

BIBLE MORALISÉE OF NAPLES

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BIBLE MORALISÉE OF NAPLES

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The *Bible moralisée of Naples* (ms. Fr. 9561) – commissioned by Robert of Naples, also known as Robert the Wise, at the end of his reign and completed in the early 1350s during the reign of his granddaughter Joanna – takes us through more than a century of the dynastic history of France and Italy.

This Bible contains part of the Old Testament (from Genesis to the third book of Judges, ff. 1-112v) together with moralisations and a highly detailed New Testament cycle stretching from Joachim being cast out of the Temple to Pentecost (ff. 113-189v). The manuscript is extraordinary and the exceptional pictorial quality of its illuminations, particularly the 76 full-page paintings portraying the landmarks in Christ's life and passion, has been emphasised by art historians.

This single-volume Bible features a juxtaposition of two illustrative formulae that make this Bible an exceptional item. The first 128 illuminations belong to the Bible moralisée genre. All the paintings in the Old Testament section, except the full-page frontispiece on folio 1, are framed by borders, many of which have plant adornments, and divided into two registers: the upper one containing the biblical scenes and the lower, their moralisations. The 76 full-page paintings in the New Testament cycle contrast sharply with the preceding cycle, taking us into a different spiritual and figurative realm of mainly Giottesque inspiration. This Bible is a luxury item with each folio painted on one side only, the flesh side.

Manuscript fr. 9561 is the only known Italian copy of a Bible moralisée. It was made for Robert of Naples of the first House of Anjou, a House that descends directly line from the Capetian branch via Charles I, the brother of St Louis and founder of the Angevin dynasty.

Unique and unrepeatable first editions, strictly limited to 987 numbered and authenticated copies.

Shelfmark: Français 9561

Size: ± 310 x 210 mm

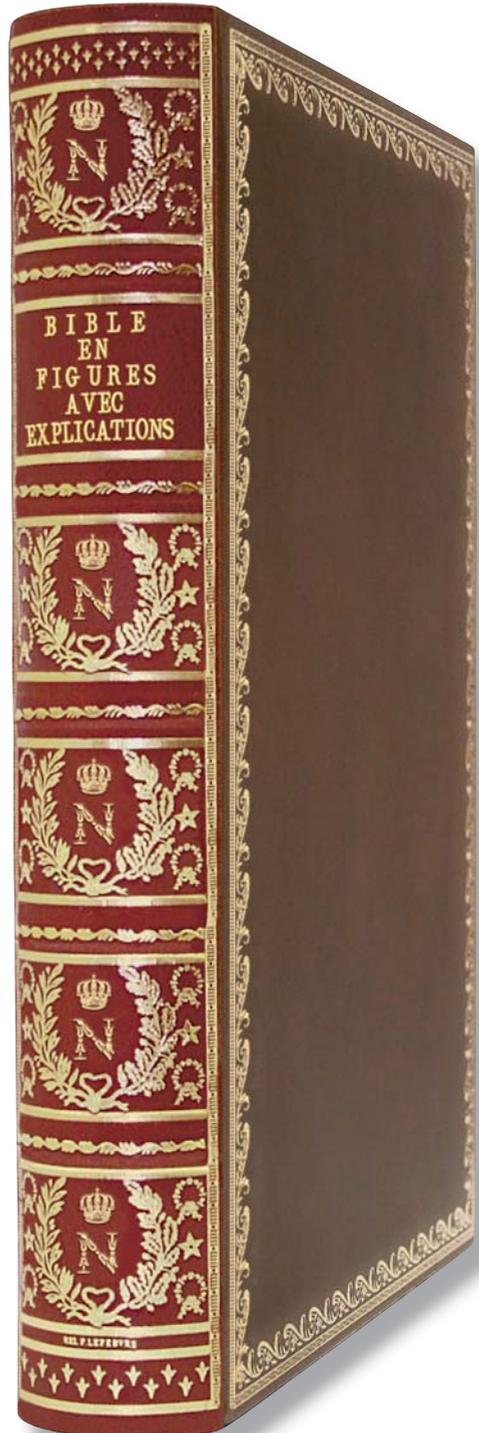
Date: c. 1340-1350

Provenance: Naples

**384 pages,
204 illuminations with gold**

Bound in brown leather.

Full-colour commentary volume by Marianne Besseyre (BnF) and Yves Christe (Université de Genève)



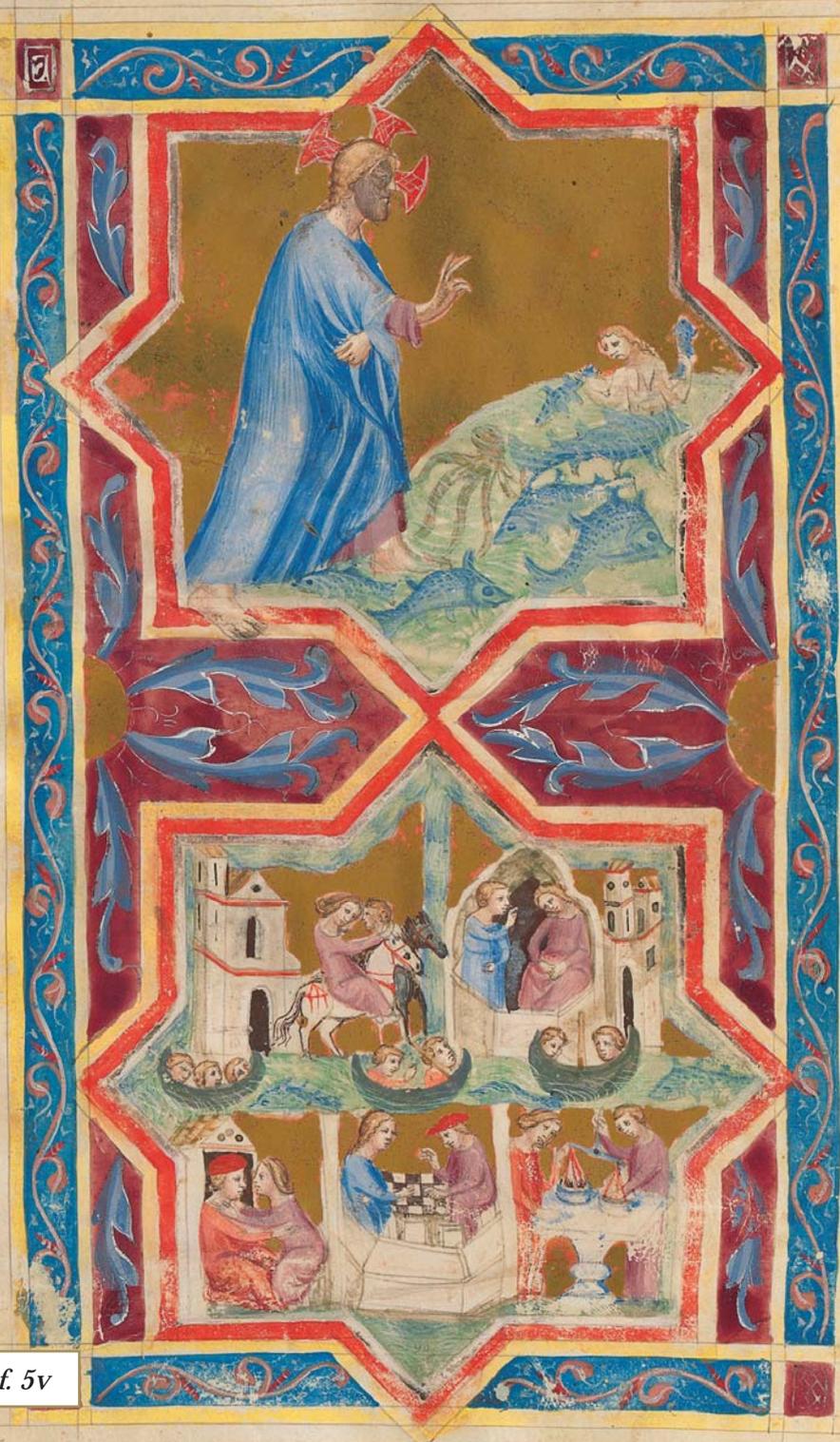


Cest brytane. Coment la vierge maue presenta nre seignour ihu crist.
u temple de ierusalem. Et saint simeon le print entre ses bras. Ensi que
saint luc le dub en son euangile. u secont capitle.



Cest l'histoire. Comment herodes fist occire tous les enfans qui estoient en Bethleem selonc
 ses perrenances. Ensi que saint mathieu le dit en son euangile u second chapitre.

7



f. 5v



◀ **f. 5v** (Gen. 1: 20-21)

God bends over the sea and creates the fish including a large octopus and a mermaid – with a single tail in this instance – holding two fish. These different sorts of fish (omitting the birds created prematurely on the third instead of the fifth day) are the different sorts of people God has populated this world with, a world shown in a sweeping view in the *Bible of Naples* and featuring, above several small sailors in three boats, a pair of riders, a young man scolding a contrite woman and, beneath this stretch of sea, a pair of lovers, two chess players and a moneychanger at his stall weighing a young woman's jewels. As we can see, people who are rather frivolous or who lead sinful lives.

Yves Christe (Université de Genève)

◀ **f. 7r** (Gen. 2: 8-9)

The text and image interpret this passage from Genesis with a great deal of license. The tree of life that God plants in his garden is embellished with six buds in the shape of miniature heads lacking in the two Bibles of Vienna. The good trees are the good men crowned with flowers beneath the porch of a church, whilst the “thorns” – not mentioned in the Vulgate – are the wicked with crowns of thorns who revel in evil deeds.

Yves Christe (Université de Genève)

▶ **f. 8r** (Gen. 2: 23)

God is shown standing in the middle of the painting, joining Adam and Eve's hands together in his own hands. The “marriage” of Adam and Eve, whom God joins by bringing their hands together, is interpreted as the marriage of Christ and the Church. In this instance, the Church is symbolised in two different ways that nonetheless mean the same thing: a crowned female personification holding a standard stamped with a red cross in her hand standing in front of a church with a single nave. The equivalent image in the *Bible of St Louis* (f. 6r, R3-R4) shows Christ standing opposite Ecclesia taking her by the shoulder with one hand and grasping her wrist in the other in front of Our Lady and Child.

Yves Christe (Université de Genève)





PROF. ROSE INDIAN
1880

f. 16r

...a est ioseph en la
 charre & un panet.
 & un botteill anet lu lipanet
 ... & li botteill asinstr

Genes. xl. capitulo -
 Lipanetiers sonia qd portot in corbeilles .i. plome & farine lautre repaste latierre
 de char & ouiel bedoient en la charre li botteilliers sonia qui lestoit anet ap teung
 & troua trois grapes & il les pinst en une cope & apporta a fararon son seignoz about
 & il les recut & litona aboute. Puis dist loz sonog a ioseph & ioseph lor dist quel
 botteilliers seroit deliure & lipanetiers seroit penduz.



Ioseph qui est en la charre
 nefie ibn .v. d'au en la prison
 & un botteill anet lu lipanet
 & li botteill asinstr

De que lipanetiers son
 li qui portot trois corbeilles
 de paste & de farine & de char
 gluense Benesie conoitise la farine qui
 est chose uaine Benesie orguioit la char
 lature. Et q les trois corbeilles & les oi
 sians qui bedient la char Benesie cels
 qui dorment en cez .ij. pedies q nes auz
 trois choses
 teu artoit & aibles les enchaoint
 & ibn crist les
 traient en enfer

li botteill qui toua les
 grapes & les pes lunt des q
 pes lor non de bon comemet
 la seote Benesie la flor telon
 ne oeur. Latierre Benesie le
 fruit telon fin. Le q il les po
 te teu. it so seignoz & il les rec
 it Benesie cels qui dorment
 & li botteilliers seroit deliure
 & lipanetiers seroit penduz

f. 29r (Gen. 41: 1-17)

In order to understand the meaning of his dream, Pharaoh questions his own philosophers but they are unable to answer him. He then orders Joseph to be released and has his hair cut, his beard shaved and dresses him in a fine robe before being brought before him. In the *Bible of Naples* the king of Egypt surrounded by his seers has been transformed into yet another seer. The following moralisation image depicts only the seven fat cows and the seven thin cows: the seven virtues that eat up the seven vices. Pharaoh in the middle of his philosophers is interpreted in a rather peculiar way. The king is a “languorous” monk asking the blind astronomers for advice but they know nothing. Pharaoh releasing Joseph from his dungeon is likened to God the Father who pulls Christ by the hand from his tomb. Finally, Joseph being received by Pharaoh to interpret the latter’s dream is Christ who points God the Father out to a seer, a person in a lilac robe sitting deep in thought in front of him and listening carefully to him. The three-volume Bibles simplify this scene and add a few details, using four pairs of medallions in each case. The seven thin cows that devour the seven fat cows are still the seven vices that bite or bother the seven virtues. The two *theologi languidi* (languorous monks) ask several astronomer clerics (including one holding an astrolabe) for advice. Behind the high-ranking officer who releases Joseph from prison a servant with a fine robe in his arms can be seen. As Christ emerges from the tomb, God the Father, depicted to the waist behind the sepulchre, grasps his wrist. Joseph explaining Pharaoh’s dream to him is likened to Christ standing preaching to two monks.

The *Bible of Naples* repeats in almost identical terms the biblical paraphrases and glosses found in the four pairs of medallions in the *French Bible of Vienna* which features more or less the same scene albeit with more details. The same may be said of the Latin Bible, although it resorts partly to the Vulgate text, and likewise of the three-volume Bibles.

Yves Christe (Université de Genève)

mort pharaon & soma qd estoit en un d'ay oilint isir fors om tuel vy espie nlt ans & q' & untoit vy autty
pis d'un autt tuel magres & ses ql manoit q l'palle & iast. vy. meigre espis & auttent les vy. ans. & seia
ilult vy. anses uachy an un p & vy megres untoient & anglotiret les vy. anses lors uint pharaon si
untoit les phi losophes & s'atre & lor temantou cōsul teson songe. lors uint pharaon sifist tere ioseph fors
la d'ant & le fist rognier & rebmit uestir & al uint teuar lui & liouit tesan teson songe & q ce estoit.



les vy. anses uachy senesciet
les vy. ueruz & les vy megruz
senescient vy. megruz. Leq les vy
megres tenoiet les vy. anses
Senescie lo vy. megruz qui d'ue
nait les vy. ueruz

Le que pharaon temantou conseil teson songe as philosphes & li
ueltoient dire Senescie les langours qui temantent cose ilis astro
nomiens qui sūt auugle & alerent qui n'ont s'uet n'eu ne que ce
nest fors songe. Leq pharaon trest ioseph & la d'ant & il uint
teuant lui & li d'ca son songe & effie lepre tonael qui trest ibu crist
tel sepulchre. Le que ioseph uient teuant pharaon & espont son
songe Senescie ibu crist qui mostre as deunz tot & auttent les
espis & les uachy senescient



f. 44v (Ex. 1: 8-14)

Pharaoh on his throne orders his provost to reduce the Jews to slavery. The young boy the officer brings before his king in all likelihood represents the people of Israel. The second illustration shows the Jews carrying straw and collecting mud to make tiles on a table already spread with clay. The tiles shown are the barrel tiles typical of southern climes. One pane in the Sainte-Chapelle, Paris, which was originally part of the Exodus window but subsequently cut out and inserted into the Judges stained-window, depicts an almost identical scene of tiles being made on a table. These materials were to be used to build three (sic) cities instead of just the two mentioned in the Vulgate. The third narrative panel contradicts its legend for it only portrays two canonical cities. Their architect sits on the left with his stonemason's rod giving orders. Beneath him, a mason mixes some mortar opposite a carpenter squaring off a beam with an adze.

Pharaoh ordering his provost to enslave the Jews is likened to Satan who orders one of his devils to have all the children of Jesus Christ enslaved in his power. Collecting clay, making tiles and gathering straw signifies Christians in the house of the devil led away from the straight and narrow by lust (shown as a couple of lovers embracing under a blanket), covetousness (a miser deep in thought leaning on a chest) and pride (a horseman galloping over a poor wretch begging from him). Devils are busy dealing with the lovers and the usurer. The three cities are then the three sorts of sins employed by the devils to destroy God's people. The three previous sins are repeated: a pair of lovers, now shown standing, a miser in front of his chest and, by way of a new allegory of pride, a woman sitting on a chair giving her valet a sharp kick. This image of a rude housewife ill-treating her servants had already been used a few years before in c. 1200, to portray arrogance in the virtue and vice medallions in the dado of the Last Judgement on the western gate of Notre-Dame, Paris.

Yves Christe (Université de Genève)

Après la mort de pharaon & de ioseph
qui tant l'ama vit uns autr pharaon
qui comit a un sien p'nost qui li fill
israhel soient mis en eslavage

Li portent lestamin a muer
Labe & firent la tuile & autres
labors

Li loz fet lan fire trois cotes
par destree & charpantier &
maconer & portent la pierre



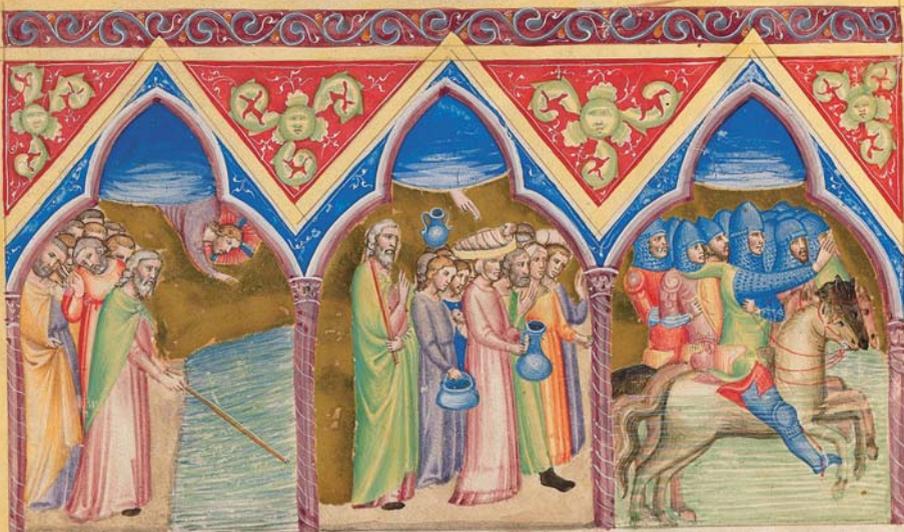
Li q pharaon comanda que la li
gnice iacob soient mise en subie
sion. Benefic le mestre deable qui
comit a un des p'noz que tant li
enfent ihu crist soient mise en
subiacon & il sifet a son pouir

De q la meisme pharaon loz fut
autr la boe a fire la tuile & port
la paille. Benefic la meisme au
deable qui destruit les cresties
par l'urine & p couoitaise & par
enguel

De q loz fet fire par destree usars
Benefic la meisme au deable qui
destruit le pueple de u p' trois me
menes & qeche p' l'urine qui
sencie la boe p' couoitaise & p' sen
fic la tuile p' enguel & p' ficla



lament moyses et son pncple & fient la mer & ele
 repart en .xij. parties Jascnuot les .xij. lignies par
 mil le .xij. partie & elamer a moy
 ses loz est temer la uet pharon apres li & son pncple
 et entrent en mer ototes ses amys



De que moyses fient la mer & ele
 part en .xij. parties Benefic le bō
 pnclet qui portes les ames que
 il gotine & elautre main terōt
 les laz & sen ames & elagent
 qui sont en cest moire

De q̄ les .xij. lignies sen uōt
 p mil le .xij. parties & elamer
 Benefic les .xij. apostres qui
 chentent les .xij. parties & el
 monte & ihu crist les conduet

De que moyses pharon uet ap̄
 le pncple moyses aut ame en ar
 mes & actual Benefic les tel & bles
 qui nont ap̄ q̄ les teaples d'ame
 & u tuit arme p̄ mil le monte &
 adreal.



f. 139v

After the wise men pay tribute to the Christ child, God warns them in a dream not to return to Herod and they decide to take another route home. Providence once again visits Joseph by night and orders him to take refuge in Egypt with Mary and Jesus, for Herod will search for the child to kill him. Painter A provides a visionary and intellectualised version of the episode by showing the angel appearing in a dream to Joseph in a separate register, above the man lying with his wife on a long white mattress, each occupying one end. It will be remembered that the old man never had carnal knowledge of Mary, even after the birth of Christ: the painter has found a suitable device for depicting them together but chaste.

The construction of this page is magnificent. First, it portrays one indoor and one outdoor scene above each other and yet organically linked. The landscape carves into the plane of the folio creating a contrast that breathes more intimacy and depth into the room occupied by the spouses. The room's vanishing point, hemmed in by a Giotto-style box, provides the framework for a multi-strata background: in the hearth, a watchful cat warms itself by the coals; two humble pieces of furniture – a low table and a chest – stand against a wall; a door opens onto the stable in the centre of the composition, providing a rather contrived frame for the focal point of this painting, i.e. the donkey that will make the flight possible. The orthogonal symmetry of the room is tempered by the harmonious curve of the holy spouses' bed, just as the vertical trees in the upper register contrast with the round boulders. This open landscape above their heads conveys a dreamlike yet earthly world beyond; it materializes the place of salvation that awaits at the end of a long journey: they must first cross arid plateaux and then dark forests before finally seeing in the distance the walls of a city where they can take refuge.

Marianne Besseyre (Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Cest l'ystoire coment li anges apparut a ioseph en dormant. et li dist. Josph
 lieue te et pren l'enfant a sa mere a fu y ten en egypte et demeure illuc
 usque arant que ie le te die. Ensi que saint mathieu le dist en son
 a seant capitle ~



Ceste ~~l'histoire~~ comment l'anges aparut a joachim et h'annucia que sainte anne sa moult
ho f. 116v non cenour. et li comntes que il deust retourner ali .a. tiel seignal qui la trou
uent au porte dela cite .





Cest l'ystoire. Coment nre seignour ihu crist fist de haue
nosles que furent faites en chuzagalilee. Cuzi que saint
dust en son euangile uiscant capite

f. 144v (John 1 i 29)

The illumination depicts John the precursor as he is called, the son of Zachary and Elizabeth (Our Lady's cousin who miraculously became pregnant six months before Mary) pointing Christ out to the people who have come to receive the baptism of penance in the waters of the Jordan. The quality of the painting is remarkable. The backdrop consists of a craggy landscape with scattered copses on rocky outcrops. The narrow, dark blue crescent forming a gap in the burnished gold-leaf sky represents the participation of the Almighty in the forthcoming anointing of his incarnate son. The river meandering across the page draws the beholder's gaze into the distance and provides a thread for interpreting a scene whose meaning gradually unfolds as progress is made along the banks of the Jordan. In the foreground two men undress: the breeches, shoes and tunic of one are already on the ground whilst the other is removing his shirt. In the lower right-hand corner is a child asking his mother to take him in her arms, but she is looking at what is going on higher up. These anecdotal incidents bring the episode down to earth and breathe life into it. A little further back, three women look up when they hear the Baptist announcing the coming of the Lord. One of them is breastfeeding her infant wrapped in swaddling clothes. This little genre painting is an opportunity for the artist to demonstrate the scope of his talent by magnanimously portraying perfectly proportioned bodies – the figures portrayed from the rear are Giottoesque *pièces de résistance*. The delicate hues of the fabrics reflect the pale colours of the robes of the men sitting further away, each in a different tone. Three of them look round as Christ draws near with a cruciform nimbus and wrapped in a shining, blue cloak trimmed with gold. Following him are his first disciples: a bearded head and three haloes on the edge of the frame can be seen. James the Baptist reaches out from the other bank towards Jesus and points a finger at him. His left hand holds an unrolled scroll upon which an uncial *e* in blue ink can be seen. This is the first letter of the Latin word *Ecce* (Behold) that the Precursor spoke when he saw Christ, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”.

Marianne Besseyre (Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Ceste Hystoire. Coment saint iehan baptiste tesmoigna de nre f. 144v
noir ihu crist. tost ues a le agnel de dien. Ensi que saint iehan le dist
en son euangile u premier capite -



f. 172r



f. 173v (Luke 22: 63-65)

The Gospels tell how Christ was humiliated after his arrest. The guards blindfolded him and several began to beat him, telling him to prophesy who was hitting him. The illustration of this episode in the *Bible moralisée of Naples* is accompanied by a reference to Saint Luke, the only evangelist to situate this event prior to the Messiah being brought before the Sanhedrin, and yet the illumination comes after his interrogation by Pilate. It is true that after being questioned, Christ is once again man-handled and his supposed royal lineage is scorned: this is what is known as the Mockery of Christ but this features Jesus in the scarlet cloak with the reed as a sceptre and the crown of thorns (merely sketched here in brown ink) (Matt. 27: 27-30; Luke 23: 11; Mk. 15: 16-19; John 19: 2-3). The reason for situating the derision of Christ at this point in the cycle was possibly to commemorate it together with the mockery of Christ at the same time: the fact that his torturers are shown hitting him about the head with reeds is apparently a direct reference, as is the fact that he is seated on a chair resembling a throne with its marble pedestal. Jesus is still wearing his long purple robe edged in gold. He stands with his hands open, offering no resistance to the blows raining down upon him from all sides. The gesticulating men in the front row let fly at him. They can be imagined letting loose a stream of insults and their rage is conveyed by their cramped feet jostling or overlapping the frame. The second row, consisting mainly of helmeted soldiers, watches without flinching.

Marianne Besseyre (Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Cest hystoire. Coment nre seignour ihu crist fu bendeý et batu des iuis. Et quant il le
batoient si disoyent. prophete qui est cil qui ta fern. Ensi que saint luc le out en
son euangile Vante deusime capitle.

f. 177v

This illumination, with no biblical text in the margin, is like a devotional painting. The style is monumental: the gold leaf floods the page with the timeless light of altarpieces. The vertical upright of Christ's huge cross extends up and beyond the blank, red sign which blurs into the decorative frame. Christ bleeds profusely from the wounds inflicted by the nails and the spear that pierced his side. The blood running down his arms, legs and feet forms a pool at the bottom of the Calvary. A human skull can be made out in a crevice in the rock upon which the cross stands. This picture of Golgotha (Hebrew for "the place of the skull") is highly symbolic for this is where the remains of the first man are brought back to life by the blood of salvation in a promise of resurrection for all humanity.

The different expressions of the two groups at the foot of the cross reveal that Jesus has just died. Our Lady is deathly pale and depicted for once as a middle-aged woman. Dressed all in black in mourning, she swoons in grief in the arms of the two Marys: the sister of her mother, Mary, the wife of Cleopas and Mary of Magdala. One holds her under her arms and the other grasps her cloak. The four women weeping behind them include a tearful young woman reaching out to the Messiah and probably Salome, the mother of the apostles James and John. The men are on the right. A man with a sponge mounted on a reed administers vinegar to Christ from the small bucketful he holds. The old man behind him looks at Jesus and gestures as if to say he has died. This man may be the Jew Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin who secretly converted to the Lord's teachings. At the same time, an armoured Roman guard with a nimbus and a shield points his index finger at the Messiah whilst looking at the reader.

The two thieves crucified with Jesus flank Christ in the background. They are tied by the arms to two tau crosses, their elbows have been broken, their wrists and ankles tied, and their shins have just been broken. A black bat, symbolising the Devil, flies off with the evil thief's soul, depicted as a brownish, new-born babe, in its claws.

Marianne Besseyre (Bibliothèque nationale de France)





Cest l'histoire coment le corps de nre seigneur ihu crist fut mis u mo-
ent. Ensi que saint mathieu le dist en son euangile .u uant se p-
tite capitle .





f. 181r

f. 182v (Matt. 27: 59-61)

Painter B chose to represent the entombment of Christ in an open landscape rather than inside the cave mentioned in the text by Matthew to which the paraphrase refers. Joseph of Arimathea has in fact decided to give the Saviour the tomb he has just had carved out of the rock for himself. But the two intersecting steep headlands forming an X above the marble tomb identify the burial place of the crucified Christ better than a stony tomb. Lying in a shroud carried by his three loyal companions, Christ can be seen with his limbs disproportionately slender, his belly swollen and his protruding ribs still bleeding from the wound inflicted by the spear. St John leans over by the head of the green marble sarcophagus near Our Lady still pressing her cheek against her son's and grasping his neck in a final embrace. Mary Magdalene, standing by Christ's feet, helps Nicodemus hold his ankles whilst the two Marys kiss the wounds in his hands. Joseph holds the other end of the cloth weighted down with its holy load that the men are preparing to lay in the coffin. Four women on their knees pray and mourn behind the imposing tomb apparently perched on the edge of a steep cliff: an explicit metaphor of the burial to come. The monumental composition of this page is awe-inspiring. The graceful solemnity of the figures is in harmony with the flowing but imposing landscape and endows the scene with both visual and psychological depth.

Marianne Besseyre (Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Cest l'ystoire. Coment le dyable ala tempter nre seignour ihu crist u desert. Et li dit. Si
 de dieu. Tu que ses pierres se facent pain. Lors dit nre seignour. Lome ne
 nt seulement de pain. Ensi que saint mathieu le dit enson euangile v quart
 capitele.

f. 146r

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M. MOLEIRO EDITOR, S.A.

This same edition includes 77 copies in Roman numerals for the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Editor and the Spanish Book catalogue.

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Lugo, August 25th 2009.



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