

# The Lorsch Gospels



## The Legacy of Charlemagne

### A Crowning Achievement of Carolingian Art

Around 810 the famous court scriptorium of Charlemagne at Aachen produced a most splendid manuscript, a collection of the Four Gospels of the New Testament, created by the most outstanding artists of this epoch, a book which Charlemagne himself may have held in his hands: *the Lorsch Gospels*.

Described as "euuangelium pictum cum auro scriptum habens tabulas eburneas" (illustrated Gospel Book, written in gold, with ivory covers) it first appears in a book record of Lorsch Abbey dating back to around 860. It is without doubt the most precious and well kept manuscript of the abbey which during seven centuries seemed to be used only at rare occasions in the cloister. This manuscript remained unequalled in the abbey's library for a great many years, and the abbey's scriptorium also regarded the Gospels as an exemplary book, unsurpassed in its collections.

### A Manuscript Illuminated in Purple and Gold

This monumental work of Carolingian art is also known as Codex Aureus, a name which indicates that this manuscript is among the rare manuscripts of the early Middle Ages which were entirely written with gold ink, from the beginning to the end, over more than 400 pages. Each page of the Lorsch Gospels shows colourful frames which are unsurpassed in form and style. Its luminous colours are so well preserved that one could think the manuscript had been written only a short time ago.

The magnificent full-page illustrations fascinate through their monumental size, among them the canonical tables at the beginning of each Gospel to help the reader find the text passage for which he is searching; the pictures of the evangelists before each preface; or the luxurious incipit pages at the beginning of each individual Gospel text. 473 generously presented pages in a large format of approx. 37 x 27 cm; flawless white vellum made from calfskin of choice quality; gold and silver in abundance on every page; two purple pages; the rarest colours; the height of artistic know-how available at the court of Charlemagne: in the Lorsch Gospels, all these distinctive features combine.

### A Most Valuable Ivory Cover

The expensive decoration of this luxurious manuscript is complete with the beautiful cover. To underline its importance and artistic value, the Lorsch Gospels were bound in a magnificent cover reflecting the height of early medieval artistic creation. It consists of two splendid ivory plates which formed both the front and the back cover of the manuscript. These carvings were probably made in the court of Charlemagne around the year 810.

The five-part plates – the plate of the Virgin in the front cover and the plate of Christ at the back – represent the most extensive ivory series ever made in the workshops at the court of Charlemagne in Aachen and thus represent a true masterpiece which is today considered as one of the most valuable testimonies to human creativeness in general.

### The Fine Art Facsimile Edition

The Lorsch Gospels, a luxurious testimony to medieval art, is now published in a limited facsimile edition of only 333 copies, complete with its ivory covers. All 437 pages in the format of 37 x 27 cm, including the splendid miniatures and all ornamental pages and canonical tables, have been reproduced true to the original. The text pages, all written in gold, have been reproduced in their uniqueness. The edition is complete with reproductions of the ivory covers, in full accordance with the original, and for the first time in 500 years combined in one book, as it was originally intended.

Fine Art Facsimile Publishers of Switzerland also publish a library edition of the Lorsch Gospels which is limited to a maximum of 60 copies. This edition is aimed exclusively at the use of libraries and has been reproduced in full accordance with the original, but without the ivory covers.

### **The commentary volume**

The editor of the scientific commentary is Dr. Hermann Schefers, director of the Lorsch Museum Centre. The commentary, your key to the work, describes the manuscript and its history in full detail.

This facsimile edition is published under UNESCO patronage.

### **Documentation Kit**

A documentation folder containing three leaves in the original format and an illustrated 16-page information brochure is available for information upon request.