

Handle with care!





We love books!

You too? You probably do.

Otherwise you wouldn't be reading this spotlight.

What is little Mary devoutly carrying to the temple?

Right! Her personal, cherished prayer book.



A book was an extremely valuable possession in the Middle Ages.

Before 1450, books were exclusively written by hand and the illustrations were painted by renowned artists.

They were only affordable for royalty, wealthy nobles, or successful patricians.

← This is a miniature in a Book of Hours for Louis XII of France.



Hours for Louis XII, Dr. J. Günther Rare Books



Proudly, he had his monogram inserted: Louis II Duke of Orléans, and Louis XII King of France”.



His predecessor, King Charles VIII, also loved books. Very much so!

Since his Latin was not fluent enough, he had a great deal of literature translated into French.

And some texts were composed especially for him.



Like the one shown here, where he is portrayed in a miniature with the protagonist of the book's story: St. Radegund of Poitiers.

Some manuscripts were as costly as the castles and palaces in which their owners lived.



*Livre des faits du bon chevalier Jacques de Lalaing, Getty Museum,
ex Dr. J. Günther Rare Books*



Books were given as exclusive gifts to powerful rulers.



Books are the secret stars of medieval manuscripts.

They are symbols of saintliness, wisdom, and knowledge.

Only wise people, saints, scholars, or kings are shown carrying them.

All examples from the previous collage as well as this miniature, showing St. Anne teaching her daughter Mary how to read, come from the same Book of Hours.

It belonged to the noble lady, Isabeau de Croix, and was probably a gift from her father. Three of the most prestigious Parisian artists of the early 15th century painted the miniatures.

This outstanding manuscript gives an idea of the esteem and the importance books had in medieval culture and life.



Today, people ask us: how should I handle these precious and rare objects?



Do I have to wear gloves?



Do these books need a specific climate?



A special room temperature, humidity, light?



Can I keep them on a shelf?



What else is there to consider?

You don't have to wear gloves! It actually impairs your sensitivity.

It is much better if you wash your hands before you leaf through a manuscript – or any other book for that matter.

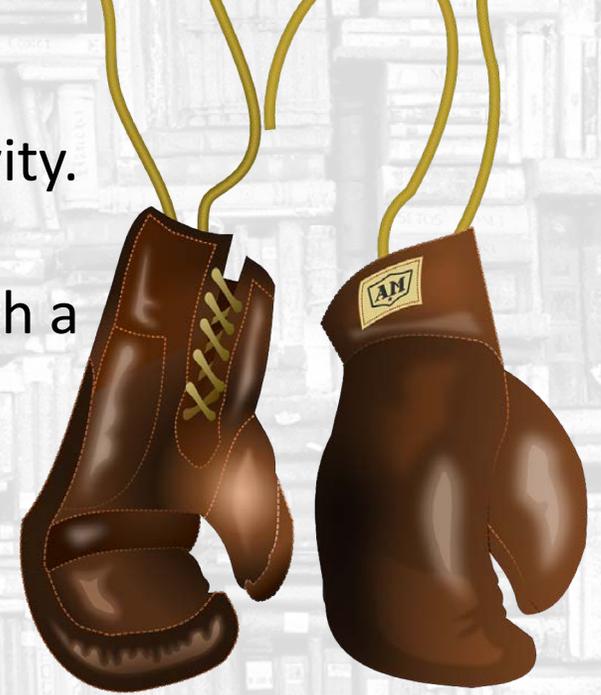
Especially after you had a:



Or some:



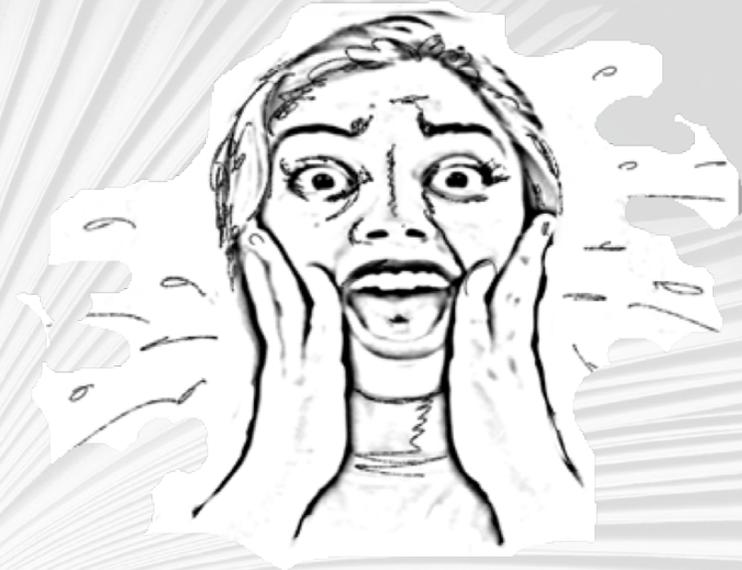
Don't finger the painted parts of the page, usually there are white margins where you can touch the page to turn it.



Don't get overexcited! We know these manuscripts are gorgeous, but appreciate them quietly.



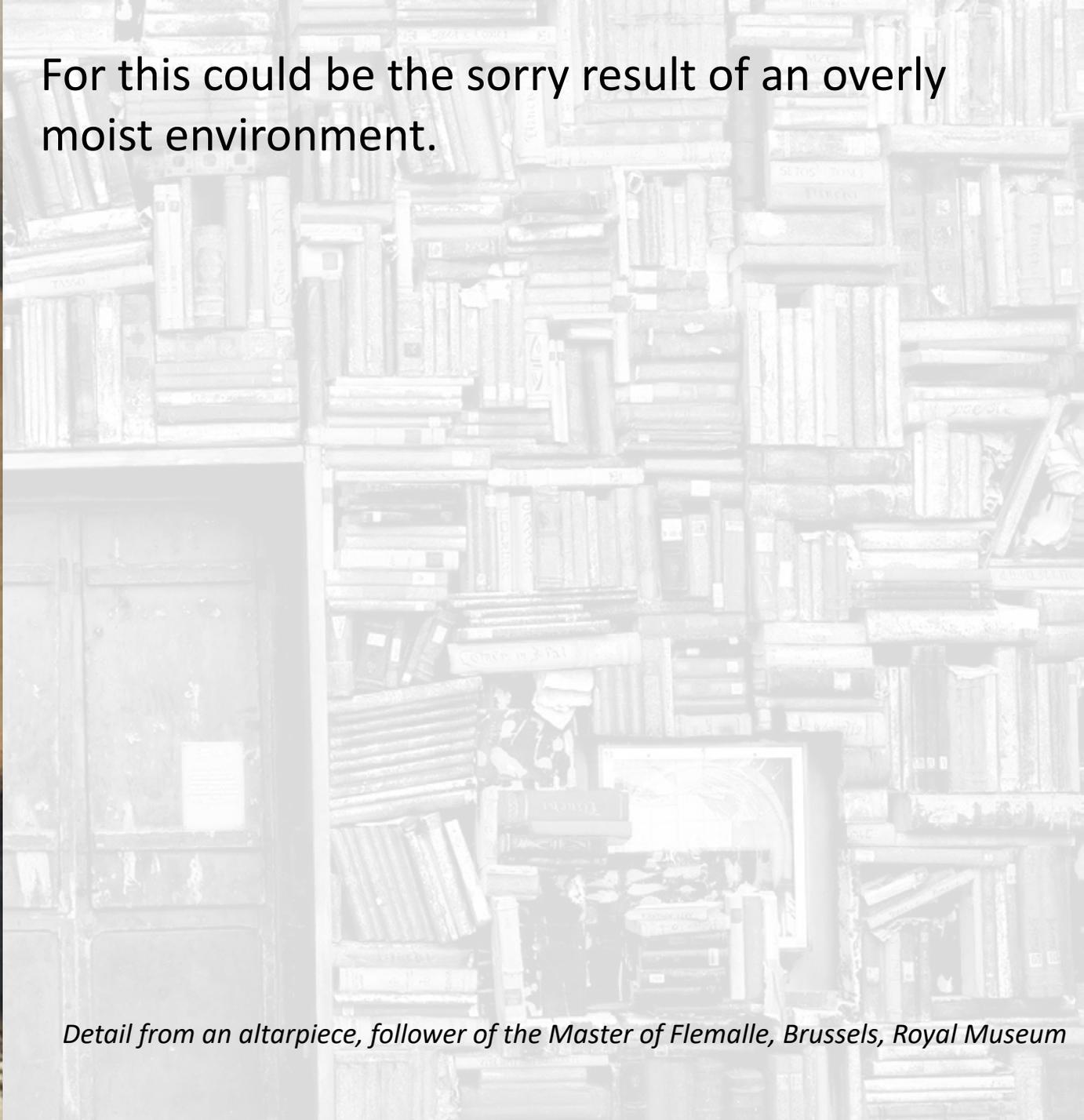
Don't sneeze nor cough on the book. We don't want your DNA sample for the next centuries!



Although they need moderate air humidity, they should not get wet.

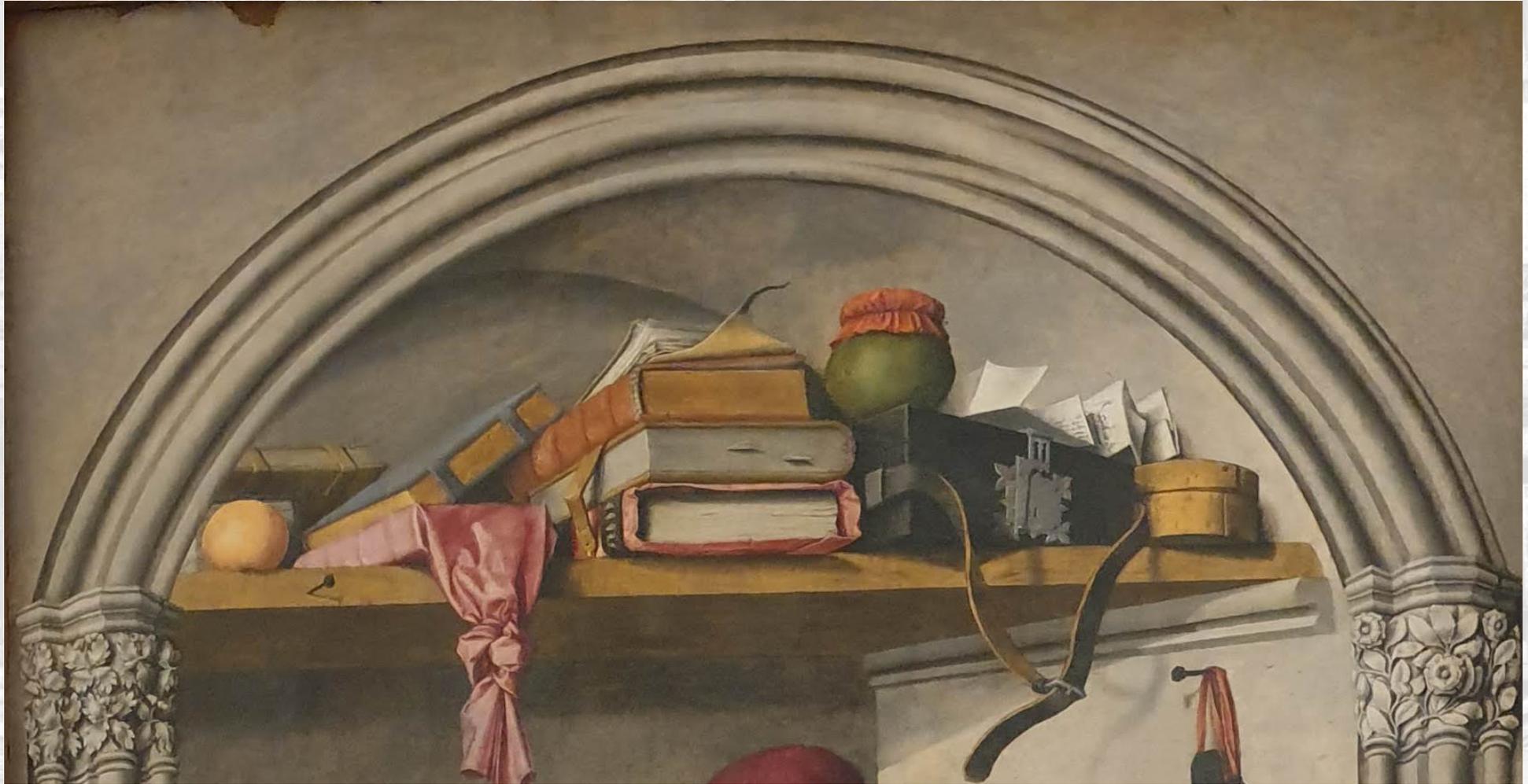


For this could be the sorry result of an overly moist environment.



Detail from an altarpiece, follower of the Master of Flemalle, Brussels, Royal Museum

Yes, you can keep them on a simple shelf. But rather not next to your groceries. A jam jar in the vicinity may be particularly counterproductive!



Barthélemy d'Eyck, Brussels, Royal Museum



Yes, of course you could leave your book on the floor. But be aware....

Gerard David, Frankfurt/Main, Städel Museum

...that your child may step on it.



Hans Baldung Grien, Karlsruhe, Kunsthalle

Speaking of children...

...you may, of course, teach
you child, how to handle a
book properly.



Vittore Carpaccio, *Frankfurt/Main, Städel Museum*

We recommend, however, to wait until s/he has reached a certain age.



Master of the Ursula Legend, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

You never know, what they
may get up to!

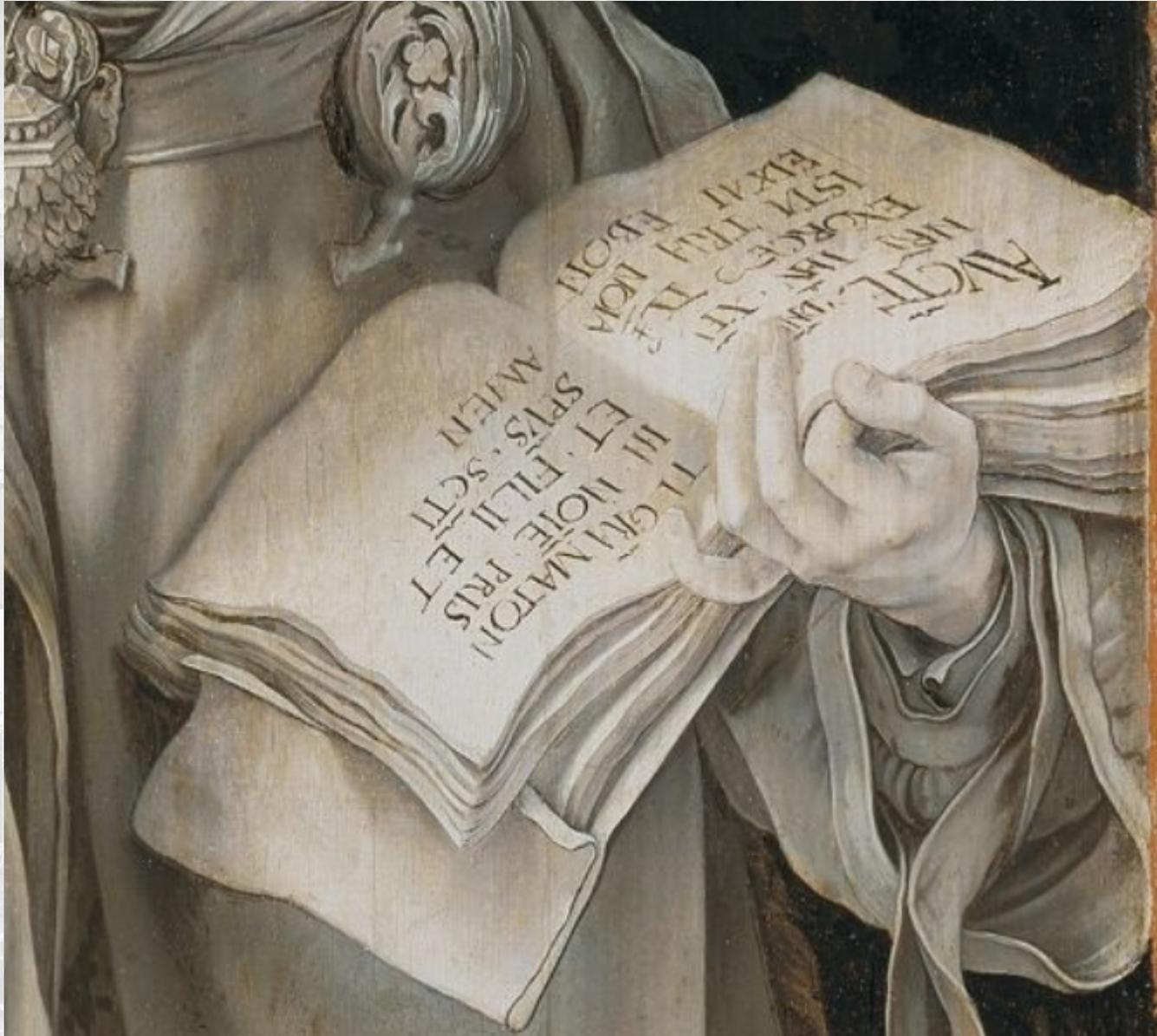


Bruges Master, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

NEVER!



Altarpiece, Kloster Kamp



Grownups can also be somewhat neglectful.



Matthias Grünewald, St. Cyriacus, St. Laurence, details, Frankfurt/Main, Städel Museum

We strongly disapprove!



Disapproving cat, female, private collection



Books are our friends and
our companions.

Treat them gently.

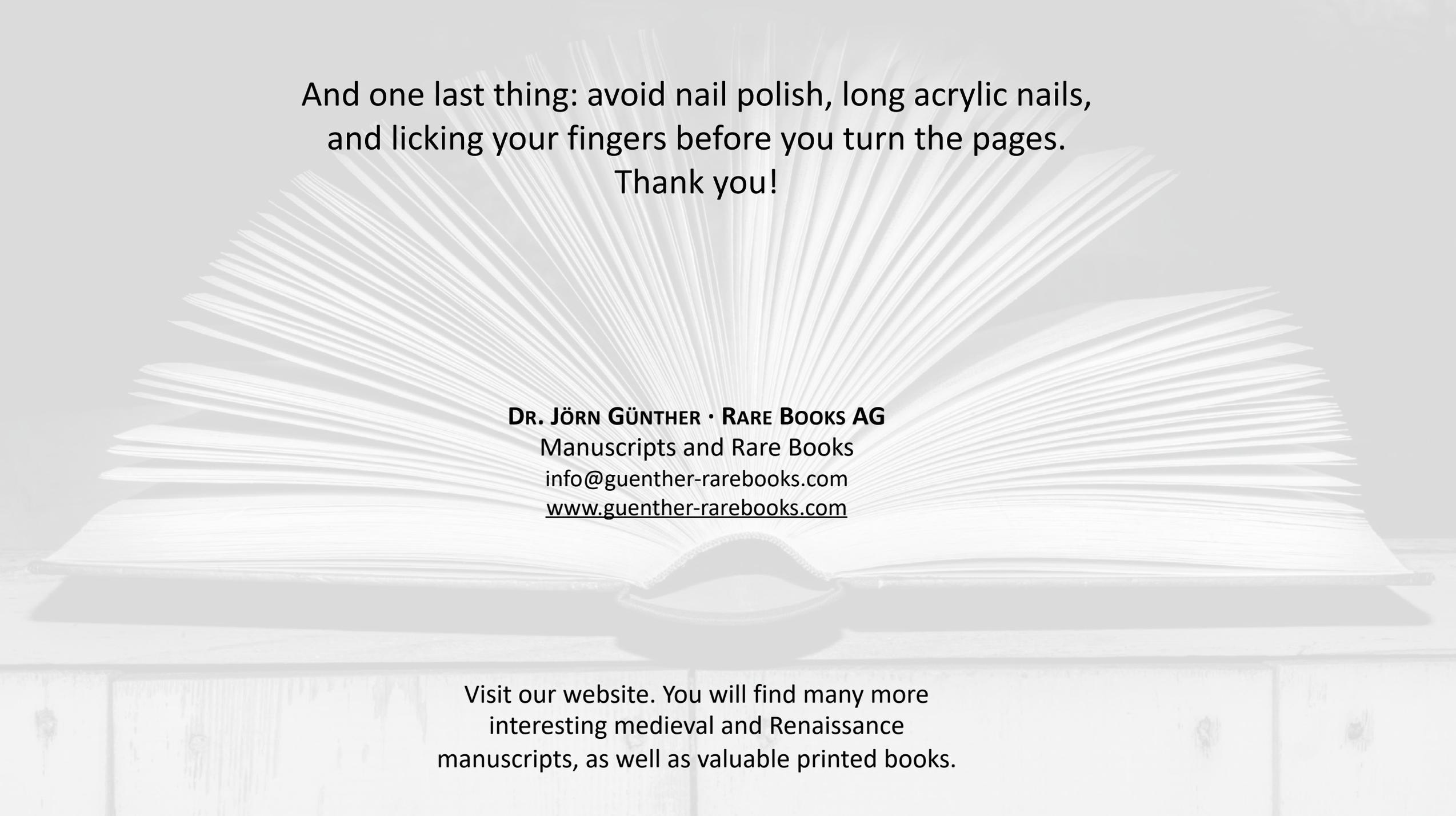
Don't bend or overstretch
their bindings.

*Barthélemy d'Eyck, detail, Brussels, Royal
Museum*

Handle them with respect, as they are a gateway to a wonderful world that is endlessly fascinating.



All these details were found in the Royal Museum, Brussels. Photos by the author.



And one last thing: avoid nail polish, long acrylic nails,
and licking your fingers before you turn the pages.

Thank you!

DR. JÖRN GÜNTHER · RARE BOOKS AG

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