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Dr. Sandra Hindman with Dr. Olaf Gericke, Landrat of Kreis Warendorf, TEFAF 2017



GERMAN GOVERNMENT CONCLUDES DEAL TO BUY BACK 1000 YEAR OLD LIESBORN GOSPELS FOR MORE THAN 3 MILLION DOLLARS AT TEFAF, MAASTRICHT

The thousand-year-old Gospel Book of Liesborn Abbey in Westphalia is finally returning triumphantly to its homeland, in a sale arranged between its present owners, the North American manuscript dealers **Les Enluminures**, and a partnership between the Kreis Warendorf and the Sparkasse Münsterland Ost.

Liesborn Abbey, in the diocese of Münster, was founded as a convent of nuns in the ninth century. This was their stately illuminated manuscript Gospel Book, their most precious possession. It was made around the year 980 by the scribe Gerwardus. The manuscript is richly decorated throughout with wonderful designs in red and yellow – by coincidence the municipal colours of the modern district of Warendorf.

In the twelfth century the abbey was re-founded for monks. The manuscript remained there until the monastery was closed in 1803. It was acquired by a professor at Hamm in Westphalia, who sold it to a famous English collector, Sir Thomas Phillipps. In 1950 it was presented to the library of a seminary in California, where it remained until 1987, when it was sold to a private collector in Norway. From there it was acquired by a private collection in Switzerland, from which it passed to **Les Enluminures**, of Chicago and New York.

The manuscript comprises the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in the Latin translation of Saint Jerome. It is written and decorated on parchment, entirely by hand, more 500 years earlier than the Gutenberg Bible. It is in almost perfect condition and it survives in its medieval wooden binding, probably carved at Liesborn Abbey itself. **It was until now one of the oldest manuscripts of the Gospels still in private possession.**

Les Enluminures is the largest company of manuscript dealers in the world, with offices in Chicago, New York, Paris and London. They are advisors and agents for many national libraries and museums. **“It is always a source of very great satisfaction when a manuscript finally returns to its rightful and ancestral home”, said Professor Sandra Hindman, founder and president of Les Enluminures.** The sale was negotiated by her and by Dr Christopher de Hamel, of Cambridge University and a senior vice-president of Les Enluminures. Dr de Hamel, then representing Sotheby’s, had been responsible for the sale of the Gospel Book of Henry the Lion to the German state in 1983. “Now, more than ever, the treasures of ancient Europe are precious reminders of our history,” Dr de Hamel added. The state of Westphalia had unsuccessfully attempted to reacquire the manuscript several times in the past. The purchase now was due to the effort and unrelenting enthusiasm of Dr Olaf Gericke, Landrat of the Kreis Warendorf, and his colleagues.

The Gospel Book of Liesborn Abbey will travel back from America to Westphalia in April, finally ending its journey where it began more than a thousand years ago.