

## Greek Manuscripts

### **84. Algerina Peckover 561 (J. Rendel Harris Collection)**

Contents: Gospels; attributable to Constantinople, first half of the 12th century. Some text from St. John's Gospel is now lacking. The manuscript in fact contains material of three dates. Fols. 1-3, 352-65, acting as end papers for the Gospels, are a majescale palimpsest of the 10th century comprising a lectionary with lessons from the Epistles and Acts, to which J.N. Birdsall has drawn attention. The main body of the text (fols. 4r-351v) is the 12th-century Gospels, into which Evangelist portraits were inserted. This is preceded by a list of headings (fol. 4r-6r) and a Prologue (fol. 6r-7r). Finally, the letter of Eusebius to Carpianus was added as upper text to fol. 2v and an index of Gospel lections for the synaxarion and the menologion was written over fols. 352r-64v. The portrait of St. John (fol. 3r) was arguably done at this time, in the early 14th century.

Folios: 356; vellum, 15.5 x 19.00 cm. The outer edges of the folios as a whole have a painted motif added, perhaps when the manuscript was rebound.

Ruling: 16 lines per page. Single text column, laid out as J. Leroy, *Les types de reglure des manuscrits grècs* (Paris, 1976), 12, no. 32D1, but with the horizontals top and bottom reaching only to the outer margin on the right, not extending the width of the page.

Script: Black ink, 12th-century *Perlschrift*, which hangs below the line. Red is used for capital letters and headings.

Quiring: In quaternions: [1-3], 13 x 4, 4(+1), 20 x 4, 2, (1+)4, 3 x 4, 4(-2), 4(-3), 2 x 4, 4(+1), 4, 3. Quires are numbered in a later hand.

Binding: Brown leather over wooden boards, the whole covered with purple velvet at a later date. Since 1994 the manuscript has been boxed.

Provenance: Previously in Athens, the manuscript was bought from Quaritch, the book dealer, in 1876. It was given by Miss Algerina Peckover of Wisbeck (in Cambridgeshire) to J. Rendel Harris, according to a note deposited in the Selly Oak Colleges' Library.

Illustration: The illustration is of two periods, comprising the Evangelist portraits placed in the main Gospel text in the first half of the 12th century and an early 14th-century portrait of St John added at the beginning of the manuscript. These are described here as they occur in the manuscript.

The Palaeologan additions to the manuscript appear in the initial folios. Fol. 2r: Letter of Eusebius to Carpianus, in an elongated orange, quatrefoil, frame written over a palimpsest in the late 13th or, more likely, the early 14th century. Fol. 3r: Early 14th-century portrait of St. John the Theologian (plate 19), painted over the earlier text. He is seated and named, (ὁ ἅγιος ἰωάννης ὁ θεολόγος) writing the opening words of his Gospel, inspired by a female personification of the Word of God (θῷ λόγος). His garments are dark red over dark blue, his chair orange-brown and footstool yellow. Before him the writing desk, in awkward perspective, has a polygonal section in the front with the Gospel, bound in orange, suspended above it. The Word of God stands behind him, wearing an orange garment and a rectangular halo suffused with gold light. The Evangelist's eagle symbol appears top right out of a segment of sky, holding an orange Gospel book. The inscriptions are in orange and the background is gold.

The portrait of St. John (fol. 3r, pl. 19), now in the place of St. Matthew at the head of the Gospels, can be dated to the Palaeologan period by comparison with manuscript illumination of that time. Parallels can be drawn with St. Petersburg, Publ. Lib. gr. 101 of the late 13th century.<sup>25</sup> John in the St. Petersburg manuscript is dictated to by Prochoros, but his pose is comparable, and the sharp fold of

---

<sup>25</sup> St. Petersburg, Publ. Lib. gr. 101: V. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina* (Turin, 1967) 281-2, figs. 397-400; R.S. Nelson, *The Iconography of Preface and Miniature in the Byzantine Gospel Book* (New York, 1980), index, 160.

drapery falling to the ground below the Evangelist's thigh appears in both, as does the open-armed chair in which he is seated. The Word of God stands immediately behind John just as the figure of Peter does behind Mark in the St. Petersburg manuscript. The awkward polygonal shape at the front of the writing desk is reminiscent of the rounded base to the desk in the St. Petersburg portrait. It is this awkwardness, the lack of a characteristic perspectival architectural backdrop, as well as other features such as the shading of the faces, that suggests a Palaeologan date for the Birmingham portrait. The Evangelist symbol is also indicative: the St. Petersburg manuscript has, in the upper half of its Matthew portrait, the theophanic vision of Christ with the four Evangelist symbols. Like the St. Petersburg manuscript, the Birmingham portrait is based on a middle Byzantine prototype.<sup>26</sup> The personification of the Word of God is taking on a similar role to that of the personifications in the mid-10th-century Paris Psalter (MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. gr. 139) itself copied in the Palaeologan period.<sup>27</sup>

Early 12th-century illumination: Fol. 7v: the St. Matthew portrait (plate 20), inserted into the quire, replaces a cut-out page. Matthew is shown as an elderly man, with white hair and beard. He wears white over pink, the garments of the folds indicated in a painterly way. He grasps the book on the lectern before him. The background is gold and the portrait has a simple blue outline frame. Fol. 8r: headpiece, with floral ornament, to the text of Matthew. Fol. 113v: portrait of St. Mark (colour plate 3), on a folio added to the middle of the quire. The Evangelist is shown, as customarily, with dark hair and beard. He leans forward as he prepares to copy the Gospel. He wears pink (heavily shaded in blue and white) over blue. His cushion, and the lower background, is green, while the lectern is olive green. The portrait has the same gold background and blue frames as the others. Fol. 114r: headpiece above the opening of Mark's Gospel (colour plate 3). [between fols. 181/2, the portrait of St. Luke is lost: a stub indicates it has been cut out]. Fol. 182r:

<sup>26</sup> In the case of the St. Petersburg manuscript, Nelson, *Iconography*, 62 links this to earlier illustration of the prologues.

<sup>27</sup> For the copying of the Paris Psalter in the late 13th century, see Lazarev, *Storia*, 283 with the comparison between figs. 110 and 414; J. Lowden, *The Octateuchs: A Study in Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, (University Park, 1992), 31, with note 127; H.C. Evans and W.D. Wixom (eds.) *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261*. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1997), 242 (no. 163).



headpiece, with floral ornament, to the text of Luke. Fol. 282v: portrait of St. John, added (plate 21). John is shown as a solemn, bald-headed man seated in a high-backed chair, in garments of olive-green and brown over blue. He holds his pen in his left hand. His lectern differs from the others in having additional projections around the book-support. The left door is open, revealing a book and ink bottle. On the stand are writing implements, as in the other portraits. Fol. 283r: headpiece to St. John's Gospel (plate 21). The initial letter is decorated with green and gold.

The portraits of Sts. Matthew, Mark and John (fols. 7v, 113v, 282v) are dateable to the first half of the 12th century and so may well have been bound into the Gospels from the beginning. The portrait of Mark (colour plate 3) can be picked out to argue this dating. It is comparable with his counterpart in the Lectionary in New York attributed to Constantinople during the first half of the 12th century, Pierpont Morgan Lib. cod. M. 692, fol. 123v.<sup>28</sup> This is apparent in the delineation of the face and beard and the pose of the figure, leaning forward with his left hand to his chin as his writing right hand droops off the page. In both the drapery is wrapped around the lower part of the figure, who thrusts his left leg forward. The furniture – reading desk, angled stool – is also comparable. The Birmingham Mark portrait can also be directly compared with that in a Lectionary on Mount Athos (Panteleimon, cod. 2, fol. 115v), with which the New York manuscript is associated.<sup>29</sup> Here the same features recur, with the sash effect of the drapery below the arm and the tuck extending down the back. Similar pastel colours are used: pale blue under pink in the Birmingham portrait; pale pink under pale green in the Athos one.

An unusual feature of the Evangelist portraits is that John (plate 21) is left-handed. This example was not known to the writer of a monograph on the subject, and now represents the earliest identified surviving example of the left-handed Evangelist.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> G. Vikan (ed.), *Illuminated Greek Manuscripts from American Collections: An Exhibition in honor of Kurt Weitzmann* (Princeton, 1973), 134-5 no. 35 with fig. 60. Here comparison is also aptly drawn with Paris, Bibl. Nat. cod. gr. 189.

<sup>29</sup> P. Huber, *Athos: Leben, Glaube, Kunst* (Zurich, 1969, rept. Zürich and Freiburg im Breisgau, 1982), 187-210, fig. 91 in colour (where it is dated too early in my view, as the end of the 11th century).

<sup>30</sup> I. Spatharakis, *The Left-Handed Evangelist. A Contribution to Palaeologan Iconography* (London, 1988), 8 with fig. 5, cites MS. Mt. Athos gr. Vatopedi 938 (714) of 1304 as the then oldest-known dated manuscript with a left-handed Evangelist, Mark.

The ornamental rectangular headpieces, with floral motifs in blue and green picked out in white, with red, against a gold background, are unexceptional and continue the same motifs found in late 11th-century Gospel books.<sup>31</sup>

Bibliography: F.H.A. Scrivener, (ed. E. Miller), *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (4th. ed., 2 Vols., London, 1894), I, 561; C.R. Gregory, *Textkritik des Neuen Testaments* (Leipzig, 1900), I, 215 as ev. 713; H.F. von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, 2 Vols., Göttingen, 1911, I(1), 55, 177 as e351; J.N.Birdsall, 'Two Lectionaries in Birmingham', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 35 (1984), 448-51.

---

<sup>31</sup> Compare, for example, the headpiece to Mark with that of John's Gospel in the Oxford Gospels Bodl. E.D. Clarke 10, fol. 123r: I. Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften* Bd. I: Oxford, Bodleian Library (Stuttgart, 1977), 58 (no. 38), fig. 123.