

Jeffrey F. Hamburger. *Diagramming Devotion: Berthold of Nuremberg's Transformation of Hrabanus Maurus's Poems in Praise of the Cross*; Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020. 384 pp. ISBN: 9780226642819. Cloth: £65

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An indication of the case studies at the heart of Jeffrey F. Hamburger's *Diagramming Devotion* is presented by the book's subtitle, Hrabanus Maurus's (ca. 780-856) *In honorem sanctae crucis* (ca. 810) and Berthold of Nuremberg's two-part work *Liber de misteriis et laudibus sanctae crucis* (1292) and the supplement *Liber de misteriis et laudibus interemerate Virginis genitricis Dei et Domini nostril Ihesu* (1294) are confronted and dissected in this new work; and the use of the word "transformation" is key to the analytical and interpretive examination concerning the medieval formulas the author presents (both textual and imagetic). Close to five hundred years separate the *carmina figurata* of the Carolingian abbot and the text-images of the Dominican *lector* and both follow on antique traditions. With more than two hundred pictures of diagrams and illuminations from a multitude of codices, architectural details and religious objects, Hamburger furnishes our understanding of transformation in medieval visual cultures (largely beyond Hranabus and Berthold's) and of the centrality of diagrams in artistic productions.

Hrabanus Maurus's figural poems were among the most popular visual contemplation mechanisms available for centuries. Interweaving image and text, and text as image, copies of *In honorem sanctae crucis* amounted, in number and in graphical style; yet its meaning and effect remained unchanged. In elaborating a plan for a comprehensive commentary on this work, Berthold produced a tripartite piece: honoring its original first, he then redraws and recombines its content in a very personal way, finally supplementing it with an authorial program of his own.

While Hrabanus's image-poems are ruled by a very strict grid, profoundly rooted in numerology, Berthold's text-images exist as a skeleton against a white background, making them much more orthogonal to the eye. And with its controlled symbolic visual language (of squares, triangles, and circles, combined with number, color and word cues), Berthold uses geometry for devotional purposes, applying diagrams to create typological relationships within his commentaries and transforms the ordering of Hrabanus' themes. In this sense, his diagrams are historical, illustrative and prefigurative. In the Middle Ages, exegesis and truth were interwoven: "in keeping with the theological, pastoral and devotional imperatives of his time, he not only simplifies his source but also scrambles it, but in ways that would have made it easier for his audience to comprehend."<sup>1</sup> Berthold

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Diagramming Devotion: Berthold of Nuremberg's Transformation of Hrabanus Maurus's Poems in Praise of the Cross* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 142.

restructures Hrabanus's biblical sequence to reshape human continuity, while presenting the veneration of the Cross and Mary's intersection as indispensable to the history of Salvation.

Diagrams activate and operate mental responses, using order to claim the truth both of reasons and feelings – mimicking processes and structures of knowledge production. Albeit with no necessary relation between a diagram and its object of reference, it serves as a tool of thought (it organizes), and as concept conceiver (it creates content). Medieval diagrams instruct through the participation of the viewer in processes of revelation and concealment of information (often dealing with complex data), stimulating both memory and meditation. Berthold's diagrams go one step further by assuming that visual patterns can also reveal the fulfilment of the scriptures, adding emotion to the system.

Typology and logic come out preeminently in Hamburgers' analysis, and it perfectly relates to the dichotomy of what can and cannot be seen in a diagram, in addition to what is culturally codified and what is left for the reader to infer. Berthold found a highly metaphorical visual solution for diagrams in embodying truth as geometrical and theological, in a clear “parenthetical moralization”<sup>2</sup> strategy, fit for monastic traditions, transforming scriptures and their metaphors into a visual lectionary: “each element and each aspect of each element – shape, size, color, placement, sequence – becomes richly meaningful... in relation to the other elements within each diagram and the series as a whole. Each figure, therefore, does not simply designate but also commemorates”<sup>3</sup>; drawing on visual and cultural memory assets, easily identifiable by his contemporaries.

The similarities and dissimilarities between Hrabanus and Berthold take shape as a crescendo of arguments throughout Hamburger's text, signaling not only authorial influences to Berthold's project but also contemporary diagrammatic constructions with similar codes and readings. Together these factors sustain the book's argument that visual experience is something that can be studied and understood from the intellectual processes involved in producing diagrams to their materiality and transmission. “Once diagrams are viewed as material objects as well as abstractions, they can be seen as telling stories”<sup>4</sup>, and so they do before our eyes, by the hand of Professor Hamburger.

In chapter one, the focus is set on the visual. Hamburger's discussion of abstraction and structure creation, logic, as well as an introductory examination of the writings of C. S. Pierce (1839-1914) – mainly his *Existential Graphs*, set the stage for the conclusion that “analogous relationships undergo similar shifts, if to different ends”<sup>5</sup> when analyzing different modes and codes for communicating diagrammatically across time.

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<sup>2</sup> Hamburger, *Diagramming Devotion*, 211.

<sup>3</sup> Hamburger, *Diagramming Devotion*, 270.

<sup>4</sup> Hamburger, *Diagramming Devotion*, 242.

<sup>5</sup> Hamburger, *Diagramming Devotion*, 32.

Even if single diagrammatical models are rare, Hamburger compresses the developments of his case study as a paradigm shift from “cross to crucifix”<sup>6</sup> that goes well beyond images – which are themselves elaborated upon in chapter four.

Chapter two focuses on the “maze of meaning” of Hranabus’s twenty-eight picture-poems in praise of the Cross and their context of production. From a sequential study of *In honorem sanctae crucis*’s reception throughout the Middle Ages, the reader is introduced to Berthold and his work, putting in review the sources and cultural materials that shaped Berthold’s visual discourse.

Chapters three and four provide extensive commentary on each of the (more than ninety) diagrams and figurative images that compose Berthold’s *Liber de misteriis et laudibus sancta crucis* and the Marian supplement. Unrelated to Hrabanus’s work, the supplement is a creation by Berthold that Hamburger describes as a “hymnodic rhapsody in prose”<sup>7</sup>. Images are taken from the Gotha manuscript<sup>8</sup>, while Hamburger adds pertinent examples from other medieval sources, in a permanent dialogue of iconicity, typology and geometry.

Chapter five presents a rich and open thematic layout (using diachronic and synchronic overviews) of classical, medieval, and modern conceptions of the nature of diagrams, how their role has been discussed and received through history. Specifically, the chapter comments upon the importance of logic in the design of medieval diagrams. While presenting Berthold’s visual solutions and communication objectives, Hamburger shows the reader what type of schemes people were used to, and in what contexts; a lengthy example is given for the visual archetype of the square of opposition.

Next, in the short summary “The Maker’s Mark” (pp. 265-272), the author elaborates on the individualities, idiosyncrasies and innovations of Berthold’s work, pointing it out as a major source in the realms of diagrammatic devotion.

In addition, the work contains an appendix entitled “Description and Partial Edition of Forschungsbibliothek Gotha der Universität Erfurt, Memb. I 80” (pp. 273-310). This partial edition is of the earliest, most-extant, known manuscript copy of Berthold’s work – excluding the section that corresponds to a later copy of Hrabanus’s *carmina figurata* and including the prologue and table of contents from MS. Lat. 8916, from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris – and the full codicological analysis and commentary of Berthold’s text included here is invaluable.

It is impossible to address in this review the world of knowledge *Diagramming Devotion* contains. Along with an extremely direct and scientific presentation of Berthold’s diagrams

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<sup>6</sup> “from cross to crucifix” and “maze of meaning” are expressions used in the opening titles of chapters three (p. 79) and two (p. 33).

<sup>7</sup> Hamburger, *Diagramming Devotion*, 212.

<sup>8</sup> Berthold of Nuremberg, *Liber de misteriis et laudibus sancta crucis, Liber de misteriis at laudibus intemerate Virginis genitricis Dei et Domini nostril Ihesu* (Lake Constance region (?), 1292-94), Forschungsbibliothek Gotha der Universität Erfurt, Memb., I 80.

(their context, aim and form), Professor Hamburger illustrates the multifaceted approaches to diagrams scholars and thinkers have put forward in the last couple of millennia. This new book possesses a clear focus on the relationship between diagrams and logic and builds upon the thesis and methodology of Hamburger's earlier discussion of imagery in *The Mind's Eye*.<sup>9</sup> *Diagramming Devotion* thus provides future research with a fruitful methodological model for visual and critical interpretation of medieval diagrammatical productions (although not exclusively), offers new analytical and descriptive vocabulary, and finally, but by no means least, contributes to an ongoing conversation of how human knowledge has relied on diagrammatical reasoning, through perception, memory and imagination.

*Diagramming Devotion* presents itself as a memorable object and it contains a literary work that fully deserves its substantial physical presence. Professor Jeffrey Hamburger has released an extraordinary study on medieval diagrams that will engage any reader and stand the test of scientific research for years to come.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Medieval West*, edited by J. Hamburger and A. Bouché (Princeton: Department of Art & Archaeology, Princeton University, Princeton University Press, 2005).