

**de Hamel, Christopher. (2018) *Making Medieval Manuscripts*. Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. 153 pp. ISBN: 978-1-85124-468-3. \$25.00**

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This new book by Christopher de Hamel, a reworking and expansion of his 1992 book *Scribes and Illuminators*, is a bit of a hybrid specimen. A former manuscript cataloger for Sotheby's auction house, de Hamel does not come across as a traditional academic. He holds a doctoral degree and this book is published by an academic library, but the usual trappings and appearances of a scholarly work are not to be found. Anyone expecting the text to address a core audience of specialists supported by numerous endnotes or footnotes coupled with a lengthy and exhaustive bibliography will be disappointed. Anyone intrigued by medieval history or who has an interest in the history of books and is searching for an access point into this field will be made to feel warmly welcomed as de Hamel maintains a tone throughout that is informal yet highly informed.

This is, more than anything else, a procedural work, a look at how the different elements used to craft a medieval document were made. In-depth analysis of the content of medieval manuscripts—of the ideas being communicated—is scant to non-existent. For an analytical bent in de Hamel's work, one might turn to two of his more recent books: *Bibles: An Illustrated History from Papyrus to Print* (2011 and also published by the Bodleian Library) and *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* (2016). The present volume is divided into an introduction and three segments. The first is "Paper and Parchment," the second is "Ink and Script," and the third is "Illumination and Binding."

The pacing is brisk. De Hamel's text clocks in at a slim 144 pages, several of which are full-page illustrations. These include photographs of the parchment making process as well as close-up details of medieval artwork serving as object lessons to the various points de Hamel discusses along the way. Additionally, there is a glossary of 18 specialized terms on page 147. However, there are no footnotes, an absence that might cause some people to see this volume as having a "coffee-table book" quality to it (thus the use of the word "hybrid" in the first paragraph). There is a bibliography, but at 25 sources, it is not as extensive as some might like, and it is certainly not exhaustive.

There are, at the risk of drifting into mere summery of the book, plenty of insights to be gained through de Hamel's discussion. Along the way, he explains, among other things, how animal hides were turned into parchment, how gold was used as the foundation for a manuscript's illustrations, and the way in which a medieval scribe held a quill differs from how people hold pens and pencils today. All interesting points and they all serve to clarify the book's target audience. This is a book, if it is purchased for library collections at all, strictly for undergraduates. The overall effect of *Making Medieval Manuscripts* is to whet the appetite of its reader for more and deeper discussion, a point at which de Hamel succeeds admirably.