Vision and Christomimesis in the Ruler Portrait of the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram

Riccardo Pizzinato

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/art_fac

Part of the Art and Design Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Fine Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.
Vision and Christomimesis in the Ruler Portrait of the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram

RICCARDO PIZZINATO
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Abstract

The Gospel book known to scholars as the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14000) is a lavishly decorated manuscript produced in 870 for the Carolingian king and subsequent emperor Charles the Bald (823–877). Although the manuscript has been much admired and its art frequently reproduced, many questions remain concerning the Codex Aureus and its miniatures, both individually and as parts of a program. This article examines the relationship between text and image in the two full-page miniatures, which represent the enthroned Charles the Bald facing an image of the twenty-four elders adoring the Lamb. It reads the illuminations as a diptych by looking at the writings of John Scotus, known as Eriugena (ca. 810–ca. 877), the poet, philosopher, and master of the school to whom the Codex Aureus’s captions have been attributed. By assimilating the king to Christ, the Word made flesh, the two-page opening captures the king’s imperial aspiration and related expectations for salvation. The miniatures not only compose a statement of ruler theology but also introduce Charles the Bald, who was the principal viewer of the manuscript, to a process of spiritual ascension through intellectual contemplation. This process was designed to elevate the king’s mind above the temporal world in order to accomplish a mystical union with God, a theosis.

Few early medieval manuscripts and patrons have been so admired and celebrated as the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14000) and Charles the Bald. The art historian Georg Leidinger, editor of the manuscript’s facsimile, wrote, “If it is possible that one man, simply through the command he gives another, can become immortal, then Charles the Bald, with his command to make the Codex Aureus, acquired eternity for himself.”1 The epithet codex aureus (golden book), often applied to medieval manuscripts, is not a misnomer in the case of the Munich Gospel book. The book is still protected in its original sumptuous front cover, a perfectly preserved work of repousse gold reliefs and gems in elaborate mounts.2 The Gospels are entirely lettered in golden uncials, and each of its pages is exquisitely decorated with gilded frames and saturated colors. In addition to a complete set of canon tables, the manuscript contains a series of nonnarrative miniatures and frontispieces that are explained by poetry verses. Completed in 870, the Codex Aureus was produced at the order of Charles the Bald, king of West Francia from 840 to 877 and Roman emperor from 875 to 877. It was written and illuminated by two priests, brothers named Liuthard and Beringar, in Charles’s so-called court school, a northern French scripto-

This article derives from my doctoral dissertation, written under the guidance of Herbert L. Kessler. I warmly thank him, Paul E. Dutton, and William Noel for their invaluable comments. I am grateful to Friederike Brüthofener, Erica Buchberger, and Jose Rodriguez for their feedback and support during the writing process. I also wish to thank the editors of Gesta, Adam S. Cohen and Linda Safran, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful observations and suggestions.


Gesta v57n2 (Fall 2018).
0031-8248/2018/7703-0003 $10.00. Copyright 2018 by the International Center of Medieval Art. All rights reserved.
rrium that is probably to be identified with the monastery of Saint-Médard at Soissons.3

Although the manuscript has been the subject of art historical inquiry since the eighteenth century, many questions remain about the Codex Aureus and its miniatures, both individually and as parts of a program. Scholars have often focused on the iconography of the illuminations and their pictorial sources, but they have rarely investigated the connection between images and text.4 In the critical edition of the verses in the Codex Aureus, Paul Dutton and Edouard Jeanneau demonstrate the close relationship between the manuscript’s tituli (captions) and the poem “Aulae siderae,” written by John Scotus, known as Eriugena (ca. 810–ca. 877), the poet, philosopher, and master of the school at the court of Charles the Bald. The two scholars attribute the tituli to Eriugena and propose that the poet was involved in the production of the manuscript’s cover and the iconography of its illuminations.5

Since the publication of the critical edition, scholars have debated both the attribution of the manuscript’s verses to Eriugena and the philosopher’s engagement in the making of the book. Yves Christe, accepting the conclusions of Dutton and Jeanneau, emphasized the presence of Eriugena’s thought not only in the Codex Aureus but also in other products of the so-called court school of Charles the Bald.6 Michael Herren and Nikolaus Staubach, in contrast, rejected the argument that Eriugena participated in the book’s production and contended that an anonymous composer excerpted the manuscript’s tituli from Eriugena’s “Aulae siderae.”7 If one follows this line of reasoning, the poem and the manuscript were created close in time to 870 to commemorate the foundation of the palace chapel of Sainte-Marie at Compiegne by Charles the Bald. Staubach further asserted that the luxury Gospel book was a foundation gift presented to the chapel at Easter in that year.8 Textual evidence does not support either Herren’s or Staubach’s conclusions, however, and Herren later acknowledged the attribution of the Codex Aureus’s verses to John Sco-

3. The manuscript’s colophon (fol. 126v) reports the date of completion and the scribes’ names: “Bis quadringenti odiunt et septuaginta / Anni, quo Deus est virgine natus homo. / Ter denis annis Karolus regnabat et uno, / Cum codex actus illius imperio. / . . . / Sanguine nos uno patris matrisque creati, / Atque sacerdotis seruat uterque gra­

4. In 1786 the learned monk and librarian of St. Emmeram, Koloo­man Santlf, made the first major study of the manuscript: Dissertatio in Aureum ac Percutatum SS. Evangeliarum Codicon Ms. Monasterii S. Emmerarni Ratibonae (Regensburg: Englerth, 1786). A five-volume color facsimile of the Codex Aureus was published in 1921, and a volume of commentary was published in 1925. Georg Leidinger, Der Co­dex Aureus der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in Munich, 6 vols. (Mu­nich: Hugo Schmidt, 1921–25). Percy Ernst Schramm and Florentine Mütherich considered the manuscript in the corpus of works of art made under Charles the Bald’s patronage: Schramm and Mütherich, Die Hofschule Karls des Kahlen, 175–98.


tus and included them in his edition of Eriugena’s Carmina.* Moreover, the thesis that “Aulae siderae” predates the building, even though it accurately describes its future appearance, is unlikely. As May Vieillard-Troieikouroff, Christe, William Dibold, Dutton, and Jeaneau have demonstrated, the poem must have been written to celebrate the dedication of Charles the Bald’s new chapel at Compiègne in 877. The identity of that chapel with the building described in the poem is beyond doubt. Both the chapel and the poem express Emperor Charles the Bald’s intention to imitate the splendor of his grandfather Charlemagne’s palatine chapel in Aachen when he made Compiègne his permanent residence early in 876.

Building on Dutton and Jeaneau’s study, this article looks at Eriugena’s writings to examine the relationship between text and image in the two full-page miniatures of the Codex Aureus, which depict the enthroned Charles the Bald (fol. 5v; Fig. 1) and the twenty-four elders adoring the Lamb (fol. 6r; Fig. 2). I first consider the illuminations as depicting two parallel worlds: the terrestrial world, ruled by the king as vicarius Christi (vicar of Christ), and the celestial world, governed by Christ. I then analyze the two miniatures as a diptych and situate them in the historical moment in which the manuscript was conceived. This reading of the two-page opening, which stands as the visual gateway to the Gospels, demonstrates Eriugena’s involvement in the book’s production and helps elucidate its purpose. The iconography portrays the king in a Christlike fashion, and image in the two full-page miniatures of the Codex Aureus, demonstrates Eriugena’s involvement in the book’s production and helps elucidate its purpose. The two-page opening employs late Roman and Byzantine iconographic elements that exalt the king as the ideal emperor of the Carolingians and assimilate him to Charlemagne.

The top and the bottom of the ruler portrait in the Codex Aureus terminate in rectangular panels painted in purple and filled with a dedicatory poem written in gold (Fig. 1). The text reads:

Here sits Charles, supported by divine grace,
Pity and the love of goodness adorn him.
Louis was just, no other king was ever juster than he
Who bore this offspring with the favor of God.
Bountiful Judith, born of noble blood, gave birth to him
When his father was giving laws to his kingdoms.
This one took his name from the name of the great Charles

The representation of Charles the Bald as a sacral, Christlike figure is not unique to the Codex Aureus. It appears early in the king’s reign (ca. 845) in the First Bible of Charles the Bald (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France [hereafter BnF], MS lat. 1, fol. 423r; Fig. 3) and later (ca. 869) in the ruler portraits on the so-called Throne of St. Peter (Vatican City, St. Peter’s) (Figs. 4–5) and a prayer book (ca. 846–69) now in Munich (Schatzkammer der Residenz, fols. 38v–39r; Figs. 6–7).¹¹ The composition in the prayer book, in particular, adopts a diptych structure akin to that in the Codex Aureus. The two halves depict Charles kneeling in front of a crucified Christ, and the king’s humble proskynesis parallels Christ’s humble death on the cross.¹² In the Codex Aureus, however, Charles appears in imperial majesty and faces an image of Christ in the form of the Lamb (Figs. 1–2). The two-page opening employs late Roman and Byzantine iconographic elements that exalt the king as the ideal emperor of the Carolingians and assimilate him to Charlemagne.


Figure 1. Ruler portrait of Charles the Bald, fol. 5v, Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram, 870, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cm 14000 (photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich).
Figure 2. Twenty-four elders adoring the Lamb, fol. 6r, Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram, 870, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14000 (photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich).
France, MS lat.

Jeauneau, “Verses of the
magni Karoli de nomine sumpsit, / Nomen et indicium sceptra tenendo
transcription and critical edition of the verses, I refer to Dutton and
the Bald and his grandfather Charlemagne. For a precise orthographic
iura docentis habet. / Istius imperio hie codex resplendet et auro, /

Qui bona construxit multa fauente Deo.” Dutton and Jeanneau,
“Verses of the Codex Aureus,” 92. The use of the demonstrative pronoun Hic refers directly to Charles the Bald and increases the immedi­
acy of text and image. The demonstrative pronoun could be translated either as the adverb “here” or as the demonstrative pronoun “this.” In both cases, it immediately evokes the association Charles the Bald–
David and Charles the Bald–Solomon. The expression stemmate regis refers to Charles’s royal ancestry. For its use in Eriugena, see Dutton,

16. This is probably a reflection of the Roman and Byzantine imperial practice of having the emperor, when in public, stand on pur­
7n5.

17. The armilla, a jeweled bracelet, was part of the insignia of rulership in the Carolingian period that made its first appearance in the ruler portrait of Charles the Bald in the San Paolo Bible. Ibid., 8n8.

18. Joachim E. Gaehde first noticed these similarities between the two manuscripts and then argued that Charles’s portrait and the Sol­

The scene in the middle of the page is arranged according to rules of visual hierarchy intended to show Charles’s super­
ior status as the Carolingian ruler. The king is the dominant figure in the composition. He sits on a jeweled throne elevated high
up beneath the baldachin canopy, whereas all the other figures stand, and he rests his feet on a podium of variegated stone.16 He is placed on the central vertical axis of the mini­
ture, an axis emphasized by the symmetrical disposition of the armed guards, the two personifications presenting cornucopias, and the two angels that flank the baldachin dome.

Charles dons lavish regalia: a jeweled golden crown with projecting ornaments and a blue tunic covered with stars and
decorated at the edges with a jeweled border. A purple chlamys streaked with gold and likewise decorated with jewels is fixed
at his right shoulder with a golden fibula. Charles’s shoes are
golden, and his red stockings are laced with gold. He gestures
with his right hand, which is marked at the wrist with an armilla.17 His pose, costume, and regalia accord with those of the king in the ruler portrait that opens the San Paolo Bible of about 869 (Rome, Abbazia di San Paolo fuori le mura, fol. 1r; Fig. 8). This suggests that the two miniatures derive from a common lost model produced by the scriptorium of St.
Martin’s abbey at Tours.18 The Codex Aureus illuminators, how­
ever, did not portray the king under a triangular pediment (or fastigium) symbolic of royal authority, as in the San Paolo Bible, but under a golden baldachin that isolates and frames the five figures in the composition, creating a clear and structured relationship among them.

The baldachin is a symbol of imperial authority, and its canopy symbolizes the dome of heaven.19 In Carolingian manuscript illumination, comparable architecture serves as a marker of sacred space above Solomon and other Old Testament kings throughout the San Paolo Bible (fol. 188v; Fig. 9).20 In the Codex Aureus, this depicted architecture creates a boundary between heaven and earth, a horizontal space occupied by the king's secular realm and intermediate between the terrestrial and the divine (Fig. 1). The veil-like curtain behind Charles's

---


Figure 5. Charles the Bald with angels and fighting groups, ca. 869, detail of the ivories of the fastigium, Throne of St. Peter, St. Peter’s, Vatican City (photo: Bridgeman Images). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.

head separates the hand of God at the apex of the baldachin from the king. It is a variation on the cortina motif, a late Roman symbol of imperial triumph and dignity. The veil symbolizes heaven, and it distinctly denotes the passage from a celestial space, where the deity resides, to an earthly space, where Charles sits. Raised up to the threshold of heaven, Charles is thus portrayed as God’s vicar on earth.

Personifications of provinces paying homage to a ruler appear for the first time in Western art in the Codex Aureus. Verses inscribed in the frame of the miniature identify them as celebrating the king. The left caption reads, “Grateful Francia bears gifts to you, 0 distinguished king,” and the right one says, “Gotia equally begins to honor you with lofty kingdoms.” The iconographic composition of Francia and Gotia flanking Charles and offering the king cornucopias with draped hands is a version of the aurum coronarium, an exaltation of the king’s sovereignty across different kingdoms of the Frankish empire.

The hand of God, the angels with staffs, and the soldiers flanking Charles are motifs familiar from other depictions of the king. They appear in the First Bible of Charles the Bald (Fig. 3), the San Paolo Bible (Fig. 8), and the carved ivories of the Throne of St. Peter (Fig. 5); they all protect the king in different ways. The miniature in the Codex Aureus is the only image that combines all three of these elements and exploits them fully. The angels and soldiers represent the divine and earthly guardians who work together to protect the Christian king. Similar concepts of protection are also found in the San Paolo Bible and the Throne of St. Peter, both contemporary with the Codex Aureus, which suggests that this imagery is a development of the last part of Charles’s reign. In the Codex Aureus, this idea is also expressed in words. Above the soldier at the left, who carries a sword belt, and the one at the right, with a spear and shield, is written, “May the arms of Christ, firm through a lifetime, favor you for eternity, / And may his shield always defend you from the enemy” (Fig. 1).

21. For the symbolism of the veil, see Dutton and Kessler, Poetry and Paintings, 71.
23. “Francia grata tibi, rex inclite, munera defert” and “Gotia te pariter cum regnis inchao altis.” Dutton and Jeaneau, “Verses of the Codex Aureus,” 91. Gotia refers to the march of Septimania, one of the territories that composed Charles’s kingdom. It was governed by Bernard Hairypaws (841–886), who returned to the king’s good graces and was confirmed in his honors in 869. Janet L. Nelson, Charles the Bald (London: Longman, 1992), 232–33.
state that the soldiers are not simply Charles’s mortal defenders, for they hold Christ’s weapons and shield. The correspondence between human and angelic protection is also indicated in the verses below the king’s image in the San Paolo Bible (Fig. 8), but in that miniature the concept is not expressed visually because both guards are moved to one side of the throne to make space for Charles’s queen, destroying the effect of symmetry. This difference indicates that the illuminators of the Codex Aureus probably maintained the original symmetrical disposition of the Touronian model in order to emphasize that Charles’s right and military authority to protect the Carolingian kingdom rests on a militant Christ.27

Many of the texts that were produced at the court of Charles the Bald and that address him directly express the idea that the ruler should be the terrestrial defender of the Church and its people.28 In the treatise On Christian Rulers, for instance, Sedulius Scottus describes a secular ruler who “opposes himself like a shield against all adversity in defense of God’s people” and “acts with pious sagacity to promote ecclesiastical peace and security.”29 In the Codex Aureus, the insistence on por-


**Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram**
traying Charles’s divine protection can be interpreted as a reflection of the difficult political situation that the king was facing at the time the manuscript was being made. The verses above the soldiers echo Eriugena’s poem “Pax fido populo,” which calls for Christ to bear arms and a shield to protect Charles the Bald against the enemies that afflict his realm. In the poems he offered to the king, Eriugena frequently speaks of his kingdom to be defended with divine protection. He who wishes his kingdom to be increased and extended never fails to enrich God’s church with honors, and he who wishes to enjoy peace and security, both temporal and eternal, acts with pious sagacity to promote ecclesiastical peace and security:30


the great and persistent conflicts of civil wars between the king and his half brothers, generalized disorder brought about by criminals and disloyal subjects, and the invasion of the Northmen that everywhere struck Charles’s Christian kingdom. The poet often praises Christ for helping the king’s army maintain peace and order inside the realm, since Christ had bestowed Charles with royal authority.31


A sign of God’s presence and supervision, the hand of God also appears over the portrait of Charles in the First Bible (Fig. 3). In the Codex Aureus, the motif is repeated on the incipit page of the Gospel of John, where the caption invokes...
the special protection bestowed by God on Charles (fol. 97v; Fig. 10). In the Codex Aureus image (Fig. 1), the divine support granted to Charles is visually indicated by the hand's downward position directly above the king's head and verbally strengthened by the panegyric written in the illumination's upper text panel. These verses affirm that the king is supported by divine grace and that he is characterized by devotion and love of goodness. This implies a concept of mutual assistance between the Christian God and the Carolingian ruler. God bestows power on Charles and provides the king with earthly and heavenly defenders; in return, the king demonstrates his devotion by being God’s defender on earth. The final verses also support this idea; they describe the king building many good things through God’s favor and suggest that the manuscript itself, made with precious materials, was executed at his command. The concept that God dispenses power over the king and the ruler, in turn, devotes himself to God derives from the Carolingian belief that kingship was not a privilege but, rather, a duty, and that the king was the minister or vicar of God. This belief, already crystallized in Charles’s portrait in the San Paolo Bible, was expounded in such Carolingian mirrors for princes as Sedulius Scottus’s On Christian Rulers, and Eriugena reiterates the concept in his poems dedicated to Charles the Bald. In “Graculus Iudaeus,” for instance, the poet declares that the wisdom of Christ established kingdoms throughout the world, put King Charles in control, and placed him at the command of his pious ministry on behalf of the Christian people. In another poem Eriugena describes Charles as a loyal and generous servant who shows his devotion to God by building magnificent churches and adorning them with golden implements. In the Codex Aureus, Charles is portrayed both visually and verbally not only as supported by divine might against the enemies of the faith and the kingdom but also as the legitimate and devoted ruler of the Franks, established in his authority by God.

Analysis of the verses in the illumination’s lower panel further supports this interpretation, for they continue the praise of Charles’s lineage—his parents, Louis the Pious and Judith, as well as his grandfather Charlemagne—and relate his royal status to David and Solomon. Both the ancestry and the Old


33. The Carolingians and their retinue attempted to foster their authority by linking themselves to the long-established late Roman imperial tradition, according to which the Christian emperor ruled over the Christian people and had an obligation to protect and promote Christian religion and liberty. On the concept of kingship as ministerium in the Carolingian period, see Ildar H. Garipzanov, The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877) (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 39–43.


35. “Cui tua disponens sapientia regna per orbem / Praefecit Karolum regemque piumque ministram.” Eriugena, Carmen 2, lines 7–8, in MGH: PLAC, 2:345. “For whom [the Christian people] the wisdom of Christ, setting out kingdoms throughout the world, put King Charles in control and placed him at the command of his pious ministry.” Translation adapted from Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 97.

36. In the poem “Auribus Aebraicis,” Eriugena wrote: “Devotum famulum, qui te veneratur honorat / Aedibus constructis aurea vasa paras.” Eriugena, Carmen 3, lines 69–70, in MGH: PLAC, 3:533. “He is a loyal servant who honours and worships you, preparing golden vessels for the temples he has built.” Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 71. In the poem “Graculus Iudaeus,” the king is said to adorn the relics of St. Denis and the church itself with gold and great objects “burning with jewels in the likeness of flames” (instar flammarum gemmis flagrantibus, auro). Eriugena, Carmen 2, line 17, in MGH: PLAC, 3:545; and Dutton, “Eriugena the Royal Poet,” 68.
Testament typology had been mentioned previously in Charles’s prayer book, his First Bible, and the San Paolo Bible, but the Codex Aureus combines them and intensifies the claims. The verses stress Charles’s right to power as the future emperor and demonstrate the supremacy of his dignity as the successor of Charlemagne.

The captions first name his father and mother and give Charles primacy over his half brothers. He is the only son who can claim Judith as his mother and who was born while his father reigned as sole emperor of the Franks. Charles thus has the charisma of one born in the purple (porphyrogenitus). The concept that he is the legitimate successor in the imperial line is further emphasized in the following verses, which claim that in addition to having the same name as Charlemagne, the king holds the latter’s epithet in the same manner as he holds his scepters. As Diebold has demonstrated, behind these verses stands important symbolism about the significance of names, especially the identical names of Charles the Bald and Charlemagne. At Charles’s court, poets explicitly compared grandfather and grandson and associated the virtues of the former with those of the latter. Their identical names and close blood relationship were essential components of Charles’s intention to rule in imitation of, or as, Charlemagne. In the Codex Aureus, the construction of the poetic verses strengthens the correspondence. Charles “has his name from the name of the great Charles.” Charles the Bald is the subject of the sentence and thus becomes an active agent in the process of his naming. The implication is that by having Charlemagne’s name, he is taking possession of it. The verses continue by saying that just as the two share a name, Charles also shares Charlemagne’s epithet, “great,” and his scepters, a metonym for royal power. In a poem dedicated to Charles the Bald’s wife, Ermintrude, Eriugena affirms that Charles is permitted to hold the many scepters of kingdoms that his ancestors also carried; they are signs of the simultaneous possession of multiple kingdoms and kingly functions. Thus the Codex Aureus verses make a logical connection between the symbolism of Charles’s name and his power by conjoining grandchild and grandfather.

Suddenly, however, the verses move from praising ancestors to a typological comparison that relates Charles’s royal status to that of David and Solomon. The first verse openly identifies Charles as David. Charles the Bald, like his grandfather before him, was often called David. During the Carolingian period, David represented the ideal of the humble king who was exalted because of his selfless submission to God’s will. In the Codex Aureus, this Charles-David glitters with the lineage of a king (stemmate regis). Stemmate regis refers to the royal line, already cited in the verses, from which Charles the Bald descends. At Charles’s court, poets often quoted and praised the king’s royal ancestry as the source of his power and royal authority. Eriugena frequently addresses Charles’s royal ancestry as a blessing of the land: “O greatest Frank, in whom royal lines shine” and “the offspring of kings whom fortunate Francia praises.”

Charles is also associated with Solomon, who was celebrated in Carolingian poetry for his sapientia (wisdom) and who became the model of the wise and just ruler, attuned to God’s will. As Sedulius wrote, wisdom allows the Christian ruler to exercise skillful judgment and mete out the law. In comparing Charles the Bald with David and Solomon, and


38. For Charles the Bald’s mother, Judith, see Dutton and Jeanneney, “Verses of the Codex Aureus,” 115. In the poem “Hellas Traosque suis,” Eriugena, in a series of questions admonishing Louis the German’s attitude against Charles, subtly specified that Louis descended from a royal line similar but not identical to that of Charles. Dutton, “Eriugena the Royal Poet,” 73–74.


40. Diebold (ibid., 288–91) noticed this particular construction, as did Staubach, Rex Christianus, 264.
in further emphasizing his descent from a line of kings (Charlemagne and Louis the Pious), the verses on the Codex Aureus page imply that Charles is the third legitimate emperor and strengthen his role as the direct heir of law-giving Old Testament kings. Accordingly, the verses do not merely name Charles the Bald "David," like his grandfather Charlemagne, but they also call him "Solomon," an epithet accorded his father, Louis the Pious. In fact, the captions describe Louis the Pious as justus (just) when he was ruling over the empire, and therefore they attribute to him indirectly the judicial role of the wise Solomon, exercising the same Solomonic laws of instruction as Charles the Bald.\footnote{Staubach, Rex Christianus, 264.} This Charles-Solomon typology had been adopted earlier in the San Paolo Bible, where, in the frontispiece to Proverbs (Fig. 9), Solomon's facial traits conform to those of Charles in the ruler portrait placed earlier in the book (Fig. 8).\footnote{Diebold, "Ruler Portrait," 13.} Moreover, the Old Testament king sits enthroned under a golden baldachin, a marker of sacred space and symbol of judicial authority, like that of Charles in the Codex Aureus (Fig. 1).

On several occasions, poets at the court urged Charles the Bald to remember that wisdom allowed Solomon to rule over the people of Israel in perfect peace and for a long time.\footnote{For the use of Solomon typology in the Carolingian period, see Hans Hubert Anton, Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1968), 430–33. For Charles the Bald as Solomon, see Staubach, Rex Christianus, 265–66.} In Eriugena's poetry, the theme of wisdom is raised to the level of a ruler ideology. The royal poet often praises Charles as a rex sapiens (wise king); God established him as king and gave him an exceptional wisdom that allowed him to have insight into divine law and thus to govern rightly over his people. The poet believes that wisdom not only grants Charles royal splendor in the present world but also allows him to elevate his mind toward the divine mystery, since he is truly both king and theologian.\footnote{In "Graculus Iudaeus," Eriugena wrote, "Praefecit Karolum regemque piumque ministrum, / Cui lux interior donavit mentis acutem, / Quo divina simul tractans humana gubernet / Vere subsistens facies limbo circumuenit amplo, / Agne, Deum solio temet uene­tare, / Praefecit Karolum regemque piumque ministrum / Cui lux interior donavit mentis acutem, / Quo divina simul tractans humana gubernet / Vere subsistens facies limbo circumuenit amplo, / Agne, Deum solio temet uen­tare." Dutton and Jeauneau, "Verses of the Codex Aureus," 93. Translation adapted from Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 129.}

Represented as a new Solomon and enthroned in his sovereign magnificence as emperor of the Carolingians, Charles the Bald gestures and turns his gaze toward the Lamb adored by the twenty-four elders depicted on the opposite page (Fig. 2).

The last two verses below the adoration scene mark the relationship between the two facing miniatures and explicitly describe Charles in the role of prayer: "And King Charles looks, wide-eyed, / Praying that he may dwell with you for all eternity."\footnote{"Et princeps Karolus uult speculatur aperto / Orans, ut tecum uiuat longeus in aequum." Dutton and Jeauneau, "Verses of the Codex Aureus," 93. Translation adapted from Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 129.} The adoration of the elders is represented as a celestial vision that opens before the ruler. Based on chapters four and five of Revelation, the illumination is depicted in a great disk of heaven. The sea of glass, described in the Vulgate as "in the sight" of God's throne, is probably represented by the wavy gold-and-purple band in the middle.\footnote{Purple shades also appear in the depiction of water behind the personification of the Sea.} It divides the vault of heaven, rendered as a three-layer, star-studded sky edged with clouds, from a lower heaven, identified by a large eight-pointed sun that hovers above the parted elders. These bearded, gray-haired elders are squeezed into the hemicycle; they twist and turn as they rise from their thrones to offer crowns to the golden Lamb in a sign of adoration. Represented on the central vertical axis at the top of the celestial vault, the Lamb dominates the composition. It has a cruciform halo and is pictured inside a golden clipeus that rests on a green globe. Around the golden medallion that encloses the Lamb we read: "O venerable Lamb, the people receive your blood / And the synagogue, darkened by its color, recedes."\footnote{"Suscipit, agne, tuum populus, uenerande, cruorem / Et synagogae suo fuscata colore recessit." Dutton and Jeauneau, "Verses of the Codex Aureus," 92. Translation adapted from Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 129.}

Outside the celestial circle, in the two lower corners, personifications of Earth and Sea are pictured; the former sits in a rocky landscape holding flowering cornucopias, and the latter carries a water jar and an oar while sitting on a stylized representation of water. At the bottom, golden verses written on a purple panel describe the scene:

All things, which this earth produces for nourishment
And which this figure of the sea encloses in an ample girdle,
Revere you, O Lamb, God in the high throne.
The apostolic assembly approaching with celestial crowns
Praise, adore, and love you with devoted hearts.\footnote{"Omnia quae praesens tellus producit alendo / Et maris haec facies limbo circumuenit amplo, / Agne, Deum solio temet uen­tante in alto. / Cana caterus cluens, uatum et uenerabilis ordos, / Coetus apostolici sertis caelestibus instans / Laudat, adorat, amat deuoto pectore temet." Dutton and Jeauneau, "Verses of the Codex Aureus," 93. Translation adapted from Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 129.}

---

46. Staubach, Rex Christianus, 264.
48. For the use of Solomon typology in the Carolingian period, see Hans Hubert Anton, Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1968), 430–33. For Charles the Bald as Solomon, see Staubach, Rex Christianus, 265–66.
51. Purple shades also appear in the depiction of water behind the personification of the Sea.
As Hermann Schnitzler, Hubert Schrade, Florentine Műtherich, Diebold, and other scholars have demonstrated, the miniature almost certainly uses as its iconographic model the mosaic ceiling of the palace chapel at Aachen (Fig. 11). Unfortunately, the present mosaic is the product of a nineteenth-century restoration by Jean-Baptiste Bethune of Ghent (1881), and it offers an unreliable image of the dome’s original appearance. The Carolingian decoration was almost entirely destroyed when the chapel’s interior was remodeled earlier in the Rococo style. The engraving by Giovanni Giustino Ciampini (Fig. 12), often accepted as a reliable source for the reconstruction of the mosaic, is probably based on a later medieval restoration that replaced the original Lamb of God with a Maiestas Domini, so it, too, provides a faulty depiction of the original mosaic.\(^\text{56}\)

In the Codex Aureus, the use of the palace chapel mosaic as an iconographic model has a mnemonic function and captures Charles the Bald’s imperial aspirations. The two halves of the diptych recall the imperial symbolism of the ruler enthroned on the west side of the upper gallery in the Aachen palace chapel, modeled on Solomon’s throne (Fig. 13).\(^\text{37}\) The intention was to assimilate Charles the Bald visually to his grandfather Charlemagne, a concept already stressed by the verses that accompany the ruler portrait. There (Fig. 1), the depicted baldachin also situates Charles in a liminal space between heaven and earth in the same way that the gallery in Aachen locates the king between the terrestrial space, where the priests and laity reside, and a heavenly space, where God dwells. Just as Charlemagne is enthroned in the palatine chapel, Charles the Bald in the Codex Aureus is the vice-regent of the earthly sphere, which he rules on behalf of the heavenly king.\(^\text{58}\)

At the top of the manuscript’s celestial vault, the Lamb stands on an unfurled scroll—an indication that Revelation has been fulfilled—and his blood spurts into a gold chalice.

---


57. Allan Doig, Liturgy and Architecture from the Early Church to the Middle Ages (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 114.

beside him (Fig. 2). The Paschal Lamb is a symbol of the crucified Christ and has an explicit Eucharistic significance. The cross-nimbus and the chalice signify that Christ is the victorious royal martyr who had triumphed over death for all mankind at the end of time, a position emphasized by the clipeus in which he is inscribed, which constitutes an image within the image. As the caption indicates, the blood is Christ’s, spilled for humankind’s sins at the Crucifixion that banished the Jewish law and instituted the Church.

The twenty-four elders rise from their thrones and pay tribute to the Lamb by offering golden crowns while worshiping him as creator of all things in a Christianized iconography of the aurum coronarium. They represent the twelve prophets and twelve apostles who congregate in the Heavenly Church, a meaning enunciated in Revelation and elaborated by Carolingian exegesis.

The personifications of Earth and Sea also pay homage to Christ: they are classical motifs of imperial triumph that represent Christ’s transcendence over the earthly world. The Codex Aureus’s illuminators certainly knew this imperialized Christological iconography, given the general consensus that they employed it when they painted the two-page Maiestas Domini in the Metz Sacramentary (BnF, MS lat. 1141, fols. 5v–6r; Figs. 14–15), which is roughly contemporary with the Codex Aureus.

59. Klauser, “Aurum coronarium.”


62. The Metz Sacramentary was likely made for Charles the Bald’s coronation as king of Lotharingia in 869. The manuscript was produced in Charles’s court school, probably by the same illuminators who painted the Codex Aureus. On the close stylistic affinities between the two manuscripts, see Florentine Mütterich, Sakramentar...
of Earth and Sea in the sacramentary are also evoked by the text of the Sanctus that accompanies the miniature, just as they are named in the verses below the adoration scene in the Codex Aureus (Fig. 2); they all revere and pray to Christ as God. The twenty-four elders and the personifications of Earth and Sea thus represent the spiritual world of the Heavenly Church and the material world of Creation that celebrate the universal triumph of Christ as the Redeemer.

The iconography of the Codex Aureus image finds its immediate source in the writings of Eriugena, where the poet describes the Crucifixion as the necessary precondition for the final reunification of humanity with God. Christ’s blood, shed on the cross, is the chief instrument of God’s fulfillment of his will for human redemption and the universality of salvation.63

Through Christ’s sacrifice, human nature returns to the pristine state it had in paradise; in addition, the entire world of Creation is brought back to its creator and all things are restored to their primordial nature. For Eriugena, since Christ

"Auribus Aebraicis": "Sanguinis et proprii fundens libamina pura / Mundo salvato pascha novum dedicat. / Sponte sua dominus se mactat ipse sacerdos, / Quae patri placens hostia sola fuit, / Hostia quae totum purgavit crimine mundum, / Mundum quem potuit perdere primus homo." Eriugena, Carmen 3, lines 51–56, in MGH: PLAC, 3:532. “And pouring out pure offerings of his own blood / he offers a new Pasch to a world that is saved. / Our Lord, a priest himself, offers himself of his own accord; / he alone was the victim who pleased the Father; / The victim which cleansed the whole world of crime— / the very world which the first man was able to ruin.” Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 71. On the subject of Christ’s blood in Eriugena’s poetry, see Celia Chazelle, The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ’s Passion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 132–65; and Richard Hawtree, “Christ on the Cross in Eriugena’s Carmina for Charles the Bald,” in Envisioning Christ on the Cross: Ireland and the Early Medieval West, ed. Juliet Mullins, Jennifer Ni Ghrádaigh, and Hawtree (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2013), 125–40.

63. Several poems of Eriugena dedicated to Charles the Bald have a paschal theme and discuss the redemptive efficacy of Christ’s blood shed on the cross and its Eucharistic significance. See, e.g., the poem von Metz: Fragment, Ms. Lat. 1141, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1972), 2:28–32; Koehler and Mietherich, Die Hofschule Karls des Kahlen, 169; and Deshman, “Antiquity and Empire,” 185.
is one in substance with God, he is the union of the divine and created orders, and he possesses all the perfections of his human and divine natures. As Eriugena formulated it in the Periphyseon, "The universal goal of the entire Creation is the Word of God. Thus do both the beginning and the end of the world subsist in God's Word, indeed, to speak more plainly, they are the Word itself." Therefore, the poet says,

In the Only-Begotten Word of God, Incarnate and made man, the whole world is restored even now according to its species, but at the end of the world will return universally and in its genius. For what He wrought specially in Himself He will perfect generally in all: and not only in all men, but in every sensible creature.

In the facing pages of the Codex Aureus (Figs. 1–2), a unity of appearance and attributes links Charles to the Lamb and sets up parallel ways in which the earthly and heavenly rulers are honored. The illuminators depicted analogous terrestrial and celestial ceremonies of the aurium coronarium: just as Christ (the Lamb) receives tribute in his heavenly court, so his terrestrial counterpart and reflection, Charles the Bald, receives homage in his earthly court. The Lamb is in the circle of heaven; the king is under the baldachin’s canopy, which symbolizes heaven. Christ’s heavenly exaltation is set against Charles’s imperial exaltation. This correspondence between terrestrial and celestial rulers had been portrayed earlier in the diptych of Charles’s prayer book (Figs. 6–7) and in the gable ivories of the Throne of St. Peter (Fig. 4). As Robert Deshman demonstrated, both the diptych and the ivories imply a concept of imitatio Christi (imitation of Christ) that exalts the ruler in his temporal office and likens him to Christ.

In the Codex Aureus, the theme of Christ’s triumph and exaltation has implications for the meaning of the glorified king represented on the opposite page (Figs. 1–2). Charles’s portrait as Christomimetes (imitator of Christ) both enhances his status and authority among humans and conveys his divine inspiration. The Carolingian king is to be understood as the divinely appointed ruler on earth, and details in his portrait—the baldachin and the hand of God—support this recognition. The architecture defines the place of the king as clearly above that of other mortal men, even approaching God’s realm, but, even more important, it places the king on the level with, and integrated into, Christ’s Passion and glory. The structure of the diptych parallels the glories of divine and divinely appointed rulers. Christ’s triumph over death and exaltation above the terrestrial world are meant to imply a corresponding exaltation of Charles, who, with the help of Christ, continued to struggle in his temporal life against the enemies of the kingdom and of the Christian faith. Charles has been appointed by God to envision the image of the heavenly kingdom and to shape its reflection on earth through his imperial ministerium (office). Thus he is a mirror image of Christ: but an image, not more. Charles is the earthly counterpart of the divine Logos, who rules in heaven as God’s regent and, from there, guides the emperor’s policies and actions. Divinely guided from above, Charles rules below as God’s minister; his mission is to lead his people and thus create on earth an imitation of the kingdom of heaven, a Christian empire. The belief that the king was a type of Christ and that with his leadership of the populus Dei (people of God) he was bound to ful


fill the divine law embodied in the Church—the source of Christian doctrine as revealed in Holy Scriptures—was a constant in Carolingian mirrors for princes and coronation liturgies.70 Hincmar of Reims made this clear in the prayer he recited as he anointed Charles the Bald king of Lotharingia in 869, and Pope John VIII reiterated the concept when he praised Charles as the new Carolingian emperor at the Synod of Rавenna in 877: “God established [the emperor] as the Prince of His people in imitation of the true king, Christ, His Son.”71

In portraying Charles triumphant in the likeness of Christ, the Codex Aureus diptych not only sanctions Charles’s imperial ambitions but also inscribes the king within the history of salvation and proclaims that deification is his destiny. Correspondences between the diptych’s two halves indicate the king’s analogical ascent to heaven. Under the baldachin, Charles the Bald sits at the juncture of two worlds; his body is in a terrestrial zone delimited by columns and framed by soldiers and personifications, while his head is in a celestial zone symbolized by the starry veil and the domical vault. Color underlines the correspondence between the baldachin’s canopy and the heavenly vault where the Lamb resides. The baldachin’s vault is blue, as is the sky where the twenty-four elders stand; the hand of God is in a green semicircle surrounded by clouds, similar to those around God’s throne where the Lamb rests perfectly above God’s outstretched right hand on the ruler portrait’s page. The king’s robe, patterned with stars, evokes the celestial sky, where the Lamb resides; in addition, the image of the enthroned king is positioned directly across from the large eight-pointed sun, and his head and the glowing star meet exactly when the diptych is closed.72 Because the images are aligned on opposite pages, the parallelism is established even when the book is open.

The enthronement of Charles as an act of celestial apotheosis, or deificatio (deification), of the Christian king is also represented in contemporary ivories on the Throne of St. Peter (Fig. 4). At the center of the horizontal panel on the back of the throne (Fig. 5), the king’s bust portrait rises from the material world, which is symbolized by the creatures carved in the panels below (Fig. 4). Meanwhile, the king’s head reaches into heaven, which is represented by the constellations of the pediment, where Christ has gathered his celestial court. Just as Charles’s body is confined to the earthly world, so his mind is in harmony with the divinity, as it is in the Codex Aureus.73

In the manuscript, Charles gazes at the Lamb, a symbol that recalls Christ’s Passion (Figs. 1–2). The caption in the panel below the Adoration of the Lamb invites the king to pray to the Word-Made-Flesh who ascended to co-enthronement in heaven with God, so that he (Charles) might be resurrected and dwell with God for eternity.74 The *imago clipeata* represents God’s invisible glory manifested in Christ’s sacrifice, a reality that is continuously renewed in the mystery of the Eucharist celebrated by the Church and made present by the text of the Gospels.75 The two-page opening thus engages the medieval theology of the image on which Eriugena predicated his concept of deification rooted in vision. In paradise, humankind—created in God’s image and likeness—enjoyed a direct vision of the divinity, but because of the Fall, God’s image in man was impaired, and humans fell from the original peak of pure contemplation into the realm of senses. In order to restore the human image, God took flesh and lived as a man. Through Christ, the visible image of the invisible Father, humans could purify their senses, elevate their minds toward the divinity, and be restored to the original image of God that had been planned for them. Moreover, the elect can even undergo deification, in the form of an analogical ascension toward the divinity, and thus attain a spiritual vision that will be fully accomplished face to face at the end of time.76

If Christ is the perfect and true image of God, Charles can enter into communion with God and restore his spiritual sight by partaking in his nature. As a result, Charles’s pious devotion to Christ makes him a virtuous ruler, a mirror image of Christ, and the king’s penetrating insight into Christ’s human-
ity enables him to participate in the Godhead, a concept verbally captured in the last verses on fol. 6r, which describe the king as gazing and praying to reside with God for eternity. Christ’s symbol, the Eucharistic Lamb, is meant to elicit an intellectual and spiritual response in the viewer, a response akin to the contemplation of the relationship between Christ’s human and divine natures. The mystery of the Eucharist, represented by the Lamb, allows Charles to enter mentally into communion with God and, through Christ’s humanity, to share in his divinity. Christ’s sacrifice, which is translated into a pictorial symbol, constitutes the meeting point of the present dialogue between Charles and the divinity. The caption inscribed around the edge of the golden medallion that encloses the Lamb guides the king to understand the meaning behind the representation and thus invokes Christ’s Passion and glory in Charles’s mind. As a material object, the painted figure participates ontologically in the transcendental truth that it depicts, and, further, it has an analogical function, leading the viewer to the content that is hidden behind the image and can be comprehended solely through a mental process.

For Eriugena, the physical world was not without access to or communication with the other world; there is a bridge between the two, constituted by the *symbolum* or *figura.* The symbol has great importance, and its definition plays a part toward the understanding of divine mysteries. In his *Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy,* Eriugena refers to a passage from Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchy* in which that author explains why intelligible beings in the Scripture, for which the mind would have absolutely no need had it not sinned, but holy Scripture is woven together out of diverse symbols and doctrines for the express purpose of the human mind, so that with the help of its introduction our rational human nature, which tumbled in transgression from the contemplation of truth, might be led back again to the pristine peak of pure contemplation.82


Here, theology is introduced as an exercise for the mind whose purpose is the analogical development of reason, progressing from sensible images to the perfect knowledge of intelligible things. As a visual symbol, Christ’s image (the Lamb) in the diptych both reveals and conceals, and then it encompasses the visible and the invisible character of the divinity. This characteristic of the image suited Carolingian meditational practice, which was founded on the possibility of a deliberate and disciplined transition from the material to the immaterial reality of God.83 The diptych therefore not only invites Charles the Bald, as the first and foremost viewer, to pass through or

animum humanum sancta scriptura in diversis symbolis atque doctrinis contexta, ut per ipsius introductionem rationabilis nostra natura, quae praevacarando ex contemplatione veritatis lapsa est, iterum in pristinam pure contemplationem reducantur altitudinem.” Eriugena, *Expositiones II,* lines 151–58, in *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae, Expositiones in Ieronarchiam coelestem,* CCCM 31, ed. J. Barbet (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), 24. “For the human mind is not made because of divine Scripture, for which the mind would have absolutely no need had it not sinned, but holy Scripture is woven together out of diverse symbols and doctrines for the express purpose of the human mind, so that with the help of its introduction our rational human nature, which tumbled in transgression from the contemplation of truth, might be led back again to the pristine peak of pure contemplation.”

beyond the image to a higher reality, but it also asks that the viewer reflect on that reality within himself." In keeping with the union of human and divine natures in Christ, the illuminations suggest a form of imitatio Christi rooted in sight: the king can draw near to God through the admiration of God’s majesty in Christ, a process developed through a speculative experience that, if properly channeled, can lead him upward toward eternity. By turning inward through contemplation or interior vision, Charles’s soul will recover an impression, likeness, or similitude of the original in whose image he was fashioned. The illuminations thus act as a visual exegesis, a tool of edification for Charles’s soul, and they aim to release the king from his earthly apprehensions by raising his mind toward a contemplation of the divinity. Elevated above the material world, Charles the Bald is transformed into an adopted son of God, a living image of Christ, and thus he partakes in God’s divinity in the form of a mystical union (thesiosis).85

Textual and visual details suggest that the diptych was addressed to the king. The use of the demonstrative pronoun hic in the panegyric beneath the ruler portrait immediately calls the viewer’s attention to the link between Charles the Bald and David on the one hand and Charles the Bald and Solomon on the other, and it emphasizes the immediacy of text and image (Fig. 1).86 The verses’ tone reflects the literary genre of the mirror for princes, which were always composed by the king’s most confidential advisers and most erudite intellectuals.87 The captions imply an educated reader capable of understanding the Old Testament typology and mentally connecting it to the Carolingian lineage.88 Moreover, the use of the verb specular in the poem’s final verses, under the Adoration of the Lamb, emphasizes the diptych’s visual qualities (Fig. 2).


86. See note 15 above.


88. For a discussion of verbal and visual literacy in Carolingian manuscripts, see Diebold, “Verbal, Visual, and Cultural Literacy in Medieval Art,” 93–95.


with Charles’s desire to rule over a unified empire as a new Charlemagne. For more than twenty years, Charles the Bald wanted to become emperor but had not achieved his goal. Even if the treaty of Verdun had denied him the Roman imperial crown in 843, for several years the king had actively developed an imperial image based on his rulership of many non-Roman peoples and kingdoms. His crowning as king of Lotharingia in 869 must have seemed to him a giant stride toward his long-held goal of attaining the imperial title and unifying territories that both his father and his grandfather had held. After his triumphal entry into Aachen, Charles celebrated Christmas there in 869, and he would have used that occasion to seat himself on his grandfather’s throne at Christmas Mass, thus accomplishing, albeit briefly, his cherished desire for imperial status (Fig. 13).

In the two-page illumination in the Codex Aureus, this imperial symbolism is captured by the use of the palace chapel as the miniature’s iconographic setting and also by the references in the verses to David and Solomon (Figs. 1–2). Just like that of his predecessors, Louis the Pious and Charlemagne, Charles the Bald’s idea of empire was conceived as a rebirth of the Old Testament Jewish kingship symbolized by the very names of David and Solomon that he also bore. The Carolingian emperor was charged with continuing Solomon’s work to protect and succor the Christian kingdom, which was seen as a holy reflection of the kingdom of heaven. And, as the wise Solomon lavished his riches on the Temple, Charles excelled in building many things with God’s help; the precious Codex Aureus itself is an example of his largesse on behalf of God. By providing for the Church, Charles became a preacher of a pious life, a life lived according to the Gospel. The magnificent book containing the Word of God was commissioned to win temporal as well as divine favor, and it credits the king for properly administering the law of God as a new Charlemagne.

The manuscript, however, could not have been completed in time to celebrate Charles’s triumph in Aachen in 869; there was not enough time to plan and execute such an elaborate manuscript. The book could have been conceived, however, if not completed, while Charles still controlled Aachen and all of Lotharingia. By the time the Codex Aureus was finished, Charles the Bald might well have lost dominion over the half of Lotharingia in which Aachen is located, but the codex would not have lost its significance as an expression of the king’s imperial aspirations, which did not slacken with the Lotharingian setback in the 870s. After the loss of Aachen and the plans for ruling Lotharingia were doomed, Charles’s idea of empire remained alive. Since he could no longer possess Aachen, the king commissioned the chapel of Sainte-Marie in Compiègne to be built in imitation of his grandfather’s building. In praise of this new royal chapel, which was dedicated on 5 May 877, Eriugena wrote “Aulae siderarum.”

The poem provides a layered description of the harmonious universe with an ideal temple at its center. Charles’s imperial chapel at Compiègne, which combines the features of the biblical Temple of Solomon and the Aachen palace chapel, is itself that ideal temple. The verses equate the chapel’s structural details with the world’s symbolic structure at the moment of Christ’s birth, thereby establishing the relationship between the king’s viewing of the symbolism of the chapel’s architecture and decoration and the revelation of the Word of God in the universe. Christ, the chapel, and the world constitute a set of equivalencies that are related metaphorically.

94. According to the Annals of Fulda, Charles “gave orders that he was to be called emperor and augustus on the grounds that now he would possess two realms.” The Annals of Fulda, trans. Timothy Reuter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 69–70. Sedulius Scottus’s poem celebrating Charles’s assumption of the Lotharingian throne described the king as the glory of the age, the hero of the Franks, and a worthy heir to both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. The poet also acclaimed Charles as a peacemaker like Solomon; the world revered Solomon for building a single temple, but Charles’s fame rested on the construction of a thousand: “Pacifer ut Salomon spectra paterna tenens.” / Ast uno Salomon templo celebratur in orbe; / Mille sed hie templis eminet arte novis.” Sedulius Scottus, Carmen 12, lines 12–14, in Sedulii Scotti Carmina, CCCM 117, ed. I. Meyers (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 28; and commentary in Staubach, Rex Christianus, 200–210.
96. Garipzanov, Symbolic Language of Authority, 262–86.
97. See note 15 above.
98. Even if the Gospel book was begun on Charles’s command immediately after his coronation in Metz or after his successes of late 869, the manuscript could only have been finished by sometime between 20 June 870 and Christmas 870, almost a year later. Dutton and Jeaneau, “Verses of the Codex Aureus,” 116.
100. Ibid.; Diebold, “‘Nos quoque morem illiari imitati cupientes,’” 273–75; and Dutton, “Eriugena the Royal Poet,” 62.

Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram
Eriugena equates the chapel with light itself, Christ, transforming it into the setting wherein the Light, which dissipates the darkness of the Fall, reveals itself. Through this process, the chapel comes to symbolize the placespaces where Light manifested itself through oral revelation from the spoken Word of God, Christ’s birth, to the Spirit of human speech at Pentecost. The chapel of Sainte-Marie in Compèigne—like Charlemagne’s palatine chapel dedicated to the Virgin and the Savior—is metaphorically the womb, the tomb, and the throne. In this way, as Michel Foussard and Stephen Nichols have shown, the king’s throne in the chapel becomes a conduit for theosis, a setting for the theophany of the Light of the Word and, at the same time, a renewal of the throne of the Old Testament kings. By sitting in majesty on the chapel’s throne, looking out on all the assembled, wearing the diadems of his ancestors and the symbols of his authority, Charles accomplishes the mystic leap that propels his mind into the spiritual realm as it is represented in the diptych of the Codex Aureus.

The “Aulae siderae” casts Charles the Bald as the personification of the visible sun, kings David and Solomon, Christ, and Charlemagne enthroned in Compèigne (the new Aachen), and this image retroactively recalls the king’s image in the Codex Aureus. Enthroned in Compèigne, Charles shines forth as a sacred, “theosized” being, a living servant of Christ, as he does in the Codex Aureus. It is not surprising, then, that Eriugena recycled in his poem imperial ideas and verses originally composed for the Codex Aureus. The manuscript captures Charles’s desire to rule as emperor in imitation of Charlemagne, and Sainte-Marie in Compèigne celebrates Charles’s imperial desire when it was transformed after his imperial coronation on Christmas 875.

For Charles the Bald, as both patron and audience, contemplating the image of himself enthroned in Aachen must have resembled an initiation into the contemplation of divine truth that aimed to transform the king into the Christlike avatar of a newly reborn empire. Underlying the transformative power of the Codex Aureus diptych was a long-established tradition of iconographic elements that signaled imperial triumph. The king himself would probably have understood unaided the meaning of the angels, soldiers, personifications, and the architectural feature of the baldachin with its allusion to Aachen. The Latin verses would have guided him through the meaning of each visual component that connected him with Old Testament types and the imperial inheritance of his father and grandfather. The learned ruler had already been the recipient of two large, luxuriously decorated Bibles that compared him with David and Solomon and emphasized the ruler’s obligations and political benefits of adhering to sacred law. Moreover, his private prayer book had already expressed the idea that the king was like Christ himself (Figs. 6–7). In the Codex Aureus, Charles is thus presented with a concept of empire that conforms to his vision of power; it promotes the king’s claim to the imperial title and his supremacy over his half brothers.

Due to the lack of sources, we do not have any clear evidence for how Carolingian luxury books in general, and the Codex Aureus in particular, were used at the royal court. We do not know for certain whether such objects were available to the king alone or were intended for other audiences as well. It is very likely, however, that Charles the Bald was not the only person who saw this book. It could have been commissioned with the intention of using it during important celebrations at court. If this were the case, and we imagine the clerics who might have viewed the manuscript, the meaning of the diptych changes slightly: the images originally planned as instruments of visual exegesis become more like a panegyric intended to celebrate Charles as protector and patron of the Church. The clergy would have been interested in the emphasis on the king’s virtuous nature and struck by the visual connections between Charles and the Church. The royal typologies were certainly familiar to them in verbal form from

105. Ibid.
107. “Ipse throno celo fultus rex spectat omnes / Vertice sublimi gestans diadema paternum, / Plena manus sciptris enchiridon aurea bactra: / Heros magnanimus longaevus vivat in annos.” Eriugena, Carmen 9, lines 98–101, in MGH: PLAC, 3:552. “The king himself, supported on his high throne and wearing / The crown of his fathers on his exalted head, looks upon all; / His hand is filled with scepters with handles of Bactrian gold: / May this magnificent hero enjoy a long life.” Translation adapted from Herren, Eriugenae Carmina, 121.
their contact with the king’s court, but they may never have seen the analogy between a Carolingian monarch and Christ expressed visually. In this sense, the miniatures probably indicated that the soon-to-be emperor was a virtuous ruler, divinely chosen. Charles was surely anxious to demonstrate his divinely granted ministerium, the divine and earthly protection it afforded him, and the benefits that this would bring to the Church and the kingdom.

This was not the only meaning perceptible in the diptych, however. Another private, spiritual message is encoded in the illuminations, and it deals directly with John Scottus Eriugena. As a royal poet, Eriugena was committed to the cause of his king and ready to compose occasional verses on demand, to be delivered at celebrations at court. During these events, the poet often offered his advice when he saw his king harassed by his half brother Lothair, Saracens to the south, and pagans to the north.112 If Eriugena is indeed the author of the Codex Aureus’s verses, as the poetry itself suggests, then the magnificent Gospel book provided a special opportunity for the poet to send a message to the king. The book was a royal commission meant to celebrate an important political event. The illuminators’ aim was to decorate the manuscript, not to involve themselves with its subliminal messages that promoted Charles’s notion of empire and secured him an eternal reward: these were probably Eriugena’s ideas. The result was achieved by using a ruler portrait from a manuscript illuminated at Tours as a model and adjusting it to emphasize the ambitions and political aspirations relevant to the king at that precise historical moment. This was done in cooperation with Eriugena, who had close ties with the abbey of Saint-Médard at Soissons, where the manuscript was probably made.113 After his treatise De divina praedestinatione was condemned by the councils of Valence (855) and Langres (859), the poet spent significant time there under royal protection.114 Wulfad, Eriugena’s former student and later abbot of Saint-Médard, was his collaborator in philosophical disputes and the dedicatee of the Periphyseon. The nearby city of Laon was one of the intellectual centers of Charles’s kingdom, and it was certainly one of the places where Eriugena wrote and taught.115 The poet’s presence in the two towns would have made it easy for the illuminators to consult with him on such an important project.

Charles’s elevation to the realm of heaven, where the twenty-four elders praise the apocalyptic Lamb, correlates with the mystical component of the ideal of wisdom as elaborated in Eriugena’s poetry, especially in the formula “rex atque theologus” (king and theologian). In his works addressed to Charles the Bald, Eriugena often encouraged the king to turn away from his terrestrial preoccupations and elevate his mind in order to enter into celestial conversation with the divinity. For the poet, wisdom is the special path of kings, which draws its source from above in the wisdom of Christ himself. Peace, the state for which the ruler should strive, is the necessary corollary to wisdom. The key to its realization lies in the king’s establishment and maintenance of a proper relationship with God. It is this primary relationship, based on steadfast faith and merciful, just, and wise rulership, that brings as its benefit the gift of grace to the kingdom as a whole. As Eriugena writes, scripture teaches the king to hold the right path, that of Christ.116 In the dedication letter for his translation of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, he wrote to Charles the Bald that

the disquiet suffered by catholic men, who in this life seem to be harassed by perilous hardship, ought to be exalted. With fixity of mind, they are cleansed [purgati] by laborious investigations of divine matters, are illuminated [illuminati] by fruitful discoveries, and are perfected [perfecti] by the never ending and unchanging face of truth and love.

Such men, Eriugena asserts, “should not be judged to live among mortals but rather to be carried into celestial association.” The poet believes that both he and the king are included in this latter category of men. He claims that, although Charles is buffeted by the great and persistent disturbances of civil wars

113. See note 3 above.
114. In the 840s and 850s Francia witnessed a prolonged and vehement controversy over the nature of divine predestination and grace. In 850, at the request of Hincmar, archbishop of Reims, Eriugena composed a treatise, On Divine Predestination, against the teaching of Gottschalk of Orbaí. Even though Eriugena’s own views on the subject were condemned, he was protected by Charles the Bald and able to continue his career as a scholar. For the controversy over divine predestination, see Chazelle, Crucified God in the Carolingian Era, 165–208.


116. "Cui soli regum sapientia praecavet pollet; / Quem purae mentis nobilitat studium; / Quem scriptura docet divinis plena figuris, / Ne recto Christi tramite debilitet." Eriugena, Carmen 4, lines 31–34, in MGH: PLAC, 3:534. See also Dutton, “Eriugena the Royal Poet,” 78–79; and Staubach, Rex Christianus, 64.
within his kingdom and by barbarian invasions of pagan people, he is not dislodged from the firmness of his royal spirit.

Like a certain immoveable rock on the edge of the sea, naturally rooted on the spot, he repels chaotic and fierce breaking waves with a hard and firm face. With the whole contemplation of his mind and heart full of devotion, the king is said to investigate Scripture, to search out Latin authors, and to consult Greek writers. God and the light of reason lead the way for him.117

Thus, Eriugena hopes to lead the minds of men, and specifically that of his king, to a consideration of celestial association imbued with wisdom. His desire is that the people of Francia, headed by Charles the Bald, will journey beyond the constellations to Christ. To fly to the heavens was, for Eriugena, to soar above the confusion of the material world below and to enter the temple of wisdom and truth, the Heavenly Jerusalem.118 The final verses under the Adoration of the Lamb, which say the king “looks, wide-eyed, / Praying,” might be intended as a recommendation to the king that both the text and the images in the Gospel book are meant for contemplation.119

The significance here is that contemplation is a supremely visual act; it is the necessary vehicle by which to access divine illumination. Seen in this light, the Codex Aureus’s diptych asserts that the book’s miniatures are not mere ornament but, rather, an integral component in the process of revelation (theophany), meant to engage Charles the Bald in what Eriugena defines as the ineffable flight of the mind.120 By contemplating the illuminations and the text of the Gospels, which are also the image that Christ took in the world, Charles can elevate his intellect above all sinful human nature, reach the state of human perfection before the Fall, and realize the imago dei in himself—defined as a union of the soul with the Word—and thus be one with the divine Logos. For Eriugena, Charles the Bald represents wisdom (which he calls intellect), the essence of the soul, which presides over the entirety of human nature and revolves around God and, in its ideal, fallen state, is identical with the divine mind.121 The diptych in the Codex Aureus thus represents a theosis of Charles the Bald as divine by intellect: he is a human being who is above all other humans as a product of reason. At the same time, he is a theophany in which God’s power manifests itself in the emperor. Moreover, only a sacralized leader, an illuminated emperor like Charles, could bring the erring elect of God back to the path of divine rectitude and realize on earth the order intended by God in the form of the Carolingian Empire. Eriugena’s intention was to make Charles the Bald the fountainhead of the empire, as Christ was the fountainhead of the Church.

The theological message conveyed by the Codex Aureus diptych was surely not hidden from Charles the Bald. In writing about the king’s patronage of the Church, Eriugena claims that his generous patron was able to see in its many ornaments the sacred symbols of the heavenly kingdom.122 Charles was accustomed to the praise and recommendations of his royal poet, and it is possible that Eriugena himself alerted the king to the spiritual meaning of the illuminations. As noted by Paul Dutton, six of the paschal poems commissioned by the king suggest that the poet was present when they were read in front of his patron.123 We can imagine that Eriugena was in court at the manuscript’s presentation and that he invited Charles to look at the two-page opening while offering him an explanation of its meaning. Rife with references to contemporary events, the diptych would have of...


118. Dutton, "Eriugena the Royal Poet," 78–79; and Staubach, Rex Christianus, 279–81.

119. See note 50 above.


123. Dutton, "Eriugena the Royal Poet," 78–79.
fered the ruler reassurance about governance and suggested his future in heaven.

The year 869 saw Charles extend his authority from West Francia into Lotharingia. This expansion of Charles’s power over two Carolingian realms was accompanied by the expectation that his reign would result in peace and harmony. Peace was the condition for which a king should strive; it should be the end result of the efforts of a righteous ruler whose effective governance maintained a communion with God. This ideal of earthly peace was considered a likeness of the eternal kingdom, yet earthly peace was unstable and susceptible to disruption; war and disputes inside the Carolingian kingdom could obstruct the flow of grace. Eriugena’s own eschatological ideas played an important part in his advising Charles to abide by the principles supported by this Christian concept of peace. His promotion of Charles’s imitatio Christi in the two-page opening of the Codex Aureus was rooted in his understanding of contemporary events, including preoccupation with the military threat presented by the Northmen. Eriugena recognized Charles, the Frankish king, as the legitimate earthly emperor tasked by God to assemble the people of his kingdoms under his Christian leadership in anticipation of Judgment Day. Eriugena wanted the manuscript to remind the ruler to elevate his mind toward the Word of God who bestowed on him his ministry of rulership. This allowed the future Christian emperor not only to be a righteous ruler for his subjects but also to participate in God’s glory. By conforming to his heavenly model, Christ, and by acting as his vicar on earth, Charles would rise into the incorporeal heaven like the one represented in the Codex Aureus, into the invisible God. In this way, as the Christian emperor, he would be conjoined to God in the higher and more sublime realm. Furthermore, the majesty of the Word of God, the Law, would be imaged in the majesty of Charles, the sacred emperor who represents divine justice and who will lead a reign of peace, where God dwells among his people as the image of Christ enthroned in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Because the Carolingians believed that they were a people elected by God, they required an emperor who embodied the unification of divine intention and human activity. Christ was the logical culmination of the Old Testament leaders, a glorious role model. A restoration of the Carolingian Empire needed a corresponding identification of an emperor with a Christ figure or imitator Christi. The ruler portrait in the Codex Aureus pictures Charles the Bald as both leader and seer, historic figure and sacral king. It transposes Charles from human to divine by making him the focus of a dual structure, one terrestrial and one celestial. Charles is a king, and as a king he is human by nature and divine by grace. As Christomites, the impersonator or acting agent of Christ, Charles personifies wisdom, and his insight and rational actions aim to restore in his people the ability to see and know God by showing them how God works to protect them. Charles’s struggle against the enemies of the empire consists in trying to make manifest the divinity of his office through his acts. To accomplish this, he must first realize in his human person the Trinitarian ideal as a model for historical action. In order to adhere to this ideal model, Charles must elevate his human mind and partake in the divine intellect. In this way, Charles becomes a translation of the second person of the Trinity, thus symbolizing not just the Law as a principle of rule but also the rational process by which it is implemented through divine grace. This concept, which presupposes the emperor’s active participation in a dialect of spiritual ascension through contemplation and conjoins the duties imposed by the imperial office to God’s universal plan for salvation, coincides with Eriugena’s idea of Charles as king and theologian. The political and spiritual foundation of the ruler’s ministerium confers on the Carolingian Empire the status of divinely preferred kingdom, thereby facilitating its symbolic homologization with the Heavenly Jerusalem. As a consequence, it makes clear that the throne, where Charles the Bald sits in the palatine chapel represented in the diptych, is the sacred locus for the theosized being, the Carolingian emperor. In such an equation, Charles the Bald, through the visual exegesis of the Codex Aureus, will become the new Charlemagne and bring a new era of peace and thus a renewal of the Carolingian Empire.

The foregoing examination of the relationship between text and image in the two-page opening of the Codex Aureus, which represents the enthroned Charles the Bald and the twenty-four elders adoring the Lamb, has shown that behind the golden Latin verses stands a message of political theology with a pronounced Eriugenian attitude that details in the miniatures bring to life. For Eriugena, the conquest of Aachen by Charles the Bald in 869 probably represented a turning point in Carolingian history. Charles was finally realizing his desire for empire, leading the way as the sole emperor and defender


125. Ibid.
128. Kantorowicz, King’s Two Bodies, 65.
of Christianity against the enemies of the Christian faith. The Codex Aureus offered the royal poet and adviser the opportunity to dedicate a manuscript that manifested his idea of imperial reform based on the concept of the ruler as a theologian.

In the mind of Eriugena, the pictorial program of the Codex Aureus would mentally transport Charles above the stars to partake in a spiritual vision of God and transform the king into the Christian emperor of the Carolingians.