Introduction

The Gospel Lectionary in the Divine Liturgy

In the Byzantine rite, three key manuscripts were used for the recitation of texts from the Old and New Testaments. The first is the Prophetologion, the liturgical equivalent of the Prophet Book; it contained the readings from the major and minor prophets of the Septuagint excerpted and arranged for their recitation. This reading was customarily done at Vespers or, when it occurred in the liturgy itself, after the Thrice-Holy Hymn, which is the moment at which conciliar decrees would also have been read, immediately before the reading from Acts of the Apostles. While the Prophet Books themselves garnered illuminations, Prophetologia were rarely, if ever, illustrated. The second is the Praxapostolos, which contains the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, which were read daily in the Divine Liturgy before the proclamation of the Gospel. Some of these attracted the work of illuminators, who apparently – and fittingly, for a manuscript used in the context of the Divine Liturgy – emphasized actions of reading and recitation. And the third is the Gospel lectionary, which contains excerpts from the four Gospels ordered for daily reading throughout the liturgical year.

The last manuscript type is the focus of this study. The Gospel lectionary would have been read aloud from the ambo of the church during the first half of the Divine Liturgy, known as the Liturgy of the Catechumens, which immediately followed the reading of the “Divine Apostles” (i.e., the reading

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from the Praxapostolos). The lectionary would have been chanted aloud by a skilled reader from the ambo, while the bishop, patriarch, or officiating priest would have listened to it from within the sanctuary and afterward given his homily from that place. The proper chanting of the Gospel text was glossed in the lectionaries by a system of musical markings known as ekphonetic notation, often written in a carmine ink. These chant marks guided the skilled chanter, usually a deacon, who would have given life to the text for an attentive congregation.

Despite the long-standing debate over the codification and standardization of the lectionary as a text, scholars seem to agree that its form more or less stabilized in Constantinople during the tenth century, though the selection of readings included in each manuscript continued to vary depending on the volume’s intended use. In the late eleventh century, however, the lectionary began to flourish with figural initials and accompanying marginalia alongside elaborate miniatures. The present book focuses on a group of closely affiliated lectionaries produced in Constantinople around 1100 with extensive illumination programs, covering initials, marginalia, and miniatures.


7 While several other lectionaries figure prominently in this story, my focus is on the exemplars of the tradition that prioritize a uniform, coherent, and complex play between text and illuminations. This group is less oriented around a lectionary type or a codification of its readings, as it is dependent on my assessment of their nuanced and compelling use of
These marginal images and initials appear in between silence and sound. While similar images are also featured in Gospel books, psalters, and collections of homilies not necessarily intended for liturgical use, they are particularly numerous in manuscripts produced specifically for public oral performance. In the case of the lectionary, these marginal images deploy a coherent logic—a regularity that has often been summed up as a banal illustration of the text and as such has been undertheorized by scholars. And while a systematic analysis suggests that their use has a coherent logic, it is one that seems replete with subtle iconographic errors and startling exceptions to its own rules. What sets the illuminations in the Gospel lectionary apart from those in other books is their repeated insistence on the oral and aural qualities of the lectionary, and their play with the ways in which readers and listeners alike would have imagined in their minds the excerpted narratives being retold in the Gospels.

The aim of this book is to consider how miniatures, illustrated initials, and marginalia in the Gospel book operate alongside the text and the text’s recitation in the Divine Liturgy at the moment of the daily Gospel reading. It looks across manuscript illumination and liturgical space with the goal of contextualizing how image, text, sound, and architecture operate alongside one another to produce what I refer to as “polyvalent images”—images that flicker across multiple readings and spectrums of possibility. Since the lectionaries discussed throughout this work appear to be some of the highest-quality illuminated Byzantine manuscripts of the late eleventh century, they have all come to be associated with the most exquisite centers of manuscript production in Constantinople,
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possibly produced from within the patriarchal orbit itself and for the church of Hagia Sophia.  

This volume will therefore imagine Hagia Sophia as the site for these manuscripts’ use. While I employ this setting with critical skepticism and qualification, I also recognize that other contexts of use are lost to us today. Therefore, the second part of this volume will explore what the use of one of these lectionaries might have been like in the space of the “Great Church” of Constantinople. This investigation is opened up by outlining and clearly elucidating the lectionary’s liturgical use and the associated theories and practices of divine inspiration, recitation, and performance that contoured the delivery of the daily lection.

Therefore, the second half of this book moves well beyond the manuscripts themselves. My interest here is to understand how the lectionary alters and affects the understanding of architectural decoration, acoustics, and ritual sites within the church. The final two chapters, for example, look at key architectural details and spaces in Hagia Sophia that played with the sonic dimension of the lectionary, its aural and iconographic resonances in the space, and how conventional readings of Hagia Sophia changed over time and over the course of the lections’ recitations. Rather than attempting to write a monographic study on the Gospel lectionary itself as a manuscript type, the goal in considering recitation practices and architecture is to demonstrate how liturgical spaces operated with the same level of iconographic play that we can observe across text–image relations.

8 While many of the manuscripts at the center of my focus overlap with the group of so-called “patriarchal lectionaries,” this term is deeply fraught with problems arising from a desire to securely attribute origins of patronage and reconstruct sites of use. Similarly, the very criterion by which these patriarchal lectionaries are identified is tautological, dependent on a group of key readings that are seen as indicators of this manuscript type. The clear coexistence of various lectionary manuscripts in the patriarchate and its orbit suggests that while this group might have been a part of the Constantinopolitan patriarchate and its orbit, others surely also existed alongside these in the same collections, playing on different functions and strengths. Furthermore, while fruitful and generative relations exist within the group, in terms of their illuminations, this category is counterproductive given that the type of marginalia and images that we find in lectionaries both overlaps and also cuts across this group in generative ways that are far more compelling and fruitful avenues of intellectual inquiry than the clear delineation of manuscript category according to an artificially constructed, modern classification for an already relatively small corpus of manuscripts. On the patriarchal lectionary, see Elena Velkovska, “L’lezionario patriarcale Ottoboni gr. 175,” in Marco D’Agostino and Paola Degni (eds.), Alethes Philia: Studi in onore di Giancarlo Prato, vol. 2 (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2010), 687–94. For an exceptional survey of recent literature, see Robert S. Nelson, “Patriarchal Lectionaries of Constantinople: History, Attributions, and Prospects,” in Derek Krueger and Robert S. Nelson (eds.), The New Testament in Byzantium (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2016), 87–115.
The key commitment of this text is to understand how pictures slowly and “procedurally” unfold through their use in the liturgy. This interest in procedurality derives from Ian Bogost’s analysis of video games, where he develops the idea of a *procedural rhetoric*: a “practice of authoring arguments through processes.” Bogost’s concept is indebted to the work of Janet Murray, who defined the procedural – the computer’s “defining ability to execute a series of rules” – as one of the key properties of a digital environment. My argument here is that rather than being stably defined, images (that is, miniatures, marginalia, initials in manuscripts or decorative details and spaces in architecture) share with us facets of meaning and spectrums of signification that are perpetually in flux. Rather than being immediately legible or concrete in meaning, these images unfold differently every time they are put to use, determined not only by liturgical ritual and the day of the year, but also by how viewers work through potential readings, getting confused or misdirected by their indeterminacy. Rather than a model of play or complexity for this iconographic approach, the concept of procedurality allows us to appreciate how images are made to elicit different experiences and readings across their usage in ritual.

**Art versus Use: The Problem of Illuminating Spoken Text**

Most art historians have viewed the riches of Byzantine liturgical manuscripts as some sort of lavish curiosity intended for the cursory glance of a wealthy and elite patron, confined to the scholar’s shelf rather than placed on the chanter’s lectern. The logic here is that because images in a text intended for recitation could not have been perused and contemplated by the user in any meaningful fashion, these were objects created either as novelties or as lavish displays of conspicuous consumption.

In 2004, Irmgard Hutter attempted to revise some fundamental assumptions about Byzantine illumination, including the practical use of complexly illuminated manuscripts in the liturgical rite. Hutter comments,

> At best, they were studied and admired for a while by those who received them, but I am pretty sure that most of them were a sort of the Byzantine

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equivalent to modern coffeetable books, before they were stored away on the shelves or in chests of a library... Those illuminated manuscripts which today are regarded as rare and special by modern observers, have been estimated in exactly the same way in Byzantine times, at their time of production as well as at their time of copying up to several hundred years later.\footnote{Irmgard Hutter, “Some Aspects of Byzantine Manuscript Illumination Reconsidered,” in E.N. Dobrynina (ed.), Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: Iskusstvo rukopisnoi knigi: Vizantiia, Drevniaia Rus’ (Saint Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2004), 21–43, at 34, 36.}

Hutter claims that these manuscripts were not often used in the service and that the “splendid volumes” of Byzantine illumination, from the Paris Gregory of Nazianzus Homilies (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 510) to the various Octateuchs, were purely objects of admiration: praised a bit upon reception, but ultimately treated as decoration. She assigns to these manuscripts a gaze identical to that of the modern connoisseur: admired for their fine technical skill and beauty but without any function beyond that gaze, intended for no daily or practical use.

The lack of wax stains on these manuscripts’ fine pages and their pristine condition suggest for Hutter their status as “fine art” objects in the Byzantine world, showing no evidence of use. Sumptuously illuminated manuscripts are often in better condition than many text-only counterparts that feature extensive use and wear. However, the notion that these illustrated manuscripts lack evidence of use is a deep mischaracterization, perhaps fueled by the fact that many of these manuscripts have been circulated only in highly cropped images of their illustrations. This has only been exacerbated by the fact that access to the manuscripts themselves and even their microfilms has been highly limited or difficult, especially for the Athonite examples wholly denied to female scholars. However, a perusal of one of the best-illuminated examples, the Dionysiou Lectionary (Mt. Athos, Dionysiou Monastery, cod. 587) immediately demonstrates extensive signs of use: smudges in the writing, drips of candle wax, interlinear notes and comments, as well as corrections to the text and the careful stitching of tears in the parchment. These signs demonstrate a class of objects that were carefully handled, respected, and cared for, but this should not negate their functional use and their functional use should not negate their aesthetic complexity.

It was along this division between the aesthetic and the functional that John Lowden, in an article tellingly titled “Luxury and Liturgy:
The Function of Books,” distinguishes between two kinds of lectionary.¹² This binary comes to delimit the boundaries of use for images and marginalia in a book such as the illuminated lectionary. From these perspectives, art is fundamentally something to be looked at and contemplated, something ultimately antithetical to so-called practical use.¹³ For example, Hutter elsewhere attempts to position the Byzantine illuminator-scribe as a fine artist through a reading of the Greek terms used to describe the use of gold script and illumination in manuscript colophons. She explicitly concludes:


¹³ This division between art and the functional has consistently plagued the modern discipline of art history. One need only recall Svetlana Alpers’s comment in her seminal essay “Is Art History?” to see the historiographic anachronism of this thinking: “The question, ‘What is art?’ and the old answer that defined it as having aesthetic rather than utilitarian appeal never seemed further from anyone’s mind.” Already in 1977, Alpers labeled the division between artistic value and functionality as obsolete. The epistemic violence of this division once produced the category of “primitive art” and articulated a colonial project through the systematic exclusion of arts whose utilitarian, tribal, and ritual value stood outside of a certain conception of art history. Arnold Rubin’s 1989 survey of the arts of Africa, Oceania, and Native America, titled Art as Technology, precisely positioned these various arts within art history through the cultural complexity offered by their utilitarian performance. This tactic speaks to the violence of such an exclusion, since Rubin takes on the feature that once served as an exclusionary force – that is, the technological – as the banner under which to unite and resist this exclusion and erasure from the history of art. See Svetlana Alpera, “Is Art History?” Daedalus 106.3 (Summer 1977): 1–13, esp. 4. See also Arnold Rubin, Art as Technology: The Arts of Africa, Oceania, Native America, and Southern California (Catskill, NY: Hillcrest Press, 1989).

In Byzantine art history, a similar division has been consciously made. For example, in a special issue of Gesta dedicated to the history of medieval art without the concept of “art,” in response to Hans Belting’s influential tome Likeness and Presence, Henry Maguire states that “art,” as has been noted by “many recent critics,” is for the most part a nineteenth-century invention oriented around individual achievement, monetary value, and detachment from everyday life. However, Maguire does not cite any of these ”many recent critics.” He tacitly suggests that while we might not know what art was for past audiences, we certainly know what art is for us today, which somehow does not require critical definition or research. Thus, the distinction between the medieval cult image and the modern work of art that Maguire was thus purporting to address was not one of art versus image, but one of “fine” versus “applied” art, “quality versus social function,” and “aesthetic beauty versus numinous power.” See Henry Maguire, “Medieval Art without Art?: Introduction,” Gesta 34:1 (1995): 3–4, at 3. For a further instantiation of my argument here, see Roland Betancourt, “Medieval Art after Duchamp: Hans Belting’s Likeness and Presence at 25,” Gesta 55:1 (2016): 5–17.
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Art is the extra added to the norm of the manuscript containing text. As a rule, however, art is not deemed worth mentioning [in monastic inventories], because, in a text-oriented book culture, the adornment is part and parcel of the written contents.¹⁴

This artist-scribe is defined in terms of skill, technique, and command in dealing with the image’s material medium, yet it lies outside the realm of possibility that the artist’s production is part of a cohesive intellectual project inseparable from the function of the manuscript. In these terms, images are nothing more than additive “ornament,” in the word’s most pejorative sense. They are not even worth mentioning, given that their expected place is in the embellishment of the text, which is primary. Yet these judgments take for granted the notion that Byzantium was in fact a “text-oriented book culture” without critically considering the status of the “text” in the premodern world: most notably, they ignore that reading the written text was often, if not always, an oral and aural act.

In Image on the Edge (1992), even Michael Camille seems to accept this binary of artistic embellishment and use. He writes:

Of course, the periphery of the written page had existed in earlier periods and had even been the site of pictures, as in Byzantine and Anglo-Saxon Psalters of the tenth century, where the side margins were the locus of often complex text illustrations. But this extra-textual space only developed into a site of artistic elaboration as the idea of the text as written document superseded the idea of the text as a cue for speech. The way monks read was called meditatio, in which every word was masticated and digested for memorization by being uttered out loud.¹⁵

Camille sees the flourishing of marginal illumination as concurrent with the shift in how the text was perceived. While acknowledging the existence of marginal illuminations in Byzantine Psalters as an exception to the model that he proposes, he describes the illuminations in Byzantium as textual illustrations and the later development as artistic elaboration, which emerges in his teleological model alongside the privileging of writing over speech.

As John Lowden observes in his most recent work on lectionaries, images are justifiable in manuscripts intended for private devotion and contemplation, but one using the lectionary would have had “little chance

to study images.” Hence, Lowden perpetuates the same assumptions about the function of marginalia and miniatures in medieval manuscripts as Hutter and, perhaps unintentionally, Camille. However, scholarship to date has not engaged the implicit conundrum here: these images do exist within texts primed for liturgical use, and they consciously and self-reflexively deploy the cross-sensory use of a multimedia manuscript as a springboard for comment and reflection. My interest here is how images operate on the peripheries of vision and how they are composed, placed, and designed to work precisely within the context of this focus during recitation, where they are not the subject of direct contemplation.

Another important conundrum must also be confronted. Surveying the corpus of extant Byzantine manuscripts, Nancy Patterson Ševčenko has observed that the majority of Byzantine illustrated books were liturgically oriented: lectionaries, books of the Divine Liturgy, liturgical rolls, Psalters, synaxaria, menologia, saints’ lives, hymnbooks, sermons, and homilies. While many of these books may have had religious functions outside the liturgy, they all share a pronounced oral character, either in the performance of the liturgy or in private prayer. Outside of these liturgical manuscripts, the full Bible was rarely illustrated (the only example extant, partially preserved, is the tenth-century Leo Bible), and individual books of the Bible that are illustrated appear to be intended for private devotion. Hundreds of illustrated Gospels exist, although the images are usually limited to portraits of the four Evangelists.

Secular texts and their illustrations may provide the most intriguing information, since they suggest reasons why images were deployed as tools. For example, ancient texts were rarely illustrated. Homer is an exception, but only before the fifth century CE. It is particularly interesting that Old Testament Octateuchs, when illuminated, have more in common with the twelfth-century Madrid Skylitzes, the only illustrated historical chronicle, 16
18 Thus, most of the religious texts that do exist, as Ševčenko aptly notes, suggest a liturgical function or a private devotional function, such as in the case of Psalters; the latter are attested in the work of Georgi Parpulov as well. Georgi Parpulov, “The Psalms and Personal Piety in Byzantium,” in Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (eds.), The Old Testament in Byzantium (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), 77–105. See also Georgi Parpulov, “Toward a History of Byzantine Psalters,” PhD dissertation, University of Chicago (2004).