

This is a publication to be celebrated for its inspired vision and rigorous scholarship. It offers detailed descriptions of 111 Latin psalters selected from the Bodleian Library's collections and representing the history of manuscript production in Latin-speaking Europe over eight centuries. Examples range from ninth-century Reims and tenth-century Winchester to sixteenth-century Florence.

The decision to dedicate a catalogue to psalters is as unusual today as it is welcome. Most modern manuscript catalogues organize their material by collection, place of origin, date of production, or a combination of these – all logical and helpful approaches. Yet for scholars interested in specific categories of texts prevalent throughout the medieval period, such as psalters, breviaries or books of hours, Victor Leroquais's monumental series of catalogues, dedicated to these and other types of manuscripts preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale and the public libraries of France, are still indispensable.

Elizabeth Solopova has now offered the Bodleian Library's equivalent for psalters, with an up-to-date summary of the numerous strands of research that have advanced in the century since Leroquais's publications. The introduction is

## A goodly heritage

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Elizabeth Solopova

LATIN LITURGICAL PSALTERS IN  
THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY

A select catalogue

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succinct and lucid, and it provides a useful starting point for anyone new to the study of medieval psalters. The impressive apparatus takes one further, offering background information on – and concrete evidence for – standard features and common tendencies as well as deviations and unique occurrences, and also treats important aspects of psalter production and use, such as psalm titles and numbering, textual divisions, punctuation, the inclusion of music and canticles, and iconography.

The psalters included in this catalogue have been selected across the Bodleian Library's rich collections, excluding two – the Lyell and the

Buchanan – that have received recent scholarly catalogues. The decision to exclude the Ormesby Psalter, one of the finest English fourteenth-century manuscripts in existence, and the reason given – that it is "worthy of a book in its own right" – are hard to understand. Other important psalters that deserve a study of their own are included in the catalogue, for example the contemporary Douce Psalter, with its enigmatic imagery and patronage, and the Gough Psalter (c.1200), with its extensive cycle of miniatures and prayers.

The greatest achievement of this catalogue is the detailed and yet manageable descriptions of the manuscripts. Many of the entries amount to scholarly articles, with depth and breadth of research rarely matched in contemporary catalogues. The structure is clear, with subsections devoted to the text, decoration, physical description (one wonders if this should have come first), binding and provenance, followed by a chronologically arranged bibliography. The subsections are more than descriptive records of facts: they sum up current research,

highlight unusual features, and include interpretations of important aspects that help the reader to build a comprehensive understanding of individual manuscripts.

My only regret is that each manuscript is represented by a single plate – in colour and in almost every case showing a full page. This may be sufficient for manuscripts with standard textual and/or modest visual contents. Yet one wishes for more images – and at least some details – from textually complex and richly illuminated manuscripts, such as the Reims Psalter or the Bohun Psalter, whose main artist is not represented by the plate chosen. In most cases, readers would be able to consult reproductions in earlier publications listed in the bibliography. There is also hope that in due course psalters will begin to feature more prominently among the Bodleian Library's online images. One appreciates the practical constraints of what is already a heavy volume and the financial risks of highly specialized publications that are becoming increasingly unpalatable even for academic publishers. Elizabeth Solopova, the Bodleian Library and the private benefactor of this project deserve the gratitude of current and future students of medieval manuscripts, history and culture.

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