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The *Liber scintillarum*: Excerpting and Recomposing Textual and Artistic Traditions in the Early Middle Ages

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Introduction

This article focuses on a non-liturgical spiritual book written for personal meditation – the *florilegium* called *Liber scintillarum* [Book of sparks][1] – a compilation of excerpts from the Bible, the Gospels,[2] and treatises and commentaries of both Western and Eastern Church Fathers.[3] The original *Liber Scintillarum* is believed to

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NOTES

[1] H.-M. Rochais, "Les manuscrits du 'Liber scintillarum,'" *Scriptorium* 4 (1950): 294–309; idem, "Apostille à l'édition du *Liber scintillarum* de Defensor de Ligugé," *Revue Mabillon* 60 (1983): 267–288, and 289–293, corrections and new manuscripts at 290–292.

[2] The excerpts from the Bible come mainly from the Book of Proverbs or from the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus (Ben-Sirah); see P. Riché, "La Bible et la vie politique dans le haut Moyen Âge," in *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, eds. P. Riché and G. Lobrichon (Paris, 1984), 385–400.

[3] The compiler of the *Liber scintillarum* selected sentences from Isidore's *Sententiae*, *Synonima*, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, and *De differentiis rerum*. For Gregory the Great, the excerpts come from *Moralia in Job*, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem prophetam*, *Dialogi*, *Regula pastoralis*, *Homeliae in euangelia*, and some letters. Augustine is represented mainly by the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and *Enchiridion*. Other authors are Ambrose, Cassian, Caesarius of Arles, Cyprian of Carthage, Eligius of Noyons, Eusebius Gallicanus, Faustus of Riez, Fulgentius of Ruspe, Hegesippus, Hilary of Poitiers, Julianus Pomerius, Maxim of Turin, Martin of Braga, Nilus, Palladius, Porcharius of Lérins, Prosper of Aquitaine, Rufinus, Taio of Saragossa, and Gregory of Tours. Further excerpts come from Basil of Caesarea, Pseudo-Clemens, Evagrius Ponticus, Pseudo-Macarius, Origen, and Ephrem the Syrian. Classical authors are represented by Hesiod, Aristotle, Cicero, and Terence. On the Western Fathers, see F. Dolbeau, "La formation du canon des Pères, du IVe au VIe siècle," in *Réceptions des Pères et de leur écrits au Moyen Âge. Le devenir de la tradition ecclésiale*, ed. R. Berndt and M. Fédou (Münster, 2013), 17–39. On the Eastern Fathers, see M. Richard, "Florilèges grecs,"

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have been written by the Benedictine monk Defensor[4] at the monastery at Ligugé,

near Poitiers, in Merovingian France in the late 7th -early 8th century.[5] Using extant

copies, scholars have analyzed its inner structure and contents[6] in order to single out

the features that made it differ from other medieval compilations.[7] However, there

has been no study of the decorated initials of the early medieval manuscripts that

transmit the *Liber scintillarum*. This article, through a systematic analysis of the

various types of initials, their decorative motifs, and the goals of the scribe-

illuminators, assesses the artistic aspect of non-liturgical manuscripts composed of

devotional excerpts. It also aims to extend the classification of initial letters to other

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in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité. Ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, eds. A. Rayez and C. Baumgartner, vol. 5 (Paris, 1964), 475–512.

[4] In 1948 Henri-Marie Rochais, drawing upon information gleaned from a text written by Jean Mabillon (1632–1707), published an article in which he argued that the compiler was the late 7th -early 8th -century Defensor, a monk at the Benedictine monastery of Ligugé, near Poitiers. Even though Rochais justified his interpretation in historical terms, his insistence on this name is questionable. Among the manuscripts that reached us, none of the most ancient (8th century) reports the name of Defensor nor any other names. Defensor appears for the first time in the prologue of some 11th -century manuscripts along with the alleged name of the monastery: *coenovium loquutiacinse martini sancti*; see J. Mabillon, *Traité des études monastiques* (Paris, 1671), 174; H.-M. Rochais, "Le 'Liber scintillarum' attribué à Defensor de Ligugé," *Revue Bénédictine* 58 (1948): 77–83, at 82; F. Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York, 2014), 56–61.

[5] H.-M. Rochais, "Florilèges spirituels," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, 435–460; idem, "Defensoriana. Archéologie du 'Liber scintillarum,'" *Sacris Erudiri* 9 (1957): 199–264.

[6] Y. Hen, "Defensor of Ligugé's *Liber Scintillarum* and the Migration of Knowledge," in *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, ed. S. Esder *et al.*, (Cambridge, UK, 2019), 218–229.

[7] D. Ganz, "Fragmentierung von patristischen Texte in der Merowingerzeit," in *Fragmente. Der Umgang mit lückenhafter Quellenüberlieferung in der Mittelalterforschung*, ed. C. Gastgeber *et al.*, (Vienna, 2010), 151–159; M. A. Rouse and R. H. Rouse, "*Florilegia* of Patristic Texts," in *Les genres littéraires dans les sources théologiques et philosophiques médiévales. Définition, critique et exploitation*, Actes du colloque international de Louvain-la-Neuve 25–27 May 1981, ed. R. Bultot (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1982), 165–180.

kinds of non-liturgical theological books, reflecting similarities and differences within this category of manuscript production.[8]

Henri-Marie Rochais, the first modern editor of the book, argued that the *Liber Scintillarum* was compiled in Merovingian Gaul,[9] but since the earliest copies of this compilation date to the second half of the 8th century, it is impossible to ascertain whether the Merovingian manuscripts were decorated at all. Preserved in the *Libri scintillarum* of the 9th and 10th centuries is Carolingian ornament applied to initials, that favors accessibility, orientation, memorization, and enjoyment through the coexistence of a variety of motifs.

The *Liber scintillarum* scribes drew these motifs from newly formed Merovingian and Insular decorative repertories as well as established Late-Antique ornamental traditions. They adapted artistic excerpts drawn from compound motifs to three specific initials: the letter D of *Dominus dicit in euangelio*, repeated 76 times; the letter P of *Paulus apostolus*, used four times; and the letter I of *In actibus apostolorum*, present just once. The ornamental repertory of the *Liber Scintillarum* developed during Carolingian times in parallel to the decorated initials of liturgical books, such as the psalter, the lectionary, the sacramentary, and the homiliary, in

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[8] Bede (*c.* 672–735), in his *Historia Ecclesiastica gentium Anglorum*, 5, 17, explains the meaning of the verb "to excerpt": *Haec de opusculis excerpta praefati scriptoris ad sensum quidem verborum illius, sed brevioribus strictisque comprehensa sermonibus, nostris ad utilitatem legentium historiis indere placuit* [I determined to add to this History excerpts from these writings for the benefit of readers. They contain the sense of his words but put more briefly and concisely], *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 512–513.

[9] H.-M. Rochais, ed., *Defensor Locogiacensis monachi Liber scintillarum*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1957–1961).
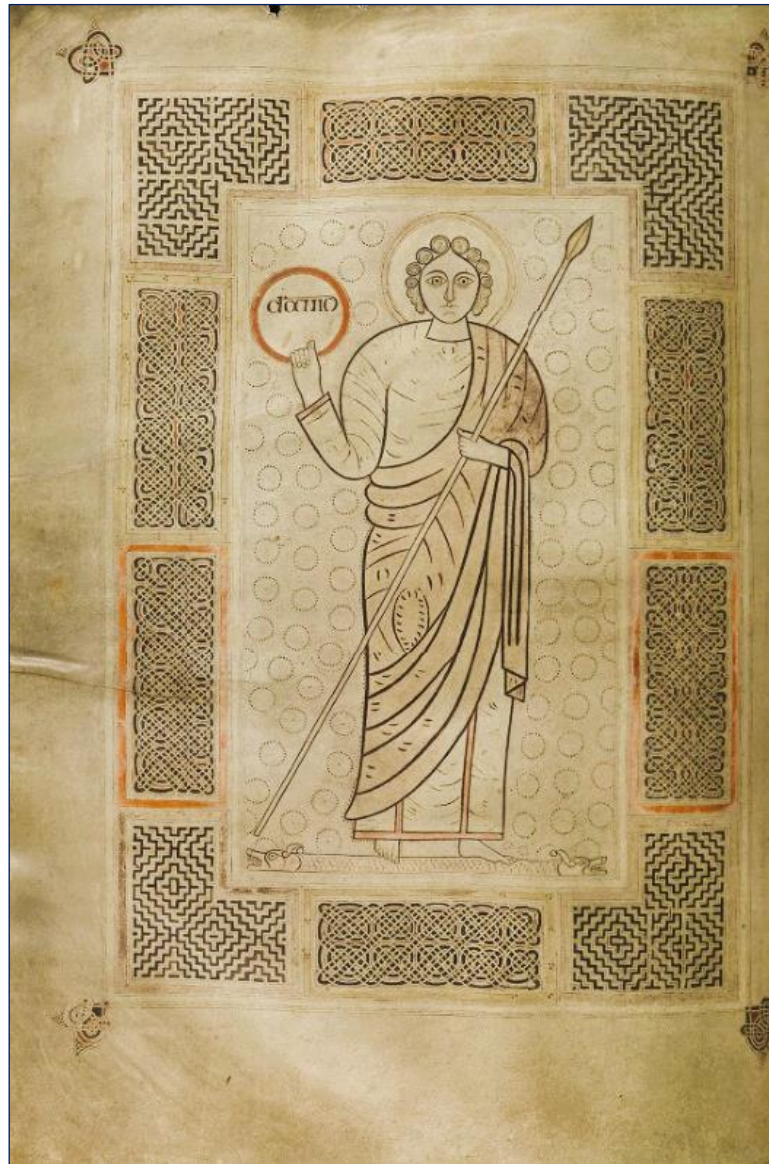
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Figure 1 *Christ or Christ in the guise of David*, in Cassiodorus, *Commentary of the Psalms*, Durham, Cathedral Library, MS B. II. 30, 8th century, fol. 172v. Picture source: image in the public domain

which the initial letters followed an order given by the unfolding of the texts.[10] In his

commentary on the first psalm, Cassiodorus wrote that Christ is the "beginning of

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[10] G. Millesoli, "Il *Vere Dignum* tra simbolo grafico e simbolo concettuale," in *Dal libro manoscritto al libro stampato* (Spoleto, 2010), 133–151; J.-C. Bonne, "Nœuds d'écriture (le fragment I de l'Évangéliaire de Durham," in *Texte-image – Bild-text*, Colloquium Technische Universität Berlin, 2–4 Dezember 1988, ed. S. Dümchen and M. Nerlich (Berlin, 1990), 85–105.

all things" and that He "has the role of heading or preface"[11] reflected in an image of Christ (or Christ in the guise of David) illustrating Cassiodorus's Commentary on the Psalms in the 8th-century Northumbrian manuscript, the Durham Cassiodorus (Durham, Cathedral Library, MS B. II. 30, fol. 172v.[12] **(Fig. 1)** In contrast, it is not until the 14th century, that such image is to be found at the beginning of the early-medieval *Liber scintillarum*.

What kind of illustration or ornament was an excerpt book expected to have? Was the letter-image D meaningful enough to introduce the reader to a non-homogeneous text? The typology of a miscellaneous book for personal use like the *Liber scintillarum* did not conform with any 'ceremonial' unfolding of texts so that the 76 decorated letter Ds of *Dominus dicit in euangelio* were possibly meant to give an ordered articulation to the excerpts collected in the book. Still, the Ds of *Dominus* were not introducing a concept, but the very name of God. For example, as St. Augustine speculated about God's name, he stated that:

> And yet God, although nothing worthy of His greatness can be said of Him, has condescended to accept the worship of men's mouths, and has desired us through the medium of our own words to rejoice in His praise. For on this principle, it is that He is called *Deus* (God). For the sound of those two syllables, in itself, conveys no true knowledge of His nature; but yet all who know the Latin tongue are led, when that sound reaches their ears, to think of a nature supreme in excellence and eternal.[13]

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[11] Magni Aurelii Cassiodori Senatoris, *Expositio Psalmorum*, CCL XCVII, 2 vols., ed. M. Adriaen (Turnhout, 1958), Cassiodorus, Psalm 1, Adriaen, I:27.

[12] L. E. Cochrane, "The Wine in the Vines and the Foliage in the Roots: Representations of David in the Durham Cassiodorus," *Studies in Iconography* 28 (2007): 23–50.

[13] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, book I, chap. VI, 6, trans. J. F. Shaw (Edinburgh, 1892), 11.

I posit that the selection of Dominus endowed the letters with a function that went beyond the ordered articulation of a text. The scribe who first devised to select the name of God as a graphic organizational element for the *Liber scintillarum* helped establish an important function for initial letters—the validation of contents for non-liturgical religious books. In art historical terms, the serial Ds of the *Liber scintillarum*, ornamented with a variety of motifs, show that decoration could arrive at its visual unity not only through homogeneous ornamental motifs but also through the regular sequence of graphic devices bearing religious and historical meaning.

The decoration of the *Liber Scintillarum* suggests that book decoration in the early Middle Ages had a wider scope than normally acknowledged and comprised the contents of non-liturgical texts for personal use, conceived to improve attention, memorization, meditation, and interpretation. The textual and artistic excerpts of the *Liber scintillarum* highlight the issues of tradition, influence, and re-elaboration of previous models. On these grounds, this original compilation deserves a specific place within the history of both book making and book illumination of the early Middle Ages.

The *Liber scintillarum*: Its Inner Structure and Decoration
The Prologue

The prologue to a book is an integral part of the book itself. The reader may eschew it to pass directly to the main chapters, but then misses how an author conceived of his text and whether the outcome conformed with his initial intentions.

The *Liber scintillarum* has a prologue as testified by six manuscripts, in which also the name of the compiler has been preserved.[14] Both the prologue and the compiler's name have been transmitted in more than one form, a difference that betrays a predilection either for short or expanded versions and for a specific author, who probably operated in the country where the manuscript was copied.[15] No doubt, the name chosen had to generally comply with the requirements of plausibility, implying that the author had also been a compiler, and most names reported for the compilation of the *Liber scintillarum* belong to this category, such as Bede in England, Alcuin in Germany, Paulus Albarus of Cordoba in Spain, Defensor of Ligugé in France, and Paterius in Italy.[16]

Henri-Marie Rochais, the first modern editor of the text, favored a French compiler, reported in the prologue of an 11th -century manuscript, where a monk

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[14] Of six manuscripts of the *Liber Scintillarum* that include a prologue, three date to the 11th century: Monte Cassino Abbey, MS 443 (Rochais, "Defensoriana," 222); Monza, Biblioteca capitolare, MS b. 23/141, fols. 9r–93v [A. Belloni and M. Ferrari, *La Biblioteca Capitolare di Monza* (Padova, 1974), 35–39]; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS H.190 inf. [V. Brown, "Palimpsested Texts in Beneventan Script: A Handlist with Some Identifications," in *Early Medieval Palimpsests* (Turnhout, 2007), 99–144, at 118–119] and three to the 12th century: Ljubljana, University Library, MS 12, fols. 82r–138v [M. Kos, *Srednjevski Rokopisi v Sloveniji*, Ljubljana, 1931]; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 9650 [A. Wilmart, "Le recueil grégorien de Paterius et les fragments wisigothiques de Paris," *Revue Bénédictine* 39, 1927: 81–104]; Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 18 [*Catalogue général des manuscrits des Bibliothèques publiques des Départements – Troyes* (Paris, 1849–1885), 771].

[15] H.-M. Rochais, "Les prologues du *Liber Scintillarum*," *Revue Bénédictine* 59 (1949): 137–156, at 138–139.

[16] According to Rochais, the compilers' names and the number of their appearance in manuscripts are the following: Alcuin = 67; Albarus = 3; Augustine = 29, Basil = 3; Bede = 44; Cassiodorus = 11; Cesarius = 1; Defensor = 32; Eligius = 1; Huchbaldus = 1; Isidore = 2; Paterius = 20. See Rochais, "Les prologues," 155. However, one should consider that the same name appears in later manuscripts in which the scribes copied previous attributions. For more accurate results, one should verify how many times the same author appears in early manuscripts.

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presents himself as Defensor. Living in the monastery of Ligugé near Poitiers, he was inspired by his abbot Ursinus to transcribe the excerpts and make them a collection.[17] He describes how he selected and organized the excerpts, conveying an active image of himself.[18] His aim was to ignite the reader's mind, particularly when it seemed tardy to react to moral demands or when it was engaged in other thoughts. These few sentences, written in the prologue, give the collection unity and soundness. But when the prologue is lacking, which is the case of all the 8th - to 10th - century manuscripts considered in this article, it is the *Capitula* [table of contents]—beginning with the first chapter *De caritate* [On charity] and ending with the eighty-first *De Lectionibus* [On readings]—that substitute for the compiler's clarification.

Unfortunately, no precise idea can be formed of how the table of contents of the earliest manuscripts (8th century) looked like in their *Incipit* initials [letters of the beginning] and heading decoration because none have preserved the first folio, usually featuring the *Capitula*.[19] The earliest manuscripts are Würzburg,

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[17] Rochais, "Les prologues," 155. On Monteccasino Abbey, MS Cassinensis 443, fols. 117r–221r, see E. J. Hobsbawm and F. Newton, *The Scriptorium and Library at Montecassino, 1058-1105* (Cambridge, UK, 1999). Newton states that the prologue of MS 443 is written "in a Merovingian spelling with the words wrongly divided into three: *monasterium locuti ac inse = monasterium locutiacinse (locogiacense)*," 314.

[18] Rouse & Rouse, "*Florilegia* of patristic texts," 169.

[19] The 8th-century fragments of the *Liber scintillarum* preserved at Kassel, Staatsbibliothek, MS Theol. 4° 10, fols. 139–141v, and in London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. II, fol. 45r, chap. I, *De caritate*, do not begin with the first folio. On Kassel fragments, see Rochais, "Les manuscrits du 'Liber scintillarum,'" 299. The Cotton Nero fragment is described as written in *charactere Longobardico*, 8th century; see J. Planta, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library deposited in the British Museum* (London, 1802), 202.

Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13;[20] (**Fig. 2**) Munich, Bayerische

Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4582,[21] (**Fig. 3**) and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS

lat. 2843 A.[22] (**Fig. 4**) Some scholars have also added to this short list the 8th -century

London, British Library, MS Harley 5041,[23] (**Fig. 5**) but it seems to belong to another

category of excerpt books.[24] It is some 9th- and/or 10th-century manuscripts of the

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[20] Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13, *Liber scintillarum*, middle of the 8th century, the 'Karlberg florilegium,' perhaps from a nunnery near Würzburg, fols. 1–57v, 286 x 234 mm, chapters V–LXXXI; the script is Anglo-Saxon minuscule and majuscule; see Rochais, "Defensoriana," 245, no. 356; H. Thurn, *Die Pergamenthandschriften der ehemaligen Dombibliothek* (Wiesbaden, 1984), 10. Some folios bear subscriptions, such as fol. 7r: monogram; fol. 8r: *gunza*; fol. 23v: *eigill*; fol. 57v: monogram made of *N u g t z a*, to be read as *Guntza*. On fol. 57v: *explicit liber sententiarum de diversis voluminibus coaptatum. Lege felix feliciter et memento mei deo gracias.* Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13 can be compared with Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 78, *Passiones Apostolorum*, second half of the 8th century, fols. 1–35, 280 x 210 mm, with many elongated initials. The script is Anglo-Saxon minuscule and majuscule. Both manuscripts were under Anglo-Saxon influence. See Thurn, *Die Pergamenthandschriften der ehemaligen Dombibliothek*, 65.

[21] Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4582, fols. 1r–77v, 155 x 243 mm, from chap. XI to chap. LXV, from St. Martin Abbey at Beuron; see G. Glauche, *Katalog der lateinischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München. Die Pergamenthandschriften aus Benediktbeuren Clm 4501-4663* (Wiesbaden, 1994), 133.

[22] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 2843 A, middle of the 8th century, 230 x 160 mm, fols. 1–102, chapters IV–IX and XVI–LXXIX, from Saint-Martial of Limoges; script: pre-Caroline minuscule, some rubrics in uncial. See E. A. Lowe, *Codices latini antiquiores. A Paleographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century* (CLA), 12 vols. (Oxford, 1934–1972), 5:552.

[23] London, British Library, MS Harley 5041, second quarter of the 8th century, fols. 1r–78v, comprises a patristic *florilegium* produced in the north-east of France and written in a Merovingian cursive minuscule (fols. 1r–8r) and uncial capitals (fols. 8v–78v). Just two excerpts, on fol. 15v and fol. 39r, begin with *Dominus dicit*. See B. Bischoff, "Frühkarolingische Handschriften und ihre Heimat," *Scriptorium* 22 (1968): 306–314, at 309; D. Ganz, "The Merovingian Library of Corbie," in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. H. B. Clarke and M. Brennan, BAR International series, 113 (Oxford, 1981), 153–172, 171 n. 49; R. McKitterick, "Nuns' Scriptoria in England and Francia in the Eighth Century," *Francia* 19 (1989): 1–35, at 17, 20. On the diffusion of monasticism and especially on the missionary activity of Columbanus and Boniface in German territories, see H. Schutz, *The Germanic Realms in Pre-Carolingian Central Europe, 400–750* (New York, 2000), 193–200.

[24] Yitzhak Hen states that MS Harley 5041 is very reminiscent of the *Liber scintillarum* (Hen, "Defensor of Ligugé's *Liber Scintillarum*," 222 n. 27). Since the *Liber scintillarum* offers a careful and synthetic selection of excerpts systematically organized, while Harley 5041 presents very long as well as

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Figure 2 Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13, 8th century, fol. 1r. Picture source: image in the public domain.
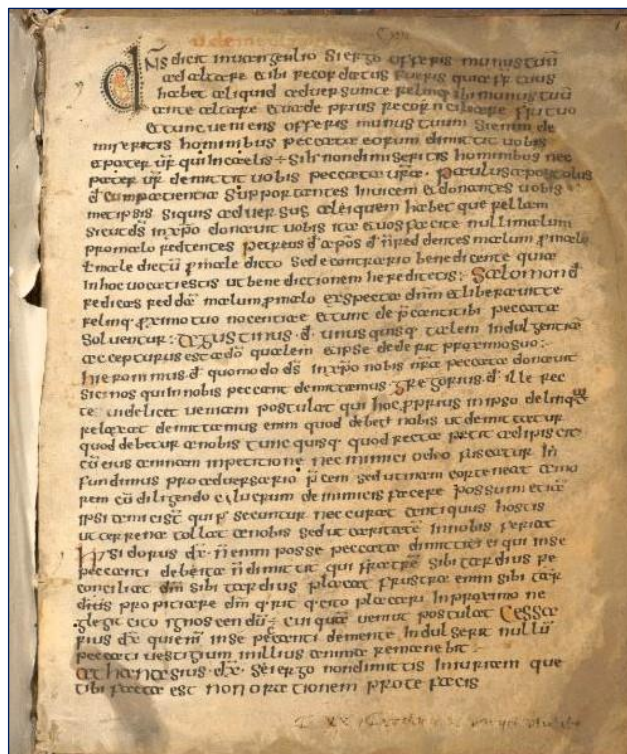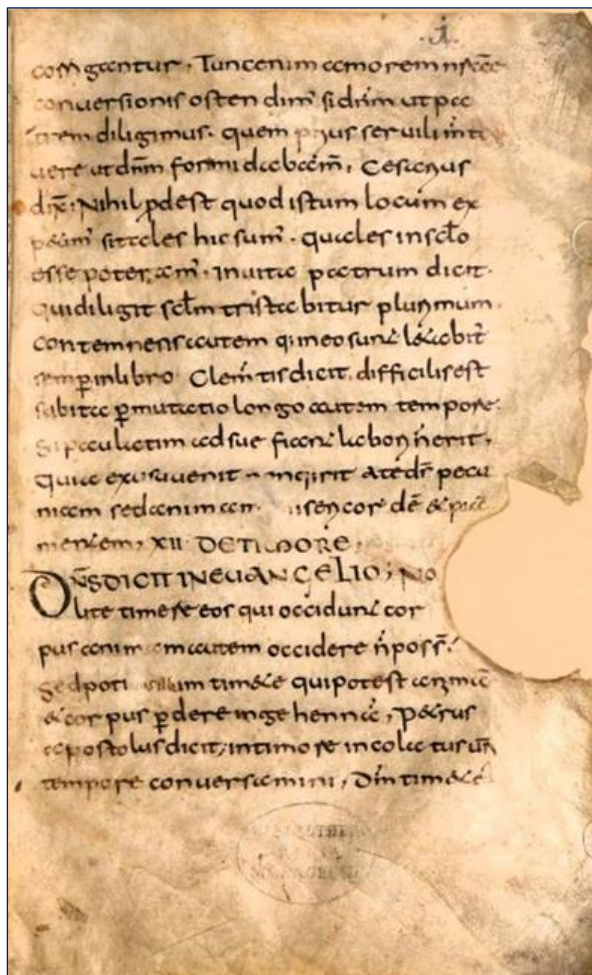

Figure 3 Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4582, 8th century, fol. 1r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

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short sentences unsystematically organized, I believe that the London manuscript can either predate the *Liber scintillarum* or be considered an independent text entirely. On the topic, see D. Ganz, "Corbie and Neustrian Monastic Culture 661–849," in *La Neustrie: Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*: Colloque historique international, ed. H. Atsma, 2 vols. (Sigmaringen, 1989), 2:339–347.
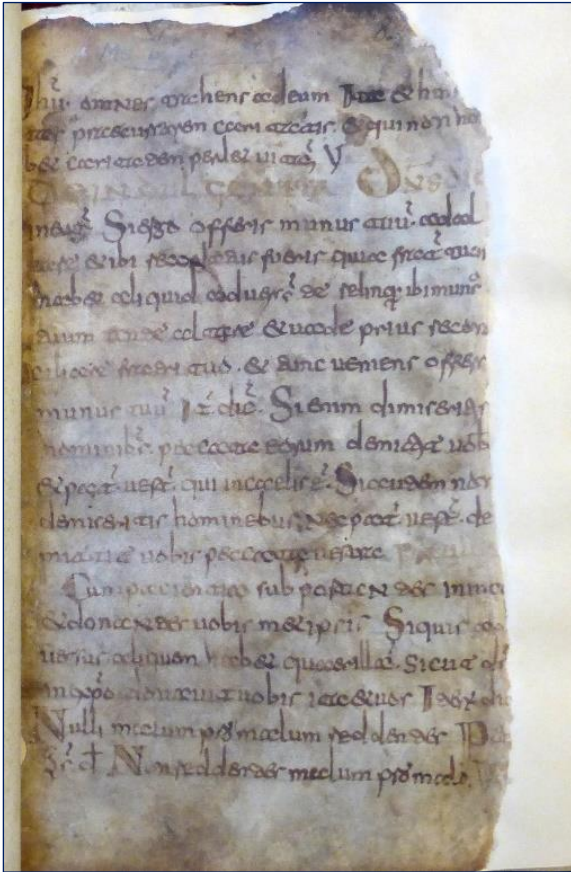
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Figure 4 Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2843 A, 8th century, fol. 1r. Photo: author. Image in the public domain.
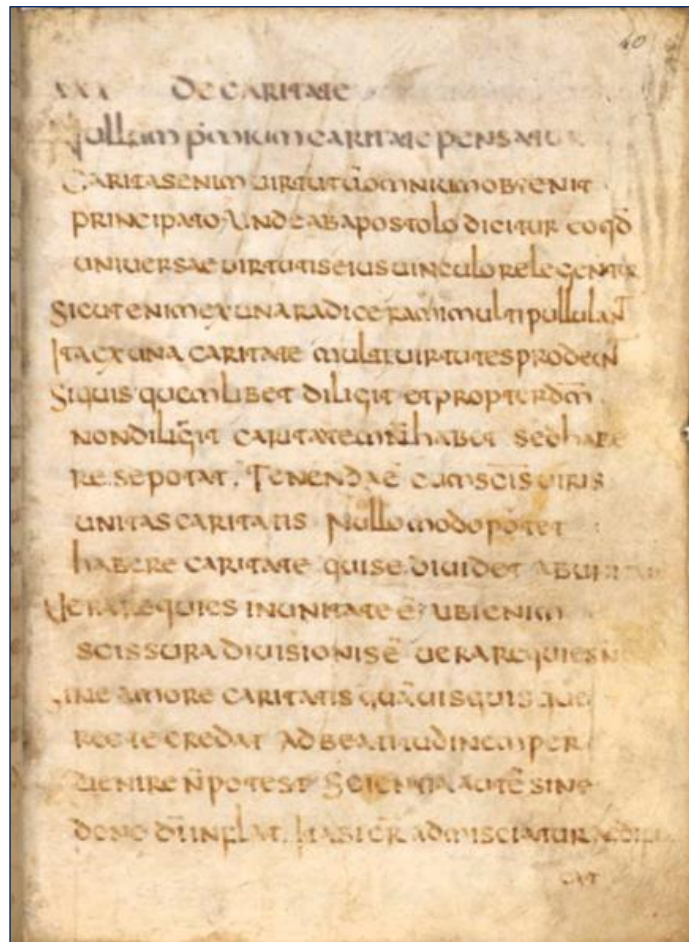

Figure 5 *De caritate*, in *Patristic florilegium*, London, British Library, MS Harley 5041, 8th century, fol. 40r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Liber scintillarum, even though preserved in not so great a number, that offer information about the structure and decoration of the *Capitula*.

Capitula or the List of Contents

The "display letters" employed in the Incipits are normally described as initials specifically designed to attract the reader's attention. In the early Middle Ages they enhanced the beginning of books and chapters and the table of contents.[25] If for modern readers a list of contents is just an informative section of a book, from which no artistic output is expected, the scribes of the early Middle Ages, though undoubtedly aware of the book's different parts, rarely missed the occasion to mark it with some artistic signs in the display initials and in the letters forming the table of contents.[26]

The *Capitula* at the beginning of the *Liber scintillarum* preserved in 9th-10th-century manuscripts received a peculiar ornamental treatment, grounded in the linear and chromatic elaboration of different kinds of display letters. A classification

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[25] P. Stirnemann and M. H. Smith, "Forme et fonction des écritures d'apparat dans les manuscrits latins (VIIIe-XVe siècles)," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 145 (2008): 67–100; B. C. Tilghman, "The Shape of the Word: Extra-linguistic Meaning in Insular Display Lettering," in *The Iconicity of Script: Writing as Image in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. F. Hamburger, special issue of *Word & Image* 27/3 (2011): 292–308; D. Ganz, "Early Medieval Display Scripts and the Problems of How We See Them," in *Graphic Signs of Identity: Faith and Power in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. I. Garipzanov et al. (Turnhout, 2017), 125–143.

[26] The various scripts used by the scribes, often on the same folio, were described by Remigius of Auxerre in a commentary to Donatus: Remigius Altissiodorensis, *Commentum in Donati artem maiorem*, Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 172–1128, 8th -9th century, 143. See L. Holtz, *Donat et la tradition de l'enseignement grammatical. Étude sur l'Ars Donati et sa diffusion (IVe–IXe siècle) et édition critique* (Paris, 1981).

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of the *Liber scintillarum*'s Incipits can be drawn considering recurrent formal features defining the layout of the initial pages and the letters' main functions. The classification I propose comprises three groups. I assigned to the first group, the Signal Initial Letter, a long isolated I that descends along the left side of the folio and relates to the first elements of the list. Its function is to capture the reader's attention by signaling the first row of headings. The second group, the Titulus Initial Letters [Inscription initial letters], is comprised of capital letters, which usually appear both before and after the list, written with different inks and separated from the headings. In the Titulus Initial Letters both the large size and variety of colors attract the attention of the reader, leading them to the headings. These letters also enclose the list, creating a sort of visual constraint, suggesting the precise space occupied by the headings. In the third class I placed the Integrated Initial Letters, made of just two words – *Incipiunt capitula* – that do not differ in size and color from those of the list. These letters are the most sober introduction to the headings even though, lacking any remarkable feature, they do not play any compelling visual role.

a. Signal Initial Letter

By far the most elaborate, the Signal Initial Letter is featured in an outstanding way in two 9th -century manuscripts, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, fols. 1v **(Fig. 6)** and 2v[27] and St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod.

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[27] On Vatican City, MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, fols. 1r–87r, see A. Wilmart, *Codices Reginenses Latini* (Rome, 1937), s. v.; Rochais, "Les manuscrits du 'Liber scintillarum,'" 304, no. 232. See also the
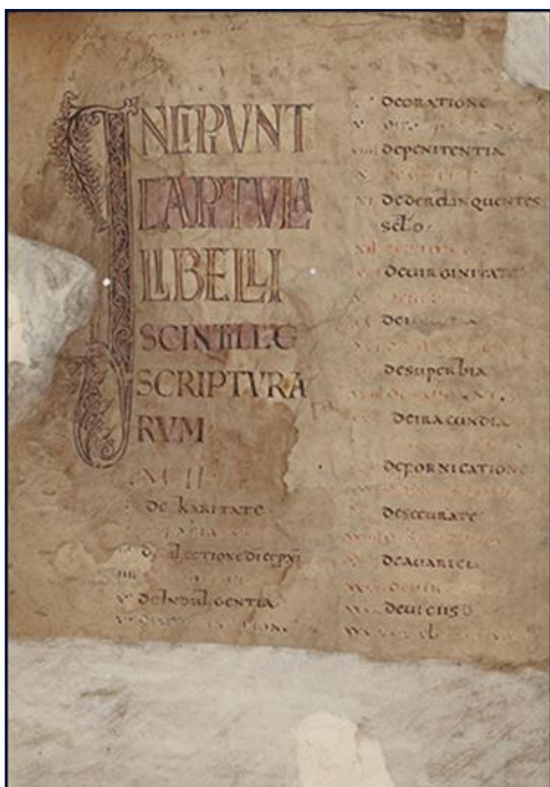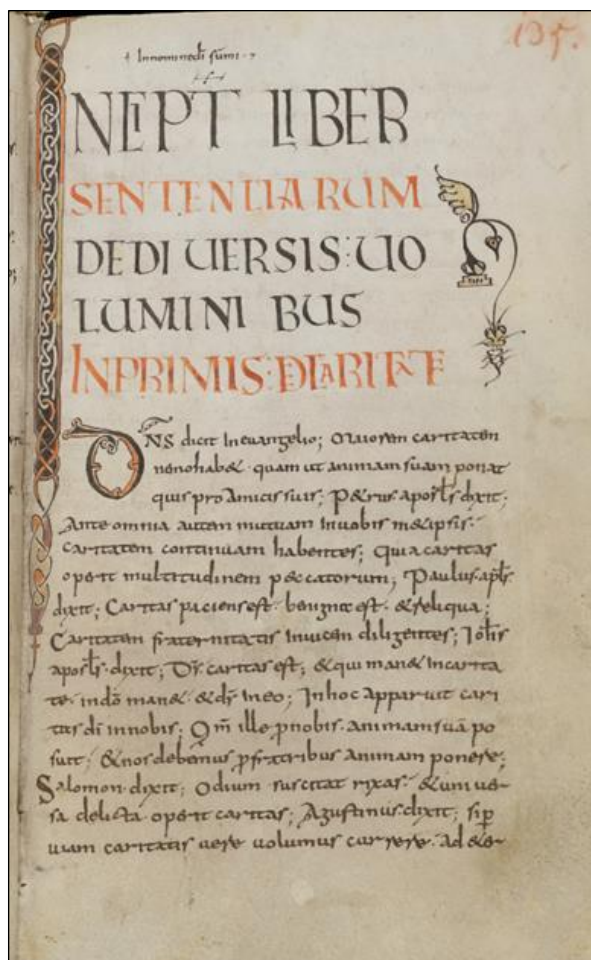
13

Figure 6 *Signal Initial I*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, 9th century, fol. 1v. Picture source: www.wiglaf.org/vatican/fonds/Reg.lat.html

Figure 7 *Signal Initial I*, in *Liber scintillarum*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 124, *c.* 810–820, fol. 135. Picture source: image in the public domain.

fragmentary *Liber scintillarum*, written in shorthand, in the miscellany Vatican City, MS Vat. Reg. lat. 846, fols. 99r–103v, chaps. II–XI; XXIII–XXXII; XL–XLIII. See W. Schmitz, *Miscellanea Tironiana: aus dem Codex vaticanus latinus, Reginae Christinae 846 (fols. 99–114)* (Leipzig, 1896), 7–69; Rochais, "Les manuscrits du 'Liber scintillarum,'" 304, no. 234.

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Sang. 124, fols. 133–135.[28] **(Fig. 7)** In both manuscripts the initial letter I of *Incipiunt*

plays the role to signal the opening of the book. In the 8th century, Sergius

Grammaticus, instead of considering the name of the initial letters, classified them

according to their shape and power -- that is, their character and sound.[29] In MS Vat.

Reg. lat. 143 and Cod. Sang. 124, the shape of the I is similar, being that of an

elongated initial, long enough to comprise several lines of script. The two letters,

instead, differ substantially in their "sound," given by their placement on the folio

and especially by their decoration. The two scribes who traced the initials, though

excerpting motifs from the same ornamental traditions (ancient and Insular),

operated in two different scriptoria, according to different visual aims.

In MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, possibly written and decorated in an early

Carolingian scriptorium in north-west France, the Signal Initial I has been traced on

fol. 1v **(see Fig. 6)**, at the beginning of the table of contents (*Incipiunt / capitula / libelli*

/ scintillae / scriptura / rum). Supple acanthus leaves either fill the letter's body or jet

out twice at the two extremities of the initial, as a cluster of leaflets above, and as a

leaf seen in profile below. The body of the letter and some words (*capitula*, *scintillae*,

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[28] St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 124, an exegetical-liturgical collection of works, probably from St. Amand monastery (Lille) in the north-east of France, is dated to *c*. 810–820. The manuscript contains 81 chapters (fols. 133–306); see G. Scherrer, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek von St. Gallen* (Halle, 1875), 44–45; Ganz, "Fragmentierung von patristischen Texte," 154.

[29] D. Ganz, "Character and the Power of the Letter," in *Graphic Devices and the Early Decorated Book*, ed. M. P. Brown et al. (Woodbridge, 2017), 31–44. Sergius Grammaticus (Ps. Cassiodorus), *De littera, de syllaba, de pedibus, de accentibus, de distinctione commentarius*, Grammatici latini IV, ed. M. Keil (Leipzig, 1864), 475–485, at 478.

and -*rum*) have been highlighted with a mauve wash, a not unusual device in other manuscripts of the same period, as in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 250, a 9th-century *Novum Testamentum* from Saint-Martin of Tours, fol. 17v.[30] (**Fig. 8**) The naturalistic elements, inside and outside of the I in MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, fol. 1v make the letter appear less rigid while the use of mauve wash, extended to the acanthus leaves and the head of a small animal below, establishes a direct connection with the *Incipit* letters on the right.

The second small size Signal Initial I of MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, traced on fol. 2v, presents, at both its base and top, small acanthus leaves seen in profile. The letter occupies just two out of nine lines of script in capital letters, written in alternating black and brown ink: *In Nomine / domini nostri Jhesu / christi incipiunt / sentenciae / de diversis / libris scrip / turarum* [In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ sentences from diverse books of Scriptures begin]. The scribe who decorated the two Is might have had at his disposal a model with ornamental naturalistic features that he re-elaborated to adapt to the page layout's requirements. In the illumination of the 8th to the 10th century, naturalistic forms were either the product of a revival of ancient types or elements of a ceaseless tradition.[31] The acanthus leaf, the ancient motif par

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[30] On Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 250, see H. Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian Book Illumination: A Historical Study*, 2 vols. (London, 1999), 1:179–81; D. Ganz, "Mass Production of Early Medieval Manuscripts: The Carolingian Bibles from Tours," in *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use* (Cambridge, UK, 1994), 53–62.

[31] E. Vergnolle, "Un carnet de modèles de l'an mil originaire de Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire (Paris, BN, lat. 8318 + Rome, Vat. Reg. Lat. 596)," *Arte Medievale* 2 (1984): 23–56. For Late Antique naturalistic repertory, see C. Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1970).

Figure 8 *Initial I*, in *Novum Testamentum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 250, 9th century, fol. 17v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

excellence,[32] is so luxuriant in MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143 as to recall decorative choices that were to become usual in the 11th century for the Bibles of Tours and Limoges.[33] Two main features of the letter Is on fols. 1v and 2v of MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143 – the limp scroll of acanthus leaves and the small head of an animal – can be compared with foliate elements in manuscripts of the early Carolingian times produced in north-west France.

The acanthus body of the Vat. Reg. lat. 143 letter I shares some ornamental elements with the acanthus scrolls in the Godescalc Evangelistary, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1203, dated 781–783.[34] In the illumination on fol. 2v **(Figs. 9-9a)**, featuring St. John enclosed in a double frame, the acanthus scroll is outlined within some sections of the frame. Its visual effect is made

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[32] On the acanthus motif see A. Riegl, *Stilfragen. Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin,1893); *Problems of Style. Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. E. Kain (Princeton, 1992); *Problemi di stile. Fondamenti di una storia dell'arte ornamentale*, trans. M. Pacor (Milan, 1963), 208–231; L. Vandi, *La trasformazione del motivo dell'acanto dall'antichità al XV secolo. Ricerche di teoria e storia dell'ornamento* (Bern, 2002); L. Vandi, "A Long Foliate Reform: Acanthus in Romanesque Tuscany between Illumination and Sculpture," in *Within and Without the Manuscript: Interactions between Illumination and the other Arts*, ed. M. Tomasi (Rome-Lausanne, 2023), 247–263.

[33] On the Bibles of Tours and Limoges, see D. Gaborit-Chopin, *La decoration des manuscrits à Saint-Martial de Limoges et en Limousin du IXᵉ au XIIᵉ siècle* (Paris, 1969).

[34] On Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1203, see F. Crivello, *Das Godescalc-Evangelistar: eine Prachthandschrift für Karl den Großen* (Darmstadt, 2011); C. Denoël, "L'Évangéliaire de Charlemagne et les débuts de la Renaissance artistique à la cour de Charlemagne," *Art de l'enluminure* 20 (2007): 18–45; B. Reudenbach, *Das Godescalc-Evangelistar: ein Buch für die Reformpolitik Karls des Großen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998).

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Figure 9 *St. John the Evangelist*, in Godescalc *Evangelistary*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1203, 781–783, fol. 2v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Figure 9a *St. John the Evangelist*, in Godescalc *Evangelistary*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1203, 781–783, fol. 2v, detail.

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more impressive by the alternation of its supple leaves and stalks with interlace, a colorful choice in which naturalism and abstraction coexist side by side. The miniature also reflects two different ways to refer to nature: when naturalistic elements are treated as ornamental motifs (seen from high up in a two-dimensional view) and when they are depicting a real plant, such as the rose buds growing by St. John's throne (seen in a frontal view).

In the Egino Codex, *c.* 796–799, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, MS Phillips 1676, fol. 18v **(Figs. 10-10a)** offers a second example.[35] The left side of the frame that surrounds a scene with St. Augustine is ornamented with elaborate lozenges and elegant acanthus leaves in profile, symmetrically depicted in brown color with pale yellow contours.[36] The miniature of the Egino Codex – one inserted single leaf – is the product of an expert illuminator whose work shares nothing with the style of the rest of the manuscript, written by local scribes in Verona.[37]

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[35] On the Egino codex, see M. Camille, "Word, Text, Image, and the Early Church Fathers in the Egino Codex," in *Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo.* Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1993 (Spoleto, 1994), 62–92; L. Nees, "Early Carolingian Manuscripts and Ivories," in *Les manuscrits carolingiens*, Actes du colloque de Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, le 4 mai 2007, ed. J.-P. Caillet and M.-P. Laffitte, Bibliologia 27. Elementa ad librorum studia pertinentiam (Turnhout, 2009), 159–184, at 167, 170–71.

[36] These acanthus leaves recall the decoration on fol. Av of the Gundohinus Gospels, Autun, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 3, dated 754–757, showing that the direct reference to a classical motif was already present in late Merovingian times, well before its alleged revival in the early manuscripts of the Carolingian age. See L. Nees, *The Gundohinus Gospels* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), fig. 1.

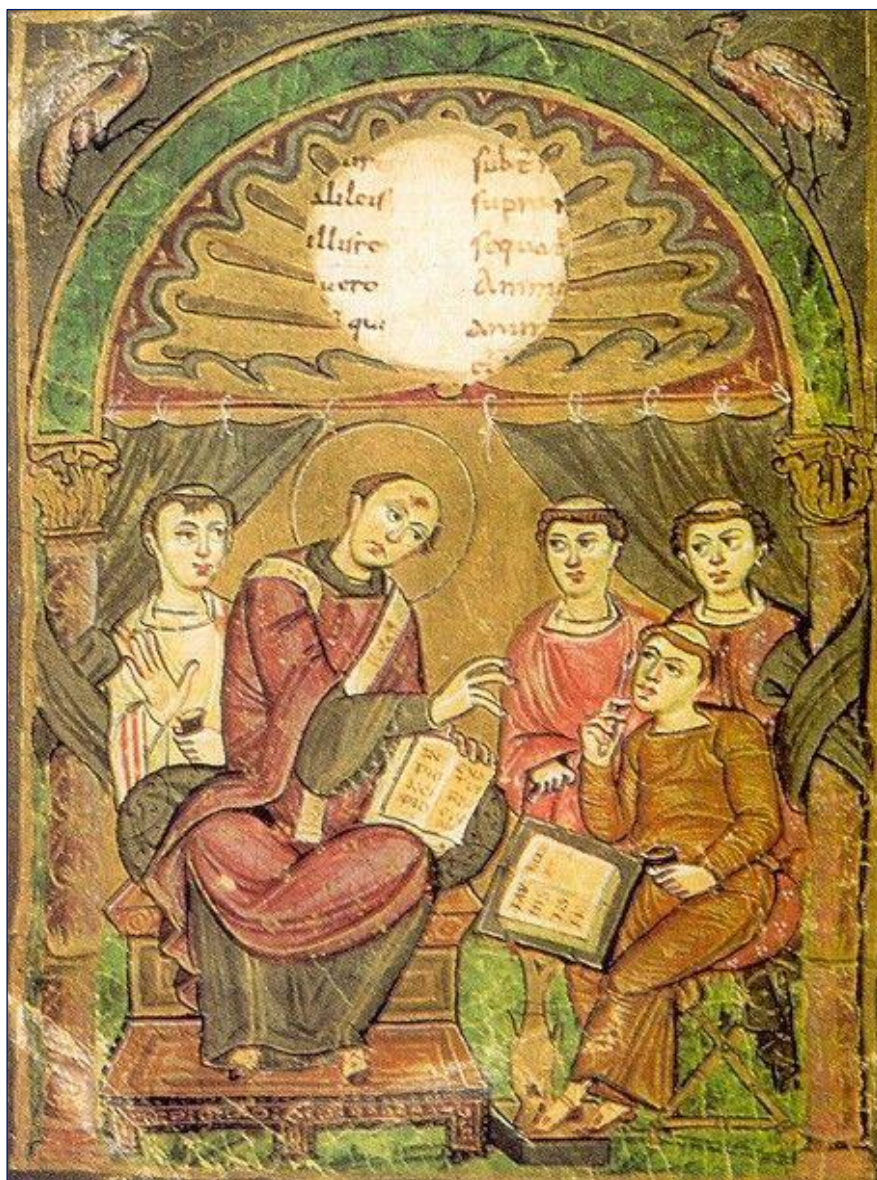[37] Nees, "Early Carolingian Manuscripts and Ivories," 171.

Figure 10 *St. Augustine*, in Egino Codex, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS Phillips 1676, *c*. 796–799, fol. 18v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Figure 10a *St. Augustine*, in Egino Codex, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS Phillips 1676, *c*. 796–799, fol. 18v, detail.

Figure 11 *Canon Tables*, in *Gospels* of Saint-Martin of Tours, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 260, 796–804, fol. 18r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

The third comparison is with fol. 18r **(Fig. 11)** of the Gospels of Saint-Martin of Tours, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 260, dated 796–804.[38] Here the acanthus scroll is less accurate than in the Egino Codex, but it always fills the long, rectangular spaces, such as an arch or a column's shaft enclosing the Canon

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[38] On Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 260, see C. Denoël, "La Bible d'Odilon et les débuts de l'enluminure clunisienne," *Rivista di storia della miniatura* 15 (2011): 50–60, at 50–51.

Tables. On the arch, the scroll unfolds, occupying the whole space, with a heavy rhythm suggested more by the large white stem than by the slender acanthus leaves, so that the stem of the plant is made conspicuous at the expense of the leaves. The same cannot be said for the scroll depicted along the shaft of the small column on the right, where the regular unfolding of the green acanthus leaves toward the bottom successfully contrasts the ascending direction of the violet stem.

According to Eliane Vergnolle, the acanthus motif of the Carolingian school at Tours presents some specific features, such as a limp form, irregularly divided into lateral lobes formed of two or three closely set round leaflets; the lobes are separated by small, dark, circular eyelets and the nervations are rendered by means of a simple pen-stroke.[39] This is also the case of MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, but among the acanthus leaves of the initial I on fol. 1v **(Fig. 12)** the head of a small animal, carefully drawn, is clearly distinguishable. The acanthus scroll, inhabited with human beings, animals, and fruit, harks back to classical times. This ingenious form, evoking nature's vitality, so ideally suited to ornamental aims, never disappeared in the arts of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, though it underwent modifications depending on the function of the artwork.[40]

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[39] Vergnolle, "Un carnet," 53.

[40] Riegl, *Problemi di stile*, 246–255, 267–336; J. M. C. Toynbee and J. B. Ward Perkins, "Peopled Scrolls. A Hellenistic Motif in Imperial Art," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 18 (1950): 1–43; *L'acanthe dans la sculpture monumentale de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge*, Actes du colloque, Paris, October 1-5, 1990 (Paris, 1993).
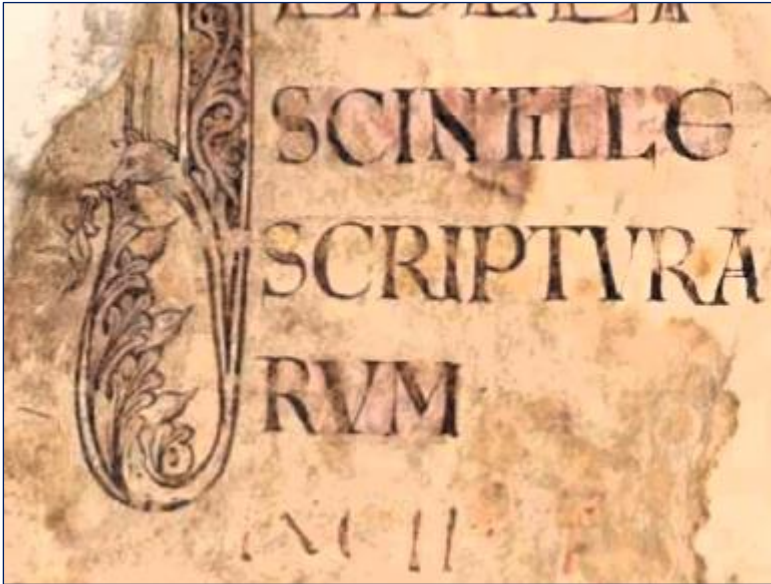
Figure 12 *Signal Initial I*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, 9th century, fol. 1v, detail. Picture source: www.wiglaf.org/vatican/fonds/Reg.lat.html

In MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, the animal head protruding from the acanthus scroll also suggests an influence from Insular decorated manuscripts, circulating on the Continent in early Carolingian times, along with Irish and Anglo-Saxon scribes.[41] Generally, Insular and classical ornament differ very much both in style and iconography, but they show some similarities in treating figures as secondary elements within inhabited scrolls, subservient to the ways stems and leaves unfold in space.

The small animal head of MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143 resembles the animals depicted in Insular style on fol. 85v **(Fig. 13)** of the 8th-9th-century Gospels called of Saint-

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[41] On Insular manuscripts in early Carolingian France, see N. Netzer, "Observations on the Influence of Northumbrian Art on Continental Manuscripts of the 8th Century," in *The Age of Migrating Ideas: Early Medieval Art in Northern Britain and Ireland*. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Insular Art held in the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh, 3–6 January 1991, eds. R. M. Spearman and J. Higgitt (Edinburgh, 1993), 45–51; L. Nees, "Art and Architecture," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 2, *c.700–c.900*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, UK, 2015), 809–844, 1029–1039.

Figure 13 *Initial I*, in *Saint-Gatien Gospels*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1587, 8th-9th centuries, fol. 85v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Gatien of Tours, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1587.[42]

Differences instead are detectable in the composition. In BnF, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1587, the animals are never independent from the tangled lines, while in Vat. Reg. lat. 143 the animal head is isolated. Although the small head is the finial of an

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[42] On the Gospels of Saint-Gatien, see H. Simpson McKee, "Breton Manuscripts of Biblical and Hiberno-Latin Texts," in *The Scriptures and Early Medieval Ireland*, ed. T. O'Loughlin (Turnhout, 1999), 275–290, at 276–279, 282, 285, 289–290; M. P. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe* (London, 2003), 198, 238, 316. See also A. Wilmart, "Le florilège de Saint-Gatien. Contribution à l'étude des poèmes d'Hildebert et de Marbode," *Revue Bénédictine* 48 (1936): 3–40; 145–181; 245–258.

acanthus stem, it has its own space and performs a specific action: It looks towards the left side of the page with a seemingly attentive eye and stretched ears. The attention the scribe paid in drawing leaves and animal shapes show a preference for naturalistic effects, the same sought for in the letters D of *Dominus dicit in euangelio*, introducing the various chapters of MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143.

Looking for a pattern or cluster of correspondences between MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, on the one hand, and the three manuscripts considered above for a comparison —BnF, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1203, Berlin, MS Phillips 1676 and BnF, MS lat. 260— on the other, one important similarity can be discerned in the form of the leaves and in their organization along a vertical axis. This enhancement of verticality, dictated by the shape of the letter I, has been one of the oft-recurring organizational devices adopted by scribes in different periods. In fact, unless the scribes bypassed the spatial constraints through the expansion of ornamental motifs around the letter I, its narrow and rigid body did not allow to draw from a large range of compositional alternatives. The reduction in size of a series of one or more naturalistic or abstract motifs or a combination of the two were the most frequently adopted.[43]

Fol. 135 **(Fig. 14)** of Cod. Sang. 124 (St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek), dated to 810–820, is the second instance of a manuscript with a Signal Initial I. The scribe who wrote and ornamented the codex preferred a selection of a specific abstract motif,

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[43] For 11th-12th -century interpretations of the letter I, see M. Maniaci and G. Orofino, eds., *Le Bibbie Atlantiche. Il libro delle Scritture tra monumentalità e rappresentazione* (Milan, 2000).

Figure 14 *Signal Initial I*, in *Liber scintillarum*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 124, *c*. 810–820, fol. 135, detail. Picture source: image in the public domain.

namely the Insular interlace, which he did not employ for the I of *Incipiunt Capitula*, but for the I of the *Incipit Liber Scintillarum*, on fol. 135. The Insular interlace,[44] or interlacing, as proposed by Ernst Kitzinger,[45] is a complex decorative motif. It is often represented by the scribes in its entirety, as on fol. 2r **(Fig. 15)** of Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 45 (Gregorius Papa I, *Homiliae in euangelia*, second half of the 8th century)[46] or, as is often the case, with some of its constituent parts, as in the letter "I" on fol. 6r **(Fig. 16)** of a Merovingian *Novum Testamentum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1063, of the 8th century.[47] The final result may be one of severe reduction, sometimes deforming

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[44] On the Insular interlace, see the groundbreaking work of J. Romilly Allen, *Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times* (London, 1904); J. J. G. Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts, 6th to the 9th Century: A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, 2 vols. (London, 1978); R. B. K. Stevenson, "Aspects of Ambiguity in Crosses and Interlaces," *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 44/45 (1981–82): 1–27; R. J. Cramp, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England: County Durham and Northumberland* (Oxford, 1984).

[45] E. Kitzinger, "Interlace and Icons: Form and Function in Early Insular Art," in *The Age of Migrating Ideas*, 3–15.

[46] Gregorius Papa I, *Homiliae in euangelia*, Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 45, second half of the 8th century, fols. 1–73, 265 x 185 mm, Anglo-Saxon and Caroline minuscule, more than one hand, produced perhaps in a nunnery, the last scribe left her signature on fol. 71v: *abirhilt*. The Dt is Insular. See Thurn, *Die Pergamenthandschriften der ehemaligen Dombibliothek*, 36; K. Bierbrauer, *Die Ornamentik frühkarolingischer Handschriften aus Bayern* (München, 1979), 70–75.

Figure 15 *Initial I*, in Gregorius Papa I, *Homiliae in euangelia*, Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 45, second half of the 8th century, fol. 2r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

the initial model.[48] Yet even the letters decorated with a drastic reduction of Insular elements always betray their ancestors.

In this light, the Signal Initial I of Cod. Sang. 124 seems to derive from the reduction of a complex Irish interlace.[49] In ornament, however, reduction does not

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[47] On Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1063, see D. Ganz, "A Merovingian New Testament Manuscript and its Liturgical Notes: Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. lat. 1063," *Revue Bénédictine* 126/1 (2016): 122–137; C. Denoël, "Novum Testamentum," in *Les temps mérovingiens. Trois siècles d'art et de culture (451–751)*, ed. I. Bardiès-Fronty et al. (Paris, 2016), 69, no. 70, with bibliography.

[48] This opinion is also expressed by Rochais, "Florilèges spirituels," 458.

[49] On interlace with apotropaic meaning, see E. Kitzinger, "The Threshold of the Holy Shrine. Observations on the Floor Mosaic at Antioch and Bethlehem," in *Kyriakon. Festschrift Johannes*

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Figure 16 *Initial I*, in *Novum Testamentum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouv. acq. lat. 1063, 8th century, fol. 6r. Picture source: image in the public domain.
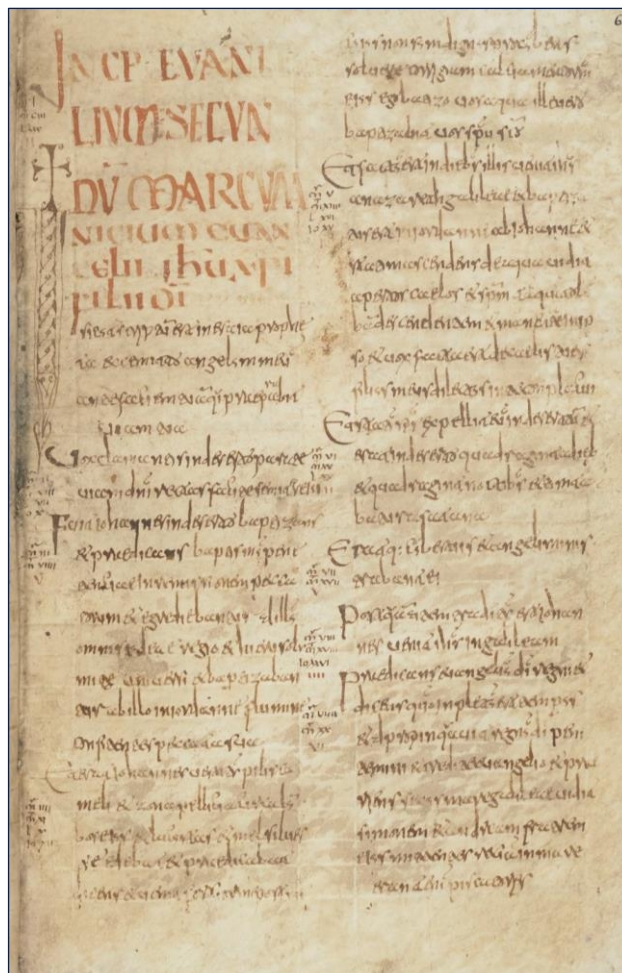
necessarily mean limitation of the line's formal potentialities: on the contrary, one

detects a different, if not a new, treatment of the filled spaces. The reduced interlace

filling the I on fol. 135 **(**see **Fig. 14)** of Cod. Sang. 124 gives the body of the letter its

structure and decoration at one and the same time. The interlace creates the

structure, as the first of the three strands forming the letter defines its borders. It also

constitutes decoration, because the second strand, being the elongated body-neck of

a bird, unfolds up and down within the body of the letter to form the interlace

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Quasten, ed. P. Granfield and J. A. Jungman, 2 vols. (Münster, 1970), 2:638–647; M. Budny, "The Art of Interlace," in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and its European Context*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, 2001), 183–210; L. Kendrick, *Animating the Letter: The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Columbus, 1999), 119–124.

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proper. The third strand is rendered as a small, loosened, supple interlace ending with a cross, conceived as an appendage to the bigger, more rigid interlace in the letter's body. Moreover, the whole decoration is presented as a rhythmical sequence of loops of varied colors: black, white, brown, cream, and orange. But the most important hue seems to be the white of the structural strand. The scribe who created the Signal Initial I by interpreting the Irish interlace as a structural motif also gave an artistic form to the letters of *Incipiunt Capitula* (fol. 133) that I classify as Titulus Initial Letters.

b. *Titulus Initial Letters*

In St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 124, the list of contents on fol. 133 **(Fig. 17)** is introduced by *Incipiunt Capitula / Libelli Scintillae / Scrip   turarum*, with a large space between *scrip* and *turarum* as if it had been copied from a text with the word written in two distinct lines. These Titulus Initial Letters comprise capital letters in black and orange, which occupy different lines separated from the headings. Thanks to their large size and alternate colors, they attract the reader's attention and, through a sort of visual constraint, lead them to the headings. This is not a feature exclusive to the *Liber scintillarum*: indeed, it is the most usual way to start a religious text. What is unusual is that a non-liturgical text shows such a solemn double beginning, one for the list of contents, another for the texts proper. This graphic attitude can be explained by the high esteem the *Liber scintillarum* attracted for its contents and function. But since all the examples discussed in this
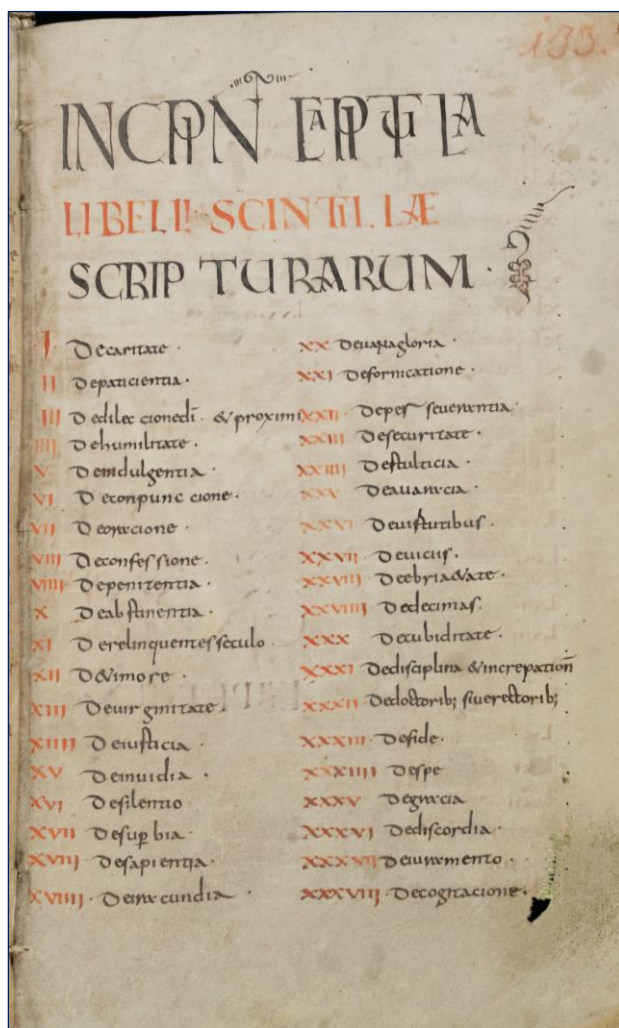
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Figure 17 *Titulus Initial Letters*, in *Liber scintillarum*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 124, *c*. 810–820, fol. 133. Picture source: image in the public domain.

article belong to the first period of the book's appearance and circulation, I propose another explanation. The Titulus Initial Letters were drawn in such a form as to also confer to this new text its own importance in parallel to liturgical texts with already established and shared values. What Catherine Karkov attributes to Gospel Lectionaries, which "were active vehicles of public instruction in ways that other sorts of manuscripts, personal prayer-books, for example, were not," can be applied to the *Liber scintillarum*.[50] This compilation of excerpts was to become an active

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[50] C. E. Karkov, *The Art of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2011), 209.

vehicle of public instruction, but it started as a private instrument for personal
meditation within monastic communities, occupying a high position in the list of
useful books.

This is particularly evident in the Titulus Initial Letters seen in three further
examples. The first is Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26, a 9th-10th -
century *Liber scintillarum*, in Visigoth script, where the Titulus Initial Letters are
traced on fols. 147v–148r.[51] **(Fig. 18)** This example shows that, in a miscellany
manuscript, both the pages with their display script, and the interrelationship
between the texts of different authors mattered. Thus, the general meaning the
compilation was intended to have can be inferred from the arrangement of the
excerpted texts. Manuscript 26 contains the *Explanatio in regulam Benedicti*
[Exposition of St. Benedict's Rule] (fols. 5–144) by Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, a
Benedictine monk (*c*. 760–840); *De agenda penitentia* [On doing penance] (144v–146v),
a homily of John Chrysostom (*c*.349–407), and the *Liber scintillarum* (147v–211v), here
ascribed to Paulus Albarus of Cordoba (*c*. 800–861).[52]

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[51] Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26, 9th -10th centuries, fols. 1–211v (*Liber scintillarum* fols. 147v–211v, 81 chapters), 360 x 260 mm, from San Millan de la Cogolla; see E. Ruiz García, *Catálogo de la sección de códices* (Madrid, 1997), n. Cód. 26.

[52] Paulus Albarus of Cordoba (*c*. 800–861) was a 9th -century Mozarab scholar, poet, and theologian who lived in Southern Iberia during the period of Muslim rule; see C. M. Sage, *Paul Albar of Cordoba: Studies on his Life and Writings* (Washington, DC, 1943).
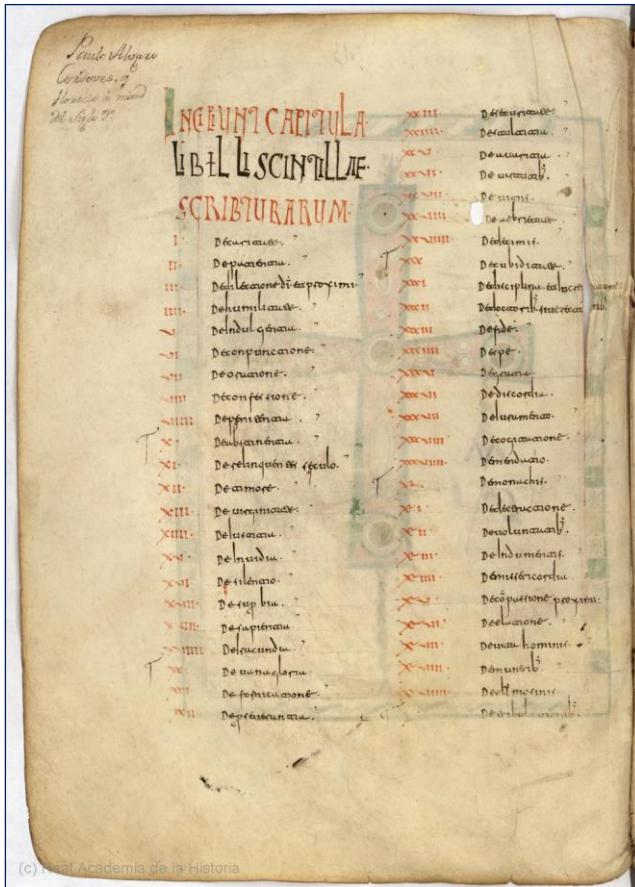
Figure 18 *Titulus Initial Letters - Incipiunt Capitula*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26, 9th-10th centuries, fol. 147v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Figure 19 *The Jeweled Cross*, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26, 9th -10th centuries, fol. 147r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

The subject of fol. 147r **(Fig. 19)** in Madrid MS 26 is a cross, with the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, used in Apocalypse 1.8 as a symbol of Christ's eternal essence,[53] and two standing figures. This cross recalls the *crux gemmata* [jeweled cross], an early Christian symbol of eternal life.[54] But in Madrid MS 26, the jeweled cross is not an isolated item. It is represented on a single leaf (fol. 147r), placed after the end of the homily on penance by John Chrysostom (fol. 146v), and before the Titulus Initial Letters of the *Liber scintillarum* (fol. 147v). In a book, and even more so for an excerpt collection, the format and sequence of texts and images help reveal its structure, while the connection of images to texts can convey the book's meaning. If one considers fol. 146v alone (containing the Explicit of John Chrysostom's homily) then the cross on fol. 147r reminds the reader that their penitential acts were to be done with the crucified Christ in mind. But if one sees fol. 147r as independent from the homily, then the depicted cross could take up a different function, as if it were the visual introduction to the text that follows. Here, another association may be worth considering, this time privileging the contents of the *Liber scintillarum*.

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[53] V. Debiais, "From Christ's Monogram to God's Presence," in *Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600)*, ed. B. M. Bedos-Rezak and J. F. Hamburger (Washington, DC, 2016), 135–152.

[54] On the *crux gemmata*, see A. Lipinsky, "La 'Crux gemmata' e il culto della Santa Croce nei monumenti superstiti e nelle raffigurazioni monumentali," *Felix Ravenna* 30/81 (1960): 5–62. On the symbol of the cross, see B. E. Kitzinger, *The Cross, The Gospels, and the Work of Art in the Carolingian Age* (Cambridge, UK, 2019).

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In the Gospels produced in the 9th and 10th centuries, the folio preceding the beginning of each *Euangelium* was reserved to the representation of important symbols or characters, a practice in use since at least the 7th century. Examples are the decorated letters or the evangelists' portraits at the opening pages of the Insular and Continental Gospels with which the Madrid MS 26 Cross can be profitably compared.[55] This would imply that the text starting after the folio with the cross – the *Liber scintillarum* – had a specific value for the community that owned the book. Although the contents of the four Gospels are not a book of excerpts, culled from many texts, the *Liber scintillarum* contains many passages from the Gospels themselves and, to emphasize their importance, each one of its chapters begins with the name of the Lord: *Dominus dicit in euangelio*. While one cannot exclude that the Cross-page of Madrid MS 26 had a double function: as an Explicit to Chrysostom's homily and an Incipit to the *Liber scintillarum*, only when considering the latter would the *Capitula* on fol. 147v acquire their full meaning.

In Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26, the *Capitula* are introduced by the Titulus Initial Letters *Incipiunt Capitula / Libelli Scintillae / Scribturarum* (*sic*) on fol. 147v, **(**see **Fig. 18)** written in red, black, and green, the same colors that prevail in the depicted jeweled cross. By making the list of headings, the scribe went beyond

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[55] On the opening pages of the Gospels, see R. Gameson, ed., *The Lindisfarne Gospels: New Perspectives* (Leiden, 2017); B. E. Kitzinger, "Graphic and Figural Representation in Touronian Gospel Illumination," in *Graphic Devices and the Early Decorated Book*, 179–202; P. van der Brink and S. Ayooghi, eds., *Karl der Große – Charlemagne. Karls Kunst*, exhibition catalog, Aachen, 20 January–21 September 2014 (Dresden, 2014); F. Mütherich and J. E. Gähde, eds., *Karolingische Buchmalerei* (Munich, 1979).
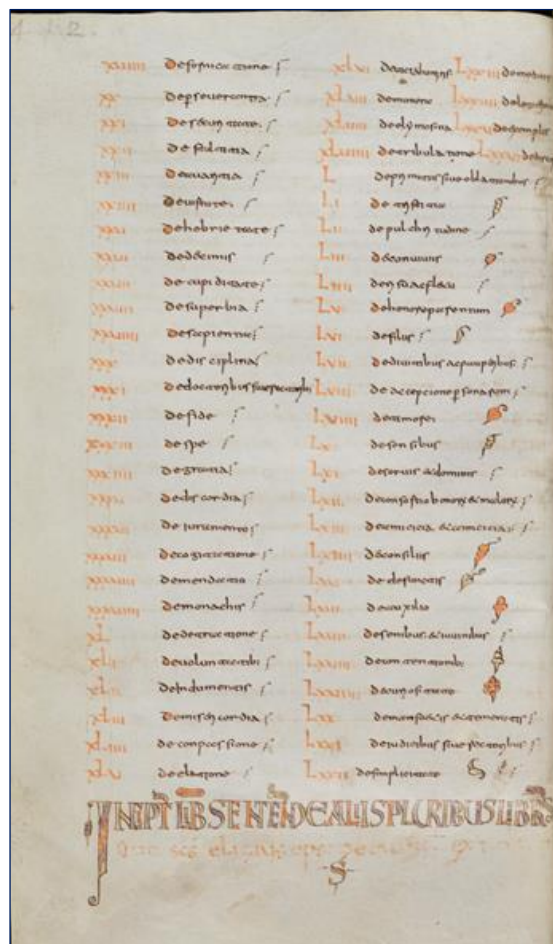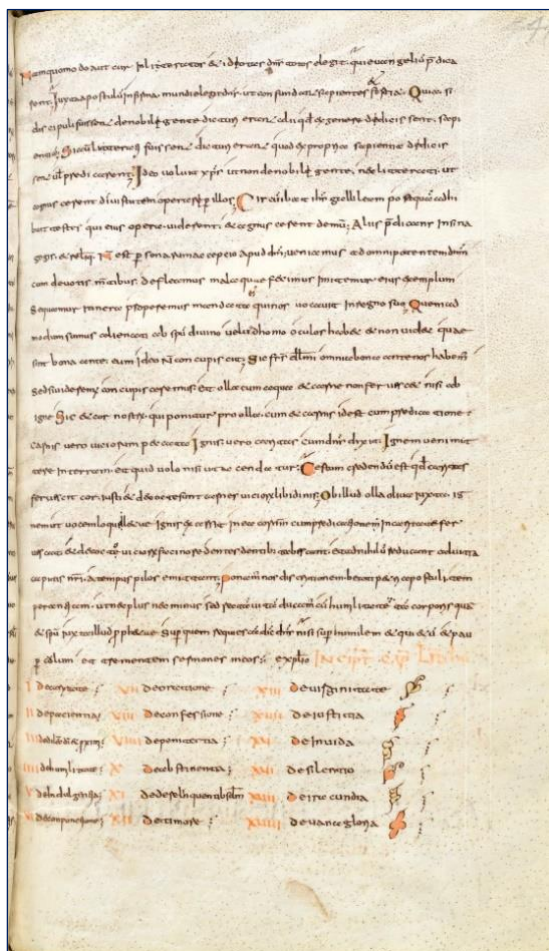
Figures 20a, 20b *Titulus Initial Letters*, in *Patristic miscellany*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230, 9ᵗʰ century, fols. 441-442. Pictures source: images in the public domain.

the 81 chapters usually ending with *De lectionibus*, leaving room for five more headings, 82 to 86, which have never been written. Instead, the scribe used five lines for the Explicit and Incipit, alternating red and black inks and elongating just some letters, such as the L and the I, traced with a rather shaky hand. This inaccurate treatment of the letters, especially regarding their proportions, particularly evident in *De caritate* on fol. 148r, where the two last syllables (*tate*) were enlarged, resulted in an enhancement of their form.

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The second instance of Titulus Initial Letters is on fol. 441 **(Fig. 20a)** of St.

Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230, a patristic miscellany of the early 9th century,
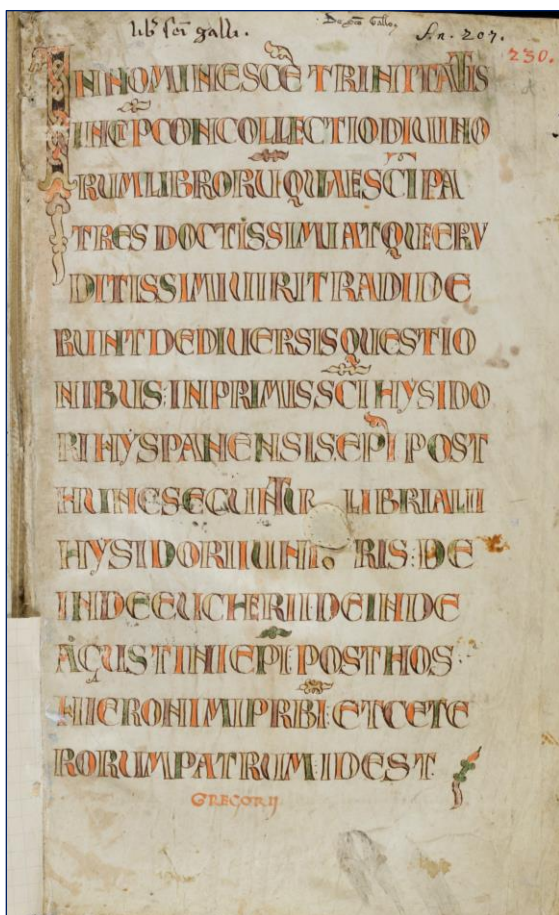

Figure 20c *Display Initial Letters*, in *Patristic miscellany*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230, 9th century, fol. 1. Picture source: image in the public domain.

in which the compilation of the *Liber scintillarum* is ascribed to St. Eligius.[56] For the

Incipit, no display letters have been used, only the abbreviations *Incp. Cap. Lbr. hu*

[*Incipiunt Capitula Libri huius*]. In the borders, small alternate red and yellow leaves

mark the end of the lines containing three headings each. The Titulus Initial Letters

proper at the end of fol. 442 **(Fig. 20b)**, are executed in Merovingian style, already

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[56] St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230, early 9th century, from Saint–Denis near Paris, fols. 1–571; *Liber scintillarum*: fols. 441–498, *Inc. lib. sentent. de aliis pluribus libris que scs. Eligius episc. de euangeliis exposuit*. See Scherrer, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek von St. Gallen*, 83–84.

employed on fol. 1 **(Fig. 20c)** for the display initials to the entire manuscript. The

letter-page on fol. 1 of Cod. Sang. 230 is a good example of Merovingian script with

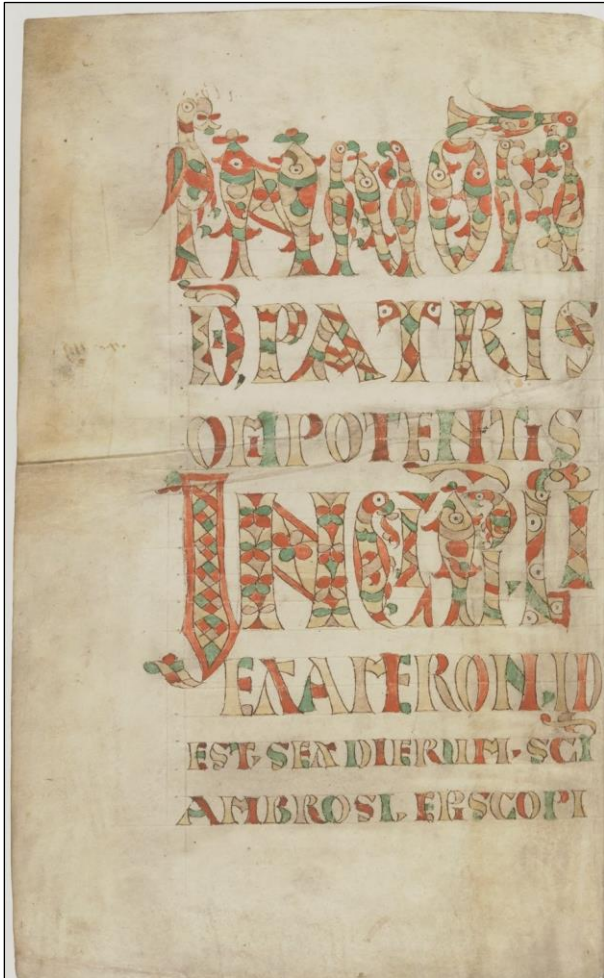which to compare the letters of the Incipit page of Ambrose's *Hexaemeron*, Paris,

Figure 21 *Incipit Page with Display Letters*, in Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 12135, Corbie, second half of the 8th century, fol. 1v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 12135, fol. 1v **(Fig. 21)** written and

decorated at Corbie in the second half of the 8th century.[57] Although the Cod. Sang.

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[57] On the *Hexaemeron* and Corbie, see O. Pächt, "The Pre-Carolingian Roots of Early Romanesque Art," in *Studies in Western Art*, Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art, Princeton, 1963, ed. M. Meiss et al. (Princeton, 1966), 67–75. Other examples are the Incipit page of St. Augustine's *De trinitate*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 126, written and decorated at Chelles in the 8th century [D. Mairhofer, *Medieval Manuscripts from Würzburg in the Bodleian Library, Oxford: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Oxford, 2014), 401–413] and the display scripts (fols. Av and 61r) of the Gundohinus Gospels, Autun, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 3, dated 754–757, possibly produced in the Frankish kingdom; see Nees, *The Gundohinus Gospels*, figs. 1 and 24.

38
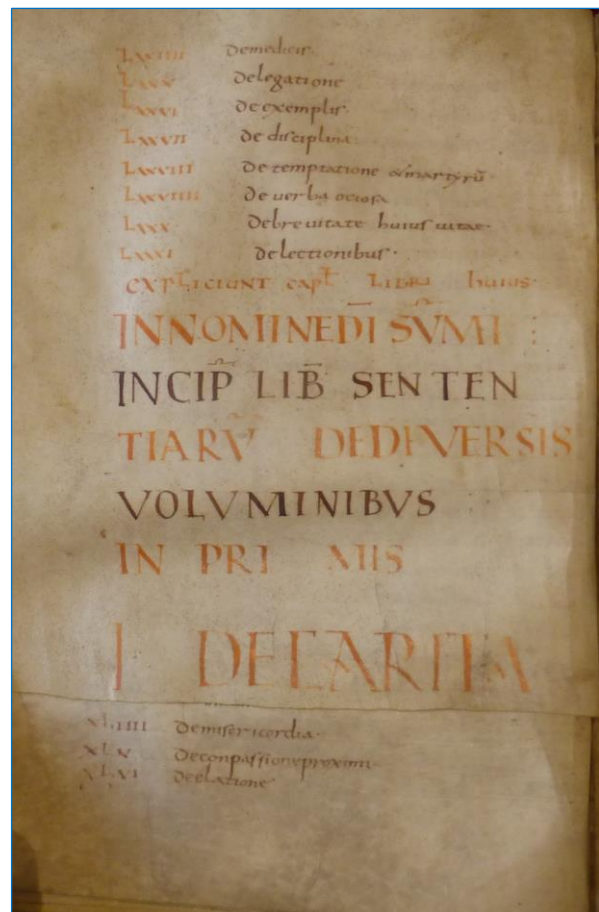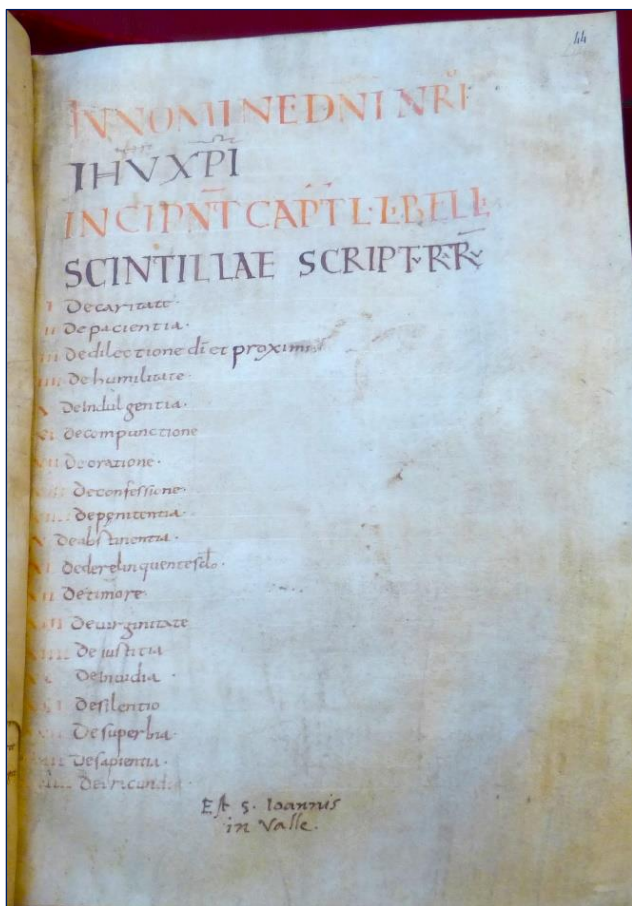
Figures 22a, 22b *Titulus Initial Letters*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 1605, 9ᵗʰ-10ᵗʰ centuries, fol. 44r; fol. 45v. Photos: author. Images in the public domain.

230 letter-page differs in shape and color from the letter-pages of the Ambrose's

Hexaemeron, they share the use of some small letters within the body of larger ones,

the so-called Filocalian script that appeared in Rome around the 4ᵗʰ century.[58] Instead

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[58] D. Bullough, "Roman Books and Carolingian *Renovatio*," in *Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage* (Manchester, 1991), chap. I, 1–38.

of a revival, their presence in early Carolingian manuscripts might have been a

continuation and development of early Frankish practice.[59]

For the third example of Titulus Initial Letters, I have chosen fols. 44r–45v in

the 9th-10th -century *Liber scintillarum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat.

1605.[60] By alternating orange and black inks, the scribe enhanced the two

introductions by tracing capital letters in order to prepare the reader for the

beginning of the text proper. On fol. 44r **(Fig. 22a)** the Titulus Initial Letters read: *In*

nomine domini nostri / Ihesu Xhristi / incipiunt capitula libelli / scintillae scripturarum. On

fol. 45v **(Fig. 22b)** the Titulus Initial Letters read: *In nomine domini summi / incipit liber*

senten / tiarum de diversis / voluminibus / In pri mis / I De Caritate. On fol. 44r, a note of

customary familiarity – *domini nostri* [our Lord] – is seen, while on fol. 45v the Lord

has been introduced by a more solemn adjective: *summus* [highest].[61]

The Titulus Initial Letters led monks and nuns to the list of contents. Reading

through the list, a relationship with the content of the excerpts was established well

before the reading of the chapters. Too, the structure of the list left monks and nuns a

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[59] Nees, *The Gundohinus Gospels*, 24. A. Petrucci, "Alfabetismo ed educazione grafica degli scribi altomedievali (secc. VII–X)," in *The Role of the Book in Medieval Culture*, ed. P. Ganz (Turnhout, 1986), 109–132.

[60] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 1605, *Vitae Sanctorum*, followed by *Scintillae Scripturarum*, 9th- 10th centuries; see J.-P. Caillet, "La classification des manuscrits carolingiens," *Cahiers archéologiques* 53 (2009–2010): 33–47, at 39; R. McKitterick, "Carolingian Book Production: Some Problems," *The Library* 12/1 (1990): 1–33, at 9 n. 34.

[61] Many early medieval manuscripts show a similar use of alternate letters of different colors. See for example, the 6th -century MS lat. 12097 (fol. 1r) and the 7th -century MS lat. 12214 (fol. 119r), both in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. See the digitized version http://gallica.bnf.fr

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degree of freedom in the choice of headings, inspired by their personal spiritual needs. The Titulus Initial Letters, displayed in a solemn manner, suggest that a list of contents addressing moral topics and enclosed within two series of capital letters – one above, the other below – was visually and emotionally more powerful than an isolated simple list. Or, at least, this is what one can infer from the early medieval Incipits of the *Liber scintillarum* in contrast to the assumption that lists are neutral, devoid of aesthetic features, being just words that order the variety of things, controlling and excluding what does not fit with the meaning established before the formation of the list itself.

The list of contents as arranged in the *Liber scintillarum* is an integral and meaningful part of the book. One can discern no actual divide between the headings of the list and the chapters proper, because the excerpts' content is expressed in a very short form. Furthermore, the names of the excerpted authors, even though they are not positioned in a regular vertical order, function as a new list which recalls and validates the initial one. The frequent use of red ink for the authors' names, which catches the reader's eye well before reading the excerpts, also contributes to this effect. Even the 76 *Dominus dicit in euangelio* can be interpreted as elements of a new list, which, in contrast to the canonical one, does not occupy a limited space; its constituent elements are placed in different folios as to open each chapter and to help memorization and the recall of a network of moral instructions.

41
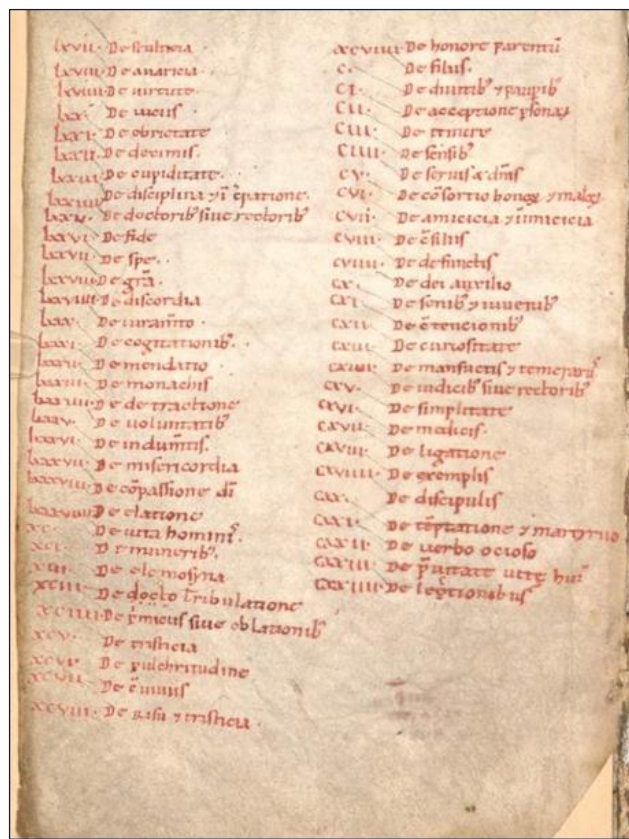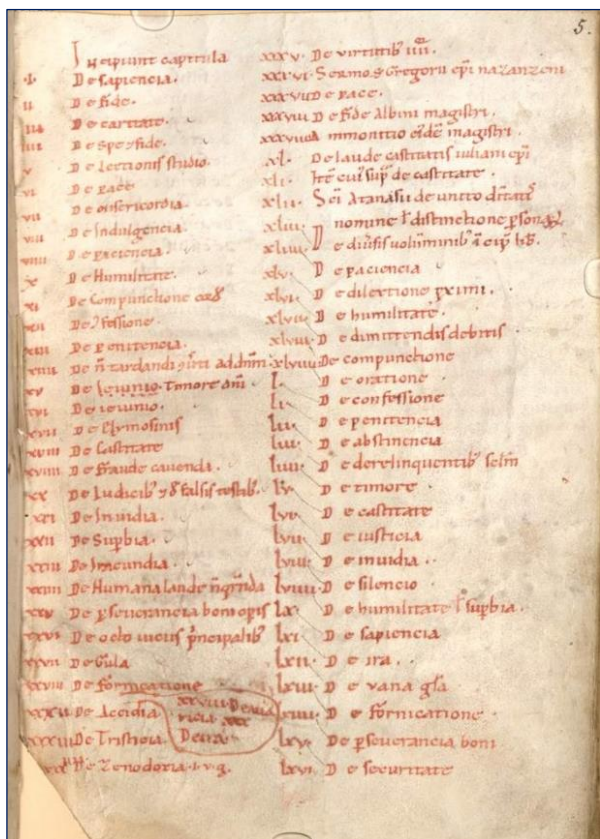
Figures 23a, 23b *Integrated Initial Letters*, in Alcuin, *De virtutibus et vitiis*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6314, *c.* 825–835, fol. 5r, fol. 5v. Photos: images in the public domain.

c. *Integrated Initial Letters*

In the *Liber scintillarum*, one realizes how much important are the Signal and Titulus letters that introduce the list of contents when they are lacking in its opening folios. Perhaps the scribe disregarded them (a rather improbable instance if the model had it) or chose to do so to accelerate the work of transcription, preferring the expedient solution of abolishing differences in size and color between the letters.

Integrated Initial Letters are of necessity connected to the text, as in some 9th-century manuscripts that have preserved the first folios. In Munich, Bayerische

Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6314, *c*. 825–835, fols. 5r–v, **(Figs. 23a-b)** the incipit of the list of

contents as well as the headings of each chapter are written in red ink. Contrary to

the usual 81 chapters, this list is comprised of 134 chapters, since the *Liber*

scintillarum's contents have been added at the end of a list referring to *De virtutibus et*

vitiis [On virtues and vices], written by Alcuin. By joining the two lists, some

headings, such as *De paciencia* and *De caritate*, are repeated.[62] In Munich, Bayerische
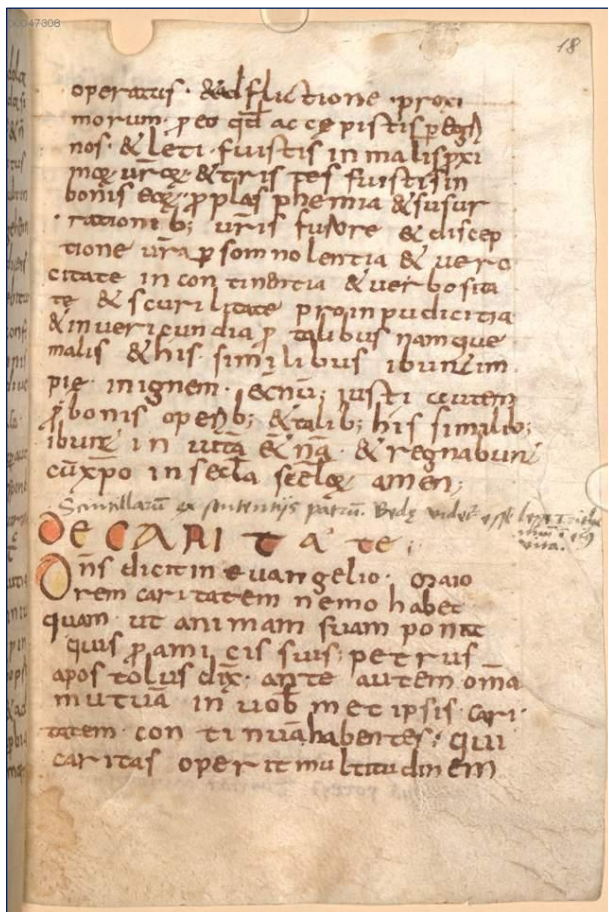

Figure 24 *De caritate*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 28135, 9th century, fol. 18r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

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[62] On Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6314, *c*. 825–835, see K. Bierbrauer *Die vorkarolingischen und karolingischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek. Textband* (Wiesbaden, 1990), 33–34; G. Glauche, *Katalog der lateinischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München. Die Pergamenthandschriften aus dem Domkapitel Freising* I *Clm 6201-6316* (Wiesbaden, 2000), 196–199.

Staatsbibliothek, Clm 28135, a 9th -century miscellany from Freising, the *Liber*

scintillarum begins with *De caritate* on fol. 18r, **(Fig. 24)** immediately after *cum Christo*

in saecula saeculorum amen.[63] This parsimony in decoration might have depended on

either the abbot's request, the deliberate choice or lack of proficiency of the scribe.

This is not the case, however, of the Integrated Initial Letters in St. Gallen,

Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 426.[64] On fol. 4 **(Fig. 25)** a short presentation written in
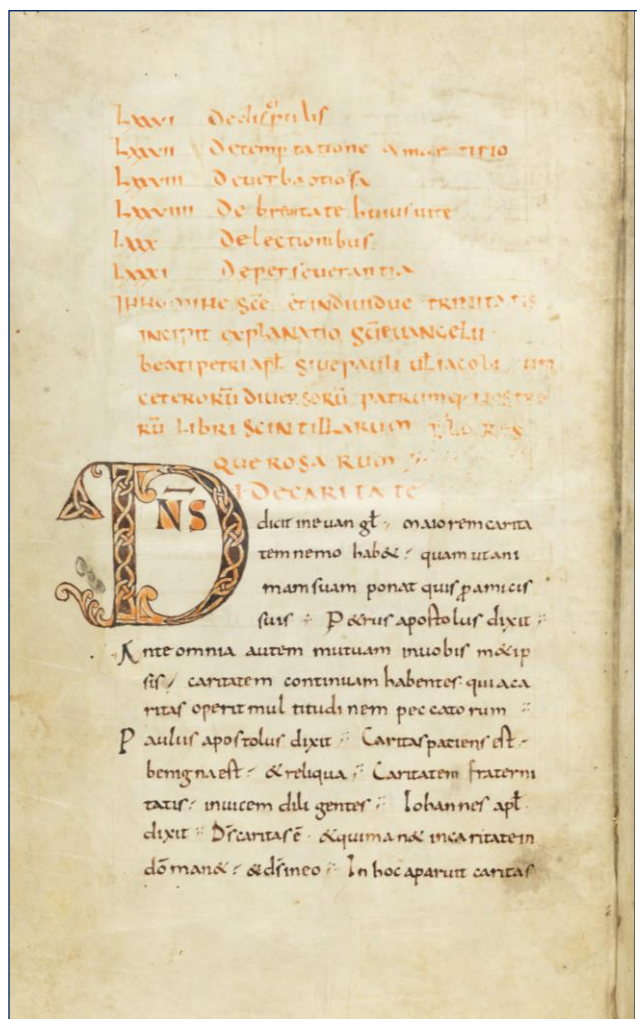

Figure 25 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, in *Liber scintillarum*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 426, 9th century, fol. 4. Picture source: image in the public domain.

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[63] On Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 28135, *Miscellany*, early 9th century, from Freising, fols. 18r–33v, see H. Hauke, *Katalog der lateinischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München. Clm 28111-28254* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 31–37; G. Glauche, *Katalog der lateinischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München. Die Pergamenthandschriften aus dem Domkapitel Freising* II *Clm 6317-6437 mit einem Anhang* (Wiesbaden, 2011), 317–318.

[64] St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 426, 9th century, 280 x 180 mm, fols. 1–290; fols. 1–4 (Incipit). See Scherrer, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek von St. Gallen*, 140.

orange ink introduces the *De caritate*: *In nomine sanctae et individuae trinitatis. Incipit explanatio sancti evangelii beati petri apostoli sive pauli atque iacobi et ceterorum diversorum patrumque sanctorum libri scintillarum floresque rosarum* [In the name of the holy and indivisible Trinity. Here begins the exposition of the Holy Gospel, of Peter, Paul, James, and other different Church Fathers and saints, and of the book of sparks and flowers of roses (the reference here is to fol. 274, *Incipiunt sententias de floribus diversis*, with aphorisms from different florilegia)]. Orange ink is also employed for the *De caritate* heading and to highlight the imposing D, the actual Incipit of the manuscript. The letter D is a decorated initial traced with great precision in its outlines, filling, and use of colors. It can be taken as a suitable introduction to the next chapter of this article, devoted to the decorated initial letters of the *Liber scintillarum*.

The Decorated Initial Letters

Classification and Assessment

Scholars of book illumination have recently shown a remarkable inventiveness in classifying medieval decorated initial letters by means of a variety of descriptive terms.[65] Without denying the positive aspects of this specific attention to decorated "characters," I do prefer a classification limited to just three terms, two qualifying the letter's form – purely graphic and decorated – and one referring to its functions – operational letter – which encompasses the previous two qualifications.

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[65] For a list of terms referring to initial letters, see J. F. Hamburger, *Script as Image* (Leuven, 2014), 2–3.

A purely graphic letter is outlined with ink, with no naturalistic motifs but sometimes with some pen flourishes.[66] The decorated initial, instead, contains either naturalistic or abstract motifs or both.[67] The 'operational letter' is a graphic operative tool that encompasses the purely graphic and decorated letters;[68] it can introduce, illustrate, and comment on the text; become an aid to memory; and prompt reflection on religious meaning.[69]

Otto Pächt focused on the medieval process of book production and decoration, classifying the various functions of decorated letters, arriving at the conclusion that the more a book had a private character, the less was the urge to decorate it.[70] This is certainly true for a text like St. Gallen Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 397 (**Fig. 26**), a vade mecum of the 9th century that belonged to Abbot Grimald (841-872),[71] as it holds good that the urge to decorate concerned more liturgical than non-

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[66] C. Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting: Book Illumination in the British Isles 600–800* (London, 1977); idem, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*; O. Pächt, *Buchmalerei des Mittelalters: eine Einführung* (München, 1984), trans. K. Davenport, *Book Illumination in the Middle Ages* (London, 1986).

[67] É.-A. van Moé, *La lettre ornée dans les manuscrits du VIIIᵉ au XIIᵉ siècle* (Paris, 1949); J. J. G. Alexander, *Anglo-Saxon Illumination in Oxford Libraries* (Oxford, 1970); J. J. G. Alexander and C. M. Kauffmann, eds., *English Illuminated manuscripts: 700–1500* (Bruxelles, 1973). Catherine Karkov proposed to substitute letter-drawings for decorated letters since the term she coined expresses the idea that initials are both thing and process, artistic and textual elements. See C. E. Karkov, "Tangled Voices: Writing, Drawing, and the Anglo-Saxon Decorated Initial," in *Graphic Devices and the Early Decorated Book*, 45–62.

[68] The operational letter is not to be connected with the concept of agency, and should not be considered as self-activating. See A. Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998), 126–133.

[69] J. F. Hamburger, "The Iconicity of Script," in Hamburger, ed., *The Iconicity of Script*, 249–261.

[70] Pächt, *Book Illumination in the Middle Ages*, 41–82.

liturgical books. However, the public reading of texts during religious ceremonies

was one among the books' functions that could justify the illustration of the sacred

history and the decoration of initial letters. But non-liturgical religious books read

for private meditation were decorated as much. No doubt, Pächt was aware of it:

Perhaps he wished to suggest that private use of non-liturgical books did not

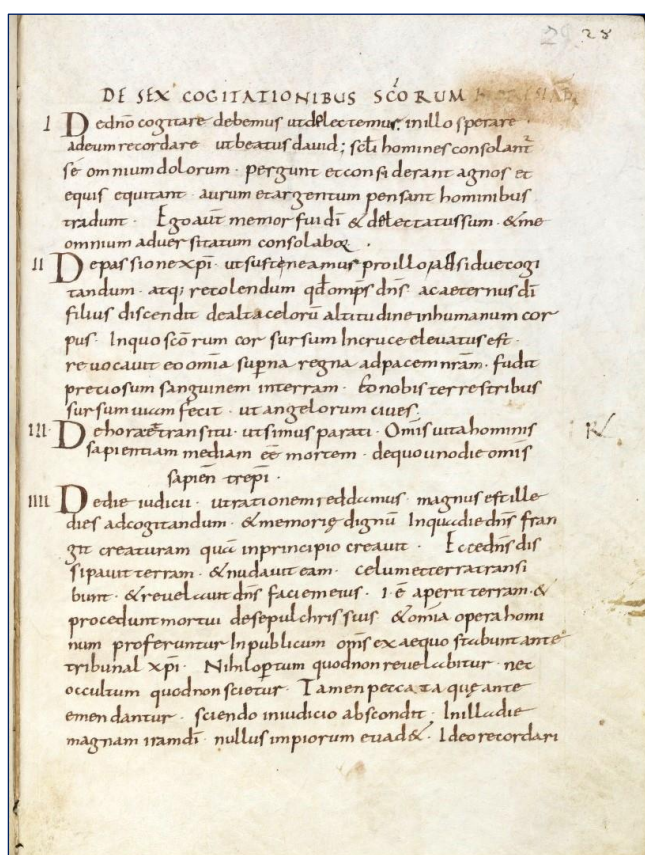necessarily require a sumptuous and original decoration.

Figure 26 *Initials* D, in *Vade mecum of Abbot Grimald*, St. Gallen Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 397, 9th century, fol. 28. Picture source: image in the public domain.

The *Liber scintillarum*, as a non-liturgical book, never received a rich ornamentation, but it was read by individuals who could directly and repeatedly look at the texts introduced by decorated initials. This active perception of letters artistically

shaped is an important instance of early medieval attitudes towards ornamented

initials. Yet, while format and contents of the *Liber scintillarum* have been already

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[71] On Cod. Sang. 397, see Scherrer, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek von St. Gallen*, 235–236; R. Bergmann and S. Stricker, *Katalog der althochdeutschen und altsächsischen Glossenhandschriften* (Berlin, 2005), II:543–544, no. 228.

studied,[72] the relation between its diverse excerpts and the decorated initial letters

that introduce them, has never attracted scholars' attention. This lack of interest can

be easily explained. The early medieval decorated letters of the *Liber scintillarum*

seem like the simplified rendition of zoomorphic, floral, and abstract motifs of both

earlier and contemporary ornamental traditions featured in liturgical manuscripts.[73]

There may be some truth in this remark -- only if one confines the decoration

of a book to some details on single folios. In a manuscript, not only the sequence of

texts, but also the organization of the decorated initial letters contributes to the

book's meaning. In the *Liber scintillarum*, the organization of the excerpts is

grounded on the reiteration, at the beginning of the 76 chapters of one and the same

sentence – *Dominus dicit in euangelio* – in which the initial letter D establishes a

unique connection of ornament and script. By shape, size, decoration, and

arrangement, the D belongs to a class separated from all other letters, even from the

four initials Ps – *Paulus Apostolus dixit* – and the one I – *In Actibus Apostolorum*.

The Ds, Ps, and the one I of the *Liber scintillarum* received their first decoration

in a period in which rendition of letters artistically shaped had already been

experimented with, especially in Northumbria, Lindisfarne, Kent, and Ireland.[74] On

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[72] H.-M. Rochais, "Pour une nouvelle édition du *Liber scintillarum*," in *Études Mérovingiennes*. Actes des journées de Poitiers, 1er–3 mai 1952 (Paris, 1953), 257–268.

[73] Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, 166–180.

[74] In the 8th century, several scribes at Echternach imitated the half-uncial script, invented at Lindisfarne at about 700, as in the Trier Gospels, Trier, Domschatz, Codex 61 and the Echternach Gospels, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9389. See Netzer, "Observations on the

the Continent, notably in Merovingian Francia and Alemania, the fish-bird motif and abstract elements were the preferred letter decoration.[75] From the 8th to the 10th centuries, the scribes who decorated the *Liber scintillarum* followed the practice to put side by side or combine ornamental traditions of different origins, making the art historian's attempts to trace a coherent line of artistic development almost impossible. Thus, the ornamental repertory of the *Liber scintillarum*, far from being a "revival," can be best appreciated if considered as a series of ceaseless slight modifications of traditional motifs, all validated by the immutable meaning of one and the same letter, the D of *Dominus dicit in euangelio*.

The Purely Graphic Initial Letters

Some scribes decorated the *Liber scintillarum* with "purely graphic" initial letters traced with the same ink of the script. If the straightforward passage from the initial D to the text proper may be seen as an advantage, memorization of the excerpts could become more difficult, due to the uniformity of the letters. On the formal level, the scribes could shape the letter by giving it a rigid or supple contour, depending on the use of straight or curved lines.[76] The size of the letter, too, whose

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Influence of Northumbrian Art on Continental Manuscripts of the 8th Century," in *The Age of Migrating Ideas*, 45.

[75] R. McKitterick, "The Diffusion of Insular Culture in Neustria between 650 and 850: The Implications of the Manuscript Evidence," in *La Neustrie*, 395–432. Since the late 6th century, bird and fish were also employed in north Italian manuscripts. See Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, 150–153 and 168–180.

[76] On Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6314, see n. 62. On Louviers, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 3, fols. 1–100v, 81 chapters, 250 x 160 mm, from the abbey of La Vallée (diocese of Evreux),

height corresponded to two, three, or four lines, was an important compositional

tool as seen in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2995 A **(Fig. 27)**, of the

10th century,[77] and in the alternation of majuscule and minuscule Ds as in Munich,
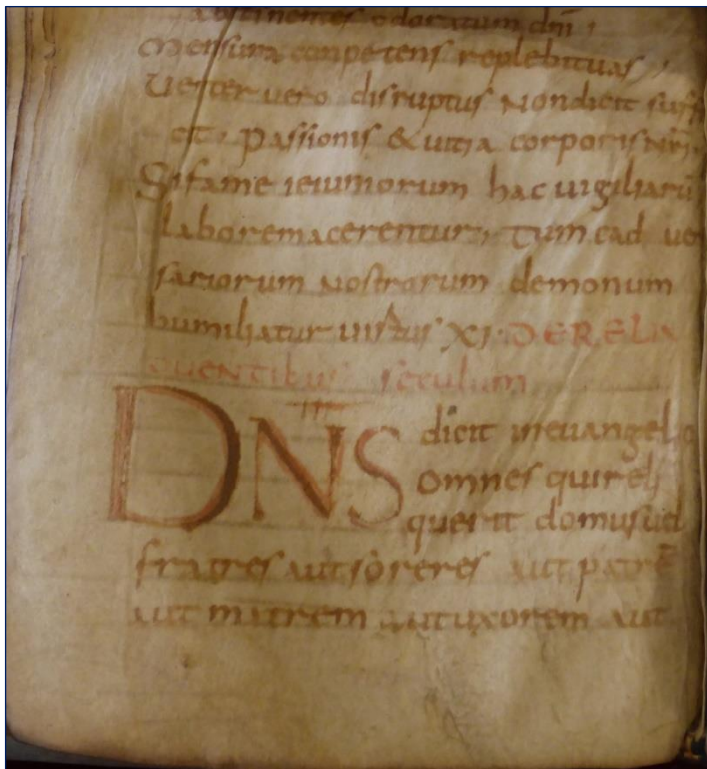

Figure 27 *Purely Graphic Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2995 A, 10th century, fol. 34v. Photo: author. Image in the public domain.

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4582, **(**see **Fig. 3)** of the 8th century.[78] The thickness

or thinness of the lines was another graphic device, sometimes with the addition of

small signs inside the body of the letter or as appendages in the form of simple

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with neither prologue nor list of contents, see H. Omont, *Catalogue des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, t. II, Rouen (Paris, 1888), 365–373, at 367.

[77] On Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2995 A, fols. 1r–63v, 150 x 90 mm, 10th century, see C. Tristano, "Periferia del mondo occidentale o centro della cultura: produzione di manoscritti nella penisola iberica altomedievale," in *Libri, documenti, epigrafi medievali*, ed. M. Maniaci et al. (Spoleto, 2002), 137–167, at 163.

[78] On Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4582, see n. 21.

flourishes as in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 1605, fol. 79v **(Fig. 28)**

of the end of the 9th century.[79]

The initial D on fol. 17r **(Fig. 29)** in Reims, Bibliothèque municipale Carnegie,

MS 435, of the 9th century,[80] is rather different from the instances above. Without
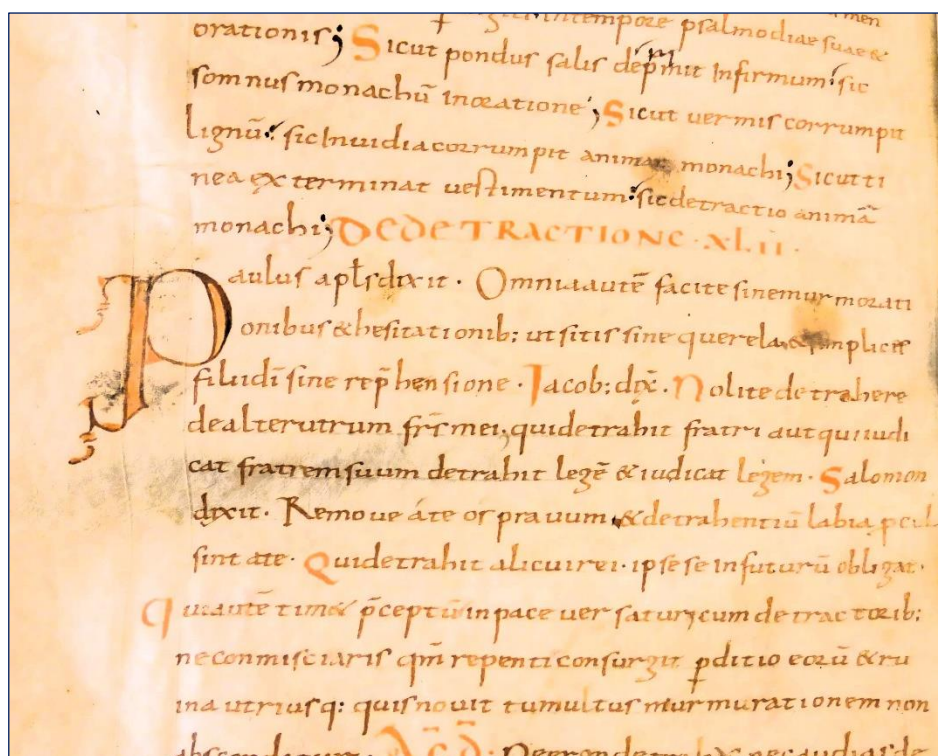

Figure 28 *Purely Graphic Initial Letters*, Initial P, *Paulus apostolus dixit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 1605, end of the 9th century, fol. 79v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

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[79] On Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 1605, see n. 60; see also Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 134, 10th century: Suckale-Redlefsen, *Die Handschriften des 8. bis. 11. Jahrhundert der Staatsbibliothek Bamberg*, 46. Mixing all the forms was also pursued, as in the 8th-century Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2843 A. See n. 22.

[80] On Reims, Bibliothèque municipale Carnegie, MS 435, 9th century, fols. 1r–125r, *venerabili Bedae adscriptus*, 255 x 165 mm, from the monastery of St. Theodor, see H. Loriquet, *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France, Départements – Reims* (Paris, 1886–1933), 48 vols., XXXVIII, 589.

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Figure 29 *Purely Graphic Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Reims, Bibliothèque municipale Carnegie, MS 435, 9th century, fol. 17r. Picture source: image in the public domain.
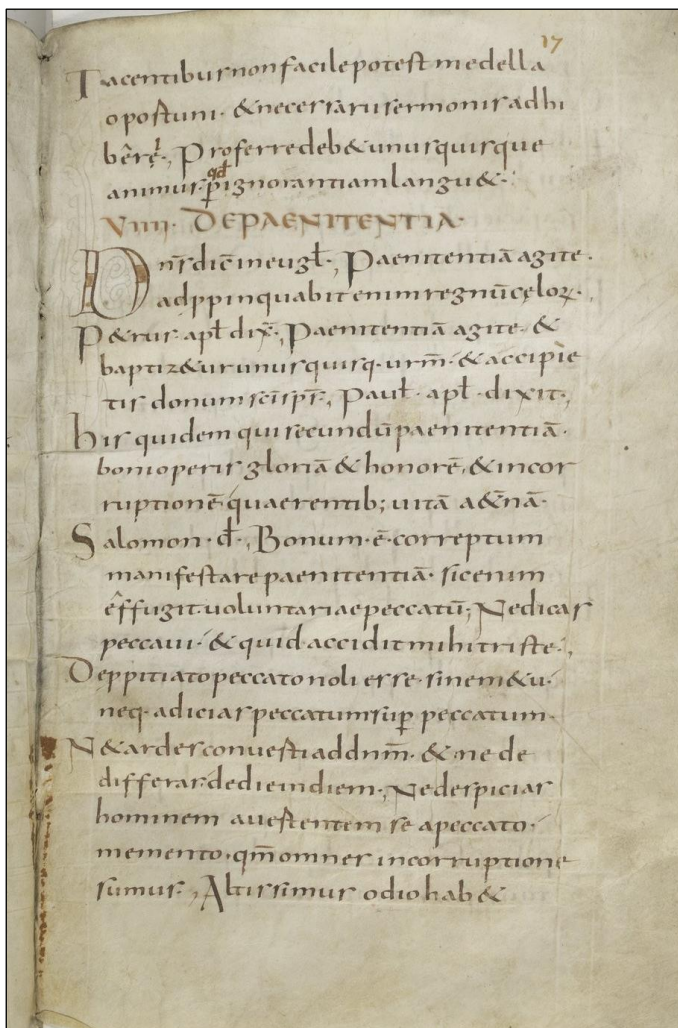
considering the scribe's mastery in the rendition of decorated letters or the kind of model at his disposal, he worked with the minimum of means – just black lines and one color, pale red – to arrive at the maximum of meaning. He relied exclusively on the graphic interplay

between the Ds of *Dominus* and the initials of the other authors' name, subtracted (where possible) from the homogeneity of the text and moved along the left border of the page. In this manner, each folio shows a clear vertical graphic map to orient the reader, while also prompting memorization of the different excerpts.

This neat treatment of the letters Ds suggests that, for early medieval monastic communities, the reiteration of simple and readable initial letters helped studying and meditation on the religious texts so that *lectio* and *meditatio*[81] --"in tension yet

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[81] Much has been written on how monks and nuns read the sacred texts, and particularly on *ruminatio*; see, for example, J. Leclercq, "The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, II (Cambridge, 1969), 188–193; C. Vircillo Franklin, "Words as Food: Signifying the Bible in the Early Middle Ages," in *Comunicare e significare nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di studio della

complementary"[82] -- were the two poles of religious life. Mary Carruthers noted the difference between reading as lecture (interpretation) and reading as meditation: the latter was an activity of dividing and composing, helping memory that was considered "the essential foundation of prudence, *sapientia*, and ethical judgment."[83] Yet, memory collects the result of both meditation and interpretation, so that in monastic environments where concentration on texts was expected to be the norm, the divide between the two mental activities might have been less evident.[84]

Wherever the first *Liber scintillarum* was composed, in it, the ideals of rumination *and* exegesis are both present.[85] Indeed, with regard to monasteries, it is difficult to claim that a new cultural trend might have been so pervasive as to completely efface previous positive habits. Most probably, the old ideal of rumination never disappeared, coexisting with the new ideal of interpreting sacred

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Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 15–20 April 2004 (Spoleto, 2005), 733–762.

[82] C. Chazelle, "Amalarius's *Liber Officialis*: Spirit and Vision in Carolingian Liturgical Thought," in *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G. de Nie *et al*. (Turnhout, 2005), 327–357, at 333.

[83] M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK, 2008, 1st ed. 1990), 219.

[84] Some scholars stated that rumination had been modified by the cult of Christian wisdom, as testified by Alcuin, Theodulph, and Paschasius Radbertus. See W. Edelstein, *Eruditio et Sapientia: Weltbild und Erziehung in der Karolingerzeit. Untersuchungen zu Alcuins Briefe* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1965); M. Alberi, "The 'Mistery of the Incarnation' and Wisdom's House (Prov. 9:1) in Alcuin's *Disputatio de vera philosophia*," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1997): 505–516.

[85] R. McKitterick, "Eighth-Century Foundations," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 681–694, at 681–682. Donatus, Bishop of Besançon (d. 660) advised the nuns in the Rule he composed for them to ceaselessly meditate on God's words in their hearts: *quando lectio non legitur, de divinis Scripturis semper aliquid ruminatis* [when you are not reading, you ought always to ruminate something from the sacred Scriptures]. See PL 87:281D–282A.

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texts. No doubt, a book of moral excerpts lent itself more to meditation than to interpretation, even though moral contents needed interpretation to be correctly applied to monastic life. Perhaps both attitudes contributed to make the *Liber scintillarum* one of the most appreciated collections, judging from the number of manuscripts copied and decorated in the Carolingian territories in the 9th and 10th centuries.[86]

The Decorated Initial Letters

It is during these centuries that the *Liber scintillarum* received its most accomplished decorated initial letters, nonetheless the decorative problems of the 9th and 10th centuries were still those faced two centuries earlier by the scribes who dealt with liturgical books, such as the Psalter,[87] the lectionary, and the sacramentary, displaying a series of similar letters. For example, the lectionary, such as the late 7th - century *Lectionarius Gallicanus* (Luxeuil Lectionary), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9427,[88] indicates the beginning of each *Lectio* from the four gospels

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[86] Rochais, "Les manuscrits du 'Liber scintillarum,'" 296–305.

[87] For some instances of Psalters with initials Ds, see L. Nees, "Words and Images, Texts and Commentaries," in *Irish Art Historical Studies in Honor of Peter Harbison*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, 2004), 47–69, figs. 1–2 (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, cod. Pal. lat. 67, fols. 6r, 23r) and fig. 3 (Frankfurt, Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, MS Barth. 32, fol. 120v).

[88] R. Branner, "The Art of the Scriptorium at Luxeuil," *Speculum* 29 (1954): 678–690; D. Ganz, "The Luxeuil Prophets and Merovingian Missionary Strategies," *Beinecke Studies in Early Manuscripts. The Yale University Library Gazette*, supp. 66 (1991): 105–117. From Luxeuil 28 codices still survive, 21 written in the distinctive and ornate Luxeuil calligraphic minuscule developed from the elongated Merovingian chancery hand. See McKitterick, "Eighth-century Foundations," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 684–685.

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with the initial D, the first letter of *Diebus illis* [In those days] that can be profitably

compared with *Dominus dicit* of the *Liber scintillarum*. On fol. 178v **(Fig. 30)** of the

Luxeuil Lectionary, the initial D evokes a past situation by means of a narration in

the third person. The Ds, though often reproduced, are part of a discontinuous

whole. Their appearance cannot keep a regular rhythm since they are modified by

the presence of other capital letters (F, I, L, O, P, S) at the beginning of different
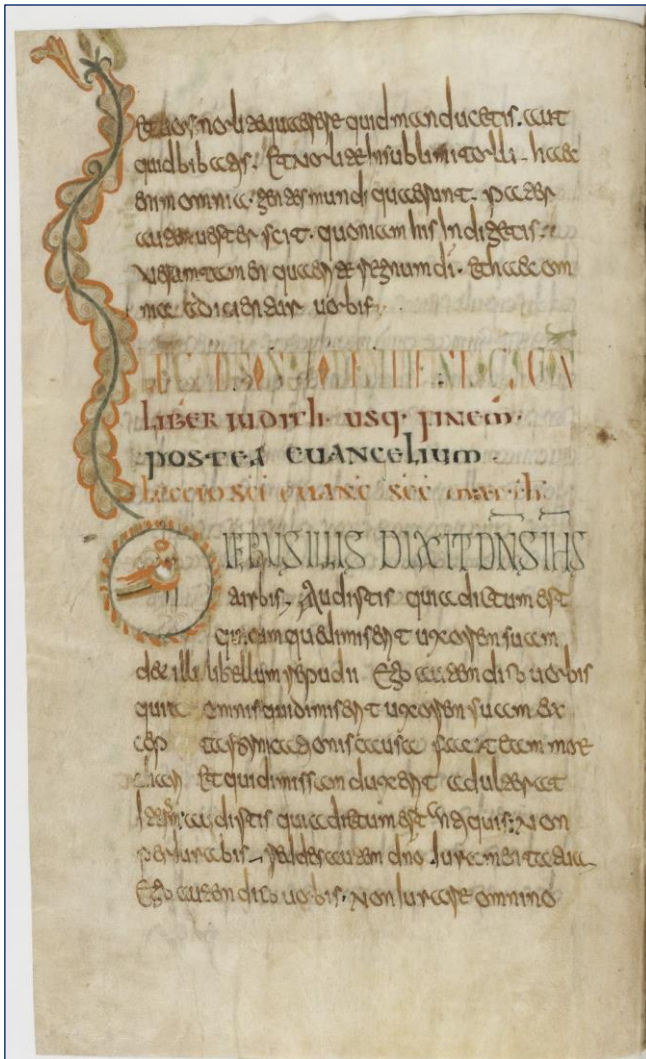
chapters.

Figure 30 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Diebus illis*, in *Luxeuil Lectionary*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9427, late 7th century, fol. 178v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

In the so-called *Missale Gallicanum vetus*, of the 8th century, Vatican City,

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Pal. lat. 493, which was more like a

sacramentary, the scribe who depicted the initials Ds of *Dominus* on fol. 78r **(Fig. 31)**,

in their variety of minuscules and majuscules, followed the principles of

differentiation and isolation. First he separated the bird from the fish, giving them

two different visual values, one dynamic, the other static; second, even though in the

form of a hybrid, he rendered the bird with naturalistic elegant features; third, he

made the fish subservient to the formation of the letter, closer to a geometric

element; ultimately, he worked with various traditions, both ancient and
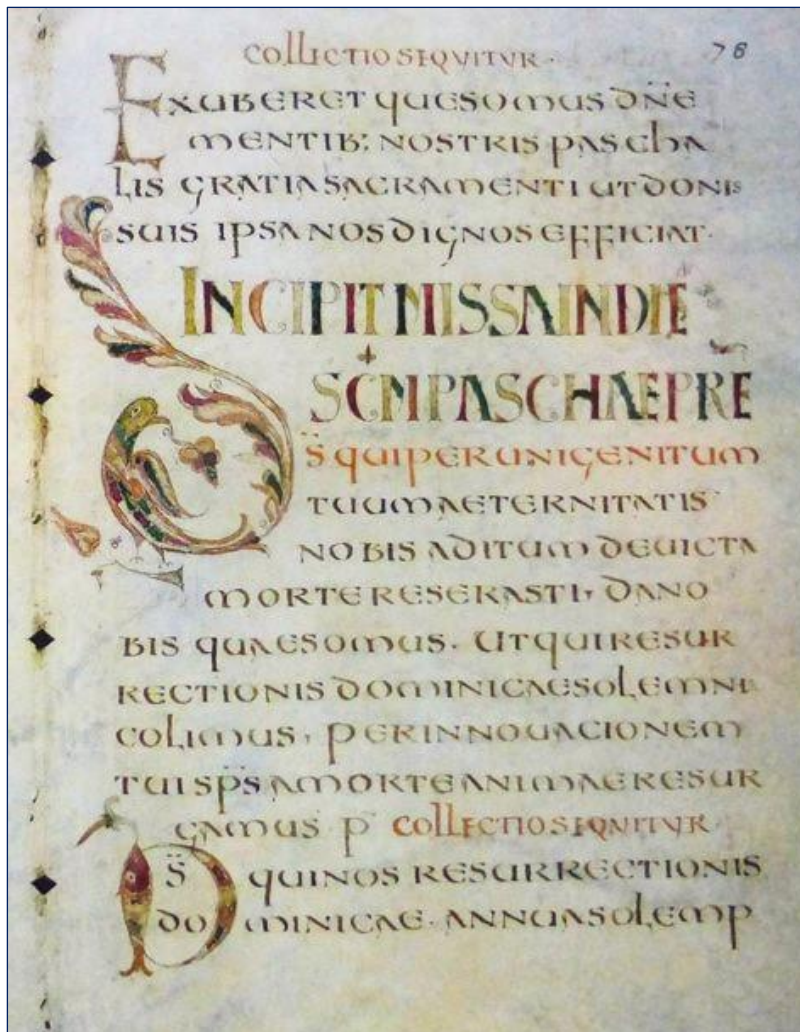

Figure 31 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initials Ds, in *Missale Gallicanum vetus*, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Pal. lat. 493, 8th century, fol. 78r. Picture source: after C. Denoël, "Le Missel gallican," in *Les temps mérovingiens. Trois siècles d'art et de culture (451–751)*, ed. I. Bardiès-Fronty et al. (Paris, 2016), p. 201, fig. 152.

Merovingian, with their acanthus leaves and geometric animals, sacrificing

ornamental unity to variety.[89]

A sacramentary proper, with a series of decorated initial letters, among which

are portrayed many Ds, is the Merovingian *Sacramentarium gellonense*, Paris,

Figure 32 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initials D, in *Sacramentarium gellonense*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 12048, 770–780, fol. 54r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

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[89] C. Denoël, "Missale gallicanum," in *Les temps mérovingiens. Trois siècles d'art et de culture (451–751)*, 202, no. 152, with bibliography. Along with the Luxeuil Lectionary (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9427) and the Bobbio Missal (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 13246), MS Vat. Pal. lat. 493 is a witness of the old Gallican liturgy. On the Bobbio Missal, see R. McKitterick, "The Scripts of the Bobbio Missal," in *The Bobbio Missal. Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul*, ed. Y. Hen (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 19–52.

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Figure 33 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 6433, 8th century, fol. 51v. Picture source: image in the public domain.
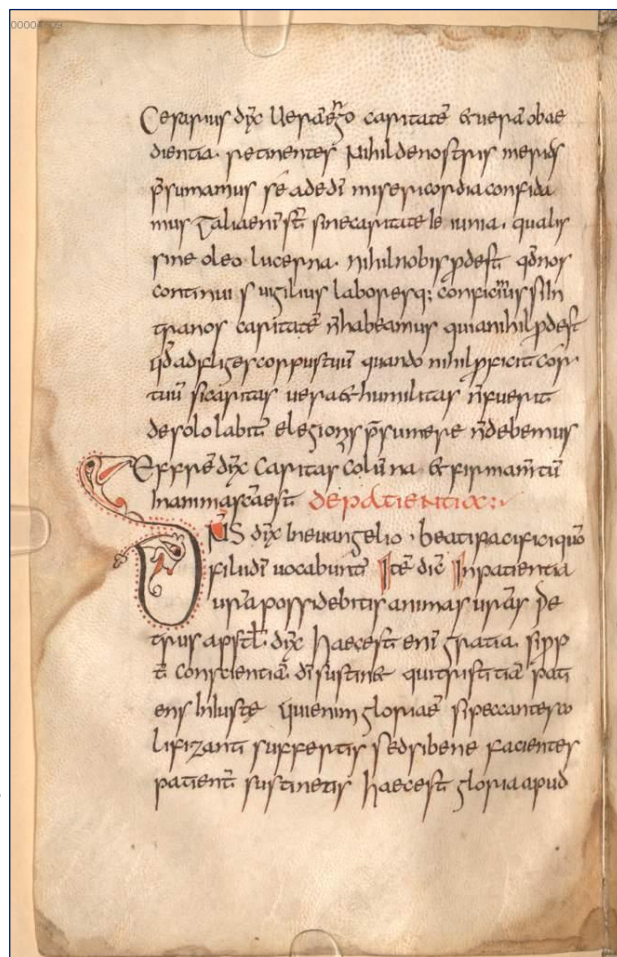

Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 12048, *c*. 770–780.[90] The decoration of the manuscript is based on the principle of continuous variation in one and the same page and, in almost all the pages, the presentation of acanthus leaves, animals, interlaces, and abstract motifs. On fol. 54r **(Fig. 32)** the Ds of *Dominus*, though on the same folium, occupy two distinct ornamental spaces and enhance rather than contrast the fragmentary character of the text.

What makes the ornamental motifs adopted in the 9th and 10th-century *Libri scintillarum* resemble 8th -century manuscripts is the reference to varied traditions. On the other hand, some scribes purposely avoided using some decorative patterns. Apart from a letter D on fol. 51v **(Fig. 33)** in the fragmentary *Liber scintillarum* (fols. 48v–62v) of the 8th century, part of a miscellany in Munich, Bayerische

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[90] C. J. Hahn, "The Performative Letter in the Carolingian Sacramentary of Gellone," in *Sign and Design: Script as Image*, 237–257; Kendrick, *Animating the Letter*, 100–101; É. Palazzo, "Graphic Visualization in Liturgical Manuscripts in the Early Middle Ages: The Initial 'O' in the Sacramentary of Gellone," in *Graphic Devices and the Early Decorated Book*, 63–79.
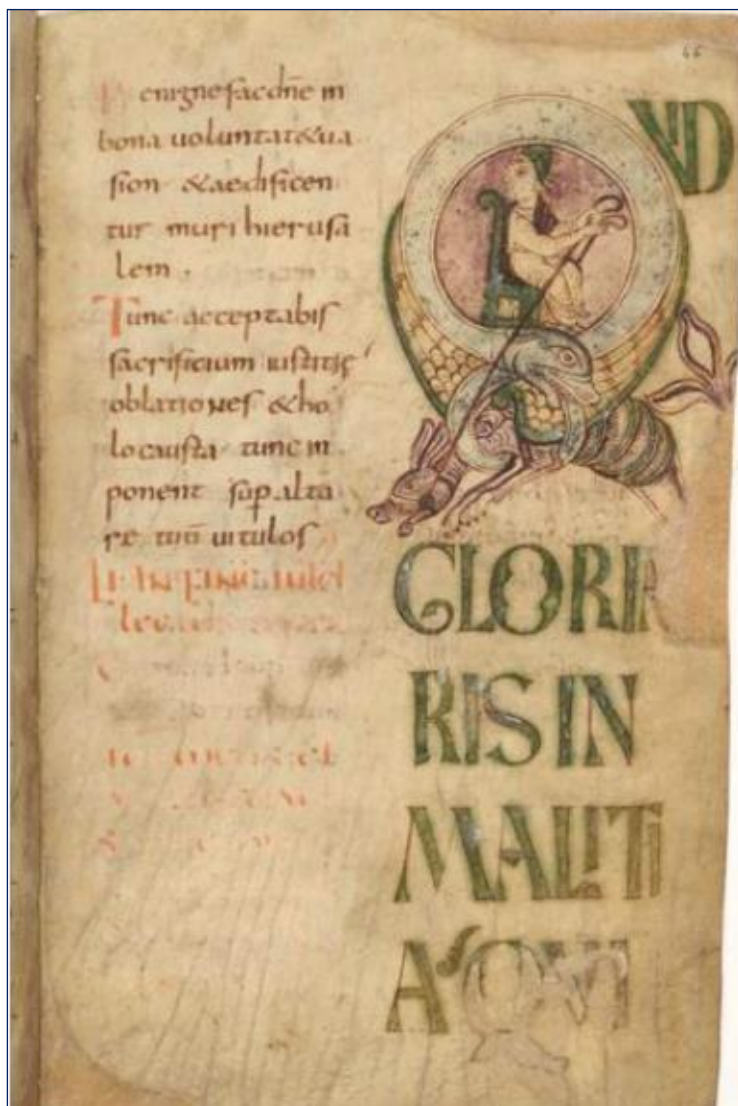
Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6433,[91]
until the 9th century, no initial
letter D was inhabited or
formed by human figure or
animals,[92] as seen in the
Corbie Psalter,[93] **(Fig. 34)** the

Figure 34 *Decorated Initial Letters*,
Initial Q, *Quid gloriaris*, in *Corbie
Psalter*, Amiens, Bibliothèque
Municipale, MS 18, 8th century, fol.
46r. Picture source: image in the
public domain.

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[91] The florilegium was copied by a certain Peregrinus. See A. Lehner, *Florilegium Frisingense (Clm 6433): Testimonia divinae scripturae et patrum* (Turnhout, 1987); Ganz, "Fragmentierung von patristischen Texte," 157. The birds used as finials of the letter D show strong similarities with motifs employed in the Book of Kells (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 58, fol. 250v); See Kendrick, *Animating the Letter*, 106, fig. 49.

[92] See Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26 (as in n. 51); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2374 from Moissac, 10th- 11th centuries; see J. Dufour, "Manuscrits à Moissac antérieurs au milieu du XIIe siècle et nouvellement identifiés. Description codicologique et paléographique," *Scriptorium* 36 (1982): 147–173, at 158–161; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2843 B, early 12th century; see F. Avril and Y. Załuska, *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine italienne, 1, VIe-XIIe siècles* (Paris, 1980), 47.

[93] On the Corbie Psalter, see H. Pulliam, "Exaltation and Humiliation: The Decorated Initials of the Corbie Psalter (Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 18)," *Gesta* 49/2 (2010): 97–115; R. Kahsnitz, "Frühe Initialpsalter," in *The Illuminated Psalter: Studies in the Content, Purpose and Placement of Its Images*, ed. F. O. Büttner (Turnhout, 2004), 137–155 and 485–493.

Figure 35 *Decorated Initial Letters*, in *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. Lat. 316, 8th century, fols. 3v-4r. Picture source: after C. Denoël, "Le Sacramentaire gélasien de Chelles," in *Les temps mérovingiens. Trois siècles d'art et de culture (451–751)*, ed. I. Bardiès-Fronty *et al*. (Paris, 2016), p. 121, fig. 36.

*Sacramentarium Gellonense*,[94] (see **Fig. 32)** and the *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*,[95] **(Fig. 35)** all from the 8th century. Also, in no extant *Liber scintillarum*, are initials rendered

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[94] B. Thyssèdre, *Le Sacramentaire de Gellone et la figure humaine dans les manuscrits du VIIIᵉ siècle* (Turnhout, 1959).

[95] C. Denoël, "Le sacramentaire gélasien de Chelles," *Art de l'enluminure* 58 (2016): 2–55; U. Ziegler, *Das Sacramentarium Gelasianum Bibl. Vat. Reg. Lat. 316 und die Schule von Chelles* (Frankfurt am Main, 1976).

by means of an extreme elaboration of graphic signs, a practice often followed in

Insular manuscripts of a slightly earlier period.[96] The extension, distortion,

diminuendo, abbreviation, and space between words, characteristic of the so-called

Figure 36 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Reg. Lat. 143, 9th century, fol. 65v. Picture source: www.wiglaf.org/vatican/fonds/Reg.lat.html
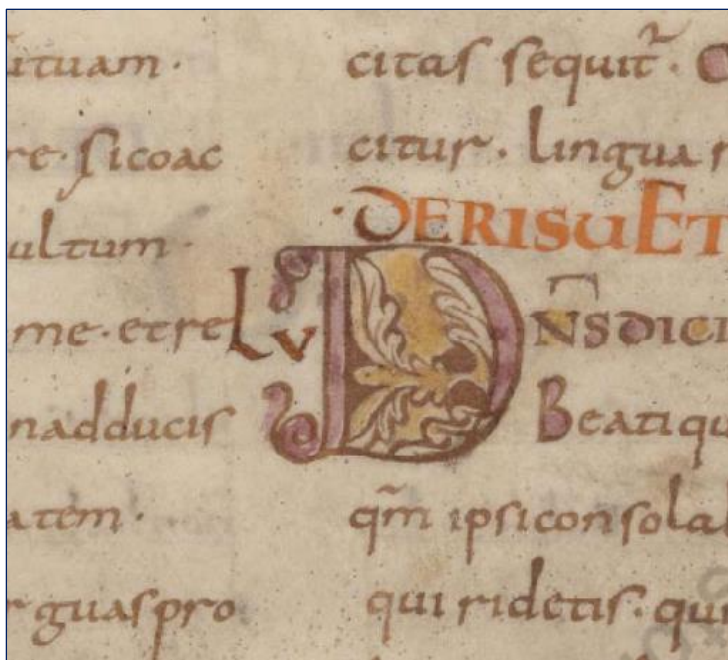
kinetic letters, contributing to form a "grammar of legibility,"[97] were not chosen for

this kind of excerpt book.

Instead, the scribes who decorated the *Liber scintillarum*, either in Carolingian

territories, in Anglo-Saxon England or in Spain, all focused on ornamental details,

drawn from acanthus leaves, interlacing, zoomorphic or geometrical motifs,

blending and adapting them to the form of the letter D. Only in one instance the

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[96] I refer here to the Book of Durrow, the Echternach Gospels, the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Lichfield Gospels, and the Book of Kells. See D. Barbet-Massin, *L'Enluminure et le Sacré. Irlande et Grande-Bretagne VIIe–VIIIe siècles* (Paris, 2013), 38–65.

[97] M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (London, 1993).

acanthus leaves are naturalistic, namely in MS Vat. Reg. lat. 143, not only on fol. 1v

in the Signal Initial I of the Incipit to the book (see **Fig. 6**), but also in various initials

Ds (fols. 11r, 20v, 44r, 55v, 58r, 65v) **(Fig. 36),** this time placing the leaves, depicted in

orange, yellow, brown, and green, within the body of the letter according to bilateral

symmetry or, more simply, isolating the leaf.

Another motif often used to decorate the initials of the *Liber scintillarum* is that

of the fish, whose appearance can be traced back to the 6th century.[98] The initials that

combine a single fish with a decorated shaft of an A or a P, are to be found in

Christian texts, and the earliest surviving examples are in Italian manuscripts. Carl

Nordenfalk distinguished two fish types, shaped either like a carp or like a dolphin;

several of the 6th -century examples cited by him were in the Corbie library and may

have influenced 8th -century initials painted there.[99] In Merovingian manuscripts, the

letter O was sometimes made of pair of birds or fishes generally pink, yellow or

green with a collar below the wedge-shaped head; also, the fish had often fins

projecting from both sides of the body.[100]

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[98] Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, 166–180; L. Drewer, "Fisherman and Fish Pond: From the Sea of Sins to the Living Waters," *The Art Bulletin* 63 (1981): 533–547; L. Wehrhahn-Stauch, "Christliche Fischsymbolik von den Anfängen bis zum hohen Mittelalter," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 35 (1972): 1–68.

[99] Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, at 117–120, reports the following manuscripts: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, PL LXV 1, Orosius (CLA 298); Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 192, Jerome on Jeremiah (CLA 811); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2235, Jerome (CLA 543); Paris Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2769, Eucherius (CLA 550); Paris Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 12205, *Institutio Nili* (CLA 633); Verona, Biblioteca capitolare, MS XXXIX (37), Cassiodorus *Complexiones* (CLA 496).

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The scribes who chose the fish motif for the letter D of the *Liber scintillarum* did not modify its structural form since the shape of the letters D and O are similar. They simply adapted the fish's body to the curves of the initial D, as on fol. 476 **(Fig. 37)** of St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230 (early 9th century); they enriched the shape with the addition of leaves, as on fol. 190v **(Fig. 38)** of Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26 (9th-10th centuries) or represented a ring-necked letter, recalling a bird's neck, as in the D of Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 102, on fol. 17v **(Fig. 39)** (9th century).[101] However, it is difficult to ascertain whether the scribes of the *Liber scintillarum* used the motif as a Christian symbol. True, the *Liber* contains sentences from the Sacred Scriptures and, more specifically, from St. Augustine (*Psalmum contra partis Donati*) and Gregory the Great (*Homelia in Evangelia*, XXIV), who dealt with the symbolism of the motif.[102] But the scribes might have not known

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[100] R. McKitterick, "The Scriptoria of Merovingian Gaul: A Survey of the Evidence," in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, 173–207. An early example is Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, MS B 62, a commentary on the Song of Songs by Spanish Bishop Justus (6th century), written at Trier at the time of Bishop Basinus (d. 4 March 705). See D. Ganz, "'In the Net or in the Line.' A Datable Merovingian Manuscript and its Importance," in *Listen, O Isles, unto Me. Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, ed. E. Mullins and D. Scully (Cork, 2011), 39–46.

[101] See notes 56 and 51. On Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 102, see G. Suckale-Redlefsen, *Die Handschriften des 8. bis. 11. Jahrhunderts der Staatsbibliothek Bamberg* (Wiesbaden, 2004), 48.

[102] Augustine discusses the symbolism of the fish in his *Psalmus contra partem Donati* (PL 43:25): *Genus autem mixtum piscis, justus est cum peccatore* [the fish is a mixed class, the just man is with the sinner] and also in his *De fide et operibus* (PL 40:219); but it seems that the metaphorical interpretation cannot explain the fish-initials simply referring to bad and good behavior. Gregory, in his *Homelia in Evangelia* XXIV, refers to fish and Christ: *Quid autem signare piscem assum credimus, nisi ipsum Mediatorem Dei et hominum passum? ...sed qui piscis assus fieri dignatus est in passione, favus mellis nobis exstitit in resurrectione* [what do we think the roast fish signifies save the mediator between God and men, who suffered? … but he who deigned to be like a roast fish in his passion, appeared like a honeycomb in his resurrection]; Grégoire le Grand, *Homélies sur l'Évangile Livre II, Homélies XXI–XL*, Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 522 (Paris, 2008), 96.
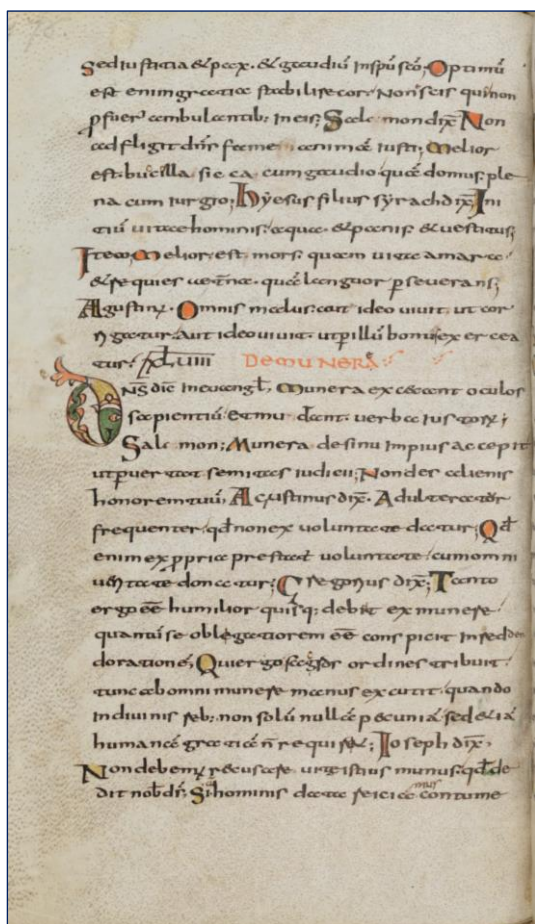
Figure 37 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230, early 9th century, fol. 476. Picture source: image in the public domain.
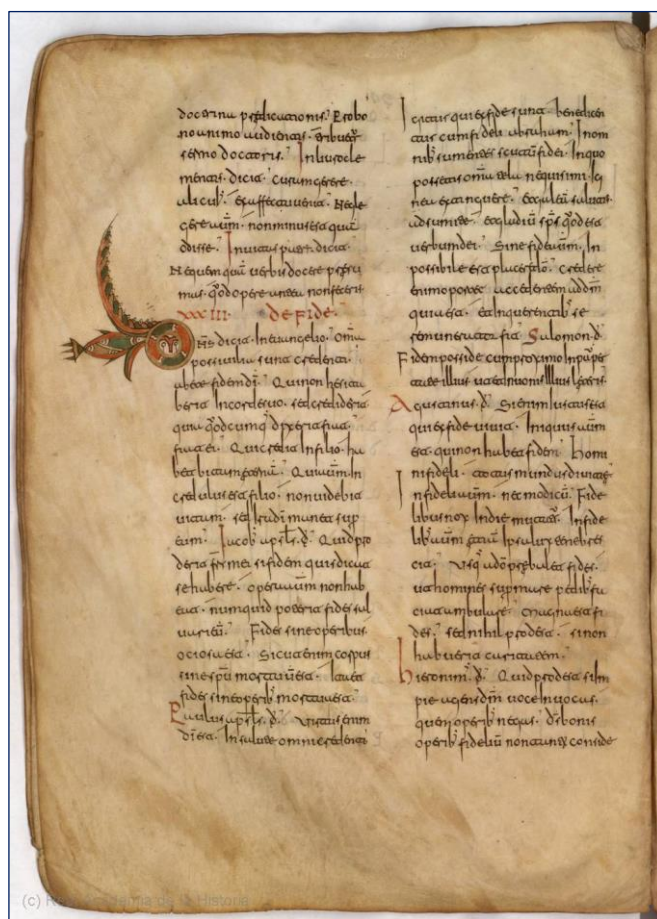
Figure 38 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 26, 9th-10th centuries, fol. 190v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

those texts and the presence of the fish-letter could simply derive from the

contemporary ornamental repertory. Thus, I consider the fish as a motif subservient

to the function of the letter D, which was, as I argued, to validate the contents of a

new religious book.

The same holds true for the interlace. Although not represented in its

complete shape, in the early Middle Ages this was one of the favorite motifs for the
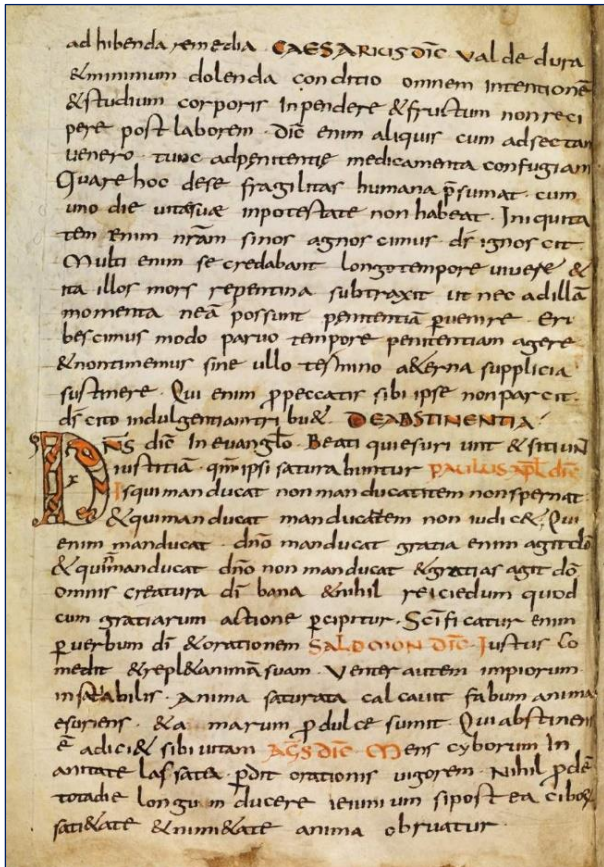
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Figure 39 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 102, 9th century, fol. 17v. Picture source: image in the public domain.
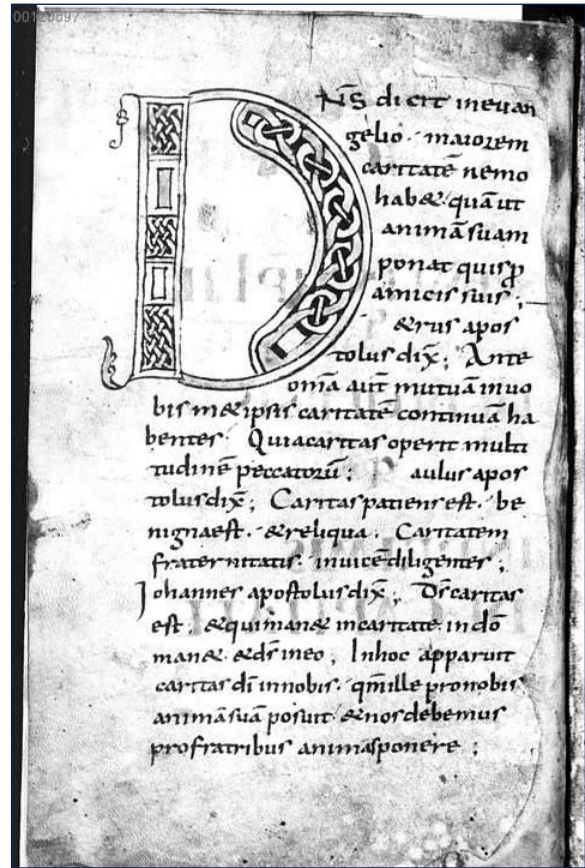
Figure 40 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 356, 10th century, fol. 3v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Ds of *Dominus dicit in euangelio*. Nancy Netzer classified the interlace as a braid; the figure-of-eight knot joined in a vertical sequence, spiraled, and as a changing or turned pattern.[103] Only on two occasions did the scribes of the *Liber scintillarum* represented monumentally the simplified interlace, one in the initial D of Cod. Sang.

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[103] N. Netzer, *Cultural Interplay in the Eighth Century. The Trier Gospels and the Making of a Scriptorium at Echternach* (Cambridge, UK, 1994), 49. See also eadem, "New Finds versus the Beginning of the Narrative on Insular Gospel Books," in *Insular and Anglo-Saxon Art and Thought in the Early Medieval Period*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, 2011), 3–13.

426, introducing *De caritate* **(see Fig. 25)**[104] and another in a similar D on fol. 3v **(Fig. 40)** in Munich, Bayerische Nationalbibliothek, Clm 356 (10th century).[105] In all other instances, the interlace is usually disentangled and reduced to a few strings to form a new letter or to fill in the inner space of the letter D, as in Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13, fol. 13v **(Fig. 41)** (8th century).[106] In the same manuscript, on fol. 7r **(Fig. 42)** the name *Dominus* has been transformed into a monogram[107] or reduced to a fanciful composition as on fol. 12r **(Fig. 43)**, similar to the D on fol. 2r **(Fig. 44)** of Gregorius Papa I, *Homiliae in euangelia*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 3731, 8th century.[108] Some scribes used extremely sober decoration, with small dots or variations of colors enhancing the initial letters, as in the P and D on fol. 59v **(Fig. 45)** of Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 102 (9th century).[109]

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[104] See n. 64.

[105] On Munich, Bayerische Nationalbibliothek, Clm 356, see Bierbrauer, *Die vorkarolingischen und karolingischen Handschriften*, 77.

[106] See n. 20.

[107] See also Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2995 A, 10th century, fols. 114r, 115r, 116v, and 118v (see n. 77).

[108] H. Hauke, *Katalog der lateinischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München. Clm 3701-3830* (Wiesbaden, 2011), 129–131.

[109] Rows of dots may reflect insular tradition, but can be traced back to early Byzantine initials; see Netzer, *Cultural Interplay in the Eighth Century*, 52. The Late antique Dioscurides manuscript, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Med. Gr. 1, shows one of the first instances of this ornamental device; see Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Zierbuchstaben*, 139; M. Collins, *Medieval Herbals: The Illustrative Traditions* (London, 2000), 39–50.
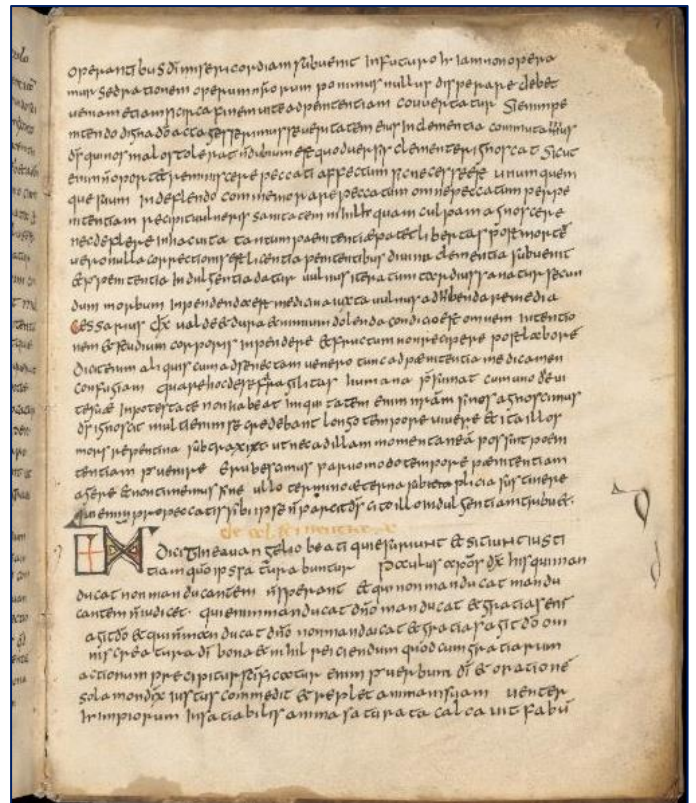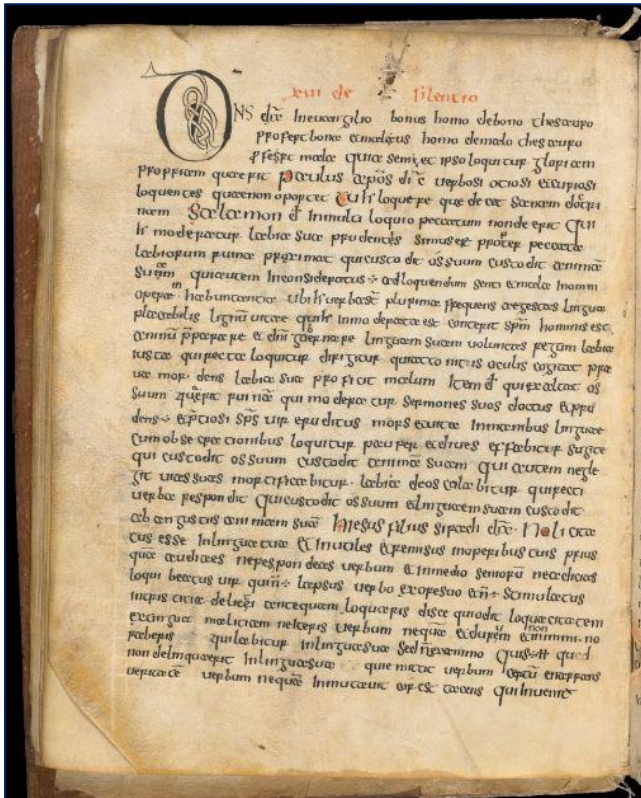
Figures 41, 42 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13, 8th century, fol. 13v (l), fol. 7r (r). Photos: images in the public domain.

The Operational Initial Letters

All the initials discussed so far were also operational letters within the field of reading for personal meditation. In the *Liber scintillarum*, the headings usually begin with a minuscule d (*de caritate*, *de poenitentia, etc.*), immediately followed by *Dominus dicit*, an alliteration that leads the reader to another series of short utterances. The name of their respective author, as Peter, Paul, Solomon, Augustine, Jerome, etc., is always reported: They wrote about their faith, expressing certainties, but also the outer and inner threats against the moral integrity of man. The letters become operational in activating the Christian drama, a moral drama unfolding in the
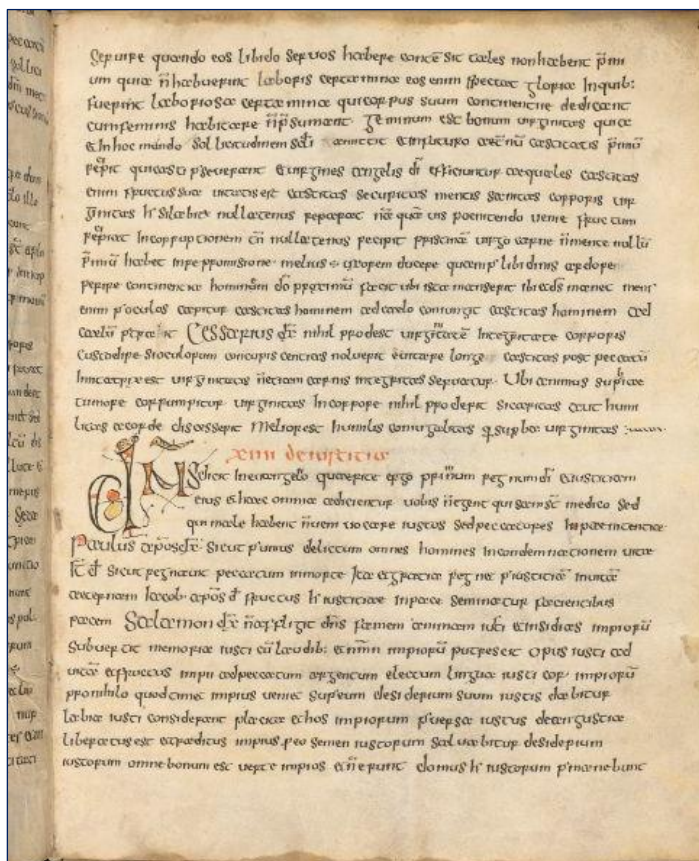
Figure 43 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus dicit*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13, 8th century, fol. 12r. Picture source: image in the public domain.
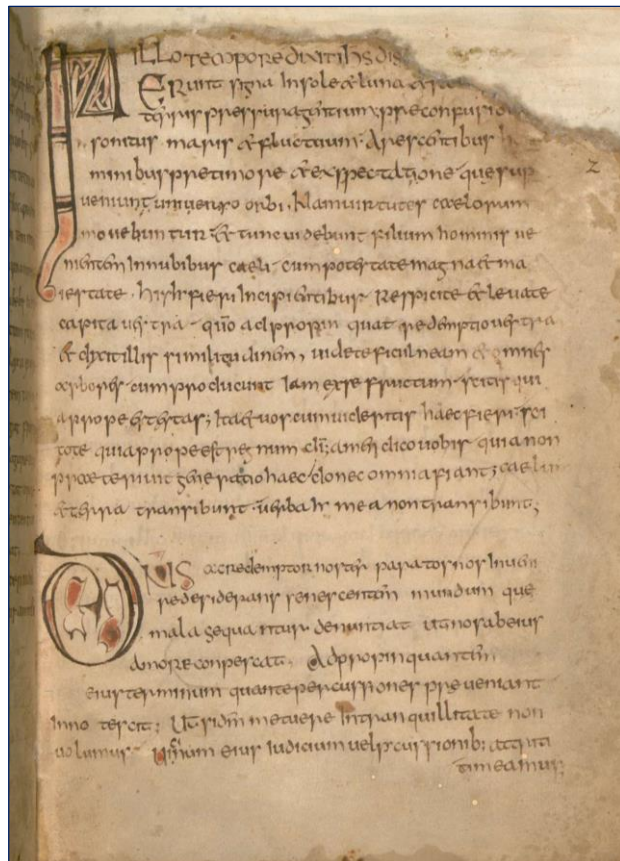
Figure 44 *Decorated Initial Letters*, Initial D, *Dominus*, Gregorius Papa I, *Homiliae in euangelia*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 3731, 8th century, fol. 2r. Picture source: image in the public domain.

drama according to the headings at the beginning of each chapter (On charity; On penitence; On virginity; On envy, etc.). The religious authors would utter sentences on topics fundamental for monastic life, orchestrated by the Lord's first utterance and enhanced by a variety of colored motifs shaping or filling the initial D. Thus, the moral value of the daily reading of and meditation on the excerpts of the *Liber scintillarum* was granted by the highest authority—*Dominus*—who was

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Figure 45 *Initials P and D*, in *Liber scintillarum*, Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 102, 9th century, fol. 59v. Picture source: image in the public domain.
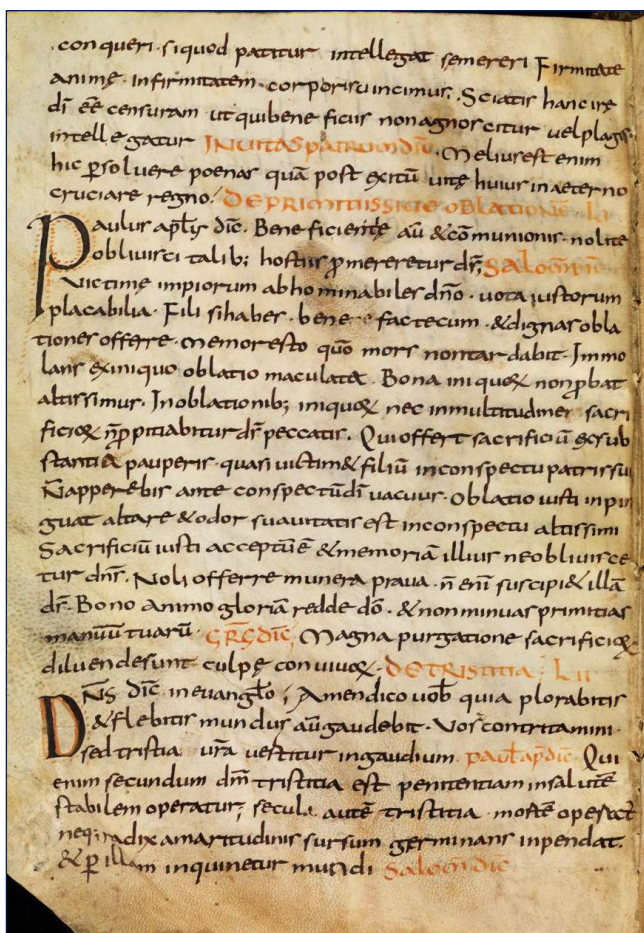
speaking to monks and nuns exclusively in the present—*dicit*—through a text—*in euangelio*—as an unending source of spiritual knowledge. Only after *Dominus*' words, the *sententiae* [sayings] of the apostles and the Church Fathers were arranged in each single chapter. And while the Ds received a naturalistic or abstract decoration, the names of the apostles and the Fathers of the Western and Eastern Church were usually enhanced by red, orange, brown, and black ink or, seldom, green, the colors generally used in the scriptoria of the early Middle Ages. No doubt, the D of *Dominus dicit in euangelio* has a certain peremptory character but one may concede that, being a visual tool for triggering an imaginary narration to stimulate meditation, symbolic overtones might have not been predominant. The operational

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value of the letter D depended on the kind of book the *Liber scintillarum* was intended to be. A distinction between symbolic and non-symbolic use of initial letters is here in order.

According to Armando Petrucci, in Carolingian times some texts lost their analytical and discursive relevance, becoming, through the iconography of the script, purely figurative fact,[110] yet also comprising ornament, colors, and images.[111] The formation of this symbolic page was not the result of an imperial revival that the Carolingian showed by using the color purple and capital letters but instead reflected the slow transmigration of Italian graphic and book models to Gaul between the 8th and 9th centuries.[112] Thus, some pre-Carolingian books followed the Christian model of the object-book, no longer an instrument, according to Petrucci, but a symbol of culture. The artificiality of script, with many ornamental elements and large proportions, made the book unsuitable to be read, but ready to be displayed as if it were made of precious materials.[113]

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[110] A. Petrucci, "Aspetti simbolici delle testimonianze scritte," in *Simboli e simbologia nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 3–9 April 1975, 2 vols. (Spoleto, 1976), 2:813–844, at 841.

[111] For the use of colored inks, one instance is the Bible, MS 1, Cava dei Tirreni, Badia della SS.ma Trinità, 9th century, in Visigoth script; see A. Perriccioli Saggese, "La bibbia visigotica di Cava de' Tirreni, la sua copia ottocentesca e la riscoperta della miniatura," in *Riforma della chiesa, esperienze monastiche e poteri locali*, ed. M. Galante et al. (Florence, 2014), 329–338; also the Theodulf Bible, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9380, 9th century; see L. Nees, "Problems of Form and Function in Early Medieval Illustrated Bibles from Northwest Europe," in *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible*, ed. J. Williams (University Park, 1999), 121–177, at 126–127, 131.

[112] E. Rosenthal, "Classical Elements in Carolingian Illustrations," *La Bibliofilia* 55 (1953): 85–106. See, for example, a lectionary of northern Italy, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9451, 8th century, written in uncial and Caroline on purple parchment.

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In this line, Cynthia Hahn has recently investigated the symbolic treatment of letters. She considered a decorative practice that started to be followed around the 7th century, especially in the British Isles, namely an elaborate initial ornamentation all about entrances and exits.[114] An example of this practice would be the 7th-century Northumbrian Durham fragment of a gospel with three Ds, fol. 3v **(Fig. 46)**, Durham Cathedral, Dean and Chapter Library, MS A. II. 10, interpreted as a Trinitarian symbol.[115] God was evoked through the repetition of the letter D that contained the now almost-disappeared texts: A scriptural ending (*In nomine domini nostri ihesu christi*), a scriptural beginning (*In nomine altissimi*), and a holy praise (*Sanctificetur nomen tuum*).

I believe that several factors may justify a symbolic interpretation of the three Ds: The letters' size, how the letters were displayed in the folio, and, eventually, how they defined a clear beginning as much as a clear ending of the text. Nonetheless, the

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[113] On Saint-Denis Gospels, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9387, 9th century, see F. Crivello, "Les Evangiles de Saint-Denis et l'influence de l'école de la cour de Charlemagne sur les scriptoria de Francie occidentale," in *Les manuscrits carolingiens*, 45–88; on Drogo Gospels, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 9388, 9th century, see M.-P. Laffitte et al., eds., *Trésors carolingiens. Livres manuscrits de Charlemagne à Charles le Chauve* (Paris, 2007), nos. 54a and 54b.

[114] C. J. Hahn, "Letter and Spirit: The Power of the Letter, the Enlivenment of the Word in Medieval Art," in *Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings*, ed. M. Dalbello and M. Shaw (New Brunswick, NJ, 2011), 55–76, at 62.

[115] Durham Cathedral, Dean and Chapter Library, MS A. II. 10 was produced at Lindisfarne *c.* 650. Only seven leaves of the book survive, bound in three separate volumes, now preserved in the Durham Cathedral, Dean and Chapter Library: MS A. II. 10 (fols. 2–5, 238–8a); MS C. III 13 (fols. 192–195); MS C. III 20 (fols. 1–2). These leaves might be the remnants of a Gospel book but, given their size, more probably belonged to a New Testament or even to a Bible. On MS A. II. 10, see Bonne, "Nœuds d'écriture (le fragment I de l'Évangéliaire de Durham," 85–105; idem, "De l'ornemental dans l'art médiéval (VIIe–XIIe siècle). Le modèle insulaire," in *L'Image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. J. Baschet and J.-C. Schmitt (Paris, 1996), 207–240.

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Figure 46 *Initials Ds, Gospel fragment,* Durham Cathedral, Dean and Chapter Library, MS A. II. 10, 7th century, fol. 3v. Picture source: image in the public domain.

Liber scintillarum was not a liturgical book featuring a starting and an ending point of the sacred history. This excerpt compilation has instead only openings, repeated many times. The lack of a conclusion of the whole book may mean that each chapter has its own partial end so that on occasion the scribes could add new excerpts according to their will, as seen in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6314.[116]

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[116] See n. 62.

Unlike the Durham Ds, the 76 Ds of *Dominus* in the *Liber scintillarum* are not symbolic since they are part of an ever-open written and visual spiritual enterprise.

Repetition of the word "Dominus" makes the letters fundamental elements of a narrative discourse with no sequence of images. With no pretension to affect the reader in order to bring him/her to meditate on something "cosmic,"[117] the operational Ds of the *Liber scintillarum* can be explained as suggestions for a cyclical organization of religious knowledge to be acquired by means of either an out-loud or silent reading, an extensive or intensive reading, or both.[118] The typology of a book of excerpts for personal use did not allow the letters Ds to be treated as symbols: Their function was to validate a compilation made of diverse contents, thus a new function created for the initials of non-liturgical books made in the early Middle Ages.

Conclusions

The decorated initial letters of the *Liber scintillarum* introduce the reader to the text, contributing to the formation of meaning.[119] The viewer of the *Liber scintillarum*

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[117] Hahn, "Letter and Spirit," 61.

[118] M. B. Parkes, "Reading, Copying, and Interpreting a Text in the Early Middle Ages," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. G. Cavallo and R. Chartier (Cambridge, UK, 1999), 90–102.

[119] On this point, the Fathers of the Church did not always agree. Augustine believed that the material form of writing had no bearing on the meaning of a text, while Jerome criticized decorated letters, considering ornament as detrimental to the understanding of meaning. Their judgment, however, did not concern texts for private reading but only liturgical books. Augustine: *Si domini nomen et auro et atramento scribatur...illud est pretiosius, illud uilius; quod tamen utroque significatur idipsum est* [if the name of God were written both in gold and in ink...the former would be the more precious,

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was generally the scribe himself who wrote and decorated the text for his own use. Patron, compiler, and reader were one and the same person who could experiment with forms and colors, judge the results attained, and modify where necessary. This favorable situation suggests some final considerations.

The first is that the meaning of a book is not exclusively found in the connection of words but also in the form of the letters themselves within a specific context, as the D of *Dominus dicit*.[120] In the same sentence, the essential lines that shape the letter D in a distinctive size also endow it with solemnity and simplicity. What the letter D possesses can be called "visual meaning" in that it is the form of the letter itself that conveys the meaning. The initial D, used for both *Dominus* and the verb *dicit*, combines two elements: the sacredness of the image of God and the presence of His words. In fact, the Lord's utterances, contrary to the saints' and the Church Fathers' sentences introduced by the past tense (*dixit*), are always in the

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the latter the more worthless; yet, that which is signified in both is one and the same]; Augustine, *De trinitate* III:10, I:147–48, trans. A. West Hodden, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ser. I, ed. P. Schaff, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: MI, 1979), 3:64. Jerome: *Pro gemmis et serico diuinos codices amet, in quibus non auri et pellis Babylonicae uermiculata pictura; sed ad fidem placeat emendata et erudita distinctio.* Jerome criticized contemporary scribes since in their manuscripts they were more interested in 'gilding, Babylonia parchment, and elaborate decorations' instead of caring for accurate texts. Jerome, *Epistula CVII*, PL 22:876; see also *Selected Letters of St Jerome*, trans. F. A. Wright (New York, 1933), 131–133.

[120] *Cum una littera uariis in locis ponitur, et pro loco ualet, non unam rem ualet. Quid tamen diuersa res quam Deus et diabolus? Tamen in capite, D littera est, cum dicimus 'Deus', et cum dicimus 'diabolus'. Sicut ergo littera pro loco ualet* [One letter is put in various places, and for each it has value: it does not just have one value. What could be more different than God and the devil? Yet in each you have the letter D. A letter therefore takes its value from its context]. Augustine, *Sermones de uetere testamento* (1–50), ed. C. Lambot (CCSL 41) (Turnhout, 1961), 30.

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present tense (*dicit*). By reading time and again *Dominus dicit* the reader realizes that what God is saying, he had already said it forever in an "eternal present."

The second consideration regards the choice of the *Dominus dicit in euangelio* as the starting sentence for each chapter. Apart from being the due tribute to the most important voice in the collection of excerpts, it seems that the compiler who first adopted this sentence was also aware of the intrinsic problem of this book: though made of "sparkling" moral sentences, its contents had no unity. As I argued, it was the recurrent *Dominus dicit in euangelio*, like a recursive litany, that was able to unify the different sentences.

The third consideration deals with the organization of the book. Lawrence Nees has suggested that "experimentation with the full opening as a decorative, visual and conceptual unit may be seen in many respects developing during the 9th century."[121] The *Liber scintillarum* is a special instance of a book that, at an early period, shows a full opening not limited to the first page, but replicated many times.

The fourth consideration is how the decorated initial letters of the *Liber scintillarum* differed from those of a liturgical book. Substantially, the former did not introduce a canonical narrative text. To tell a story, as Franz Wickhoff writes, an artist could choose among three possibilities: a continuous narration, an isolation of the scenes, or a complementary method.[122] This suggestion holds true for

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[121] Nees, "Words and Images, Texts and Commentaries," 62.

[122] F. Wickhoff, *Die Wiener Genesis* (Wien, 1895); trans. and ed. E. Strong, *Roman Art. Some of its Principles and their Application to Early Christian Painting* (London, 1900), 1–16.

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manuscripts with biblical narrations, where space and time were fundamental components of human and divine actions. But when no visual story can be inferred from the written words, as is the case with the *Liber scintillarum*, then the scribes and other readers or listeners could imagine another kind of narration by conceiving the *Dominus dicit in euangelio* as a form of continuous narration made possible by the presence of the same resounding words. Since *Dominus dicit* appears time and again as the first sentence of a long series of different sayings, it is possible to take it as the main graphic character that gives unity to the variety of graphic scenes produced by the sentences of the different authors. The story will not unfold in an external time or space, but within the conscience of the reader.

The fifth and final consideration reflects the reader's intervention. While in the early Middle Ages the full texts of religious works, such as the Gospels and the Psalter, both in the East and West,[123] have often been enriched with marginal comments artistically arranged, just one 8th -century manuscript of the *Liber scintillarum* examined in this article (Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13) **(see Figs. 2, 41, 42, 43)**, bears the signs, now almost erased, of comments not arranged in a decorative manner.[124] Did the excerpts' straight and clear meaning

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[123] K. Linardou, "An Exercise in Extravagance and Abundance: Some Thoughts on the *Marginalia Decorata* in the Codex Parisinus Graecus 216," in *Graphic Devices and the Early Decorated Book*, 218–239.

[124] Readers scratched many Latin glosses, now difficult to decipher; only five East Frankish have been interpreted. See Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia*, 57. Commentaries are frequent, instead, in the 11th century, as in London, British Library, MS Royal 7. C. IV; see S. S. Getty, *An Edition, with Commentary, of the Latin/Anglo-Saxon Liber scintillarum*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1969; R. H. Bremmer Jr, "The Reception of Defensor's *Liber*

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exclude any form of comments in the margins organized in a decorative way? Or was the absence of marginal notes determined by the size of the book, generally rather small? It is possible, but by no means certain, that the scribes of this kind of text tried to fill the page in all directions to enhance the value of the sentences written in ceaseless succession. The points of visual dis-junction within the text are provided by the names of the religious authors.

As Jean Leclercq has remarked, *florilegia*, where reading and praying were one and the same action, offered the monk's mind the most suitable form of meditation, grounded on the absence of method.[125] Actually, instead of rumination suggested by metaphors regarding the Bible's texts seen as food, the *Liber scintillarum*'s sentences, by igniting the mind, partook of the concept of energy, unfolding in the spatial and temporal dimensions. At the same time, energy entails efforts and risks, as any action contributing to moral renewal brings with it. However, the sentences introduced by *Dominus dicit in euangelio* were instrumental in supporting efforts and facing risks. The initial letters Ds, far from being mere graphic devices, were signs of powerful sounds, and the sounds themselves were signs of the thing imagined, that is, God, resonating in the devotee's mind.[126]

Scintillarum in Anglo-Saxon England," in ...*Un tuo serto di fiori in man recando. Scritti in onore di Maria Amalia D'Oronco*, ed. P. Lendinara (Udine, 2008), 75–89.

[125] J. Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1957), 178.

[126] Augustine, *De trinitate* XV:10, I:486: *Inventae sunt etiam litterae per quas possemus et cum absentibus conloqui, sed ista signa sunt vocum, cum ipsa voce in sermone nostro earum quas cogitamus signa sint rerum*; translated as *On the Trinity*, ed. G. B. Matthews, trans. S. McKenna (Cambridge, UK, 2002), 187: "Letters have also been invented by which we can speak to those who are absent; but the

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To conclude, I believe that the *Liber scintillarum* deserves a place in the history of the development of Carolingian book production, manuscript illumination, and cultural dissemination. As such, the organization of excerpts into a coherent whole became a textual form in its own right. Carolingian scriptoria were noted for the production of complete texts, yet many *Libri scintillarum* were produced in the 9th-century Carolingian Empire, testifying to a monastic interest in a non-liturgical book that contained sentences on virtues and vices by their respective authors.

The *Liber scintillarum*, with its excerpts and the series of initial letters – Ds, Ps, and the one I – introducing the different chapters, along with the letters I of the Incipits, variously decorated and systematically organized, belongs to an early medieval project of reading, meditating, memorizing, and recalling. This meditational project developed alongside the performative project of liturgical book production, showing the place of sacred scripture in both public and private devotion. All in all, the *Liber scintillarum* is a book on the history of moral thought, whose importance was validated, then as now, by *Dominus dicit in euangelio.*

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letters are the signs of the words, while the words themselves in our speech are signs of the things of which we are thinking."

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APPENDIX

Liber scintillarum

8th-century Manuscripts

Kassel, Staatsbibliothek, Theol. 4° 10, fragment, fols. 139r–141v

London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. II, fragment, fol. 45r, chap. I

Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4582, fols. 1r–77r

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2843 A, fols. 1r–102r, chaps. IV–IX and XVI–LXXIX

Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 13, fols. 1r–57v, chaps. V–LXXXI

9th-century Manuscripts

Autun, Bibliothèque municipale, G. III, fols. 1r–92r

Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 102, 1r–78v, chaps. I–LXXXI

Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Patr. 134, 1r–101r, chaps. I–LXXXI

Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 485 (483), fragment, fol. 55

Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 27, fragment, fol. 53rv

Louviers, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 3, fols. 1r–100v, chaps. I–LXXXI

Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia 26, fols. 147v–211v, chaps. I–LXXXI

Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 6314, fols. 1r–192r

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, nouv. acq. lat. 1605, fols. 44r–110v, chaps. I–LXXXI

Reims, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 435 (E 345), fols. 1r–125r, chaps. I–LXXXI

St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 124, fols. 133–306, chaps. I–LXXXI

St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230, fols. 441–498, chaps. I–LXXXI

St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 426, fols. 1–252, chaps. I–LXXXI

Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Reg. lat 143, fols. 1–87, chaps. I–LXXXI

Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Reg. lat. 846, fols. 99r–103v, chaps. II–XLIII

Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M. p. th. f. 48, fols. 1–62v, chaps. VI–LXXXI

10th 11th-century Manuscripts

Avranches, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 108, chaps. I–LXXXI

Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS 112 (A 115), fols. 1r–81v, chaps. I–LXIV

Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 356, fols. 1r–156r, chaps. I–LXXXI

Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 8106, fols. 1r–9r, chaps. I–IV

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2374, fols. 1r–62v, chaps. I–LXXXI

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2995 A, fols. 1r–120r, chaps. I–LXXXI

Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 302 (292), fols. 52r–101r, chaps. I–LXXXI