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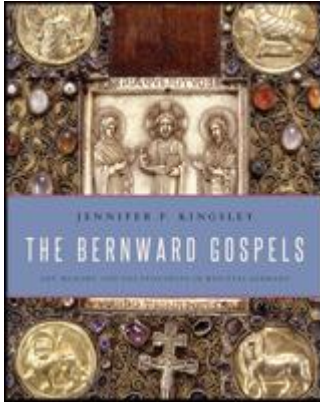


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Book Review: Jennifer P. Kingsley, *The Bernward Gospels: Art, Memory, and the Episcopate in Medieval Germany* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

By Eliza Garrison, Middlebury College

The guiding argument of Jennifer Kingsley's book is that the magnificently illuminated Bernward Gospels (Hildesheim, Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18) was a crucial object in the ritual commemoration of its patron during the final years of his life and long after his death. In a general sense, Kingsley points out, this manuscript's unusual iconography and its physical organization can tell us much about Bernward's self-fashioning. Over the course of four chapters, Kingsley analyzes four of the manuscript's guiding concepts: Memory, Service, Sight, and Touch. In spite of the criticisms that I will make of aspects of the book's organization and the scope of its argument, this important study is an essential point of reference for those interested in Ottonian art and theology.

The introduction and the conclusion, which bookend the substantial chapters that they bracket, offer the reader only the most basic contextualization for the Bernward Gospels. Indeed, the image that opens Kingsley's text, a painting of John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary on either side of a golden cross, is not from the Bernward Gospels at all, but instead derives from another Bernwardian manuscript called the Bernward Bible

(Dom- und Diözesanmuseum Hildesheim Inv. Nr. DS 6). Although this image does not play much of a role in the rest of the book, Kingsley uses this picture as a way to frame the complexity of Bernward's virtual presence in the figure of John; the first sentence of Kingsley's book in fact notes straightaway that the "painting assimilates Bernward of Hildesheim to John the Evangelist, Moses, and Jerome" (Kingsley, 1). While I have no reason to doubt that this image does precisely that, Kingsley makes this proposition without doing much at all to explain how this works. What Kingsley is perhaps most interested in are the theological concepts that this monumental work of Ottonian book painting activates, and here her study follows in many ways the model of Adam Cohen's venerable monograph on the Uta Codex. In lieu of providing historical and political contexts for Bernward's massive expansion of St. Michael's in the years leading up to his death (and at a time that ran just about exactly parallel to Henry II's construction of Bamberg cathedral as his future burial and cult site – See Kingsley, 100, and Garrison, *Ottonian Imperial Art and Portraiture*, 113-163), Kingsley understandably looks to famous sections of Thangmar's *Vita Bernwardi* that note Bernward's keen interest in the "mechanical arts" (Kingsley, 3) and presents the reader with a rich yet brief section on the codicology of the Gospels. This part of the introduction is its most substantial contribution, and it sets up nicely the description of the Gospels in the book's appendix, for Kingsley is here able to determine that the plans for Bernward Gospels seemed to have changed in mid-production: the manuscript was probably originally planned to be a more modest service book, and the book's full-page illuminations were integrated such that they interrupted the flow of the text. The reader is left wondering what may have

changed in Bernward's (or really, the abbey's) financial circumstances to afford the inclusion of such richly painted images. Perhaps, one imagines, the stakes involved in the making of the Gospels hastened the book's newly ambitious program.

Figure 1 Bifolium, Bernward Gospels. Hildesheim, Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18. Photo: Wiki images.



Chapter One, “Memory,” opens with the famous dedication bifolium depicting, on the left, Bernward in a church interior in the act of donating his gospels and other beautifully crafted liturgical objects, and, on the right, Mary and Child enthroned between the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Both images offer alternate schematic cutaway views of the interior of St. Michael's church. As Kingsley points out, this image is the key to understanding the rest of the manuscript's program of illumination. Following a thorough consideration of the various models that were available to Bernward and the Hildesheim illuminators who must have worked closely with him in

planning the manuscript's pictorial cycle, Kingsley advances to the "meat" of her argument: that this initial bifolium pictures the treasury visually, and thus could have functioned much like a written inventory. Indeed, the visual list that we see on these two folia mark, on the one hand, the founding moment of Bernward's treasury at St. Michael's, and thereby cue later ritual commemorative responses to this moment – and to Bernward – far into the future. This image, Kingsley makes clear, is both a representation of donation and of the celebration of the mass; each of the objects represented in this visual treasury list visualizes differently the truth of the Incarnation. Kingsley's rich analysis of the materiality of the image of the Virgin and Child is particularly excellent; in her examination of the metals used to render the folds of the figures' garments, she reminds us that this image occupies a space somewhere between picture and object. Ultimately, on this bifolium the Gospels and other images of things in Bernward's treasury were, as Kingsley puts it, "symbolic[ally] transform[ed]...into treasure." We are thus presented with visual proof of what Kingsley calls Bernward's "gift-giving *pro anima*" (Kingsley, 35), an act that was believed to secure Bernward's place in heaven in a work that was used directly above Bernward's own grave.

In the second chapter, "Service," Kingsley analyzes the Gospels' evangelist portraits and the six scenes of the ministry of John the Baptist. The four evangelist portraits are unusual because of the ways in which these figures are connected to each other; this "idiosyncrasy" (a term Kingsley uses a great deal in this chapter) must be related to the integration of different models in the creation of the Gospels' cycle of illumination. Kingsley's conclusions here are that the evangelists and John the Baptist

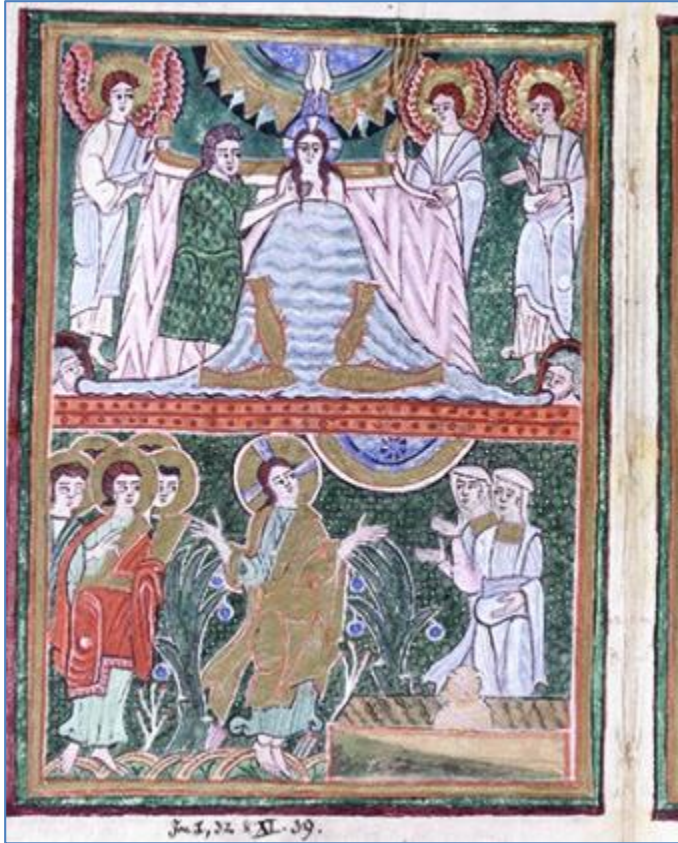


Figure 2 Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol.174v, Baptism of Christ (above) and Raising of Lazarus (below). Photo: Photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum

served as exempla for Bernward, and thus in many ways their images in this book also referred to the roles that Bernward himself served: he was both a priest and also a messenger of the gospels. Thus, if the dedication scene visualizes the treasury's sacred

transformation, with Bernward as the initial arbiter of that change at St. Michael's, then the images of the evangelists and John the Baptist picture the various models whose legacies and images were to shape the manner of Bernward's commemoration at St. Michael's.

In chapter three, "Sight," Kingsley examines illuminations in the Bernward Gospels that fall into two separate but related categories: one group is characterized by the striking axial symmetry of its images; the second group of images shows figures either in profile or three-quarter view and engaged in activity that is part of a narrative. All of these images represent different ways of visually apprehending the divine, and

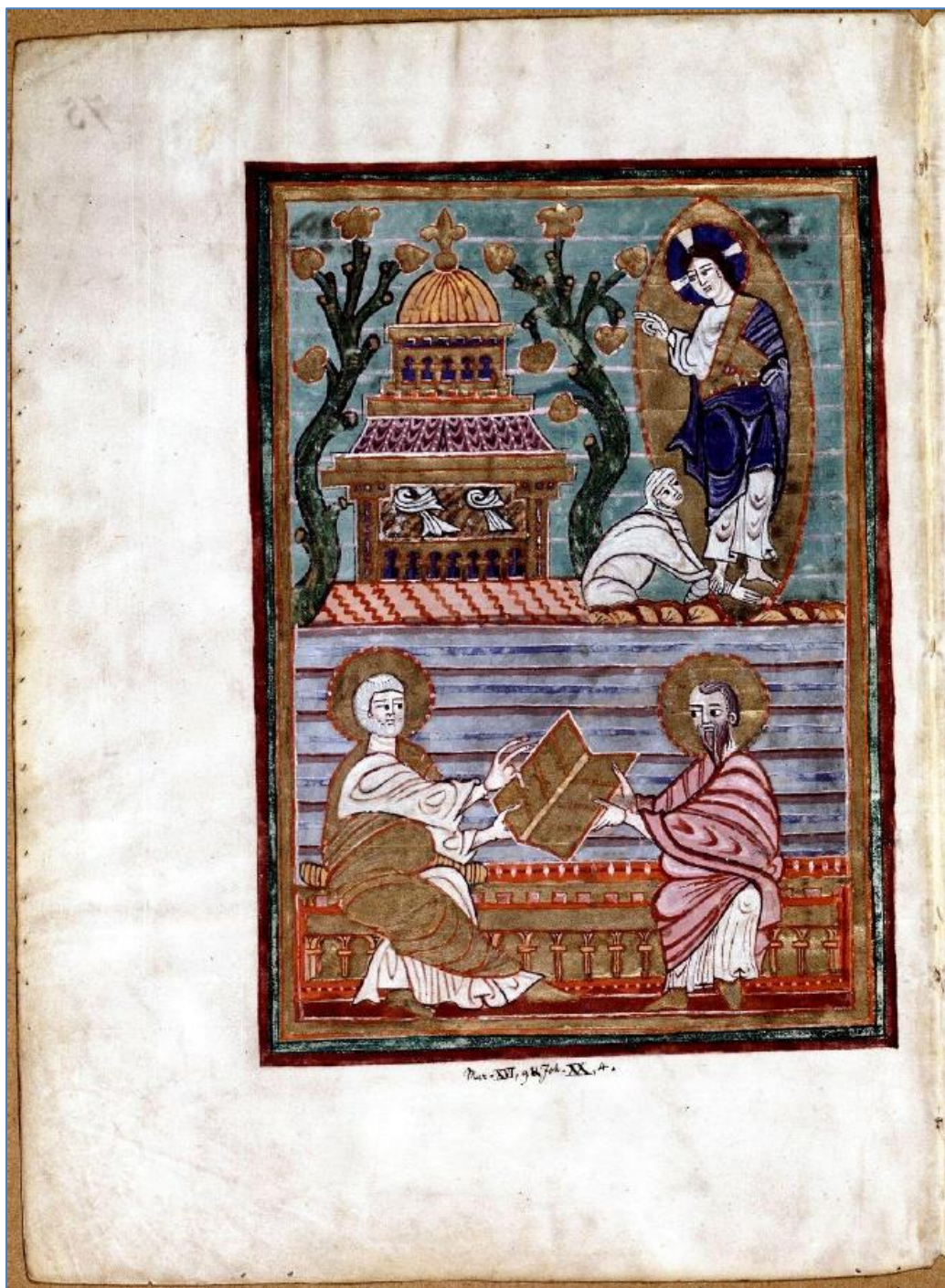


Figure 3 Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, Domschatz 18 (Bernward Gospels), fol. 75v, Noli me tangere (above) and Peter Charging Mark to Write the Gospels (below). Photo: Dom und Diözesanmuseum

each elaborates on the concepts that the dedication bifolium lays out. We are to understand (this seems to be implicit in Kingsley's argument) that the holy figures in each of these scenes serve as models for the Gospels' patron. Just as the objects in the visual treasury list at the beginning of the manuscript are portals to the divine, such works (and obviously the Gospels themselves) are ideally to cue the kind of Augustinian vision that we see modeled in the selection of images that Kingsley treats in this chapter.

Kingsley's fourth and final chapter, "Touch," is perhaps the book's strongest, and an earlier version of it appeared in 2010 in a special issue of *Peregrinations* devoted to Ottonian art. In this chapter, Kingsley looks closely at three miniatures that visualize differently the physical apprehension of Christ. The author first turns her eye to the Gospels' highly unusual representation of the *Noli me tangere* on folio 75v. Whereas it might be tempting to understand this image as another way of representing of spiritual sight, as Robert Deshman once suggested, Kingsley argues that this picture is especially important in the book's illumination cycle because of the way in which the two figures are connected by touch even though this scene is distinctly about not touching. This image has no known antecedents and for this reason could very likely represent an innovation of the part of the designers of the pictorial cycle, one of whom was certainly Bernward himself. Kingsley uses Calcidius's fourth- or fifth-century translation of Plato's *Timaeus* to explain the "non-touching form of haptic perception" rendered in this image (Kingsley, 84). Bernward knew the *Timaeus*, and Kingsley makes a convincing case for Bernward's familiarity with Calcidius's translation (Kingsley, 84-5). We see similar visual explorations of haptic perception in scenes of the Last Supper and Judas's betrayal (fol. 118r) and in the Baptism of Christ (fol. 174v). As is the case with the entire

pictorial program, these scenes refer back to the work's donor; these different ways of touching Christ are to be understood as *exempla* for Bernward. Indeed, looking back to the dedication scene, we see Bernward modeling this haptic perception as he grips the Gospels themselves. This manuscript and the works that Bernward donated to the treasury along with it can be together understood as objects that could make invisible mysteries visible and could serve as conduits to the divine.

Kingsley's monograph is a welcome and hotly anticipated contribution to the Anglophone literature on Ottonian art, and Bernwardian art in particular. It is clearly and forcefully written, and the thematic organization she chose is fruitful. Because of this organization, the arguments of her four chapters unfold elegantly; each chapter builds nicely upon arguments presented in the preceding sections. Its razor sharp focus will offer other students of this manuscript and Bernward's patronage a crucial analytical touchstone. The volume contains both a number of high quality black and white reproductions from the manuscript and a positively sumptuous full-color array of every single full-page miniature in the Gospels.

Certainly no book is perfect, though, and there are a number of aspects of this astute and lively study that would seem to demand further explication. One of the challenges of a monographic study is that one runs the risk of myopia, and, appreciating as I do Kingsley's formidable strengths as an art historian and as a scholar with keen interests in the connections between art and theology, unschooled readers of this book might be confused about the connections between the people who made the book and the book's patron. While there can be no doubt that Bernward was involved in the creation of this manuscript at every stage, and that the designers of the work's pictorial program

were deeply engaged with the theological debates of the early eleventh century, Kingsley's study could do a much more thorough job of acknowledging the complications that arise when dealing with Ottonian patronage and especially that of Bernward; the reader could easily get the impression that Bernward himself was responsible for painting the illuminations in the book. And perhaps he was (indeed, the inscription on the final folio may be in Bernward's own hand), but Kingsley's study would be stronger if the introduction, for example, explained her vision of the artistic process of organizing and planning the Gospels' iconographic cycle. Some readers may also be, as I was, surprised to find that this book contains only tangential discussions of other major works that shared space in the treasury at Saint Michael's. That is, the Bernward Gospels were (and are) part of a much larger collection of precious objects that are of monumental art historical importance, and, while Kingsley should not be held responsible for not having written a comprehensive analysis of the Bernwardian works in the treasury at Saint Michael's, there would have been room in her introduction or conclusion for a consideration of the ways in which the theological concepts that motivate the book's images are shared by other works in the treasury. To be fair, Kingsley does occasionally acknowledge some of these connections – particularly in cases where we see objects from the treasury pictured in the manuscript - but the rather important fact that the Bernward Gospels were imbricated in a much larger physical whole (the treasury, the abbey church of Saint Michael's, etc.) is something that the author does not discuss. Indeed, this manuscript was created amidst a flurry of artistic and building activity at Hildesheim, and a quick glance at the cycle of illumination in the Gospels makes immediately clear that the ideas that gave meaning to the book seem very

clearly to find expression in works such as the monumental bronze doors and the Column of Christ, to name just two examples. Further, the detailed analyses of the textual sources for the miniatures in the book would have been stronger if Kingsley had integrated a consideration of how the book would have been used and viewed. Ottonian sources are frustratingly tight-lipped about such questions, but a little bit of educated speculation in this regard would have enriched the author's otherwise compelling arguments. In the end, the book concludes as it began with a re-statement of the book's thesis: that the Gospels conditioned the way in which Bernward's memory was preserved at St. Michael's. There can be no debate about the fact that the book functioned in this way, and yet a consideration of what the spiritual and political stakes were for Bernward in commissioning this work would certainly have deepened Kingsley's concluding remarks. That is, the expansion of St. Michael's and its treasury was programmatic, and the Bernward Gospels were a precious part of a much larger whole. 🐼