

DONATION BY THE FRIENDS OF THE BAILLIEU LIBRARY

FACSIMILE OF THE MORGAN CRUSADER BIBLE
THE PICTURE BIBLE OF ST. LOUIS

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The University of Melbourne Library has a world class collection of modern facsimiles of European illuminated manuscripts. This collection in part makes up for the difficulties which scholars and students have in accessing original mediæval manuscripts from Australia.

The facsimiles are regularly used for research and information by staff and students from three of the University's largest humanities departments: Fine Arts, History and English. Since these fine facsimiles attempt to get as close to the look and feel of the original as possible, they are also examples of modern fine printing and book binding. The quality of the facsimiles means that they are highly priced, and with dwindling library budgets it becomes increasingly difficult to justify their purchase. Over the years the Friends of the Baillieu Library have supported the acquisition of a number of these fine facsimiles in their effort to assist the Library with at least one significant book purchase per year.

The *Morgan Crusader Bible* is the most recent such donation by the Friends, and one of the most splendid. It is also known as the "Picture Bible of Saint Louis" because the manuscript's patron was the French king Louis IX (1214–1270). He was a great patron of the Arts and a devout Christian, and the

Morgan Crusader Bible is probably the most important of the many books which he commissioned.

The manuscript was finished nearly at the same time as the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, one of the most famous Gothic buildings, completed in 1248. The great windows of the Saint Chapelle resemble the pages of the manuscript so much that it has been thought likely that the same artists were involved. Both the windows and the manuscript support the idea of a crusade against the heathens, an idea of great importance to Louis, and the reason for the title *Morgan Crusader Bible*. The 283 pictures in the manuscript are splendidly gilt and painted in vivid colours. They show events of the Old Testament from the creation of the world to the times of King David. Importantly the setting is not that of the pre-Christian era. Costumes and surroundings have been "updated" to a mediæval setting and would have given a clear political message to contemporaries about the vital importance of reconquering the Holy Land by means of a crusade. To us the pictures give a fascinating view of mediæval life and knighthood with much vivid detail. The manuscript had a turbulent fate and travelled throughout the world before it arrived, nearly intact, in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York in 1916. Whilst in the possession of the Shah of



Iran in the early 17th century, three leaves were removed, and they have later been identified in the Bibliothèque National in Paris. In this facsimile of the manuscript, the "missing" pages have been included, giving us a complete version of the manuscript for the first time since the 17th century.

The facsimile is a work of art in its own right which gives us an impression of the manuscript much more realistic than it would be possible from a microform or a computer image. It is a major acquisition for the University of Melbourne Library and will add greatly to the collection of fine mediæval manuscript facsimiles already in the Library. It will also sustain research in this area for many years to come. ❖