

Utah State University

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Review of Barta and Emerson

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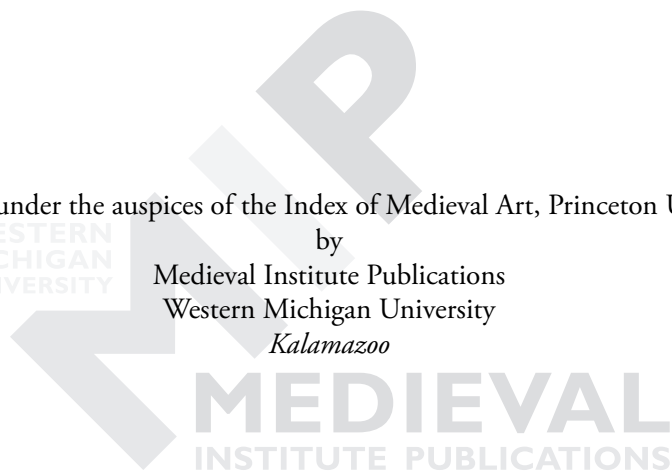
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Cover photo: Lessines, *Veil Rentier*, ca. 1275. Brussels, KBR, MS 1175, fol. 116v. (Photo: Royal Library of Belgium.)



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Ringerike elements, belongs to the tenth or eleventh century. For Moss, determining a source for the book therefore hinges on determining a center where this range of exemplars would be available to a tenth- or eleventh-century scribe.

Timothy O'Neill's "Initial Wanderings: Continuity and Development of the Smaller Initials in Irish Manuscripts, c. 500–c. 1500" traces the continuities and discontinuities in the development of minor initials in Insular manuscripts and links this progression to developments in the institutional structure of the Church in Ireland. The linkages between scribal practice and ornament are particularly clearly drawn here, a useful corollary to Mullarkey's article.

In "Exhibiting the Lindisfarne Gospels," Claire Breay traces the changing contexts in which that codex has been displayed at the British Library since the mid-nineteenth century, reflecting the changing viewpoints and priorities of successive keepers of manuscripts toward the volume's historical, cultural, and artistic value. Breay, the current incumbent in that role, points out how keepers' choices have influenced perceptions of the book, and how concerns for the preservation of the volume have also come to balance public accessibility.

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**Renana Bartal. *Gender, Piety, and Production in Fourteenth-Century English Apocalypse Manuscripts*.
London: Routledge, 2016. Pp. 182; 5 color illus., 80 black-and-white illus.**

**Richard K. Emmerson. *Apocalypse Illuminated: The Visual Exegesis of Revelation in Medieval Illustrated Manuscripts*.
University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018.
Pp. 288; 37 color illus., 63 black-and-white illus.**

The Book of Revelations stood at the center of medieval European Christian religiosity. Its visionary text; its author, widely understood in the period as the same John who had stood beside the cross; and its prophetic implications shaped the way that Christians experienced time, conceptualized the sacred, and explained to themselves worldly phenomena. As such, John's apocalyptic vision, its interpretation, its visual translation, its integration into the liturgy, and its rhetorical deployment stand at the center of an entire historical enterprise that encompasses almost every discipline of medieval studies. In art history, substantial work in English by Suzanne Lewis, Jeffrey Hamburger, Nigel Morgan, and John Williams, as well as a host of other important studies in German and French, have tended to focus on specific groups of manuscripts, from the spectacularly colorful and dreamlike Spanish Beatus tradition of the ninth through eleventh centuries to the early English Gothic illustrated apocalypses that are the focus of Peter Klein's foundational *Endzeitervartung und Ritterideologie* (1983).

Two recent publications dealing with the illuminated Apocalypse tradition stand in distinctively different relation to the history of art historical scholarship on the Apocalypse and come from scholars occupying different positions in the academic landscape. Renana Bartal's *Gender, Piety, and*

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Production in Fourteenth-Century English Apocalypse Manuscripts contributes to a burgeoning and lively discussion of the role of later-medieval devotional practices and bibliophilic, image-centered piety in the development of an array of spiritually useful and aesthetically pleasing books in Northern Europe in this period. Bartal is an early-career scholar at Tel Aviv University, and this is her first monograph, based on her 2010 doctoral thesis. Meanwhile, Richard K. Emmerson, a highly decorated medievalist (and a current co-editor of *Studies in Iconography*) with roots in English literature and performance studies, has brought forth the labor of forty years of engagement with Apocalypse texts and images in his sumptuously produced *Apocalypse Illuminated*. Unlike earlier art historical treatments of the subject, Emmerson's book spans the history of Apocalypse illumination from the ninth through the early sixteenth centuries. This encompassing view allows him to ask how "apocalypticism" and its accretion of iconographic themes over the long duration shaped and informed medieval Christian religiosity, up to and including the spiritual dimensions of Christopher Columbus's voyage to uncharted lands in 1492.

Bartal's study looks at three manuscripts in depth. They are the Pepys Apocalypse (Cambridge, Magdalene College MS Pepys 1803), the Selden Apocalypse (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 38), and the Brussels Apocalypse (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, MS II 282). All three were produced in England in the first quarter of the fourteenth century by an easily recognizable group of artists once identified with East Anglia, but now understood to have worked for a variety of patrons and in a variety of places around southeastern England. While the three manuscripts have in common a pool of illuminators and a central text, they differ widely in both verbal and pictorial content. Bartal identifies this variance as the most salient feature of the group, and sets out to analyze the points of divergence among the three books in terms of their diverse audiences, settings for use, and relationships to the larger tradition of Apocalypse illumination. She argues that in order to understand the books from both the point of view of their production and their use, attending to difference is the key to seeing them not so much as philologically precise "copies" of established forms, but as individualized, fresh responses on the part of both artists and patrons to the evolving needs of a range of spiritual communities.

The Pepys Apocalypse, with which Bartal begins her study, is a bilingual manuscript containing the Vulgate text of Revelations followed by an Anglo-Norman verse translation. Unlike many more famous thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English illuminated Apocalypse manuscripts, Pepys and its close cousins contain almost no verbal exegesis. Instead, Bartal contends, the pictorial program does the work of facilitating devotional and even mystical engagement with the text. This is an important insight and helps account for the variance between Pepys and a closely related group of Apocalypse manuscripts by the same group of artists working from a common workshop model (as Bartal suggests). The hypothetical model-book apparently reflected an iconographic program developed in concert with an exegetical text, either the Berengaudus or the anonymous French prose commentary. Whereas these commentaries direct the reader to study the image (or John's visions) and then read the gloss for a "key to unlock the door," Bartal argues that the Pepys designers shifted the text-image relationship so that "the pictures themselves clarify some meanings hidden in the Apocalypse text" (24). Close examination of subtle differences between the iconography of the closest picture cycle with commentary to that found in Pepys and company allows Bartal to support this contention with specific, observable details, such as the genitals added to the naked bodies of the souls gathered under the altar to clarify that God is revealed to them while they are still in their mortal, earthly flesh.

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The visually driven engagement with the verbal text, Bartal contends, is well suited to a female monastic audience, which would also have been sensitive to carefully calibrated alterations in the iconography that she limns. Perhaps the most impressive of her observations relates to the illustration for the Revelation 19.6–9, the Heavenly Marriage of the Lamb. Here, she notes, the illuminator and/or designer has replaced the wedding ring held up by the Bride found in comparable English Apocalypse manuscripts with commentary texts. Instead, the Bride elevates the Host, and becomes, effectively, a female priest or a version of *Ecclesia* (35). This shift, which valorizes the female reader-viewer, also reflects the exegetical prowess of the illuminator. It is such a small difference that it is unlikely to have come at the direction of a second party, but it reflects the artist's familiarity with both the French prose and the Berengaudus commentaries. This is a wonderfully nuanced and balanced interpretation based on extremely fine-grained iconographic analysis—both artist and intended viewer are given credence as intelligent, informed thinkers engaged in a discourse about the relationship between, to borrow Jeffrey Hamburger's phrase, "the visual and visionary."

As Bartal moves on to the Selden Apocalypse, she shifts her focus from the monastic environment to that of the manor house. Unlike Pepys, Selden contains another text in addition to the Apocalypse, namely the *Évangile de l'Enfance*, a mid-thirteenth-century French verse translation of the *Pseudo Matthaei evangelium*. This particular combination of the "beginning and end of Christ's story" (59), she contends, would have suited the needs of a gentry-class woman charged with the early religious education of her children, and she identifies a possible *destinaire* or at least early owner for the book, one Johanna de Bishopesden, who inscribed (or had inscribed on her behalf) the book's first page. Johanna was a wealthy woman, daughter of a knight and married into a knightly family—indeed, it seems married twice into the same family, first to one brother, and after his death, to the other. Not only do we have the name of the *destinaire*, but also that of the person who made the book, one John, who specifically names himself both designer and scribe. This wealth of information about the production of a relatively obscure manuscript allows Bartal to dig deeply into the process of its making and some of the possible ways in which it was tuned to the particular needs of its socially and spiritually ambitious owner. In particular, Bartal interprets the Selden Apocalypse's unique combination of texts and illustrations in terms of the designer-scribe's role as a compiler, a restless seeker of good material that will help the reader-viewer understand and remember the literal sense of the text. Again, she sees model-books at work, both for the *Évangile* section and for the Apocalypse illuminations. The notion of the compiler as an independent intelligence charged with the instruction of the laity is not unique to the Selden's John. In the colophon to *La Somme le Roi* (composed 1279), another book intended for lay readers, the author is described as having "compiled and perfected" the material it contains.

In her final chapter, Bartal tackles the Brussels Apocalypse, which combines the same French prose translation of John's Revelations as found in Selden with the vernacular scholastic manual on spiritual vision, the *Lumere as lais*. Long understood as a copy of the Queen Mary Apocalypse (British Library Royal Ms. 19 B XV), Brussels shares many of its iconographic traits, and so falls a long way from Selden with its more eccentric and literalistic picture cycle, despite being painted by the same hand. However, Bartal views Brussels not as a copy but as a model for Queen Mary, and once again uses extremely fine iconographic observations and text–image correlations to support her argument. This is an important contribution, but perhaps more interesting still is Bartal's treatment of the illuminator's role in adapting once more to a different type of expected audience, one more

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well educated than the gentry woman and children for whom Selden seems to have been made. By removing textual inscriptions found in other Apocalypse illustrations, stripping down iconographic clues, and expanding iconographic grouping across several frames or even folios, the Brussels artist created a much more demanding visual program, one that demanded of its viewer more pre-existing knowledge of both text and iconography and more ability to immerse oneself in contemplative viewing. Whether clerical or lay, Bartal suggests, the intended user of Brussels had a more rigorous and sophisticated religious sensibility.

Bartal's contribution has immense value in that it turns a close, even microscopic lens on a group of little-studied manuscripts that, despite their restricted geographic scope, their shared pool of illuminators, and their less-than-luxurious production values, illustrate the sheer variability of devotional book production and consumption in one small region of Europe in the fourteenth century. Her focus on differentiation, and her willingness to investigate the role of artists and scribes themselves in the tuning of books to potential users, shift the discussion of English manuscript culture away from generalities and genealogies toward an organic view in which books constitute the material trace of ongoing negotiations between a variety of reading and viewing communities and the makers who catered to their needs. The terms "piety" and "production" in her title are well served. In terms of "gender," perhaps a more searching investigation of the role of these and other Apocalypse manuscripts in the book ownership patterns and patronage activities of women might be pursued. The glimpse of Johanna de Bishopesden is tantalizing, offering as it does an inkling of the complex and still poorly understood social worlds in which rural gentry women operated in this period.

Richard K. Emmerson's *Apocalypse Illuminated* shares with Bartal's work an investment in going beyond the genealogical study of iconography. Like Bartal, Emmerson tips the hat to scholars who have devoted energy to tracing the origins of different iconographic motifs through the corpus of illustrated Apocalypses, but, also like Bartal, he is more interested in the specific configurations of iconography, style, mise-en-page, text, and context found in individual manuscripts than he is in the reconstruction of lost models. Both scholars situate iconographic and formal variance as an index of very particular cultural situations. This focus on the individualized artistic character of works, the role of the illuminator-as-thinker, and the artist-audience interaction unites Emmerson's approach with that of Bartal, although almost everything else about the two books is polarized. Emmerson's scope is vast, temporally, geographically, and in terms of medium; his central questions are less about artistic practice and more about the long history of apocalypticism in the Middle Ages and the role that visual images played in it; finally, his aim is to illuminate how visual exegesis, the interpretation of verbal texts through non-verbal representations, functions as an important strand in the larger exegetical corpus concerned with Last Things.

The book begins with an overview of medieval interpretation of John's text. While much of this summarizes topics explored in far greater depth in Emmerson's own earlier work as well as in that of his frequent collaborators Bernard McGinn and Ronald Herzman, he lays out a number of fundamental points that will structure his approach to the illuminated manuscripts he discusses in subsequent chapters. The first of these has to do with a distinction between apocalypticism as a generalized, orthodox attitude that accepted an eventual End Time as inevitable and ordained and a more radical and heterodox millenarianism that sought to historicize and localize this doctrine in terms of very specific and often proximate events and individuals. A second point he emphasizes has to do with the nature of spiritual vision—distinguished in patristic and Carolingian theology from

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dreams, visions had a special status of divine immediacy, and indeed revelation. Finally, Emerson reminds the reader that for most of the Middle Ages, the early Christian precedent for interpreting the Apocalypse through allegoresis dominated, that it was only in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the historical-literal interpretive mode came to the fore, and that it is likely the case that visually exegetical images produced in any given period aligned themselves with the general tenor and practice of written exegesis. However, he notes, the history of Apocalypse exegesis is complex, and different modes often coexisted. Connected to this point, he outlines his understanding of what constitutes “visual exegesis” itself: an almost polyphonic orchestration of different interpretive voices, including the prophetic, the moral, the ecclesiological, and the historical.

With this framework established, Emerson launches into the corpus of illustrated Apocalypses. His first chapter deals with two famous manuscripts from the early ninth century produced for Carolingian monastic and church patrons, the Trier (Trier, Stadbibliothek, MS 31) and Valenciennes (Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 99) Apocalypses, and one equally renowned early eleventh-century book for an Imperial patron, the Bamberg Apocalypse (Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek Msc. Bibl. 140). None of these books contains a verbal exegetical text, meaning that all the interpretive work within their covers must come either from the images themselves, or from the reader-viewer engaging with them. Emerson reads all three of these books as deeply invested in an ecclesiological approach to John’s text. For example, in the Trier Apocalypse he notes the unusual emphasis on the seven letters of John to the churches of Asia, in which the artist visualizes not only the churches as personified entities, but also the content of the letters themselves (31). Building on work by Lawrence Nees, Emerson explores the radically image-driven character of the Valenciennes approach to Apocalypse and links this to a more prophetic reading of the text than that found in Trier. Finally, with the Bamberg manuscript he explores how the ecclesiological, prophetic, and historical modes are interwoven in the Bamberg Apocalypse through formal, stylistic, and iconographic means—especially *mise-en-page*, the striking colorism of Reichenau illumination, and an almost iconic approach to the figure.

Turning to the equally well-known canon of Spanish Beatus manuscripts, Emerson develops the theme of the potential for visual exegesis to create rich, multivocal approaches to the biblical text. Here, however, he must also deal with a complex and interwoven interpretive text that draws on a variety of earlier texts and traditions, compiling them for a “frontier monastic” (52) audience concerned not only with ecclesiology, but also with prophecy and its specific applicability to the historical moment in which the clash of Islam and Christianity was very much at the forefront of their experience. Not only that, but Beatus himself seems to have included what might today be called data-visualization in his original treatise in the form of a pair of tables detailing the names, numbers, and signs of the Antichrist. Indeed, as previous scholarship has suggested,¹ the original manuscript of Beatus’s text likely contained other visual material, including a world map and some simple miniatures that divided the biblical from the commentary sections of the text. Additionally, Emerson has to address the vast scholarly literature on this corpus of twenty-seven manuscripts. All the same, he does manage to stage a convincing argument that despite a long tradition of understanding the images as literal word illustration, they play an important role in the exegetical function of these books. For the monks who made and used them, he argues, the books “lead reader-viewers through John’s visionary experience to achieve what Cassiodorus perceived to be the purpose of monastic *lectio divina*,” (82) namely spiritual vision of the divine.

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Romanesque and early Gothic Apocalypse illumination and commentary form the core of Emerson's fourth chapter, which features a heterogeneous collection of material, including a prefatory cycle from an illustrated Apocalypse commentary by Haimo of Auxerre (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bod. 352); copies of Lambert of St. Omer's *Liber floridus* (Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 92; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, ms. lat. 8865); Herrad of Hohenbourg's now lost *Hortus deliciarum* (known through several nineteenth-century facsimiles); the surviving apocalyptic section of a *Bible moralisée* (Oxford–London–Paris manuscript: British Library, Harley 1527); and the illustrated Alexander Minorita of Bremen *Expositio in apocalypsim* (Cambridge, University Library, Mm.5.31). While it is hard to generalize about the interpretive tilt of these diverse books, Emerson evokes the gradual opening of visual exegesis to more historical and moralizing approaches suited to new audiences, whether French royalty or activist Franciscans. If anything, this chapter abundantly (and somewhat overwhelmingly) demonstrates his opening assertion that apocalyptic illustration could weave together multiple strands of exegesis and demand of the reader-viewer an intense interpretive engagement not only with words, but with imagery as well.

In the penultimate chapter, Emerson takes on an even more daunting body of visual evidence and secondary scholarship. Moving from a consideration of the illustrated Latin Berengaudus-commentary containing Apocalypses produced for high-status patrons, both lay and clerical, to a look at the more varied and variable vernacular illustrated manuscripts (including the three intensely studied by Bartal) produced both in England and in French-speaking but English-allied Lorraine, and finally to a range of para-apocalyptic illustrated texts, Emerson observes the expansion of audiences and interpretive communities for the Apocalypse, noting that, luxury and aristocratic display aside, the visualization of this complex text retained and even developed its devotional significance. The flow between monastic and lay audiences also stands out as an important aperçu.

In the concluding chapter, Emerson expands his view to include not only painted but also printed Apocalypse books, ranging from deluxe manuscripts such as the Savoy Apocalypse (El Escorial, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo, Vit. 1), created over a span of seven decades in the fifteenth century for two ducal patrons, to the modest woodblock images that illustrate *Der Antichrist und die fünfzehn Zeichen vor dem Jüngsten Gericht* (Strassburg, ca. 1480), and include artists from Jean Colombe to Albrecht Dürer. Finally, Emerson turns to the "radical apocalypticism" of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as it fit into the larger critique of the papacy and the established Church. The final illustration in the book is a woodcut from the Luther Bible of 1535, depicting the Whore of Babylon as pope. We are a long way from the vision of the frontispiece to Revelations found in the First Bible of Charles the Bald (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, ms. lat. 1), illustrated as figure 3 (15). Between the magisterial, mysterious, and revelatory Carolingian conception and the frankly narrative and historicized Protestant view, an entire history of visual exegesis has unfolded, changing the way people read and understood the text and leaving intact only the impulse to visualize it.

These two publications are, as noted, quite different from one another, despite their common subject matter. Bartal's is a model of scholarly restraint and discipline, rigorously focused on the close examination of a limited, but still revelatory body of previously unexplored material. Emerson's sweeps through a much wider terrain, and concentrates on well-known and one might even say indexical examples of Apocalypse illumination. Both use the methods of iconography to support arguments that ask us to look more closely at the mutability and adaptive qualities of visual representation of

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the Apocalypse, and both credit artists and their audiences with the ability to perform exegesis in a pictorial language. Bartal's book is humbly illustrated with mostly black-and-white images and few color plates gathered together at the beginning of the third chapter, while Emmerson's displays the high production values we have come to associate with medieval art history publications from the excellent Penn State Press. For teaching purposes, I would choose Bartal's book for a graduate seminar, as I would hope for students to learn not only from its content but also from its precise and discipline-specific methods and construction. Emmerson's book would make an excellent text for an upper-level undergraduate course surveying the Apocalypse and its illustration, either for art history or for religious studies or history of religions. As an introduction to the broad tradition of Apocalypse illumination and exegesis, it would immerse students in the complexities without drowning them in detail. In conclusion, both books deserve recognition as valuable contributions to the large and varied art historical literature on the Apocalypse, and both will I imagine serve as reference points for future scholarship.

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NOTES

¹ Especially John Williams, *The Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of the Illustrations in the Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: Harvey Miller, 1994, 2 vols.), vol. 1.

Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Robert Suckale, and Gude Suckale-Redlefsen, eds.
Painting the Page in the Age of Print.
Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2018.
Pp. xxxii, 329; 218 color illus.

The transformation from “pen to press,” about the new technology to produce books in the first era of print, did not happen overnight, nor was that transition absolute, because illuminated manuscripts persisted well into the sixteenth century, often as luxury possessions at courts. Meanwhile, even some early printed books also often included illuminations, often at the behest of noble patrons, for example in the hybrid works printed in Paris by Antoine Vérard.¹ However, existing scholarship about such latter-day painted manuscripts, pioneered in France by the late Myra Orth but also deeply investigated by scholars of Flemish or Italian manuscripts, has favored panel paintings in those two leading regions.² Part of the problem for Germany is that the “late Middle Ages” in general and the fifteenth century in particular have so often been seen as a period of religious decline or a mere prelude, quickly overshadowed by the Reformation; or in art (except for Flemish oil paintings) as a late, less vital moment of “Gothic” art or a prelude to the likes of Dürer and Holbein.³

Thus, this survey volume about fifteenth-century German book illumination comes as a most welcome redress of geographical imbalance in manuscript studies that traditionally favor France, Flanders, and Italy. The authors, all senior leaders in the field, are veterans of both period and place,

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