

Illuminated Byzantine Gospels

Holkham Mss. 3 (13th century) and
4 (11th century)

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Illuminated Byzantine Gospels

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FOREWORD

Holkham MSS. 3 and 4 are thirteenth and eleventh century manuscripts bought by the first Earl of Leicester in 1717 from the library of Andreas Seidel at Berlin.

MS. 4 is a startling exception to the general principle that in Byzantine illumination before the fourteenth century portraits of the Evangelists are unaccompanied by their symbols.

An article by the librarian at Holkham on 'Byzantine Illumination at Holkham' in *The Connoisseur*, March 1954, p. 90, reads "Sir F. Kenyon considered MS. 3 very interesting and the arrangements of the pictures unusual . . . The decorations were thought by Dean Burgon to be 'of unique interest'. 'They are very precious . . . how fine again are headings of St. Mark's and of St. John's Gospels', while Dr. Pacht says that the very unusual and possibly unique illumination is well worth reproduction . . . The first four illuminated leaves are the Canons of Eusebius (green and blue). The picture fol. 3 (which is surmounted by two foxes instead of birds like the other leaves) was chosen to be the first illustration in Roscoe's *Catalogue of the Manuscript Library at Holkham*. This was never printed, but fifty copies were printed of proof impressions of the engravings for it in 1835. This leaf was selected 'not only from its affording a fair idea of the style of decoration used in the MS. but also from its exhibiting, in the opinion of competent judges, the earliest instance of the ogee arch known . . .'"

These two manuscripts are little known as they are not mentioned in J. Ebershold, *La Miniature Byzantine* or L. Dorez, *Les manuscrits a peintures de la bibliotheque de Lord Leicester, Holkham*

Hall. In 1958 the Earl of Leicester generously expressed his willingness to allow these two manuscripts to be exhibited at the Edinburgh Festival and for an Eastman colour filmstrip to be made of their illuminated pages. Roscoe was prepared to devote four out of the twenty-five illustrations of his proposed catalogue to reproductions from MS. 3 alone; but no indication at all is given that these manuscripts contain any illuminations in Seymour de Ricci's *Handlist of Manuscripts at Holkham*. The majority of the Holkham Greek manuscripts have been purchased by the Bodleian Library, but these two were not included in the sale and consequently these two manuscripts are not included among the Byzantine illuminated manuscripts at Oxford, of which colour films have also been recently made.

An interesting and peculiar feature of MS. Holkham 3 is that with each of the gospels, with its usual author portraits and decorative text headings, there are a series of pictures of the miracles of Christ. These occupy one page for the first and last gospels and two facing pages for each of the others. The pages are divided into compartments. This cycle was unknown to Gabriel Millet. These show:

fol. 5. (Above) The Baptist in camel-skin. The axe laid to the root of the tree. The Baptist's head in a bowl. (Below) Christ on the shore by tree calls Simon and Andrew fishing in a boat.

fol. 55v. (Above) Christ heals leper. Man washes in pool of Siloam. Christ heals blind man. (Below) Christ bids a paralytic take up his bed. Christ and Zacchaeus.

fol. 56. Christ's baptism. Transfiguration. (Below) Miracle of five loaves. Mary washing Christ's foot.

fol. 8v. Christ in the garden.

fol. 88. Christ raises Lazarus. Christ approaches Jerusalem.

fol. 144. Crucifixion. Harrowing of Hell. Thomas touches Christ's side. Pentecost.

HOLKHAM MS. 3

Each gospel is preceded by an author portrait and an illuminated title. Before each gospel are some unusual scenes from the Life of Christ. 222 x 153 mm.

FRAMES 1 to 8. fol. 1, 1v; 2, 2v, 3, 3v, 4, 4v.

Headings of Eusebian tables.

FRAME 9. fol. 5.

(Above) the Baptist in camel-skin. The axe laid to the root of the tree. The Baptist's head in a bowl.

(Below) Christ on shore by tree calls Simon and Andrew fishing in a boat.

FRAME 10. fol. 5v.

St. Matthew.

FRAME 11. fol. 6.

Ornamental headpiece of St. Matthew.

FRAME 12. fol. 55v.

(Above) Christ heals leper. Man washes in pool of Siloam. Christ heals blind man.

(Below) Christ bids a paralytic take up his bed. Christ and Zacchaeus.

FRAME 13. fol. 56.

Christ's baptism. Transfiguration.

(Below) Miracle of five loaves. Mary washing Christ's foot.

FRAME 14. fol. 56v.

St. Mark.

FRAME 15. fol. 57.

Ornamental headpiece of St. Mark (with portrait medallion).

FRAME 16. fol. 87v.

Christ in the garden.

FRAME 17. fol. 88.

Christ raises Lazarus. Christ approaches Jerusalem.

FRAME 18. fol. 88v.

St. Luke.

FRAME 19. fol. 89.

Ornamental headpiece of St. Luke.

FRAME 20. fol. 114.

Crucifixion. Harrowing of Hell. Thomas touches Christ's side. Pentecost.

FRAME 21. fol. 144v.

St. John.

FRAME 22. fol. 145.

Ornamental headpiece of St. John (with portrait medallion).

HOLKHAM MS. 4

Eleventh century. Each gospel is preceded by an author portrait and illuminated title. Each evangelist is seated at a reading desk in an armchair accompanied by his evangelical symbol except St. John who stands among rocks with his eagle dictating to a seated scribe. Evangelical symbols are rare at this date. 220 x 155 mm.

FRAME 1. fol. 4v.

St. Matthew.

FRAME 2. fol. 5.

Ornamental headpiece of St. Matthew's gospel.

FRAME 3. fol. 112v.

St. Mark.

FRAME 4. fol. 113.

Ornamental headpiece of St. Mark's gospel.

FRAME 5. fol. 178v.

St. Luke.

FRAME 6 fol. 179.

Ornamental headpiece of St. Luke's gospel.

FRAME 7. fol. 280v.

St. John.

FRAME 8. fol. 281.

Ornamental headpiece of St. John's gospel.

HOLKHAM MSS. 345 and 34

This film also contains three Milanese illuminations, showing Rome from Livy and the Crucifixion and an altar from a Missal as they are contained in two Holkham manuscripts which happened to be on loan in Oxford and available to the University printer at the same time as the Byzantine Manuscripts. They had been destined for the exhibition of North Italian art at Milan in 1958 but arrived too late for inclusion in its catalogue. These are Holkham MSS. 345 and 34.

MS. 345 was written by Antonius Crivellus for Filippo Maria Sforza and is illuminated by "the master of the Vitae Imperatorum" according to Toesca and Pacht. Toesca considers that MS. 34 is by a follower of the master. It was probably written for the church of St. Eustorgio in Milan. Thomas Coke, first Earl of Leicester, was buying books at Milan between 19th November and 9th December 1714.