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Materiality Analysis

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The Crusader Bible Analysis of Materiality

The given context of a specific point in history can very well determine the general idea of how a manuscript will likely be composed and what will influence it. Content, origin, and illustration are a few key details that construct the reader's interpretation of material. Medieval manuscripts serve as a significant resource for modern scholars in their efforts to broaden their understandings of subjects like theology, art, and war. Including relevant material and imagery of 13th century France helps cement the manuscript into the historical and artistic concepts of history. *The Crusader Bible* is a vibrant visualization of many Old Testament characters and events. Imagery portrayed through folios and colorful illustrations proves as an effective medium for the religious narrative and many artistic elements of medieval western Europe.

The best way for an author to reach out to an audience is to heavily integrate elements of everyday life that can also be found in Christian tradition. *The Crusader Bible* was made in Paris around the year 1250. Commissioned during the reign of King Louis IX, the manuscript took on a large size measuring up to a total frame size of 390 by 300 millimeters. In the forty-three folios commissioned by an upper class French patron we see elaborate biblical illustrations of the daily elements of faith, love, and hate. It must be noted that *The Crusader Bible* was originally a picture book until inscriptions were later added so it was very important for the illustrator to produce clear and vivid illustrations. Folio 17v covers the book of Ruth and specifically illustrates the harvesting and gathering of barley (Leson, par. 5). Shades of green, blue, and tan are used to fill in the lines of illustration while gold leaf adorns the corners of the inscriptions. Although there is a wealth of color and fine materials used in this text, it is worth noting that farmers in the medieval concept were not the wealthiest. However, this speaks to the fact that the illustrator of this work wanted to deliver an exemplary version of the life of daily agricultural work. Sowing, harvesting, and stacking were all actions that a medieval European population could relate to considering agriculture was one of the main driving economic forces in Medieval Europe. In the middle east, agriculture was also vital to economic survival so Ruth's hard work and eventual conversion and faith to God is the ultimate example for how anyone should live their life according to the illustrator. Folio 17v was a perfect integration of biblical faith and hard work.

A vivid description of story is important to persuade someone of its authenticity. The Crusader bible accurately portrays several battles in biblical times in bright detail and taps into diplomatic strategy and religious sentiment. Folio 41r illustrates a battle between Joab's army and Hanun the Ammonite king. Through the inscriptions we find out that David was given poor treatment in the court of Hanun which caused this conflict and despite the fact that the Ammonite king hired thousands of Syrian mercenaries, Joab and David channeled the power of God and defeated the entire army (Leson par. 3). What is interesting about the illustration is the gruesomeness of its nature. The illustrator of this folio intensely displays soldiers with spears going through their heads and deep gashes on their bodies caused by ax blows. This is a direct correlation to the inscriptions and their description of the relentless warfare carried out by Joab and the Israelites. Nonetheless, Folio 41r concentrates on its main focus as a "Crusader Bible." The depicted war scenes can be seen in the context of crusading activities commissioned by the French King during the period that this masterpiece was being created. This text was obviously not a pocket bible that crusading soldiers took with them as they traversed to the promised land. The illustrations and page sizes and designs are to ornate and delicate for that purpose. The manuscript was passed down to too many particular craftsmen to not make it special. The text was used as a homage for Christianity and a standard model for how European soldiers should carry out their deeds of holy warfare.

Displaying the full spectrum of emotions in an illustration like *The Crusader Bible* is important in order to connect with the audience. As different as the middle ages seems in comparison to the lifestyles we practice in our lives, there are strong similarities in the themes of love and revenge. In Folio 14v the immoral theme of adultery is present in the inscription of Samson and his Philistine wife. However, we see the violent result of adultery in the illustrations of Folio 14v. In the upper panel Solomon takes out his revenge on the burning of philistine crops and the murder of those outraged by his actions. However, the theme of faith reoccurs again when Samson channels the power of God through a donkey jaw bone to massacre the philistine mob that went after him for burning their crops (Leson par. 3, 5). Gruesome violence is a reoccurring theme in the old testament and the illustrator of *The Crusader Bible* made sure to detail that aspect in Solomon's story. The illustrator probably did not intend to influence anyone to carry out these actions after being cheated on by their spouse. However, this folio goes to show the general public that infidelity is a grave sin and with the faith of God, your enemies that transgressed against you will eventually be defeated.

Publishing in a digital environment changes the the landscape of a composition and it is a necessary adjustment. One can not expect everyone to know about the content they put out. And on an academic level, it is especially important to use clear conversational language. The analysis of rhetoric, image, and materiality are not easy concepts to explain to anyone. However, the way one constructs a digital publication is important to the reader's clarity. When one deeply writes about academic analysis it is very easy for an outside reader to get lost, confused, or uninterested. Readers need to have an organized set of background details in order to get a gist of what an author might be arguing about. No one should expect the general public to know about the *Crusader Bible* so I made sure to include only the important characters in the the biblical texts. I myself was confused with the amount of characters so I felt that I should have only included the characters vital to my argument. However, once one has detailed the context of the material, the following analysis is just as important. I made sure that my analysis was not to complex and that it included common emotions and daily life details.

The *Crusader Bible* serves as one of the greatest displays of Medieval quintessence. The pages are as elaborate as stained glass panes in a cathedral. What is remarkable about these illustrious pages is the content that they cover. Biblical stories were standard in medieval texts but the stories in the *Crusader Bible* were redefined in the sense of illustration. The detail that went into the creation is unparalleled to anything else. The manuscript itself also dove into topics related to the daily lives of the French people of this time. By doing this, the commissioner of this work would have been satisfied in the fact his work would have done an excellent job in influencing the general population of France during that period of history. The Crusader Bible was an effective form of medium for the religious narrative, the historical crusades happening at that time, and the many artistic elements of medieval western Europe.

200 Word Reflection:

The analysis of materiality assignment was definitely easier to to revise than the visual analysis essay. I think that due to the approachable size and understandable content, it took me less time to re interpret my own work. I was able to skim my original essay and already have a strong grasp of what was good and what needed more improvement. What really lacked in my essay was the inclusion of historical background information to the *Crusader Bible* itself. I needed to remind myself that aside from the interpretive and analytical review of the content, it was important for me to observe the historical background of the text. When was it created, for what reasons, and the actual size and manufacturing location of the text were all topics that I had to address in my essay. By reviewing my essay, I was also able to catch a couple of sentences that were not very clear. In fact, some that did not even make sense were caught by my revisions. The commentary on my final draft also guided me in identifying those errors. Clearing up a lot of these convoluted words ensured that it would be possible to use this essay in a digital publishing environment.

Page from *Crusader Bible*:



Page Example: Saul killing King Nahash and destroying the Ammonites MS M.638, fol. 23v, det. *The Crusader Bible* The Morgan Library & Museum Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1916.