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A KNIGHT'S TALE AND A DAMSEL'S DEVOTION:

The Getty Museum Presents *Chivalry in the Middle Ages*

LOS ANGELES – Damsels in distress, knights in shining armor, and tales of love and adventure – these notions of chivalry have shaped popular understanding of the Middle Ages. Artwork from the period reveals that chivalry, first developed as a model code of conduct for the medieval knighthood, eventually permeated almost every aspect of aristocratic culture. The J. Paul Getty Museum's newest exhibition *Chivalry in the Middle Ages*, on view July 8–November 30, 2014 at the Getty Center, demonstrates how manuscripts of a variety of genres, ranging from romances to hunting treatises, played a central role in promoting the tenets of chivalry. Lavish illuminations like those shown in the exhibition contributed to the magnificence of the court and the visual splendor of elite life.



A Royal Wedding Feast; An Unsuitably Dressed Guest Cast into Darkness, 1469. Follower of Hans Schilling (German, active 1459 - 1467) and from the Workshop of Diebold Lauber (German, active 1427 - 1467). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig XV 9, fol. 88v

"The concept of chivalry is one that many of us are familiar with from our younger days when we read tales of King Arthur and Robin Hood," explains Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "The manuscripts on view in this exhibition, all from the Getty's extraordinary collection, both illustrate, and themselves formed a part of, the refined rituals and vibrant lifestyle of the aristocracy in the Middle Ages. Not only were the texts and images of chivalric manuscripts entertaining, but they also the most vivid manifestation of the ideal courtly world for noble readers to explore and emulate."

Courtly Love and Marriage

Telling of heroes' exploits in life and love, romances were among the most cherished illuminated texts of the Middle Ages. Their popularity was in large part due to the captivating images of lovers exchanging amorous letters, arranging furtive trysts, and strolling arm in arm on wealthy estates. These tales typically focused on a young knight's adventurous pursuit of an aristocratic woman who was already married or promised to a high-ranking nobleman. The knight would perform brave and honorable deeds to become worthy of his lady's esteem, and – because the nature of the affection was often secret – their devotion would stand apart from worldly concerns.

"The best-known tales of courtly love are those involving the knights of the Round Table," says Melanie Sympson, former Getty graduate intern and curator of the exhibition. "One 14th-century image in the exhibition shows the knight Tristan escorting the princess Isolde to her marriage with his uncle, King Mark. Along the way, Tristan and Isolde drink a love potion that causes them to fall madly in love, placing Tristan in the difficult position of choosing between the chivalric duty he owes his overlord Mark and the intense longing he feels for Isolde."

One of the Getty's newest manuscript acquisitions, Lieven van Lathem's *Romance of Gillion de Trazegnies* (after 1464), demonstrates the rewards of chivalrous behavior. The scene on view is of the marriage between knight Gillion de Trazegnies and his bride, Marie d'Ostrevant. The marriage was a reward to Gillion by Marie's father, the Count of Hainaut, for the young knight's loyalty and virtue. However, in a trope typical of romances, nefarious villains conspire to separate the couple. At one point, Gillion is tricked into thinking that Marie is dead and marries another woman.

Hunting and Feasting

In the Middle Ages, chivalric customs surrounding food and feasting distinguished the nobility from commoners. Courtly feasts were held to celebrate holidays or special events such as weddings and knighting ceremonies. Sumptuous banquets elevated the everyday activity of eating into splendid affairs, allowing nobles to demonstrate their generosity and refinement. Manuscript illuminations commemorated not only these medieval hunts and festivities but also represented banquets from classical antiquity and the Bible with the same trappings of contemporary elite culture.

In *A Hunter and Dogs Pursuing a Fallow Deer* (about 1430-40) and *Hunters and Dogs Pursuing a Wild Goat* (about 1430-40), well-trained hounds chase a stag while eager archers aim their crossbows at a wild goat below them. These illuminations appear in the *Book of the Hunt*, the most popular hunting manual of the Middle Ages. Biblical subjects could also be given the chivalric touch, as in a depiction of *The Writing on the Wall at Belshazzar's Feast* (about 1400-1410). The Old Testament tale is visualized as a medieval king's banquet, complete with musicians who entertain the group as they dine in luxury.

Games and Tournaments

For the medieval nobility, games and tournaments were more than entertaining pastimes. Learned from a young age, aristocratic activities such as chess, swordplay, and sports were part of a broader education in acquiring skills of strategy, strength, and dexterity, as well as abstract qualities of courtesy and fairness. Tournaments were among the grandest and most important contests in the later Middle Ages, with jousts becoming the highlight of festivals that could last for several days. Elegant images rendered by medieval artists provided visual instruction in competitive techniques and commemorated events of historical significance.

In *Initial E: An Equestrian Duel between a Creditor and a Debtor* (about 1290-1310), a man who has borrowed money disputes the charges of his creditor. The sum owed by the debtor is significant, and, by order of the king, he is required to challenge the creditor to a duel. This manuscript contains the only known copy of the law code of Aragon ordered by King James I, which includes aspects of a chivalric culture such as the judicial duel. In a less bloody demonstration of game play, a layout of chess problems from the late 1300s presents different strategies and the sequence of moves required to checkmate an opponent.

Chivalry in the Middle Ages is on view July 8-November 30, 2014 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center. Because these works on paper are light sensitive, this exhibition is presented in two installations (July 8-September 21, 2014 and September 23-November 30, 2014), providing Museum visitors an opportunity to see two different sets of images.

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A Tournament Contest, about 1560 – 1570. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig XV 14, fol. 8.

audience by presenting and interpreting the works of art through educational programs, special exhibitions, publications, conservation, and research.

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