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**SPEAKING BOOKS. ORNAMENT AND SENSUAL PERCEPTION
IN EARLY IBERIAN BOOK ILLUMINATION**
**LIBROS PARLANTES. ORNAMENTO Y PERCEPCIÓN SENSITIVA EN
LA MINIATURA ALTOMEDIEVAL HISPANA**

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ABSTRACT

Depictions of codices speaking or acting in two Northern Iberian manuscripts from the late 10th century are a singular phenomenon in the contemporary book culture of Early Medieval Europe, where animated books appears only in later times.

At a first glance these representations vested with a dense set of ornaments could be interpreted in relation to the text they precede – a text, which gives a systematic clue to a collection of church council decisions. However, as the ornamentation of their talking bodies has a fundamental impact on the illumination program as a whole, one might ask if the motif of the animated codex is connected to other ideas, such as to the authority of the book, but also to modalities a codex or a text should be perceived.

My paper focusses on two perspectives: On the one hand, it has to be shown, that the animated codices are related to thoughts about the role of voice and sound in the transmission of the Holy Scripture within the liturgy and therefore require a multi-sensual perception. On the other hand, I pursue the relation between letters, colors, and ornaments in the illumination of Northern Iberian Manuscripts to outdraw intentions to complicate the understanding of the texts and to veil its content.

Thus, I argue that ornamentation acts within the manuscript illumination in a contradictory way to clarify the authority of the book: it offers an access to knowledge though structuring the written text, but at the same time pinpoints to the secrecy and therefore divinity of its content.

KEYWORDS: *Codex Albeldense*, *Codex Aemilianense*, ornament, letter-labyrinth, multi-sensual perception.

RESUMEN

Dos manuscritos del norte de la Península Ibérica de finales del siglo x contienen representaciones miniadas que hablan o actúan. Estas composiciones constituyen un fenómeno singular en la cultura codicológica de la Europa altomedieval. De hecho, los libros animados aparecen sólo en épocas posteriores.

A primera vista estas representaciones, revestidas de una densa trama ornamental, podrían ser interpretadas en relación con el texto al que preceden, anticipando el contenido de la colección de cláusulas redactadas en Concilios de la Iglesia visigoda. Sin embargo, como la ornamentación de sus cuerpos parlantes tiene un impacto fundamental en el programa de iluminación de los manuscritos en su conjunto, uno podría preguntarse si el motivo del códice animado está vinculado a otros principios, como la autoridad del libro, pero también al modo en que debería ser percibido un códice o un texto.

Este artículo se centra en dos perspectivas. Por una parte, hay que demostrar que los códices animados están relacionados con pensamientos sobre el papel desempeñado por la voz y el sonido en la transmisión de la Sagrada Escritura dentro de la liturgia, lo que requiere una percepción sinestésica de esas miniaturas. Por otro lado, examino la relación entre letras, colores y ornamentos en la iluminación de los manuscritos del norte de la Península Ibérica. Con ello, pretendo desvelar las intenciones que movieron a los autores a intrincar la comprensión de los textos y encubrir su contenido. Así, sostengo que la ornamentación actúa dentro de la iluminación de los manuscritos de manera contradictoria con el propósito de explicitar cuál es la autoridad del libro: ofrece un acceso al conocimiento a través de la estructuración del texto escrito, pero, al mismo tiempo, señala el misterio y, por lo tanto, la sacralidad de su contenido

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Códice Albeldense*, *Códice Aemilianense*, ornamento, letra-laberinto, percepción sinestésica.

In two closely related Northern Iberian legal codices from the last quarter of the 10th century, the so-called *Codex Albeldense* and *Aemilianense*, a book appears as a communicating person (Figs. 1, 2).¹ Placed on a piece of furniture, in the *Codex Albeldense* designated as *anologivm*, a hand protrudes from the codex. Its outstretched forefinger and middle finger recalling the blessing hand of God and pointing to a male figure sitting opposite, inscribed as *lector*. The male figure, whose robe and staff remind one of a spiritual minister, also turns to the book with a gesture of speech. In the *Codex Aemilianense* even a touch of the hands is

¹ Escorial, Cod. D.I.2, Cod. D.I.1. On both manuscripts see e.g. G. ANTOLÍN, *Catálogo de los codices latinos de la real biblioteca del Escorial*. 5 vols., Madrid, 1910-1923, vol. 1, pp. 320-368; A. GARCÍA DE LA FUENTE, *La miniatura española primitiva*, Madrid, 1936, pp. 120-135; O.K. WERCKMEISTER, "Das Bild zur Liste der Bistümer Spaniens im Codex Aemilianensis", *Madrider Mitteilungen*, 9 (1968), pp. 399-423; M. C. DÍAZ Y DÍAZ, *Codices visigóticos en la monarquía leonesa*, León, 1983, pp. 155-162; M. S. de SILVA Y VERÁSTEGUI, "Los primeros retratos reales en la miniatura hispánica altomedieval", *Príncipe de Viana*, 41 (1980), pp. 257-261; *eadem*, "Neovisigotismo iconográfico del siglo X: Ordo de celebrando concilio", *Goya: Revista de Arte*, 164/165 (1981), pp. 70-75; *eadem*, *Iconografía del Siglo x en el Reino de Pamplona-Nájera*, Pamplona, 1984; M. DÍAZ Y DÍAZ, *Libros y librerías en la Rioja altomedieval*, Logroño 1991, pp. 64-74; J. A. FERNÁNDEZ FLÓREZ, M. HERRERO DE LA FUENTE, "Un calígrafo-miniaturista del

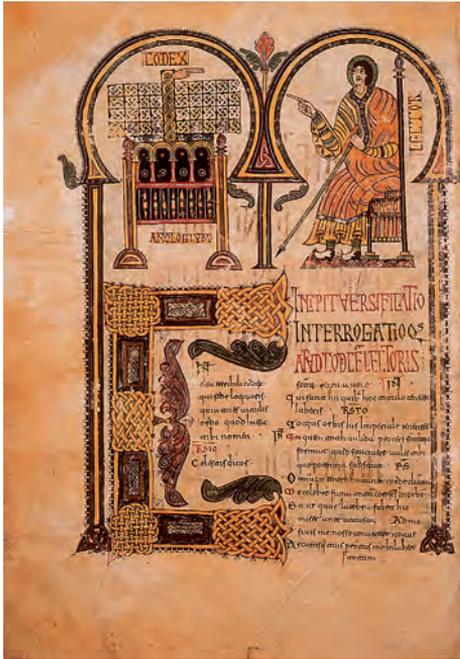


Fig. 1. Codex Albeldense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.2, fol. 20v, lector and codex (Patrimonio Nacional)



Fig. 2. Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 19v, lector and codex (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abt. Madrid)

recognizable, which makes the interaction perceivable as a moment of inspiration. The depiction is astonishing because it is for the first time that an animated book is represented – a motif, which is seldom discussed within research. Similar representations in later times have received more attention: A well-known example is the illumination of a red book enclosing the figure of Jesus Christ within a 14th century version of the ‘Sachsenspiegel’.² Despite the temporal distance as well as the iconographic differences it is worth noting, that it is also in this case a legal manuscript, in which a personified codex is depicted.

año Mil: Vigila de Albelda”, *Codex Aquilarensis*, 16 (2000), pp. 153-180; J. GARCÍA TURZA (ed.), *Codice Albeldense 976: Original conservado en la Biblioteca Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de el Escorial (d.I.2)*, Madrid, 2002; K. BÖSE, “Der Codex Albeldense. Rezeption, Autorschaft und Aufgaben mittelalterlicher Buchausstattung”, en K. MAREK, M. SCHULZ (ed.), *Kanon Kunstgeschichte: Einführung in Werke, Methoden und Epochen*. Vol. 1: *Mittelalter*, München, 2015, pp. 55-77; eadem, *Von den Rändern her gedacht. Visuelle Rahmungsstrategien in Handschriften der Iberischen Halbinsel*, Köln, 2019.

² Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 3.1 Aug. 2°, fol. 85r. On the Sachsenspiegel-manuscript from Wolfenbüttel: R. SCHMIDT-WIEGAND (ed.), *Sachsenspiegel: Die Wolfenbütteler Bilderhandschrift Cod. Guelf. 3.1 Aug. 2°*, Graz, 2006. On this special motif see H. WENZEL, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild. Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter*, München, 1995, p. 366. – See also the representation of Jesus Christ within in book in the Wiener version of the Bible moralisée, dat. 1230, Wien, ÖNB, Cod. 2554, fol. 16r. S. TAMMEN, “Verkörperungen: Ecclesia und Philosophia in der Bible moralisée (Codex 2554 der Österr. Nationalbibliothek, Wien)”, *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Vergleichende Kunstforschung in Wien*, 52 (2000), pp. 6-9.

Both Northern Iberian codices, one written in 976 in the Benedictine monastery of Albelda³ and the other compiled in 992 on the basis of the former in the nearby monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla,⁴ situated also in La Rioja, contain a wide variety of legal texts. Among them the *Liber Canonum* takes the largest share, which contains a historical order of the council decisions of the Iberian and Gallic councils until 681.⁵ The depictions shown here precede the beginning of the *Excerpta Canonum*, which in ten books provides systematic access to the subsequent canons. It is therefore a treatise that aims to facilitate the use of the *Liber Canonum*. Not only the first but four more books are introduced by a similar representation.⁶ Therefore, Soledad de Silva y Verástegui, who dedicated an impressive monograph to 10th century manuscripts from Navarre, discusses the animated book as a singular motif, which can be only understood in relation with the following text. There are neither parallels within Northern Iberian manuscripts from that time nor earlier role models.⁷

This is partly convincing. But for what reason the text of the *Excerpta Canonum* has been illuminated at all? Precisely because the animated book seems to be a singular motif within Northern Iberian manuscripts from the iconographical point of view, we should try to embed this special depiction within the overall illumination program of both legal manuscripts. Even if within both Codices the various legal texts can be perceived as singular books due to different concepts of illumination, there are elements of design such as ornaments binding the single treatises together to one single volume and pinpointing to the question: what kind or idea of book is really represented within that remarkable iconography?

It is striking how strongly in the design of both codices, illumination and scripture are related and connected to each other by ornament: In the *Codex Albeldense*, the entire page at the beginning of the *Excerpta Canonum* is framed by a double arcade, which places the

³ On the monastery of Albelda: C. J. BISHKO, "Salvus of Albelda and the Frontier Monasticism in Tenth-century Navarre", en *idem* (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Spanish Frontier History*, London, 1980, pp. 559-590; A. LINAGE CONDE, *Los orígenes del monacato benedictino en la Península Ibérica*. 3 vols., León, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 662-669; S. ANDRÉS VALERO, C. JIMÉNEZ MARTÍNEZ, "El dominio de San Martín de Albelda (siglos X-XI)", en *Segundo coloquio sobre la historia de la Rioja*, Logroño (2-4.10.1985), Logroño, 1986, pp. 345-357; M. LAZARO RUIZ, "El monasterio de San Martín de Albelda: Estrategias en la ocupación del territorio y valoración socioeconómica (925-1094)", en J. I. de la IGLESIA DUARTE (ed.), *VII Semana de estudios medievales*, Najera (29.7-2.8.1996), Logroño, 1997, pp. 353-384; J. GARCÍA TURZA, "El monasterio de San Martín de Albelda. Introducción histórica", en *idem* (ed.), *Códice Albeldense*, pp. 9-27.

⁴ G. MENENDEZ PIDAL, "Sobre el escritorio emilianense en los siglos X a XI", *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 143 (1958), pp. 7-19; J. A. GARCÍA DE CORTÁZAR, *El dominio del monasterio de San Millán de la Cogolla (siglos X-XIII): Introducción a la historia rural de Castilla altomedieval*, Salamanca, 1969; LINAGE CONDE, *Orígenes*, vol. 2, pp. 646-653; J. GARCÍA TURZA, "El monasterio de San Millán de la Cogolla en la alta edad media: Aproximación Histórica", *Berceo*, 133 (1997), pp. 9-25; M. S. de SILVA Y VERÁSTEGUI, "El monasterio de San Millán de la Cogolla: Tres hitos importantes en su actividad artística", *Berceo*, 133 (1997), pp. 27-50.

⁵ Beside the *Liber Canonum* one can find the Decretals, the *Liber Iudicium*, a penitential, but also texts with annalistic content. – On the manuscripts from the Iberian Peninsula containing legal texts see: M. S. de SILVA Y VERÁSTEGUI, "L'illustration des manuscrits de la Collection Canonique Hispana", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 32.3 (1989), pp. 247-261; *eadem*, "Contribución al estado de la cuestión de los estudios iconográficos en los manuscritos jurídicos ilustrados de la edad media", *Cuadernos de arte e iconografía*, 4-7 (1991), pp. 158-163.

⁶ In the *Codex Albeldense*: fol. 35r, 37v, 43v, 47v; in the *Codex Aemilianense*: fol. 19v, 31v, 34r, 40r, 44r. See SILVA Y VERÁSTEGUI, *Iconografía*, pl. XVI, fig. 124, 126. There is no illustration of fol. 44r.

⁷ SILVA Y VERÁSTEGUI, *Iconografía*, pp. 377, 378.

two columns of text and the interlocutors in relation to each other. The design of the page is dominated by yellow interlace, from which the decoration of the animated codex with the grid-like arranged loops of four and the ribbon representing the binding is equally formed. It also forms the knot motifs that characterize the decorative initial **C** for *Celsa* and seem to inflate it into a dominating visual element of the page. In the *Codex Aemilianense*, the interlace ornamentation of the initial **I** for *In nomine* and **C** for *Celsa* is almost at the heart of the page.⁸ In addition, there are correspondences of color and motif: While the **C** initial, for example, is dominated by blue ground and yellow interlace, which omits a cross in the middle in favor of a contemplative effect,⁹ the represented codex consists of alternating yellow and blue woven knots held together by a yellow dew band. In addition, the ivory-colored interlace motif corresponds to the stem filling of the letter, which internally structures the double arcade of the liturgical furniture on which the codex rests.

In the following, I want to discuss the role of the ornament in the relationship between image, scripture/writing and the text-based content within both manuscripts, with a special attention to the *Codex Albeldense*. I would like to explore their part in a staging of the speaking codex to pursue my main question, with which idea the representation is connected. My paper focusses on two perspectives: On the one hand, it has to be shown, that the animated codices are related to thoughts about the role of voice and sound in the transmission of the Holy Scripture within the liturgy and therefore require a multi-sensual perception. On the other hand, I pursue the relation between letters, colors, and ornaments in the illumination of Northern Iberian Manuscripts to outdraw intentions to complicate the understanding of the texts and to veil its content.

THE BOOK AS AN AUTHORITY FIGURE

Not only the first, but also the following four books of the *Excerpta Canonum* are preceded by a fictitious conversation between a figure referred to as codex and another person not further identified within the text. In both manuscripts, these dialogues are always accompanied by illuminations of a conversation between codex and lector, although the first one is by far the most visually elaborate.

The first and longest dialogue, which appears in the guise of a student instruction, is particularly interesting for our subject matter, because it provides clues about the nature and role of both instances and the deeper meaning of the conversation. The codex is first presented as a living order, *vitalis ordo*, and as a book of the heavenly kingdom, *coelestis*, which seems to refer to a legal order of the world authorized by God. At the same time, he is addressed as a great body through which, *corpore multo*, words seem to be scattered like seeds throughout the world, but must nevertheless be communicated.¹⁰ For this purpose, the scattered inventions, that are the original limbs, must be reassembled to form a new body, *novum corpus*.

⁸ The illumination precedes the title column: IN NOMINE TRIPLO / SIMPLO DIVINO. / INCIPIIT LIBER CANONU(M) A TOTIUS ORBIS / IUS IMPERIALE / TENENTIBUS / VEL A S(an)C(t)ORUM PATR(U)M / [ABTISSIME NAMQ(UE)] / EDITUS.

⁹ On this aspect with regard to Insular manuscripts: B. C. TILGHMAN, "The Shape of the Word: Extralinguistic Meaning in Insular Display Lettering", *Word & Image*, 27.3 (2011), pp. 292-308.

¹⁰ *Et si scire Deus dederit scrutare profunda, / Sicque per orbem verborum te semina sparsum / Sinibus aggregare meis, ut acumine mentis / Te aggressus stringa distentum corpore multo, / Dispersione trahens nec*

Naturally, the codex acts as a divinely inspired symbol of authority often depicted in different medias in Early Medieval Art.¹¹ Also in other parts of the two legal manuscripts a codex is depicted as such. In the Codex Albeldense on folio 344 recto a codex is placed in the middle of the representation of a church council. The whole page illumination precedes a text, which regulates the process of the council.¹² However, the speaking codex is also related to the aspect of knowledge. The gain in knowledge acts as a dramaturgical bracket for the conversation within the text. At the beginning of the discussion, the student reveals himself to be completely ignorant of the nature of the codex and its purpose: *Quia tue es vitalis ordo? [...] Qui sunt hi quibus hoc titulo censere iuberis? [...] Tibi quae potentia substat? [...]*¹³ Therefore, the codex asks the student to recognize, by listening, the secrets that can be revealed through the signs (letters): *Ausculata iam quid possunt mea promere signa / Et si posse subest tibi sic agnosce secreta [...]*¹⁴ The conversation ends with the student's assurance that he or she has now gained knowledge that motivates to want to know more.¹⁵

For the text, in which the production and mediation of knowledge becomes the main subject, vividly formulated through the metaphor of the body and its restitution, a representation was chosen that follows the pictorial tradition of the author portraits in the guise of a scholarly discussions, which is connected with aspects of knowledge.¹⁶ A comparable illumination represents the opening illumination within a manuscript containing Ildefonsus of Toledo's (+667) treatise *De virginitate perpetua Sanctae Mariae*. Within the codex compiled in 1067 the prologue on folio 2 recto is framed on the left side by Ildefonsus himself gesturing to the other side, where an empty chair refers to the present although invisible God (Fig. 3).¹⁷ Above the scene a representation of Mary enclosed in a clipeus underlines the moment of vision and inspiration. However, in the *Codex Albeldense* as well as the *Aemilianense* the chair is

iam commenta sub uno / Quo dum iudicium quaeret sententia discors, / Quisquid velle libet totum concordia praestet: / Sicque novum corpus primaevius artibus implens / In genus brevia formem compendia tardis. G. MARTÍNEZ DíEZ (ed.), *La Colección canonica hispana*. 6 vols., Madrid, 1966-2002, vol. 2, p. 45 (51-59).

¹¹ Cf. for example the representation of the Second Council of Constantinople in a Byzantine manuscript from around 880, which contains Gregory of Nazianzus' (+390) Homilies (Paris, BnF, Ms. graec. 510, fol. 355r). In the center of the miniature, an opened book of the Gospels is placed on a throne, flanked by the bishops as members of the Council and Emperor Theodosius. Illustration in: R. M. W. STAMMBERGER, *Scriptor und Scriptorium. Das Buch im Spiegel mittelalterlicher Handschriften*, Graz, 2003, p. 131.

¹² *Ordo de celebrando concilio. Codex Albeldense*, fol. 344r. BÖSE, Von den Rändern, fig. 85. For a depiction of the illumination within the *Codex Aemilianense* (fol. 347v) see SILVA Y VERÁSTEGUI, *Iconografía*, pl. XVIII.

¹³ Martínez Díez, *Colección canónica*, vol. 2, p. 43 (1-3).

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 44 (13).

¹⁵ *Postquam te nosse valui et cognoscere quivi / Ac sublime tuum posse mihi nosse dedisti, / Appeto plane satis tua mecum volvere iussa.* MARTÍNEZ DíEZ, *Colección canónica*, vol. 2, p. 45 (48-50).

¹⁶ On the depiction of scholarly discussions as a version of the authorportrait: E. C. LUTZ, "Modelle der Kommunikation: Zu einigen Autorenbildern des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts", en C. BERTELMEIER-KIERST, C. YOUNG (ed.), *Eine Epoche im Umbruch. Volkssprachliche Literalität 1200-1300* (Cambridger Symposium 2001), Tübingen, 2003, pp. 45-72; C. MEIER, "Das Autorbild als Kommunikationsmittel zwischen Text und Leser", en *Comunicare e significare nell'alto medioevo* (15.-20.4.2004). Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 52,1, Spoleto, 2005, pp. 499-538.

¹⁷ Florenz, Bblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Ashburnham 17, fol. 2r. Because the prologue represents a praise of God it seems very likely that the empty chair refers to God.



Fig. 3. Ildefonsus of Toledo, *De virginitate perpetua Sanctae Mariae*, Florenz, Bblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Ashburnham 17, fol. 2r, Ildefonsus of Toledo (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abt. Madrid)

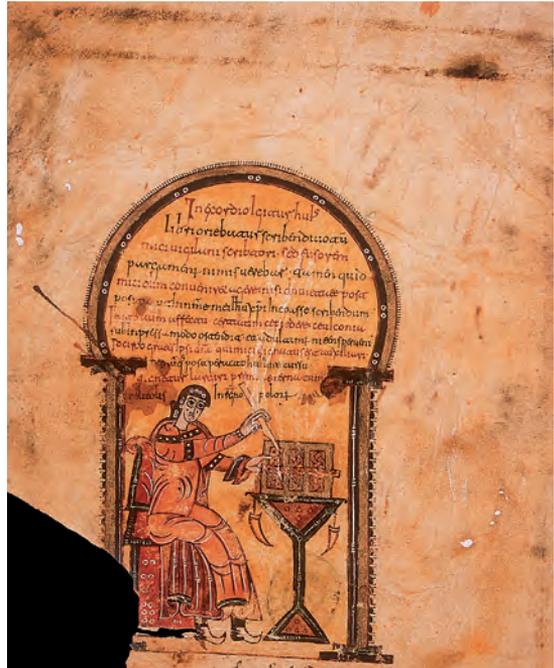


Fig. 4. Codex Albeldense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.2, fol. XXIIv, Vigila (Patrimonio Nacional)

occupied by a more tangible figure, the codex itself, not only due to the gesture. Also because of the yellow ornaments giving the book its corporeal presence.

In relation to an opening miniature, which is only preserved in the *Codex Albeldense*, it is also clear that the embodiment conveyed by ornaments can also be linked to the production process. Surely, the speaking codex not only refers to the legal body, but also to the manuscript, which the recipient has before his eyes (Fig. 4). On the back of the first page of the *Codex Albeldense* on folio XXII verso, the scribe of the manuscript, the monk Vigila, is seated under an arcade with an inscribed arch field, bent over his work. In contrast to the text below, in which the act of writing is reviewed¹⁸, the miniature visualizes the production of the manuscript probably in the act of painting. What exactly the monk is finishing, whether the outer cover of the codex or an illumination, remains unclear. The comparison to the speaking books suggests, that it could be the binding. Because the twisted tape seems to be a pictorial cipher to stand for the binding, which suggests precisely one of the dialogue scenes in which

¹⁸ *In exordio igitur huius libri oriebatur scribendi uotum mihi Vigilani sribitori, sed fusorem pargamentum nimis uerebar. Tamen, quid mihi olim conueniret agere nisi duuietate postposita ut in nomine mei Ihesu Christi incoasse scribendum. inito autem affectu certatim cepi edere ceu iconia subinpressa modo ostendit, et ad ultimum nitens perueni. [...]* - At the beginning of this book the desire to write arose in me, Vigila the writer, but I was very much afraid of being a waster of parchment. Nevertheless [...] I began to write in the name of my Jesus Christ. And in this state, I began to eagerly publish as the picture below shows, and I finished working.

the speaking codex' is unfolded and stored on the *anologium*.¹⁹ It is hardly imaginable that Vigila is working on the book covers, because he has an instrument of writing or more probably of painting in his hand; in no way he is shown carving.²⁰

For Vigila is in the process of completing the book decoration formed by loops of four, the design of which is more similar to that of the speaking codex on folio 20 recto. Thus, with the opening of the *Codex Albeldense*, the production of the *Codex Albeldense* takes place in a completely new way before the eye of the beholder.

Thus, while the embodiment or reification expressed by the ornament in the Illuminator's portrait is linked to the manuscript production, the representation of the speaking codex can be associated with the production of knowledge. In other cases, as it is in a colophon of the monk Florentius from the Castilian monastery of Valeránica within a manuscript containing the commentary of Iob, the gain of knowledge is also related to the affliction of the scribe's body suffering during the production process.²¹

LECTIO DIVINA AND THE SENSES

The fact that parts of the *Excerpta Canonum* are written in dialogical form is not unusual for the Medieval Latin literature of the Early Middle Ages. The dialogue accompanied by an illumination puts the act of speech in the here and now and makes therefore the recipient a potential dialogue partner. This is already evident from the spatial proximity between the representations of dialogue and the written text. The representations of the dialogue in the *Codex Aemilianense*, for example, frame the text in the marginal column. The fact that lector or book are sometimes rotated by 90 degrees attracts additional attention (Fig. 5).

In contrast, in the *Codex Albeldense*, the act of speaking is emphasized by means of inscriptions. In the dialogue scene that precedes the second book of the *Excerpta Canonum*, the book is shown opened and labelled with the following words: *LOCU/UTIO CODI/CIS APVD / LECTOREM / IN EXCERPTIS / CANONI(S)* (Fig. 6). *Locutio* can be translated in this context as 'speech' or 'power of speech'.²² The depictions are furthermore extended by inscriptions that open up

¹⁹ *Codex Albeldense*, fol. 35r. - In the opened state, a fine vertical line marks the central axis of the manuscript, which continues only above and below the book in a cord-like band.

²⁰ On early medieval representations of writing instruments in the portraits of the Evangelists: V. MAZHUGA, "Les instruments d'écriture dans les représentations des évangélistes pendant le haut Moyen Âge", en M.-C. HUBERT (ed.), *Le statut du scribe au Moyen Âge*. Actes du XII^e Colloque scientifique du Comité international de Paleographie latine, Cluny (17.-20.7.1998), Paris, 2000, pp. 113-126. Splendid bindings have not survived for the manuscripts examined here. Preserved bindings from that time consist of leather covered lids, see A. BENY, P. BARBACHANO, "La encuadernación en el scriptorium de San Millán de la Cogolla (siglos X-XIV)", en P. M. CÁTEDRA, M. L. LÓPEZ-VÍDRERO, M. I. PÁIZ HERNÁNDEZ (ed.), *La memoria de los libros: Estudios sobre la historia del escrito y de la lectura en Europa y América*, Salamanca, 2004, pp. 67-84. Although a workshop for ivory work may have been established in San Millán de la Cogolla already existed in the 11th century. On the workshop see: J. A. HARRIS, *The Arca of San Millán de la Cogolla and its Ivories*, Diss. Univ. of Pittsburgh, Ann Arbor, MI 1999.

²¹ See C. BROWN, "Remember the Hand: Bodies and Bookmaking in Early Medieval Spain", *Word & Image*, 27.3 (2011), pp. 262-278, esp. 272. Catherine Brown has wonderfully shown, how much Northern Iberian compilers identified up to physical strain of writing with the Gregory the Great (+604), to whom the commentary to the Book of Iob was ascribed.

²² J. F. NIERMEYER, C. VAN DE KIEFT, J. W. J. BURGERS (eds.), *Mediæ latinitatis lexicon minus: Lexique latin medieval. Medieval Latin Dictionary. Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols., Darmstadt, 2002, vol. 1, p. 809.

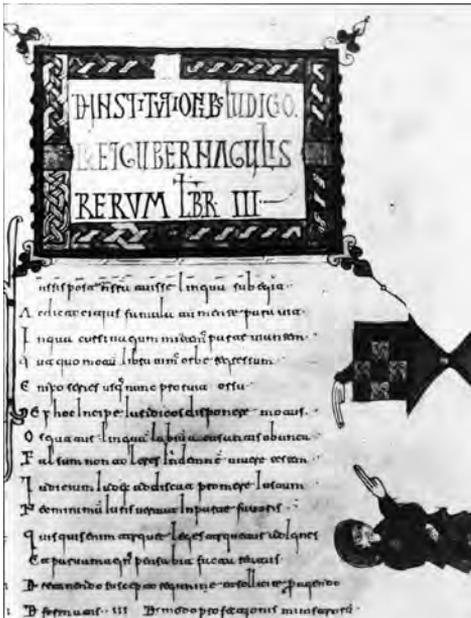


Fig. 5. Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 34r, lector and codex. @ Soledad de Silva y Verástegui



Fig. 6. Codex Albeldense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.2, fol. 35r, lector and codex. @ Soledad de Silva y Verástegui

a further, now liturgical horizon for the understanding of the scene beyond textual evidence. In the etymologies of Isidor of Seville (†636), *analogium* is a piece of furniture similar to an ambo, from which the readings in the service were taken.²³ The designation of the questioner as *lector*, in turn, was handed down by Isidor to the person who was responsible in the Mozarabic liturgy for the readings from the Old and New Testaments, the Apocalypse and the Epistles from the *analogium*.²⁴ Through the inscriptions the illumination can be related to the *lectio divina*, the moment of liturgical lecture. The visual experience is expanded by the sense of hearing providing the codex on the *analogium* with the idea of being the vivid word of God. The acoustic perception is likewise echoed in the written dialogue even though liturgy

²³ *Analogium dictum, quod sermo inde praedictur; nam λόγος Graece sermo dicitur, quod et ipsum altius situm est.* ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS, *Etymologiae*, Liber XV, cap. IV, 17. MIGNE (ed.), PL 82, 0545C.

²⁴ *Lectores a legendo; PSALMISTAE, a psalmis canendis vocati; illi enim praedicant populis quid sequantur; isti canunt ut excitent ad compunctionem animos audientium, licet et quidam lectores ita miserante pronuntiant, ut quosdam ad luctum lamentationemque compellant.* ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS, *Etymologiae*, Liber VII, Cap. XII, 24: De clericis. MIGNE (ed.), PL 82, 0292C. *Pulpitum, quod in eo lector, vel psalmista positus in publico conspici a populo possit, quo liberius audiatur.* ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS, *Etymologiae*, Liber XV, cap. IV, 15: *De edificiis sacris.* MIGNE (ed.), PL 82, 0545B. Isidor has also dedicated a chapter to the lector in his treatise on church services: ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, Liber II, cap. XI: *De lectoribus.* MIGNE (ed.). PL 83, 0791A-0792A. – In the *Liber Ordinum* of the Visigothic Church the term lector doesn't exist. However, it is the presbyter who is in charge of the readings: M. FEROTIN (ed.), *Le Liber ordinum en usage dans l'Eglise wisigothique et mozarabe d'Espagne du cinquième au onzième siècle*, Paris, 1904, LXXXV, 204, pp. 27-28: *Ordo the sabbato celebrandvs.*

is not mentioned at all, because the codex asks the lector to hear what his letters are capable of revealing: *Ausculata iam quid possunt mea promere signa*²⁵ – a passage, which reminds Isidor's prescription of the letter who makes present without voice the speech of those who are absent.²⁶

In his treatises *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, Isidor of Seville furthermore explains which cognitive and above all also verbal skills a 'lector' as a body of sound has to fulfill: He must be inspired by books and have a knowledge of the words to convey the meaning of the Holy Scriptures. The purpose is to leave deep traces in the minds and senses of those who are listening. Therefore, the lector must be able to focus on the correct accentuation or the quality of his voice.²⁷ This is exactly what Alcuin (†804) is about in a poem that is part of a Touronian Bible manuscript. Following Alcuin to transport the meaning of Bibles it has to be read out loud before the church community. And it is the task of the 'lector' to mediate the book, whose holy body contains the gifts of God, through the knowledge of meanings, titles or commas.²⁸

In contrast to the pictorial representations, the dialogue within the text, which is assigned to the first book that precedes the *Excerpta Canonum*, another aspect of the lectio divina, the *meditation*, plays a role and challenges other senses in the reception process.²⁹ The student describes the acquisition of knowledge as physical activity. Thus, he wants to incorporate the words of the 'codex', which are scattered like seeds all over the world by culling them with his mind and taking them up in his inner being.³⁰ The student therefore describes the reception as a somatic act which reminds the sensual recording of scripture in the context of *lectio*, as it was mediated by Gregory the Great and other authors.³¹ The text of the dialogue and the pictorial representations of the conversation between the 'codex' and the 'lector' are thus linked to complementary sensual experiences of the *lectio* within the reception process. While the dialogue text emphasizes the incorporation during the meditation process,

²⁵ MARTÍNEZ DÍEZ, *Colección canónica*, vol. 2, p. 44 (13).

²⁶ *Litterae autem sunt indices rerum, signa verborum, quibus tanta vis est, ut nobis dicta absentium sine voce loquantur.* ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS, *Etymologiae*, Liber 1, cap. III,1. MIGNE (ed.), PL 83, col. 0074B.

²⁷ *Qui autem ad hujusmodi provehitur gradum, iste erit doctrina et libris imbutus. [...] Sicque expeditus vim pronunciationis tenebit, ut ad intellectum omnium mentes sensusque promoveat, [...].* ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, Liber II, cap. XI,2. MIGNE (ed.), PL 83, col. 0791B.

²⁸ *Continet iste uno sancto sub corpore codex / Hic simul hos totos, munera magna Dei; / Quisque legat huius sacratio in corpore libri / Lector in ecclesia verba superna Dei / Distinguens sensus, titulos, cola, commata voce / Dicat ut accentus ore sonare sciat.* Quoted from: D. GANZ, "Mass Production of Early Medieval Manuscripts: The Carolingian Bibles from Tours", in R. GAMESON (ed.), *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration, and Use*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 53-62, esp. 56. See also E. DÜMMLER (ed.), *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, reprint Berlin 1881, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 288-292 (Carmen 69).

²⁹ See J. LECLERCO, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1990, p. 72.

³⁰ [...] *Et si scire Deus dederit scrutare profunda, / Sicque per orbem verborum te semina sparsum / Sinibus aggregare meis, ut acumine mentis / Te aggressus stringam distentum corpore multo.* MARTÍNEZ DÍEZ, *Colección canónica*, vol. 2, p. 45, 51-54.

³¹ See B. CALATI, "La 'Lectio divina' nella tradizione monastica benedettina", *Benedictina*, 28 (1981), pp. 407-438, esp. pp. 423-424; LECLERCO, *Amour des lettres*, p. 21; I. ILLICH, *Im Weinberg des Textes: Als das Schriftbild der Moderne entstand. Ein Kommentar zu Hugos Didascalicon*, München, 2010, pp. 57-59.

the pictorial representations evoke the moment of hearing the liturgical reading, that is, the proclamation of God's Word.

Thus, the ornament plays an important role within the illumination program. It binds together representations of the book in different parts of the Albeldense-manuscript with the consequence that it is not only the speaking codex who seems to be divinely inspired, but also the manuscript itself so precious decorated. In this vein, the ornament can be understood as a medium of the divine word, which has to be perceived in multi-sensual ways.

LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

Visual poetry as part of both legal manuscripts can also be interpreted in the context of the knowledge process and again ornament plays a key role. As the *Codex Aemilianense* only contains various letter-labyrinths, the *Codex Albeldense* includes beyond that acrostics and telestics on the process of manuscript production and grids-poems praising the royal house of Navarre, but also dedicated to the scribes/bookpainters. All these forms of visual poetry are known through a vivid Early Christian tradition connected with the names of Optatianus Porphyrius (†335) or of Prudentius (†after 405),³² but also of Venantius Fortunatus (†ca. 600).³³

Letter-labyrinths³⁴, which I would like to concentrate on here, are known as cubes since the 16th century and are typical of Northern Iberian manuscripts of the 10th and 11th centuries.³⁵ They are part of a broad cryptographic interest that can be recognized in Northern Iberian

³² Prudentius was born in the North of the Iberian Peninsula. The monastic community of San Prudencio de Laturce, a branch of the monastery Albelda in the Rioja, claimed in 950 to possess the relics of Prudentius: A. UBIETO ARTETA (ed.), *Cartulario de Albelda*, Valencia, 1960, p. 29, no. 19.

³³ On the reception of the works of Venantius Fortunatus on the Iberian Peninsula in the Early Middle Ages see P. F. ALBERTO, "Venancio Fortunato en la Hispania visigótica", en M. DOMÍNGUEZ GARCÍA (ed.), *Sub luce florentis calami: Homenaje a Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz*, Santiago de Compostela, 2002, pp. 251-269.

³⁴ Their seems to me no definit equivalent term for the German 'Buchstabenlybrinth' in English, which could be either letter- or word-labyrinth. There is no contemporary medieval term for this form of visual poetry either. Cf. for example Ambrosio de Morales' description of letter-labyrinths in the northern Iberian book culture as *cifra cubicas*: [...] se comenco poco despues a usar mucho en Castilla. Assi todos los mas de los libros, que hallamos escritos en Espana de seyscientos o quinientos anos a tras, tienen al principio alguna escritura o cifra destas cubicas. Assi las llamo, porque quadran por todos quatro lados los escrito, AMBROSIO DE MORALES, *Los cinco libros posteros de la cronica general de España*, Córdoba, 1586, 40r-40v, quoted after N. RODRÍGUEZ SUÁREZ, *Ambrosio de Morales y la epigrafía medieval*, León, 2010, p. 50, or *cifra ordinaria*: [...] y luego la cifra ordinaria en que dice: *Theodemiri Abbatis Liber*. AMBROSIO DE MORALES, *Viaje de Ambrosio de Morales per orden del Rey D. Phelipe II. a los Reynos de León, y Galicia, y Principado de Asturias para reconocer las Reliquias de Santos, Sepulcros Resales, y Libros manuscritos de las Cathedralas, y Monasterios*, Madrid, 1765, pp. 32, 38.

³⁵ On letter-labyrinths in Northern Iberian manuscripts: J. D. BORDONA, "Exlibris mozárabes", *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*, 11 (1935), pp. 153-163; U. ERNST, *Carmen figuratum: Geschichte des Figurengedichtes von den antiken Ursprungen bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, Köln, 1991, pp. 406-420; K. BÖSE, "Die Lesbarkeit des Unleserlichen. Ornamentalität in mittelalterlichen Buchstabenlabyrinthen", en V. BEYER, C. SPIES (eds.), *Ornament: Motiv – Modus – Bild*, München, Paderborn, 2012, pp. 286-314. – The following aspect has been discussed to a broader extent in: *eadem*, "In Between, Center, and Periphery. The Art of Illumination on the Early Iberian Peninsula", en B. KRITZINGER, J. O'DRISCOLL (eds.), *After the Carolingians. Re-defining Continental Manuscripts Illumination in the 10-11th Centuries*, Berlin, 2019, pp. 400-432.

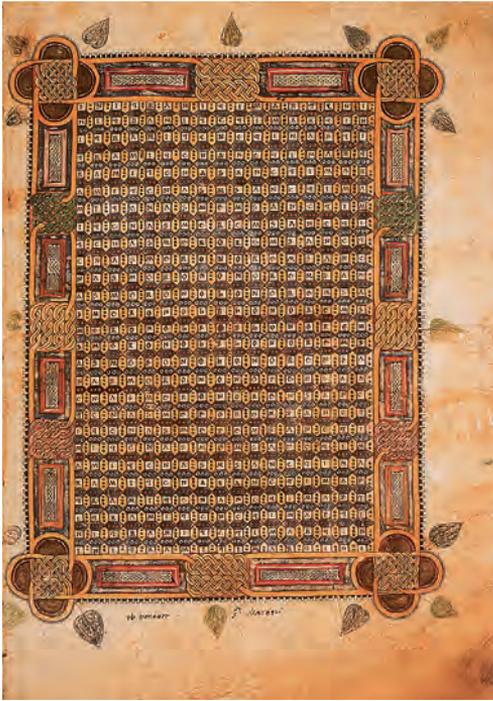


Fig. 7. Codex Albeldense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.2, fol. 19r, letter-labyrinth: OB HONOREM SANCTI MARTINII (Patrimonio Nacional)

manuscript culture.³⁶ It represents a labyrinthine text, which has to be deciphered in the course of reading. This intext stores the name of the abbot or the scribe or illuminator, more rarely that of the monastery patron, as is the case with one of the two letter labyrinths in the *Codex Albeldense* on folio 19 recto: *Ob honorem sancti martini* (Fig. 7). A rectangular frame accentuated by interlace surrounds a structure in which visigothic minuscule letters and diamond shaped motifs alternate. Within this grid, each letter occupies a distinctive position. Disorienting the reading expectation, the sense of writing can only be determined from a certain point, but then in an abundance of reading possibilities. In this case, the centrally placed rubricated O provides the entry point to the intext, which can be accessed along the central vertical and horizontal axis, corresponding or opposite to the reading direction. While putting together the reading possibilities in the mind, the shape of a cross appears before the inner eye. Starting from these main axes, further ways of unravelling the

text are conceivable by changing direction. The labyrinth of letters thus offers a maximum of reading possibilities. In contrast to Late Antique and Merovingian examples,³⁷ the pictoriality of the Northern Iberian examples represents a special feature.³⁸ Their variable appearance through colors and ornaments gives the impression that they served as a means of self-expression for their builders, but also aimed to surprise the recipient of the manuscript.

Moreover, their visual level delays deciphering them, provoking a disorienting effect, for example by drawing attention to an overarching diagrammatic pattern. This is for instance

³⁶ As an example of micro-writing: Bible from Albares, fol. 216ra, 217rb, 233vb.

³⁷ Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. I.2.4° 2, 2r; Berg, Bürgerbibliothek, Cod. 219, fol. 76v; vgl. ERNST, *Carmina*, pp. 397-406. – On one-way labyrinths see: H. KERN, *Labyrinth: Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen, 5000 Jahre Gegenwart eines Urbilds*, München, 1999; for a discussion of both medieval texts and representations, see in particular P. R. DOOB, *The Idea of the Labyrinth: From Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, 1990; for medieval book illumination, see W. BATSCHLET-MASSINI, “Labyrinthzeichnungen in Handschriften”, *Codices Manuscripti*, 4, no. 2 (1978), pp. 33-65; and W. HAUBRICHS, “Error inextricabilis: Form und Funktion der Labyrinthabbildung in mittelalterlichen Handschriften”, en C. MEIER et al. (eds.), *Text und Bild: Aspekte des Zusammenwirkens zweier Künste in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, Wiesbaden, 1980, pp. 63-174.

³⁸ Also in contrast to the examples in Asturian manuscripts for king Alfons III.: Escorial, Cod. P.I.7, fol. 1r (Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etimologiae*); Escorial, T.II.25 (Q II.25), fol. 1v (Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiarium*).

the case in the Bible from 920 (Fig. 8).³⁹ Therefore, the labyrinths seems to be a tool of reflection on the relation between letters and ornaments, names and overarching visible patterns such as diagrammatic forms. The idea is strengthened that the labyrinths could be based on a deeper-lying message.

The pictoriality sharpens the awareness of the viewer/reader that he can never grasp all the paths at once: The harmonious arrangement of colored boxes or ornaments and letters is based on the structure of a grid. The regularity of the pattern formation, sometimes also without axial-symmetrical accentuation, results in a centrifugal direction of movement, which points to an ungraspable completeness of the pattern beyond the frame, which consequently appears in the parchment only in the detail. This impression is intensified when, as in the case of the labyrinth in the *Codex Albeldense* on folio 19 recto (Fig. 7), the pattern is cut through the framing. This interplay of order and disorientation, of the whole and the fragmentary, is carried to extremes in the labyrinth on the reverse side by means of ornamentation (Fig. 9), which is composed by alternating letters enclosed in colored framed boxes and yellow knot-motifs. This labyrinth contains the exlibris of the abbot Maurellus (971-979): MAVRELLI ABBATIS LIBRVM. One almost overlooks, that only the knot-motifs lying on the vertical and central axes are highlighted through a red line. Thereby they form a visible cross. However, the cross-sign does not offer a key to the intext, which instead begins in the upper left corner.

Therefore, I interpret this and comparable labyrinths of letters as a metaphor of divine order,⁴⁰ which is only partially, but not fully accessible to the viewer/reader. Color and ornament prove to be a phenomenon of a liminal zone, through which accessibility and limitation



Fig. 8. Bible, León, Archivo Catedralicio, Ms. 6, fol. 2r, letter-labyrinth: MAVRVS ABBATI LIBRVM / VIMARA PRESBITER FECIT (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abt. Madrid)

³⁹ León, Archivo Catedralicio, Ms. 6, fol. 2r.

⁴⁰ Here I would like to refer to the work of Ulrich Ernst on *carmina figurata* (figured poems). Ernst considered such poems to be a reflection of the *ordo mundi*; in other words, harmoniously structured divine creation. ERNST, Carmen, p. 831. On *ordo*, see H. Reinhardt, "Ordnung," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Darmstadt, 1984, vol. 6, col. 1251-1254, with reference to Augustine, who understands *ordo* as an instrument of divine creation; i.e. *De ordine libri duo* II, cap. 1-2, MIGNE (ed.), PL 32, pp. 993-994. See also F. NIEHOFF, "Ordo et Artes: Wirklichkeiten und Imaginationen im Hohen Mittelalter", en *Ornamenta Ecclesiae: Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, Köln, Schnütgen-Museum, 1985, vol. 1, pp. 33-48.



Fig. 9. Codex Albeldense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.2, fol. 19v, letter-labyrinth: MAVRELLIS ABBATIS LIBRVM (Patrimonio Nacional)



Fig. 10. Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 17v, letter-labyrinth, unfilled (Patrimonio Nacional)

are equally mediated. The idea of a complex matter, expressed through this letter-labyrinths, is made tangible in the act of reception itself, in particular through a set of four unfilled labyrinths in the *Codex Aemilianense*. Each of them features another pattern made by polychrome ornamental motifs.⁴¹ On folio 17 recto the grid consists of alternating blue, brown, and yellow diamond shape ornaments. The latter form together a cross, which dominates the maze. While in the labyrinth on folio 17 verso knot ornaments are alternating with colored squares (Fig. 10), on the opposite site the pattern evokes the technique of weaving (Fig. 11). For the last one on folio 18 recto, the pattern of the first labyrinth is taken up again, but supplemented and complicated by further internal structures. In contrast to the geometric regularity of the preceding labyrinths, the whole page illumination on folio 19 recto, which was not built as a letter-labyrinth is surprising (Fig. 12). It represents a composition of golden crosses of different sizes interwoven in an interlace pattern. The closeness that characterizes the design on folio 19 recto appears as the conclusion of a series of letter labyrinths. It forms a threshold just before the legal text, introduced by the *Excerpta Canonum*. The first dialogue, as I have already discussed, presents itself as an update of the knowledge acquisition. Therefore, I would like to interpret the arrangement of the ornamental pages preceding this chapter as a choreography,

⁴¹ The labyrinths are fully illustrated in: Böse, *Von den Rändern*, figs. 92-96.

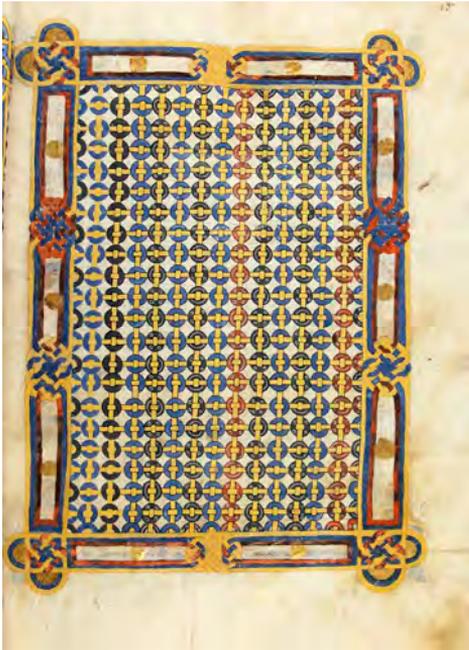


Fig. 11. Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 18r; letter-labyrinth, unfilled (Patrimonio Nacional)

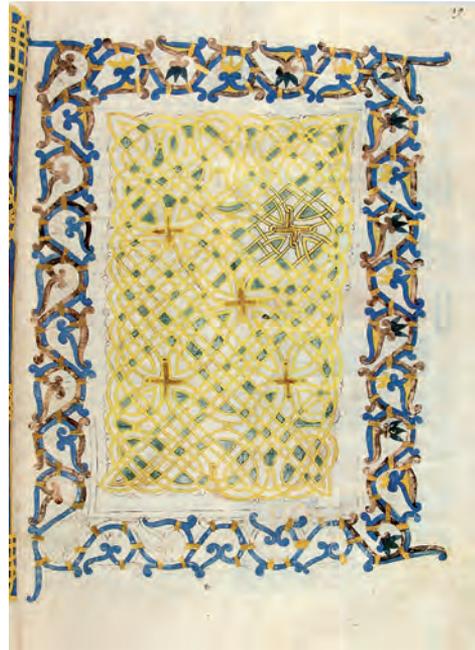


Fig. 12. Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 19r; ornament page (Patrimonio Nacional)

which in abstract and pictorial form reminds the recipient of the limits of understanding the text and in this vein mentally attunes him to the effort of gaining knowledge.

In this sense, the letter-labyrinths in the case of *Codex Albeldense* and *Aemilianense* complement the statement of the following representations of a dialogue between codex and lector. They serve not only to memorize the book production through the names of scribes, book-painters or abbots. They contribute to the understanding of the book as a whole, which the recipient again could understand as divinely authorized and as a labyrinth of knowledge, opening up to a deeper meaning. And again, it is the ornament which offers itself like a red thread to the recipient for binding together different parts of the manuscript in form and content.

