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## **PATTERNS OF DECORATION: QUIRE SIGNATURES AND INITIALS IN 12TH CENTURY CISTERCIAN LEGENDARY (ALC. 418-422) FROM ALCOBAÇA**

### **Résumé**

Le monastère portugais de Santa Maria de Alcobaça a été fondé en 1153 en tant que 53<sup>e</sup> affiliation à l'Abbaye cistercienne de Clairvaux. Il est partie prenante de l'activité intense de création artistique qui anime le Portugal du Moyen-Âge et constitue à cet époque un centre culturel important. Le monastère recelait une riche bibliothèque de manuscrits et nous pouvons dater du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle pas moins de 24 manuscrits préservés. Un des manuscrits les plus intéressants de ce fonds est *Le Légendier* d'Alcobaça, Alc. 418-422,

qui du point de vue stylistique reprend toutes les tendances esthétiques essentielles de la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle présentes à ce moment dans ce scriptorium. Le quatrième volume du *Légendier* contient les signatures uniques du corpus de manuscrits du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, signatures dont les ornements sont dans une relation stylistique et formelle étroite avec le reste de l'ornementation des manuscrits et qui constituent un témoignage important sur le travail méthodologique et la coopération dans le cadre du scriptorium d'Alcobaça.

**Keywords:** Illuminated Romanesque manuscripts, Cistercian Monastery Alcobaça, Legendary Alc. 418-422, initials, ornamented quire signatures

### **A few historical notes**

The Portuguese Cistercian monastery Santa Maria de Alcobaça was founded in 1153 as the 53<sup>rd</sup> affiliation to the Clairvaux Abbey. It was founded at the outermost edge of the Christian territory that had only recently been reconquered from the Arabs, which helped create a new Portuguese political state. The foundation, therefore, had a significant ecclesiastical and political impact, as well as revitalising the economic and cultural life of the country. It is still not precisely clear what the political background

was that led to the foundation of this Portuguese monastery, but several different hypotheses identify the involvement of Saint Bernard, and diplomatic mediation at the papal court has led many scholars to the presumption that the foundation of Alcobaça was part of a more ambitious ecclesiastical and political plan.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of its foundation, Alcobaça was a part of a vibrant artistic environment that spread from the north of Portugal to its

1 B. NAVALA, *Knjižno slikarstvo 12. stoletja v cistercijan-skem samostanu Alcobaça* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2011), 22-27.

south. At almost the same time, cathedrals in Braga, Oporto, and Coimbra were being built, mixing foreign artistic influences, mainly from France, with the local Iberic Romanesque tradition.

### Alcobaça's library during the 12<sup>th</sup> Century

Alcobaça's monastic library is nowadays considered one of the most splendid Cistercian libraries. Copying of manuscripts started in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when a printing workshop was established in the monastery. Book production in Alcobaça was therefore continuous right up until the abolishment of the order in 1834. The first preserved catalogue of Alcobaça's library dates from 1775,<sup>2</sup> which is why we can now only reconstruct the original state of the medieval library by analysing the remaining manuscripts. Its later development and history can also only be outlined on the basis of different notations and historical documents that have been preserved. Of the 453 manuscripts that are today kept in the National Library of Portugal, we can date 24 manuscripts to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the lack of written documents and written sources, the dating is based on stylistic and formal analysis of the artistic decoration, analysis of material aspects of the manuscripts, palaeographical analysis, and on a few ex-libris and marginal notes.

Manuscript production in Alcobaça started shortly after the establishment of the monastery in 1153 and reached its creative peak at the time of the Abbot Martinus, who led the monastery between 1176 and 1191. In the colophon of the manuscript, Alc. 365 can be found a note that says that the manuscript was copied at the time of his abbacy.<sup>3</sup> The content of Alcobaça's medieval library is very similar to other Cistercian libraries of

that time, but there are nevertheless some exceptions: there is a relatively large number of preserved liturgical manuscripts; there is a clear preference for Latin (and not Greek) church fathers; the library contained the natural history work *De Avibus* by Hugo de Folieto and a canon law collection by Burchard of Worms, which indicate the importance that Alcobaça will have in the coming years in the area of ecclesiastic and civil law.

There are six different liturgical manuscripts that can be dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which in comparison with other Cistercian libraries is a relatively large number, considering that these kinds of manuscripts were in constant use during the liturgy or quickly replaced by new texts when new formal regulations changed the content of liturgical books.

The group of liturgical manuscripts in Alcobaça 12<sup>th</sup> century is thus formed by two *Lectionaries*, one *Psalter*, one *Collectar*, one *Martyrology* and the *Legendary*<sup>4</sup> in five volumes with current shelf number Alc. 418-422.

*Legendary* is one of the few of Alcobaça's manuscripts that contain an ex-libris (Fig. 1). At the end of the last volume, the scribe wrote: "*Liber S. Marie de Alcubacia*" and decorated the capital letters with filigree ornament. This is a very valuable piece of information that precisely determines the provenience or ownership of the manuscript and that it belongs to the original library of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

As was common amongst the affiliated monasteries, the Alcobaça *Legendary* was copied from the Clairvaux "old" *Legendary*,<sup>5</sup> which was lent before it was replaced in 1170 by the new one. In this way, the manuscript arrived in Alcobaça in the last decades of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Although the similarities between both, especially regarding the wording and the content, are more than obvious, there are also some significant differences. In the

2 F. DE SA, *Index Codicum Bibliothecae Alcobatie* (Lisboa: Typographia Regia, 1775).

3 '*Et ego martinus eiusdem loci abbas dico et confirmo (...)*'. Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional, Alc. 365, fol. 117<sup>r</sup>.

4 Lisbon, BN, Alc. 418-422.

5 F. DOLBEAU, 'Le Légendrier d'Alcobaça. Histoire et Analyse', in: *Analecta Bollandiana*, 102 (1984), 263-296.

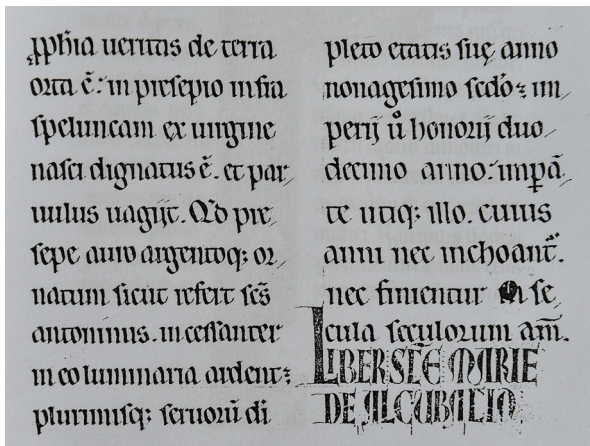


Fig. 1: Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, *Legendary*, 5<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 422, fol. 251r<sup>6</sup>

table of contents in the first volume of the *Legendary*, we can read that the text also includes the legend *Vita S. Mauri abbatis*, but the notation is crossed and then on folio 232r can be read “*Quere in libro de uitis sanctorum partum*”. This means that the *Legendary* was conceived as an individual work, but at the same time also as a part of an already existing monastic library, where the legend of the above-mentioned saint had already been copied elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

It can also be observed that some other legends, mainly of local saints, were added as well. In the main text were among others also included *Historia Titi et Vespasiani* and the legend of Saint Vincent.<sup>8</sup> The latter was probably even copied in the scriptorium of the Lisbon’s cathedral by the master called Stephanus.<sup>9</sup>

It is vital to note that two out of five volumes of the *Legendary* still possess their original bindings, which is quite surprising for such a large format manuscript and for its content, since the liturgical books were in constant use by the monastic community. Alc. 418 and Alc. 421 (that is the first and

the fourth volume of the *Legendary*) possess their original bindings. According to the systematization of medieval Portuguese bindings, this is of the complete loop type (type B), which is the prevailing type of Alcobaça’s medieval bindings, because (due to the routing of the straps) the manuscript is very solidly and very flexibly bound together. Because this technique is quite challenging and time-consuming, it was very soon replaced by another technique that was less firm, so the fragility of the manuscript was increased. In the scientific literature it is considered that the binding of the type complete loop is a slightly older binding technique and that its origins must be local, that is Iberic, and that other later techniques appear in Alcobaça mainly as a foreign, French influence.<sup>10</sup>

### Initials and decorated quire signatures

The *Legendary* from Alcobaça is stylistically a mixture of different textual and stylistic solutions that follow the aesthetics of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century and late Romanesque illumination. The decoration of the manuscript is composed mainly by the initials; only Alc. 421 has ornamented quire signatures, which are unique to Alcobaça’s book production in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The initials from the manuscript can be typologically divided into calligraphic, silhouette, and painted initials, while painted initials can be further divided into a group of initials with compact bodies and into initials formed by scrollwork. An interesting subgroup of these initials is leafy initials,<sup>11</sup> whose body is formed only by leaves. The leaves do not grow out of the tendrils, but appear to grow out of leaves themselves and thus present a totally novel arrangement. The formal Romanesque duality of the scrollwork body and leafy adornment is lost and no longer

6 Illustrations are copies of the microfilms, obtained from the National Library in Lisbon, Portugal.

7 M. A. MIRANDA, *A iluminura românica em Santa Cruz de Coimbra e Santa Maria de Alcobaça* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 1996), 276-280.

8 MIRANDA, note 7, 202.

9 MIRANDA, note 7, 200-202.

10 A. A. NASCIMENTO, *Encadernação Portuguesa Medieval. Alcobaça* (Lisboa, 1984).

11 NAVALA, note 1, 92.

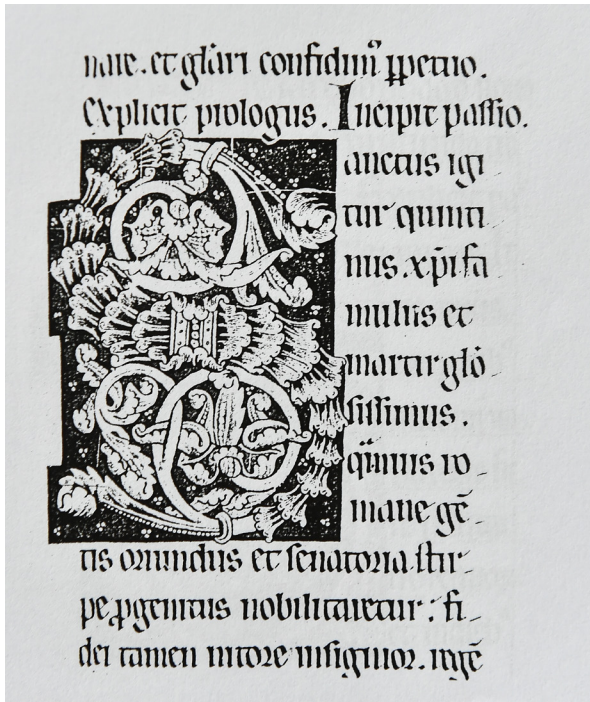


Fig. 2: Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 93r

exists. Now the initials are formed only by leaves and other unusual elements that have no logical connection with the natural. It seems that such initials represent an endpoint in the Romanesque foliated scrollwork ornamentation.

Stylistic analysis of the Alcobça's *Legendary* shows that the artistic elements of the manuscript were the work of several different masters of drawing and painting, who followed the same model, but were stylistically very different in the conception of their initials. The collaboration of several different artists at the copying and illumination of such a comprehensive work as a *Legendary* was by no means a rarity; on the contrary, it could be said that it was almost a rule in the monastic scriptoria, because such an extensive liturgical text was quite a task that demanded many hours of uninterrupted work and dedication. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Alcobça's *Legendary* is a work of different hands, which sometimes worked simultaneously and sometimes in a consecutive way but all contributed to the stylistic variety of the manuscript, which

nevertheless appears as a completed and coherent work of art.

The authors of the initials from Alc. 420 and most of the initials in Alc. 422 were two artists who were stylistically very close to the so-called Alcobça's heavy style and who combined these elements with the elements from the Papias Master.<sup>12</sup> These initials have compact and dense bodies, foliage spreads in the bellies of the letters and is in most cases richly cross-hatched with tiny strokes of the pen.<sup>13</sup> Stylistically different are the initials from other volumes of the *Legendary*, namely Alc. 418, 419, 421, and partly Alc. 422. These are richly ornamented scrollwork initials that lay on the painted background, which follows the contours of each letter. The initials mark the beginning of each of the volumes or the beginning of every single legend through the text. Such initials are full of internal dynamics, movement and formal tension and are formed by somewhat surprising elements. It might be concluded that by the very deformation of the natural, by introducing bizarre and illogical elements, these initials represent some kind of late Romanesque mannerism, for which further artistic development is no longer possible.<sup>14</sup>

These initials were made by a master, or even better, a group of the masters who used the same formal terminology and followed similar formal patterns and models. These artists that worked in Alcobça's scriptorium in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century are called "Masters of the late Romanesque mannerism". This type of illumination first appeared in the middle of the century in the monastery of Clairvaux, and it very clearly appears in the illuminated "monochrome" *Bible*.<sup>15</sup> Almost five decades later, the style re-appeared rather modified in the scriptorium of Cîteaux, where it flourished again.<sup>16</sup>

12 NAVALA, note 1, 122-133.

13 NAVALA, note 1, 145.

14 NAVALA, note 1, 146.

15 Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms 27<sup>15</sup>.

16 Y. ZALUSKA, *L'Enluminure et le Scriptorium de Cîteaux au XIIe Siècle (Commentarii cistercienses, Studia et Documenta*, vol. IV), (Cîteaux: 1989), 160-167.



Fig. 3: Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, *Legendary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, Alc. 419, fol. 77r; *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 131v; *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 60v

The dualism of the formal construction of the initial (the scrollwork body and foliated ornament) disappears and the initial now becomes an inseparable item in which elements such as tendrils, all kinds of leaves, geometric elements, fruit, drapery, feathers and fantasy elements are drawn and added in order to create a fantastic and indeterminate composition that only schematically represents the body of a letter. This type of illumination is surprisingly optimistic, full of *joie de vivre* and points towards the new era, which will begin at the turn of the century.

In connection with the initials that can be attributed to the Masters of the late Romanesque mannerism, another formal distinction can be singled out: the design and the construction of different elements show that some of the elements seem to be continually repeating or appear one after another in the conception of the large initials or even ornamented quire signatures. A clear example of such repetition is the body of a dragon that sometimes appears as a “real” dragon with a drawn head, ears, and tail but sometimes only the form of its body is used as an abstract artistic element. These repeating elements such as globes with fan-shaped leaves, leaf ears or fan-shaped leaves appear not only in the *Legendary* but also in other manuscripts from the Alcobaça’s scriptorium, for example in the so-called

“cut out” *Bible*.<sup>17</sup> These repeating elements are always of the same size and meticulously reproduced at the conception of different initials from various manuscripts. On this basis, it can be supposed that the artist used stencils in order to facilitate the drawing of repeating elements. The use of the stencils made it possible for them to repeat the same vegetative element in the exact same way and size in different compositions.<sup>18</sup>

The possibility of the use of stencils in the scriptorium is an interesting detail, which demonstrates the use of technical devices within a scriptorium. It is easy to imagine the working process and that the copying and illumination of manuscripts was a team effort in which the artists exchanged folios with drawings of exempla and models as well as stencils, because this procedure enabled them to be more accurate and faster since the method facilitated the drawing of some of the more complex elements.<sup>19</sup>

Undoubtedly, the ornamented quire signatures are stylistically and morphologically tightly bound to the painted initials that

17 Lisbon, BN, Alc. 427-431.

18 N. GOLOB, ‘Kadelne iniciiale v dveh volumnih frančiškanskega graduala’, in: *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n.s. XXXVIII, (2002), 152-183.

19 R. W. SCHELLER, *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900 – ca. 1470)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995).

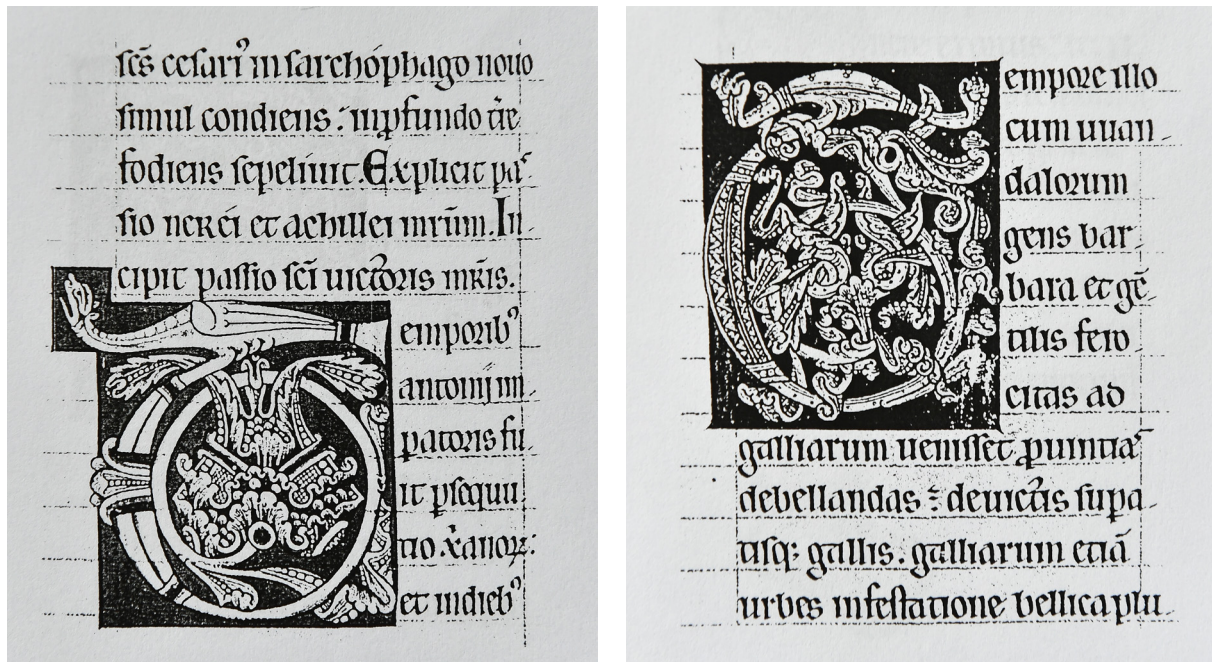


Fig. 4: Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, *Legendary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, Alc. 419, fol. 92v; *Legendary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, Alc. 419, fol. 98r

prevail in a formal and an aesthetic sense. Quire signatures mark in some manuscripts the end of each quire and in other manuscripts only the end of some of the quires with no evident methodology or order. In Alcobça manuscripts only Roman numerals were used as the orientation in the process of book-binding. Marking the quaternions with quire signatures, which lie in the middle or at the right side of the bottom margin, was not consistent.

Furthermore: when one examines the materials, it can be deduced that the scriptorium of Alcobça was deciding quite freely about marking or not marking the quaternions with quire signatures. Some quire signatures are also ornamented, mostly with calligraphic ornament. Only the fourth volume of the *Legendary* (Alc. 421) has the quire signatures, adorned by the elements of painted initials.<sup>20</sup>

The fourth volume of the *Legendary* (Alc. 421) is also one of the two volumes of this manuscript that still possesses the original binding, so its margins were never trimmed and the folio layout is still exactly as originally conceived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>20</sup> NAVALA, note 1, 69.

The ruling of this manuscript is very spacious, and the margins are opulently large and empty. The bottom margins, approximately 102 mm tall, offer enough space for the artist's intervention.

Ornamented quire signatures in Alc. 421 are closely connected to the painted initials of the manuscript, and together they form a unique stylistic and formal dialogue. Stylistically, they are very close to the type of illumination that can be attributed to the Masters of the late Romanesque mannerism. Such illuminated quire signatures are unique and exceptional in the Alcobça's collection of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Although the quire signatures are executed in a drawing technique with pen in black-brown tint, they can still be described as painted, because they adopt the formal language of the painted initials and are formed by the same elements that assemble the initials.

Ornamented quire signatures in Alc. 421 denote eleven out of thirty quaternions in the manuscript.

The authorship of the eleven ornamented quire signatures can be assigned to one single master, probably from the group of the Masters of late Romanesque mannerism.



Fig. 5: Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 17v; *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 49v; *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 65v; *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 81v; *Legendary*, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, Alc. 421, fol. 102r

However, the ornamented signatures are impossible to connect with certainty to individual initials in the text, and it is impossible

to connect the master of the quire signatures to the exact parts of the illumination in the manuscript.

The Master of Alcobaça's quire signatures conceived the ornamental composition of all of them in the same way: above the Roman numeral, there is a stem carrying a floral ornament that spreads left and right of the bottom margin of the folio. The ornament consists mainly of leaves, which crown-like climb and envelop the top of the Roman numeral. The only non-floral elements are some pearl-studded globes and clasps. The artist used a fine pen, enabling him to draw fine parallel lines, giving the leaves and other parts of the drawing a certain depth and life-like appearance. Breaking down ornaments into their constituent parts, twelve types of leaves can be observed. Their comparatively large variety made it possible for the artist to produce a large selection of combinations.<sup>21</sup> All these elements can also be found in the formal conception of large painted initials throughout the text. It is interesting to note that these elements now appear singled out, individualized and with no connection to the other elements and no connection to the larger compositions of painted initials. Due to this singularity of artistic form, the quire signatures obtain a completely new aesthetic value; they are individualized as deliberate autonomous drawings, having the task of model drawing.

It can be said that the Master of the ornamented quire signature was most probably the author of the larger painted initials in Alc. 421. It also seems that while executing the quire signatures he deliberately singled out some of the elements and represented them individually, so that they could be exposed in their simple and singular beauty that is sometimes overlooked when they form more significant and more complex compositions. However, it is also possible that while painting the quire signatures the artist was "rehearsing his pen" and drew some elements on a small scale before using them as part of a more complex work. This can be observed at the tenth quire signature that, above the

Roman numeral, represents a globe with filigree floral fan-shaped elements. Globes decorated with fan-like leaves represent an often-repeated motif also in initials. So, for example, in initial P on folio 102r, the motif decorates the body of the letter. This is why the vital question of methods and work practices within the scriptorium of the 12<sup>th</sup> century arises. In one way, it can be said that the quire signatures were conceived simultaneously with the large painted initials in the text and formed some kind of an echo or were even used as a "dictionary" of favourite and most essential elements. However, it is also possible that while executing these quire signatures the artist developed his own notebook of elements that he will be using for the large painted initials in an entirely novel and outstanding way.

It is also interesting to observe the rhythm of ornamented quire signatures through the manuscript. The first ornamented quire signature denotes the end of the first quaternion (folio 9v). After that, all subsequent quire signatures are ornamented until the fifth quire signature, which is not ornamented. The sixth quire signature is again ornamented and so are all quire signatures, including the eleventh. The twelfth quire signature is not ornamented, but the thirteenth is, and that is also the last ornamented quire signature in the manuscript. It is impossible to say why only eleven out of 30 quire signatures are ornamented and why the rhythm of this marginal artwork is suddenly interrupted at the first third of all the folios. Maybe it was the lack of time that obliged the artist to concentrate on "more important" initials and simply leave the margins empty. Alternatively, it is also possible that this artist was assigned only the first thirteen quaternions, and he simply decorated only those, so the remaining quaternions, assigned to other masters, were left blank.

It is probably not a coincidence that very similar crown-like leafy elements can be found in the Model-Book from the Cistercian Monastery in Rein in Austrian Styria.<sup>22</sup>

21 B. BENUJIČ, 'Cistercian Legendarium (Alc. 421) from Alcobaça: The problem of ornamented quire signatures', in: *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, s. n. XLIII (2007), 210-217.

22 Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 507.



This model book of patterns and templates, of course, cannot be considered as one of the sources of the Alcobaça manuscript; nevertheless, it can be concluded that the same artistic ideas and convictions pervaded in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Cistercian monastic art. The Rein Model Book also presents an example of how formal stylistic elements were spread among calligraphers and illuminators. In Alc. 421, there are several and various decorative elements (like the stylized forms of the dragon body, globes with filigree ornaments, fan-shaped leaves, stylized acanthus leaves etc.) that are stylistically not homogenous and point to the fact that its authors might have consulted certain models, templates and stencils to produce ornaments of this kind.<sup>23</sup>

Ornamented quire signatures in the fourth volume (Alc. 421) of the *Legendary* are undoubtedly unique. Although not all quire signatures are ornamented, those that are represent a crucial artistic element of the manuscript. They are the only representatives of so-called marginal or secondary art from the Alcobaça collection of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In their artistic conception the individual stroke of the master can be singled out and, on the basis of the analysis of the elements that form the composition, his individual character can be determined. In his work, he allowed a certain interplay and complementation thus creating a whole which is in a way a dramatic and intense work of art. Analysis of the secondary and marginal artistic endeavours tells us a story about the work processes in the framework of the scriptorium where several different artists worked simultaneously and thus contributed to the execution of manuscripts that are today ranked as one of the most prominent representatives of the Cistercian Romanesque art.

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23 BENULIČ, note 21, 216.