



Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England

By Michael Camille

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What is the status of visual evidence in history? Can we actually see the past through images? Where are the traces of previous lives deposited? Michael Camille addresses these important questions in *Mirror in Parchment*, a lively, searching study of one medieval manuscript, its patron, producers, and historical progeny.

The richly illuminated Luttrell Psalter was created for the English nobleman Sir Geoffrey Luttrell (1276-1345). Inexpensive mechanical illustration has since disseminated the book's images to a much wider audience; hence the Psalter's representations of manorial life have come to profoundly shape our modern idea of what medieval English people, high and low, looked like at work and at play. Alongside such supposedly truthful representations, the Psalter presents myriad images of fantastic monsters and beasts. These patently false images have largely been disparaged or ignored by modern historians and art historians alike, for they challenge the credibility of those pictures in the Luttrell Psalter that we wish to see as real.

In the conviction that medieval images were not generally intended to reflect daily life but rather to shape a new reality, Michael Camille analyzes the Psalter's famous pictures as representations of the world, imagined and real, of its original patron. Addressed are late medieval chivalric ideals, physical sites of power, and the boundaries of Sir Geoffrey's imagined community, wherein agricultural laborers and fabulous monsters play a similar ideological role. The Luttrell Psalter thus emerges as a complex social document of the world as its patron hoped and feared it might be.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Michael Camille is Professor of Art History at the University of Chicago. His books include *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (1989) and *Image on the Edge* (Reaktion, 1992).

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