



1408–10

Vellum with gold leaf,  
ink, and paints

Folio (each):

17 1/8 x 12 3/8 inches  
(43.5 x 31.4 cm)

Other (leather-bound box):

19 1/2 x 14 3/4 x 3 3/8 inches  
(49.5 x 37.5 x 8.6 cm)

### OROSIUS MASTER AND ASSISTANTS

French (active Paris)

The Philip S. Collins Collection,  
gift of Mrs. Philip S. Collins in  
memory of her husband, 1945,  
1945-65-1

### LET'S LOOK

Initial observation:

Encourage students to describe the miniature, the text, the decorated letters, and the borders.

Open Discussion:

Begin an open discussion of the manuscript page by asking students to share their impressions of the work and find visual evidence for their statements.

## LA CITÉ DE DIEU (THE CITY OF GOD)

This decorated page is from an early fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript (handwritten text decorated with gold and paint). Titled *La Cité de Dieu* (*The City of God*), the manuscript is a French translation of a book originally written in Latin by Saint Augustine during the fifth century. The manuscript was commissioned during the reign of Charles V—possibly by the king himself—when books on religious subjects and ancient history were read with interest by the nobles of the French court.

This page of the manuscript includes Chapter One and part of Chapter Two of Book III of *La Cité de Dieu*. The text is written in formal Gothic script, with a decorative initial beginning each chapter (*J* for the first chapter and *E* for the second). Words in red ink mark the end of Chapter One. The miniature (small painting) on this page illustrates the story told in the text, and the borders framing the miniature are embellished with an elaborate ivy pattern.

## ABOUT LA CITÉ DE DIEU

*La Cité de Dieu* is a twenty-two-volume text written in 413–26 CE by Saint Augustine, an early Christian bishop and theologian. When Rome was destroyed by the Visigoths (invaders from the North) in 410 CE, people thought the mythological gods and goddesses were punishing Rome for the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Saint Augustine's book refutes this charge by explaining human history as a conflict between the City of God (made up of Christians) and the Earthly City (composed of nonbelievers). The eternally peaceful City of God is presented in vivid contrast to the Earthly City, which is doomed to rise and fall repeatedly—like Rome.

## ABOUT THE MINIATURE

The miniature presents almost symmetrical depictions of the rise and fall of the ancient city of Troy, one of the mythological examples Saint Augustine cites to illustrate the fate of the Earthly City. A fine line divides the picture in two, and buildings on each side are labeled Ilion (Troy). The architecture seems dollhouse-like—the crowded buildings are small in proportion to the figures—and is shown from multiple perspectives, some buildings from below, others from above, and still others from the right or left side.

Phrases below the city identify what is taking place: on the left, the building of Troy (*l'edification de troie*); on the right, the destruction of Troy (*la destruction de troie*), showing the city under attack, crumbling and burning. In the lower right are two warships full of armored knights brandishing shields and weapons. In the upper left a man dressed in red and gold gestures towards two gold statues in a shrine. Text on the base of the shrine identifies the gesturing figure as Laomedon, king of Troy, and the two statues as the mythological gods Apollo and Neptune. According to Saint Augustine, Troy fell because King Laomedon broke a promise he had made to Apollo and Neptune.

## BOOKS IN THE 1400S

Many manuscripts made in the late Middle Ages were religious texts written in Latin and used by the Church for devotional purposes. With the advent of international trade, the rise of the middle class, and the establishment of universities during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, European cities flourished, literacy spread, and book production expanded. Books were no longer made only in monasteries, but were also produced in secular (nonreligious) workshops in university towns like Paris and Bologna. Booksellers, clustered around universities, sold secondhand books and arranged for new manuscripts to be made. Manuscript prices depended on the quality and quantity of materials and decoration; books as beautifully handcrafted as *La Cité de Dieu* were commissioned by wealthy nobles, but less elaborate manuscripts could be purchased by students and monks.

## HOW ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS WERE MADE

The creation of an illuminated manuscript was an extensive, collaborative process. First, a parchmenter soaked, stretched, and scraped animal skins (usually from a sheep, calf, or goat) to make sheets of parchment or vellum, which were then trimmed, folded, and stitched into groups called gatherings or signatures.

Next, a scribe determined the layout of each page of the volume—areas for text, illustrations, and decorated letters and borders. He then copied the text using a quill pen made from the feather of a goose or swan.

An illuminator added miniatures, border decorations, and areas of gold, or illumination, which reflected light so that the pages seemed to glow. Gold leaf was made from coins hammered into thin sheets that were glued to the page and then burnished (polished by rubbing vigorously) with a tool made from a dogtooth or stone mounted on a handle. Burnishing the gold leaf prevented it from tarnishing, ensuring that it would continue to shine brightly through the present day.

Illuminators worked with brushes made of squirrel or ermine hair inserted into the hollow end of a feather. This miniature was painted in tempera made from pigments (colored powders from ground-up plants and minerals) mixed with either glair (a glue containing egg white) or gum (from fish lime or animal skins). A highly prized blue was made from lapis lazuli, a semiprecious stone from faraway places like Afghanistan. Medieval encyclopedias described “dragonsblood red” as a mixture of blood from elephants and dragons that had killed each other in battle, but it was actually made from plant sap. Finally, a bookbinder collated the gatherings and stitched them to bands along their spines. Most book covers were made of leather-covered wood held shut with a metal clasp.

The names of the artists involved in making illuminated manuscripts were rarely recorded. The illuminator of this miniature may have studied with artists who worked for the Duke of Berry, a nobleman famous for his library of illuminated manuscripts, which included a renowned book of hours (book of prayers and meditations) called *Les Très Riches Heures (The Very Richly Illustrated Hours)*.

After the mid-fifteenth century, production of books like this one gradually diminished because of the invention of movable type—printing type made up of individual, reusable pieces that are assembled so that any desired line of text can be printed. Today, a mechanical process derived from movable type is used in producing printed materials, including books and newspapers.

## HOW THIS ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT CAME TO THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Although this book is believed to have been made for King Charles V of France, its owners are unknown until the eighteenth century, when it was listed as one of the four finest manuscripts possessed by the Marquess of Lothian in Scotland. The leather binding also dates from that time (it was added by James Scott, a bookbinder in Edinburgh). The manuscript was later bought by

Cortlandt Bishop at the sale of the Lothian collection in New York in 1932, and then acquired in 1938 by Philip Collins, whose widow donated his entire collection of manuscripts to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1945.

## DIRECTED LOOKING

- How was this manuscript made?

*Motivate group brainstorming and information-sharing by distributing cards with the following words printed on them:*

parchmenter	gold leaf	pigments
vellum	burnish	glair
scribe	miniature	dragonsblood
quill	squirrel hair	lapis lazuli
illuminator	tempera	bookbinder

- Looking at this page and the way it is decorated, what can you tell about who commissioned this manuscript?

*Because this book was elaborately decorated with precious materials (including gold), it would have been too expensive for students, monks, or anyone but the very wealthy.*

- What is happening in the miniature?

*One side of the city of Troy, or Illion, is being built while the other is being destroyed. King Laomedon (pronounced lay-O-meh-DON) stands before gold statues of the gods Apollo and Neptune and gestures toward his city. Knights in armor are arriving to attack the city. French and Latin words tell what is happening on each side of the picture and identify some of the figures.*

- What kind of lettering is this? Where can it be seen today?

*The formal Gothic script in this manuscript was used in the late Middle Ages. Today we see this lettering in the mastheads (titles) of some newspapers (such as The New York Times), as well as in invitations, holiday cards, and monograms. A modified Gothic font is also available on many computer software programs.*

## ACTIVITIES

- Explore the tools and materials used to make illuminated manuscripts by making pens and brushes from feathers, inventing various ink recipes, and researching the minerals used to make pigments.
- Experiment with making small books, following these steps for making gatherings or signatures. Fold a piece of paper in half lengthwise to form a *folio*. Fold in half again, crosswise, to make a *quarto* (four thicknesses). Fold the paper in half once again, lengthwise, for an *octavo* (eight thicknesses). Make pages by slicing open the folds along the outer edge with a letter opener or table knife. Design and decorate the pages.
- Make a large, illuminated, decorated initial using tempera paint, gold foil, and gold ink on watercolor paper.
- Research the invention of movable type and modern printing, and compare these methods with illuminated manuscript production. Then debate mass production versus handicraft.

*This illuminated manuscript page is included in Images of the Middle Ages, a set of teaching posters and resource book produced by the Division of Education and made possible by a generous grant from the Lila Wallace—Reader’s Digest Fund.*