

# TOUCHING PARCHMENT

## W MEDIEVAL USERS RUBBED, HANDLED, AND KISSED THEIR MANUSCRIPTS

## VOLUME 1: OFFICIALS AND THEIR BOOKS

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# Coda

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This volume has offered an approach to reception theory, in that the user/viewer/reader co-produces meaning by creating a performance around, with, and in response to, the book and its contents. Insofar as the user/viewer/reader leaves a trace on the page, he or she is also co-producing the surface design alongside the illuminator and scribe, sometimes adding marks, sometimes rubbing them away, sometimes smearing or flattening surface detail. The method I have exemplified in these pages, unlike traditional art history, does not assume that the images in books will be experienced primarily optically, but that manuscripts (as opposed to just images) will be experienced in tactile, proprioceptive, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory ways, as well. It is my sincere hope that readers who have made it this far will close their screens and make their way to the nearest library with staff who will allow them to leaf through a medieval manuscript. Where is *your* nearest manuscript? French regional libraries are my favorites. When you arrive, avoid the urge to request their most famous manuscript, and ask for something grungy and neglected instead.

Ask this manuscript: How were you held, used, handled? Who interacted with you, and who was your audience? Who, if anyone, read you aloud, and how did they hold their audience's attention? Who touched you, and where?

By asking such questions, you are developing a more intimate approach to history. Please email me and tell me about what you learned by thinking about the physical material in this way.

