

0. THE PRECIOUS MANUSCRIPTS - Story Preface

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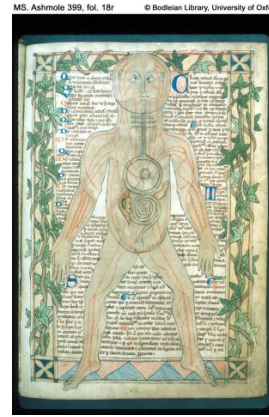
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The Bodleian Library, at Oxford University, contains many priceless manuscripts. This image depicts one of them. Curators describe it with these words: "Anatomical illustration showing the veins, from a medical miscellany. England; 13th century, late. Bodleian Library, MS. Ashmole 399, fol. 18r. Click on the image for a full-page view. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

The [Bodleian Library](#) in Oxford owns impressive books and manuscripts from ancient times. Many were written or copied by religious scholars and scribes who, for centuries, dominated the intellectual world. Here are a few striking examples.

A mutilated manuscript of the [Gospels](#), most likely copied in Ireland, is from the second half of the 8th century while a slightly less [aged treasure](#), from a Gregorian Sacramentary, is probably from 825-50 AD.

Not all surviving illustrations are from religious books and manuscripts:

- An anatomical drawing, depicting [veins in the body](#), is from a 13th-century English medical text;
- [Euclid's Elements](#), created in Constantinople around 888 AD, features explanatory drawings;
- A late 10th/early 11th century work—from the "Caedmon Manuscript" of Anglo-Saxon poetry—includes the drawing of an [angel guarding the gates of Paradise](#).

Rarely do we see pictures of the monks who worked so hard to create these masterpieces. [This monk](#) decided to be different. At the end of his manuscript of *St. Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah*, the illustrator (from the late 11th century AD) created a self-portrait. The work is from the Benedictine Abbey of Jumieges in Normandy.

Because the Bible was the source of so much discussion, and so many manuscripts produced during the Middle Ages, most of the [stunning illuminations](#) we still have today are Bible-related. "[Hezekiah and the Water Clock](#)" is a pictorial interpretation of II Kings 20 while the monastic skill of first-letter illumination is graphically shown in the [letter "B"](#) from Psalm 1 ("Beatus vir").

Sometimes monks did much more than copy the works of other scholars. Sometimes monks fundamentally disagreed with the tenets of their religion.

Woe unto free-thinking monks and scholars who ran afoul of the Catholic Church in Europe! Their histories undoubtedly had tremendous influence on the founders of the American Republic.

One such history, still significant today, is the story of the British scholar, John Wycliffe.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-PRECIOUS-MANUSCRIPTS-Book-Burning-and-Cens>

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