CLASS DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

BRUGES: MAGNET FOR INTERNATIONAL CREATIVES IN THE 1390s

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Around 1390 a scribe named Johannes de Ecclesia acquired a 50-year-old book of hours, took it apart, and added material to it. Although adding to finished manuscripts was a common way of upgrading them, several aspects of this event are unusual. First, the book was in roll rather than codex form, and while the original manuscript was unwieldy, the resulting one is 11 meters long and nearly impossible to use. Second, while the original manuscript was made in England, the material was added in Bruges, but copied models from Northern France. Third, the scribe may have come from Catalonia, and his vernacular name may have been Juan Iglesias (= Johannes de Ecclesia). Fourth, the texts he added to the roll were executed in a variety of display scripts. Thus, the resulting object was truly international, and of dubitable utility. In this talk, I consider Bruges as a site where scribes, illuminators, book collectors, and other literary creatives gathered before 1400: Bruges formed a site of creative explosion. I also consider this unusual roll as a trace of multiple scribes’ creative effort.

Kathryn M. Rudy is the author of five books, including Rubrics, Images and Indulgences in Late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Piety in Pieces: How medieval readers customized their manuscripts (Open Book Publishers, 2016); and Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books (Yale University Press, 2015). She was a fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in Amsterdam in 2018-19. Currently she holds a Leverhulme Fellowship to develop tools for the technical analysis of medieval manuscripts. She has held a Paul Mellon Senior Fellowship (2017-18), as well as grants from the British Academy, the Bodleian Library, the Getty Research Institute, and the Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie (IKKM) at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.