

An Inventory of Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Collector	Harry Ransom Center
Title:	Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts Collection
Dates:	11th-17th centuries (bulk 15th-17th centuries)
Extent:	134 bound or custom-boxed items, plus 4 document boxes, 1 oversize folder, 6 oversize boxes, and 1 framed item. (84.42 linear feet)
Abstract:	Collection contains 215 Medieval or Renaissance manuscripts.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-03327
Language:	Manuscripts are written in several languages, including Dutch, English, Flemish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Middle English, Old English, and Spanish.
Access:	Most items are open for research, though some are restricted from handling due to condition. Digital facsimiles of the restricted items are available.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases and gifts, 1960-1989. Collection consists of items from various collections, including George Atherton Aitken, W. H. Crain, Carlton Lake, Edward A. Parsons, Thomas Phillipps, Walter Emile Van Wijk, Evelyn Waugh, John Henry Wrenn, and others.
Processed by:	John Kirkpatrick, April Adamson, Sidney Tibbetts, Joan Sibley, and Aine McVey, 2009
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Sources:

Carl-Mitchell, Charlotte. "Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts at the HRHRC." *Library Chronicle* N.S. no. 35 (1986):88-105.

Carl-Mitchell, Charlotte and Karen Gould. "List of HRHRC Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts." *Library Chronicle* N.S. no. 35 (1986):106-113.

Scope and Contents

The Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts Collection is a gathering of 215 Medieval or Renaissance manuscripts that date from the eleventh through the seventeenth centuries (bulk fifteenth through seventeenth centuries). Each item has a designated shelf mark (HRC 1 through HRC 225) and the items are organized by shelf mark number.

The manuscripts are written in several languages—including Dutch, English, Flemish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Middle English, Old English, and Spanish—and originated from a variety of countries—among them Austria, Bohemia, Bolivia, Byzantium, England, Flanders, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, and the United States.

A substantial number of the texts are religious in content, though a number of other general subjects—including alchemy, architecture, astronomy, botany, cartography, classical literature, diplomacy, drama, genealogy, government, heraldry, history, kings and rulers, law, literature, mathematics, medicine, monasticism and religious orders, music, philosophy, poetry, science, and war—are also represented.

The earliest manuscript in the collection (HRC 29) is an eleventh-century codex of various texts compiled by Abbot Ellinger of Tegernsee, which is informally known as the "Bede manuscript" since Bede's *De Natura Rerum* is the first text.

Because of their magnificent illuminations, the best-known medieval manuscripts in the collection are the books of hours, which contain prayers and offices used for devotion by the laity. Of the eleven books of hours in the collection, all of them dating from the fifteenth-century, seven came from France, which was a major center for the production of such books during that era. The most notable of these—known as the "Belleville Hours" (HRC 8)—was made for the Belleville family, who, from the eleventh-century until the French Revolution, owned large land estates.

The collection also contains Biblical texts and service books used in church liturgy or worship, such as antiphonaries, breviaries, graduals, rituals, prayer books, psalters, and sermons. Among these is a fifteenth-century German ferial psalter and hymnal (HRC 114) important for its stylistic relationship to the Gutenberg Bible and early printed psalters.

Another major category of manuscripts includes classical texts, with copies of works by Cicero, Horace, Ovid, and Plato among others, as well as literary works from the Middle Ages, whose texts were composed by Chaucer, Dante, and Petrarch.

The historical documents in the collection represent a number of English, French, and Spanish monarchs as well as notable persons such as Oliver Cromwell, Martin Luther, John Milton, Sir Isaac Newton, Abraham Ortelius, and Sir Walter Raleigh. Among the types of documents present are charters, commonplace books, contracts, correspondence, decrees, deeds, diaries, government records, indentures, letters patent, minutes, notarial documents, notes, papal bulls, petitions, pontificals, receipts, reports, speeches, and writs.

A complete index with identified names of authors of texts or signers of documents in the collection is included in this finding aid.

Related Material

Other collections at the Ransom Center containing additional early manuscripts include: George A. Aitken Collection, Eastern Manuscripts Collection, Clay Tablets and Cones Collection, Kraus Map Collection, Lanza-Acosta Bolivian Collection, Arthur Livingston Papers, Papyri Collection, Pforzheimer Manuscript Collection, Ranuzzi Collection, Shelley Family Collection, and the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Collection.

Separated Material

This collection was previously known as the Pre-1700 Manuscript Collection. During recent cataloging, ten items that were found to post-date 1700—or that were more appropriate to another Ransom Center collection (e.g. the Eastern Manuscripts Collection)—were removed from this collection.

Item-level Descriptions

Detailed item-level descriptions and digital facsimiles of restricted items are available in a [searchable database](#).

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