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J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS
EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY: FOOD IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

New Museum Exhibition Explores the Cultivation, Preparation,
and Consumption of Food



The Temperate and the Intemperate, about 1475 – 1480. Master of the Dresden Prayer Book (Flemish, active about 1480 - 1515).
Tempera colors and ink on parchment. 6 7/8 x 7 5/8 in. 91.MS.81.recto. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 43, recto

LOS ANGELES – Drawn primarily from the J. Paul Getty Museum's prestigious collection of illuminated manuscripts, *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: Food in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, on view October 13, 2015- January 3, 2016, at the Getty Museum at the Getty Center, celebrates the cultivation, preparation, and consumption of food as the framework for daily labor and leisure in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

"The harvesting, hunting, preparation, and consumption of food are central to daily life in all societies and it is therefore not surprising to find activities relating to food throughout the pages of illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance," says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "These images and the corresponding text

provide rare insights into the kitchens and hearths of the time, revealing cooking techniques, kitchen tools, and popular dishes. In a period when most high art was commissioned by the Church, these images of kitchen life provide a uniquely quotidian counterpoint, even when integrated into biblical scenes."

While not as plentiful and varied as it is today, food in the Middle Ages and Renaissance occupied people's thoughts and filled the engaging stories and scenes in illuminated manuscripts. Integral to all aspects of life, food played a central role in Christian devotional practices, with the consecration of bread and wine at mass being a key theme. Food also figured prominently in biblical stories and saintly miracles, where it served to nourish both the body and the soul. And, feasting scenes display both grand and modest tables set with food, as well as carefully arranged diners of different social classes, sometimes consuming to the point of gluttony and drunkenness. These are the themes explored in the exhibition's three sections:

Nature's Yearly Banquet

Many medieval manuscripts used in Christian liturgy and prayer open with a calendar to guide readers on particular feast days. These frequently feature the agricultural tasks, animal husbandry, and other daily activities corresponding to each month. Most of the calendar scenes featured in the exhibition revolve around wheat – the foundation of the medieval European diet.

In the *September: A Man Sowing* (about 1415-1420) by the Workshop of the Rohan Master, the astrological sign for Libra is revealed in the star-filled sky which corresponds to the calendar month. "The medieval agricultural cycle in northern Europe began in September. Here a peasant sprinkles golden seeds that he draws from a cloth draped around his neck. The elegance of this toiling man and his movement reflects the graceful style of painting produced for the French court and other high-ranking patrons around the early 1400s," explains Christine Sciacca, assistant curator in the Department of Manuscripts at the Getty Museum.

Preparation and Consumption

After the harvest and the hunt, raw foods were prepared for consumption and then shared at meals and banquets, both simple and lavish. Most of the meals in the images in this section of the exhibition appear modest and spare, but contemporary accounts reveal that medieval feasts often involved spectacle and the theatrical presentation of dishes. Court



The Feast of Dives, about 1510 – 1520. Master of James IV of Scotland (Flemish, before 1465 - about 1541). Tempera colors, gold, and ink on parchment. 9 1/8 x 6 9/16 in. 83.ML.114.21v.. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig IX 18, fol. 21v

artists, for example, were sometimes called upon to add final visual flourishes, such as gilding on edibles, which would have impressed and amazed guests.

Some illustrated texts offer suggestions about the curative powers of particular foods and issue warnings against those that could cause gastric distress or imbalance to the bodily humors. In Master of James IV of Scotland's *The Feast of the Dives: Lazarus's Soul Carried to Abraham* (about 1510-20), the morals surrounding eating, especially the perils of consuming to excess and the depravity of the glutton, are emphasized in the story of the poor man Lazarus. The beggar approaches the door of a well-fed rich man (Dives) and begs for table scraps, at which point the man sets his dog upon him. The punishment for this lack of generosity is illustrated by Dives suffering in hell while Lazarus ascends to heaven.

Food for the Soul

Food not only structured daily life in the Middle Ages but also underpinned numerous stories recorded in Hebrew and Christian scripture. The Master of the Oxford Hours' *Adam and Eve Eating the Forbidden Fruit* (about 1440-50) illustrates the origins of humanity with Adam and Eve. Food was too tempting for them to resist, leading to their expulsion from paradise, and also to their new self-knowledge, which Saint Augustine blames in his text for the ultimate mortality of humans.

The types of food mentioned or depicted in illuminated accounts are often limited to bread, fish, and wine, reflecting the simple diet of biblical times as well as Christian fasting, modesty, and piety. The texts and images in this section of the exhibition present food as spiritual nourishment, inviting readers and viewers to consider the deeper meaning of what was harvested, prepared, and consumed.

Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: Food in the Middle Ages and Renaissance will be on view October 13, 2015 –January 3, 2016 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center. The installation was conceived by Christine Sciacca, assistant curator in the Museum's Department of Manuscripts.

This exhibition is presented in conjunction with *The Edible Monument: The Art of Food for Festivals* at the Getty Research Institute (October 13, 2015 –March 13, 2016). This exhibition, drawn from the Getty Research Institute's *Festival Collection*, features rare books and prints, including early cookbooks and serving manuals that illustrate the methods and materials for making edible monuments.



Adam and Eve Eating the Forbidden Fruit, about 1440 – 1450. Master of the Oxford Hours (French, active about 1440s). Tempera colors, gold and silver paint on parchment. 14 1/4 x 10 3/4 in. 83.MN.129.31v. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig XI 10, fol. 31v

Getty visitors interested in exploring both exhibitions can discover how people ate, celebrated, and related to food in early modern Europe with a fun, educational activity, the *Art of Food* mobile tour. Geared for all ages, this tour will guide visitors through both exhibitions and a journey through galleries.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

The J. Paul Getty Museum collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum's mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

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