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Codex Eyckensis: The unique Codex of Eyke

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The oldest book

The Codex Eyckensis is Belgium's oldest book. Moreover, it is the oldest Gospel Book of the Low Countries—present-day Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Codex was written by hand on parchment by an eighth-century monk. The book consists of two parts. Codex A, the first part, is a fragment of a Gospel manuscript comprising the portrait of an Evangelist, depicted serenely writing, seated on a throne under an arc, framed within a beautiful knotwork border. The Evangelist portrait takes up one full folio. It is followed by four folios with Canon Tables: lists of corresponding sections in the four Gospels. This complex information is presented in an architectural frame of pillars and arches to assist the reader in locating and tracking concordant passages. These Canon Tables are incomplete. Codex B, the second part of the manuscript, does have a complete set of twelve Canon Tables. These Canon Tables

are followed by the Gospels of Matthew, Marc, Luke and John. The two manuscripts were merged into one binding, most likely in the course of the twelfth century.



The fact that the manuscript is still kept at the original location is highly unusual. Equally remarkable is the continuing popular devotion to the saints for whom the Codex Eyckensis was originally intended, Harlindis and Relindis. The next 25-yearly procession in honour of the two saints is planned for the year 2022.

Prestigious provenance

The Codex dates back to the time of the Christianisation of Western Europe. Renowned missionaries such as Willibrord and Boniface came from Ireland and Britain to the Continent to spread Christianity. While the mainland had already been Christianised in the course of the third and fourth centuries, this process had been interrupted and even reversed by the influx of heathen Germanic tribes. Willibrord and Boniface succeeded in convincing the Merovingian rulers of the importance of their message, which in a political sense boiled down to: rejoin (papal) Rome.



During the twentieth century the Codex Eyckensis did not suffer so much from war as from a failed conservation attempt. In 1957 the dean of Maaseik is thought to have taken the Codex Eyckensis in the pannier bag of his motorcycle all the way to Düsseldorf, where amateur restorer Karl Sievers then proceeded to laminate the folios with "Mipofolie" adhesive foil—a method that had been used to protect maps in the Second World War. This proved to be well-nigh disastrous. Between 1988 and 1992 this Mipofolie was removed from the parchment folios with painstaking care and using the most advanced methods. On this occasion the two constituent manuscripts, Codex A and Codex B, were separated and individually bound.

Since 1994 the Codex Eyckensis is once more on display as part of Saint Catherine's Church treasure.



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