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Thomas Kren and Roger S. Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal: From the Library of Margaret of York*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012. 87 pp. \$9.99 U.S. (i-book). ISBN 978-1-60606-127-5.

Review by Martha Easton, Seton Hall University.

While it is no longer familiar to modern audiences, *The Visions of Tondal*, the story of an Irish knight who journeys to hell, purgatory, and heaven in the company of his guardian angel, was a popular narrative in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the survival of hundreds of copies of the text in fifteen languages. The text itself was written in the mid-twelfth century by an Irish monk named Marcus in Regensburg, Germany, probably for the Benedictine convent of St. Paul's located there. This particular version is a French translation (*Les Visions du chevalier Tondal*) of the Latin original, commissioned by Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, and written in Ghent by court scribe David Aubert in 1474. It is notable for being the only copy containing a cycle of miniatures, illuminated by the northern French artist Simon Marmion of Valenciennes. It was acquired by the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1987, along with a companion volume (*The Vision of the Soul of Guy de Thurno*). These two manuscripts, along with a third now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (*The Life of St. Catherine*; Ms. nouv. acq. fr. 28650), originally formed one volume.

This i-book includes the essays that were part of the original 1990 print publication, and adds for the first time reproductions of all the miniatures and partial English translations of the French text. The new electronic format boasts an "open to explore" feature, allowing the reader to view each miniature in great detail. It also includes the complete manuscript, which allows the user to turn, virtually at least, each folio, interacting with the manuscript in a way that was once only possible when actually handling the book.

The narrative of *The Visions of Tondal* might remind the modern reader of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, if Ebenezer Scrooge had a singular visit from one angel rather than from each of three ghosts. Like Scrooge, the knight Tondal is a sinner in need of a wake-up call, but rather than visiting his past, present, and future, Tondal's pilgrimage with the angel takes him to hell, purgatory, and heaven. The story opens with Tondal inviting a friend to dinner, and then, Scrooge-like, harassing that friend to repay a debt. Suddenly, he falls down as if dead, but the continued warmth of his body saves him from being buried. As the demons close in, his guardian angel appears and leads his soul to witness the horrific torments of doomed sinners who are endlessly tortured in a variety of gruesome ways, depending on the nature of their sins. Tondal himself is forced to undergo some of these punishments, but always escapes and is led away to the next one by the angel. At each stop he admits that he deserves these torments, but pleads to be delivered from them. The angel assures him that God's forgiveness is stronger than Tondal's transgressions, but warns him to remember these horrible punishments when he returns to his body so that he might be preserved from eternal damnation. After meeting Lucifer, Tondal and the angel journey to various levels of purgatory, and then heaven, so that he can experience the sweet rewards of those who strive to do good, even if they are not entirely successful and must spend some time in purgatory. Ultimately, Tondal's soul returns to his body, and in his newfound faith, he reforms his ways and gives away his riches to the poor, just as Scrooge wakes up from his night journey with a new sense of generosity, gleefully buying Christmas gifts and forgiving debts.

The first essay, Roger Wieck's "The Visionary Tradition in the Middle Ages and *The Visions of Tondal*," looks at the narrative as part of a long tradition of visionary literature by looking back in time at its precedents. Wieck summarizes the history of the creation of the text by Marcus, its quick and wide dissemination in Europe, and its connection to St. Paul's in Regensburg through Marcus's dedication of the tale to a woman named "G," who has been identified as Gisela, the abbess of the convent. Wieck provides an interesting overview of the way that redemptive journeys through hell have served as narrative inspiration over the centuries, from the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* to the Greek myths detailing the descent of various gods into Hades, from Christ's Harrowing of Hell to other Christian morality tales involving angelic companions on visits to the next world. The tour of visionary literature concludes with an examination of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, although Wieck points out that unlike *Tondal* and its predecessors, Dante's poem was not meant to be taken as a chronicle of an actual journey.

The second essay, Thomas Kren's "The Library of Margaret of York and the Burgundian Court," describes the political and artistic context of the patronage of Margaret of York, who commissioned this manuscript. He details the power and influence of the Burgundian court in the fifteenth century and the subsequent art patronage and collecting of figures by Philip the Good and his son and daughter-in-law, Charles the Bold and Margaret of York. Philip owned one of the most extensive secular libraries in Europe, assembled through inheritance, gift, commission, and purchase, with as many as one thousand books. Although Margaret's library was not nearly as extensive, consisting of only twenty volumes, it held some of the most spectacular illuminated manuscripts made during the 1470s, including *The Visions of Tondal*. By virtue of her association with the court, Margaret had access to some of the most celebrated writers and artists of her day, including David Aubert, who wrote a large number of manuscripts for Philip the Good and other members of the Burgundian court, and the artist Simon Marmion, whose other significant works owned by the family included an elaborately-illuminated copy of the *Grandes Chroniques de France* that was received as a gift by Philip, as well as a *Lamentation* painting commissioned by Margaret herself (now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Margaret was part of a larger late medieval trend of noblewoman who commissioned, owned, and used manuscripts. Kren distinguishes her collection from that of other women, however, since it contained many works of a theological and spiritual nature rather than manuscripts dedicated strictly to daily devotional use. Kren suggests that Margaret's notable piety is evident in her sponsorship and patronage of many convents and monasteries in the Low Countries. This religious devotion may have been fostered in part by the particular time in which she lived, an age of warfare and political upheaval. Her husband died in 1477 at the Battle of Nancy, and her two brothers, Edward IV and Richard III of England, formed part of the ill-fated House of York.

The final essay, "The Art of Simon Marmion, Burgundian Illumination of the 1470s, and *The Visions of Tondal*," also by Thomas Kren, provides a deeper look at the artist of the manuscript and the artistic context within which he was working. In fact, although the colophon names David Aubert as scribe, Margaret of York as patron, and Ghent, 1474, as the place and date of production, the name of the artist is not mentioned. The illuminations have been attributed to Simon Marmion, who created paintings and manuscripts for the Burgundian ducal family, as mentioned above. Even though no documents or signatures exist to tie him to particular objects, the evidence suggests that he was in fact the illuminator of *The Visions of Tondal* for Margaret of York. The illustrations of the manuscript exhibit the interest in color and naturalism that is representative of Marmion's oeuvre, particularly in the scenes of fire and atmospheric darkness in the several scenes of hell, and in the more pastel and peaceful scenes of purgatory and paradise. Kren also examines other artists of the period and the fifteenth-century artistic conceptions of heaven and hell, and makes a case for Marmion to take his place alongside better-known artists for his evocative use of color and his skill in portraying the expressive psychology of his figures.

I do have two quibbles regarding the technology. Because it describes the artistic context of the manuscript, the last essay continually refers the reader back to the plates, but there is no easy way to

access them. It would be more convenient and efficient to provide hyperlinks, so that the reader is not forced to take the steps to return to a previous section in order to access the image under discussion. Also, even though the plates themselves could be pinched and thus enlarged, it was difficult to make the larger image stationary.

Despite these minor issues, this i-book is a wonderful publication, and it seems clear that this technology is the future of scholarship on illuminated manuscripts. Presenting a manuscript in digitized form benefits everyone. The cost of production is reduced for the publisher, and the purchase price is affordable for the consumer, particularly since high-quality facsimiles of illuminated manuscripts are stratospherically expensive. The digitization of manuscripts also means increased access. The entire manuscript, rather than the select folios presented in a museum setting or in a more typical publication, can be made available to a broader audience.

There are some downsides to this technology. Digitized manuscripts can be viewed without the stress that physical handling places on the real thing, and so paradoxically, the broad access to manuscripts afforded by virtual technology will in turn restrict access to actual physical objects, even to scholars. Is something lost in the process? One could argue that a manuscript is more than just images and words on a page; there are details and subtleties that are apparent only when they are seen in person. While bindings can be described, the quality and thickness of the parchment detailed, and lacunae, stubs, and other such features noted, the sense of scholarly exploration, to say nothing of personal revelation, is compromised when a manuscript is viewed only in digital form. While the viewer of the digitized manuscript is able virtually to turn the folios, approximating a physical interaction with the book and its pages, it can never be the same as the intimate flesh-upon-flesh experience of fingers touching parchment. There is something about the heft and feel, the very materiality and tactility of the manuscript, which connects our experience to that of previous users and viewers of the same physical object.

Earlier this year, a renowned scholar of illuminated manuscripts mentioned to me that the exploding digitization of manuscript collections meant that the “discovery” was going to be harder and harder to achieve, although he did not begrudge the change. Manuscript studies have always been a rarified field, with material that is difficult to access since it is typically in a vault rather than on view, necessitating travel, academic credentials, and a good visual memory, the latter particularly important since manuscripts were rarely photographed in their entirety, and certainly not in full color. Since few people have a pathway into this esoteric world of hushed libraries, book cradles, and pencils, the possibility always existed of new revelations, of things that had never been noticed, connections that had never been drawn, entire manuscripts that had never been examined. With digitization, such experiences are apt to become rarer as access to manuscripts becomes more and more democratic. So while something is lost—the personal interaction with the object, the potential for secret discovery—something is also gained. The rich world of medieval illuminated manuscripts is opening to a wider audience, and with that comes the possibility of a pooling of knowledge, of collaboration, of shared discovery. This is a good thing, and *The Visions of Tondal* provides a model for how such projects can be presented.

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