



The Rothschilds and their Collections of Illuminated Manuscripts

Christopher de Hamel

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The family art collections of the Rothschilds were legendary for their extravagance and refinement. This is the first history of the Rothschilds as bibliophiles and especially as collectors of medieval illuminated manuscripts. It follows the extraordinary and sometimes mysterious collections of Barons Adolphe de Rothschild (1823-1900), of Naples, Ferdinand (1839-1898) of Vienna and Waddesdon, Edmond (1845-1934) of Paris, and others, following the restless movement of these supremely important works of art across the private libraries of Europe.

In 1940, the Rothschild collections in Paris were looted by the Nazis, and the tale pursues the fate of the stolen manuscripts, some of them still missing. Almost no Rothschild manuscript ever includes a bookplate or ownership mark. The inquiry traces literally hundreds of illuminated manuscripts, including some of the world's most famous books, made for the Duc de Berry, Catherine of Cleves, Isabella the Catholic, and many others, and finds them to have one thing in common: they were all, at one time, Rothschild possessions.

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