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An exegetical study of the annunciation of Luke 1:26-38 through text and art

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Appendix A: Detailed Description of the Rothschild Prayer Book¹

The Rothschild Prayer Book has a silver-gilt cast and chased centrepieces of the binding. These show the lion rampant of the Palatinate and the diaper² of Bavaria, with the Wittelsbach coat of arms, cornerpieces, clasps and catches, leaf edges gilt and gaufered to a diaper pattern. Its size, 228 x 160mm has 252 leaves of parchment,³ each devotion opens with a five- or six-line illuminated initial with staves of acanthus⁴ against a coloured ground. The script is Gothic rotunda in black ink, in Latin, the Use of Rome, and the text space is 115 x 41 mm, 18 long lines ruled in brown ink and red rubrics. There are two sets of foliations: one in Arabic numerals in pencil at the top right-hand corner of every recto with I, II added on the first and last folios; the other set is also in Arabic numerals in ink at the lower left corner underneath the majority of the sixty-seven full-page miniatures.⁵ There are twelve full-page calendar borders with *camaïeu d'or*⁶ frames with roundels illustrating major feasts, zodiac signs⁷ and full-colour miniatures of occupations of the month. There are five small miniatures with accompanying full-page borders, sixty-seven full-page arch-topped miniatures with surrounding borders and complementary borders on the facing pages, two further text-pages with full borders, all the borders of richly varied *trompe l'oeil* type. There are also some with sprays of acanthus and strewn flowers and including insects and vignettes, and some with *camaïeu d'or* architectural surrounds with sculptural figures or reliefs. Others have jewels and enamels against coloured grounds, individual borders replicate cloth of gold, peacock feathers, and on some pages, the border space contains narratives to augment or complement the subject of the miniature. However, the artwork lacks four leaves, three with miniatures and one with a full-page border,

¹ Taken from the Christie's sales catalogue. Accessed <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/books-manuscripts/the-rothschild-prayerbook-a-book-of-hours-5766082-details.aspx>

² A diaper in this context is "a trellis of repetitive square or diamond shapes, found on furniture, textiles, and ceramics as a decorative." Michael Clarke and Deborah Clarke, "Diaper," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³ Parchment or vellum, is a writing support material made from goat or calf skin; however the term *vellum* refers to material which is made from calf skin that has a flesh side and a hair side. Brown, *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms*. 95.

⁴ "The Tree of Jesse is often based on the acanthus." Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols*, 142. Thus the artist/creator may have been making a direct reference to the prophecy of Isa 11:1 instead of just mere decoration.

⁵ Kay Sutton and Margaret M. Manion, *Revealing the Rothschild Prayer Book (Book of Hours) C.1505-1510: From the Kerry Stokes Collection* (Perth, WA: Fremantle Press, 2015), 19.

⁶ A French term which means monochrome. Michael Clarke and Deborah Clarke, "Camaïeu," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷ The zodiac is not Christian, but its inclusion shows the cultural diversity of the time in this particular part of Europe.

slight pigment losses from the backgrounds of two miniatures, folios 120 *verso* and 124 *verso*, with a small smudge on the edge of a border on folios 1 *verso*, 2, 5 *verso* and 125. The otherwise immaculate condition of the artwork can be attributed to the fact that the book has been closed for most of its existence; and by not being subjected to regular exposure to light, the colours are still vibrant. The provenance of this prayer book has had it pass through the hands of at least four Rothschild family owners, however because the family is Jewish it is assumed they had little use for a Christian prayer book and therefore it was not handled very often.⁸ On the other hand its lack of use could indicate that the person who commissioned it was more interested in its artistic merit, not its religious purpose.

⁸ The provenance for the Rothschild Prayer Book is not certain until it becomes the property of Anselm von Rothschild (1803-1874), then Baron Nathaniel von Rothschild (1836-1905), son of Anselm; followed by Baron Alphonse von Rothschild (1878-1942): he inherited Nathaniel's palace and, presumably, the manuscript along with it. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis Series Nova 2844 (returned to the Rothschild family in 1999 and sold at *The Collection of the Barons Nathaniel and Albert von Rothschild*, Christie's London 8 July 1999, lot 102).