# STUNNING ILLUSTRATIONS



- 0. STUNNING ILLUSTRATIONS Story Preface
- 1. SECULAR SCENES
- 2. ROYALTY'S ILLUMINATIONS
- 3. LEARNING WITH PICTURES

#### 4. STUNNING ILLUSTRATIONS

- 5. ILLUSTRATED HISTORIES
- 6. ILLUSTRATED LAWS



In the middle ages, artistic scribes created compendiums of birds and animals which were called "Bestiaries." These works focused on natural history, but the illustrations of featured animals were often accompanied by a moral lesson. This excerpt from the *Aberdeen Bestiary*—known as "Christ in Majesty"—is from the 12th century and is a true illumination since it was created with gold or silver. A miniature, it is Folio 4 verso from the *Aberdeen Bestiary*. Today it is located at the University of Aberdeen.

Beyond the Biblical stories and scholarly analyses which fill medieval manuscripts, it is interesting just to look at the pictures. Many were created by monks and artists whose names are long forgotten. Their work, however, is like a bridge between their time and ours.

- The *Visconti Book of Hours* is a two-volume prayer book filled with <u>marvelous illustrations</u>. It was started by Giovannino de'Grassi and completed by Luchino Belbello da Pavia and his assistants. In the linked picture, we see not only the creation of Eve but also a griffin, a hunting leopard, and many vine-leaves and flowers. Located at the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence.
- <u>Bona Sforza</u> was the wife of <u>Sigismund I</u> of Poland. Her 16th century *Book of Prayers* contains many gorgeous illuminations, including the <u>nativity of Christ</u>. Located at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- One of the Ghent-Bruges workshop illustrations in the *Mayer van den Bergh Breviary* portrays <u>daily chores</u> framed by strewn flowers in a <u>trompe-l'oeil</u> style. (Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp)
- Another illustration in that same <u>Breviary</u> (a prayer book designed for every day use) highlights the nativity surrounded by <u>scenes</u> of contemporary (16th century) life.
- King David, the most famous of Jewish rulers and writer of many Biblical Psalms, is <u>shown kneeling</u> in this illumination on parchment. It is part of the *Gradual of Esztergom*. Located at the Cathedral Library <u>Esztergom</u>, Hungary.
- In the Middle Ages, books of hours richly illustrated the twelve months of the year. Jean de Mauléon created this scene, for the month of September. While one peasant <u>plows the field</u>, another sows the seeds. Located at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.
- Church officials, including priests, were a significant part of daily life during Medieval times. Beyond <u>marrying</u> <u>people</u>, Bishops were called upon to <u>admonish</u> parishoners for their wayward deeds. (Bodleian Library, Oxford)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/STUNNING-ILLUSTRATIONS-Illuminated-Manuscripts

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/STUNNING-ILLUSTRATIONS-Illuminated-Manuscripts



#### Visconti Book of Hours - Illumination

This image depicts a page from the *Visconti Book of Hours*. The original illumination - created by Luchino Belbello da Pavia, circa 1430 - measures 25 cm (9.8 in) in height and 17.9 cm (7 in) in width.

The Web Gallery of Art provides more detail about the *Visconti Book of Hours* (which is currently maintained at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, in Florence, Italy) as well as this specific illumination (which is also known as Manuscript [Landau Finaly 22]):

Giovannino de' Grassi began illuminating this two-volume prayer-book for Gian Galeazzo Visconti; but it was a long time after they both were dead that the work was completed by Luchino Belbello da Pavia and his assistants.

On folio 46v, the initial of the text, the capital C, is the nucleus of the folio with rather crowded embellishments. Encircled by the letter we can see the creation of Eve, in front of a golden background.

The three figures - God the Father, Eve and Adam - are arranged in a way that follows the line of the C. Stylized golden vine-leaves, springing from a straight vine-stock on the right-hand side of the margin, surround the initial, and the seemingly irregular, curving network of vine-tendrils is also adjusted to the shape of the letter.

In the arid, rocky landscape at the bottom of the folio there are some luxuriant, thriving bushes and shrubs, with different animals among them, which point back to the previous days of the Creation, when the Earth was populated by plants and animals.

The bottom strip with its flat representations - connected with the principal one, as was usual at that time - expands in Belbello's miniature, as it did in the works of his contemporaries, into a spacious stage.

In the two upper corners of the initial, groups of radially arranged angels support the Viscontis' unpleasant coat of arms which depicts the serpent devouring a child.

We are presented with a fantastic mixture of fairytale and reality, of decoration and representation. The griffin is depicted in a three-dimensional manner as is the hunting leopard, the favorite "domestic animal" of the Viscontis, an animal the painter may have seen every day in his master's park.

However, at that time it did not depend only on the presence of the model whether the artist succeeded in representing it successfully. This is shown by the fact that, although there were elephants, bears, lions, monkeys and rabbits too in the Viscontis' menagerie, in Belbello's miniature they appear schematically, in a childishly simplified form. This may be due to the fact that the painter had not had much practice in depicting them and had not mastered the skill of representing them.

From among the innumerable instances of the intertwining of natural and fantastic forms it is worth while pointing to the oval, colorful flower cups swaying among the golden vine-leaves. These flowers have nothing to do with reality, and, in particular, not among vine-leaves.

On the other hand, they have striking similarities to ornaments on the jewelry of the period, not only because they appear in three-dimensional forms, but because of the enamel-like layers of paint which cover them.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

Image online via the Web Gallery of Art.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Visconti-Book-of-Hours-Illumination



#### Biblioteca Nazionale

Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Biblioteca-Nazionale-



## Florence - Panoramic View

Image online, courtesy <u>ibiblio.org</u> website.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Florence-Panoramic-View



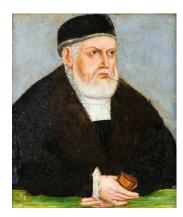
#### Bona Sforza

Bona Sforza was the wife of Sigismund I of Poland. Her 16th century *Book of Prayers* contains many gorgeous illuminations, including the nativity of Christ.

Today that work is maintained by the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

This image, from a Polish-language website, depicts an image reported to be Bona Sforza. Image online via Polish-language website.

View this asset at: <a href="http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Bona-Sforza-">http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Bona-Sforza-</a>



#### Sigismund I

This painting of King Sigismund I, from Poland, was created by Lucas Cranach the Younger (1515-1586) around 1553.

The oil-on-tin plate measures  $19.5 \times 17.5$  cm (7.7  $\times$  6.9 in) and is currently maintained at the Czartoryski Museum and Library in Krakow, Poland.

In 1517, Sigismund married Bona Sforza - his second wife who was Queen Consort - with whom he had six children:

- Queen Isabella of Hungary
- Sigismund II of Poland
- Sophia, Duchess of Brunswick-Lüneburg
- Anna I of Poland
- Queen Catherine of Sweden
- Wojciech Olbrach

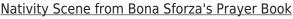
The King, and his Queen Consort, were both patrons of Renaissance culture.

Click on the image for a better view.

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sigismund-I





Bona Sforza was the wife of Sigismund I of Poland. Her 16th century Book of Prayers contains many gorgeous illuminations, including the nativity of Christ. Today that work is maintained by the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

This image depicts one of the illuminations in Bona Sforza's Book of Prayers. Created between 1527-28, this particular page is also known as Manuscript (Ms. Douce 40).

The Web Gallery of Art provides <u>more information</u> about this richly colored illustration: The book was made for Bona Sforza, wife of Sigismund I, King of Poland, who arrived from Italy in 1518.

The five most beautiful pictures of the richly decorated book, depicting scenes from the childhood of Christ, were executed by an artist with monogram S.C. (=Stanislaus Claratumbensis).

This artist was influenced by the engravings of the masters of the Danube school (Dürer, Altdorfer, Cranach) and he used also Italian Renaissance elements.

The miniature on folio 60, presented here, depicts the Nativity scene.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

Image, described above, online via the Web Gallery of Art.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Nativity-Scene-from-Bona-Sforza-s-Prayer-Book

#### Mayer van den Bergh Breviary - Daily Life

This image - one of the Ghent-Bruges workshop illustrations in the Mayer van den Bergh Breviary - portrays daily chores framed by strewn flowers in a trompe-l'oeil style.

The work depicted in this picture—which measures 224 x 160 mm—was created by a Flemish miniaturist working in Ghent or Bruges circa 1510-15.

The Web Gallery provides more information about the illumination:

All the features that earned the Ghent-Bruges workshop its success and fame are present in the Mayer van den Bergh Breviary's miniatures. They include the margin decoration, painted in trompl'oeil, often with a strewn flower motif.

This new brilliantly detailed observation of nature and representation of the human figure anticipates the Renaissance approach.

Click on the image for a better view. When you do that, notice other aspects of daily life which are going-on in this illumination.

Image online via Web Gallery of Art.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Mayer-van-den-Bergh-Breviary-Daily-Life

#### <u>Gradual of Esztergom - Illumination of King David Kneeling</u>

This image—from a never-completed work—portrays David (writer of *Psalms* and Israelite King). It was created by a miniaturist working in Esztergom, Hungary between 1500-20.

The Web Gallery provides more information about the illumination:

The miniature representing King David Kneeling comes from the Gradual of Esztergom. It was commissioned by Tamás Bakócz, archbishop of Esztergom (1498-1521).

This wonderfully ornamented large-size codex, produced at Esztergom, was never completed. Click on the image for a better view.

Image, described above, online via Web Gallery of Art.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Gradual-of-Esztergom-Illumination-of-King-David-Kneeling



### Esztergom - Aerial View

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Esztergom-Aerial-View



# <u>Plowing Fields - by Jean de Mauleon</u> Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

View this asset at: <a href="http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Plowing-Fields-by-Jean-de-Mauleon">http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Plowing-Fields-by-Jean-de-Mauleon</a>



<u>Walters Art Gallery</u> Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art website.

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