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DOUBLE BOOK REVIEW: Danielle Joyner, *Painting the Hortus deliciarum: Medieval Women, Wisdom, and Time* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016)

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PEREGRINATIONS

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Book Review: Danielle Joyner, *Painting the Hortus deliciarum: Medieval Women, Wisdom, and Time* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), xiv + 242 pages, 36 color and 60 b&w illustrations, \$89.95 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-0-271-07088-9.

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The *Hortus Deliciarum* took shape between *c.* 1167 and *c.* 1185 largely under the direction of the Augustinian abbess Herrad to educate the canonesses at the Alsatian monastery of Mont Sainte-Odile, also known as Hohenbourg. The manuscript was designed as a salvation history told through music, poetry, image, and text. Rather than relying on Scripture and exegesis alone, the *Hortus* incorporated a wide range of learned texts known in medieval Europe at the time of its compilation. It also featured an extensive illumination program that often exhibited an impressive level of creativity and originality. It is a work that seems to have been singular for its time, making its destruction during the 1870 Siege of Strasbourg all the more lamentable. It is accessible today only through contents that were transcribed, traced, sketched, or otherwise copied in the nineteenth century. Thus, it is knowable only as an incomplete and shadowy version of itself. The disparate copied materials came together for the first time in 1979 in a reconstruction project led by Rosalie Green and published as a two-volume set by the Warburg Institute.¹ Yet, a book-length study of the *Hortus* that availed itself of this

¹ Rosalie Green et al, *Herrad of Hohenbourg: Hortus Deliciarum*, 2 vols. (London: The Warburg Institute, 1979).

invaluable resource did not appear until Fiona Griffiths’s groundbreaking 2007 examination.²

Danielle Joyner’s book, developed from her 2007 dissertation written under Jeffrey Hamburger, is the first monograph on the *Hortus* since Griffiths’s 2007 study and the first by an art historian. It therefore fills a lacuna in scholarship on the *Hortus* that has long been wanting. Joyner’s objective is to reveal how a sophisticated understanding of time was imparted to the canonesses through the contents of the *Hortus* and shaped the ways in which the women conceptualized their role in Christian history. In learning how time was measured and calculated, and in comprehending time’s cyclical nature, Joyner argues, the canonesses were made privy to the underlying structure of the universe and



Figure 1 The Foundation and Congregation of Hohenbourg, *Hortus Deliciarum*, fols. 322v–323r.

² Fiona Griffiths, *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

gradually understood their place in the earthly church and in its eternal celestial counterpart. This knowledge, in turn, ensured their salvation.



Figure 2 The Ladder of Virtue, *Hortus Deliciarum*, fol. 215v.

The first chapter of Joyner’s book demonstrates how the *Hortus* was unique among other twelfth-century educational materials created for monastic women. In comparing the double-page illumination of the Foundation and Congregation of Hohenbourg (**fig. 1**) to the dedication or author images in the *Stammheim Missal*, the *Guta-Sintam Codex*, and the Rupertsberg manuscript of Hildegard of Bingen’s *Scivias* (which also survives only as a modern copy), Joyner finds the *Hortus* emphasized the community as a whole, rather than focusing only on the greatness of its

founders or abbesses or patron saint. That the *Guta-Sintram Codex* is the collaborative work of two Augustinians (the canon and artist, Sintram of Marbach; and the canoness and scribe, Guta of Schwarzentann) highlights how differently the *Hortus* operated even from works created in the same monastic tradition. In addition to the greater sense of community that the *Hortus* expressed through its imagery, Joyner also reveals Herrad’s

unique talent for combining visual and textual communication to impart complex lessons to her canonesses on pride and virginity.³

There are instances in this chapter where one can disagree with Joyner's analysis of particular images. For example, she identifies the figure in the *Hortus* who achieves the crown of life at the top of the Ladder of Virtue as a "virginal nun," but there is no clear evidence that the Hohenbourg women would have understood this figure to be a nun (**fig. 2**). One inscription on the image identifies the figure as Virtue, or Caritas,⁴ and another notes, "this person of virtue signifies all saints or elect that guardian angels lead to the first heaven."⁵ Nor does the inscription specifically address the issue of virginity. When Joyner compares the *Hortus* Ladder with depictions of this iconographic motif in other twelfth-century manuscripts, such as the Zwiefalten martyrology and the Walters *Speculum virginum*, she does not draw out how differences in pictorial content among these examples also create different meanings. The Zwiefalten and Walters images compare to the *Hortus* image only in their use of the ladder motif. The figures that populate these ladders differ greatly from those in the *Hortus*, and we must consider the possible intentions behind these different iconographic choices. The *Hortus* Ladder invited the Hohenbourg canonesses to consider concrete, worldly temptations that plagued all members of the church, not only their own community. They were urged to look outwards rather than focusing only on their own spiritual progress. This would argue against Joyner's statement later, that the *Hortus* "was not preoccupied with contemporary events" (pp. 103–04).

³ Joyner also discusses lessons on the dangers of pride in the *Hortus* in Danielle Joyner, "All That Is Evil: Images of Reality and Figments of Imagination in the Hortus Deliciarum," in *Imagination and Deixis: Studien zur Wahrnehmung im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Herzel, 2007), pp. 105–25.

⁴ *Virtus id est Caritas*.

⁵ *Hec persona virtutis significat omnes sanctos et electos qui angelica custodia perducuntur ad celestia premia*.

In her second chapter, Joyner discusses folios 2v to 17r of the *Hortus* to show how Herrad revealed a “centrality of times to the history of salvation.” Broadly speaking, this portion of the *Hortus* once contained material relating Genesis from creation up to the labors of Adam and Eve. It is within these first few pages of the *Hortus*, Joyner argues, that the canonesses gained an understanding of time that shaped how they would proceed through the manuscript. Joyner perceives a pictorial emphasis on the fourth day of Creation, and she argues that this reveals Herrad’s particular interest in time. After understanding the heightened importance of time among the creation sequence, a series of cosmological diagrams (fig. 3) would teach the canonesses the physical mechanics of the planetary movements that gave time its shape. Scripture and science interweave to construct a salvation history that incorporates natural phenomena – an approach to the

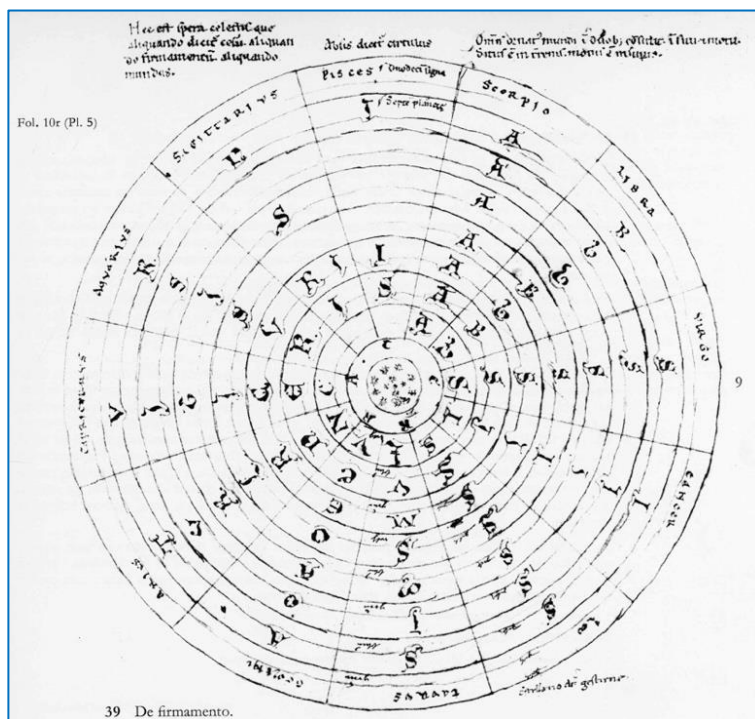


Figure 3 Celestial Sphere, *Hortus Deliciarum*, fol. 10r.

world that Marie-Dominique Chenu found to be characteristic of twelfth-century spirituality.⁶ The *Hortus* diagrams contain numerous errors, however, as Joyner admits, and they were often accompanied by moralizing texts. We therefore must question to what degree the canonesses would have understood the scientific content of these images.

⁶ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

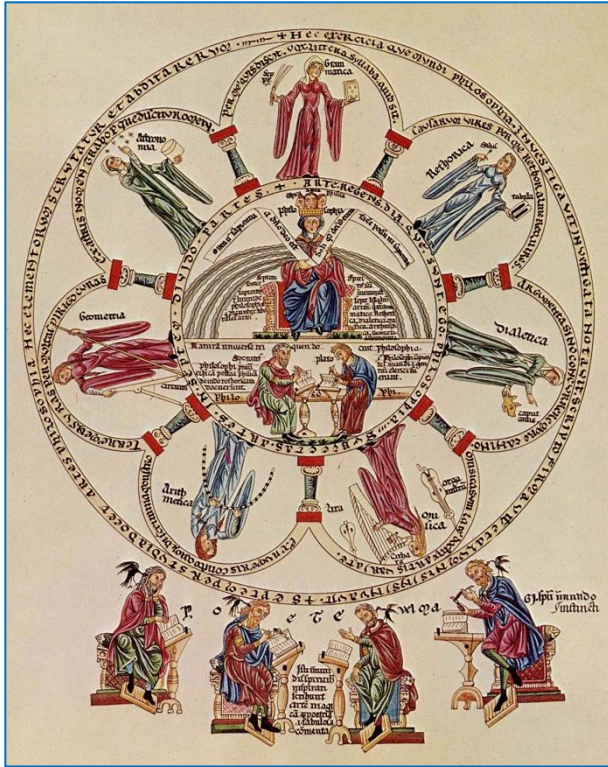


Figure 4 Philosophy and the Seven Liberal Arts, *Hortus Deliciarum*, fol. 32r.

Here Joyner is sometimes overly selective in what she includes in her analysis. Folios 2v to 17r of the *Hortus* do not only address the issue of time; there is also material relating world geography and the animals found in different regions (fol. 14r-v), a lesson on topography followed by technical and administrative terms related to agriculture (fol. 15r-v), and terms for different kinds of roads and markers one would encounter while traveling (fol. 15v). Even a brief discussion of these materials

would provide a fuller image of this section to those not intimately familiar with the *Hortus*. And, although Joyner states that folios 16r to 17r will factor into this chapter discussion, she does not include them here. These folios contained texts and images related to the microcosm (fols. 16r-v) and the creation of Adam and Eve (17r). Joyner does later discuss the microcosm image in the fourth chapter of the book, where she argues that Herrad intended it as a bridge between the cosmological and human histories of the world. Joyner eloquently captures the poetic beauty of Herrad's artistic decision here: with a turn of the page, a presentation of the human body as a universe in miniature transitions to God breathing life into the first human. It is puzzling however, why she did not discuss it with the materials that surround it in this earlier part of the manuscript. Joyner also does not explain why she chose to end her examination of this portion of the manuscript at folio 17r, in the middle of the Adam and Eve cycle, leaving out the remaining scenes of the Fall, the expulsion from Eden, and Adam and Eve laboring. It is

uncertain that Herrad or the canonesses would have divided the material in this way, so an explanation for the author’s decision to do so would be helpful.

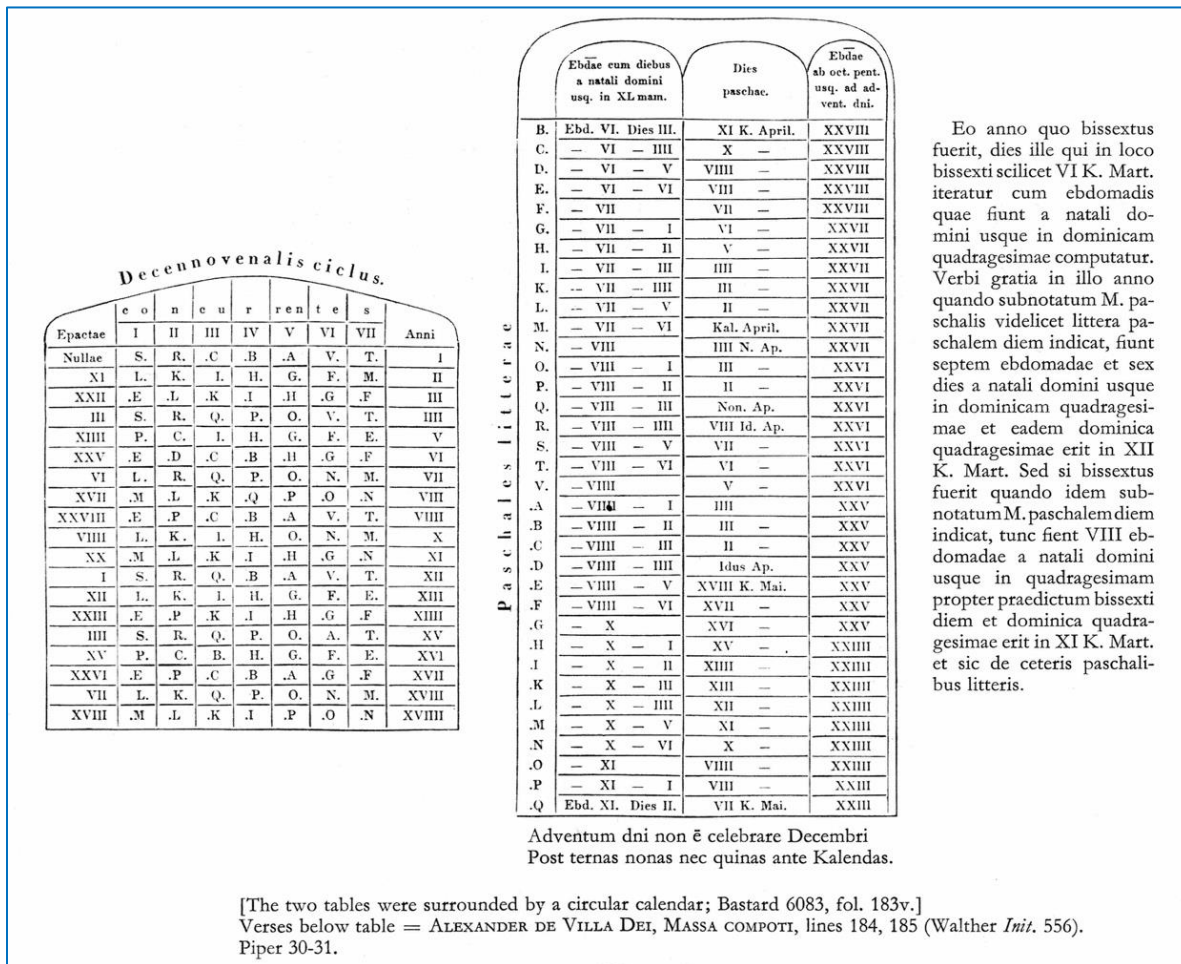


Figure 5 Computus Tables, *Hortus Deliciarum*, fol. 319r.

Joyner’s third chapter explores how Herrad conveyed to the canonesses that the study of astronomy and other forms of legitimate knowledge contained within the seven liberal arts was a step toward their salvation. Astronomy’s place among the other disciplines in a *rota* image of Philosophy and the Seven Liberal Arts (fig. 4) confirmed to the canonesses that these subjects came from the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the malevolent spirits that inspire the *poetae* and *magi* outside of the circle. The image of Idolatry that once occupied the verso of this folio included a scene of Abraham refusing to worship Nimrod’s fire.

Joyner argues that Herrad wished to correlate the wisdom of discerning true knowledge from that of evil spirits to Abraham's wisdom in remaining faithful to God. In understanding Abraham's steadfastness as wisdom, the canonesses would have learned that the pursuit of good knowledge is essential to achieving salvation. The second part of this chapter examines the *computus* tables located on folios 318v to 319v (**fig. 5**). The tables, according to Joyner, would have familiarized the canonesses with a scientific understanding of the liturgical calendar, thereby deepening their engagement with the cosmological subject matter from the beginning of the manuscript discussed in chapter two. Joyner's detailed analysis of how the various tables function as a unit is a heroic scholarly undertaking that elucidates perhaps the part of the manuscript that has been the murkiest for modern scholars.

In chapter four, Joyner intensifies her examination of the cyclical nature of reading and looking through the *Hortus*. She highlights the texts from which Herrad drew most heavily — the mystical writings of Rupert of Deutz and Honorius Augustodunensis — and the illuminations they accompanied. Joyner illustrates how Rupert's and Honorius's works revealed to the canonesses the typological relationship between events from the Old and New Testaments, and how the Church reenacted them through the liturgy and the sacraments. That the manuscript also included specific dates for major events in the lives of Noah, Moses, and Christ in its texts and image inscriptions suggests that attaining a solid understanding of the *computus* and the construction of time was essential to comprehending the unfolding of Christian history. In learning to recognize "specific cosmic patterns" and the cyclical nature of time, the canonesses gained a greater understanding of creation itself.

Joyner's fifth chapter considers the penultimate section of the *Hortus*, which concluded the manuscript's salvation history with a consideration of Ecclesia's work in the world and at the end of time. Here Joyner ties together the various reading and viewing strategies she identified in her previous chapters. Having moved through the *Hortus* and

learned how their education entwined with their salvation, Joyner argues that this section would have communicated to the canonesses their place in the earthly and eternal Christian communities. The trans-temporality threaded throughout the *Hortus* culminates in this final revelation.

Joyner's book will be valuable to any scholar interested in the intellectual life of medieval monastic women's communities. It bolsters previous studies that have shown the level of sophisticated learning that was available at Hohenbourg, and thus furthers the case that medieval women's education could be more complex than currently thought. She offers numerous medieval *comparanda* that illustrate Herrad's ingenuity in modifying pre-existing iconographic motifs to express sophisticated ideas visually. Rather than upholding traditional notions of how iconographic motifs functioned in the medieval world, Herrad's comfort in altering visual models to suit her educational purposes forces us to consider "symbolism" in elastic terms. It reminds us that we must consider an iconographic motif not only as part of a general category, but in the context of its specific circumstances. 🐼