

The Franciscan Bible from the National Museum Library in Prague (XII.B.13) Within the Context of 13th Century Painting

The painted miniatures decorating the so-called Franciscan Bible (Prague, KNM XII.B.13), which dates in around the 1270s, illustrate the development of painting in Central Europe during the transition period between Late Romanesque and Gothic style.

Illuminations in the Franciscan Bible are the work of four masters, the first of whom illustrated the Old Testament, and the latter three worked on the New Testament. The style of the illuminations places its authors firmly in the circle of artists drawing inspiration from the workshop of Giovanni da Gaibana. The Gaibanesque style is characterized by using traditional local motifs, with elongated tails expanding into the borders. Color tones gradually shift toward the cooler palette; form tends toward more schematic drawings and simplified shapes; imitation of Western style is characterized by gradual abandonment of heavy impasto modeling. The First Master most likely came from the Central Rhenish region, but his ornamental motifs are inspired by the Gaibanesque tradition; the other three masters, on the other hand, fully adopted the Gaibanesque style. Their works differ in the way they chose to interpret the common motifs, their use of modeling, as well as their color scheme. Each of the illuminators also had their specific way of working with minor motifs of various provenance. Illuminations in the Franciscan Bible combine components from various styles, including elements from the Western tradition, incomparable in manner and standard to any other work created within the Czech lands.

As its primary method, this paper uses a thorough analysis of the manuscript's illuminations, both within the context of the entire system of illustrations, and as to the typology of various ornamental motifs. Other methods used include formal analysis, typological comparison, and iconographical analysis.