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For completion by the student:		
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Module code: AHHI7016 Studying Medieval Manuscripts: Records and Manuscripts	Student ID number: 1704037	Educational support needs: No
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Assignment due date: 12.06.2020		
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Discuss the Range of Types of Illustrations Found in Medieval Bibles. What Function Did Such Decorations Serve?

Historical scholarship in the study of the Apocalypse Bibles has been met with much debate in the tradition of monastic learning. The connection between the text and the illustrations may provide a clue into the rise in the popularity of these Bibles in the thirteenth century.

The Apocalypse Bibles have been described by Morgan as luxury books whose principal interest was found in the entertaining values of the pictures¹. Emmerson expresses them as the elite entertainment of the day, which held the same interest in the Medieval world as it is today².

Nevertheless, Cleaver has proposed the illustrations in the manuscripts acted as an educational aid³, suggesting they hold a greater function than previously thought. The manuscripts from the thirteenth century reflected the monastic communities, and to a lesser extent, their secular benefactors. The imagery would require interpretations based on the understanding and meaning of a word or exegesis, which played little significance to the elite insight into the Bible.

However, this did not hinder the appeal in owning such books amongst the elite, it aided the faithful to understand the complexities of the text. The rise in literacy amongst the laity encouraged the study of the Bible. The decorations would act as a method of learning, not only as a record of things seen, but for an 'act of looking, reading, and remembering in the insight and fascination of the book'⁴. Yet, they also communicate to historians the way manuscripts were interpreted within a monastic setting, but also how this may have differed to a secular

¹ Morgan, N.J., *Lambeth Apocalypse Manuscript 209 in the Lambeth Palace Library*, (1993, London: Harvey Miller), p37.

² Emmerson, R.K., 'Medieval illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts' in *A Companion to the Premodern Apocalypse*, edited by Ryan, M.A., (2016, Brill), pp19-66, p44.

³ Cleaver, L., 'Horsemen and wild beasts': Dublin Apocalypse Manuscript'', *The Journal*, Feb 2019, Available at: < <https://www.thejournal.ie/horsemen-and-wild-beasts-dublin-apocalypse-manuscript-goes-online-for-the-first-time-4471768-Feb2019/>> Accessed on 3 March 2020.

⁴ O'Hear, N.F.H., *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art: A Case Study in Visual Exegesis*, (2011, Cambridge University Press), p2.

reader. Apocalypse Bibles as products independent of the New Testament, suggests the

Medieval enthusiasm for the end of time. It is this enthusiasm which the essay will aim to study in more detail and to conclude whether this was due to its function as an educational aid. To achieve this, the essay will explore the decorative features of the Apocalypse Bibles through a close study of the *Getty Apocalypse, MS Ludwig III.1*. The essay will attempt to explore in detail the three key illustrations, to outline the importance of the decorations and their relationship with the text it depicts. To achieve this, it will explore firstly, the miniatures as reflecting the complexities of *Revelations*, secondly, the historiated initials acting as a point of reference, and thirdly, the marginalia drawing together the imagery and text to understand *Revelations* fully. The essay will then conclude that the Bible illustrations represented more than a mode of entertainment but reflected an important part in religious learning.

Miniatures:

A significant function of the Medieval Bible was the miniatures which have challenged modern scholarship, raising questions on how they were communicated to a Medieval reader. The miniature represents an interpretative approach to highlight both the Biblical text and the adjacent commentary. Generally, miniatures comprise of illustrations including figures, animals, foliage, and other objects associated with the text. It was, therefore, the duty of the craftsmen to emphasise the significance of the written passages. One argument suggests that these books should not be viewed as visual aids, nor should it be overshadowed by the fact that these were books intended for the clergy.⁵ These manuscripts were produced by craftsmen who had no affiliation with monastic communities, travelling to wherever their services were required. It would, therefore, be of no surprise these manuscripts would be produced without the intention of being visual aids; but have

⁵ Law-Turner, F., 'Beast, Benedictine, and the Ormesby Master: Pictorial Exegesis in English 14th Century Manuscript Illumination', *The British Art Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn 1999), pp. 5-13, p12.

been adapted this way. The definition of a miniature refers to the Latin word *minium* that derives from the red pigment ink used by scribes in the form of lead oxide. The word *miniatura* refers to the painting or portrait in an illuminated manuscript, where the miniatures were in fact 'isolated visuals but a sequence of illustrations only to be understood by the reference of the text'.⁶ The *Book of Revelations* as a narrative text is particularly difficult as it consists of complex themes and allegorical values in exploring the struggle between good and evil. Each folio of the Getty Apocalypse consists of a Biblical passage, with the key verses, supplemented with Berengaudus' commentary. The commentaries were important as a method of understanding the Bible in more detail and to assist the reader in experiencing a revelation from the Bible. Furthermore, the passages present for the reader an image of religious thought and although there is no great narrative as such, it is loaded with theological intricacies.

The problems posed by the Apocalypse Bibles is whether or not they were designed to be visual aids. *The Dublin Apocalypse, TCD MS 64* is unique amongst Apocalypse manuscripts which contains full-page miniatures with no historiated initials or marginalia. Suggesting the principal purpose is not to memorise the text, but to visualise the key ideas. Fundamentally operating as an alternative form of learning, highlighted the objective by the varying passages from page to page. Folio 1v (Figure 1) is the most substantial example in presenting the Revelations text, using the space in the margin to display the Biblical passages. The manuscript is believed to have originated at a St Albans monastery, but may have been produced in London, sent unbound to either Peterborough or Norwich⁷. The size of the miniatures in contrast to the text suggests learning through imagery. Illustrations about the end of time would impact the reader's understanding of the book, then what could be expressed in the passages.

⁶ Harthan, J., *An Introduction to the Illuminated Manuscripts*, (HMSO, 1983), p7.

⁷ Morgan, N.J., "Iconography of the Dublin Apocalypse", *Trinity Lecture Series*, (2019, Trinity College Dublin).



Figure 1: Christ in Majesty, Folio 1v (Source: Trinity College, Dublin)

The Getty Apocalypse miniatures represent both the Biblical extract, but the significant aspects demonstrated by Berengaudus. Folio 25v (Figure 2), offers an interesting interpretation of the false prophet who kills and marks the dead as Christ marks his followers with the cross:

And he shall make all the little and great, rich and poor, freemen and bondmen, to have a character in the right hand, or on their foreheads⁸

⁸, Morgan, N.J., "Folio 25v" in *Illuminating the End of Time*, (2011, USA: Getty Museum), refers to the translation of *Revelations* in the Getty Manuscript.



Figure 2. The Beast from the Earth Killing People and People Receiving the Mark of the Beast, (Source: Getty Museum)

The visuals were an important part of understanding the exegesis of the Bible. In the case of the Getty Apocalypse, the miniatures epitomised images of nightmares, with terrifying demons corrupting humanity. There is little doubt that such images would invoke fears for their immortal souls but manipulated the political and social anxieties in their own time. The 1240s witnessed the Mongol invasion of the Russian provinces and the 1270s saw the Christians suffer defeat against the Moslems in the Eighth Crusade at Tunis, launched by Louis IX of France. Emerson argues that the Apocalypses should not be related to the fear of Doomsday⁹. Yet, to disregard the events of the time would hinder the understanding of the Medieval mind. Consequently, the miniatures may have been designed to relate to the images of the *Book of Revelations*, but it is the interpretation made by the readers, which would give rise to such fears. From images of the end of time, it can be agreed that these visuals can be viewed as "picture books" in a way, but not merely to entertain. As a

⁹ Emerson, R.K., 'Medieval illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts' in *A Companion to the Premodern Apocalypse*, edited by Ryan, M.A., (2016, Netherlands, Brill Publishers), pp19-66, p44.

result, these images demonstrate a complex view from an ecclesiastical and theological perspective.

The image of the False Prophet in folio 25v suggests a moral meaning to the reader, to warn those who against their will are drawn towards a life of sin.

Historiated Initials:

A further example of the function of illustrations in the Medieval Bible is the historiated initials, which were to exhibit identifiable scenes, figures, and motifs. These decorations would relate to either Biblical figures or religious themes. The modern term refers to the Latin *ystoies* or *histoires* which are illustrations represented as allegories, explaining ideas and concepts discussed in the adjacent text. Nonetheless, these illustrations operate as light relief from the seriousness of Bible study. Furthermore, these initials could be used as place markers, helping the reader to source a specific passage, without having to read the text. Cleaver argues that as literacy grew, the laity became more educated in the Bible, but not to a high standard.¹⁰ Therefore, this suggests that the appeal of Apocalypses not only captivated the clergy but the secular communities, even without any knowledge of Biblical study. The readership of these Apocalypses differed and can be conceived by the quality of the illuminations. Manuscripts were 'labour intensive, luxurious and sought after items; status symbols as well as devotional objects'.¹¹ The Lambeth Bible with its extensive gold-leaf details was by no doubt in the possession of Lady Eleanor de Quincy, Countess of Winchester, revealing the fascination of these manuscripts as devotional materials for the wealthy patrons.

The Getty Apocalypse has been recognised as the only thirteenth-century illuminated manuscript to contain a full set of historiated and inhabited initials. Despite this, the manuscript only offers two Biblical characters: folio 30v, representing King David playing a harp to accompany the 'harpers on

¹⁰ Cleaver, L., *Dublin Apocalypse*, 2019.

¹¹ O'Hear, N.F.H., *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art: A Case Study in Visual Exegesis*, (2011, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p3.

the sea of glass' and folio 26v signifying two shepherds looking to the star of Bethlehem, in the 'lamb adorned of Mount Sion' miniature. Both these initials bare a close link between the imagery and the text. Highlighting an important element of the text worth considering. Why the artist has only produced two Biblical initials in comparison to the other initials which display a mix of secular and ecclesiastic icons is unknown. Morgan emphasises that many of the English Apocalypses have a single initial at the beginning of the text, showing John preaching or at his writing desk¹². Getty appears to use the image of John as a reminder to the reader that John is the author and this is his vision; revealing that the initials are more than decoration, but something of significance which should be acknowledged. The historiated initials contain, not only human figures but birds, animals in a narrative sense, these generally are in the form of fables. The fables correspond to the Biblical passages, to represent a greater metaphor reinforced by the artist, who would know a great deal about the Bible. The initial that appears in folio 18v (Figure 3), 'the Seventh Trumpet: The Twenty-Four Elders Adoring the Throne of God', explores the fable of the fox and the stoke. These fables are not just purely decorations but serve a message to the reader. The moral of the fable that tricksters must expect deception in return as part of the golden rule, cannot be overlooked as significant in the wisdom of the Apocalypses. Berengaudus stresses in the 'the kingdom of this world of Jesus Christ will be achieved when the Devil with all those he has deceived will be plunged into hell'.¹³ Therefore, historiated letters not only represent traditional decorations associated with the manuscripts, but refer to fables which are closely associated with the significance of the Bible passages.

¹² Morgan, N., *Illuminating the End of Time: The Getty Apocalypse*, (Getty Museum, 2011), p17.

¹³ Translation of Berengaudus Commentary by N.J. Morgan in 'Illuminating the End of Time', p51.



Figure 3: The Seventh Trumpet: The Twenty-Four Elders Adoring the Throne of God (Source: Getty Museum)

Lewis stressed the idea of the historiated letters as a “living alphabet”, referring to the active motions of the figures. In the Getty Apocalypse, the letters become part of the manuscript not only from the characters inside the letters but also from the interaction with both the text and the miniatures. The *drollies* or grotesques essentially attack the manuscript, which although entertaining, would serve a more complex purpose. Learning passages of the Bible was not just about memory, but understanding the inner multifaceted narrative. This could be in the form of a point of reference, marking a division in the ‘manuscript, chapter, paragraphs, and in some cases the verses’.¹⁴ These would act as a type of bookmark, highlighting vital words or passages linking between text and image.

Marginalia:

The marginalia is another feature of the Medieval Bible, which refers to the images which appear within the margins of the page. The painted decorations in the borders are generally part of the

¹⁴ Lewis, S., ‘Beyond the Frame: Marginal Figures and Historiated initials in the Getty Apocalypse’, *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal*, Vol. 20 (1992), pp. 53-76, p62.

decorative scheme of a manuscript, attached to the initials or incorporated into the borders.¹⁵The

margins are generally decorated with a mix of vibrant characters engaging in activities both amusing and mundane. Many of the actions of these characters represent ideas from both visual and literary sources¹⁶. In devotional books such as the *Book of Hours* or the *Psalter*, marginalia may construct images that include both secular and ecclesiastical images. The *Luttrell Psalter* for example uses mocking images of peasants at work which although aimed for the elite audience, had little bearing on the reality of the characters they presented. Furthermore, the figurative patterns do not appear to work in isolation but connect to the text and central design of the miniature. A concept which undoubtedly can be explored in the Getty Apocalypse, which appears to use the margins for a more important purpose. The artist has intentionally reserved the margins solely as a space for John the Divine to interact with the narrative and become part of the events.

The presence of John in the folio challenges the interpretation of the Apocalypse Bibles as decorative. The idea of placing John in the margins is not unique to the Getty Apocalypse, but the artist aims to exploit the style to the fullest, the manuscript containing thirty-three folios with John appearing outside the frame. In the Bible, John's position outside of the frame serves numerous functions, principally a theological one, acting as a guide in helping the reader understand *Revelations*. In doing this, the artist has suggested the role of John as not just being a character within the narrative, but within a liminal space. The marginal portrayal of John visibly 'reaching his visions with a wide range of affective gestures opens the door to readers' memory'.¹⁷Therefore, evoking a tool for educating the reader and communicating ideas beyond the narrative. In the *Beatus Apocalypse*, MS M.429, fol. 2 (Figure 4) the miniature illustrates Christ communicating the word of God to the angel, then the angel to John. The transmission of the word from Christ to John

¹⁵ Brown, M.P., *Understanding the Illuminated Manuscript: A Guide to Technical Terms* (Second Edition), (2018, USA, Getty Museum Publishers).

¹⁶McIlwain-Nishimura, M., *Images in the Margins*, (USA, Getty Publishers, 2009), p26.

¹⁷ Lewis, S., *Beyond the Frame*, 1992, p61.

is significant and appears to be at the heart of the Apocalypse's concept of John as an intermediary to the reader.

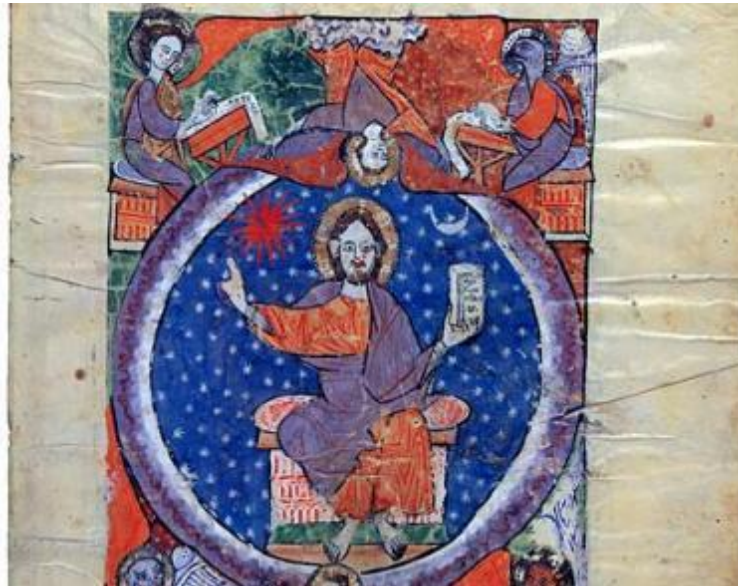


Figure 4: Christ in Majesty (Source: Morgan Museum)

The reader is therefore given access to the visions and able to understand them completely with John as a witness, who then transmits these ideas to the reader. Consequently, it can be observed that the purpose of placing John into the margins is not purely to act as a decorative component of the manuscript but to educate the reader on the greater significance of the scene. Although Apocalypse Bibles were not designed initially as educational tools, even with the illustration of John in the margin, it is impossible to neglect them as such. The book provided a mode of understanding the manuscript with greater significance, the experience which would be understood by both the laity and clergy.

This essay has demonstrated many aspects which the Bible decorations served, examining closely the association of the imagery and its function as an educational aid. It has set out to explore the methods which the decorations played in the greater role of the exegesis of *Revelations*. It has been

observed that the decorations have provided morals which were the exemplar of the thirteenth century everyday life. The nature of the decorations within the manuscript does not suggest a picture book designed for a secular reader but hints towards a learned readership who would understand the intricacies to its fullest. However, this does not mean it was not accessed by the wealthy patrons but was designed to be made for a monastic community. Overall, the range of decorations in manuscripts such as the Getty Apocalypse was to function as a source for learning to be used to its full advantage. They were undoubtedly adapted by the reader, whether this is to act as a guide for memory or to isolate keywords or passages which were important. As a result, the adaption of such manuscripts as educational aides has reinforced the miniature as the most significant of all the decorations. Hence, the Dublin Apocalypse which contained only one type of decoration, the miniature. The historiated initials and the marginalia subsequently acted as a link between the text, commentary, and the miniature. The essay firstly explored the miniature as reflecting the complexities of *Revelations*, the imagery was a method of understanding the Bible in more detail by pinpointing the significant words or phrases highlighted by both the Biblical text and the Berengaudus commentary. Furthermore, it would encourage the reader to understand *Revelations* in greater detail. Secondly, the historiated initials acted as a point of reference, where the initials would serve as a marker to guide the reader to source a specific passage through visual memory. The initials were described as active and moveable, using characters from traditional fables as allegorical of the Biblical text. Thirdly, the marginalia which reinforced the link between images and text through John the Divine. The role of the margins as a liminal space for John who is communicating the apocalypse to the reader, consequently educating them on the greater significance of the scene. Despite these observations, there is much to learn about the educational value of Bible decorations within the monastic sphere, but also beyond. Literacy plays an important part in the way the Bible was transmitted to the secular communities. Therefore, it would require more attention to be employed towards the theological details of the imagery and what social

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impact *Revelations* played in the communities, which would benefit the question of why the

Apocalypse Bibles were so popular.

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