



Ex omnibus sanctis anti



Azom
stet
ritis anti
reges et
presides
nolite a
gritare a
ter respo
deatis de
bitur et

Vobis quid loquamini
omnem terram exiit som
eorum et in fines orbi
terre verba eorum. Oremus

Roncede que sumus
amuntem dicitur

Signs & Symbols

DECODING MEDIAEVAL & RENAISSANCE ICONOGRAPHY

Signs & Symbols

DECODING MEDIAEVAL & RENAISSANCE ICONOGRAPHY

Item List

HERITAGE COLLECTIONS
DUNEDIN PUBLIC LIBRARIES
DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND
2011



'I could begin, like St. Bernard, by asking what do they all mean, those lascivious apes, autophagic dragons, pot-bellied heads, harp-playing asses, arse-kissing priests and somersaulting jongleurs to be found protruding from the edges of medieval buildings and in the margins of illuminated manuscripts?'

This is the question asked by the late art historian Michael Camille in the preface to his book *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (1992). Although this particular work is concerned in part with the relationship between marginal illustration and the text it surrounds, Camille's question can readily be applied to images found at the core of any book or work of art. Linger in any gallery or museum long enough and sooner or later you will hear questions being raised by visitors curious about the content of the pictures before them: 'What does it mean?' 'Who are these figures?' 'Is there more to that flower and basket of fruit?'

The identification and search for meaning behind the visual arts is known as *iconography*, literally 'image writing', from the Greek εἰκών ('image') and γράφειν ('to write'). The earliest studies of iconography date to the sixteenth century and consisted mainly of collections of emblems and symbols gathered from classical literature accompanied by explanatory text. This early examination of iconography is represented by Florentius Schoonhovius's *Emblemata* (1626), which is paired with Hugo Grotius's *De jure belli ac pacis* (1712), each depicting an image of Lady Justice (case 13).



During the eighteenth century, iconography served alongside archaeology as a means of identifying and classifying motifs and subject matter found in classical monuments. The following century saw iconography break away from archaeological practice, as it took on the mantle of what many people most closely associate with it: the study of religious, mainly Christian, symbolism.

Christian iconography lies at the heart of this exhibition, with the strong religious nature of the Alfred and Isabel Reed Collection providing a deep well from which to draw. The thirty-five items on display – a combination of illuminated manuscripts and printed books – range from three thirteenth-century Latin Bibles (cases 9, 10 and carrel 6) to a fine early-twentieth-century facsimile of the Gutenberg Bible (case 1). The majority of the objects date to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, covering such themes as major biblical scenes (cases 1 to 5), the Trinity (case 6), the symbols of the Evangelists and saints (cases 7 to 12), and imagery used to preface the individual sections in a Book of Hours (case 15).

Colours also held symbolic significance in Christian art. White symbolised purity, innocence and virtue. Red was the colour of the Pentecost, a symbol of the blood of martyrs and of Christ's Passion, among other representations. Blue was for heavenly grace and constancy, and is the colour of the mantle worn by the Virgin Mary as representative of the mantle of Heaven. Few colours shine as brightly on mediaeval manuscripts as the gold (a symbol of divine light) of the gold-leaf used to illuminate initial letters and backgrounds and to



highlight margins. Two large initial letters (carrels 4 and 5) on exhibit are striking examples of this colour iconography.

One of these letters, a large initial 'R' cut from a sixteenth-century manuscript, is surrounded by faunal (and floral) imagery, which adds a new level to the exhibition in the animals depicted. Though largely decorative, the use of specific animals frequently had symbolic significance, such as the rabbit (a sign of fecundity, lust and timidity) and dog (an ambiguous figure representing either loyalty or evil) exhibited in two manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth century (carrel 6).

Other forms of iconography developed out of classical and Christian symbolism. In late-nineteenth-century Britain a coded 'language of flowers,' known as *floriography*, developed as a means for the restrained Victorians to pass coded messages that expressed emotions best unspoken. The significance of curling ivy, blooming roses, ornamental acanthus, and other floral depictions upon which floriography is based is represented by three illuminated manuscripts from Spain, France and Germany (carrels 1 to 3).

Iconography was also adopted by early printers who incorporated symbolic meaning into their devices. Few are as famous as the *festina lente* ('make haste slowly') dolphin and anchor of the Aldine Press in Venice, seen on the title-page of a 1540 edition of the works of Cicero (case 14). Shown alongside the Aldine is Christopher Plantin's 1565 Latin Bible; exhibited for the title-page wood-engraving depicting



the hand of God using a compass (the Plantin Press device) to draw the world, combining the religious with the proud Dutch tradition of fine cartography.

Symbolism and iconography are not unknown to us today. There are many twentieth- and twenty-first-century examples all around us from street signs to emoticons. However, as society shifts further towards secularization and classical literature no longer holds its central place in many literature courses, the images and symbols displayed in this exhibition are becoming less and less recognisable by people outside academic circles ('Do you want one with or without the little man on it?' was the question recently asked of a Heritage staff member seeking to purchase a Crucifix from a local shop.) It is hoped the present exhibition will shed some light on these once familiar symbols and reacquaint us with the images and hidden messages of centuries past.

Anthony Tedeschi
Rare Books Librarian



Item List

Case 1: Creation

Facsimile of the Gutenberg Bible. Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1913. RBF Gutenberg 1454 [1913].

Case 2: The Fall of Man & Annunciation

Gabriele Simeoni. *Figure del Vecchio Testamento: Illustrate di bellissime stanze volgari ...* Venice: Niccolò Bevilacqua, 1574. RBP Italian Selections 1574.

Book of Hours, in Latin and French. Northern France (perhaps Rouen), late-fifteenth or sixteenth century. Reed MS8.

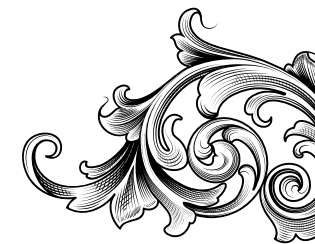
Case 3: Nativity

Single leaf from an Antiphonal, in Latin. Northern Italy (perhaps Bologna), fourteenth century. Reed MSF18.

Case 4: Annunciation to the Shepherds & the Flight into Egypt

Single leaf from a Book of Hours, in Latin. Northern France (perhaps Paris), sixteenth century. Reed MSF36.

Single leaf from a Book of Hours, in Latin. Northern France, fifteenth century. Reed MSF16.



Case 5: The Commendation of Souls

Book of Hours, in Latin with additions in Middle English. Southern Netherlands (possibly Bruges), fifteenth century. Reed MS10.

Case 6: The Trinity, the Dove & the Man of Sorrows

Two leaves from a Book of Hours, in French. Paris: Printed by Thielman Kerver, 1544. RPRF Fra. 1544/4 and 1544/10.

Single leaf from a Book of Hours, in Latin and French. Northern France, late-fifteenth or sixteenth century. Reed MSF60.

Case 7: Four Evangelists (Matthew & Mark)

Biblia sacra, ad vetustissima exe[m]plaria nunc recens castigata, Romæque reuisa ... Lyon: Gulielmum Rouillium, 1588. RBP Bible Latin 1588.

Biblia, ad vetustissima exemplaria nunc recens castigata Cum licentia superiorum. Venice: Niccolò Bevilacqua, 1583. RBP Bible Latin 1583.

Case 8: Four Evangelists (Luke & John)

The New Testament of oure Sauyour Iesu Christ ... [Antwerp]: Matthew Crom, 1538. RBP NT English 1538.

Single leaf from Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*. Westminster: Wynkyn de Worde, 1527. RPRF Eng. 1527/1.



Case 9: St. Jerome

Biblia cum tabula nuper impressa [et] cum summariiis nouiter editis. Venice: Simon Bevilaqua, 8 May 1498. RBP Bible Latin 1498.

Bible, in Latin. Northern France (perhaps Paris), thirteenth century. Reed MS4b.

Case 10: King David & St. Margaret

Bible, in Latin. France or England, thirteenth century. Reed MS3.

Single leaf from Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*. Westminster: William Caxton, 1483. RPRF Eng. 1483/1.

Case 11: Saints Stephen, Laurence & Christopher

Book of Hours, in Latin, use of Rome. Paris: Printed by Jehan de la Roche, for Nicolas Vivien, 23 February 1514. RL Catholic Hours 1514.

Case 12: St. Anne & the Fitzherberts

A composite Book of Hours, in Latin. Southern Netherlands and England, fifteenth century. Reed MS5.

Case 13: The Printer's Device

Hugo Grotius. *De jure belli ac pacis libri tres, in quibus jus nature & gentium, item juris publici precipua explicantur ...*



Amsterdam: Ex officina Westenina, 1712. RPRE 1712 Hol.

Florentius Schoonhovius. *Emblemata ... Partim moralia, partim etiam Civilia ...* Leiden: Ex officina Elzeviriana, 1626. RPRE 1626 Hol.

Case 14: Colophons & Scientific Instruments

M. Tullii Ciceronis orationum volumen primum, in quo multa, quæ in aliarum editionem libris corrupte legebantur, ex diligenti uetustorum exemplariu[m] collatione sunt emendate. Venice: Paulo Manuzio, 1540. RPRE 1540 Ita.

Biblia, ad ventustissima exemplaria castigate. Antwerp: Ex officina Christophori Plantini, 1565. RBP Bible Latin 1565.

Case 15: Opening the Hours

Three cuttings from a Book of Hours, in Latin. France (Paris), fifteenth century. Reed MSF45.

Wall Carrels 1 to 3: The Language of Flowers

Lectionary, in Latin. Spain (perhaps Toledo), ca. 1500. Reed MSF62.

Three leaves (one bifolium) from a Book of Hours, France (Paris), [1408]. Reed MSF17a and 17b.

Single leaf from an Antiphonal, in Latin. Germany, fifteenth century. Reed MSF28.



Wall Carrels 4 and 5: Illumination & Colour

Part of a leaf from a Gradual, in Latin. Italy (perhaps north-west), fifteenth century. Reed MSF25.

Cutting from a Gradual, in Latin. Probably Northern European, sixteenth century. Reed MSF37.

Wall Carrel 6: Animal Figures

Bible, in Latin. England, thirteenth century. Reed MS2.

Single leaf from a Psalter, in Latin. France or Flanders, late-thirteenth or fourteenth century. Reed MSF38.



Coming up...

'Chapter One. I Am Born': 200 Years of Charles Dickens
9 February to 6 May 2012

The first Reed Gallery exhibition of 2012 joins the world-wide celebrations marking the bicentennial of the birth of Victorian author Charles Dickens (1812–70).



REED GALLERY

11 NOV 2011 - 22 JAN 2012

FLOOR 3 • DUNEDIN CITY LIBRARY

MON - FRI 9.30am - 8pm

SAT/SUN 11am - 4pm

ADMISSION FREE



dunedin public libraries

Kā Kete Wānaka o Ōtepoti

A DEPARTMENT OF THE DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL