Illuminated pages at the beginning of medieval manuscripts rarely represent commentaries in the sense that they argue the content of the text they enframe. Nevertheless, they fulfill commentarial functions because they comment the process of production and perception of the text as well as the codex. This kind of commenting or annotating is expressed both in a spatial and a material way. I would like to exemplify my arguments using early medieval manuscripts produced around 1000 in three different parts of medieval Europe. Firstly, I will look at openings containing framed purple fields without any representation at all, which occur in Ottonian Gospels. Secondly, I will discuss letter-labyrinths that often prelude written texts as a typical feature in northern Iberian manuscripts. And finally, I will consider the relation between illuminations at the beginning as well as at the end of an Early-English manuscript from Winchester. However, before turning to the manuscripts, I would like to discuss very briefly the question of how we can define those illuminated pages that precede a written text or a manuscript.

Scholarship usually denominates illuminated openings that mark the beginning of a codex as a ‘frontispiece,’ although this term was not used earlier than the early modern period to describe full page images opening a printed book and representing the author or essential elements from the following text. However, unlike early modern frontispieces, their medieval counterparts are not superimposed on the text block. Rather, they are themselves an integrated and material part of it and are sometimes closely intertwined with written elements.

Medieval openings have hitherto received scant attention in a systematic way. Mostly, they have been analyzed in the context of individual manuscripts. Often they represent architectural motifs. Therefore, they have been understood as an entrance to the codex in the sense of a “porticus” or an “image-porche.” In addition, their role as sites of encounter between individual makers, patrons, and readers has often been discussed. Jeffrey Hamburger highlighted the proximity to the medieval prologue, determining structural analogies such as the programmatic functions of these illuminations and their articulation of authorial self-consciousness. Finally, Joshua

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O’Driscoll discusses introductory miniatures in Ottonian gospels as a “moment of pause,” interrupting “the otherwise regular pace of reading.”

Following O’Driscoll, I would like to focus on the perception, but also production process of illuminated manuscripts and discuss my examples in the way they are placed within the manuscript. Since in this case the illuminated ‘openings’ form part of a sequence of whole page illuminations, it seems reasonable to approach these pages by considering recent art historical writing on the spatiality of the medieval book. Therefore, I understand illuminated opening pages as a liminal zone or a space of transition between the illumination program and the cover, between the enclosed text and broader contexts of reception, but also of production, of the codex.

PAGES WITH PURPLE-COLORED FIELDS IN OTTONIAN MANUSCRIPTS

If one opens the Gospels from the Cologne canonry ad Gradus completed in 1030, a multiple framed illumination appears on the recto of the first folio (fig. 1). Within the frame one’s view falls on decorated double page as standard type of openings in the medieval codex.


a purple-colored field without any representation. The field is not empty, but there is nothing which draws attention except the purple color itself. In catalogues as well as in monographs this illumination has hitherto been neglected, probably because of its non-figurative character. But the illumination seems far from useless to me. Similar compositions can be found in other liturgical manuscripts from the same time. A sequence of three framed purple fields from part of the decoration in an eleventh-century sacramentary from St. Vitus in Mönchengladbach, a former Benedictine abbey. They do not appear at the beginning of the codex, but in between the Canon missae, the Eucharistic prayers spoken during mass, and the prayers for the Proprium de tempore et de sanctis, those varying prayers spoken by the priest according to the feasts of the liturgical year. Both sections belonged to a different quire.

Obviously, these illuminations set the Canon missae apart from the rest of the text and emphasize its sacredness. Furthermore, if we have a closer look at the framing decoration, these three pages appear as a transitional zone. The frames on the double-page just following the Canon missae show the same ornaments and colors within its borders, that is to say a border of half-palmettes, outlined in gold and blue. In contrast, the frame of the third purple field is decorated with a ribbon of blue palmettes surrounded by a golden and an orange line. The Proprium de tempore et de sanctis again is introduced by a lettered purple field, whose multiple frames represent a mixture of the previous principles of frame decoration: a border of half-palmettes in violet outlined by a golden and an

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12 Dated between 1070 and 1080.

orange frame. In this way, the empty purple fields form a passage between different parts of the sacramentary.

Similar to the Gospels from St. Maria ad Gradus, the Gospels from Bamberg Cathedral, made in Cologne in the second quarter of the eleventh century also open with a frame purple field on the recto of the first folio. The reverse shows a portrait of Saint Jerome as the author of the Vulgata. As in the St. Maria ad Gradus Gospels, the purple field is pointing outwards emphasizing a material limitation of the codex.

However, the semantics of the color purple can be understood as a comment on the Gospel content. Usually, purple is related to ideas of splendor and empowerment. While in the east only the emperor and his family were allowed to wear and to surround themselves with purple cloth, in the west the color was connected with royalty, following Byzantine splendor. Therefore, the first purple page enhances the codex also through the material semantic of purple, which in the context of the Gospels could pinpoint to royalty, but also to the victim, more precisely the blood of Christ – a symbol so virulent in the theological debates at that time.

But why a framed purple field primarily in a position of transition? Through the framing device and through its dimensions (22.5 x 15.5 cm), the purple field within the St. Maria ad Gradus Gospels forms part of a more general pattern of decoration within the manuscript. Firstly, the purple field is placed in the same way (and in the same position) as the Maiestas Domini on the reverse

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15 Followed by different preliminaries such as the praefationes of Jerome, the argumentum (a bref biography of each evangelist) or the capitulationes (tables of contents of the Gospels).

They are located directly on top of each other. Secondly, other sumptuous text-pages are highlighted as well through a framed purple background of the same size. These richly ornamented text-pages are mainly written in gold and include in particular the *Incipit* of the following Gospel as well as a full page initial, which highlights the beginning of the corresponding text.\(^{17}\) Thus, it becomes clear that the first illumination of the manuscript is not an isolated feature, but forms part of an overarching conception. In this sense, the distinction between a non-figurative decoration without scripture on one hand and framed purple fields with figurations or scripture on the other comes into view and has to be further evaluated. While the *Maiestas Domini* refers to the visionary appearance of God-Christ, the lettered colored fields are connected to the beginning of each Gospel book. In retrospect then, the existence of an ‘empty’ purple field on folio one makes clear for the reader that something comes into being if he opens the manuscript.

With regard to the enthroned Christ on the reverse, the empty purple field raises awareness and could be read as an announcement of a vision. Concerning the lettered purple fields, with which the empty field shares a similar design of frame, one can assume that the text production happened in front of the viewer’s eye by turning the pages. This production could be related to the manufacture of the codex, that is the process of writing, but also to the process of inspiration as well as incarnation.

It is probably not surprising, that only in the portrait of Luke the evangelist writes on an entire purple parchment scroll (fig. 3). The scroll is purple possibly due to the fact that the annunciation and therefore the idea of God’s word becomes flesh marks the beginning of Luke’s Gospel. Thus, the process of the Evangelist’s inspirations is here connected to the idea of incarnation. If we are looking back from here to the beginning of the manuscript, the framed purple field can also be understood as a device or announcement for things which will be re-presented on parchment while we open the codex.\(^{18}\)

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17 Supplemented by the *argumentum*.
Letter-labyrinths in northern Iberian manuscripts

Letter- or word-labyrinths have a prominent place among the various types of decorated openings in northern Iberian manuscripts. Comparable pictorial forms, where letters are arranged in a labyrinthine way, are hardly to be found in manuscripts from other regions except some examples in Merovingian manuscripts. In northern Iberian manuscripts, word-


labyrinths usually preserve the names of scribes and illuminators of a codex, as well as of their owners. They therefore have an impact on the reception process, which nevertheless extends the idea of memorializing the people involved in the manuscripts’ production. It is worth noting that word labyrinths not only precede liturgical texts, but also occur in legal or scientific manuscripts and in Bibles. In particular, letter-labyrinths frequently open biblical commentaries – a type of text already dealing and sometimes also struggling with a correct and truthful understanding of the biblical books.

From the combination of fields filled with letters on the one hand and colors or ornaments on the other there results a labyrinthine form that hinders comprehension at first glance. A good example is a letter-labyrinth which precedes a manuscript written and illuminated in 945 by the monk Florentius for the Castilian monastery Valeránica. It contains Gregory’s the Great commentary on the Old Testament book of Job. The word-labyrinth on folio 3 recto represents a grid filled with Visigothic letters and multicolored fields surrounded by a rectangular interlace frame. The


alternating pattern disturbs the expectations of the reader, since the
text, evoking the name of the scribe and illuminator, can be read
starting from only one particular point.

In the Moralia-Codex, this particular point is the letter F in the
middle of the upper line. From here the hidden content may be read
with and against the left-to-right direction of Latin along the central
vertical or horizontal axis. In addition, other directions of reading
allow for further solutions, although the access point as well as the
central vertical axis always determine the first steps. In combining
the lines in Florentius’s word-labyrinth, a T appears before the inner
eye, which may be read as a tau cross. However, in most word-
labyrinths the decoding of the hidden text originates from the center
of the grid. Thus, the text radiates out in four directions, creating the
form of a cross. Therefore, the reader or viewer has to relates texts
to symbols such as the cross, which illustrates that letter-labyrinths
are spatially organized figures.

From the perspective of the production process, the word-
labyrinths could be used by scribes and illuminators as a way to
display their skills and to surprise the book’s recipient, because no
two are exactly alike. This is especially the case when multiple
designed labyrinths occur in sequence like in the so-called “Codex
Aemilianense,” a law collection from San Millán de la Cogolla (fig.
4-6). Here similarities can be identified to the medieval prologue,
which offered medieval authors the chance to play with tropes and
expectations in order to surprise the recipients. It seems very likely
that scribes and illuminators were conscious of letter-labyrinths as a
long-standing tradition already flourishing in the eighth-century

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Austurian kingdom.\textsuperscript{23} This is not surprising at all as the monasteries, where the manuscripts were produced, were in most cases founded in border zones of the Asturian and Leonese kingdoms as well as the nascent kingdom of Navarre with the purpose of laying cultural and economic claim to recently conquered lands. Therefore, the book illumination with its recourses to interlace decoration known from early medieval book illumination as well as late antique traditions of visual poetry bear witness to processes of identity formation.

Since the labyrinths mostly precede the text, another meaning should be added. A common feature of northern Iberian word-labyrinths is the regular alternation of letters and boxes of color or ornament. This leads to the idea of a harmonious and perfect structure, which could be interpreted as an expressions of God’s work. In this vein, Ernst understands the medieval examples of visual poetry as a reflection of the \textit{ordo mundi}. Moreover, since I do not believe that the decoding of all possible readings was intended, word-labyrinths should be considered as a model of coding and decoding, conceptualizing the relation between human existence and the divine order of the world – or, more precisely, the divine order of knowledge.

The patterns of word-labyrinths, arising from the rhythmic arrangement of letters and boxes of colors and ornaments, works against the linear process of reading and, therefore, result in an effect of disorientation. Moreover, in some cases colored boxes or ornament together built an overarching diamond-shaped pattern. These patterns evoke the \textit{Maiestas Domini} compositions in both Carolingian and Ottonian manuscripts, where square or diamond

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}
framings refer to the sovereignty of God over the cosmos. Within the word-labyrinths those overarching diagrammatic forms make the decipherment more complicated. In other examples, the labyrinth creates the perception of being incomplete in the way that the border cuts off the underlying pattern. Thus, the impression of order and disorder, the whole and the fragmentary within the perception process conveys the idea of a structure not entirely comprehensible. With their dazzling designs, the word-labyrinths are playing with the limits of the readers’/viewers’ interpretive abilities at the beginning of the manuscript or, more precisely, the text.

This seems especially evident to me in manuscripts provided with a sequence of word-labyrinths, as in the Codex Aemiliananense. Following a full-page depiction of a cross composition (fol. 16v), the first word-labyrinth represents a pattern built by diamond shapes in different colors which form a cross sign at the very center. While in the labyrinth on folio 17 verso knot ornaments alternate with colored squares (fig. 4), in the following on folio 18 recto the pattern evokes the technique of weaving (fig. 5). The labyrinth on folio 18 verso represents an interlace pattern, which was partly imitated in the margins, probably by a recipient. At the end of the sequence the reader/viewer is confronted with an astonishing full-page composition (fol. 19r), which was not composed as a word-labyrinth: an irregular pattern with golden crosses of different sizes interwoven in an interlace pattern (fig. 6).

This irregular and far more inaccessible composition sets this non-figurative illumination apart from its precedents. Here the concept of encoding and decoding seems not to be the purpose at all. Rather, the illumination confronts the reader/viewer with his or her comprehension abilities on a further level, suggesting that he or she should be fully aware of the complexity of the following text and that for the reception process both are necessary, reading as well as seeing. Certainly, the sequence discussed here also serves the idea

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of a divinely inspired legal text. But if we consider that sequences of word-labyrinths precede different types of texts, they likewise give the idea of divine order of knowledge, for which every codex could provide a key.

OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS WITHIN THE BENEDICTITIONAL OF ST. ÆTHELWOLD

The examples shown here clearly demonstrate how strongly the codex was understood as a well-organized and structured object that had to be activated by the viewer/reader, to correlate different times and spaces. This is also the case in my last example, which focuses on illuminations at both the beginning and the end of a codex. These illuminations mark the codex as a place where different times and spaces can be linked together. When early medieval manuscripts are given an elaborate visual design at the beginning, it is often arcades that open the codex and thus invite the viewer to enter the book in a metaphorical way. In the example of the Benedictional of St. Æthelwold († 984), Bishop of Winchester, which was probably written shortly after 971, the arcades are somewhat different. The codex opens with a series of seven full-page miniatures, each framed by columns covered by wide arches. Under each of these arcades, different groups of saints are gathered, which together figure the heavenly hierarchies. However, the groups of saints are placed in relation to the arcades in such a way that there is simply - figuratively speaking - no space for the viewer to enter. The saints stand closely packed next to and behind each other,

giving the impression that the main purpose here is to represent an almost infinite mass in an infinite space. This impression is underlined by the fact that the exact location of the saints remains in suspension: in front of the arcade, between the columns or even behind them?

The series at the beginning of the codex (fol. 1r-4r) is answered by the representation of a church at the end (fol. 118v). This is the last almost full-page miniature which precedes the episcopal blessing on the occasion of a church consecration. Instead of a frame made up of individual architectural elements, as marks the appearance of the saints at the beginning of the manuscript, the architecture of a church is drawn here, which invites the gaze into the interior. Below a centrally placed arcade stands a bishop who could certainly be identified as Æthelwold. Unlike the saints at the beginning of the manuscript, he is shown communicating to the right. He turns away from an altar, which is vested with a purple altar cloth and equipped with a chalice and a paten, towards a hierarchically ordered group of monks and lay people. His hands and arms cross the column, drawing attention to his actions: for the bishop is about to give the blessing from a golden book. That this book could be the Benedictional is obvious.

But it is not only through the golden book that a connection is made between the last illumination of the Benedictional and the representation of the community of saints at the beginning of the codex, all of whom are also equipped with a golden, heavenly book. In terms of its color scheme, the last illumination does not appear to be complete at first glance. Since the manuscript, richly decorated with pictorial representations, does not otherwise give the impression of having been incomplete, it was probably about something else. Because of the unfinished character of the depiction, essential elements of the representation receive a special emphasis – the arcade framing the bishop, the bishop himself, the altar prepared for the Eucharistic mass, and the book. The colored highlighting of these parts of the composition emphasizes the idea of considering the concluding miniature and the initial full-page depictions together. The final miniature of the codex is therefore not only an illustration of the consecration of a church. The relation between beginning and end of the codex pinpoints to the idea of the mass as the celebration of the community of the faithful together with the
saints in an unifying space, a sacred space. In this sense, the codex, the Benedictional, proves to be an instrument through which relations between the heavenly and the earthly Church could be established by the recipient.

To sum up, the illuminated openings discussed here are not a commentary in the strong sense, but rather an element of the paratext, meaning attached elements, through which a text becomes a book. Nevertheless, they comment its content on a metatextual level. They refer to the multiple authorship of the text, whether it is the divine author, the scribe, the book-painter, or the recipient. They offer the possibility of drawing analogies between different processes of production. This is the case in some liturgical manuscripts made in the Ottonian realm with the objective of bringing to mind incarnation as well as inspiration within the process of reception. Furthermore, they reflect the problem of the reception of the text as they invite the reader to be aware of as well as be prepared for the complexity of a divinely inspired text and therefore support the monastic lectio. But above all, they mark the book as a place where the recipient experiences how different times and spaces, the earthly and the spiritual, the infinite and the finite are connected in multiple ways.

Figure 1: Gospels from St. Maria ad Gradus, Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, Cod. 1001a, fol. 1r (Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek)
Figure 2: Gospels from St. Maria ad Gradus, Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, Cod. 1001a, fol. 1v (Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek)
Figure 3: Gospels from St. Maria ad Gradus, Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, Cod. 1001a, fol. 122r (Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek)
Figure 4: Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 17v, letter-labyrinth, unfilled (author’s archive)
Figure 5: Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 18r, letter-labyrinth, unfilled (author’s archive)
Figure 6: Codex Aemilianense, Escorial, Cod. D.I.1, fol. 19r, ornament page (author’s archive)