653.4. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909.

El Greco, Portrait of Giulio Clovio, Italy, Rome, ca. 1570, for Fulvio Orsini.

Naples, Capodimonte Museum. Reproduction courtesy of Art Resource, Inc.

This portrait, commissioned by Orsini, the librarian of the Farnese Palace, is the only monumental portrait of an illuminator showing his work. Clovio points to the Creation scene in the Farnese Hours, expressing his spiritual link with Michelangelo (the miniature is based on the *Creation of the Sun and Moon* on the Sistine ceiling) and his own role as artistic creator. Clovio's pointing to the "tiny" Michelangelo might also refer to Vasari's characterization of him as the new but *piccolo* Michelangelo of his day. The portrait also has another meaning. According to Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*, Clovio, in his old age (d. 1578), lived at the Farnese Palace, where he took great pleasure in showing his manuscript to visitors.

Leaves from the Graduals of San Michele à Murano

The leaves were originally part of a two-volume Gradual illuminated at the Camaldolese monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence for Paolo Venier, who became the abbot of the sister house at San Michele à Murano (Venice) in 1392. The first volume contained the music from Advent to the end of Passion Week, the second went from Easter to the end of the Sundays after Pentecost. Under the leadership of Don Silvestro dei Gherarducci (d. 1399), during the second half of the fourteenth century, the monastery's school assumed a position of importance comparable to that held by Pacino da Bonaguida in the first half.

Don Silvestro, the scribe Don Jacopo, and their choir books are mentioned in Vasari's *Lives of the Painters* but under Lorenzo Monaco, the most famous artist at the monastery during the first quarter of the fifteenth century. According to Vasari, Jacopo was the "best writer of initials who has ever existed," and Don Silvestro "illuminated the same books with no less excellence." They were greatly admired by Pope Leo X, who had recalled the high praise given to them by his father, Lorenzo de' Medici.

Ibn Bakhtishu, Manafi al-Hayawan (Uses of Animals), in Persian.

Persia, Maragha, between 1297 and 1300, for Shams al-Din ibn Ziya al-Din al-Zushki.

MS M.500, fols. 36v–37r. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1912.

This book, ranked among the ten greatest Persian manuscripts, dates from the reign of Ghazan Khan (1295–1304), the Mongol ruler who ordered the Persian translation. The Mongol invasion, culminating in the conquest of Baghdad, influenced the development of Islamic painting. The Mongols brought a new, naturalist Chinese style to Persian art, which is reflected here. The text discusses the nature and medicinal properties of man, animals, birds, reptiles, fish, and insects. On the left, two gazelles run in front of a steep rocky mountainside, kicking up dust (to approximate a misty landscape setting), while on the right two mountain rams fight on a fanciful Chinese-style bridge composed of colored rocks, with oriental-style gold clouds in the sky.

Scenes from the Life of David, leaf from the Winchester Bible, in Latin.

England, Cathedral Priory of St. Swithin, ca. 1160–80, illuminated by the Master of the Morgan Leaf.

MS M.619v. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1912.

Described as the finest English painting of the twelfth century, this is the Morgan's most important single leaf. The Winchester Bible, the finest English Romanesque Bible, was begun about 1155–60 but never finished. Three full-page drawings by the Apocrypha Master were executed; two remain in the Bible. The only painted leaf (1170s) is the present one, the masterpiece of the Master of the Morgan Leaf. The leaf prefaced the Book of Samuel. Shown are Saul watching David slay Goliath, Saul hurling a spear at David and Samuel anointing David, and Joab killing Absalom and David mourning the death of his young son. The Morgan Master simplified the drawing by reducing the number of feet (those of horses and men alike) in the bottom tier.

Scenes from the Life of Samuel, leaf from the Winchester Bible, in Latin.

England, Cathedral Priory of St. Swithin, ca. 1160–80, illuminated by the Master of the Morgan Leaf.

MS M.619r. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1912.

This leaf was created for the Winchester Bible, which is preserved in that cathedral. During a nineteenth-century rebinding, the leaf was removed, ending up with the Florentine dealer Leo Olschki, who offered it to William Morris for £100 before Pierpont Morgan bought it. Its origin was not then recognized. Here the Apocrypha Master's drawings were closely adhered to, and the Morgan Master's colors were less innovative than on the verso. In the first column, Hannah prays for a child and is shown before Eli; at the top of the second she presents Samuel to Eli in the temple. In the middle Samuel is before the recumbent Eli, and God appears to the sleeping Eli. At the bottom Samuel meets Saul and then anoints him.

Upper cover of the Berthold Sacramentary. Gilt silver and jewels.

Germany, probably Weingarten Abbey, ca. 1215, made for Abbot Berthold.

MS M.710. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1926.

The Berthold Sacramentary, the masterpiece of Weingarten illumination, is the finest, most luxurious German manuscript of the time. A major monument of Romanesque art, the book retains its original jeweled binding. The cover is dominated by a silver-gilt statuette of the Virgin and Child, anchored by a framed cross. Surrounding the Virgin, whose prominence reflects her important cult in Weingarten, are twelve repoussé figures identified by inscriptions: the four Evangelists, the archangels Michael and Gabriel, the virtues Virginité and Humility, SS. Oswald and Martin (patron saints), St. Nicholas, and Abbot Berthold himself. The cover was also a reliquary; according to the inscription running along its sides, it contains relics of the Virgin Mary and SS. George, Oswald, Bartholomew, Thomas, Peter, Paul, and James.

Gaston Phébus, *Livre de la chasse*, in French.

France, Paris, ca. 1407, possibly commissioned by John the Fearless for Louis d'Orléans.

MS M.1044, fol. 1v. Bequest of Clara S. Peck, 1983.

Gaston III, nicknamed Phébus because of his golden hair, wrote a hunting treatise (1379–89) in four books on the habits of wild animals, hunting dogs, hunting on foot and horseback, and the trapping of wild animals. This manuscript and another in Paris (Bibl. nat., fr. 616), jointly commissioned by John the Fearless (?), are the two finest. The present manuscript later belonged to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, who added their ex libris—the splendid coat of arms shown here. Since the pomegranate is not included, the arms predate 1492, when Spain acquired Granada. The masterful Castilian illuminator who painted the arms cleverly quoted, in the borders, some of the animals depicted in the manuscript itself.

Gaston Phébus, *Livre de la chasse*, in French.

France, Paris, ca. 1407, possibly commissioned by John the Fearless for Louis d'Orléans.

MS M.1044, fols. 15v, 55r. Bequest of Clara S. Peck, 1983.

The illustration on the left introduces chapter 6 of the first book, which deals with the hare. According to the text, hares live in droves of five or six, and each group has its own abode. Note that two of the hares, including the one with two leverets, also appear in the left margin of Ferdinand and Isabella's full-page arms. On the right, illustrating chapter 34 of the third book, the huntsman in quest of harts in thick coverts is given instruction: under no circumstances is he to give tongue, otherwise the harts will leave the covert.

Gaston Phébus, *Livre de la chasse*, in French.

France, Paris, ca. 1407, possibly commissioned by John the Fearless for Louis d'Orléans.

MS M.1044, fols. 44v–45r. Bequest of Clara S. Peck, 1983.

Dogs were an extremely important part of the hunt, thus Phébus devoted his second book to their nature and care. The illustration on the left introduces chapter 24, which suggests that dogs should be allowed to romp twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, and that every dog should be combed. The miniature on the right begins chapter 25, on making sundry snares and nets. Also included is a detail showing the production of cord, the basic material for the nets, on a rope maker's spinning wheel. At the far right, dogs are being fed.

Thirty-Five Visconti-Sforza Tarot Cards.

Italy, Milan, ca. 1450, painted by Bonifacio Bembo or family, probably for Bianca Maria Visconti and Francesco Sforza.

Three late-fifteenth-century replacement cards have been attributed to Antonio Cicognara.

MS M.630.1–35. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1911.

Although tarot cards originated about 1425–50 in Milan or Ferrara, they were not generally used for fortune-telling until the 1780s. Fifteenth-century painted tarot cards are exceedingly rare, and no complete deck (seventy-eight cards) survives. The thirty-five cards shown here, along with thirty-nine in Bergamo, form the most complete and one of the most important and beautiful sets known. The cards have been attributed to Bonifacio Bembo and his family. Bembo was the favorite painter of Bianca Maria Visconti, and it seems likely that the deck was made for her and her husband, Francesco Sforza (1410–1466),

whose betrothal (1432) and marriage (1441) united the two families and whose emblems and devices are intermingled on some cards.

Five cards from the suit of coins

Seven of coins

Eight of coins Ten of coins

Queen of coins King of coins

Each suit has ten number cards and four picture cards

(page, knight, queen, and king).

Four cards from the suit of swords

Ace of swords Ten of swords

Queen of swords King of swords

Note that the ace of swords contains the Visconti motto, *A bon droyt* (To the good belongs the right).

Fourteen trump cards and Fool

Juggler Empress Popess Pope Temperance

Chariot Lovers Fortitude Wheel of Fortune Hermit (Time)

Hanged Man Death Sun Judgment Fool

Note that the robe of the Empress is embroidered with the three interlinked diamonds of the Sforza family and the Visconti ducal crown with its palm and laurel; the eagle on her shield may also refer to the Visconti arms. Temperance, Fortitude, and the Sun are replacement cards attributed to Antonio Cicognara. Each deck had twenty-one trump (tarot) cards and a wild card (Fool).

Four cards from the suit of staves

Ace of staves Four of staves

Nine of staves King of staves

Note that the ace and four of staves both include the Visconti motto, *A bon droyt* (To the good belongs the right).

Seven cards from the suit of cups

Ace of cups

Three of cups Five of cups Nine of cups

Page of cups Knight of cups Queen of cups

Note that the ace of cups is made up of a large fountain, a Sforza device

Gospel Lectionary, in Greek.

Constantinople, end of the eleventh century.

MS M.639, fols. 217v–18r. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1919.

This Lectionary, containing Gospel readings for the Mass, includes the finest Byzantine illuminations in the Morgan. The main decoration consists of five large miniatures marking major textual divisions; four depict the evangelists from whose Gospels the readings of each division were taken. This portrait of Mark introduces the lessons for Lent and Holy Week. There are no actual portraits of the evangelists. According to Byzantine convention, each evangelist conformed to a specific physical type. Mark was always painted as a dark-haired, bearded, and swarthy young man. The writing pose depends on classical models, while the elongated figure and schematized drapery are characteristic of Byzantine illumination of the second half of the eleventh century, which itself developed from the tenth-century classicizing Macedonian renaissance.

Gospel Book, in Latin.

France, Reims, Abbey of St. Remi, ca. 860.

MS M.728, fols. 94v–95r. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1927.

The most distinctive and influential center of Carolingian illumination was Reims, which flourished during the reigns of Charlemagne and his successors. This, the only Reims Gospel Book written in gold, is the finest of the Morgan's dozen Carolingian manuscripts. St. Remi was then under the brilliant leadership of Archbishop Hincmar (845–82), counselor of Emperor Charles the Bald (r. 840–77), grandson of Charlemagne. As is usual in illustrated Gospel Books, a "portrait" of an Evangelist precedes each of the four Gospels. Such author portraits were derived from antique models; here Luke wears a Roman toga and holds a basket containing scrolls, the standard book form in antiquity. Facing the portrait are the opening words of his Gospel, *Quoniam quidem multi . . .* (Forasmuch as many . . .)

Beatus of Liébana, Commentary on the Apocalypse, and Jerome, Commentary on Daniel, in Latin.

Spain, province of León, probably San Salvador de Tábara, mid-tenth century, written and illuminated by Maius for Abbot Victor of the monastery of Saint Michael at Escalada.

MS M.644, fols. 222v–23r. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1919.

St. Beatus of Liébana completed his commentary about 776. The long cycles of pictures accompanying it constitute the greatest achievement of medieval Spanish illumination. The Morgan Beatus is important because it is the earliest complete

copy and thus stands at the beginning of the Beatus tradition. Although the book was ordered for Escalada (consecrated in 913), it was not made there, as Maius worked in the tower scriptorium at San Salvador de Tábara, where he died and was buried in 968. Maius tells us he made the book so that the “wise may fear the coming of the future judgment of the world’s end.” Shown here are the *Vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem* and *Christ Enthroned on the River of Life*.

Gospel Lectionary, in Latin.

Austria, Salzburg, Abbey of St. Peter, ca. 1050.

MS G.44, fols. 1v–2r. William S. Glazier Collection, given in 1984.

This book of readings for the Mass is one of three important eleventh-century Salzburg manuscripts in the Morgan that illustrate the transition from Ottonian to Romanesque styles. The book opens with two presentations: the book to *St. Peter* and *Joachim and Anna Present the Virgin in the Temple*. The latter, an early example of an apocryphal subject in a Western liturgical book, comes from the Infancy Gospel ascribed to James. The nude thorn extractors on columns recall the Roman statue of Spinario, then regarded as an image of Priapus; the women embracing columns recall the barren women who embraced Simeon Stylites’s column for fertility. Such details allude to Anna’s miraculous conception of the Virgin, for she remained barren well into old age.

Sacramentary, in Latin.

France, Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel, ca. 1060.

MS M.641, fols. 122v–23r. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1919.

The Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel rose in importance during the Norman Conquest. In the eleventh century, when the abbey was built on the rock, its scriptorium pioneered a Romanesque style. As a pilgrimage site between England and the Continent, the abbey absorbed influences from both regions and disseminated its distinctive style. This Sacramentary, containing texts read by the celebrant during high Mass, is the most lavish manuscript from Mont-Saint-Michel. This Crucifixion of St. Peter is executed in the characteristic Norman style, with figures more drawn than painted. The busy drapery and foliage, jagged lines, and distinctive pale palette betray the influence of tenth- and early-eleventh-century English decoration. In the crucifixion bystanders weep, and the *titulus* (title) is oddly placed below Peter’s head.

Life, Passion, and Miracles of St. Edmund, in Latin.

England, Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds, ca. 1130, illuminated by the Alexis Master during the time of Anselm, Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds (1121–48).

MS M.736, fols. 18v–19r. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1927.

One of the earliest illustrated biographies of an English saint, this lavish volume was a testimonial to patron saint and abbey alike. Most miniatures are based on the passion text of Abbo of Fleury (945–1004); the posthumous miracles depend on Osbert of Clare’s text, composed for Anselm shortly before this manuscript was made. On the left, eight thieves are miraculously paralyzed when they attempt to break into Edmund’s burial place. On the right, they are brought before Bishop Theodred, who orders all eight hanged. The miniatures are attributed to the Alexis Master, founder of the St. Albans school. Named after his St. Alexis cycle in the St. Albans Psalter, he skillfully combined Anglo-Saxon, Ottonian, and Byzantine influences to create England’s earliest Romanesque style.

Prayer Book, in Latin.

Italy, Milan, ca. 1420, illuminated by Michelino da Besozzo.

MS M.944, fols. 26v–27r. Purchased with the generous assistance of Alice Tully in memory of Dr. Edward Graeffe, 1970.

This book contains most of the surviving paintings by Michelino, a leading Lombard painter of the early fifteenth century. Regarded by his contemporaries as “the most excellent of all the painters in the world,” he supposedly made precocious animal studies before he could speak. Documents from between 1398 and 1443 in Milan Cathedral refer to him as a master of stained glass and fresco, but he was also a panel painter. Of his few manuscripts, this is clearly his masterpiece. Its twenty-two remaining miniatures (half are gone) betray the assurance, virtuosity, and modeling of his mature works. In this Resurrection, Christ has miraculously escaped from the sealed tomb. Metallic paint is used for the armor of the sleeping guards.

Hours of Catherine of Cleves, Windesheim use, in Latin.

The Netherlands, Utrecht, ca. 1440, illuminated by the Master of Catherine of Cleves for Catherine of Cleves, Duchess of Guelders.

MS M.917, pp. 244–45. Purchased on the Belle da Costa Greene Fund and the assistance of the Fellows, 1963.

The Cleves Master, named for his masterpiece, is unquestionably the most gifted and original of all Dutch illuminators. His rich palette, extraordinary powers of observation, and the everyday realism of his biblical scenes, place him among the greatest of illuminators. The borders surrounding suffrages (brief devotions to saints) are often novel. The peaceful coexistence of the crab and mussels surrounding St. Ambrose, for example, are a commentary on his preaching abilities, for

it was said he could reconcile the most bitter of enemies. (In the natural world mussels clam up in the presence of crabs, which crave their delicate flesh.) On the right, the pierced and bleeding hearts surrounding St. Augustine signify his remorse for his sin of dissipation while a student in Carthage.

Hours of Henry VIII, Rome use, in Latin.

France, Tours, ca. 1500, illuminated by Jean Poyer.

MS H.8, fols. 61v–62r. The Dannie and Hettie Heineman Collection, given 1977.

This manuscript is the masterpiece of Jean Poyer, who worked for King Charles VIII and Anne de Bretagne. According to an eighteenth-century tradition, Emperor Charles V gave it to King Henry VIII of England (1491–1547): its eighteenth-century silver clasps bear his name, arms, and motto. This Adoration of the Magi marks the beginning of Sext (sixth hour) of the Hours of the Virgin. By the ninth century, the Magi were named Caspar (oldest), Balthazar, and Melchior (youngest), and later they were connected with Europe, Africa, and Asia. Here, however, the youngest is shown as a black man; his innate nobility is rendered by some of Poyer's most inspired painting, evident in his closely observed facial features, exotic turban, and gold earring.

Da Costa Hours, Rome use, in Latin.

Belgium, Ghent, ca. 1515, illuminated by Simon Bening for a member of the Sá family, possibly Joÿo Rodrigues de Sá.

MS M.399, fols. 5v–6r. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1910.

Known as the Da Costa Hours because of its second owner, Don Alvaro da Costa, chamberlain to Manuel I of Portugal, this masterpiece is by Simon Bening, the last great Flemish illuminator. Famous and sought after during his lifetime, he was regarded, along with Giulio Clovio, as one of the five greatest illuminators of his day. The manuscript is celebrated for its cycle of full-page calendar illustrations that accurately portray the passing of the seasons. Such cycles had not occurred in Flemish manuscripts since their initial and singular appearance, almost exactly a century earlier, in the *Très Riches Heures* of the duc de Berry, which Bening must have seen. The month of April is shown here.

Hours of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, Rome use, in Latin.

Rome, Italy, 1546, illuminated by Giulio Clovio for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.

MS M.69, fols. 26v–27r. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1903.

The Farnese Hours, the last great Italian Renaissance manuscript, was highly praised in Vasari's *Lives of the Painters* (1568). Of Clovio (1498–1578), a Croatian, Vasari said that there "has never been . . . a more rare painter of little things," calling him a "new, if smaller Michelangelo." Here the bareness of the Adoration of the Shepherds is contrasted with the lush paradise that Adam and Eve must leave. The dramatic light generated by Jesus derives from the Revelations of St. Bridget, as does the motif of the Virgin exposing the Christ child—the shepherds had not been told the child's gender. Many details from the Fall of Man are based on Dürer's famous engraving of 1504.

Old Testament Miniatures, with Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian inscriptions.

France, probably Paris, 1240s, possibly for Louis IX, King of France.

MS M.638. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1916.

This picture book, with nearly three hundred scenes, is one of the most splendid thirteenth-century French manuscripts. Its battle scenes are vivid and so realistically depicted that they are a major source for studying medieval warfare. No other miniatures by the half dozen artists who worked on the book are known, suggesting they were wall painters, a conclusion supported by the breadth and monumental character of the miniatures. In 1604 Cardinal Bernard Maciejowski, bishop of Cracow, sent the book to Shah 'Abbas the Great as part of Pope Clement VIII's mission to foster the shah's tolerance of Christians and gain support in their military action against the Turks. The shah ordered the Persian inscriptions, while a later Jewish owner added those in Judeo-Persian.

Old Testament Miniatures, with Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian inscriptions.

France, probably Paris, 1240s, possibly for Louis IX, King of France.

MS M.638, fols. 21v–22r. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1916.

On the left, Azotus is smitten by a plague of mice. On the right, Philistines watch the return of the ark to Bethsames on a new cart, which is joyfully received by its reapers. The gold mice in the gold vases on the trespass-offering are mistakenly shown live. On the bottom, the Levites place the ark and offering on a great stone; on the right, the Bethsamites sacrifice the cart and cattle. On the right, Samuel exhorts the Israelites to serve only God and put away idols of Baalim and Ashtaroth, while five Israelites demolish golden statues of them. At the bottom, Samuel offers a lamb to God, and the Israelite warriors are successful against the fleeing Philistines.

Old Testament Miniatures, with Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian inscriptions.

France, probably Paris, 1240s, possibly for Louis IX, King of France.

MS M.638, fol. 23v. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1916.

In what is perhaps the most dramatic battle scene in the manuscript, Saul cleaves the skull of the fleeing Nahash with his sword. Nahash's companions are also attacked from the right by another company entering from the gateway of Jabesh-Gilead. In the left border, a man is raised off the ground as he catapults a huge stone. At the bottom, Saul is publicly anointed by Samuel, and peace offerings are sacrificed before the Lord. The head of God appearing from clouds on the right, curiously, has been supplied with the cruciform halo of Christ.

Old Testament Miniatures, with Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian inscriptions.

France, probably Paris, 1240s, possibly for Louis IX, King of France.

MS M.638, fols. 41v-42r. Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1916.

On the left, King David observes Bathsheba bathing and sends a messenger to fetch her. At the bottom, David commits adultery with Bathsheba. After David learned that Bathsheba had conceived, he attempted one of the most famous cover-ups in history. On the right, having recalled her husband, Uriah, from the battlefield, he bids him to lie with Bathsheba. Uriah, however, refuses to go home and camps in front of David's house. Below, angered because Uriah foiled his plot, David gives him a letter for Joab, his commander, instructing him to place Uriah in the heat of battle. At the right, in the siege of Rabbah, a crossbowman on the tower shoots the arrow that pierces Uriah's breast.

Detachable silver-gilt binding of the Farnese Hours.

Italy, Rome, 1590s, made by Antonio Gentili for Odoardo Farnese.

MS M.69. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1903.

During Cardinal Alessandro Farnese's lifetime, the Farnese Hours had a plain vellum binding with ties of red cloth, depicted in El Greco's portrait of Clovio holding the book. After Farnese's death (1589), the manuscript passed to his grandnephew, Odoardo Farnese, cardinal-deacon of San Eustachio in Rome. It was Odoardo who had Gentili make the book's second binding, which depicts the Annunciation. The composition was inspired by an Annunciation in the manuscript itself, where Gabriel and Mary are also in ovals and on facing pages. The binding was once attributed to Cellini, but a Farnese inventory identified the goldsmith as Il Faenza, or Antonio Gentili of Faenza, who had made the magnificent candlesticks and cross installed on St. Peter's high altar in 1582.