02.06.12, Teviotdale, The Stammheim Missal

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The Stammheim Missal by Elizabeth C. Teviotdale is one of the books published recently in the Getty Museum Studies on Art Series. The series is aimed at a broad audience and is intended to acquaint readers with individual works of art, the historical and cultural contexts in which the works of art were created, and the range of methods employed by scholars who analyze works of art from a variety of periods and cultures. Teviotdale's volume well fulfills these goals.

The Stammheim Missal (The J. Paul Getty Museum, MS. 64) was produced in the monastery of Saint Michael at Hildeshiem, Germany, during the late twelfth century. It is richly decorated with tempera, gold and silver on twelve calendar pages, twelve full-page miniatures, ten historiated initials, thirty-seven large decorated initials, hundreds of small decorated initials and twenty-nine text pages with painted arcades. Although it is a magnificent example of Romanesque manuscript illumination, it has not been widely published until now. Therefore Teviotdale’s book, which includes full color reproductions of all of the large miniatures, sample calendar pages, initials and text pages, will be useful to serious scholars as well as a general audience.

Teviotdale has organized her book into six chapters. In the first chapter she begins by sketching the monastic community of Saint Michael at Hildeshiem and the important role Saint Bernward, the monastery's founder, played in both the artistic and liturgical life of the community. Saint Bernward had been an important patron of the arts and had been responsible for works of art, particularly the bronze doors he had commissioned for the cathedral, that were a part of the monastery's daily life. The commemorative mass for the saint required a special liturgy that also became a part of the monastery's recurring cycle of religious services.

After establishing these facts, Teviotdale clearly and concisely summarizes the origins of the Stammheim Missal and its relationship to an earlier manuscript produced at Saint Michael's, the Ratmann Missal. She continues with a description of the contents of the Stammheim Missal, pointing out that the verbal text is identical to that of the Ratmann Missal, and that although the Stammheim Missal's program of decoration is more ambitious than that of the older book, some of the decoration is modeled on the earlier illuminations. Teviotdale finishes the chapter with a description of the contents of the Stammheim Missal. She discusses each kind of decoration, its placement in the manuscript, and how it relates to the verbal text. She provides clear definitions of terms and explains each part of the missal and how it relates to the liturgy.

Chapters two and three provide contextual information. In chapter two Teviotdale discusses the different kinds of books traditionally used in the celebration of the Mass and how they were decorated. She explains the purposes of sacramentaries, graduals, lectionaries and missals and summarizes the function, subject matter and development of painted decorations in each type of book. She supports her discussion with well chosen illustrations. In addition to introducing the layman to the purposes and kinds of decoration found in early medieval liturgical manuscripts, this chapter establishes a basis for
understanding the close examination of the decoration in the Stammheim Missal that follows.

Chapter three provides a summary and explanation of the development of typology in medieval thought and art. Teviotdale pays special attention to the use of typology in the works of art commissioned by Saint Bernward for Saint Michael's, most notably the famous bronze doors made for the cathedral. The discussion in this chapter clarifies the intellectual and artistic context that produced the Stammheim Missal.

The final three chapters describe and analyze the decoration in the Stammheim Missal. Chapter four focuses on the full-page frontispiece miniatures, chapter five discusses the full-page miniatures for feasts and saints, and chapter six considers the way the decoration works together as a program.

In chapter four Teviotdale concludes that the five frontispiece miniatures are the earliest extant example of a set of manuscript illustrations that encapsulate the medieval theory of typology and clearly express the theme of salvation history. She points out that the only earlier monument with a similar comprehensive statement is the set of bronze doors Saint Bernward ordered for the cathedral at Hildesheim. The first three frontispiece miniatures introduce the section of the book containing the chants sung by the choir during the Mass. A pair of facing pages (fols. 10v and 11) depict the theme of the Wisdom of Creation. The following page (fol. 11v) represents the Annunciation. The other two frontispiece miniatures (fols. 85v and 86) introduce the texts for the Eucharistic prayers and depict Christ in Majesty and the Crucifixion, respectively. Teviotdale carefully describes each miniature, identifying each figure and translating each inscription. She then explains the multiple layers of theological meaning represented in each complex miniature, and the overall meaning of the group of miniatures taken together. She suggests parallels between the composition of the manuscript miniatures and the arrangement of the panels on Saint Bernward's bronze doors.

In chapter five Teviotdale analyzes the five miniatures that accompany the texts for the major feast days of the church year and the feast days for two saints who were especially significant for the monks at Hildesheim. The subjects of these miniatures are the Nativity (fol. 92) for Christmas, the Resurrection (fol. 111) for Easter, Christ's Ascension (fol. 115v) for Ascension, Saint Peter Preaching (fol. 117v) for Pentecost, the Assumption of the Virgin (fol. 145v) for Assumption, Saint Michael, the monastery's patron saint (fol. 152), and Saint Bernward, the monastery's founder (fol. 156).

Teviotdale explains the meanings of the visual elements of the miniatures and their verbal texts in relation to the way they were interpreted in medieval exegesis. She points out pertinent examples of ways the artist used the visual elements of the miniatures to emphasize their theological meanings. For example, in the miniature of the Ascension the artist has used the same colors and patterns for the costumes of both Christ and Mary, emphasizing their close relationship not only as mother and son, but as Christ and the Church. As in the previous chapter, Teviotdale considers the overall meaning of the group of miniatures taken together. She concludes that the illustrations of the major feast days of the year continue the visual summation of salvation history, and that the two miniatures of the saints associated with the monastery of Saint Michael's at Hildesheim bring salvation history into the lives of the monks who would see and use the manuscript.

The final chapter of the book deals with how the artists of the Stammheim Missal used formal visual elements to create a unified, comprehensive program. Teviotdale discusses the use of framing devices, composition, figural poses, gestures, pattern and color that create visual parallels throughout the manuscript, reinforcing the doctrinal messages embedded in the illustrations. Teviotdale concludes that the program of decoration in the Stammheim Missal is typical of twelfth century thought and art because it sought to schematize all of the ideas of medieval understanding of salvation history, working in references to typology from Jewish scripture and the natural world, in one comprehensive program. The result is a set of beautiful, clearly legible visual images with multiple levels of meaning that also dazzle the eye with their color and design.

The final pages in Teviotdale's book provide a brief physical description of the Stammheim Missal, its provenance, its exhibition history, a glossary of terms, and a very brief bibliography. With its excellent color reproductions, informative discussions and contextual material, this is a welcome addition to the literature on medieval manuscripts.