

**Gospel Book**  
**In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment**  
**Spain (Castille?), dated 1543**

135 ff., modern foliation in pencil, top, outer corner, recto (collation i-vii<sup>s</sup> viii<sup>s</sup> [-8, following f. 63, cancelled with no loss of text] ix-xvii<sup>s</sup>), horizontal catchwords, inner, lower margin, leaf and quire signatures, bottom, outer margin recto, with a letter designating the quire, and an Arabic numeral, the leaf, with quires 1-8 signed 'a-h', and quire nine beginning a new series with 'aa', ruled in brown crayon with the top and bottom rules full across; single full-length vertical bounding lines inside, outside and between the columns, additional frame added in red ink around each column of the written space, and in quires one and two (through f. 16v) with ruling for each line of text in red ink, (justification 240-238 x 165-160 mm.), written below the top line on every other ruled line in an accomplished rounded liturgical gothic script in two columns of thirty lines (ruled with sixty-two lines), majuscules in text carefully highlighted in yellow wash, corrections marked with red crosses, red running titles and rubrics, guide notes for running titles remain on many folios, one-line initials within the line of text, ff. 66-67 and 68, alternately red and blue, with pen decoration in violet or red, chapters begin with two-line red or blue initials with violet or red pen decoration respectively, forming a box around the initial, more elaborate 5- to 3-line initials with pen decoration at the beginning of prologues; nine- to eight-line initials at the beginning of each Gospel, blue and gold, red and blue, or red, with intricate pen decoration in violet, red, and blue, overall in very good condition, with some staining in the outer margins on the opening and closing folios. Bound in its original Spanish blind-stamped binding in brown leather over stout wooden boards which project beyond the book-block at the top and bottom, but which are cut flush at the fore edge, front and back covers decorated with two sets of triple fillets forming a rectangular outer border with rope interlace at each corner, small rosettes and two types of knot-work stamps and a center panel with intersecting double fillets, flat spine with four double raised bands and head and tailbands, decorated with simple double fillets, fastened back to front with clasps, lower board now missing (holes remain), and brass catches, upper board, originals also missing, with replacement catches, the five brass rosettes in the center and four corners of the upper and lower boards are replacements of earlier, much larger bosses, in good condition, with some scuffing, and a small repair to the lower cover. Dimensions 382 x 268 mm.

This Spanish Gospel Book, which was dated by the rubricator 1543, is a strikingly handsome and unusual example of a large-format copy of the Gospels. Both its script and the decoration are the work of expert craftsmen, and it retains its original blind-tooled binding. Clearly intended for liturgical use, the text has been carefully corrected. Gospel Books from this date are rare; examples from Spain are even more uncommon. The Schoenberg Database lists only one other example, and that is probably an Evangeliary rather than a Gospel Book proper.

## PROVENANCE

1. Written in 1543 (dated by the rubricator, f. 135v) in Spain, most likely in Castille, as indicated by the script and the style of the decoration (discussed below). The script is very similar to Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS Vitr. 18-5, a Missal from Toledo (see José Janini, José Serrano, and Anscario M. Mundo. *Manuscritos litúrgicos de la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid*, Madrid, 1969, no. 191, pp. 224-227 and pl. 17). This impressive, large format copy of the four Gospels was written for liturgical use; the size and formality of its script would have made it easy to read; additionally, many passages are marked with accents in red, another sign of oral use. Although its physical format suggests it was made for the lectern of an important Church or monastery, there are no clues within the manuscript that allow us to determine its origin more closely.
2. The manuscript was in England by the mid-twentieth century; Maggs Sale, November, 1961, Cat. 880, no. 108, and Christies, July 19, 1961, lot 102; printed catalogue description from this sale, in English, glued inside the front cover, with pencil notes by for this catalogue visible as well.
3. Harry A. Walton, Covington, Virginia, USA.

## TEXT

ff. 1-40, f. 1, Prologue to Mark (Stegmüller, *Repertorium biblicum*, no. 589], ff. 1v-40, Matthew;

ff. 40-63v, f. 40rv, prologue to Mark (Stegmüller, *Repertorium biblicum*, no. 607), ff. 41-63, Mark; f. 63v, blank;

ff. 64-106, ff. 64rv, prologue to Luke (Stegmüller, *Repertorium biblicum*, no. 620), ff. 64-106, Luke, with the biblical introduction to Luke copied as a prologue;

ff. 106-135v, ff. 106rv, prologue to John (Stegmüller, *Repertorium biblicum*, no. 624), ff. 107-135v, John, ending, "... *explicit euangelium secundum iohannem. 1543.*"

Several details of the text of this rather splendid, large format Gospel Book are notable. Its size and formality suggest liturgical use, as do the presence of passages that include accent marks in red, and the fact that the New Testament Canticles in Luke, chapters 1 and 2, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79) and the Nunc dimittis (Luke 2:29-32) are set apart from the narrative with each line beginning with a one-line colored initial. Additionally, the manuscript includes intriguing rubrics within each Gospel which mark the chapters at the beginning of the Passion narratives, "This is not read" and then indicate "This is read," later in the Gospel, usually at the point of the discovery of the empty tomb (chapters marked "Istud non legitur," are f. 35, Matthew 26, f. 59, Mark 13, f. 100v, Luke 22, and f. 125v, John 13; chapters marked "istud legitur," are f. 39v, Matthew 28, f. 62v, Mark 16, f. 104v, Luke 24, and f. 133v, John 20). Perhaps a different book was used for the Passion narratives, or these readings were set aside from the usual lections for reading during Holy Week. Throughout, the text has been carefully corrected.

Manuscripts continued to be copied in Spain after the invention of printing, including illuminated copies of royal confirmations of noble status or the rights of a family (*Carta executoria* and *Carta ejecutoria*), which are perhaps the most common, and liturgical books, especially Choir Books, Antiphonals and Graduals. These manuscripts were prohibitively expensive to print because of their very large format and musical notation.

This book, which includes the text of four Gospels, is much more unusual. The Schoenberg Database lists only one other Gospel book from Spain, a manuscript described as "Gospels for Saints days and Sundays," and therefore probably a Gospel Lectionary or Evangeliary, rather than a Gospel book proper; it is dated 1595, and measures 338 x 228 mm. Another large format Evangeliary or Gospel Lectionary from Guadalupe, c. 1506, was recently sold at Sothebys, London (7 July 2009, lot 43) measuring 370 x 262 mm. (this manuscript is related to the Epistolary, Houghton MS Typ 199).

A few examples of other large format Gospel Books from the sixteenth century from elsewhere in Europe can be cited: a book copied in Paris in 1545 by the scribe Johannes Holand measuring 359 x 253 mm. (see Schoenberg Database, no. 4560, Sotheby's 1950, lot 21, and many other sales); a German Gospel Book from c. 1500, 346 x 235 mm. owned by Robert Hoe (his sale, 1912, lot 2450), an earlier Spanish example, with John and Luke, 365 x 255 mm., c. 1350? Cathedral of Tortosa, MS 23; four Gospels, ca. 1450?, 423 x 276 mm., now Vatican City, MS Vat lat 42, and four Gospels, ca. 1550?, 370 x 220 mm., Beauvais, bibliothèque municipale, MS 15. These books suggest there may have been a vogue for large format copies of the Gospels within the context of the Counter Reformation Church; to my knowledge, this is a subject that has never been the subject of scholarly investigation.

In 1543, when this book was copied, Spain was the most powerful Kingdom in Europe and the New World. Its king, known in Spain as Charles I, also ruled as the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500-1558) over a vast Empire, which stretched from Spain, across Europe to the Netherlands, Austria, the Kingdom of Naples, and across the ocean to Spanish America. The origin of this manuscript is thus of particular interest, as it was copied at the height of Spain's power. Spain was, moreover, staunchly Catholic, and the heart of the Counter Reformation Church; the manuscript was copied just two years before the opening of the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

## ILLUSTRATION

Each Gospel begins with a skillfully executed pen initial with intricate decoration in contrasting colors; notable in the pen decoration, which includes beading and closely spaced parallel lines, are the decorative void spaces formed by the patterns of the dense infilling, a tradition in manuscripts from Castille beginning in the thirteenth century (see for example, François Avril, Jean-Pierre Aniel, Mireille Mentré, et alia. *Manuscrits enluminés de la péninsule ibérique*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1982, plate CXIX, no. 162, f. 26, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS n.a.l. 2557, although the initials in our manuscript are simpler and lack the characteristic frames found in this manuscript); some initials include short curling vines in symmetrical patterns, decorated with leaves.

The initials are:

f. 1v, 8-line blue and gold puzzle initial with intricate pen decoration in violet and red;

f. 41, 9-line red initial decorated with violet pen decoration forming a box around the initial,

f. 64v, 8-line red initial with violet pen decoration,

f. 107, 9-line red and blue puzzle initial with red and blue pen decoration.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

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