The Prophet Book

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The Prophet Book contains the full text of the 12 Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) and the four Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) of the Septuagint in one volume. The pages are sometimes filled with a catena, an extensive commentary on the biblical text, and this makes the manuscripts more bulky than if they had contained the biblical text alone.

There are about 50 manuscripts of the Prophet Book datable to before the 15th century, and seven of them are illuminated. The oldest surviving Greek Prophet Book, *Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 2125, is not illuminated. The uncial script of this manuscript has been dated by palaeographers to around 700 AD, or early in the 8th century. Among the seven illuminated manuscripts, two contain the 12 Minor and four Major Prophets with catena. Two manuscripts also contain both the Minor and Major Prophets, but without catena. One contains only the Minor Prophets, while the other contains only the Major Prophets, with a catena in each case. Finally, one manuscript has only the book of Isaiah with catena.

The system of illustration is also varied: four of the manuscripts have full-page miniatures with portraits of a single standing prophet. One manuscript has the bust portraits in medallions. Two have the portraits located in the text either at full-length or at half-length. Three manuscripts have a few narrative illustrations in addition to the portraits. All of them belong to the genre called the Prophet Book, but their content and the system of illustration are rather heterogeneous.

*Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Chig. R. VIII. 54*

The manuscript was purchased by the Vatican in 1923. This is the oldest manuscript in the group of illuminated Prophet Books, dating from the 10th century.

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1 This overview on the illustrated Prophet Books, as well as the description of each manuscript given in the first part of this article is based on Lowden, *Illuminated Prophet Books*.
2 Ibid., p. 6.
3 On this manuscript, see Belting, "Le problème du style", pp. 302, 304, fig. 49; Dufrenne,
It is a huge volume (40.2 × 31.3 cm) with 493 folios, containing the 12 Minor and four Major Prophets with catena. Only 11 of the full-page author portraits facing the beginning of the relevant chapter remain. Although the other five portraits are lost, it can be assumed that the manuscript once had portraits of all 16 authors.

The illustration is on a single leaf of parchment which is independent of the text quires. Lowden observes that the portraits are contemporary with the production of the book, since the text on the scroll that the portrait of Haggai holds was written by the same scribe who wrote the text of the manuscript. The prophets are depicted within a frame standing, holding an open or closed scroll in their left hand and most of the times raising the right hand in a speech gesture. Their poses vary.

**The Turin and Florence Manuscripts**

The codex Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, B. i. 2, containing the Minor Prophets and the codex *Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Laur. Plut. 5.9, containing the Major Prophets were companion volumes produced in the late 10th century. The manuscripts provide no clue to the early history, provenance and ownership. Their present dimensions (Turin: 33.8 × 29.5 cm, and Florence: 35.5 × 27.5 cm) are similar. The Turin manuscript contains only 93 folios, whereas the Florence manuscript contains 339 folios. The scheme of their decoration is however different: the Turin manuscript is prefaced by an illuminated bifolio with busts of the 12 Minor Prophets, whereas in the Florence manuscript, each of the four Major Prophets was originally prefaced by an author portrait. Only the standing portrait of Jeremiah has survived, considered to be a masterpiece of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance (Fig. 84).

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4 Lowden, *Illuminated Prophet Books*, p. 10, fig. 7.