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The Apocalypse, or Revelation of John, is arguably the most memorable book of scripture in the Christian Bible. With its rich symbolic and enigmatic language, it was second only to the Psalms in the number of single-volume illustrated manuscripts produced in the Middle Ages. In his *Apocalypse Illuminated*, Richard Emmerson explores how it was visualized, interpreted, and received by a variety of readers across seven centuries of medieval book illumination from the early Christian period to the Reformation.

This undertaking is ambitious. With over 130 illustrated Apocalypses extant, the inclusion of a comprehensive analysis of each is impossible. Moreover, the field is not wanting in past authorities, facsimile editions of individual codices, or studies of groups of related Apocalypse manuscripts. In fact, past discussions of the complex interrelationships between these codices may have deterred some from approaching the
topic. Fortunately, Emmerson, a renowned authority on manuscript illumination and medieval apocalypticism, presents a nuanced and much-needed overview of this scholarship as well as his own thoughts on Apocalypse illuminations and their place in medieval culture. Encyclopedic in the scope of its materials, themes, and approaches, the book provides new, important insights into the interpretation and meaning of these profusely illuminated books.

Emmerson focuses on certain noteworthy examples, striving to balance their analysis as works of art with attention to their historical, religious, and social contexts. To avoid the confusion that may arise in considering representative images from disparate manuscripts, he selects repeated motifs, such as Heavenly Jerusalem; the two witnesses, often identified as the patriarch Enoch and the prophet Elijah, who were taken to heaven without suffering death; and the image of the Antichrist, whose understanding has changed dramatically over time. This approach allows Emmerson to flesh out the continuities and particularities of various cycles of Apocalypse illumination, forgoing the search for lost models and the construction of elaborate stemmata that preoccupy much of earlier scholarship. In his close image-text analysis of the representative illuminations, Emmerson aims to show their roles within the manuscripts, interpretations over time, and the influences of apocalyptic expectations and historical events.
Arranged chronologically, the first chapter considers the place of the Apocalypse in the Christian canon, its authorship, and the various ways it was interpreted. The enigmatic symbolism of John’s Revelation attracted the attention of numerous medieval exegetes and may have also encouraged manuscript makers to add images that would elucidate its meaning. By their choice of detail or composition, the designers of illustrated cycles of Apocalypse manuscripts provided their own interpretations of the biblical text, serving as exegetes in their own right. However, the following chapters devote more attention to the writers of the various exegetical texts than to the designers of the illuminated cycles, probably because, as Emmerson rightly notes, we know so little about the creators’ identities. He then sets out the four interpretive strategies that inform the visual exegesis of illustrated Apocalypses: ecclesiological, historical, prophetic, and moral.

Chapter 2 discusses the first illustrated Carolingian and Ottonian Apocalypses. Emmerson places them within the context of early medieval apocalyptic expectations and introduces us to their diverse designs and treatment of word/image relations. He notes that the Trier (Fig. 1) and Valenciennes Apocalypses differ substantially from each other in content, style, and mise-en-page, suggesting that they present a fresh Carolingian interpretation rather than an adaptation of a lost early Christian model. The lavish Bamberg Apocalypse, made for the Ottonian court around the year 1000, probably gained immediacy from prophetic concerns about the Last Days. Emmerson’s
discussion of the three Apocalypses highlights the complexity of their iconographies and sophisticated styles. He demonstrates that while none inscribes commentaries to accompany the biblical text, their images alone provide suggestive visual exegesis.

The third chapter focuses on Apocalypses included the commentary by Beatus of Liébana, which flourished in Spain from the mid-tenth to the thirteenth centuries. Following John Williams, Emmerson suggests that the Beatus miniatures are not based on a lost model any more than the Trier and Valenciennes Apocalypse cycles derived from a lost early Christian archetype: instead they stem from the monastic culture of the
embattled Christians of northern Spain. (Fig. 2) Providing a nuanced review of the vast literature on the Beatus cycles, he turns to two major manuscripts dating to the mid-tenth century. His main contribution here is his reevaluation of the scholarly commonplace that Beatus miniatures provide only literal illustrations of the biblical
text, demonstrating instead that, placed between the text of Revelation and the commentary, they also interpret.

The fourth chapter analyzes some Romanesque and Gothic manuscripts made in France and Germany. It traces the continuum of ecclesiological interpretations that characterize monastic apocalypticism, examining changes in the representation of Revelation that reflect new patrons and audiences, including royal readers and members of new religious orders, such as the Franciscans. It expands the book’s purview to explore important apocalyptic imagery that appears in other codices that are not Apocalypse manuscripts, such as the well-known twelfth-century illustrated encyclopedias, the Liber Floridus and the Hortus Deliciarum, and the moralized Bibles made in thirteenth-century Paris, which include the largest cycles of Apocalypse imagery in medieval art. Emmerson emphasizes how the images elaborate a visual exegesis of Revelation that adds new moral and historical interpretations to the established ecclesiological and prophetic exegeses that characterized the Carolingian and Spanish Apocalypses studied in his earlier chapters.

Chapter 5 addresses the Anglo-French cycle, which originated in England in the mid-thirteenth century and constitutes the largest and most complex group of illuminated Apocalypses. Since no earlier English Apocalypse exists, previous scholars have posited a lost Gothic archetype and devised complex stemmata. In contrast, Emmerson introduces us to the Berengaudus and Anglo-French commentaries often
accompanying these codices and the variety of their layouts and formats. He examines their reception by distinct patrons and viewing communities and contextualizes them within high medieval apocalypticism. (Fig. 3) As in his discussion of the Beatus Apocalypses in chapter 3, he focuses on the exegetical strategies and iconographical
variations in representative manuscripts and, more significantly, provides a detailed account of their new features, such as cycles illustrating the lives of the Antichrist and John.

During the fifteenth century, Revelation continued to be illustrated in Apocalypse manuscripts and in new formats, such as marginal scenes in books of hours, the new print media, and oil paintings. Chapter 6 looks at the period leading to the Reformation, when both established and new formats as well as exegetical traditions influenced Apocalypse representations.

Like a medieval encyclopedic compilation, the book’s strength lies in its selection of subjects and their organization into a coherent whole. Emmerson’s wide-reaching analysis of Apocalypse illuminations achieves a successful balance between focusing on individual books and situating them within their historical contexts. Its engaging treatment of seven hundred years of Apocalypse illumination is a rare accomplishment and will appeal to specialists and students alike. Its ambitious scope provides both a reference tool and a grand narrative that allows readers to trace iconographic change and continuity. Handsomely produced, it will interest all who are drawn to these stunningly beautiful illuminated books of scripture.