



Book Painting

THE COURT ATELIERS

IT is in illuminated books that we see the most striking, most numerous achievements of Carolingian painting, for with rare exceptions all the frescoes and mosaics have disappeared. This painting makes its appearance quite abruptly, almost one might say *ex nihilo*, after three centuries of widespread European political turmoil in the course of which the antique world gradually fell into ruin and Western art seemed to be dying out.

In Italy, the direct heirs of Greece and Rome preserved little more than vague memories of their glorious past, and the faint gleams of it that lingered on served but to emphasize the darkness of a night that threatened to be endless. Limited to decorative patterning, the art of the young countries of Europe went on repeating inherited motifs and techniques; its contacts with the declining civilization of the Mediterranean world had not as yet struck any spark of original inspiration, any real promise for the future. True, these contacts affected the insular art of the North and to some extent clarified it, but that art remained hard, schematic; until quite late in its history the art of the British Isles seemed incapable of renewal.

The Birth of Carolingian Book Painting

Nevertheless that spark was kindled. In 754, the third year of the reign of King Pepin, the very year in which, by a remarkable coincidence, the Carolingian dynasty officially began, the scribe Gundohinus completed a Gospel Book (whose illustration he supervised) at 'Vosevium'—a place which remains unidentified. This book was made to the order of a lady named Fausta and a monk, Fuculphus. Nothing like it had yet been seen on the continent north of the Alps: the art of the Carolingian book begins with Gundohinus, just as the Carolingian dynasty begins with Pepin.



63 – VOSEVIUM (?). GOSPEL BOOK OF GUNDOHINUS: ST MATTHEW, DETAIL. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, AUTUN.

62 – VOSEVIUM (?). GOSPEL BOOK OF GUNDOHINUS: CHRIST IN MAJESTY, DETAIL.

It was on 6 January 754 that Pope Stephen II met Charlemagne's father on his estate at Ponthion, near present-day Vitry-le-François, and went with him to Saint-Denis to crown him king of the Franks. The pope was accompanied by a large concourse of cardinals and churchmen. This ceremony had been preceded by two embassies sent to Rome by Pepin in 750 to reconcile Pope Zacharias to the idea of a change of regime in the Frankish kingdom. The fact that Gundohinus went out of his way to specify the year of the new reign suggests that he recognized its importance, as did many contemporaries.

It might be rash to associate in any precise way the Gospel Book of Gundohinus with Pope Stephen's visit and Pepin's coronation; the concordance of dates may be a mere coincidence, but it is surely meaningful. Of more immediate importance is the question: whence did Gundohinus, or rather his illustrator, get his models? It is evident that they came from a particular part of northern Italy, the region intermediate between the Germanic north and the Roman south, from which the Merovingians had already borrowed so much in all the domains of art: Lombardy, which travellers crossed on the way from Rome to Gaul and which, owing to the proximity of Ravenna (annexed by the Lombards in 751), had maintained closer artistic contacts than any other region with the Byzantine world—with which, moreover, the pope and the Franks were still on friendly terms. The figure of Christ in the Gundohinus Gospels reproduces almost line for line the king image on the Val di Nievole helmet; the garment, the parallel lines on the sleeve and also the position of the right arm are similar, as is the hair plastered down on both sides of the face (a Lombard hair style as we learn from the Lombard historian Paul the Deacon and the gold cross of Duke Gisulf) and the low pedestal on which the figure stands; two guardian angels replace the soldiers of Agilulf. The circular band of leafage around Christ imitates the one around the Ittenheim warrior, while the medallions in round beaded frames have many Lombard equivalents. We may also note how closely this image recalls the one on the altar of Ratchis at Cividale, of exactly the same date as the Gundohinus Gospels. The standing evangelist figures that follow the figure of Christ derive from the Greek tradition; they are elongated or presented half-length, frontally, as at San Vitale in Ravenna. Thus the earliest known example of Carolingian book painting might easily pass for a Lombard work: all its images look back to northern Italy, to the barbarians who at that time were those most deeply imbued with the Mediterranean culture. There is one discrepancy, however: the curious palmettes marking the knees of Christ. Peculiar to the British Isles in the metallic, pointed form it here assumes, this motif is a drastically schematized interpretation of drapery folds on the legs of frontally seated figures. The same idiosyncrasy appears on the sarcophagus (c. 680) of Bishop Agilbert at Jouarre, whose affinities with insular art have been rightly pointed out. Here, as at Jouarre, the open book resting on the left leg is partly hidden by the knee. Moreover, the zoomorphic decoration of the initials is of the Merovingian type. Despite these barbarian traits, the Gundohinus Gospels show an independence of its milieu; the artist drew inspiration from Italian sources, from that mixed art trend which, to his way of thinking, stood for the Mediterranean tradition.

Book Illustration of the Court of Charlemagne. The Godescalc Gospels

Nearly thirty years had passed when in 781 Pepin's son, Charles, met Pope Adrian I in Rome. As in 754, a book has commemorated for us this new encounter between the king of the Franks and the pope; this time, however, the book did not merely synchronize with the event but resulted from it. Carolingian art began with the coronation of Pepin, but it acquired its true character only with the journey to Rome of the future Charlemagne: from then on, it was a court art, the art of a dynasty, promoted by the king, his descendants, relatives, associates and officers of state. No sooner had Charles returned to Aachen than he commissioned a scribe named Godescalc to make a Gospel Book for his use, that is, a collection of pericopes, extracts from the Gospels arranged in their liturgical order. The book was completed before the death of Charles's wife Hildegard on 30 April 783. Nothing is known about Godescalc, a Frank, judging by his name, except that he was a personal friend of the king, his *'ultimus famulus'* as he described himself in a dedication in which he lauded the sagacity and foresight of the king and the interest he took in the art of the book: *'providus et sapiens, studiosus in arte librorum.'* We can only guess at the models to which Godescalc had recourse, but it is evident that all belonged to the Byzantine world. Following the evangelist portraits is the first depiction in Western art of the Fountain of Life. This image, which from the fourth century on had been included in the repertory of the Christian art of the East, figured as the final decoration of the Gospel canons in the Greek translation of Eusebius, where it was given the form of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. This was the form which had been popularized in Italy by pilgrim flasks brought from the Holy Land, such as those preserved at Monza and Bobbio, which were probably gifts made by the Lombard queen Theodelinde. The posture of the evangelists grouped in the front of the book conforms to the Greek tradition. Indeed these portraits can best be compared with those of the sixth century in San Vitale, Ravenna, and their architectural setting with Greek equivalents admittedly later in date, but iconoclasm has deprived us of all their predecessors.

Charles appeared in Rome as master of the Western world; he went there for Easter after spending the winter of 780 at Pavia, the Lombard capital, where six years earlier he had captured King Desiderius and all his treasures. His son Pepin, baptized by Pope Adrian, became king of Italy, a fact Godescalc did not fail to mention in a note on the calendar of his Gospels. At Parma on his return journey Charles met the English scholar Alcuin whom he summoned to Aachen five years later to take charge of the Palace School. Undoubtedly the Godescalc Gospels was a by-product of Charles's stay in Rome and Lombardy; in this sense it may be said to have had its origin in Italy. But the work itself bears the mark of 'barbarian' craftsmanship. For at this time the work of insular artists, whether they came from Ireland or from England, was dominant north of the Alps; their graphic virtuosity in particular ensured their primacy everywhere. Many of the motifs common in



64 – DIOCESE OF MAINZ. GOSPEL BOOK OF GODESCALC: ST MARK. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.



65 – DIOCESE OF MAINZ. GOSPEL BOOK OF GODESCALC: ST LUKE. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.

manuscripts painted in the British Isles recur in this book: trumpets, scrolls, interlaces with shuttle-shaped angles, rows of teeth (or combs) and, above all, large initial letters of the distinctively Irish type (in the words *Liber*, *Initium*). Other motifs, however, are of Mediterranean origin: palmettes and branches lightly brushed in with white paint on a dark ground, Greek key patterns viewed in perspective, polychrome shadings, cones paired *tête-bêche*.

As a rule the art of Charlemagne's painters is characterized by the intermingling of these two art currents; but the Godescalc Gospels differ from the other illuminated manuscripts commissioned by the king by a Middle East flavour peculiar to it. Nowhere else in Carolingian court art is Christ represented with this plump face, darkly glowing eyes, bulging cheeks, pinched lips and what (though He is shown full face) gives the impression of a snub nose. Nor do we see elsewhere evangelist portraits with these lean, bearded faces and garments whose folds are indicated by light and dark stripes. No less distinctive is the technique: broad areas of colour lightly washed in, always in cold tones. Whatever was the origin and training of this painter's immediate successors, it is clear that his style was promptly superseded and that—at least in the royal *familia* and its ramifications—it had no sequel. The only other examples of it are to be found at Corbie, in the Psalter and the manuscript by George of Amiens described in the previous volume in this series. In them we find all the characteristics of the Godescalc Gospels and a reason for its 'Syrian' air: these artists obviously belonged to the same milieu. And was it not in part at Corbie, Adalard's abbey, where the Lombard king Desiderius once stayed, that Western painting took a new lease on life?

Painting at Charlemagne's Court: The Second Team of Artists

A new lease on life, but, as things turned out, a precarious one, ill-adjusted and soon to peter out. It was resumed, however, some years later by a new team of artists. It is a curious fact that by the twelfth century at the latest the Godescalc Gospels were in the church of Saint-Sernin at Toulouse (capital of Charlemagne's son Louis, king of Aquitaine, the future Louis the Pious). How this book reached Toulouse, through whose hands it passed, is a matter of pure conjecture. It is possible that Charles himself gave it to his son. We may note that the Merovingian Gellone Sacramentary, too, found its way to the South and that Benedict of Aniane was a trusted adviser of King Louis. The period when painting was in abeyance seems to have lasted for some time. Thus a Psalter commissioned by Charles and copied by the scribe Dagulf after 783—it was to be a gift to Pope Adrian—contained no illustrations. Had the king had at his disposal a painter on whom he could rely, would he have left in this condition the Dagulf Psalter, a book presented to the pope with a dedication composed by Alcuin? Nor were there any paintings in the first part



66-67 – MIDDLE RHINE. GOSPEL BOOK OF ADA: ST MATTHEW AND ST LUKE. STADTBIBLIOTHEK, TRIER.

of the Ada Gospels (named a putative sister of Charlemagne, otherwise unknown), written before 785 and now at Trier; while the second part, made later, was illustrated. This seems to confirm the view set forth above of an 'abeyance'—but let us admit, it is little more than guesswork. This much is certain: afterwards, Carolingian art was so closely associated with the royal household that the court must be regarded as the formative centre, without exception, of the artists who were to compose its various branches or 'schools.' All art activity was now controlled, and was to be controlled for years to come, by the patron, the giver of commissions to the artist, the man who supported him and for whom he worked. Once he disappeared, the artist too disappeared; with no work being forthcoming, he looked for another employer. The royal household always supplied the driving force and the various 'schools,' as we shall see, were not separated in watertight compartments; they followed each other chronologically (in the steps of their successive patrons), and the artists (or, what comes to the same thing, their techniques) shifted from one school to another. In short, despite its superficial diversity, there is only one Carolingian art properly so called—an art inseparable from the dynasty, without whose support it would not have existed. And it was the men alone, patrons and artists, who counted, not the places where they happened to reside.

The change of orientation took place some time after 795, when Charles was



69 – GOSPEL BOOK (HARLEY 2788): CANON TABLES, DETAIL. BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON.

settling into his newly built (perhaps not yet completed) palace at Aachen. Among the members of Charles's court circle was a young man named Einhard, the king's future biographer. A poet and a fine scholar, Einhard was also a practicing artist; Alcuin gave him the nickname of Bazaleel, the biblical craftsman 'with knowledge of all manner of workmanship' commanded to make the Ark of the Covenant. We know of Einhard's own work by the design, in the form of a triumphal arch, for the metal pedestal of a cross presented by him (c. 830) to his parish church at Maastricht. This was a work of wholly Roman Imperial inspiration, as likewise were the books painted for Charlemagne after the Godescalc Gospels. Quite likely Einhard was the guiding spirit of the 'second team' of royal artists.

Among all the manuscripts decorated at Charles's court after the Godescalc Gospels (apart from the Gospel Book in the British Museum, Harley ms. 2788, which marks a new departure and whose peculiarities will be described at a later page), four superb volumes have pride of place. Of the first only one picture and



70 – GOSPEL BOOK (HARLEY 2788): ST JOHN, DETAIL. BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON.



71 – GOSPEL BOOK (HARLEY 2788): ZACHARIAS AND THE ANGEL. BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON.



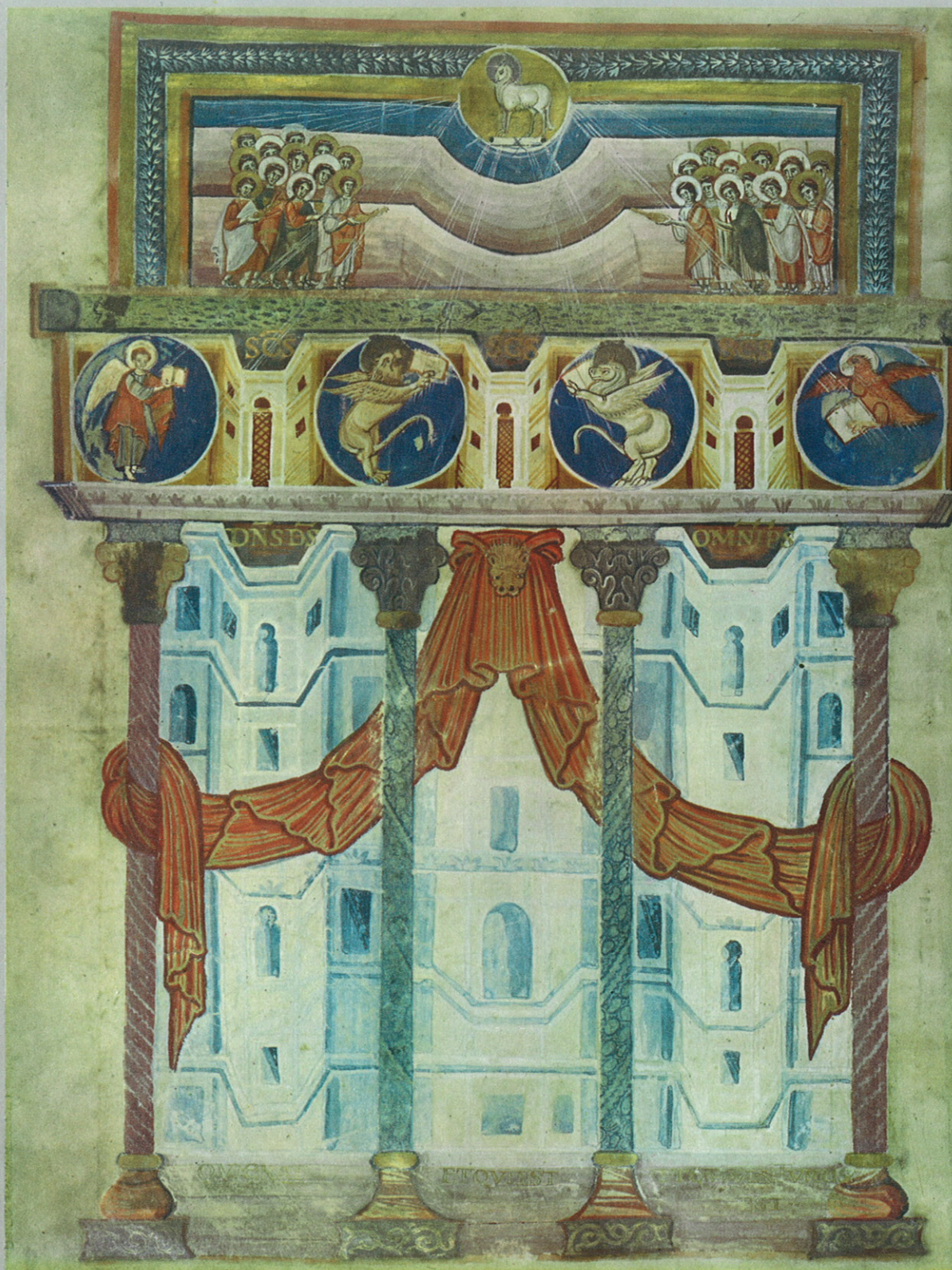
72 - MIDDLE RHINE. GOSPEL BOOK (COTTON CLAUD B. V.): ANNUNCIATION TO ZACHARIAS. LONDON.

two lines of text survived the fire which in 1731 destroyed the library of Sir Robert Cotton. This, the second Gospel Book made for the king, was perhaps intended to replace the Godescalc Gospels which he had given to his son Louis. Its figures are of the same Italo-Alpine type as those found, for example, on the contemporary ivory book cover of Genoelselderen, which comes from the same artistic milieu, and in the sixth-century Gospel Book of St Augustine of Canterbury. There is nothing to surprise us in this permanence of traditional forms, unaffected by the techniques employed and perpetuated over long periods by fidelity to the tradition of successive schools of craftsmen. These artists, servitors of a more or less exalted rank, belonged to the *familia*, to the group of men who were employed by the royal household on works of art of various kinds and therefore conformed to an accepted norm, whatever the branch in which they specialized—painting, ivory carving or metalwork.

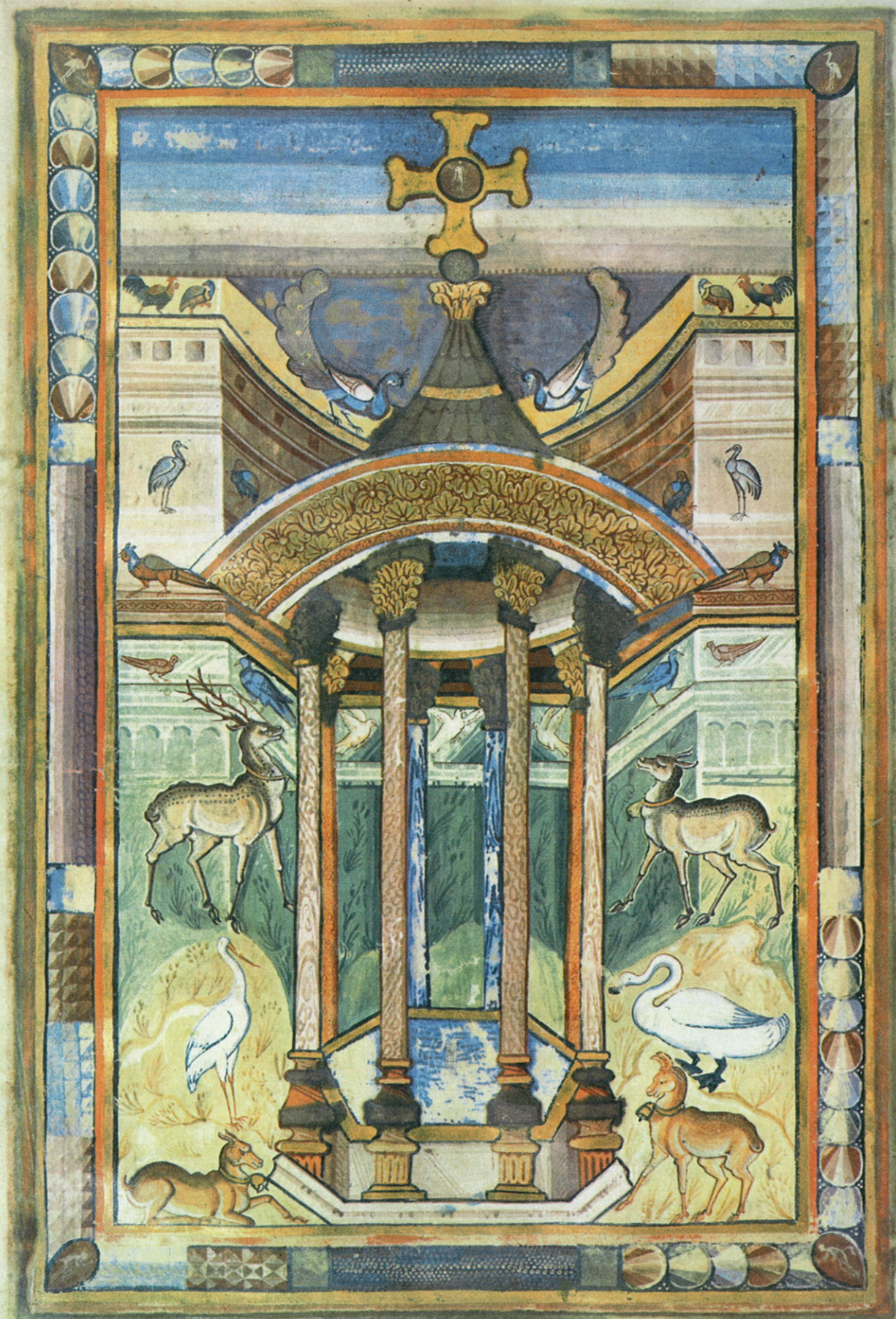
The same Italo-Alpine style characterizes the small figures in the secondary scenes of the next Gospel Book made for Charlemagne and presented by Louis the Pious in 827 to the abbey of Saint-Médard at Soissons; for example the opening pages of the Gospel of Luke depicting the Annunciation, the Visitation and Christ Teaching. This last image is inscribed in the initial letter, one of those 'historiated' initials which had first appeared in the eighth century in the south of England. We would first draw attention, in the Saint-Médard Gospels, to a point of undoubted importance: a spiral column in the canon table is an exact copy of an antique column still to be seen today in St Peter's in Rome. In this manuscript the artists accumulated a wealth of ornamentation of the most various kinds with a view to producing an effect of sumptuousness—the result being, as one might expect, a plethora of decoration. There are passages each of which, taken separately, is a meticulously executed *tour de force*; details which, one feels, are designed to create a picture governed by a directive idea or a given theme, nobly conceived and majestically coherent; but the overall effect is one of confusion. Nothing could be clearer than the intention, nothing stranger than the means employed to formulate it, despite the obvious effort towards unity. The Adoration of the Lamb, which opens the book to introduce us to the revelation of the Gospels, is built up of three superimposed zones whose



73 - MIDDLE RHINE. GOSPEL BOOK OF SAINT-MÉDARD OF SOISSONS. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.



74 - MIDDLE RHINE. GOSPEL BOOK OF SAINT-MÉDARD OF SOISSONS. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.



75 - MIDDLE RHINE. GOSPEL BOOK OF SAINT-MÉDARD OF SOISSONS: FOUNTAIN OF LIFE. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.

ascending movement is focused on the medallion at the top containing the Lamb. The medallion is the only element directly on the median line. All the others stand right and left of centre but tend towards the apex; they are swept upward by some all-pervading force, the force that lifts a large curtain (spanning some three quarters of the picture space) slung across the columns of a proscenium. The curtain rises theatrically on what looks like a huge stage set in the antique manner, a six-storied construction flooded with the radiance emanating from the Lamb. The design of the substructure, a façade with alternating recesses and salients, is continued on a reduced scale in the level above, which is surmounted in turn by a third zone whose horizontal lines melt into curves to match the rounded edge of the medallion. There is a contrast, certainly intentional, among the lowest zone, which is completely void, the middle band occupied only by the four evangelist symbols (acting as intermediaries) and the heavens in which the Lamb is enthroned, attended by the twenty-four elders of the Book of Revelation. This image of the empyrean, separated from the rest in accordance with the cosmography of the age and the text of the Apocalypse, represents the *mare vitreum*, the zenith from which falls a refreshing rain, i.e., lustral water. As they move upwards, the forms become less and less angular, and the number of personages increases as if to signify that life asserts itself more and more as we rise heavenwards. But materially speaking, nothing holds together; perspective effects are destroyed by horizontals which appear on the same plane as the buildings and simultaneously on a colonnade whose bases lie far in front of the structure proper. The artist has not understood the models for his reliefs; the celestial zone of water, like an earthly lake, with its fish and fishermen, is simply a copy of an antique mosaic, several examples of which have come down to us. Nor has the artist troubled to create a plausible landscape; by taking some concrete figurative motifs and imposing them, quite unchanged, onto a flat plane, he has built up a symbolic image. He gives no thought to weight and mass, which have ceased to count, for his interest lies elsewhere and all that he has in mind is the idea his picture will evoke. He has drained the ancient forms of all terrestrial content, disregarded their conventions; he has charged all with intimations of a world perceptible beyond appearances. Thus, despite his scrupulous fidelity to Mediterranean models, he is essentially medieval. After this impressive composition comes a Fountain of Life with deer and birds, signifying the Christians, coming to drink. This is a copy of the Fountain of Life scene in the Godescalc Gospels, and it suffers from the same imbalance as its predecessor, but its architecture is much more intricate. The evangelist portraits and large initials following are enclosed in arches and frames adorned with cameos and pictures containing tiny figures (these were soon to proliferate at Tours).

Like the Saint-Médard Gospels, the other two manuscripts of this group differ from the Godescalc Gospels in their classicism. This is true of the Abbeville Gospels, written on purple vellum at the abbey of Saint-Riquier, presided over by Angilbert; also of the Lorsch Gospels, in which the Gospel of St Matthew opens with a sequence of icons, portraits of the ancestors of Christ reminiscent of the emperor portraits paraded in the streets of Rome.





78 - MIDDLE RHINE. LORSCH GOSPELS: ST JOHN. BIBLIOTECA APOSTOLICA, VATICAN CITY.



77 - ABBEY OF SAINT-RQUIER. ABBEVILLE GOSPELS: ST MATTHEW. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, ABBEVILLE.

*The Aachen Painters under Louis the Pious.
The School of Ebbo at Reims*

Italy's influence was considerable in the art of Charlemagne's painters, whose sources were first Lombard, then Greco-Roman. In the case of the artists whose works we shall now consider, it was a very different aspect of Italian art that caught their eyes: its Hellenistic, Alexandrian aspect. It is, however, to Rome and chiefly to northern Italy that we must turn once more to find the models and first artists of this new development; we say 'first' since a distinction must be drawn between two phases separated by a gap of about a decade. These early artists had been trained on the same lines as the painters of Pope John VII at Castelseprio and those of San Salvatore at Brescia, and like them, might, perhaps, have come from distant parts of the Mediterranean area to escape the Arab invasions of the seventh century. Actually, though, this hypothesis is unnecessary since we learn from various sources, many ancient bilingual texts in particular, that Hellenism had already established itself in northern Italy where Ravenna, as opposed to Roman Milan, was in effect the Byzantine capital. We would have trouble in associating with some specific personality this group of Carolingian works, were it not that one of them, the Ebbo Gospels, dating from the end of the first phase, was painted about 820 for an intimate friend of Louis the Pious, Ebbo, the archbishop of Reims (see p. 101). Now Louis, more than any other ruler of the day, had close personal contacts with Italy: he owned estates in northern Italy, in the neighbourhood of Brescia in fact; he had a long stay at Ravenna in 793, took part in the local Christmas festival and with his brother Pepin seized Benevento before going to join his father at Salzburg. The earliest of these books of Alexandrian lineage dates, it happens, to the decade 790-800, and there is much in favour of the view that it was made for the young prince.

This is the Coronation Gospel Book in Vienna, said to have been found on Charlemagne's knees when his tomb was opened by Otto III in the year 1000. Two similar but later Gospels exist, one in Aachen, the other (from Xanten, some twenty miles north of Aachen) in Brussels. By a lucky chance, the Xanten manuscript contains a loose sheet with an evangelist portrait on purple vellum which some scholars think to be a fragment of a fifth- or sixth-century volume (its date is, naturally, conjectural). However, its quality is so high and its style so markedly antique that it may well have been a page of a Gospel Book painted in northern Italy and brought by one of the painters summoned to Aachen by Louis the Pious. Though belonging to the same artistic family and milieu (all were painted at Aachen between 790 and 810, before Charlemagne's death), these three books are the work of different hands. The evangelist portraits in the Coronation Gospel Book illustrate a text which, in the margin of one of the sheets, bears the name *Demetrius presbyter*, the Latinized form of a Greek name; whether it is the name of the scribe himself or that of a painter, there is no knowing, but in any case it is that of someone who took part in the making of the manuscript. This man was a Greek, as was George, bishop of Amiens, who like him came to the North from Italy. If the



79 - AACHEN. CORONATION GOSPEL BOOK: ST JOHN. SCHATZKAMMER, KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM, VIENNA.



80 - AACHEN. CORONATION GOSPEL BOOK: ST MARK. KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM, VIENNA.

sequence of manuscripts assigned to the Reims School (of which these three Gospels are, so to speak, the pioneers) was the work of Franks, as there is every reason to believe, it was from this trilogy that they took guidance. In seeking to assess the quality of these calm, beautifully conceived images and assign them their chronology, we see their evident affiliation with one of the earliest Greek manuscripts extant, the famous Vienna Dioscorides, illustrated before 512 at Constantinople for Anicia Juliana, daughter of the Emperor Olybrius. These pictures are distinctive



81 - AACHEN. CORONATION GOSPEL BOOK: ST MATTHEW. KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM, VIENNA.

in their harmony and antique dignity, and above all their feeling for space wholly lacking in northern works, their representation of figures in open settings unencumbered by the architectural elements that tend to clutter up from top to bottom the works of Charlemagne's painters. The evangelists are placed, alone or in groups, in open country, against a natural background. In the Xanten Gospel Book they are arrayed, draped in togas, in a straight line; two are writing and two reading, each with his head propped on his right arm, in an attitude of meditation characteristic



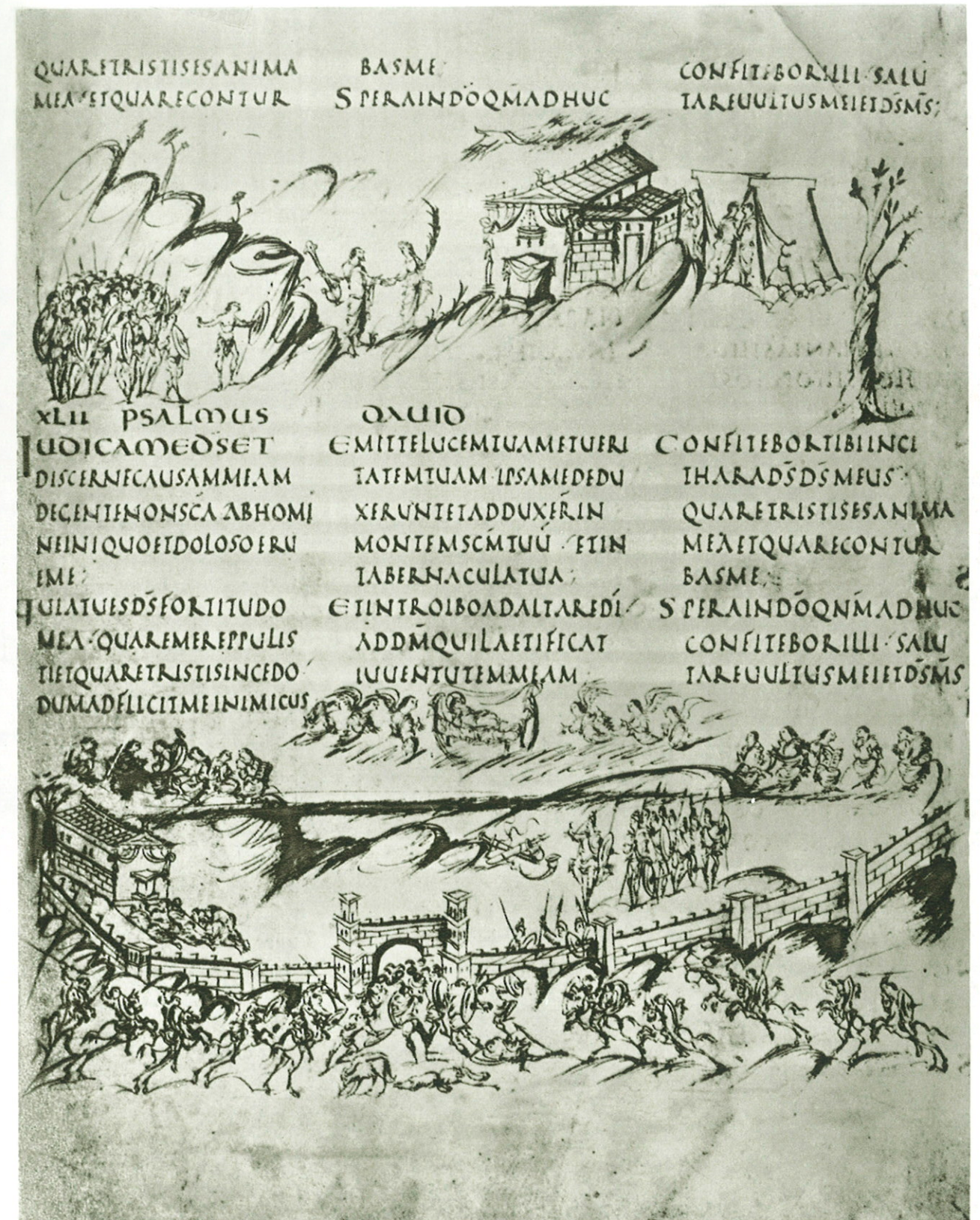
82 - AACHEN (?). GOSPEL BOOK: ST LUKE, DETAIL. CATHEDRAL TREASURY, AACHEN.



83 - AACHEN. XANTEN GOSPEL BOOK: EVANGELIST PORTRAIT, DETAIL. BIBLIOTHÈQUE ROYALE, BRUSSELS. ►

of the thinker or poet, of which there are so many examples in antique art. Above them are set out their attributes perched on identical hillocks and dominated by the figure of Christ seated on the *orbis terrarum*. The evangelists have no haloes, and in the Coronation Gospels no attributes; both these omissions were, until the thirteenth century, characteristic of Byzantine art. The painters of Louis the Pious and their successors at Reims always gave the evangelists haloes, sometimes excessively large ones, while they often summarily indicated their small attributes: concessions in both cases to Latin taste and practice. In the Aachen Gospels the evangelists are also grouped on the same page, but relegated to the four corners, with their backs turned to each other. Behind each figure is a round, vault-shaped hillock (an Alexandrian device) isolating him from the others and containing a small recess for the attribute. In the background is a line of trees with a thin strip of bright sky at each end. Curiously enough, the painter began by placing a small wall behind two of the evangelists. The handling is quite different from that of the earlier Coronation Gospels but the idea behind each is the same: that the gospels, though independent texts, derive from the same source and that their concordance demonstrates their truth—just as the four quarters of the world, though separated, form a whole. This was an idea expounded by St Augustine in his *De consensu evangelistarum*, to which the painters gave expression in their own ways: the Xanten painter austere, almost frigidly; the Aachen painter with more vivacity and something of that nervous energy which until now had made itself felt only in the Alexandrian-Mediterranean art of antiquity, but which was to be revived and pressed to its extreme limit by Ebbo's Frankish painters at Reims. In all three books we find a special technique differentiating them from all the other manuscripts of the early Middle Ages in the West: modelling produced by means of colour, with line playing only an ancillary part and indeed often disappearing entirely, and the application of muted colours in small juxtaposed touches in the impressionistic manner of the earliest Byzantine illuminations and Roman paintings of the Hellenistic period.

Like all their contemporaries these artists adopted the system of vertical projection, but they utilized it in a way those others had never contemplated. This system often consisted of transverse bands of narrative, registers of various sizes placed one above the other, whose boundaries were indicated simply by wavy lines between them. This line usually served no other purpose than that of dividing up the scenes (as in the Ashburnham Pentateuch, for example). Such, however, was not the case with one of the most famous productions of the Reims workshops at the time of Ebbo, the so-called Utrecht Psalter (see below). Here, as in its Alexandrian prototypes, the structural curves were disguised as hills or undulations of the ground on which the figures stand; thus the artist could isolate the scenes without using a clearcut dividing line, and could suggest the organic unity of each Psalm's episodes, images and implicit prefigurations of the New Testament. The painter of the Aachen Gospel Book used the same procedure. So it is that only in the Aachen Gospel Book and in that of Ebbo are the evangelists represented in the open air, at once united and separated, each with his writing desk, perched, like his attributes, on some windy crag. This practice, enabling a far more supple



84 - HAUTVILLERS. UTRECHT PSALTER. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, UTRECHT.



86 - HAUTVILLERS. UTRECHT PSALTER, DETAIL. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, UTRECHT.

treatment of the motif than in the Xanten Gospels, led in time to remarkable results.

Whether or not these paintings can be assigned to the court art of Louis the Pious, it is certain that in them the Greek tradition appears at its purest, out of its time and place, as in the Castelseprio frescoes in northern Italy. These artists were not Franks; their dignity, their serenity, legacy of an ancient culture, were poles apart from the turbulent vitality of their barbarian pupils. If we hesitate to call them Greek emigrants, compatriots of Demetrius, and if the evidence of an affiliation cited above does not seem conclusive, we have only to look at the works of their successors, the painters who worked at Reims under the aegis of Archbishop Ebbo. These men were indigenous, a younger generation who had gone to school and learned all they knew from their elders, but they exploited this knowledge with an unusual zest.

None was better qualified than Ebbo to understand and carry out the emperor's intentions regarding Mediterranean models, and he evidently played the same part at the court of Louis as Einhard had played at the court of Charlemagne. Of Germanic extraction, son of a nurse of the future Louis the Pious, Ebbo had been the schoolmate and then (freed from his menial condition) a bosom friend of his foster brother who, after becoming king of Aquitaine in 781, was associated with the government of the empire in 813. Louis, impressed by Ebbo's industry and intelligence, appointed him imperial librarian. 'The vigour of his mind,' wrote Charles the Bald, 'combined with his tremendous energy, enabled him to enter the prelacy and rise rapidly to a high rank in it.' Appointed archbishop of Reims in 816 in place of the uncultured Gislemar (Ebbo showed no gratitude for his elevation, but heaped abuse on his benefactor when the emperor was deposed for the second time in 833) and eager to enhance the renown of his church, Ebbo enlisted the services of the best



87 - HAUTVILLERS. UTRECHT PSALTER, DETAIL. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, UTRECHT.

artists and presented them with benefices. It was in the abbey of Hautvillers (between Reims and Epernay), a country residence of the archbishops, where under his and Abbot Peter's auspices some of the finest illuminated manuscripts of the Carolingian period were produced, those which were to have the deepest, most lasting influence on Western art, on both painting and relief carving. Like many of his fellow barbarians, Ebbo was hot-tempered, harsh and domineering, but he also had a streak of what might be called shrewd sensibility. Charles the Bald knew him well and, while aware of his faults of character, could not help feeling an interest in, even a liking for, this singular man. In answer to the pope, who had asked for information about Ebbo, Charles recounted an anecdote which throws light both on the man himself and, indirectly, on the type of art he sponsored—curious, badly organized, but rich in promise for the future. In June 823 when Judith, wife of Louis the Pious, was awaiting the birth of her child (the future Charles the Bald), she gave Archbishop Ebbo a ring, as was the custom, to serve as a memento of the occasion. Ten years later, when Ebbo was in disgrace for his desertion of Louis at Soissons, and had gone into hiding in Paris at the house of a 'recluse' from his diocese, a man named Framergaud (whose signature appears on some of the Reims manuscripts), he had the romantic notion of sending this ring back to Judith to remind her of him. Judith was moved to tears by the memory of the days when friendship reigned between the foster brothers, and made an attempt, in vain, to reconcile them.

The Utrecht Psalter (so named after the university where it is now preserved) was written and illustrated at Hautvillers between the years 820 and 830; although the text conforms entirely to Latin usage, this need not necessarily mean that its makers were Carolingians. Yet such was undoubtedly the case. The extreme vivacity of the figures and the delicate precision of the pen strokes would seem surprising if we



88 - HAUTVILLERS. UTRECHT PSALTER, DETAIL. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, UTRECHT.

assumed that what we have here is a complete novelty, the product of a recently and arduously acquired skill. But we must have no illusions regarding these wholly delightful pictures. When we examine them closely, we find that their host of tiny figures can be reduced to a certain number of types and a limited repertory of gestures and attitudes, that for each given situation there is an unvarying set of gestures. One might be inclined to take them for mere sketches dashed off in the inspiration of the moment, were it not so evident that they are fully thought out and finished works. Certainly they have many qualities of the sketch: hasty and wonderfully agile. That these artists had both intelligence and sleight of hand is proved by the charming facility of their images. Yet these seemingly casual jottings were based on a schematic method, to which the unflagging fecundity of the artists was largely due. Gifted men like themselves could quickly master these procedures. The illustrators of the Utrecht Psalter owed everything, so far as style is concerned, to the Greek or rather to the Hellenistic tradition; this was their starting point, yet they were quite as remote from it as were Charlemagne's poets from their ancient models. Another Psalter of similar technique but with fewer illustrations is preserved at Troyes.

The Reims illuminations can be compared with Roman frescoes and stuccoes of the first century A.D., such as those in the Casa di Livia in Rome and at Boscoreale; there must have existed others, easily accessible to Carolingian artists, in the remains of the villas and palaces of Roman Gaul. A fragment such as the angel of the Annunciation in Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (c. 700), near the Carolingians in time, shows already that exaggeration of ancient Hellenistic forms which was carried still further by the Reims illuminators. Evidently these small, elegant and agile figures appealed to the draughtsman, who selected those that caught his fancy, guided, it would seem, by a previous cycle of illustrations, of which we can gain



90-91 - HAUTVILLERS. PSALTER. BODLEIAN LIBRARY, OXFORD.

some idea from another Psalter at Oxford (whose text, however, differs at certain points), or a commentary. He selected, assembled, and dashed down his vivid figurations, in which nothing was really new but the zest giving them such vibrant life.

True, these artists chose their models, as we will see in some of the examples to be cited below, but always within a limited, narrow domain beyond which they did not look. This selectivity is somewhat surprising when we recall the diversity of the models from which Charlemagne's painters drew inspiration: books of the most varied origin, medals, engraved gems, paintings, mosaics, motifs stemming from East and West. But the Reims painters seem to have drawn on their own resources and to have been out of touch with the outside world. Their patron Ebbo, and their headquarters Hautvillers, had not the huge collections of the court at their disposal; all they had to go on was what their predecessors had bequeathed to them.

To the Reims group we also owe the remarkable Gospel Book written for Ebbo at Hautvillers before 823 under the supervision of Abbot Peter; adorned with paintings in the same style as the Utrecht Psalter, it is charged with a nervous energy verging on the bizarre. These painters were later to quiet down, but their art always retained that strained, almost frenzied accent to which was surely due their popularity with the imperial court. Though their artistic provenance was Hellenic, the makers of the Ebbo Gospels belied their origin by introducing into their figures a typically Carolingian wildness, the barbarian élan of the Frankish temperament.

89 - HAUTVILLERS (?). PSALTER. TROYES CATHEDRAL.



92 - HAUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF EBBO: ST JOHN. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, ÉPERNAY.



93 - HAUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF EBBO: ST MATTHEW. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, ÉPERNAY. ►



96 - HAUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF EBBO: CANON TABLES, DETAIL. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, ÉPERNAY.



97 - HAUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF EBBO: CANON TABLES, DETAIL. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, ÉPERNAY.

hunters drawing their bows, appeared also in the Utrecht Psalter and were derived from the same earlier models; indeed the artists' repertory, appearances notwithstanding, varies little. Carpenters had already been shown at work on the roof of a pedimented church in a sixth-century Byzantine ivory now in the Cathedral Treasury at Trier; hunters, animals and incidental figures of all kinds had formed part of the stock-in-trade of the Hellenistic painters and stucco-workers. While frankly recognizing the early Carolingians' undoubted talents, we would be quite wrong to regard them as in any sense pioneers or having any special interest in the world around them; to begin with, there was nothing really new in their way of seeing it. Still, their interest and curiosity rapidly developed, which goes far to explain the amazing lifelikeness of some of their delineations. Soon some quick-witted painters, also working at Reims, saw how to turn this expertise to good account; one of them, for the first time in the West, ventured to try his hand at the portrait done from life, in the manner of the ancients. Thus the lesson was not lost, and was never to be lost.



98 - HAUTVILLERS. VOLUME OF MEDICAL TEXTS: AESCULAPIUS DISCOVERING BETONY. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.

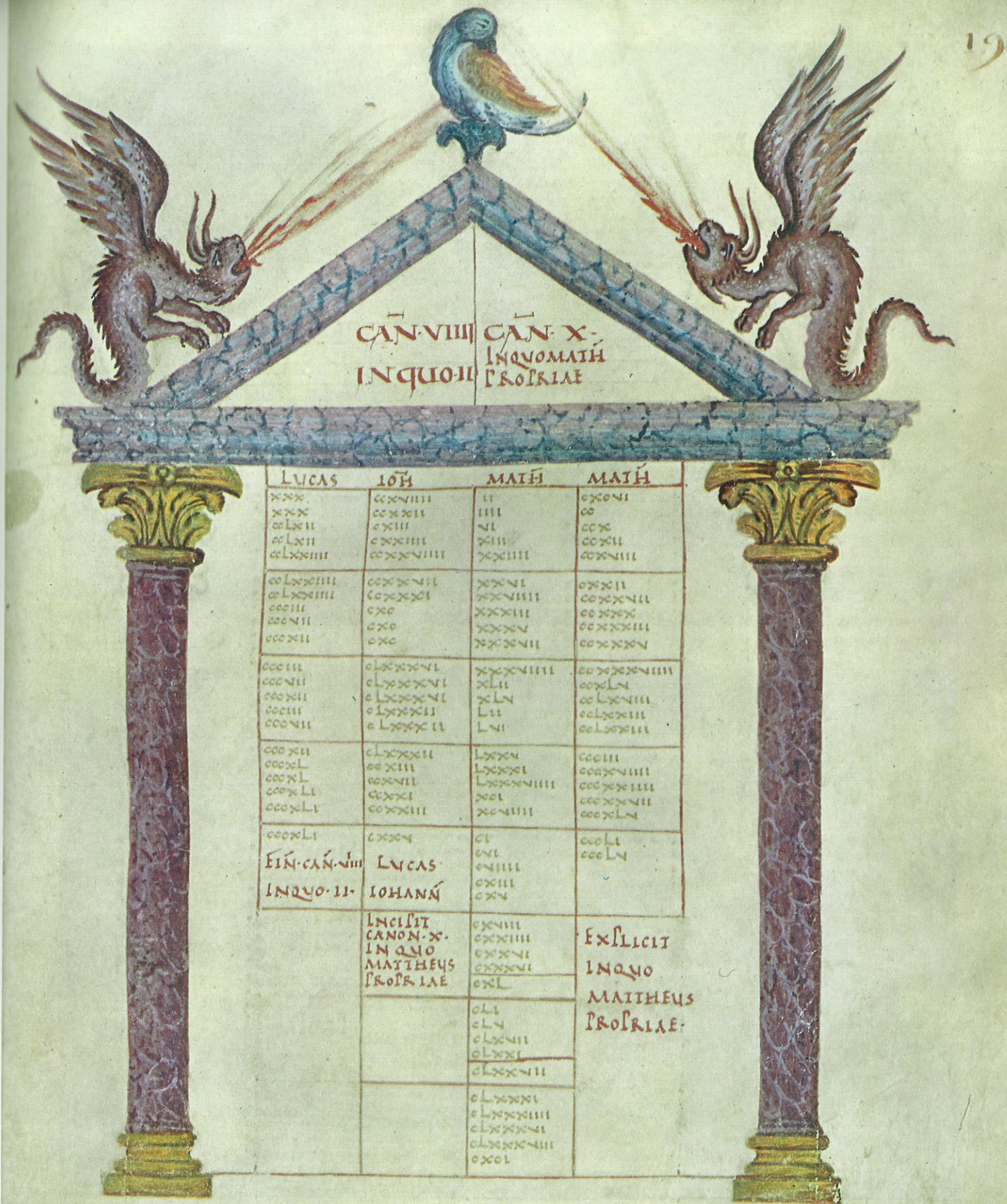
There must have been books among the models used by the Reims artists, but none has come down to us. Apart from a coloured portrait of Aesculapius on the opening page of a collection of medical texts, the only illustrated book from Reims definitely known both to be an exact copy of an antique work and to have been in the possession of the Reims painters is a *Physiologus*, the earliest surviving Latin translation of a treatise compiled at Alexandria about the second century A.D. In this symbolic treatise on the nature of animals, which in its original form must have contained pictures (as did every work of a scientific character or with scientific pretensions), the Reims painters transmitted the gist of a far earlier work, now lost. They drew freely on its imagery, using a method also adopted in other Carolingian art centres. From the stock of available material—whose extent varied from place to place—they chose whatever served their turn. At Reims the supply of material consisted only of imported Hellenistic works, so they had to make do with these.

The illustrations of such a manual as the *Physiologus*, copious because of its didactic nature, and indispensable for an understanding of the text, took the form of



99 - HAUTVILLERS. *PHYSIOLOGUS LATINUS*: THE SALAMANDER. BÜRGERBIBLIOTHEK, BERNE.

isolated pictures with no precise religious or philosophical significance. Thus it was possible to copy them as they stood and place them anywhere, indiscriminately, simply because they were amusing, picturesque and pleasing to the eye. At Reims, for example, the artists borrowed from the *Physiologus* one of the most original and most lasting of the motifs of their canon tables (it was used in manuscripts of the Reims region up to the eleventh century)—the flame-spouting dragon with a curly tail. This creature also figures, oddly enough, in the concordance tables of the illuminated Bibles, but its natural place was in the *Physiologus* where, like a salamander, it spits fire at a dove hiding in the tree named *peredixion*. For according to the *Physiologus*, the shadow of this tree struck fear into the dragon or serpent because their prey, the dove, could always escape death if it stayed perched in the shadowed side of the tree. This tree was the symbol of Christ who guarded the Christian (the dove) from the attacks of Satan (the serpent). Obviously Christ, the dove and the serpent were not out of place in the canon tables of a Gospel Book, and in the Hincmar Gospels the painter might well have had some sort of apotropaic purpose, i.e., regarded them as talismans. But he left out the tree, without which

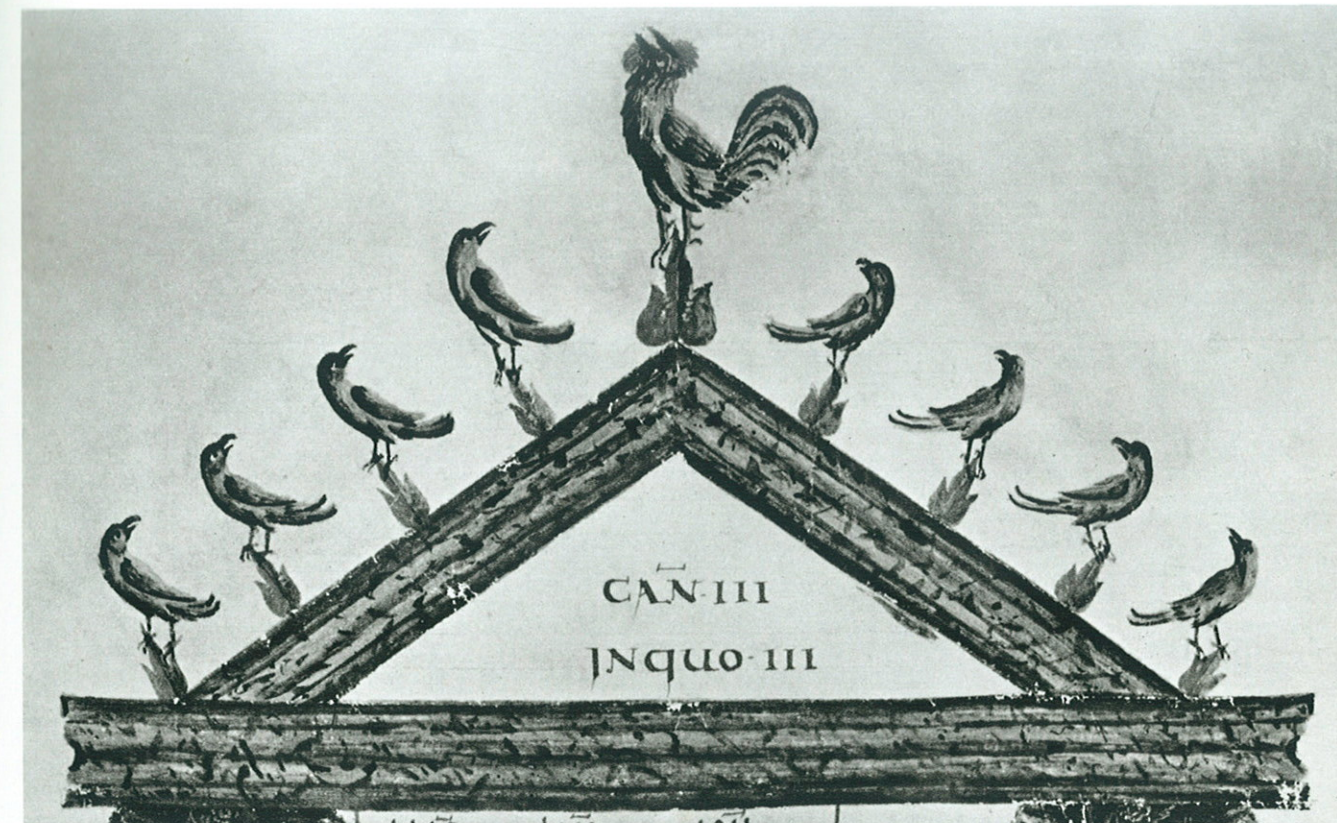




102 – HAUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF HINCMAR: CANON TABLES, DETAIL. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, REIMS.



103 – HAUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF HINCMAR: CANON TABLES, DETAIL. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, REIMS.



104 – HAUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF HINCMAR: CANON TABLES, DETAIL. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, REIMS.

the symbol loses its point. The truth is simply that he found the 'flame-thrower' decorative and borrowed it from the *Physiologus* to adorn a page where he was at a loss for a motif. In the same way, Romanesque illuminators would have no hesitation about enlivening the margins of sacred texts with those quaint little figures that so shocked St Bernard: wrestlers, hunters pursuing some monstrous quarry, acrobats and so forth, all taken over (like the Reims dragon) from the antique or the Oriental repertory. (Gothic illuminators went even further in this direction, and nothing could be less in keeping with the spirit of antiquity than their medieval mixture of the sacred and the fanciful. In this respect the painters working for Ebbo already belonged to the Middle Ages and, unlike those of Louis the Pious, proved themselves true Carolingians. The scribe—perhaps he was also the painter—of the *Physiologus* had a Germanic name, Haecpertus—a far cry from Demetrius.) Another curious image figures in the Hincmar canon tables: a cock perched at the top of a gable, flanked by birds at regular intervals along the slopes. This may be a reminiscence of the sport of 'shooting the popinjay,' still popular in France. Archers try to bring down a cock or hens spaced out at different heights along a wood framework (often in the shape of a triangle) with spikes on which the birds are 'planted.' Were the Reims painters, with their keen eye for the amusing detail, the first to notice the similarity to the gables of their pediments? Perhaps, but we must remember that the 'popinjay' sport goes back to earliest antiquity and is shown in ancient reliefs (examples of which are extant).



105 – HOUTVILLERS. GOSPEL BOOK OF HINCMAR: ST MATTHEW. BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, REIMS.



106 – SAINT-DENIS (?). GOSPEL BOOK OF ST EMMERAM OF REGENSBURG: ST JOHN. BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK, MUNICH. ►



107 - REIMS. GOSPEL BOOK OF ST FLORIAN OF COBLENZ. DÜSSELDORF.



108 - GOSPEL BOOK OF THE CELESTINES. BIBL. DE L'ARSENAL, PARIS.

The liveliness and inventiveness of these artists' imagination is best illustrated by the changes imposed on the evolution of one of their favourite motifs. Ebbo's painters and those of Louis the Pious had inherited the backgrounds of hills encircling the subject of the picture, the summarily indicated landscape edged in the Hellenistic manner with patches of leafage and small buildings. In the Ebbo Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are represented thus, seated in the open air, their garments fluttering or bunched together by the wind. In the Aachen Gospels, also, the evangelists stand out against a hill, but here the hill had the specific function of separating the figures. A mere traditional setting in the Coronation Gospels, the hill was transformed at Hautvillers, in the Ebbo Gospels, into a ball-shaped mound no longer having any precise significance. Then one of the painters of Ebbo's time brilliantly saw how, without any drastic alterations, this setting could be made to play an active role—as if the artist had looked at it with a fresh eye and was struck by its possibilities. In the Hincmar Gospels he accordingly transformed the pointless hills into a cloud bank mantling the earth with shadows like the darkness of the Old Covenant. Behind the clouds rises the evangelist symbol; its radiance defines their summits and, focused on the evangelist like a searchlight, brings out each detail of his form. This compelling image inspired one of Charles the Bald's painters, last and most prolific of the Reims group, to paint in the St Emmeram Gospels (about 870) one of the most memorable illuminations of the age. As the eagle

soars up, the clouds melt away under its gaze and the light streaming from the widening tract of limpid sky floods St. John's face with its radiance as he looks up towards its source. The other evangelist portraits are inspired by the same idea, less dramatically but no less clearly indicated—that the Gospels filled a world of darkness with the light of Revelation. Half a century had elapsed since the painters employed by Louis the Pious took over from the Alexandrians what was a technical device; the Carolingians had given it a new meaning by replacing the antique *terra firma* with a vision of the medieval heavens.

A curious variant of this celestial setting should be mentioned. In the Celestine Gospels, of unknown provenance but close affiliation with those of Reims (some details of its decoration foreshadow the manuscripts made for Charles the Bald), each evangelist is placed beneath a bank of clouds above which emerges his symbol, and each entire scene is framed by a polygonal crenellated wall with square turrets. This wall, which had already figured in Byzantine paintings, recalls a primitive design sketched in the Aachen Gospels, as well as an exactly similar wall in an isolated drawing contemporary with the Utrecht Psalter: a fragment of the St Florian Gospel Book, now at Düsseldorf. But here, in the Düsseldorf drawing, a strip of ground crowded with figures replaces the cloud bank in the centre. It is evidence of an alternative version which did not find favour in Reims itself. In another, similar version in New York, likewise Greek and akin to that of the Palace School of Charlemagne, a building or a curtain upheld at each end forms the background behind the evangelist. Among many other examples (for there was a large number of Reims-inspired manuscripts) are the Loisel Gospels (date and exact provenance conjectural, but certainly deriving from Reims) and the Blois Gospels which, incidentally, are copies of those of Demetrius and thus confirm the close kinship of their maker with the painter of Louis the Pious. Their figures and techniques have a good deal in common with those of Charles the Bald's painter but are not to be confused with them.

Towards the middle of the ninth century the School of Reims, lacking firm control or effective leadership, began to fall to pieces. Its illuminators had only vague stylistic contacts with the Hautvillers artists; they were pupils or imitators of the great masters or of some collateral branch of the Reims artists. One, however, was to have a brilliantly successful career, first at Tours, then at the royal court.

Ebbo left Reims in 833. Relegated to Fleury (i.e. Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire), then to Fulda, he was not deposed until 845, when Hincmar, his successor and one of his bitterest political opponents, promptly dismissed his predecessor's personnel. Of the last manuscripts decorated in the Hautvillers manner, the only one inscribed with Hincmar's name gives him the title of 'abba'; none of the manuscripts in which he is called 'archbishop' is illustrated. We do not know in which of the Reims communities Hincmar was abbot. In any case, assuming he then employed any artist from Hautvillers who had already worked for Ebbo, nothing more is heard of the man. The School of Reims, properly so-called, died out with its founder and any subsequent works assignable to it belong to the collateral branch. This fact is all the more curious since Hincmar completed and adorned with paintings the cathedral begun by his predecessor; unfortunately none of these paintings has survived.



109 – LOISEL GOSPEL BOOK: ST MATTHEW. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.

Soon after Ebbo's downfall one of the painters trained in the Reims School settled at Tours. Another, it would appear, moved to Metz. On their arrival, these 'emigrants' found themselves confronted by a well-established iconographic tradition, active groups of artists having programmes differing from their own. Naturally enough their work was affected by these contacts. For—and this is a point to bear in mind—individuals, not only influences, migrate and, as was to be expected, each painter largely retained his personal idiom while conforming to the new programmes.



110 – BLOIS GOSPEL BOOK: ST MARK. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.

Conversely, it seems most unlikely that any Tours painters changed their style beyond recognition as a result of contacts with the newcomers or a half-conscious assimilation of their methods. This is probably the best explanation of the infiltrations of the Reims School traceable at Tours, at Metz and elsewhere; there is certainly a striking concordance of dates between the end of each of the local schools and the series of recurrent osmoses which ensured the coherence and continuity of the artistic practice of the age.