

Sara Salvadori, *Hildegard von Bingen: A Journey into the Images*, Milan, Skira, 2019, 224 pp. ISBN: 978-8857240152. Cloth: €49

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Sara Salvadori's book provides a deep analysis of the iconography of a series of miniatures in a copy of the *Scivias* of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). The 35 miniatures are located in the Wiesbaden Codex, which was probably produced during Hildegard's lifetime. Salvadori analyses the illustrations from a symbolic perspective, which she calls a 'symbolic logic' (p. 36), and reaches conclusions by drawing connections between motifs in various miniatures. According to Salvadori, each connection of motifs represents an inner journey, and when readers follow these connections they too experience this journey, 'moving from observation to vision, from knowledge to wisdom' (p. 111). Thus, Salvadori proposes a mystical viewing of Hildegard's miniatures. A complementary volume titled *Scivias: A Journey Beyond the Images* will be published soon.

The first chapter, «Portrait», presents Hildegard to the reader. Salvadori highlights Hildegard's contribution to changes in the 12th century, as she corresponded with high authority figures, managed large convents, and composed many works. Surprisingly, Hildegard's visionary experiences are mentioned only at the end of the chapter. Salvadori presents Hildegard as a messenger of a visionary message, without analysing Hildegard's experiences beyond reporting them. Nevertheless, she presents some aspects of Hildegard's life as supernatural. For example, Hildegard went on four preaching journeys, each in a different direction. Salvadori connects the general geographical routes of these journeys to the composition of a miniature in the Wiesbaden Codex (p. 19). Additionally, Salvadori compares these routes, which were close to rivers, to the four rivers of Eden and the journey to Salvation. Salvadori does this using a visual language that greatly resembles that of Hildegard.

The title of the volume, *A Journey into the Images*, refers to the title of *Scivias* – *Sci vias* (meaning 'know the ways'). Throughout the volume, Salvadori presents different paths that she explores in *Scivias*. In the second chapter, «*Scivias: A Sapiential Journey*», Salvadori begins her presentation of these paths. Salvadori marks the first path – Hildegard's own sapiential journey – by analysing the terms that Hildegard used to describe her visionary experiences and the creation process of *Scivias*. Next, Salvadori maps the main paths in *Scivias*, based on *Scivias*'s three books. The books are not clearly separated according to themes, although some scholars have tried to show otherwise. Salvadori's explanation manages to create a systematic division, albeit a complicated one. She shows that the three books have the same structure; each starts with a description of example of divine assistance, followed by a journey of the soul, and ends with praising the divine. Salvadori compares the three books to the Trinity, based on *Scivias* Vision II.2. In this Vision, the

Trinity is analogized by a stone, a flame, and the human word, as each of them contains three elements that are simultaneously united. Salvadori goes a step further and compares each of these analogies to one Person of the Trinity: the stone to the Father, the flame to the Holy Spirit, and the word to the Son (the Word). As said, Salvadori connects these three analogies to the three books of *Scivias*: the stone and a stone house to the first book that addresses knowledge of good and bad; the flame to the second book that describes inundation by the Holy Spirit; and the Word to the last book about the journey toward salvation and enlightenment.

The third chapter, «Grammar», deepens the reader's acquaintance with *Scivias*. After a brief introduction of her method of exploration, Salvadori presents the miniatures, reproduced in original size and colour (including the initiates) on the right side of each facing page. These high-quality reproductions are a great contribution for future researchers. On the left side of each facing page, Salvadori briefly presents each miniature and summarizes Hildegard's reports of the visions, emphasizing symbolic elements. Salvadori scarcely refers to the commentaries of the visions — which Hildegard reported she miraculously heard. Salvadori broadly refers to biblical texts (that appear in medieval commentaries on the visions) and to other miniatures. At the bottom of each left page, another reproduction of the miniature appears; in this smaller reproduction, all the details in the miniature are identified.

The fourth chapter, «Rhetoric», is the main part of the volume. In this chapter, Salvadori traces each motif and analyses it, guiding the reader to view the miniatures from a mystical point of view through several methods. One is to trace different motifs that symbolize the same entity. For example, the Father is depicted as light, a flame or burning bush, an aura, a cloud and eyes (pp. 116-123). Based on this method, Salvadori shows that God is present in each of the miniatures. Another method is to trace one motif that symbolizes several entities. Salvadori makes some surprising observations with this method. Two of these are: (1) a pair of uniquely shaped trees are both seen in transcendental Eden (Vision I.2) and in the creation of the world (Vision II.1) (p. 147); and (2) a cloud form appears both as Mary in the annunciation (Vision II.1) and as the Virtues in the choirs of angels (Vision I.6) (p. 151). In some cases, these two methods connect: the army of heavenly spirits appears as human figures and as stars; however, stars signify several things, including fallen angels and fallen human beings (pp. 194-5).

Another method that Salvadori uses is the study of the basic elements of the illustration. She divides the illustrations according to their background colour and in doing so suggests that each colour symbolizes a basic idea. Based on this method, Salvadori observes that the dark areas are always enveloped in the illustrations, signifying that God is stronger than evil. Salvadori refers not only to plain colours, but also to their combinations; and differentiates between monochrome, stippled and starry blue backgrounds. Another basic element that Salvadori examines is simple shapes, such as circles and squares; Salvadori demonstrates that they start in earthly situations and end in heaven. She also focuses on numbers, mostly towards the end of «Rhetoric», when the discussion

becomes more mystical. The most relevant example for us is the multiplication of the seven gifts from God with the five senses. The product, thirty-five, is the number of miniatures in *Scivias* (p. 184).

The last method that Salvadori uses is to combine and reconstruct the miniatures. She does this in three different ways. Firstly, she prints the miniatures one on top of the other in order to compare their composition. For example, she prints the prefiguration of the Church (Vision II.5) over the illustrated Trinity (Vision II.2) and the prefiguration of the Synagogue (Vision II.5), hereby demonstrating the similarities in composition between these three miniatures and entities. Secondly, Salvadori organizes all the figures of Virtues from the various miniatures in an ellipse and in a spiral to discuss the personifications of Virtues (pp. 201-2). The third and more complicated reconstruction of the miniatures relates to the first half of *Scivias*'s third book, which describes one building in detail. Amazingly, Salvadori built a model of the building based on the miniature and Hildegard's description. One of her conclusions is that the miniature maintains the same proportion as described by Hildegard in the text. In addition, Salvadori compares the building to visions from the first and second book of *Scivias* and to biblical Jerusalem (the tent of Moses, the gate of the temple of Solomon and a map of old Jerusalem).

Salvadori does not refer much to the scholarly sources that have been written about the miniatures. These references could have improved the discussion about the codex's text-image relationships and the creation processes of the miniatures. In addition, she does not refer at all to other miniatures from Hildegard's time that use the same iconography as Wiesbaden Codex. Her focus on the meaning of the miniatures (instead of their creation process) may be connected to the approach that the miniatures are a commentary on the visions, as noted by scholars as Christal Meier, Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch, and Nathaniel Campbell. Salvadori's volume is a feast for the eyes and contributes to our understanding of the Wiesbaden miniatures. It is a fantastic addition to the scholarly sources about Hildegard.