

Sub-project B01

Biblia Pauperum Manuscripts: The formation and Transmission of Biblical Knowledge in Word-Image Complexes

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Objectives

Sub-project B01 examines the evolution of changes to layout and book architecture in German Biblia pauperum manuscripts. In a succession of diagrammatic word/image complexes based on the exegetical model of typology, this work from the late medieval period provides a synoptic view on the Old and New Testament. Through comparative analysis of the variation, enhancement and modification of the individual word and image elements and of the matrix types which allocate a place on the page to the different groups of characters, the project investigates the conditions under which the appearance of the work was changed and with which intentions and effects. The question as to the specific merits of the types is considered as well as if and how changes to one part of the visual texture have any programmatic or content-related consequences.

The Project

The more than 80 surviving manuscript versions of the Biblia pauperum reveal a tangible process of restructuring and particularising Bible texts to facilitate the transmission of biblical knowledge and the Christian doctrine during the late Middle Ages. Originating around the middle of the 13th century as a Latin work, several German editions of the Biblia pauperum appeared from the 14th century onwards.



Biblia pauperum in Latin from the first half of the 14th century. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4523, fol. 52r



Biblia pauperum from 1425 containing Latin and German texts. Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Pal. lat. 871, fol. 3v

Their typological concept is implemented in a sequence of word/image complexes, the structure of which is not changed within a codex. An illustration of a New Testament event (antitype) is juxtaposed with two Old Testament scenes as prefigurations (types) as well as four figures of the prophets. Other features include tituli, banners and commentaries explaining the typological significance of the biblical events. The earliest Biblia pauperum manuscripts contain 34 word/image units presented in a layout with initially four and later two units on a double page. This is a direct reference to the materiality of a codex divided into pages. In the course of them being passed down, the scope of the texts has frequently been modified, as has the arrangement of the different elements on the codex page and the number of word/image units in the different manuscript groups.

Unlike manuscripts containing text only, Biblia pauperum copies have to achieve the task of adopting or designing a layout which combines text and image and is befitting to the concept of the work. The manuscripts of the Biblia pauperum demonstrate a constellation which is significant for the project area and can provide information as to the conditions and effects of organising a manuscript visually within the framework of a particular historical context.



Page from a German Biblia pauperum, c. 1430/50. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 148, fol. 127v



Printing emerged in the 15th century as a method of text transmission. Copy of a block book, c. 1470/1518. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 59, fol. 1r