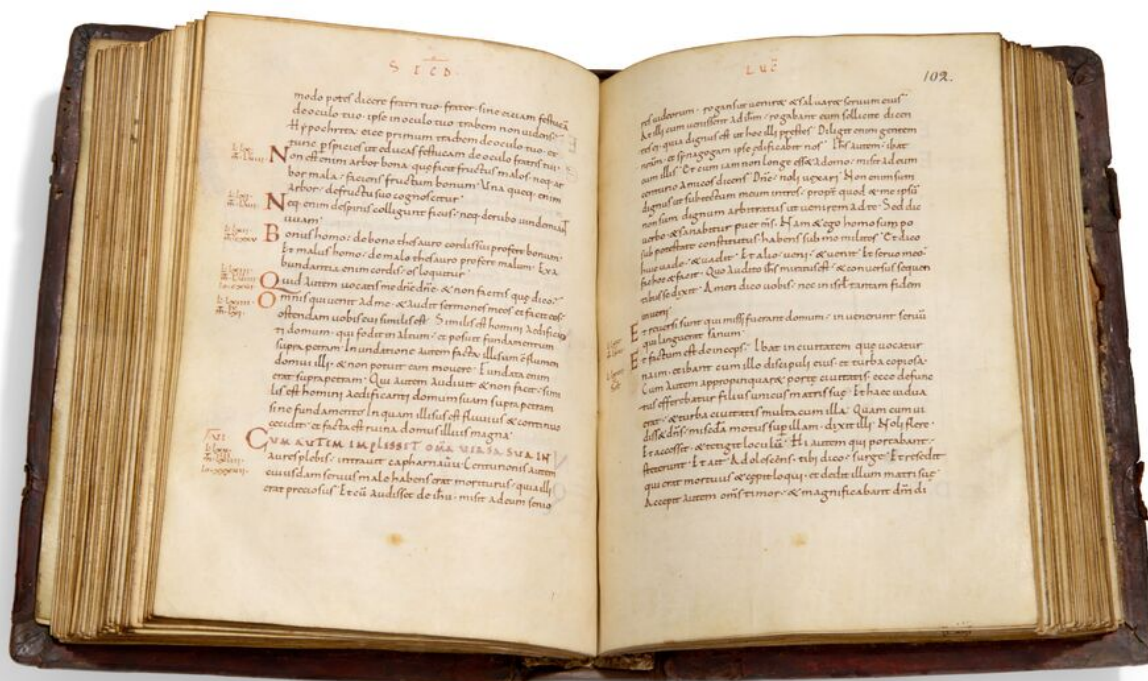


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10TH-CENTURY GOSPELS

Gospels, in Latin, manuscript on vellum [Germany, ?Essen Abbey, c.900]

A rare survival from the dawn of the 10th century and an exceptional testament to Carolingian women's literary culture: a splendid Gospel book perhaps produced by the community of canonesses at Essen Abbey, in a handsome 16th-century blind-stamped binding from a named workshop. Fewer than ten Latin Gospels of the 10th century or earlier have been offered at auction in the last 100 years, and none with links to a female scriptorium.

241 x 187mm. i + 166 leaves, collation: 1⁴, 2-6⁸, 7⁴, 8-9⁸, 10¹⁰, 11⁴, 12-16⁸, 17⁴, 18-20⁸, 21⁷ (of 8, lacking viii, likely a cancelled blank), 22⁸, 23⁵ (of 6, vi a cancelled blank), 19th-century foliation in ink 1-4, 13-178 (skipping 30-32 and 55 but with no loss of text), followed here, contemporary quire signatures survive, 26 lines written by at least two scribes in brown ink in an attractive, very distinctive and precise Carolingian minuscule, ascenders slightly clubbed, 'et' abbreviation regularly used for the ampersand and sometimes within words, ruled space: 160 x 113mm, initials, running headers and rubrics in orange-red,

contemporary marginal cross-references, offsetting of ?earlier pastedowns on upper and lower boards (lacking around 12 leaves: 8 after f.4 likely with the Canon Tables and the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, inserted leaves with the beginnings of Matthew and Luke, and probably a bifolium after f.134 with the end of the summary chapters for John and the beginning of the Gospel of John, occasional smudges and marginal staining, some bleeding of red ink on final leaves, small wormhole in upper margin of final leaf, a few natural flaws to the vellum, else in excellent condition with wide margins). Early 16th-century German blind-stamped calf of the O.M. workshop, EBDB workshop w002453, rolltool r000990 and another, brass catches (rebacked, lacking clasps). Brown cloth box, title gilt.

Provenance:

(1) The manuscript was probably produced in the North-Rhine region of Germany at the turn of the 9th century, as suggested by Prof. Rosamond McKitterick on the basis of the script. The mention of 'Pro velatione ancillarum Dei' and 'Ad velandam maritatum' in the 25 lessons following the Capitulary at the end may indicate that it was produced at a female house, or even for use in one. A plausible candidate is Essen Abbey, established c. 845 by Altfrid,

a Saxon noble who later became Bishop of Hildesheim and was canonized as a saint. The abbey was founded near a royal estate known as *Astridhi*, which eventually lent its name to both the religious institution and the surrounding town. The first abbess was Gerswit, a relative of Altfred, who also commissioned the construction of a church for the community of canonesses, known as the *Stiftskirche*. Thanks to the support of the Liudolfing dynasty – the family of the Ottonian emperors – the abbey gained the status of *reichsunmittelbar*, or Imperial Abbey, sometime between 874 and 947. The abbey played a significant role in Carolingian women's literary culture: from its elevation to Imperial Abbey, it became home to a highly productive scriptorium (on which see K. Bodarwé, *Sanctimoniales litteratae. Schriftlichkeit und Bildung in den ottonischen Frauenkommunitäten Gandersheim, Essen und Quedlinburg*, 2004). For the cultural influence of Essen and other female houses in the Rhineland, see the catalogue for the exhibition held at the Ruhrländmuseum Essen, Mar. 19–July 3, 2005, *Krone und Schleier: Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenkloster*.

The script is very distinctive, not least with the form of the abbreviation signs, ligature of 'ct', occasional curly 'd' as well as straight shaft 'd', the attempt to differentiate headings/incipits from the main text, and the form of the capitals. There is a change in hand for the Gospel of Mark: notable and peculiar is the capital 'Q' executed in a single clockwise stroke ending in a more vertical descender. A comparable script, with similar letter formations including straight and curly-shaft 'd's, can be found in another 10th-century Essen manuscript, a Missal now at Düsseldorf, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf, Ms. D 3.

The community at Essen had a rich and extensive library, which included several Gospel books, Missals and Sacramentaries, two memorial books, the statutes and constitutions of the community, and works by Augustine, Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, Bernard of Clairveaux, Gregory the Great, Hugh of St Victor, Ludolph of Saxony, among others. Some 50 fragments and codices from this great library survive today: after the dissolution of the abbey in 1803, the vast majority of the manuscripts ended up in German institutions (such as the Münsterarchiv in Essen and the University Library in Düsseldorf); a very small handful, like the 11th-century Gospel Book of the Abbess Svanhild (now Manchester, John Rylands Library, Latin MS. 110) found their way to institutions abroad.

The present Gospels are a handsome, formal and impressive production: the nail-holes running along the edges of the first flyleaf suggest that the original binding may have been metalwork – perhaps a treasure binding, given the quality of the manuscript. Its format and size may indicate personal rather than institutional use: it is tempting to link it to one of the two early abbesses of Essen Abbey: Wicburg (c. 896–906) and Mathilde I (907–910 – although the latter's existence is disputed).

(2) August Friedrich Christian Vilmar (1800–1868), German Neo-Lutheran theologian, author, preacher and Professor of Theology at Marburg: his sale at:

(3) Karl Theodor Völcker's Antiquariat, Frankfurt, 5 March 1869, lot 1933: catalogue cutting pasted down on inside upper board. The manuscript was already lacking the openings to the Gospels in the 19th century.

(4) The Chicago Theological Seminary, Hammond Library: bookplate on inside upper cover; their accession number 19665 (also stamped in red on f.2); their shelfmark '112.17 V991 Rare', published in S. De Ricci, *Census*, 1935, I, p.521, no 19665.

Content: Preface to the Gospel of Matthew (Stegmüller 590) ff.1v-2; summary chapters of Matthew ff.2v-4; St Jerome's letter to Pope Damasus, 'Sciendum etiam neque ignarum', ff.4-4v; Gospel of Matthew, lacking beginning and opening in Matthew 1:16 '[Iacob autem genuit Ioseph] virum Marie. De qua natus est Iesus qui vocatur Christus', ff.13-57v; summary chapters of Mark ff.58v-59; preface to the Gospel of Mark (Stegmüller 607) ff.59v-60; Gospel of Mark, lacking beginning and opening in Mark 1:4 'Fuit Iohannes in deserto baptizans, ff.61-86; preface to the Gospel of Luke (Stegmüller 620) ff.87-87v; summary chapters of Luke ff.87v-90; Gospel of Luke, lacking beginning and opening in Luke 1:5 'Fuit in diebus Herodis' ff.91-133; preface to the Gospel of John (Stegmüller 624) ff.133v-134; summary chapters for John, lacking end ff.134-134v; Gospel of John, lacking beginning and opening in John 1:6 'Fuit homo missus a Deo cui nomen erat Iohannes' ff.135-165v; Roman Capitulary of Gospel Lessons in the pre-Carolingian Frankish form (T. Klauser, *Das römische Capitulare evangeliorum*, 1935, type Δ, pp.131-172) ff.166-177; 25 votive masses 'de diversis causis' (the texts agree especially closely with Paris, BnF, Latin 11958, a 9th-century Gospels from Corbie Abbey; St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 52, a 9th-century Lyon Gospels; and with the 9th-century so-called Gospels of Queen Theutberga of Lotharingia, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Cloisters, acc. no. 2015.560) ff.177v-178v.

Fewer than ten Latin Gospels of the 10th century or earlier have been offered at public auction in the last hundred years – and only one this century: the 9th-century Gospels of Queen Theutberga (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015.560, sold at Christie's, 15 July 2015, lot 20, for £1,986,500 and previously Sotheby's, 16 June 1997, lot 2, for £1,101,500). Other notable examples are the late 10th-century Liesborn Gospels (Wadersloh, Museum Abtei Liesborn, sold at Christie's, 2 December 1987, lot 139, for £418,000); the 9th-century Gospels of St Hubert (Cologne, Schnütgen Museum, Hs. G 531, sold at Sotheby's, 26 November 1985, lot 93, for £1,430,000); a 10th-century Gospels from the Rhineland (sold at Sotheby's as 'Property of a Lady', 10 June 1963, lot 127); the 10th-century Dyson Perrins Gospels (Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS IV 99, sold at Sotheby's on 1 December 1959, lot 51); a 10th-century Gospels from the collection of Baron Theodor Cramer-Klett, published in Jacques Rosenthal, *Bibliotheca medii aevi manuscripta*, cat.90, 1928, no 135); and the late 10th-century Anhalt-Morgan Gospels (New York, Morgan Library and Museum MS M.827, sold at Sotheby's, 31 May 1927, lot 1).

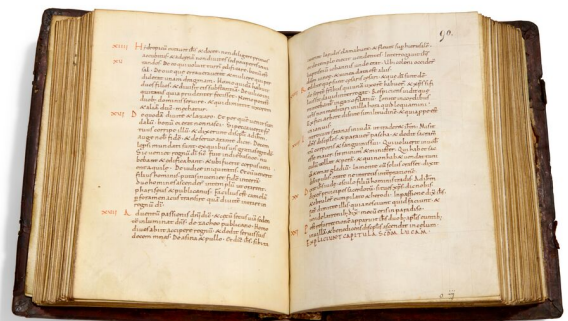
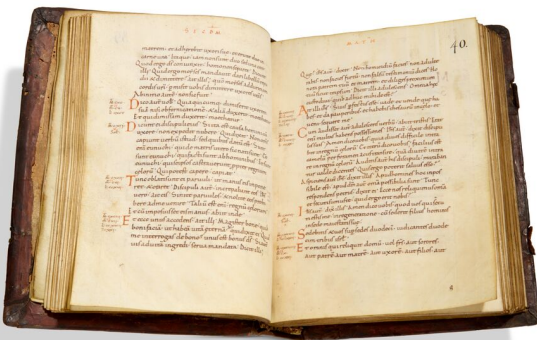
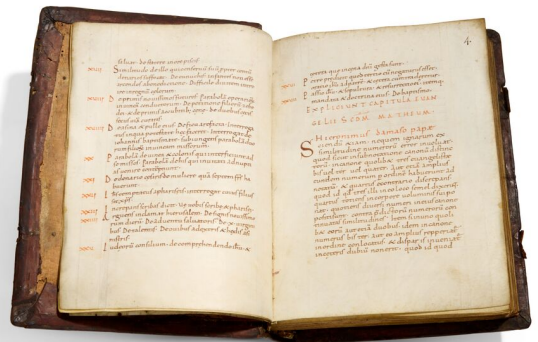
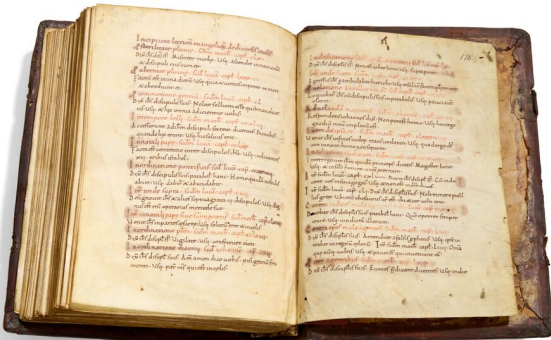
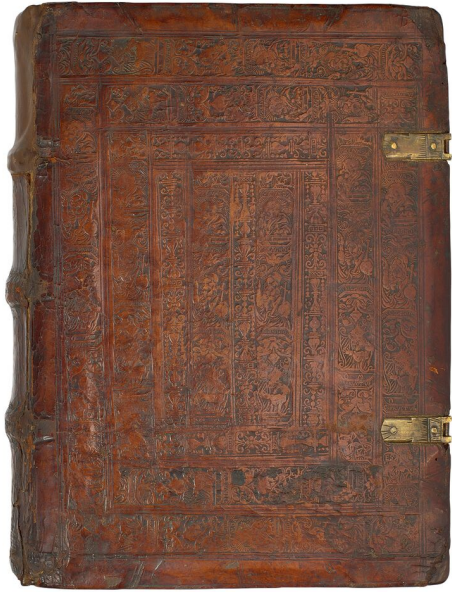
Christie's would like to thank Prof. Rosamond McKitterick for her help and advice in cataloguing this manuscript.

£700,000-1,000,000

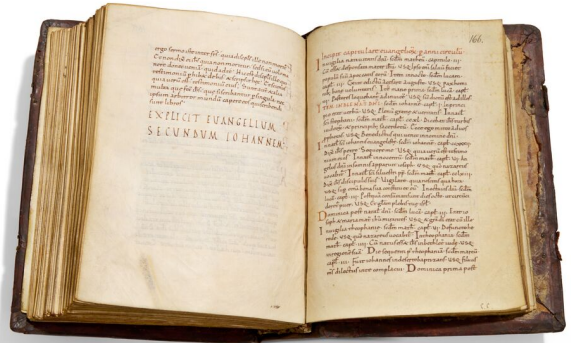
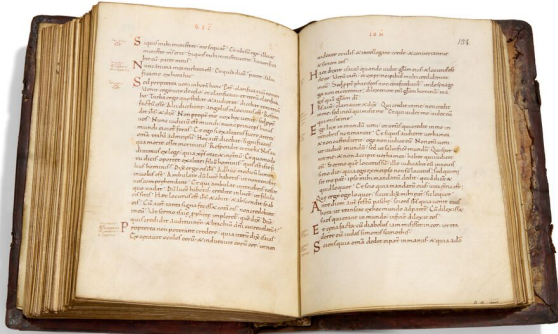
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