



Anonymous Bohemian illuminator

Leaf from an antiphonal with historiated initial H showing the Nativity Scene and 4 small initials. Watercolour, gouache, pen and gold heightening with Latin script on vellum, text on both sides.

Bohemia, c. 1370-80. Initial 10 x 7 cm; script area 35 x 20 cm; leaf dimensions 47.5 x 32 cm. 18 lines and notes. Textura in black-brown ink, square notation on red 4-line staves. Matted, framed (frame 62 x 46 cm).

Text: "Hodie nobis caelorum rex de Virgine nascere..." (Responsorium, 1st Noct, for Christmas). The present leaf from a dismembered antiphonal illustrates the Nativity Scene in an initial H and shows a delightful

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watercolour of the Annunciation to the Shepherds in the left margin outside of the initial. Springing from the burgundy coloured initial are broad, acanthus tendril offshoots in green, which twist into the lower border to form the bas-de-page decoration. The simple colouring of the charming depiction is limited to green and burgundy tones, while the initial ground is rendered in blue and decorated with tendrils. The illustrator's vibrant narrative streak also extends, as mentioned, into the area outside the initial, where a tree-strewn rocky landscape with a city view at its summit develops in a steep verticality at the left shaft of the letter. Amidst his flock and a barking dog at the foot of this rocky hill, a shepherd stands with his back to the viewer, looking up at the angel to hear the good tidings of the birth of the Saviour. The Bohemian authorship of this beautiful leaf results from the pictorial iconographic aspects as well as from the figure types, which are unmistakably connected to Bohemian painting circa 1360-80. The mother lying on a blanket with her closely held child kissing her may be—albeit in a simplified form—referencing The Nativity by the Master of Hohenfurt (c. 1350, Prague National Gallery), who in turn may have taken up Italian pictorial inventions. The face of the Virgin is based on the repertoire of Bohemian types, as modelled by the anonymous Bohemian painter of the Madonna in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and in the Adoration of the Magi in the Pierpont Morgan collection in New York c. 1360-70. Certain tempering in the drawing of our Joseph are reminiscent of figures by the Master of Wittingau, such as the head of Nicodemus in the Entombment from c. 1380 in the National Gallery in Prague. The presently established artistic connections to Bohemian art circa 1360-1380, and the not entirely successful attempt by our illuminator to transpose the gentle rendering of light found in Bohemian painting of the period into the medium of illumination, as seen in the pale colour of the flesh tones, suggests that the present leaf probably was probably produced circa 1370-80. The leaf presented here is a rare example of Bohemian illumination of the late 14th century outside of the imperial court. (Prof. emer. Dr. Gaudenz Freuler, University of Zurich) Mounted on cardboard. Wavy, some marginal browning, lightly dust-stained, the centre with deleted note. Provenance: Günther

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