



During medieval times, the Wheel of Fortune was not a game—it was a concept of life. This image depicts an illumination illustrating a Wheel of Fortune, circa 1457.

The [British Library](#) tells us [more](#) about the concept of fate, via a Wheel of Fortune, during medieval times:

*The Rota Fortunae [the Wheel of Fortune] was a concept familiar to the medieval reader, and this image would have reminded the viewer of the fragility of power.*

The book in which this illumination appears is John Lydgate's *Siege of Troy*. It was an ambitious project which told the tale of the Trojan War (long before the ruins of Troy were found in the 19th century).

The University Library, at the University of Manchester, maintains this manuscript. Its curators tell us [more](#) about the work and its illuminations:

*A large and richly-decorated mid fifteenth-century manuscript of John Lydgate's *Siege of Troy*. The *Troy Book*, or *Siege of Troy*, was one of the most ambitious attempts in medieval vernacular poetry to recount the story of the Trojan war.*

*He [Lydgate] began composing the poem in October 1412 on commission from Henry, Prince of Wales (the future King Henry V), with the express purpose of ensuring that the great epic about the Trojan War could be read in the English vernacular. He completed it in 1420. The work is a translation and expansion of Guido delle Colonne's "Historia destructionis Troiae."*

*There are five pictures in the text space before the prologue and books 2-5, and more or less large pictures in 64 margins. Among the miniatures are a painting of Lydgate presenting his work to Henry V on folio 1r; a detailed painting of the 'Wheel of Fortune' on folio 28v; the funeral of Hector on folio 109v; and the arms of the Carent family on a red ground hatched in gold, with floral ornament and a frame, on folio 173r.*

*The manuscript belonged to the Carent family of Somerset in the 15th century; later passed to the Mundy family of Markeaton Hall, Derbyshire; then to John Somers, Baron Somers, and was sold in Somers-Jekyll sale of 1739. In the 19th century it was owned by Henry Perkins and the 26th Earl of Crawford.*

The work is now owned by the University of Manchester.

Click on the image for a magnificent full-page view.

Credits:

Illumination in John Lydgate's "Siege of Troy." Original maintained by the University Library at the University of Manchester. Image online via Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

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