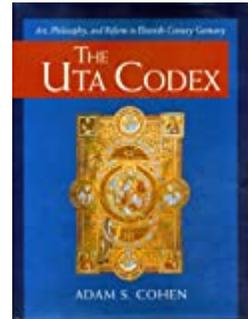




Adam S. Cohen. *The Uta Codex: Art, Philosophy, and Reform in Eleventh-Century Germany.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. xiv + 267 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-01959-8.



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A Gospel Lectionary at Niedermuenster: Iconography and Context

The wealth of inscriptions embedded within the sumptuous images of the *Uta Codex* make this Ottonian manuscript one of the most profoundly intellectual artistic creations of the eleventh century. Adam Cohen has made a wise choice in exploring this complex imagery in the historical and cultural contexts in which it was created and used.

Manufactured in the imperial city of Regensburg around A.D. 1025, the *Uta Codex* (Munich, Bavarian State Library Clm. 13601) is a collection of gospel readings originally intended to serve the liturgical needs of the nuns of Niedermuenster, a daughter house of St. Emmeran. The manuscript is still kept in its original gold box, richly encrusted with jewels, delicate gold filigree, and small enamels. Reflective of the book's function as a gospel lectionary, the cover of this box displays a scene of Christ enthroned in majesty surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists. This compositional arrangement and rich ornamentation are echoed in the twelve illuminated pages that comprise the core of the book's decoration, each of which is reproduced as a full color plate in Cohen's book. Four full-page frontispieces preface the

text, and the readings from each gospel are introduced by an author "portrait" and a facing initial page. Like the gold cover of the book box, each decorated page of the manuscript includes an important scene (or in the case of the initial pages a decorative interlace) at the center surrounded by four smaller scenes at the corners and two scenes to either side of the central scene. These scenes, in addition to the multiple bands of text, provide the reader with much material for cogitation about the gospels as well as the overall purpose of the codex itself.

Cohen's iconographic examination of the frontispiece scenes and the evangelist pages is particularly insightful. Since the only strictly art-historical analyses of the *Uta Codex* are Boeckler's work on the fourth frontispiece, which represents the mass of St. Erhard, and survey discussions by Mayr-Harting and Dodwell, Cohen had much room to make an original contribution.[1] Devoting a chapter to each of the four frontispieces and one chapter to the evangelist portraits and their accompanying initials, he exhibits a thorough knowledge of the theology, philosophy, musical and mathematical theory, and visual and textual sources available to monks in eleventh-

century Regensburg. In addition, Cohen's discovery of a manuscript of Macrobius's *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, a direct source for several of the *tituli* in the *Uta Codex*, made possible new transcriptions of a number of the inscriptions in the manuscript as well as new interpretations of the related miniatures. Cohen emphasizes the art-historical dictum that images do not merely illustrate text, but rather complement the text as a parallel commentary. As Cohen demonstrates, it is not only the textual inscriptions that are intellectually complex here, but also the visual statements made.

The first frontispiece represents the Hand of God. Derived from a similar page in the *Codex Aureus*, a Carolingian manuscript given to the monks at St. Emmeran, this image is uniquely designed to preface the remaining illuminations in the *Uta Codex*. According to Cohen, the Hand of God page is a declaration about the eternal essence of God, which the artists deliberately paired with the second frontispiece, an image of God incarnate in Christ and His appearance with the Virgin Mary to Abbess Uta of Niedermuenster. This clever pairing of images demonstrates how the age of the Law in the Old Testament is followed by a new era of Grace under Christ. Cohen argues that this history of God's contact with mankind is continued through the other images in the manuscript. For example, the author sees this history expressed in the third frontispiece, which represents the Symbolic Crucifixion framed by Synagoga (the Law) and Ecclesia (Grace), and in the fourth frontispiece, where mass is celebrated by the founding saint of Niedermuenster, Erhard. By combining the crucifixion with a mass for the community of Niedermuenster, the iconographic mastermind behind the manuscript, the monk Hartwic of St. Emmeran, demonstrated to the reader that the once unapproachable and cosmic God had not only become incarnate on earth, but was also physically present for the nuns at Niedermuenster.

God's historical relationship with mankind is reiterated in the evangelist portraits of the manuscript. Cohen begins his discussion of these pages by describing the verses accompanying the images in the Gospel pages in terms of musical and geometric systems. After an intense examination of Ambrosian strophes and some discussion of the astronomical and Platonic conceptions of heavenly spheres, the reader is led to the conclusion that medieval artists used music and geometry "to express the nature of Christ and the development of divine history" (p. 133). This is, as Cohen later asserts, the same theme expressed in the four frontispieces. Like the message of the four gospels, the purpose of the images and text in

Uta's manuscript was to convey the history of God's relationship to humans and to communicate God's grace specifically to the community of nuns at Niedermuenster.

Although Cohen evaluates the function of the manuscript from its images and text, he also attempts to place the evangeliary in its broader historical and cultural context. By comparing the *Uta Codex* with other Ottonian and Carolingian manuscripts, Cohen establishes ways in which the manuscript from Niedermuenster is a mixture of Ottonian tradition and more unique inventions. To better define the overall purpose of this codex, he explores questions of medieval memory practices, patronage, female monasticism, the reform movement, and the political atmosphere of Regensburg. These questions are addressed primarily in the first chapter on historical background and in the seventh and eighth chapters about the manuscript as a whole.

While the author renders valuable service in addressing new critical questions about the *Uta Codex*, he also provides ideas for further study. He does not, for example, do more than skim the surface of the history of medieval liturgy, nor does he fully exhaust the topic of female monasticism. Future scholars may wish to reexamine the image of Erhard's mass and consider it against the relationship of medieval nuns to the Eucharist.[2] A more detailed discussion of the effects of the reform on nuns as opposed to monks would also add to this discussion. Cohen also specifies that the *Uta Codex* was not a royal manuscript, so that he skillfully avoids reiterating a lengthy discourse in Ottonian art history about the role of kings.[3] Because Mayr-Harting and Dodwell describe several places in the *Uta Codex* where a connection to imperial ideals can be made, it might be fruitful to dwell in more detail on the patronage of emperor Henry II in Regensburg and his relationship to Niedermuenster.

From Cohen's book we learn that Regensburg was a center of intellectual pursuits. The monk Hartwic of St. Emmeran, who probably designed the manuscript for abbess Uta, would have had a wealth of theological and philosophical literature at his disposal. Because the manuscript was made for the nuns at Niedermuenster under abbess Uta, it is clear that these women were also respected in Regensburg for their intellectual capacity. Their wealth and continual support from the dukes of Bavaria and the emperor made the nuns at Niedermuenster ideally suited to utilize one of the most intellectual manuscripts of the Ottonian period. Ironically its pristine condition reveals that Uta's codex was only infrequently used. One wonders if this lack of usage reflects the effec-

tiveness of Uta's reform efforts.

Notes

[1]. Albert Boeckler, "Das Erhardbild im Utacodex," in *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, ed. Dorothy Miner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 219-230; Henry Mayr-Harting, *Ottoman Book Illumination* Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 126-129; and C. R. Dodwell, *The Pictorial Arts of the West, 800-1200* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 151-152. The other sources on the *Uta Codex* are, as Cohen explains in his overview of the literature, scattered and less interested

in discussing the images.

[2]. Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); idem, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[3]. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

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