

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Williams College Museum of Art Presents
*The Book of Kings: Art, War, and the Morgan Library's
Medieval Picture Bible*

January 29-April 24, 2005

Williamstown, MA— the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) will open a new exhibition entitled "The Book of Kings: Art, War, and the Morgan Library's Medieval Picture Bible" on January 29, 2005. Organized by The Walters Art Gallery, (Baltimore, MD,) the exhibition features an exquisite facsimile of one of the most visually stunning illuminated manuscripts produced in the Middle Ages, known as the Morgan Picture Bible. Accompanying this Bible will be other objects from the Gothic period, psalters and reliquaries, arms and armor, other religious artifacts, and everyday domestic items, many similar to those seen in the pages of the manuscript itself.

The Morgan Picture Bible was designed to bring selected Old Testament stories into the 13th-century present of its original audience. The creators' intent was to make those stories not only powerful and relevant, but as appealing and entertaining as possible by placing biblical heroes in contemporary settings. For example, depictions of architecture evoke the castles and houses of 13th-century French towns; battle scenes are full of 13th-century armor, weapons, and battle insignia.

Scholars believe the Picture Bible was commissioned by Louis IX of France, the Capetian monarch who built the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris to house the Crown of Thorns, before leaving for the first of his two crusades in 1248. The Bible eventually passed to the Cardinal of Cracow, who then offered it as a diplomatic gift to the great Muslim leader Shah 'Abbas in the early 17th century. The manuscript then found its way into the hands of Jewish owners, probably in the 18th century. These various owners added inscriptions around the

images in Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian. With these inscriptions, the keepers of the manuscript have used their own languages to lay claim to the book, appropriating its narrative content and assimilating it into their own cultures. The Bible ultimately provides unique insights into the politics, religion, and culture of a world in transition.

Griffith Mann, Zanvyl Krieger Curatorial Fellow at the Walters and one of the curators responsible for the exhibition, says, "from its inception in the middle of the thirteenth century, the remarkable manuscript that provided the platform for this exhibition existed independent of any accompanying text. As a result, its numerous full-page illuminations offer a dramatic glimpse at the ways in which medieval painters used pictures to tell stories that connected their world with the biblical past."

Related Events

Gallery Talk: *The Book of Kings* and *Beyond East and West*

Wednesday, February 16, 2005

4:00 pm

Peter Low, Assistant Professor of Art, and Holly Edwards, Lecturer in Art, will discuss the connection between these two new exhibitions at WCMA.

WCMA Celebrates the Winter Exhibitions

Reception

Wednesday, February 16, 2005

5:00 pm-6:00 pm

WCMA Family Art Days

Vive le Roi! Thursday and Friday April 21 & 22, 2005 10:00 am-12:00 pm and 1:00 pm-3:00 pm Saturday, April 23 10:00 am-3:00 pm. Celebrate the finale of WCMA's special exhibition *The Book of Kings* in royal style! Explore the "Crusader Bible," try on chain mail, riding britches, royal capes and more! Illustrate a manuscript of your own and design a medieval chalice with which to toast your friends and family. *Vive le roi!*

Publicity Images Available

Publicity images for *The Book of Kings: Art, War, and the Morgan Library's Medieval Picture Book* and other current exhibitions are available for use. *The Book of Kings* is organized by the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, with the cooperation of the J. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. This exhibition is generously supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities: expanding our understanding of the world. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily

reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.