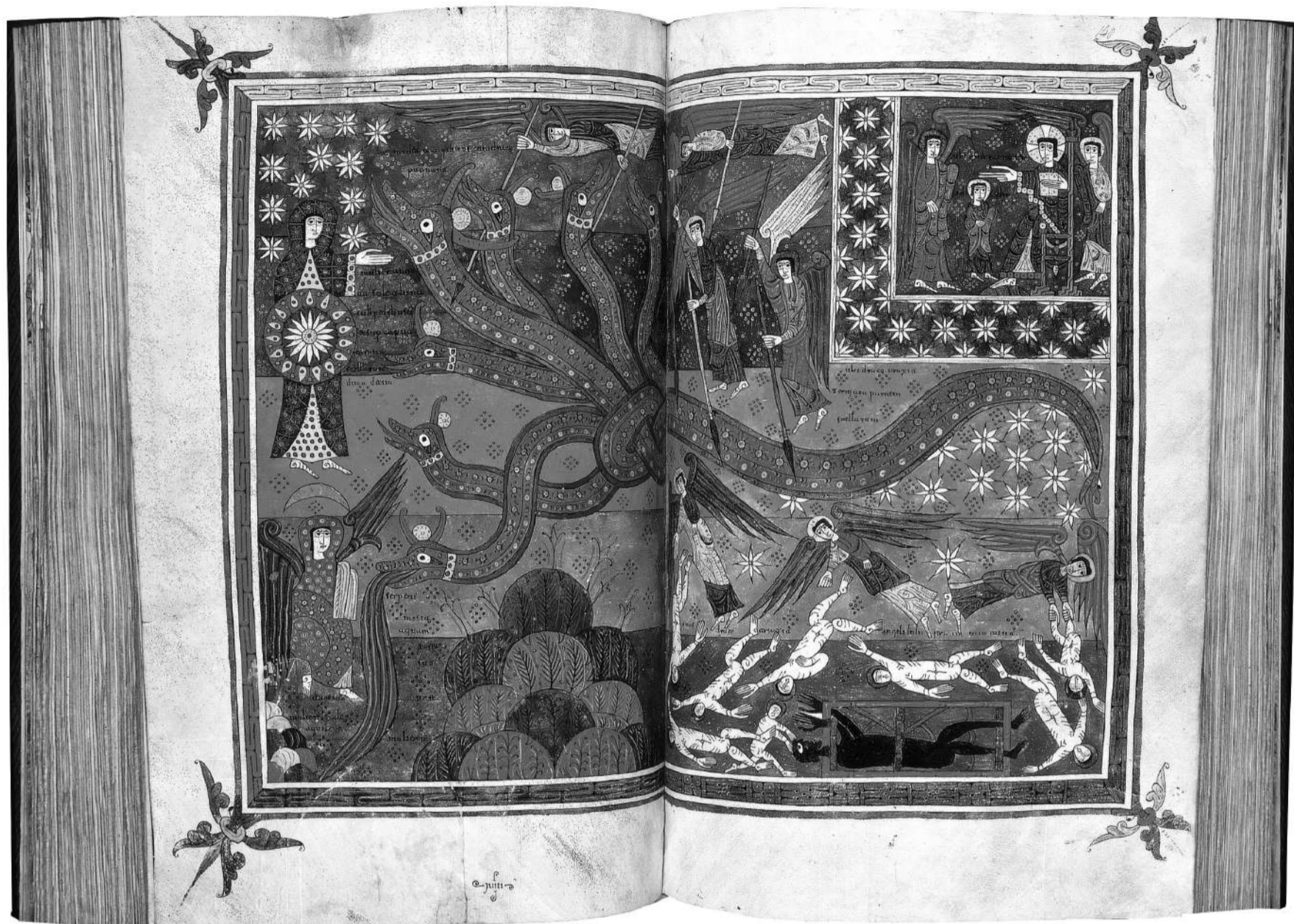




Beatus of Liébana

Codex of the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos

«quasi-original»



❖ 560 pages. + Size: ± 14.75 x 9.75 inches (375 x 248 mm).

❖ ©The British Library Add. Ms 11695.

❖ 106 miniatures, illuminated with gold, with the most beautiful and spectacular chromatic range of all the Beatuses.

❖ Codex copied by the monks Domingo and Muño and illuminated by the prior Don Pedro, between 1091 and 1109, in the *scriptorium* of the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos.

❖ It was Abbot Don Juan who had the good fortune to receive the manuscript fully illuminated. [...] As chance would have it, June 30, 1109, the date of the completion of the entire work, was also the day of the death of King Alfonso VI."

❖ In an undetermined period, it was enriched with splendidly decorated folios from a Silensian antiphonary and a vision of hell, unique in Romanesque art".

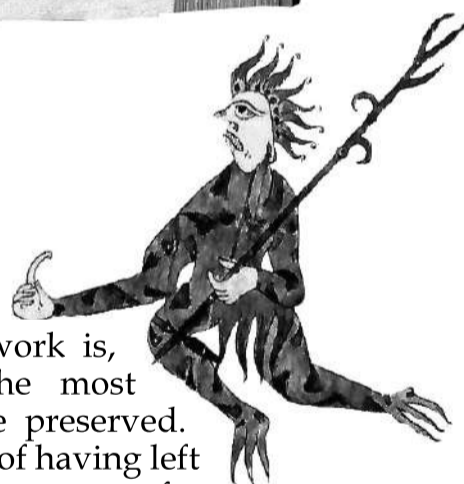
❖ Written entirely in Visigothic minuscule, it contains evident influences of the Carolingian script.

❖ The Silense copy of Beato's work is, without any doubt, one of the most beautiful copies among all those preserved. Moreover, it gives the impression of having left the hands of its authors just a moment ago, for nine hundred years of history have hardly left any traces on it."

FR. MIGUEL VIVANCOS, O.S.B.

Prior of the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos,

D. in History





El Abad de Silos

Pax

The Apocalypse of John is one of the most enigmatic books ever written and, even today, countless sects arise that base their catastrophic predictions on a subjective interpretation of such a venerable text. It is not surprising, therefore, that from the first centuries of Christianity some churches were reluctant to accept as inspired such a controversial text whose meaning escaped them. Little by little, however, the revealed character of the Apocalypse was universally accepted and read in liturgical celebrations.

The Holy Fathers took on the great task of explaining its deep symbolism and knew how to extract from it the true doctrine of the faith. Not in vain, since it was written, this book of Revelation (such would be its true name in English) was conceived by the Church as a message of hope for the Christian communities that suffered the scourge of persecution. A message that is valid for the Church in all times and places.

This is how the Lebanese monk Beatus understood it, when he proposed his commentaries on the Apocalypse as a stimulus for those Christian communities of the Asturias, which were on the verge of extinction. Judging by the diffusion of his work, it is safe to say that he achieved his purpose very well.

Centuries later, when that hour of maximum alert had already passed in the north of the peninsula, but without the danger having definitively disappeared, Beato's book was still considered very valid by the monastic communities, as was the case with the abbey of San Sebastian and Santo Domingo de Silos, whose monks no longer lived the immediacy of the Muslim danger.

For, in reality, what else is the life of every Christian, and therefore of every monk, but a permanent combat in his constant earthly pilgrimage? *Militia est vita hominis super terram*. The Christians and monks of the Middle Ages lived this truth not without a certain anguish, always fearing not only the lurks of earthly enemies, but fundamentally those of the devil, the true and powerful enemy, who continually seeks their irremediable doom. Fortunately, they had the example of Christ which, with powerful literary and visual imagery, the Apocalypse and its commentator Beatus presented to their readers.

At the end of the eleventh century and at the dawn of the next century, the monk-copyists of the Castilian monastery of Silos carried out, in the midst of considerable difficulties, one of the finest copies of Beatus' work that has had the good fortune to reach our days. The codex had cost a lot of time, great effort and, no doubt, also considerable sums of money. That is why the monks of the Silensian monastery took such great care of it that, nine hundred years later, its excellent state of preservation is still admirable.

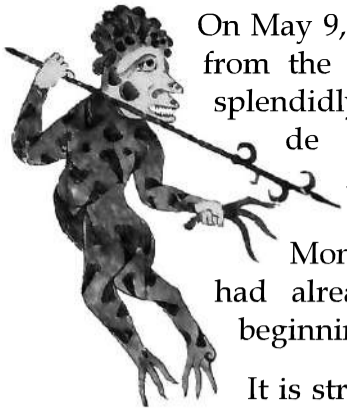
For reasons that still elude us, this magnificent manuscript traveled through unknown paths and various libraries, even before the eighteenth century, until it reached the British Library, where it is preserved today. But it does not matter, because wherever it is, it has been, is and will continue to be the Beatus of Silos. The monks restoring the abbey of Silos in 1880 understood this, and very soon got hold of a superb black and white photo album, which reproduces all the illustrations of this Beatus.

Today, at the dawn of the third millennium, we are about to be able to enjoy an "almost-original" edition, made possible by the technical advances and the passion for good books of Mr. Manuel Moleiro. Celebrating the millennium of the birth of Saint Dominic of Silos, whose restoration work made possible the *scriptorium* of Silos, the architect of this Beatus, we believe that this edition can become one of the landmark events of such an important anniversary.

For monks and for Christians today, Revelation remains a book of hope. In fact, it is the book for our time, because Christ is the true hope of man, the alpha and the omega of us all. This truth was lived and expressed in a marvelous way by those young copyists of the 11th century.

May we, for our own good and for our true happiness, know how to do the same.

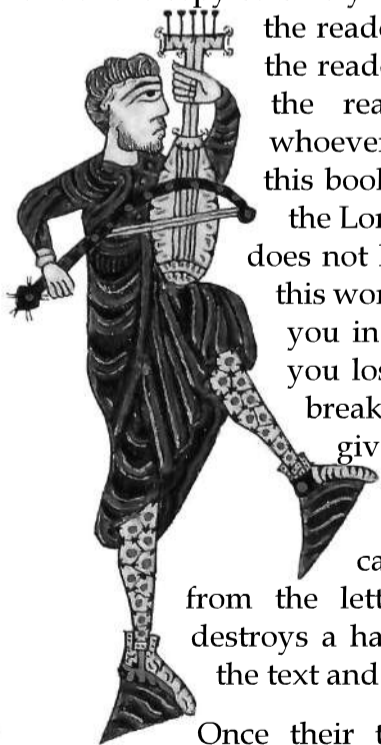
Fr. Clemente Serna González
Abbot of Silos



On May 9, 1840, he bought a precious manuscript from the British Museum in London; it was a splendidly illuminated hand-copied text of Beato de Liébana's Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John. The codex had been made in the scriptorium of the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos, but it had already had a busy life from its very beginnings.

It is strange that a monastery as old as that of San Sebastián de Silos, located in the south of the province of Burgos, founded towards the end of the 9th or beginning of the 10th century, did not have among its books a copy of a work as characteristic as this one until the end of the 11th century. We know relatively well the vicissitudes of the Silense library, its oldest manuscripts, the rebirth of the scriptorium in the time of the saintly abbot Domingo, who would later give his name to the monastery, the heyday of the times of Don Fortunio.... But at no time do we find that, throughout the tenth century, the monks of Silos dedicated their time and effort to the copying of a Beatus, a book that, from its origins in Liébana at the end of the eighth century, enjoyed an extraordinary prestige. By chance and the interest of an 18th century archivist from Silos, Father Domingo Ibarreta, three folios from two different Beatus, which he found abandoned in the library of the abbey of Santa María la Real de Nájera, have been preserved in the monastery of Silos. One of these folios, once from the Riojan monastery of Cirueña, dates from the 9th century, and is thus the oldest preserved testimony of the handwritten transmission of the Beatus Commentary, unique also for its primitive illumination.

But none of this directly concerns Silos. At the end of the 11th century, when the text of Beatus began to be more rarely copied and used, the monks of Silos decided to undertake the costly task. Costly because it was a codex that required very good parchment, varied inks, gold and silver to be profusely illustrated. If a careful and well-finished work was to be carried out, it was also necessary to have good calligraphers and illuminators. Silos lacked none of these at this time; the monks Domingo and Muño set to work, and on Thursday, April 18, 1091, at the sixth hour of the day, they finished the work of hand-scribing the text, which could have taken them a few months. Following the custom, they could thank God for having allowed them to finish their work: "Blessed be the Lord who led me to the port of this work. I also bless the king of heaven who has brought me unharmed to the end of this book, amen". The work of the copyist is very difficult, as they themselves remind



the reader: "The work of the scribe benefits the reader; the scribe wears his body and the reader nourishes his mind. You, whoever you are, who take advantage of this book, do not forget the scribes, so that the Lord may forget your sins. For he who does not know how to write does not value this work. In case you want to know, I'll tell you in detail: the work of writing makes you lose your eyesight, bends your back, breaks your ribs and upsets your belly, gives pain to your kidneys and causes discomfort to your whole body.

So you, reader, turn the pages carefully and keep your fingers away from the letters, because just as a hailstone destroys a harvest, so the useless reader erases the text and destroys the book".

Once their task was finished, Domingo and Muño had to pass the work, not yet bound, to the illuminators so that, in a year or so, they could copy the illuminations of the model in the spaces left blank for that purpose. But then some problems began to occur, the exact determination of which we do not know. The fact is that, at the death of Abbot Fortunio, which occurred around 1100, only a small part of the miniatures had been completed. The work must have come to a standstill in the following years, and it was Abbot Don Juan, who had the good fortune to receive the fully illuminated manuscript from the hands of his prior, Don Pedro, who must have carried out

most of the missing work. **As chance would have it, June 30, 1109, the date of the completion of the whole work, was also the day of the death of King Alfonso VI, who had been a distinguished benefactor of the house of St. Dominic.**

The state of conservation of the manuscript is such that it gives the impression of having been very little used. Almost fifty years after it was finished, it was used to copy on one of its blank pages a document that, because of its importance for the community, deserved to be kept in a safe place. We refer to the division between the abbey and convent tables, which took



place in 1158. A curious reader had it in his hands in the 14th century and pointed out the passages that most caught his attention. From that moment on we ignore everything about him; at some point he left Silos never to return. In the 18th century it belonged to Cardinal Antonio de Aragón, who donated it to the College of San Bartolomé in Salamanca, from where it passed, when these colleges were suppressed, to the Royal Library in Madrid. It can be assumed that Joseph Bonaparte took it from there when he was King of Spain, and then it was sold by him to the British Museum, when he was only Count of Survilliers.

This is, grosso modo, the history of a manuscript that, although at the textual level does not pose major problems, must

be studied in depth at the iconographic level to determine with precision the different hands that intervened in it, its models and influences, its innovations, etc. Not to mention the fact that, at an undetermined time, it was enriched with some splendidly decorated folios from a Silensian antiphonary and a **vision of hell, unique in Romanesque art.** But also a conscientious paleographic analysis will shed light on the gradual introduction of the Carthaginian script in the kingdom of Castile, since, **written entirely in Visigothic minuscule,** the influences of the new form of writing are nevertheless very frequent in the codex.

Over and above these more or less erudite considerations, I believe that an aesthetic evaluation of our manuscript is fundamental; we often forget our feelings before an ancient or medieval work of art in order to quickly move on to rational analysis. And this is not what Domingo and Muño and, above all, Prior Pedro intended. **The Silense copy of Beato's work is possibly one of the most beautiful of all those preserved. Moreover, it gives the impression of having just left the hands of its authors, since nine hundred years of history have hardly left any mark on it (in the whole manuscript only three folios are missing).** A facsimile edition of it, long longed for, will be of great interest to scholars, but, above all, it will be most useful to those who love beauty and enjoy it.

FR. Miguel C. Vivancos, O.S.B.

Prior of the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos

D. in History



SILOS BEATUS:

#1. Folio 2: Hell

#2. Folio 7v: Maiestas Domini

#3. Folio 86v: Adoration of the Lamb

#4. Folio 126: The Seven Angels with the Seven Trumpets

#5. Folio 164: The Adoration of the Lamb on Mount Zion

#6. Folio 172: The Seven Angels Come out of the Temple

#7. Folio 183v: The Woman seated on the Seven-Headed Beast

#8. Folio 188: The Lamb Defeats the Beast, the Dragon and the False Prophet

#9. Folio 190v: The Fire of Babylon

#10. Folio 196: The Horseman Faithful and True

#11. Folio 209: Christ upon his Throne and the River of Life

#12. Folio 276: Labyrinth

