

*Traversing
the Globe*

— *THROUGH* —

*Illuminated
Manuscripts*



In the premodern era, a complex nexus of land and sea routes connected the remarkably mobile Afro-Eurasian peoples, many of whom were far more aware of or curious about the world beyond their doorsteps than one might realize. Real and imagined places come to life in stunning and at times surprising ways on the pages of illuminated manuscripts and painted book arts. These highly prized objects allow us to glimpse, admire, and study a world gone by, its peoples, different belief systems, and an interconnected global history of human thought and ideas about art.

The exhibition is drawn primarily from the Getty Museum's collection of manuscripts but augmented with several generous and important loans from local institutions that effectively expand the geographic, artistic, and religious scope of the presentation. In the two galleries we examine how book arts contributed to various outlooks on the world through a kaleidoscopic narrative about what it meant to be "global" from the ninth to the seventeenth century. By taking a visual and thematic journey across Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas in one gallery, and by emphasizing moments of encounter, exchange, and exploration in the other, the exhibition considers networks rather than boundaries, connectivity rather than isolation, geographic centers and periphery regions, and a world of cross-cultural artistic interaction.

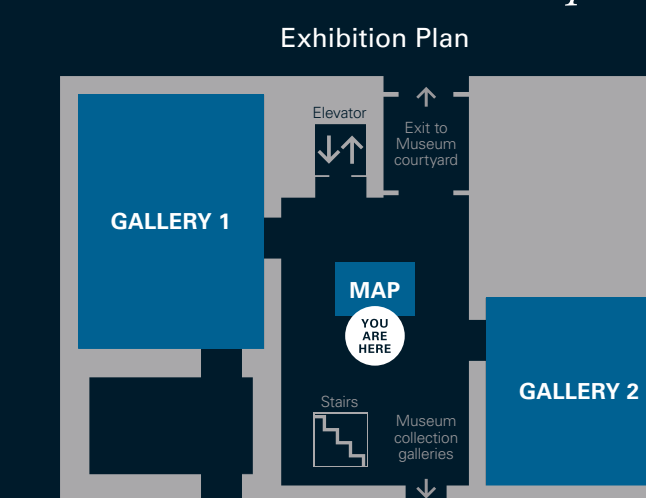
Mapping the Global Middle Ages

Please note that several works shown on this page will only be on view in the exhibition from January 26–April 10, 2016.



One of the great challenges of telling a global history is determining its chronological and geographic scope. The Middle Ages, for example, have sometimes been described as a thousand-year period, centered largely on the Judeo-Christian communities of the historic Roman Empire—East and West—in Europe, western Asia, and the Mediterranean Basin from about the fourth century through the mid-fifteenth century. Medieval India, by contrast, is generally thought to span the sixth through the eighteenth century, and its history is at times framed by points of contact with the many cultures of Asia. The history of Islam privileges the concept of a Golden Age that began with the religion's inception in the seventh century and lasted until about the sixteenth century; geographically, the Islamic world engaged a vast territory, from northern Africa to throughout central and eastern Asia. The term “medieval” cannot be easily applied to the Americas or most parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, regions that developed largely independently of the interwoven socioeconomic network of greater Afro-Eurasia. The exhibition tells a global history of the ninth through the early seventeenth century, and this map highlights major centers of book use and production.

Traversing the Globe — THROUGH — Illuminated Manuscripts



Bihar image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Reed and Alan Rosenberg Collection, Museum Associates purchase (M 73.1.001-01), www.lacma.org; Guatemala image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, accession # 80.202.19.001, www.lacma.org; Herat image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Reed M. Rosenberg Collection, gift of Joan Paley (M 73.1.011), www.lacma.org; Kathmandu Valley image: British Library, accession # 1999.0101, www.bl.uk; Kairouan image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Reed M. Rosenberg Collection, gift of Joan Paley (M 73.1.002), www.lacma.org; Helmarshausen image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Reed M. Rosenberg Collection, gift of Joan Paley (M 73.1.003), www.lacma.org; Shiraz image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Reed M. Rosenberg Collection, gift of Joan Paley (M 73.1.004), www.lacma.org; all other images: J. Paul Getty Museum

Illuminated manuscripts are made of parchment (specially prepared animal skin) covered with tempera and often gold leaf. Because these materials are sensitive to light, the books on view in this exhibition are displayed at low light levels.

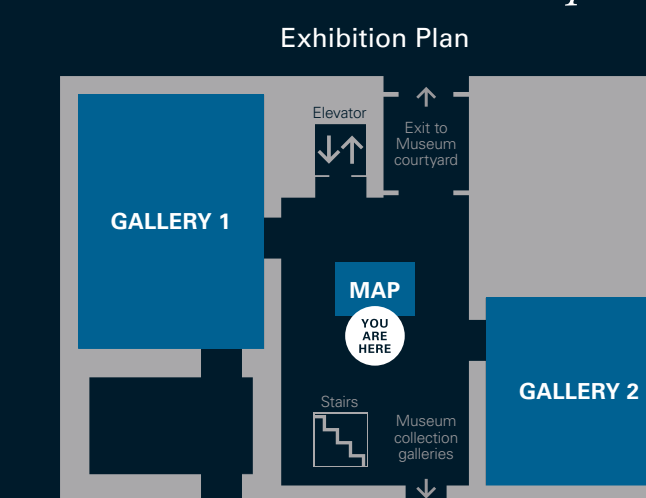
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Bihar image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Book and Paper Conservation Collection, Museum Associates purchase (M 731.130.01).
www.lacma.org. Guatemala image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, anonymous gift (M 2012.19.001), www.lacma.org. Heronklay image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Book and Paper Conservation Collection, gift of Joan Paley (M 731.071). www.lacma.org. Kathmandu Valley image: British Library, photograph of the British Library. Shiraz image: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Book and Paper Conservation Collection, gift of Joan Paley (M 731.042). www.lacma.org. All other images: J. Paul Getty Museum.

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A Global Outlook

In a time before the borders of cities, nations, or even continents were clearly defined or established, individuals could turn to texts—among them epic romances, world chronicles or histories, travel literature, and devotional tracts—to learn about distant lands, exotic goods, foreign peoples, and bygone eras. Many of these accounts were accompanied by wondrous illuminations, which gave life to a world that was otherwise accessible only to intrepid travelers or a clever imagination.

The transmission and translation of these stories, which often drew on numerous sources from the past and present, represents a global phenomenon in book culture across Afro-Eurasia. The manuscripts in this section emphasize the transmission, translation, circulation, and exchange of transregional narratives and accounts of great local and cultural significance.

Encountering Africa

Africa is a landmass whose size equals that of significant portions of Europe, central Asia, and North America combined. For almost two millennia, book arts have been produced by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities across the northern and central portions of the continent, primarily in Egypt, the Maghreb (northwest Africa), and Ethiopia. Manuscripts were among the material commodities (like salt, gold, ivory, paper, and luxury textiles) traded throughout trans-Saharan Africa and are representative of the area's rich traditions of artistic expression and intellectual preservation.

African people have long been depicted in European art, through such individuals as Saints Augustine of Hippo (Algeria) or Catherine of Alexandria (Egypt) or as slaves, attendant figures, diplomats, or historical personages, like the Queen of Sheba, Cleopatra, or the black African king who brought gifts to the Christ child. Crusaders reported on Christian kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa, including Prester John's purported kingdom on the rim of eastern Africa bordering the Indian Ocean, and ideas about race and skin color evolved as Eurasian peoples came increasingly into contact with Africans.

Imagining Asia and the Distant East

The concept of an ambiguous and marvelous “East,” often in contrast with the monolithic “West,” was pervasive in premodern Europe. This nebulous geography could at once encapsulate the entire Byzantine Empire or include the lands of India and the Far East, thereby respectively also encompassing Eastern Christian communities (such as those in Armenia), the lands of Islam, and the so-called Idolaters (usually referring to Buddhists, but generally denoting any non-Christian tradition). The limits of these continental “orients” were not fixed, and yet these vast regions were rich with artistic heritages of manuscript culture, created on a variety of supports, including paper, parchment, palm leaves, and precious fabrics. Elaborately decorated codices existed in China from as early as the seventh century (as seen in the Getty Research Institute’s exhibition *Cave Temples of Dunhuang*, on view from May 7–September 4, 2016). This section emphasizes the role books had in the transmission of religious ideas along sea and land routes, including the multi-faceted Silk Roads.

Glimpsing the Americas *in the Early Modern World*

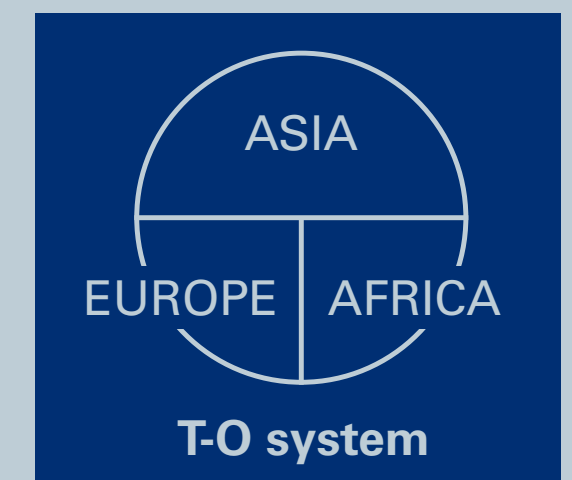
With the exception of a few possible Viking sources, pan-Afro-Eurasian knowledge of the Americas was relatively scant prior to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The empires of the Aztec, Maya, Inca, and other Amerindian peoples were primarily in inland settings connected by commerce and through a network of rivers, coastal routes, and overland roadways (likely used for religious functions—processions and pilgrimage, for example). Many Mesoamerican and Andean societies had rich literary traditions, some of which resulted in written, decorated, and bound codices (most were unfortunately lost or destroyed during initial European contact). Books continued to be produced long after, often with a mixing of Amerindian and European motifs and ideas.

The manuscripts in this section were made worlds apart—in the southern Andes, the Venetian lagoon, and Magdeburg—but each provided European audiences with information about the cultures of the Americas.

Mapping the World

the View from Europe

World maps always reveal a view of the earth from the perspective of a particular time and place. Premodern Europeans knew the world to be round, a concept that can be traced intellectually back to the ancient world and to various places around the globe. The most common expression of the sphericity of the earth at the time was the T-O system, in which the known landmasses were arranged within the letter *O* to form a *T*, with Asia generally the largest portion, and Africa and Europe sharing roughly equal segments. Maps often included references to *terra incognita*, or unknown lands, including the long-acknowledged existence of a *terra australis* (or southern landmass, from which we derive the word Australia). Fantastical creatures and peoples were thought to inhabit these and other exotic locales, imaginative notions that persisted even during the great period of voyages of discovery and exploration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when world atlases were first published and sophisticated nautical charts were in circulation.



Akephalos and Kynokephalos (detail), Ghent, about 1475, from *Mirror of History*. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XIII 5, volume 1, fol. 67v

Religious Exchanges

The themes of travel and journey are inherent to many world religions: the Buddha traversed considerable distances to spread his teachings; Jewish communities annually commemorate the exodus out of slavery from Egypt and the eventual establishment of a kingdom in the Promised Land; among Christ's last words to his followers was the commission to go into all the world and make disciples; and the Prophet Muhammad's *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca is emulated by Muslims from around the world each year. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, in particular, became universal faith systems in the premodern world, in that their followers adapted practices from one cultural or geographic area to another, giving rise to local expressions, interpretations, and variations. Interactions between religious communities or empires occurred in many ways, as peaceful or wary encounters and as violent or destructive clashes. This section examines the potential risk involved as well as the intellectual-artistic flowering that might occur in commercial exchanges across religious, geographical, and political boundaries.

Worldwide Networks

Cultures in Contact

Long before national boundaries were fully established, land and sea routes were crucial to the increasing interconnectedness of the premodern world. Cross-cultural trade was ubiquitous, and portable objects—such as manuscripts, ceramics, textiles, and glassworks—were active agents in ensuring the spread of religions, ideas, and materials across wide geographies. People rarely traveled for pleasure but rather with commercial, diplomatic, or spiritual motivations. Among those who traversed the globe were merchants, military personnel, missionaries and pilgrims, ambassadors, migratory communities, slaves, and refugees. The religious, linguistic, and ethnic contacts among Afro-Eurasian peoples do not follow an established paradigm but rather are fluid and at times hybrid exchanges, each of which contributed to the development of a cosmopolitan world. The Silk Roads running through central Asia linked China to the Mediterranean, and commodities other than sericulture were traded, including spices, gems, glass, porcelain, paper, pigments, and animals. Some of the objects in this section—and throughout the exhibition—were produced in major cultural centers, while others were created at the periphery or in border regions.

This material was published in 2016 to coincide with the J. Paul Getty Museum exhibition *Traversing the Globe through Illuminated Manuscripts*, January 26–June 26, 2016 at the Getty Center.

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