

2011

### To Touch the Image: Embodying Christ in the Bernward Gospels

Jennifer P. Kingsley  
*Columbia University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal>



Part of the Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons

---

#### Recommended Citation

Kingsley, Jennifer P. "To Touch the Image: Embodying Christ in the Bernward Gospels." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 3, 1 (2010): 138-173. <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol3/iss1/5>

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Art History at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* by an authorized editor of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [noltj@kenyon.edu](mailto:noltj@kenyon.edu).



## To Touch the Image: Embodying Christ in the Bernward Gospels

By Jennifer P. Kingsley, Columbia University

In the early eleventh century a lavishly illustrated gospel book was made under the direction of Bishop Bernward for the Benedictine monks of St. Michael's Abbey in Hildesheim (Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18). Bernward presented the codex to the monastery<sup>1</sup> in conjunction with dedicating its church's crypt altar to Christ, the Virgin, Michael, and the "whole celestial army" on September 29, 1015. A painted bifolium at the front of the manuscript portrays that moment, fols. 16v-17r (**fig. 1**),<sup>2</sup> and inscriptions in the picture's frames place special emphasis on Mary and Christ.<sup>3</sup>

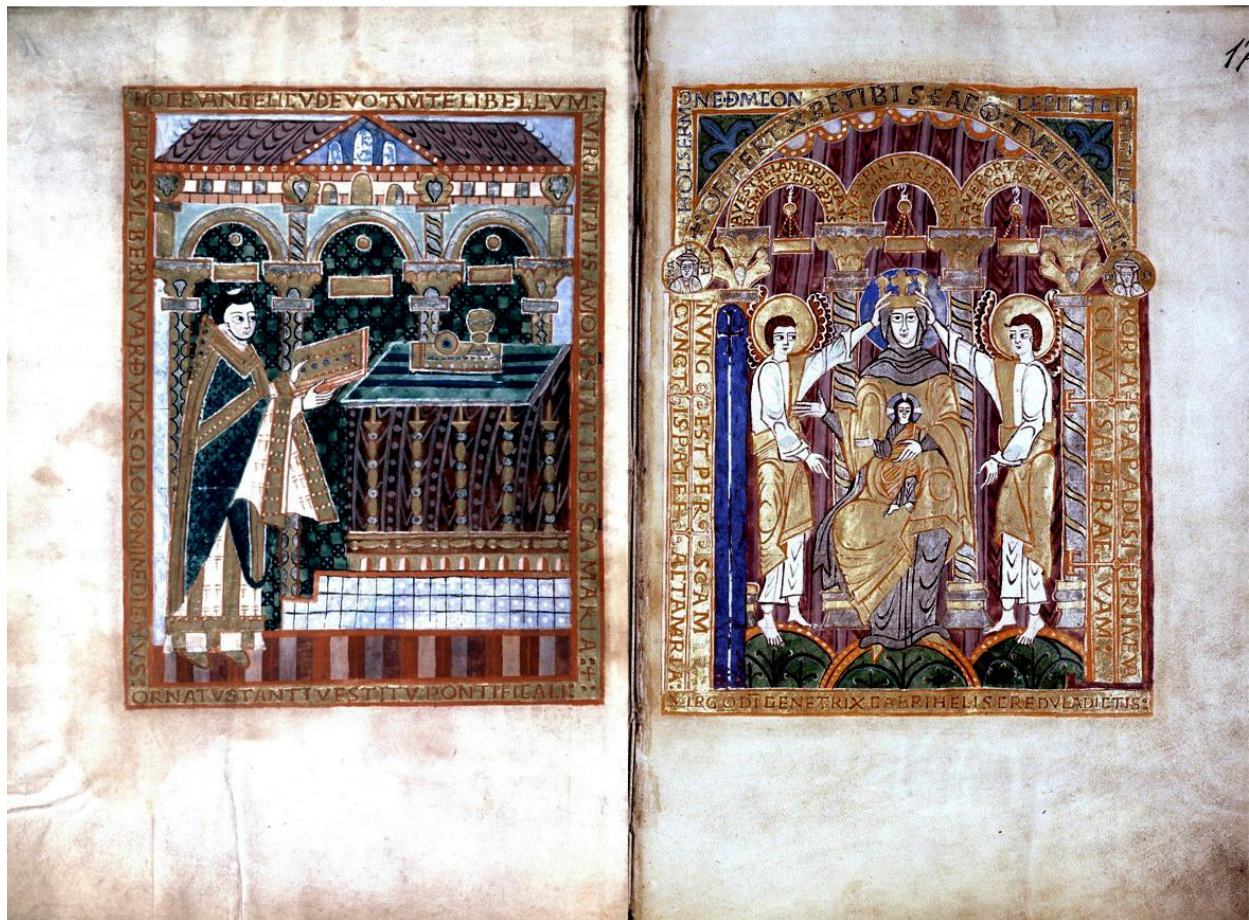
<sup>1</sup> A dedicatory inscription on fol. 231v reads: "I, Bernward, had this codex written and, ordering that my wealth be added above, as you see I present (it) to St. Michael beloved of the Lord. Let there be a curse of God on anyone who takes it from him." (*Hunc ego Bernwardus codicem conscribere feci / Atq(ue) meas ut cernis opes super addere iubens / Dilecto domini dederam sancto Michaheli / Sit anathema dei quisquis sibi dempserit illum*). Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> The patron saints represented in the painting match the dedication of the crypt as reconstructed by W. Berges and H. J. Rieckenberg from remnants still in situ, in *Die älteren Hildesheimer Inschriften bis zum Tode Bischof Hezilos (†1079)* (Göttingen, 1983), 54-62, 172ff. *anno dominice incarnationis Mxv ordinationis beRNWARDI VENERabilis presulis hild(eshemensis) anno xxIII INDICT(IONE) XIII iii k(alendas) oct(obris) in honore d(omi)ni beate genitRICIS ET archangeli michaelis et totius militie cELEstis hec cripta a bernwardo ep(iscop)o dedicata est*. Capitalized letters are those that remain extant.

<sup>3</sup> In the picture's frame (fol. 16v):

"This small book of the gospels, with a devoted mind  
the admirer of Virginitie hands over to you, Holy Mary  
Bishop Bernward, only scarcely worthy of this name,  
and of the adornment of such great episcopal vestment."

*Hoc evangelicu(m) devota m(en)te libellum: Virginitatis amor pr(ae)stat tibi s(an)c(t)a Maria: praesul  
Bernward(us) vix solo nomine dignus: ornatus tanti vestitu pontificali.*



**Figure 1.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fols. 16v-17r, Dedication Opening (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).

Bernward's gospel book is approximately 280 x 200 mm with a total of 232 folios and over thirty paintings and decorated initials. The text is a standard local variant of the gospels,<sup>4</sup> and concludes with a list of pericopes that offer brief indications for readings on Sundays and the main feasts of the liturgical year.<sup>5</sup> Although the gospel book's text is redacted in narrative order,

<sup>4</sup> The text is identical to that used at the major regional producer of manuscripts in tenth-century Corvey. Gerd Bauer, "Corvey oder Hildesheim?: Zur Ottonischen Buchmalerei in Norddeutschland," 2 vols., (Ph.D. diss., Universität Hamburg, 1977), 1: 49-50.

<sup>5</sup> The liturgical indications correspond to a type originating in Rome, and labeled  $\Sigma$  by Theodor Klauser, although the feasts for the last two months of the liturgical year stem from the so-called  $\Delta$  group, which Klauser showed included Gallican material. Klauser, *Das römische capitulare evangeliorum: Texte und Untersuchung zu seiner ältesten Geschichte*, vol. 1: Typen (Münster, 1935), 93-172; cf. Bauer, "Corvey oder Hildesheim?" 1: 56-92. A

the inclusion of these pericopes indicates the manuscript probably served its monastic community in rituals, as the source of set readings that would have been read in liturgical sequence.<sup>6</sup>

The manuscript's decoration, consisting of figural scenes and illuminated text pages grouped into four separate sections that each illustrate one gospel, does not seem, however, predominantly related to the book's possible liturgical use. Nor would the paintings likely have been examined or displayed during a ritual. In fact, evidence suggests that many of the more splendid Ottonian service books were treated like reliquaries in ecclesiastical rituals and were usually carried closed rather than open.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the paintings do not simply correspond to the gospel text;<sup>8</sup> indeed certain thematic foci repeat across all four groups of pictures that suggest something about the interests of the patron and designer of the codex.<sup>9</sup>

---

different labeling scheme is adopted by Antoine Chavasse. See the summary of his findings in: Chavasse, "Evangélique, épistolaire, antiphonaire et sacramentaire: Les livres romains de la messe au VIIIe et IXe siècle," *Ecclesia orans* 6 (1989): 177-255. For the correspondence between Klauser and Chavasse see: Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, rev. ed., trans. William G. Storey and Niels Krogh Rasmussen, with John K. Brooks-Leonard (Washington D.C., 1986), esp. 342-348. The full text of the capitularies for Hildesheim's manuscripts is in Stephen Beissel, *Das heiligen Bernward Evangelienbuch im Dome zu Hildesheim: Mit Handschriften des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts in kunsthistorischer und liturgischer Hinsicht verglichen* (Hildesheim, 1895), 51-64.

<sup>6</sup> On books in the medieval liturgy see: Andrew Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office: A Guide to Their Organization and Terminology* (Toronto, 1982); Eric Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books from the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century* (Collegeville, MN, 1998); John Lowden, "Illuminated Books and the Liturgy: Some Observations," in *Objects, Images and the Word: Art in the Service of the Liturgy*, ed. Colum Hourihane, Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers 6 (Princeton, 2003), 17-53.

<sup>7</sup> Anton von Euw, "Früh- und hochmittelalterliches Evangelienbücher im Gebrauch," in *Der Codex im Gebrauch*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 70, ed. Christel Meier, Dagmar Hüpper, and Hagen Keller (Munich, 1996), 21-30.

<sup>8</sup> Rainer Kahsnitz, "Inhalt und Aufbau," in *Das Kostbare Evangelium des Heiligen Bernward*, eds. Michael Brandt, Rainer Kahsnitz and Hans Jakob Schuffels, (Munich, 1993), esp. 18-22.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer P. Kingsley, "The Bernward Gospels: Structuring *Memoria* in Eleventh-Century Germany," (Ph. D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2007), esp. 1-15.





**Figure 2.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 175v, Ascension (above) and Portrait of the Evangelist John (below) (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).

Among the ideas treated in the Bernward Gospels' paintings is the sensory perception of the divine, a theme that Robert Deshman was the first to identify as a critical component of the manuscript's pictorial program. In a 1997 *Art Bulletin* article, Deshman focused on an unusual representation of Christ's Ascension that concludes the manuscript's pictorial cycle, fol. 175v (**fig. 2**).<sup>10</sup> This imagery, first christened the "disappearing Christ" by Meyer Schapiro in the 1940s, seems to have been invented in Anglo-Saxon England around the millennium.<sup>11</sup> It shows the ascending Christ at the very moment he vanishes into heaven, his upper body obscured by clouds. Noting parallel exegetic innovations in contemporary Anglo-Saxon sermons, Deshman argued that the disappearing Christ was developed as a prompt for spiritual seeing, the second category in Augustine's well-known tripartite system of vision.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Robert Deshman, "Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images," *Art Bulletin* 79 (1997): 518-546.

<sup>11</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "The Image of the Disappearing Christ: The Ascension in English Art Around the Year 1000," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, ser. 6, 23 (1943): 133-152, repr. in Schapiro, *Selected Papers; III. Late Antique, Early Christian, and Mediaeval Art* (New York, 1979), 267-87.

<sup>12</sup> In brief, Augustine explained that bodily eyes employ corporeal sight to perceive the earth, the eyes of the heart employ spiritual vision to perceive something beyond the created world and the eyes of the mind employ intellectual vision to see God directly. These ideas are developed most fully in *De trinitate* and the *Confessions*. Margaret Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's 'De trinitate' and 'Confessions'," *Journal of Religion* 63 (1983): 125-42; Deshman, "Disappearing Christ," esp. 537-8.





**Figure 3.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 75v, Noli me tangere (above) and Peter Charging Mark to Write the Gospels (below) (photo: Dom

und Diözesanmuseum).

Based on this understanding of the disappearing Christ imagery, Deshman also offered an interpretation for the puzzling representation of the *Noli me tangere* that illustrates the Book of Mark, fol. 75v (**fig. 3**). In the Gospel's account, found in John, Mary Magdalene visits Christ's tomb, finding it empty. At first filled with sorrow, she suddenly recognizes a man standing by the tomb as the resurrected Christ. Rejoicing that he lives, the Magdalene reaches for Christ, but he denies her touch, ordering "do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my father!" (John 20:17).<sup>13</sup> In patristic and medieval commentary, the central point of this gospel episode is Christ's command not to touch, often dramatically represented in the West. Conventionally, Mary stretches her arms towards Christ in longing, while Christ, twisting back with the force of his command, stops her with a gesture.<sup>14</sup> In the *Bernward Gospels*, in flagrant violation of Christ's command and in contrast to every medieval convention for the scene, Mary comes into contact with Christ's feet.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Biblical citations are quoted from Michael D. Coogan with Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom and PHEME PERKINS, eds., *New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Gertrud Schiller, *Die Auferstehung und Erhöhung Christi*, Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst 3 (Gütersloh, 1986), 276-288.

<sup>15</sup> Rainer Kahsnitz argues this unusual detail may stem from a conflation of the *Noli me tangere* with representations of an account in Matthew where two Marys visit Christ's tomb and, kneeling, touch his feet. This illustration is more popular in Early Christian and Byzantine art and is generally known as the "chairete." Kahsnitz "Inhalt und Aufbau," in *Das Kostbare Evangelium des Heiligen Bernward*, eds. Michael Brandt, Rainer Kahsnitz and Hans Jakob Schuffels (Munich, 1993), 38-9. However, the chairete scene invariably includes two women usually placed at Christ's left, not one woman on his right. Moreover, even though the miniature may have been influenced by early Christian or Middle Byzantine illustrations of Matthew's story, its depiction of touch is a meaningful alteration of a known type. In comparison, the same scene on Bernward's famous bronze doors, although similar in its composition, shows Mary at some distance from Christ, who twists back with the force of his command "do not touch!" There is no contact between the two figures. *Bernward von Hildesheim und das Zeitalter der Ottonen*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim, 1993) 2: VII-33, 508; Harvey Stahl, "Eve's Reach: A Note on Dramatic Elements in the Hildesheim Doors," in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art-Historian and the Object*, eds. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas (Ann Arbor, 2002), 162-175.



Deshman argued that the same Augustinian exegetical tradition underlying the disappearing Christ also explained this unusual *Noli me tangere*. Augustine's commentary on the Ascension deals with the nature of Christ as both man and God, and the problem for mankind of understanding and perceiving that dual nature.<sup>16</sup> Another Augustinian homily that highlights the problem of faith and perception treats two post-resurrection episodes of touch, the Doubting Thomas and the *Noli me tangere*. Augustine explains that Mary was forbidden to touch Christ because she recognized Christ simply as the man she had known, failing in that moment inwardly to perceive his divinity.<sup>17</sup> Analyzing the *Noli me tangere* in light of Augustinian exegesis, Deshman argued that the depiction of Mary's touch in the *Bernward Gospels* served, like Christ's physical disappearance from the viewer's eyes in the manuscript's Ascension painting, as a lesson of the connection between faith and spiritual sight. Thus Mary's dramatic act in the *Bernward Gospels* was not to be treated as a tactile experience, but rather as a modeling of visionary perception. For Deshman, when the painting shows the Magdalene touching Christ through the mandorla, a sign for Christ's godhood, it suggests that she spiritually sees his divinity.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in Deshman's argument, *Bernward's* manuscript presents the acts of both the Magdalene and John the Evangelist as prompts to the book's monastic audience for spiritual seeing.

---

<sup>16</sup> These ideas were picked up by such later commentators as Leo the Great, Maximus of Turin, Cesarius of Arles, and, were especially important for the Anglo-Saxons, such as Bede. Deshman, "Disappearing Christ," 534, 114n-119n.

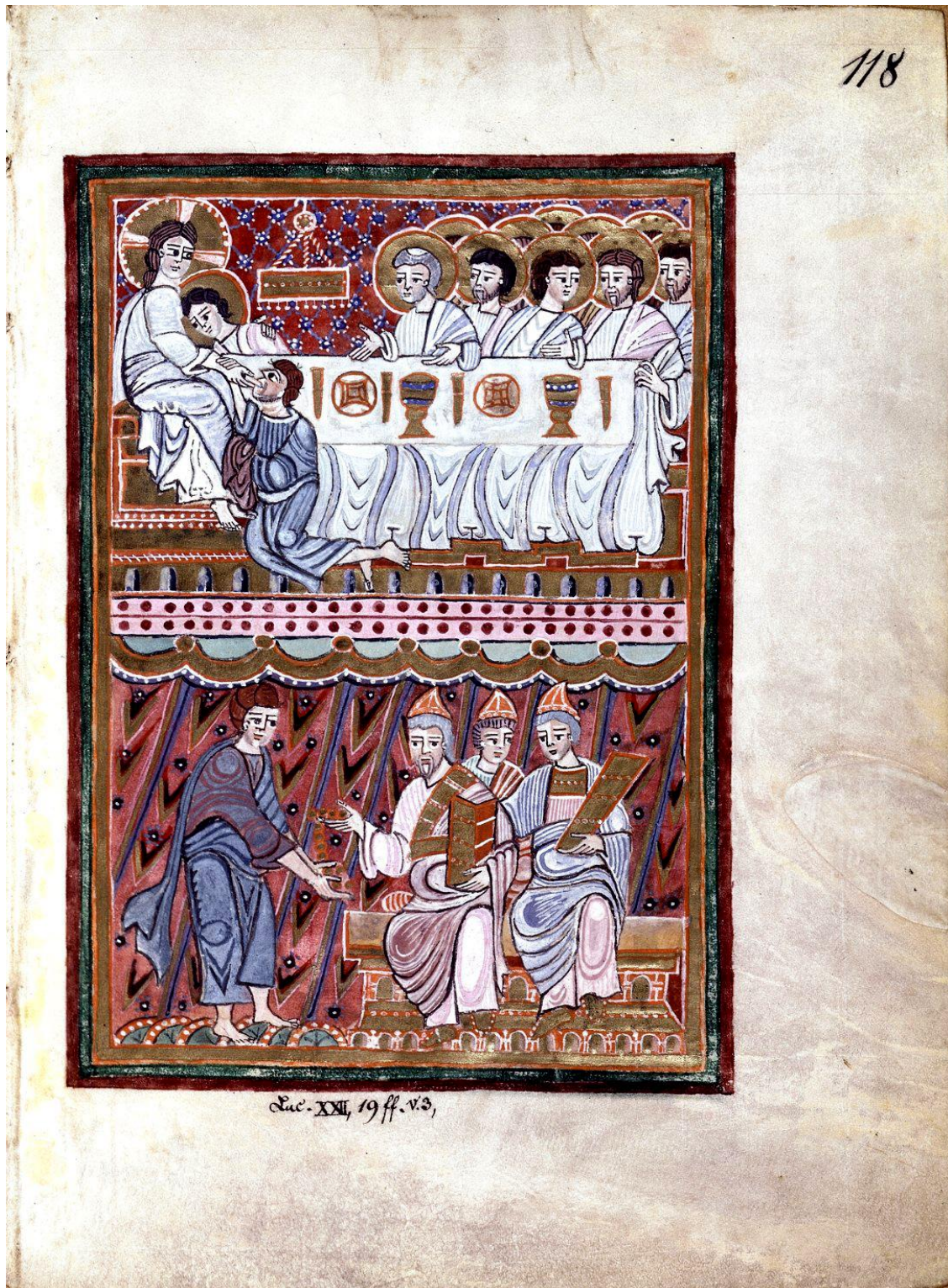
<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium* 121, chaps. 3-5, ed. August Mayer, *S. Aurelii Augustini In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV*, CCSL 36 (Turnhout, 1990), 665-68. This Augustinian interpretation remained popular in the tenth and eleventh centuries, appearing, for example, in the "Sermo in veneratione sanctae Mariae Magdalene" generally attributed to Odo of Cluny, although Dominique Iogna-Prat suggests the work belongs to the intellectual environment of Vezelay in the mid-ninth to mid-eleventh century, in "La Madeleine du Sermo in veneratione sanctae Mariae Magdalene attribué à Odon de Cluny," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome: Moyen Age* 104 (1992): 37-70.

<sup>18</sup> Deshman, "Disappearing Christ," esp. 537-38.

Setting aside the problem of the Benedictine community's use of the book's imagery in a tome that was probably kept in St. Michael's treasury and thus only available to be studied, or even seen, by a select few, there is another fundamental problem in Dushman's claim that these paintings of the Bernward Gospels served to teach the monks spiritual seeing. Although a powerful argument for understanding the new Ascension imagery based on its Anglo-Saxon context, by interpreting the touch represented in the Bernward Gospels' *Noli me tangere* as a sign for visionary perception, Dushman's conclusions subsume touch to sight.<sup>19</sup> Such a

---

<sup>19</sup> Art historians have generally privileged the role of visual perception over the other senses in the making of images. This trend has shifted somewhat in the last decade. A particularly fruitful area of research has been on synaesthesia in the Byzantine liturgical experience of icons. Robert Nelson, "The Discourse of Icons: Then and Now," *Art History* 12 (1989): 144-157; Liz James, "Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium," *Art History* 27 (2004): 522-537; Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 631-55. Studying the art of the Latin West, Elizabeth Sears has noted the pictorialization of hearing in the Utrecht Psalter. Sears, "The Iconography of Auditory Perception in the Early Middle Ages: On Psalm Illustration and Psalm Exegesis," in *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgement from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1991): 19-38. Other scholars have searched for tactile and gustatory experiences of and in works of art: Volker Schier and Corine Schleif, "Seeing and Singing, Touching and Tasting the Holy Lance: The Power and Politics of Embodied Religious Experiences in Nuremberg, 1424-1524," in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000-2000*, eds. Nils Petersen, Claus Cluver, and Nicolas Bell (New York, 2004), 401-487; Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, 2005). The need to continue to expand the discussion to include all the medieval senses prompted the International Center for Medieval Art in 2008 to sponsor a session at the International Congress in Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo entitled "Framing the Medieval Senses in Art." Some of the ideas in this paper were originally presented at that conference, as well as in the previous year's session "Ottonian Art and History." I am grateful to the organizers of these sessions, as well as participants and attendees for their comments.



**Figure 4.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 118r, Last Supper (above) and Judas with the High Priests (below) (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).





**Figure 5.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 174v, Baptism of Christ (above) and Raising of Lazarus (below) (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).

translation of the depicted tactile experience into a visual one does not take into account the evidence of the Bernward Gospels' pictorial program, which places a special emphasis on touch, particularly in the illustration and framing of three Gospel episodes: the *Noli me tangere*, fol. 75v (**fig. 3**), the Last Supper, fol. 118r (**fig. 4**) and the Baptism, fol. 174v (**fig. 5**). In this paper I argue, in contrast to Dushman, that the *Noli me tangere* is not about visionary experience, but rather about tactile perception and the tangibility of the sacred. The painting is part of a series that develops a pictorial exegesis on the nature of touch and its role in apprehending the divine.<sup>20</sup>

In the *Noli me tangere*, Mary bodily enters Christ's mandorla, a sign of his godhood, her entire upper body overlapping the golden oval. Contact occurs, but the Magdalene's touch is the most minimal possible that can still be considered a touch. The edge of her thumb barely grazes Christ's left heel. Christ too touches Mary, his foot crossing over her arm, as he begins to rise off the ground. This posing of Christ's foot over Mary's arm may be read one of two ways, either as an overlap that creates a minimized contact, or as an aggressive denial of Mary's touch. Both possible interpretations of these gestures imply a touch that both activates and resists connection at one and the same time. Mary and Christ's gestures perform a non-touching or denied-touching contact. This strange representation portrays a sensory experience that is intrinsically in dynamic tension. Mary and Christ's touch works in motion, crossing the threshold between earth and heaven. While Mary enters the space of Christ's godhood, the mandorla, Christ's ascending feet graze Mary's earthly, human flesh.

---

<sup>20</sup> While Dushman's argument that the Bernward Gospels' miniatures explore spiritual sight is borne out by a series of visionary pictures that appear throughout the manuscript, these are structured in an alternate pictorial mode to those I explore here as images of tactile perception. Whereas the narrative scenes such as the *Noli me tangere*, Baptism and Last Supper feature figures primarily in profile who move in a shallow foreground space, a series of full-page miniatures present Christ statically and frontally. The latter include witnessing figures who "see" Christ. Kingsley, esp. 139-237.

Such a dynamic non-touching touch has, to my knowledge, no parallel in either medieval pictures or exegesis. However, a philosophical text, Calcidius' well-known fourth or fifth-century latin translation of Plato's *Timaeus*<sup>21</sup> includes an extended discussion of what it describes as *sine sensu tangentis tangentur*, that is, touching without the sense of touch, in essence, a non-touching form of touch.<sup>22</sup> In his commentary, Calcidius explains the physical process of such a touch:

*Yet there is some superficial contact but no real touch*, and this with the bodies in it rather than with itself. When these are perceived, the feeling arises that matter itself is perceived because it seems to be formed by the 'species' it takes in, whereas, in reality, it is formless. And thus the perception of the forms present in matter is clear but that of matter itself, which underlies these forms, is obscure, and a co-perception rather than a perception. Therefore, since not matter itself is perceived but what is of matter, and since it only seems to be perceived together with the material things, there arises such an uncertain sense. And consequently, it is well said that "matter is touched without being perceived by the man who touches it," *for it is not really touched*. . . . matter is tangible, because one gets the impression that it is touched, when that which is touched first of all comes within reach of the senses. However, contact with matter is accidental, it is untouchable itself, because it is perceived by neither the sense of touch nor the other senses.<sup>23</sup>

This description of "touching without the sense of touch," a touch that involves "some superficial contact but no real contact," an "accidental" contact with something true that is yet untouchable itself, is clearly a verbal equivalent to the form of touching represented in the painting.

Bishop Bernward certainly knew Calcidius' *Timaeus*. By the late tenth and early eleventh

<sup>21</sup> Identifying Calcidius as a historical person has proven difficult. An eleventh-century copy of the *Timaeus* includes a dedication to Bishop Osius of Cordoba, an advisor to Constantine. This has led some scholars to assume that Calcidius wrote in fourth-century Spain. However, Calcidius' name does not appear in Isidore of Seville's list of Spanish writers, a strange omission for the writer of a text as popular as the *Timaeus*. Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame, IN, 1986), 421-433.

<sup>22</sup> For more on this phrase see Daniel Heller-Roazen, "The Matter of Language: Guilhem de Peitieu and the Platonic Tradition," *Modern Language Notes* 113 (1998): 851-80, esp. 851-60.

<sup>23</sup> *Timaeus, A Calcidio Translati Commentarioque Instructus*, ed. J.H. Waszink, Plato Latinus 4, ed. Raymond Klibansky (London and Leiden, 1962), paragraph 345, 336-8; eng. trans. J.C.M. van Winden, *Calcidius on Matter, His Doctrine And Its Sources: A Chapter in the History of Platonism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 221-2, italics mine.



centuries there was a dramatic increase in the production of Calcidius' text throughout Northern Europe, including in the Ottonian territories.<sup>24</sup> Also critical at that time were shifts in the location and form of the glosses that increasingly became interlinear explanations and definitions.<sup>25</sup> This, along with the insertion of explanatory diagrams that in turn influenced religious painting, suggests that by the eleventh century Calcidius' *Timaeus* formed part of school curricula.<sup>26</sup> Both Abbo of Fleury, the great teacher, and Gerbert of Aurillac, future Pope and closely connected to the Ottonian imperial court, studied and taught Calcidius' translation and commentary.<sup>27</sup> Although no extant copies can be associated with Bishop Bernward directly, his 1019 charter for St. Michael's monastery derives its discussion of the relationship between matter and soul from the *Timaeus*, using specific and uncommon vocabulary from Calcidius' translation,<sup>28</sup> and a second painting in the Bernward Gospels, fol. 174r (**fig. 6**) owes its cosmological content in part to the *Timaeus*.

---

<sup>24</sup> Of the seventeen extant copies containing both Calcidius' translation and his commentary, at least eight were produced in Germany. *A Calcidio Translatus*, cvi-cxxxi, clxxxvii-clxxxviii.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Gibson, "The Study of the *Timaeus* in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Pensamiento* 25 (1969): 183-94; Anna Somfai, "The Eleventh-Century Shift in the Reception of Plato's *Timaeus* and Calcidius' Commentary," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65 (2002): 1-21; Paul E. Dutton, "Medieval Approaches to Calcidius," in *Plato's Timaeus as cultural icon*, ed. Gretchen J. Reydams-Schils (Notre Dame, IN, 2003), 183-205.

<sup>26</sup> Anton von Euw, "Die Majestas-Domini-Bilder der ottonischen Kölner Malerschule im Licht des platonischen Weltbildes Codex 192 der Kölner Dombibliothek," in *Kaiserin Theophanu: Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die Wende des Ersten Jahrtausends*, eds. Anton von Euw and Peter Schreiner, 2 vols. (Cologne, 1991), 379-98.

<sup>27</sup> Gillian Evans and Alison M. Peden, "Natural Science and the Liberal Arts in Abbo of Fleury's Commentary," *Viator* 16 (1985): 109-27. See also the articles in: *Gerberto: Scienza, storia et mito; atti del Gerberti Symposium (Bobbio 25-27 luglio 1983)* (Bobbio, 1985). This is important in tracing the possible source of Bernward of Hildesheim's knowledge of Calcidius because of the bishop's close connections to the imperial court. Hans Jakob Schuffels, "Bernward Bischof von Hildesheim. Eine biographische Skizze," in *Bernward von Hildesheim und das Zeitalter*, 1: 29-46, with selected references.

<sup>28</sup> Fidel RädI, "Calcidius und Paulus begründen ein Vermächtnis: Zu Bernwards Dotationsurkunde für St. Michael in Hildesheim," in *Latin Culture in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Medieval Latin Studies Cambridge, September 9-12, 1998*, ed. Michael W. Herren, C.J. McDonough and Ross G. Arthur (Turnhout, 2002), 328-49.





**Figure 6.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 174r, Frontispiece to John (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).



The picture is a rare illustration of the symbolic content of John's opening verses.<sup>29</sup> In the upper zone of the picture sits the crowned Deity, portrayed as Christ by the cross behind his head. He holds the lamb of God, which extends its leg to touch a book with seven seals. Below, Christ appears as the child on an altar-shaped crib.<sup>30</sup> Of the many layers of meaning in this highly complex miniature, several pertain to the platonic cosmology found in the *Timaeus*. Below the Christ-child appear the personifications of two out of the four elements from which the artificer of the *Timaeus* (the creator figure) formed the cosmos: water as *Oceanus* and earth as *Terra*. In the upper section, the Deity sits above a globular universe, an almond-shaped mandorla behind him. His feet rest on a green semi-circle that represents the created earth. Immediately around the earth is a golden sphere bordered with a dotted green band that serves as the outer edge of the cosmos, the place where the stars of the zodiac are affixed.<sup>31</sup> In line with Calcidius' commentary, earth is thus placed at the center of the celestial bodies. The miniature combines this representation of the earth's place in the cosmos with another diagram that illustrates the eleventh-century *Timaeus*, the division of the universe into temperature bands.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> There are two close contemporary parallels to this picture's content, both similarly influenced by astronomical and Platonic ideas about the heavenly spheres. The first is the *Uta Codex's* frontispiece to the Gospel of John (Munich Clm. 13601, fol. 89v) and the second is a painted bifolium in the *Bamberg Gospels* produced in Cologne (Bamberg Staatsbibliothek, Msc. Bibl. 94, fol. 154v-155r). For a detailed analysis of the similarities between the three see Adam Cohen, *The Uta Codex: Art, Philosophy and Reform in Eleventh-Century Germany* (University Park, PA, 2000), 120-8, figs. 32, 34, 35. On the Cologne miniatures more specifically see Von Euw, "Maiestas-Domini-Bilder."

<sup>30</sup> Kingsley, 166.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce Eastwood, "Plato and Circumsolar Planetary Motion in the Middle Ages," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 60 (1993): 7-26; Eastwood, "Calcidius' Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* in Latin Astronomy of the Ninth to Eleventh Centuries," in *Between Demonstration and Imagination: Essays in the History of Science and Philosophy Presented to John D. North*, eds. Lodi Nauta and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden, 1999), 171-209; Eastwood, "Invention and Reform in Latin Planetary Astronomy," in *Latin Culture in the Eleventh Century*, eds. Michael W. Herren, C.J. McDonough and Ross G. Arthur, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2002), 1: esp. 282-90.

<sup>32</sup> In the Bernward Gospels', miniature six bands surround the Deity; the three lowest are bordered in gold and include both clouds and rays of light, representing the earthly bands. The top three are green, separated by blue



This astronomically influenced painting is directly relevant to Calcidius' notion of a non-touching touch because Calcidius' phrase *sine sensu tangentis tangentur* appears precisely in the section that treats the nature of primordial matter, the so-called matter of the third kind.<sup>33</sup> In the second part of the *Timaeus*, Calcidius confronts Plato's assertion that such matter (*hyle* in the Greek) is neither corporeal nor incorporeal (*neque corpus necque incorporeum*), material nor immaterial.<sup>34</sup> Translating Plato's term for matter as *silva*, Calcidius attempts to explain the paradox of such matter by focusing on the relationship between its incorporeal nature and its ability to take form.<sup>35</sup> Matter is, Calcidius explains, basing himself on Aristotle's notion of potentiality "potentially both corporeal and incorporeal" (*sed tam corpus quam incorporeum possibilitate*).<sup>36</sup>

Calcidius continues, following Plato, by explaining that the potentiality of such matter is what makes it perceptible.<sup>37</sup> It is at this moment, when he translates and explains Plato's linking of the potentiality and perceptibility of matter that Calcidius introduces a change of language that produces the notion of a touching performed without the sense of touch. Whereas in the Greek, Plato describes in generic terms that such matter (*hyle*) was apprehensible (*hapton*) with the aid of non-perception (*met'anaesthesias*) – in Calcidius' Latin version matter potentially material

---

dotted lines and containing two star-shaped bursts of color. These resemble the diagram in *A Calcidio Translatus*, paragraph 67, 114, which is the basis of an image of Christ Enthroned produced in Cologne around the year 1000. On the Cologne miniature see: Von Euw, "Maiestas-Domini-Bilder." On the impact of cosmological diagrams on pictures of Christ Enthroned see Bianca Kühnel, *The End of Time in the Order of Things: Science and Eschatology in Early Medieval Art* (Regensburg, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> *A Calcidio Translatus*, 32-52. The following discussion is indebted to Heller-Roazen, "A Matter of Language."

<sup>34</sup> *A Calcidio Translatus*, paragraph 309, 314.

<sup>35</sup> *A Calcidio Translatus*, 50 d-e.

<sup>36</sup> *A Calcidio Translatus*, paragraph 309, 314.

<sup>37</sup> *A Calcidio Translatus*, paragraph 288, 292; paragraph 309, 314.

and immaterial is touched (*tangitur*) without the sense of touch (*sensus tangentis*).<sup>38</sup> Calcidius thus forges a direct link between tactile experience and the perception of matter that is potentially material and immaterial.

How does Calcidius' non-touching touch of *silva* relate to the tactile perception of Christ? For medieval Christians reading Calcidius, the potentiality of such matter to be both corporeal and incorporeal naturally suggested the theological understanding of Christ as both human and divine, perceptible man and imperceptible God. The medieval tradition conventionally interpreted the *Timaeus*, and Calcidius' accompanying commentary, as an equivalent of the Genesis creation story, which was in turn understood typologically in relation to John the Evangelist's account of Christ's Incarnation. The Genesis passage opens with the phrase *in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram* (in the beginning God created earth and heaven). Similarly, John's Gospel begins *in principio erat verbum* (in the beginning was the Word) – a phrase that generated the popular medieval metaphor for Christ Incarnate as the Word-made-flesh. The textual and conceptual echo between the two *in principio*,<sup>39</sup> and their relationship to Calcidius's description of the cosmos was lost neither on medieval commentators nor on the designer of the John frontispiece in the *Bernward Gospels*.

As already stated, this painting draws on a variety of sources to illustrate the symbolic content of John's opening verse. The multivalent picture portrays the fulfillment of God's scheme of salvation begun by his act of Creation in Genesis, the first *in principio*, continued by

---

<sup>38</sup> *A Calcidio Translatus*, 50, line 18.

<sup>39</sup> A widely circulating commentary on the opening of John's Gospel makes a similar point. Donatien de Bruyne, *Préfaces de la Bible latine* (Namur, 1920), 173. Pictures also frequently established links between the two *in principio*. Illustrators of Genesis, for example, borrowed the layout of the IN initials used primarily in frontispieces for the Gospel of John. Harry Bober, "In Principio: Creation Before Time," in *De artibus opuscula xl: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, 2 vols., ed. Millard Meiss (New York, 1961), 1:13-28; Richard Putney, "Creatio et Redemptio: The Genesis Monogram of the St. Hubert Bible" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1985). Frontispieces to John, in turn, invoked details from Genesis. Kühnel, *End of Time*, esp. 185-98, 239-47.

Christ's Incarnation, the second *in principio*, and fulfilled in Revelation. A central theme of both *in principio* that plays a critical role in the picture is light, which not only emerges in rays within the five bands of the upper zone, but also pours from a celestial body in the painting's middle frame. A specific reference to Genesis is the portrayal of Terra's children as Adam and Eve who, sitting on her lap, reach for the serpent who proffers the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Drawn from the conventional understanding of John's *in principio* as a description of Christ, the Word, made flesh, is the portrayal of Christ as the incarnate child in the middle of the painting. References to Revelation also abound, particularly in the miniature's upper zone where Christ is both the Enthroned One and the lamb that opens the book of Judgment, labeled *vita*. In this painting, the platonic content creates a link between the matter of Creation (*silva* in Calcidius' terms) and Christ's incarnate body. Reading the *Noli me tangere*'s imagery against the content of John's frontispiece suggests that platonic ideas about the tangibility of such matter underlies Mary's non-touching touch of Christ's resurrected body.

Historical evidence suggests that this question of the tangibility of Christ was at stake in contemporary discussions about the Resurrection. In the first quarter of the eleventh century, the Ottonian dioceses of upper Lotharingia, as well as Frankish regions around Orleans, were the sites of a lay movement accused of the so-called Manichean heresy. According to Adémar of Chabannes and Gerard of Arras-Cambrai, this group rejected the materiality of the sacred: relics, the body-ness of the resurrected Christ, and the stuff of church ritual: altar, incense, bells, and pictures.<sup>40</sup> In arguing against these heretics, both men used Gregory the Great's commentary on

---

<sup>40</sup> Michael Frassetto, "Reaction and Reform: Reception of Heresy in Arras and Aquitaine in the Early Eleventh Century," *Catholic Historical Review* 83 (1997): 385-400.



the book of Job as the basis of their assertion that Christ resurrected *in carne*,<sup>41</sup> in the flesh, and to justify church practices involving bodies and matter. In book 14 of the *Moralia in Job*, an exegetical treatise that circulated widely in the eleventh century, Gregory had established an influential interpretation of Job's prophecy, which stated that Job would resurrect in his own body and not another body.<sup>42</sup> Gregory concluded from this that Christ, and following him, humans at the end of time, would resurrect in their actual bodies. Proof of this type of resurrection *in carne* was the Doubting Thomas' touch of Christ's wounds, because it showed the palpability (*palpabile*) of Christ's body, proving it to be of flesh.<sup>43</sup>

By using Job's prophecy, therefore, Adémar and Gerard were reiterating long-standing medieval theories that God's embodiment in Christ justified, even required, the materialization of the sacred in the church, but broadened the discussion to include the nature of the resurrected body. A similar concept underlies the representation of the *Noli me tangere*. In light of Calcidius' commentary, and a historical background that associated the palpability of Christ's body with the proof of the Resurrection *in carne* (in the flesh), it becomes probable that Mary's touch in the *Bernward Gospels'* painting acts not as a sign for sight, but rather as a dynamic, tactile perception of the divine Christ's fully embodied resurrection.

---

<sup>41</sup> The idea of resurrection *in carne* was opposed to Pauline ideas circulating since late antiquity that either dematerialized the resurrected body or believed it to be materially transformed. Caroline Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995), esp. 1-114.

<sup>42</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, Pt. 3, Bk. 14, chaps. 54-8, ed. Marc Adriaen, *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Job*, CCSL 143A (Turnhout, 1979), 739-47.

<sup>43</sup> *Moralia in Job*, Pt. 3, Bk. 14, esp. chap. 56, CCSL 143A: 743-4.



**Figure 7.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 76r, Portrait of the Evangelist Mark (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).

Emphasizing that Mary's gesture represents a tactile perception is its pictorial echo in the scene below. In this picture touch is again portrayed as the sense employed for perceiving Christ *in carne*, in this case made manifest in the form of another sacred body, the gospels, the Word-made-flesh, fol. 75v (**fig. 3**). In this scene the Evangelist Mark receives a book from St. Peter. The book's spine points to where Christ's foot crosses over Mary's arm, and the respective contact of Mary to Christ, and Mark to the book helps forge a link between the two objects of their perception – the pictured body of Christ above and the pictured book as body below. The book as word-made-flesh becomes the *Bernward Gospels* themselves in the portrait of Mark that appears on the opposite folio, fol. 76r (**fig. 7**). There Mark writes his gospel in a codex portrayed as the *Bernward Gospels*. The ornament of the represented book, purple and light blue stripes on an orange ground, repeats the pattern decorating the Gospels on that page, in the background behind Mark.<sup>44</sup>

Two additional pictures in the *Bernward Gospels* present alternative models of tactile perception. In the Last Supper, Judas is placed apart from the other Apostles, fol. 118r (**fig. 4**). He kneels in front of the table and his lower body overlaps an architectural frame, above which appear the other figures of the painting. Judas' right hand is laid on Christ's wrist, and his mouth opens to receive the bread that Christ proffers. The oblong shape and pinkish color of the bread conflate it with Christ's fingers, making explicit the connection between Christ's flesh and the apostolic meal, and presenting Judas' experience of Christ's body as both a grasping of Christ's incarnate body – the hand – and the embrace of his sacramental body – the Eucharist.

In the scene below, Judas appears inside an enclosed space, cupping his hands to catch a line of gold coins. The pairing of these two episodes highlights contrasts important to the

---

<sup>44</sup> Every opening in the *Bernward Gospels* uses pattern and ornament as a mechanism to convey relationships between the miniatures. Kingsley, "The *Bernward Gospels*."



pictures' meaning. The three men who pay for Judas' betrayal are aligned with the crowd of believing disciples above. Judas appears in the same spot in both pictures. Above he kneels and touches Christ. Below, he stands facing the opposite direction, turning away from Christ's body. Generically described as a betrayer, Judas served also as a model of limited perception following an idea put forth by Augustine.<sup>45</sup> Augustine contrasted Judas' experience at the Last Supper with that of Peter. Although both partook of the salvific body of Christ, because of his lack of faith Judas partook unto death, while Peter partook unto life. For Judas consumed the bread but his perception remained limited to external things.<sup>46</sup> In the Bernward Gospels' paintings, although Judas opens his mouth to receive the sop and touches Christ, he remains physically separate from the experience. Frame, ornament and the repetition of Judas below as someone who turns his back to Christ suggest that Judas remains bound to the earthly realm. He tastes the sop only as bread, and touches merely the outside edges of Christ's skin, his human body. Theologically and pictorially, Judas' touch is corporeal, limited and static.

In the final scene of touch, the Baptism of Christ, John unusually grasps Christ's shoulder between both hands, fol. 174v (**fig. 5**).<sup>47</sup> A lock of Christ's hair falls over the Baptist's fingers underscoring that their touch involves a close physical contact that, like the Magdalene's,

<sup>45</sup> Ingrid Westerhoff, "Der Moralisierte Judas : Mittelalterliche Legende, Typologie, Allegorie Im Bild," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 61 (1995): 85-156; Irit Kleiman, "The Life and Times of Judas Iscariot: Form and Function," *Medievalia et humanistica* n.s. 33 (2007):15-40. In the roughly contemporary Quinity of Winchester (c. 1023-65) Judas serves as an example of those who refuse the reality of Christ and the Trinity. Judith A. Kidd, "The Quinity of Winchester Reconsidered," *Studies in Iconography* 7/8 (1981): 21-33.

<sup>46</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 71, chap. 11, *PL* 38, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1845), 453. Additional critical passages on Judas in Augustine are *Tractatus in Joannis Evangelium* 50, chap. 10, and 112, chap. 2, *CCSL* 36: 437 and 634.

<sup>47</sup> For a general overview see Gertrud Schiller, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst* (Gütersloh, 1966), 137-52, esp. 148, pl. 344-82. I have found only two similar examples of this gesture, both in later manuscripts. In a codex produced at Salzburg in the second quarter of the eleventh-century John the Baptist touches Christ's shoulder with his left hand (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 781, fol. 40v). Georg Swarenski, *Die Salzburger Malerei des romanischen Stils* (Leipzig, 1913), 33, plate XV (46). In a pericopes book produced in Echternach around 1040, John grasps Christ's shoulder with both hands (Brussels: Library, Bibliothèque Royale, 9428, fol. 18v). See the facsimile: Anton von Euw, Bernard Bousmanne, and Martina Pippal, eds. *Das Echternacher Evangelistar* (Luzern, 2007), 18v.

overlaps their two bodies. Conventionally understood as a theophany, the Baptism represents the moment when John realizes and proclaims Christ's divinity. A detail underscores, however, that at the moment he perceives Christ's godhood, John also handles Christ's *human* body.<sup>48</sup> The angels who flank Christ open a large curtain between them, quite different in its prominence and gold border from the small indistinct towels that angels sometimes hold in medieval renderings of the Baptism.<sup>49</sup> Christ's flesh has been painted in the same shade and pattern as this cloth, seeming, in this way, partly to dissolve into the broader expanse of the textile. Such a conflation of Christ's body to the curtain evokes a conventional metaphor that first appeared in Paul's letter to the Hebrews and crystallized in Western thought during the eleventh century, wherein the curtain serves as a marker for Christ's human flesh.<sup>50</sup>

Like the Magdalene's touch, the Baptist's tactile perception is presented as a dynamic

---

<sup>48</sup> Although I have found no textual exegesis specific to John's touch in the Baptism in the West, Byzantine commentary justified John's touch by discussing Christ's human nature. Two hymnographers of the sixth century, Romanos and Sophronius of Jerusalem, emphasized how John's testimony was based on a physical, sensory experience. John feared to touch Christ and be consumed by his divinity, but Christ reassured John by recalling his human incarnation. Romanos concluded by declaring Christ's words: "For you will achieve honor from this such as did not fall to the lot of the angels; for I shall make you greater than all the prophets. No one of them saw me clearly, but rather in figures, shadows and dreams. But today you see, you touch the unapproachable light..." Romanos, *Hymnes*, ed. and trans. José Grosdidier de Matons, vol. 2, *Sources chrétiennes* 110 (Paris, 1965), 248-50; eng. trans. based on Marjorie Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, 2 vols. (Columbia, MO, 1970), 1: 53-4 and quoted in Kathleen Corrigan, "The Witness of John the Baptist on an Early Byzantine Icon in Kiev," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988): 4. For Sophronius' hymns see: Sophronius of Jerusalem, *On the Holy Baptism*, ed. Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta hierosolymitikes stachyologias* 5 (1888; rpr. Brussels, 1963), 158. The issue of Byzantine influence in Ottonian Germany of the late tenth and early eleventh-century is still hotly debated and has tended to center around the problem of the possible influence of Otto II's greek wife Theophanu. For a good introduction to both sides of the debate see the collection of essays: *Empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the Turn of the First Millenium*, ed. Adelbert Davids (Cambridge, 1995); Anton von Euw and Peter Schreiner eds., *Kaiserin Theophanu. Begegnung Des Ostens Und Westens Um Die Wende Des Ersten Jahrtausends. Gedenkschrift Des Kölnerschnütgen-Museums Zum 1000. Todesjahr Der Kaiserin* (Cologne, 1991) and *Kunst Im Zeitalter Der Kaiserin Theophanu* (Cologne, 1993). The extent to which Ottonian theologians read Greek, or were familiar with either Byzantine exegesis or liturgy remains unresolved. However, there is evidence of translated Greek sermons, such as the Akathistos hymn, influencing art in the West already in the eighth century. Suzanne Lewis, "A Byzantine 'Virgo Militans' At Charlemagne's Court," *Viator* 11 (1980): 71-94.

<sup>49</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, 137-52, esp. plates 344-82.

<sup>50</sup> Johann K. Eberlein, *Apparitio regis, revelatio veritatis: Studien zur Darstellung des Vorhangs in der bildenden Kunst von der Spätantike bis zum Ende des Mittelalters* (Wiesbaden, 1982), esp. 85n-86n, with further bibliography.

one that moves between earthly and heavenly. On the one hand, when John touches Christ's body he establishes its fleshly limits, grasping Christ's humanity. On the other hand, because the moment of baptism is also a theophany, at the moment of touching Christ's flesh, John also perceives Christ's divinity. This reverses Mary's experience in the *Noli me tangere* to the extent that instead of penetrating a symbol of his godhood to touch his humanity, John the Baptist handles Christ's incarnate human flesh and perceives his divinity. Yet in both cases, their dynamic touch contrasts with Judas' static experience. Such a form of tactile experience requires a movement between material and immaterial, earthly and divine.

John's dynamic touch is that of a priest. Five additional paintings laid out on three folios, fols. 75r, 111r, and 111v (**figs. 8-10**) illustrate episodes from John the Baptist's *Life*. Each painting portrays him primarily as a model for the priesthood.<sup>51</sup> In one scene, illustrating the Gospel of Mark, the Baptist preaches to the people while wearing a stole over his left shoulder, in the manner of a deacon who assists the celebrant during mass, fol. 75r (**fig. 8**).<sup>52</sup> In a later scene from the Gospel of Luke, John's parents appear, his father Zacharias presented as head priest of the Jewish temple. The first folio shows Zacharias before the inner altar of the Jewish sanctuary where he learns of his wife's miraculous conception, fol. 111r (**fig. 9**) while the following folio presents two scenes: the Visitation and the Naming of John the Baptist, fol. 111v; (**fig. 10**).

---

<sup>51</sup> Kingsley, 198-237.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Braun, "Die Stola," in *Die liturgische Gewandung im Occident und Orient: Nach Ursprung und Entwicklung, Verwendung und Symbolik* (Darmstadt, 1964), 562-608.





**Figure 8.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 75r, John the Baptist Preaching (above) and Christ Calling the Apostles (below) (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).





**Figure 9.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 111r, Annunciation to Zacharias (above) and Zacharias leaves the temple (below) (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).

In the Annunciation to Zacharias, the painting below shows a crowd outside the sanctuary, beyond the pink curtain that separates the inner sanctum from the rest of the building. Zacharias has emerged from there, and the front-most man reaches out to him in a gesture of speech. The zone above shows Zacharias on the other side of the curtain, in the space of the altar. Together the two parts of the scene underscore Zacharias' priestly activities by showing only he can go behind the curtain to the holy space of the altar. The picture also more generally places a strong emphasis on liturgical implements. Zacharias holds a censer, featured prominently as it crosses the boundary between Zacharias and the angel. The censer's motion, swinging into the center of the scene, draws Zacharias' hand over and outside the column. Squiggly lines on a blue band that contrast with the predominantly pink tones of the page animate the area between the chains of the censer. The implement thus stands out starkly from the page both as the only object to enter the sacred space of the altar, and as that which draws Zacharias into that zone. On the far right the vertical axis presents a group of liturgical objects: a hanging lamp, a bowl and below, in a separate section of space marked by the gable that frames it, a candelabra; the ritual implements help further to underscore the Baptist's priestly lineage.

The following folio also employs liturgical references in order to locate John in relation to the priesthood. Two inscriptions, the *Magnificat* above (on Mary's scroll) and the *Benedictus* below (on Zacharias' tablet) refer to liturgical canticles recited daily in the performance of the Divine Office. These hymns together relate the fulfillment of God's eschatological plan by means of Christ's Incarnation, whose way was proclaimed and prepared by John the Baptist.

By presenting John the Baptist primarily as a priest, the *Bernward Gospels* offer John as a model for the priest celebrant, in this case the manuscript's patron, who appears in the

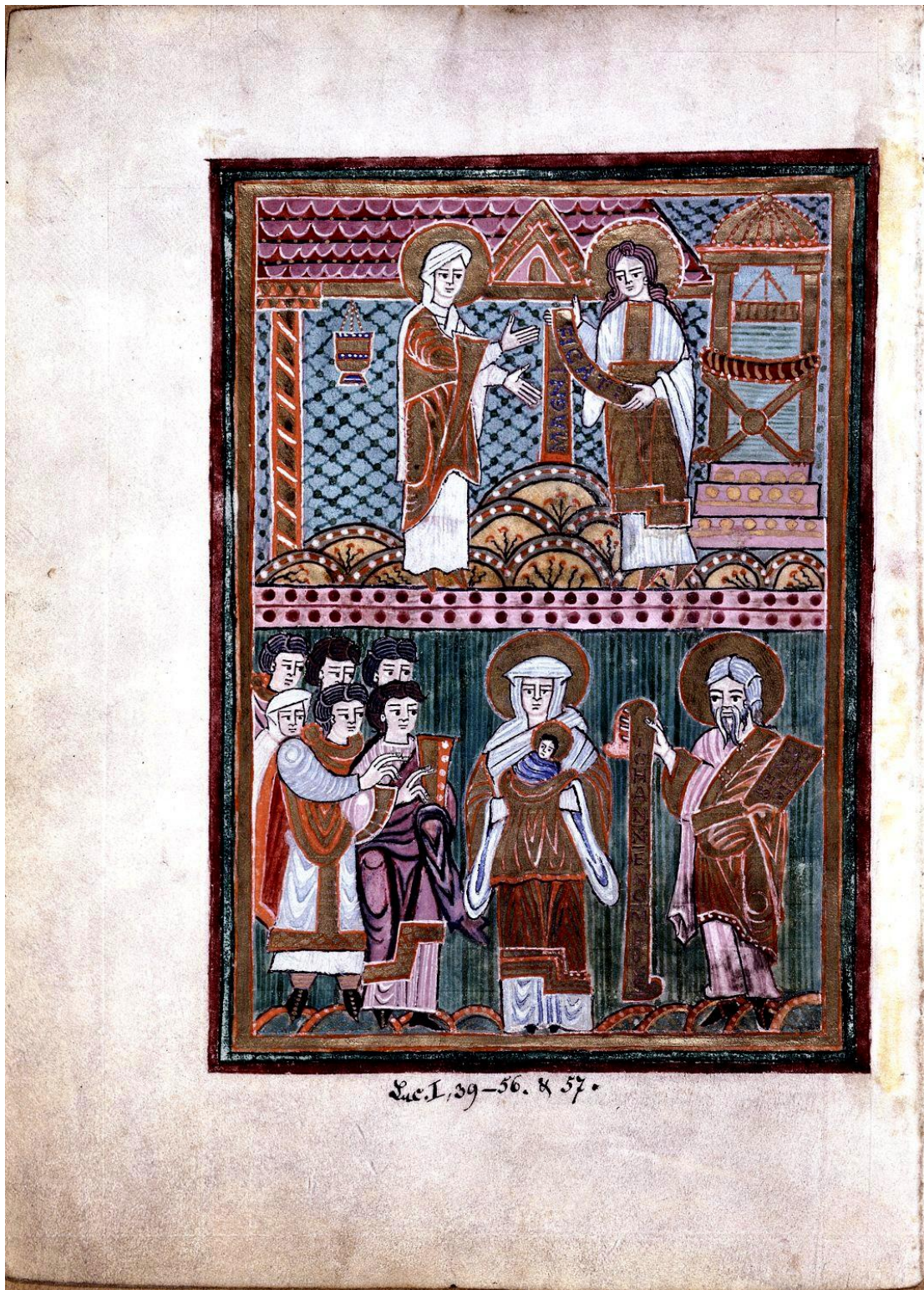


dedication painting at the beginning of the manuscript, fols. 16v-17r (**fig. 1**).<sup>53</sup> The portrayal of the Baptist in liturgical garb, fol. 75r (**fig. 8**) echoes the dedication painting's emphasis on Bernward's ritual vestments. Bernward wears the alb, cope, stole and dalmatic. His garments are highlighted by an inscription in the lower frame that reads "such great episcopal vestments."<sup>54</sup> Like John's father Zacharias, fol. 111r (**fig. 9**), Bernward stands before an altar set for the celebration of a liturgy – in Bernward's painting with the chalice, paten, and portable altar. Bernward's book helps move him into the space of the altar. Similarly Zacharias' censer crosses into the innermost sanctuary of the Jewish temple. Finally, in the Baptism, fol. 174v (**fig. 5**), John's touch, a two-handed grasp of Christ's shoulder, mimics Bernward's hold on the Gospels, fols. 16v-17r (**fig. 1**) that, we have already seen, was commonly understood as the Christ Logos, or Word-made-flesh.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ottonian biographies occasionally employ John the Baptist as a model for their subjects in order to emphasize how these figures' sanctity derives from taking on an active pastoral role. Cf: Phyllis G. Jestice, "A New Fashion in Imitating Christ: Changing Spiritual Perspectives Around the Year 1000," in *The Year 1000: Religious and Social Response to the Turning of the First Millennium*, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York, 2002), 165-85.

<sup>54</sup> In the left folio's bottom frame: *Bernwardus ornatus tanti vestitu pontificali*



**Figure 10.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 111v, Visitation (above) and Naming of John the Baptist (below) (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).

As a model for the bishop, the Baptist's ritual touch of Christ keys Bernward's tactile experience of the gospel book, an object that is, on the one hand, the body of Christ (the word-made-flesh), and on the other hand, the *Bernward Gospels* donated by the bishop to St. Michael's monastery. Bernward stands inside the church, offering the codex to the altar. That altar is the only pictorial element to project beyond the frame of the building. By crossing over the church's external wall, the altar stands ambiguously both inside and outside the architecture. It occupies a space between the two painted folios that respectively represent Bernward's earthly church and the saints' heavenly space. By means of his gift, Bernward points, via the altar, to the saints depicted on the opposite folio. Between them and Bernward stands a door, one of a pair labeled "door of paradise" in the miniature's frame. Whereas the inscription of the door on the right states that it is "closed" (*clausa*), the one facing the page's inner margin, and Bernward's altar, is marked "opened" (*patefacta*). Prominent hinges on the right door underscore that it is indeed depicted as closed, while an arched blue doorway on the left emphasizes that the path between Bernward's altar and the saints is open. By such framing devices, the painting directs a dynamic movement from left to right and back again. It begins with Bernward's gesture, goes through the open door that reveals Mary and then hits a closed door that pushes back in the opposite direction.

Similar to the dynamic nature of the Magdalene and the Baptist's perception, Bernward's sensory experience is portrayed in motion. The bishop's gift helps project him to the very edges of heaven, but also sends him back again, cyclically grounding him in the perception of the material world. The pictorial representation of the gift's capacity to mediate Bernward's communication with God derives from liturgical habits. Until the middle of the eleventh century, the congregation participated in an offertory procession that took place at the beginning of the



Mass. Before the blessing of the Eucharist, the celebrant would ask God to accept and sanctify the congregation's offerings (*secreta*).<sup>55</sup> Immediately thereafter, the priest would pray that the consecrated bread be raised to the heavenly church and blessed by God. The liturgy thus connected the gifts at the altar with Christ's incarnation in the host. The effectiveness of the gift, according to contemporary descriptions, depended on its being transformed and raised to the heavenly altar. By this process the object converted from an earthly good to something accepted by God, giving proof of the donor's merit.<sup>56</sup>

The eleventh-century liturgy constructed the gift as a site of, in Calcidius' terms, potentiality, where the materialized matter rises to the level of the immaterial and the immaterial begins to materialize. In the dedication painting, Bernward touches the book, a liturgical object that offers a zone for Christ potentially material and immaterial to take form. By means of adopting varying modes of touch the bishop may, or may not, perceive the divine in the earthly church. Similar to the Magdalene's non-touching touch of Christ's resurrected body, and the Baptist, whose touch perceives beyond the fleshly limits of Christ's incarnate body, Bernward's tactile experience is performed dynamically; his touch moves in space and time. This 'touch in movement' that shifts between material and immaterial perception is contrary to Judas' static, and thus limited touch.

The *Bernward Gospels* present a pictorial exegesis on the sensory perception of the divine not only through vision, as Dushman correctly identified in his analysis of the Ascension miniature, but also through touch. Ultimately, both senses are modeled for the manuscript's patron and work together in the dedication portrait. Bernward not only touches the book, but also

---

<sup>55</sup> Paul Tirot, "Histoire des prières d'offertoire dans la liturgie romaine du VIIe au XVIe siècle," *Ephemerides liturgicae* 98 (1984): 148-97.

<sup>56</sup> Elian Magnani S. Christen, "Transforming Things and Persons: The Gift pro anima in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, ed. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner and Bernhrd Jussen (Göttingen, 2003), 269-84.

looks past it through the open door to the heavenly church. For Bernward it is his gift, a luxurious art object, that materializes the sacred, mediating Bernward's tactile and visionary perception.

As the *Bernward Gospels'* exegesis on touch underscores, early medieval art, foregrounding as it does its own materiality, was understood as more than merely visible, it was also particularly tangible.<sup>57</sup> That very quality attracts touch. Two Ottonian texts tantalizingly hint at the importance of touching in devotional practice. A tenth-century monk from Reichenau describes that the brothers' regularly touched a painting of the Virgin and Child during prayer.<sup>58</sup> An eleventh-century miracle described in the *Life* of Dominic of Sora requires the kissing and embracing of a saint's image.<sup>59</sup> Extant objects too show evidence of having been touched. The ivory cover of Bernward's Franco-Saxon Gospels, Hildsheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 13 (**fig. 11**) show signs of wear that suggest that in this carving of the Crucifixion, the representations of Mary and Christ, patron saints of St. Michael's, were more frequently touched than that of John the Evangelist. The Virgin's face is particularly worn, Christ's slightly

---

<sup>57</sup> Jérôme Baschet, "Introduction: L'image-objet," in *L'image: Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt, Cahiers du Léopold d'Or 5 (Paris, 1996), 7-57; David Ganz and Thomas Lentz eds., *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren: Bildtheorie und Bildgebrauch in der Vormoderne* (Berlin, 2004); Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art, Rethinking the Middle Ages 1* (Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, NY, 2004), 19-44 and "Image and Object: Christ's Dual Nature and the Crisis of Early Medieval Art," in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*, eds. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (Aldershot, 2008), 291-320.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Berschin and Johannes Straub, *Die Taten des Abtes Witigowo von der Reichenau (985-997): Eine zeitgenössische Biographie von Pörlinger von der Reichenau*, Reichenauer Texte und Bilder 3 (Sigmaringen, 1992), verse 344-354. On the custom see Jean-Michel Sansterre, "Vénération et utilisation des images apotropaïques de l'image à Reichenau vers la fin du Xe siècle: un témoignage des gesta de l'abbé Wittigowo," *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire* 73 (1995): 281-85.

<sup>59</sup> François Dolbeau, "Le dossier de saint Dominique de Sora, d'Albéric du Mont-Cassin à Jacques de Voragine," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome Moyen Âge* 102 (1990), 7-78; the miracle recounted in the eleventh-century text by Alberic is on pp. 68-69. On the miracle see Sansterre, "Un saint récent et son icône dans le Latin méridionale au XIe siècle: À propos d'un miracle de Dominique de Sora," *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995): 447-52.

less so, while John appears to be in good condition and the carved lines of all three figures' garments remain quite crisp.



**Figure 11.** Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 13, Front Cover (photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum).



The Bernward Gospels' pictorial exegesis places both touch and sight at the heart of the process of using art to locate the self in relation to God. Through seeing and touching, the Ottonian patron is carried to the very edges of heaven and back again. That process relies on the sensual apprehension of matter, a dependence always problematic for medieval Christians. Whereas Augustine's commentary, and its clever pictorialization in the disappearing Christ offered a solution to the problem of seeing, the issue of corporeal touch required the codex's designer, probably Bernward himself,<sup>60</sup> to adopt another approach heavily influenced by the scientific, philosophical, and theological ideas circulating in Ottonian Germany. Developing a

---

<sup>60</sup> On the problem of identifying "designers" in medieval art, particularly with reference to the relationship between patrons and artists see: Piotr Skubiszewski, "L'intellectuel et l'artiste face à l'oeuvre à l'époque qui peint," in *Le travail au Moyen Âge* (Louvain, 1990), 263-321. Bernward is a particular case because his biography suggests his close involvement and supervision of artistic projects in Hildesheim. Thangmarus, *Vita Bernwardi episcopi Hildesheimensis*, ed. Gerhard Pertz, MGH SS 4 (Hannover, 1841), 754-82. Yet, the dating of Bernward's biography remains problematic and thus also identifying whether the biography's presentation of Bernward as an artist-patron and close supervisor serves as a narrative device or has some historical basis. See most recently Knut Görlich, and Hans Henning Kortüm, "Otto III, Thangmar und die Vita Bernwardi," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 98 (1990): 1-57; Marcus Stumpf, "Zum Quellenwert von Thangmars Vita Bernwardi," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 53/2 (1997): 461-96; Stephanie Haarländer, "Lexikon der Bischofsviten," in *Vitae episcoporum: Eine Quellengattung zwischen Hagiographie und Historiographie; untersucht an Lebensbeschreibungen von Bischöfen des Regnum Teutonicum im Zeitalter der Ottonen und Salier* (Stuttgart, 2000), 494-95; and Martina Giese, *Die Textfassungen der Lebensbeschreibung Bischof Bernwards von Hildesheim*, MGH Studien und Texte 40 (Hannover, 2006). Francis Tschan long ago suggested that the head of the Hildesheim scriptorium, by implication involved in designing Bernward's codices, was a scribe named Guntbald, originally from Regensburg, whose name appears in two manuscripts produced for Bernward, a gospel book (Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 33) and a sacramentary (Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 19). Tschan, *Saint Bernward of Hildesheim*, 3 vols. (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1942-52), 2: 54ff. Georg Swarzenski thought Guntbald may also have painted some miniatures, in *Regensburger Buchmalerei des X. und XI. Jahrhunderts: Studien zur Geschichte der deutschen Malerei des frühen Mittelalters*, rev. ed. (Stuttgart, 1901, repr. 1969), 85. This assertion is repeated by Ulrich Kuder, in *Bernward und das Zeitalter 1*: 191-201. Yet the only illumination that can be definitively attributed to Guntbald is a poorly executed gilded inscription far below the level of the Bernward Gospels' illumination. Cohen, *Uta Codex*, 147-148 and 150-151, figs. 53-54. Finally, there is no evidence Guntbald was involved in the production of Bernward's most lavish manuscript, the *Bernward Gospels*. Rather, the complex theological and philosophical concepts embedded in the gospel book's pictorial program, the use of ornamental motifs circulating in the Ottonian court, and the pictorial program's focus on fashioning episcopal memory, all suggest the patron's close involvement in the design of this manuscript. On the courtly ornament and style in Bernward's manuscripts see Stephen Wagner, "Silken Parchments: Design, Context, Patronage and Function of Textile-Inspired Pages in Ottonian and Salian Manuscripts," (Ph.D. diss. University of Delaware, 2004), esp. 143-162; Eliza Garrison, "The Art Policy of Emperor Henry II (1002-1024)," (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2005). On the commemorative aspects of the Bernward Gospels' program see Kingsley, "The Bernward Gospels," and "Picturing the Treasury in Ottonian Art," in process.

pictorial exegesis on touch, the *Bernward Gospels* affirms the authenticity of God's material *imagines*: Christ incarnate, Christ resurrected, Christ the consecrated host, and Christ the word.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> *Imago* is a multivalent term referring equally to material pictures, visions, narrative images, the topos that Christ was in the image of his father and more. Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Imago: De l'image à l'imaginaire," in *L'image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiévale*, eds. Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt (Paris, 1996), 29-57.