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The Bible of Naples (Paris, BnF, MS. français 9561): Female Power, Piety, and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Angevin Naples

With an approach that combines image-text analysis and gender studies, this dissertation will examine the richly illustrated, fourteenth-century manuscript known as the Bible of Naples (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS français 9561) to understand, for the first time, the origin, significance and uses of its original format and contents. Johanna of Naples (1326/7-1382), queen of the Angevin Kingdom of Naples was the patron and owner of the Bible of Naples. She was one of the first sovereign queens of the Middle Ages and a controversial historical figure who during her long reign was jailed, excommunicated, and accused of plotting her husband’s murder. This study argues that the illuminated manuscript, which contains a moralized bible and an extended Christological cycle, is more than just a devotional aid, and, with its original images and their unexpected sources conveyed messages of legitimacy, empowerment, and legacy to its female audience, namely Johanna and her entourage.

This dissertation explores how the Bible of Naples adopts and adapts the visual language favored by Johanna’s female ancestors to create original interpretations of traditional biblical images by portraying women as the protagonists its illustrations. Ultimately, by putting art-objects commissioned by Angevin women in conversation with the MS français 9651, my study will not only shed new light on the understudied and misunderstood figure of Queen Johanna, but it will also provide new perspectives on female patronage at the Angevin courts of Naples, Hungary, and Southern France. The latter will be analyzed not as a practice derivative of male patronage, but as a generative phenomenon which catered to the interests of the female actors who funded, handled, and experienced the objects they commissioned.