

EXHIBITS

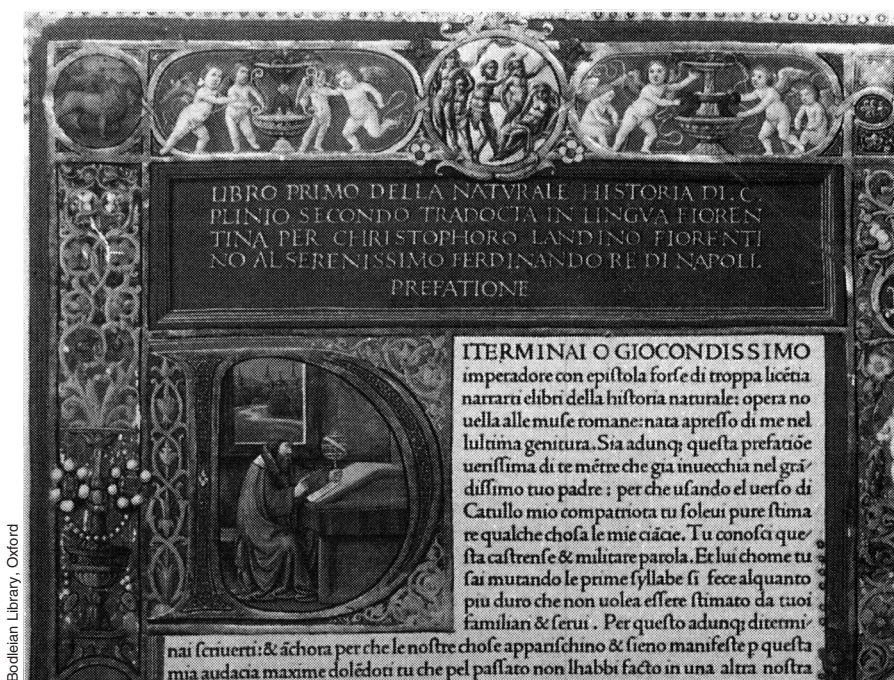
ton gives this country once again a President who knows the British are the problem—and he's trying to find his way to a path of growth and economic opportunity. But the reality is that Clinton does not know what to do, and that, if he did know and tried to do it, he would be "lynched."

Yet, the American Presidency is the crucial agency for replacing the bankrupt world monetary system. Eighty percent of the world's currency transactions are denominated in U.S. dollars, and therefore the dollar is the bulwark of international economic life. The power rests with the U.S., and particularly the Presidency, for making the necessary changes.

Therefore, President Clinton must be taught what to do, and must garner support, LaRouche emphasized. But to win him that support, we must confront his biggest problem—the "dumb citizens" who believe all the myths which have gotten us into the mess in the first place.

Using the example of Shakespeare's Hamlet, LaRouche told the leaders that they must learn the lessons of Classical tragedy, and be prepared to discard the old ways of thinking that have led to the current financial and economic disaster. Too many Americans would "rather bear the ills we have, than fly to others we know not of," and have submitted to the "dread of something after death [of the I.M.F.]," said LaRouche, recalling Hamlet's famous Act III soliloquy. Under those conditions, as in the drama, we will all end up dead.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche then spoke on the view from Europe of the current crisis. After reviewing how various European elites are showing a much greater awareness of the depth of the disintegration crisis than are Americans, Zepp-LaRouche shifted gears into examples of the new *fascist* thinking which is being discussed at European meetings of the Conservative Revolution elite. The oligarchy is prepared to throw away all norms of human and civil rights, and to "solve" this financial crisis in the same way they solved the 1930's Depression, she said—with full-fledged fascist economic programs, death camps and all.



Bodleian Library, Oxford

When God Was Portrayed Holding a Book

It is customary to think of the Renaissance as a rebirth of learning in all realms, and so the growth of vernacular literature and the proliferation of books is to be expected. But throughout the Middle Ages, the written word was no less important. Christian faith was tightly bound to the Holy Word. The Gospel of John begins: *'In principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud Deum'* ('In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God'). *In no other religion is God represented holding a book.* The development of illuminated manuscripts in Florence was utterly dependent on the perpetuation of medieval traditions of faith and learning and the fervent pursuit of spiritual life within the city. In the Four-

teenth and Fifteenth centuries, manuscript production flourished in Florence at a moment when the intellectual, secular, and spiritual realms were interwoven and demonstrated a like desire for illuminated books, many of which were created by the city's finest painters" [Emphasis added; the other "religions of the Book"—Islam and Judaism—forbid graphical representations of God.]

This pregnant observation concludes the essay by Barbara Drake Boehm, entitled, "The Books of the Florentine Illuminators," which is included in *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300-1450* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994, \$75 hardbound), the catalog of a groundbreaking exhibition held last winter at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which closed in February. The exhibition briefly overlapped another one, dedicated exclusively to

See front and back inside covers for color reproductions of works displayed at these exhibits.

Frontispiece, Pliny the Elder, "Natural History." Text portions printed in Venice, 1476. Hand Illuminations painted in Florence, 1479-83. The Painted Page.

illuminated books, the J.P. Morgan Library's *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*, which was open from February 15 to May 7. Between them, these exhibitions offered a shimmering panorama of the illustrated "Word" from the dawn of the proto-Renaissance in the Florence of Giotto and Dante, to the twilight of the High Renaissance in Rome in the mid-Sixteenth century.

Both shows leave behind catalogs which, while their fine reproductions remind us of the beauty of the original colors and textures, continue to enrich our knowledge of the crucial role of hand-painted books in Italy in making the ideal of progress a palpable reality. (The Morgan catalog, published by the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 1994, is \$39.95 softbound.)

Florence: Renaissance Birthplace

The Metropolitan show presented an "unconventional but compelling portrait of the emergence of a Renaissance style in Florence, one of the most significant events in the history of Western painting," as it was described by Metropolitan director Philippe de Montebello. It surveyed the accomplishments in various media of five generations of manuscript painters in Florence, cutting across the usual divisions between "medieval" and "Renaissance," and indeed right through the disaster of the Bardi bankruptcy and Black Death of the 1340's to document an amazing continuity of intellectual, social, and artistic fruitfulness; and it also united illuminated pages with panel paintings, textiles, and other media which are not usually associated with manuscript illumination. The book pages themselves belonged to several distinct categories which are very helpfully explained: liturgical manuscripts used in the Mass; devotional manuscripts used by individuals or societies; and a secular text, Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The striking conclusion of the exhibit was a substantial section devoted to Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, the Dominican Observant friar known as "Fra Angelico." In the past, Angelico was often presented in art history textbooks as a relatively conservative figure, whose piety led him to allegedly "water down" the radical return to antiquity of early Renaissance heroes like the painter Masaccio, and the architect Brunelleschi.

Instead, as Carl B. Strehlke's catalog essay presents the case, Angelico was Masaccio's greatest heir, the first artist to translate Brunelleschi's prescriptions for altarpieces for his churches (they should be in perfectly square plain frames) into reality, the inventor of the "Sacred Conversation" mode of altarpiece, in which saints gather around the Virgin and Child as if conversing at a social gathering instead of being enclosed in separate niches, and one of the most rigorous painters in applying the new, mathematically determined linear perspective of Brunelleschi to religious art. Since Masaccio's career was cut off by his death before the age of thirty, the Dominican friar Angelico stands out as the bold pioneer of the new Renaissance spirit whose influence radiated throughout Europe after the Council of Florence.

Another artist featured in this show, in both manuscript illuminations and painted panels, is Lorenzo Monaco, whose workshop was key in the training of the young Angelico. Lawrence the Monk, as his name translates, was associated with the Camaldolese

Monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli in Florence, which had been the premier center of illustration of books throughout the second half of the fourteenth century. It was at this very monastery, after the turn of the fifteenth century, that a cloistered monk named Ambrogio Traversari gathered around him a group of young people, both Italian and foreign, in a conspiracy to revive Greek Classical learning and the early Church Fathers, notably Sts. Ambrose and Augustine on the Latin side and their Greek counterparts, for a twofold purpose: (1) to heal the centuries-old breach between the eastern and western churches by finding common ground in the patristic sources, which were Platonic in inspiration; and (2) to forge modern States—city-state republics like Florence and eventually, nation-states—utilizing the wisdom of the ancients, particularly their scientific knowledge but also the beauty and refinement of their language.

Needless to say, such a project, which had vast ramifications for the future European voyages of discovery and for



Lorenzo Monaco, "Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter in an Initial S," c.1404.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

the development of movable-type printing, was fully at home in the same monastery which hosted Florence's busiest scriptorium.

Scholar-Saints

The Morgan Library's show *The Painted Page*, which was first mounted in London at the Royal Academy of Arts, reveals the fulfillment of the project begun by Traversari and his disciples, including wealthy patrons like the young Cosimo de' Medici, whose family, as Papal bankers and leading citizens of the Republic of Florence, had the means to finance the Renaissance. The first major action by Cosimo in this regard, after he came back from political defeat, imprisonment, and exile in 1434, was to finance bringing the ecumenical council with the Greek church from Ferrara to Florence

in the autumn of 1438. What became known as the Council of Florence was a watershed for disseminating Florentine Renaissance conceptions to the rest of Italy and many parts of Europe.

One manuscript which seems to summarize the whole glorious project is Dante's *Inferno*, illuminated by the previously underrated Bartolomeo di Fruosino, who, we learn from the Metropolitan catalog, was an intimate friend of Ambrogio Traversari. This opening page of the book, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, has a portrait of Dante as a humanist scholar working in his studio, similar to those which became so popular after 1450 and appear over and over again in the manuscripts exhibited at the Morgan Library, where we find Sts. Augustine, Athanasius, Gregory, and Jerome, but also Pliny, Livy, Ovid, Plutarch, at work in their respective

"studios," surrounded by books and often, scientific instruments, in spaces beautifully created according to the laws of perspective. This new imagery coincides with a greatly changed repertoire of kinds of books—not only bibles, choirbooks and personal devotional books, as before, but new translations and editions of the Greek and Latin classics, and other secular texts.

I counted, in the Metropolitan show, no fewer than ten images of the Godhead holding a book, many of them open to the Greek letters *alpha* and *omega*. The number of Classical scholars and Church Fathers at the Morgan show seen in their well-equipped studios is beyond counting, but one can point to the Morgan's own magnificent title page of "De spiritu sancto,"

by Didymus Alexandrinus, illuminated in Florence for the King of Hungary, the great book-lover Matthias Corvinus, as an example of the extraordinary evolution which took place after 1450 [SEE inside back cover, this issue]. It shows St. Jerome through a round window-frame seated at a fine writing desk in his study, with pen and inkwell, numerous books spilling out of a cupboard, crucifix, eyeglasses, scissors, and other paraphernalia. Over the parapet is a shimmering early-springtime view of the skyline of Florence. One could hardly ask for a finer manifestation of a visual metaphor of "man created in the image of God" than the sequence which goes from the book-bearing Godhead through the scholar-saint in his studio.

Florence, with its permanent workshops, remained the center of manuscript illumination throughout the Fifteenth century. It was the birthplace of the new, rounded classical script, the home of permanent manuscript workshops, and the origin of the white-vinestem motif which came to dominate book decoration. But other centers bloomed as the Renaissance spread out in the wake of the Council of Ferrara-Florence of 1438-1442, each with their distinctive styles: Naples, Venice, Ferrara, Urbino. After around 1470, a collaborative relationship emerges between Venice, which became the base for the new printed books produced there (mainly by French and German immigrants) and the Florentine illuminators.

The greatest new revelation of the Morgan show is the section on hand-illuminated printed books, as many incunables were designed with empty spaces left to be filled in with illustrations, large initials, and decorative borders. These elegant books combined the labor-saving device of printing with the time-honored art of hand illumination, serving as a transition to the development of printed illustrated books, which made the letters and art of the Renaissance available to a far vaster public than ever imagined in the Middle Ages, and unleashed the potential for developing the truly republican citizenry of the emerging nation-states.

—Nora Hamerman



Woodcut, Dante's "Divine Comedy," Venice, 1491, suggests continuity from manuscripts to fully printed books. **The Printed Page.**