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Introduction: From the Earliest Bibles to Byzantine Manuscripts

ooks produced during the Middle Ages, before the perfection of printing with movable type by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century, were all handwritten and are therefore called manuscripts. The study of these books requires the expertise of many specialists: paleographers who analyze the development of various forms of script, liturgical and literary historians who examine the text and its variations, codicologists who investigate the structure and physical makeup of the book, and art historians who study the decorations, usually small painted pictures. These illustrations are often called miniatures, not because of their size but rather after the minium or orange lead used in their preparation and in the writing of red-ink headings or rubrics. Actually, the miniatures may constitute only a small proportion of the ornament in a manuscript, for frequently the text also contains decorated letters and penned calligraphic flourishes and is surrounded by elaborate borders. All of these elements are present in varying proportions in what is called an "illuminated" manuscript. In the narrow sense the term illumination refers to any ornament to which gold, silver, or bright colors have been added. In many medieval manuscripts, these illuminations take on a major function in relation to the book, whether as symbolic ornament, iconic representations of holy personages, or pictorial narration accompanying and elaborating the text. The scale or lavishness of this decoration is usually determined by the importance of the text it opens, major divisions having elaborate ornament, and lesser subdivisions having less obtrusive accentuation.

The form of handwriting or script and the motifs of decoration and styles of painting in miniatures went through various stages of development during the Middle Ages, but the basic format and structure of the book was established by the late antiqueearly Christian period. The earliest form of the book that was easily portable in the classical world was the scroll or rotulus. It was usually made of sheets of papyrus, which were glued together and contained columns of text. As the reader followed the text, he unrolled it from one side and rolled it up on the other, the direction depending on the language: scrolls containing Hebrew, which is read from right to left, would have unwound from left to right; those containing Greek and Latin, which are read from left to right, would have unwound from right to left.

Papyrus, a paperlike substance made from a reed that grew in the Nile Valley, was fragile, and scrolls were awkward formats because the reader had to rewind to find a particular place in the text. By the end of the first century A.D., however, it was discovered that if the skins of animals, usually calves or lambs, were properly scraped and cured they would make an excellent sturdy, durable, and flexible surface upon which to write. This parchment or vellum was cut into sheets and folded down the middle to form two folios (a bifolio), which could then be inserted with others and bound with other gatherings or quires by being sewn along the crease into a binding. The result was the codex (plural codices)—the book form that we still use today.3 (Parchment was occasionally used in scrolls and papyrus sometimes in codices.) Codices could contain considerably more text and were significantly easier to use than scrolls. In the Middle Ages, the leaves. when they were numbered at all, were foliated, that is, each was numbered on only one side; the convention of numbering both sides of the leaf (pagination) was widely adopted only well after the invention of printing. When speaking of a foliated manuscript one must distinguish between the right-hand or front surface (recto of the folio) and the left-hand or back surface (verso of the folio). The increasing use of the vellum codex coincided with the increasing demand for Christian texts, and as a result the codex became the prevailing form of the medieval book.

The Bible, particularly the New Testament, was the principal religious text of the Christian Middle Ages in Europe and the source of many different compilations of passages for various liturgical purposes. Originally, of course, the Bible had existed as two disparate parts, a Hebrew Old Testament, consisting of books written between the eighth and second century before Christ, and a Greek New Testament written in the first century after Christ. The contents of both parts varied considerably well into the first centuries of the Christian era.

A concerted effort was made by the Jews to standardize the Judaic tradition of the Old Testament after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the emperor Titus in A.D. 70. In order to restore the authority and preserve the purity of the text of the

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Old Testament, the order of the books and the language of their texts were carefully compiled and codified between A.D. 70 and 100. This standardized "Massoretic" or canonical text has survived practically unchanged from that time until the present day.

The oldest surviving Hebrew texts of the Old Testament known at present are the fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls found in caves near Qumran, which are thought to date from between 200 B.C. to A.D. 70.5 Before their discovery in 1947, the oldest known Hebrew texts were believed to date from the ninth century after Christ. Thus this significant archeological discovery provides the earliest examples of the uncodified, pre-Massoretic text of the Old Testament.

Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, surviving Greek translations of the Old Testament predated those known in Hebrew. In the third century B.C., legend has it, seventy-two scholars at Alexandria translated the Hebrew books into Greek in seventy days, thereby lending to this version the name "Septuagint." Two fourth-century copies of this translation have survived, the Codex Sinaiticus (now divided between Leipzig and London, British Library, MS Add. 43725), and the Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican Library. Both of these manuscripts also contained books of the New Testament.

Other fragmentary remains attest to the variety of compilations of biblical texts at an early date in the Christian period. Fragments of papyrus codices found in the Fayoum district of Egypt in 1930 (some for a while in the Chester Beatty Collection and now in scattered collections) were believed to date from the first half of the second century to the fourth century A.D.⁶ The earlier ones contained texts in Greek predating the Septuagint. Most of these fragments contained Old Testament texts in Greek, but there was also a copy of the New Testament containing the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The oldest fragment of the New Testament is a passage from the Gospel of St. John now in the John Rylands Library in Manchester.

Major impetus for the production of an integrated Bible as a Christian book was generated by the studies and translations of the Old Testament by Origen of Alexandria (d. 253). He provided a six-column parallel translation in Greek alongside the Hebrew text in an edition known as the Hexapla. Using manuscript sources first at Alexandria and then, after 231, at Caesarea in Palestine, he based his translations on newly discovered and more authoritative versions of biblical texts.

Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313, which decreed that Christianity be given equal status with other religions in the Roman Empire, removed the fear of persecution for the Christians. Although he was not baptized a Christian until on his death bed in

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337. Constantine nevertheless threw the weight of imperial patronage behind many Christian enterprises, commissioning the construction of new vast basilicas for Christian worship and also the writing of fifty copies of the Greek Bible in vellum codices for his new capital at Constantinople. Although probably not part of this imperial commission, the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus nevertheless reflect this new burst

of production of the Bible for Christian purposes.

The next major event in the development of the Bible in Western Europe was the translation of the text into Latin. Portions of the New Testament had been translated from the Greek into Latin by the early second century, and these translations served as the basis for further variations. In an effort to resolve inconsistencies in these "Old Latin" (Vetus Latinum) versions, as they are now often called, Pope Damasus commissioned St. Jerome in 382 to undertake a revision of the Latin text. Insofar as he was able. Jerome turned to what he considered the most authoritative Greek texts, most of which belonged to the Alexandrian family. In the case of the Old Testament, he made a new translation directly from Hebrew sources. The resulting compilation was the Latin Vulgate Bible, which gradually became the basis for most of the Biblical texts in the Middle Ages.7

The Bible, particularly the New Testament, also served as a source of passages that were excerpted and arranged in a variety of sequences in separate volumes to suit the developing ceremonial needs of the early Church. As the rites for various sacraments became formalized, these texts in specialized liturgical books became more standardized, although they were continually subjected to further variations throughout the Middle Ages.

The Gospels were frequently written as a separate book to be used in the liturgy because lessons were read from it by the deacon during the celebration of the Mass. Originally these lessons were simply read from the chapters of the Gospels in the order that they were written, special passages being singled out only for the most major of feast days, such as Christmas and Easter. After the seventh century, however, it became the custom to assign specific passages to particular feast days. This practice necessitated the numbering of subunits of the chapters and the compilation of a Gospel list or capitulary with the number and the opening and closing words of the lesson. This list provided the order of the lessons to be read during the entire liturgical year. The numbering of these sections is believed to have been done by Ammonius and was used by Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, in the fourth century, to compile a concordance of similar passages in the four Gospels in tabular form. The prefacing of the text of the Gospels with these canon tables, as they are called, soon became

a common practice, and was adopted by St. Jerome in his revision of the Latin Gospels.

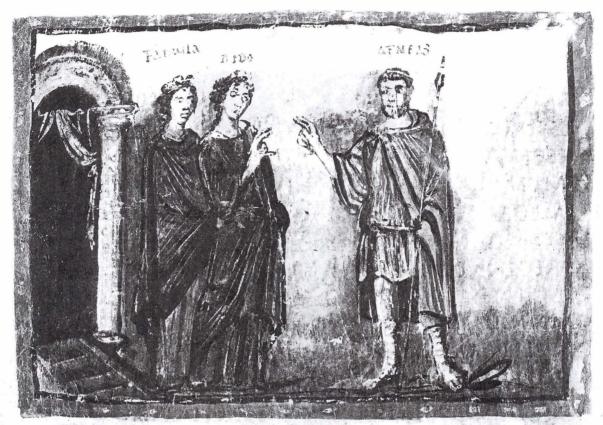
Because the Gospels were used as a liturgical book, a variety of specialized permutations was created. All four Gospels were combined and condensed in a continuous narrative or harmony, called the Diatessaron, by Tatian in the second century. Various readings in the four Gospels were intermixed and arranged according to the sequence of lessons throughout the liturgical year in books called evangelistaries, Gospel lectionaries, or pericopes. The Epistles were excerpted and arranged according to the liturgical order of their readings in epistolaries, and, at an early moment, the Psalms from the Old Testament became a separate entity as the psalter. Representative examples of major stages of this development and specialization are discussed in the following chapters.

The early surviving texts of the Bible such as the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus contain no major decorations or miniatures. A fifth-century Greek Bible, the Codex Alexandrinus Condon, The British Library, MS Roy. I.D. V-VIII), does, however, manifest a late antique tradition of providing penned decoration around explicits or colophons at the completion of each of its books.8 It also shows a predilection for increasing the size of beginning letters of sentences which was gaining in usage

in secular manuscripts of the late classical period.

A major tradition of diagrams and narrative illustration did exist, however, in the scientific and literary texts of the classical period. Usually inserted in the columns of text in scrolls, they served as one of the sources of inspiration for the miniatures of the codex. Kurt Weitzmann had explored in detail these early illustrations and their transformation when adapted to the format of the codex folio.' Although only a handful of early illustrated century Vergilius Vaticanus, containing fragments of the Geor- Z Vatican Vergil (Vatican City Riblioteca American Vergil) Vaticana, Cod. Vat. lat. 3225), may be representative. 10 It has framed miniatures (Pl. 1), usually set within the text area, but sometimes occupying an entire page. Stylistically the miniatures approximate the effect of the monumental mosaics or wall paintings of ancient Rome, containing effectively modeled three-dimensional figures placed within convincing architectural or landscape scenes. The frame enhances this spatial effect by defining a "window" through which we observe the scene-an effect that was reintroduced to book illustration in the Renaissance and still dominates the modern book. In some later miniatures this illusionistic style is supplanted by flatter, more patterned figures and more diagrammatic and spaceless settings, as in the miniatures of

^{1.} Aeneas, Fatula, and Dido. Vergil, Aeneid, fol. 36v (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Vat. lat. 3225: Photo Biblioteca Vaticana)



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a late fifth-century copy of Vergil, the Vergilius Romanus (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Cod. Vat. lat. 3867.11

An antique tradition of unframed miniatures also appeared in and y differency codices. Not only do some of these unframed s mes appear in the title miniature of the Ecloques in the Vergilius Possens but also in later manuscripts produced during the n the century in the Carolingian Empire and the tenth century in Byrotium, presumably copied after late antique prototypes. For example, a Carolingian Physiologus or bestiary now in Bern (Burgerbibliothek, MS 318), containing sketchy miniatures of animals set against the parchment, is believed to have been copied after a fifth-century manuscript, while a tenth-century Byzantine copy of a herbal, the De Materia medica of Dioscurides (New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library MS M. 652), with beautifully executed paintings of botanical specimens set against the vellum page, closely reflects the magnificent early sixthcentury Byzantine copy now in Vienna, which in turn was based upon earlier prototypes. 12

The earliest surviving example of the adaptation of the narrative miniature to a Christian biblical codex is the set of six leaves of the fourth- or fifth-century Quedlinburg Itala fragment, containing illustrations to the Book of Kings (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Cod. theol. lat. fol. 485) and some accompanying passages of the Old Latin, pre-Vulgate text. Two to five scenes are grouped together in adjacent frames on a single folio, removed from the text, and are painted in the free illusionistic style of the late classical manner. Thus, although the style and narrative quality of these illustrations remain close to classical prototypes, the separation of picture and text allows the illustration to develop a decorative validity and iconographical importance of its own. Three examples will illustrate the developing modes of narrative embellishment in biblical books in the sixth to seventh centuries.

The Vienna Genesis (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. theol. gr. 31), believed to have been produced in Syria in the sixth century, shows a close affinity with the manner of late antique manuscript illumination. Although the manuscript now consists of only twenty-four folios with miniatures, scholars have conjectured that originally it possessed about nine-ty-six folios with 192 illustrations. Written in silver uncials upon purple dyed parchment, even in its fragmentary state it is the most sumptuous manuscript to have survived from the early Christian—early Byzantine period before the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century. All of the miniatures appear at the bottom of the text pages (Pl. 2), reminiscent of some of the pages of the Vergilius Vaticanus, but they are of both the framed and

Roman Vergil

Vienna Genesis Speria Yolio



2. Joseph and Potiphar's Wife. Vienna Genesis, fol. 16r (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. theol. gr. 31)

the unframed type. The text, which follows the Septuagint version, is frequently abbreviated, and the accompanying miniatures have been shown to contain incidents and figures not mentioned in the text of Genesis. Thus in one of the most remarkable miniatures in which Joseph struggles away from the persistent advances of Potiphar's wife, leaving his garment in her hand, an enigmatic lady in blue at the right examines a string. She is thought to be the astrologer mentioned in Jewish commentaries who foretold that Joseph would become the father of the children of Potiphar's wife. In the second scene below, the women and

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perhaps reflect that at the time of this incident none of in of the household were present. Since most of the figures ed in these scenes appear to be based upon popular elaboration of the story, it has been suggested that they were derived a Jewish paraphrase of the text. The form of this earlier which served as a model, it has been conjectured, must be been similar to the Cotton Genesis (London, The British Liry, MS Cotton Otho B. VI), a sixth-century manuscript behaved to have been made at Alexandria which was unfortunately largely destroyed in a fire in 1731. The few surviving fragments show that this manuscript was copiously illustrated with framed miniatures interspersed throughout the text.

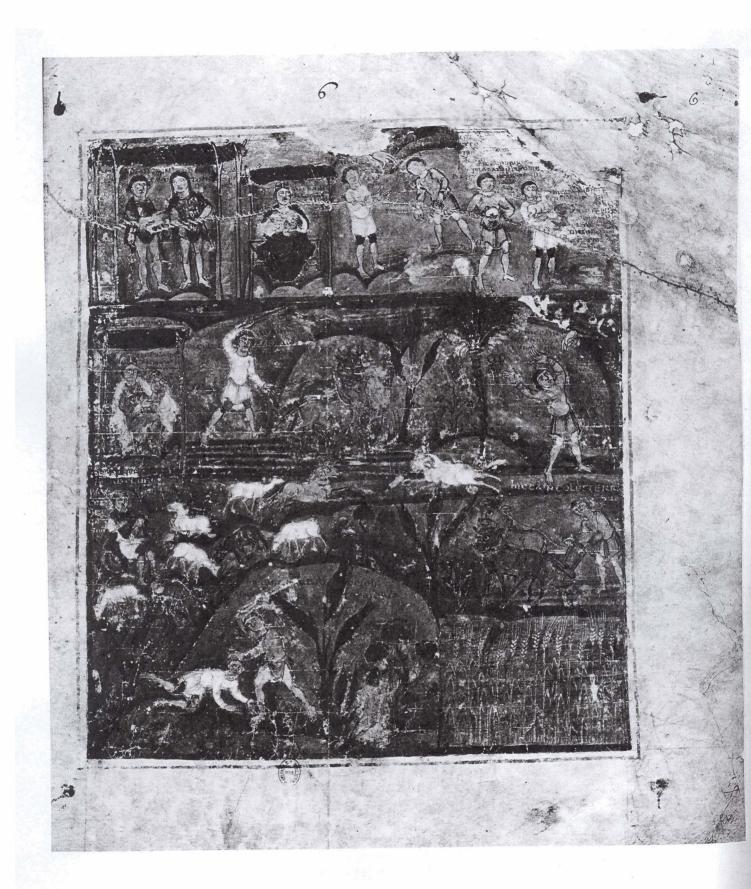
A variant of this mode, employing full-page miniatures that sometimes combine several scenes, appeared in another early manuscript, the Ashburnham Pentateuch (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS n.a. lat. 2334). Believed to have been produced, in northern Africa in the late sixth or early seventh century, it originally consisted of the first five books of the Bible but is now missing Deuteronomy. It now contains nineteen illustrations although originally it may have had as many as sixty-eight full page miniatures. Serving as a frontispiece to Genesis is a fullpage table containing the names of the books in Latin and Latin transliterations of Hebrew names enclosed within a curtained arch, perhaps symbolizing an unveiling of the Word. Some minlatures, such as that of the Flood (fol. 9r), occupy the entire page, as in the single illustration devoted to this theme in the Vienna Genesis. Others, such as the story of Adam and Eve after the Fall (Pl. 3), place a variety of incidents in horizontal registers with each scene set against a different colored background. This device for depicting an expanded narrative, perhaps also stemming from the tradition of using two registers of scenes in some of the Vienna Genesis miniatures, was to become a major pictorial element in later Byzantine, Carolingian, and Romanesque manu-

A second system of illustration is found in a Syriac Bible now in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, MS syr. 341), believed to have been made in northern Mesopotamia in the sixth or seventh century. In this case miniatures set within one of the two columns of text per page introduce each book of the Bible. Most of these are full-length portraits of the authors, particularly the prophets, a reflection of a long tradition in classical scrolls. Some of the miniatures, however, depict principal figures or incidents in the ensuing book, such as Job seated on a dung heap preceding the Book of Job. Another, before the book of Proverbs, shows an allegorical group of the Virgin and Child flanked by Solomon, personifying the wisdom of the Old Testament, and by Ecclesia;

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3. Adam and Eve after the Fall. Ashburnham Pentateuch, fol. 6r (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS n.a. lat. 2334: Photo Bibl. Nat., Paris)





the wisdom of the Christian Church. Although large sections of the text and its illustrations are missing, and only one New Testament miniature, James the Apostle, survives, the variety of types of miniatures suggests that they were derived from several sources. This Bible is the earliest surviving example of a full Bible with a consistent program of illustrations. The practice of opening each book of the Bible with a miniature or, later, of placing the narrative scene in the opening capital letter (historiated initial), continued to be widely used in the later Romanesque and Gothic periods.

As groups of books of the Old Testament, such as the Pentateuch (the first five books) or the Octateuch (the first eight books), were frequently bound in a single volume, the four Gospels, because of their importance for the reading of lessons during the Mass, were also produced as a separate book. Patrick Mc-Gurk found that many of the Gospel books of the fifth through the first half of the seventh century soon became uniform in arrangement, appearance, and scribal tradition. 18 The Western Old Latin, pre-Vulgate copies contained only the Gospel texts, while those of eastern Mediterranean origin normally contained a prefatory gathering with the canon tables of Eusebius and a letter from Eusebius to Carpianus explaining their use. When St. Jerome completed his revision of the Gospels, he not only prefixed the Eusebian canon tables from this earlier tradition but also included a letter from himself to Pope Damasus (beginning "Novum opus") explaining his revision and the use of the tables. St. Jerome also wrote a preface, beginning "Plures fuisse," in which he discussed the work of the four Evangelists. These writings of St. Jerome thus became standard prefatory material for the Vulgate versions of the Gospels. A letter from St. Jerome to Paulinus of Nola beginning "Frater Ambrosius" (Pl. 44) and his prefaces to the individual books likewise became standard prefatory material for the Old Testament.

Many of the early Gospel books, however, did not contain miniatures, although some of them did have embellished explicits (colophons) as mentioned above. Thus the Rossano Gospels, in the Cathedral Treasury at Rossano in southern Italy, is of considerable importance, for it is the earliest surviving illustrated Gospel book. Believed to have been produced in Syria in the sixth century, it is written in Greek in gold and silver uncials on purple dyed parchment. Only the Gospels according to Matthew and Mark with twelve miniatures survive. The Gospel of St. Matthew is prefaced by eleven miniatures following not the narrative order found in the text but the liturgical order according to the lessons read during Lent. Old Testament prophets appear with some of the narrative scenes, and their accompanying quo-

canon tables a letter of Jerome

Rossano Cos V. Corr. Des

4. Christ before Pilate, Suicide of Judas. Rossano Gospels, fol. 8r (Rossano, Archiepiscopal Treasury Photo Giraudon)



tations assert the relevance of Old Testament prophecies to the events of the New Testament. It is therefore thought that this arrangement is in part derived from an illustrated Lectionary, a book that contained passages from the Bible arranged according to the order in which they were read on the feast days during the liturgical year (see the section below on the Pericopes of Henry

The miniatures are similar to many of those in the Vienna Genesis and to some in a fragment of another Gospel book on purple parchment in Paris (B.N., MS suppl. gr. 1286), the Sinope Gospels, in that the miniatures are unframed and are sometimes presented in two horizontal tiers. The folio with Christ before Pilate contains this scene in the upper register (Pl. 4), and Judas attempting to give back the thirty pieces of silver and committing suicide in the bottom scenes. Below another miniature depicting the parable of the Good Samaritan—in which the Samaritan is shown as Christ—Michah, Sirach, and David (shown twice) are represented above relevant passages from their prophecies.

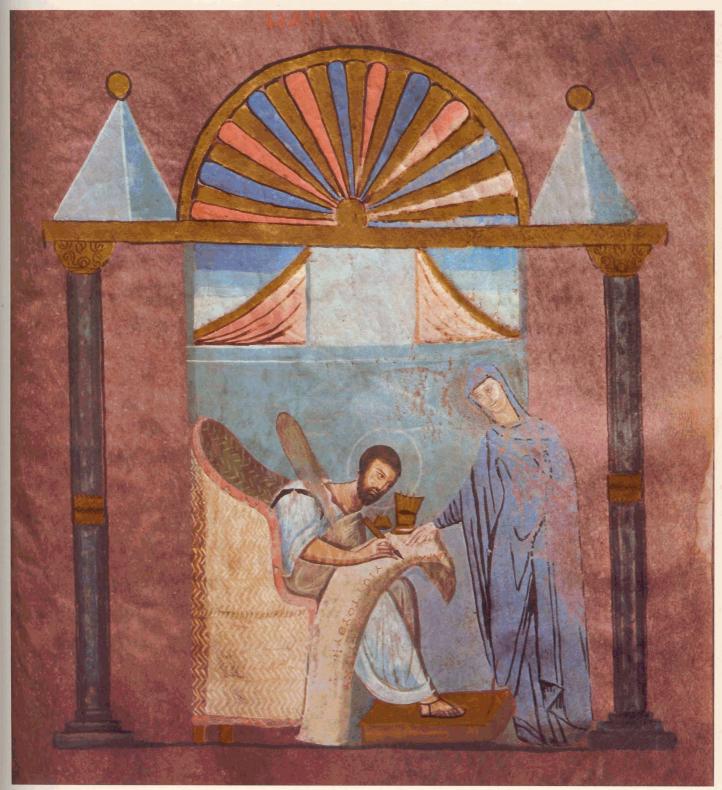
Prefacing the Gospel of St. Mark is a representation of the seated Evangelist poised to write and receiving instructions from a woman dressed in blue (Pl. 5). She is the personification of Divine Inspiration or Divine Wisdom and is derived from the frequent Hellenistic illustrations of the Divine Muse found in classical manuscripts. St. Mark sits within an architectural frame, two marble columns supporting a gold entablature with blue triangular elements at each end and a semicircular lunette with multicolored radii—a flat patterned design perhaps derived from shell-like niches found in late Roman architecture and sculpture. This representation of the enthroned writing evangelist in an architectural setting became a standard miniature prefacing the Gospels in Byzantine and Western manuscripts throughout the rest of the Middle Ages.

In style the Rossano miniatures are also closely related to those of the Vienna Genesis and Sinope Gospels, with softly modeled figures and lively gestures and glances. But the three-dimensional illusionism of architectural elements and landscapes are now giving way to more awkwardly rendered, schematic forms. Thus the Rossano Gospels marks an important link between the naturalism of the classical, Hellenistic style of late antique painting and the more stylized representations developing in the Byzantine east.

Manuscripts produced during the ensuing centuries in the Byzantine Empire continued the developments briefly sketched above, adapting the form of figural art, narrative miniatures, and exegetical juxtapositions to the demands of the developing litgoghia

5. St. Mark. Rossano Gospels, fol. 121r (Rossano, Archiepiscopal Treasury: Photo Giraudon)





urgy. Alt propresentations of divine personages were forbidden du the tumultuous years of the iconoclastic controversies from 26 to 843, classical traditions of painting survived in illustrations of literary and mythological texts and may have been responsible for the remarkable revival of classical motifs, compositions, and even style in the religious manuscripts of the Macedonian renaissance of the tenth century. The most frequently repeated images were those of the Evangelists. Normally prefacing Gospels or lectionaries, they usually depicted seated Evangelists as in the St. Mark of the Rossano Gospels, although standing types, such as those found in the illustrations of the prophets in the Syriac Bible, were also used. Scholars have also distinguished between profile and frontal portraits, and both of these types found their way into the repertoire of Western manuscripts, as in the Lindisfarne Gospels discussed below.

Narrative miniatures continuing the frieze effect of early Christian illustrations predominate in Byzantine Gospel books, psalters, and homilies or sermons, particularly those of St. John Chrysostom or of Gregory Nazianzus. In some manuscripts such as the Paris Psalter (B.N., MS gr. 139) of the tenth century, full-page miniatures with single scenes closely dependent upon the Hellenistic style preface the text, while in a copy of the ninthcentury homilies of Gregory Nazianzus (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS gr. 510) full-page miniatures containing three horizontal registers and multiple scenes are used.22 Frequently, particularly in psalters, unframed scenes are placed in the margins adjacent to the relevant texts. Representations of patrons or imperial personages also became frequent. An early example, the portrait of Juliana Anicia, a Byzantine princess, in a copy of Dioscurides' De Materia medica dated 512, follows the formula for late antique imperial portraits.23 Later examples, such as the eleventh-century portrait of Nicephorus III between St. John Chrysostom and St. Michael (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Coislin 79), follows an abstract, hieratic style derived from Byzantine icons.24

Most of these developments are <u>posticonoclastic</u> and the special forms of Byzantine manuscripts and their illumination fall outside the scope of this book. But the books of the Byzantine Greek world manifest a close continuity with what must have been formulated in the early Christan period and constitute, therefore, the best indications of the nature of these early developments. Byzantine illuminations may also have exerted considerable influence on the development of manuscript illustration in the Latin West, particularly in the Ottonian and Romanesque periods, and therefore cannot be dismissed from any discussion of Western medieval art.²⁵

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