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***WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE IS YOUR HEART ALSO: A KESSLERIAN
VIEW FROM THE SOISSONS GOSPELS****

***DONDE ESTÁ TU TESORO, TAMBIÉN ALLÍ ESTÁ TU CORAZÓN: UNA VISIÓN
KESSLERIANA A PARTIR DEL EVANGELIARIO DE SOISSON***

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ABSTRACT

This essay revisits the Soissons Gospels' famous first painting to argue that the perspective—at once spatial and soteriological—the image offers its beholder is part of a larger attempt, deliberately pursued in opulent visible and material forms, to enact the proper *ordinatio* of worldly and religious values. Orienting the beholder in relation to the manuscript as a whole, the painting pictorially and imaginatively situates them within the portico of a Carolingian *templum* that is also a *thesaurus*: a sacred structure, purpose-built for the production and preservation of soteriological value. The soteriological charge of the manuscript's overt material and aesthetic richness is, I suggest, pointedly thematized in the painted pages that open Matthew's Gospel.

KEYWORDS: Carolingian, perspective, scripture, typology, temple.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo revisa la famosa primera iluminación de los Evangelios de Soissons para argumentar que la perspectiva -a la vez espacial y soteriológica- que la imagen ofrece a su espectador forma parte de la tentativa más amplia, deliberadamente perseguida en formas visibles y materiales opulentas, de plasmar la *ordinatio* adecuada de los valores mundanos y religiosos. Al

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posicional al espectador en relación con el manuscrito en su conjunto, la miniatura lo sitúa pictórica e imaginariamente en el pórtico de un *templum* carolingio que es también un *tesauro*: una estructura sagrada, construida *ex professo* para la producción y conservación de valores soteriológicos. La carga soteriológica de la evidente riqueza material y estética del manuscrito se tematiza específicamente, según sugiero, en las páginas pintadas que abren el Evangelio de Mateo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: arte carolingio, perspectiva, escritura, tipología, templo.

The making of luxurious manuscripts of Christian scripture, glittering with gold and silver, reached both an aesthetic and intellectual fever pitch in the Carolingian era. As Herbert Kessler has magisterially explored over the course of his long career, typology—expressed in both word and image—played a decisive part in spurring and shaping Carolingian investments in the material forms of Holy Writ. Kessler’s work has revealed how the Mosaic Tabernacle and the Solomon Temple served as powerful—if often powerfully polysemous—touchstones for Carolingian artists and beholders grappling both with the Jewish tradition and with Christianity’s central *mysteria*: the divine word made flesh, the trinity, the relationship of the “old law” and the “new dispensation” and, not least, a conception of salvation history that reached back to the Israelites and forward to the Apocalypse.

Following in the *vestigia Kessleriana*, in this essay I step into the pages of the Soissons Gospels (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 8850), an opulent Carolingian manuscript around which considerable scholarly commentary has accrued. In what follows, I suggest that the manuscript’s famous first painting offered its beholder a perspective that was at once a spatial construct and a privileged soteriological vantage point. Significantly revising its putative scriptural referents—John’s Apocalypse, but also the Tabernacle and Temple—the painting aimed to orient the beholder in relation to the manuscript as a whole, not least its sustained opulence. Simulating splendid, even fantastical architecture and precious materials, the illumination of the Soissons Gospels asserted the superlative value of Christian revelation by means of worldly riches: an opulent *ordinatio* of terrestrial and sacred values, self-reflexively thematized in the painted pages that open Matthew’s Gospel. In pursuing this interpretation, I am gratefully conscious of my debt to Herbert Kessler. My perspective on the Soissons Gospels and the vista on Carolingian values that the manuscript opens up, is a view afforded from within the art historical house that Herb built.

REVELATION AND ORIENTATION

The Soissons Gospels, usually dated to the early ninth century, has been characterized as the culminating achievement of the so-called “court school of Charlemagne”.¹ The complex full-page painting that opens the manuscript has attracted considerable art historical attention

¹ For a full digital surrogate of the manuscript see: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8452550p.image>. According to Odilo of Saint-Médard’s *Translatio sancti Sebastiani* (c. 930 CE), Louis the Pious and his wife



Fig. 1. The “Adoration of the Lamb” painting in the Soissons Gospels: Paris, BnF, MS lat.-8850, f. 1v. Photo: BnF

(Fig. 1).² Much of the pictorial field is given over to the representation of an architectural space, or rather spaces. Moving from the bottom to the top of the composition, four fictive stone columns with gold and silver Corinthian-style capitals are sited upon a horizontal band of orange pigment, that serves simultaneously as a groundline and a framing element. A parted

Judith presented the manuscript to the abbey of Saint-Médard in Soissons, together with a golden chalice and paten once belonging to Charlemagne and marked with his monogram, as well as other gifts, on the occasion of the abbey church’s re-dedication (Easter, 827): KOEHLER, *Die Hofschule*, p. 70; citing ODILO of SAINT-MÉDARD, *Translatio S. Sebastiani*, O. HOLDER-EGGER (ed.), *MGH. SS, XV.1*, p. 388: ll. 7-15. As orientations to the manuscript, see W. KOEHLER, *Die Hofschule Karls des Grossen*, vol. 2, Berlin, 1958, pp. 70–82; F. MÜTHERICH and J. GAEHDE, *Karolingische Buchmalerei*, Munich, 1979, pp. 39–45; M.-P. LAFFITE and C. DENOËL (eds.), *Trésors carolingiens: livres manuscrits de Charlemagne à Charles le Chauve*, Paris, 2007, pp. 97–100 (Cat. no. 10).

² A selection of recent studies: D. DOMBROWSKI, “Die erste Seite des Evangeliars aus Saint-Médard in Soissons. Zeit- und Reichsbewusstsein in der karolingischen Kunst”, in *Geschichte vom Ende her denken. Endzeitentwürfe und*

curtain hangs from a lion masque at the center of this portico. Passing behind the innermost pair of columns, each half of this textile wraps around the arcade's outermost columns.

The foreground columns frame and punctuate an architectonic scenography of projecting and recessive forms, modeled in white and blue, that fills much of the pictorial field. In the architrave borne by the columns, the four Evangelist symbols, each holding an opened codex, appear within medallions filled with blue grounds. Vertically aligned with the four columns below, each medallion spans a recessed, niche-like space within a buttery yellow architectural structure, itself punctuated by round-arched apertures filled with grills and square windows of opaque brown-red pigment. Like the architectural scene immediately below it, this fictive edifice's rhythmic alternation of projecting and receding masses is differentiated by the play of light and shadow and delineated by orthogonal moldings.

Spanning the width of the pictorial field above the architrave, a narrow blue-green band teems with the silhouetted forms of fish, aquatic flora, water fowl, and human figures. An apocalyptic theophany crowns the composition. Flanked by two groups of twelve male figures holding golden objects, the *agnus dei* appears within a gold-ground medallion that breaks the upper frame of the painting. With a rotulus at its feet, the apocalyptic lamb is connected to the Evangelist symbols below by thin white lines.

It has long been recognized that the upper zones of the painting reference John's vision of the Apocalypse. In the uppermost register, the four and twenty elders offer their homage to the lamb (Apoc. 4:5); the golden objects held in their hands can be identified as the *citharas et fialas aureas* (harps and golden bowls) described in Apocalypse 5:8.³ The quasi-nilitic scene that fills the narrow band immediately below evokes the "sea of glass" of Apoc. 4:6. So too, the Evangelist symbols are also the four living creatures who sing unceasingly before the heavenly throne, according to Apoc. 4:8. The text of their praise-song is itself inscribed in gold majuscules within the pictorial field. *SANCTUS SANCTUS SANCTUS* (holy, holy, holy) spans the upper width of the lower architectonic scene and the song concludes in the spaces between the columns' bases: *DOMINUS DEUS OMNIPOTENS QUI ERAT QUI EST ET QUI VEN- TURUS EST* (Holy holy holy Lord God Omnipotent who was, who is, and who shall come).⁴

ihre Historisierung im Mittelalter, S. EHRICH and A. WORM (eds.), Regensburg, 2019, pp. 21–46; W. DIEBOLD, "Not pictures but writing was sent for the understanding our faith': Word and Image in the Soissons Gospels", and I. MESTEMACHER, "Images of architecture and materials: the miniatures in the Soissons Gospels (Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Lat. 8850)", in *Die Handschriften der Hofschule Kaiser Karls des Großen: individuelle Gestalt und europäisches Kulturerbe*, M. EMBACH, C. MOULIN, and H. WOLTER-VON DEM KNESEBECK (eds.), Trier, 2019, pp. 17–36 and 39–67, respectively; D. RUSSO, "Plans, fonds, surfaces: présence visuelle et politique de l'«objet» à l'époque carolingienne", in *Charlemagne et les objets. Des thésaurisations carolingiennes aux constructions mémorielles*, P. CORDEZ (ed.), Bern, 2012, pp. 5–27; E. FISCHER, "The Depiction of Spatial Experience in Early Medieval Gospel Books, 787-814 CE", PhD Dissertation, Chapel Hill, N.C., 2018.

³ Scriptural quotations not transcribed from the manuscript are from the Vulgate; English translations are quoted from the Douay-Rheims translation. In transcriptions I have silently expanded abbreviations, preserved orthography, and modernized punctuation.

⁴ The lion mask may allude to the Lion of Judah (Apoc. 5:5): L. SAURMA-JELTSCH, "Das Bild in der Worttheologie Karls des Großen: Zur Christologie in karolingischen Miniaturen", in *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur*, R. BERNDT (ed.), Mainz, 1997, pp. 670–671. On the Lion of Judah, with reference to the Grandval Bible, see H. KESSLER, "Facies Bibliothecae Revelata': Carolingian Art as Spiritual Seeing", in *Testo e Immagine Nell'alto Medioevo*, vol. 2, Spoleto, 1994, pp. 560–562.

To preface a Gospel Book with an imposing full-page painting overtly keyed to John's Apocalypse—a text *not* included in the manuscript—is, on the face of it, a curious decision. Nonetheless, the Soissons Gospels' Adoration of the Lamb painting—like its famous *fons vitae* image and Evangelist portrait pages for Mark, Luke, and John—was carefully calibrated to the manuscript's textual contents.⁵ Iconographic details in each of these paintings directly respond to the accessory texts that accompany the Gospels: Jerome's *Plures fuisse* prologue to the four canonical Gospels and the *Argumenta* that preface each Gospel.⁶

The Soissons Gospels' Adoration of the Lamb miniature is positioned both as a frontispiece to the manuscript as a whole and as a visual complement to *Plures fuisse*, which opens on the facing recto.⁷ In that prologue Jerome observed:

*Unde et apocalypsis iohannis, post expositionem viginti quattuor seniorum qui tenentes cytharas et fialas, adorant agnum dei. Introducit fulgora et tonitrua, et septem spiritus discurrentes, et mare vitreum et quattuor animalia plena oculis, dicens: animal primum simile leoni, et secundum simile vitulo, et tertium simile homini, et quartum simile aquile volanti, et post paululum: plena inquit erant oculis et requiem non habebant die ac nocte dicentia: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus omnipotens qui erat, et qui est, et qui venturus est.*⁸

This also explains the words found in the Apocalypse of John. After the description of the twenty-four elders who worship the Lamb of God while holding the harps and bowls, it introduces lightning and thunder and the seven spirits moving to and fro and the sea of glass and the four living creatures full of eyes. Then it says: "The first living creature was like a lion and the second was like a calf and the third was like a man and the fourth was like a flying eagle." And a little bit later it says: "They were full of eyes and never ceased day and night from saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.'"⁹

Clearly, the painter of the Adoration of the Lamb image found something like an iconographic agenda in *Plures fuisse*.

But what of the painting's complex elaboration of pictorial space by means of fictive architecture? In keeping with the painting's apocalyptic imagery, scholars have identified the architectural mise-en-scène that dominates the image as a vision of the new Jerusalem, visually constructed with spolia from both the Mosaic Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple.¹⁰ In a compelling articulation of this line of interpretation, Bruno Reudenbach noted how the painting,

⁵ R. WALKER, "Illustrations to the Priscillian Prologues in the Gospel Manuscripts of the Carolingian Ada School", *The Art Bulletin*, 30 (1948), pp. 1–10; P. UNDERWOOD, "The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 5 (1950), pp. 41–138; DIEBOLD, "Not pictures".

⁶ Following Saurma-Jeltsch, I employ *Argumentum*, the manuscript's designation, rather than the post-medieval terms "Priscillian" or "Monarchian Prologue": SAURMA-JELTSCH, "Das Bild in der Worttheologie", pp. 654–656.

⁷ WALKER, "Illustrations," p. 3; B. BRENK, "Schriftlichkeit und Bildlichkeit in der Hofschule Karls des Großen", in *Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo*, Spoleto, vol. 2, 1994, pp. 631–691, at p. 670.

⁸ Paris, BnF, MS lat. 8850, f. 4r.

⁹ JEROME, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. T. SCHECK, Washington, D.C., 2008, p. 56. I thank Rowanne Dean for her assistance in accessing Scheck's translation.

¹⁰ References to Old St Peter's and Charlemagne's chapel at Aachen have been identified in the image's architecture. Exigencies of space prevent me from critically engaging these proposals, which I find suggestive but not conclusive.

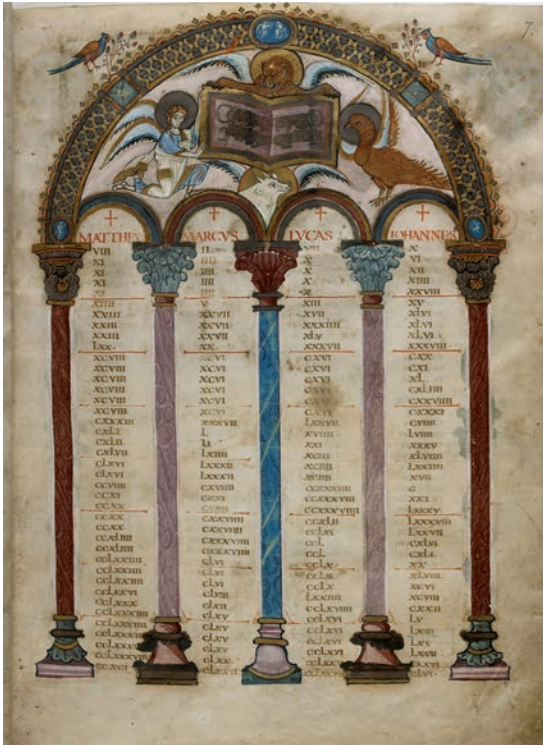


Fig. 2. The First Canon Table in the Soissons Gospels: Paris, BnF, MS lat. 8850, f. 7r. Photo: BnF

with its four columns and red parted curtain, evokes the veil and dividing wall that demarcated the space of the Holy of Holies, and the ark of the covenant within it, in both the Tabernacle and the Temple.¹¹ Followed by the famous so-called Fountain of Life image on f. 6v, the arcade of the Canon Tables on ff. 7r-12v (Fig. 2), and by the Gospel texts themselves, the Adoration of the Lamb image is the first of a series of thresholds leading the reader-viewer, with every turn of the page, ever deeper into Soissons Gospel book.¹²

Although this established interpretation of the liminal character of the Adoration of Lamb image is fundamentally correct, I suggest that art historians have not attended closely enough to the implications of the painting's spatial construction for the beholder's standpoint. The orientation of the beholder is not a minor aspect of the painting. Both innovative and signifying, perspective in the Adoration of the Lamb image is at once a pictorial conceit *and* a theological vantage.

¹¹ B. REUDENBACH, "Der Codex als heiliger Raum: Überlegungen zur Bilderausstattung früher Evangelienbücher", in *Codex und Raum*, S. MÜLLER, L. SAURMA-JELTSCH, and P. STROHSCHNEIDER (eds.), Wiesbaden, 2009, pp. 59-84, at pp. 70-71.

¹² *Ibid.* See also Nordenfalk's influential description of canon tables as "an impressive atrium at the entrance of the sacred text itself": C. NORDENFALK, "The Apostolic Canon Tables", *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6e pér., 62 (1963), pp. 17-34, at p. 18.

TEMPLA CAROLINA

Although we do not usually bring to Carolingian paintings the questions about perspective or the spatial-pictorial construction of the beholder's standpoint that we reflexively pose to later medieval paintings, Herbert Kessler has deftly shown that Carolingian painters could and did exploit the potential of perspectival construction to make a point.¹³ The aim was not to demonstrate, or else celebrate painting's capacity for simulating a phenomenological experience of the world, but rather to enlist painting's ability to open up exegetical, often typological perspectives. The Adoration of the Lamb image in the Soissons Gospels is a case in point. Not only does the tetrastyle arcade filling so much of the pictorial field, and thereby the beholder's field of vision, affiliate the setting of the image with other Carolingian temples, but it also situates the beholder, quite specifically, within the built space of an imagined *templum*.

Herbert Kessler and Martina Pippal have persuasively argued that the columnated structure inhabited by Joshua, Moses, Aaron and the "Filii Israel" in the lower register of the Moutier-Grandval Bible's frontispiece painting for Exodus should be identified as the *atrium tabernaculi*: the outer court of the Mosaic tabernacle (London, British Library, Add. MS 10546, f. 25v; Fig. 3).¹⁴ Accordingly, the curtain held back by the figure of Joshua in the left-hand foreground of the lower register, is the veil of the Holy of Holies; the curtain on the right side of the register can be identified as the curtain screening the *atrium* from the Tabernacle's outer court. At the same time, the Grandval Bible's frontispiece to Exodus transforms the tent architecture of the Mosaic tabernacle into the fixed monumental construction of the Temple.

This visual elision, or fusion, of Tabernacle and Temple is a hallmark of medieval exegesis and visual representation.¹⁵ Indeed, as Herbert Kessler has explored in a series of studies, the visual fusion of Tabernacle and Temple served as a foundational first term for aggressive

¹³ Most recently and pointedly in H. KESSLER, "‘Filled to the brim’: the meaning of perspective in carolingian art", in *Ars auro gemmisque prior. Mélanges en hommage à Jean-Pierre Caillet*, C. BLONDEAU et al. (eds.), Turnhout, 2013, pp. 181–88. For a twelfth-century exemplum, see also IDEM, "Optical Art before Assisi", in *L'image en questions: pour Jean Wirth*, F. ELSIG et al. (eds.), Paris, 2013, pp. 50–55. Fischer's dissertation is also an important exception to this general rule: FISCHER, "The Depiction of Spatial Experience".

¹⁴ KESSLER, "Facies Bibliothecae Revelata", pp. 552–59. See also IDEM, "Through the Temple Veil: The Holy Image in Judaism and Christianity", *Kairos* 32/33 (1990), pp. 53–77; M. PIPPAL, "Relations of Time and Space: The Temple of Jerusalem as the Domus Ecclesiae in the Carolingian Period", in *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Bezalel Narkiss on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, B. KÜHNEL (ed.), Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 67–78; EADEM, "Distanzierung und Aktualisierung in der Vivianbibel: Zur Struktur der touronischen Miniaturen in den 40er Jahren des 9. Jahrhunderts", *Aachener Kunstblätter*, 60 (1994), pp. 61–78. A digital facsimile of the Grandval Bible is available: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_10546.

¹⁵ In addition to the works cited in nn.14 and 18, the following are helpful points of entry into a vast bibliography: FISCHER, "The Depiction of Spatial Experience", pp. 174–202 et passim; B. KÜHNEL, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem: Representations of the Holy City in Christian Art of the First Millennium*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1987; C. KRINSKY, "Representations of the Temple of Jerusalem before 1500", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 33 (1970), pp. 1–19; B. KÜHNEL, "Jewish Symbolism of the Temple and the Tabernacle and Christian Symbolism of the Holy Sepulchre and the Heavenly Tabernacle", *Jewish Art*, 12/13 (1986-1987), pp. 147–168; D. VERKERK, *Early Medieval Bible Illumination and the Ashburnham Pentateuch*, Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, 2004, pp. 89–102; EADEM, "Exodus and Easter Vigil in the Ashburnham Pentateuch", *The Art Bulletin*, 77 (1995), pp. 94–105; P. BLOCH, "Das Apsismosaik von Germigny-des-Prés. Karl und der alte Bund", in *Karl der Grosse. Lebenswerk und Nachleben. Karolingische Kunst*, W. BRAUNFELS and H. SCHNITZLER (eds.), vol. 3, Düsseldorf, 1965, pp. 234–261.



Fig. 3. Exodus frontispiece in the Grandval Bible. London, British Library, Add. MS 10546, f. 25v. Photo © British Library Board (London, British Library, Add. MS 10546, f. 25v).

Christian supercessionist projects in the Middle Ages.¹⁶ In the Grandval Bible's Exodus image, the sign of the cross on the curtain on the right side of the lower register, the depiction of Moses with Paul's face, and the titulus within the image transforming the "filii Israhel" into the "populus Christi," together reconfigure the Tabernacle after a Pauline blueprint.¹⁷ The figure of Joshua drawing back the curtain from the Holy of Holies in the image, Kessler demonstrated, is a pictorial deviation from scripture, motivated not only by a long-lived Christian exegetical identification of Joshua and Jesus, but also by Paul's insistence in the letter to the Hebrews that Christ's self-sacrifice put an end to Levitical observances and made previously hidden, divine mysteries accessible.¹⁸

¹⁶ The following are not exhaustive: KESSLER, "Through the Temple Veil"; IDEM, "Sacred Light from Shadowy Things", *Codex Aquilarensis*, 32 (2016), pp. 237–70; IDEM, "Arca Arcarum: Nested Boxes and the Dynamics of Sacred Experience", *Codex Aquilarensis*, 30 (2014), pp. 83–108; IDEM, "Filled to the brim"; IDEM, "Gazing at the Future: The Parousia Miniature in Vatican Gr.699", in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Ch. MOSS, K.KIEFER (eds.), Princeton N.J., 1995, pp. 365–375.

¹⁷ KESSLER, "Facies Bibliothecae Revelata", pp. 554–558.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 554–556. On the import of the Letter to the Hebrews, see also KESSLER, "Through the Temple Veil", pp. 69–75; IDEM, "Sacred Light".

Like the Exodus frontispiece in the Grandval Bible, the Soissons Gospels' Adoration of the Lamb image also effects a signifying visual reconfiguration of its scriptural source-texts and the architectural structures they describe. If the upper levels of the image strongly evoke the unceasing heavenly liturgy described in Apocalypse, the columned arcade, with its prominent parted veil, clearly identifies the lower two-thirds of the painting with the sacred architecture of a temple; more specifically, with the portico of a temple.

The four columns that dominate the foreground of the painting have led many interpreters to see a reference to the four gilt columns of setim wood at the entrance to the tent of the Tabernacle (Exod. 26:26-30), yet the careful depiction of their colored and variegated stone surfaces make such an identification less than convincing.¹⁹ Nor can they be readily identified with the two bronze columns, named Jachin and Boaz, that Solomon erected in the Temple's Portico (1 Kings: 7). If the Adoration of the Lamb image "renovates" the Mosaic Tabernacle and the Solomonic Temple, it does so radically and according to the ekphrastic directions of John's apocalyptic vision.

Just as the Tabernacle-Temple was typologically appropriated by Carolingian exegetes and artists, so too the word *templum* in Carolingian Christian texts (as in earlier and later Christian Latin usage) often served as a synonym for *ecclesia*, denoting both a built architectural structure and the transhistorical Christian community.²⁰ Thus, for example, in Carolingian liturgies for the dedication of a church the word *templum* designated the building being consecrated.²¹ This language use and the typological claims it articulated reverberate in the use of the tetrastyle *templum* as a visual token of Christian sacred space and identity in Carolingian images.

Arguably the most explicit and concentrated Carolingian deployment of the tetrastyle temple as an icon for Christian cult space, religious identity, and sacral authority appeared in the form of coins (Fig. 4). Charlemagne's *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* coinage—likely first issued in September 813, in connection with the coronation of his son, Louis the Pious, as co-emperor—forms a subset of his "portrait coinage," so called after the famous profile, laureate bust depictions of Charlemagne that appear on their obverses.²² On their reverses these silver de-

¹⁹ MESTEMACHER, "Images of architecture", pp. 46–47.

²⁰ On ecclesiology and ecclesiastical administration during Charlemagne's reign, see M. DE JONG, "Charlemagne's Church", in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, J. STORY (ed.), Manchester; New York, 2005, pp. 103–135.

²¹ For further discussion see D. POLANICHKA, "Transforming Space, (Per)Forming Community: Church Consecration in Carolingian Europe", *Viator*, 43 (2012), pp. 79–98; EADEM, "'My Temple Should Be a House of Prayer': The Use and Misuse of Carolingian Churches", *Church History*, 87 (2018), pp. 371–398. I regret that I have not been able to consult, EADEM, "Precious Stones, Living Temples: Sacred Space in Carolingian Churches, 751–877 C.E.", PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2009. For a literary-philological perspective, see H. FLASCHE, "Similitudo Templi (Zur Geschichte einer Metapher)", *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 23 (1949), pp. 81–125.

²² This coinage has attracted intensive attention and debate. For two recent critical re-assessments, see S. COUPLAND, "The Portrait Coinage of Charlemagne", in *Early Medieval Monetary History: Studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn*, R. NAISMITH, M. ALLEN, E. SCREEN (eds.), Farnham, Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT, 2014, pp. 145–156; J. DAVIS, "Charlemagne's Portrait Coinage and Ideas of Rulership at the Carolingian Court", *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 33 (2014), pp. 19–27. On the issues of dating and mints, see S. COUPLAND, "The Formation of a European Identity: Revisiting Charlemagne's Coinage", in *Writing the Early Medieval West: Studies in Honour of*



Fig. 4. *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* coin issued by Charlemagne. Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Inv. No. 18202748. Photo © bpk / Münzkabinett, SMB / Lübke & Wiedemann.

narii feature a pedimented tetrastyle temple, crowned by one cross, occupied by another, and encircled by the legend *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* (Christian Religion/Faith), rendered with both Greek and Roman letter-forms.

As Michael Matzke observed, the forms of the temple on the reverses of these coins harken back to late Republican Roman coins featuring temples with pagan cult figures at their centers.²³ The *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* coins transform these earlier numismatic structures in a fashion that parallels the signifying elision of architectural referents identified at work in Carolingian depictions of the Tabernacle-Temple, including the imposing edifice in the Soissons Gospels' first image.²⁴ Rather than presenting a hexastyle façade with a pagan cult figure at its center, Charlemagne's *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* coinage (and its continuation during the reign of Louis the Pious²⁵) reduced the number of columns to four and replaced the pagan idol with the

Rosamund McKitterick, E. SCREEN, C. WEST (eds.) Cambridge, U.K., 2018, pp. 213-229, at 219-228. As Coupland notes, the *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* coinage may have been a rather limited issue, intended to mark the coronation of Louis, rather than serving primarily as currency: COUPLAND, "The Formation".

²³ M. MATZKE, "Antikenrezeption am Beispiel der Münzen Karls des Großen", *Geldgeschichtliche Nachrichten*, 31 (1996), pp. 264-273, at pp. 271-72. See also I. GARIPZANOV, "The Image of Authority in Carolingian Coinage: The Image of a Ruler and Roman Imperial Tradition", *Early Medieval Europe*, 8 (1999), pp. 197-218, at pp. 203-205. On Roman numismatic temples, see D. BROWN, *Temples of Rome as Coin Types*, New York, 1940. Brown's "Method 1" group offers the closest *comparanda*.

²⁴ Kessler's discussion of the portico of the palace of Latinus in the Vatican Vergil (BAV, Cod. Lat. 3225, f. 60v) as a visual model for Grandval Bible's tabernacle architecture is salient: KESSLER, "Facies Bibliothecae Revelata", p. 558; IDEM, "Filled to the brim", pp. 184-186.

²⁵ See S. COUPLAND, "Great David's Greater Son? The Portrait Coinage of Louis the Pious", in *La productivité d'une crise. Le règne de Louis le Pieux (814-840) et la transformation de l'Empire*, P. DEPREEUX, S. ESDERS (eds.), Ostfildern, 2018, pp. 37-64.

sign of the cross. The four columns of the *XPICTIANA RELIGIO templa* surely evoked the four Evangelists and their gospels, as is undoubtedly the case in the Adoration of the Lamb painting.

Although considerable ink has been spilled on the question of whether the *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* coinage's temple evoked a specific, actual architectural structure, I would suggest that the architectural statement made by these coins is nonetheless quite clear.²⁶ Taking the position on the reverse often occupied by mint names in other Carolingian coins, the Christian *templum* is presented as the structure within which values at once religious and worldly are produced and preserved.²⁷ Coupled with the encircling legend, the architectural icon of the *templum*, housing the sign of the cross, identifies the Christian religion as both the spiritual mint and the sacred treasury that guarantee Carolingian terrestrial and soteriological economics.

THROUGH THE TEMPLE VEIL?

Gazing at the painting that opens the Soissons Gospels, we are not imaginatively situated in front of the entrance façade of a Temple, as is the beholder of the reverse of a *XPICTIANA RELIGIO* denarius. Nor, I suggest, do the columns and the drawn back veil frame a view into interior space of the Tabernacle-Temple or the *sancta sanctorum* of an apocalyptic Christian temple.²⁸ The columns and curtain instead delimit a partial perspective upon a distanced multi-storied cityscape that, by visual implication, stretches beyond the limits of the pictorial field. The painting thus subtly, but effectively positions its beholder as if, having stepped within the portico of tetrastyle *templum*, they now turn back to take in the dense urban scene of the new Jerusalem, gleaming and half-dissolved in the play of light and shadow.²⁹

John's Apocalypse, however, poses a significant challenge to such an account of the image's architecturally framed perspective. When John sees "the holy city, the new Jerusalem,

²⁶ Proposed referents include Old St. Peter's, Constantine's Church of the Holy Sepulcher at Jerusalem, the aedicula housing the tomb of the Resurrection within the Anastasis Rotunda at Jerusalem, and Charlemagne's palatine Chapel at Aachen; for further discussion see M. BIDDLE, "XPICTIANA RELIGIO and the Tomb of Christ", in *Early Medieval Monetary History: Studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn*, R. NAISMITH, M. ALLEN, E. SCREEN (eds.), Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT, 2014, pp. 115–144.

²⁷ Coupland has argued that the dies were cut and minting likely took place at Aachen; COUPLAND, "The Formation", pp. 221–27.

²⁸ Kühnel characterized the architecture seen through the arcade as "a complicated structure, very much resembling a modern apartment house": KÜHNEL, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem*, p. 132. Brenk described the depicted cityscape as a "mehrgeschossige Bühnenwand eines Theaters", comparing the draped textile to an antique *velabrum*: BRENK, "Schriftlichkeit und Bildlichkeit", p. 671. Diebold likewise observed "[t]he bulk of the page is given over to a city view, resembling an antique stage set": DIEBOLD, "Not pictures", p. 30. Kessler suggested that the columns frame "a marble wall, which must be seen as the Church of Christ that was revealed when the curtain of the Jerusalem Temple is drawn back," concluding that "the miniature asserts that the Gospels are the atrium of the Church and, in turn, of the heavenly Jerusalem": H. KESSLER, "Rome's Place between Judaea and Francia in Carolingian Art", in *Roma fra Oriente e Occidente*, Spoleto, 2002, pp. 695–718, at pp. 709, 713. Elsewhere Kessler characterized the view as showing "the heavenly Jerusalem, visible through four columns draped with a cloth": IDEM, "Real Absence: Early Medieval Art and the Metamorphosis of Vision", in *Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra tarda antichità e alto Medioevo*, vol. 2, Spoleto, 1998, pp. 1157–1211, at p. 111.

²⁹ See also H. KESSLER, "Image and Object: Christ's Dual Nature and the Crisis of Early Medieval Art", in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe*, J. DAVIS, M. MCCORMICK (eds.), Aldershot, 2008, pp. 291–319, at p. 307, n. 30.

coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Apoc. 21:2), he explicitly observes: “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Apoc. 21:22).³⁰ Employing the phrase *dominus deus omnipotens* that gleams within the Adoration of the Lamb image, Apoc. 21:22 makes a supercessionist claim in no uncertain terms: the new Jerusalem, descending from heaven to earth, is a city *without* a Temple because Christ, the *agnus dei*, has made the ultimate blood self-sacrifice. John’s Apocalypse is consistent on this point: with only one exception, the text’s many references to a Temple-Tabernacle explicitly locate that structure in heaven.³¹

Allowing its beholder to survey the cityscape of the new Jerusalem from within the tetrastyle portico of an apocalyptic Christian temple, the Adoration of the Lamb painting would seem to blatantly deviate from its putative scriptural source-text. How then are we to understand the spatial and theological perspective framed by this visual entry-point into an exceedingly sumptuous Gospel Book?

Although the perspectival construction of the painting and its positioning of the beholder in relation to pictorial space defy the norms of quasi-mathematical consistency favored in much late medieval and early modern painting, the Adoration of the Lamb image is nonetheless a coherent—even polemically coherent—spatial construction. Poised immediately within the porch of a pictorially imagined Christian tetrastyle temple, the beholder is given a privileged perspective upon the new Jerusalem. This perspective is codicologically, visually, and hermeneutically presented as if seen from within the foyer of a stupendous evangelical book-space: a *codex-templum*. In turning the page, the beholder is effectively re-oriented. Moving inward, through the pages of the Soissons Gospels, the beholder discovers that this *templum* is also an evangelical *thesaurus* filled with golden words, opulent materials, and precious objects.

FILLED TO THE BRIM: THE EVANGELICAL *THESAURUS*

Among the visually opulent Gospel Books associated with Charlemagne’s reign, the Soissons Gospels stands out for its intensive—even self-conscious—simulation of all that was held most dear, in both aesthetic and material terms, in the arts of the Carolingian era. As Beat Brenk penetratingly observed, the “Schatz-Charakter” of the Soissons Gospels is unmistakable and unprecedented: both with respect to the lavishness of its illumination and thanks to its self-reflexive visual thematization of the preciousness of the Gospels and their four-fold manifestation of Christ, the *verbum incarnatum*.³²

Each turn of the page in the Soissons Gospels discloses a sustained, aesthetically charged effort to express the superlative value of the Gospels in insistently material terms. With the exception of the orange-red rubrics that punctuate the manuscript’s two columns of text, each word in the manuscript is written in gold. The exclusive use of chrysography to transcribe the

³⁰ *Et templum non vidi in ea: Dominus enim Deus omnipotens templum illius est, et Agnus.*

³¹ The Temple that John is instructed to measure in Apoc. 11: 1-2 does not seem to be identical with the temple in heaven of Apoc. 11:19, 15:5, and 15:8; nor is it part of the new Jerusalem, whose descent to earth is described in Apoc. 21:2.

³² BRENK, “Schriftlichkeit und Bildlichkeit”, pp. 664–666.

four Gospels, and the prefatory texts that accompany them, asserts in no uncertain terms the soteriological value of Christological revelation.³³

The manuscript's canon tables feature depictions of veined stone columns and intaglio gemstones, some of which, like those integrated into the manuscript's Evangelist portrait pages and incipit pages, are iconographically charged (Figs. 5 & 6).³⁴ Structuring hermeneutic access and imaginative ingress to the Gospels by way of an imposing arcade that rewards close scrutiny, the Soissons Gospels' canon tables collectively describe a superlative, sumptuous architect-



Fig. 5. Evangelist portrait page for Matthew's Gospel in the Soissons Gospels : Paris, BnF, MS lat. 8850, f. 17v. Photo: BnF



Fig. 6. Incipit page for Matthew's Gospel in the Soissons Gospels Paris, BnF, MS lat. 8850, f. 18r. Photo: BnF

³³ Fischer's observation that the use of chrysography makes the text exceedingly difficult to read is important and warrants further consideration: FISCHER, "The Depiction of Spatial Experience", pp. 136–137. On the theological import of scribal aesthetic choices in the Soissons Gospels and other "court school" manuscripts see D. GANZ, "'Roman Books' Reconsidered: The Theology of Carolingian Display Script", in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, J. SMITH (ed.), Leiden, 2000, pp. 297–315. On chrysography see V. TROST, *Gold- und Silbertinten: Technologische Untersuchungen zur abendländischen Chrysographie und Argyrographie von der Spätantike bis zum hohen Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden, 1991. See also H. KESSLER, "The eloquence of silver: more on the allegorization of matter", in *L'allégorie dans l'art du Moyen Âge. Formes et fonctions. Héritages, créations, mutations*, C. HECK (ed.), Turnhout, 2011, pp. 49–64.

³⁴ MESTEMACHER, "Images of architecture", p. 49. The fictive intaglios' iconographic import has not yet attracted the attention it deserves.

ture. The materials feigned on the manuscript's pages—marble, gemstones, pearls, gold, and silver—not only evoke Carolingian high-status architecture and treasury objects, but were also invested with ecclesiological, tropological, and allegorical significance by patristic and contemporary exegesis.³⁵

The soteriological import of the Soissons Gospel's artfully cultivated opulence is itself thematized in the facing Evangelist portrait and Incipit pages that open Matthew's Gospel (ff. 17v-18r; Figs. 5 & 6). A layer of glittering golden paint fills the outer margin of each page. Against this gold ground, intersecting rows of simulated pearls, punctuated by red and blue depicted gemstones and fictive intaglios, enrich this simulacral metalwork frame.³⁶

Within the frame on the verso, an arch featuring yet another simulated carved gemstone rests on two columns provides an architectural setting for the figure of Matthew. Accompanied by his symbol (the angelic man) in the tympanum above, the Evangelist sits on a jeweled seat as he holds a golden stylus over the pages of the opened book resting on the tall, spindly desk before him. The pages of this depicted codex, like those of the book held by the Evangelist symbol above, display legible text framed in gold.

The book grasped by the Evangelist symbol features an expected quotation: the first words of Matthew's Gospel, which also appear on the facing recto within the opening. By contrast, the text inscribed upon the pages of the human Evangelist's book is an unusual choice; to the best of my knowledge, it has no precedent in earlier or contemporary Evangelist portraits.³⁷ Here we read: THESAURIZATE VOBIS TESAUROS IN CAELO (store up for yourselves treasures in heaven; Matt. 6:20). The phrase is a quotation from Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Enjoining his followers to value heavenly treasure more than fugitive worldly wealth, Christ concludes: "for where your treasure is, there is your heart also" (Matt. 6:21).

With its own rich tradition of patristic and early medieval exegesis, the injunction inscribed upon Matthew's fictive book was a motivated choice.³⁸ In the Soissons Gospels' portraits of Mark, Luke and John, each Evangelist figure's opened codex displays a phrase from the relevant Gospel quoted in the preceding *Argumentum* for that Gospel; these phrases are also

³⁵ For points of entry into a vast bibliography: MESTEMACHER, "Images of architecture"; S. TRINKS, "Saxum Vivum and Lapidēs Viventes: Animated Stone in Medieval Book Illumination", in *Canones: The Art of Harmony*, A. BAUSI, B. REUDENBACH, H. WIMMER (eds.), Berlin, 2020, pp. 193–207; A. SCIAMPACONE, "Material Value and Immaterial Vision: The Role of Real and Represented Gems in the Gospels of Saint-Médard of Soissons", *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval & Renaissance Studies*, 42 (2011), pp. 1–35; FISCHER, "The Depiction of Spatial Experience". On simulated stone, see also I. MESTEMACHER, "Matter of Life and Death? The 'Living Stones' and Medieval Gospel Books", in *Steinformen: Materialität, Qualität, Imitation*, I. AUGART, M. SASS, I. WENDERHOLM (eds.), Berlin, 2019, pp. 179–190. On the use of material substances and qualities to apperceptually "engage spiritual issues", see KESSLER, "Image and Object."

³⁶ BRENK, "Schriftlichkeit und Bildlichkeit," p. 665.

³⁷ I make this observation tentatively. According to Harmon, the Harley Gospels (London, BL, Harley MS 2788, f. 13v; transcribing Matt. 11:28) is the only other "court school" (of Charlemagne) Gospel Book to feature a text other than Matt. 1:1 in the pages of Evangelist figure's book: J. HARMON, *Codicology of the Court School of Charlemagne: Gospel Book Production, Illumination, and Emphasized Script*, Frankfurt am Main, 1984, pp. 284–87.

³⁸ For illuminating further discussion, see E. MAGNANI, "Un trésor dans le ciel". De la pastorale de l'aumône aux trésors spirituels (IVe-IXe siècle), in *Le trésor au Moyen Âge. Discours, pratiques et objets*, L. BURKART, P. CORDEZ, P.-A. MARIJAU (eds.), Florence, 2010, pp. 51–68.

given pictorial form in the small scenes that fill the spandrels of the arch surmounting the seated Gospel writer.³⁹ The text in Matthew's depicted book breaks with this consistent pattern.⁴⁰

Of course, as the *Argumentum* notes, before Matthew was an apostle he was a *publicanus* or tax collector; according to Matt 9:9, he was called to follow Christ whilst working in a customs-house. In the image, Matthew's conversion from assessor of worldly goods to reckoner of the inestimable value of heavenly treasure may be subtly registered in the curious positioning of the fingers of his right hand, merging an *allocutio* gesture with the codified finger calculus employed in early medieval mathematical operations.⁴¹

Less ambiguously, with his golden stylus, the painted Evangelist directs the reader-viewer's attention to the golden word *thesaurus* inscribed in the open book before him. This detail effects a stunning *mise-en-abyme*. The speech of Christ—the divine Word—appears as a golden text within a depicted gospel book, encountered within an actual gospel book written almost exclusively in gold. Like the Soissons Gospels as a whole, the Evangelist figure's fictive codex visually and materially practices what it preaches.

The depiction of Matthew's opened book is a potent instance of visual-textual prolepsis that blurs the boundary between pictured evangelical reality and the experience of a flesh-and-blood reader-viewer, who, with ten turns of the page, again encounters Christ's exhortation to store up treasure in heaven within a column of gold text on f. 27r. Precisely in its opulence, the manuscript self-reflexively asserts and celebrates the massive aesthetic and conceptual investments made in the Gospels and in Gospel books during Charlemagne's reign. In no uncertain terms, the Soissons Gospels declares that where Carolingian treasure is found, there is the (elite) Carolingian heart.⁴²

³⁹ The significance of the *Argumenta* for the Evangelist portrait pages for Mark, Luke, and John in the Soissons Gospels was first demonstrated in WALKER, "Illustrations." For further discussion, see DIEBOLD, "Not pictures", pp. 25–30.

⁴⁰ As Brenk noted, Matthew's Evangelist portrait diverges from the other Evangelist portraits in the Soissons Gospels in yet other respects: BRENK, "Schriftlichkeit und Bildlichkeit", p. 663. Resembling the haloes of the Evangelist portraits in the Ada Gospels (Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. 22), Matthew's scalloped halo in the Soissons Gospels is distinct from the round, flat gold nimbi of Mark, Luke and John in the manuscript's other Evangelist portraits (ff. 81v, 123v, 180v). So too, the peacocks in the spandrels of the arch enclosing Matthew and his symbol do not derive from the *Argumentum*, as do the scenes depicted in the spandrels of the three following Evangelist portrait pages. In this connection it should be noted that f. 17, with Matthew's portrait on its verso, forms a conjoined bifolium with f. 24 within a regular quaternion quire: HARMON, *Codicology*, 256. The stylistic, compositional, and iconographic differences that distinguish Matthew's portrait page from those for Mark, Luke, and John in the Soissons Gospels invite speculation and warrant further examination.

⁴¹ For the *allocutio* comparison, see SAURMA-JELTSCH, "Das Bild in der Worttheologie", p. 653. On the finger calculus, see E. ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM, "The Finger Calculus in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages. Studies on Roman Game Counters I", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 5 (1971), pp. 1–9; C. DENOËL, "Imaging Time, Computation and Astronomy. A Computus Collection from Micy-Saint-Mesmin (Vatican, BAV, MS Reg. Lat. 1263) and Early Eleventh-Century Illumination in the Loire Region", in *After the Carolingians: Re-Defining Manuscript Illumination in the 10th and 11th Centuries*, B. KITZINGER, J. O'DRISCOLL (eds.), Berlin, 2019, pp. 118–160, esp. pp. 129–138.

⁴² Whereas Sciampacone sees the fictive riches presented in the manuscript's illumination as posing a challenge to a beholder bent on transcendence, Metsemacher discerns in them a coordinated effort to present the manuscript as a treasure "on the brink between heaven and earth": SCIAMPACONE, "Material Value"; MESTEMACHER, "Images of architecture", p. 61. In my view, the manuscript celebrates the successful integration of temporal and soteriological economies and was an active part of a larger, top-down Carolingian project of political-religious *ordinatio* bent on "pegging" worldly to divine values. On the role of manuscripts and artworks in the "Vorstellung

CONCLUSION: MUNERA MAGNA DEI... PERPETUAE NAMQUE SALUTIS OPES

In ca 799-801, Alcuin composed a poem that was likely intended to serve as a celebratory preface to a pandect bible.⁴³ Preceding a verse inventory of the books that make up canonical Christian scripture, Alcuin meditated upon their provenance and value:

*His etiam libris inest caelestis origo,
Hos quia dictavit spiritus ipse deus.
Continet iste uno sancto sub corpore codex
Hic simul hos totos, munera magna dei.
Omnia namque novae ac veteris pia famina legis
Hic te non dubites, lector, habere, pius.
Hic vitae fons est, haec est sapientia vera,
Hae sunt perpetuae namque salutis opes.*⁴⁴

A heavenly origin is in these books
Because the Spirit, God himself, composed them.
That codex in one holy body contains
Them all here together, God's great gift.
Indeed, all the pious pronouncements of the new and the old law
Do not doubt, pious reader, that you have (them) here.
Here is the fountain of life, here is true wisdom,
Indeed, these are the eternal riches of salvation.

Framed in relation to a pandect bible, Alcuin's terms of praise resonate powerfully with the pictorial arguments and aesthetic rhetoric of the Soissons Gospels. In the manuscript, as in the poem, the "eternal riches of salvation" are immediately at hand: God's "great gift" is housed within the codex's holy *corpus*.⁴⁵ At once divine law, true wisdom, and a *fons vitae*, Scripture—instantiated in the Soissons Gospels—is both sacred treasure and a soteriological treasury.⁴⁶

Unlike the Israelite's ark of the covenant, screened from view within the Tabernacle and the Temple, the divine *verbum incarnatum* was ostentatiously made manifest in the Soisson

einer christlichen Weltordnung und Normsetzung" (p. 296) at the court of Charlemagne, see B. REUDENBACH, "Rectitudo als Projekt: Bildpolitik und Bildungsreform Karls des Großen", in *Artes im Mittelalter*, U. SCHAEFER (ed.), Berlin, 1999, pp. 283–308.

⁴³ To date, the poem has primarily been discussed in relation to verses inscribed in the Codex Amiatinus; for a recent critical reassessment, see M. GARRISON, "Alcuin, Carmen 69, and the Ceolfrith Pandects", in *All Roads Lead to Rome. The Creation, Context and Transmission of the Codex Amiatinus*, J. HAWKES and M. BOULTON (eds.), Turnhout, 2019, pp. 129–142. On pandect bibles as crucial sites for Christian typological construction of the relationship between the "old" and the "new law" see H. KESSLER, "The Montalcino Bible's Steep Mountain of Mysteries", *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 65 (2020), pp. 307–371.

⁴⁴ ALCUIN, *Carmen 69*, E. DÜMMLER (ed.), *MGH. Poetae latini aevi Carolini*, Berlin, 1881, p. 288, ll. 25-32.

⁴⁵ See É. PALAZZO, "Le 'livre-corps' à l'époque carolingienne et son rôle dans la liturgie de la messe et sa théologie", in *Reading, writing and communicating*, W. FALKOWSKI (ed.), Warsaw, 2010, pp. 31–64 ; B. REUDENBACH, "Der Codex als Verkörperung Christi", in *Erscheinungsformen und Handhabungen heiliger Schriften*, J. QUACK and D. LUFT (eds.), Berlin, 2014, pp. 229-244.

⁴⁶ Asking Christ to protect and direct "king Charlemagne," the poem's closing prayer may indicate that it was intended for Charlemagne: ALCUIN, *Carmen 69*, p. 292, ll. 189-200.

Gospels' gleaming golden words. Starting with the Adoration of the Lamb image that opens the manuscript, the Soissons Gospels introduced its reader into an architecture purpose-built for theophany, thereby working a supercessionist reversal of the Temple-Tabernacle's spatial logic of intensifying concealment.⁴⁷ Constructed with precious materials feigned by painting, the architecture of the Soissons Gospels was made to surpass the Tabernacle and Temple in its overt opulence. This pointed, soteriologically charged statement of values asserted the unsurpassed preciousness of Christian revelation by means of the material, visible forms of worldly riches. And the manuscript's bold experiment in salvation economics was itself thematized in the painted pages that open Matthew's Gospel. Opulently framed, Matthew was depicted as an authoritative fiduciary role-model. Enshrining Christ's injunction to lay up treasure in heaven in gold letters, the portrait of Matthew—like the Soissons Gospels as a whole—transformed the spirit of Christ's teaching, even as it preserved the letter of the "new law." For a Carolingian reader-viewer, to open the Soissons Gospels was to enter an evangelical *templum-thesaurus* and thereby to become a privileged soteriological insider: a connoisseur of scripture's "eternal riches," an inhabitant of the glorious *nova Jerusalem*.

⁴⁷ As Kessler noted, the lively scene of Matthew and Mark's Evangelist symbols drawing back curtains from the *fons vitae* in the tympanum of the canon table on f. 11r also activates tropes of the Christian unveiling of hidden Jewish sacred truths: H. KESSLER, "Images of Christ and Communication with God," in *Comunicare e Significare Nell'alto Medioevo*, Spoleto, 2005, pp. 1099-1136, esp. pp. 1111-1112; IDEM, "Facies Bibliothecae Revelata." See also C. DENOËL, "La Parole révélée: essai sur la symbolique visuelle du livre dans les livres d'évangiles de l'époque de Charlemagne," in *Charlemagne. Les Temps, Les Espaces, Les Hommes. Construction et Déconstruction d'un Règne*, R. GROSSE, M. SOT (eds.), Turnhout, 2018, pp. 477-506.