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Writing on Roman Books in the Early Middle Ages

A Reassessment of Treasure Bindings and their Inscriptions as Paratexts, and a Case Study of the Gospels of S. Maria in Via Lata

For the French literary theorist Gerard Genette it was a 'fait accompli': when he decided to speak about the exterior of the book, its envelope so to speak, the book emerged as a written object or, perhaps better, an object constituted by writing: of the possible elements that can be found on the front, the back, and the spine of a book, the vast majority are composed of alphabetical signs, of words, phrases and sentences: the "name or pseudonym of the author(s)", the "title(s) of the work", a "genre indication", the "name of the translator(s), of the preface writer(s), of the person(s) responsible for establishing the text", a "dedication" or an "epigraph", a "facsimile of the author's signature", the "name and/or colophon of the series", the "name or trade name [...] of the publisher", the "address of the publisher", the "date" of the publication.[1] All of this mainly written information may act as part of the peritext – and hence of the paratext – of the book: it is visible before the book is opened and its content read, and therefore structures the access to and the use of the book. Genette characterizes the paratext in spatial terms, as a "threshold" or "vestibule that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back."[2] This makes clear that the paratext has a mediating function between the inner realm of the text and the social world outside. The written signs on or around the book fulfill functions that go beyond the scope of information – functions of advertising, of enticement to purchase and read, of assertion as to how this book should be treated.

Genette's concept of the paratext is a good point of departure for a reflection on the particular role of book exteriors as a place for inscriptions. Every element of writing placed on a book contributes to this 'para' related to the text in the book. For this reason, there would be a fundamental difference between writing on a book and writing on a building, a coin, a garment, a piece of ceramic or a sculpture. Insisting on this 'para'-point seems all the more crucial since neither epigraphical nor art historical studies have acknowledged it so far. Yet in order to make an appropriate use of this argument, we must also critically consider that Genette's concept is based exclu-

1 Genette 1987, 24 (all quotes are from the English translation).
2 Genette 1987, 2.

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sively on a very small sample, on material coming from his own milieu. Instead of "Paratexts", Genette's book should have been titled "Paratexts in Modern France" or, even more precisely, "Paratexts in Gerard Genette's bookshelves".[3] Hence, the question arises to what extent the model of the bookbinding as written peritext must be reformulated when we go back in history and look at books from the manuscript age. If we were to accept Genette's own opinion, the paratext would not even have existed in this period, when "texts often circulated in an almost raw condition, in the form of manuscripts devoid of any formula of presentation."[4] Obviously, no one with even only a superficial knowledge of medieval manuscripts would agree with a description of them as texts "presented in an unadorned state".[5] Presuming that Genette was aware of the absurdity of his own judgement, we may conclude that it was dictated by a fundamental postulate about the paratext: that paratext is secondary text framing the primary text. For the modern period, this equation works well: similar materials and techniques are used for the outer and the inner parts of books, and there are no limits for text appearing on the covers of a book. Yet in the Western Middle Ages, the relation between the cover and the book block looked quite different. Instead of offering space for additional text(s), most medieval book covers shielded the text inside the book from an environment not made for books.[6] Occasionally, techniques such as blind tooling and chiseling were used to create an ornamental surface on the front and the back covers of the book. In these cases, an elevated aesthetic dimension was added to the book's exterior.[7] Writing, in contrast, played only a minor role. Only in some cases were titles and authors mentioned on the spine.[8] During the twelfth century, title plates became more common: small pieces of parchment that typically would be fixed on the back cover, protected by a shield of horn.[9] These practices point to a situation in which book collections were small – the average monastic library comprised about fifty volumes – and manuscripts were stored in a horizontal position, not in bookshelves but in wardrobes and chests. Therefore, it is only with the advent of larger libraries that inscriptions became more systematic, based on standardized categories such as author names and work titles.

3 Genette's own comments on this issue are neither consistent nor convincing: while in certain parts of his work he clearly states that he is exclusively focused on Western book culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he defines it "a synchronic and not a diachronic study – an attempt at a general picture, not a history of the paratext" in the last part of the book's introduction (Genette 1987, 13).

4 Genette 1987, 3.

5 Genette 1987, 1.

6 See Loubier 1926, 58–86; Mazal 1997, 62–144; Szirmai 1999, 95–319.

7 For the early medieval period, see Mazal 1999, 274–278; Szirmai 1999, 129–130. For Romanesque bookbindings, see Szirmai 1999, 166–167; Fingernagel 2007, 365–376. For the late Middle Ages, see Szirmai 1999, 166–167; Haidinger 2016, 51.

8 See Christ 1937, 87–90.

9 See Fingernagel 2007, 362; Petrucci Nardelli 2007, 86–87.

However, what makes the earlier Middle Ages one of the most thought-provoking test cases for our understanding of the exterior paratext is a small group of books made for a rather different use: books containing the readings, prayers and chants of the Mass that were produced for liturgical recitation rather than private reading. In the particular framework of the liturgy, books were treated as sacred objects. For this reason, enormous artistic labor was invested in their decoration – ornate initials, figurative miniatures, and calligraphic writing transformed the book into an aesthetically refined object, but even more so did the ivory tablets, chiseled gold or silver plates, enamels, gemstones and textiles that formed spectacular 'surfacescapes' on the book's exterior.[10] This higher category of sacred book objects is fundamental for understanding the symbolic power attributed to the book in the Middle Ages.

'Treasure' or 'jeweled' bindings, as the coverings of these liturgical books are usually called, constitute a fascinating test case for a more comprehensive understanding of the paratext. From an aesthetic and material viewpoint, they tend to radically invert the usual outside-inside hierarchy.[11] The covers transform the text into a figurative representation that both enhances the idea of God's corporeal presence in the book and presents itself as ornament or garment of the book. Ultimately, then, this form of book cover does not aim to visualize but rather to transcend the written text with corporeal images – it constitutes an 'iconic paratext' in an emphatic sense. For this reason, this particular type of bookbinding may sometimes come without any writing at all (Fig. 7). Nevertheless, writing *is* present on many treasure bindings – transforming the 'iconic paratext' into an 'iconotextual paratext'.[12] And since this type of book cover is produced with 'durable' materials such as gold, silver, ivory or enamel, and made to be displayed in public rituals, these written elements are much closer to what is commonly considered an 'epigraphic' text or an 'inscription'.

This paper is about the role of writing on books produced for liturgical use in Rome, the very place this volume is dedicated to, during the earlier Middle Ages. In a certain sense, investigating these objects means chasing a phantom: Roman manuscripts produced up to the twelfth century have been largely destroyed, with few exceptions that have escaped this fate.[13] The same must be said about Roman church treasuries – that is, the collections of *ornamenta ecclesiae* to which liturgical books, together with *vasa sacra*, reliquaries, processional crosses, altar hangings, tapestries, and liturgical vestments normally belonged.[14] Fortunately, the destruction has not been total, and one early medieval Roman Gospel-book has been preserved together

10 See Steenbock 1965; Lowden 2007; Rainer 2011; Ganz 2015a. The term 'surfacescape' has been introduced by Jonathan Hay for the analysis of decorated objects in early modern Chinese Art, see Hay 2010.

11 See Ganz 2014.

12 For the concept of the iconotext, see Wagner 1996.

13 See Supino Martini 1987, 46–47; Paravicini Bagliani 2010, 75–77.

14 See Elbern 1976; Pomarici 1999; Iacobini 2003.

with its precious cover: the Gospels from S. Maria in Via Lata or the 'Berta Gospels', which will act as key witnesses in the course of our inquiry. As we will soon see, this book bears an inscription that can be considered an extremely instructive case of writing on (liturgical) books. Yet instead of focusing on this object alone, I want to highlight its historical significance by putting it in a broader context. Hence, in a sequence of complementary considerations, I will briefly delineate the extraordinary role that Roman books held in early medieval European liturgy, and then attempt to reconstruct some specific Roman strategies of handling the paratext of treasure bindings.

The Gospels from S. Maria in Via Lata

Rome is certainly not the first place that comes to mind when one thinks of medieval treasure books. The spectacular codices encrusted with the finest works of goldsmithery and ivory carving that are the spotlight of exhibitions, and fill the pages of coffee-table books on medieval art, come almost exclusively from cathedrals, monasteries or courts within the Frankish empire. Looking at the fundamental catalogue in Frauke Steenbock's *Der kirchliche Prachteinband* (1965), one gets the impression that this kind of book did not even exist in the Eternal City.[15] Yet this conclusion would be completely misguided, as we will soon understand. Indeed, there is one object that has escaped Steenbock's attention: a Gospel-book which is clad in silver plates, with some golden elements and gemstones on the back (Fig. 1–2).[16]

The codex in question is rather small for a liturgical Gospel-book, its folios measuring 24.0/25.0 by 17.5/18.5 centimeters. The interior has survived in extremely bad shape: for a long time, the book must have been exposed to damp. On most pages, only pale traces of the text and its ornament remain. Still, it is clear that the manuscript contained a typical combination of the sacred text proper – the four Gospels – and standardized (inner) paratextual material: Jerome's *Novum opus* and his *Praefatio*, followed by the *capitula* and the canon tables on the first pages of the manuscript, with the important *Capitulare evangeliorum*, which indicated the sequence of readings during the liturgical year, at the end.[17] As for the decoration, the most conspicuous elements are the canon tables with their ornate arcades (Fig. 3).[18] Additional embellishment is to be found at the beginning of each Gospel: the initium is written in golden capitals against a purple ground (Fig. 4). Other elements – such as the evangelists or large initials – are lacking, giving the book a rather sober appearance with a clear focus on the text.

15 See Steenbock 1965.

16 The dimensions are slightly bigger than those of the manuscript: 26.5 × 20.0 cm. See the descriptions in Federici 1898, 133–138; Supino Martini 1980; Petrucci Nardelli 2003.

17 See the description in Federici 1898, 124–129. The manuscript and the covers have been digitized: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_S.Maria.in.Via.Lata.I.45.pt.A (accessed: 30/01/2023).

18 For a short appraisal of the miniatures, see Bertelli 1984, 588.

Fortunately, the state of conservation is much better for the covers: two silver plates worked in repoussé and niello. On the front, the Annunciation to Mary is represented, with the archangel approaching the enthroned Virgin from the left. Above them, two male saints appear in half-figure, flanking a Greek cross. Along the edge, we find the element that is of the greatest interest for the topic of this article: an inscription that gives the name of one of the saints – the Roman deacon and martyr Cyriacus – and then continues with an invocation of Christ, Cyriacus and bishop Nicholas of Smyrna by the donor, a nun named Berta. On the back, a broad ornamental frame with a series of palmettes runs around the cover. In the center, a smaller plate with a Greek cross has been inserted. The edge of this nearly square element and the cross are gilt, and decorated with gemstones and pearls, the surface of the cross being filled with filigree. Because of its differing proportions this most precious part of the binding must have been made for a different object – some scholars have suggested the lid of a reliquary casket, and noticed that the smaller cross at the center of the jeweled cross may have served as the container for a small cross relic.[19]

Thanks to the inscription and to the images on the cover, the provenance of the 'Berta Gospels' can be traced back to the female monastery of SS. Ciriaco e Nicola in Via Lata, an institution founded in the mid-tenth century. In 1435, Eugen IV (1431–1447) suppressed the convent and ordered that its possessions be incorporated into the nearby collegiate church of S. Maria in Via Lata. Here, the fate of the Gospel-book took a fascinating turn: S. Maria was believed to have been built on the site at which St Luke had written the Acts of the Apostles and painted several images of the Virgin Mary. Around 1500, the most renowned of these icons was installed in the apse of the church and thus became the focus of veneration for church visitors.[20] Around the same time, the Gospel-book developed into an additional attraction of this Roman sanctuary of St Luke: as sources of the seventeenth century tell us, it was by then regarded as having been written by the apostle himself.[21] Unfortunately, the price for this glory was that the codex-relic was kept inside the church, which was repeatedly flooded by the river Tiber, and perhaps even in the lower church, the Oratorio dei SS. Paolo e Luca, a particularly humid place.[22]

19 See Bertelli 1984, 588; Petrucci Nardelli 2003, 221–222.

20 See Cavazzi 1908, 62–67; Weißenberger 2007, vol. 1, 76–77, vol. 2 (catalogue), 129–131.

21 In 1655 Fioravante Martinelli listed the book among the relics kept in the church: *Liber coopertus laminibus argenteis, longitudinis palmi unius, qui est etiam variis gemmis non veris ornatus, et in carta pergamena conscriptus, continens evangelium S. Lucae ab eo, ut dicitur, conscriptum, in quibus laminibus haec incisa legitur inscriptio: Suscipe Christe, & S. Cyriace, atque Nicolae hoc opus quod ego Berta ancilla Dei fieri iussi*. Martinelli 1655, 166. See also Federici 1898, 122, 124; Cavazzi 1908, 332–334. According to Federici, Urban VIII (1622–1644) decreed that the codex should be eliminated from the collection of relics, stating that it was produced at a much later time. Yet Martinelli's book, published a decade after Urban's death, demonstrates that this order was not obeyed. Interestingly, the relic status of the Gospel-book seems also to have prompted the commission for a copy of the front cover in an enlarged format. For a detailed discussion and comparison with the original, see d'Onofrio 2008.

22 See Federici 1898, 122; Cavazzi 1908, 197–240.

Fig. 1: Gospel-book of S. Maria in Via Lata (Berta Gospels), back cover, ca. 960 or early 11th century.

Fig. 2: Gospel-book of S. Maria in Via Lata (Berta Gospels), front cover, ca. 960 or early 11th century.

Fig. 3: Gospel-book of S. Maria in Via Lata (Berta Gospels), canon table of Canon I (fol. 14r), 2nd half of the 9th century.

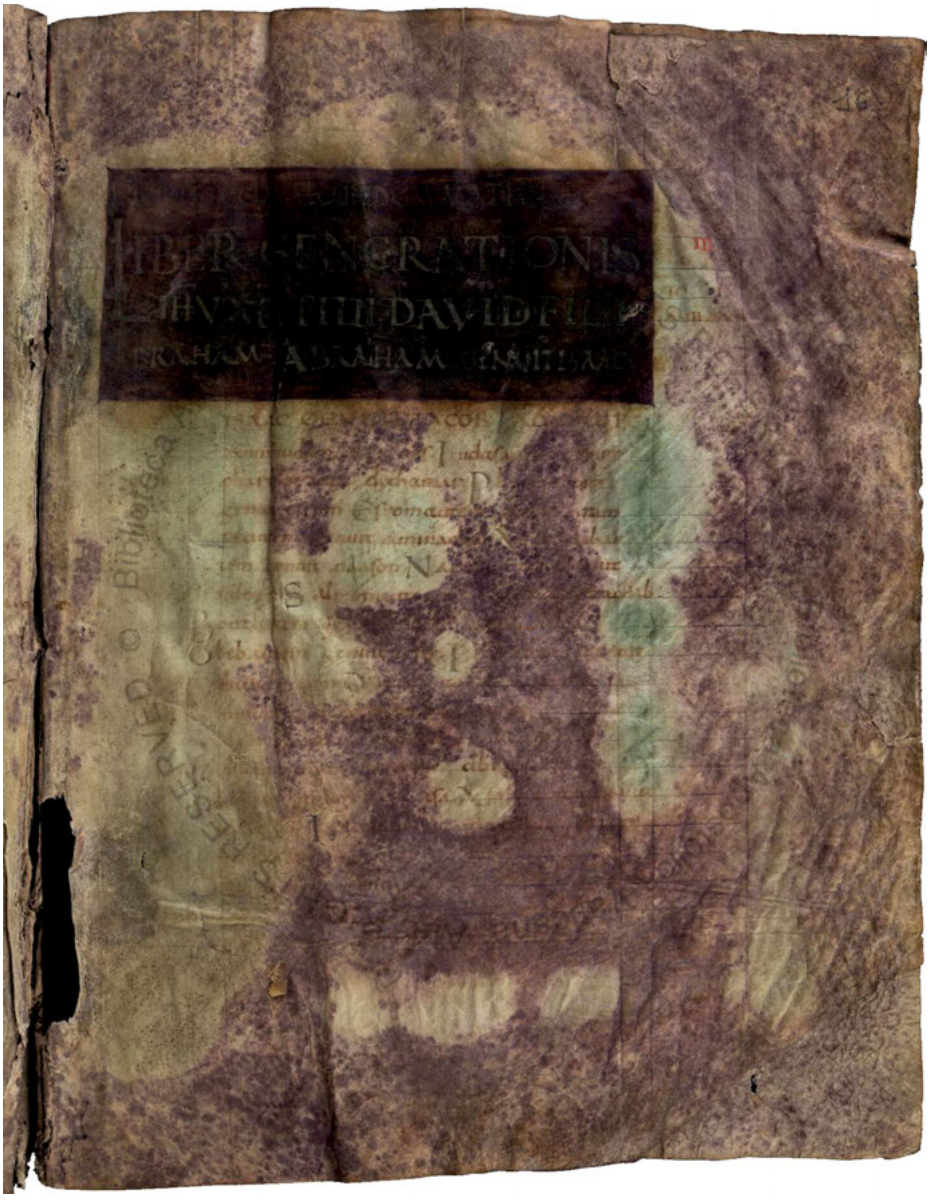

Fig. 4: Gospel-book of S. Maria in Via Lata (Berta Gospels), initium of Matthew (fol. 16r), 2nd half of the 9th century.

As for the date of the Gospel-book and its cover, it has long been assumed that they were made around the turn of the millennium, in the late tenth or early eleventh century.[23] The main reason for this attribution was the identification of the figure of Berta on the cover with a Roman noblewoman who appears in several documents of the monastery and is referred to as a member of the convent. Things began to get more complicated in 1980, when two papers with in-depth analyses of the codex appeared. In one of these, Paola Supino Martini, a leading expert on Roman paleography of the time, demonstrated that the manuscript must have been written much earlier, in the last quarter of the ninth century.[24] Concomitantly, Laura d'Adamo, a textile historian, presented the results of her technical investigation of a silken fabric that had been discovered beneath the silver plates: a samite with a pattern of large roundels showing a man fighting a lion (Fig. 5–6).[25] According to d'Adamo, this textile was made in Syria towards the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century. On the basis of these findings, Supino Martini concluded that the silk constituted the original binding of the late Carolingian Gospel-book. As a codicological examination showed, the manuscript had never been rebound. Around the turn of the millennium, the silver covers would have been added to the still-extant binding. In two recent contributions by Franca Petrucci Nardelli and Maria Laura Marchiori, this timeline has been called into question. Yet the arguments of both of these scholars in favor of a contemporaneous date for the manuscript and its silver covers fail to convince.[26] Supino Martini's reconstruction remains the most plausible hypothesis: we are dealing with a Gospel-book that was written in Rome in the late ninth century, and transferred to a recently founded monastery a century later. Against Petrucci Nardelli and Marchiori, it needs to be emphasized that these stages correspond to two different luxury bindings: the first made out of precious silk, and the second consisting of two silver plates nailed onto this fabric.[27]

Obviously, the question of the date also has implications for the identification and the role of the commissioner mentioned in the inscription on the cover. For Vincenzo

23 See Federici 1898, 138–139; Toesca 1927, 1110; Bertelli 1984, 588. On stylistic grounds, Pomarici 1999, 146 suggested a still later date in the later twelfth century.

24 See Supino Martini 1980.

25 See d'Adamo 1980.

26 According to Petrucci Nardelli 2003, the silver covers were made at the same time as the manuscript, between 875 and 900. She invokes paleographic and iconographic features of the upper cover in favor of this hypothesis. The major problem is that a gift to the monastery's two patron saints before its foundation makes no sense, and that there is no evidence that the monastery could have been founded earlier. Against Petrucci Nardelli, Marchiori 2012 provides a critical reassessment of the sources regarding the foundation of the monastery in 950/960. In her opinion, the entire codex was a donation by one member of the founders' family, Berta, for the new convent. Yet by assigning to the manuscript and the covers a mid-tenth century date, Marchiori ignores Supino Martini's paleographic evidence.

27 In two previous publications, I uncritically accepted Petrucci Nardelli's and Marchiori's proposals, and therefore failed to see this point, see Ganz 2015a, 88; Ganz 2018a, 186–195.

Federici, the late-nineteenth-century discoverer of the codex, it was clear that the 'Berta' of the cover is the same person as "Berta religiosa ancilla dei", a Roman noblewoman and member of the convent who is mentioned in three documents from the monastery's archive, dating between 1012 and 1024.[28] Certainly this Berta would have been wealthy enough to donate a Gospel-book with a binding of silver, gold and gemstones. Another interesting candidate has been discussed by Marchiori: Berta, a half-sister of Prince Alberic of Rome (d. 954) and a cousin of the three sisters Marozia, Stephania and Theodora who founded the monastery in 950/960.[29] Such a direct relationship with the group of the founders, one of the most powerful Roman families of the time, would offer a strong motive for such a prestigious donation. Yet one big question mark remains: there is no evidence for Alberic's half-sister being a member of the convent at all. Therefore, the woman mentioned in the charters between 1012 and 1024 should still be taken into consideration as a possible patron of the book.

Irrespective of this question, it is clear that 'Berta' commissioned only a new cover for an already existent and lavishly-bound manuscript. Keeping this in mind will considerably alter the meaning of the inscription along the edge of the upper cover. Its exact wording is:

> *SVSCIPE XP(ist)E ET S(an)C(t)E CYRIACE ATQ(ue) NICOLAE HOC OPVS Q(uo)D EGO BERTA ANCILLA D(e)I FIERI IVSSI.*
>
> ("Christ, along with St Cyriacus and Nicholas, accept this work that I, Berta, servant of God, ordered to be made").[30]

Reading the inscription as part of the 'paratext' of the Gospel-book, one would expect that "this work" referred to the manuscript enclosed in the cover, or the codex in its entirety. And of course this understanding was and is still obvious for any reader who lacks information about the book's history. But since the addressees named in the text may not be so easily deceived, a more accurate reading seems appropriate: according to this theory, "this work" would only refer to those parts of the book that Berta actually commissioned herself: that is, the silver covers minus the recycled gilt cross with gemstones. Given that the Gospel-book was already covered with a precious fabric, the creation of "this work" could be judged completely superfluous. But of course this is not the idea that Berta's inscription articulates. As we will soon see, ornament was thought to be crucial, enhancing the book's sacredness in the performative context in which it was used. In this sense, "this work" added the ultimate embellishment to an already ornate object.

28 See Federici 1898, 138–139; Supino Martini 1980, 106. On May 25 1012, *domna Berta religiosa ancilla dei* purchases a farmhouse in the terrritory of Albano, and on March 9 1024 *Berta religiosa ancilla dei de venerabili monasterio sancti Christi martyris Ciriaci* buys a vineyard in the same area. The documents are edited in Hartmann 1895, 40–42 (32), 42 (33), 58–59 (47).

29 Marchiori 2012, 116–123.

30 English translation after Marchiori 2012, 113.

Fig. 5: Gospel-book of S. Maria in Via Lata (Berta Gospels), back cover with Byzantine silk, late 8th or early 9th century.

Fig. 6: Gospel-book of S. Maria in Via Lata (Berta Gospels), front cover with Byzantine silk, late 8th or early 9th century.

Roman Books and Early Medieval Liturgy

The paucity of what actually remains from Roman book production stands in stark contrast to the enormous significance that Rome held as a center of the early medieval book world. Thanks to the papacy, Rome was one of the few places where a powerful institution spanned classical Antiquity and the European Middle Ages along with their changing societies and cultures. Residing in the former capital of the Roman Empire and one of the most important cultural centres of the Mediterranean world, papal book collections were uniquely advantaged.[31] Rome offered continued access to antique classical culture and established itself as the most important place of exchange with the Greek culture of Byzantium. Its prestige as the 'city of books' is mirrored in Bede's well-known account of Wearmouth-Jarrow's abbot Benedict Biscop travelling repeatedly to Rome and returning with his ship full of books that added up to a "very noble and large library from Rome" (*bibliotheca de Roma nobilissima copiosissimaque*) at the time of his death.[32] Despite repeated episodes of looting, the papal library must have continued to be one of the largest and most significant in Western Europe throughout the early Middle Ages, before it was almost obliterated in the course of the twelfth century.[33]

Nowhere is the importance of Rome in early medieval book culture more prominent than in the central rite of the liturgy. The often discussed phenomenon that one could summarize as 'liturgical Romanness' – with the popes taking on the role of the ultimate authors and safekeepers of Latin liturgy – depended largely on the distribution of 'Roman' liturgical texts. Texts and regulations coming from the Eternal City, or believed to do so, dominated every important aspect of early medieval liturgy. This topic has often been treated as part of Carolingian politics of liturgical reform – for example, the introduction of the Roman model of the sacramentary, the *Gregorianum-Hadrianum* under Charlemagne, or the accounts linked to the romanization of liturgical chant starting under Charlemagne's father Pippin III.[34] But these initiatives should not be overemphasized. They were preceded by other, similar efforts of romanizing the liturgy that are mirrored in the story of Benedict Biscop quoted above.

On a quite elementary but also very efficient level, written paratexts such as titles or prologues contributed to giving liturgical texts the appearance of Roman books: the Gregorian sacramentary propagated by Charlemagne came as "edited by the Roman pope St Gregory" (*a sancto Gregorio papa romano editum*), and its predecessor, the Gelasian sacramentary, stated its Roman origin as well: "Here begins the book of sacraments of the Roman church" (*incipit liber sacramentorum Romanae ecclesiae*). The first of the *Ordines romani* – which from the mid-eighth century onwards began to be

31 See Supino Martini 1987, 43–56; Buonocore 2010; Bilotta 2011.
32 Beda Venerabilis 1930, vol. 2, 416 (ch. 11).
33 Paravicini Bagliani 2010, 75–77; Bilotta 2011, 27–28.
34 See Bullough 1991, 7–20; von Euw 2000; Hen 2011.

widely disseminated as the authoritative model of liturgical screenplays – is presented as "order of the ecclesiastic ministry of the Roman church" (*ordo ecclesiastici ministerii romanae ecclesiae*). In addition to these liturgical handbooks, the biblical texts which were to be recited during the liturgy came in a Roman vestment, so to speak, insofar as they were used in Latin translations that were linked to the initiative of the popes: thus the *Novum opus* preface to the four Gospels, the most important of all sacred texts, prominently emphasized the papal commission to Jerome's work of translation.

For the sake of our inquiry, it is crucial to keep in mind that the authority attributed to Roman origins was a result of an interplay between two factors: while on the one hand actors such as the Frankish rulers deliberately made use of them, it was also the pontiffs who propagated themselves as ultimate safekeepers of Christian liturgy in their letters, as well as in the historical account of the *Liber pontificalis*, as Rosamond McKitterick has recently shown.[35]

As far as the liturgy of the book is concerned, it must be remembered that the first versions of the *Ordines romani* were imbricated with the specific topography of the Eternal City insofar as they subscribed to the Roman practice of stational liturgy: "The celebration of papal liturgy in a succession of Roman churches", McKitterick states, "anchored papal ritual to Roman topography and Roman saints."[36] As Felix Heinzer has highlighted with regard to *Ordo romanus* I, the practice of Roman liturgy required that papal Masses be preceded by processions from the Lateran Palace to the places of worship:

> At least at the major holidays, the ornate Gospel-book of the papal chapel will be carried at the processional ride of the pope and his cortege from the Lateran to the stational church, together with the chalice, the paten and other vasa sacra. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the book which is apparently enclosed in a precious, jewelled binding should be secured in a sealed box as a precaution.[37]

Thanks to this dynamic structure, the book participated in the various travel routes across the Eternal City that the pope had to follow:

> The gospel codex used during the festive stational mass represents this correlation [between the role of the pope as *episcopus urbis* and the urban matrix of the liturgy], not only because of its status as the gospels of the pope, but also because the instrument of the procession served the purpose of a manifestation of that conquest of the public space as cultic space that was afforded to Christian religion in the course of the Constantinian shift. The processional path through the streets and across the squares of Rome – de facto a triumph in the original sense of the word, – which precedes and leads to the cultic use of the book, can be considered as an integration of the urban space into the liturgy.[38]

35 See McKitterick 2020, 133–145.

36 McKitterick 2020, 141.

37 Heinzer 2009, 45. See *Les Ordines romani*, vol. 2, 69–74 (*Ordo romanus* I, 7–23).

38 Heinzer 2009, 51.

It is obvious that prescriptions dealing with the pope's 'journey' to the various stational churches could not be obeyed in places other than Rome, where sacred vessels and books would have been stored in each church, or sometimes even belonged to individual altars or chapels. Hence, there was a potential conflict between the logic of these objects being part of the local treasure of a specific sanctuary, enhancing its particular sacredness, and the logic of these objects being brought from the very center of the Roman church, the residence of the popes in the Lateran. According to the latter idea, the transfer of the Gospel-book to the altar at the very beginning of the Mass would have been the last stage of a longer journey that had its starting point at the papal residence. Ultimately, the proclamation of the Word of God would have originated from the popes.

Ornate Books in Medieval Rome: Evidence from the *Liber pontificalis*

While the impact of Roman texts on the European liturgy has been the topic of a long discussion, the same cannot be said of the material and aesthetic dimension of the cult: to what degree would Rome have been considered a 'model' for the artistic labor invested in the embellishment of the places, objects and actors of Christian liturgy? The attempt to answer this question leads to pathways of inquiry that hitherto have not been pursued in a systematic manner. And given the almost complete absence of *ornamenta ecclesiae* produced and/or used in early medieval Rome, we largely have to rely on reconstructions deduced from textual sources to do so – first among them the *Liber pontificalis*, with its detailed information about papal donations for Roman churches and the exchange of diplomatic gifts between the popes and foreign rulers up to the late ninth century.[39]

Looking at this collection of biographies, the picture of a church in splendid ornament emerges, its protagonists the popes acting in their capacity as bishops of the Eternal City.[40] Unlike today, where monumental architecture, mosaics and wall paintings are the principal remnants of the early medieval period, the often extremely meticulous narrative of the *Liber* conveys the idea of church interiors clad in silver, gold and silk. While the most spectacular of these objects were the early imperial donations made by Constantine for the Lateran and St Peter's, the principal Roman churches continued to receive precious liturgical furniture on a more modest level, as it seems, during the sixth and seventh century, but with increasing intensity during the early Carolingian period.[41] The bulk of these enormous investments went to the temporary instal-

39 For a critical discussion of the *Liber pontificalis* as a source for art history, see Bauer 2004, 32–38.
40 See Delogu 1988; Iacobini 2003; Montevecchi 2019.
41 For a synthesis of this development, see Delogu 1988, 273–276. However, as Bauer 2004, 32–34 rightly objects, this change mirrors a shift of priorities by the authors of the *Liber*: in the Carolingian

lations and moveable objects of liturgical performance. Participating in these events must have been an overwhelming experience for every visitor coming from elsewhere in Europe. The sheer material value of Roman *ornamenta* must have far exceeded that of any other place, including the secular courts of kings and emperors. The result was an unheard-of intensity of *splendor* – supported by light emanating from dozens of candelabra and reflected by large numbers of silver, golden and silken surfaces.[42]

As for the books used on these occasions, they participated in the same strategy of silvering and gilding the liturgy. Since they have never been analyzed as a separate group, and since the *Liber pontificalis* mentions them only in a limited number of passages, it may be useful to have a brief look at the complete list of relevant entries.

The first mention of a papal book donation comes surprisingly late: in the life of Gregory III (731–741), we hear about a series of precious liturgical objects which consisted of "a large gold paten with various stones, weighing 26 lb, also a chalice with jewels, weighing 29 lb; also gold gospels with jewels, weighing 15 lb [ca. 4.91 kg]".[43] Following the common practice in the *Liber*, the book's description is extremely short and totally focused on the paratextual materials used for the binding. We also learn that there was no substantial difference between books and other *ornamenta* in this regard. Half a century later, the biography of Leo III (795–816) mentions two *evangelia* for St Peter's: "gold gospels adorned all round with jewels, prases and jacinths, and pearls of wondrous size, weighing 17 lb 4 oz [ca. 5.67 kg]"[44] and "a gospel-book of fine silver-gilt, weighing 6 lb 3 oz [2.04 kg]".[45] According to the *Liber*, Leo's donations exceeded those of every other pope. As the comparison between the two entries shows, these gifts followed a hierarchical system of material distinctions between more important and less prestigious objects. In the ninth century, book donations start to be mentioned with more frequency, but the era of heavy golden books encrusted with gemstones seems to have passed: thus, Leo's successor Paschalis (817–824) is recorded to have given a "gospel-book with a silver cover weighing

period, the accounts show a stronger interest in documenting individual donations than in the time before. In neither case can the indications be regarded as complete.

42 See Pavolini 2003.

43 *The Lives of the Eighth Century Popes*, 24. *Item fecit patenam auream magnam cum diversis lapidibus, pens. lib. XXVI. Et calicem similiter cum gemmis, pens. lib. XXVIIII. Similiter et evangelia aurea cum gemmis, pens. lib. XV. Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 1, 419.

44 *Hic fecit beato Petro apostolo fauctori suo evangelia aurea cum gemmis prasinis atque iacinctinis et albis mire magnitudinis in circuitu ornata, pens. lib. XVII et uncias IIII. Et fecit calicem aureum praecipuum, diversis ornatum lapidibus pretiosis, pens. lib. XXVIII. Similiter et patenam auream pens. lib. XXVIII et uncias VIIII.* ("For his patron St Peter, gold gospels adorned all round with jewels, prases and jacinths, and pearls of wondrous size, weighing 17 lb 4 oz; a special golden chalice, adorned with various precious stones, weighing 28 lb; also a golden paten weighing 28 lb 9 oz.") *Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 2, 15 (57); *The Lives of the Eighth Century Popes*, 204.

45 *The Lives of the Eighth Century Popes*, 221. *Fecit vero ubi supra* [= in basilica beati Petri apostoli], *intro confessionem beati Leonis confessoris atque pontificis evangelium ex argento mundissimo deauratum, pens. lib. VI et unc. III. Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 2, 27 (87).

8 lb 8 oz [ca. 2,83 kg]" to St Peter's.[46] Sergius II (844–847) donated "a gospel-book of fine silver-gilt" for the *confessio* of S. Martino ai Monti which he had rebuilt and endowed with many relics and ornaments.[47] The disastrous looting of Old St Peter's and S. Paolo fuori le mura by the Saracens in August 846 made Sergius' pontificate one of the major turning points in the history of Roman church treasuries. Trying to cope with the enormous losses, Leo IV (847–855) distributed ample donations to various churches. Among them was "a Gospel with silver panels" that Leo is said to have donated to the chapel of his namesake Leo I in St Peter's, together with several "catholic books".[48] Under Leo's successor, Benedict III (855–858), the number of donations rose to three Gospel-books, one of them apparently more important, "sheathed in silver and gold, weighing 15 lb" for the conventual church of St Calixtus, and the other two "of fine silver" for the titular churches St Balbina and St Cyriacus.[49] In a remarkable passage dedicated to another ornate book, the motivation behind these commissions is explained:

> As a capable servant of Christ and as one who with pure heart unceasingly bore the great care of the holy church [...] he saw that the holy church had suffered the theft or loss of the cover of that volume in which the readings of Paul the apostle's true preaching, and the epistles of the other apostles and of the prophets, are set out in order, readings which the subdeacons, aloft at the ambo, regularly read at all stationes of the churches. Great concern seized him firmly, and he

46 *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 23. *Enimvero et in ecclesia beati Petri apostoli fauctoris sui fecit evangelium cum baticin ex argento, pens. lib. VIII, unc. VIII*. *Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 59 (27).

47 *Item beatissimus papa fecit in basilica sancti Martini confessoris confessionem de argento purissimo exauratam, cum imagine sanctae Mariae cum decem virginibus; et in ipsa confessione evangelium de argento purissimo exaurato et rugula in praedicta confessione, par I.* ("In St Martin the confessor's basilica this blessed pope provided a confessio of fine silver-gilt, with an image of St Mary with 10 virgins; in the confessio a gospel-book of fine silver-gilt; also in the confessio one pair railings.") *Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 2, 97 (38); *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 104.

48 *Similiter et codices catholicorum numero VII, Historiarium, Salomonem, Antiphonarium et Psalterium, Sacramentorum, Gestarum et Sermonum, seu et Evangelium cum tabulis argenteis*. ("Also 7 codices of catholic [books]: the Histories, a Solomon, an Antiphonary and a Psalter, a Sacramentary, the Acts and the Homilies, and a Gospel with silver panels.") *Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 132 (105); *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 155–156.

49 *Nam et in titulo Calixti fecit* [...]. *Ad laudem et gloriam ipsius ecclesiae fecit evangelium argento auroque perfusum I, pens. lib. XV*. ("In Callistus's *titulus* he provided [....]. For this church's praise and glory he provided 1 gospel-book sheathed with gold and silver, weighing 15 lb.") *Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 145–146 (25); *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 182. *Et in ecclesia beatae Balbine martyris optulit evangelium ex argento purissimo*. ("In St Balbina the martyr's church he presented a fine silver gospel-book.") *Le Liber pontificalis* 1955–1957 vol. 2, 146 (25); *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 182. *Et in titulo beati Cyriaci martyris optulit evangelium unum ex argento purissimo, ad laudem et gloriam ipsius ecclesiae*. ("In St Cyriac the martyr's titulus he presented 1 gospel-book of fine silver, to that church's praise and glory.") *Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 146 (29); *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 183.

> endeavoured to prepare another such volume similarly worthy of it [...]. Decorating it with silver panels of wondrous workmanship, he freely presented it to the Roman church.[50]

In addition to papal donations, the *Liber pontificalis* mentions books that arrived as prestigious diplomatic gifts from the Byzantine court. The first of these imperial presents is mentioned in the life of pope Hormisdas (514–523) – more than two centuries before books begin to appear in the record of papal commissions. At the beginning of a list of objects Hormisdas is said to have received from Byzantium, there are "gospels with gold covers and precious jewels, weighing 15 lb [ca. 4.91 kg]".[51] In the mid-seventh century, emperor Constans II sent "golden gospels decorated all around with white gemstones of amazing size" on the occasion of the election of Vitalian (657–672).[52] After that, the custom of eastern imperial book donations disappears from the account of the *Liber*, to reappear only in the mid-ninth century: in the life of Benedict III "one fine gold gospel-book with various precious stones" is mentioned. As the text explains, this and other presents were delivered by the monk Lazarus whom Michael, the son of emperor Theophilus, had dispatched to Rome.[53]

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50 *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 185. *Verum etiam ethereo conpunctus nutu magnam sanctae ecclesiae ut idoneus Christi minister curam corde purissime indesinenter gerens, tectum scilicet voluminis in quo constant vere praedicationis Pauli videlicet apostoli et aliorum apostolorum epistolas atque prophetarum ordinabiliter constitute lectiones, quae a subdiaconibus leguntur per cunctas ecclesiarum stationes more solito sursum in ambone, raptum vel perditum a sancta ecclesia fuisse percipiens, captum cum magna vehementer sollicitudine, oc tale dignum similiter volumen praeparare studuit, in quo grecas et latinas lectiones quas die sabbato sancto Paschae simulque et sabbato Pentecosten subdiaconi legere soliti sunt scriptas adiungi praecepit, mireque operationis tabulis argenteis decenter adornans sanctae ecclesiae Romanae libenter optulit*. *Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 2, 147 (32).

51 *Sub huius episcopatum multa vasa aurea vel argentea venerunt de Grecias, et evangelia cum tabulas aureas cum gemmis pretiosis, qui pens. lib. XV; patenam auream cum yaquintis qui pens. lib. XX* [...]. *Haec omnia a Iustino Augusto orthodoxo votorum gratia optulta sunt*. ("In his episcopacy there came from Greece many gold and silver vessels, and: gospels with gold covers and precious jewels, weighing 15 lb; a gold paten with jacinths, weighing 20 lb [...]. All these were presented by the orthodox emperor Justin as an offering for prayers answered.") *Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 1, 271 (10); *The Book of Pontiffs*, 48.

52 *Hic direxit responsales suos cum synodicam, iuxta consuetudinem, in regiam urbem apud piissimos principes, significans de ordinatione sua. Et dum suscepti essent renovantesque privilegia ecclesiae reversi sunt. Quorum clementia per eosdem missos direxerunt beato Petro apostolo evangelia aurea cum gemmis albis mirae magnitudinis in circuitu ornatas*. ("He sent his apocrisiarii with the usual synodic letter to the pious emperors in the imperial city, informing them of his ordination. When they had been received and had secured the renewal of the church's privileges they came home. Their Clemency sent to St Peter by the same envoys gold gospels decorated around with pearls of wondrous size.") *Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 1, 343 (1); *The Book of Pontiffs*, 71.

53 *Huius temporibus Michahel, filius Theofili imperatoris, Constantinopolitanae urbis imperator, ob amorem apostolorum misit ad beatum Petrum apostolum donum per manum Lazari monachi et picturiae artis nimie eruditum, genere vero Chazarus, id est evangelium de auro purissimo I cum diversis lapidibus pretiosis; calicem vero similiter de auro et lapidibus circumdatum*. ("In his time Michael, emperor of the city of Constantinople, son of the emperor Theophilus, for love of the apostles sent a

And western rulers? The *Liber pontificalis* mentions just one highly significant case: after his coronation as Roman emperor at Christmas 800, Charlemagne distributed several presents between the churches of the Eternal City. Among the objects which he donated to the Lateran basilica, a "gospel-book with a cover of fine gold, adorned with jewels, weighing .. lb" is highlighted.[54]

The picture that emerges from the *Liber pontificalis* is that of a practice of enshrinement focused on one particular text, the collection of the four Gospels. This exclusive treatment mirrors the regulations of the *Ordines romani* in which the platform of the most elevated place of clerical performance, the ambo, is reserved for the moment when the deacon recites the pericopes from the life of Christ. As we also learn from the *Liber*, the popes paid much attention to the implications of light emanating from the Gospel-book in the moment of the liturgical reading. In the biography of Leo III, for example, the donation of a *lectorium* and *cereostati* in fine silver for St Peter's is mentioned, and their function of creating brightness for the Word of God is highlighted:

> In the same place [i. e. St Peter's] he provided [...] a decorated lectern of wondrous size and beauty, of fine silver weighing 114 lb; candlesticks of fine silver, to stand close to this lectern, weighing in all 49 lb; and over these candlesticks 2 cast lanterns with 2 wicks, of fine silver weighing 27 lb; and he decreed that they should stand on either side close to the lectern on Sundays on saints' solemnities to shine with bright light for the reading of the holy lessons.[55]

The precedence given to the Gospels is equally manifest in paraliturgical situations: one such typical moment is the public performance of a solemn oath, for example when the same Leo III, shortly before Charlemagne's coronation, convened "all the archbishops, bishops, abbots, and all the Franks who were in the great king's service, and all the Romans" in St Peter's where:

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gift to St Peter the apostle by the hand of the monk Lazarus – he was very well trained in the painter's skill, though he was a Khazar by race. The gift was 1 fine gold gospel book, with various precious stones; a chalice of gold, surrounded with stones [...].") *Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 147 (33); *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 185–186.

54 *Item, in basilica Salvatoris domini nostri, quae appellatur Constantiniana, obtulit* [...] *verum etiam et evangelium cum battaci ex auro mundissimo, in gemmis ornatum, pens. lib.* ("In the Saviour our Lord's basilica called Constantinian, he presented [....] a gospel-book with a cover of fine gold, adorned with jewels, weighing ... lb"). *Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 8 (25); *The Lives of the Eighth Century Popes*, 192.

55 *The Lives of the Eighth Century Popes*, 208. *Fecit ubi supra* [...] *lectorium ex argento purissimo mire magnitudinis et pulcritudinis decoratum, pens. lib. CXIIII; necnon et cereostatos ex argento mundissimo, stantes iuxta ipsum lectorium, pens. simul lib. XLVIIII; verum etiam super ipsos cereostatos fecit lucernas fusiles bimixas II, ex argento purissimo, pens. lib. XXVII. Et hoc constituit ut dominicorum diem vel in sanctis sollempnitatibus hinc inde iuxta ipsum lectorium consisterent et ad legendum sacras lectiones luminis splendore refulgerent. Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 18 (67).

> the venerable pontiff embraced Christ's four holy gospels, and in their sight he went up into the ambo, and stated aloud on oath: 'I have no knowledge of these false allegations [...] and I know that I have not committed such crimes.' This done, all the archbishops, bishops and abbots, and the whole clergy performed a litany and gave praise to God, to his mother our lady the ever-virgin Mary, St Peter prince of the apostles and all God's saints.[56]

Clearly, the Gospel-books received as gifts from foreign emperors were also handed over in a ritual context. In all accounts of golden Gospel-books arriving from the Byzantine court, they are singled out as presents with major symbolic impact – although these books containing Greek texts were of no practical use in the Western liturgy.

Another point that should not be omitted is the astonishingly peripheral role that books play in the accounts of the *Liber pontificalis*. Other objects such as antependia and altar claddings, ambos, crosses, ciboria, candlesticks, crowns, chalices and patens appear with much higher frequency.[57] In the case of Leo III, the overall weight of donations in precious metal is 22,100 lb of silver (7,227 kg) and 1,446 lb of gold (472.8 kg) – which means that the books mentioned in his biography contributed only 0.3 % and 1.2 % of these metals respectively.[58] However, there is reason to question these small numbers: the use of books for liturgical reading, liturgical prayer and liturgical chant was a formal requirement, and their ornament a necessity. That book covers clad with silver, gold and gemstones were a standard for the papal liturgy is confirmed by the *Ordines romani*: here, the use of a sealed box (*capsa*) is required to protect the precious cover and to prevent the loss of gemstones during the passage from the Lateran palace to the stational church.[59] Therefore, we can assume that the *Liber* is extremely incomplete in terms of luxurious books.[60] The most plausible explanation for the sparsity of references is that most book coverings were too lightweight to include them in lists of papal endowments which were meant to impress their readers in terms of the weight of precious metals.

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56 *The Lives of the Eighth Century Popes*, 190. *Alia vero die, in eadem ecclesia beati Petri apostoli, omnes generaliter archiepiscopi seu episcopi et abbates et omnes Franci qui in servitio eidem magni regis fuerunt, et cuncti Romani in eadem ecclesia beati Petri apostoli, in eorum praesentia amplectens prelatus venerabilis pontifex sancta Christi quattuor evangelia coram omnibus ascendit in ambonem et sub iusiurando clara voce dixit: 'quia de istis criminibus falsis, quibus super me inposuerunt Romani qui inique me persecuti sunt, scientiam non habeo, nec talia egisse me cognosco.' Et hoc peractum, omnes archiepiscopi, episcopi et abbates et cunctus clerus, letania facta, laudes dederunt Deo atque Dei genitricis semperque virginis Mariae dominae nostrae et beato Petro apostolorum principi omniumque sanctorum Dei. Le Liber pontificalis,* vol. 2, 7 (22).

57 See Delogu 1988.

58 Delogu 1988, 276.

59 *Diebus vero festis, calicem et patenam maiores et evangelia maiora de vestiario dominico exeunt sub sigillo vesterarii per numerum gemmarum, ut non perdantur. Les Ordines romani*, vol. 2, p. 73 (*Ordo romanus* I, 22).

60 The incompleteness of the *Liber* is rightly emphasized by Bauer 2004, 32–34.

Roman Books as Models? From Books in Gold and Silver to Books in Ivory

With regard to Rome as a model for liturgical ornamentation, it is tempting to look at the most prominent golden books from all over Europe that have been preserved as emulations of papal ornament – that is, the Theodelinda Gospels in Monza (ca. 600) (Fig. 15–16), the Lindau Gospels (ca. 860/70), the Codex Aureus from St Emmeram (870) (Fig. 24), and the Reichenau Gospels from Bamberg (ca. 1010).[61] If we factor in that the indications of weight provided by the authors of the *Liber* comprise only the precious materials – gold, silver, and gemstones – then the most impressive golden book of the Middle Ages, the Codex Aureus of St Emmeram commissioned by Charles the Bald remains well behind the golden Gospel-books donated by Gregory III, Leo III, and by emperor Justin: the gold used for its cover has 'only' a weight of 2.77 kg, and that of its gemstones 0.5 kg.[62] However, given the extent of the destruction of the objects in question, it is extremely difficult to tell to which degree the splendid liturgy of papal Rome set a standard – at the level of both the materials and the artistic skills that were invested – for other places in Europe.

Looking for evocations of 'Romanness' in Western European liturgical books, we are on much firmer ground when we consider a different category that has not yet been mentioned: books covered with carved ivory panels. In the early Middle Ages, bookbindings made from elephant tusks were extremely popular in different regions of the Frankish empire, and later also in Spain. Paradoxically, there is no trace of them in sources regarding Rome. In the *Liber pontificalis*, the only materials mentioned in connection with liturgical books are gold, silver and gemstones. Even more surprisingly, the lemmata which are commonly used to indicate ivory – *ebur*, *eburneus*, *elephantinus* and *osseus* – are completely absent from this text. Of course this silence could be just an omission – the result of a biased taxonomy which led the authors to privilege a narrow selection of the most prestigious materials above others. A similar tendency to obscure the share of elements such as enamel, silk and ivory can be observed in treasure inventories from the early and high Middle Ages.[63] But unlike the *Liber pontificalis*, the silence of these inventories does not extend to objects entirely made from or totally clad with those 'other' materials.

That there is indeed reason to assume that ivory held no importance in papal politics of liturgical ornament is corroborated by the corpus of preserved artworks.[64]

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61 For Monza and the Codex Aureus, see below. For the Lindau Gospels (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M. 1), see Steenbock 1965, 92–96 (21); Ganz 2015a, 131–148; Ganz 2017d. For the Reichenau Gospels (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4454), see Steenbock 1965, 126–128 (47); Ganz 2015a, 85–95; Theil 2016.

62 Jäckel 1968, 151.

63 For the underlying taxonomies of the inventories, see Burkart 2006, esp. 144–155; Ackley 2014. For references to ivory objects in early medieval inventories, see Holcomb 1999, 43–69.

64 See Goldschmidt 1914–1918; Goldschmidt 1923–1926; Gaborit-Chopin 1978. For the project of a critical revision of Goldschmidt's corpus, see Kahsnitz 2010.

Contrary to the fusible works of goldsmithery, medieval ivory carvings have survived in much higher numbers due to the hardness of their material. Therefore, many more ivory panels from book covers have been preserved than complete treasure bindings. Hence, if something like a Roman school or workshop tradition of ivory carving ever existed, we would expect to find some of its products. Looking at the corpus of preserved medieval ivory objects, however – as documented by Adolph Goldschmidt and in more recent surveys – there seems to be little room for a hitherto-overlooked workshop tradition operating in Rome. Therefore, there is strong evidence to suppose that ivory was not included at all in papal politics of liturgical ornament.[65]

The absence of ivory on the 'surfacescape' of papal book ornament appears all the more significant when we think of Rome as the leading center of ivory carving in late Antiquity. Around 400, Roman workshops were actively involved in the adoption of this material for objects related to writing, such as the diptychs distributed by the consuls or commissioned by members of the Roman nobility.[66] It is during this time that the first treasure bindings for sacred books with a pair of ivory covers were created.[67] Although none of these seem to have been actually produced in Rome, and although Constantinople took the lead in the production of carved ivories from the sixth century onwards, we can be quite sure that most of these objects would have been perceived as 'Roman' in the early Middle Ages, for a series of reasons: many of them represented officials of the Roman empire, many of them were testimonies of Roman paganism, and some of them represented artefacts of the early Roman church. As a rule, medieval ivory carvers would have reused these artefacts for their work and therefore frequently been exposed to them.[68] Not least for this reason, ivory panels for book covers were the medium of an ongoing adaptation and transformation of pictorial formulas rooted in 'Roman' traditions. Certainly, one of the most impressive results of this process are the ivory covers of the Lorsch Gospels, a Gospel-book created by the 'court school' of Charlemagne (Fig. 7).[69] In no other case do we encounter a similar classicist

65 Going through the oldest papal treasure inventory drafted in 1295 for Boniface VIII (1294–1303), this hypothesis seems to be confirmed once more: in the (surprisingly short) list of liturgical treasure books owned by the popes, we encounter several items that remind us of the preference for precious metals in the *Liber pontificalis*: an evangelistary with golden covers (*cum laminis aureis*), one big and beautiful evangelistary decorated with silver (*grossum et pulcrum guarnitum de argento*), one with silver covers (*cum laminis argenteis*), and a *pontificale*, beautiful and decorated with silver (*pulcrum guarnitum de argento*). Another type of binding that is frequently mentioned are *ordinaria*, *missalia*, and *orationalia* clad with red silk (*coperta xamito rubeo*). See Ehrle 1885, 34–35. The absence of ivory in this category is all the more striking since the inventory comprises objects such as boxes and chests of gold, silver, and ivory (*pixides et cassedule de auro et argento et ebore*) and ivory icons (*icone de ebore*), that is triptychs with moveable wings imported from Byzantium or France. See Molinier 1882–1888, 53–54 (1884), 16–17 (1885).
66 See Volbach 1976; Olovsdotter 2005; David 2007; Cameron 2013.
67 See Lowden 2007, 36–44; Ganz 2016, 65–67. See also Steenbock 1965, 69–71 (5), 73–75 (8), 76–78 (10–11).
68 See Holcomb 1999, 77–128 (Ivory as palimpsest: The uses and reuses of the past); Wittekind 2008.
69 Ivory, 37.5/38 × 27.5 cm. See Steenbock 1965, 82–83 (14); Reudenbach 1994; Kahsnitz 2010, 81–96 (11). For the manuscript, see Schefers 2000.

Fig. 7: Lorsch Gospels, front cover, ca. 810.

Fig. 8: Monza Cantatorium, back and front cover, early 6th century and ca. 900.

attitude that suggests a return to late-antique Romanness. Artistically more modest, but equally illuminating is the famous binding of the Monza Cantatorium, which visibly incorporates a late consular diptych. Changing only minimal details, the double portrait of the Roman official is transformed into a representation of the two authors of the chant-book enclosed by the covers – that is, the Jewish king David and the Roman pope Gregory (Fig. 8).[70] In this reinterpretation, writing plays a decisive role: ultimately, it is the inscriptions in capitalis in the architrave that secure the transformation of a secular official into the author of a book of Christian chant.

A Roman Book with Two Covers: The S. Maria in Via Lata Binding and its Changing Materials and Images

The broader historical picture reconstructed thus far enables us to reassess the Berta Gospels. Clearly the most conspicuous part of the book, the two silver plates, fits extremely well into the pattern of splendid ornament in precious metal. Although the covers were made roughly a century after the events reported in the *Liber pontificalis*, they give the impression of being oriented towards the highest standard of 'Roman' books, that present in the papal treasury. Especially with regard to the back cover and its golden and jeweled cross, we can understand Berta's donation as an act of elevating the status of an older Gospel-book.

This being said, we have to admit that it is much more difficult to evaluate the first binding of the Berta Gospels. Beyond precious metal and ivory, textiles constituted another eminent category of materials used for book covers. As has often been noted, fabrics are given ample space and meticulous attention in sources regarding ecclesiastical *ornamenta* – in treasure inventories from all over Europe as well as in the Roman *Liber pontificalis*.[71] It is clear that textiles of the highest quality – silken cloths with woven patterns from Byzantium or Islamic regions, but also fabrics with golden embroideries from Western workshops – were considered as highly as ornaments in precious metals. But the documents in question always refer to 'paraments': hangings, veils, and altar cloths for the church building, and liturgical vestments for the clergy. That no silken book is mentioned in the *Liber pontificalis* may once again be due to the not all too impressive quantity of material needed. In any case, the Berta Gospels do not represent the only early medieval codex to survive with a textile covering. We can therefore be sure that this practice of dressing up a book indeed represented an alternative to more durable binding materials.[72]

70 Ivory, 36.7/37 × 12.8 cm. See Steenbock 1965, 72–74 (7); Wittekind 2008, 295–297; Ganz 2016, 84–86. For the manuscript, a Cantatorium (Corbie, mid-ninth century), see von Euw 2000, 84–85.

71 See Petriaggi 1984; Osborne 1992; Martiniani-Reber 1999.

72 See Wilckens 1990; Ganz 2015a, 32–63.

The piece of fabric used for the binding is decorated with a figurative pattern: large roundels with ornate frames depict an armored man battling against a standing lion. Although the scene is still easy to recognize, the colors of the weaving have almost disappeared. Originally, they were bright and intense – red, yellow and white against a blue background. Hence, it must have been apparent to spectators that the images on both sides of the book belonged to the realm of secular iconography. As the *Liber pontificalis* tells us, this was not always the case: many of the most prestigious papal donations of paraments are said to bear Christian imagery.[73] In contrast, the courtly lion-fight motif on the Gospel-book has been rotated counterclockwise and shifted into a position where the heads of the two actors seemed to be cut off– a technique of taming secular images that we also encounter in other contexts.

One way to understand the cover commissioned by Berta is to look at it as a tool of ostentatious sacredness. Not only was a certain amount of silver added, but also an image that visualized one of the most solemn mysteries of Christian faith. Since the encounter between Gabriel and the Virgin represents the very moment when the divine Logos became incarnate, it is a very suitable choice for the exterior of a Gospel-book.[74] The event of the Annunciation could be used as a biblical metaphor for the arrival and/or the presence of Christ in 'his' book. On the cover, the depicted action takes place in the form of the transmission of spoken words to which the gestures of both figures refer. As the spoken word enters into Mary's body, so too will the Logos. In this perspective, the angel has an active role as a messenger sent by God, while Mary is characterized as passive recipient. Yet there is a detail that highlights Mary's active involvement in this process: a woolen thread that winds up from a vessel next to Mary's left leg into her lap. The creator(s) of the cover have purposefully adapted the apocryphal narrative of Mary as a temple virgin who was spinning wool for the temple veil when Gabriel approached her. In (Greek) patristic commentaries and homilies, this detail has been interpreted as an image of Mary's active participation in the incarnation of the Logos. Commentators connected it to St Paul's exegesis of the temple veil as *figura* of Christ's flesh.[75]

While the spinning Mary was very common in Byzantine representations, it appeared only rarely in Western medieval art.[76] Although there were earlier examples in Rome, I find it more probable that the maker(s) of the cover consciously decided to adapt a Byzantine prototype – and to rearrange it according to their intentions. In fact, the utensils that are needed for spinning – spindle and distaff – are absent on the cover. The process of wool production thus takes on a miraculous note. Even more striking is the concatenation of textile motifs across the cover: on Mary's side, the thread rising from the vessel is placed into a relation of contact and similarity with

73 See Petriaggi 1984, 39–43; Martiniani-Reber 1999, 300–302.

74 See Ganz 2015a, 78–85.

75 See Constas 1995; Evangelatou 2003.

76 For the Byzantine tradition, see Evangelatou 2003.

Mary's garment and the end of her cloak that hangs from her left arm. But the angel, too, is clad in a waving pallium whose foremost end merges with the curtain that screens the entrance of the building in the background. The 'speaking' right hand of Gabriel strikingly superimposes the arch that marks the upper edge of the curtain. The doorway with the veil is placed in the very center of the composition. With regard to the apocryphal narrative, the building to which the curtain belongs may be identified as the temple whose ornament the Virgin is working on.

To sum up, the process of incarnation has a visual subtext here in the act of producing and connecting textiles which serve as visual commentaries or metaphorical mirrors: while Mary is spinning wool, she gets close to the veil of the old temple and the garments of the celestial messenger. The historical event of the incarnation of Christ is linked to the sacramental process of the 'inlibration' of Christ in the Gospel-book.

Returning to the issue of 'Romanness', it should be stressed that despite these important conceptual parallels, the Berta Gospels have no resemblance with other early medieval book covers in terms of formal organization. Generally, treasure bindings have a clear tendency towards strongly accentuated and slightly elevated borders – see, for example, the roughly contemporary case of the Precious Bernward Gospels where a similar arrangement of the inscription has been chosen (Fig. 19). In the Roman Gospel-book, the strip with the inscription is too slender to 'contain' the composition. Furthermore, and this is absolutely unique, the frame of the cover in Rome is crossed by the figure of the angel, leaving no space for the inscription in this area. At a conceptual level, this trajectory of transgression appears extremely ingenious and meaningful: it underlines the biblical narrative as a metaphor for the inlibration of the Logos. However, from a formal viewpoint, it adds to an overall impression that the smiths who designed and created the silver plates proceeded without clear rules as to how the regular space of a book cover should be structured: their handling of this format differs notably from the Gospel-books, lectionaries and sacramentaries produced in other parts of Europe. In this regard, the manner in which the cross and the two saints in half-figure are placed on top of the huge narrative scene seems awkward and improvised. In a similar vein, the oddity of the blank areas between the re-used cross plate and the palmette frieze on the back cover is a sign that the executing smiths were working without clear genre models, and lacking a strategy for integrating pictorial formulas from differing contexts into a new format. Hence, the binding does not seem to be the outcome of a long and flourishing tradition in the European capital of liturgical books.

Writing on Sacred Books: Categories of Inscriptions on Treasure Bindings and their Dimension as Paratexts

In the final part of this paper, I will take a closer look at the element with which we began – inscriptions on the cover as part of the paratext of liturgical manuscripts. As the other contributions to this volume show, medieval Rome is a unique place in terms of 'epigraphic culture'. As far as inscriptions in or for artworks are concerned, the monumental apse mosaics commissioned by the popes of the early medieval period constitute an impressive example of a high-standing epigraphic practice. As Erik Thunø has shown, the authors of these texts were well aware of the rich antique tradition of monumental inscriptions, but were also able to combine allusions to classical poetry with theological reflection.[77]

To what degree this 'elitist' approach of inscribing donations with sophisticated declarations was also applied to the extinct universe of works of goldsmithery and textile art is difficult to tell. Certainly, the inscription on the Gospel-book from SS. Ciriaco e Nicola belongs to a different category of more succinct and straightforward messaging. But this should not be seen as implying a lower status of the book's patron, as a comparison with the cross reliquary casket from the Sancta Sanctorum demonstrates. Here, on one of the very rare works of goldsmithery commissioned by an early medieval pope, the inscription running around the central image *PASCHALIS EPISCOPVS PLEBI DEI FIERI IVSSIT* ("Bishop Paschal had this made for the people of God") could not be more laconic and formulaic.[78]

Yet judging the semantic potential of inscriptions from their text alone would be a fundamental mistake. The central point of this article is that they should be considered in close connection with the objects for which they are made: script on a book always means script on an object that is a container of written texts.[79] But script on an early medieval treasure book also means something different from script on the cover of a contemporary novel that has a print run of ten thousand copies. In this sense, I will proceed by combining Genette's fundamental concept of the paratext with an approach that takes the specific mediality and materiality of liturgical treasure books into account.

As we have already seen, these books lent the paratextual element of the cover an importance that became apparent in three-dimensional images and precious materials. Instead of the text of the inscription alone, a series of relationships between the inscription and other elements was at stake here: between the inscription and the book, between the inscription and the images on the cover, and between the inscrip-

77 See Thunø 2011.

78 Thunø 2002, 79.

79 The only study with a particular focus on this topic remains Petrucci Nardelli 2007. Yet her focus on the chronological relation between the act of writing and the production of the binding ("preexistent", "contemporary", and "posterious") is extremely formalistic and offers no hermeneutical perspective.

tions and the materials of the cover. Since this topic has not yet been discussed in a systematic manner, I will introduce a taxonomy of three major categories of inscriptions on early medieval treasure books and illustrate them with some examples before I return to the case of the Berta Gospels.

In a first group of inscriptions, the immediate reference is to the images on the covers: to the depicted actors and actions that they personify. Especially interesting are those cases where the inscriptions aim at a particular understanding of these images: for example, in the sense of a reenactment in the here and now of the book. In this case, inscription and image should always be considered as elements of one larger 'iconotextual paratext' of the book.

In the case of a second group of texts, acts of donation are commemorated. Here, the inscription addresses 'this' book in the sense of a singular object kept in a specific place. While the act of donation has already taken place, the inscription is always about the long-lasting results of a transaction that connects human beings – the donor(s) – to the transcendent realm – the saints, Mary, or Christ.

Finally, a third group of inscriptions should be considered: here, written words are part of the pictorial representation, appearing on books or written tablets in the images. As we will see, this group is important for systematic reasons: it is based on a constellation of deliberate self-reference.

To readers familiar with medieval art, it will not go unnoticed that each of these categories coincides with inscriptions to be found on other artworks. Yet contrary to the traditional approaches, this classification is not meant to complement categories of content.[80] While the common text-based approach has produced important insights regarding the rhetorics of inscription and their paradigm of formulaic topoi, the neglect of the particular objects on which the inscriptions are placed has dramatically reduced their semantic potential. In fact, what needs to be explored in a more systematic manner is how writing on books is related to these books, creating a particular space of interaction. In order to explain this point better, I will briefly go through the three groups mentioned above and look at some examples. A particular focus will be given to what one might call the deictic potential of inscriptions: the coordinates of persons, times and places to which they point, and their correlation to the book and its usage.

80 For a recent overview, see Debiais 2017 – whose focus is primarily on monumental art and therefore much less general than the title suggests. For donor inscriptions, see Favreau 1992; Favreau 2001. The case of artist inscriptions can be left aside for the purpose of our inquiry, since the earliest examples on treasure bindings are from the thirteenth century. For this category, see Dietl 2009. The issue of texts added to pictures has been widely discussed, for medieval art see Kessler 1989; Rütz 1991; Wittekind 1996; Arnulf 1997; Henkel 1999; Heck 2007; Kessler 2009; Heck 2010; Hahn 2011; Krause/Schellewald 2011; Wirth 2011; Rehm 2019.

Inscriptions Related to the Imagery of the Covers

As is well known, Byzantine images of the post-iconoclast era had to be accompanied by inscriptions that indicated the identity of the represented persons (Fig. 20). In Western Europe, no rules of this type were established, and only occasionally were inscriptions adapted as identifiers. Nevertheless, as we have already seen in the case of the Monza diptych, adding the name of a depicted person could be used as a powerful tool: while the portraits of the Roman consul were only slightly altered, carving letters into the framing architecture transformed them into two images of the Graduale's two sacred authors. Similar, but more complex effects can be observed with longer inscriptions in the guise of tituli.[81] A good case in point is the famous Evangelium longum of St Gall, a lectionary whose ivory covers were created by the monk Tuotilo around 900 (Fig. 9–10).[82]

The inscription of the front cover frames the central representation of Christ in Majesty, guarded by two cherubim and surrounded by the four evangelists, their symbols, and the four cosmological entities sun and moon, earth and sea. Rather than identifying the subject of this omnipresent iconography, the inscription instructs viewers to perceive this image in a particular way: *HIC RESIDET XP(istu)S VIRTVTVM STEMMATE SEPTVS* ("Here resides Christ enclosed by the wreath of virtues [or powers]") – a formula that strengthens the representative effect of this picture on this book but also invites viewers to see the surrounding figures as elements of one common world order. The images on the back cover, on the contrary, clearly tie the book to the founding history and the sacred topography of St Gall. They recall the miraculous domestication of a wild bear at the very spot where Gallus had planted a small cross with a purse reliquary containing relics of the Virgin, who was later to become the patron of the monastery church founded at the same place and whose Assumption into heaven is to be seen in the upper register. Here, the two inscriptions – *S(anctus) GALL(us) PANE(m) PORRIGIT VRSO* ("St Gallus extends bread to the bear") and *ASCENSIO S(an)C(t)E MARIE* ("Assumption of St Mary") – may indeed secure the 'correct' understanding of two subjects that are uncommon on a book containing readings from the Gospels. Yet beyond that, they help to construct the particular identity of this unique Gospel-book as an object within which the founding moment of the monastery and the Assumption of Mary, the mother of the Logos and the patron of St Gall, persist.[83]

81 While the term 'titulus' is sometimes limited to versified inscriptions, and therefore to poetic texts (see Arnulf 1997), I will use it in a broader sense here that also includes texts in prose.

82 Gold sheet, gemstones, ivory, 39.8 × 23.5 cm, the dimensions of the ivory panels are 32.0 × 15.5 cm. For the ivory cover, see Steenbock 1965, 98–100 (23); Duft/Schnyder 1984, 55–93; Ganz 2012; Ganz 2015a, 258–289. For the manuscript, a Gospel lectionary, see von Euw 2008, 425–431 (108). For Tuotilo, see Ganz/Dora 2017.

83 See Ganz 2012; Ganz 2015a, 275–282.

Fig. 9: Evangelium longum, back cover, ca. 900.

Fig. 10: Evangelium longum, front cover, ca. 900 and 2nd half of the 10th century.

Fig. 11: Ivory panels from Geneols-Elderen, back cover, late 8th century.

Fig. 12: Ivory panels from Genoels-Elderen, front cover, late 8th century.

As the example of the Evangelium longum demonstrates, inscriptions in the guise of a 'titulus' type always have a bearing on both the image they accompany and on the books on which they are placed. On another ivory covers from the late eighth or early ninth century – made for a now lost Gospel-book – a conscious use of tenses can be observed (Fig. 11–12).[84] The images on the back cover depict events described in the Gospel of Luke as important stages of Christ's incarnation. Above each scene, a short sentence is added in the present perfect: starting with the deictic *VBI*, it is stated that *GABRIEL VENIT AD MARIAM* ("Where Gabriel came to Mary") and *MARIA SALUTAVIT ELISABETH* ("Where Mary hailed Elisabeth"). Whereas the Logos is present but still invisible here, the front cover shows Christ in 'full flesh', defeating with his bare feet the beasts addressed in the inscription: *VBI D(omi)N(u)S AMBULABIT SVPER ASPIDEM ET BASILISCV(m) ET CONCVLLABIT LEONE(m) ET DRACONEM* ("Where the Lord will walk over asp and basilisk and will tread down lion and dragon"). A variation on Psalm 90:13, the sentence is formulated in the future tense and thus underlines the eschatological meaning of Christ's victorious appearance. Hence, the inscriptions on the covers point backward and forward, to a glorious past and to a triumphant future. At the same time, thanks to the deictic *VBI*, they point to the book and its capacity for mediating between both of these times and the here and now.

In this context, a late Carolingian Gospel-book from Metz Cathedral constitutes an interesting counter-case (Fig. 13).[85] In the central ivory panel, the Crucifixion of Christ is represented. The inscription is part of the surrounding frame of gold, jewels and enamels. Worthy of note, its deictic elements point away from the here and now:

> *IN CRVCE RESTITVIT XPS PIA VICTIMA FACTVS / QVOD MALA FRAVS TVLERAT SERPENTIS PREDA FEROCIS.*
>
> ("On the cross Christ was made a pious victim and restored what the evil deception of the defiant serpent had pillaged").

The depicted action is explicitly located elsewhere (*IN CRVCE*) and in the past (*RESTITVIT*). It is characterized as healing the painful consequences of an event that took place in even more remote times, at the beginning of history (*TVLERAT*). Yet by focusing on the 'remoteness' of the depicted event and its prehistory, the inscription highlights all those elements in the ivory that bridge such a geographical and historical distance: for example, the writings of the four evangelists which are being

84 Ivory with blue glass inlays, 30 × 18 cm. See Goldschmidt 1914–1918, vol. 1, 8–9 (1); Steenbock 1965, 80–82 (13); Neuman de Vegvar 1990; Kahsnitz 2010, 122–124 (19); Ganz 2015a, 78–85.

85 Gold sheet, gemstones, pearls, enamels and ivory, red velvet, 32.4 × 25.7 cm. See Steenbock 1965, 110–111 (33); Laffitte/Goupil 1991, 98; Kornbluth 1998–2002; Laffitte/Denoël/Besseyre 2007, 204–205 (55b); Ganz 2015a, 127; Ganz 2017c. The manuscript was produced in Metz ca. 840–850, see Laffitte/Denoël/Besseyre 2007, 203–204 (55a).

Fig. 13: Gospel-book from Metz Cathedral, front cover, ca. 870/80.

produced above the cross, but also the actors sitting at the bottom of the ivory: flanked by Okeanos and Tellus, Roma is shown here. Thanks to the institution of the Roman church, and thanks to the sacred books that she produces and disseminates, a permanent and worldwide mediation between there and here, then and now is guaranteed.

Inscriptions Commemorating the Donation of the Book

Many inscriptions on medieval book covers commemorate acts of donation. One of these is present on the back cover of the Evangelium longum whose outer frame bears an inscription (Fig. 14) recording that "for this ornament Amata gave twelve *denarii*" (*ad istam paraturam Amata dedit duodecim denarios*).[86] The placement and the execution of these words are so unimpressive that they could (and still can) be easily overlooked. But normally it is exactly the opposite: on the Gospel covers in Monza, for example, the horizontal strips bearing Queen Theodelinda's donor inscription are an essential part of the entire composition, which consists of orthogonal geometric figures (Fig. 15–16):[87]

> *DE DONIS DEI OFFERIT / THEODELENDA REG(ina) / GLORIOSISSEMA / S(an)C(t)O IOHANNI BAPT(istae) / IN BASELICA / QVEM IPSA FUND(avit) / IN MODICIA / PROPE PAL(atium) SVVUM.*
>
> ("Out of the gifts of God Theodelinda, the most glorious queen offers [this] to St John the Baptist in the church that she founded, in Monza, near her palace").[88]

This inscription is unusually rich in detail, offering precise information about the topographic network of places into which the donation is meant to be integrated: we learn that Theodelinda, the Queen of the Lombards, had previously founded a church dedicated to John the Baptist, and that this church was located in the vicinity of her palace in Monza, one of the seats of royal power. The object enclosed within the golden covers was intended as a donation to this church.[89] By commemorating the local context of

Fig. 14: Evangelium longum, back cover, detail with Amata's donor inscription on the outer frame, ca. 900.

86 See Ganz 2017a, 48–50.

87 Gold sheet with antique cameos, gemstones, pearls, glass, lapis lazuli, almandines, 34 × 26 cm. See Steenbock 1965, 78–80 (12); Lowden 2007, 32–34; Rainer 2011; Ganz 2015a, 227–257; Ganz 2015b; Ganz 2017b, 252–258.

88 Cited after Lowden 2007, 33.

89 One reason for the scant attention paid to the inscription as a formal element is the long-accepted identification of the book cover with a baptismal gift for Theodelinda's son Adoloald that Gregory I

her donation, Theodelinda, "the most renowned queen", correlates this network of places with the universal world order of Christianity, embodied by the Gospels and visually represented through the figures of the cross and the rectangle on both covers.

The very object of the transaction between the donor and the celestial recipient remains implicit in this early case. Later donors were less shy when it came to emphasizing the high value of 'their' books in ambitious terms. A conspicuous peak of this tendency is reached in the Ottonian period. Thus, on a lectionary that Ansfridus, bishop of Utrecht, donated to his cathedral, the book itself begins to speak to the viewer (Fig. 17):

> *ORNATV LAPIDVM RVTILANS AVROQVE POLITVM PRAESVLIS ANSFRIDI MARTINO MVNVS OBIVI.*
>
> ("Shimmering through the ornament of stones and decorated with gold, I came as a gift of bishop Ansfridus to saint Martin").[90]

Like a person, the book has moved from one bishop to the other, clad in precious materials that were to be found on the upper cover. Apparently, the use of gold and gemstones was intended to contribute to the success of this mission. In addition to their economic value, the light-reflecting properties of this ornament are evoked.

In terms of aesthetic impact, the technical mastery of the creators could also be stressed. On the back cover of the Precious Gospels commissioned by Bernward of Hildesheim (Fig. 19), the object of the donation is praised as *HOC OPV(s) EXIMIV(m) BERNVVARDI P(re)SVLIS ARTE FACTV(m)* ("This outstanding work of bishop Bernward, made with art").[91] As we have already noted with regard to the Berta Gospels, the deixis of *HOC OPVS* becomes highly ambivalent when it is placed on a book cover. In this case, readers may also ask what "this outstanding work made with art" comprises – the entire book, only its exterior parts, or only the back-cover on which the inscription is placed, surrounding a spectacular Madonna in silver-plate? While the answer to this question must be left open, it is clear that the inscription forcefully makes the point that the value of a treasure book was enhanced by the skillful handling of the materials invested for its production. Yet especially in the case of sacred texts, such immense investments could easily be judged as excessive. This kind of objection is sometimes reflected in inscriptions that put the external splendor of the

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mentions in a letter to the Lombard queen. According to this view, the cover would have been made in Rome (!) and the inscription a later addition that disturbed the original compositional structure of the cover. For a critical reassessment of this discussion, see Rainer 2011, 63–70.

90 Silver sheet, red velvet (ca. 1500), 33.5 × 26 cm. See Steenbock 1962, 555–563; Steenbock 1965, 185–186 (89); Ganz 2018a, 195–202. For the manuscript, a Gospel lectionary (possibly St Gall, second half of the tenth century), see the short entry in Stiegemnann/Kroker 2009, 399–400.

91 Silver plate, partially gilt, niello, silk, 28.0 cm × 20.5 cm. See Steenbock 1965, 158–160 (66); Brandt 1993; Ganz 2010, esp. 204, 206–211. For the inscription, see also Wulf 2008, 7–8. For the manuscript, a Gospel-book, see Kingsley 2014.

Fig. 15: Gospels of Queen Theodelinda, back cover, ca. 600.

Fig. 16: Gospels of Queen Theodelinda, front cover, ca. 600.

Fig. 17: Ansfridus Codex, back cover, early 11th century and ca. 1500.

book in relation to its inner, spiritual value. A key term for emphasizing the appropriateness of the costly and elaborate decoration of the book is 'honor'. On the frame of a Byzantine ivory panel appropriated for a now-lost Gospel-book, Berthold, a bishop who has been identified as Berthold of Toul (996–1019), declares that (Fig. 20):

> *PRESVLIS IMPERIIS / BERTOLDI CLAVDITVR OMNIS / TEXTVS EVANGELII / REDIMITVS HONORE DECENTI.*
>
> ("By Bishop Berthold's command, the text of the entire Gospel [or: the entire Gospel-book] is enclosed, garlanded with fitting honor").[92]

Instead of reusing the succinct *TEXTVS EVANGELII* formula, donors could also choose a more extensive appraisal of the book's religious significance. Nowhere did this happen with such eloquence as in the verses on the front cover of the Pericopes of Henry II (Fig. 21):

> *GRAMMATA QVI SOPHIE QVERIT COGNOSCERE VERE / HOC MATHESIS PLENE QVADRATVM PLAVDET HABERE / EN QVI VERACES SOPHIE FVLSERE SEQVACES.*
>
> (Whosoever seeks to understand the writings of the true wisdom / Rejoices to possess this rectangle filled with learning / Behold here those who shone forth as true followers of wisdom").

In the first place, what is to be praised about this book is that it enables Christians to find the spiritual message they were looking for, a message formulated by the "true followers of wisdom". As the last verse explains, the lavishly decorated cover is to be considered as appropriate ornament for such a salvific content: *ORNAT PERFECTAM REX HEINRIH STEMMATE SECTAM* ("King Henry adorns this perfect doctrine with a crown [or: a wreath]).[93] Consciously, the present tense is used here, thereby creating an "endless material loop" insofar as "the book's ritual use reified and repeated Henry's donation."[94]

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92 For an extensive discussion of the ivory and its inscription, see North/Cutler 2003. See also Ganz 2015a, 321. The translation is from Cutler/North 2003. For *textus evangelii* as a phrase for the material Gospel-book (rather than for text of the Gospels), see Lentes 2005.

93 Translation based on Fillitz 1994, 121; Garrison 2012, 127; Toussaint 2013, 50. Toussaint is more precise with tenses but still uses the future for PLAVDET which I have corrected. Gold sheet, silver, gemstones, pearls, enamels, ivory, 42.5 × 32 cm. See Steenbock 1965, 131–133 (50); Fillitz 1994; Garrison 2012, 125–133; Toussaint 2013, 49–56; Ganz 2015a, 315–323. For the manuscript, a Gospel lectionary (Reichenau, early eleventh century), see Mütherich/Dachs 1994.

94 Garrison 2012, 127.

Fig. 18: Precious Gospels of Bernward of Hildesheim, front cover, tenth century, ca. 1015 and ca. 1192.

Fig. 19: Precious Gospels of Bernward of Hildesheim, back cover, tenth century, ca. 1015 and ca. 1192.

Fig. 20: Hodegetria with four saints and donor inscription of bishop Berthold, 10th century and ca. 1000.

Fig. 21: Pericopes of Henry II, front cover, ca. 860/870, 10th century, and 1007–1012.

Donor Inscriptions Addressing Depicted Recipients

Occasionally, donors chose to connect the written words commemorating them closely to the images which they placed on the covers. Of particular interest in our context are those cases where the texts directly address heavenly actors that are depicted in the image – sometimes begging for the acceptance or consideration of the donated object, sometimes praying for mercy. Inscriptions of this type tell us a lot about the often unspoken expectations that guided donors of treasure books. At the same time, they transform the act of donation into a perpetual drama that accompanies the liturgical use of the book. Thus, on the highly original but also controversial ivory panel of the Notker Gospels in Liege (Fig. 22), the distych on the frame says that

> *EN EGO NOTKERVS PECCATI PON/DERE PRESSVS / AD TE FLECTV GENV QVI TERRES / OMNIA NVTV.*
>
> ("See here, I Notker, depressed by the weight of the sin [give this/appeal] to you who frighten all with your nod, with bent knee").[95]

The image enclosed in these words shows Christ in Majesty hovering between the four symbols of the evangelists – one of the most common subjects for the decoration of a Gospel-book, which we have also encountered on the Evangelium longum. Yet thanks to the inscription, Christ becomes the addressee of the supplication formulated by *EGO NOTKERVS* – that is, Notker, bishop of Liège between 972 and 1008. The words written in the frame give voice to the figure whom we see at the bottom of the *Maiestas domini* – a man in clerical attire who has left his episcopal cathedra and is now kneeling down before what seems to be a chapel or a church. According to the sources, bishop Notker founded the collegiate church of Saint Jean, to which the Gospel-book belonged, as an act of penance after he had destroyed three churches during the siege of Chèvremont. The fact that the book in his hands is open – without any doubt the Gospel-book itself – makes him a permanent reader devoted to the enthroned Logos.

Not the weight of a particular sin, but a general anxiety about the fate of his own soul is articulated on Bernward's Precious Gospels. On the front cover (Fig. 18), the following words are engraved in the frame of a Byzantine ivory panel that the bishop of Hildesheim had purchased: *SIS PIA QVESO TVO BERN/VVARDO TRINA POTESTAS*

95 Enamels, gilt copper, ivory, 30.0 × 24.0 cm. The elements in the frame are later additions (twelfth century and ca. 1500). The manuscript is an unfinished Gospel-book (Stavelot, second half of the twelfth century). The date of this ivory has been much debated. Several scholars have argued in favor of the twelfth century, see Gaborit-Chopin 1978, 87; Lasko 1994, 171–174. In fact, the halo around Notker's head seems to preclude a creation during the bishop's lifetime. Yet this element could also be a later addition. For a convincing discussion of the ivory as Ottonian with later modifications (twelfth century), see Brandt/Eggebrecht 1993, vol. 2, 215–216 (IV-51).

Fig. 22: Notker Gospels, ivory from the front cover, ca. 990/1000.

("Have mercy upon your Bernward, I pray you, threefold power").[96] The inscription addresses the three actors of the Deesis represented in the image, but the Ego whose words it utters is only present in the text. Thus, the text permanently activates the figures on the cover as interlocutors of the donor. Looking at the back cover (Fig. 19), it becomes evident that the donated object itself is meant to influence this process in a favorable manner: after stressing the "art" of "this outstanding work", the inscription here continues: *CERNE D(eu)S MATER ET ALMA TVA* ("Behold, O God and your nourishing mother"). Thus, the aesthetic quality of the book's exterior was meant to play an active role in the judgement of Bernward's soul.

96 Gilt silver, gemstones, pearls, glass, ivory, 28.0 cm × 20.5 cm. The ivory panel is from a Byzantine triptych (Constantinople, tenth century); the frame has been renewed in the late twelfth century. See the literature cited above, note 90. For a different translation – *TRINA POTESTAS* as "Triune God", see Wulf 2008, 9.

Inscriptions as Representations of Written Words

A third category is constituted by inscriptions which function as representations of written texts. To my knowledge these have not yet been treated as a distinct group – although they are extremely numerous and constitute an important argument for an interpretation of treasury bindings as paratexts. First of all, inscriptions inside an image are a common feature of medieval Crucifixion imagery. During the ninth century, the image of Christ on the cross became one of the most prominent subjects on Gospel-books, lectionaries and sacramentaries. Therefore, the cross titulus that Pontius Pilate had written and ordered to be attached above Christ's body is by far the most frequent inscription that we find on medieval treasure bindings.[97] The omnipresence of the cross title highlights the fact that the first text about Christ was written on the cross. On the Gospel-book made for Metz Cathedral, for example (Fig. 13), the title acts as a prototype for the Gospels that the evangelists compose sitting above the cross. Each of the four authors would have included the titulus verbatim in his account, but with a different wording.[98]

Inscriptions that represent written texts have a strong tendency to cite verses from the sacred scriptures enclosed by the covers. On a late tenth-century ivory panel from Metz which must have arrived at Bamberg Cathedral with the donations by Henry II (Fig. 23), two events from the history of Christ's childhood are depicted: the Annunciation to Mary and the Nativity.[99] As for the upper register, at first glance the virgin's encounter with the archangel seems to develop as a mere dialogue. Yet between the two interlocutors, a *tabula ansata* is placed in upright position – a written object containing Mary's answer to Gabriel according to Luke 1:38: *ECCE ANCILLA D(omi)NI FIAT MIHI SECVNDV(m) VERBV(m) TVVM* ("Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word"). Unlike later speech scrolls, which represent utterances of direct speech, the *tabula* is an inscribed object containing a quote from one of the Gospels. The placement of the *tabula* on a vertical axis with the body of the

97 For the prominence of the Crucifixion on treasure bindings, see Ganz 2015a, 106–155.

98 See Ganz 2018b.

99 Ivory, velvet (early modern), 31.1 × 21.7 cm. See Steenbock 1965, 108–110 (32). The manuscript is an older Gospel-book from the second quarter of the ninth century produced in Mainz that was rebound in the late tenth century, see Bierbrauer 190, 116–117 (229). While the panel with the Baptism of Christ on the front cover is still in its Ottonian setting of gold plate and gemstones, the panel with the Annunciation and the Nativity on the back cover is surrounded by a textile covering that seems to stem from an early modern restoration. Both Graff 1736/1743, 107 and – copying from him – Murr 1799, 229 name the Crucifixion as the subject of the back cover in their inventories. Therefore, scholars have generally assumed that the Annunciation/Nativity panel was transferred from another codex to the back cover in the early nineteenth century, when the entire treasury was confiscated by the Bavarian State. Yet this hypothesis is unconvincing for several reasons: the Annunciation/Nativity panel does not appear in either Graff's or Murr's detailed inventories; there is no trace of the Crucifixion panel; and the Baptism and the Annunciation/Nativity panels are perfect twins in style and format. Hence, it seems that Graff's reference to the Crucifixion is simply an oversight by the author, and that the Gospel-book still retains both ivories from the Ottonian binding.

Fig. 23: Gospel-book from Bamberg Cathedral, ivory from the back cover, ca. 980/90.

newborn Christ hints at the different processes of the materialization of the Word after the Annunciation: in the flesh, and in the written words of the Gospels.

Certainly the most ambitious program in this regard is to be found on the front cover of the Codex Aureus of St Emmeram, a Gospel-book commissioned by Charles the Bald in 870 (Fig. 24).[100] Here, all written words are taken from the Gospels – from four different passages, with John as the principal source. Unsurprisingly, two of them are to be found in the images that show the four evangelists and their inspired text

100 Gold sheet, emeralds, sapphires, pearls, leather binding (early seventeenth century), 43.5×34.5×13 cm. See Werckmeister 1963; Steenbock 1965, 90–92 (20); Ganz 2015a, 160–191; Ganz 2018a, 202–214. For the manuscript, a Gospel-book (Court school of Charles the Bald, 870), see Bierbrauer 1990, 127–131 (248).

Fig. 24: Codex Aureus from St Emmeram, front cover, 870.

production. While the books of Mark and Luke are still empty, we can read the first words of the documents Matthew and John are working on: Liper generacionis (Matthew 1:1) and in principio (John 1:1). Sitting between them on his heavenly throne, Christ presents his own book: *EGO SVM VIA ET VERITAS ET V(ita)* ("I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14:6). The use of the 'I' here signals that Christ is, in a

certain sense, 'the' or 'a' book.[101] But even more spectacular in this regard is the scene in the upper left corner, where the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1–11) is depicted. The representation on the cover impressively highlights the fact that this is the only instance in which Christ is said to have performed an act of writing.[102] When scribes and Pharisees ask Christ if the prescriptions of the Law should be applied in this case, Christ bent down and wrote his answer with his finger on the ground. This is exactly the moment that is represented on the cover. Beneath Christ's writing finger, we can read the words *SI QVIS SINE PECCATO* ("If there is anyone without sin") – which is a variant of John 8:7: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her". While the biblical account puts emphasis on the fact that Christ wrote twice without telling us what he wrote, the Christ on the cover is writing what he actually said ("Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her", according to John 8:7). In sum, the iconotext of this original cover can be understood as a self-reflexive discourse on the multilayered authorship and complex materiality of Christian sacred scripture.

The Inscription of the Berta Gospels: A Reassessment

How do the covers of the Berta Gospels fit into this panorama of epigraphical categories and options? Clearly, the main part of the inscription belongs to our second group: it recalls the names of the patron and the celestial addressees of the book. The transfer from one to the other is the subject of a request – as if the decision to accept this gift were still pending or had to be permanently renewed. This kind of dramatization of the donation act comes very close to Bernward's Precious Gospels (Fig. 18–19). In both cases, the plea formulated by the donor connects the book to individual expectations of intercession and salvation. A further point in common is the fact that the addressees of this call to action are not only invoked by their written names, but also visually represented – text and image closely interact. In this context, it should be noted that the inscription on the Berta Gospels is complemented by the name of the monastery's principal patron, Cyriacus, written on the upper part of the left border – an element that belongs to our first category. While Christ holds the first place in the hierarchical order of the longer sentence, the repetition of Cyriacus' name emphasizes the fact that the very owner of this book is ultimately he, the patron of the monastery. Furthermore, viewers may also note that both saints are depicted holding books – Cyriacus, the deacon, holds a codex with a plain cover, and Nicholas, the bishop, a volume with ornate binding which he touches with veiled hands. Regardless of whether Berta's gift is yet to be accepted or not, it is certainly most appropriate for these men.

101 For 'EGO'-messages on books held by Christ, see Reudenbach 2014.
102 See Keith 2009; Knut/Wasserman 2010.

In contrast to the two saints, the body of the principal recipient remains invisible on the cover of the Roman Gospel-book, hidden inside Mary's womb and symbolically represented through the central cross. Clearly, this decision to substitute Christ's body with the cross-symbol gives the covers an antiquated touch when we compare it to the popularity of the Crucifixion scene in other parts of Western Europe. But the decision to place a cross between the two saints may also be seen as a visual allusion to the cross-shaped ornament of the back cover – and therefore to a particularly valuable gift that Berta chose to include on her book.

This brings us to the second part of the inscription in which Berta's role is characterized. The use of the personal pronoun *EGO* forcefully asserts her position as the patron of *HOC OPVS*. As we have seen, most donors preferred a more distanced stance, speaking in the third person about their books. The one exception that we have encountered is the Notker ivory (Fig. 22), where the use of the *EGO* is related to the bishop's figure in the image. This parallel may indeed be helpful for a better understanding of Berta's cover: for the second part of the inscription does indeed strongly interact with the Annunciation scene. For medieval readers familiar with the Gospel texts, the resonance between the wording of the relative clause in the inscription and the wording of the Annunciation pericope would have been extremely striking: the phrase *ANCILLA DEI* on the book mirrors the phrase *ancilla domini* in the book, where it was part of Mary's reply to Gabriel: *Ecce ancilla domini. Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* ("Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word", Luke 1:38).[103] Obviously, this passage from scripture could be found in the manuscript beneath the cover. Unlike the Bamberg ivory (Fig. 23), where it was repeated verbatim in the Annunciation scene, the Roman book cover echoes only parts of the passage. A decisive factor is the proximity between the words of the relative clause and Mary. While *ANCILLA DEI* is written upside down below the Virgin's throne, the words *EGO BERTA* run along the vessel with the fleece from which she is spinning wool. Hence, the iconotext of the cover suggests that the *ancilla* of the Annunciation scene is acting as a model for the *ANCILLA* of the book's donation. The fact that Berta's book donation included a precious textile – still visible on the spine – would have added to this parallel.

These observations bring us to a point that has been addressed only incidentally so far – the topological and diagrammatical dimensions of writing. While writing inside books followed a regular pattern of strictly parallel horizontal lines, there were more options for placing words on the bindings of treasure books – and for using such placement in meaningful ways. Interestingly, there was a clear preference for inscriptions that run along the borders of the cover (Fig. 12, 19–22) – constituting a written frame not only for the image in the center, but also for the book itself. A similar effect seems to be intended on the back cover of the Ansfridus Codex, where the

103 As has been already noted by Marchiori 2011, 131–132.

book speaks from the frame of the central mandorla (Fig. 17). In some cases, this gesture of encircling or encompassing the book is alluded to by terms such as *STEMMA* (Fig. 10, 21), *SEPTVS* (Fig. 10), *REDIMITVS* (Fig. 20), or *CLAVDITVR* (Fig. 20). On the front cover of the Genoels Elderen ivories, the band with the inscription is interrupted on either side in order to create a cross figure (Fig. 12). In light of these options, even inscriptions that follow the more conventional matrix of horizontal lines could assume particular meaning: texts written in lines refer to the visual order of sacred texts inside the book (Fig. 8–10, 11, 13), but they may also become an integral part of the visual order of ornaments on the book, as the case of the Theodelinda Gospels demonstrates (Fig. 15–16).

The Berta Gospels clearly follow the variant of the inscription as frame for both the central image and the book, with all the words oriented towards the center. Nevertheless, the spatial arrangement of the inscription differs from that of Non-Roman treasure books in two aspects: on the left border, the sequence of alphabetic signs is interrupted by the figure of the angel. This forceful transgression of the inscribed frame creates a visual equivalent to the divine intervention that is invoked in the first part of the text. *FIERI IVSSI*, the activity of the donor, needs to be complemented by *fiat mihi,* the submission to divine will. Yet the analogy between text and image goes even further: the structure of the sentence written on the edge, composed of two syntactical units hinged by *HOC OPVS*, finds a parallel in the bipartite arrangement of the pictorial composition. This additive structure, as inelegant as it may seem from a merely formal viewpoint, ensures a close correspondence between the images and the text. Considering the fact that the Annunciation is highly unusual as the principal subject of a Gospel-book's front cover – for example, if we compare it with the event's secondary position on the ivories from Genoels Elderen and Bamberg – one might conclude that the choice of this scene was ultimately motivated by the wish to find a suitable equivalent to a text speaking of Berta's activity as *ANCILLA DEI*.

As we have seen, the covers of the Berta Gospels and their inscription share some fundamental 'topoi' with treasure bindings from other parts of Europe. In this respect, they can be considered to be a part of a shared epigraphic culture in early medieval Europe. Yet as this analysis has shown, they also represent a particular, Roman version of this culture. Not only is Berta's donation indebted to a typically Roman preference for book covers made of precious metals, it also shares their most distinctive feature, a close correlation between text and image. Whereas inscriptions in other areas of Europe are added to images that were chosen beforehand, in the case of the Berta Gospels the images seem to have been chosen as visual equivalents to the wording of a predetermined inscription.

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