

The Emilianense Beatus

Also known as the **First Beatus**, because it is the oldest of all the Beati preserved and the most faithful to the original prototype, which has now long been lost.



When contemplating the Beatus Emilianensis in the National Library in Madrid (Codex Vit. 14-1) we could not agree more with the opinion that Émile Mâle, the great French art historian, gave about the “Beati”: *Because of their violent colours, their strange drawings, their dreamlike atmosphere, they exercise a veritable tyranny on imagination: whoever has seen them once, does not forget them. Mireille Mentré, for her part, says of our Beatus: Strange and excessive paintings, linked to an ascetic quest, which was not to be found again, in its pure state, in the other Beati.*

After the Cirueña fragment (Silos, monastery library), the **Emilianense Beatus is the oldest surviving illuminated manuscript of Family I**, which in turn represents the oldest tradition of the Beati. It has been dated to **the first half of the 10th century**, around 920-930 (W. Neuss); P. Klein places it between 925 and 935. José Camón Aznar, who did not have so much evidence, even suggested the end of the 9th century. Other authors, however, date it somewhat later, considering its miniatures to be of a mature Mozarabic style. There is no indication that the work can be attributed, with any certainty, to a specific workshop. Most critics have considered it to be a work executed at the scriptorium of San Millán.

P. Klein doubts this *Emilian origin* and claims (because of the writing, the ornamental technique and the colouring) a **Leonese origin** (more precisely in the east of the kingdom of León), or even, like Mentré, he points to **the scritorium of Valeránica (Castile)** as the possible origin of this Beatus.

It remained for seven centuries in San Millán de la Cogolla (La Rioja), until it was transferred to Burgos in 1821. It then passed into the possession of the politician, bibliophile and collector Serafín Estébanez Calderón. Upon his death (1867), together with his entire library, it was transferred to the Ministry of Public Works. In 1873 it was handed over, on an interim basis, to the Superior Diplomatic School in Madrid. Finally, in 1886, it was deposited in the National Library in Madrid for its final safekeeping.

As a result, the manuscript, on parchment of 144 folios measuring approximately 250 x 345 mm, in Visigothic minuscule script, has come down to us in a very deteriorated and mutilated state. Leaves are missing at the beginning and at the end, as well as some 31 intermediate folios. There is evidence that at least twelve illustrations have been cut out. **Twenty-seven apocalyptic miniatures, the tablets of the Antichrist, as well as small capitulars, are preserved today.**

The miniaturist is anonymous. All the surviving illustrations refer to the apocalyptic text and are integrated into the literary context as a visual complement to the passage being recounted and commented on. They are placed immediately after the *storia* (apocalyptic account) and before its corresponding *explanatio* (Beatus commentary). As befits the Beati of Family I, the preliminary miniatures and those of the cycle of the prophet Daniel are missing.

Researchers, bibliophiles and art lovers will be grateful for the enthusiasm and determination provided by the Siloé publishing house when bringing this “disturbing” work to light in a facsimile edition. **The primitivism of its illustrations, the freedom of its drawings, the naturalism of some of its miniatures and its personalised chromatism will bring the lucky owner closer to an unforgettable visual experience.**

