

Carl Nordenfalk

Abstract: The essay is on Carl Nordenfalk, Swedish art historian, medievalist and museologist. The objective is to present his internationally acknowledged professional life and elucidate the circumstances which led him to write his celebrated doctoral dissertation, ‘Die spätantiken Kanontafeln’. This pioneering work contributed immensely to scholarship on the history of the medieval book and is still recognised for its long-lasting scholarly value.

In 1938 Carl Nordenfalk published his doctoral thesis on the Eusebian canon tables.¹ This study marked the start of his long and successful academic career and also signalled his life-long interest in illuminated and decorated manuscripts. His dissertation came to be recognised as one of the most valuable contributions to medieval art history. Its impact is still felt today. This work established a solid foundation for scholarly investigation of the gospel books. It also opened up a new area of research which continues to benefit from further explorations. The collection of papers presented in this volume supplies fitting testimony to it.

International scholarship remembers Carl Nordenfalk primarily as an exceptionally competent authority on the art of the medieval book and the author of several comprehensive studies in this field. Less well known, particularly nowadays, is that he was also a museologist of excellent reputation, a prolific writer of scholarly and popular texts on a number of art historical topics and editor of numerous publications.² Well prepared by an excellent humanistic education and having developed an intense and multifaceted relationship to the fine arts, Nordenfalk constantly traversed cultural and temporal boundaries and moved easily from Egyptian papyri to modern painting and to any art phenomenon in between.³

The contribution here derives much of its data from Nordenfalk’s memoirs, up to now only published in Swed-

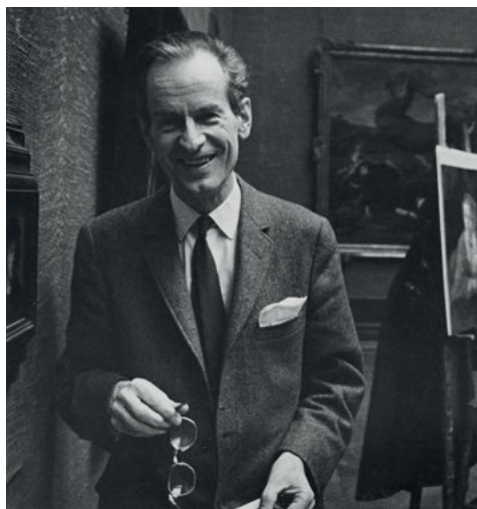


Fig. 1: Carl Nordenfalk, Stockholm 1966, photo H. Hammerskiöld. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum’s archives.

ish.⁴ In this book, unpretentiously titled ‘Mest om konst’ (Mostly about art), Nordenfalk writes about his professional and academic life, his meetings, cooperation and friendship with famous scholars, museum experts, and patrons of the arts. Describing the various settings and environments in which he worked, the author elucidates the different cultural phenomena he had the opportunity to deal with, in conclusion analysing the aims and results of his research. Out of these fascinating narratives, composed throughout with literary skill, admirable objectivity, self-distance, and crisp humour, emerges the image of an ingenious personality and a scholar firmly convinced of the value of knowledge and art.

⁴ Published in 1996 by the The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien) in the series ‘Swedish Learned Men’. Carl Nordenfalk was unable to finish the book before his death. The last chapter focusing on his life in the United States (1970–82) was based on notes by his daughter, Katarina Nordenfalk, and those of Per Bjuström and Allan Ellenius who wrote the introduction. I also consulted the introduction to Carl Nordenfalk’s *Festschrift* (see n. 19) and the note ‘In memoriam’, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 61/3 (1992), 81–82, both written by Per Bjuström. I met Carl Nordenfalk only once in 1990. Although having been very ill, he agreed to read and evaluate the first draft of my Ph.D. thesis. His positive and appreciative evaluation allowed me to finish and successfully defend my work, despite the difficulties and negative attitudes I was confronted with at my former institute, the department of art history at Uppsala University. The present article is an expression of my admiration for a great scholar and a generous man.

I am grateful to Dr. Robert Phoenix for linguistic revision of this text and to Ms Emilia Ström for providing me with access to the materials in the Stockholm NM’s archives. I also acknowledge Weronika Witakowska for her patient assistance in the preparation of the illustrations and Mr Samuel Fogg for sharing with me the photographs from his collection.

¹ See below 13–16.

² A complete list of his publications compiled by Gunhild Osterman is to be found in his autobiography (see n. 4) and in his *Festschrift* (see n. 19).

³ See below 4, 16.

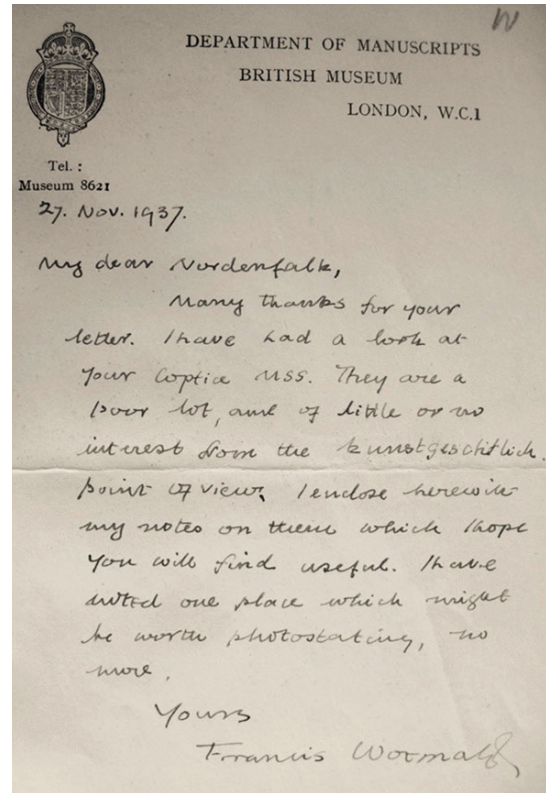
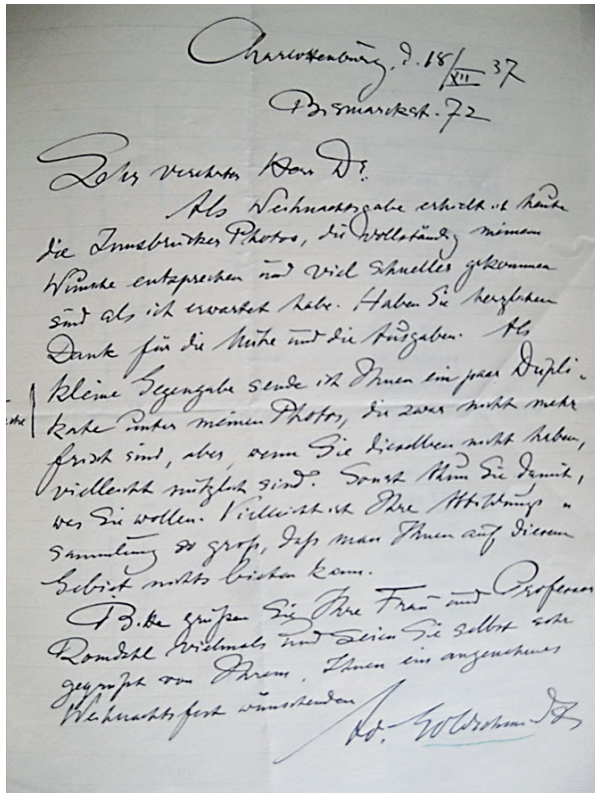


Fig. 2A–B: Letters to Nordenfalk; A: from Adolph Goldschmidt, B: from Francis Wormald. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

1 Brief biography

Carl Nordenfalk was born in Stockholm on December 13th, 1907. In 1926 he first studied history, continuing with art history at the University of Uppsala, Stockholm University and finally at Gothenburg University. As early as 1927, he developed a sustained interest in art history while studying German in Bonn, where he participated in Paul Clemens's seminars, a reputable specialist in Romanesque and Gothic church architecture of the Rhineland.

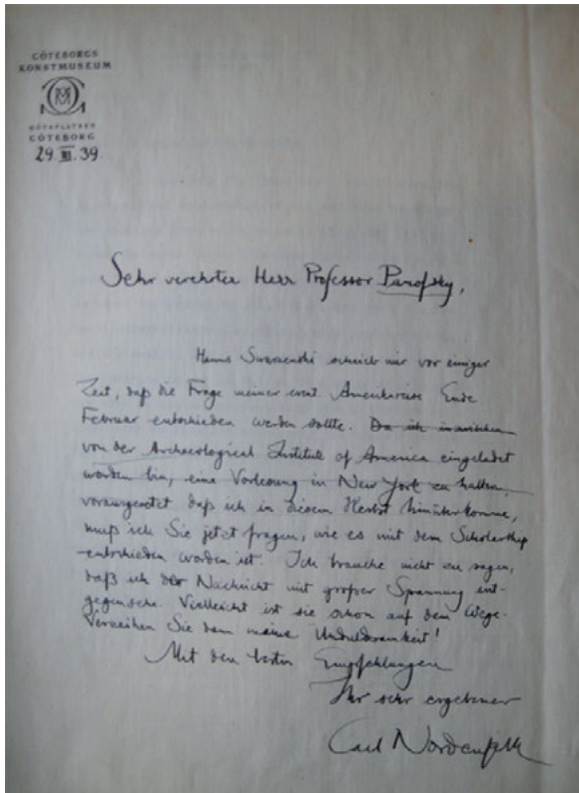
Upon his return to Sweden, Nordenfalk wrote his master thesis on the Echternach School of book painting,⁵ a subject which introduced him to the world of medieval manuscripts. He was to cherish and pursue this research field to the end of his life. The study of medieval manuscripts led him to major European libraries and renowned teachers. In Germany, he studied with Arthur Haseloff in

Kiel, Georg Swarzenski in Frankfurt, Adolph Goldschmidt and Albert Boeckler in Berlin (Fig. 2A). In Berlin, he studied with Wilhelm Koehler, the founder of the *Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft* and *spiritus movens* behind the comprehensive publication of the corpus of Carolingian illuminated books. During his research travels Nordenfalk became acquainted with an international group of art historians who shared similar interests: Francis Wormald and Hugo Buchthal in London, Otto Pächt in Vienna, and Meyer Schapiro and André Grabar in Paris. Several of these were to become life-long friends and the nucleus of his amazingly large network (Fig. 2B).

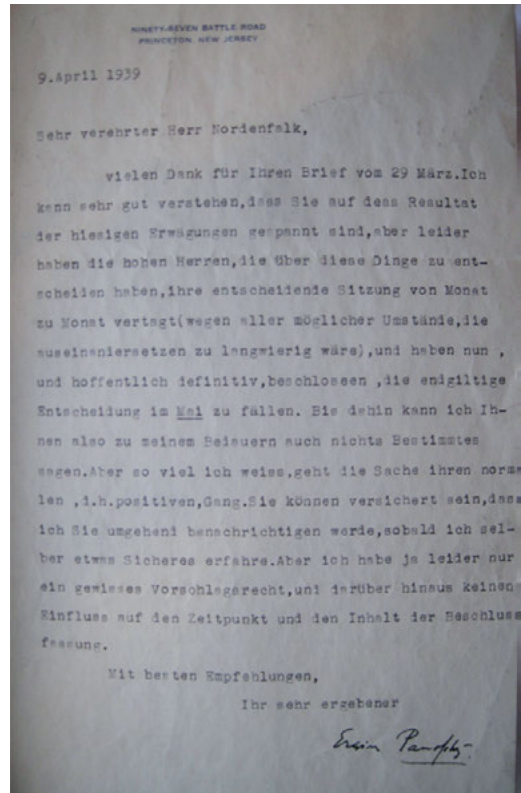
In autumn 1935 Nordenfalk joined the staff of the Museum of Art in Gothenburg, where he combined research activities on various subjects concerning illuminated manuscripts with his duties as the museum's assistant director. In 1938, at Gothenburg University, he defended his doctoral dissertation 'Die spätantiken Kanontafeln: kunstgeschichtliche Studien über die eusebianische Evangelien-Konkordanz in den vier ersten Jahrhunderten ihrer Geschichte'⁶ for which he was awarded the *venia docendi* (see Fig. 13).

⁵ Published in three papers: 'Ein karolingisches Sakramentar aus Echternach und seine Vorläufer', *Acta archaeologica*, 2 (1931), 207–244; 'On the Age of the Earliest Echternach Manuscript', in *Acta archaeologica*, 3 (1932), 57–62; 'Neue Dokumente zur Datierung des Echternachter Evangeliars in Gotha', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 1 (1932), 153–157, reprinted in the collection of his papers, *Studies in the History of Book Illumination*, London: The Pindar Press, 1992.

⁶ His opponent was Arthur Haseloff, professor at the Christian-



A



B

Fig. 3A–B: A: Letter from Nordenfalk to Erwin Panofsky and B: letter from Panofsky to Nordenfalk. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

Nordenfalk continued his museum career. From 1944 to 1958 he worked in the National Museum of Stockholm as head of the Department of Outgoing Activities, where he was responsible for permanent loans, travelling exhibitions and cultural education. His vast scholarly production was connected to the artefacts in the museum⁷ and his constant preoccupation with academic problems pertaining to medieval manuscripts. Both research areas developed his growing international reputation. In 1949 Erwin Panofsky invited him to spend a year at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey (Fig. 3).

In 1958 Nordenfalk was appointed the chief curator for the Department of Art and Sculpture in the Stockholm National Museum. Shortly thereafter, he became the museum's director,⁸ a position which he held until his retirement in 1968.

At such a time in life most people gradually withdraw from professional life. For Nordenfalk, however, there

began a very successful academic career in the United States spanning twelve years. Between 1968–70, he again held a fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, researching the production of illuminated books in the British Isles. He was a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley (1971–72 and 1977–78) and Mellon professor at the University of Pittsburgh (1971–76), where he held seminars on medieval art and curated exhibitions in the Frick Art Building. In 1972–73 he held the prestigious Kress Professorship at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and was the Slade Professor at the University of Cambridge. From 1978–82 he was a fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina and lectured at the University of California, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, with one interim year (1979–80) spent at the Harvard Center for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.⁹

Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, a specialist in book painting in the Middle Ages and author of *Codex purpureus Rossanensis* (1898) and *Der Psalter Egberts von Trier* (1901).

⁷ See below 4–8.

⁸ The position was combined with the professorial chair in art history.

⁹ In gratitude for the excellent research opportunities he was provided with in the USA, Nordenfalk donated his large library containing several precious facsimile editions of medieval manuscripts to the Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and his large slide collection to The Morgan Library & Museum in New York.

Nordenfalk returned to Sweden after a car accident in 1982. He joined the National Museum in Stockholm and continued his scholarly work until his death on June 13th, 1992.¹⁰

2 Museums and exhibitions

Carl Nordenfalk's museum work stretched over thirty years. The Stockholm National Museum, in particular, owes its international position and partnership in several significant international projects to him. Nordenfalk's far-sighted acquisition policy¹¹ and personal contacts to important museum directors and art historians, as well as his standing as a prominent scholar and specialist in variegated areas of art history, allowed him to organize several innovative and internationally acknowledged exhibitions. These events excelled for their thoroughgoing planning and research, the latter presented in high-quality informative catalogues. Due to limitations of space it is possible to mention but a few of the most spectacular exhibitions.¹²

During his year at the Gothenburg Museum Nordenfalk was also obliged to teach a course of modern art history at the university. He chose to lecture on Vincent van Gogh and intensified his research into the painter's life and works reading van Gogh's correspondence with his brother Theo and the painters Anton van Rappard and Émile Bernard. The material inspired him to write a monograph on van Gogh, based on the belief that it is impossible to dissociate the painter's artistic production from his dramatic life-story.¹³

While writing this book, Nordenfalk became acquainted with van Gogh's nephew, Vincent Willem van Gogh (Fig. 4). With his support, in 1946, he organised a large exhibition in the Stockholm National Museum, gathering the painter's works which went on to become the core of the van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. On that occasion a series of seminars was arranged for Swedish art historians, providing them with a unique opportunity to examine

the paintings in detail. The studies resulted in a collection of essays published alongside the exhibition catalogue.¹⁴

It was no accident that the first important exhibition organised by Carl Nordenfalk in the Stockholm National Museum in 1952,¹⁵ entitled 'Golden Books', was devoted to illuminated medieval manuscripts from Swedish and Danish collections (Fig. 5). For the exhibition a catalogue *raisonnée* was written (the first of its kind in Sweden), accompanied by a collection of essays. Both publications were firmly anchored in Carl Nordenfalk's previous studies while drawing on new research material.¹⁶

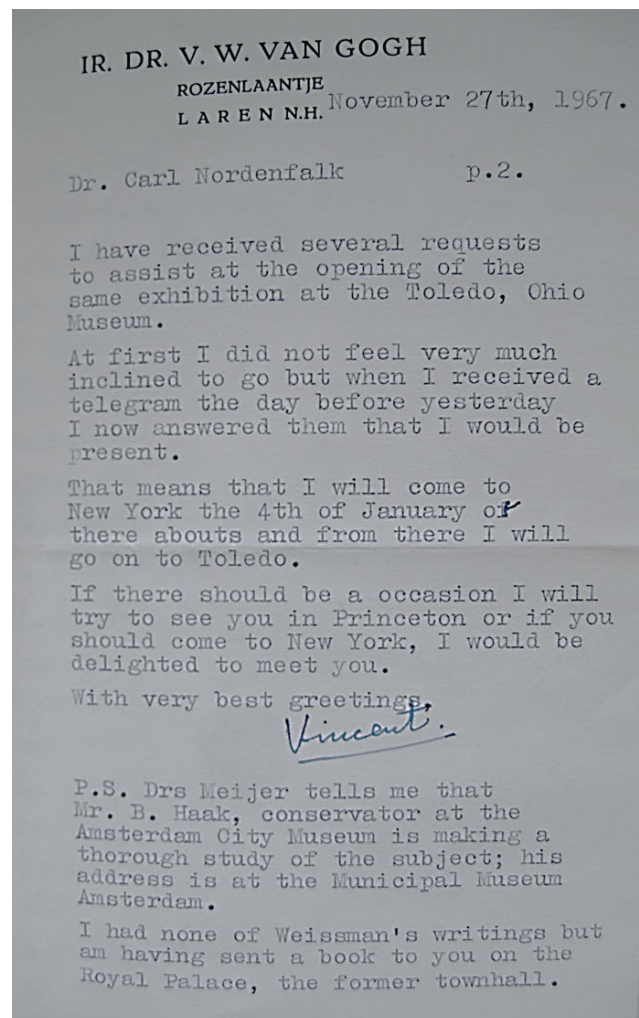


Fig. 4: Letter from Vincent W. van Gogh to Nordenfalk. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

¹⁰ In his bibliography 27 publications are listed between the years 1983 and 1992. See also n. 43, 44, 49, 51.

¹¹ Among the most significant ones were the acquisition of Watteau's 'Love Lesson' in 1953 and Goya's so-called 'Allegory of Spain' in 1961.

¹² The interested reader will find them listed in Nordenfalk's bibliography, see n. 2, 4, 19.

¹³ The book published in Swedish, *Vincent van Gogh: en livsväg*, Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt, 1943, saw several editions, the latest in 1992. It was translated into six languages, also into English: *The Life and Work of van Gogh*, London: Ekel, 1953.

¹⁴ *Vincent van Gogh. Utställning anordnad till förmån för svenska Hollandshjälpen*. Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö, mars-juni 1946 ed. C. Nordenfalk, F. Holmér, Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1946; 'Swedish van Gogh-Studies', ed. C. Nordenfalk, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 5/3-4 (1946).

¹⁵ In co-operation with the Danish manuscript expert Kåre Olsen.

¹⁶ C. Nordenfalk, Kåre Olsen, *Gyllene Böcker. Illuminerade medeltida*



Fig. 5: Gregorius IX, *Liber Decretalium*, fourteenth c.; Frontispiece, fol. 1r, Initial *I(n huius libri)*, Stockholm, National Museum. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

The Stockholm National Museum profited enormously from Carl Nordenfalk's interest in medieval books and his professional dealings in it. In the years during which he headed the institution he built up a significant collection of manuscripts. Unlike many art historians he recognized the value and rarity of books produced outside of Europe and purchased Hebrew, Armenian and even Ethiopic manuscripts for the museum (Fig. 6).¹⁷ They were

handskrifter i dansk och svensk ägo, maj–september 1952, Stockholm: Carlson Press Boktryckeri, 1952 (also printed in Danish); *Libri aurei*, ed. C. Nordenfalk, T. Kleberg, Uppsala-Stockholm 1952 (Studies published by the Nordisk tidskrift för bok och biblioteksväsen, on the occasion of the exhibition of illuminated manuscripts held in Copenhagen and Stockholm from April to September 1951); see also C. Nordenfalk, "Livres d'Or". Exposition de manuscrits enluminés à Copenhague et Stockholm en avril–septembre 1952', *Scriptorium*, 5 (1951), 305; C. Nordenfalk, 'Golden Books in Scandinavian Collections. Retrospect of an exhibition', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 22/3–4 (1953), 41–49.

17 This includes the fragments of one of the oldest decorated Ethiopic Gospels (Stockholm, National Museum, B 2034). Unfortunately when the second fragment of this manuscript was auctioned at Sotheby's, Western Manuscripts and Miniatures, London, December 5th, 1994, lot 53, the National Museum's directorate did not purchase

described in the catalogue prepared for the exhibition celebrating Carl Nordenfalk's 80th birthday. It, too, was given the title 'Golden Books'.¹⁸ The catalogue published for the occasion was followed by a collection of articles written by friends and colleagues.¹⁹

1956 was the international Rembrandt jubilee year.²⁰ The National Museum of Stockholm joined in the celebration by organising its own comprehensive exhibition. It borrowed works to enable the presentation of a broad overview of the painter's oeuvre. They ranged from very early paintings to works that remain unfinished after Rembrandt's death. Detailed and timely research preceded the exhibition and resulted in a scholarly catalogue followed

the folios. Instead, they went to a private collector in London and in 2006 to the Metropolitan Museum in New York (acc. no. 2006.100).

18 *Gyllene böcker. Nyförvärv och nyupptäckter* (The Golden Books: New Acquisitions and New Discoveries), Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 13.12.1987–6.3.1988.

19 *Florilegium in honorem Carl Nordenfalk octogenarii contextum*, Nationalmusei skriftserie, NS 9, Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1987, 209–224.

20 It marked his 350th birthday.



Fig. 6A–D: Ethiopic Gospels, fourteenth c., folios in disorder; **A:** 2nd page of Eusebius's *Letter to Carpiamus*; **B:** Canons VI–VII, Stockholm, National Museum, MS B 2034; **C:** tholos or 'Fountain of Life' **D:** Crucifixion, New York, the Metropolitan Museum. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives (A–B); courtesy of Sam Fogg (C–D).



Fig. 7: Rembrandt van Rijn, 'The Batavians' Oath of Allegiance' and x-ray photograph of the painting, Stockholm, National Museum. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

by a collection of papers.²¹ The focal point of the exhibition was the monumental painting 'The Batavians' Oath of Allegiance' in the Stockholm National Museum's permanent collection (Fig. 7). Rembrandt had painted it in 1661–62 for the new town hall in Amsterdam.²² Preparing the painting for display and further loan to an extensive exhibition in Holland, x-ray examinations were carried out, which became the subject of a short film distributed in Swedish and English versions. This innovative approach to the exhibiting of an art object was watched with great interest by art historians and art conservators in Sweden and abroad. The exhibition was a great public success attended by the members of the Swedish royal family and its closing was marked by a lecture given by the French minister of culture, André Malraux.

The most ambitious exhibition curated by Nordenfalk was dedicated to the renowned Queen Christina of Sweden and took place in Stockholm in 1966. Arranged in cooperation with the Council of Europe Fund, the event involved a large group of local and international committees, consisting of a number of experts and specialists in various aspects of museology. The primary objectives of the exhibition were to elucidate Christina's remarkable, turbulent life through artefacts and to present art objects from her famous collections of antiquities, sculptures, paintings, drawings, handicrafts, armoury, coins and precious manuscripts. An enormous catalogue printed in six languages, containing over fifteen thousand entries and numerous papers, required many years of research and preparation.²³ Several musical and theatre events accompanied the exhibition, reminding the public of Queen Christina's interest in these arts, and shedding more light on the related artefacts on display in the museum.²⁴ Quite remarkably, for the exhibition's research, Pope Paul VI

gave Nordenfalk and his team permission to open Christina's grave at St Peter's in Rome and carry out scientific investigation of her mortal remains. For the occasion a copy of the queen's iron death mask was cast and added to the exhibits (Fig. 8).

Finally, this overview must mention two exhibitions organised by Nordenfalk during his stay in the United States, both with the participation of his students. The first, with the title 'Colour of the Middle Ages: A Survey of Book Illumination based on Colour Facsimiles of Medieval Manuscripts' took place in the Pittsburgh State University Art Gallery.²⁵ The collection in the exhibition showed the state of the art of modern printing, and how it was able to create duplicates that were barely distinguishable from the original manuscripts. The exhibition also provided a very large survey of the history of medieval book illumination displaying copies alongside originals that had seldom been viewed or certainly never seen together. The didactic success of the exhibition was repeated in 1977, when the collection, extended by several additional high quality examples was shown in the Stockholm National Museum, announced as 'A Book Painter's Pictorial World'.²⁶

The second exhibition arranged under Nordenfalk's tenure as the Kress Professor in Washington focused on the collection of fragmentarily preserved manuscript illuminations donated by Lessing J. Rosenwald to the National Gallery of Art. Cataloguing of the material was a laborious and highly sensitive task. In addition to having to identify the manuscripts to which the fragments had originally belonged and attributing these books to appropriate painting schools, the researchers were instructed to select the fragments suspected to be forgeries.²⁷

3 Medieval books

Carl Nordenfalk's engagement in curatorial museum work and the breadth of his curatorial production are both impressive and an important area of his professional life. Nevertheless, he always insisted that the art of the medieval book was the research field for which

21 Rembrandt. *Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 12 januari–15 April 1956*, introduction by C. Nordenfalk; Special issue of *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 25/1–2 (1956), ed. C. Nordenfalk, and S. Karling.

22 In 1956 Nordenfalk wrote several popular papers on other works by Rembrandt, but the scholarly study of this painting was only published many years later in Swedish and in an English version: *The Batavians' Oath of Allegiance. Rembrandt's only monumental painting*, Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1983.

23 *Christina, drottning av Sverige: en europeisk kulturpersonlighet (Christina, Queen of Sweden: a personality of European civilisation): Europaradets elfte utställning: Nationalmuseum, 29 juni–18 oktober*, ed. Per Bjurström (Nationalmusei utställningskatalog, 305), Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1966 608 pages, 96 plates, also printed in English, French, German, Italian and Finnish versions.

24 The subject was treated in a special publication by the collaborator of the exhibition and the editor of the catalogue Per Bjurström, *Feast and Theatre in Queen Christina's Rome*, Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1966.

25 C. Nordenfalk with cooperation of V. Cassidy, K. Haskins, J-A. Sieger, *Colour of the Middle Ages. A Survey of Book Illumination based on Colour Facsimiles of Medieval Manuscripts*, University Art Gallery, Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Building, Pittsburgh, P.A., March 12–April 18, 1976.

26 *Bokmålares bildvärld. Handskrifter under 700 år faksimil* (Nationalmusei utställningskatalog, 407), Stockholm 1977.

27 C. Nordenfalk, Carra Ferguson, and David S. Schaff, *Medieval and Renaissance Miniatures from the National Gallery of Art*, ed. Gary Vikan, Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1975.



A



B



C

Fig. 8A–C: A: Opening of the exhibition ‘Christina, Queen of Sweden’: C. Nordenfalk, H.R.H. Princesses Sibylla and Christina, H. Em. Cardinal Eugène Tisserant. B: Queen Christina’s iron death mask, C: its copy. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum’s archives.



Fig. 9: *Codex Caesareus*, c.1050, Uppsala, University Library, MS C 93, fol. 3v: Christ in Majesty crowning Henry III and Agnes of Poitou, fol. 4r: Henry III presenting the Gospel Book to St Simon and St Jude

he held the highest priority. His numerous publications on this subject were, and continue to be, of fundamental importance to those who study illuminated manuscripts. They provided not only an aesthetic evaluation of the material, but also insightful analysis and assessment of its historical and theological connotations, including detailed studies of the sources that he had gathered with great care and attention. Most of these works were completed and published after he had stepped down from his directorship of the Stockholm National Museum. The following discusses merely a selection of them.

In the late 1950s Nordenfalk, already ranked as one of the most significant specialists in medieval book illumination, was asked to write a monograph in collaboration with André Grabar. The study was to treat the heretofore neglected subject of early Medieval and Romanesque painting. The two volume work spanned two periods, from the fourth to the eleventh century and the eleventh to the thirteenth century. It dealt separately with the wall-paintings

and manuscript painting of the epochs in question.²⁸ The books appeared in several languages and formed part of 'The Great Centuries of Painting' series, published by the prominent Swiss publishing house SKIRA. For its separately printed, high quality, colour illustrations matching and complementing the text masterfully, the book was a work of art in its own right. The broad scale with which the authors treated their subject and the highest level of polygraphic art made the books a classic in art history. They are still greatly appreciated and very much in use today.

During his second stay at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, Nordenfalk divided his time between two main projects. The first was the production of a full-colour facsimile edition of one of the most valuable manuscripts in the Swedish collections, the so-called

²⁸ *Early Medieval Painting from the Fourth to the Eleventh Century*, New York: Skira, 1957; *Romanesque Painting from the Eleventh to the Thirteenth Century*, New York: Skira, 1958. The books have been translated into French and German.

Nordenfalk's 'American period' is also marked by a more popular, but greatly appreciated book written during his time as professor at Pittsburgh University. The work features an introduction and commentaries to forty-eight high-quality colour plates,³⁴ presenting masterpieces of insular manuscript illumination, such as the *Book of Durrow*, the *Gospels of St Willibrord*, the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, the *Canterbury Codex Aureus* and the *Book of Kells*, some of which had been the objects of early studies he carried out.³⁵ The Hiberno-Saxon illumination also became a theme for his academic studies afterward. Of the aspects he explored were questions of the receptivity of classical forms in insular art and the iconography of the figural miniatures in the *Book of Kells*. He also picked up the intriguing topic of the depiction of animals in this manuscript, particularly those of cats and mice³⁶ (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11: *Book of Kells*, c. 800, Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 58, detail of fol. 48r, cat and mouse. From Nordenfalk 1983 (see n. 32), 216, Fig. 3.

ticana und Codex Latinus Fol. 416 der Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1976. The introduction in English was published in the collection of his papers, see n. 5.

³⁴ *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting: Book Illumination in the British Isles, 600-800*, New York: George Braziller, 1977. The book was also published in London, Munich and Paris.

³⁵ 'Eastern Style Elements in the Book of Lindisfarne', *Acta archaeologica*, 13 (1942), 157-169; 'Before the Book of Durrow', *Acta archaeologica*, 18 (1947), 141-174, both repr. in 1992, see n. 5.

³⁶ 'The Draped Lectern. A motif in Anglo-Saxon Evangelist Portraits', in *Intuition und Kunstwissenschaft. Festschrift für Hans Swarzenski zum 70. Geburtstag am 30. August 1973*, Berlin: Mann Verlag Berlin, 1973, 81-100; 'Corbie and Cassiodorus', in 'A Pattern Page Bearing on the Early History of Bookbinding. Hugo Buchthal on his 65th Birthday', *Pantheon*, 32 (1974), 225-231; 'Another look at the Book of Kells', in Friedrich Piel and Jörg Traeger (eds), *Festschrift Wolfgang Braunsfels*, Tübingen: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1977, 275-279; 'Katz und Maus und andere Tiere in the Book of Kells', in *Zum Problem der Deutung frühmittelalterlicher Bildinhalte. Akten des 1. Internationalen Kolloquiums in Marburg a.d. Lahn*, 15. bis 19. Februar 1983, ed. Helmuth Roth, Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1986, 211-219, all articles repr. in 1992, see n. 5.

However, it was not a book, but one of Nordenfalk's articles which caused real excitement among medieval manuscript specialists and started a long but fruitful scholarly controversy, one which the public could follow in the prestigious art history journal, *The Art Bulletin*. The paper³⁷ dealt with the sixteenth-century illustrated manuscript containing the gospel harmony composed by Tatian, the *Diatessaron*, written in Persian (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Cod. Orient. 81). Prior to the article's publication, Nordenfalk had discussed the subject with a large group of specialists. He argued that the decorated pages representing the cross-carpet page, the Four Evangelists (identified by the inscriptions in Syriac), the Entry into Jerusalem and the diagram of Paradise with the symbols of the Evangelists (Fig. 12), preserve ornamental and figurative forms that go back to Tatian's original manuscript. This hypothesis was criticised by Nordenfalk's friend Meyer Schapiro who convoked a whole seminar at Columbia University with the aim of scrutinising Nordenfalk's analysis.³⁸ The discussion of this very exceptional manuscript, which still baffles researchers,³⁹ continued with the answers and comments by Nordenfalk,⁴⁰ remaining faithful to the memorable thought he formulated in one of his earlier publications:

The hypotheses and judgements based on circumstantial evidence cannot be avoided in any reconstruction of the lost archetype. This drawback, however, is not sufficient reason for giving up the whole matter from the start. On the contrary, the more hidden the game the most thrilling the hunt.⁴¹

³⁷ 'An Illustrated Diatessaron', *The Art Bulletin*, 50/1 (1968), 119-140.

³⁸ Meyer Schapiro and Seminar, 'The Miniatures of the Florence Diatessaron (Laurentian MS Or. 81): Their Place in Late Medieval Art and Supposed Connection with Early Christian and Insular Art', *The Art Bulletin*, 55 (1973), 494-531.

³⁹ Jacques Guilmain, 'A Note on the "Arabesque" in the Diatessaron, Florence, Bibl. Laur., Orient. 81', *The Art Bulletin*, 55/1 (1973), 38-39; Pier Giorgio Borbone in *Le Vie delle Lettere. La Tipografia Medicea tra Roma e l'Oriente*, ed. Sara Fani et al., Firenze: Mandragora, 2012, no. 19; P.G. Borbone, "'Monsignore Vescovio di Soria" also Known as Moses of Mardin, Scribe and Book Collector', *Khristianskiy Vostok*, 8 (XIV) (2017), 79-114, esp. 95.

⁴⁰ C. Nordenfalk, 'The Diatessaron Miniatures Once More', *The Art Bulletin*, 55 (1973), 532-546; 'One Hundred and Fifty Years of Varying Views on the Early Insular Gospel Books', in *Proceedings of a Conference at University College Cork*, 31 October-3 November 1985: Ireland and Insular Art A.D. 500-1200, Dublin 1987, 1-6, repr. in 1992, see n. 5.

⁴¹ 'The Apostolic Canon Tables', 17, see n. 53.



Fig. 12: *Diatessaron*, 1547, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Or. 81, fol. 128v, diagram of Paradise surrounded by the symbols of the Evangelists. With permission of BML.

After his return to Sweden, Nordenfalk embraced the research theme he called his life's passion: the Five Senses as imagined in art from the Middle Ages to the modern time. He had begun to work intensively on the subject when he was a fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina but presented it for the first time in 1975 when he lectured at the Sorbonne at the École Pratique des Hautes Études.⁴² The material he began to gather and study during his Slade professorship comprised, among others, over two thousand photographs. Regrettably, only a fraction of the collection appeared in his publications.⁴³

⁴² 'Les Cinq Sens dans l'art du Moyen-Age', *Revue de l'art*, 34 (1976), 17–28.

⁴³ *Sevres et les cinq sens*, Stockholm: Nationalmuseum 1984; 'The Five Senses in Flemish Art before 1600', in *Netherlandish Mannerism. Papers given at a symposium in Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, September 21–22 1984*, Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1985, 135–154; 'The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 48 (1985), 1–22.

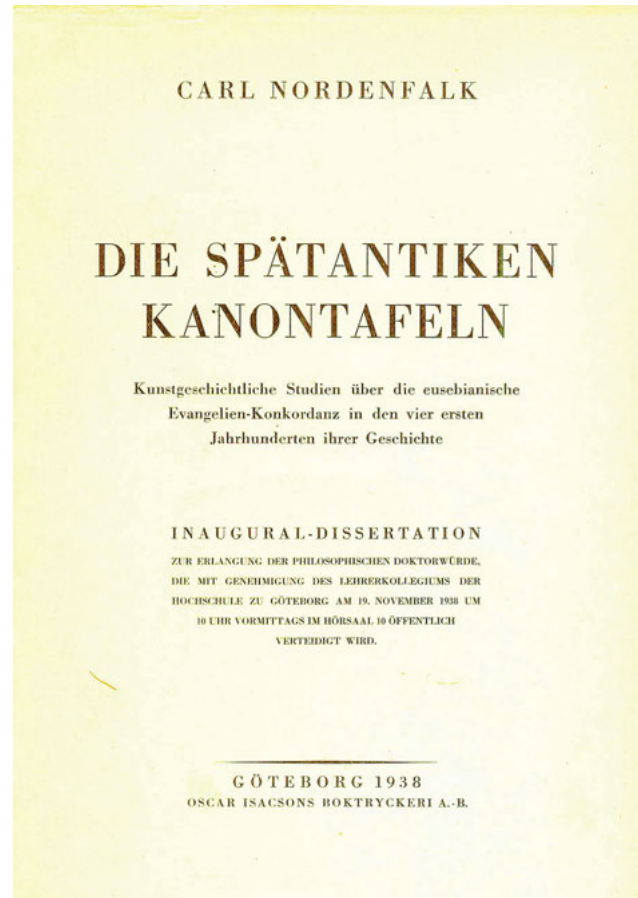


Fig. 13: Title page of C. Nordenfalk's dissertation.

4 'Die spätantiken Kanontafeln'

The name of Carl Nordenfalk is prominently associated with a work he wrote at the beginning of his scholarly career: his dissertation on the Eusebian canon tables, i.e. the tabular concordance indicating parallel passages of the four gospels, invented by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea in the fourth century (Fig. 13). The tables, presented in a decorative architectural setting, are introduced by Eusebius's letter to his friend Carpianus in which he explained how to use the tool, and closed by a symbolic composition known as the 'Fountain of Life' (Fig. 6 A–C). The whole set became an integral part of late antique and medieval manuscripts of the New Testament in every Christian language, but its layout changed, depending on the different cultural regions in which it was produced. Being of limited practical usefulness, the canons owed their long-lasting prosperity to their symbolic and artistic value.



Fig. 14: Gospels, sixth century, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS lat. 3806, fols 1v–2r. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

From Nordenfalk's autobiography we learn that the Eusebian Canons had not been the original subject of his dissertation, but the above-mentioned *Codex Caesareus Upsaliensis*. He abandoned the subject in 1933, when Albert Boeckler, in connection with the publication of the *Speyer Gospel Book* (Escorial, Library of the Monastery of San Lorenzo, Cod. Vitrinus 17), announced his work-in-progress on the Echternach painting school. The second choice of topic emerged from the study of two full-page miniatures belonging to the so-called *Registrum Gregorii* (Trier, Stadtbibliothek, cod. 171/1626 and Chantilly, Musée Condé, no. 15654). They were the work of an anonymous painter dubbed the 'Master of Registrum Gregorii', flourishing in Trier in the 970s–980s, considered to be the most important artist of the Ottonian age.⁴⁴ However, after an

extensive period of research it became clear that the material linked to him was too vast and too problematic to be treated in a doctoral thesis.

In the Biblioteca Vaticana, Nordenfalk found two folios of a Latin manuscript from the sixth century containing four canon tables (*Codex lat. 3806*) (Fig. 14). The discovery enabled him to consider the new subject as a material basis for his thesis—an analysis of the arrangements of the tables, moving towards the reconstruction of the Eusebian archetype. Aware that the number of medieval gospels with decorated canons is enormous, Nordenfalk turned his attention to ancient, rare examples. Taking them as a starting point, he completed the comparative material with manuscripts from eastern Christian traditions known for their conservative attitude towards their ancient models.⁴⁵ Implementing a novel analysis of the layout of the canon tables, he distin-

⁴⁴ The results of this research were published in the paper 'Der Meister des Registrum Gregorii', *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 1/3 (1950), 61–77, in which Nordenfalk gave an innovative analysis of the space treatment by the painter in the frontispiece miniature with the portrait of Otto II and the dedicatory miniature depicting Pope Gregorius the Great. He returned to the subject many years later in the articles: 'The Chronology of the Registrum Master', in *Kunsthistorische Forschungen. Otto Pächt zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*,

Salzburg 1972, 62–76 and 'Archbishop Egbert's "Registrum Gregorii"', in *Studien zur mittelalterlichen Kunst 800–1250. Festschrift für Florentine Mutherich*, edited by Katharina Bierbrauer, Peter K. Klein and Willi Sauerländer, Munich: Prestel, 1985, both repr. in 1992, see n. 5.

⁴⁵ In addition to Syriac manuscripts, he took into consideration a group of Armenian, Georgian and Ethiopic examples reliant on the Greek models.

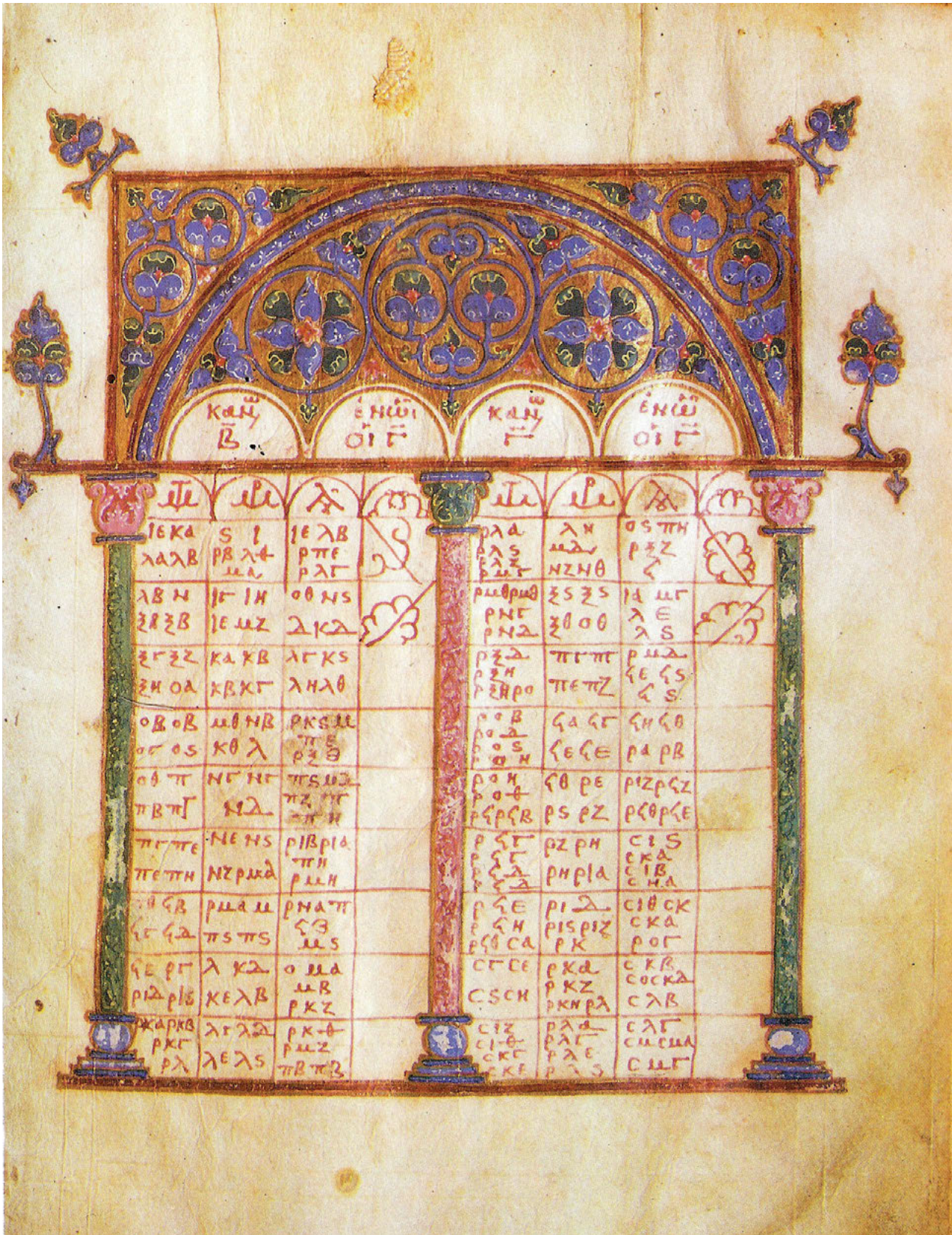


Fig. 15: Gospels, Constantinople, twelfth c.; Stockholm National Museum, Ms B 1961, fol. 3r, Canons II–III. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

guished several canon series as characteristic of particular groups of manuscripts,⁴⁶ their arrangement depending on the varying length and width of the text columns which in themselves would depend on the size of the manuscripts.

Approaching the subject from an art historical point of view, Nordenfalk highlighted the importance of the canons' decoration. He indicated that the idea of framing tabular texts with ornamental strips imitating columns, originally executed by the scribe, developed towards the painterly imitation of architectonic structures composed of a multiplex portico⁴⁷ and gradually enriched by a repertory of aniconic and figural embellishments, entrusted only to the painter. Furthermore, even representational motifs such as the busts of the Evangelists, the apostles or prophets, arranged according to the theological typology, became incorporated into the decoration system. The aim of these additions was to increase the prestige of the canons, considered not only to be a practical comparison of the Four Gospels, but also a solemn entrance into the sacred texts clearly alluding to the gates of Heavenly Jerusalem (Fig. 15).

On the whole, Nordenfalk's dissertation provided a pioneering approach to the subject and constituted an ambitious attempt to cover a very large research field which, at that time, was still very much in its infancy. Later accumulation of new data and knowledge led Nordenfalk to reject any offers for the book's reprint.⁴⁸ In spite of that, even in its original form, 'Die spätantiken Kanontafeln' has proven to be of lasting value. It remains profitable reading not merely in terms of art history but for anyone studying the medieval gospels.

Lack of time in preparing a new edition of the book did not prevent Nordenfalk conducting further research into the problems concerning the canon tables. He wrote a series of articles which, as he said, were intended to be the *addenda and corrigenda* to his dissertation.⁴⁹ In the paper 'The Beginning of the Book Decoration'⁵⁰ he



Fig. 16: Alf Rolfsen, portrait of C. Nordenfalk, Gripsholm Castle. With permission of the Stockholm National Museum's archives.

developed the idea of possible prototypes of the concordance's architectonic frames, such as the colonnade, arcade and *tholos*, raising also the problem of the symbolic value imposed on these forms after their adaptation to the embellishment of Holy Scripture. In 'The Eusebian Canon-Tables: Some Textual Problems',⁵¹ he pointed out the lack of serious text-critical analysis of the Greek canons and as a consequence, of a proper classification. A paper on a rare example of the canons executed in a Coptic monastic milieu⁵² is a piece of veritable detective work in which the author, upon meticulous analysis of a few, badly preserved papyrus fragments, managed to reconstruct a large part of the concordance. In his paper 'The Apostolic Canon Tables'⁵³ Nordenfalk discussed, within a wide iconographical context, the origin and dissemination of the canon arches decorated with portraits of the apostles depicted within the medallions. His paper on different textual versions of the Eusebian synopsis, intending to continue the discussion of the original contents of the concordance, remained unfinished.

⁴⁶ He distinguished between the Greek, ancient, canon series composed of 7 pages and the creation, later on, of a set of 10 pages, between the standard Latin system comprising 12 pages and a later, alternative set composed of 16 pages. He also described and explained the Syrian system that used 19 pages.

⁴⁷ Nordenfalk established the useful typology of the architectural framework of the canons being composed of the double and triple arches: 'n', 'm', and 'mn' types.

⁴⁸ In his memoirs, Nordenfalk indicated that in 1979/80, at Dumbarton Oaks, he made an effort to update the book and publish it in English, but the task was too big and could not be accomplished within the one year fellowship, which, moreover, had been granted for another project.

⁴⁹ 'Canon Tables on Papyrus', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 36 (1982), 29–38, here 29; repr. in 1922, see n. 5.

⁵⁰ *Beiträge für Georg Swarzenski zum 11. Januar 1951*, Berlin: Mann,

Chicago: H. Regney, 1951, 9–20, repr. in 1992, see n. 5.

⁵¹ *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 35/1 (1984), 91–104; repr. in 1992, see n. 5.

⁵² See n. 49.

⁵³ *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6:62, 1963, 17–34, repr. 1992, see n. 5.