



The Valley of Dry Bones in Medieval Art

Aspen Foulk ; Dr. Erika Loic



Abstract

The Roda Bible's Old Testament was written and illustrated in the eleventh century at the monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll in Catalonia, Spain. This was one of multiple bibles created for the purpose of promoting education and discourse amongst the monks. There are illustrations to depict important stories from the various books. Through iconographic comparison of these illustrations to other medieval works of art it can be deciphered what the Ripoll monks found to be important for their needs. The specific story for the Valley of Bones from the story of Ezekiel deals with the anxiety of death in most depictions, but retains a scholarly perspective in the Roda Bibles. By comparing the representation of the imagery of the Valley of Bones across multiple depictions from medieval art it can be seen that the Ripoll monks focused on communication with God and teaching others.

Methods

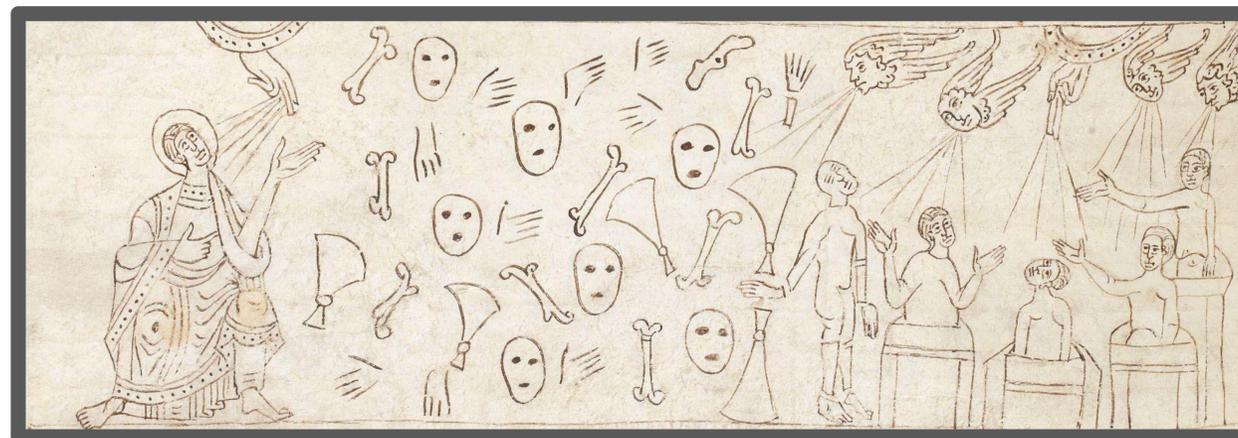
- Analyze the illustrations found in the Roda Bible
- Compare the illustrations to Les Bibles de Ripoll by Anscari M. Mundó
- Compare the annotations of Mundó to The Index of Medieval Art
- Compare the Bible citations to the Latin Vulgate written by St. Jerome
- Iconographic comparison of these Ezekiel illustrations and other contemporary and earlier medieval art.

References

Mundó, Anscari M. *Les Bibles de Ripoll*. Vol. 3, *Estudi dels mss. Vaticà, Lat. 5729 i París, BNF, Lat. 6*. Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, Bisbat de Vic, 2002.

Conclusion

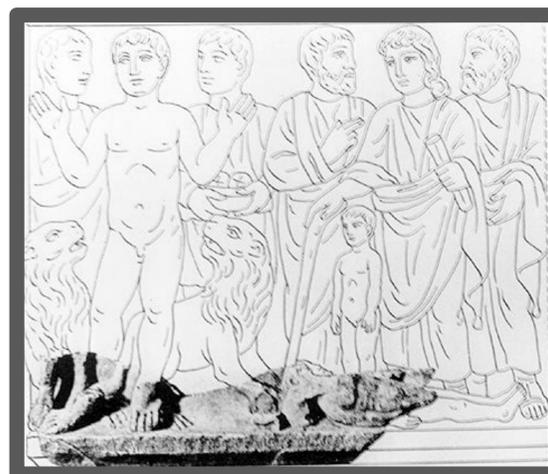
The Roda Bibles were specifically made for use by monks to teach other monks and facilitate learning amongst their community. When looking at the depiction of the Valley of Bones with the context of the rest of the manuscripts page it can be seen that there is a repeated depiction of Ezekiel and God in a communicative or teaching position. God communicates with Ezekiel about what will come to pass with the Valley of Bones and how they will be recovered with the tissues that make up the rest of the person's body and the skeletons brought back to life. Ezekiel is in the same position as the monks would be in their monasteries, communicating with God for inspiration and interpretation. A sarcophagus from Italy carved from marble depicts the Valley of Bones next to a scene of three Magi giving gifts to baby Jesus. In this context the artist is focusing on the idea of rebirth. By placing these images on the sarcophagus the commissioner is hoping to be able to be brought back and live again. Dealing with the anxieties of mortality instead of the institution of teaching. On a different sarcophagus the Valley of Dry Bones is depicted next to the story of Daniel and the Lions den. Here it is focused more on the idea of overcoming death, once again choosing to emphasize a different idea than the one illustrated in the Bible. By utilizing iconographic comparison from the original text of the Bible to the various depictions of the story through the interpretation of people it can clearly be seen that the Roda bibles were focused on maintaining an educational view and keeping the Valley of Bones as unchanged and true to source as possible, where the popular utilization of the story was to represent an overcoming of death or a second chance at life.



Roda Bible (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 6) 11th cent. Spain



Sarcophagus; Rome; 4th century (Vatican Museum, Cat.31450)



Catacombs of Callixtus; sarcophagus fragment; 4th century