



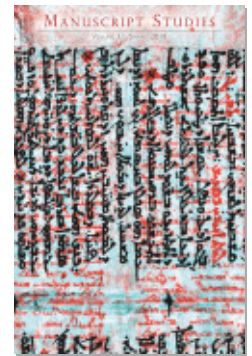
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*Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* by Christopher De Hamel  
(review)

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press, the University of Notre Dame Library acquired a leaf of the Beauvais Missal (Ege FOL 15) (Frag. I.38).

A manuscript description is never complete, and neither is a manuscript catalog. No one ever has the last word. And so this catalog, rather than serving as the ultimate authority, is instead a snapshot of these manuscripts as they were observed and studied in 2016, and the volume should be considered in tandem with the earlier, albeit also flawed, catalogs. Although Gura's descriptions provide the first truly detailed work on these manuscripts and are therefore most welcome, they are frozen in ink on paper and, without images, are frustratingly incomplete. It is to be hoped that the descriptions will eventually be uploaded as PDFs, TEI-encoded documents, searchable data, or some combination thereof, and made available online linked to their associated digital surrogates. The print catalog alone is only half of the story.

Christopher De Hamel. *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2016. Vi + 632 p. illus. £30 / \$45. ISBN: 978-0-241-00304-6.

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**B**ECAUSE IT IS HEAVILY ILLUSTRATED, Christopher de Hamel's immensely readable *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* is far less daunting than its page count might imply. It wants to be read by anyone even remotely curious about early Western manuscripts and book history. Although it is too long for use as a text in most book history courses, and is in any case written for interested nonspecialists (me, for example; but I suspect that specialists would enjoy it, too), my only difficulty, were I to teach such a course again, would be choice of chapters. I would use more than one.

De Hamel discusses twelve manuscripts in order of their creation, from the late sixth through the early sixteenth centuries: roughly a thousand

years, beginning after the breakdown of imperial order in western Europe and running to the early modern period. Each chapter mentions other manuscripts to which its subject is related, through illustrations, artists, craftsmen, texts, previous owners, or other matters; an appended list of these manuscripts requires six pages. His twelve exemplars live in European or North American libraries. The book's organizing conceit ("meetings" with manuscripts, de Hamel as tour guide) encourages "conversational" descriptions of buildings and settings; staff; varied rules, regulations, and enforcement standards; lunch; and bits of autobiography (the last time I was here; I remember when this place was a barren hill; people with whom I discussed this book or whose scholarship I use).

The book introduces many lenses through which to view manuscripts. It shows how cooperative the enterprise of trying to understand a manuscript must be, and depicts instances of students in the field functioning as a community. Emphasizing how much is not yet known about the manuscripts he discusses, de Hamel simultaneously models how a student finally confident enough to speculate about what remains uncertain must show those bits of evidence, hypotheses, and general historical background that support, or question, speculation. Students, teachers, and readers will value his discussions of specific manuscripts. These demonstrate why manuscripts are worth thinking about at all, despite what we don't, and may never, know about them. And he shows that working with them is fun. "There is a pleasure in handling a manuscript which has not changed owners in almost a thousand years and has never travelled more than a couple of miles," he remarks (p. 260), referring to Salisbury Cathedral's copy of St. Jerome's commentary on Isaiah, written during the reign of William the Conqueror when the Cathedral, still located in Old Sarum, had not yet moved two miles to where "the new town of Salisbury" would be built in the thirteenth century. De Hamel's emergent self-portrait depicts a real human being enjoying his work.

The first of the major manuscripts de Hamel discusses, the Gospels of Saint Augustine, dates from the late sixth century. Preserved at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where de Hamel was Librarian, its Augustine is not the Bishop of Hippo but rather the first Archbishop of Canterbury, sent by Gregory the Great to bring Christianity to the "angels" of an island far from Rome. "Probably the oldest non-archaeological artefact of any kind to

have survived in England,” de Hamel writes, “continuously owned and in use in the country since the late sixth century,” it is “the oldest surviving illustrated Latin Gospel Book anywhere in the world” (p. 44). He describes its script, illustrations, and how it came to England from Rome.

De Hamel’s second manuscript is a pandect (or complete Bible) made at Jarrow (Northumbria) circa 700. It traveled in the opposite direction. The Codex Amiatinus (now in the Laurenziana, Florence), “the oldest surviving entire manuscript of the Vulgate,” is “still the principal witness for establishing the text of the Latin Bible” (p. 61). Intended as a gift by St. Coelfrith for Gregory II, it never reached its intended recipient, fetching up instead at San Salvatore on Monte Amiata (Tuscany) and reaching the Laurenziana only at the end of the eighteenth century. Again de Hamel describes script, illustrations, and the manuscript’s travels; he also discusses its parchment and notes its weight: over seventy-five pounds.

De Hamel’s third manuscript, the late eighth-century Book of Kells (Trinity College, Dublin), is another text of the four Gospels, better known for its decoration and calligraphy than its text (“a poor and degraded witness to the Gospel”). All three manuscripts represent, in one way or another, public (“state”) religion. “Sacred object[s] and . . . tangible symbol[s] of divinity . . . for sanctifying a church, for carrying in processions, for swearing oaths, and for veneration[,] . . . catalyst[s] for religion and . . . central implement[s] of the liturgy” (p. 128), they figure forth forms of power, not the joys of solitary spiritual reading.

Other manuscripts are secular. The early ninth-century *Aratea* is an astronomical text preserved in Leiden’s university library. As de Hamel looks at it in Leiden, a sudden change of light reveals a detail suggesting how this manuscript was copied and reproduced during its long history by technologies no longer in use. Even contemporary reproductive technologies, he warns, would not reveal that detail. Sometimes one has to see the thing itself—and get lucky with lighting.

The *Carmina Burana*, from the first half of the thirteenth century (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich), is relatively well known even today thanks to Helen Waddell’s *The Wandering Scholars* (1927) and Carl Orff’s cantatas, *Carmina Burana*, *Catulli Carmina*, and *Trionfo di Afrodite* (1937–51), all of which used the Munich text. Surprisingly, de Hamel relates the

secular manuscript's physical format to religious breviaries (compilations of daily readings of psalms and other texts); equally unexpectedly, he relates its text to medieval encyclopedic works; and he discusses what both relations signify. He also shows the manuscript developing by accretion over time.

A third secular work is the National Library of Wales's copy of the Hengwrt Chaucer (ca. 1400). (American, perhaps even English, readers might welcome instruction on how to pronounce "Hengwrt.") Recent work by Linne R. Mooney presents de Hamel the opportunity to examine the scribes who actually wrote manuscripts: here, Mooney argues, one Adam Pinkhurst, to which de Hamel responds with the Scottish verdict, "not proven." His reader will note how de Hamel structures his argument, offers comparisons with Huntington's Ellesmere Chaucer, and treats both an argument he does not accept and its author. But anyone who neglects de Hamel's endnotes will miss that last point (p. 603), as well as many references to additional information.

The Visconti *Semideus* (ca. 1438), by Catone Sacco, now in St. Petersburg's National Library, opens with Sacco's *De laudibus virginis*. This text praising the Virgin is apparently a late addition—a literal pretext to Sacco's treatise on warfare, *Semideus*—to this manuscript created for presentation to Filippo Maria Visconti. De Hamel describes how treatises were produced, mutating and adapting to changes in patronage; how some parts function for one purpose, other parts for another; and how such matters can affect whether copies of a manuscript, whole or in parts, survive. His description of this manuscript demonstrates clearly how it was changed by accretion, deletion, and omission during its years of travel between patrons with differing needs, travels integral to understanding both its history and its present.

De Hamel discusses five more religious manuscripts: a mid-tenth-century collection of interpretations of the Apocalypse, gathered in Spain by Beatus of Liébana, now in New York's Morgan Library; the Bodleian copy of an eleventh-century manuscript containing St. Jerome's commentary on Isaiah; a Psalter from the third quarter of the twelfth century now at Copenhagen's Royal Library; the Hours of Jeanne de Navarre, from the second quarter of the fourteenth century, preserved in Paris at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (the only one of de Hamel's twelve manuscripts still "preserved today in the country where it was actually made" [p. 567]);

and the Spinola Hours (ca. 1515–20), now in Los Angeles at the Getty. These books, no longer public or “state” religious books, indicate the inner religious feelings of individuals, and later ostentatiously display both inner piety and the economic ability to command luxury.

Describing “the origins of the business of professional artists and commercial publishing” (pp. 569–70), de Hamel takes his reader from a world of books produced by monastic scribes to one where “the preparation of complicated illuminated manuscripts” is “usually coordinated by professional booksellers” directing the work of “various sub-contractors, scribes, illuminators and binders.” Jacopo de San Pietro, probably involved in preparing the manuscript of Sacco’s *Semideus* for presentation, is, by 1477, working with printed books (pp. 504–7). While we distinguish manuscripts from print, for indifferent Jacopo, books were books.

De Hamel’s summary mentions “the element of pure chance” that leaves manuscripts where they are now. Both their aesthetic and historical values matter: recording “the conversion of Europe to Christianity and Roman literacy” and the “the migration of knowledge,” they also offer evidence of “parchment, scripts as exotic as rustic capitals and Visigothic minuscule,” “illumination and bindings,” “how books were copied and assembled,” and provenance. He emphasizes “the value of determining and documenting the structure of the quires” and of tying information from individual manuscripts to “independent records”; the significance of furnishing “actual names and places which bring reality to the lives of books”; and “how often there are things we absolutely do not know, or cannot yet resolve” (pp. 567–70). Much is left to do.

De Hamel has published extensively on medieval and early modern manuscripts for both scholarly and general readerships. He grew up studying such books, beginning to look at them as a teenager in the public library of Dunedin, New Zealand. Almost no librarian responsible for an early manuscript would now make the decision that some librarian made in Dunedin: He wants to see it? Let him see it. When, properly accredited, the posterity for whom we keep this stuff shows up, we usually expect it to display gray hair, or none. De Hamel’s readers owe that Dunedin librarian thanks. This is a wonderful book.