

BEATUS OF LIÉBANA CODEX OF GERNONA

*“Unique and unrepeatable first edition, strictly limited to 987
numbered and authenticated copies”*

The *Commentaries on the Apocalypse*, the book by Beatus, the abbot of the San Martín de Turieno monastery in Liébana, was widely disseminated in the Middle Ages to defend Christological orthodoxy from the Adoptionist heresy professed by Elipandus of Toledo and Félix of Urgell.

The many Beatus manuscripts copied in different medieval scriptoria bear witness to its diffusion and influence both on the Iberian peninsula and in the Carolingian empire at a time when medieval society was in the throes of a profound transformation. This doctrinal and sociological perspective provides an in-sight into the presence of this Beatus in Gerona cathedral.

The *Gerona Beatus* was copied in 975, some 190 years after the source manuscript. It entered our cathedral at an early date, for it was owned by Ponç, the precentor of the cathedral schools, from 1018 onwards. It belonged to his private library although he undoubtedly used it to teach clerics and scholars. It subsequently came into the hands of Joan, his disciple and successor in the precentorship, who bequeathed it to the cathedral in his will of October 6th 1078.

The importance of the Gerona copy is revealed by analysing the different elements in the manuscript. The meticulous calligraphy of its Visigothic script makes the text easy to read. The text itself consists of a compilation of writings by authors from different places and periods, which suggests that Beatus had a fine patristic library in his monastery. But what must be highlighted above all, however, is the iconography. [The 114 full-page illustrations and countless miniatures make this the most complete and rich Beatus in iconographic terms.](#) Furthermore, the fact that these paintings were the work of a woman, the miniaturist En, adds an interesting and original touch to the decorative wealth of the codex.

The restoration of the *Gerona Beatus* and the “identical reproduction” by M. Moleiro Editor must also be considered to be a bibliological work of art that has made it possible to recuperate hitherto hidden forms and colours and, essentially, to disseminate this outstanding, bibliographic work. Its presence in major libraries and distinguished centres of learning will allow access to it by scholars.

The Gerona Cathedral chapter is doubly delighted about the work done, for the outcome is not only an exceptional gem that enriches the cathedral treasury but also a tool of research for drafting bibliography and bibliography programmes.



last copies

Binding
and bookcase



Beatus of Liébana

CODEX OF GERONA

Gerona Cathedral

- Shelf Mark: Catedral, Núm. Inv. 7 (11).
- Size: 400 x 260 mm.
- Date: 10th C.
- 568 pages written in visigothic script.
- 114 illuminations decorated with gold and silver.
- The most illuminated of all Beatus.

«First, unique and unrepeatable edition strictly limited to 987 copies»

The *Gerona Beatus* is the most important and valuable illustrated manuscript to have survived from the 10th century. Some of its most interesting details are:

- The codex was executed in the scriptorium of the Tábara monastery, or in one of the centres dependent on it, between 970 and 975.
- The manuscript was commissioned by Abbot Domingo: "*Dominica Abba liber fieri praecepit*".
- This is the only Beatus with illustrations by a woman, the miniaturist En, assisted by the presbyter Emeterius, according to the inscription on folio 284. Her paintings in the *Gerona Beatus* situate her amongst the most expressive and innovative painters in the entire Middle Ages.
- The main scribe is a monk called Senior.
- The *Gerona Beatus* once belonged to precentor (*caput scholarum*) Juan who bequeathed "*a Santa Maria ... et librum expositionis apocalipsin...*", as recorded in his will dated October 6th 1078.



- ◆ The fire of Babylon and the mourning of the kings and merchants, ff. 215v-216r

The codex containing the *Commentaries on the Apocalypse*, the work by Beatus of Liébana, housed in the Gerona cathedral museum was created between 970 and 975 by the female painter En – the *ordinadora* of the manuscript, i.e. the person who directed the work – with the help of Emeterius. It is more classical in appearance than the other tenth-century Beatus manuscripts and it attempts, within the flat, abstract appearance of the paintings, to achieve naturalist effects as can be seen in the incipient landscapes, the interest taken in anatomy and the sense of depth conveyed. Furthermore, the materials used for the pigments and the lavish use of gold and silver indicate the economic clout of the San Salvador de Tábara monastery and, to be more precise, of the patron who commissioned the work about whom only the name and status are known: Abbot Domingo. The codex was brought to Gerona cathedral in the mid 11th century by the precentor Joan. Iconographically, it belongs to stemma II, i.e. the most recent

family of the Beatus series, branch IIb, the most narrative. However, one must take into account the singularity, straying as it does, in certain respects, from this group and donning characteristics that are typical of other groups and even stemma I, or are alien to the Beatus tradition. Consequently, of all the manuscripts in this series, the *Gerona Beatus* not only has



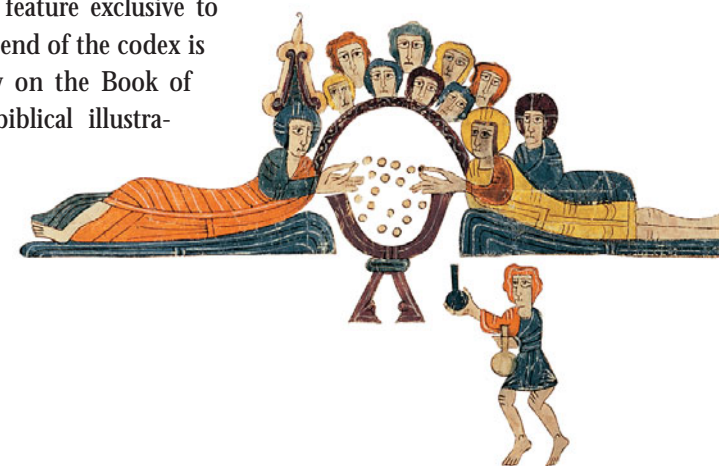
the most images but also the most complex iconography, a combination of elements from different traditions: Gnostic, Carolingian from the school of Tours, Visigothic and, to a lesser extent and particularly in decorative aspects, Islamic. The influence of profane iconography and possibly oral tradition must not be overlooked, being a characteristic typical of this manuscript.

The iconography can be divided basically into three parts:

- extra-apocalyptic: which transforms the manuscript into a sort of summarised, figured Bible with particular emphasis on the life of Christ, in a period when this iconography was virtually exceptional in the western Hispanic kingdoms, hence the wealth of visual sources used in the composition of these images;
- apocalyptic: located between the tale of St John and the commentary by Beatus; in this instance, the image, used to reinforce the text of the Revelation visually, follows the narration rather than its explanation;
- and finally a feature exclusive to branch IIb: added to the end of the codex is St Jerome's commentary on the Book of Daniel, influenced by biblical illustrations typical of this book, as can be seen in later works such as the Rodes and Ripoll Bibles.

The commentary volume:

- Size: 230 x 330 mm.
- 336 pages.
- Considerations on the *Gerona Beatus*
GABRIEL ROURA I GUÍBAS
- An iconographic and stylistic analysis of the *Gerona Beatus*
CARLOS MIRANDA GARCIA-TEJEDOR





"Its stylistic and iconographic traits make this the most innovative, monumental and lavish tenth-century Beatus by far, being obviously designed to move beyond the flat appearance, simplicity and abstraction that characterised that period towards a corporality and still very incipient naturalism, particularly in fabrics, employing a leisurely pace that is occasionally rhythmic but always elegant, and clearly intended to gradually return to the classical tradition".

Carlos Miranda,
The Gerona Beatus

"What makes this manuscript unique is the vast number of additional illustrations it contains in comparison to previous Beatus. It begins with a Cross and a Maiestas, followed by a vision of heaven having no known, extant precedents, and continues with six miniatures of the Evangelists. It also features genealogies which extend throughout a remarkable cycle of the life and death of Jesus Christ, a cycle found in no other codex and rather uncommon in the art of that period on mainland Spain".

Joaquín Yarza
Beato de Liébana,
Manuscritos Iluminados



▲ Maiestas Domini, f. 2r



EXPLANATIO SYRASCRIPTÆ

ESTO RI DE
audi mulierem sedentem
sup beati. Hicofecit
dicitur beati ppter ore.
Promittit enim orande
se sedentem sup aquas multas.
Beata ex aquas unum suna hoappls.
Corruptelum dicit sedere sup pptos
in heremo. Metuere beata cordi.

unum suna. Beata utim dicam
ea. corp aduersarius agno ho
corp diaboli quoniam hominimali.
In quo corpore nunc diabolus nunc
cupit uelut occisum ho suer
dicit mali In quo diabolus se erant
figurat Inangelum lucis anunc
cupit alio nimen diabolus.
Nunc ppter accipian dicit ea quod hec
ad aut una ciuitas babilon era
Eaudi mulierem sedentem sup or

▲ The woman upon the scarlet beast, f. 209r



The image of St James in the *Gerona Beatus* is the earliest, extant portrait of the apostle. He appears with the other apostles in a group portrait mentioning the places where they preached (ff. 52v-53r).



1

The messages to the seven Churches of Asia Minor

1 Church of Ephesus, ff. 70v.-71r.

2 Church of Smyrna, f. 76r.

3 Church of Thyatira, f. 85r.

4 Church of Sardis, f. 89v.

5 Church of Philadelphia, f. 94r.

6 Church of Laodicea, f. 100v.



2



3



4



5



6

Quia unaxpi enipote. lam soluat
diabolus per omnia mundum malum
facere permittitur. Sicut per heret
miam de deo adfructu dicit.
Dicit ille dno donno dicit ulagoris ulos
cactus. Inimicos suos eda uorubia
gladius et implantur sanguine an.
Qm sacrificium dno tubuath In aer
tu aquilonis In flumine eufrate.
Sacrificium dicit sed occisionis et
luu lacoris sicut dicit dan fribus
dicit per brum. Gladius dno Im
ple. aut et sanguine In cruce
abadipe. Itorum et unatum quia
sacrificium dno In boror. et lucula
go magna In duma. Boror et
Iduma. et u ciu auer suna.
De aquilone autan lam diximus.
Et soluat suna quat auor
angeli. In elum In co au
per et uaqob. Parua
In horum amantiss
et unum uo occi.
dona ad aquam
pu xan ho
mi
num.
Hec suna quat auor an poru. In
erianum amantiss. In erianum
amantiss. Parua am dixia quia
et qua percutta et et aqua puri solis
et lune et et ellurum. ad miam fetau
dum que et et et aqua puri dicit et
et aqua nocat lra dian etum et
nocan sinagoga que quim alis
In aenebris ambulat. Sed et par
et dicuntur unaxpi aduat unaxpi.
q Inesse ad bellum preparati cur.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the 8th century, the Iberian Peninsula was invaded and occupied by Muslims. Many Christians, particularly members of religious orders and the ruling classes, took refuge in the mountains in the north, particularly in the sheltered valleys in the Picos de Europa region.

It was against this setting, in the year 776 in the San Martín de Turieno monastery (subsequently dedicated to Saint Toribio) in the valley of Liébana, that the monk and abbot called Beatus wrote the *Commentaries on the Apocalypse* to oppose a heresy upheld by Elipandus, archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain, who declared Christ, in his godly nature, to be God's natural son, but in his human nature, to be merely God's adopted son.

This heresy was similar to Muslim beliefs and was unexpectedly supported in Catalonia by bishop Félix of Urgell. The heresy became so widespread that in order to stamp it out, pope Adrian I was obliged to seek Charlemagne's help and to call three councils: Ratisbon in the year 792, Frankfurt in 794 and Rome in 799.

The *Commentaries on the Apocalypse* by Beatus became the greatest best-seller of the Middle Ages, being copied until the 13th century. All these manuscripts were illustrated with paintings – the reason for their popularity – that so greatly marked western culture that they became a genre of universal art. Owing one was a symbol of power and wisdom, and for centuries copies were commissioned by kings and great abbots.

Beatus wrote the text to stimulate the faith of Christians and to help them

overcome the situation that arose in the 13th century following the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. The Christians in Galicia and Asturias, which had become independent, were consolidating a deep sentiment of belonging to their land and wanted to avoid ecclesiastical submission to Toledo.

The message conveyed by the text was that, despite all the evils and tragedies hanging over Hispanic lands, Jesus Christ would finally redeem them.



f. 165v

"With their striking colours, strange drawings and dreamlike atmosphere, its miniatures subject the imagination to a veritable tyranny. Once seen, never forgotten".

Jesús Domínguez Bordona,
Ars Hispaniae

"Its fabulous images have given rise to the greatest iconographic landmark in the history of mankind."

Umberto Eco