



Jill Bradley, *'You Shall Surely Not Die': The Concepts of Sin and Death as Expressed in the Manuscript Art of Northwestern Europe, c.800-1200*, Brill: Leiden & Boston 2008. 2 vols. 727 pp.

Jill Bradley's book, based on her doctoral thesis from Nijmegen, is an in-depth study of medieval miniatures. Its sheer size bears witness to its thoroughness, even to the point of exhausting the reader. The main innovation of the book is its approach: studying mental attitudes through iconographic evidence. Bradley concentrates on images representing the fall and personifications of death, and is thus able to access attitudes towards such basic tenets of Christian life as sin and death. The time-span of the book is from 800 to 1200, thus giving Bradley the chance to make observations of changes in the outlook towards these things. Her geographical focus is north-western Europe, covering the areas of modern-day France, Germany, the Netherlands, and England.

The book starts with a short introduction in which Bradley explains her approach and the basic assumptions that have informed her choices. She rightly points out that visual images, just like verbal metaphors, have to be recognized by the public in order to be effective. Thus images reflect the attitudes of the society that uses them, and changes in visual metaphors can be regarded as also indicating mental shifts. The introduction is quite brief, and a reader with no background in art history is left wanting for some discussion of the use and production of the miniatures as background for the detailed analysis of the following chapters. Bradley groups the miniatures in clusters based on the frequency of the specific themes in the index of Christian art in Utrecht. These groupings reveal that the themes of

sin and death have been more topical at certain times and places, and it is these clusters that are at the centre of Bradley's study.

The book proceeds chronologically, starting with the Carolingians. Each chapter begins with an introduction to the general context for the manuscripts in question. This context is outlined quite broadly, comprising not only social and religious attitudes but also changes in the monetary economy as background for the postulated feelings of uncertainty and confusion of the ninth century. When discussing this general background Bradley utilizes a number of sources, ranging from annals to poetry and theology. Her command of this wide range of sources is made even more impressive when one considers that this is only background for the actual analysis of the miniatures, for which she has consulted over 100 different manuscripts. After this general introduction to the mentality that produced the illuminations, each chapter continues with the detailed discussion of the actual miniatures. First Bradley outlines the 'basic type' of the fall for each period discussed, thus giving her a tool with which to measure each illustration. Her decision to do so can be questioned, since this basic type does not necessarily exist as such in any single manuscript, but it helps her to point out the typical features of each period and the individual characteristics of the miniatures. After discussing the basic type, Bradley moves on to the detailed analysis of the images. The wealth of detail may prove too much for the reader who is more interested in the general trends in attitudes revealed by each cluster of pictures rather than in the specific manuscripts in question.

The reader's task of following this detailed analysis of images would have been made easier if the accompanying illustrations had been larger or in some cases not quite so dark. Considering the large number of illustrations (119) included in the book, it is understandable that they are quite small and in black-and-white. This is nevertheless regrettable because some of the details discussed by Bradley cannot be clearly seen in the pictures. It would have been nice to see the illustrations reproduced in a better way in a book in which they are of such crucial importance. All of the illustrations are located at the end of the second volume, which forces the reader to have both volumes at hand when reading the first one. The publisher's decision to publish the book in two volumes can further be questioned. The number of pages (727) is not so many as to make publication in a single volume impossible. The high price of the book (150€) also makes one wonder whether publishing it in one volume instead of two hard-cover volumes would have made it a bit more reasonably priced.

The reader has to be impressed by Bradley's command of her numerous sources. Her accomplishment is made even greater by her inclusion of discussion of sculptural evidence towards the end of the book. This gives her a more balanced view since, unlike the miniatures, the sculptures had a wider and more varied public, which in many cases also included uneducated laymen. These public images of the fall allow Bradley to contrast the two types of evidence and to consider the role of the audience in the way the message is conveyed. When discussing the more public type of evidence, Bradley asks pertinent and very interesting questions concerning the visibility of these images in a church setting, thus also considering their context within the church building.

All in all, Bradley's book is highly original and creative work. She admirably links the themes and attitudes revealed by the miniatures to wider changes in the culture and mentality that produced them. Her analysis even takes politics into account, thus making interesting connections between the changes in mentality displayed by the images and the contemporary political climate. The strength of Bradley's approach is based on the fact that she does not discuss the individual illustrations in isolation but in conjunction with other miniatures both in the same manuscript and in other texts from the same period.

In addition to the iconographic evidence, she also uses written sources. These give further support to her argument in cases where the visual evidence is open to many interpretations, and help to convince readers, who are not able to judge for themselves when the illustrations in the book are too small or dark. Nevertheless, in some cases it is not always quite clear on what basis Bradley has decided whether an image, such as a dragon for example, should be interpreted as a symbol of death rather than sin or vice versa. The other minor point of criticism is the lack of footnotes in some places. On p.145, for example, there is a discussion of Anglo-Saxon Penitentials and attitudes towards sex without a single reference either to the sources or secondary literature. These, however, are minor details and do not diminish Bradley's accomplishment. Through her multifaceted approach and extremely thorough investigation, she is able to yield surprisingly rich results out of the iconographic evidence and make a fascinating survey of attitudes concerning sin and death.

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