



TITLE: *The Story of Abraham* (page from *Heiligenleben*)

ARTIST: Unknown

DATE: 1496

SIZE: 10 x 6 ½ inches

MEDIUM: Woodcut and Moveable Type

ACQUISITION #: 2001.1.102

ADDITIONAL WORK IN COLLECTION BY ARTIST: No.



VOCABULARY

Illuminated Manuscript: a manuscript in which the text is supplemented with decoration such as initials, borders, and miniature illustrations.

Woodblock print: technique for printing text, images, or patterns used. It is a block of wood engraved in relief which is used to print.

Hagiography: The writing of the lives of saints. The word comes from the Greek “hagios” which means “holy” and “graphia” which means “writing.” The word literally means “holy writing.”

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Just like books of gospels and biblical illuminated manuscripts, this page contains the detail and precision of other religious works. The literal meaning for “Heiligenleben” is “holy life.” This page, which tells the story of Abraham is an example of hagiography. This page is possibly a part of a hagiographic illuminated manuscript, such as *Der Heiligen Leben* or *The Lives of Saints*, produced by a Dominican monastery in Nuremberg, Germany during the 1400s. This manuscript was as large as a bible and provided readings over the course of a year and included saints’ feast days as well. Many such illuminated manuscripts were created simply to teach people about saints and/or martyrs. In addition, books that spoke of the lives of the saints usually told the story of the way they died. According to religious text, Abraham died at the age of 175. Biblically, Abraham is the saint who began monotheism.

SOURCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movable_type
- <http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/ukiyo-e-woodblock-printing-process>
- <https://www.inksaver.co.za/en/blog/History-of-printing-part-1-woodblock-printing.php>
- <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/24901>
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/history/abraham_1_s.html
- http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/medievalbook/churchbooks/Lives_of_Saints.htm

ILLUMINATED LETTERS & MOVABLE TYPE

Movable type first reached Europe in the 15th century, the century in which *The Story of Abraham* was printed. Movable type made the text in illuminated manuscripts more uniform, mechanical, and easier to create. However, the illuminated lettering at the beginning of the paragraphs in this book was done by woodblock. The illuminations and color allow the pages to appear more vibrant, giving the eye a break from the intensity of the script. The illuminated letters are more detailed than that of the moveable type. In addition, they are larger and contain colorful, curvilinear, organic designs.



Above: letter punch

MEDIA AND PROCESS DESCRIPTION

The first metal movable type in Europe was invented in Germany by Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz. Between 1436 and 1450, he created the hardware and technique for casting letters. Gutenberg devised the first practical method of making cheap copies of letter punches in large quantities needed to print complete books. He also invented oil based inks for printing on paper and the first Latin typefaces. Scholars speculate that the development of movable type in Europe was progressive and not a single innovation.

Completed By: Natalia C. Martinez, Summer 2018

LIVES OF THE ADMIRIED GRADES K-5

Session Activity: In this session, students will learn about the process of creating illuminated manuscripts, their content, and the historical context in which they were written. Students will create their own illuminated pages.

Objectives:

- Students will create facsimiles of pages from a manuscript like *Lives of Saints*.
- Students will gain an understanding of the historical value of illuminated manuscripts.
- Students will gain an understanding of movable type and its invention.
- Students will write about admired persons.

Materials: Styrofoam sheets, printing ink, markers, crayons, colored pencils, paper, pencil, ruler.

Procedure:

Discuss the use of movable type in manuscripts and the way it was a turning point in history. Illuminated manuscripts were then created more easily and in a timely manner. While the text was completed with the movable type, the images and illuminated lettering were not and woodblock prints were often used for those. Manuscripts, like *Lives of the Saints*, were about admired people. Show the students images of movable type and of illuminated manuscripts and then ask them: Who do they admire? Who are people important in their lives about whom they would write so their stories may live on?

After showing the students images of illuminated manuscripts, have them make their own pages about persons they admire. These can be family members, friends, or celebrities. They will draw scenes to represent admired persons, and will write their stories. As in the manuscripts, students will create illuminated letters to begin each paragraph. Styrofoam prints of letters can be used instead of woodblocks. All students' pages can be combined to create a class book called *Lives of the Admired*.



Illuminated letter, *Heiligenleben (Lives of the Saints)*, 14th Century

Visual Arts Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: K-5

Strand C: Cultural and Historical Connections

Standard 1: The student understands the visual arts in relation to history and culture.

Benchmark: VA.C.1.1.1 Know that specific works of art belong to particular cultures, times, and places

Visual Arts Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: 6-12

Strand C: Cultural and Historical Connections

Standard 1: The student understands the visual arts in relation to history and culture.

Benchmark: VA.C.1.4.1 Understand how social, cultural, ecological, religious, and political conditions influence the function, meaning and execution of works of art.

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS AFTER THE INVENTION OF MOVABLE TYPE GRADES 6-12

Session Activity:

Use these questions listed in the procedure below to introduce the students to an assignment of a two page paper on analysis and research of illuminated manuscripts after the invention of movable type. Students will include information from a teacher-created powerpoint as well as their own original research. After the papers are written, students will orally present information they've discovered and the way the information relates to the manuscripts originally studied, like the example presented from *Heiligenleben*.

Objectives:

- Students will gain an understanding of movable type and its uses in illuminated manuscripts.
- Students will gain an understanding of woodblock prints and their significance within illuminated manuscripts
- Each student will write a two page essay on the history and uses of movable type and woodblock prints in illuminated manuscripts.

Materials: a pencil, paper, computer or access to the internet, xeroxes of illuminated manuscript pages, powerpoint.

Procedure: Using the information given, as well as information from other sources, create a powerpoint for the students on the uses of movable type and the way it came to be used. In addition, hand out xeroxes of several illuminated manuscript pages and have the students analyze the sheets. What is unique about each manuscript page? How was the text and imaging produced? Do you recognize the language in which it was written? What is the purposes of these pages? Describe all aspects of the imagery. After reviewing the information on movable type and illuminated manuscripts, assign the essay and the oral presentation. Require students to include at least two images to demonstrate their prints. They must use MLA or Chicago Manual Style for their essays.

Resources:

<https://www.inksaver.co.za/en/blog/History-of-printing-part-1-woodblock-printing.php>
http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/medievalbook/churchbooks/Lives_of_Saints.htm
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movable_type