

# Imaging the Early Medieval Bible (Pennsylvania State Series in the History of the Book)

In *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible*, five outstanding medievalists challenge conventional wisdom on the beginnings of biblical illustration. Traditionally, scholars have maintained that the subjects and format of Bible illustration were largely determined by archetypes of the earliest years of Christian artistic culture. Taken together, the essays in this book present a convincing argument that illustrated and decorated Bibles were shaped by ad hoc decisions that resulted in a creative variety of approaches.

First, John Lowden asserts that biblical manuscript illumination is more likely to have derived from, than to have inspired, biblical monumental painting.

Katrin Kogman-Appel provides a thorough survey of the debate over how Jewish motifs entered Christian art. In her discussion of Roman manuscript art, Dorothy Verkerk proposes that the celebrated Ashburnham Pentateuch, rather than the hypothetical Leo Bible proffered by Koehler, should be taken as a witness to the capital's approach to Bible illustration and the kind of model sent to the monastic scriptoria north of the Alps. Lawrence Nees presents the northern Bibles, Insular and Carolingian, as individual commissions for specific donors made at certain specific moments in time. Finally, John Williams studies the Bible of 960 in Leon, an ideal vehicle to examine the premises underlying reigning theories of the evolution of Bible illustration. Although its format and extensive imagery have been taken as a sign that it reflected early stages of Bible illustration, it stands revealed as owing little to pictorial traditions.

Taken together, these essays present a convincing argument that illustrated and decorated Bibles were shaped by ad hoc decisions that resulted in a creative variety of approaches.

## Review

"This book belongs on the bookshelf of every (medieval) art historian."

--Jens T. Wollesen, Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada

"With its oversized dimensions, large type on high-quality glossy paper, and breathtaking photos of extraordinary rare manuscripts, *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible* could easily pass as a 'coffee-table' book one might find in a well-educated church official's home. It thus could easily be passed over by serious scholars, but that would be a mistake."--Norbert A. Wethington, *Christianity and Literature*

"The five contributors to *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible* effectively challenge Weitzmann's stranglehold on their discipline by focussing less on 'iconographic genealogies' and more on the revolutionary aspects of early medieval biblical illustration, the unique cultural and liturgical contexts of early medieval luxury Bibles, and Jewish-Christian artistic and exegetical exchange in

late antiquity. I found this book to be extremely valuable, both in terms of the historiographical issues it raises and its clear and concise treatment of the latest theories in the field of early medieval art history."--Lynda L. Coon, Religious Studies Review

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"Foremost in [the contributors' or maybe the volume's] critique, which I share, is Weitzmann's displacement of the focus of art-historical attention from the material artifact at hand to an imagined set of antecedents. . . . these self-consciously revisionist studies provide a valuable picture of present-day moods and concerns on topics surrounding the illumination of biblical texts in the early Middle Ages."--Walter Cahn, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*

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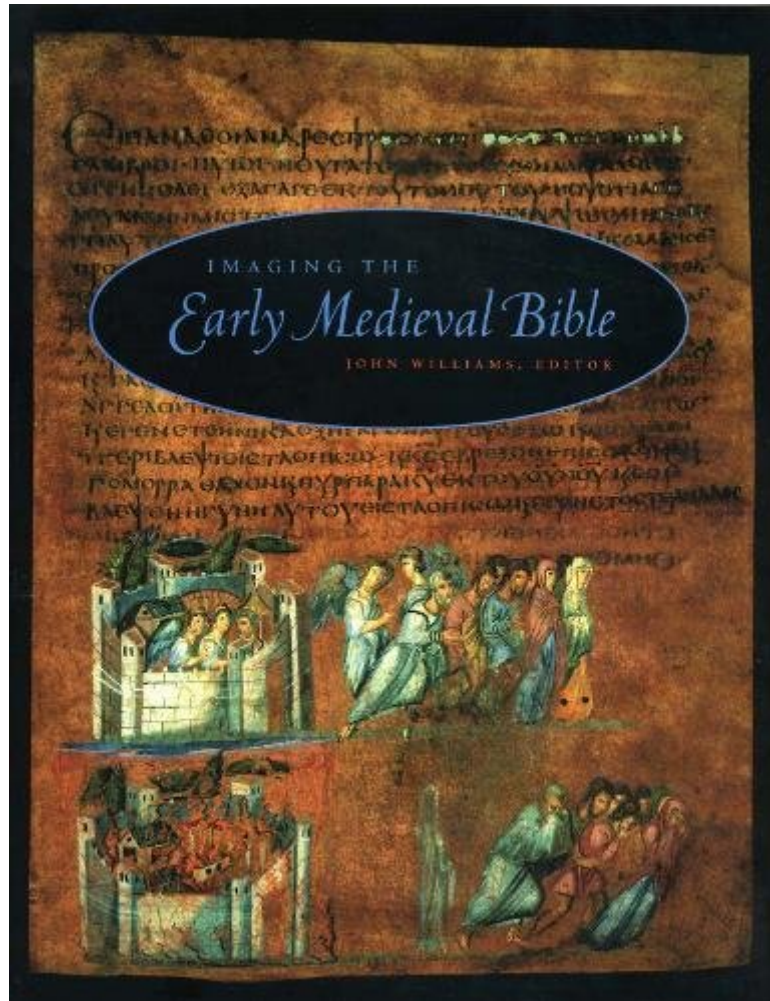
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John Williams is Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Art History at the University of Pittsburgh. His previous books include *The Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of the Illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1994) and *A Spanish Apocalypse: The Morgan Beatus Manuscript* (1991).

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