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Illuminations from a Dominican Gradual of about 1300

by ERWIN ROSENTHAL

I recently found, in a Swiss private collection, two miniatures which attracted my attention because they appear to originate, with others, from a Dominican liturgical manuscript of eastern Switzerland. This codex, now lost, can be linked with the famous Gradual of St. Katharinenthal, since 1959 in the Swiss National Museum.

I

1. *Initial M with two scenes (fig. 1)*

On the left side is a vision of Isaiah, on the right Saint Luke portraying the Virgin. As to the first representation, "The call of the prophet", it is rendered in a remarkable and most unusual way. The sitting figure on the left side is Isaiah, who in the Testament says of his vision: "I saw

also the Lord sitting upon a throne . . . Above it stood the seraphim . . . Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar and he laid it upon my mouth, and said: Lo, this has touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

The illuminator gives a clear representation of the text, yet "The Lord" is—for him—Christ, marked by the crossed halo, and holding a golden staff, symbol of his majesty. Isaiah—who had prophesied the Messiah—holds a long scroll, attribute of his vocation as a writer and author. The six wings of the seraphim are reduced to two (of an angel). On the right side the Virgin sits working at a weaver's loom, while Luke sits and draws her portrait. The illuminator seems to combine two iconographical sources. The Virgin is not holding her child



Fig. 1 Christ and Isaiah (left), St. Luke portraying the Virgin (right). Initial M from a Swiss liturgical manuscript of about 1300. Swiss private collection

Jesus—and there is, in fact, an old legend handed down from the “Protoevangelium Jacobi”, which says: “The Virgin went to fetch water when she heard a voice: Ave Maria gratia plena, the Lord is with you, you are blessed among women. She went back into the house, sat down and began to spin.” On the picture the distaff is bound up with ribbons¹. Finally, in the lower left corner of the miniature a nun kneels in prayer, wearing a white robe covered with a black mantle. She is the abbess of a Dominican convent to whom the manuscript was presented (see the same figure and the donor’s portrait on fig. 2). The whole initial is framed by a fabulous beast which ends in two white dogheads—an allusion to the Dominican order (“Domini canes”).

The miniature is painted in vivid colours, with gold ground. The faces are drawn with pen. Size: 13 × 13 cm.

2. *Initial D with the Last Supper* (fig. 2)

Christ, surrounded by Apostles, is in the centre. His right arm is around John the Evangelist asleep on his shoulder. Opposite them sits Judas, toward whom Christ’s arm is stretched out across the table. Below, the Dominican abbess is kneeling. In front of her, also kneeling, are the two donors. The picture is framed by a serpent-like, monstrous beast, ending in a dog’s head (again “Domini canes”). The animal is biting into the tail of a serpent which is coiling upwards towards a grimacing face.

In this miniature, also, gold ground and vivid colours (mostly red, blue and green) are used. It is framed in red and blue bands. Size 13.5 × 11 cm.

Two elements determine the stylistic origin and character of these two bookpaintings. A marked painterly quality, achieved by keen brushwork, lending splendour and luminosity to strong colours. In contrast, the faces are rendered by means of delicate pen drawing, on white ground. This linear technique definitely originates in France², while the vigorous brushwork clearly tends toward a German mode of illumination. The two bookpaintings evidently come from a region between these two countries and may well have been executed in a studio in eastern Switzerland.

The faces of the figures are not drawn in black exclusively; red ink was used in tracing the noses and mouths, while red dots mark the cheeks. This same peculiarity is typical for the illuminations of two important Swiss manuscripts: the Gradual of St. Katharinenthal (shortly before 1312), and the “Manessische Liederhandschrift” (Manesse Codex, Heidelberg University Library). Both these manuscripts were written and illuminated at the beginning of the 14th century. St. Katharinenthal is situated near Lake Constance on the Swiss border of the Rhine (Canton Thurgau). The Manesse Codex is believed to have been written and illustrated in Zürich where it was commissioned.



Fig. 2 The last Supper. Initial D from a Swiss liturgical manuscript of about 1300. Swiss private collection

The two miniatures described above are slightly earlier, very probably of the very end of the 13th century. As the peculiarities mentioned in the previous paragraph also appear in the Gradual of St. Katharinenthal and in the Manesse Codex, one may deduce the existence of an eastern Swiss studio tradition.

Further elements have to be taken into consideration: one of these is a predilection for juxtaposition of strong red and blue. Compare, for instance, the Madonna sitting opposite Luke with the “Dame Sperrvogel” in the Manesse Codex. In both manuscripts the same red and blue combination is applied to the framing bands of the paintings as the one on our two illuminations.

Another parallel is offered by the type of the Madonna sitting opposite Luke and that of the young woman portrayed in the St. Katharinenthal and Manesse Codices. Their aspect is that of healthy, worldly maidens—quite in contrast to the sensitive, sophisticated countenance of aristocratic French ladies.

The same features can be observed in Swiss glass windows, e.g. the figure of St. Barbara within the rich composition on the choir glass windows of Blumenstein (Canton Berne)³, or, somewhat later, the figure of the Virgin on the glass windows at Königsfelden (Canton Aargau)⁴. In view of these considerations I suggest that the two illuminations are to be placed within the Swiss tradition.



Fig. 3 Initial N with Ecclesia and Christ. Supposed forgery of the early 19th century. In the Lessing J. Rosenwald collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

II

Having traced the origin of two newly discovered illuminations to Switzerland, I may now proceed with the examination of a miniature which is stylistically related to them.

A curious resemblance to them is evident in a remarkable, well-preserved miniature in the collection of Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald, representing *Christ and allegory of*

Ecclesia (fig. 3). However, this surprisingly brilliant work was recognized by the eminent connoisseur Carl Nordenfalk as a forgery⁵. It had been owned by M. Grasset before being bought at a Paris auction sale by the art dealer Wertheimer, and was then acquired by Mr. Rosenwald. Now, how can a connection of the Gradual illuminations with this forgery be explained?

On this miniature a large painted initial N incorporates

two figures. One represents an upright sitting Christ, the other a standing allegorical personification of Ecclesia. The sitting Christ-image is an obvious copy of the one represented on one of our Gradual bookpaintings (fig. 1, left side), while none of our leaves show a figure comparable to the Ecclesia. A very close similarity to the latter, however, may be found in an Ecclesia standing next to St. John the Evangelist in the Gradual of St. Katharinenthal (fig. 4). On the sheet, which is supposed to be spurious, weakness of craftsmanship, especially in the treatment of the folds of the draped clothing, and careless brushwork in the rendering of beasts and plants are obvious when compared with such delicately treated details as the miniature (fig. 1 and 2) displays.

Besides, one wonders what the supposed significance of such an initial could be, not followed by text, and surrounded by a large, framing border divided into 24 compartments, each one containing a more or less monotonous array of three or four miscellaneous figures. At the bottom, five male donors (three secular pilgrims to Jerusalem, and two Dominican monks), and four female (all Dominican nuns) are portrayed. For this border the illuminator may have been inspired by one of the magnificent tall initials in the St. Katharinenthal Codex, e.g. the initial I on folio 158 verso (fig. 13 in ZAK 31, 1974, p. 107). This initial is composed of a single decorated band on the left of the whole text. It is formed by ten circular sections connected with each other, each one containing a scene from the life of St. John the Evangelist.

Another misconception may attract our notice. The little Jesus figure painted over the lap of the Virgin has nothing to do with the allegory of "Regina Coeli". The visitation of Mary and Elisabeth, both pregnant, was commonly represented by means of a little child painted on their bodies. A fine contemporary example can be found in the Karlsruhe Codex, which is in many ways related to the St. Katharinenthal Codex (Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe, MS U.H.1, fol. 176 verso)⁶. Such, then, were the models which the presumed forger in Constance used, without, however, considering their meaningful iconographic significance.

As to the prototype of this evidently forged illumination, I may suggest the following solution. That the splendid huge Gradual of St. Katharinenthal was still in its place of origin through the 18th century seems to be a fact, also that it was bought in 1821 (or shortly before) by Franz Josef Aloys Castell, goldsmith and art dealer in Constance, to be acquired later by a British collector. In fact, two of the most splendidly illuminated leaves were now removed from the codex, and their miniatures cut out and sold piece by piece⁷.

From these data we may surmise that the goldsmith and art dealer Castell may himself have manufactured the spurious leaf. The subtle technique, the painstaking, masterly handling of gold leaf and ornamental details confirm



Fig. 4 The Virgin and St. John the Evangelist. Initial A from the Gradual of St. Katharinenthal, dated 1312 (fol. 258 verso). Swiss National Museum, Zürich

the skilled hand of a goldsmith. He evidently chose for his composition a model out of the St. Katharinenthal Codex. What other sources he may have used for the large border framing I cannot tell so far, but the miniature in question can be considered the work of an accomplished 19th century artisan.

Referring back to the two newly discovered illuminations, they, too, passed through the hands of Castell. As was shown, his Christ figure is unmistakably a copy from our Christ-Isaiah scene. This is proof that Castell owned this fragment, and the question arises whether he owned only a few leaves, or perhaps a complete, or near-complete Gradual which he took apart, selling the illuminated pages miniature by miniature. If so, was there, then, another Gradual from St. Katharinenthal, from Töss, or from a similar source? These are questions which cannot be answered at this stage.

III

We now come to the question of the probable existence of other works by our master of the two Gradual leaves. My search in this direction resulted in the discovery of two illuminations not only painted by the same hand as these, but also most probably having belonged to the same codex.

One scene shows *Mary presenting her Child to the priest in the temple* (fig. 5)⁸. I found its description and reproduc-

tion in Catalogue LXXXVI, c. 1920, "Pergament-Miniaturen und Handzeichnungen", of Jacques Rosenthal, Munich. There, under No. 3, I recognized my own description, written some 60 years ago, indicating the date 1300, and attributing the miniature to a German book-painter. The given measurements are 12.2×12.2 cm. I wrote: "Die Handschrift ist laut überliefelter Inschrift im Jahre 1300 von einem Mönch in Kaisheim vollendet worden." Kaisheim is a place in Swabia, where, as far as I know, no Dominican monastery existed at the time, but there was a famous Cistercian abbey. I am afraid there is no way now of verifying the credibility of that inscription which referred to Kaisheim⁹. The fragment cannot in any case be part of a Cistercian Gradual, because it includes a Dominican nun kneeling at the bottom. Judging from the reproduction, there is no doubt that here the same artist was at work—cf. the framework, beasts, and foliage—who painted our two illuminations from the lost Dominican Gradual (fig. 1, 2). The figures, too, are similar: the priest's face, hair, and beard show a strong affinity with those of the Christ figure on our illustration, and there is the same delicacy as that of the graceful image of the Virgin. Both confirm what I said at the end of the first part of this study about a connection existing between them and Swiss stained glass windows.

At the bottom, opposite the nun, a donor and his wife are portrayed. A small crown identifies him as a nobleman who had probably commissioned, and partly or completely financed the execution of the Gradual.



Fig. 5 The Virgin and the High Priest holding the Child Jesus. Initial N from a Swiss liturgical manuscript of about 1300. Collection of Mr. Robert von Hirsch, Basel



Fig. 6 Jesus saving the Elect (above) and Sinners in Hell (below). Initial S from a Swiss liturgical manuscript of about 1300. Property of Mr. Bernard Breslauer, London

Finally, another leaf from the same codex has recently come to my attention, in London. It is owned by the distinguished dealer in rare books, Mr. Bernard Breslauer, who has kindly agreed to my including its description in the present paper. As the reproduction shows (fig. 6), on the upper part of a large initial S, Christ is represented freeing the elected. In the lower part, a devil keeps guard over six condemned sinners.

The colour effect is again achieved by the use of gold, a strong red, blue, and green. The borderline is red, the size 11.1×11.5 cm. Considering the stylistic affinity between this initial and our miniature, there can hardly be any doubt that they all belonged to the same codex. We can therefore safely claim to have traced a handsome group of, so far, four illustrations originating from what must have been a magnificent Swiss codex of around A.D. 1300.

It would be daring to jump to conclusions and to establish a particular workshop on the basis of the scanty material at hand. It is to be hoped that more will be discovered through future research. This could only be achieved by examining the rich material of Swiss illuminated bookpaintings preserved in Switzerland's great libraries—above all in Basel, Zürich, St. Gall, and Schaffhausen, abroad in Constance, Heidelberg, Stuttgart, etc., a task which goes far beyond the scope of this essay. Other leaves from the same manuscript may in due course be found in some private collection or on the rare book market.



Fig. 7 Initial B from a Swiss liturgical manuscript of about 1300. Probably martyrdom of Saint Lucia (above) and Saint Lucia on the grave of Saint Agatha (below). Unknown property

Several culturally important convents existed in Switzerland at that time (around 1300), with studios in which Dominican nuns worked as scribes, copyists and illuminators—e.g. the convent of Töss (near Winterthur, Canton Zürich), to mention just one that was well known for its production of manuscripts. The Töss workshop, however, ceased to function as early as in the 16th century, and its holdings were scattered in many directions.

It is highly desirable that a methodical study of archives should shed some light on these unexplored aspects, and complete this tentative enquiry into the fate of an eminent Swiss codex.

NOTES

- ¹ Medieval illuminations also represented Eve spinning.
- ² For the delicate style around the end of the 13th century, two well-known codices in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris offer good examples: *Le Somme du Roy* of 1295, or the *Breviaire de Philippe le Bel* of 1297.
- ³ Mitteilungen der Antiquarischen Gesellschaft in Zürich, 26, Heft 4, Zürich 1906, p. 180 (26), Tafel 1 [HANS LEHMANN].
- ⁴ KDS Aargau III, Basel 1954 [EMIL MAURER].
- ⁵ For an opposite view, see postscript by LUCAS WÜTHRICH, Editor of this Review, at the end of this article.
- ⁶ Cf. BEER (note 7), p. 100, figure 38.
- ⁷ For the barbarous handling of this manuscript cf. above all:

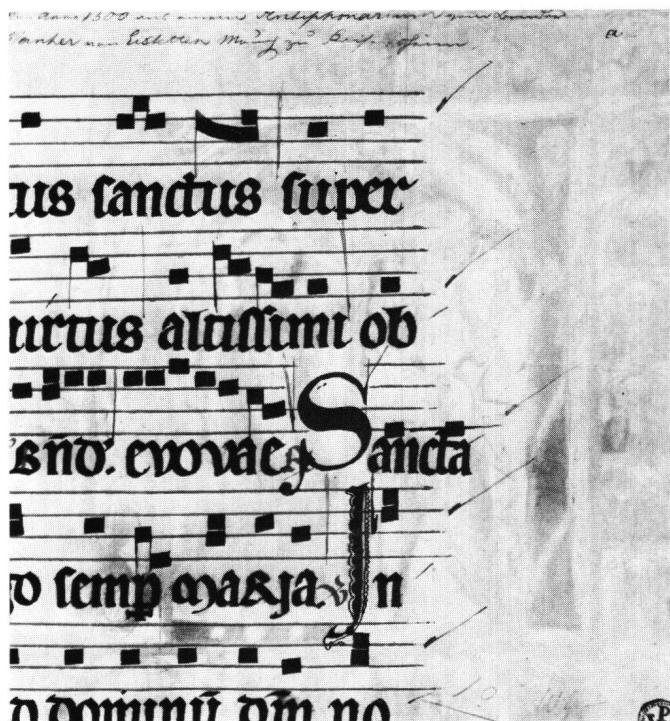


Fig. 8 Verso of the Initial N (cf. fig. 3). Part of an Antiphonary of about 1300. Lessing J. Rosenwald collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

ELLEN J. BEER, *Beiträge zur oberrheinischen Buchmalerei in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Basel/Stuttgart 1959, p. 122–124; DIETRICH SCHWARZ in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 21. August 1960, Blatt 5 (Nr. 2788); LUCAS WÜTHRICH in: *Bericht der Gottfried-Keller-Stiftung* 1969–1972, p. 15ss.—For the Gradual of St. Katharinenthal in general cf. ALBERT KNOEPFLI in: *Librarium* 2, Heft 3, Dezember 1959, p. 144ss., and DIETRICH SCHWARZ and EMIL MAURER in: *Atlantis* 31, Heft 12, Dezember 1959, p. 576–589; ALFRED A. SCHMID, *Bericht der Gottfried Keller-Stiftung* 1958/59, p. 20–45.

⁸ The illumination is reproduced here by courtesy of Mr. Robert von Hirsch, Basel, the present owner.

⁹ HANNS SWARZENSKI (and ROSY SCHILLING), *Die illuminierten Handschriften und Einzelminiaturen in Frankfurter Besitz*, 1929, p. 78. Here Kaisheim is also mentioned, though there is no proof for the miniatures having originated in that place.—Cf. also E. J. BEER (note 4), p. 123.

¹⁰ According to information supplied by Prof. Ewald M. Vetter (Mannheim), there is a confrontation of Mary and the Child with Christ enthroned in the socalled ‘Quinity’ of Kantorowicz, an English 11th-century MS. The identification of Mary and the Child in her womb with Ecclesia is somewhat problematical; what is meant is rather the ascended *Regina Coeli* (= illustration for the Ascension of Mary).

REDAKTIONELLE ANMERKUNG

Der Autor des vorstehenden Beitrags, Herr Dr. Erwin Rosenthal, vertritt die Meinung, daß die Miniatur mit Ecclesia und Christus (Abb. 3) eine neuere Fälschung sei. Er hält es für möglich, daß der Konstanzer Kunsthändler Franz Josef Aloys Castell, der um 1821 vorübergehend Besitzer des Graduale von St. Katharinenthal war, die Miniatur hergestellt habe. Diese Ansicht gründet Dr. Rosenthal auf ein Urteil von Carl Nordenfalk, das ihm dieser brieflich mitteilte. Die betreffende Stelle lautet: “[The miniature is] painted on old parchment, but in a way which proves the miniature to be spurious. When [it] was detached from the paper pasted on the back, a part of an Italian antiphonary came to light which had on one side a margin ca. 3–4 cm wide. The miniature on the other hand has no margin corresponding to that of the back which it must have shown had it been genuine.” (Abdruck mit Erlaubnis des Adressaten, wofür hier herzlich gedankt sei.) Qualität und Stil der Miniatur entsprechen so vollkommen den anderen Miniaturen aus dem verlorenen Graduale (vgl. Abb. 1, 2, 5, 6), daß eine Fälschung eigentlich unmöglich erscheint. Man vergleiche etwa die Gestaltung der Gesichter und Falten. Entscheidend für die Echtheit scheint die Randleiste mit der Menge der Zeugen zu sein, ebenfalls die Mitte der unteren Leiste, wo die knienden Stifter in absolut echt empfundener Andacht erscheinen. Nordenfalk ließ sich wahrscheinlich durch die vorgefaßte Meinung bestimmen, daß die zuerst abgedeckte Rückseite Teil eines italienischen Antiphonars bilde. Es dürfte sich dabei aber um die echte Rückseite der Miniatur auf der Vorderseite handeln. Daß diese über den Spiegel der Notation hinausragt, ist nichts Besonderes. Im Graduale von St. Katharinenthal stehen die meisten Initialen partiell außerhalb des Notenspiegels. Die ikonographischen Argumente von Dr. Rosenthal wirken zwar einleuchtend, haben aber keine eigentliche Beweiskraft. In der Zeit der klösterlichen Mystik, wie sie gerade in den Frauenklöstern der Ostschweiz im 14. Jahrhundert blühte (man denke an Elsbeth Stagel von Töß), sind ikonographische Sonderformen nichts Außergewöhnliches. Es wäre nützlich, nach Parallelen für die Ecclesia mit dem Christkind im Leib (neben dem thronenden Christus) zu suchen¹⁰. Daß die Ecclesia auf Abbildung 3 offenbar mit jener auf Abbildung 4 (des Graduale von St. Katharinenthal) verwandt ist, könnte auf eine Abhängigkeit schließen lassen. Die mindere

Qualität von Abbildung 3 macht Abbildung 4 als Vorlage wahrscheinlicher. Das hieße, daß die hier publizierten Miniaturen aus einer Notenhandschrift stammten, die nach dem Graduale von St. Katharinenthal zu datieren wären (dieses selbst wurde kurz vor 1312 geschaffen).

Dem Verfasser dieser Anmerkung ist übrigens in Basel kürzlich eine Photographie in die Hände gekommen, die eine weitere Miniatur aus der von Dr. Rosenthal postulierten Handschrift wiedergibt (ehemals im Berliner Kunsthändler, Abb. 7). Man erkennt eine Initiale B mit zwei Szenen. Sie dürften Bezug nehmen auf das Fest der heiligen Lucia. Oben wäre in diesem Fall das Martyrium der Heiligen dargestellt, unten ihr Besuch am Grabe der heiligen Agatha von Catania (vgl. *Legenda Aurea*). Störend wirkt bei dieser Interpretation einzig der fehlende Heiligenschein bei der toten Agatha. Im Graduale von St. Katharinenthal ist das Fest der Lucia im Proprium de Sanctis vermerkt (fol. 157 recto, ad 13. Dec.), ein besonderer Text und eine Initiale fehlen aber dazu.

[PS: Am 17. Oktober 1975 hatte der Unterzeichnate Gelegenheit, die Sammlung von Herrn Lessing J. Rosenwald in Jenkintown bei Philadelphia zu besuchen (Alverthorpe Gallery). Herr Rosenwald zeigte ihm persönlich die hier zur Diskussion stehende Miniatur mit der Initiale N (Abb. 3). Es kann gar kein Zweifel an ihrer Echtheit herrschen. In der Tat handelt es sich um das Fragment eines Antiphonars (nicht eines Graduale). Die Textstelle zu den Musiknoten auf dem Verso (Abb. 8) bezieht sich auf das Offizium zum Text der Himmelfahrt Mariae (15. August). Darauf Bezug nehmen dürfte auch die Miniatur auf der Vorderseite, die Maria hinter Stern mit eingeschriebenem Sohn und neben dem Triumphator zeigt als die in den Himmel aufgenommene Himmelskönigin (Abb. 3). Die Schrift ist in Form und Größe dem Graduale von St. Katharinenthal nahestehend. Die Vermutung von Dr. E. Rosenthal, daß die von ihm erwähnten Miniaturen die Reste einer weiteren Handschrift aus St. Katharinenthal bilden, scheint durchaus möglich zu sein. Es sei an dieser Stelle Herrn Lessing J. Rosenwald für die Erlaubnis zur Abbildung der in seiner Sammlung befindlichen Miniatur, die er zusammen mit seiner übrigen Sammlung schon vor Jahren der National Gallery in Washington gestiftet hat, bestens gedankt.]

Lucas Wüthrich

ORIGIN OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1, 2: Swiss private collection
- Fig. 3, 8: National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection, Washington D.C.
- Fig. 4: Swiss National Museum, Zürich
- Fig. 5: Collection of Mr. Robert von Hirsch, Basel
- Fig. 6: Property of Mr. Bernard Breslauer, London
- Fig. 7: Photograph in the collection of Mr. Robert von Hirsch, Basel