

Scot McKendrick, John Lowden, and Kathleen Doyle, eds. *Royal Manuscripts: The Genius of Illumination*.

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In November 2011 the British Library held an exhibition celebrating the Royal manuscript collection. Presented to the nation in 1757 by King George II and consisting of almost 2,000 books they, with 9,000 printed books, formed the Old Royal Library. This, in turn, provided the basis of the British Library itself. The exhibition marks a three-year collaboration between the library and Courtauld Institute and brings together 154 manuscripts, mainly drawn from the British Library collection, and includes not only works from the Royal collection but also other manuscripts either owned by or associated with English royalty. A sumptuous catalogue has been produced to accompany the exhibition, containing three introductory essays together with shorter but very informative essays on each of the manuscripts presented in the exhibition. Each manuscript is also represented by at least one full-page color illustration, providing a visual treat for the reader. This is a beautiful production, and its high-quality illustrations will appeal to both a general and a scholarly audience.

While many of these manuscripts have been exhibited before, the catalogue provides the reader with the rare opportunity to examine the range of books that were once part of the royal collection. The accompanying three essays serve to contextualize the manuscripts. John Lowden provides a European overview of the association of royalty with books, beginning with the fourth-century Emperor Constantine. He distinguishes between books given as gifts either to or from kings

and books for royal use, tracing the development of royal libraries into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The collection has rich holdings of both English and European illuminated manuscripts. Scot McKendrick explores the continuous history of collecting Continental books by English royalty, from the time of Edward III to Henry VIII. Many of the most splendid examples found in the collection are European in origin, coming particularly from France and the Netherlands. These books have generally been associated with John, Duke of Bedford, the younger brother of Henry V, who took advantage of his role as Regent of France to take possession of the French royal library, and Edward IV who acquired as many as fifty deluxe manuscripts produced in the southern Netherlands. However, as McKendrick demonstrates, these two collectors were not alone in this interest, highlighting the close personal and cultural ties between England and the Continent. The final essay in the collection by Kathleen Doyle provides an account of the history of the manuscripts held in the Old Royal Library from its foundation under Edward IV to its donation by George II. She discusses the role of individual monarchs such as Henry VIII, who added over 400 manuscripts to the library, and the impact of the Commonwealth government that centralized and inventoried the collection, preserving it for public use. Usefully she also provides an annotated appendix of inventories and catalogues from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

While these essays provide a useful introduction, it is the discussion of the individual manuscripts that are this book's major contribution. The catalogue draws on a range of expertise both from inside the library and beyond, including Joanna Fronska, Richard Gameson, Deirdre Jackson, Stella Panaytova, and Lucy Freeman Sandler. Each manuscript is provided with a detailed full-page entry generally laying out the origins of the text itself as well as the manuscript's production. Comparisons are made with other versions and the provenance of each is discussed, demonstrating the rocky path that some of these works followed before arriving in the British Library. The oldest work in the exhibition is an eighth-century Northumbrian Gospel Book. The works are arranged thematically, with a section devoted to the collection of Edward IV. The categories are broad enough to accommodate the variety of texts included, such as psalters, instructional works, the wonderful itineraries of Matthew Paris, histories, liturgical works and romances, and humanist writings. Examples of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* and Geoffrey of Wales's *Typographica Hiberniae* are included, as well as works by Boccaccio and the deluxe *Coronation Book of Charles V*. Several musical collections are also included, including a Motets collected for Henry VIII. Short, although not comprehensive, bibliographies are provided for each manuscript.

This splendid book makes these manuscripts accessible at last to a wide audience.

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