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)
C'est le jour que Marie présente le Seigneur au temple de Jérusalem. Elle fait un hymne à Dieu entre ses bras, ainsi qu'auge le texte en son chapitre suivant.
C'est l'histoire Comment Jésus a fait sortir tous les enfans qui étaient en bétellem venus

tos puéricultures. Enfi que saint Mathieu le vit en son evangile a Scare l'appel.
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)

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)

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)
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)
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)
lament morts et son

assennat les vilignes par

sauc phamon aprés lison puple

preple-sièf lamer sel

mil eyp partie relamer amos

rentrent en mer obtres ses ames

seu est teinat

Le que morses siert lamer cele
Le que vilignes senost

part en rift parier Senecelto

puelat qui perois les aymes que

il gouine et lannte maus tuent

les boulfes amnes et de gent

sont en est mode

Leque morses phamon utaff

le puple monstes ecranne eur

re a despen Senecel les relieus

qui ono apres les neapes dame

tu muamne pmile moine et

nauekt.

f. 62v
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)
C'est l'histoire comment l'angle apparut à Joseph en dormant, et tout Joseph
hante et pren l'enfant à sa mère afin ten en Egypte et demeure illuminé.
unique avant que céle te vie. Enfi que sant machie le dit-en son
ascant capite.
Cecil. il donna corment la angues aprir a Joseph et hannya que sainte Anne famoul
hub ont couenue, et il commenc que il tendretouner alt... a tel segnal qu'il la troi
ner au ponte de la cite.
L'estoire. Comen me seigneur thu est fust et hau.
Nostro que furent faits en dina galiee. Ensi que sam-
vus en son euangile usant capitie.
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)
Cette histoire. Comment saint Jean baptise les réfugiés de nègre nourri par un autre riche à l'agneau du bien. Fust que saint Jean le vint en son évangile un premier capitale.

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)
C'est l'histoire. Comment mon seigneur a dû se berner et tout des siens. Et quand il le
tardement il disoient prophètes qui est ce qui tu seras. Ensi que saurit liez lui en
son evangile y un centime capitale.
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)
C'est l'histoire comment le corps de nostre seigneur Jhesu Christ est mis en un tombeau. Ensui que saint Matthieu le vit en son evangile, il tiroit a un cyapitre.
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)
C'est histoire. Comme le diable alla temps n'ire seigneur diant u destre. Et il a dit veu, tu que ses pierres se faicent pain. Lors d'autre seigneur. Lome ne n'ont seulement ce pain. Enst que trint matin le vint eut en son evangile quart-capite.
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José Antonio Caneda Goyanes
Notary of Lugo, Colegio de Galicia

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