



The St Albans Psalter: A Book for Christina of Markyate

Jane Geddes

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The St Albans Psalter, made in the 1130s, is one of the great monuments of English Romanesque painting and has survived the disasters of religious upheaval and war in pristine condition. The sequence of forty full-page miniatures illustrating the Life of Christ establishes their artist, the so-called Alexis Master, as one of the most influential painters in early twelfth-century England. It includes 215 initials illustrating the psalms in a vigorously literal way. Their inventiveness and charm belie the complex theological and personal messages which they convey.

This new book by Dr. Jane Geddes is the first to reproduce so much of the psalter in color, but it also fully integrates the psalter's contents into the historical context of its probable patron, Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans and its recipient, the Anglo-Saxon hermitess Christina of Markyate. Using a record of Christina's life, written by a St Albans monk, the book examines in depth every aspect of the psalter, tying it in closely to the lives of Christina of Markyate and Abbot Geoffrey. Through her close analysis, Geddes provides a profound insight into female literacy, Anglo-Norman relations, the organization of England's premier scriptorium, monk-nun relations and the emerging Anglo-Norman language. This new book demonstrates the significance of the St Albans Psalter, which in social terms is as important as the Bayeux Tapestry, crystallising the artistic, spiritual and emotional integration of Anglo-Saxons and Normans.

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Lorraine Wheat:

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