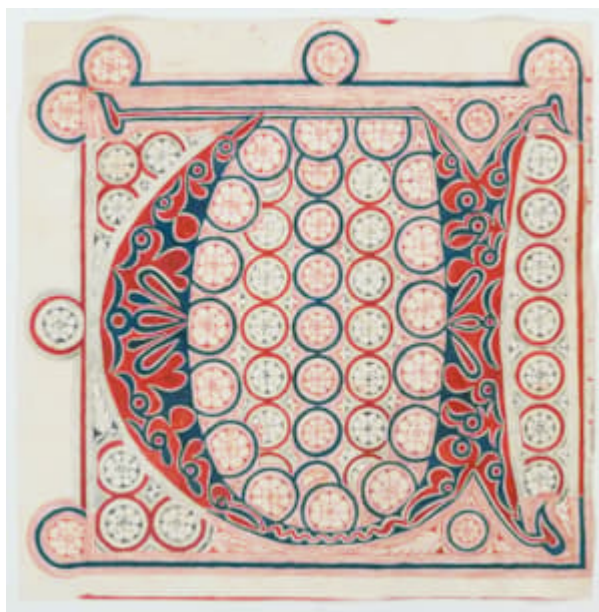


# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**16th Century SPANISH SCHOOL**

**A Decorated Initial V from an Antiphony**

Manuscript in red, blue and grey ink on vellum.

Inscribed with part of a rubric '[As]censione dni' in red ink on the verso.

288 x 285 mm. (11 3/8 x 11 1/4 in.)

This is one of a group of four matching ornamental initials from a large 16th century Spanish antiphonal manuscript that were offered for sale by Maggs Bros. in London in 1967. This cutting of an initial V, with traces of text and ruling for music, incorporates a foliate pattern in red and blue outlined with white, surrounded by a repeated pattern of circles with flower heads inside them. While the ornament of the present sheet and another from the group, with the initial A, is based entirely on circles, the other two cuttings, with the initials C and S, also incorporated lozenges. Indeed, the initial S adds squares to the design, creating a pattern quite reminiscent of Islamic ornament, which in turn would suggest a possible origin in southern Spain for the parent manuscript.

The reverse of this decorated initial V includes the rubric '[As]censione d[omi]ni' ('Ascension of the Lord'), so it is likely that this initial was meant to begin the introit lines 'Videntibus illis elevatus est' ('When they saw him, he was lifted up') or 'Viri Galilaei, quid aspicitis in caelum' ('Men of Galilee, why are you looking up to heaven?') in the text of the antiphony.

The very large scale and repeated ornament of the present sheet, as well as the three related initials, is typical of late medieval and 16th century Spanish liturgical choirbooks. They may be likened in particular to the 'letras de compas para illuminadores' (or 'casos quadrados') illustrated by Juan de Yciar in his famous writing book *Arte Subtilissima*, published in Spain in 1550, and may thus be tentatively dated to around the same time.

This manuscript cutting was once part of the collection of Stuart Cary Welch (1928-2008), a noted scholar and curator of Islamic and Indian art who had a long professional relationship with both the Harvard University Art Museums in Cambridge (MA) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Much of his personal collection of Indian and Islamic paintings, drawings, manuscripts, arms and armour, sculpture and textiles was presented to Harvard over a period of several years.

**Literature:**

London, Maggs Bros. Ltd., *European Miniatures and Illumination*: Bulletin No.5, April 1967, pp.51-53, no.37 (as 'Spanish Illuminator, c.1550', priced at £25).