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Bible MoralisÃ©: Vienna, Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vind. 2554 (Manuscripts In Miniature)



Synopsis

The latest addition to this series of 'Manuscripts in miniature' is Codex Vindobonensis 2554, in Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. It is one of the earliest surviving examples of a unique group of Bibles containing the most extensive cycles of biblical illustrations juxtaposed with theological and allegorical interpretative images. The Bible Moralisée was produced in the first half of the 13th century, and contains over 1000 illuminated medallions accompanied by textual extracts and commentaries that act as captions to the illustrations, revealing the relevance of the Bible to contemporary life. This volume reproduces all of the illuminated pages of the codex in full colour, and includes a commentary setting the work in its historical and artistic context.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This beautiful illuminated manuscript, now in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, is one of the earliest surviving examples of a unique group of Bibles containing the most extensive cycles of biblical illustrations juxtaposed with theological and allegorical interpretative images. The present moralized Bible was produced in Paris in the first half of the 13th century, and contains over 1000 exquisitely illuminated medallions accompanied by textual extracts and commentaries that act as captions to the illustrations and thus reveal, by word and image, the relevance of the Bible to contemporary life. They reflect the rapidly-changing world of the thirteenth century and highlight the many ideological problems prominent in the intellectual and political milieu of the time. It is a book

that has long fascinated both historians and art-historians, since it stands out not only as one of the major artistic achievements of its time, but also as an important historical document for an understanding of medieval Europe. All illuminated pages of Codex 2554 are reproduced in full colour in this volume. In his commentary to the manuscript, Gerald Guest explains the origins of this type of Bible manuscript; he compares the work with other surviving examples, examines the style and meaning of the illuminations, poses the likely patrons and puts the creation of the moralized Bible in its intellectual and artistic context. The author has also translated all the French texts that accompany the illuminations into English.

The Codex Vidobonensis 2554 is one of the first of a relatively large number of Bible Moralis. The exact date of its creation is currently a topic of historical debate however, but 1215-1230 is an accurate range. These bibles were not called Bible Moralis until a century later. They are also vastly different than the average medieval illuminated bibles in that very little biblical text is written and a substantial number of biblical stories from the Old and New Testament are left out. Each manuscript page has eight roundels (circles with illuminations). Four of the eight roundels contain illustrations of the biblical scene. Each of these four have a corresponding illustration of the contemporary spiritual significance of the scene. This "spiritual significance" often contains a moralistic interpretation of the biblical scene - hence the name, Bible Moralis. For example, the illuminators and theologians believed that the Cain and Abel story spiritually signified the evil nature of the Jews. Adam's elevation of Abel above Cain signified Jesus Christ who "held the Christians and put the Jews beneath Him, outside the Holy Church." The accompanying "spiritual interpretation" scene depicts Jesus Christ standing in an outline of a Church, facing the Christians to the left welcoming them while casting out the Jews to his right. The Jews throughout the volume are distinguished for easy visual comprehension by their money sacks, pointed noses and disfigured faces, and pointed turbans. Entire books have been written about the depiction of Jews in these bibles for these texts are treasure troves of contemporary Medieval cultural information. This edition is a top notch smaller sized facsimile of the original. The extensive introduction covers all pertinent information and the translations of the Old Medieval French are supplied. I had the chance to talk to one of the experts in the field of Medieval French Bibles and she disliked the translations, however, my knowledge of Medieval French is up and coming so I cannot really pronounce judgment on that aspect of this otherwise wonderful book.

Delightful colour illustrations with minimal text exposition. A minor drawback is the reproduction is

not actual size, but much smaller. This makes for much of the beautiful detail hard to see easily without appropriate magnification.

Gorgeously printed images and translations and explanations of every line and image. I would personally consider this a collectors' item because it is such a beautiful book. I used it as a major resource for my art history Independent Study on 13th Century French Manuscript Art.

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