

**Georgi Parpulov, *Middle-Byzantine Evangelist Portraits: A Corpus of Miniature Paintings*, Manuscripta Biblica, Paratextus Biblici 3.7, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022. ISBN 978-3-11-075463-6. Hardback, pp. xiv + 167, 6 color images and 87 (mostly) color plates. €139.95.**

- [1] Georgi Parpulov’s *Middle-Byzantine Evangelist Portraits* is not an analytical and argumentative study but a corpus of items. It presents the fruit of collecting, arranging, categorizing, and cataloging information and images of evangelist (miniature) portraits. Even more, seventy-five of the portraits have never been published in print before, and Parpulov is a pioneer in making the details of these items available. This exhaustive corpus is the first of its kind and a welcome tool for enabling researchers to investigate more deeply into the complex nature of book projects from the mid-ninth to the mid-thirteenth century.
- [2] The book under review is the seventh volume of the *Biblia Manuscripta* series, a series that is growing continuously and rapidly (e.g., in 2023 two volumes have already been published, and two are still to come yet this year). *Middle-Byzantine Evangelist Portraits* actually belongs to a specialized subseries, *Paratextus Biblici*, that up to now includes only two volumes, although “a large number of paratexts are being published (in the subseries ‘Paratextus Biblici’)” (i) in the near future. All in all, the publications in the *Biblia Manuscripta* series originate from the project *Paratexts of the Bible* (PTB; cf. [paratextbib.eu](http://paratextbib.eu)), led by Martin Wallraff, Patrick Andrist, and Martin Karrer. The project is based at the Ludwigs-Maximilian University in Munich and performed in collaboration with the Kirchliche Hochschule in Wuppertal, Germany. Apart from the book series, the project’s results are presented as a searchable online database (see <https://www.manuscripta-biblica.org>).
- [3] But what do evangelist portraits have to do with proper textual criticism, and why is the catalog-like corpus of interest to readers of *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*? Those textual critics who focus solely on the written New Testament texts—and, thus, at the same time do not even consider any other nonbiblical texts or textual units in the same manuscripts—might easily answer: nothing. But a look at page 77, an “Index of manuscripts by Gregory/Aland (GA) census number,” immediately demonstrates that paratextual elements are natural parts of manuscripts and important in the overall conception of codices. Although these portraits were not meant to draw attention to the pictorial representations and, consequently, redirect attention from the texts themselves, they are “‘thresholds’ to the Holy of Holies,” (v) that is, to the text of the four gospels. The many entries in the index that actually *have* a GA number are proof enough of the close interrelationship between various textual passages from the four canonical gospels and paratextual elements within a certain manuscript of the official *Kurzgefasste Liste* (see the New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room [NTVMR] of the Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung in Münster, at <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste>). Together with “prefaces, canon tables, chapter lists etc.,” the evangelist portraits form a fine treasure trove of information that help one to evaluate and analyze a manuscript in full. They thus provide further insights into the quality and making of a codex. Of course, all of that is useful for a more in-depth picture of the New Testament text a manuscript offers.
- [4] The book starts with a preface from the editor, Martin Wallraff (v–vi), in which the organization, strategy, method, and layout of the catalog is explained. Abbreviations and symbols are defined clearly, and readers get to know how to combine the printed corpus with the cataloged items numbered from 1 to 469 that can be found in the database on-

- line, *and* they learn which paratexts actually are dealt with in the database. Once more this demonstrates a twofold strength of the corpus: it brings together information about evangelist portraits that is usually distributed among various specialized studies, and at the same time it interacts with the searchable online database of the PTB.
- [5] A short introduction (“Portraits of the Evangelists in Middle-Byzantine Manuscripts,” ix–x) follows that *en passant* touches the topic of scribal implements depicted in the portraits. Thus a few randomly selected images of such implements are printed (xi–xiv, figs. 1–6). Unfortunately, the images do not show material from the Byzantine period but rather findings from Mtskheta, Georgia, from the third or fourth century and from Egypt from the sixth and ninth to twelfth century. The silver and reed pens shown in the figures in particular may convey a misleading understanding of the writing process and, when it comes to portraits, of the design process when the pencils are seen as those that were used for the manuscripts presented in the catalog. For the reader it is important to know that Parpulov clearly differentiates between portraits that are original parts of manuscripts and others that are additions to them. Moreover, Parpulov explains further abbreviations, numbers, symbols, and, above all, the composition of the short and precise descriptions in the catalog. Multifigural compositions—that is, images with more figures than just that of an evangelist—are excluded from the corpus.
- [6] The catalog (1–69) consists of 469 entries and 7 additional ones in an appendix. The latter are treated separately because these miniatures “have been repainted to such an extent that their original pigments are no longer substantially visible” (68). Interestingly and helpfully, the entries are arranged according to a “*roughly* chronological order and are, *as far as possible*, grouped according to common compositional types” (ix) so that readers can trace equalities, developments, and differences of the depiction of a certain evangelist rather easily. Of course, for further details on the writing implements, how a pen was held, hand gestures, postures, the position of writing, and even what can be read in the opened manuscript in an evangelist’s hand, readers of the book must consult specialized studies. The catalog entries are structured as follows: the place where the manuscript is kept today (with inventory number), record numbers (D for the database Pinakes [see <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr>] and GA for the *Kurzgefasste Liste*), a short description, the folios with evangelist portraits, and a few bibliographic references (Parpulov aimed at citing “less than three titles per item,” ix).
- [7] A selective bibliography focusing on central publications (e.g., only one study by Sirarpie der Nersessian is cited) and three indexes (manuscripts by GA numbers, manuscripts by location and shelfmark, and dated or datable manuscripts) facilitate navigation in the catalog (77–80).
- [8] The plates form the second core piece of the publication (81–167, pls. 1–87). Here readers swiftly identify the strategy explained in the foreword and introduction: all the portraits of a specific manuscript are printed one after the other before the portraits of the next manuscript follow. The manuscripts are ordered in a (roughly) chronological way. The reproduced images, printed on the same paper as the rest of the book and not on glossy paper, are of good quality, and the portraits all take up one page each. Only together with images in the ParaTexBib database *and* with others available to the public from collections and museums can readers achieve a full pictorial catalog of evangelist portraits. In other words, readers with a special interest in a portrait not reprinted in the plate section of the book must engage with other sources in order to achieve a more or less complete understanding of the plate section.

- [9] Be that as it may, the book can be seen as an interim step that provides a fairly comprehensive catalog with a representative selection of plates that will result in a complete database thereafter. More important is that the publication offers a considerable number of previously unpublished portraits for the first time, and it does so now. Those interested in that topic have them now and do not have to wait for a completion of the database. Parpulov is to be thanked for accomplishing the rather dry task of compiling an easy-to-use and clearly arranged catalog that enables scholars to perform further research into Middle-Byzantine evangelist portraits.

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