

Fragmentology

A Journal for the Study of Medieval Manuscript Fragments

Fragmentology is an international, peer-reviewed Open Access journal, dedicated to publishing scholarly articles and reviews concerning medieval manuscript fragments. *Fragmentology* welcomes submissions, both articles and research notes, on any aspect pertaining to Latin and Greek manuscript fragments in the Middle Ages.

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Review

Gaudenz Freuler (with contributions by Georgi Parpulov), *The McCarthy Collection, Volume I: Italian and Byzantine Miniatures*, London: Ad Ilissvm 2018, 304 pp. ISBN 9781912168071.

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We are living in a golden age of lavish print publications dedicated to privately formed collections of manuscript fragments. This may seem an astonishing fact, but it is demonstrably true.¹ Why is this so? It appears to be the result of a number of complementary circumstances. To begin with, consider the evolution of collecting practices: two centuries ago, those wishing to chart the course of European painting had ample access to post-Napoleonic spoils in the form of full altarpieces that were only rarely subject to export controls. In the twentieth century, such individuals were increasingly constrained to mere retable compartments. Now, ambitious collectors are largely limited to miniatures and leaves excised from manuscripts. Indeed, as full manuscripts grow scarcer on the antiquarian market, and ex-novo private manuscript libraries are becoming a rarity, collectors of means still have the ability to buy widely in the genre of illuminated manuscript miniatures. Then, of course, there is the thrill of discovery and the aesthetic delight of the *cutting*, which is distinguished from the codex by its display

¹ To name only the most prominent examples of the genre since the turn of the millennium, one can cite S. N. Fliegel, *The Jeanne Miles Blackburn Collection of Manuscript Illuminations*, Cleveland 1999; G. Freuler, *Italian Miniatures: From the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Centuries*, Milan 2013; M. Medica, Federica Toniolo, and Alessandro Martoni, *Le miniature della Fondazione Giorgio Cini: pagine, ritagli, manoscritti*, Milan 2016; C. De Hamel, *The Medieval World at Our Fingertips: Manuscript Illuminations from the Collection of Sandra Hindman*, London 2018, and the forthcoming catalogue of the Burke collection, edited by Sandra Hindman and Federica Toniolo.

value. The reasons for the current re-birth of the printed collection catalogue are more prosaic: the advent of widespread digital photography, desktop publishing, and high-quality offset printing have rendered such projects more feasible. Furthermore, catalogues of single-leaf items are able to illustrate an entire collection, rather than a mere selection of folios, as would be the case in a catalogue of books. For the scholar, the arrival of the internet has made tracing sister leaves and localizing artistic contexts easier than ever before. In the past few years, specialist researchers have been able to harness new tools in the service of collectors, with extraordinary results.

The present volume is the first of three charting the McCarthy Collection of manuscript fragments (consisting of leaves and cuttings), and is dedicated to material from the Italian peninsula and the Byzantine world. A short personal foreword by Robert McCarthy confirms the collector's rationale: miniatures can offer a condensed vision of large-scale artistic trends. Following this, a brief introduction and the first eighty entries are by Gaudenz Freuler, with the final eight entries on Byzantine material written by Georgi Parpulov and included as a coda. Several of the entries group together leaves or cuttings that hail from the parent manuscript or set of manuscripts, such that in total 152 objects are included. Initially, only one further catalogue volume was planned, but now, at least two forthcoming volumes have been announced. Written by Peter Kidd, they will be dedicated to Spanish, English, Flemish and Central European (vol. II) as well as French material (vol. III).

In the current volume, each entry begins with basic information including the size of the fragment (but not the written area) and the incipits. Subsections list recent provenance and related literature, and, where possible, sister leaves and specific bibliography. The commentary is discursive, well written, and not overly long. There is relatively little about the collection history of individual items within each entry (a subject covered synoptically in the short introduction), but there is much discussion of original liturgical contexts. Though only a select number of items are reproduced recto-verso, the illustrations are otherwise generous, and where comparative leaves, panel paintings and frescoes from elsewhere are illustrated, the relative colour balance appears to be accurate.

As the introduction sets forth, the collection's pan-European scope echoes the comprehensive twentieth-century assemblages of Georges Wildenstein and John Frederick Lewis, now housed at the Musée Marmottan Monet and the Free Library of Philadelphia, respectively. In many ways, the emphasis amongst the Italian material dovetails nicely with that of a present-day collection with a later focus, that of T. Robert & Katherine States Burke, currently on deposit at Stanford University, and for which an exhaustive catalogue is forthcoming. While the latter is centered on Florentine and Sieneese works of the mid-fourteenth century and beyond, the Italian portion of the McCarthy collection is particularly strong in earlier material.

For example, the first sixteen entries are dedicated to an impressive assortment of fragments extracted from eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts. Entry 18 brings together nineteen small miniatures and inhabited initials from an early and extravagantly illustrated volume of the *Golden Legend* produced in Lombardy in the late 1280s. Acquired from a variety of sources over the past twenty-five years, the assiduously collected fragments are here analyzed globally in order to arrive at conclusions about the textual peculiarity of the original book.

Another important section of the catalogue (entries 19–39) concerns Bolognese illumination, ranging from early Bible illustration to the expressive and narratively dense choirbook initials of Niccolò di Giacomo. The following entries are largely devoted to Venetian (cats. 40–44) and Friulian (cat. 45) examples, and an important nucleus of Umbrian material (cats. 46–53), where links with monumental painting and sculpture at Assisi and elsewhere are especially prevalent.

The middle section of the catalogue is dedicated to Tuscany (cats. 54–69), with Sieneese and Florentine leaves intermixed, beginning with two leaves by the Master of Sant'Alessio stemming from the choirbooks of San Francesco al Prato, Pistoia (cat. 54, a–b).² A significant amount of material hails from the former Bernard H. Breslauer collection, and as such the McCarthy collection shows

2 See S. Chiodo (ed.), *Storie di pagine dipinte: Miniature recuperate dai Carabinieri*, Livorno 2020, 80–81.

itself to be an heir to that important dispersed ensemble.³ The two most visually stunning items of this pedigree are the extraordinary Adoration of the Magi from a Gradual by an eponymous master close in spirit to Agnolo Gaddi and Spinello Aretino (cat. 67), and a two-level frontispiece from a Gradual showing the Annunciation taking place above a choir of Bridgettine Nuns, attributed to Lippo d'Andrea (cat. 69).

The penultimate group of Italian entries (cats. 70–75) charts a voyage from little-known works by Jacobello da Salerno (cat. 71) through the Marche and Liguria, demonstrating the geographic breadth of the collection. A final nucleus, later in date, can be grouped around the enduring influence of Lombard illumination in the Po Valley in the first half of the fifteenth century (cats. 76–80).

The final entries are dedicated to Byzantine material from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, with a closing entry (cat. 88) discussing eight leaves from an illustrated Georgian Gospel Book of the sixteenth century. Here, a remarkable series of Evangelist portraits (cats. 81, 84, 85, 86, and 87) bears witness to the continuity of this genre in the Eastern Mediterranean, and a certain later susceptibility to extraction: remarkably, several of these items can be traced to parent manuscripts at Mount Athos and elsewhere, which had been subject to despoilment a hundred or more years ago.

Catalogues such as this one serve to produce a momentary snapshot of the state of knowledge, to fix in paper a moment in the life of a collection. Of course, the obvious peril is that the state of the question in this field advances rapidly. One case in point is that, since publication, a fifth leaf of the fine Umbrian Missal of circa 1290 has surfaced, which can be added to the three from the McCarthy collection (cat. 47, BM nos. 1421, 1420, and 1812) and the sister leaf, formerly in the Friedrich G. Zeileis collection, identified in the catalogue. The new leaf is currently on the market (August 2020), and its purveyors, Maggs of London, were presumably able to

3 W. M. Voelkle, R. S. Wieck, and M. F. P. Saffiotti, *The Bernard H. Breslauer Collection of Manuscript Illuminations*, New York 1992.

identify it owing to the very appearance of the McCarthy catalogue: discovery begets discovery, sleeper-seekers beware!⁴

In another case, the very recent catalogue of the exhibition *Storie di pagine dipinte: Miniature recuperate dai Carabinieri* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti, 2020) has traced one of the McCarthy leaves by the Maestro Daddesco (cat. 62) to a precise parent volume: Antiphonary B from the choir books of Santo Stefano al Ponte in Florence, now held at the Museo Civico in Montepulciano.⁵ The fact that the author named this set, as well as those made for the Duomo of Florence in the 1330s, as potential comparanda in the commentary of the catalogue entry is a testament to first-class connoisseurship and codicological skill.

Overall, the volume is magnificent in terms of production values, as we have come to expect from Paul Holberton Publishing and its imprints. The book is a pleasure to peruse and complements other recent publications alluded to above, and is as much a testament to the learning of its authors as it is to the discernment of the collector. As with any complex project of this nature, there are some inevitable typos. One of the reproductions of Cat. 49, for example, is mislabelled as Cat. 48 (p. 159), and some callout numbers in the introduction are erroneous. One hopes that these very minor oversights are the reflection of a still-waxing collection, a living gathering of objects that one hopes may some day be honoured through an equally erudite and authoritative, but certainly more flexible, web-based digital platform.

4 Leaf from a finely illuminated manuscript Missal - with an almost nude man and two men's heads within the initials, in *Latin on vellum [Italy, Umbria (probably Assisi), c. 1290]* https://www.maggs.com/departments/continental_and_illuminations/all_categories/223109/ (Accessed 30 August 2020).

5 Chiodo, *Storie di pagine dipinte*, 210–11.