

INTRODUCTION

PETER KIDD

I have already provided a general introduction to the collection of non-Italian, non-French, manuscript leaves and cuttings in Volume II, and so here I concentrate on the French items, which form the largest part of the McCarthy collection of manuscripts as a whole. In his Foreword above, Bob McCarthy has explained how he was introduced to French Gothic art as a teenager, on visits to sites such as Chartres Cathedral. Although the names of a few Gothic architects have come down to us, the vast majority of the stained-glass painters, stone and wood sculptors, metal-casters, goldsmiths, ivory carvers, enamellers, seal-designers and engravers, and other artists, are entirely unknown. The situation is scarcely better for manuscript illuminators: sometimes there are colophons or other inscriptions that name them, and sometimes manuscripts can be identified, with a high degree of confidence, with individuals recorded in documentary sources, but more often than not the identification of a manuscript with a named illuminator is based on a balance of probability, rather than secure evidence.¹

In the introduction to Volume II, I explained my reluctance to use overly precise attributions, and I hope that a perusal of the previous attributions, quoted under each Literature heading, will demonstrate the extent to which they often either have undeservedly long tenures, being repeated uncritically from one publication to the next, or, conversely, have remarkably short life-spans. As an example of the former, the miniatures of cat. 80 in the present volume were published several times as being from Metz or that region, but are in fact almost certainly from Paris. An example of a short-lived attribution is the cutting from the 13th-century Bible of Pedro of Pamplona (Vol. II, cat. 5), which is now definitively known to be Spanish, but was once attributed to “northern France (probably Paris)”, and described as “in the early Paris style associated with the Vienna Bible Moralisée”. Thirteenth-century Paris presents a particularly thorny problem, partly because all attributions lie in the shadow of a single, deeply flawed, study; it will therefore be worth exploring the situation in some detail.

Despite the vast number of manuscripts produced in Paris during the life of King Louis IX (1214–1270), a time-span corresponding to the emergence and rise of the University, and the flourishing of professional book-production in the city, the only major study of the whole period written during the past hundred years remains Robert Branner’s monograph, *Manuscript Painting in Paris during the Reign of Saint Louis: A Study of Styles* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1977),² which is fraught with practical and

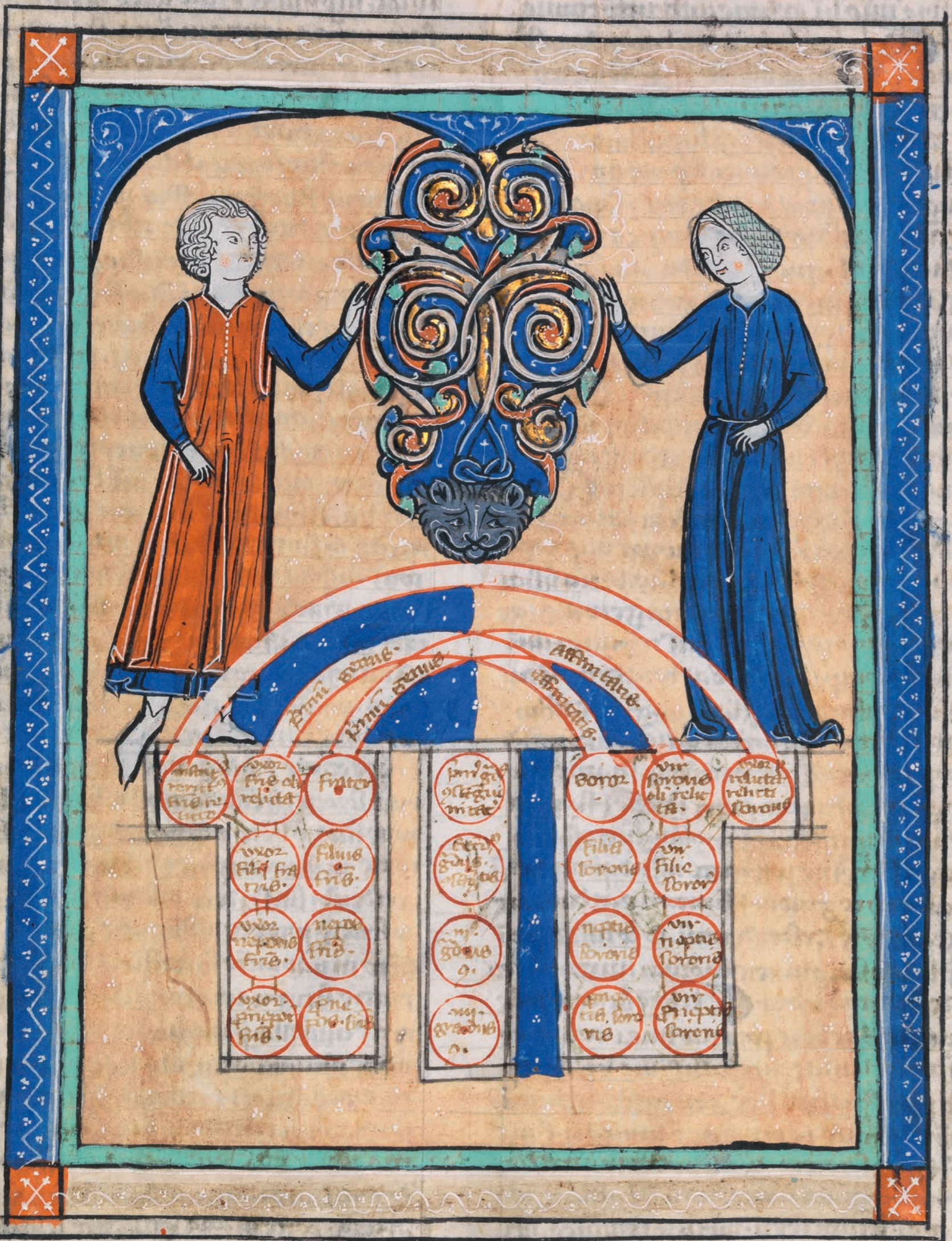
methodological problems, and is very difficult to use for a variety of reasons. As what follows may be seen as unduly critical of his work, it is worth acknowledging at the outset that the book in its present form is probably not exactly as Branner would have wanted it. He dated his Preface June 1971, and died in 1973, aged only 46. According to a prefatory note by the General Editor of the series in which the book was published, dated May 1975, “virtually all of the editing of Branner’s manuscript was completed under his supervision before he died”, but I have it on good authority that this statement is not accurate, and that parts of the text existed only in the form of notes at the time of his death. Publication did not take place until 1977, four years after he died: publication was apparently not entirely straightforward, and the text was certainly not fully checked or proof-read by its author.

Branner’s prose is often opaque, the accompanying reproductions (mostly in monochrome) are often too small to allow detailed stylistic analysis, and his entire text is founded on a series of non-credible assumptions about how “ateliers” were organized and operated. He also deliberately omitted two of the most important manuscripts of the period, to which a significant number of illuminators contributed, the Psalter of St Louis and the Morgan Library’s “Crusader Bible”.³

We should first address the crucially problematic concept of “ateliers”. The very first sentence of Branner’s book reads: “This book is an effort to identify and study paintshops active in Paris in the middle half of the thirteenth century”, but nowhere in the book, as far as I have found, are we given a definition of “paintshop”, and we are left to assume that it is synonymous with “atelier”, a word and concept that is also not defined.⁴ In Chapter 1, under the heading “The Illumination of Books in Paris”, the first sentence is: “We have no precise knowledge as to how painters and paintshops functioned in thirteenth-century Paris”, yet he continues (p. 11),

What emerges from this study is that a style of painting constituted the tradition of an atelier. I regard this as a fundamental point, so much so that I in fact shall use the terms “style” and “atelier” almost interchangeably.

A little further on, under the heading “The Atelier of the Vienna Moralized Bibles”, Branner suggests that “The Latin Moralized Bible in Vienna seems to have been painted by seven major artists” (p. 37), and goes on to explain how their styles can be differentiated! Elsewhere, the output of the “Vie de St-Denis atelier” is analysed



as the work of at least five artists working in different styles, distinguished as the St-Denis Painter, the Marlay Painter, the St-Corneille Painter, and so on. An “atelier” and a “style” are therefore patently *not* synonymous, so Branner’s willingness to “use the terms ‘style’ and ‘atelier’ almost interchangeably” has inevitably created unnecessary confusion and misunderstanding.

There is an irony in the fact that, in his introductory chapter, Branner suggests that manuscripts were produced by the bookseller or *librarius*,⁵ who subcontracted individual tasks to independent scribes, illuminators, binders, et al.: “There seem to be a few cases where a *librarius* employed a particular scribe and a particular illuminator more than once, but this was rare” (pp. 9–10). In other words, he acknowledges that production of books was *not* based around an illuminator’s “atelier”, but around a bookseller, despite the way he describes the organization of manuscript production throughout his text.

It seems self-evident that there were two main ways in which someone in 13th-century France could learn the art of illumination. One was to be either married to, or the child of, someone who was already an illuminator, and learn from him/her. Alternatively, a non-family member could learn through an apprenticeship. In both cases, it is natural to expect the pupil to paint in (almost) the same style as the teacher. In my opinion, a small team consisting of an illuminator, plus his wife and/or offspring, and/or an apprentice, all working in a single household, allowing day-to-day collaboration, can meaningfully be described as an atelier. In practice, the women in this scenario were probably expected to spend much of their day in household chores and the care of children and/or elderly relatives, allowing little time for illumination (which was in any case restricted to the hours of daylight – only about eight hours per day in winter in Paris). Since they could presumably not develop their skills by working full-time, they were perhaps expected to do mostly the repetitive work of supplying minor initials, patterned backgrounds, foliate marginalia, etc., which represented the great majority of the decoration required in most illuminated manuscripts.⁶ Even if an illuminator trained his offspring to help him with the figural illumination, sons and daughters would often leave the household after they married; an apprentice, once his apprenticeship was complete, would likewise typically leave and work independently. This would result in a situation where a husband and wife, one or more sons, one or more daughters, and one or more former apprentices might all be working

simultaneously, but independently, in slight variations of a single style, within a single city such as Paris. It is very difficult to conceive of such separate people – perhaps often working in competition with one another to secure commissions – as a single “atelier”, if that term has any connotation of collaborative work in a shared working-space (as implied by Branner’s other term, a “paintshop”).

In his account of the Johannes Grusch atelier, Branner concludes (p. 86),

Just as it seems far-fetched to think of a great number of painters working in one shop for a long period of time, so it seems overly subtle to envision several separate but related shops comprising only one or two painters each.

But the latter is exactly what I envisage as the normal situation, for the reasons outlined in the previous paragraph.

So much for Branner’s highly problematic concept of ateliers, and his regrettable decision often to treat them as synonymous with styles. Another prime example of how Branner based his hypotheses on a fundamentally flawed understanding of how manuscripts were made is his belief that, in some books, the leaves with historiated initials were marked with the “signatures” of different artists:

there cannot be much question as to the meaning of these marks. Like masons’ marks in the building profession, they probably were used for purposes of payment.⁷

It is doubtless relevant that Branner specialized in the study of Gothic architecture before turning his attention to manuscript illumination: this would explain his firm belief that these manuscript “signatures” were analogous to masons’ marks. In fact they are nothing of the sort,⁸ but Branner nonetheless used them as a basis for trying to distinguish different illuminators, and as a result tied himself in untenable knots, even going so far as to conclude:

What these “signatures” tell us is that stylistic analysis alone often is not enough or often is improperly used ... by showing that some like images were painted by different artists while some unlike ones were made by the same man.⁹

He was so strongly attached to the idea that these were signatures that he disbelieved the evidence of his own eyes, and set aside his faith in stylistic analysis as the basis for distinguishing different artists.



A second observation that demonstrates Branner's ability to misinterpret evidence completely is that (p. 12)

Some unfinished manuscripts show us how the work looked before inking (fig. 2), where the face and hand of the lower figures were never drawn in,

and yet it is evident in his fig. 2 that the figures are not unfinished at all: the white pigment of the lower face and hand has simply flaked off, revealing the preparatory sketch underneath. This has happened quite often in French 13th-century manuscripts (suggesting to me perhaps that white pigment was more brittle, or did not adhere to parchment as well as other colours) and, as proof of this, we have four examples in the present catalogue (cat. nos. 27, 40, 48 and 54).

I have re-read parts of the Branner's book several times during the writing of this catalogue, and still find many of his arguments impossible to comprehend. Sometimes when I think that do understand them, I find them impossible to accept. I have therefore generally avoided attributing manuscripts to his "ateliers".

Another problem that must be contended with is not Branner's fault – at least not directly. Perhaps because readers of his book have found it so difficult to comprehend his stylistic groupings, the names he invented for different styles/ateliers have been

used recklessly in the subsequent literature (especially in auction and dealer catalogues, presumably because works by "named" artists are thought to be more commercially appealing than ones by anonymous artists). It is not uncommon, for example, to see a Bible leaf attributed to the "Atelier of the Vienna Moralized Bibles", as if this represents a distinct style, but, as explained above, Branner used this as an umbrella term to apply to many different illuminators working in different styles, who are extremely unlikely to have belonged to a single vast "atelier", and are far more likely to have simply been independent contractors, hired temporarily and specifically to contribute to the immense task of illuminating a *Bible moralisée*.¹⁰ Likewise, ever since the attribution to the "Dominican Painter" was applied in 1985 to the Chester Beatty Bible MS W.116 (see cat. 37) by Branner, it has been repeated unquestioningly.¹¹

This long critique of Branner and his influence is not intended as an *ad hominem* attack – his approach was very much of its time – it is instead meant as a wake-up call to those who use his style groups and atelier names uncritically, and to justify my unwillingness to use them in the catalogue descriptions that follow. A comprehensive reassessment of the material covered by Branner is long overdue, but well beyond the scope of the current catalogue.

NOTES

- 1 Honoré provides a good example (see cat. 51): there is only a single illuminated manuscript that contains his name, and from this inscription it is ambiguous which of the two artists in the volume he was, if either. There is now a general consensus among scholars, but this consensus could be wrong.
- 2 There have of course been many subsequent studies of aspects of 13th-century Parisian illumination, including monographs and catalogue entries about individual manuscripts, but none of these publications cover the same period in as much depth. The tail-end of Branner's period is treated in François Avril, 'Manuscrits', in *L'Art au temps des rois maudits: Philippe le Bel et ses fils 1285–1328* (Paris, 1998), pp. 256–60; and Alison Stones, *Gothic Manuscripts: 1260–1320, Part One, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in France*, 2 vols. (Turnhout and London, 2013), while the whole period has been covered by Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200–1500*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2000), although mainly from a historical and documentary perspective, rather than an art historical one.
- 3 Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 10525, and New York, Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.638.
- 4 It is also notable that Branner unnecessarily uses non-English terms when English would be just as suitable, as if to add an impression of authority to the concept, e.g. "chef d'atelier" instead of simply "head of a workshop".
- 5 On the use of the words *librarius*, *libraire*, etc., see Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, 'The Book Trade at the University of Paris, ca. 1250–ca. 1350', in *La production du livre universitaire au moyen âge: exemplar et pecia*, ed. by L.J. Bataillon, B.G. Guyot and R.H. Rouse (Paris, 1988), pp. 41–114, reprinted in Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, Publications in Medieval Studies, 17 (Notre Dame, 1991, repr.

1993), pp. 259–338, at pp. 260–63, where they suggest that the terms bookseller, stationer, *libraire*, etc. are *not* synonymous, concluding that stationers were a special sub-set: "those *librarii* who were stationers rented out *peciae*, and those *librarii* who were not stationers did not"; compare, however, Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200–1500*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2000), I, pp. 24–25, in which they suggest that the distinction was not so clear cut. It is a distinction not recognized by many scholars: see e.g. Michelle P. Brown, *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms* (Los Angeles and London, 1994), p. 118; and revised edition (Los Angeles, 2018), p. 103.

- 6 We are of course reminded of the passage in Christine de Pizan's *The Book of The City of Ladies*: "I know a woman today, named Anastasia, who is so learned and skilled in painting manuscript borders and miniature backgrounds that one cannot find an artisan in all the city of Paris – where the best in the world are found – who can surpass her, nor who can paint flowers and details as delicately as she does, nor whose work is more highly esteemed, no matter how rich or precious the book is. People cannot stop talking about her. And I know this from experience, for she has executed several things for me, which stand out among the ornamental borders of the great masters." The colophon in the Bible of Robert de Billyng (Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 11935; digitized on Gallica.bnf.fr), finished in 1327, suggests a division of labour that was perhaps not unusual in a luxury manuscript even a century earlier: historiated initials and borders (Anciau de Cens), and penwork flourishing (Jacquet Maci).
- 7 Robert Branner, 'The "Soissons Bible" Paintshop in Thirteenth-Century Paris', *Speculum*, 44 (1969), pp. 13–34, at p. 19; cf. 'The Manerius Signatures', *Art Bulletin*, 50 (1968),

p. 183 and fig. 1, and Branner, *Manuscript Painting in Paris* (1977), p. 11.

- 8 P. Stirnemann, 'Réflexions sur des instructions non iconographiques dans les manuscrits gothiques', in *Artistes, artisans et production artistique au moyen âge*, III, ed. by Xavier Barral i Altet (Paris, 1990), pp. 351–56, explains the real purpose of the marks. I reached the same conclusions independently when examining the late 12th-century *Decretum Gratiani* at the Getty Museum, before Patricia kindly brought her article to my attention.
- 9 Branner, 'The "Soissons Bible" Paintshop', at p. 19.
- 10 In a very recent article about the Hornby-Cockerell Bible (cat. 15), Eric Johnson discusses its attribution as follows: "The most common attribution by far is to the Vienna Moralized Bible workshop, but this ascription seems rote, at best, as none of the listings offer any descriptive details supporting this possible provenance ... I suspect that many dealers have credited the creators of the Moralized Bibles with the Hornby-Cockerell manuscript's creation simply as a matter of convenience. When compared with the many Moralized Bible illustrations reproduced in Branner's study, any similarities seem to be of the more general variety common to most illuminated output of the first half of the thirteenth century" (Eric J. Johnson, 'Breaking and Remaking Scripture: The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Hornby-Cockerell Bible', *Manuscript Studies: A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies*, 4.2 (2019), pp. 270–333, at 296).
- 11 Personally, I cannot see that the leaves in the present catalogue (cat. 37) have much in common stylistically with the plates in Branner's book; cf. the previous note.



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