"THE ST. JOHN'S PSALTER"
THE STYLE AND DATING OF THE MINIATURES IN MS. K. 26 IN ST. JOHN'S LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE

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DONALD ROYCE ROLL

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By

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ABSTRACT

"THE ST. JOHN'S PSALTER"
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An analysis of the forty-six illuminations from the St. John's Psalter (MS.K.26) was executed to determine the style and dating. It was approached from a stylistic comparison of the Oscott Psalter and thirteenth century English wall painting.

Two artists were responsible for the illumination in the St. John's Psalter, an original artist and a later artist who overpainted the manuscript and whose style comes close to that of the Oscott Psalter workshop.

A date for the original artist might be hazarded as around 1260 and a date for the second campaign and the Oscott Psalter would be some ten years later, around 1270.

To

Webster Smith

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MS. 50000, The Oscott Psalter, British Museum, London.

Painting on the Chapter House Ceiling, Oxford, photographed by the author with permission from Oxford University, Oxford.

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THE STYLE AND ARTISTS OF
THE ST. JOHN'S PSALTER

The forty-six full page pictures illustrating the Old and New Testaments at St. John's College, Cambridge, are the subject of a brief notice by S. C. Cockerell in the catalogue of the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition of illuminated manuscripts in London in 1908.[1] Cockerell dates the pictures to be about 1280 and attributes them to three artists. The Old Testament pictures are ascribed to the first artist, the sixteen New Testament pictures from the Annunciation to the Betrayal (ff. 11 - 18v) to the second artist, and the remaining fourteen pictures (ff. 19 - 25v) to the third artist. "They are" adds Cockerell, "monumental compositions of the greatest interest and importance..."[2]

In his catalogue of the manuscripts in the library of St. John's College, Cambridge, published in 1913, M. R. James states that the forty-six pictures in the St. John's Psalter (MS.K.26) belong to the thirteenth century, but offers no more precise date. He calls them "finest work", but questions whether they are of English origin. He describes the pictures between the three artists exactly as

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1 Illustrated Catalogue of the Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts, Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1908, p. 23.

2 Ibid.

Cockerell had done.[3] The catalogue mentions the donor as Caroli Baker, and gives the short memorial that is penned on an opening page:

> "1672. Memoriale ven. viri Francisci Leeke quondam huius Collegii discipuli et nuper Ecclesiae Collegiatae B. Mariae de Southwell Canonici."

At the end of the manuscript a signature is written, "William Leeke" which James dates to be of the sixteenth century. The manuscript is written on vellum with the present size of eleven inches by seven and one-quarter inches.

More recently Professor Brieger in his English Art 1216-1307 praises the quality of the Old Testament pictures in the St. John's Psalter, and evidently attributes the final picture of the whole series, that of King David playing the harp of f. 25v, to the artist of the Old Testament pictures, since he attributes only twenty-nine, not thirty, pictures to "later and weaker hands."[4]

A cursory study of the forty-six pictures in the St. John's Psalter does indeed suggest that they are the work of three artists, or at least that the series can be divided

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3 M. R. James, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of St. John's College, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1913, p. 264 for date; pp. 266 and 268 for division of hands.

4 P. Brieger, English Art 1216-1307, fourth volume in the Oxford History of English Art, Oxford, 1957, p. 182.

into three groups. The first sixteen pictures, those illustrating incidents in the Old Testament, show a masterly technique, a perfectly sustained balance between fine strong pen drawing and thinly applied color wash which though they cover the preliminary drawings, nowhere obscure them (see Figures 1 through 10.). The seventeen pictures following f. 11, illustrating the Annunciation (Figure 11.) present an entirely different appearance. There has been a radical departure from the technique of the earlier pictures, which certainly suggests the participation in the work of a second artist. The entire surface of the picture is covered with thick paint, and details of drawing are coarsely executed with the brush, not with pen and ink. The outlines of figures and objects are confirmed by bold black strokes. The following fifteen pictures, up to and including the scene of the Betrayal on f. 18v agree, more or less with the style of the Annunciation 9see Figures 11 through 20.). Another startling break in style occurs on f. 19, in the picture of the Flagellation (Figure 21.). There is no more densely applied paint, only thin color washes, and this color once more acts as the accompaniment to the sensitive drawn pen lines. Certain outlines are, however, confirmed with bold black strokes, put in rather carelessly with a brush (see Figures 21 through 24.).

The fourteen pictures beginning with the Flagellation of f. 19 (Figure 21.) were attributed to Cockerell and James to a single artist distinct from the previous artists whose hands they distinguished within the series of forty-six pictures. Do these fourteen pictures really form a consistent stylistic group? They do not. The picture of the Crucifixion (Figure 22.) which follows immediately upon the picture of the Flagellation, reverts to the technique of the artist of the Annunciation (Figure 11.). The body of Christ and the faces of St. John and the Virgin are covered with thick paint, and all the details of the design are done with a brush. Yet in the next picture, illustrating the Harrowing of Hell, the dense paint ceases, and fine pen work is allied with thin color washes. This style remains constant until the picture of f. 22v, illustrating the Last Judgement (Figure 23.), whose surface is again largely covered by dense paint and details are coarsely painted, not drawn in ink. It is impossible that a single artist would practice two such distinct techniques, or that his work would exhibit such fluctuations of quality.

Returning to the work of the artist responsible for the Annunciation, and also, according to Cockerell and James, for the subsequent fourteen pictures, is it possible to show that the group of pictures attributed to him are absolutely of a kind? A careful examination of this group shows that

it cannot be attributed to a single artist. The picture of the Annunciation to the Shepherds on f. 12v exhibits many areas of splendid pen drawing lying below transparent color washes. Similarly, large areas of the picture of the Massacre of the Innocents (Figure 16.) are drawn with a pen and only thinly covered with paint. It is impossible, without important reservations, to attribute the Annunciation to the Shepherds and the Massacre of the Innocents to the artist responsible for the densely painted, coarsely drawn, picture of the Annunciation (Figure 11.). The group of New Testament pictures from the Annunciation to the Betrayal is no more self consistent than the group which succeeds it.

The inconsistency of style which characterizes the group of pictures from the Annunciation to the Betrayal is not apparent merely from one picture to the next. Inconsistency of style appears within the individual pictures. Even within the picture of the Annunciation itself (Figure 11.), which defines the canon of Cockerell and James's second artist, the hair of the angel is delicately drawn with a pen and lightly covered with yellow coloring, whereas the surface of his face is painted with dense white paint and his features are put in pale brown paint. In the picture of the Magi Before Herod (Figure 14.) Herod's features are painted in in blue on a white base, whereas the heads of the Magi are drawn with a pen and merely tinted. In the Journey

of the Magi (Figure 13.) the heads and clothes of the Magi are covered by dense coats of paint and exhibit no sign of pen work, whereas the rolling turf on which they ride is drawn with a pen and covered with a transparent green wash. In the Flight into Egypt St. Joseph's head is drawn with a pen, whereas the Virgin's head is entirely painted. In the Baptism of Christ (Figure 17.) the figures of St. John and Christ, and the head and hands of the attending angel, are painted in such a way that the vellum is entirely covered up, but the Holy Dove and the angel's wings are drawn with a pen and only lightly tinted with a color wash. In the picture of the Last Supper (Figure 19.) all the figures are heavily painted and the flat surface of the table is covered by a thick coat of chalky white paint. Yet the drapery which falls in front of the table is lightly colored with a transparent green wash and the folds of cloth are drawn in ink.

Exactly the same inconsistency is found within the heavily painted pictures in the last group of fourteen pictures, attributed by Cockerell and James to a third artist. In the Crucifixion (Figure 22.) the entire upper surface of the picture is thickly painted, but the bottom of the draperies of St. John and the Virgin, and also the mound on which the cross stands, are drawn with pen and ink and only thinly colored. Similarly in the Last Judgement (Figure 23.),

where Christ's draperies and huge glove-like hands are entirely painted, his head is drawn with a pen.

In the group of pictures from the Annunciation to the Betrayal the areas of pen work do not merely lie adjacent to the densely painted areas. In many places fine pen work, deliberately suppressed, is nonetheless still visible below the dense paint. The mantle of the angel in the Annunciation (Figure 11.) shows fine pen work folds beneath the quite different fold system painted on top of them. The sole of the angel's left foot, drawn with a pen, shows through the clumsily painted foot, drawn with its thick black outline. The face of the Virgin in the Nativity is painted on top of another face, with a differently shaped nose (Figure 12.). In the picture of the Triumphal Entry the decorated border of St. Peter's mantle, his left foot, and the off-hind leg of the ass on which Christ rides, can be seen showing through the hind quarters of the little colt, which consists entirely of paint and has no under-drawing. St. Peter, seated at the left in the scene of the Last Supper (Figure 19.), formerly had an ear placed higher on his head than his present ear, and his right hand was formerly much more finely shaped. All the loaves scattered on the table exist in ink under the white painted surface, although they have been put in again, in different places, in black paint on top of the white surface.

Thus the group of pictures attributed by Cockerell and James to the second artist shows not only a curious mixture of styles, a tinted drawing style side by side with a heavily painted style, but also ample evidence that the painted style was working counter to the tinted drawing style, covering it over and reworking details. The present condition of these sixteen New Testament pictures came about only after a second campaign in which a set of tinted drawings were overpainted by a second artist who was not responsible for the original designs. Only a few pictures in the group of fourteen pictures attributed to the third artist bear heavy coats of paint. Cockerell and James thought that they could distinguish a third hand simply because in the Flagellation and most of the subsequent pages a thick coating of latter paint was not imposed on the original finely drawn and colored pictures. The over-painter largely limited himself to adding bold black outlines in paint.

Two, not three, artists were responsible for the forty-six pictures in the St. John's Psalter. All of the forty-six were designed and executed in a style which combines magnificent pen drawing with thin washes of all-over color. The first sixteen New Testament pictures were more or less heavily over-painted by a second and later artist. The last fourteen pictures of the series were for the most part spared of his attentions.

The original unity of the entire series is easily demonstrated. The system of broad tubular V-shaped folds, narrowing and bending at the middle, which is a characteristic of the drapery in the Old Testament pictures, for example, in the figure of Noah entering the Ark (Figure 6.), reappears both in the dark blue drapery covering the legs of the Virgin in the Nativity (Figure 12.), and in the white blanket spread over her bed. The hand with which the shepherd restrains his dog in the picture of the Annunciation to the Shepherds is precisely the same as the hands of Adam and Eve clutching fig leaves in the scene of the Expulsion (Figure 2.). The head of the angel was clearly drawn by the same artist who drew the head of the woman at the left of the Judgement of Solomon (Figure 10.). Buried beneath the paint of the angel's nimbus is another pen drawn nimbus of the same type as the one found throughout the Old Testament series. The pointed roofs of the turrets at the extreme right and left at the top of the picture of the Annunciation to the Shepherds formerly had open-ended tiles, now buried in paint, exactly as in the turrets above the Judgement of Solomon (Figure 10.). Beneath the painted pattern on top of the Virgin's throne in the Adoration of the Magi (Figure 15.), another pattern can still be seen which corresponds exactly to that on top of the throne of the

three-headed angel worshipped by Abraham (Figure 7.). The magnificently drawn children in the Massacre of the Innocents (Figure 16.) must be attributed to the artist who drew the nude child in the Judgement of Solomon (Figure 10.). The great open loops of drapery in front of the table in the Last Supper (Figure 19.), are the same loops on Cain's hood in the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel (Figure 3.), and on the lining of the mantle below God's raised arm in the picture of Noah commanded to build the Ark (Figure 4.). Another example, despite the overpaint, is the bearded head of the soldier who lifts his hand over Christ's head in the Betrayal (Figure 20.). This was clearly originally designed by the artist who drew the powerful head of Abraham in the Sacrifice of Issac (Figure 9.). The head of Christ in the Flagellation (Figure 21.) is close to that of God in the scene of the Condemnation of Cain, and the whole of Christ's figure resembles the nude Adam and Eve in the scene of the Fall (Figure 1.). Joseph of Arimathaea in the Descent from the Cross wears exactly the same shoes, strapped at the ankle, as Cain and Abel in the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel (Figure 3.). The shoes of Noah (Figures 4 through 7.) can be paralleled to the shoes worn by the soldiers in the Flagellation of Christ (Figure 21.).

If a comparison between the scene of Noah building the Ark (Figure 11.), where the drawing is of a consistently high quality, and the scene of the Flagellation (Figure 12.), where the drawing style is slack and cursory, might be thought to challenge the attribution of all the pictures in the St. John's Psalter to one hand, it must be noted that even within the sixteen Old Testament pictures the artist takes rather less care on some occasions than on others. For example, the head of Abraham serving food to the Trinity (Figure 8.), which is traced through the vellum from the head on the obverse (Figure 7.), is much less distinguished than its original. The heads of Noah's family entering the Ark on f. 8 (Figure 6.) have not had lavished on them the care and delicacy which is spent on the head of Abel in the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel (Figure 3.), but the same hand is quite clearly responsible for Abel and for Noah's family. Similarly one hand, growing weary on occasion but returning to its full mastery in the figure of King David on f. 25v (Figure 24.), can be discerned throughout the forty-six pictures in the St. John's Psalter (MS.K.26).

THE ST. JOHN'S PSALTER AND THE OSCOTT PSALTER

To place the St. John's Psalter (MS.K.26) within the context of English thirteenth century manuscript illumination,

a comparison can be made with the Oscott Psalter.

In his recent book Brieger notes that there is some affinity between the St. John's Psalter and the Oscott Psalter, formerly Dyson Perrins Ms. 11, now in the British Museum. He writes, "There seems to be a relationship, not so much in style but in temperament, between the Oscott Psalter and the curious Old Testament illustrations which precede the psalter (MS.K.26 of St. John's Coll., Cambridge)".[5] This statement considerably underestimates the connection between the two manuscripts, which is intimate and direct. Whole compositions, and details of heads and figures are shared by the St. John's College and the Oscott Psalter.

In a small half-roundel on f. 10 of the Oscott Psalter (Figure 28.), Noah is represented boring a nail hole in the hull of the Ark with an auger, as of f. 7v of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 5.). At the bottom of f. 10 of the Oscott Psalter (Figure 28.) are two quarter roundels containing the heads of two men. The Jews' hats of crumpled linen with the characteristic peak at the center are exactly like the hat of Noah in the pictures of ff. 7, 7v and 8 of the St. John's Psalter (Figures 4 through 6.). On f. 8 of the Oscott Psalter (Figure 26.) the scenes of the Journey of the Magi, with horses facing

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5 Ibid., pp. 181-2.

in different directions, and the Magi before Herod, with the figure of Herod writing in his chair, are closely connected to the versions of these subjects of the St. John's Psalter (Figures 13 and 14.). The one feature of the Oscott Psalter's picture of the Magi before Herod which does not appear in the St. John's Psalter version, the drapery hooked over the points of Herod's crown (see lower roundel of Figure 26.), can be paralleled in the picture of King David of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 24.). The scenes of the Adoration of the Magi and the Warning of the Magi in the St. John's Psalter and the Oscott Psalter also show marked agreement in composition and iconography (compare Figure 15 with Figure 27.). The woman in the foreground of the Massacre of the Innocents of the Oscott Psalter (Figure 31.) crouches in the same position and gives battle with the same weapon as the woman in the Massacre (Figure 16.) of the St. John's Psalter. The figure of St. Elizabeth (Figure 25.) of the Oscott Psalter with her curious almond-shaped eye, closely resembles the figure of the woman holding the child in the Judgement of Solomon (Figure 10.) of the St. John's Psalter. The picture of King David on f. 15v of the Oscott Psalter (Figure 33.) shows a striking resemblance in expression, disposition of body, and the grand scale on which the figure is conceived, to the corresponding picture of f. 25v

(Figure 24.) of the St. John's Psalter. King David's harp is designed in exactly the same way in the St. John's Psalter and in the Oscott Psalter, ornamented with a dragon whose foliated tail is coiled around the stem of the harp.

The biblical illustrations in the Oscott Psalter are limited to roundels and half-roundels. But the full page pictures representing the Apostles and King David as Psalmist show complete agreement in layout with the Flagellation, the Harrowing of Hell, and King David on ff. 19, 20 and 25v (Figures 21 and 24.). These pictures in the St. John's Psalter, and the pictures representing single figures in the Oscott Psalter have an inner frame at the top consisting of a lobed arch, the lobes being painted a different color from the arch proper. In the spandrels above the arch are walls, turrets, and tiled roofs of a highly characteristic design (compare Figures 33 and 34 of the Oscott Psalter with Figures 21 and 24 of the St. John's Psalter). All these points of resemblance make it certain that the Oscott Psalter and the St. John's Psalter are historically connected with one another.

In order to establish the St. John's Psalter in its proper place in the chronology of English manuscript

illumination it is essential to discover the precise nature of its connection with the Oscott Psalter. The Oscott Psalter is a sumptuously painted manuscript. The principal colors are gold, dark blue, a dull grey-blue modelled with brown, a bright strong orange, crimson and white. All detailed features of the pictures are painted over a colored base, and there is abundant use of black outlines. The color range and the painting technique correspond exactly to those of the overpainted areas in the St. John's Psalter. A broad field of gold serves as the background of the Annunciation and many of the subsequent New Testament illustrations in the St. John's Psalter. Dark blue appears, for example, in the drapery covering the lower part of the Virgin's body in the Nativity (Figure 12.). The very characteristic grey-blue, modelled with a curious oily brown pigment appears in the drapery of St. Joseph in the Nativity. The harsh orange appears on the wings of the angel in the Annunciation (Figure 11.) and consistently thereafter. Crimson appears on the cloak of the Magus at the left of the picture of the Journey of the Magi (Figure 13.). White is used as a base color throughout the over-painted pictures in the St. John's Psalter, for example, in the inner surface of the angel's wings and the entire figure of the Virgin in the Annunciation and in the vivid white glove of the

Magi and King Herod in the picture on f. 13v (Figures 11 and 14.). Black outlines are characteristic of the over-painter's style in the Flagellation (Figure 21.).

The aedicules in the spandrels in the picture in the Oscott Psalter representing single figures are boldly and brightly painted. Walls are chalky white with windows and brick courses are put in black paint with the point of a brush. The tiled roofs are orange and blue (Figures 33 and 34.). In the St. John's Psalter the aedicules which are still free of overpaint are very delicately tinted with green and yellow washes, and much of the vellum remains uncolored. All architectural details are drawn with a pen. But in several of the overpainted pages the walls are chalky white, tiles are blue and orange, and brick courses and other details are firmly painted in black. Since the aedicules in the Oscott Psalter are designed in exactly the same manner as those in the St. John's Psalter, the resemblance of the overpainted aedicules in the St. John's Psalter to those in the Oscott Psalter approaches identity.

The comparison of a typical overpainted head in the St. John's Psalter, that of King Herod in the picture of the Magi before Herod, with the head of Zacharias in the

Visitation of the Oscott Psalter, shows close agreement in style (compare Figures 14 and 25.). In both cases the face is covered with matt body color, onto which the features are painted. Zacharias' beard and hair are painted in grey-blue on white. In the St. John's Psalter Herod's features themselves correspond with the same coloring.

On f. 11v of the Oscott Psalter (Figure 29.) the scene of Lot's escape from Sodom is represented. Lot's wife stands at the left, an amorphous white figure with the huge head and blurred features of a fetus. The artist who overpainted the pictures in the St. John's Psalter has given precisely the same appearance to Lazarus in the Raising of Lazarus of f. 17 of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 18.). This is a highly particular correspondence, arguing a common workshop for the Oscott Psalter and the overpainted pictures in the St. John's Psalter. There are other such correspondences. The short stiff scroll held by the angel in the Annunciation in the St. John's Psalter (Figure 11.) is thickly painted in white and has a black outline all around it. The words "Ave Maria" are inscribed in ornamental capitals in black paint on the white scroll. The scroll in the hands of the angel in the Annunciation of f. 7 in the Oscott Psalter (Figure 25.) is painted and inscribed in the same way.

The figure of Christ in the picture of the Baptism on f. 16v of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 17.) is the work of the artist responsible for the overpainting. All the details of drawing and modelling of this figure are remarkably paralleled in the corresponding figure of Christ on f. 14v of the Oscott Psalter (Figure 32.). Both figures exhibit precisely the same clumsily constructed left arm, surrounded by a firm black outline. The two figures are not by the same hand. The Oscott Psalter's Baptism shows a slightly more angular style. But the overpainted figure of Christ in the St. John's Psalter and the figure in the Oscott Psalter are clearly enough contemporary products of one and the same workshop.

On f. 25v of the St. John's Psalter the original artist drew the strings of King David's harp with a pen on the uncolored vellum. The pen drawn strings can still be seen passing across the palm of King David's left hand (Figure 24.). The artist responsible for the overpainting of the St. John's Psalter filled the area within the harp with black paint and restrung the harp with lines of white paint. In the Oscott Psalter's version of King David the area within the harp is filled with black paint, on top of which the harp strings are painted in white. This exact agreement again shows that the St. John's Psalter was overpainted by the artist working in the

closest association with the artist responsible for the Oscott Psalter.

There is ample evidence, therefore, for defining the nature of the connection between the St. John's Psalter and the Oscott Psalter. The comparison of the overpainted areas in the St. John's Psalter with the pictures in the Oscott Psalter suggests that the St. John's Psalter was actually repainted in the workshop which produced the Oscott Psalter. The presence of the St. John's Psalter in the Oscott Psalter workshop accounts satisfactorily for the remarkable correspondences between the two manuscripts in iconography, composition and layout of the pages. The St. John's Psalter is the archetype of a large part of the Oscott Psalter. The artists of the Oscott Psalter were of first rank, and so they used their archetype freely. This freedom extended to the partial reworking of the older manuscript to bring it into line with the full painting technique practiced in the Oscott Psalter workshop.

Whatever the date and provenance of the Oscott Psalter may be, the repainted areas of the St. John's Psalter share that date and provenance. Whatever the date of the Oscott Psalter, the St. John's Psalter in its original, unrepainted state must be earlier but

it is unlikely to be of different provenance since not much time can have elapsed between the original completion of the manuscript and its renovation. It is necessary therefore to enquire into the place of the Oscott Psalter in the history of English thirteenth century painting.

THE ST. JOHN'S PSALTER'S DATE

Before proposing a date, an investigation of the closely related Oscott Psalter must be undertaken to ascertain when the overpainted illuminations were done in the St. John's Psalter. Unfortunately, no conclusion as to the provenance of the Oscott Psalter can be drawn from the Calendar, and the origin of the Oscott Psalter can only be determined or guessed at on the basis of style.[6] Miss Saunders in her book on English illumination writes: "The whole style of the figure painting would point strongly to a connection with the paintings at Westminster Abbey."[7] After comparing the Oscott Psalter figures to the painting of St. Faith at Westminster Abbey, she continues: "The resemblance is still much stronger with the painting of the much injured Westminster

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6 For the Calendar and other contents see Sir George Warner, Descriptive Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts in the Library of C. W. Dyson Perrins, Oxford, 1920. pp. 40-42; also Brieger, Op. cit., p. 180.

7 O. Elfrida Saunders, English Illumination, Florence, 1928, p. 67.

re-table...."[8]

The excellence of technique displayed in the Oscott Psalter, and the troubled sensitive heads of the Apostles (Figure 34.), with their heavy rolling locks of hair and sunken cheeks, certainly suggest a connection with Westminster work. However, apart from the general character of the heads, the Oscott Psalter does not come particularly close to the retable. The figures on the retable, for example, the best preserved of the major figures, that of St. Peter[9], are extremely elongated, with very small heads and elegantly gesturing hands. Draperies are thin, soft and gleaming, and are ornamented with wide patterned borders. These borders ripple to and fro across the gently curved figure of St. Peter, increasing the over-all impression of suavity and grace. The refinement, and the elaborately gesticulating hands of the figures in the retable have, as is widely acknowledged, their best manuscript counter-part in the Douce Apocalypse[10], rather

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8 Ibid., p. 68.

9 E. W. Tristram, English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century, Oxford, 1950. pl. 5.

10 See M. R. James, The Apocalypse in Latin and French (Bodleian Ms. Douce 180), Roxburghe Club, Oxford, 1922. Compare the Westminster retable with pp. 13, 16, 31,33, 51. See also Francis Wormald, "Painting in Westminster and Contemporary Painting," in the Proceedings of the British Academy, xxxv, 1949, pp. 170-7.

than in the Oscott Psalter. In the Oscott Psalter, King David and the Apostle (Figures 33 and 34.) are tall, with small heads like the retable's St. Peter, but others of the figures are shorter, sturdier, more matter of fact. They have large feet which they plant resolutely on the ground, and their gestures are urgent, not slow and mannered. None of their draperies are given a detailed finish of surface, but are flat in color, hanging in broad broken folds and descending vertically to the hem in sharp jabbing pleats (Figure 34.).

The fact that the Oscott Psalter exhibits none of the elegance and extreme sophistication of the retable suggests that it is earlier than the retable. The swaying postures and the soft, fluid draperies of the retable are apparent in all its successors, and no manuscript in which the facial types so nearly approach Westminster Work as the Oscott Psalter could have remained unaffected by the new "soft" manner, if the "soft" manner had begun to be practised.

Brieger suggests that the Apostles in the Oscott Psalter have their nearest parallel in the four Apostles on the vault of the Chapter House at Oxford.[11] This

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11 Brieger, Op. cit., p. 181; also see Figure 35.

comparison is a good one. The proportions of the figures, their resolute air, their long feet and toes, and the large broken folds and occasional open loops, noticeably in Oxford St. Matthew and St. John, agree well with the figures in the Oscott Psalter.[12] The heads of the Oxford figures are not far removed from those in the wall paintings in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel at Winchester,[13] so that the Oxford figures are unlikely to date from the second half of the thirteenth century. The Oscott Psalter figures are later, belonging to the second half of the century, but before the Westminster retable. In his essay on the paintings in Westminster Abbey, Professor Wormald states that there is "nothing intrinsically impossible" in dating the Westminster retable to about 1270.[14]

Having compared the Oscott Psalter with paintings at Westminster and at Oxford, comparisons will now be made with the pictures in the St. John's Psalter.

The head of Abraham kneeling and adoring the three-headed angel on f. 9 of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 7.) is strikingly similar to the head of St. Peter in the

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12 Tristram, Op. cit., pls. 85-92.

13 Ibid., pls. 31-32.

14 Wormald, Op. cit., p. 173.

Westminster retable.[15] St. Peter's nose is drawn in with a continuous line running from the eyebrow round the point, and running on with a little extra stroke towards the mouth. The nostril is indicated by a separate small hooked stroke. Precisely the same highly individual method of constructing the nose appears in the head of Abraham in the St. John's Psalter. The down-turned mouth, the round area of the bare chin, the elaborate segmentation of the beard, as well as the shape of the whole head, agrees precisely with the retable and the St. John's Psalter.

St. Peter's brow in the retable is surrounded by short curling locks of hair, while the remainder of his hair runs back smoothly, with waves at the nape of the neck. These features occur in the head of Abel on f. 5v of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 3.). Abraham on f. 9 of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 7.) has a small forelock which falls forward, the rest of his hair sweeps back. This exactly corresponds to the hair style of the middle bearded head in the picture of the Feeding of the Five Thousand on the retable.[16] The large ear of St. Peter, with the small

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[15] Tristram, Op. cit., pl. 6.

[16] Wormald, Op. cit., pl. 5.

rolling curls immediately above it, is exactly matched by the large ear and small curls of God on f. 6v, the Condemnation of Cain, of the St. John's Psalter. The more or less frontal beardless head, inclined towards the left in the Feeding of the Five Thousand, closely resembles the heads of the angel of f. 9 of the St. John's Psalter (Figure 7.), notably the head inclined to the left. The profile head of Cain on f. 5v (Figure 3.), with his pendulous nose, firm lips, and small pointed chin, agrees interestingly with the winged profile head in one of the imitation cameos on the frame of the retable.[17] The firm crooked nose, the cheeks creased in a smile, the full lips, the curved line of the jaw in the head of Cain on f. 6v of the St. John's Psalter corresponds to the foremost of the heads on the double-headed cameo on the frame of the retable.[18] Many of the figures in the St. John's Psalter have broad ornamented borders to their mantles, which run across the figures, for example, the three-headed angel on ff. 9 and 9v (Figures 7 and 8.), and Noah kneeling on f. 7 (Figure

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[17] M. Rickert, Painting in Britain: The Middle Ages, London, 1954, pl. 114A.

[18] Wormald, Op. cit., pl. 2.

4.). This feature agrees well with the retable. The figure of Abel on f. 5v (Figure 3.) approaches the canon proportions followed in the retable. But the figures in the St. John's Psalter are generally shorter and more heavily built, for example, Cain on f. 5v (Figure 3.). The drapery style in the original parts of the manuscript is quite different from that of the retable. Draperies are arranged in wide broken triangular folds, which reveal little of the bodily structure below, and indeed cause many of the figures to appear entirely flat. There is little feeling in the St. John's Psalter for the plastic bulk of the figures which is an admirable feature of the Westminster retable. Except for hints here and there, for example, in the figure of the angel in the Expulsion (Figure 2.), there is in the St. John's Psalter none of the easy elegance which characterizes the retable. Whereas in the drawing and the extremely delicate tinting of his heads the original artist of the St. John's Psalter is rapidly approaching the style of the retable, his figures and draperies have not yet come within the sight of that style, though they are, perhaps less far from the Douce Apocalypse. It is impossible that the original artist of the St. John's Psalter can be independent of the workshop which produced the retable, but it is equally impossible that being so

closely associated with that workshop he should have produced the St. John's Psalter at a date subsequent to that of the retable.

The original artist of the St. John's Psalter, whose style is characterized by an admirable balance of pen drawing and color wash worked prior to the retable, however, is quite close to the style of the workshop. A date for the original artist might be hazarded as around 1260. The St. John's Psalter was overpainted by an artist whose style comes close to that of the Oscott Psalter which was added within the next ten years.

THE ST. JOHN'S PSALTER AND THIRTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH ART

Why was the St. John's Psalter overpainted? The original colored drawings are brilliantly accomplished, far finer in quality than the overpainted sections of the manuscript. That work of such high quality was buried beneath dense coatings of later paint suggests that in the decade from 1265 to 1275 a revolution in taste had taken place. The idea of how an illuminated manuscript ought to look had changed radically.

The seeds of this revolution are already present in the original style of the St. John's Psalter. The Old

Testament illustrations are colored drawings, not, properly speaking, tinted drawings such as occur in the Westminster Psalter, the Paris Apocalypse, and the Dyson Perrins Apocalypse. The figures in the St. John's Psalter are covered with thin color washes, and so are the backgrounds. The technique employed in the original parts of the St. John's Psalter provides a beginning of a trend away from tints. In three later manuscripts, the Abingdon Apocalypse, Lambeth 209, and the Yates Thompson Apocalypse, the chalky color washes become the dominant partner, and the formal structure erected by the pen line begins to weaken. This increased emphasis on the paint has its natural outcome in the richly modelled paintings of the Douce Apocalypse, with its obvious connections with the sumptuously painted Westminster

The painters of illuminated manuscripts in the second half of the thirteenth century were making a deliberate effort to revive the type of coloring employed in the late Romanesque manuscripts of about 1200. Wormald makes a most interesting comparison between the Westminster retable and late twelfth century metalwork.[19] The revival

[19] Wormald, Op. cit., pp. 168-9.

at Westminster of the appearance presented by late twelfth century metalwork would provide a parallel for the revival of Romanesque coloring by court artists. The panels of Klosterneuberg Altar incidentally, are shaped in exactly the same way as the trefoil headed Old Testament pictures in the St. John's Psalter. Similar trefoil headed compartments occur on the inner face of the tomb of Henry III at Westminster.

A change of taste must largely account for the extraordinary number of important manuscripts which show evidence of overpaint applied at about 1270. But a habit of mind may also be discerned in this apparently barbarous repainting of older manuscripts, a habit acquired by artists accustomed to dealing with large-scale wall paintings. The records of the royal works at Winchester and Westminster are full of references to the renovation and refurbishment of wall paintings decorating the royal apartments. The paintings in the Painted Chamber at Westminster were constantly being renewed, and Wormald states that "from what one can see from the copies the composition of some of the paintings look as if it were earlier than the actual style of painting."[20] Thus the paintings in the Painted Chamber

[20] Ibid., p. 172.

provide an analogy for the two levels of work to be discerned in the St. John's Psalter. Apart from the strong evidence of the similarity between the heads drawn and colored by the original artist of the St. John's Psalter and the heads in the Westminster retable, and the evidence of similarity between the painting style of the later sections in the St. John's Psalter and the Oscott Psalter, the very fact that the St. John's Psalter was overpainted quite soon after its completion may be taken as evidence that it was, both in its original and in its overpainted condition, a product of the Court School.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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FIGURES

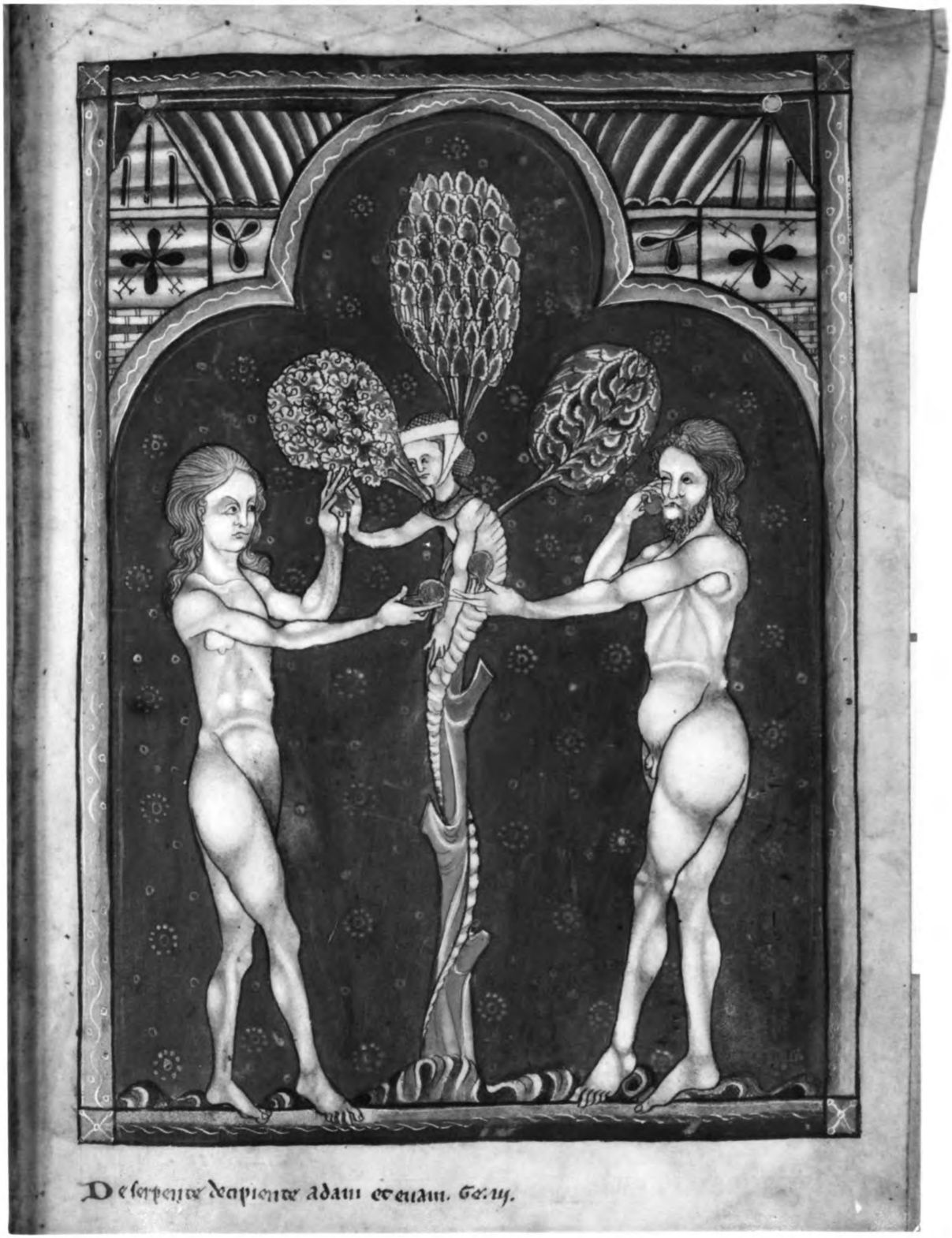

Figure 1. St. John's Psalter, f. 4,
The Fall

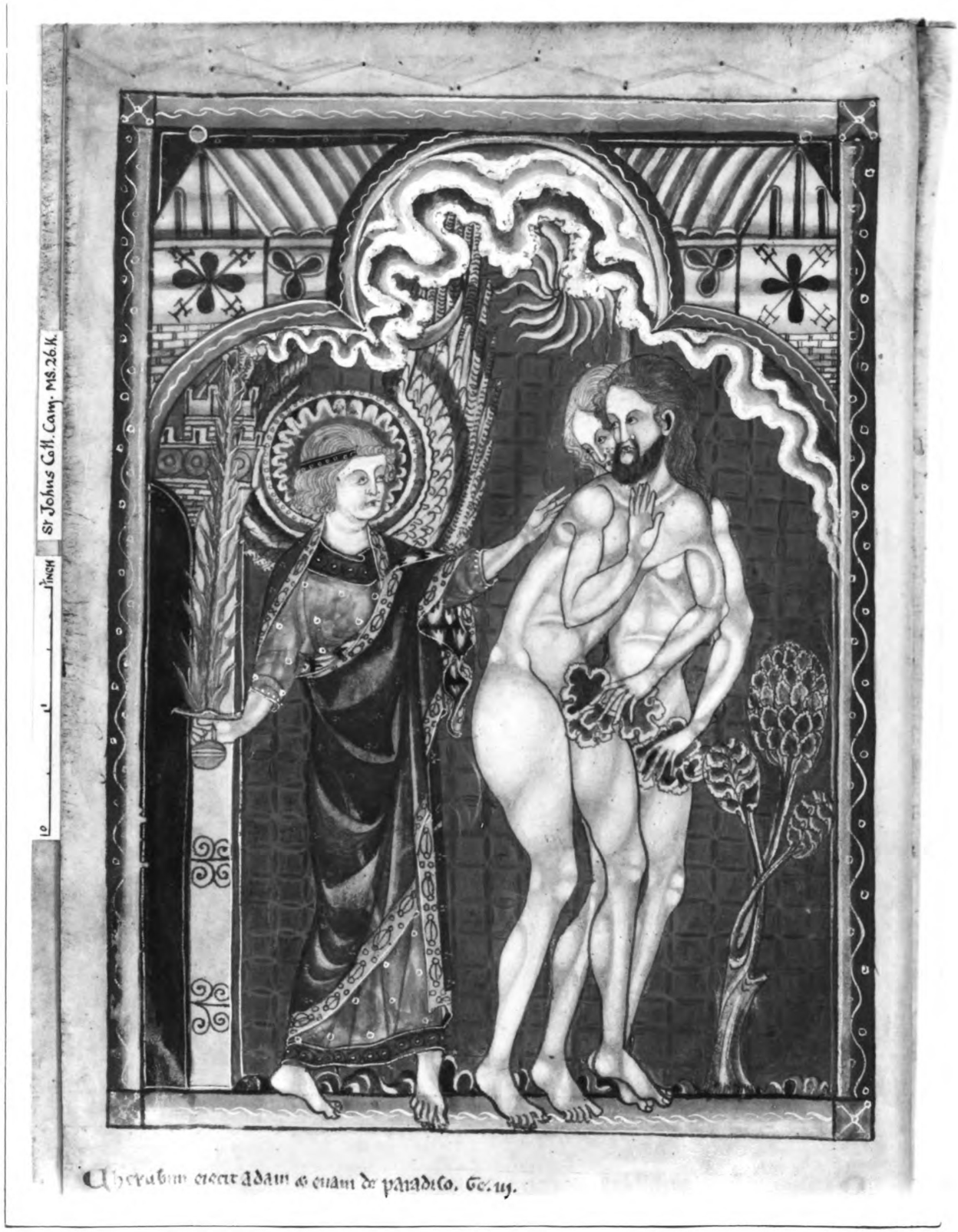

Figure 2. St. John's Psalter, f. 4v,
The Expulsion

Figure 3. St. John's Psalter, f. 5,
Sacrifice of Cain and Abel

Figure 4. St. John's Psalter, f. 7,
Noah Commanded to Build the Ark

Figure 5. St. John's Psalter, f. 7v,
Noah Building the Ark

Figure 6, St. John's Psalter, f. 8,
Noah Entering the Ark

Figure 7. St. John's Psalter, f. 9,
Abraham Adoring the Trinity

Figure 8. St. John's Psalter, f. 9v,
Abraham Serving Food to the Trinity

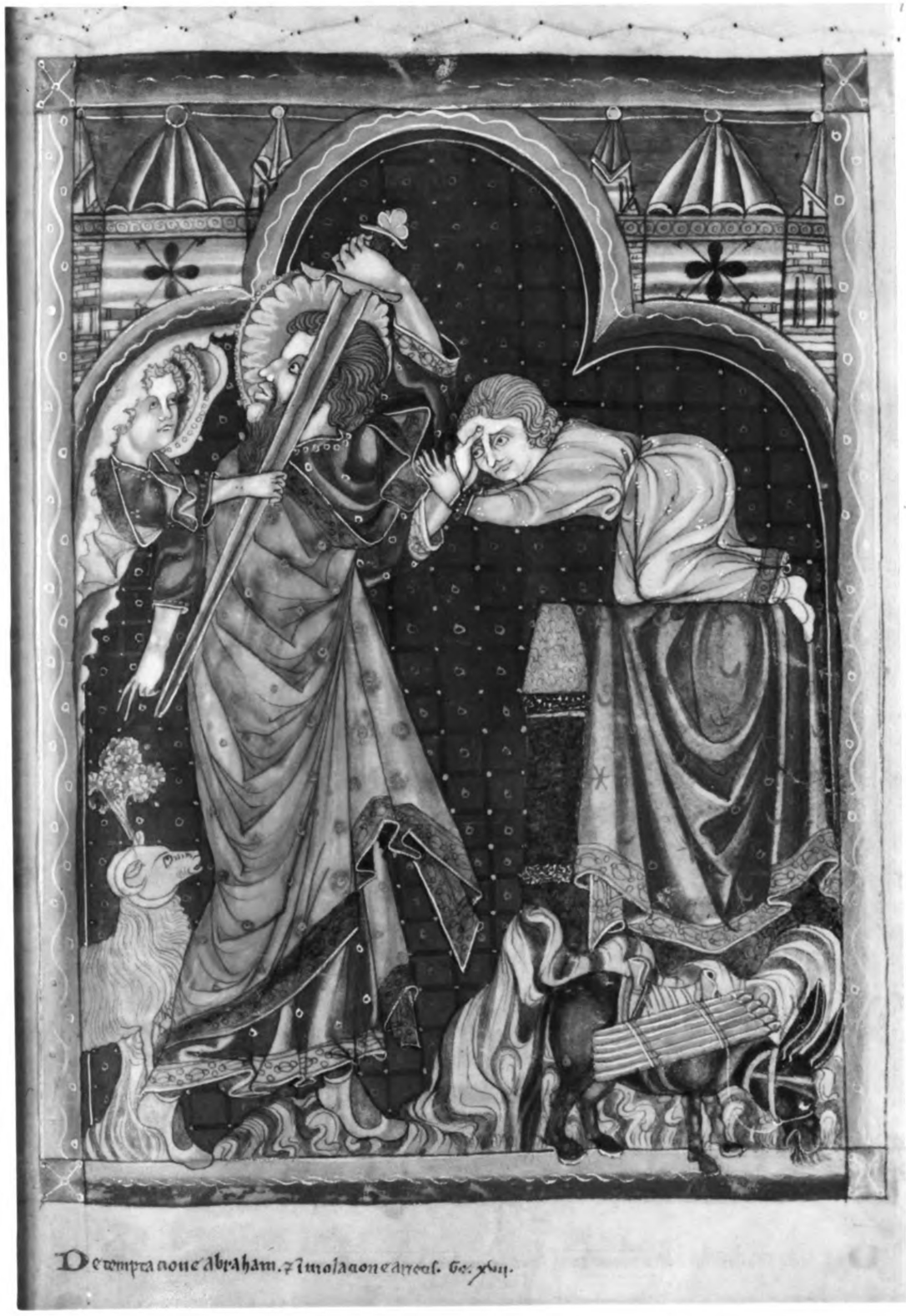

Figure 9. St. John's Psalter, f. 10,
Sacrifice of Issac

Figure 10. St. John's Psalter, f. 10v,
The Judgement of Solomon

Figure 11. St. John's Psalter, f. 11,
The Annunciation

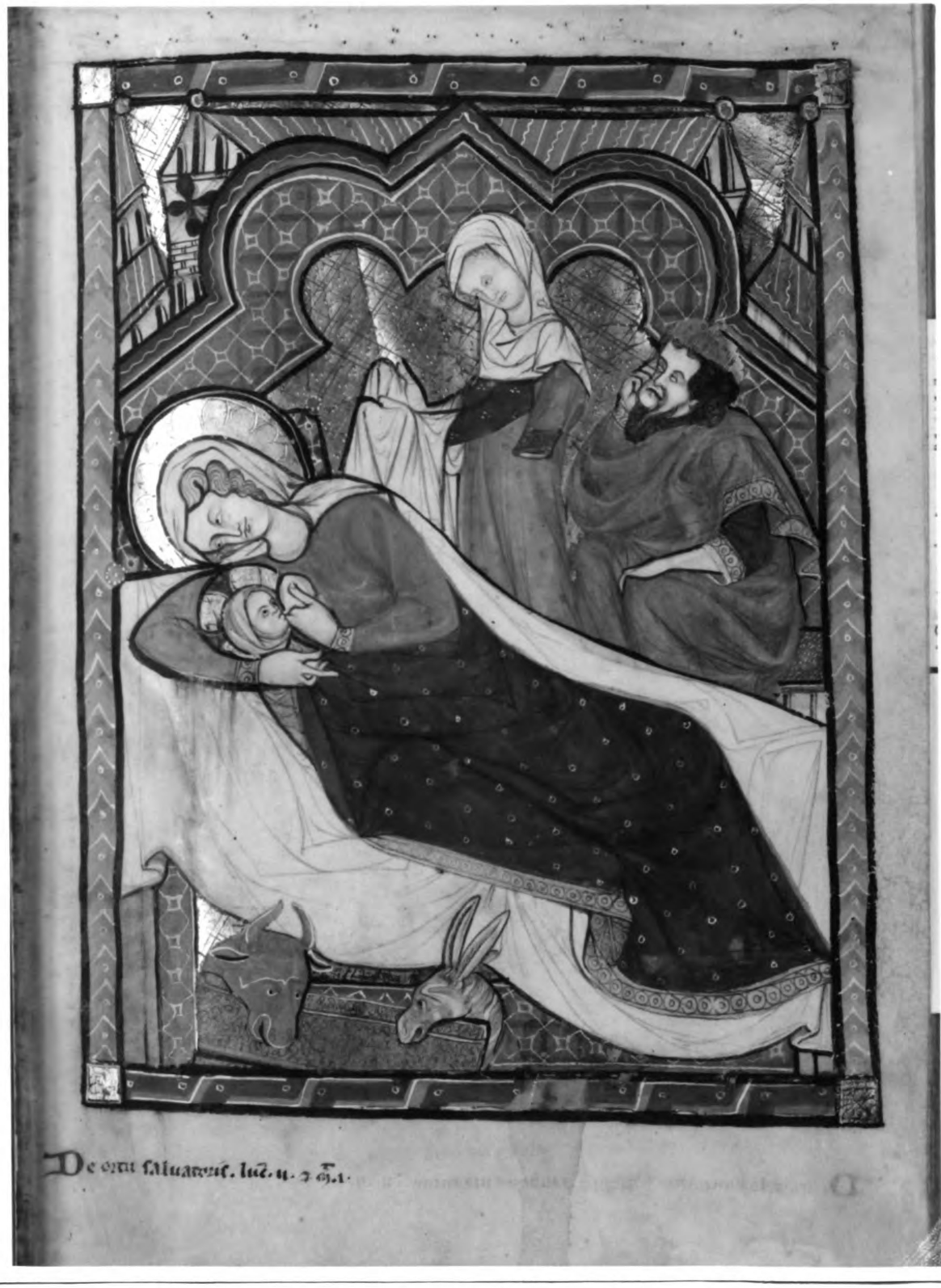

Figure 12. St. John's Psalter, f. 12,
The Nativity

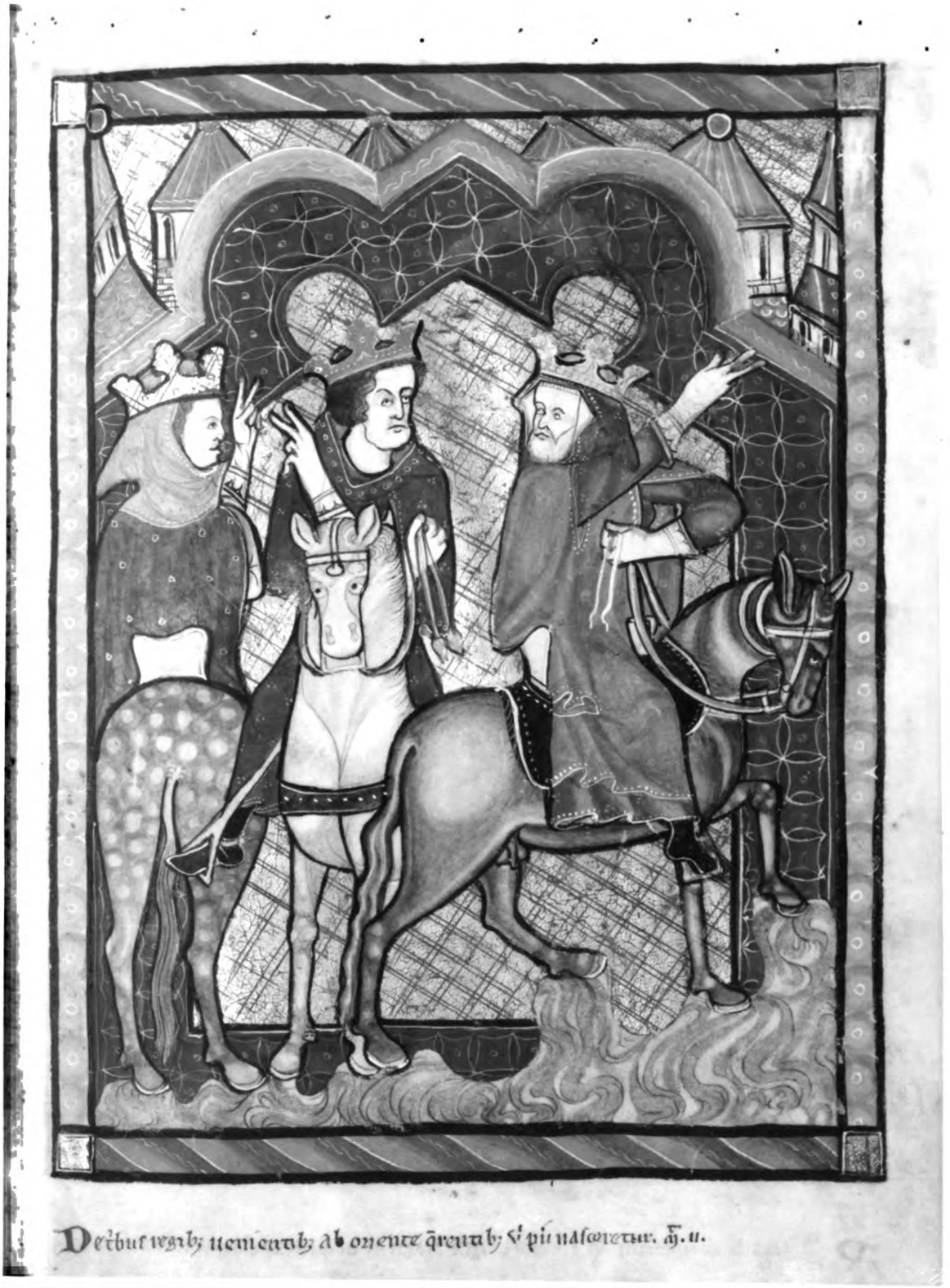

Figure 13. St. John's Psalter, f. 13,
Journey of the Magi

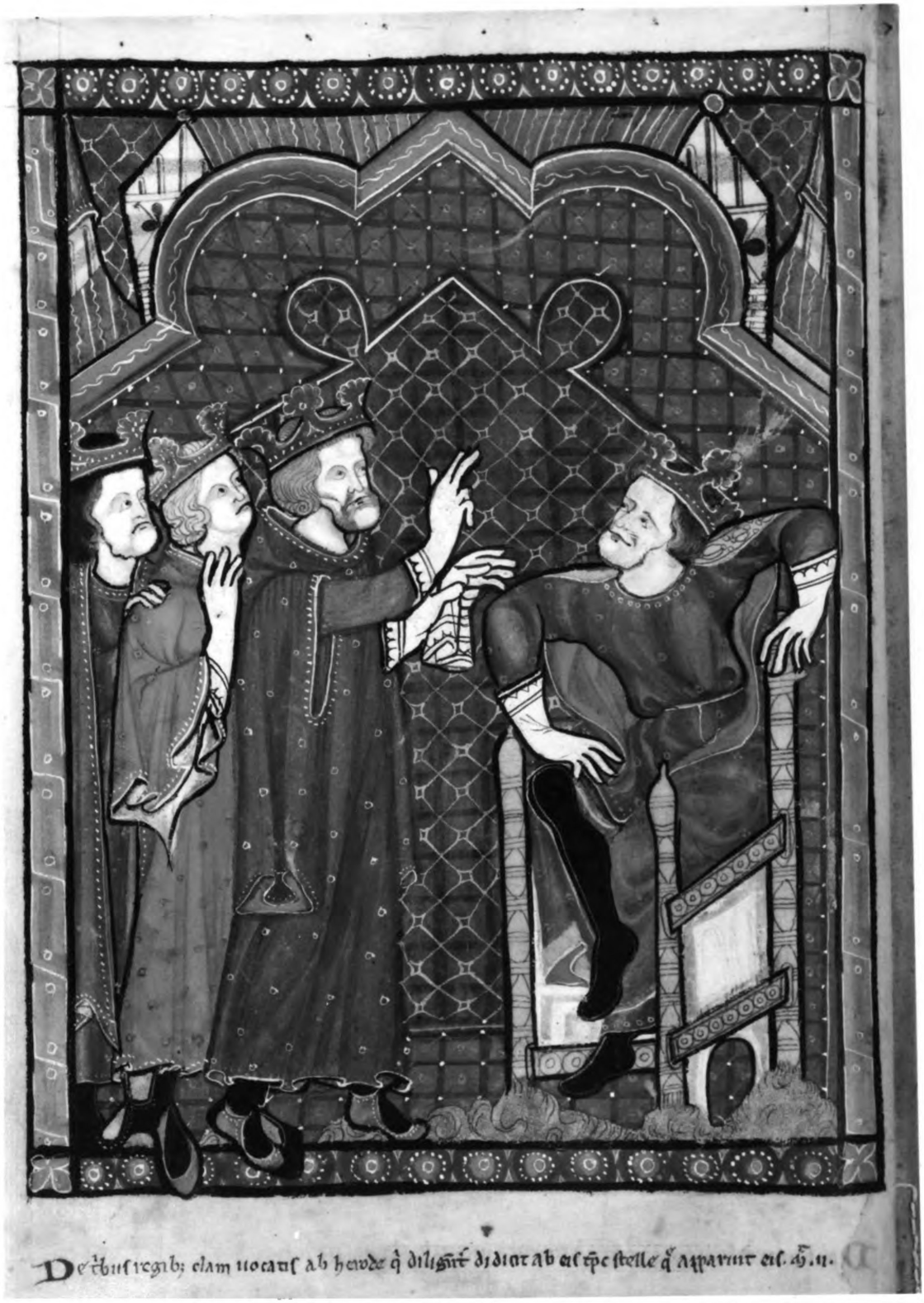

Figure 14. St. John's Psalter, f. 13v,
The Magi Before Herod

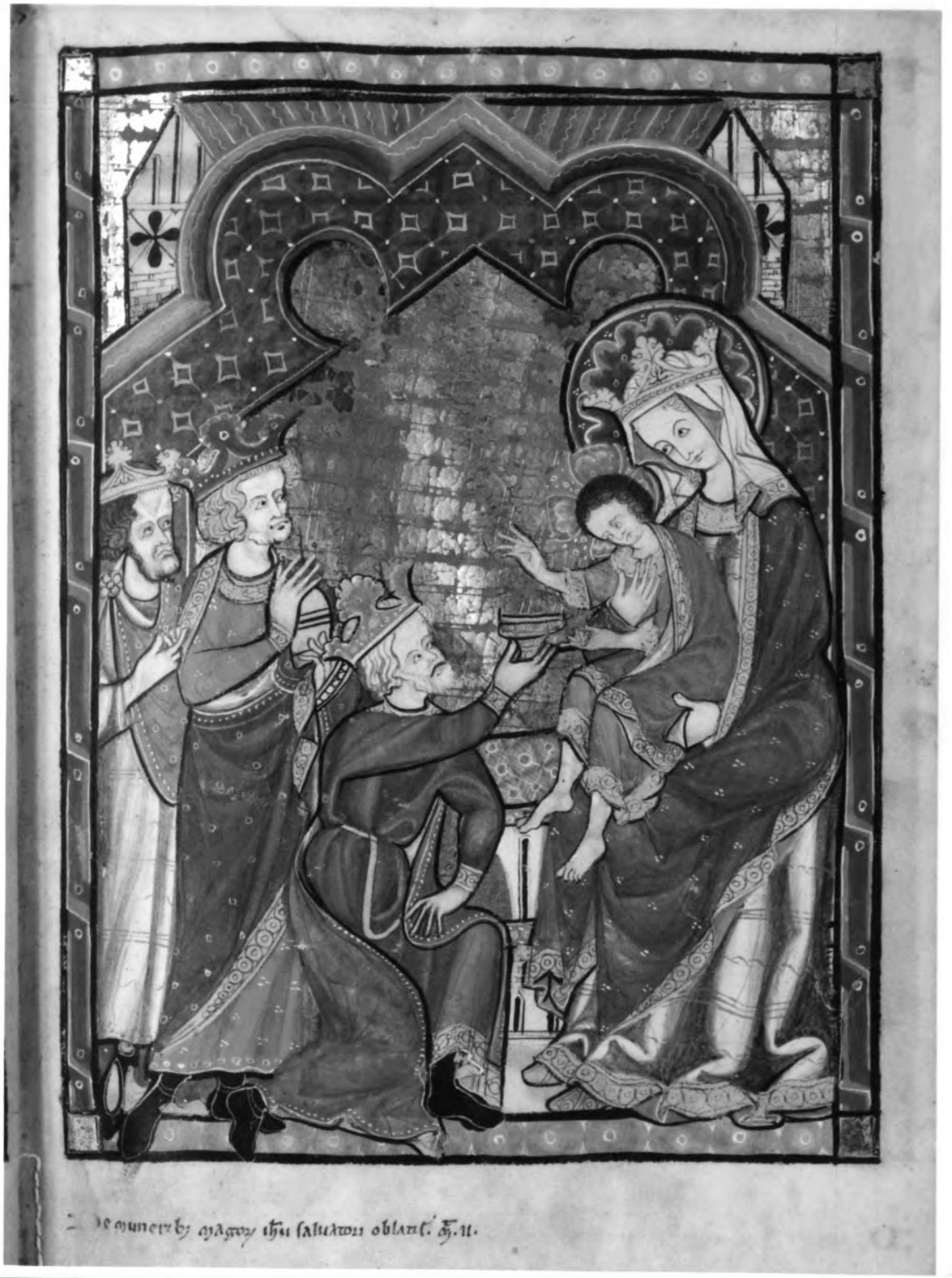

Figure 15. St. John's Psalter, f. 14,
The Adoration of the Magi

Figure 16. St. John's Psalter, f. 15v,
The Massacre of the Innocents

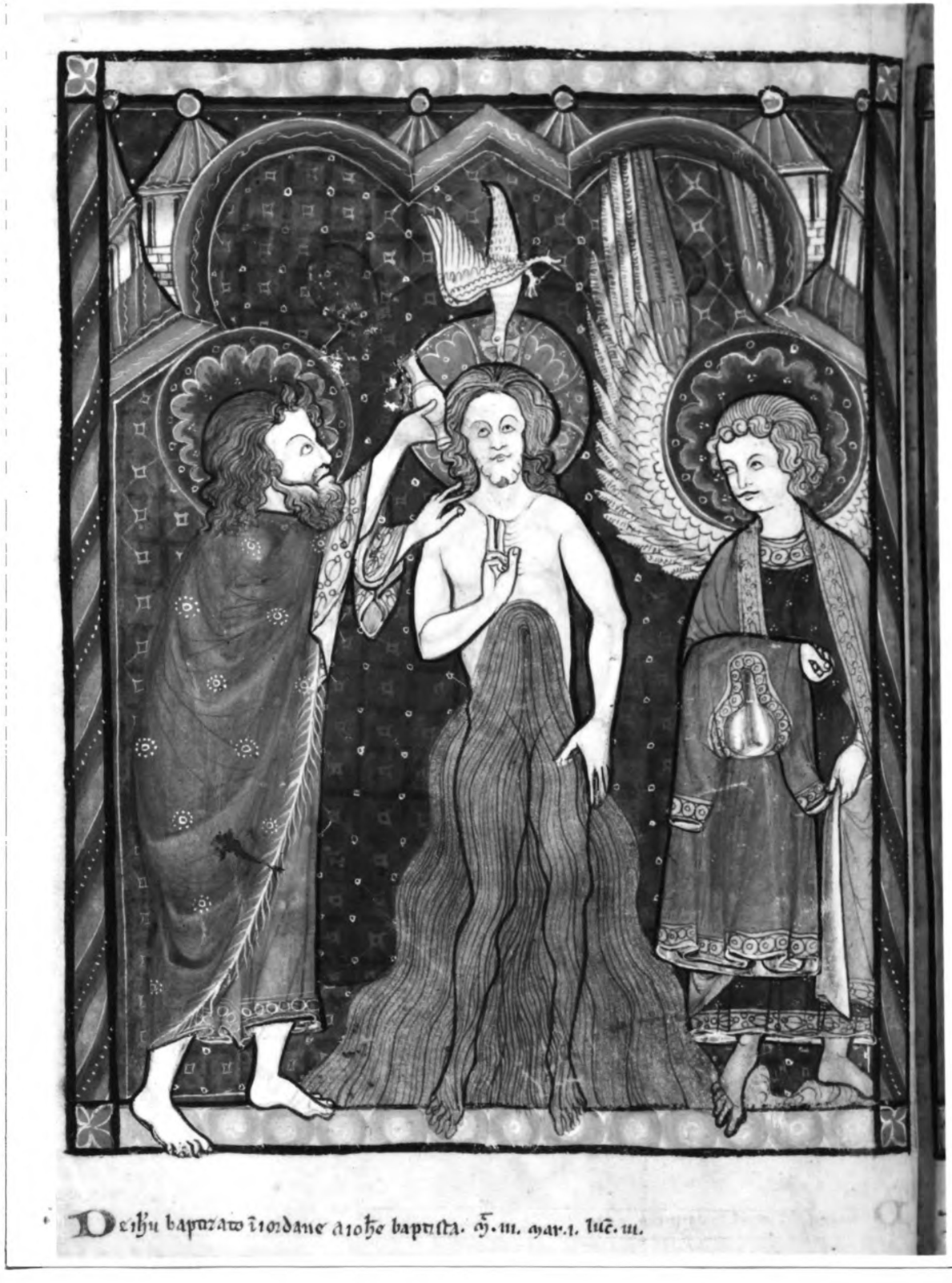

Figure 17. St. John's Psalter, f. 16v,
The Baptism of Christ

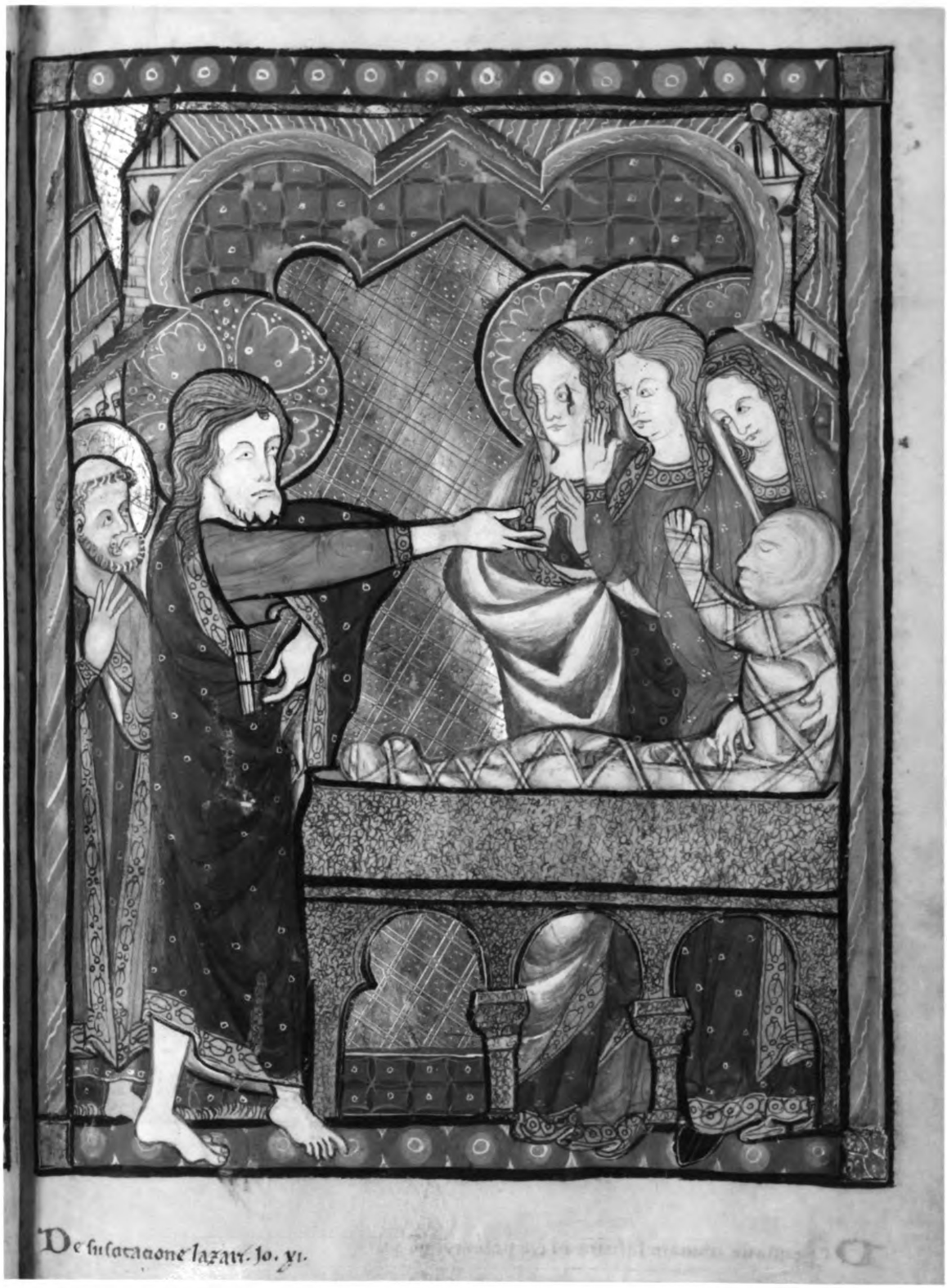

Figure 18. St. John's Psalter, f. 17,
The Raising of Lazarus

Figure 19. St. John's Psalter, f. 18,
The Last Supper

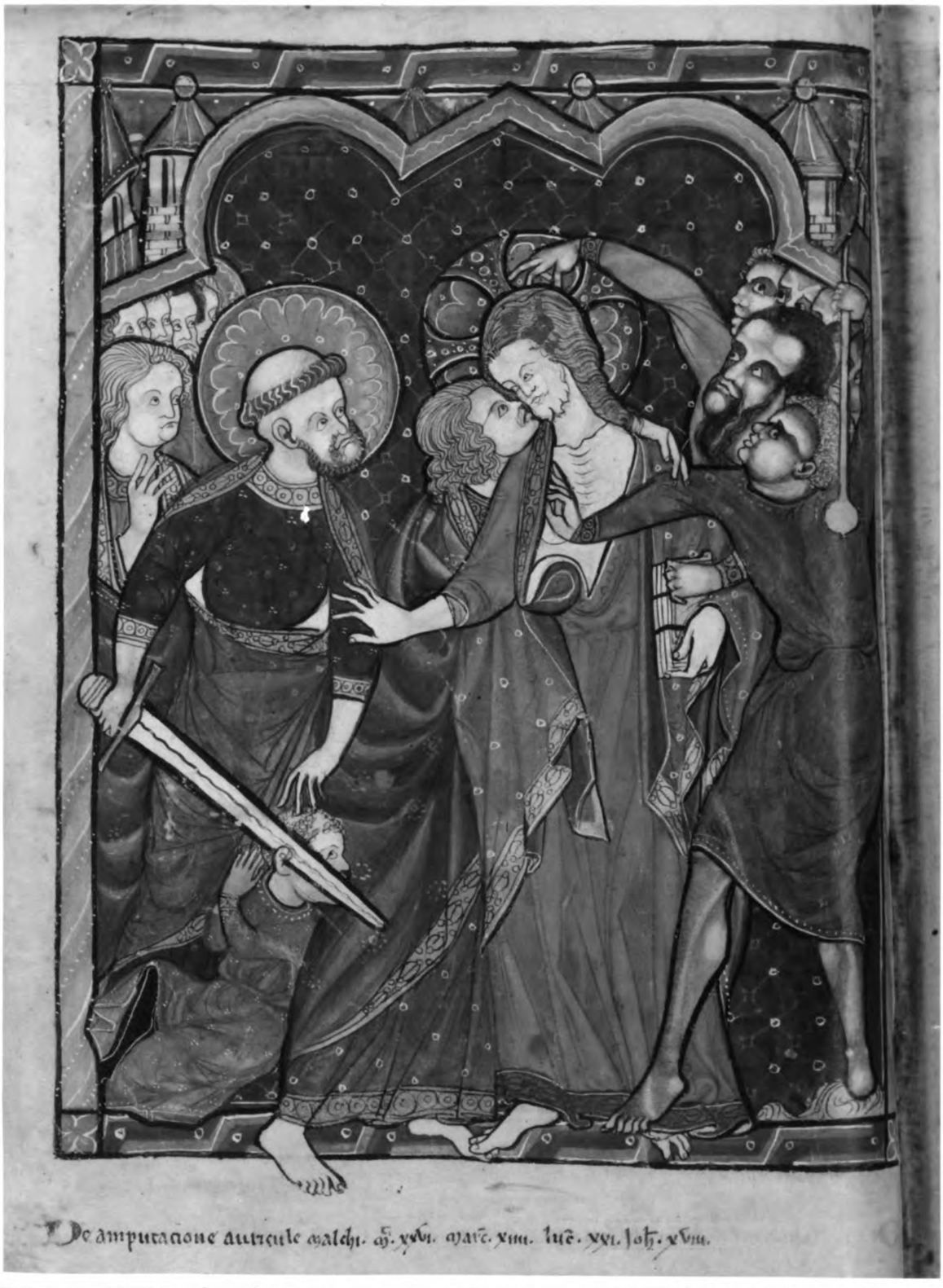

Figure 20. St. John's Psalter, f. 18v,
The Arrest of Christ (The Betrayal)

Figure 21. St. John's Psalter, f. 19,
The Flagellation

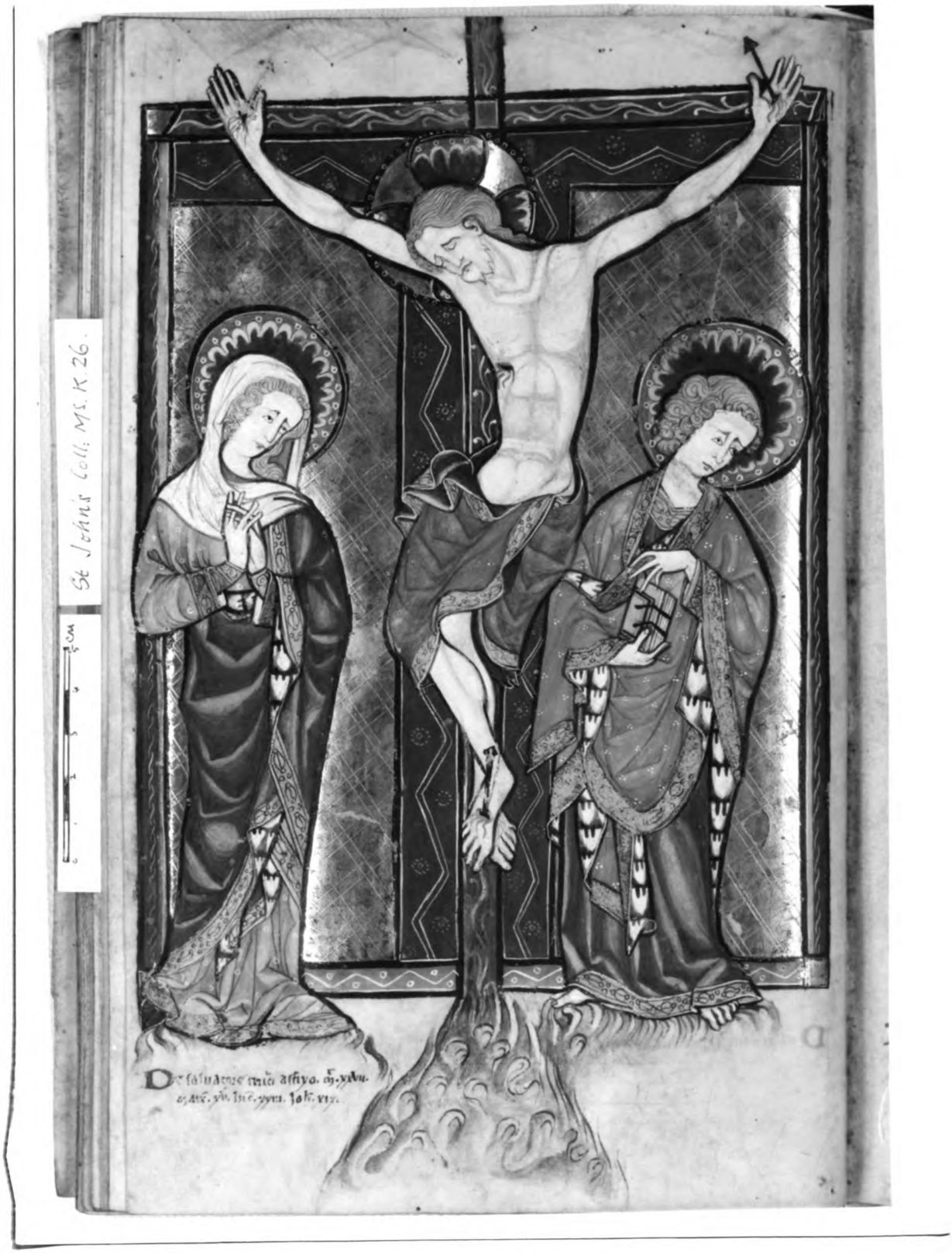

Figure 22. St. John's Psalter, f. 19v,
The Crucifixion

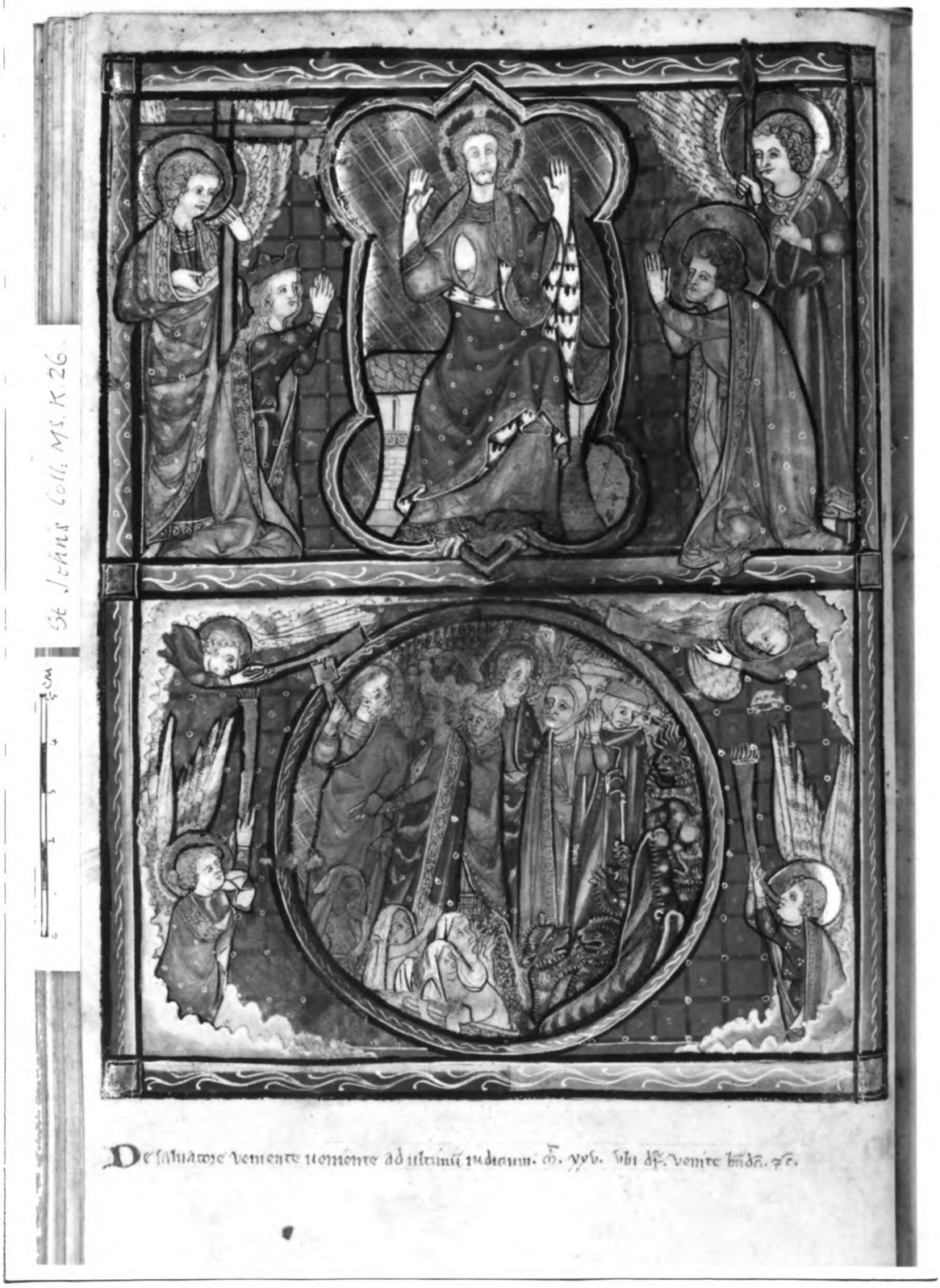

Figure 23. St. John's Psalter, f. 22v,
The Last Judgement

Figure 24. St. John's Psalter, f. 25v,
King David as Psalmist

Figure 25. Oscott Psalter, f. 7,
The Annunciation and Visitation

Figure 26. Oscott Psalter, f. 8,
Journey of the Magi and The Magi
Before Herod

Figure 27. Oscott Psalter, f. 8v,
The Adoration of the Magi and
The Warning of the Magi

Figure 28. Oscott Psalter, f. 10,
The Flagellation and Christ Crowned
with Thorns

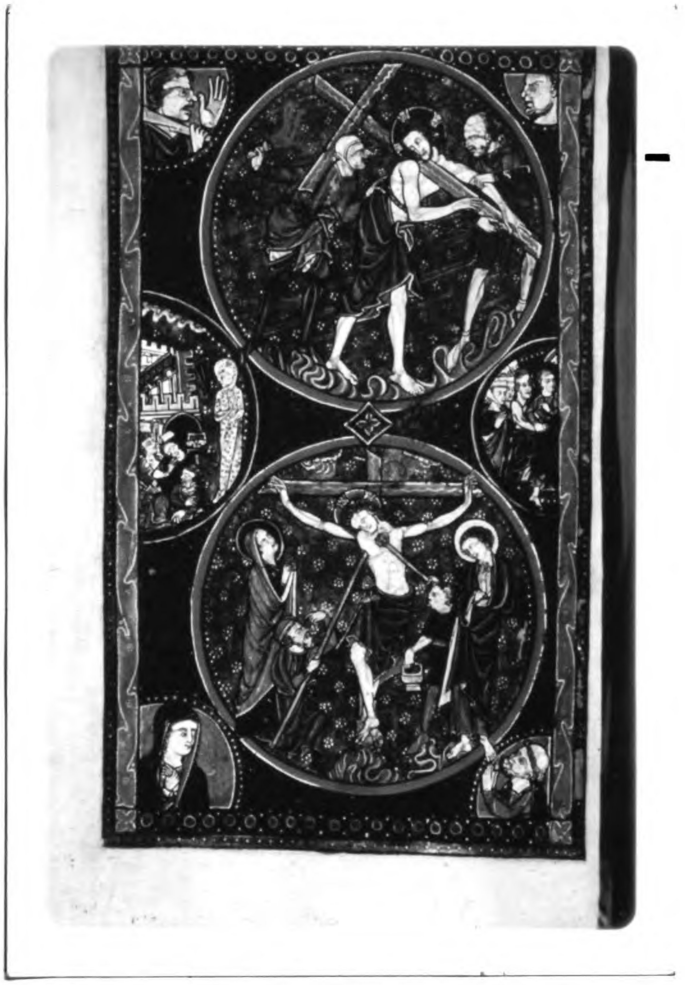

Figure 29. Oscott Psalter, f. 11v,
Christ Bearing the Cross and
The Crucifixion

Figure 30. Oscott Psalter, f. 12v,
The Last Judgement

Figure 31. Oscott Psalter, f. 13,
The Massacre of the Innocents and
The Flight into Eqypt

Figure 32. Oscott Psalter, f. 14v,
The Presentation and the Baptism

Figure 33. Oscott Psalter, f. 15v,
King David as Psalmist

Figure 34. Oscott Psalter, f. 17v,
An Apostle

Figure 35. Painting on the Chapter House Ceiling, Oxford