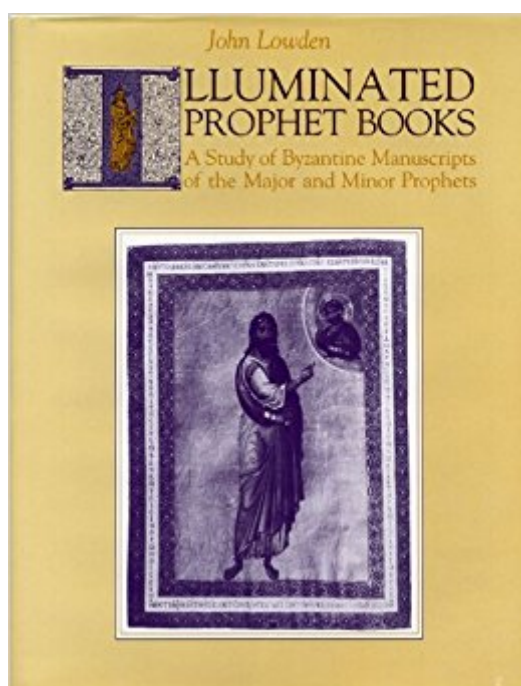


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Illuminated Prophet Books: A Study Of Byzantine Manuscripts Of The Major And Minor Prophets



Synopsis

The book takes as its starting point a small group of illuminated manuscripts made in Byzantium in the tenth to thirteenth centuries. These are fully illustrated here for the first time, and described in detail. This material provides the opportunity to discuss fundamental questions about the way all artist of this period worked and were trained, and what their intentions and expectations were. The study moves from a brief theoretical introduction, explaining the choice of material, to a preliminary overview of the group. Each manuscript is then discussed in detail, in an attempt to show how and why it has come to look the way it does. Analysis then proceeds in an ever-widening spiral, moving from the individual manuscripts, to the relationship within the group, to possible connections with art from the West to the Christian Orient, from the Early Christian period to the fourteenth century, and, finally, to the possibility of lost material unlike that which survives. This broad survey raises crucial questions about how artists knew what to paint and how we should approach the material left for study. The answers proposed here, in emphasizing the importance of an artist's workshop training, the evidence for artistic originality, and the necessity to build hypotheses on the basis of surviving material, represent an approach to manuscripts which can be broadly applied. The originality of the artist and the uniqueness of the work of art (concepts often assumed to be unimportant before the Renaissance) are revealed here, not merely in the manuscripts of the group but throughout the Byzantine world and beyond its frontiers.

Book Information

Hardcover: 128 pages

Publisher: Pennsylvania State Univ Pr (Txt); Not Indicated edition (January 1, 1989)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0271006048

ISBN-13: 978-0271006048

Product Dimensions: 8.5 x 0.7 x 11 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #2,179,810 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #71 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Other Media > Illuminations #793 in Books > Arts & Photography > Other Media >

Calligraphy #4631 in Books > Arts & Photography > Decorative Arts & Design > Decorative Arts

Customer Reviews

John Lowden is a University lecturer, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. He has

published various articles in specialist journals such as *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* and *Jahrbuch der Oesterreichischen Byzantinistik*.

Besides the 128 pages of text, the volume contains over 100 pages of very nice black and white (eight in color) facsimiles of the manuscripts discussed, the photos are on glossy paper and of excellent quality. Lowden displays a fine acumen here in presenting these manuscripts to the reader. The main text focuses on about seven illuminated Greek Prophet books. Additionally he comments upon and shows images of about 20 others. This group of MSS, "Byzantine Illuminated Prophet Books" form a small but homogeneous group. None are dated, but all are a product of the Byzantine scriptoria and scribes. Lowden cogently discusses the relevant iconography of each MS, and reveals many interesting features. Lowden focuses upon the visual artwork much more so than he does upon the scripts. As a palaeographer, I do wish that he had spent more time with analysis of the scripts, and perhaps more "textual criticism" of the actual written contents. This is a fine reference work displaying scribal and illuminator talents of the (circa) 10th century in or around the Byzantine empire, with a focus upon the art (illuminations and miniatures) aspects and relationships. The volume is well made, sturdy and is Smyth sewn. The type is clear and properly leaded for ease of reading. It has an index, and a catalogue of the MSS (with ruling charts). It has good footnotes and fine bibliographic data. Recommended for study of: Byzantine Book Illumination, 10th century scribal practices, and for general information on the Biblical texts of this group of MSS. Lowden's penetrating analyses are very educational and he is a good writer.

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