

Article

Saepius Legentes ac Sedulo Conspicientes: Reading the Image, Contemplating the Text in Hrabanus Maurus' Carmina Figurata

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Abstract: *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis (DLSC)* by Hrabanus Maurus is a seminal work in the medieval Christian literature that explores the Cross as the central structure of the universe through a unique amalgamation of poetry, prose, and visual art. The work employs a multi-layered narrative that enriches the reader's understanding, encouraging a meditative interaction with the text that emphasizes the contemplative over the recitative. This paper analyzes Hrabanus's intricate use of verbal and visual elements to guide his readers into a profound meditation on the universal significance of the Cross.

Keywords: Hrabanus Maurus; medieval theology; visual poetry; theological symbolism; Carolingian renaissance

1. Introduction

“... Quidam monachus, post monachum Moguntinae civitatis episcopus, nomine Rabanus, ... tale de laude crucis orditus est opus et textuit et texendo perfecit, quo pretiosius ad videndum, amabilius ad legendum, dulcius ad retinendum, nec laboriosius ad scribendum potest inveniri nec poterit” (“A certain monk, and after being a monk bishop of Mainz, called Hrabanus, started such a book about the praise of the Cross and wove it and perfected it by weaving, that none other can be found more precious to see, more pleasing to read, sweeter to remember, or more laborious to write”). (Odilo of Cluny, *Sermo XV, De sancta cruce*, PL 142: 1034A–B)

The monk and later bishop of Mainz St Odilo (994–1048) is here referring to is no other than Hrabanus Maurus (780?–856)¹; the book is the work that is generally known as *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis* from Jacobus Wimpfeling's first edition in Pforzheim in 1503, although most probably during the Middle Ages it was rather referred to as *In honorem sanctae crucis* (Perrin 1998, p. 255) or some other similar expression². It enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages, as over eighty manuscripts or fragments have survived to the 21st century (Perrin 1990). Nowadays, we are all familiar with it as well, at least to a certain extent, as some of its pages are shown on the cover of some recently published books about the Carolingian era, with some enigmatic figures floating on a grid of letters³.

The book, composed between 810 and 814, is in itself a remarkable demonstration of mastery of the Latin language, and the integration of image and text is such that, at times, it is hardly possible to determine where the image ends and the text starts.

Hrabanus conceived it as a double work, divided into two books, complementing each other, preceded by a few preliminary pieces that change from manuscript to manuscript. The first book, which is the core of the whole work, is a series of 28 *carmina figurata*, in a layout with each *carmen* placed on the left page of the double-page spread and the corresponding explanation of the *carmen* added on the right page, together with the transcription of the *versus intexti*. The second book starts with a preface where Hrabanus explains why he added it (apparently later) and the free prose transcription of all the *carmina*. In his



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relatively recent and only scholarly edition⁴, Michel Perrin (1997b, pp. X–XI) refers to the preliminary pieces as A, to the *carmina figurata* of the first book as B, to the corresponding *declarationes figurae* of the first book as C, and to the second book as D. Then, he notes each piece with a number; for instance, B12, C12, and D12 refer, respectively, to the twelfth *carmen figuratum*, its corresponding *declaratio figurae*, and its rendition in prose. This incredibly convenient referencing convention will be followed in the rest of this paper.

In this article, our goal is to delve into the several layers of meaning of the text and images and how Hrabanus leads his reader to the text through the figures in a sort of pendulum movement, *saepius legentes ac sedulo conspicientes* (“reading over and over again and observing diligently”), as he states in one of the preliminary pieces⁵. However, before that, we need to take a detour to understand Hrabanus Maurus’ choices and his compositional methods in his personal use of the old genre of the *carmen figuratum*.

2. Composition and Dissemination of *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis* (DLSC)

Hrabanus conceived the idea of DLSC, apparently encouraged by Alcuin while still studying under his direction at the Monastery of Tours. At least, this is what we have to understand from Alcuin’s letter to Hrabanus, in which he requests *libellum, quem me rogante scribere promisisti, rogo, ut tua fiat promissio firma et mea impleatur laetitia* (“the Little book which you promised to write at my request, I ask, so that your promise be fulfilled and my joy complete.” MGH, *Epistolae* IV, pp. 223–24). However, Alcuin died in 804 when Hrabanus was far from having DLSC ready.

When Hrabanus finally finished DLSC, somewhere between 810 and 814, he was 30 years old, as he himself declared in the *Intercessio Albini pro Mauro*:

Ast ubi sex lustra implevit, iam scribere temptans/ad Christi laudem hunc edidit arte librum,/quo typicos numeros, tropicas et rite figuras/indidit, ut dona panderet alma dei. (“And when he completed six lustra, now attempting to write, he produced this book with art for the praise of Christ. In it, he placed symbolic numbers and allegorical figures, in order to unfold the nourishing gifts of God”). (A2) (MGH, *Poet. Lat.* II, p. 159)

Some additional information about the origin of DLSC is found in Hrabanus’ letter to his fellow student (and later Hrabanus’ successor as abbot of Fulda), Hatto (M.G.H. *Epist.* V, p. 381⁶), when he presented him with the first copy of the book. This letter was written at the latest in December 814, since Hrabanus refers to Hatto as *conlevita*, meaning they were both deacons, and we know that Hrabanus was ordered as a priest that year. In it, Hrabanus recalls that he started the work *te adhortante* (“with your urging”) and *te conlaborante* (“with your help”). Although this later statement could be understood simply as a polite expression in recognition of friendship, Hatto’s role in the conception of DLSC may have been indeed very influential since, according to Hrabanus, Hatto was very appreciative of the art of painting (*Nam picture tibi cum omni sit gratior arte*, M.G.H. *Poet. Lat.* II, p. 196, v. 1), whereas for Hrabanus, the written word was clearly superior⁷. Therefore, the collaboration between Hatto and Hrabanus may have been instrumental in the origin of DLSC. Furthermore, Hrabanus seems to have been the only author, with Hatto’s role reduced to that of a reviewer.

Although in the same letter to Hatto, Hrabanus states that he dictated (*dictavi*) DLSC, we should understand “dictation” in the general sense of “composition,” at least for the *carmina*, as it is difficult to believe that this type of *carmina figurata* could be composed in any other way than by writing (as we shall see more in depth in the following section). Moreover, in the dedication to Archbishop Otgar of Mainz (A1, v. 2), Hrabanus refers to DLSC as the *librum quem dudum mente dedi et calamo* (“the book some time ago I produced with my mind and my pen”); this statement is also corroborated by another dedication to the abbey of Saint-Denis (A4, v. 3–4), where he adds *prosaque metroque confeci librum mente manuque simul* (“I made the book in prose and verse with my mind and my hand at the same time”), implying that, together with the mental effort, he also labored manually. Of course, the prose parts could have been dictated to a secretary in the literal sense of the word.

Apart from Hatto, who seems to have received a preliminary version of *DLSC*, Hrabanus (or rather the abbots of Fulda, since one cannot assume that Hrabanus could have had the monastery scriptorium at his disposal to produce such costly manuscripts) presented many authorities with copies of *DLSC*, and for a few of them, the dedicatory poems or letters have been preserved in one way or another. When we are confronted with any of the existent copies of the book, it is easy to see why the abbots of Fulda Ratgar (802–817) and Eigil (817–822), and later Hrabanus himself (822–842), considered it a precious gift. In chronological order (Perrin 1997b, pp. XX–XXVI), the personalities we know for certain received a copy of *DLSC* are the following:

- Hatto, around 810 (*M.G.H. Epist.* V, pp. 381–82).
- Archbishop Haistulf of Mainz (813–826) (A1, v. 6–112).
- The abbey of St. Martin of Tours (maybe as early as 824, but it could have been as late as 822) (A2).
- Archbishop Otgar of Mainz (826–847), but the presentation happened in any case before 833 (A1) (Perrin 1997a, p. 57).
- Emperor Louis the Pious, probably in 835, maybe in 831 (A5, A6) (Perrin 1997a, p. 52)
- Pope Gregory the Fourth (827–844), although he may have never received the book (A3)
- Archbishop Raoul of Bourges (840–866). However, Perrin thinks that although manuscript P (see below) belonged to Raoul, he may have been, in fact, the second or even the third owner⁸ (Perrin 1997b, pp. XXIV–XXV)
- Pope Sergius the Second (844–847), in 844 (Perrin 1997b, p. XXV)⁹
- Margrave Eberhard of Friuli (dead in 864/5) (MGH, Epist. 5, pp. 481, 15–19)
- The abbey of St. Denis, after 840 (A4)

We know these personalities received a copy of *DLSC* simply because the presentation letters have been preserved somehow. We cannot know who else may have also been presented with one.

In any case, a few of the 81 manuscripts and fragments identified by Perrin (1990) were copied either in Fulda or Mainz and, therefore, under Hrabanus' supervision. These are the following:

- V: Vaticanus, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reginensis Latinus 124: 365 × 295 mm, 61 ff., copied in Fulda during the second quarter of the ninth century (https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.124 (accessed on 15 June 2024)). It is a composite manuscript, and one of its segments may have been Hrabanus' own copy, or otherwise, a copy from the exemplar of the library of the Fulda monastery, copied during Hrabanus' lifetime, and corrected as the text evolved and became more precise (Perrin 1997b, pp. XXXIV–XXXV, XXXIX).
- P: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 2423: 415 × 325 mm, 45 ff., copied in Fulda in the second quarter of the ninth century (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9078151c/f1.item> (accessed on 15 June 2024), in black and white).
- A: Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale 223: 405 × 335 mm; 47 ff., copied in Fulda in the second quarter of the ninth century (<https://portail.biblissima.fr/ark:/43093/mdatab46be2e2dfc8fdd8cc234d100192cea3b945c02e>, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8452181v> (accessed on 15 June 2024)).
- T: Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria K. II. 20: 290/330 × 210/240 mm, 48 ff., copied in Fulda in the middle of the ninth century.
- Q: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 2422: 365 × 280 mm, 43 ff., copied in Fulda and Mainz in the middle of the ninth century (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8490076p> (accessed on 15 June 2024)).
- W: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 652: 410 × 310 mm, 47 ff., copied in Fulda and Mainz in the middle of the ninth century (https://digital.onb.ac.at/RepViewer/viewer.faces?doc=DTL_7223619&order=1&view=SINGLE (accessed on 15 June 2024)). This seems to be the copy of Archbishop Otgar of Mainz¹⁰.

3. Structure: *Opus Geminum* in Two Books

In Hrabanus' conception, *DLSC* was an *opus geminum*¹¹, meaning that it was written both in verse and prose, referring to the *carmina figurata*, always placed on the left page of the double-page spread, and the corresponding *declarationes figurae* (that is, the corresponding explanations of the *carmina*), always placed on the right page, so that *carmen* and *declaratio* face each other. To that, he added some preliminary matter that grew with time; in the initial state of composition, the preliminary matter contained at least the *carmen figuratum* where Hrabanus establishes his authorship and the prologue accompanying it. This preliminary matter grew with new dedications. Also, later, Book II was added with a prologue and a prose rendition of the *carmina*.

In Perrin's (1997b) scholarly edition, however, *DLSC* (he rather uses the title of *In honorem sanctae crucis*) is divided into four main parts. The first part is the preliminary matter, including dedications, a prologue, and a list of chapters. As a whole, this part is identified as A by Perrin (1997b). Then, Book I is divided into the *carmina*, labeled as B, and the *declarationes*, labeled as C. Finally, Book II is Perrin's part D.

3.1. Preliminary Pieces

As for part A, although none of the preserved manuscripts contain all these pieces together, Perrin (1997b, p. XI) lists the following:

- A1: Dedication to Otgar.
- A2: Dedication to St-Martin of Tours. It is also known as *Intercessio Albini pro Mauro*.
- A3: Dedication to Pope Gregory the Fourth.
- A4: Dedication to St-Denis.
- A5: *Carmen figuratum* to emperor Louis the Pious.
- A6: *Declaratio figurae* corresponding to A5.
- A7: Prologue.
- A8: Poem-preface with Hrabanus' signature.
- A9: Table of chapters.

Some manuscripts, but not all, also add images representing the author, guided by Alcuin, offering of the finished book to St. Martin, or a very similar composition where Alcuin guides Hrabanus to the presence of Archbishop Otgar of Mainz, instead. The presence of Alcuin was conceived, most probably, as a sort of posthumous tribute to his old master. Some manuscripts include, instead, a similar scene where the book is offered by Hrabanus alone to Pope Gregory the Fourth (see Figure 1).

The best-known piece of this introductory matter is the dedicatory to Emperor Louis the Pious, which is itself a *carmen figuratum* (A5), followed by the corresponding *declaratio figurae* in prose (A6) (Figure 2). Together, all pieces can qualify as a *speculum principis* (Sears 1990, p. 642), and it is a later (most likely in the 830s) addition. It has been the object of study multiple times¹², and therefore, we send the interested reader back to those studies. Here, we will limit ourselves to calling attention to the fact that the content of the *versus intexti* is very consciously related to the part of Louis' body where they have been placed.

However, although it has not received much attention, one might argue that the most important piece of part A is the *carmen figuratum* where Hrabanus declares his authorship (A8), complementing the prologue (A7). The reader will immediately notice that it is the only *carmen* placed on the right page of the double-spread, and it has no distinguishable figure. However, some letters stand out against the colored background in a fashion that forms a sort of grid of six rows and six columns superimposed on the grid of 36 × 36 of the poem. A closer look will also reveal that the 36 *litterae intextae* reveal the author's name: MAGNENTIVS HRABANVS MAVRVS HOC OPUS FECIT. Finally, it is written in elegiac couplets (minor mode) rather than elegiac hexameters, as the rest of the *carmina* is.



Figure 1. Manuscripts V, fol. 2v (left), Hrabanus, guided by Alcuin, presenting DLSC to St. Martin; and W, fol. 1v (right), Hrabanus, guided by Alcuin, offers DLSC to Archbishop Otgar of Mainz. In both cases, the presentation image faces the *Intercessio Albini pro Mauro* (A2).



Figure 2. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 652, fols. 16v–17r. *Carmen figuratum* with the image of Louis the Pious (A5) and corresponding *declaratio figurae* (A6).

As for the content, Hrabanus states clearly his objective: *nunc dicere numen, partier carmina et al.loquiis/dona patris summi, quae largus reddidit orbi* (“to proclaim, equally in poems and speeches, the divine will, the gifts of the Supreme Father, which generously he gave to the world”). Further, he compares himself to the widow who offered a few small copper coins (Mc 12:41–44, Lc 21:1–4) and asks the rich ones of this world not to scorn his little offering (that is, the book), because, after all, he is only giving to the world what he had received from Christ (*en quanto tribuo tribuit mihi Jesus amator*).

The signature-poem (A8) is paired with the prologue (A7) (Figure 3). It is not just a coincidence (nothing is in *DLSC*), as the two texts complement each other. In the prologue, Hrabanus returns to the motivation that prompted him:

Hortatur nos lex diuina ad deferendum Domino dona; nec excipit aliquem, sed ab omnibus spontaneam expetit oblationem, cum Moysi Dominus praecepit ita dicens: Loquere filiis Israhel, ut tollant mihi primitiai, ab omni hamum: qui offert ultroneus accipietis eas. Vbi nullus excusationi locus datur, quando uoluntas prompta quaeritur et non necessitas imponitur, sed uniuscuiusque proprio arbitrio relinquitur, unde ipse haec legens, animum deuotum impendens, offerebam has primitias, in laudem sanctae crucis expensas, quae columna est caelestis aedilicii, in qua uidelicet constructa est domus Christi: ipsi arbitri interno qui me conspicit, non superba intentione, sed humili deuotione, quicquid sua gratia possum, in eius laudem uolo conferre, qui non secundum faciem, sed secundum cor iudicans, non aestimat quantitatem muneris, sed quantitatem deuotionis (“The divine law encourages us to bring gifts to the Lord; it doesn’t exempt anyone but seeks a voluntary offering from all, as the Lord commanded Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites, that they take for me a first offering, from everyone who is willing; you shall receive them from those who offer willingly. Where no excuse is given place, when a ready will is sought and no necessity is imposed, but it is left to each one’s own discretion. Hence, I, reading these things, devoting a devout spirit, shall offer these first fruits, spent in praise of the holy cross, which is the pillar of the heavenly building, in which the house of Christ is evidently constructed. To that internal judge who sees me, not with proud intention, but with humble devotion, whatever I can by His grace, I want to contribute to His praise, who judges not according to appearance, but according to the heart, not estimating the quality of the gift, but the amount of devotion”).

Nevertheless, then Hrabanus addresses his reader, informing them of the way to read *DLSC*:

Nec enim arbitror me posse aliquid sanctae cruci decoris conferre, quae claritate sua cuncta clarificat; sed claritatem eius et maiestatem perpetuam, laudibus quibuscumque possum, conseruis meis praedico, ut saepius eam legentes acsedulo conspicientes, nostram in ea redemptionem assidue cogitemus, Redemptorique nostro incessanter gratias agamus ... (“For I do not think that I can contribute any honor to the Holy Cross, which illuminates all things with its brightness; but its brightness and everlasting majesty, with whatever praises I can, I proclaim to my fellow servants, so that by reading about it often and diligently observing it, we may constantly think about our redemption in it, and unceasingly give thanks to our Redeemer ...”)

Quapropter rogo, ut quicumque textum huius operis perspexerit, non statim propter artificis uilitatem spernendo abiciat, sed, si uelit et possit, legat et oculo sanae fidei intuendo atque per auctoritatem diuinarum Scripturarum diiudicando ... (“Therefore, I ask that whoever has examined the text of this work would not immediately discard it with contempt due to the lowliness of the craftsman, but, if willing and able, should read it and consider it with the eye of healthy faith and judge it through the authority of the divine scriptures ...”)

De cetero autem moneo lectorem, ut huius conscriptionis ordinem teneat, et figuras in eo factas ubique seruare non negligat, ne operis pretium pereat, et utilitas lectionis minuatur. Quod ut facilius possit, uniuscuiusque figurae rationem in sequenti sibi pagina prosaico stylo intimare curabam, subnectens expositionem eius simul et uersus qui in ea conscripti sunt. (“Furthermore, I advise the reader to maintain the order of this writing and not neglect to preserve the figures made therein everywhere, lest the value of the work be lost, and the utility of reading be diminished. To make this easier, I took care to intimate the rationale of each

figure on the following page in a prose style, underpinning both its explanation and the verses that are written in it.”)

That is, Hrabanus conceived *DLSC* to guide the meditation of the readers, and this meditation includes the contemplation of the figures as well as the rumination on the different levels of the text, presumably the *versus intexti*, the *declaratio figurae* on the right page, and the field of the *carmen*. This reading must have been extremely slow, given the grammatical complications and the absence of aiding devices such as punctuation or space between words.

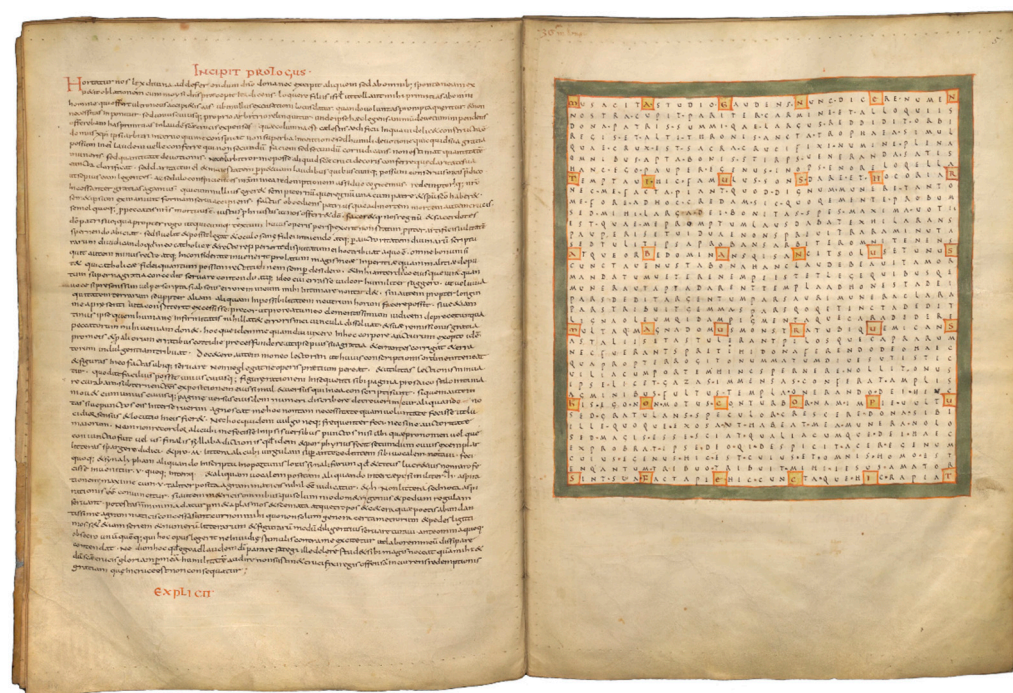


Figure 3. Prologue (A7) and signature-poem (A8) in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 652, fols. 4v–5r.

3.2. Book I: *Carmina* and *Declarationes Figurarum*

The core of *DLSC* is Book I. It comprises 28 *carmina figurata* (identified as B by Perrin) plus the corresponding *declarationes figurae* (identified as C by Perrin), which have the function of expounding the theological, spiritual, and symbolical rationale of the *carmina*. All the *carmina* occupy the left page of the double-page spread, whereas the corresponding *declaratio figurae*, where Hrabanus elaborates on the poem content and its sources, occupies the right page (see Figure 4). Together, they can be conceived as a cosmological macro-poem about the history of creation, the mediation of Christ, and the redemptive power of the Cross, starting with the risen Christ and then descending to the time and space of human history. Then, the first half of the *carmina* (B1 to B14) deals with the time from the creation of the universe to the Passion of Christ, whereas the second half (B15 to B24) deals with the time of the Church and the Kingdom of Heaven (Perrin 2009, p. 44). The *declaratio figurae* corresponding to *carmen* 28 works as a sort of conclusion and recapitulation for the whole book with the statement that the Cross is the *consummatio et perfectio rerum* (“consummation and perfection of the world”) at the end of the *declaratio figurae* (C28) (Perrin 1995, p. 200).

In this way, Book I can be considered a sort of liturgical year in miniature, a concentration of dogmatic and theological poetry and sacred history. All in all, a true monastic prayer.



Figure 4. B15+C15: the Lamb of God encircled by the evangelists' symbols. Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 2422, fol. 17v-18r.

The composition of the *carmina* is extremely complex. All poems in section B are written in hexameters of a fixed number of letters (there are 14 poems of 37 letters, 7 of 35, 4 of 39, 2 of 36, and 1 of 41), and most of them are also square, meaning that the number of verses is the same as the number of letters per verse. Only a few poems are slightly higher than wide: B1 (47×39), B22 (41×39), and B28 (43×35). Because of its square or rectangular nature and the fact that the letters are arranged in a grill, this type of *carmen figuratum* is sometimes referred to as *carmen cancellatum* or “grill poem”.

If writing poetry within these constraints is not difficult enough, the figures add a new layer of complication. The groups of letters overlaid on the figures can be read independently, contain their own message, and have their own Latin metric. Therefore, they are to be read twice—once by themselves and once together with the “field” of the poem. They receive the name of *versus intexti*, where “intextus” means, literally, interwoven. The poem is written in rustic capitals in most earlier manuscripts, with the *versus intexti* highlighted using the uncial script (Perrin 1997b, p. XXXIV).

So, in order to build his poems, Hrabanus needed first to determine the main theme of the poem, then consider which figure(s) and which number(s) would be appropriate to convey it, and after that, give form to the *versus intexti* within the appropriate shape and number. Further, he would have to decide the number of letters for the hexameters, place the figures with the *versus intexti* in the grid, and compose each hexameter using the letters of the *versus intexti* when required¹³.

One can hardly imagine the difficulty of writing Latin metric poetry within such constraints, and one cannot but be forgiving of the liberty Hrabanus takes concerning the conventions of classical poetry. Hrabanus is, as a matter of fact, very conscious of this and feels that some explanation is needed in the prologue. One almost feels that he is apologizing for it, even though licenses of this sort are not uncommon in the poetry of the time. Still, in 1884, Dümmler found this twisting of the language so appalling that he chose “to omit the book composed on the praises of the Holy Cross, lest readers be wearied by its tedious and insipid circumlocutions” (MGH, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini* II, p. 157). It would seem that in his harsh judgment he was ignoring the constraints that the genre was imposing on the composition and therefore the function of the figures as well.

3.3. Book II: Prose Rendition of the Carmina

Also, the reading must have been extremely cumbersome, even with the help of the *declaratio figurae*. To help the reader, Hrabanus added Book II at a later date (D in Perrin's notation), in which he renders the same poems in prose after a short preface of justification declaring the rationale of the addition:

Opus, quod in laudem sanctae cruces metrico stilo condidi, in prosam vertere curavi, ut, quia ob difficultatem ordinis et figurarum necessitate obscura locutio minusque patens sensus videtur metro inesse, saltem in prosa lucidior fiat ("The work, which I composed in praise of the holy cross in metrical style, I have taken care to convert into prose, so that, because the expression seems obscure and the meaning less clear due to the difficulty of the arrangement and the necessity of the figures in the meter, it may at least become clearer in prose.").

(MGH *Epist.* 5, p. 384)

In some manuscripts, between Book I and Book II, the poems were re-copied but in normal writing—that is, free from the grid and the figures and with separation between words (Perrin 1997b, p. XIX).

4. The Figures of DLSC

When confronted with any of Hrabanus' *carmina*, the first thing one perceives is the figures. However, by no means do they have the value of paintings or illustrations.

The figures within Hrabanus' *DLSC* are far more than mere visual embellishments; they serve as a fundamental component of the text communicative framework. Each figure, intricately designed, guides the reader's journey through the text, leading them directly to the *versus intexti*. But not only that: the figures are meticulously crafted to convey specific theological messages, interwoven with the messages offered by the texts, and therefore they function simultaneously as narrative devices and symbols in their own right. Their dual role enriches the reader, providing a deeper, more layered understanding of the text's spiritual and intellectual exploration.

Therefore, in this section, we will analyze the interaction between the figures and the verses, uncovering the sophisticated method by which Hrabanus embedded a layer of rich symbolic and doctrinal content into the fabric of his poetry in order to complement and enhance the textual narrative.

The figures themselves, which in one way or another are cross-like designs (except for B22, which is *Chi-Rho* monogram), can be divided into four different types:

- Plain crosses, in general, very stylized and with a linear design (see Figure 5).
- Geometrical shapes (squares, hexagons, etc.) (see Figure 6).
- Letters, many times doubling as numbers, either Roman or Greek.
- Pictorial elements (Christ, the Four Living Creatures with the Lamb, Hrabanus himself, etc.) (for example, see Figure 4 above).

However, even the figures that represent pictorial elements such as Christ, the Lamb of God, or angels are not materially exact representations but have a symbolic type; they transcend physical reality and take the viewer to the superior reality they represent.

Besides the obvious cross-like pattern most of the figures are arranged in, to read the *versus intexti* they contain, one must go from top to bottom and then from left to right; that is, the eyes must follow the figures in the same direction the sign of the Cross is made.

In this way, the Cross inevitably becomes the mediation between the material world of the book pages and that superior reality into which the reader-observer is taken.



Figure 5. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 652, fol. 31v–32r. B26–C26.

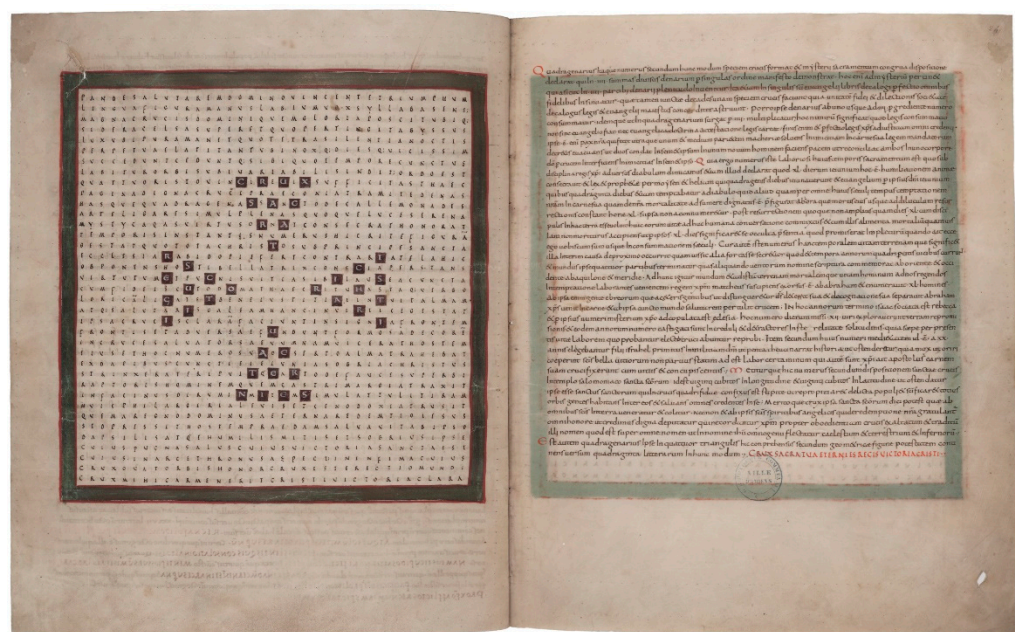


Figure 6. Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale 223, fols. 23v–24r. B18–C18.

That Hrabanus did not see the figures as a mere ornament to the written word is plain from his admonition to his friend Hatto (M.G.H., *Epist.* V, p. 328):

... si cui commissum tibi opus ad rescribendum tradideris, illum admoneas, ut figuras in eo factas et conscriptionis ordinem servare non negligat, ne forte, si formas figurarum variaverit, et scripturae ordinem commutaverit, operis precium perdat; et iam opus meum non meum esse faciat, quia non meum idem, sed nec suum, quia est vitiatum (“... if you entrust the work I send you to somebody else to copy it, admonish him not to neglect the figures made in it nor the text of the writing, lest the work loses its value if he changes the shape of the figures or alters the order of the writing; and so make my work no longer mine, but his, because it is corrupted”).

Another sign of the value of the figures is the fact that the titles of the *carmina* are, for the most part, either the description of the image itself or the meaning of some number that is conveyed by the figure. The following table lists the titles of the poems (Perrin 1997b, pp. 23–24), the size of the grid in the number of letters (height by width), a brief description of the figures, the *versus intexti* (in small uppercase), and the folia where they can be found in the manuscripts VPAQW¹⁴

I. De imagine Christi in modum crucis brachia sua expandentis et de nominibus eius ad diuinam seu ad humanam naturam pertinentibus (“On the image of Christ extending his arms in the form of a cross and on the names belonging to his divine or human nature”) [47 × 39]

Risen Christ, naked but with a loincloth, extending his arms in the form of the cross, although the cross is missing. On Christ’s head, there is a cruciform halo with the letters A, M, Ω. The hands of Christ extend beyond the field of letters.
DEXTRA DEI SVUMMI CVNCTA CREAVIT
IESVS./CHRISVS LAXABIT E SANGVINE DEBITA
MVNDO./IN CRVCE SIC POSITVS DESOLVENS VINCLA
TYRANNY./AETERNVS DOMINVS DEDVXIT AD STRA
BEATOS./ATQVE SALVTIFERAM DEDERAT DEVS ARCE
CORONAM. VESTE QVIDEM PARVA HIC TEGITUR QVI
CONTINENT ASTRA, ATQVE SOLVUM PALMO CLAUDIT
VBIQBE SVO./ISTE EST REX IVSTITIAE./ORDO IVSTUS
DEO./REX REGVM ET DOMINVS DOMINORUM./A, M
ET Ω (Jesus created all things with the right hand of the Most High./Christ will pay the world’s debts with his blood./Thus placed on the cross, He frees us from the chains of tyranny./The eternal Lord has led the blessed to the heavens./God has placed the crown of salvation in the sky./A small garment covers He who holds the stars together,/and his palm encloses the entire earth./This is the King of Justice./A just order by God./King of Kings and Lord of Lords./A, M, and Ω)
V: 8; P: 4; A: 6; Q: 3; W: 6

II. De crucis figura quae intra tetragonum est scripta et omnia se comprehendere manifestat (“On the figure of the Cross, which is written within a square and reveals all things within itself”) [35 × 35]

Stylized Greek cross just one letter in width in a square.
O CRVX QVAE SVMMI ES NOTO DEDICATA
TROPAEIO./O CRVX QVAE CHRISTI ES CARO
BENEDICTA TRIVMPHO./O CRCX QVAE EXCELLIS
TOTO ET DOMINARIS OLYMPO./O CRVX QVAE
DEDERAS RVPTO PLEBEM IRE AB AVERNO./O CRVX
DVX MISERO LATOOQVE REDEMPTIO MVNDO./O
CRVX VEXILLUM SANCTO ET PIA CAVTIO SAECLO (O
Cross, dedicated to the illustrious trophy of the Most High./O Cross, flesh blessed by the triumph of Christ./O Cross, you surpass and rule over the entire Olympus./O Cross, you have allowed the people to leave the shattered Avernus./O Cross, guide for the wretched and redemption for the vast world./O Cross, standard and pious protection for the world you sanctify.)
V: 9; P: 5; A: 7; Q: 4; W: 7

III. De nouem ordinibus angelorum et de nominibus eorum in crucis figuram dispositis (“On the nine orders of the angels and their names arranged in the form of a cross”) [36 × 36]

The words “crux” and “salus” arranged in a cross shape.
ANGELI/ARCANGELI/VIRTVTES/POTESTATES/
PRINCIPAT<VS>/DOMINATIONES/THRONI/
CHERUBIN/SERAPHIN (Angels/Archangels/Virtues/
Powers/Principalities/Dominations/Thrones/Cherubim/
Seraphim.)
V: 10; P: 6; A: 8; Q: 5; W: 8

III. De Cherubim et Seraphim circa crucem scriptis et significatione eorum (“On the Cherubim and Seraphim written around the cross and their significance”) [37 × 37]

A stylized Greek cross divides the field into four quadrants. The two upper quadrants are occupied by two seraphims with six wings (following Is. 6:2). In the two lower quadrants, there are two cherubims with arms extended. EX ARX ALMA CRVCIS, EN FABRICA SANCTA SALVTIS./EN THRONVS HIC REGIS, HAEC CONCILIATIO MVNDI./SIGNA CRVCIS CHRISTI AST SERAPHIM CAELESTIA MONSTRANT/PENNARVM ATQUE SITV HAC CVNCTA SACRATA PROBANT./NAM HAEC SOCIA EXVLTANT CELEBRANDO HAC LAVDE SVPERNVN/CONCLAMANTQVE TRIBVS SCEPTRA SABAOOTH VICIBVS./HINC SIGNANT CHERVBIM HAEC LABBARA SANCTA TRIVMPHVM,/DISTENSISQVE ALIS BRACHIA TENSA NOTANT./QVAE LATERE ASSISTVNT ARCAE ET SACRA OPERCVLA CONDVNT/FACTAQVE PROPITIA OFFICIO IPSA PROBANT. (Behold the venerable fortress of the cross; here is the holy fabric of salvation./Here is the throne of the King, which reconciles the world with God./The celestial Seraphim signify the cross of Christ,/And by the position of their wings, they demonstrate that all is consecrated./These allies exult in celebrating the Most High with this praise,/And proclaim three times the scepters of Sabaoth./These holy banners mark the triumphs of the Cherubim,/With their wings spread, they symbolize the outstretched arms of Christ./Those who stand by the side of the Ark and conceal its sacred cover/Prove by their action the accomplishment of atonement.)

V: 11; P: 7; A: 9; Q: 6; W:9

V. De quattuor figuris tetragonis circa crucem positae et spiritali aedificio domus Dei (“On the four square figures placed around the Cross and the spiritual structure of the house of God”) [35 × 35]

A stylized cross divides the field into four quadrants. A square occupies each quadrant. INCLYTA CRVX DOMINI CHRISTI FVNDA-MEN ET AVLAE./TE PATRIARCHARVM LAVDABILIS ACTIO SIGNAT./PLEBSQVE PROPHETARVM DIVINO FAMINE IVSSA./AGMEN APOSTOLICVM PANDIT TVA RITE TROPAEA./MARTYRUM ET IPSE CHORVS EFFVSO IVRE CRVORE (Illustrious Cross of the Lord, foundation of God’s Church./The praiseworthy action of the patriarchs signifies You./The people of prophets, commanded by the divine word./The apostolic rank rightly unfolds Your trophies./The very chorus of martyrs has justly shed their blood.)

V: 12; P: 8; A: 10; Q: 7; W:10

VI. De quattuor uirtutibus principalibus quomodo ad crucem pertineant et quod omnium uirtutum fructus per ipsam nobis collate sint (“On the four principal virtues and how they pertain to the Cross, and how the fruits of all virtues are bestowed upon us through it”) [37 × 37]

Four triangles arranged to form a cross. ARCE CRVCIS DOMINI SVMMA PRVDENTIA SISTIT./IVSTITIA ET PRONA MANDAT SE PARTE TENENDAM./FORTI SED IN DEXTRO CORNV FERT SPICVLA TVDO./CUM IN LAEVO MODERANS DISPONIT IVRA MODESTA. (Wisdom resides at the very top, in the fortress of the Lord’s Cross./Justice dictates that it be willingly upheld./On the right side, courage carries its arrows./While on the left, temperate moderation arranges its laws.)

V: 13; P: 9; A: 11; Q: 8; W: 11

VII. De quattuor elementis et quattuor uicissitudinibus temporum et de quattuor plagis mundi et de quattuor quadrantibus naturalis diei quomodo omnia in cruce ordinentur et in ipsa sanctificentur (“On the four elements and the four changes of the seasons, and the four plagues of the world, and the four quarters of the natural day, how all things are ordered in the cross and sanctified in it”) [35 × 35]

VIII. De mensibus duodecim et duodecim signis atque duodecim uentis et de apostolorum praedicatione et de ceteris mysteriis duodenarii numeri quae in cruce ostenduntur (“On the twelve months and twelve signs, and the twelve winds, and on the preaching of the apostles, and on the other mysteries of the number twelve which are shown in the Cross”) [37 × 37]

VIII. De diebus anni in quattuor hexagonis et monade comprehensis et de bissextile increment quomodo in specie sanctae crucis adornentur et consecrentur (“On the days of the year encompassed in four hexagons and a monad, and on the leap year increment, how they are adorned and consecrated in the representation of the Holy Cross”) [41 × 41]

X. De numero .LXX. et de sacramentis eius quomodo cruci conueniant (“On the number 70 and its mysteries, and how they correspond to the Cross”) [37 × 37]

Four circumferences of different colors arranged in the shape of a cross.

VER, ORIENS, IGNIS, AVRORA, HAC PARTE RELVCENT./AVTVMNVVS, ZEPHIRVS, TELLVS ET VESPERA HIC FIT./ARCTON, HIEMS, LYMPHA, MEDIA NOX ECCE LOCATAE./AER, AESTAS, AVSTER, ARCI HIC SIT MERIDIESQVE (Spring, the East, fire, dawn shine on this side./Autumn, Zephyrus, the earth, and evening are here./The Bear, winter, water, and midnight are placed here./Air, summer, the south wind, and midday are here in the fortress.)

V: 14; P: 10; A: 12; Q: 9; W: 12

Twelve-armed cross, with the secondary arms stemming from the middle of the main arms.

IN CRVCE NVNC MENSES, VENTI, DVODENAQVE SIGNA./GREX ET APOSTOLICVS DECORATVR LVCE CORVSCA./SVNT QVOQVE CONSOCIA HIC STIPS, PLAGA ET ORBIS OPVS./SANCTA VALET CELEBRI AST CRVX DARE CALLE BONVM HOC. (In the cross now, the months, the winds, and the twelve signs of the Zodiac./The flock of apostles is adorned with dazzling light./This trunk of the cross, this region, and the work of the world are also associated here./The holy cross can bestow this good through a well-trodden path.)

V: 15; P: 11; A: 13; Q: 10; W: 13

A cross formed by four narrow hexagons.

TERQVE CENTENOS DECIESQVE SENOS,/ET SEMEL QVINOS HABET VNIVERSVM/TEMPVS, ANNALIS CRVCE CIRCIVTUS/ECCE DIES HIC./SED PLAGIS POSTI SATIS EXAGONI/QUATTVOR MONSTRANT DECIES NOVENOS./SINGVLI TOTOS PIE CVM MONADE/ET SVPER VNVM./STIRPS QVOQVE SANCTA CRVCIS CONPLET CERTO ORDINE SCEPTRVM/HAECQVE DECVS MUNDI EST MAGNA SALVS HOMINVM HAEC./CUNCTA TENET CHRISTVS BARATHRVN, ORBEM ATQVE AETHERA CELSA,/NAM REGIT ASTRA POLI HIC CLAVSTRAQVE CVNCTA DIEI (The universal time contains/three times a hundred, ten times six,/and once five days in the cross,/This is the annual cycle./Four hexagons placed at the corners/Each signify, in a holy manner, in total/ninety plus one/With a unit. Also, the holy wood of the cross completes the sovereignty in a specific order;/It is the glory of the world and the noble salvation of men./Christ holds all—the abyss, the world, and the high heavens,/For He governs the stars of the sky and all the gates of the day.)

V: 16; P: 12; A: 14; Q: 11; W: 14

A cross pattern formed by five circular sets of 14 single-letter squares (70 squares in total).

CRUX, PIA CONSTRVCTA, HIC SVPERASTI VINCVLA MORTIS./MAGNA, BONA ET SANCTA, HIC SVPERASTI CRIMINA SAECLI (O Cross, piously constructed, here you have overcome the bonds of death./Great, good, and holy, here you have overcome the crimes of the age.)

V: 17; P: 13; A: 15; Q: 12; W: 15

XI. De quinque libris mosaicae legis quomodo per crucem innouentur et exponantur ("On the five books of the Mosaic law and how they are renewed and expounded through the Cross") [36 × 36]

XII. De nomine Adam protoplausti quomodo secundum Adam significet et eius passionem demonstret ("On the name of Adam, the first-formed, and how it signifies the second Adam and demonstrates his passion") [35 × 35]

XIII. De diebus conceptionis Christi in utero uirginis in quattuor crucibus demonstrates, hoc est, .CC.LXX.VI. Et eius numeri significatione ("On the days of gestation of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary showing in four crosses that is 276, and on the significance of this number") [35 × 35]

XIII. De annis ab exordio mundi usque in annum passionis Christi in notis graecarum litterarum secundum formam sanctae cruces dispositis simul cum sacramento quod in hoc reuelatur ("On the years from the beginning of the world until the year of the Passion of Christ, arranged according to the form of the Holy Cross in the signs of Greek letters, together with the mystery revealed in this") [39 × 39]

Five squares arranged in a cross shape. Each square has a side six letters in length.

TE GENESIS CRVX ALMA BEAT, TVA MVNERA
LAVDAT./EXODVS ATQVE CANIT TRANSITVS CARMEN
AMORE./IVRA SACERDOTIS LEVITICVS OPTIME
PSALLIT./AST NUMERVS CANTAT MAGNALIA MIRA
TRIVMPHI./NAM DEVTERNOMIVM RENOVANTIS
GAVDIA DICIT. (Genesis, O nourishing Cross, calls you
blessed and praises your gifts./Exodus sings the song of
passage with love./Leviticus excellently chants the priestly
laws./But Numbers sings of the astonishing wonders of
triumph./For Deuteronomy speaks of the joys given by He
who renews the world.)

V: 18; P: 14; A: 16; Q: 13; W: 16

The name "Adam" in Greek uppercase letters.

SANCTA METRO ATQVE ARTE EN DECET VT SINT
CARMINA CHRISTO HINC. (It is fitting that the poems to
the glory of Christ be holy in their meter and their art.)

V: 18; P: 15; A: 17; Q: 14; W: 17

Four Greek crosses arranged in a cross shape. The width of the crosses' arms is three letters, so each cross contains 69 letters.

FORMA SACRATA CRVCIS VENERANDO FVLGET
AMICTV./MAGNVS VESTIT HONOR LAETVS, LOQVOR
HOC NATIONI./CORPORIS ERGO SACRI CONSTRVCTIO
IN ARTE BEATA./E NVMERO RADIANS QVAE INTVS
PROBAT IISSE BEATE./NVNC CANAM AT EXORANS
LESVM ABDERE ET VDA PIARE/VERA SALVS ISTA EST
BENEDICTIO SANCTA SALVTIS./IN TOTO IPSE MANENS
TENET IPSEQVE VIVIT IN OMNI./FONS BONITATIS,
AMOR PIETASQVE, REDEMPTIO VERA. (The sacred form
of the cross shines with its venerable garment./I joyfully tell
the nation that great honor clothes it./The construction of a
holy body is blessed in its art./Shining from the number it
embodies, it proves the blessed event./Now in my song, I
pray for Jesus, wounded, to hide and wash away my
tears/This is the true salvation, the holy blessing of
salvation./He himself remains in all, holds everything, and
lives in every being./Fountain of goodness, love, piety, and
true redemption.)

V: 20; P: 16; A: 18; Q: 15; W: 17

Greek ciphers arranged in a cross shape: ∞ = 1000, T = 300, Z = 7, Γ = 3. The Γ occupies the center of the cross, and each of the arms is formed by the letters Z, T, and ∞, running from the center to the edge. The addition of all the ciphers results in 5231.

EN CRVCIS HAEC SPECIES IESVS BENE MONSTRAT
HONOREM./CONPVTAT HVNC NVMERVM IESVS QVO
EST PASSVS IN ARVIS. (This aspect of the cross well
demonstrates the glory of Jesus./Jesus counts this number at
the end of which He underwent His Passion on the earth.)

V: 21; P: 17; A: 19; Q: 15; W: 19

XV. De quattuor euangelistis et agno in crucis specie constitutis (“On the four evangelists and the Lamb arranged in the form of the Cross”) [36 × 36]

The Lamb of God in the center of the field. Then, arranged to form a cross, are the symbols of the four Evangelists. MATTHEVS HVNC HOMINEM SIGNAVIT IN ORDINE STIRPIS./LIBER GENERATIONIS <IESV CHRISTI>./MARCVS REGEM SIGNAT./VIX CLAMANTIS <IN DESERTO>./DAT LVCAS PONTIFICEM./FUIT IN DIEBUS HERO<DIS REGIS IUDAEAE SACERDOS>./ALTIVOLANS AQVILA ET VERBVM HAVSIT IN ARCE IOHANNIS./IN PRINCIPIO ERAT V<ERBVM>./SEPTEM SPIRITVS DEI./ECCE AGNVS DEI, ECCE QUI TOLLIT PECCATA MVNDI. (Matthew marked this man in the order of lineage./The book of the generation <of Jesus Christ>./Mark signifies the king./The voice of one crying <in the wilderness>./Luke presents the high priest./In the days of Herod, <king of Judea, there was a priest>./The soaring eagle, John, grasped the Word in the fortress <of heaven>./In the beginning was the <Word>./The seven spirits of God./Behold the Lamb of God, behold He who takes away the sins of the world.)

V: 22; P: 18; A: 20; Q: 17; W: 20

XVI. De septem donis Spiritus Sancti quae propheta Esaias enumerate (“On the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit enumerated by the prophet Isaiah”) [37 × 37]

A Greek cross with a width of five letters. Within it, seven flowers of eight petals each, one flower on the crossing and three flowers on each of the arms.

SPIRITVS SAPIENTIAE/ET INTELLECTVS,/SPIRITVS CONSILII/ET FORTITVDINIS,/SPIRITVS SCIENTIAE/ATQVE PIETATIS,/SPIRITVS TIMORIS DEI (Spirit of wisdom/and understanding,/Spirit of counsel/and might,/Spirit of knowledge/and piety,/Spirit of the fear of God.)

V: 23; P: 19; A: 21; Q: 18; W: 21

XVII. De octo beatitudinis euangelicis (“On the eight beatitudes from the Gospels”) [39 × 39]

Eight octagons arranged in a cross shape. REGNA POLI DOMINVS VVLT PAVPERIS ESSE BEATI/ATQVE SOLVM MITES SEMPER HABITARE SVPERNVN./FELICES FLENTES QVIS CONSOLATION IN ALTO EST/NAM IVSTI CVPIDOS AETERNA REFECTIO CONPLET./MENTE PIOS SURSVM MISERATIO LARGA REPENSAT/CORDA SERENA DEVM CERNENT ET IN ARCE SVPERNA. PACIFICOS DOMINVS PROLIS CONPLECTIT AMORE./PRO CHRISTO AFFLICTOS REGNVN IAM SPECTAT OLYMPI. (The Lord wishes the kingdom of heaven to belong to the blessed poor/ And that only the meek may always dwell in heaven./Blessed are those who mourn, for they have consolation in heaven,/For eternal refreshment fills those who hunger for righteousness./Generous mercy rewards in heaven those with pious hearts/And the pure in heart will see God in the heavenly fortress./The Lord embraces his peaceful children with love./The kingdom of Olympus already beholds those who have suffered for Christ.)

V: 24; P: 20; A: 22; Q: 19; W: 22

XVIII. De numero quadragenario et mysterio eius
("On the number forty and its mystery") [37 × 37]

XVIII. De quinquagenario numero et sacramento in
eo manifestato ("On the number fifty and the mystery
manifested in it") [37 × 37]

XX. De numero centenario et uicenario et mystica eius
significatione ("On the number one hundred and
twenty and its mystical significance") [37 × 37]

XXI. De numero septuagenario et binario cum eius
significationibus ("On the number seventy-two and its
significance") [37 × 37]

XXII. De monogrammate in quo Christi nomen
comprehensum est in cuius medietate tempus
praedicationis ipsius denotatum est et in altera
medietate tempus ante iudicium eius futurum in quo
Antichristus regnaturus aestimatur ("On the
monogram in which the name of Christ is included, in
one half of which the time of his preaching is
indicated, and in the other half the time before his
future judgment during which the Antichrist is
estimated to reign") [41 × 39]

XXIII. De numero uicenario et quaternario et eius
sacramento ("On the number twenty-four and its
mystery") [37 × 37]

Four sets of 10 single-letter squares arranged as a tetractys.
The four tetractys are arranged to form a cross. Therefore, in
total, 40 single-letter squares.

CRUX SACRA, TU AETERNI ES REGIS VICTORIA CHRISTI
(Sacred Cross, you are the eternal victory of Christ, our King.)

V: 25; P: 21; A: 23; Q: 20; W: 23

Five Xs (Latin cipher 10) arranged in the shape of a cross.

Each of the diagonals of the Xs has five letters.

QVINQVE IVVAT APICE AST SACRA DICERE, DE CRVCE
ET HAEC NAM EST (It is beneficial to speak of five sacred
things by a letter, which is that of the cross.)

V: 26; P: 22; A: 24; Q: 21; W: 24

Four lambdas (Greek cypher 30) arranged in the shape of
a cross.

EST ORBI TOTO DOMINI NAM PASSIO VITA./ARVO
CRVX VNA SPES LIBERTATIS AB IRA./LUX LAETA
LVCET DIVINO MVNERE PLENA./VERACI NVTV
SIGNAT ET PROEMIA REGNI. (The Passion of the Lord is
life for the entire world./For the world, the cross represents
the sole hope of liberation from divine wrath./The joyful
light shines, full of the divine gift./It also marks the rewards
of the kingdom with a truthful sign.)

V: 27; P: 23; A: 25; Q: 22; W: 25

A cross formed by four oval sets of 18 single-letter squares
each. Therefore, in total, 72 single-letter squares.

IN CRVCE LEX DOMINI DECORATVR LVCE
CORVSCA./GENTES ET LINGVAE SOCIANTVR LAVDE
SACRATA. (The law of the Lord is adorned with dazzling
light on the cross./Nations and languages are united in
sacred praise.)

V: 28; P: 24; A: 26; Q: 23; W: 26

A Chi-Ro shaped with Greek letters. The P: COCHR
IHEVCV ALHΘIA (adding up 1260¹⁵). The X: ΘC XPC IHC
(adding up 1327). At the center of the X, there is an H from
ALHΘIA; adding the H (8) to 1327, one gets 1335.

NAM ALMA DECET RADIANT SCRIPTA HINC QVOD
NOMINE CRISTI./SANCTA SALVTARIS LAVDAT HAEC
SCRIPTIO CHRISTVM./CHRISTVS HOMO EST PLACIDVS
NEMPE ARBITER HIC QVOQVE MVNDI EST. (It is fitting
that from here below the sacred writings shine with the name
of Christ./This holy and salvific writing praises Christ./Here
is Christ the man, the gentle judge of the world.)

V: 29; P: 25; A: 27; Q: 24; W: 27

Greek cross with arms ending in triangles made up of six
single-letter squares, in the style of a cross pattée.

FORTIS VIRTVS/VICTOR CLARVS./FORTIS CONPLEVIT
CHRISTVS SVA FAMINA VIRTVS./VICTOR
CONSIGNANS IESVS PIA PROEMIA CLARVS.

(Courageous strength./Illustrious victor./Christ, with
courageous strength, fulfilled His promises./Jesus, the
illustrious victor, guarantees pious rewards.)

V: 30; P: 26; A: 28; Q: 25; W: 28

XXIII. De numero centenario et quadragenario atque quaternario eiusque significatione ("On the number one hundred forty-four and its significance") [37 × 37]

XXV. De Alleluia et Amen in crucis forma ordinatis ("On the words Alleluia and Amen arranged in the form of the Cross") [37 × 37]

XXVI. De prophetarum sententiis quae ad passionem Christi et ad nostrum redemptionem pertinent ("On the sayings of the prophets which pertain to the passion of Christ and our redemption") [37 × 37]

XXVII. De apostolorum dictis ex eadem re in Nouo Testamento ("On the words of the apostles concerning the same matter in the New Testament") [35 × 35]

XXVIII. De adoratione sanctae cruces ubi opifex ipse pro se deprecatur et ubi imago ipsius ad orandum subtus crucem genua flectit ("On the adoration of the Holy Cross, where the craftsman himself prays for himself and were the image of himself bows down beneath the cross to pray") [43 × 35]

Four irregular pentagons of 36 letters arranged in the shape of a cross.

INMACVLATA COHORS CANTAS TV VOCIBVS
ILLIC,/REX VBI IESVS OVAT QVO PASCIT VIRGINIS
AGNVS,/CARMINA QVAE NVLLVS DIFFVSO FAMINE
CANTAT./HIC VESTER GREX NI SOLVS ET
SPLENDIDVS ORDO. (Immaculate cohort, you sing with full voices there,/where King Jesus triumphs, where the Lamb of the Virgin grazes,/the song that one hears but cannot sing./Your flock is numerous and your order splendid here below.)

V: 31; P: 27; A: 29; Q: 26; W: 29

A small Greek cross at the center of the field. Around it, the letters of the word Alleluia arranged to form a cross pattern.

CRVX AETERNA DEI ES LAVS, VIVIS IN ARCE
POLORVM. (O Cross, you are the eternal praise of God; you live in the citadel of the heavens.)

V: 32; P: 28; A: 30; Q: 27; W: 30

Greek cross, with the arms and shaft reaching the edges of the text.

ES PLACITA SUPERIS, CRVX, HVIC ES NAVITA
MVNDO (You are pleasing to the beings above, O cross, you navigate this world.)

V: 33; P: 29; A: 31; Q: 28; W: 31

Greek cross, with the arms and shaft reaching the edges of the text.

SI DO TE TIBI METRA SONO HIS TE, IESVS, IN
ODIS./SI DO NISVS EI ET SI HONOS ARTEM IBIT ET
ODIS (O Jesus, if I give you my verses, I make you resound in my songs./If I give Him my art and my efforts, His glory will be expressed in my songs.)

V: 34; P: 30; A: 32; Q: 29; W: 32

Greek cross, slightly displaced to the upper part of the field. Under it, Hrabanus in attitude of adoration.

ORO TE RAMVS ARAM, ARA SYMAR ET
ORO./HRABANUM MEMET CLEMENS ROGO,
CHRISTE, TVERE, O PIE IVDICIO. (O tree, I pray to you, you who are an altar, and I pray to be carried upon your altar./O Christ, in your mercy and holiness, I beseech you, protect me, Hrabanus, on the day of Judgment.)

V: 35; P: 31; A: 33; Q: 30; W: 33

From the titles of many of the *carmina* and the letter to Hatto quoted above, it appears clearly that, in Hrabanus' conception of *DLSC*, the figures are an essential constituent part and not a mere decoration. Nevertheless, here, the figures are also at odds with the role that Pope Gregory the Great had attributed to religious images in his famous letters to bishop Serenus of Marseilles (*Reg. Epist.* 9 and 10), so often used by the Carolingian scholars. These figures are not for the instruction of the illiterate; rather, they are guiding and informing the rumination of the readers of the text.

Another feature that immediately stands out for the observer is the omnipresence of geometry, whose attributed meanings most likely originate in Boethius's *De institutione arithmetica* (Perrin 2009, p. 37). The educated reader would not fail to recognize that the circle in B7 is the representation of perfection and, therefore, of God, and the triangle in

B18 is an abstract representation of the Trinity. The same goes for the number of shapes and the number of letters each shape takes on the grid.

In C11, Hrabanus also attributes to figures a mnemonic function in the context of the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant:

Quisquis legis primae plenam desiderat habere notitiam, necesse est ut huius figurae per omnia menor sit et eius factum mente saepius revoluat, et comparans priora posterioribus recolat scriptum: ‘Omnia in figura contingebant illis; scripta sunt autem ad correctionem nostram, in quos fines saeculorum deuenerunt’, et quod exemplari et umbrae deseruiunt caelestium; et item: ‘Vmbra enim habens lex futurorum bonorum, non ipsam imaginem rerum’. Vmbra enim non sine vero corpore fit, sed tamen ipsa in se veram et integram speciem corporis non exprimit. Quapropter oportet ut quisquis veritatis amator est, si umbram prius videat, ad verum, cuius ipsa umbra est, ocius oculos convertat, ne dum in umbra penitus intuitu haereat, veritatis fructum neglegens perdat. (“Whoever may desire to have full knowledge of the first law needs to be thoroughly familiar with this figure and often reflect on its deed in his mind, and by comparing the earlier with the latter, he should recall the scripture: ‘All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come, and that which serves as a model and shadow of heavenly things. And likewise: ‘For the law having a shadow of good things to come, not the very image of the things.’ For a shadow is not made without a real body, yet it does not express the true and complete from the body in itself. Therefore, it is necessary that whoever is a lover of truth, if he first sees the shadow, should quickly turn his eyes to the truth, of which it is a shadow, lest while he dwells deeply in contemplation of the shadow, he neglects and loses the fruit of truth”).

This is the power of images in the understanding and rumination of *DLSC*, which is in itself a form of devotion and veneration of the Divine person based on the senses, with its inexhaustible source of religious instruction and contemplative wonder ([Hamburger 2020](#), p. 33). In this sense, *DLSC* is a statement of the potentialities of the image in collaboration with the written text in the service of a single message ([Ferrari 1999](#), p. 316).

In this way, because of the reciprocal and intrinsic relationship between the written verse and the figures, the *versus intexti* can qualify as “iconotext,” defined by Michael Nerlich as a combination of figures and words intertwined to create a unified system of signification in such a way that neither can be freed from the other ([Wagner 2015](#), pp. 378–79).

On top of this, many images convey a number either directly or indirectly by the number of letters fitted in the *versus intexti*, and numbers add a new layer of significance and are not small. In a later section, we will return to the numeric symbolism in *DLSC*.

Colors, however, seem to have more a decorative than a symbolic function since, as [Perrin \(2009\)](#), pp. 41–42) points out, the manuscripts of the ninth century do not agree in the use of the colors for the *figurae*; therefore, one must assume that colors have no particular significance in most of the figures of the ninth-century manuscripts from Fulda and Mainz (the ones that were copied under Hrabanus’ supervision).

There is one exception to this, though: B16. The reason is no doubt that Hrabanus refers to colors in the corresponding *declaratio figurae*, C16, where he expounds that Jesus shows the whiteness of the lily in the chastity of his flesh and the redness of the rose in the blood of his passion (see Figure 7). Then he continues specifying the meaning of the colors of the flowers: hyacinth means the heavenly life of Christ among men, purple the blood of his Passion, linen the absolute chastity of his body, and scarlet his perfect charity.

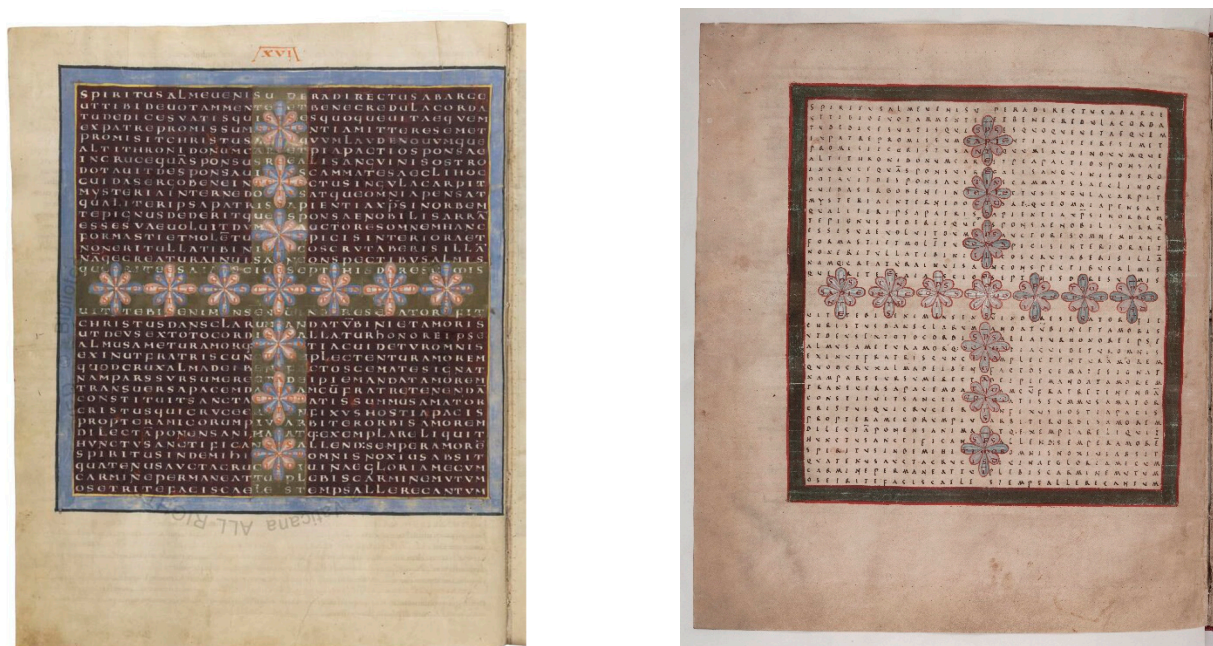


Figure 7. B16. **Left:** Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reginensis Latinus 124, fol. 23v. **Right:** Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale 223, fol. 21v.

For the rest, as [Perrin \(2001, 2009\)](#) notes, manuscript V tends to use different colors, whereas most of the other manuscripts of the ninth century tend to agree with each other in the use of colors. And this cannot but cause some surprise, not only because nothing else in *DLSC* seems to lack a particular meaning but also because in a later work (*De rerum naturis*, also known as *De universe*, 20,10), Hrabanus is very conscious about the meaning each color:

Colores autem diversi diversas significant species virtutum, quibus decorator plasma Dei ad imaginem sui conditoris, ut ruborem sinopidis vel minii ostendat in ardore caritatis, et purpurismum in martyrio et passionibus pro Christi nomine expensis, in auripigmento splendorem sapientiae, in Veneto atque hyacintho caelestem conversationem, in cerusa candorem castitatis, et ceteris speciebus virtutum, ut pro se opportunitas temporis affert et ratio postulat ordinis. ("The different colors signify different kinds of virtues, with which the creation of God is adorned in the image of its creator, so that the redness of sinopsis or minium shows in the fervor of charity, and purplish in martyrdom and sufferings spent for the name of Christ; in orpiment the brilliance of wisdom, in Venetian blue and hyacinth the heavenly conduct, in white lead the wideness of chastity, and in other kinds of virtues, as the opportunity of time brings forth and the reason of order demands.")

However, the disagreement of manuscript V in the use of the colors may have another explanation: although V does not qualify *codex purpureus*, the background of almost every *carmen figuratum* is dyed in purple, and that may have conditioned the choice of colors by the miniaturists. Furthermore, as [Pastoureau \(1986\)](#) points out, color and even the perception of color are cultural concepts that change with time, and maybe colors that we see as different were considered more similar in the ninth century. Other possibilities are the availability of pigments and colorants and even some misunderstanding of the *rubricator* or the miniaturist. In this respect, B7 seems quite illustrative. In this case, W disagrees with almost all the other manuscripts, as if the miniaturist had turned the colors to 90 degrees (see Figure 8).

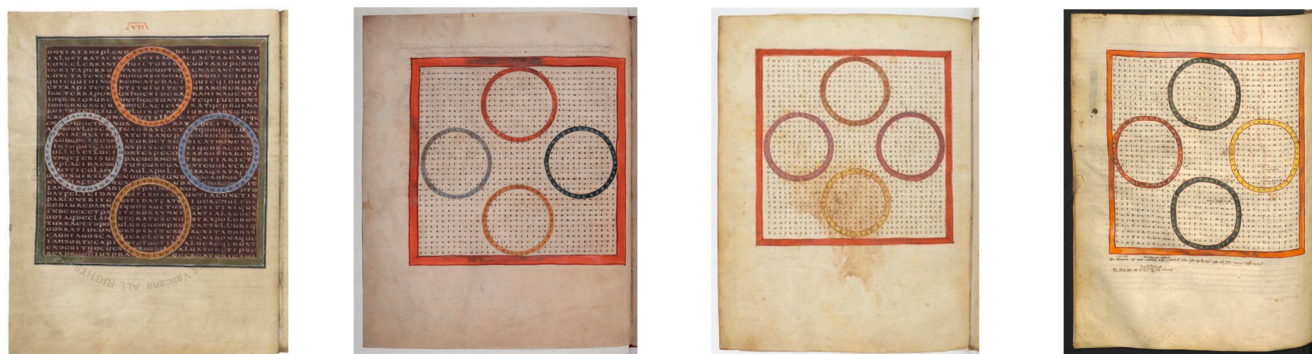


Figure 8. B7. From left to right: V, fol. 14v; A, fol. 12v; Q, fol. 9v; W, fol. 12v.

5. Conclusions: The Uniqueness of DLSC

DLSC by Hrabanus Maurus stands as a profound theological meditation on the Cross, positioning it as the governing structure of the universe. Through his intricate blend of visual, verbal, and numerical elements, Hrabanus orchestrates a symphony of intellectual and spiritual engagement, inviting his readers into a dynamic interaction where they traverse from the tangible representations of images to the abstract realms of conceptual thought. This journey is further enriched by the *declarationes figurae* and the additional explanations in the second book, which together weave a dense tapestry of symbolic meaning. The inclusion of such a multitude of representational layers—figural, abstract, narrative, and hieratic—transforms *DLSC* into what [Hamburger \(2020, pp. 27, 30\)](#) describes as a “spectacular heteroglossia,” a multi-voiced discourse that speaks across centuries.

Hrabanus’ work is not merely to be read but to be observed and meditated upon. The visual and textual layers demand a mode of engagement that is reflective and contemplative rather than recitative. Each element, from the individual figures in the poetry to the overarching thematic structures, contributes to a complex puzzle that challenges the reader. The integration of these elements, which may initially appear mysterious and difficult to decipher, underscores the meditative process Hrabanus envisioned. This approach compels the reader to slowly unravel the meanings, progressing step by step from the visible intricacies of the images to the invisible depths of the text.

The interplay between figures and words in *DLSC* is akin to an intricate embroidery, where every thread is essential to the complete picture. [Michael \(2023, p. 10\)](#) notes that Hrabanus opted to create *DLSC* not only within the visually rich genre of figurative poetry but also by incorporating unprecedented pictorial figures into some of his poems. This method enhances the semantic relationships between the elements of the poem, where the more unusual the elements, the tighter their semantic connections become, often clarified through annotations within the poem itself or by references to specific biblical passages.

In *DLSC*, Hrabanus positions Christ as the mediator between the heavenly and earthly realms, embodying the savior of a world that reflects the heavenly Jerusalem. This theological positioning emphasizes the transformative power of Christ and the Cross, suggesting a world transfigured—or ‘christified’—through Redemption. As a result, the work highlights the vital stages of Redemption, accentuating the importance of the Cross in liturgical celebrations, particularly during the Paschal Triduum. This focus elevates the Cross cult, underscoring its centrality in Christian worship and theology.

Isidore of Seville’s notion from *Etymologiae* that “an image expressing the species of something, which when it is seen creates a memory of it” resonates deeply within Hrabanus’ work. This idea encapsulates the essence of *DLSC*’s imagery, designed to be seen, remembered, and reflected upon. Through this visual and textual interplay, Hrabanus crafts a cognitive and spiritual map for his readers, guiding them through a layered exploration of Christian doctrine and the cosmic significance of the Cross. In doing so, *DLSC* serves as a theological treatise and a monumental work in the annals of medieval scholarly and religious art.

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Notes

- ¹ Hrabanus Maurus was one of the most prominent figures of the Carolingian Renaissance. Born into a noble family around 780, he was dedicated to the Fulda monastery, whose abbot sent him to Tours to study under the tutelage of Alcuin of York. This education set the foundation for Hrabanus' extensive contributions to Christian theology, education, and poetry. After his return to Fulda, he was appointed as *scholaster* or school master. As abbot of Fulda from 822 to 842, Hrabanus implemented reforms to enhance the monastery's role as a center of learning and spirituality. His leadership not only expanded the library, making it one of the most significant in Europe but also fostered an environment where scholarly activities flourished. His efforts in expanding Fulda's scriptorium contributed to the preservation and dissemination of classical and Christian texts, underscoring his role in the Carolingian intellectual revival. Hrabanus' involvement in the theological debates of his time, particularly regarding predestination and free will, highlighted his deep engagement with the doctrinal issues facing the Church. Despite facing controversy, his intellectual rigor and dedication to orthodoxy were evident in his writings and teachings. Beyond his scholarly and religious contributions, Rabano Mauro's legacy includes his influence on the educational methods of the time. He advocated for a curriculum that encompassed a wide range of subjects, including the liberal arts, aiming to develop well-rounded individuals equipped with both spiritual and worldly knowledge. This holistic approach to education reflected the Carolingian Renaissance's ideals, emphasizing the importance of learning and intellectual curiosity.
- ² Literary works had no formal title in the Middle Ages. Other expressions used to refer to *DLSC* are "laus Cristi", "liber ad laudem Christi", "Christi ad laudem", "libellum quod in honorem sanctae crucis dudum prosa metroque", "in laudem sanctae crucis", "liber de sanctae cruce", and similar (Perrin 1997b, pp. XVI–XXVII).
- ³ Two examples are Mayke de Jong's *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840*, and Peter Godman and Roger Collins' *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*.
- ⁴ Rabani Mauri *In honorem sanctae crucis*. Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Medievalis, vol. 100. Turnhout: Brepols, 1997.
- ⁵ We follow Jean Perrin's edition in the referencing of the different elements of *DLSC*. This quotation is taken from the prologue, identified by Perrin as A7.
- ⁶ A partial translation into French can be found in Perrin's prologue to his 1997 edition in the Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis, p. XIII.
- ⁷ In a dedicatory poem to abbot Eigil (MGH, *Poetae*, ii, p. 186), Hrabanus extols the written word for its enduring nature and spiritual significance, articulating that God's laws were recorded in written, and therefore emphasizing that while all material creations are vulnerable to decay and the ravages of time, written characters alone possess immortality: *Lex pia cumque dei latum dominans regit orbem,/Quam sanctum est legem scribere namque dei!/Est pius ille labor, merito cui non valet alter/Aequiparare, manus quem faciet hominis./Nam digiti scripto laetantur, lumina visu,/Mens volvet sensu mystica verba dei./Nullum opus exsurgit, quod non annosa vetustas/Expugnet, quod non vettat iniqua dies:/Grammata sola carent fato, mortemque repellunt,/Praeterita renovant grammata sola biblis./Grammata nempe dei digitus sulcabat in apta/Rupe, suo legem cum dederat populo,/Sunt, fuerant, mundo venient quae forte futura,/Grammata haec monstrant famine cuncta suo.* ("As God's kindly law rules in absolute majesty over the wide world, it is an exceedingly holy task to copy the law of God. This activity is a pious one, unequalled in merit by any other which men's hands can perform. For the fingers rejoice in writing, the eyes in seeing, and the mind at examining the meaning of God's mystical words. No work sees the light which hoary old age does not destroy or wicked time overturn: only letters are immortal and ward off death, only letters in books bring the past to life. Indeed God's hand carved letters on the rock that pleased Him when He gave His law to the people, and these letters reveal everything in the world that is, has been, or may chance to come in the future." Trad. Godman 1985, p. 249).
- ⁸ In a letter to Eberhard of Friuli (MGH, *Epist.* 5, pp. 481, 15–19), Hrabanus informs that he had sent a copy of *DLSC* to Pope Gregory the Fourth. However, when the messengers, presbyters Ascrih and Hrudpert, arrived in Rome, the Pope had passed away, and they handed over the book to his successor, Sergius. The story is corroborated by the *Annals of Fulda* for the year 844.
- ⁹ As referred in the note above, Sergius was not the intended recipient of the book, but Gregory the Fourth.
- ¹⁰ This manuscript has been foliated in a somewhat irregular fashion. As it seems, when the manuscript was copied in the ninth century, some pages were left blank, and some of them were later used for annotations, notably the page that mirrors the dedication to Otgar and that is presently foliated as 1r, with the illustration of the presentation being fol. 1v. Therefore, the folium that contains the dedication to Otgar in the verso was left without foliation and later a Roman "I" was added. All the references to this codex use the existing foliation system.
- ¹¹ In this, Hrabanus follows Prosper of Aquitaine and Sedulius.

- 12 An excellent study about Louis' representation in *DLSC* and the changes it suffered along the centuries can be found in Kelin Michael's doctoral dissertation (Michael 2023). I warmly thank Dr. Michael for her assistance by providing me with her work that will not be publicly available until 2029 in the Emory University repository of theses and dissertations.
- 13 One unfinished *carmen figuratum* of Venantius Fortunatus (BNF Lat. 8312 fol. 22r) shows this compositional procedure. See Brennan 2019. A reproduction, in black and white, is accessible at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10034714t/f23.item> (accessed on 1 June 2024).
- 14 Because all the *carmina* figurate occupy the left page of the double-spread, and therefore the verso of the folio, the "v" after the folium number has not been considered necessary.
- 15 Because one of the Cs is common for SOCHP and IHCVC.

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