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The McCarthy Collection: Italian and Byzantine Miniatures Volume I, edited by Gaudenz Freuler

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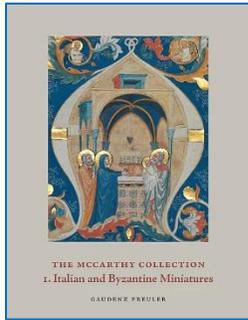
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Review of *The McCarthy Collection: Italian and Byzantine Miniatures Volume I*, edited by Gaudenz Freuler (2018).

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The McCarthy Collection, Volume I, edited by Gaudenz Freuler, marks another important publication in the continuing efforts to catalogue and present lesser-known and previously lost Italian Gothic miniatures to the public and to the larger academic community. As Freuler outlines in the volume's introduction, simultaneous interest in Italian Gothic codices paralleled the plundering of ecclesiastic libraries under the direction of Napoleon Bonaparte in the 18th century. Over time, many manuscripts were dismembered and illuminations cut away. This has made it difficult to study the Italian Gothic manuscript and its role within the larger field of medieval art history. As a result, many of the earliest publications on these works have focused on identifying regional schools, in an attempt to reassemble an accurate corpus of images. Although *The McCarthy Collection* adds to this on-going list, it also aims to move beyond attributions and to reconstruct the larger historical environments in which the works were first created and used; special focus is given to schools in and the environments of

Bologna, Emilia, Umbria, and Perugia. The result is a broad appreciation for the artistic developments that occurred throughout the peninsula, the stylistic advancements that different schools shared, and distinct modes of representation found in each region.

The book is well-organized and accessible to scholars and lay readers alike. The catalogue is laid out in two sections. Illustrations are arranged in the first chronologically, from the late-11th century to the mid-15th century, accompanied by eighty entries. Beyond this, the volume's regular citation of *comparanda*, referenced in most of the catalogue entries, expands the reader's appreciation for the tremendous output of medieval Italian Gothic manuscripts beyond those housed in The McCarthy Collection. Crisp images and detailed figures give readers an intimate experience with works that they might otherwise never see. Each catalogue entry also provides the Latin verse to which each respective initial belongs. This is an invaluable resource, reminding the reader that these paintings were part of a liturgical context and not independent, autonomous works. In some cases, the volume provides information which has been lost, due to mutilation of these liturgical works over the years. The majority of the pieces are Italian Gothic, but the last eight entries comprise the Byzantine miniatures in the McCarthy Collection, dating from the 11th through the mid-16th century.

One of the entries on an exquisite Italian miniature discussed an initial S with *The Presentation in the Temple* (cat. 25, **fig. 1**), exemplifying the two-pronged approach—connoisseurial and social taken by Freuler. Through stylistic comparisons to an initial G



Figure 1 Initial “S” with *The Presentation in the Temple*, BM 2470, Emilia, c. 1285–90, parchment, 175 x 165mm.

with *The Assumption of the Virgin*, held in a Milanese private collection, Freuler proposes Bolognese authorship and dates the cutout to c. 1280, in part because of the stylistic resonances seen in contemporary Florentine works, such as Cimabue’s *Maesta*. By comparing historiated initials to better-known, monumental works, Freuler imparts a greater social and artistic role to these often-unknown illuminators. In another entry

Figure 2 Master of the Deruta Missal, Initial “G” with *A Group of Apostles*, BM 1069, Perugia(?), c. 1288–1292, parchment, 203 x 178mm.



(Cat. 46, **fig. 2**), the initial G with *A Group of Apostles*, the author compares the illumination to contemporary programs in Rome and Assisi, prompting further research into the movements and shared resources of notable Italian schools. Although placing these illustrations within a larger, established artistic milieu helps elevate the profile of illuminators, one wonders if it inhibits a more comprehensive analysis of manuscript painters in medieval Italy. Can we, for example, regularly assume that manuscript painters followed the stylistic decisions of monumental artists? Is it not possible that, as mobile objects, manuscripts helped to transmit these designs from one

school to the next? While this reevaluation of medieval illuminators working in Italy between the 11th and 15th centuries is beyond the scope of *The McCarthy Collection*, one cannot help wonder what future scholarship can be undertaken thanks to the thoughtful publication of such a collection.

As other scholars have argued, albeit for other media, the period of Italian Gothic art holds a precarious place in the historiography on Western European art. In particular, these manuscripts fall outside of the dominant trends of Gothic manuscripts, which focus primarily on French and English works, while there is an implicit pressure on Italian codices to serve as a precursor to the developing naturalism associated with the Italian Renaissance.¹ Greater attention to these manuscripts and illustrations challenges the period classifications within the subfields of medieval Italian and Gothic scholarship. The scrupulous work undertaken by scholars, such as Freuler, to find, categorize, and publish so many unknown treasures of medieval Italy marks an important step in a more holistic reevaluation of the position of medieval Italian Gothic manuscripts within the field. 🐼

¹ Marvin Trachtenberg, “Gothic/Italian Gothic”: Toward a Redefinition,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 50:1 (March, 1991): 22-37. Although Trachtenberg’s study focuses on architecture, his historiographic critiques hold true for manuscripts studies, as well. This is still a topic that deserves further research, however.