

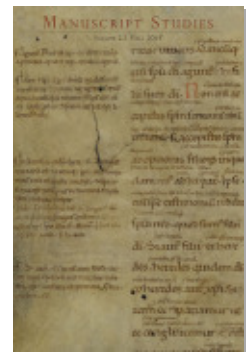


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*The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus: A Study of the
Original Manuscript, Ghent, University Library MS 92* by
Albert Derolez (review)

Mary Franklin-Brown

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REVIEWS

Albert Derolez. *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus: A Study of the Original Manuscript, Ghent, University Library MS 92*. Studies in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art History 76. Turnhout: Harvey Miller/Brepols, 2015. Iv + 355 pp., 22 black-and-white illustrations, 98 color illustrations. €125. ISBN 978-1-909400-22-1.

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THE *LIBER FLORIDUS* (NOW Ghent, University Library MS 92) has inspired powerful fascination in the Middle Ages and our own day. Compiled by Lambert of Saint-Omer, canon of the Church of Our Lady in the Flemish city, in the period 1111–21, this encyclopedia is preeminent for its remarkable illustrations, some of which are masterpieces of Romanesque drawing. But it is also unique for its proliferation of maps and circular diagrams and the considerable space it accords to poetry and literary narrative. The latter may surprise, given Lambert's own limitations as a Latinist, and that is just one mystery among many. What was the codex's original structure, before illustrations and even whole quires disappeared? The question is complicated by the fact that Lambert's organizational logic is nothing like what we find in antique or scholastic encyclopedias, and he himself altered its structure more than once in the course of his work. Finally, what was Lambert's relation to the great abbey of Saint-Bertin in the same town? Why would a canon at a neighboring church not have access to essential encyclopedic texts, present in the abbey's library, until he had already worked on his own encyclopedia for years? Why, if any of the monks did take interest in his work, would he be so poorly supplied with writing materials that he would be obliged to compile an encyclopedia on unevenly

sized pieces of parchment and disused leaves from other books—and to make of his first draft his only fair copy?

No scholar working today knows the book as well or has come as close to answering these questions as Albert Derolez, who was for many years the curator of manuscripts and rare books at the Ghent University Library. Derolez's 1968 edition (semi-diplomatic, semi-facsimile), and his dissertation, published in Dutch in 1978 and in English in 1998 (*The Autograph Manuscript of the Liber Floridus: A Key to the Encyclopedia of Lambert of Saint-Omer*, Corpus Christianorum, Autographa Medii Aevi, 4 [Turnhout: Brepols]), have until now provided the best access to the *Liber Floridus*. But the copies of the in-folio edition have themselves become rare books, and Derolez's dissertation demanded from readers a high degree of prior familiarity with codicology before they could follow his argument about Lambert's stages of compilation and revision.

Fortunately, the new millennium has brought three great contributions to *Liber Floridus* scholarship and teaching. The Ghent University Library has digitized the entire codex and made it available online, while an attractive affiliated site offers helpful introductory blurbs in Dutch, French, and English on the genre, the author, and the historical and intellectual context (www.liberfloridus.be/index_eng.html). The library has also made the 1968 edition available for download. Now, Derolez has published a new study, *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus*, based on his dissertation but updated to reflect the latest scholarship and expanded with new notes providing the *incipit* of every text, 120 photographic plates, and extensive tables and indices.

Derolez has worked very hard to make this new book accessible. It begins with a selective bibliography. This is followed by two pages of "Preliminary Notes and Definitions," a primer on quire structure and codicological terminology that also shows readers how to understand the diagrams he will use throughout the book, thus preparing students and general readers for what will follow. The introduction is divided into ten sections, beginning with a survey of scholarship and proceeding to treat Lambert, the autograph manuscript, its parchment, quire structure, layout, script, and illumination, and the text, its sources, structure, and table of contents. All this is dispatched in twenty-five well-written pages (although students and

general readers may be put off by having to plunge first into a survey of scholarship rather than the codex itself). The main text of the book analyzes quire structure, ruling, paint colors, and other phenomena that provide clues to how Lambert expanded his encyclopedia. It is divided into chapters treating the individual sections of the codex: the preliminary texts, the main body, the various supplements, and the final texts. A last chapter extrapolates Lambert's successive campaigns of compilation from the codicological insights that have preceded, and a brief conclusion describes his unique version of encyclopedism. Appendices introduce the copies, related manuscripts, and manuscript sources of the Ghent encyclopedia.

The quarto size may not make it easy to slip *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus* into a tote bag, but it is too beautiful a volume to read in a coffee shop or subway train. And format serves purposes beyond the merely aesthetic. As befits one of the world's most distinguished codicologists, Derolez has designed the book creatively for easy legibility and access. Wide outer margins accommodate the notes as well as diagrams of the structure of each quire. All photographs of the Ghent manuscript are published in color, and they reproduce every surviving painting, diagram, and decorated initial. Black and white photographs of copies or related manuscripts provide insight into lost sections or illustrations. Most of the plates show openings (that is, two pages facing each other) and are quite small (100 × 150 mm), but with a digitized version available, it is no longer necessary to publish full-size reproductions. The photographs suffice for appreciating the physical aspect of the leaves and the true colors (never reliable on a computer screen). Derolez also provides closeups of Lambert's early and later hand and the other hands that occasionally intervened in the manuscript. The final illustrations reproduce handwriting in other manuscripts that Lambert copied or in which he made annotations. These are followed by extensive tables and indices. Cumulatively, the book provides myriad points of access and a failsafe system of reference.

Most of the book's argument follows Derolez's earlier work. He concludes that there is no good reason to doubt that the Ghent manuscript is in Lambert's own hand, with only occasional interventions by other copyists. He argues that the *Liber Floridus* is not the haphazard mess that early scholars represented. Instead, the book is organized into sections defined by

an associative logic that becomes more tenuous toward the end of the codex, when Lambert bound together pictures for which he had not found adequate textual accompaniment. It is also compromised by the late changes he made to the volume, moving illustrations about in a way that created new blanks to be filled. It is no small accomplishment of Derolez's new study that we come to sympathize with the twelfth-century canon as he grappled with the consequences of moving an illustration: solving one problem, creating new ones. Derolez also shows what models and interests inspired this book. The encyclopedic paradigm came, of course, from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (early seventh century). Lambert drew out the symbolic potential of Isidore's material, transforming it, and he did so himself and in his own way, for he did not become aware of Hrabanus Maurus's symbolic version of the *Etymologies*, the *De rerum naturis* (ca. 843), until late in his project. Lambert was also far more interested in history and eschatology than Isidore had been, and he wove this material into the Isidorean tapestry. But his greatest originality was his illustrations.

The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus does offer a new argument concerning Lambert's relations to Saint-Bertin. Scholars had believed the relations between the abbey and the chapter in Saint-Omer to be strained, but Lambert did, after all, eventually discover Hrabanus Maurus. Derolez draws our attention to codices from the chapter library copied in the scriptorium of the abbey at about the same time. He demonstrates that the *Gesta Francorum Hierusalem expugnantium*, an account of the First Crusade, resulted from a collaboration between Lambert and one or several monks from the abbey, and he notes that manuscript fragments from the abbey now at the British Library must have been copied from the *Liber Floridus*. So Lambert did entertain productive relations with the abbey, but they do not seem to have been continuous or consistent.

In combination with the digitized manuscript and edition, *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus* places this fascinating codex at the figurative fingertips of scholars and students across the world. It could be a wonderful resource for teaching the history of the book or codicology at universities that lack medieval manuscripts, and this reviewer is already designing a class project around it. But by synthesizing past scholarship and adding new insights, Derolez's book also becomes a valuable contribu-

tion to scholarship on the *Liber Floridus*, on medieval compilation, and on encyclopedism. The *Liber Floridus* is indeed “the most typical example of Romanesque encyclopedism” (185), and *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus* will now become the starting point for all new work on Lambert’s book.

Bent Lerbæk Pedersen. *Catalogue of Yao Manuscripts*. Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts, Xylographs etc. in Danish Collections 10.3. Copenhagen: NIAS Press—Det Kongelige Bibliotek, 2016. Xii + 126 pp., 48 illustrations. £100. ISBN: 978-8-776941-84-0.

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THIS ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE OF the collection of thirty-seven Yao texts in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, will interest not only those who specialize in Yao studies. Anyone curious about manuscript cultures and how they support religious practice and other social priorities will find the material in this collection fascinating. The examples of student exercises and primers, and of manuscript copies of printed books, provide insights into how a manuscript culture sustained itself until very recently on the linguistically and ethnically diverse periphery of the print-dominated Chinese world.

The texts are in an accessible script and language: an unelaborate variety of written Chinese, written in plain though sometimes idiosyncratic hands. This is not to deny that the texts present many challenges of reading and interpretation that require an expertise in Yao studies. However, by providing many photographs of select manuscript pages, Pedersen’s catalogue offers a point of entry to the culture of these documents to many interested observers.

“Yao (瑶)” is a traditional Chinese-language ethnic classification, still in use officially today, applied to a population of about three million distributed