



THE GREAT CANTERBURY PSALTER
(ANGLO-CATALAN PSALTER)

THE GREAT CANTERBURY PSALTER

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, PARIS

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CANTERBURY, AROUND THE YEAR 1200

Henry II is king of England and following his marriage to Leonor of Aquitaine his dominions encompass part of France too. In 1170, Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, has returned from his exile in France with a series of splendid manuscripts illuminated on the continent which were to influence the style of the Christ Church scriptorium, one of the most important centres making illuminated codices in England.

- **Shelfmark:** Lat. 8846.
- **Date:** 13th/14th C.
- **Size:** ± 480 x 332 mm.
- 356 pp. and more than 140 fascinating **miniatures** embellished with gold.
- 190 **ornamental letters** upon gold ground with plants motifs
- The text, set in three columns, contains the Hebrew, Roman and Gallican version of the Psalms.
- Full-colour commentary volume by: Prof Rosa Alcoy, University of Barcelona, Prof. Nigel Morgan, University of Cambridge and Prof. Klaus Reinhardt, University of Trier.



► folio 1r



◀ folio 2v

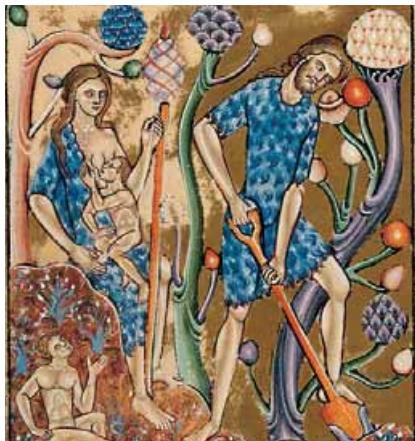


▶ folio 3r



At that time this workshop was a hive of activity thanks to a fascinating and ambitious project: a triple Psalter featuring the Latin, Hebrew and Gallican versions of the Psalms in addition to glosses in Anglo-Norman, a dialect stemming from the French spoken in England for three centuries following the Norman conquest, and considered to be an educated language and the one preferred by the court and the upper classes.

The Canterbury workshop, in keeping with Carolingian tradition, designed a codex that combined texts and images in such an ingenious composition that it constituted, in the words of Professor Klaus Reinhardt Ph.D., a peerless masterpiece. The English artists organised the spaces allocated to text and specified the position and size of the miniatures. They copied virtually the whole text in impeccable script, there being no sign of any mistakes or corrections, and illuminated the first part of the codex.



The English masters decided to begin the psalter with daring paintings intended for an erudite audience. They created four full-page, illuminated folios that could not fail to impress the patron or anyone else privileged enough to see them. The Canterbury artists created a dazzling prologue providing a detailed summary of the history of humanity according to the scriptures in fabulous images.

◀ detail, folio 1r



▶ folio 4r



The spectacular nature of the project, the splendour of the manuscript and the lavish use of gold suggest it may have been a psalter for a king: Henry II himself, Louis VII of France or even Philip Augustus in the early years of his reign. Another candidate of noble birth could be Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony.

◀ details, folios 10r & 20r

The English artists created a universe brimming with unusual scenes whose singularity and complex symbolism made them difficult to interpret. The almost dream-like portrayal of nature, with unreal, imaginary forms, is stunning. The painters endowed the animals with a personality of their own, depicting them with such expressive faces that they sometimes seem to be speaking to each other. The wealth of colours and lavish use of gold make this manuscript a veritable gem.

However, the English miniaturists' painstaking task was mysteriously interrupted. Something happened to the workshop or the codex that prevented the Canterbury masters from completing the meticulous illumination work they had undertaken.



▶ detail, folio 5v

BARCELONA, MORE THAN A CENTURY LATER

Pedro the Ceremonious was crowned king of Aragón and Catalonia in 1336. The painter and miniaturist, Ferrer Bassa, had already returned from his journey acquiring knowledge in Tuscany where he had been in contact with the most fertile and creative painting in the Italian Trecento.

Bassa produced several works commissioned by the king in his Barcelona workshop. A splendid psalter of English origin came into his hands, but, for some unknown reason, it was unfinished. The English masters had, however, left sketches for seven miniatures and allocated blank spaces for the rest. It is highly likely that Pedro the Ceremonious insisted on Ferrer Bassa completing this spectacular psalter for him whilst respecting its sumptuous lavishness. Modern-day researchers have found many clues linking its completion to the king himself.

The seven paintings drawn by the Canterbury masters and painted by Ferrer Bassa a century later are the result of a truly unique combination of the Anglo-Byzantine culture close to the 1200 and the pictorial forms of the 1300 Italianate Gothic. They constitute a remarkable fusion of cultures, a hybrid art in which no boundaries of space, time or culture exist.

In the second part of the manuscript, Ferrer Bassa's brushstrokes reinterpret the Byzantine dimension of English painting with greater artistic



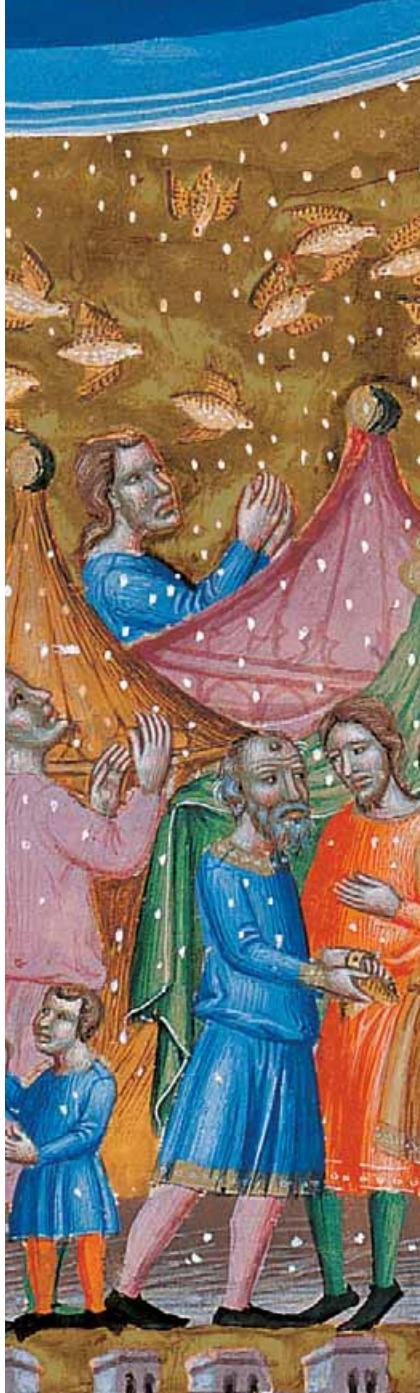
◀ detail, folio 150v



▶ folio 166r

*Venit xpi fundatio
nem. et in hunc funda
vit hominem unde agit
psalmi.*

*In diem an sabbati. secundum quo facetus est hoc ad magis. et similitudine di. factus omnis que erant ualde bona. reuerit salbo
pignans quod requirentur in dabo. si faciant tona opaque. cum labore suum. in quo deficerit. hoc. non spes quiete tenteret.
et quod opera finem habet. secundus dies quod fructus habet usque. sabbati non habet utrum. die scutis ob hoitem. serto sed utrum
reformare. in. et die si legitur fundata et. similitudine de. cum hoc fundat in fide immobil. tunc sit hoc ab imagine
dei. quod significat secundus dies.*



◀ detail, folio 135v

license, revealing a thorough knowledge of trecentist pictorial resources. Bassa's images convey new ways of structuring space along with more naturalist landscapes.

Ferrer Bassa, considered to be the finest painter in the Crown of Aragón in the 14th century, developed a personality of his own, clearly marked by the Tuscan styles of the Trecento, particularly those of Florence and Siena with which he was so familiar. A painter making a delicate, elegant and refined use of colour.

Bassa was the painter of the Catalan-Aragonese royal household and the preferred artist of Alfonso the Kind and Pedro the Ceremonious, who both commissioned him to produce several works for their residences and chapels royal. Most of them were apparently portraits, now missing.

Sed: quoniam mundi detuta soluit. et salutem bonum opatur post expectantem ait adueniunt amicos. et ait in ipso aduentu ida querentes in se non frustram. ideo quia omnia equum nimis sustinuit. lati illata mala pittant. Tunc ait: oī peditus matut. pse. p parte sua opposita. uero bennuotat caput a ponna induit. fuit et ab aduersariis. et a causa utusq; partis domini uidetur cognita. Quanto ex consensu diuine uidetur impinguando aduersariis. penas p iniquitate pibat. Quinto: q; uentus est et sue pars de passione suscipiens ad laude di p que ea in tem commutatione. salutem suscepunt mui-

tans. Salutem mea f. ord. Qm in inuenit. a. p. libata pse cito. Quen rapui. e. Gratias sustinuit qd addit. al. p. libato detinuit. Ds tu fuis. pars. si. p. inuenit orationem sua ut audiatur. qd si sua si mundi detuta uenit colore. topam salutem omnium. Non trudescant. dñs. Qui expectant. e. p. res ait aduentu. Qui qm. t. In ipso aduentu. fuit pta. Qm. p. e. s. dicit qnta equum nimis sustinuit. lati sua mala pittant. Ego u. pars. mi. oī. p. se et parte communis. Qm benigna. e. qd auferentur si voluntate. remissor ipsa rebu- nione. Ne affat. f. a. p. ponna sua duplicitate. qd hu- milis. e. respinge. et ibulanomib; qstatim. Intende ale mee. qd humilitate qd gloriosus. h. et aia

mius. Proprius innos. m. Abducatur duplicitate. ut ut- sfundante. usc. ne conseruat. Tu sis imp. m. Icausa sua qd. iudicis manefida. In conspectu e. s. o. Icausa minitoris qd in conspectu d. e. Imp. p. e. m. A pso na sua u. iff. ip. obediens. reperiret. sustinuit. Fiat misericordia. pars. m. Imp. p. s. ego s. p. r. d. pars. s. Sa- tu. t. d. Uolutat de passione. t. m. b. Laudab. d. laudat p sua commutatione. ratio. fuit. Et p. comi- dano laud. Qm. s. f. Exponit bona qd hoc commu- tione sequantur. Et cibum habent. c. Quod si fit ad altar. Et habitab. ubi. Omodo inhabitant. christiani. e. terri. Et senz. t. c. p. In p. postebit ed. et in futuro omis qd ducit normi et habitabit in ea. i. celestem terram.



▶ folio 117r

THE GREAT CANTERBURY PSALTER: A BRILLIANT EXAMPLE OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF CULTURE

Two periods, two places, two artistic styles and two workshops for a single manuscript: the *Great Canterbury Psalter*, also known as the *Anglo-Catalan Psalter*.

Around the year 1200, English art experienced one of its most brilliant periods, a time when the last Romanesque stage, a marked influence of Byzantine art and the beginnings of a new style known as Gothic all came together. This rich, artistic amalgam was to merge, more than a century later, with the finest, Italianate Gothic introduced into the Iberian Peninsula by Ferrer Bassa. The result is a perfect symbiosis between the most splendid English painting of the late 12th century and the most innovative and interesting Catalan painting of the 14th century.

This convergence of the two different figurative cultures of England and Catalonia, more than one hundred years apart, is one of the most important features of the codex, a facet that makes it unique in the history of art. The *Great Canterbury Psalter* is an essential manuscript for an understanding of medieval European painting.

This lavish psalter captivated the leading figures of western history and occupied a place of honour in their libraries. It belonged to the exquisite Jean, duc de Berry and the first female bibliophile in history, Margaret of Austria, who bequeathed it to Mary of Hungary, emperor Charles V's sister. Napoleon Bonaparte removed it from the Bourgogne library in Brussels and took it to Paris in 1796. In 1809 it received the binding featuring Napoleon I's coat of arms that it has retained to the present day.



◀ detail, folio 108v

ibulationes. Omnes enim qui uolunt in Christo pie uiuere. p.p. Deus in nomine eius. s.m.f. in presenti. In virtute iudica. i. separa in futuro.

Quoniam alieni. **Supposita.** ē. **p̄stutio.** **Ecce enim**
adū. diapsalma. pars secunda salutis fidelis popu-
li. Autem psalmus. Imp̄lano quasi certa enuntiatio

de damnatione zipheos. Voluntarie. Nota que
liberatus psolunt. Quoniam ex omni tribulacione
hic est intellectus huius psalmi.



Vicor in psis e-
ruditu dñi t uenit
sent zipher i dñe
issent sicut sine
dñ abstundit e-

In h̄mē in carminib⁹ intellect⁹
Quarū insipiens nō intelligit tū cognoscet qm̄ intere stat
fets. Quib⁹ n̄ p̄tare s̄a p̄tio
ad cū uenissent zphei & dixis
- dd̄ n̄ no[n]t̄ - ibi enī datus ē. fuit in matutinū d.

A detailed view of a medieval manuscript page. The central feature is a large, ornate initial 'Q' in blue and gold, containing a small figure of a saint or monk in purple robes. To the right of the initial, the text 'in mundo' is written in a Gothic script. Above the initial, another line of text continues in red and black ink. The page is filled with dense Latin text in two columns, written in a Gothic hand.

Zipb-ius penebat ad tu-
bum inde unde dicit alieni
heit cui iudicatur.

Verba eccl^e latens inter 21
p^obes. cuius bonum intus. E.
1 m^otes occulta. alii abis pe-
tne libetan. ego in tuo no-
mine.

EGR

Roor

GAH

▶ folio 93r



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