

Izzy Coopersmith

Herbal in the tradition of Dioscorides

Tombstone

Title: Herbal in the Tradition of Dioscorides

Date: 15th Century

From: Eastern Mediterranean

Dimensions: 26.1 x 19 cm bound 26.8 x 20.2 cm

Medium: Ink and wash on paper

Gallery Label

This 15th-century illuminated manuscript is very similar to Dioscorides of Anazarbus' Late Antique pharmacology manuscript *De Materia Medica*, which became the standard manual on plants and their medicinal properties. The *Herbal in the Tradition of Dioscorides* is made up of 679 chapters, a prologue, table of contents, and 20 pages worth of illustrations, including images of 71 different plants. Each chapter covers a different plant along with their medicinal uses written in black ink. There are marginal notes by users, and evidence of binding restoration showing the usage and importance of this manuscript in the early modern world.

Catalog Essay

The Herbal in the Tradition of Dioscorides is a 15th-century manuscript from the Eastern Mediterranean with 17th century Greek binding. It is also known as a pharmacopeia, a book containing medicinal drugs, their effects, and directions for usage. Dioscorides of Anazarbus was born in southeast Asia Minor during the Roman Empire in the early 1st century CE. He traveled around the Mediterranean world collecting plants, their nomenclature, and their properties. This information was used to make many herbal-based manuscripts over 1,500 years by physicians and scholars. There is longevity in his work as they hold importance in their practical qualities.¹ Dioscorides' first text of *De Materia Medica*, written originally in Latin, was made around 50-70 CE, containing 5 volumes about medicinal plants, drugs, and how they could be prepared. The *Herbal* was written in the same style, following Dioscorides, while also incorporating traditions close to Galen and Isocrates, two early Greek writers and physicians. This manuscript was written in Greek and presents up to 679 plants, including their properties of medicine and their usage, each plant receiving its own chapter.²

Interestingly, The book includes illustrations condensed within the first 20 pages. The actual text of the chapters comes after the illustrations, prologue, and table of contents. Within each chapter,

¹ Helen C. Evans, "Byzantine and Islam: Age of Transition (7th-9th Century)" *Byzantine and Islam: Age of Transition* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 9-10.

² *Transformation of knowledge: Early Manuscripts from the Collection of Lawrence J. Schoenberg* (London: Paul Holberton, 2006), p. 100-101 (LJS 62).

black ink is used and while red indicates the first initials on each page, and the marginal decorations are done in red and black ink as well. The marginal notes and restoration in the binding show evidence of heavy usage³.

The Jaharis Lectionary

Tombstone

Title: The Jaharis Gospel Lectionary

Date: 1100 CE

From: (around) Constantinople

Dimensions: Overall – 14 ½ x 11 ⅝ x 4 ⅞ in (36.8 x 29.6 x 12.4 cm); Page size – 14 x 10 ½ in (35.5 x 26.8 cm)

Medium: Gold and ink on parchment; leather binding

Gallery Label

This 12th-century Byzantine illuminated lectionary contains readings from all four Gospels (John, Matthew, Luke, and Mark) arranged in the order in which they would be read in church services throughout the liturgical year. This lectionary is divided up into two sections according to two Orthodox calendars: fixed feast days and movable feast days. Like many Byzantine lectionaries, this is a large formatted book with large text for easier reading. Nonfigural geometric and vegetal decorations in gold, blue, and green ink are consistently painted throughout the codex, as well as the inclusion of Evangelist portraits of the four gospels in various sections. As illuminated manuscripts were an elite object in the Byzantine world, the quality of this work and the particular order of the lections, leads many to believe it was made for the great Church of Constantinople, Hagia Sophia.

Catalog Essay

In Byzantium, illuminated liturgical manuscripts were not commonplace or an everyday household item. They were incredibly expensive objects and owning one showed status and elitism. *The Jaharis Lectionary* is a large and beautiful illuminated manuscript, proving to be one of the most extraordinary of its kind. The earliest lectionaries can be traced back to the 7th century, but became much more common starting in the 11th century. They were typically smaller books that had the specific purpose of reading the Gospels during mass. This lectionary importance is demonstrated by its great size. The four Gospels are arranged in the order of how they would have been read throughout the liturgical year. This lectionary is divided into sections according to the two Orthodox calendars: the Synaxarion, or the movable year, starting with Easter; and the Menologion following a fixed year schedule.

³ Evans, *Byzantine and Islam: Age of Transition*, 9-10.

Made in 12th-century Constantinople, this book's extravagance indicates its use in the great church of Hagia Sophia. Made from parchment, its 308 pages show its use, as there are signs that the text was corrected and annotated by a scribe himself.

This manuscript made its way to Paris during the 19th century and fell into the hands of historian Henri Bordier. There is evidence of the book being rebound during this time as well as research from his findings. He found that the opening of each gospel includes half-page full length evangelist portraits painted on gold. In each portrait, the evangelist is seated at his desk and writing, framed by a gilded border with flowers and foliage. There are many other decorations found throughout the book, made from many different colors, some be geometric and others resembling the foliage found around the portraiture.⁴

Fragment of a Hanging with two figures in Arcades

Tombstone

Title: Fragment of a Hanging with two figures in Arcades

Date: 4th-6th century CE

From: Egypt

Dimensions: 42.5 x 635 cm (16 ¾ x 25 in)

Medium: Tapestry weave in polychrome wool

Gallery Label

This textile furnishing was found in Egypt in a burial context, alongside many other tapestry fragments. Originally used as a wall hanging, this piece was likely manufactured in a workshop where textiles of a similar nature were made. It was repurposed as a burial shroud after its initial construction. As there are two different colors in the warp (or weaving), this work demonstrates high-quality craftsmanship through its illusionistic play of light and shadow. The two figures are dressed in traditional Persian-style garments and the architecture shown in the piece acts as a frame for the two figures as they carry fruits and objects, personifying the earth and its abundance. There are many missing details due to time but there is evidence of ancient repair.

Catalog Essay

Fragment of a Hanging with two figures in Arcades is a furnishing fragment made with the standard tapestry weave found in multiple wall hangings from Egypt around the 4th-6th centuries CE. This piece was likely made in a workshop for tapestries of a similar nature; other fragments

⁴ John Lowden. 2009. *The Jaharis Gospel Lectionary: The Story of a Byzantine Book*. New York, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

almost identical to this piece have been found.⁵ This specific textile was made from polychrome wool, which lines up with the standard for Late Antique textiles. They were typically made from linen, wool, or a mixture of the two. These materials worked well together due to linen being strong and fine, while wool is more elastic and soft, but bonded to dye very well. Weaving techniques were developed from Greco-Roman antiquity, where there was a large population of dyers, spinners, and weavers.⁶

This piece has many different colors throughout, using dye likely from vegetable or animal origins. Different shades could be achieved by combining sources or by using different levels of mordants, the chemical used to combine the fabric and dye. The figures depicted in the textile are shown wearing Perisan-style garments; the figure on the left is shown carrying a flask and bowl, where the one on the right has created a pouch with his garment in order to hold pomegranates. These motifs may personify the earth's prosperous offerings and the guarantee of a happy life.⁷ Complete textiles are hard to find, but these fragments still hold a lot of information in them. After being removed from their original context as wall hangings, many, including this one, have been found in Egypt as burial shrouds. Due to the dry climate, the textiles survived. They were later often sent as diplomatic gifts or war booty to Western Europe, which explains how they came to be in Western museums.

Liturgical Texts - Catalog Essay

Liturgical books and texts are some of the most important objects from Byzantium. They hold some of the most important aspects of the liturgy. The liturgy refers to the services held by the church, which can include Eucharist, Sacraments, and Baptisms. There are many customs that take place during these services, some of which include: blessing, singing, washing, kneeling, eating, and more. Services have many fixed aspects, but depending on the day or season, service leaders rely on these liturgical texts to help guide the service.⁸

Lectionaries, a general term for books containing readings from the Four Gospels for the liturgical services, can be traced back to the 7th century CE.⁹ There are three major types of liturgical books: the *evangelion* (lectionary) which contains Gospel lections; the *prophetolgia* which contains Old Testament lections; and the *Apostolos* which contains lections from the Book of Acts. These texts are crucial as their main purpose is to provide the readings of the church during mass.

⁵ Kathrin Colburn, "Materials and Techniques of Late Antique and Early Islamic Textiles Found in Egypt," In *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, ed. Helen C. Evans and Brandie Ratliff (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 161-68.

⁶ Colburn, In *Byzantium and Islam Age of Transition*, 161-68.

⁷ Colburn, In *Byzantium and Islam Age of Transition*, 161-68.

⁸ Taft, Robert F. "Liturgy." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. (Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁹ Taft, Robert F. "Lectionary." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. (Oxford University Press, 1991).

Liturgical texts found in this gallery range from fragments of Psalters, a Menologion (a church calendar), to entire lectionaries made for Hagia Sophia, and are all exceptional examples of the importance of liturgy for the Byzantine world. The Old Testament and the New Testament are all represented, and provide an idea of what a liturgical service during the Byzantine Empire looked like.