ILLUMINATING THE WORD IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

This richly illustrated study addresses the essential first steps in the development of the new phenomenon of the illuminated book, which innovatively introduced colourful large letters and ornamental frames as guides for the reader’s access to the text. Tracing their surprising origins within late Roman reading practices, Lawrence Nees shows how these decorative features stand as ancestors to features of printed and electronic books we take for granted today, including font choice, word spacing, punctuation, and sentence capitalization. Two hundred photographs, nearly all in color, illustrate and document the decisive change in design from ancient to medieval books. Featuring an extended discussion of the importance of race and ethnicity in twentieth-century historiography, this book argues that the first steps in the development of this new style of book were taken on the European continent within classical practices of reading and writing, and not, as is usually presented, among the non-Roman “barbarians.”

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