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Visual Portrayals of Scriptural Narratives

Edited by

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ACT	Ancient Christian Texts
AgHist	*Agricultural History*
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AICMS	*Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*
A.J.	Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AL	*Arte Lombarda*
Amat.	Plutarch, *Amatorius*
AncBio	*Ancient Biomolecules*
ANT	Anglo-Norman Texts
Antennae	*Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Culture*
Anth	*Anthropozoologica*
ArtB	*Art Bulletin*
ArtJ	*The Art Journal*
ARTS	*The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies*
ASAH	*Assaph: Studies in Art History*
AU	*The Art Union*
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BCMA	*Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*
BEFAR	Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
Bibl.	Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*
B.J.	Josephus, *Bellum judaicum*

BMFA	*Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*
BN Neérl.	Bibliothèque Nationale Neérlandica
BMW	The Bible in the Modern World
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BPSC	Biblical Performance Criticism Series
BRec	*Biblical Reception*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CA	*Critica d'Arte*
ca.	circa
cat.	catalog
Cat.	Cicero, *In Catalinam*
CC	Continental Commentary
CEB	Common English Bible
cm	centimeters
Dem. ev.	Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*
Dial. mar.	Lucian, *Dialogi marini*
EM	*Elseviers Maandblad*
EMCVA	Early Modern Catholicism and the Visual Arts
Epigr.	Martial, *Epigrammata*
ERC	*Explorations in Renaissance Culture*
Erot.	[Demosthenes], *Eroticus*
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
exh. cat.	exhibition catalog
Exp. Apoc.	Tyconius, *Expositio Apocalypseos*
FC	Fathers of the Church
GBA	*Gazette des beaux-arts*
GR	*Geographical Review*
GSCC	Groningen Studies in Cultural Change
Hist.	Dio Cassius, *Historiae Romanae*
Hist. mon.	Rufinus, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*
Hypatia	*Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*
In Apoc.	Victorinus of Pettau, *Commentarius in Apocalypsim*
Inst.	Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*
Int	*Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*
JAAC	*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHistSex	*Journal of the History of Sexuality*
JLS	*Journal of the Lepidopterists' Society*

Jos. Asen.	Joseph and Aseneth
JPGMJ	*J. Paul Getty Museum Journal*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
Jupp. trag.	Lucian, *Juppiter tragoedus*
JWCI	*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*
KJV	King James Version
LS	*Libyan Studies*
m.	Mishnah
Metam.	Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
MFAB	*Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*
MIB	Masterpieces of the Illustrated Book
MJBK	*Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*
MM	Museum Monograph
MMJ	*Metropolitan Museum Journal*
MS BL 42555	Manuscript 42555. British Library, London
MS BL 17333	Manuscript 17333. British Library, London
MS BNF lat. 14410	Manuscript lat. 14410. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
MS Lambeth Pal. 209	Manuscript 209. Lambeth Palace, Liverpool
MS Ludwig III.1	Manuscript Ludwig III.1. Getty Museum, Malibu
MS MMA	Manuscript 68.174. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MS UL Mm.5.31	Manuscript Mm.5.31. Cambridge University Library, Cambridge
NHR	*New Hibernia Review*
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	*New Literary Theory*
Noct. att.	Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NP	*The New Path*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OH	*Oud Holland*

OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
par(r).	parallel(s)
PCC	Paul in Critical Contexts
PCQ	*Print Collector's Quarterly*
PL	Patrologia Latina [= *Patrologia Cursus Completus*: Series Latina]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864
PP	*Pastoral Psychology*
PRQ	*Political Research Quarterly*
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
PSEMIF	Proteus: Studies in Early Modern Identity Formation
Ps.-Mt.	Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew
RelArts	*Religion and the Arts*
Rhet.	Aristotle, *Rhetorica*
RSP	*Rivista di studi pompeiani*
Sat.	Juvenal, *Satirae*
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
ser.	series
SF	*Social Forces*
SFG	Spanische Forschungen der Görresgesellschaft
SHA	Studies in the History of Art
SHA	*Studies in the History of Art*
SPP	Studies in Prints and Printmaking
StAM	Studies in Ancient Medicine
Subl.	Longinus, *De sublimitate*
Symp.	Plato, *Symposium*
THR	Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance
Tim.	Lucian, *Timon*
ULC	*Upper & Lower Case: The International Journal of Typographics*
UTH	UBS Technical Helps
Vit. phil.	Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*
Vit. soph.	Eunapius, *Vitae sophistarum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
W86th	*West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*
WestBC	Westminster Bible Companion

WI	*Word & Image*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
Yad.	Yadayim

Introduction

HEIDI J. HORNIK, IAN BOXALL, AND BOBBI DYKEMA

While Jews and Christians have long been considered "people of the book," in our highly literate contemporary world this has often been assumed to mean primarily or even exclusively "people of the *written* book." Yet at least as early as the sixth century, with the Rabbula Gospels, and long before that in terms of wall paintings and material objects, Christians in particular have been at least as much people of the image. From first-century Palestine to global Christianity today, the sacred stories, hymns, poems, and teachings have been interpreted and shared in images as much as in text. In times and places where the majority of the populace was textually illiterate, images on walls, in codices and books, and in objects for liturgical and home use have been a key part of conveying the scriptural story.

Yet until recent decades, it was not at all uncommon for the academic disciplines of biblical studies and art history to be altogether separate from each other. It is increasingly gratifying to see biblical scholars learning the language and skills of visual exegesis and tracing the reception of biblical accounts through images, as well as art historians delving more deeply into the biblical and theological worlds of the images they study. In all cases, scholars are understanding that depictions of biblical texts are not merely illustrations but are themselves visual exegeses, offering commentary on, interpretation of, and added detail to the biblical text. This trend is reflected in the professional academic societies of both disciplines, but the Society of Biblical Literature has provided the strongest, and most fruitfully consistent, forum through the Bible and Visual Art program unit, begun in 2001. This volume reflects select contributions presented in recent sessions of the Society of Biblical Literature Bible and Visual Art program unit. As such, they represent the scholarly work of both art historians and biblical scholars, brought together to aid collaboration and dialogue between these two disciplines. Academic interpretive

approaches such as sexuality and gender, reception history, visual exegesis, and intertextual relationships are explored, all maintaining an equal footing for both the image and the text.

Visual depictions allow a very different reading of a textual story, especially in their ability to emphasize particular moments or figures and to add layers of compelling detail through the use of color, light and shadow, composition, and scale. It is through the visual and not the textual record, for example, that we learn that Paul's encounter with a blinding light on the road to Damascus caused the apostle to fall off his horse; there is no horse in the textual account. Such details add life and color to the often barebones structure of biblical narrative, creating imaginative reconstructions of biblical people, places, and events. Many of these details become part of the tradition that surrounds the narrative for future generations of artists, both literary and visual.

As one of the first volumes in the Bible and Its Reception series of SBL Press, this volume must, first and foremost, attend to the way in which artists themselves have actualized the text in the production of visual images. This part of the exercise requires that we frequently examine a work of art in stylistic, historical, and iconographical terms. Erwin Panofsky, in his instrumental essay "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," first published in 1939 and still available in his *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, also significantly contributes to our methodological stream. Panofsky allows that "synthetic intuition [a sense of the meaning of the whole picture] may be better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar."[1] Yet he warns against pure intuition because a work of art is a symptom of "'something else' which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as more evidence of that 'something else.'" Panofsky calls it "intrinsic meaning or content." Intrinsic meaning is "apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion unconsciously by one personality [a painter, for instance] and condensed into one work." Intrinsic meaning, therefore, will inform both the "compositional and stylistic methods" and "iconographical sig-

1. Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 38.

nificance" of a painting.[2] The authors represented here tread down this challenging path to differing degree in order to situate each work of art in its cultural, political, and theological context and to attempt an evaluation of its intrinsic meaning.

John Shearman, an art historian, focuses the problem quite clearly: "It goes without saying, I would have thought, that we cannot step right outside our time, avoiding, as it were, all contamination by contemporary ideologies and intervening histories." Nevertheless, we also agree with Shearman's conclusion:

> Such inevitable imperfection ought not to be allowed to discourage the exercise of the historical imagination. In the same way it goes without saying that we will not reconstruct entirely correctly, but it is a sign of an unreflexive lack of realism to suppose that because we will not get it entirely right we had better give up and do something else not subject to error.[3]

In this first move of reception history, namely, to understand the way the artist has actualized or concretized the biblical text, we have been greatly assisted by another art historian, Paolo Berdini. Berdini thinks of the interpretation of the text as a "trajectory of visualization," which he labels "visual exegesis." In Berdini's words:

> The painter reads the text and translates his scriptural reading into a problem in representation, to which he offers a solution—the image. In that image the beholder acknowledges, not the text in the abstract, but the painter's reading of the text so that the effect the image has on the beholder is a function of what the painter wants the beholder to experience in the text. This is the trajectory of visualization, and the effect of the text through the image is a form of exegesis. Painting is not the simple visualization of the narrative of the text but an expansion of that text, subject to discursive strategies of various kinds.[4]

This volume offers a banquet of visual exegeses not only for biblical scholars, theologians, and art historians but also for working pastors and

2. Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology," 30–31.

3. John Shearman, *Only Connect … Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 4–5.

4. Paolo Berdini, *The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35.

armchair exegetes, as well as art-museum aficionados and those entranced by beauty in human artistic creation. The essays cover a wide range of biblical passages as well as artists and art mediums. The biblical sources are found in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament ranging from the story of David and Bathsheba to the strange accounts in Revelation. The artistic mediums include painting, pottery, coins, and various works on paper including prints and codex illumination. Artists considered range in time and place from ancient Greece to the present day, through medieval France, Renaissance Italy, and the Dutch Golden Age, to the twentieth-century United States. Some scholars begin with an examination of various instantiations of depicting a particular biblical text, exploring their similarities and differences to shed light on how these accounts were understood and interpreted at particular places and moments in time. Several authors selected a particular work of art, not always overtly biblical in theme, as their starting point and explored the visual references to the biblical text. Still others have examined a biblical narrative in the context of the period and culture in which it was created to shed more light on the particulars of the staging and relationships within a single biblical episode. Postmodern art that problematizes both biblical accounts and the visual reception history is examined in interesting and provocative ways by several authors.

The essays proceed broadly in the order in which the respective biblical accounts treated appear in canonical Scripture. While each essay evidences particular scholarly expertise, the typical biblical exegete, theologian, or art enthusiast will find these essays accessible and approachable.

Yohana A. Junker's chapter surveys the visual tradition of portraying Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite and subsequently of King David (2 Sam 11; 1 Kgs 1–2). Junker critiques the dominant presentation of Bathsheba as seductress, an interpretation implicated in a patriarchal power dynamic that reduces Bathsheba's womanhood to fetishized erotic spectacle. She then considers how Marc Chagall's *David and Bathsheba* (1956) and *Bathsheba* (1962) mark a break in the art-historical tradition, reconfiguring Bathsheba's identity. The essay concludes with consideration of contemporary Black women artists Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Lorraine O'Grady, whose oeuvres, juxtaposed with the Bathsheba narrative, confront the violence of the Eurocentric and heteropatriarchal gaze, and invite the viewer to complicate ways of reading Bathsheba's story.

Two contributors, one an art historian, the other a biblical scholar, explore the rich possibilities in visualizing the Song of Songs (Canticle of Canticles). While the Song forms part of the Hebrew Bible, it also functions

as a transition to the New Testament, given the ancient Christian tendency of treating the book as an allegory of Christ and the church, or the Virgin Mary, or the human soul.

James Clifton's contribution focuses on the *Florilegium*, created in Antwerp around 1587–1589 by Adriaen Collaert and published by Philips Galle. The *Florilegium* consists of a series of twenty-four numbered engravings: a title plate, a scene of the Sponsus and Sponsa of the Song of Songs (Canticle of Canticles) in front of a garden, a bouquet of flowers in a vase, and twenty-one plates of various flowers with stems and leaves. The plate of the Sponsus and Sponsa, with its quotation of passages from chapters 2 and 5 of the Canticle, which suggests a different, though potentially overlapping, audience for the *Florilegium*, has been neglected. Clifton examines readings of the Canticle and images derived from it as profound allegories of the transformation of the soul through Christ and of the union of the soul with Christ, and argues that the *Florilegium* (including the floral plates) served devotional and meditative functions for some viewers. Generated in the lively mix of artists, scientists, and theologians of Antwerp's publishing world, the *Florilegium*, he proposes, is a hybrid work of art, science, and faith, in which mutually enhancing Scripture and botany are marshaled together to appeal to diverse viewers in a broad market.

Jonathan Homrighausen's essay on the same biblical book explores the complex intertextual relationships in the visual exegesis of the Song of Songs present in the *Saint John's Bible*, a modern version of the medieval illuminated manuscript tradition completed in 2011. Its treatment of the Song of Songs connects it most closely with temple symbolism and with Jesus's relationship with his disciples. Homrighausen shows how, in linking the Song with the temple, the *Saint John's Bible* draws a parallel between the intimacy of God's presence in the temple and the intimacy of the lovers in the Song. The Song's association with Jesus alludes to Jesus's encounter with Mary Magdalene in John 20:11–18 and suggests medieval Western liturgical traditions depicting the female beloved in the Song as the Virgin Mary, crying out for her son at the foot of the cross. In turn, this liturgical, canonical, and christological visual exegesis of the Song provokes the reader (or viewer, or pray-er) to read imaginatively, like their medieval forebears, constructing possible new meanings in the process. Homrighausen ably demonstrates the value, when considering the meaning(s) of this biblical book, of engaging its visual reception as a discussion partner.

Unsurprisingly given their narrative genre, the gospels have provided rich subject matter for artists across the centuries. Gospel texts are therefore well represented in this volume. Heidi J. Hornik examines two complementary narratives through the lens of the same artist, Ippolito Scarsella (1550–1620), commonly known as Scarsellino. Scarsellino was a Ferrarese artist who produced post-Trent religious paintings in the Mannerist style. He was considered among the Reformers in late sixteenth-century Italy, and his theological iconography anticipates the Baroque style of the next century. His two works in question, *Christ and Saint Peter at the Sea of Galilee* (Harvard Art Museums) and *Noli Me Tangere* (Musée Magnin, Dijon), focus on Christ's encounter with two gospel characters considered models for the penitent sinner in the post-Tridentine church: Peter (Matt 14:28–31) and Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18). Hornik proposes that the writings of theological writer Cornelius à Lapide (1567–1637), most notably his *Great Commentary*, which draws heavily on the work of earlier commentators, serve as a valuable tool for interpreting these two penitent saints and the biblical narratives illustrated here. The dialogue between the two—Lapide's commentary and Scarsellino's images—richly illuminates these two vivid gospel narratives, one that encourages physical touch, the other eschewing it.

A gospel character is also the subject of the essay by Ela Nuțu. Nuțu examines visual interpretations of Salome, daughter of Herodias (Matt 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29), regarded in popular perception as the epitome of the femme fatale, due not least to her portrayal in fin-de-siècle Decadent art. Such a view focuses on one aspect of a gospel text that is relatively silent about the girl's character and motives: her dance before Herod. In redressing the balance, Nuțu explores alternative depictions of Herodias's daughter, away from the dance, by Italian Renaissance artist Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480–1533). Nuțu argues compellingly, against some other interpreters, that Luini sets out to portray Salome not as a seductress, but as sweet and compliant, her gaze vacant. In his Vienna *Salome*, she is more akin to his Magdalene, furtive and impish, betraying the tainted innocence of a child on the precipice of adulthood, or, in Nuțu's words, "a spark of individuality."

The next two essays consider narratives within narratives, those vivid parabolic stories, so central to the teaching of Jesus, embedded in the gospel story. In her contribution, Christine E. Joynes discusses visual interpretations of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1–20 and parr.), a parable with particular appeal to artists in the modern period. The well-

known nineteenth-century images of Millet (1850), Millais (1864), and van Gogh (1888) are brought into dialogue, together with Oscar Roty's 1896 image of Marianne as sower, familiar from French coinage. Joynes argues that, despite superficial appearances, the sower is frequently shown as incompetent, indicating that the images are not intended to show the actual practice of sowing. She locates the popularity of this parable in the nineteenth century against the backdrop of social and political events and movements, and debates about the relationship between faith and reason and the historicity of the gospels. In doing so, she reflects on the dynamic relationship between text, image, and artist's context.

David B. Gowler's contribution concentrates on the subversive depiction of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32) by American artist Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975). Benton's is an unusual visual interpretation of the parable, portraying the prodigal's return home without the joyful reconciliation explicit in the gospel text. Benton's prodigal has waited too long to return home; his father is long dead, the family house is in ruins, and bones are all that remain of the fatted calf. The possibility that Benton's image is autobiographical is explored, together with other reasons for his shockingly provocative interpretation of this parable's ending.

Though this volume prioritizes interpretations of biblical texts by visual artists, it is important to acknowledge that visual exegesis is not confined to art history. As biblical scholars, especially rhetorical critics, increasingly acknowledge, the world out of which the texts came and which shaped what the original audiences heard was also highly visual. Hearing or reading provoked the creation of mental images. Jeff Jay's contribution addresses this important dimension of biblical interpretation, bringing John's depiction of the Beloved Disciple, reclining "in the lap" or "on the chest" of Jesus (John 13:23, 25), into dialogue with the ancient iconographic motif of lap holding. This potent image of romantic, even erotic, love is part of the rich iconography of the banquet in ancient Mediterranean cultures, evoking images of intimacy, community, wine, the vine, and abundance. The same cluster of images coheres in John's Last Supper discourse (especially John 15). The multivalency of the image is explored in order to illuminate John's subversion of luxury, wealth, and prestige in favor of a discipleship of service and anticipated suffering, as well as the unique role of the Beloved Disciple in communicating his intimate knowledge of Christ's life and teaching.

The Last Supper, albeit in its more conventional Synoptic form (Matt 26:20–30; Mark 14:17–26; Luke 22:14–38), also appears in the

essay by Meredith Munson. The precise connection to the gospel narrative, however, may not be immediately obvious. Her subject is *Dinner for Threshers* (1934; de Young Museum, San Francisco), by American artist Grant Wood. This decidedly odd depiction of the American Midwest is explored as a carefully encoded visual text of this artist's personal memory, as well as emblematic of a broader cultural memory, representative of an earlier time in American history viewed from the hardships of the Great Depression. Its resemblance to the predella of a triptych altarpiece, and its compositional arrangement, mirrors traditional visualizations of the Last Supper. This chapter moves beyond obvious similarities to explore Wood's appropriation of earlier models for his painting of dinner in rural America.

At certain periods in the history of Christian art, the book of Revelation has vied with the gospels for the honor of being the most visualized biblical text. The final contribution, by Ian Boxall, focuses on John of Patmos's vision of the mighty angel with the little scroll (Rev 10), a complex and ambiguous figure often identified by patristic and medieval commentators as Christ himself. Boxall compares a number of visual receptions of this passage, from different periods and cultural contexts, to illustrate both the challenges and the possibilities of visual exegesis. On the one hand, Albrecht Dürer's uncharacteristically stilted image of the angel in his *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (1498) reveals how even visual artists can struggle to present John's description effectively. By contrast, Jean Duvet's engraving published in 1561 and John Martin's 1837 *The Angel with the Book* explore with varying degrees of subtlety the nature of angelic vision and of John's inspiration. Similar exegetical subtlety, Boxall argues, can be detected in the illuminations of the passage in the Anglo-Norman Abingdon, Getty, and Cloisters Apocalypses, as well as William Blake's *The Angel of the Revelation* (ca. 1803–1805), the latter offering a novel interpretation of the seven thunders (Rev 10:3–4).

Appropriately for a book on the Bible and visual art, this volume is well illustrated. In each of the chapters, the primary work of art and the supporting images are illustrated in color. This enhances the accuracy of our object-oriented discussion. As the Bible and Visual Art program unit has contributed to the academic interdisciplinary discussion annually at the Society of Biblical Literature, it is hoped that this volume will showcase this contribution and provoke further scholarly publications uniting biblical studies and art history. The reader is additionally encouraged to seek out these works of art in situ and consider them

anew in the light of these essays, as well as to consider anew the biblical passages with which they are in dynamic conversation.

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