



# Medieval Monsters And Heroes

Winston He – ENG 181 005

## Materiality Analysis

### An Analysis of the Crusader Bible

One of the best preserved forms of medieval artwork exist as manuscripts. More books have survived from the Middle Ages than any other medium. As a form of art, medieval literature and texts are significant for not only their textual content, but also their materiality. Stories lie not just within the words, but also the illustrations and materials utilized.

The Crusader Bible is believed to have been created in the middle of the thirteenth century. Like the majority of literary works created during the Middle Ages, the Crusader Bible was a religious work focused on depictions of the Bible. The manuscript is renowned for being one of the greatest visualizations of the Old Testament in existence. Its illustrations depict scenes of battles, everyday life, emotions, adultery, rape, and murder, all of which were set in France. However, as brilliant as the illustrations are, the book's physical characteristics tell just as vivid a story about its origin.

Since the date that the Crusader Bible was believed to have been created, the book has been physically altered on multiple occasions and no longer resembles the original form. By the time manuscript wound up in the Pierpont Morgan Library, it was bound in sheepskin from the eighteenth century and believed to have been rebound several other times since it was created in the thirteenth century (Old Testament 2). Although the changes in binding suggest that the work is well traveled as well as important and valuable enough to need to be rebound again and again, they also blur the origin of the manuscript.

A more careful examination of manuscript has revealed that it originally consisted of only illustrations. The text contained in the manuscript was not produced by the same artisans who created the images. The Crusader Bible's Latin inscriptions were not added until the fourteenth century, while the manuscript was in Italy. When it was gifted to Shah 'Abbas in Isfahan in 1608, the Persian inscriptions were added. After Isfahan was sacked in 1722, the book ended up in the possession of a Persian-speaking Jew, who then added the Judeo-Persian inscriptions. Moreover, the translations of the inscriptions turned out to be inaccurate notations and failed attempts at identifying the subjects of the illustrations. As a result, the Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian texts that currently exist in the manuscript are less significant for their content than the story they keep of the book's journey through time. However, the inaccuracy of the added inscriptions and lack of text in the original form imply that it may have originally been created for an individual who already knew the story of the Bible. This bolsters a common belief that the Crusader Bible was originally meant for King Louis IX, who already knew the story of the Old Testament very well, to look at (The Crusader Bible 5).



Amalek and his army threaten the Israelites with war. Moses commands Joshua, son of Nun, to assemble an army. Note the clothing Joshua is wearing.

Fol. 9v. Digital image. The Morgan Library & Museum. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Oct. 2015.

While the large quantity of alterations made to the book generate ambiguity regarding its origins, the Crusader Bible has long been associated with the French king Louis IX and his Seventh Crusade. Although no solid evidence exists that he actually commissioned the work, many of the books characteristics point to this conclusion. The Crusader Bible is believed to have been made in Paris in the context of Louis' other commissions and crusading activities. The styles and icons utilized throughout the manuscript parallel those used in the Sainte-Chapelle, which had been commissioned by Louis IX during the same period to house Christian relics. The prevalence of Christianity throughout Europe during the period led to the frequent intertwining of religion and royalty. Louis was often compared to the Israeli king Solomon, the Sainte-Chapelle to Solomon's Temple, and the Grande Chasse containing the relics to the Ark of the New Covenant in the Bible. Prior to the date the Crusader Bible was believed to have been created, Pope Gregory IX's crusader propaganda compared the people of Judah to Louis's Christian Kingdom and Louis IX's predecessors believed that they were the successors to the God-chosen kings of Judah, thus claiming divine sanction for their "sacred" kingship. The French people were convinced that Paris was the New Jerusalem and they the chosen people. This blurring of the line between French royalty and religion Louis' crusades is further reflected in the illustration of biblical kings in crusader armor and fleur-de-lis crowns, ultimately implicating a strong connection between the manuscript and the French crown (The Crusader Bible 2).

Beyond the content depicted in the manuscript, high patronage is similarly suggested by the size and material of the book. The book consists of 43 leaves of vellum 390 millimeters in length and 300 millimeters in width (Old Testament 1). In comparison, the Hours of Catherine of Cleves measures 192 by 130 millimeters and the Prayerbook of Claude de France measures 157 by 102 millimeters. The Crusader Bible's dimensions are several times larger than those of small personal prayer books made during time period. Such large pieces of vellum were expensive to use and common people would likely have lacked the financial resources to have such a large and premium manuscript created. Only wealthy families and royalty could have afforded to purchase a work of that scale, thus supporting the hypothesis that King Louis commissioned the manuscript.

Even the illustrations were created using premium materials. Within the illustrations, gold foil was generously used as a decoration. Each of the 86 illustrations was enclosed by a gold border and gold was used to fill large spaces within the illustrations. The gold was only one of an assortment of colors used throughout the manuscript. A similar set of colors is used for all of the illustrations. Red, blue, and orange are also used on each of the pages. On a symbolic level, the colors may once again have been used to create a connection between the book and royalty as many paintings of King Louis IX were created using the exact same colors. Further analysis of the blue pigment used so heavily throughout the book showed that it was extracted from lapis lazuli, a rare mineral found primarily in Afghanistan. The high cost of not only importing the mineral from the Middle East and extracting the pigment from the mineral typically compelled most artists to use the color sparingly or utilize less expensive blue pigments such as azurite (The Crusader Bible 7). The cost of obtaining and using a scarce material in such abundance once again implies both high patronage and high craftsmanship on the part of the artists. Common people who saw such a manuscript would have been awestruck not just by the skilled artwork, but also the abundant use of such luxurious and elusive materials.

While the quality and cost of the materials used imply that the artists who created the work were likely skilled, technical analyses of the manuscript have also discovered that multiple artisans were responsible for producing the work. Evident differences between in initial preparatory designs that are visible beneath the paint layer as well as final illustrations imply that multiple artists created the paintings. These subtle differences suggest that up to seven different hands worked on the illuminations (The Crusader Bible 7). The multitude of artists would certainly have required an increased financial investment. Once again, such a commodity would not have been available to most people alive during the time.

The Crusader Bible contains numerous characteristics that point to a deeper level of significance beyond the brilliant illustrations. The religious and cultural aspects subtly implied by the book's luxurious physical qualities and craftsmanship not only provide insight into the importance and reverence of royalty in thirteenth century French society, but also hint that King Louis IX had commissioned the work himself.

"The Crusader Bible." *The Crusader Bible*. The Morgan Library & Museum, n.d. Web. 17 Oct. 2015.

He 1

#### Materiality Analysis

While I was composing my original draft, I believe that there was a lack of a connection between my individual support points and primary argument. I analyzed individual aspects of my selected manuscript's content and materiality, but I did not clearly connect each of these points back to my thesis. As I revisited my materiality analysis, I had a better picture of my paper's main argument. My focus was on strengthening connections between paragraphs and making my transitions smoother as well as explicitly connecting each individual section of my paper back to the overarching argument. With the additional space, I was also able to restructure several of my body paragraphs into which I felt I had crammed information in my original draft. As I moved certain thoughts that seemed out of place into different paragraphs, my paper became better organized. Since the focus of each paragraph was clearer, it also became easier to create transitions between paragraphs. Furthermore, the additional space allowed me to expand my thoughts on the materiality and smaller technical details that I felt I had rushed through and left out in my original draft, such as the discussion regarding the multitude of artisans who were responsible for creating the manuscript. The result was a more structured and thorough analysis of my selected manuscript.

Search

RECENT POSTS

Composing in an Oral Mode

The Voyage of St. Brendan

RECENT COMMENTS

Jenny Bledsoe on The Voyage of St. Brendan

ARCHIVES

November 2015

September 2015

CATEGORIES

Uncategorized

META

Log in

Entries RSS

Comments RSS

WordPress.org