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# Color Symbolism in the Castilian Atlantic Bibles: Initials and Scenes from the *Bible of Avila* (BNM, Vit. 15-1)

**Abstract**

The Atlantic Bibles of the Umbro-Roman school are associated with the needs of the Gregorian Reform, which began at the end of the 11th century. Their first impression is one of great ornamental sobriety, in accordance with the early stages of what Garrison and Berg have labelled the "geometric style." This was first manifested in the decoration we find concentrated in the initials heading the individual books of the Bible. In Castile, one outstanding example is the *Bible of Avila*, begun by the Umbro-Roman school and finished in a Castilian *scriptorium*. This double perspective can be observed in a similarly double palette of color: Italian and Spanish.

It is especially in this second phase when a reduction to the minimum of polychromy leads us to think that color has here a symbolic use. Red and blue, having had symbolic connotations since the birth of Christian iconography, are the principal colors of the scenes illustrated in the *Bible of Avila*, with the addition of green and yellow, which are also rich with symbolism. This possible symbolism of color may work to reinforce the conceptual nature of these miniatures, in direct relation to the text they decorate and to the liturgy they accompany. The Bible in the Middle Ages, in the context

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of monastic schools, was the most important manuscript for teaching and learning. Its miniatures and the symbolism of its colors contribute to the transmission of meanings.

*Keywords:* color, Romanesque miniature, image and didactics, *Bible of Avila*, Christian iconography

## Introduction

Studies of Biblical miniatures from the 10th to 12th centuries have for the most part addressed codicological and iconographic aspects, but have paid little attention to color beyond questions of technique and material. The research presented herein aims to take this a step further, by proposing a consideration of color in relation to the meaning of the initials and scenes that appear in the Atlantic Bibles, within the conceptual and symbolic context of Romanesque art. The insistence on materiality is consonant with what has been found in the technical treatises of the period, most notably the three volumes that the monk Theophilus dedicated to the art of painting (ca. 1120) and which would greatly determine the later activities of Western workshops and their assimilation of the Eastern tradition (Theophilus, ca. 1120/1979). The recognition of these writings would still be evident in the Late Middle Ages, as witnessed by a manuscript conserved in Montpellier and dated 1300, which clearly echoes the ideas of Theophilus (Clarke, 1901).

The recommendations given to miniaturists in that text reveal that, from a technical point of view, there had until then been little variation in the treatment of colors, with innovations centered primarily on the selection of materials. Undertaking a conceptual analysis of color in this period therefore presents considerable difficulties, as, from the beginnings of the Romanesque period in the 10th century, we are faced with a great eclecticism in the merging of the Eastern and Western traditions, which did not always coincide in their interpretations of colors. Indeed, as Di Napoli (2006) pointed out, each culture generates its own preferences and hierarchy in terms of color, and so in the Romanesque period it is no

simple task to determine where the Eastern influence ends and the Western begins, with chromatic approaches being divergent on occasion. Moreover, the study of the chromatic palette of each codex must be viewed in the light of its original function (liturgy, individual devotion, diplomatic gift, etc.) as well as the social status of the individual who commissioned it, as both factors were determinants in the choice of the materials they employed.

Our study aims to identify the general purposes of the *Bible of Avila* (BNM, Vit. 15-1), within the context of the Italian Atlantic Bibles, in particular those of the Umbro-Roman school, the copying of which began in the second quarter of the 12th century. Its chromatic variants and an anti-naturalistic use of color in some details of New Testament scenes suggest, *a priori*, a possibly symbolic use of color, following the intuition that colors have a power to transmit ideas which is equal to that of words (Sanz, 1985).

## The Atlantic Bibles in the context of the Gregorian Reform

The Gregorian Reform, instituted by Gregory VII at the end of the 11th century, sought to renew the spiritual life of the clergy and to inspire the faithful to live like the early Christian communities (Berg, 1968; Dalli, 1978; Capitani, 2000). The Pope, seeking greater unity, would impose the Roman Rite over local liturgies such as the Ambrosian and the Mozarabic. This would lead to the copying and illuminating of new manuscripts to meet these liturgical needs, characterized by a great sobriety in their decoration, adapting to the austerity advocated by the pontiff and in accordance with the new Gregorian liturgy (Supino, 1987). The ornamental sparseness of these codices to some extent recalls the sign-images of paleo-Christian art, which was similarly lacking in ostentation but remarkably rich in meaning.

Chief among the codices copied and illuminated in monastic scriptoria were the bibles created for reading in community, generally in the choir or the refectory. This would determine their size, some 50 to 60 cm in height, leading historians to define them as "monumental" (Salmi, 1962;

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Pächt, 1987) or "gigantic" (Kitzinger, 1982), although the name they would come to be known by was given to them in 1912 by Pietro Toesca, who grouped them under the denomination of "Atlantic Bibles" (Toesca, 1912). Apart from their proportions, the common aspects of these manuscripts include their script, a Carolingian minuscule derived from the recension done by Alcuin of York in the ninth century; their decoration, centered primarily in the initials; and the use of vivid, contrasting colors. We find all of these in the *Bible of Avila*, which exemplifies the Italian influence in 12th-century Castilian *scriptoria*.

Pinpointing the geographical origin of the Atlantic Bibles is no simple task, however, due to the lack of colophones or inscriptions which would indicate their chronology and origin, and this is also the case of the *Bible of Avila*, in which the only inscription that links it to the cathedral of Avila – *Istos liber este santi Salbatoris Abulensis*, on fol. CCXCVIII v – is only able to take us back as far as the 14th century, long after its initial creation (Rodríguez, 1999). Rome and Milan are considered to be the inarguable centers of diffusion for the Atlantic Bibles, with the former having more significance in relation to the Gregorian Reform and the monastic *scriptoria* of Umbria, such as Grottaferrata, Subiaco, Farfa, and Montecassino. In this sense, H. Toubert (2001), in his study on the close links between the Gregorian Reform and art, points to the cultural rebirth that would take place in Montecassino under the Abbot Desiderio (1058–1087). The hypothesis that Rome was the main center of production and dissemination of the Atlantic Bibles is also supported by G. Lobrichon (2000), who reminds us that, in the context of the Gregorian Reform, these codices would come to represent the authority of the Roman seat, apostolic legitimacy, and the primacy of Peter.

## Color in geometric-style initials

When examining the Italian Atlantic Bibles – and in particular those from workshops associated with the *Bible of Avila* – one of their identifying characteristics, as noted in the first studies of medieval Italian miniatures

by K. Berg (1968) and E. B. Garrison (1953–61), is the repetition of a decorative language known as the "geometric style."[1] Originating in the late 11th century, it would reach its full expression in the second quarter of the 12th with the illumination of the *Bible of Avila*, and was focused essentially on the decoration of the initials found at the headings of the various books of the Bible. It should be noted that, although today these letters are valued from an ornamental perspective, they were originally designed to support the codex's internal structure and guide the attention of the monks in their community readings. Furthermore, in the monastic and cathedral schools, where the Bible was the principal book used, it was a tool for teaching reading and memory skills, especially through the recitation of the psalms (Rodríguez, 2013). For all of these reasons, these large, illuminated initials would become "decorative alphabets" that possessed a great expository power. Indeed, we might add to the denomination geometric style the appellative "epigraphic," as in no case was the clarity of the letters themselves eclipsed by their decoration (Rodríguez, 2012).

Text and image, word and color were thus placed at the service of the liturgy and monastic reading, as in such compilations as that of the Cluniac abbot Uldaric, who, following the guidelines of the abbot William of Hirsau (1130–1191), ordered that the annual reading of the Bible in the chorus or refectory should conform to the *ordo romano* (Cahn, 1982). This showed a continuity with the Benedictine practice documented in eighth-century Rome of reading the books of the Bible in night prayers throughout the liturgical year (Boynton, 2011; Ayres, 2000), which explains in great part the proliferation of biblical manuscripts in medieval *scriptoria* (Cochelin, 2011). The liturgical use of these codices can also be deduced by certain marginal annotations and by the presence of canon tables, a system that synthesizes concordances among the four Gospels. This system of correspondences, which divides each book into 1,162 sections, was established in the fourth century by Eusebius, the Bishop of

[1] E. B. Garrison (1953–61) and K. Berg (1968) distinguish several phases in the evolution of the geometric style: the *early style*, practiced primarily in Rome in the second half of the 11th century; the *transitional style*, in the second quarter of the 12th century, when it expanded into Tuscany; and the *late style*, from the middle of the 12th century.

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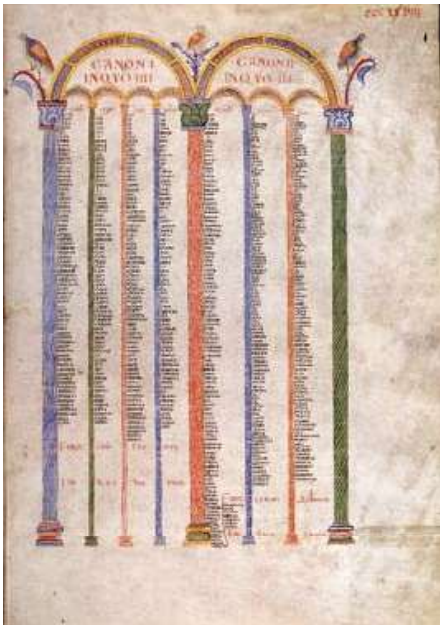
Caesarea, to facilitate the relation and comparison of parallel passages in the Gospels. It would at the same time concentrate a striking decorativism in the Atlantic Bibles. Silva y Verástegui (1999) traces the first graphic examples of canon tables to Syrian codices of the sixth century.

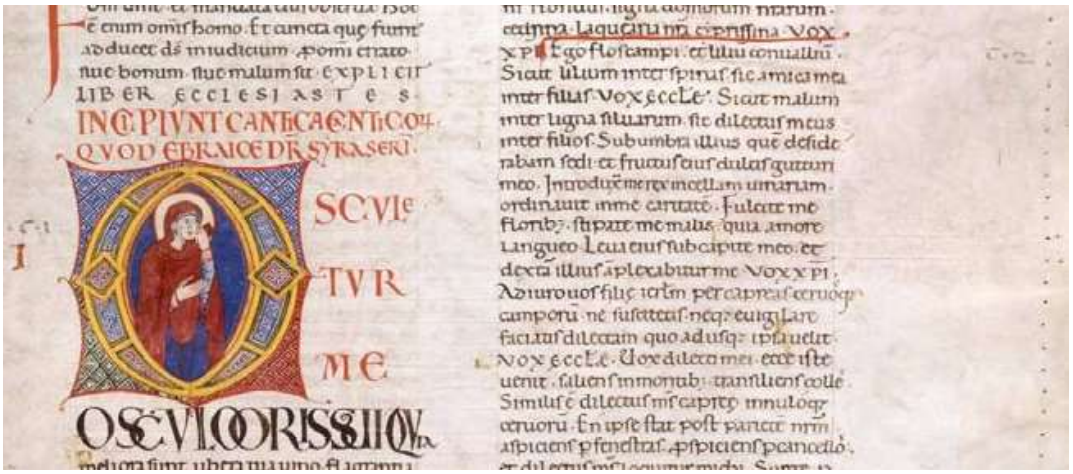
**Figure 1. *Bible of Avila*, fol. CCCXXVIIIr**



In the repertory of motifs which make up these geometric-style initials in their various phases, one can note a pronounced eclecticism in the reinterpretation of models developed earlier in Carolingian, Ottonian, and Merovingian codices, rich with contrasting polychromy and forging a unique visual language that would become a sign of identity for the Atlantic Bibles (Klange, 1979). The most notable feature was the generalized use of yellow to define the initials. The repetition of this color, applied brightly, denotes a desire to imitate valuable materials, as had been done in the mural paintings of Ancient Rome. Yellow, of ambiguous meaning in the Middle Ages, is used here as an analogy to gold, which is found in the initials of the *Tours Bibles*, often commissioned to monastic *scriptoria* under royal protection (Ayres, 1994). The Carolingian influence was the legacy of the monastery of Bobbio, and is reflected in other ornamental aspects as well, such as the repeated use of "corner interlacing" (Guilmain, 1960).

The ornamental riches of the geometric style in its later development extended to the filling in of the initials with decorative, geometrical patterns of four-leaved vanes, colored primarily with red, blue, and green to accentuate their contrast to yellow. This desire to highlight colors can also be observed in the fact that certain initials of the Italian section of the *Bible of Avila* were not set against the parchment itself, but superimposed over a monochromatic background of ultramarine blue and outlined in red ink, or over a polychrome background to which red and green were added.[2] The precision of these motifs and their meticulous detail enable us to draw certain analogies to the goldsmithing of the period. Thus, the use of red, green, and blue would seem to be a replication of the insertion of precious stones into the gold filigree suggested by the yellow.[3]

**Figure 2. *Bible of Avila*, fol. CCXXIIr**



[2] This may be observed, for example, in Book 2 of the Paralipomenon, the Book of Judith, the Song of Songs, the Book of Wisdom, the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Book of Obadiah, and the Gospel of St. Luke. These polychrome and essentially decorative backgrounds form a criteria of unity with other codices attributed to the same workshop as the *Bible of Avila*.

[3] The Italian section of the *Bible of Avila* and works associated with the same workshop presented bright and consistent colors, perhaps because of the use of honey, rubber, or egg as binding media to produce a work that was more durable and precious, as well as open to later rectification.

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The fact that the initials of the Atlantic Bibles of the 12th century, and in particular the *Bible of Avila*, are often used as decorative frames for author portraits that show the writer and main characters of each biblical book reveals similarities to the jeweled mosaic clipei, which in the Byzantine tradition exalted the dignity of certain personages. But unlike those mosaics, whose inscriptions and iconographic attributes serve to identify their subjects, in the Atlantic Bibles it is rather the text–image relationship that is highlighted by this type of individualization, which generally consists of repetitive figures. The clearest exception to this is in the Pauline epistles, where the apostle is shown with the features that have characterized him since the paleo-Christian tradition of the fourth century.

With the use of such "author portraits," the miniaturists who illuminated the Atlantic Bibles were also returning to an earlier tradition, as, at least from the 10th century in the Byzantine tradition, codices of the prophetic books were headed by images of their authors, depicted in parallel to the block of text (Lowden, 1988). This model would be repeated in the 12th century, with the insertion of such portraits within the initials, one of the iconographic constants of the Atlantic Bibles, above all in the prophetic books and in the Pauline epistles (Ayres, 1993–94; Cahn, 1982). These portraits share some common chromatic features, with the hair of the younger subjects done in orange hues, while a greyish blue was used to give a more elderly appearance. Beyond formal considerations, such colors provide a clear parallel to the painted murals of the Umbro-Roman school, as Toesca (1929) observed. The chromatic palette of these miniatures, then, became a source of inspiration for more monumental painting, just as certain decorative motifs used to adorn illuminated initials – palmettes, mascarons, etc. – would be reiterated in various ensembles of Roman monumental sculpture.

The chromatic palette employed in making these initials is yet another criterion for the approximate dating of medieval Italian biblical manuscripts, and serves even to define as closely as possible the circle of a given master or workshop, as in the case of those codices attributed to the so-called Master of the *Bible of Avila*. A comparative study of different

**Figure 3. *Bible of Avila*, fol. LVv**

Italian codices has led Garrison to suggest a possible trajectory for this master, beginning with a bible preserved in the Diocesan Museum of Trento (cod. 326), continuing to another kept in the Vatican's Apostolic Library (Barb. Lat. 589/590), and culminating with both the *Bible of Avila* and another which is preserved in the Capitular Archive of Turin (cod. 332). In all of these codices, a common chromatic palette becomes central to their unity. To these biblical manuscripts may be added a collection of passion narratives, now in Milan's Ambrosian Library (B. 49 Inf; B. 55 Inf; B 53 Inf), in which we find a repetition of the same repertory of motifs, the same type of features for the figures depicted, and the same palette of colors.

## The double chromatic palette of the *Bible of Avila* and its possible symbolism: Initials and scenes

Paradoxically, in the case of the *Bible of Avila*, the chromatic homogeneity of codices originating from the same workshop was broken with its arrival in Spain. Color, then, also becomes a criterion for determining the point at which the Italian influence in the manuscript ends and the Spanish style begins. This occurred in the late 12th century, possibly in the context of the donations made by Alfonso VIII to the cathedral of Avila. An analysis of the text shows that the addition began after Books

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2 and 3 of Ezra and the Psalms. With regard to the initials, it marks a departure from the geometric style in terms of their structure, their polychromy – which is less vibrant and contrastive – and their execution, which is rougher and less precise in its definition of forms. It is apparent that the new polychromy does not reveal the same intention to imitate precious materials, being closer to the representations we find in fanciful sculptural reliefs, to the point that zoomorphic forms determine the structure of the initials themselves and substitute them in a way which recalls the Merovingian tradition (Guilmain, 1960).

The chromatic change in the initials is most notable in the New Testament scenes that extend from folios CCCXXIII to CCCXXV (the Baptism of Christ, the Wedding Feast at Cana, the Presentation of Christ at the Temple, the Temptations of Christ, the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the Washing of the Feet of the Disciples, the Arrest of Christ, the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross, the Resurrection of Christ, the Anastasis, the Meeting with Pilgrims of Emmaus, the *Noli me Tangere*, the Supper at Emmaus, the Doubting Thomas, the Ascension, and the Pentecost), to which could be added the illuminated folio dedicated to Noah that opens the Old Testament (Rodríguez, 1999). An examination of the New Testament episodes reveals a certain debt to the compositional schemes of the *Tours Bibles*, in the narrative arrangement of episodes in superimposed registers.[4] However, the absence of color in the backgrounds of these scenes is a significant variant which implies a quicker, more economical execution. The arrangement of motifs and characters directly upon the parchment itself highlights a limited, austere chromatic palette not found in other contemporary manuscripts. The predominance of red and blue applied unnaturally to some details – such as the cross, the tree from which Judas hangs himself, and the colt upon which Christ enters Jerusalem – suggests that the approach followed here is a symbolic one.

[4] Nevertheless, as precedents of the *Bible of Avila*, we find closer examples among the Atlantic Bibles themselves, such as the *Pantheon Bible* (Vatican Apostolic Library, Vat. Lat. 12958), dated 1125–1130. Pirani (1966) considered this bible to be from the mid-12th century. Berg (1968) has tried to date it more exactly, at around 1125, a view accepted by Cahn (1982), who places it definitely between 1125 and 1130.

To these basic colors are added green, used essentially in the representation of clothing, and yellow, to accentuate ornamental details. These colors are applied with great purity, without the range of tones and hues that we find in the biblical texts themselves.

The red, blue, and green which characterize the scenes of the *Bible of Avila* are colors that in the West would acquire a certain liturgical prominence over the course of the 12th century. Their application in the clothing of these figures therefore points to another significant aspect: the close connection between art and liturgy in the Middle Ages. As for the use of yellow, in both the Italian and Spanish parts of the manuscript, this is done with a positive connotation – as a symbol of divine light – and not in the negative sense of envy or betrayal (Napoli, 2006), as evidenced by the fact that it is not used for the garments of Judas when his betrayal of Christ is announced, an image which is especially common in the art of the Late Middle Ages. In the *Bible of Avila* (fol. CCCXXIIIv), Judas is dressed in clothing which combines red, blue, and green, like the other figures, and this in our judgment is a determining factor for dismissing a strictly symbolic use of color in these scenes; rather, we feel that the coloring is employed towards the function of the compositional balance of these images.

**Figure 4. *Bible de Avila*, fols. CCCXXIIIr–CCCXXIIIv**

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Colors, according to the studies done by Pastoureau, accumulate social and identifying value for different societies and cultures, and in the *Bible of Avila* we witness a consolidation of the meanings which blue, red, and green had acquired for Christianity over the centuries, with some new interpretations as well. Blue, for example, was associated with royalty in Ancient Egypt, for the preciousness of lapis lazuli, which was even used to denominate the color itself, as at that time the use of such precious materials was of greater significance than the descriptive values associated with such colors. The connotations of privilege characteristic of blue would continue for the Babylonians and Hebrews, who considered it a sacred color pertaining to the divine, even if they would introduce less costly variations of the color in their painted works. In Ancient Greece, it was also esteemed as a primary color, but this view would change for the Romans, when it began to be associated with barbarian tribes and thus acquired a negative connotation. Imperial Rome would roundly reject it, connecting it practically with the color black and with death (Frosinini, 2015).

In the Middle Ages, however, blue would be given a renewed value, becoming a prized color for liturgical vestments. In the Late Middle Ages, it was also associated with the figure of the Virgin (Frosinini, 2015) and was a standard color for her robe or cloak, as can already be appreciated in the depiction of her at the foot of the cross in fol. CCCXXIVr of the *Bible of Avila*. In Christian iconography, blue was often used to express the divine nature of Christ, an interpretation that could also be drawn from the New Testament episodes of the *Bible of Avila*. Its central role in this codex provides another reason for considering the Spanish contribution to be later than the Italian, situating it approximately in the decade of the 1170s. Blue, the color of the celestial vault, is present in the details of the Ascension, with the *dextra Dei* framed in a blue *clipeus* in the Byzantine style and the lower part of the figure of Christ eclipsed by a chromatic patch of blue that alludes conceptually to the *celum* cited in the inscription parallel to the image (fol. CCCXXVr). A correspondence to nature can likewise be seen in the Baptism scene, in which the Jordan River also appears as a patch of blue. Two centuries later, the painter and treatise-writer Cennino Cennini (2009) would give this exaltation of blue in his *Book of Art*: "Ultramarine

blue is a noble, beautiful color; more perfect than any other; words fail to describe it". The preponderance of blue in the medieval era would in turn be manifested, as di Napoli (2006) reminds us, in the creation of workshops that specialized in its various shades and hues.

Together with blue, red has also had a special relevance throughout history, being linked in Antiquity to power, an idea reflected in the *Bible of Avila* in the depiction of the devil wearing a red cape as he offers to Christ dominion over the kingdoms of the earth, described in the *titulus* that heads the second of the Temptations (fol. CCCXXIIIr) and taken from the narration of St. Matthew in folio CCCXXX of the manuscript itself ("*filius dei es mitte te deorsum*"). This connotation of power and royalty may also be signaled by the perizoma worn by Christ, in both the Crucifixion and the Descent from the Cross, which has a tonality somewhat closer to the color purple, the most important color in Ancient Rome, reserved for the Caesars (Frosinini, 2015).

**Figure 5. *Bible de Avila*, fols. CCCXXIIIIr and CCCXXIIIIv**

In assimilating colors into its various artistic manifestations, Christianity would over time transform the color red into a symbol of the Passion of Christ and of his human nature. For this reason, it is also frequently

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associated with blue, which, as we have already noted, represents Christ's divinity. In the *Bible of Avila*, this combination is given visual form in those scenes which depict the Crucifixion and the Descent from the Cross (fol. CCCXXIVv) (Rodríguez, 2010). However, the fact that this bichromy is extrapolated to other episodes of Christ's childhood and public life raises doubt as to its possible symbolism. In this respect, J. Gage (2001) points out that, despite the medieval taste for chromatic diagrams, or for relating colors to specific ideas, in practice artists were relatively free in the selection of colors. It has been established that medieval model books primarily transmitted iconographic formulas rather than arrangements of color.

The most naturalistic treatment of red is found in the scene of the *Anastasis* (the Harrowing of Hell), where it is used to recreate the image of fire as the most feared punishment of Hell, in accordance with other medieval texts. Portal (1996) offers a positive interpretation of fire as a symbol of the regeneration and purification of souls (Goff, 1985).

Red and blue, which predominate in the New Testament scenes of the *Bible of Avila*, are supplemented with green, a color that would acquire a greater importance in the Late Middle Ages when it characterized the more everyday liturgical vestments. Aristotle had already presented it as a positive color, falling between light and darkness, while in medieval lapidaries emeralds and other green stones were thought to possess magical properties (Gage, 2001). The absence of landscapes in the *Bible of Avila* reduces the application of this color to isolated references, more decorative than realistic, as can be seen in the treatment of the *orto* in the *Noli me tangere* episode, or the central iconographic element of the palm branches in the Entry into Jerusalem scene.

The colors which do not present doubts as to their symbolic uses are grey and black, which have different meanings with respect to earlier monastic tradition. Since the ninth century, black had been considered a color of humility and penitence (Pastoreau, 2012). Its use in this manuscript for the depictions of hell and the devil point to a different reading focused on the idea of evil and sin, consonant with the esthetic of ugliness. The devil, then, would be depicted as a strange hybrid of human forms and animal claws in the miniatures of the Temptations (Flores, 1985). The figure

of the malignant one is also defined by his greyish-blue col-oring, and his crest of fire, which denotes his destructive power, and a face whose features are indiscernible. In the *Anastasis*, we find a similar image of the Leviathan, symbol of the "*portas inferni*" referred to in the accompanying inscription for this scene in the intermediate register of folio CCCXXIVv.

**Figure 6. *Bible of Avila*, fols. CCCXXVr and CCCXXVv**

Black as a symbol of death can be found in the tree from which hangs the inert body of Judas (fol. CCCXXIVv), whose anatomy is left uncolored to accentuate its lifelessness. In an earlier study, we conjectured that the body of Judas might have been left unfinished (Rodríguez, 2010), so that a polychrome coloring could be added later, but the fact that the parchment has not been prepared for this leads us to suspect a symbolic purpose.

White, on the other hand, may be linked to purity in the only page dedicated to the Old Testament scene of the flood. The decorative coloring of the ark, in the style of the ornamented reliquaries of the time, is complemented by the scene of the patriarch's sacrifice of thanksgiving, with the animals arranged upon the altar. The miniaturist seems to be illustrating the verse in which Noah "took of every clean beast" (Gen 8.20), using in this case white as a symbol of purity. This parallelism of text and color

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does not seem to occur in the *tituli* that accompany the various scenes of the *Bible of Avila*, as these do not include adjectives or nouns of color. Indeed, these inscriptions give absolute priority to the illustrated narratives, rather than to any practical considerations of the artists.

As has been suggested before for the color green, the close relationship between art and liturgy in the Middle Ages also extended to the use of colors. Although white had been a color associated with catechumens, it is not until the 11th century that we find texts that refer to a common criteria of color as an element of Christian ritual, first in the dispositions of Pope Innocent III (1161–1216), and later popularized by the liturgist Guillaume Durand in his *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (1285–1286). In Chapter XVIII of Book III, Durand makes reference to the colors of liturgical garments, principally white, blue, red, green, and black (Pastoreau, 2012). We feel that it is no coincidence that these are the same colors with which the miniatures of the Atlantic Bibles, and the *Bible of Avila* in particular, are illuminated. Although they are chronologically from a later period, they carry on an early tradition, with practices that date back to the sixth century and were consolidated in the Carolingian period. The relevance of colors in the liturgy is obvious, as, beyond their mere materiality, they express the passage of time in terms of liturgical rhythms, as well as underscoring the essential meaning of these rituals.

## Conclusions

In much of the Atlantic Bibles, and in particular the *Bible of Avila*, the application of color corresponds to a basic conception of the manuscript itself as a liturgical ornament, within the context of the Gregorian reform. The codex is therefore ennobled with polychromy, as in the Middle Ages material beauty was seen as ultimately a reflection of spiritual, transcendent beauty. Indeed, medieval theologians would debate openly about the consideration of color as only a material reality, or as a reality comparable to the light which emanates from God, the idea put forth by Abbot Suger in the third decade of the 12th century.

Aside from their liturgical use, these biblical manuscripts were often used for community readings, for which their vivid, contrasting colors became indicative of the manuscript's internal structure as well as of devices to call the attention of the monks. The importance of monastic *scriptoria*, and the diffusion and exchange of codices among the various monasteries, explains the uniformity of patterns and colors found in biblical miniatures. In the case of the *Bible of Avila*, it is precisely the break with this homogeneity of repertory and color that allows us to observe the two successive phases of their elaboration: the original Italian period, from the second quarter of the 12th century, and the Spanish addition, from around the 1170s and 1180s. We can see from this that color can be yet another factor for placing a given codex within a specific spatial and chronological framework.

These iconographic formulas, and the colors employed for vestments and figures, also allow us to compare the miniatures to other artistic media, such as mural painting and sculpture. While the Italian section of the *Bible of Avila* shows similarities to Roman frescoes, like those of San Giovanni a Porta Latina or San Clemente, the only clearly visible analogies in Spain are the scenes of Christ's Arrest and the Last Supper painted on the apse of the church of San Justo in Segovia (Ainaud, 1966; Yarza, 1990; Morena, 1995; Fernández, 1999; Rodríguez, 1999; Azcárate, 2002). In any case, the parallels between both sets of works are more iconographic than chromatic, although the poor conservation of these paintings, exposed to constant humidity throughout the centuries, prevents a solid conclusion regarding their original aspect.

The use of color in the Atlantic Bibles can, however, be associated with the link between medieval art and liturgy, a relationship intrinsic to the codex itself in that it only achieves its fullness and its true meaning in the celebration of ritual – hence the use of yellow to imitate the gold brocade of liturgical vestments, as well as the colors white, blue, red, and green, which were associated with the liturgy from at least the ninth century. This symbolic connotation leads us away from the symbolism that we perceive *a priori* in the *Bible of Avila*, especially in the New Testament scenes, in which the predominance of red and blue suggest the dual,

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human/divine nature of Christ. A closer examination of these colors, arranged arbitrarily, provides a more nuanced view of this idea and leads to the conclusion that it is the liturgy which imposes the selection of colors, inasmuch as the manuscript is simply one more liturgical element (Castiñeiras & Verdaguer, 2014). In the *Bible of Avila*, this connection to the liturgical can be observed from an iconographic perspective as well, in the selection and ordering of scenes.

All of this makes stronger the recommendations given to the illuminators of manuscripts by the monk Theophilus, who reminded them that they were not aiming for the senses, but for the soul, for which purpose their pigments must be an instrument for inspiring prayer and reflecting the beauty of Paradise.

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