

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS



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Meditation, rhetoric, and the making of images,
400-1200

The Craft of Thought

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7. PRUDENTIUS' PSYCHOMACHIA, A VISIBLE EPIC

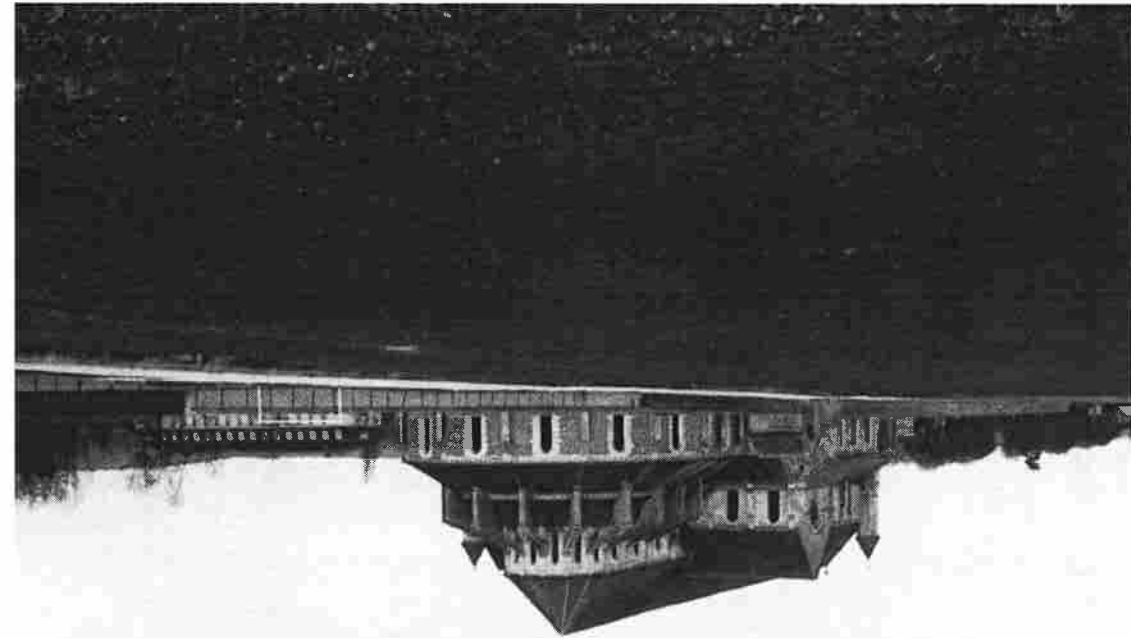
Prudentius was one of the first Christian poets, writing at the end of the fourth century; the collection of his poems, with his author's preface, is dated about 405. He was a Roman provincial, like so many early Christian authors, living and working his entire life in Spain.⁶⁷ Composed in dactylic hexameters, the traditional meter of epic, *Psychomachia* ("soul-struggle") figures the virtues and vices as warriors, paired in hand-to-hand combat. The virtues are of course victorious, and celebrate their conquest by constructing a great victory Temple, described at length. There is also a verse preamble to the epic, retelling the story in Genesis 14 of Abraham's battle against the heathen kings who imprisoned his nephew, Lot. And there is a concluding prayer which summarizes the work's gist as our soul's constant struggle against its own inner vices, until "building the golden courts of his temple, [Christ], in regard of its moral virtues, crafts ornaments for the soul, delighting in which rich Wisdom may reign forever on her ornate throne."⁶⁸ Notice how important ornament and decoration are in this passage, as tokens and products, the "furniture" as it were, of ethical actions.

Psychomachia spawned a huge progeny of moral allegory and picture-making.⁶⁹ Remembered *ad res* most frequently, the images of warrior virtues and vices remained a fruitful part of confessional matter throughout the Middle Ages; they crop up in every art form. Having learned at least *summatim* the story of *Psychomachia*, a student had a readily available, heuristically secure scheme that could be used to "re-view" one's own deeds in the structured way necessary for effective penitence, the most vital of all the tasks of remembering.

Prudentius has gotten bad reviews since the nineteenth century. The opinion of H. J. Rose is typical: "Prudentius is often disgusting . . . morbid . . . puerile and always tedious."⁷⁰ Indeed.

Here is a characteristically disgusting, morbid example, quoted from the description of the death of Luxuria at the hands of Sobrietas. Luxuria, "making her drunken way to the war" in a chariot (line 320) is challenged by Sobrietas, who frightens the chariot horses by thrusting a wooden Cross in their faces. They shy in panic, and Luxuria, their driver, is thrown from the chariot and "falls forward under the axle and her mangled body is the brake that slows the chariot down" (lines 415–416). Sobriety hurls a rock at Luxuria:

Plate 32: The church of the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny, from the south-east.



has overcome with great slaughter the monsters in the enslaved heart."⁷⁴

The remainder of the preamble provides an epitome (which is an ornament of contraction) of Genesis 14:14–18, wherein Abram hears of Lot's capture, arms his servants, rescues Lot and scatters the barbarians, and then returns victorious, to be greeted by Melchisedech, the priest of God, "whose mysterious birth... has no ostensible author," a detail that ornaments (and so marks specifically) the traditional exegetical association of Melchisedech with Christ. Epitome answers to the mnemonic-cognitive need for *brevitas*; it is the "brief" scheme that allows one to recall a work "plentifully."

Yet Prudentius' epitome of the text is not barren of detail, the way modern summaries tend to be. Lot, "set at liberty by the bursting of his chains, straightens his neck in freedom, where the links had chafed."⁷⁵ The detail helps to "paint" Lot in a reader's memory, giving him one of those so-called allegorical attributes that function cognitively to mark this image as worth further mental attention.

Prudentius calls his texturized retelling of the story of Abraham and Lot "haec linea" that he has "praenotata," "sketched out first" (before his main story) "as a model... which our life should resculpt with due measure."⁷⁶ The morally examined life is the work of a careful artist, an artist first of all not in stone or paint or even in words, but in *lineae*, the richly textured lineaments of an educated and well-stocked memory. *Linea* is used here as a synonym of *ratio*, the mental schemes and schedules that Augustine found, along with images and notations of emotions, among the things in his memory. The word resonates richly in medieval mnemotechnic.⁷⁷ But notice here how Prudentius uses the word – which later comes to mean "a diagram," and is associated with the mental "sketch" of a composition (by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, among others) – to indicate what we now would probably call the *story*. Prudentius' *linea* is made up of Biblical events recalled *summam*, like those which Augustine recommended as the basis for teaching.

At the beginning of the series of epic combats, the reader is advised to carefully "see" the pictures which the poem will paint: "The scheme [ratio] for victory is before our eyes if we are able to note at close hand the very faces of the virtues, and their deadly struggle against pestilent men."⁷⁸ If we can mentally take close note of the features of the virtues and those struggling against them, then a scheme (*ratio*) will be always present to us (in the memory images we

chance drives the stone to smash the breath-passage in the midst of the face and beat the lips into the arched mouth. The teeth within are loosened, the throat cut, and the mangled tongue fills [the mouth] with bloody fragments. Her gorge rises at the strange meal; gulping down the pulped bones she spews up again the lumps she swallowed. "Drink up now your own blood, after your many cups," says the indignant virgin [Sobriety].⁷¹

Before a work can acquire meaning, before a mind can act on it, it must be made memorable, since memory provides the matter with which human intellect most directly works. As we have seen, this is a fundamental assumption of memorial cultures. If one thinks of the ornaments of a work as mnemonic hooks, as its inventorying heuristics, one will quickly understand that ornaments need minimally to satisfy the requirements of memorability.

In other words, Prudentius' *Psychomachia* is designedly disgusting and morbid because it is those qualities that make it memorable, particularly for the novice, schoolboy minds for which it was written. That, at least, was the assumption in ancient pedagogy. When the novice John Cassian, you recall, had trouble forgetting the epic stories which his *pedagogus* instilled in him as a child, he remembered most powerfully *exactly* the disgusting and bloody parts – the "images of warring heroes" that turned unbidden before his mental eye as he prayed the liturgy or tried to meditate on his psalms.⁷²

From the start of its preamble, *Psychomachia* functions as a mnemonic gathering place, a "common place" into which a number of stories are collated. Recollection works through associational chains; the formation of these is a core technique of Prudentius' story-telling. The starting-point, or principle, in the preamble chain is the name Abraham. This name is specially marked by an ornament, etymology, as it also is in Genesis, for it was lengthened by a syllable from the earlier name Abram.⁷³ This is a meaningless detail to us, but Roman students, who learned to read by syllables, would have paid it full attention.

The name "Abraham" is then treated as a gathering site for a network of stories linked to him, those of Isaac, Lot, Sarah, and the visit of the three angels. But this poem will select the story of Lot, rescued by Abraham from "hard bondage under the barbarians," the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this story, Abraham teaches us "to war against the ungodly tribes... until the spirit, battling valorously,

retain from the story) for conquering, with Christ's aid, the rebellious passions and thoughts that arise in us. In other words, we are invited carefully to inspect the text, allow it to paint its synaesthetic pictures in our own minds, and transfer that picture to our memories where it will always be available to us ("praesens") as a sort of ethical device, part of the furnishing of our soul – "furnish" being another meaning of Latin *ornare*, the root of the word "ornament."

These images in the story-line are not iconographic, if by that one means images that signify single specific concepts. Prudentius is concerned to provide a foundation, a "ratio," that will securely stick in our memory: this will enable us at any age to "recognize the features" (as it were) of our own "divided will [fissa voluntas]" (line 760) when sin "attacks." The power of the ornament scheme is precisely its ready memorability as a picture, not as a concept.

The main story of *Psychomachia* is made readily memorable by relying on two elementary procedures. A set of backgrounds is prepared, in this case the episodes of the plot, each the combat of a chief virtue and a chief vice. One ends up with a simple scheme of combats: Faith vs. Worship-of-False-Gods; Chastity vs. Lust; Patience vs. Wrath; Humility vs. Pride; Sobriety vs. Luxuria; Good Works vs. Greed; Concord vs. Discord. In fact the *Psychomachia* is divided into "combats" the way other works are divided into "chapters." One finds similar dividing techniques used very commonly in long narratives later in the Middle Ages: the *Divine Comedy*, in addition to its cantos and its meter (meter being a basic auditory mnemonic) is also divided into a topography of circles, terraces, and spheres; *The Canterbury Tales* into pilgrims; the *Decameron* into a finding system of days indexed to tellers.

Into each background cell of his foundational *ratio*, Prudentius has gathered up related matters. Some are vices and virtues associated with one or both of the central images as helpers (good and bad), such as Hope, who helps Humility to kill Pride; or Luxuria's attendants, Pleasure, Strife, Desire, Jest, Ostentation, and Coquetry, who rush away "in agitated flight" when their master is killed, scattering their toys as they run (lines 445–449). Bible stories are also attached to the combats. So when Lust is slain by Chastity, her victory speech "collates" Judith and Holofernes, the "virgin immaculate" who bore Christ, and the Whore of Babylon shut into Hell. This kind of "chain-making" or *catena* is familiar to all medievalists, from innumerable examples in both Latin and vernacular literatures. I want to emphasize

its basis in *memoria*, "gathering" associations into a "place." Nor are the chains confined to what is written down in the text; for example, the killing of Holofernes by Judith is invoked as part of the chain linked to the combat of Chastity and Lechery, but when Hope cuts off the head of Luxuria and holds it up, dripping, the action reverberates (or should) like the rich trope it is, bringing back Judith and Holofernes, and as an antithesis, Salome and John the Baptist.

Psychomachia was one of the earliest non-Biblical works to be illustrated. Sixteen manuscripts still survive, painted between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. But the prototype set of pictures is thought to have been made much earlier, perhaps as early as the fifth century, not long after the poem was composed.⁷⁹ The pictures in the program for *Psychomachia* mark the main incidents of its story: indeed, rather as in the case of the eighth-century commentary on the Apocalypse by Beatus of Liébana (which I will examine next), picture and textual episode together make up a series of *storiae*, memorable incidents marked with a picture which serves as a sort of punctuation and "summary." The incident of Luxuria's death was marked by such a picture, as indeed is nearly every incident in the battles in some manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

But not only the *imagines agentes* of the story were treated in this way. One eleventh-century manuscript of the poem places a half-page picture of "Prudentius" just before the prayer which concludes and summarizes the gist of his work (Plate 8). Just as Augustine suggested storing in memory things related to Paul under an image of the author which would serve as their mnemonic inventory-marker, so this image may serve as a marker for the authorial *res* of Prudentius' poem.

Intricate chains of stories, woven together in the activities of memory, are a characteristic medieval habit of mind that is not accidental, nor the manifestation of some time-spirit or "mentality." It was *learned in school* from texts like the *Psychomachia*. Like a tuning-fork, the textual trope reverberates in the cultural-made-personal memories of those who read it. So a reader's memory, not confined by worries about "the author's intended meaning," is freed to roam its memorial symphony, "gathering up" harmonies and antitheses in the compositional activity which Hugh of St. Victor described as "meditation," the highest kind of study, that "takes the soul away from the noise of earthly business" (such as grammatical commentary) and "renders his life pleasant indeed" who makes a

practice of it.⁸⁰ Interpretation can then become a form of prayer, a journey through memory like that Augustine took with his mother Monica, by means of which, at moments, the soul seems to recollect beyond its self, to find out God's own sweetness.⁸¹

Prudentius' images are painted for the mind's eye. Effort is made not to overwhelm the student with detail: the narrative details are few but they are particularly vivid and specific. This accords with a basic technique for making such images: one must be careful not to overwhelm the mental eye with an excess of images. And those one has must be extreme, "eye-catching" of course, but also fully *synaesthetic*, a fully realized sensory experience that includes re-created sound (the screams and cries and battle trumpets) and taste (chiefly of blood and crushed bone) and odor (vomit and blood but also crushed violets) and touch (chiefly pain).

The battles are described in extreme ways: the lurid description of Luxuria's death which I quoted earlier is repeated with minor variations for all the vices. Each one is made dead, dead, dead – with blood dripping and bones smashed, strangled until the eyeballs pop from their sockets, beheaded, the corpses torn to pieces and thrown into the air. Luxuria, a decadent hothouse flower, "throws violets and fights with rose-leaves" before she is crushed under the wheels of her chariot.⁸² Discord, smiling cheerfully, insinuates herself into the ranks of the victorious virtues. But she has a dagger hidden under her cloak, with which she stabs Concord. Then, revealed by the blood staining her robe, she renames herself Heresy, and is torn to pieces by countless hands, the bits of her corpse scattered to the wind and thrown to dogs and crows, and then, after they've been trampled in stinking sewers, fed to the fishes.⁸³

These pictures stick in the mind, not as "concepts" or "objects" but *as an inventory* of synaesthetic, syncretic memory cues, to be drawn upon, drawn out from, and *used* for constructing new work. Many later artists, when considering the subject-matter of the virtues and vices, write or paint or carve "in Prudentius" the way that Augustine wrote his Latin in the vocabulary and cadences of the Psalms.⁸⁴ Even in their sophisticated, mature age, medieval churchmen would still pull forth the heuristic *schemata* of a combat of vices and virtues. Gregory the Great, writing as Pope, provides a penitential scheme of eight sins, with Pride as the mnemonically crucial "beginning of all sin," followed by its seven Princes, each captain of a military troop of associated sins.⁸⁵ It is an effective

scheme, a useful heuristic – the "beginning" of a meditation, which is then expanded (*Moralia in Job* xxvi.28).

The narrative of *Psychomachia* seems to have become translated entirely into a series of pictures. In the copy-book which he made at the end of the tenth century at the abbey of St. Martial in Limoges, the monk Adémar de Chabannes first drew all the (by then) conventional sketches of *Psychomachia*'s scenes in their narrative order, and then wrote out the text of the poem following these pictures.⁸⁶ Another example, somewhat later, is the set of *Psychomachia* drawings in Herrad of Hohenbourg's *Hortus deliciarum*, which was placed in the book without any supporting text from the poem, presented just as a set of picture *topoi* with labels on some of the individual images.⁸⁷ And when *Psychomachia* had become to many audiences little more than a gathering of famous tropes, each of which amounted to a sort of picture epitomized for memory by a phrase or name, Chaucer could paint in his description of Mars' temple in *The Knight's Tale* the image of the smiler with the knife under the cloak, while Dante – invoking the same memory icon, but heading down a different associational pathway – shows the discordsowers of the eighth circle with bodies rent and horribly torn.⁸⁸

Psychomachia ends with the victorious virtues entering the New Temple (recalling both Ezekiel and the Apocalypse) that has been laid out by Faith and Concord. This is constructed out of a variety of Biblical motifs (the Tabernacle, the Temple, the New Jerusalem, and Wisdom's house in Proverbs 9). The composition is described as the laying out of a Temple plan (foundation – we are surely expected to recall 1 Corinthians 3:10) and then the raising of the walls of various precious stones (a detail remembered from Revelation), using a building-crane or "machina."⁸⁹ Faith begins by *remembering* that Solomon laid out a temple to celebrate the end of the strife that tore his father David's reign, for "it is when blood is cleansed that a temple is built and an altar set up."⁹⁰

Then it was that Jerusalem was made glorious with her temple and, herself now divine, received her God to rest there, now that the homeless Ark was established in its place on the marble altar. In our camp too let a sacred temple arise, that the Almighty may visit its holy of holies.⁹¹

Ark (of Noah), Ark (of the Covenant) in its Tabernacle carried in the camps of the Israelites, and Temple of Solomon in the citadel of

Jerusalem are all brought together, a "common place" of Christian memory by this time. To these structures are added the visionary citadels (*arcēs*) of Ezekiel and of John. Faith and Concord set to work "to lay out the new temple and set its foundation" (line 825).

First, Faith measures out a central square with her golden measuring rod, and the square-shaped city walls are laid out, with three gates in each side. Measuring the building with a golden rod is an action taken from Ezekiel, both directly and via its appearance in John's vision, and the city which the virtues lay out from that square is the Heavenly Jerusalem of Apocalypse 21, the visionary citadel of Ezekiel 40, and the "city on a hill" of Matthew 25, the three "gathered up" into a pattern by their shared word, *civitas*. It is also called a *templum* both in Ezekiel and here, another word that brings together the New and Old Testament sets of buildings.

This is literary troping built up by means of a basic mnemonic *catena*. The objects collated begin with the same syllable, *arc-*: *arc-a*, "ark" or "chest," both of Noah and of the Covenant, where God's *arc-ana*, "secrets," are hidden away; *arc-es*, "citadels," the walled cities of Ezekiel's and John's visions; and also *arc-us*, "arches," the shape of each of the triple triumphal doorways in the walls. Above the gateways gleam the names of the "apostolic senate" written in gold.⁹² Here *enargeia* becomes ekphrasis, the sensuous description of *making* a building. And the ekphrasis is, in some sense, constructed out of puns or *paronomasia*, another basic rhetorical ornament of great inventive power.⁹³

Concordances of sound (at the level of syllable) and shape (arch, gateway, chest, and walled city) are fundamental to meditative troping, making a mnemonic machine that can serve to inventory and "find out" a multitude of "things" hidden away (as *arcana*) in memory. The story-telling proceeds by "picture-making," each episode being a "frame" or "form" on which (or into which) one learns to hook up a multitude of diverse material. Each also can serve as the "form" for a number of different meditations, on a variety of occasions.

8. THE BEATUS "HEAVENLY JERUSALEM": A PICTURE WITH WHICH TO INVENT

An ekphrasis, such as the temple description we have just examined in *Psychomachia*, need not be confined only to literature. As the literary

ornament acts as an invention site, a sight for meditation, so I would suggest do certain ekphrastic pictures. I realize that I seem to be stretching the term here (and I am), but cognitively speaking there is no reason why a word picture and a painting cannot both "paint pictures in the mind," and more to the point, function in similar ways as meditative "gathering" sites.

I want now to consider a famous picture of the Heavenly Jerusalem as just such a rhetorical ornament, an ekphrasis in paint. This example is a picture which is part of a set of images in an apocalypse commentary first put together (out of older materials) in the eighth century by a Spanish monk, Beatus of Liébana. I have included several of its pictures from a number of different manuscripts of the work (Plates 1-4, 9, and 19), but to begin with I want to focus on the "Heavenly City" image alone (Plates 2 and 3).

Plate 2 reproduces one version of it from an eleventh-century manuscript of Beatus' book, made in Gascony between 1028 and 1061 at the monastery of Saint-Sever. Plate 3 reproduces the same picture, this one from a manuscript made in the middle of the eleventh century in León.⁹⁴ The very ornateness of the picture made it a remarkably flexible meditational tool. It is the sort of thing one wants to look at and look at again; the ways and routes within and among its remarkably various patterns conduct one's sight, mental and physical, in endless yet coherent directions. The apostle images, each in its arch (each arch positioned as one of the three gates in each of the City's four walls), are each also identified with one of the twelve stone foundations that make up the Heavenly City in John's vision (Revelation 21:14). Each type of stone is also marked by an angel poised over the gate (cf. Revelation 21:12): a scribe has written out *summatim* what the commentary says of their properties.⁹⁵

The picture is in one way a simple visual summary of the literal text of Revelation 21:10-22, and yet the design elements of this picture encourage someone looking at it to form for him- or herself shifting patterns of shapes (arches and columns), of graphic elements (dots and cross-hatching), of individual images in the multiple "places" of the pages, and of its strong, distinct colors. As O. K. Werckmeister has written about the Saint-Sever set of these pictures, their "conceptual clarity . . . suited the exact literal comprehension of the text [at the level of the story] required for its elaborate exegesis."⁹⁶ The same can be said of the Heavenly City picture in the Facundus Beatus. It is a picture of surfaces: everything is bright and distinct. Nothing about

it suggests obscurity or darkness, nothing requires elucidating. And it is exactly this quality that makes it an exceptional inventive gathering site.⁹⁷

Each design element can serve, if one chooses, as a relatively simplified, “empty” location in which to “gather” other material, verbal and visual (and for all we know, depending on the interpreter, olfactory, tangible, and gustatory too). The simpler and “emptier” (I am using this word in its mnemotechnical sense, as the opposite of “crowded”), the more variously useful the location can be made to be. These places in this picture, each carefully marked by color and ornament, serve as a schema of compositional backgrounds, as powerful as the textual order itself. They are in fact an alternative text – not an “illustration” of the words. The ornaments of this picture can be dilated, “loosened up and expanded” in just the way verbal texts treated as *memoria summaria* can be, by procedures of shuffling, collating, gathering in – devising and composing meditation.

Greatly influential in the development of the Beatus picture book was the Spanish scribe who made the manuscript now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, sometime about 945.⁹⁸ Though not the first to illustrate the commentary, this scribe comments on the role of the pictures in his book and his reasons for making them, in language that clearly indicates their meditative purpose. Maius’ colophon reads: “As part of its ornamental order [decus] are the picture-making words of its stories [uerba mirifica storiarum] which I have painted [depinxit] in their order, so that they may inspire fear among those who are learned [scientibus] of the coming future judgment at the world’s future end.”⁹⁹ Recall that meditation begins most effectively with the emotion of fear – the chilling terror that raises prickles on our flesh, which make us stick tight when we throw ourselves upon the redeeming Cross. Maius says that his paintings were made to raise up such terrors in the learned, the *scientes*, “those who have knowledge.” Evidently, as all historians who have studied the Beatus tradition have recognized, this picture book was not for beginning students or for illiterate laity. It is a book designed for monks remembering Hell and the Last Things.

And, in accord with meditative practice, the book provides an orderly (“per seriem”) way, constructed of images to gaze on and scrutinize and “turn over” with the eye. Moreover, as Maius writes, he has painted completely (the force of *depingere*) those pictures which are in the words of the *storiae* – as Beatus called the sections,

each a few verses long, into which he divided the narrative of St. John’s vision. “Mirifica verba” are words which make images to be looked at: they are “marvellous,” *mirifica*, but what makes them so are the wonderful sights, the images (*mir-*, “gaze with wonder”) which they fashion (*fac-*, the root of *fica*). These are what Maius says he has depicted. The verb *depingere*, an intensive form, serves a dual purpose in this sentence, for it refers to both the letters of the *verba* which Maius wrote (in medieval Latin, *pingere* is commonly used for the scribal task of lettering)¹⁰⁰ and also to the *mirifica* pictures which these words raise up in his mind and, through his brush, are translated as paintings to the book. There they, together with the words, may paint pictures in the minds of other monks as they engage in meditative reading.

This union of words and pictures is apparent in the layout of the Beatus commentary. Plate 9 shows a typical page, the section of the text which describes the sixth angel pouring out his bowl. This example is from Maius’ book. Notice that the complete book chapter starts with the *storia*, a short segment of Revelation (16:12, in this case), written immediately under the “incipit” in the left-hand column. As one reads the chapter from beginning to end, one then must immediately continue on to the picture of the sixth angel, pouring his vial into the river Euphrates so that it dries up. This picture is framed, a device that seems to be Maius’ contribution to the Beatus tradition.¹⁰¹ And it has a verbal “title” which identifies the scene, written in the right-hand part of the L-shaped frame.

The commentary on the Apocalypse text is then written below the picture. Notice that it begins in the right-hand column, under the picture, following directly upon it. And notice particularly that it is introduced as “the explanation of the above-written *storia*.” A reader must proceed through both the written verse and the picture in order to get to their gloss, or “explanatio.” Williams characterizes these pictures as “a surrogate” for the text, mediating “between the text and the reader’s imagination.” Werckmeister has called them a translation of the literal text into “a dense sequence” of equally literal “tableaus.”¹⁰² I would go further than either of these statements to suggest that word and picture together make up, equally, the *res memorabiles* for meditative reading. Neither surrogate nor translation, word and picture both constitute “the above-written *storia*.” Together they make up the “*verba mirifica storiarum*” which Maius has fully painted. Like the text, the picture is also a memory site, a

place for inventive “gathering” or *collatio*. This concept of the picture is emphasized by the frame Maius painted around it: like the column of text, it provides a definite “place” on the page, both of the vellum and of *memoria*.

In the Saint-Sever book, the pictures were not only adapted as they were copied, but some were also expanded, translated in the inventive way I have described. The scenes are treated as images-for-memory-work, rather than as objects in need of exact reduplication. Werckmeister has pointed out that elements in some of this manuscript’s pictures actually depart both from the traditional pictures in Beatus manuscripts and from the literal text in Revelation, the master-painter (a monk, of course) clearly using the picture as an inventive site, just as we have seen monks doing elsewhere with material that is entirely verbal. Made some hundred years after Maius’ book, this manuscript, written for the Cluniac abbot of Saint-Sever, Gregory of Montaner, adapted the traditional matter of the *storiae* specifically to themes in the liturgy of the dead, a concern of the abbey’s noble sponsors and the occasion of the intercessory prayers which the monks of Saint-Sever promised to them.¹⁰³

In one case, the picture of “the Lamb and the One on the Throne,” part of the narrative (*storia*) of the opening of the sixth seal depicted in Revelation 6:12–17 (Plate 4), the Saint-Sever painter has added an inscription to the traditional one found in other such scenes, crowding the lettering into the space in order to bring together two quotes that are unrelated and out of textual sequence; the two quotes make one statement, however, to explain a feature of his picture that is, in fact, not found explicitly in the Bible. On each side of the enthroned deity, the sky is rolling up like a book-scroll. This feature is made from a phrase in Revelation 6:14, which depicts the sky as receding like a scroll that is rolled up. The *tituli* written in the upper part of this picture quote both these words and also a phrase from Revelation 6:16, the words of which are quoted before the words from verse 14, out of sequence. Clearly the painter has departed from the exact sequence of the text in order to pull its pieces together in a new composition – adapted from tradition, to be sure, but “expanded and loosened up.”¹⁰⁴

On the basis of a number of such changes, Werckmeister makes clear how the painters of this manuscript were not just copying verbatim (and “formatim,” as it were) from an exemplar, nor just illustrating the words of the Bible. I find this compelling evidence that

such pictures were thought of in the same way that textual *ekphrases* were, as sites for further meditational composition. Moreover, the Saint-Sever manuscript version of the picture of the sixth seal (of which the Lamb and One on the Throne is the upper half) appears to be directly the work of Stephanus Garzia, whom François Avril calls “the master of the program,” the one who signed the manuscript and was responsible for two other painters working under him; it is also one of the pages that have remained untouched by later hands, so the alterations to the Biblical text which Werckmeister detected in this image seem to have been part of its original conception.¹⁰⁵

One question always arises in respect of these “mirifical” books: how were they used? We have very little, if any, direct evidence about this. But the Saint-Sever book was made at the abbot’s direction, and one of an abbot’s major tasks was to nourish the spiritual life of his brothers, by giving both them and himself food for prayer and meditation. The “stories” in this book are apocalyptic “seeings,” *visiones*. They can nurture meditations on the events because they stick in the minds of those who have seen them. The marvellous colors, the extraordinary figures (both noble and monstrous), the clarity of each scene in its background, the frame – these are all effective mnemonic and cognitive agents. The pictures thus serve not as “aids” for memorizing the words, nor even primarily as pictorial “expressions” of an articulated theology, but as the sort of Gregorian *machinae* which could raise the clearing eyes of one’s mind towards God.¹⁰⁶

9. ETYMOLOGY: THE ENERGY OF A WORD UNLEASHED

Another commonly used ornament that many humanistic grammarians have found puerile and disgusting in its own way is etymology (the early twentieth-century philologist Ernst Curtius called most medieval forms of it “insipid trifling,” and one late-nineteenth-century editor referred to his author’s “most perverse etymologies”).¹⁰⁷ To a scientifically trained student of philology like Curtius, this figure is annoyingly playful, for it pays no attention to the actual history of words, but instead whacks up the roots and endings, rearranging them arbitrarily and inconsistently, apparently just to make some whimsical rhymes and far-fetched puns, often in two or more languages at the same time, which may or may not have anything to do with the actual language of the word being

composed by a monastic author probably in the early eighth century, starts with a "seeing" of a great jeweled cross clad in gold. The poet sees it in a dream, and describes it as a wondrous tree, wound about with light. The cross image itself is that of an early Christian jeweled cross of the sort depicted commonly in churches of Rome and the eastern Mediterranean. This cross is the focus of all eyes in the poem: the angelic host, men upon earth, and all this fair creation. The cross is wondrously decorated. The person beholding it in his vision is "stained" or "decorated" as well, but with sin ("synnum fah") and "for-wounded," he says, with blemishes. And in this mood of compunction, as he gazes at the golden, jeweled cross, he begins to perceive through the gold that it too is bleeding. It too is troubled and wounded; the sight makes the visionary even more anxious. And in this mutually troubled, compunctive state, the cross tells its story to the visionary.

Barbara Raw has written well about the various themes and concerns of this poem: as she says, "it is a true meditation, for prayer looks forward to the next world." Remembering Christ's heroic sacrifice, the vision is also the means of "remembering" Heaven. Scholars have often commented on how the conventions of Germanic heroic poetry have been translated in the poem to the Passion story.¹⁴⁵ But my interest here is in how the decoration of the cross is both mirrored in and transmitted to the visionary, at first apparently ironically (the cross is decorated with gems, the dreamer with sins) but then literally, as the visionary's wounds, his compunction of heart, enables him, as he looks further and more clearly, to see that the cross is also bleeding. Blood and gems waver in the decoration before his eyes, as at times the cross appears bloody, at times golden.

A series of verbal-visual puns accomplishes this transmutation, this *allegoria*. Visionary and vision blend sympathetically, and then the full narrative composition develops, oriented from this beginning, as the dreamer looks ever more deeply upon the cross. And the device that creates this blending, the "machine" for the poem's composition, is the ornamented surface of that initiating picture.

Dream vision, picture, and "the mystery of the bed chamber"

Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat.

The Song of Songs 5:2

I. "VISION" AND "FANTASY"

The mystery of my chapter title is not one that has a solution. I am using the word in an archaic way, to mean "craft" or "technique." The bedroom I will talk about is what both the Romans and the medieval monks called *thalamus* or *cubiculum*. The monks associated it most often with the bridal chamber of the Song of Songs. And while all the sexual associations of fertility and fruitfulness resonate in this bedroom mystery, its goal is cognitive creation, and its matrix is the secret places of one's own mind, the matters secreted away in the inventory of memory, stored and recalled, collated and gathered up, by the "mystery" or craft of mnemotechnical invention.

In addition to prayer and the literary colloquy with the Biblical text known as *sacra pagina*, an important genre of monastic meditation is dream vision. At the end of the last chapter I discussed briefly the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood* as an example of this genre, and I suggested that it be understood as deriving from the orthopraxis of monastic memory work, which often begins with meditation upon a "picture," either materially or verbally painted in (or for) the mind's eye. In this chapter I want to investigate more closely some aspects of monastic visions which are closely linked with rhetorical procedures of invention. Once again, I will be looking at a well-known monastic genre through the lens of rhetorical composition, rather than that of dogma or psychology. I wish to stress that I do not offer this analysis as an alternative to the other, but rather as a supplement, an enrichment.

The concept that focusses this chapter is "visions," a word that in

medieval rhetoric means the mental seeings which most usefully can meet a composer's needs to get started and then sustain the crafting of a particular composition. Recall that Quintilian used the Latin word *visiones* to translate Greek *phantasiai*, and commented that these mental craftings were most powerfully of use to call up the emotional energies of oneself and one's audience.¹ If the mind uses machines and devices for thinking, then these *visiones* are an important source of their energy. Quintilian defines *visiones* at greatest length when he is talking about the rhetorical ornament of *enargeia*, the power in verbal description to call up cognitive "visions" that can be useful for inventive purposes.²

This rhetorical concept of *visiones* also influenced Augustine's well-known analysis, in his commentary on the literal text of Genesis, of the three types of human vision. There, very much like Quintilian, Augustine calls the mental images formed by imagination and memory "spiritual" (because they are made in the spirit rather than received by the eye) and fictive. These mental seeings derive and are made from the matters presented to our minds by our senses ("corporeal" vision). But unlike Quintilian, Augustine recognised a third sort of vision, the "intellectual" kind, called in monastic praxis *theoria* or direct vision of God. True *theoria* is very rare, though it is the goal, the *skopos*, of all human "seeings." Ecstatic and prophetic visions recounted in the Bible – even those of Moses, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John – are still "spiritual" in nature because the visionary sees the likeness of bodies, and immaterial things are made knowable by means of images present to the soul.³

In monastic rhetoric more generally, the concept of *visiones* (as in Augustine) was also greatly influenced by the traditions of prophetic vision, especially of the Last Things, Hell and Heaven. Monastic visions, as we will see, take pains to pay their intertextual respects to the master visionary narratives of Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, John, Peter, and Paul, among others. Though prophetic vision has certainly included the foretelling of future events, the role of prophet has also always included that of interpreter, the Christian teacher-orator's role of speaking God's word to people in present societies. Augustine defended this opinion that a prophet is a prophet by virtue of his judgment most fully in the twelfth book of his commentary on the text of Genesis. A true prophet understands truly, as demonstrated by his immediate power of moral discernment and judgment.⁴

2. BOETHIUS' LADY PHILOSOPHY: INVENTIVE VISION

I would like to start off my investigation of "vision" with a famous scene of literary composition, a familiar moment of pure imagination as we now would call it, pure creative vision. It occurs at the very beginning of Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. The work begins with a poem of complaint (Book I, meter 1). And then the story starts up, as follows:

While I, in silence, thought to mull over this composition within myself [Haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem] and expected to inscribe with a stylus my tearful protest, a woman was seen by me to be standing up over my head [adstitisse mihi supra verticem visam est mulier]... Who, seeing the Muses of poetry standing over my bed and speaking words to my tears, was momentarily angered and burned with fierce looks: "Who," she said, "has permitted these whores of the theater to have access to this diseased man...?"⁵

Boethius, we discover, is in his bed when the vision (*imago*) of Lady Philosophy appears to him. After her appearance has been described carefully (an example of *enargeia*), she dramatically reviles the "whores of the theater" – the Muses clustered about Boethius as he lies in bed – whom she chases away "from this diseased man [hunc aegrum]," as he lies prostrate, weeping.

I would like to call attention to some features of this famous narrative that will seem trivial, because they are so commonplace. First, notice that Boethius is engaged in *silent* composition, that is in meditation and memory work. The poem he is working on (meter 1) is at some stage before it gets written down with a stylus, the stages of "invention" and "disposition," whose product was often called *res* to distinguish it from the *dictamen*, the stage at which the *res* was "clothed" with its final words, and also from the *liber scriptus*, when it was (perhaps, if it was worthy) written down in a fair copy, the *exemplar* to be copied by others. From what he tells us (and from the fact that a poem does recognizably exist, however unfinished he implies it to be), Boethius is in the final drafting stages, almost ready to write his composition out with a stylus, but still wanting to mull it over ("reputarem"), still *inventing*.⁶

The reason Boethius is lying down in his bedchamber, as his narrative makes clear, is not in order to sleep but in order to compose poems. He is lying in bed because that physical attitude was among the postures that were commonly thought to induce the mental

concentration necessary for "memory work," recollective, memorative composition. It is not the only such posture possible: sitting or standing at a lectern pensively, head in hand or staring into space, eyes open or closed, with or without a book, are also common postures of meditative memory work. In classical as in monastic rhetoric, withdrawal to one's chamber indicates a state of mind, the entry to the "place" of meditative silence which was thought essential for invention.

It is during this activity of mental composing that a woman of grave countenance "was seen by me" ("mihī . . . uisa est mulier") standing upright over the composing poet. We are not told whether or not his eyes, at this point, are closed; later manuscript paintings of this scene show him either with eyes closed or eyes open.⁷ But his mind is not only conscious, it is fully engaged in recollective composition of his poem, performed, as the rhetoric handbooks all counsel, by means of mental imaging techniques.

Boethius is described by Philoſophy as "dis-eased," *aeger* referring often (as it does here) to a state of mental distress. This is primarily understood to refer to Boethius' perilous ethical health, which Lady Philoſophy attempts to restore. But mental uncase, anxiety, restlessness – Boethius is lachrymose throughout this scene – is also a preliminary state of mind for one composing, and so we can take Lady Philoſophy's comment literally as well as "morally." Quintilian speaks (disapprovingly) of one in the first throes of composing as being restless and anxious.⁸ More importantly for Boethius and his audience, this mental state came to be understood as an important initiator of the "way" of monastic meditation. Illness, anxiety, and restlessness are common mental states (though not always present) for visionary monks as well, from which the emotional stages of contemplation (which is an act of progressive vision) relieves one, or so one hopes.

The poet carefully regards his vision of the lady, painting her in the eye of his (and our) mind. Then Philoſophy spies the Muses "nostro adſiſtentes toro," "standing over my bed," watching over the composing poet. They leave in confusion. And then Boethius, weeping and astonished ("obſtipui"), fixes his countenance upon the ground and in *ſilence ſtill* (the adjective "tacitus" is repeated) begins to watch for whatever will come next.

The emphasis in this narrative scene on acts of seeing is extraordinary: everybody is watching everybody else. I've already men-

tioned how Lady Philoſophy is seen by the meditating poet. Lady Philoſophy calls the Muses "has scenicas meretriculas," these false stage-images, onstage to be looked at.⁹ And finally, Boethius says he *watches* Lady Philoſophy – the verb used is "exspectare" from the verb *ſpectare*, "to look."

In order to look upon Philoſophy, Boethius looks at the ground ("visuque in terram defixo," lines 46–48). That is a very peculiar detail. The manuscript images I have seen of this encounter (mostly painted well after the twelfth century) show Boethius lying on his back (with his eyes open or closed) and looking up at Philoſophy.¹⁰ But the text says that after Philoſophy banishes the Muses, Boethius turns himself prostrate, face downward, grief-stricken. The only things one can see from such a position are mental.

And indeed, lying prostrate and weeping "in ſilence" (that is, in meditation) became a standard posture in the Middle Ages for all kinds of invention. In the late eleventh century the monk Eadmer aſcribed juſt ſuch behavior to Anſelm during the initial composition of his *Proſlogion* and two centuries later, Bernardo Gui ſaid that Thomas Aquinas did the ſame thing when he composed.¹¹ *Com-punctio cordis*, grief and fear induced to begin the memory work of prayer, is, as we have ſeen, an early element of inventional practice in monasticism. Many of the Jewish prophets had their visions in fear and illneſs; ſome alſo then fell prostrate as a poſture of readineſs to ſee and remember. The prophet Daniel alſo had ſome of his visions in his bed (Daniel 7:1).¹² In pagan literature alſo there are moments of a ſort of *compunctio cordis*. For example, Aeneas, in a famous initiating act of memory work, *weeps* before a picture that moves him to remember and then composes for Dido the ſtory of his flight from Troy.

One of the moſt famous Chriſtian literary ſcenes in which reading, inventive memory work, and viſion "take place" is that of Auguſtine's conversion in the garden in Milan. As deſcribed in *Confessions* VIII.vii–xii.19–30, Auguſtine aſſumes a number of poſtures. He firſt is ſitting, reading "a book of the apoſtle" beſide his friend, Alypius, in anguiſh of thought; as he reads he weeps and expreſſes his mental agony in geſtures, ſuch as tearing his hair and locking his hands over his knees. Then in his mind he ſees Lady Continence (VIII.27) accompanied by a flock of exemplary figures, a literary *pictura* made up of *imagines agentes* within a background *locus* which help him to recall and reſolve his moral dilemmas, his divided will. Still weeping, he ſtands up and throws himſelf prostrate under a figtree. In that

posture he repeats to himself some texts from the Psalms, and then he hears something like a child's voice chanting "tolle, lege," "take, read." At that point, he stands again, goes back to where Alypius is still sitting and picks up (one meaning of *lege*) the book he had left there, in which he reads (the other meaning of *lege*) his fated passage (Romans 13:13-14). Though not often so treated by historians now, the scene as a whole, from start to finish, is a paradigmatic instance of the inventive orthopraxis of reading described by others among his contemporaries. Its steps include the thinker's initial anguish expressed and maintained by his continual weeping, his cognitive use of mental imaging, his repetition of Psalm *formulae*, his prone posture to resolve the crisis in his thinking.¹³

3. COMPOSING IN BED: SOME ROMAN ANTECEDENTS

In monastic practice, the emotionally wrought inventional posture of lying prostrate is linked, by Bernard of Clairvaux among others, to the verse (5:2) from the Song of Songs: "Ego dormio, et cor meum *vigilat*," "I sleep but my heart [my *memoria* and my soul] is awake." In his twenty-third sermon on the Song of Songs, Bernard describes the process of what he calls the mystery of the bedchamber (*secretum cubiculi*), divine contemplation.¹⁴ The first stages are characterized by "restlessness," an active mind disposing matters, arranging things. The language is that of inquiry and composition: invention and disposition, the initial stages of creation. Anselm's biographer Eadmer described the first stage of invention as being like an illness (inquietude is dis-ease).¹⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux writes further that this preparatory stage is

> a remote and secret place, but not a place of repose ... the contemplative who perhaps reaches that place is not allowed to rest and be quiet. Wondrously yet pleasurably [the Bridegroom] wears out the one who is scrutinizing and examining, and renders him restless. Further on, the Bride beautifully expresses this ... when she says that though she sleeps her heart is awake.¹⁶

This languorous, expectant restlessness is what is characterized in the key text, "ego dormio et cor meum *vigilat*," and in the verses ascribed to the Bride which immediately follow it (Song of Songs 5:3-8).

Roman rhetorical practice also associated composition with going to bed. During Cicero's dialogue "On Oratory," the chief speakers,

Marcus Antonius and Lucius Crassus, pause twice (between the books of the dialogue) in order to collect their thoughts on the subjects put to them by the younger members of the party. Marcus Antonius prefers to compose by walking with Cotta in the portico ("in porticu," a structure that provides the *intercolumnia* often recommended as backgrounds for memory work). But Lucius Crassus retires to an invention chamber:

Accordingly, Cotta went on to say, after they had separated before noon to take a brief siesta, what he chiefly noticed was that Crassus devoted all this midday interval to the closest and most careful meditation; and that as he [Cotta] was well acquainted with the look [Crassus] wore when he had to make a speech and with the fixed gaze of his eyes when he was meditating, and had often witnessed this in important lawsuits, on the present occasion he was careful to wait till the others were reposing, when he came to the room [exhedra] where Crassus was reclining on a couch [lectulus] placed there for him, and as he perceived that he was deep in meditation, at once retired; and that almost two hours were spent in this manner without a word being spoken.¹⁷

Notice the "fixed gaze" Cotta comments on: evidently, this memory work takes place with open eyes. The posture of lying on a couch to cogitate also made for some good jokes, that the composer was actually sleeping rather than working. Scholars still complain that their postures for thinking frequently go unrecognized, and are mistaken for boredom or inactivity; would that others were as discreet as Cotta!

The Roman *exedra* was a sort of large bay or recess within a larger space; it could also be a small chamber off a larger area of the house. And at least from the Republican period on, like other rooms in Roman houses it was often painted with images arranged "intercolumnia," in scenes composed between columns, either architectural or painted.¹⁸

So we may think of Crassus as selecting for his invention process a fully decorated place. Notice that the couch has been specially placed there for him. And since the dialogue takes place at his own villa, we can also presume that this *exedra* is one of Crassus' own particular rooms. It has been set up especially for him on this occasion as a place to invent, and a couch has been put there specifically for this purpose. But he would also have had his habitual study or *cubiculum*, used for his business, for conversation with particular friends, for reading and

contemplation. I imagine Crassus' chamber as a room looking rather like the cubiculum from the villa of Fannius Synestor at Boscoreale, shown in Plate 15.¹⁹ That room is just large enough for a single couch. The word Cicero uses, *lectulus*, meant not just a bed for sleeping, but one for conversation and study – perhaps because of its partial homophony with *legere*, *lectus*, “gather by picking” (like flowers) and “read.”²⁰ Its walls are all painted in panels, *intercolumnia*, with fantastic, theatrical architecture, though without any *imagines agentes* within these backgrounds (Plates 15 and 17). It opens off a much larger space, for it is now in the columned Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The original effect was indeed, as many historians have noted, like a stage set – note the theatrical mask in the frame over the mural shown in Plate 17. The murals make a “theater” of locations that, apparently, was assumed to be conducive to intentional meditation – not because it provided subject-matter, but because the familiarity, the route- (and rote)-like quality, of such a patterned series in one’s most tranquil space could help provide an order or “way” for compositional cogitation. This villa also had an *exedra* just next to the cubiculum, whose walls were painted with *faux-marbre* panels with a heavy garland of leaves and fruits draped over them, and fantastical single objects hung from the garland, one per panel: a basket with a snake, a satyr mask, a cymbal.²¹

Such murals can be used to map out one’s topics during invention, somewhat as a mandala-picture does in traditions of Buddhist contemplation.²² They provide “where” to catch hold of the process of thinking something through. It is the very habitual nature of the pictures in one’s most familiar place (one’s house, indeed one’s very bedroom) that makes them inventively fruitful over time for a variety of matters. These matters may or may not have anything to do directly with the subjects of the art. Indeed, an arbitrary association between cueing image and recollected matter can often be mnemotechnically more secure than what is obvious and common. A picture of a Homeric episode (for example) need not cue only literary, formal, and moral associations: one very familiar with it could use it to order his thoughts about anything at all. And by the same token, someone who knew nothing of Homer (or the Bible) could use the same picture to remember whatever he chose. That is the nature of mnemonic association, as was well known. It is personal and often arbitrary, neither universal nor necessary, even within a given culture.²³

Like Cicero, Quintilian assumes that a person needing to compose might choose to go to bed. He describes someone desperate to invent a composition as “[lying] back with eyes turned up to the ceiling, trying to fire [his] imagination by muttering ... in the hope that something will present itself.”²⁴ Equally, he counsels (as will Martianus Capella, much later) that night-time, when silence reigns and distractions are minimized, is the best time for the meditative stages of composing the *res* and premeditated drafts of the *dictamen*, which require intensive concentration.²⁵ Writing with a stylus is better done, he says, in daylight. This advice also reverberates within the poetry of the Song of Songs: “In lectulo meo, per noctes, quaesivi quem diligit anima mea,” “In my bed, through the night, I have sought him whom my soul loves” (3:1).

This tradition of retiring to a small room or recess for the concentrated memory work involved in composing carries on in both early Christian worship and in monasticism. As we have seen in Romuald’s prescriptions and in those of Anselm and Peter of Celle, the meditative trope of withdrawing to a *cubiculum* or *cellula* owes a good deal to these continuing assumptions about the suitable postures, gestures, and places counseled also in ancient rhetoric. “Come now, little man,” wrote Anselm at the start of his meditation on the meaning of faith, “enter the little chamber of your soul.”²⁶ Gesture, posture, and space were thought to be significant, because they help to prepare the mental attitude and mood necessary for concentration.²⁷

Thus, a small space is associated in particular with meditative memory work. In the fourth century, Paulinus of Nola described “four little rooms within the colonnades inserted in the longitudinal sides of the basilica at Nola, [which] offer suitable places for the isolation of those praying or meditating in the law of the Lord.” These also contained memorials of the dead. Each room was also marked by a *titulus*, two lines of verse inscribed over the lintel.²⁸ These spaces were clearly in the tradition of Roman *exedrae*, as “familiar” spaces – for family graves (for example) are there – set apart as places intended for “silent” meditation, yet open to the public space of the large assembly hall.

4. THE VISION OF WETTI: MONASTIC VISIONARY INVENTION

In many examples of monastic visionary literature, the preparatory state of the visionary is recognizably similar to the tropes of composi-

tion in antiquity. Monastic *visiones* have their immediate context in Biblical dreams like that of Peter (Acts 10, discussed as a type of *visio* by Augustine in the twelfth chapter of his commentary on Genesis), and the apocryphal otherworld visions of Peter and Paul, but they are not indebted only to these. The Christian models intersect in monastic dream visions with the orthopraxis of rhetorical invention.

These various traditions can be detected, for example, in the *Vision of Wetti*, composed in 824 by the Benedictine abbot Heito of Reichenau. This is a prose version; a verse version was made by Walafrid Strabo, then a young monk at Reichenau, three years later. *Wetti* is of particular interest because it is so thoroughly monastic in its milieu: it was not written for a lay audience, as were some later examples of the genre like the “*Vision of Tondal*” (1149), but to further a specific clerical cause, the reform movements of the early ninth century associated with Benedict of Aniane and the emperor Louis the Pious.²⁹ So in the case of the *Vision of Wetti* one cannot argue, it seems to me, that it employs “folk features” as popular concessions to an unlearned audience. Indeed, I do not believe that its compositional features are unlearned at all.³⁰

The *Vision of Wetti* is, like all monastic dream poems, a *recollected* vision, a way of “remembering” Heaven and Hell. Brother Wetti becomes ill from drinking a medicinal potion, that the others in his monastery had all received in good health. He vomits repeatedly: think, for instance, of Proverbs 23:8, speaking of a wise man, “The morsel which thou hast eaten thou shalt vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.” Given the commonplace link between remembering and digesting, meditation and rumination, books and eating, this illness from food – including the detail of vomiting – “gathers” *Wetti*’s experience, compositionally, into a set of visionary and prudential tropes, all of which are also tropes of recollection. In addition to the motif, found in both Ezekiel and John’s Apocalypse, of the visionary “eating the book” as a prelude to a vision of heaven, Ezekiel also became ill with a stroke-like paralysis when he experienced his visions; Daniel fainted. *Wetti* becomes so ill that he must be carried on a litter to his cell, which (this is emphasized in the story) shares a common wall with the refectory, where his brothers remain at dinner (monastic meals included reading, so that, as the Rule says, monks’ souls and bellies alike may be fed).

While *Wetti* is resting on his bed *not asleep but with his eyes closed*, he sees the devil in the guise of a monk, who puts him in great fear –

he is then comforted by an angel.³¹ This preliminary vision serves the function of a brief *summa* for the main vision to come. *Wetti* “wakes up” (“*experfactus*”) from his vision (though – notice – he was earlier described particularly as *not asleep*) and then dictates the matter of this first vision to two monks whom he summons to his bed. And, Heito assures us, nothing has been added or subtracted from his account.³² This account of how *Wetti* composed is similar to what Eadmer, Anselm’s biographer, says of Anselm’s composing habits: from the initial composition of his *res* or material by mental “vision,” to *dictamen* (in this case literally “dictating” to the two monks), to inscription on parchment, the *liber scriptus*.³³ And the same compositional stages are observed in order to set down the major vision which follows.

Wetti’s main vision is preceded by great fear brought on by his first vision, the state of “compunction” that every monastic meditation starts with. “Anxious in the immensity of this fear” he falls face downward, prostrate in the shape of the Cross, arms extended.³⁴ It is the common posture of inventive recollection, accompanied by an intense emotion, such as fear or grief (Aeneas weeps; Daniel and Ezekiel are afraid and fall prostrate; Boethius weeps, is afraid, and falls face down – the classical and Jewish traditions in this regard do not seem to be readily distinguishable). There is no question but that the prophetic religious tradition insisted that a more profound state followed upon these gestures: the state of *raptus*, visionary ecstasy. This state is also characterized as non-cognitive and thus *beyond* memory except through the “messenger service” of fictive images, made for human eyes and ears. But the way to that ecstatic state is through the gestures and postures associated with inventive memory work.³⁵

While *Wetti* lies prostrate his fellow monks chant the Penitential Psalms and other readings to him, as they occur to their memories (“*qui sibi ad memoriam occurrent*”). These psalm *formulae* are chanted by his companions (“*decantare*”) to focus and comfort his mind during his distress; recall the practice described by John Cassian, Augustine, and Romuald of Camaldoli, which focusses the mind in meditation in this same manner.

Wetti then gets up and goes to his bed (“*resedit in lectulo*”). He asks that the beginning of Book Four, the “last book,” of Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* be read to him, “to the ninth or tenth page.”³⁶ The specific nature of this request is meant to send us to our Gregory.

There we will not be disappointed, for the passage cited deals specifically with the nature of seeing spiritual, incorporeal matters. The *Dialogues* more generally contain as well many accounts of monastic rememberings of Heaven and Hell. We are clearly intended to remember these literary "seeings," as Wetti does, as the basis (or initiating point) for his own visions. Heito makes very clear the literary basis of Wetti's visions: the Psalms, the prayers, the teachings and stories of Gregory. They do not come from some unanticipated divine seizure, but are built in a consciously remembered, highly "literary" manner, from the matter he has just been reading.

Then, while his two companions withdraw to a corner of his cell, Wetti finally falls asleep, and the same angel as in his preliminary dream comes to conduct him through the sights of Hell and Heaven (both seen as citadels set upon mountains). His angel guide particularly commends him "because in his anguish he gave his full attention as much to chanting the Psalms as to his readings." The angel urges him to continue doing this, and even gives him another reading assignment, frequently to repeat Psalm 118.³⁷

And then the angel raises him up "and led him along a beautiful path" ("duxit per viam . . . praeclaram") to a citadel-like building containing many places in which Wetti views, with angelic commentary on each, images of the evil and the good souls. This map-like configuration of places joined up by paths, among which a guide leads the visionary, with commentary "attached" in each place, is a major organizational commonplace of early medieval otherworld journeys.³⁸ It is an obvious application of the mnemotechnical principle of a *locus* with *imagines agentes*, and the associated compositional principles of *viae* and *ductus*, which I have already explored.

This organizational trope is not limited to visionary literature. Plate 18 shows a picture of Hell copied in the nineteenth century from the late-twelfth-century meditational book *Hortus deliciarum*, which was made by the abbess Herrad of Hohenbourg for her nuns.³⁹ Hell's many places are marked off clearly from one another, each containing images of the devils and the damned: one would find a route through these places during a meditative "remembering." Plate 19 shows another picture of Hell divided similarly into background places, with "active images" collected memorably in each one. This picture, with Hell Mouth a prominent addition to the conventional *Beatus pictura* of Revelation 20:1-10, is from the Cistercian-produced Arroyo Beatus, made about a century after Herrad's picture.⁴⁰

When he awakens, Wetti asks his brothers to write his vision down on wax tablets. His reasons for doing this are instructive:

I fear lest, my tongue being paralyzed, what I have seen and heard will not be revealed, for they were enjoined to me with such a great penalty attaching to my duty to make them public, that I fear if I am accused of remaining silent about this to be condemned without mercy, if by my silence [these sights and sounds] should perish and not become common knowledge through me.⁴¹

So the monks write his visions down promptly in order on wax from Wetti's dictation. Wetti's fear that his tongue will be paralyzed and prevent him from recounting what he saw seems like an odd detail. But it evokes Ezekiel, the prophet who could not speak of his visions except what and when the Lord told him. Such tropes from Ezekiel very often echo within these monastic visions, as we will see elsewhere.

The human prelude to the vision of the otherworld in the *Vision of Wetti*, both in Heito's and in Strabo's versions, is cast entirely in terms of the praxis of monastic meditation. No effort is made to do otherwise, to make it unique and "personal," for example. Its literary genesis and foundations are made obvious; it self-consciously depends upon the remembering of other literature for its authenticity and its "authority." Far from a unique act, it takes pains to announce itself as being fully a product of the conventional ways of monastic visionary invention. The dream, in homage to its literary ancestry, which includes Ezekiel and John, begins with "eating a book" as a literary activity, as inventive memory work: reading, whether silently or aloud, leads to vision, and vision, the activity of composing, results in writing down a finished new literary work.

5. SEEING THE DRAGON: GREGORY THE GREAT'S LIFE OF ST. BENEDICT

The otherworld visions in the Bible, though considered true in the ethical sense, were understood at their "surfaces" – that is, in the ornamental detail of their language – to be cognitive fictions. The rhetorically educated exegetes of the patristic period, like Augustine, Origen, and Jerome, instituted what they called a "spiritual" exegesis, but it is also one which insists that some language is completely fictive. Gregory the Great, for instance, commented that Ezekiel's

vision of the new Jerusalem was not to be understood literally but figuratively, fictively, and took as evidence of this the fact that the measurements given in the text are not completely coherent. In other words, Ezekiel's vision was not to be thought of as in any way a sort of tourist's guide to the New Jerusalem.

One of the most interesting developments in the exegesis especially of Ezekiel's temple vision during the later Middle Ages is the effort to literalize its text. In the later twelfth century Richard of St. Victor, a major visionary writer himself, commented on Ezekiel specifically to refute the assertion of Bede and Gregory that the plan of the temple citadel was irreducibly incoherent, literal non-sense, and thus only to be read "spiritually" and as metaphor (including synecdoche, ekphrasis, metonymy, and so on). As Beryl Smalley said of this literalizing effort, "a scientific movement is really afoot," a movement to objectify and de-trope the ekphrasis, understanding it less as an instance of rhetorical *allegoria* and more as the linguistically "transparent" description of an object.

Smalley associated this exegesis with a Victorine desire to visualize verbal descriptions of Scripture.⁴² But what was at issue, I think, was not whether or not to visualize the words – visualization was always part of the orthopraxis of reading these texts, as we have seen. The issue was rather what sort of "reality" the visionary building should be understood to have, whether it was a wholly "cognitive picture," or was also a picture "of" a factual "object." Monastic sightings, deriving from the orthopraxis of prayerful meditation, occupy an ambiguous ontological ground, at least according to our modern notions of the relative truth status of "real" and "fictional" images. In many of them, their ethical and meditational usefulness is foregrounded to the question of their authority as "objective" truth. Even the having of visions, as the compositional circumstances of the *Vision of Wetti* show, was regarded as a practical cognitive act in Carolingian monastic rhetoric, an effective device for the machinery of thinking, and closely related to the cognitive task of making pictures as "ways" for composing meditation.

The result of this assumption was a weak distinction (from our standpoint) between meditative reading and visionary experience. To demonstrate what I mean by this, I would like to examine some incidents recounted in Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict of Nursia* (composed in 594; Benedict died in 550), one of the most widely read and remembered books in monastic culture. Forming the

second book of Gregory's *Dialogues*, the life of Benedict is the central example in Gregory's effort to demonstrate, during a period of great social turmoil in the West, that Italy also had produced saints worthy to be venerated as much as the monastic founders of the eastern desert. The genre which Gregory picked was that of the dialogue, one of the most familiar types of pedagogical literature, having been used for (among many other famous works) John Cassian's *Conferences*. The speakers are Gregory and his young student, Peter.

There are several incidents of visions in this work, in which the relationships between fictive images and what I suppose we must call "reality," for want of a better word, are perceived in instructive ways. I want to examine three of these now, as presenting instances of *visiones* for cognitive, pedagogical purposes. In each one, as I hope to show, literary materials provide the key to understanding.

One of [Benedict's] monks had given his mind over to wandering and no longer wished to stay in the monastery. Though the man of God faithfully rebuked him, frequently admonished him, in no way would he consent to stay with the community but with obstinate requests insisted that he should be released, until one day, fed up with his constant whining, the venerable father [Benedict] angrily ordered him to depart. As soon as the monk had gone outside the monastery he discovered [inuent] to his horror that a dragon with gaping jaws was blocking his way. And when this same dragon that had appeared to him seemed to want to devour him, trembling and shaking he began to call out in a loud voice, "Help me, help me, for this dragon wants to eat me." His brothers, running up, could not see the dragon at all [draconem minime uiderunt], but they led the trembling and shaking monk back to the monastery. He immediately promised never to leave the monastery again, and from that moment he kept his promise, for because of the holy man's prayers he had seen, standing in his path, the dragon that previously he had followed without seeing it.⁴³

Notice that nobody except the monk sees the dragon. This is emphasized: neither the other brothers who run to his aid, nor Benedict, see the monster. We now would understand this fact to mean categorically that the dragon does not corporally exist. And given that circumstance – that there "is" no dragon – the first thing we moderns would most likely do is to convince the visionary to see what we see, or rather don't see: "pas de dragon," as the *Sources chrétiennes* translator puts it. The modern rejoinder, "nobody else

sees it," would constitute altogether sufficient proof of the dragon's non-reality, proof of the sort we would expect any other person to accede to, and if he did not, his persistence in taking for real what is clearly a figment of his imagination would demonstrate to us his insanity.

Or we might take a symbolizing approach, and understand the dragon as a psychic phenomenon, a "projection" of the monk's anxiety and ambivalence onto the physical landscape. In this case, the dragon could be said to have a mental "reality." But in both these modern attempts to explain the dragon, we would now agree that the dragon certainly has no actual existence – the proof of this, to us, residing in the acknowledged fact in the story, that no one else sees it.

Gregory, however, casts the whole episode in terms of seeing an actual, corporeal thing. There is no suggestion in his account that the monk's seeing is merely an insubstantial apparition. "As soon as" the monk leaves the place of the monastery he "discovers" the dragon blocking his path with jaws open to consume him whole. This causes him, you will notice, to tremble and shake, a detail that is repeated. The whole time that this monk of wandering mind is located outside the monastery, he is in a state of great fear and anxiety, immediately threatened by this dragon that he has "discovered" in his "path." But "immediately" his location changes, and he is back inside the monastery, he is made ethically whole again, because "he had seen" the dragon. The verb is *viderat*, the pluperfect indicative tense – no subjunctive, a hesitation that Gregory could certainly have made had he chosen to do so.

In an effort to be more "religious" in our interpretation, let us call this dragon a "vision." The change of terminology, however, does little to alleviate our scholarly problem. In our psychology, a vision is close kin to, if not quite the same thing as, a figment of the imagination: it still has no corporeal reality. A vision to us differs from an act of imagination only because we define it either as an unmediated intuition sent directly into our mind by a paranormal agent, or as an unconscious and thus uncontrolled effect of a mind-altering experience (usually chemical in nature). But such notions about visions do not fit the case of this incident either.

The language which Gregory uses for the monk's vision is the language of rhetorical invention. It is granted to him, after all, by Benedict's flash of anger (the "prayers" which are causally invoked at the end of the story must include the saintly anger which immediately

precipitates the action). We recognize the emotionally charged state of mind, both of Benedict (in his anger) and of the monk who is its object, to be the first stage of meditation.

There are two locations for this story, separated by a clear boundary, the monastery wall. The monk moves along a "path" (*iter*) from one location to the next (inside to outside to inside again). And he is a monk of erring, mobile, "curious" mind. Strong emotion, the compunction of his fear, concentrates his wandering mind in one single overwhelming picture: the dragon he "discovers" in his path, who opposes any further movement outward from the monastery. The verb used, *invenio*, is mentally charged within this context, especially since the dragon is not "there" as an object.

The monk "invents" the dragon in his path, and he invents it from literary and pictorial sources found in his (or rather, Gregory's) memorial store. For the dragon is remembered from a conflation of texts about the devil, including Revelation 12:9 (where the devil is the great dragon who is thrown to earth from Heaven by Michael during the war in Heaven) and 1 Peter 5:8 (where the devil is a ravening lion who goes about seeking whom he may devour). There also likely existed even at this early date a program of Apocalyptic pictures, made and disseminated within contemplative circles.⁴⁴ So the dragon is presented as a figment of the imagination and as vision at the same time. "Figment" means "fiction," something made up from images in the mind stored there by actual experience (including education), something recollected exactly in the manner in which one was taught to remember Heaven – or in this case, Hell.⁴⁵

Moreover, the vision in question is presented as the seeing of a corporeal beast. The monk saw the dragon which had been following him. Both verbs used, "viderat" and "sequebatur," are indicative, the grammatical mood one uses to speak of physical things that one saw or that did something to one. And the dragon is physical – if one assumes, as Gregory and his contemporaries did, that memories are stored physically in the brain as cognitively functioning images, and that this physiology of cognition can be spoken of meaningfully in corporeal terms, just as the physiology of muscle movement can be. Human thinking, we should recall, was considered to be embodied, in images and pictures and schemes. In this sense the dragon he invented was indeed corporeally seen by the monk, even though no other person saw it.⁴⁶ For Gregory and his audience, the fact that it was "figmented," made up out of fragments of text and pictures the monk

had seen before, does not compromise but actually affirms the dragon's existence. It exists neither psychically nor objectively but socially, within the ethos of Gregory's recognizing and recollecting audience.

6. SEEING THE DEVIL AND GOD: THE AESTHETIC OF MNEME

The reality of these kinds of vision is fictional and ethical, starting from an aesthetic principle that emphasized *mneme* (as in the idiom *mneme theou*, "the memory of God") over *mimesis*, and ethical judgment over epistemology. Another story about a wandering monk will help to define further what I mean by saying this. This monk could not concentrate during prayer, but let his mind wander far and wide. His abbot finally sent him to Benedict who rebuked him for laziness, *stultitia*. (Remember that Bernard of Clairvaux prohibited fantastic images in cloisters also for fear of encouraging laziness, for the bad sort of mental *curiositas* is a form of laziness, a failure to pay attention. Gregory's *Life of St. Benedict*, and his analysis of the origins of mental wandering, was certainly well known to Bernard.)

Having set this wayward monk straight, Benedict returned him to his home abbey, but within days the monk was back to his old habits, to his abbot's despair. Then Benedict himself came to visit, to try to diagnose the monk's problem. During the silent prayer following the communal recitation of psalms (*psalmodium*), Benedict

saw [aspexit] that a kind of little black boy [quidam niger puerulus] was drawing this monk, who was not able to stay at prayer, outside by the hem of his garment. Then Benedict said quietly to the abbot, Pompeianus, and to Maurus, "Do you see who it is that draws this monk out?" "No," they said. "Then let us pray that you also will see [uideatis] whom this monk is following." They prayed for two days, and then Maurus saw but the abbot, Pompeianus, still could not see. The next day, having finished prayers, Benedict, upon leaving the oratory, discovered the monk standing outside, and struck him with a stick on account of the blindness of [the monk's] heart. From that day, the monk did not suffer any more ulterior persuasions from the little black boy, but was able to remain in prayer without moving, and so the ancient enemy did not dare to rule in his thoughts; it was as though [the devil] himself had been struck by the blow.⁴⁷

There are some obvious similarities between this story and the one

we just examined. Again, Gregory uses verbs of corporeal seeing (*videre, aspiceret*), and again he uses the indicative mood entirely – until the very end, where the sudden introduction of the subjunctive construction "ac si . . . percussus fuisset," is immediately forceful by its very difference from the rest of the passage. The difference serves to underscore the real nature of that "sort of little black boy," which Benedict saw, and taught others to see who could not see him at first.

The line, so natural to us now, dividing "imaginary" from "actual" phenomena is instructively permeable in this tale, exactly as it is in the story of the monk who saw the dragon. This vagrant monk, having trouble concentrating on his prayers, is described as suffering from mental wandering: his abbot, Pompeianus, notices that while the others "inclined" in the physical and mental postures of *studium orationis*, the discipline of prayer, this monk goes outside and wanders in his mind over worldly, transitory things. A continuity between the physical postures (being bent over in prayer or standing and walking outside) and what we now think of as separate, the mental "state," is apparent here. The one flows seamlessly into the other, in a dialogue of corporealities of brain and muscles.

Benedict sees the little black boy, but with what we would now insist is "only" his imagination. Again, no one can see the figure but Benedict, at least at first. Both Maurus and then Pompeianus must pray, that is engage in meditative memory work (as Benedict needed to do), in order to "see" the phenomenon that is physically drawing the monk out from the oratory. The event is described as occurring specifically during silent meditation following the *psalmodium*. And in such meditation remembered reading comes into one's mind. Indeed, the "little black boy" has been invented from Benedict's (and Gregory's) memory store. In the *Life of St. Anthony*, Gregory's literary model and an essential monastic text, the devil in the guise of a little black boy, "his appearance matching his mind," tempts Anthony, while he is at prayer, to engage in fornication – that wandering, mental fornication which John Cassian so well described, and which is clearly the moral and cognitive problem of the monk in this story.⁴⁸

Once he has himself learned the real nature of the monk's problem, by connecting it to the remembered story of Anthony, Benedict is able to teach the others. He finds the monk standing as usual outside the place of prayer and hits him with a stick, *virga* – a stick that also should send vibrations through an audience's textured memory

stores. In Gregory's culture, the physical gesture made by Benedict was basic to sound education, placing the monk in the position of a lazy schoolboy, with Benedict as his *grammaticus*. Notice that Benedict does not hit "the little black boy," he hits the monk himself. There is no ambiguity about that. The gesture is not hostile but pedagogical. And only after this entirely corporeal action does Gregory use the subjunctive, when the devil, whom we now can recognize because we have searched our own memory inventory to find our image (stored when we first learned the story) of the wholly literary, entirely fictive little black boy, feels as though he himself had been struck when the monk was hit.

The monk is struck on account of the blindness of his heart, his ethical obtuseness resulting from his un-seeing (badly lighted, ill-stocked, and unresonant) memory. As a fable of seeing, the blindness of the monk is contrasted to the clear-sightedness of Benedict – and what Benedict sees with the eye of his mind is a familiar story in his treasury of memorized things (*memoria rerum*), presented here *summam* to those who, unlike the lazy monk, have the eyes to see and hear it in their own memory stores. Evidently Maurus is a quicker student than is Pompeianus, who must meditate and pray longer in order to find the allusion. But the whole incident is cast in the model of schooling, familiar as a model of monastic life from Cassian and Basil and other early monastic writers; and it is a rhetorical, literary education, one in which the *res*, both *dicta et facta*, which one had learned so painfully and corporeally have all the actuality of the blows from rods and rulers which helped to imprint them in the first place in the matter of one's brain. The devil, of course, having no body, can only feel these blows "as if" – and also cannot learn a lesson.

The dragon and the little black boy are examples of Gregory (and Benedict) recollectively "seeing" their reading via cognitive-memorial images, that are made and stored at the invitation of the rhetorical *enargeia* in the words and "pictures" of other works. In fact, Gregory sees Benedict's life almost wholly in terms of what he has already "seen" in his prior reading – for, as scholars have noted, nearly every incident in the biography has a parallel in the lives of the prophets (Moses and Elisha especially), apostles, and the desert saints like Anthony. The *Life of St. Benedict* is an immensely rich network of texts (I include in the word "texts" as I am using it here the graphic arts programs that Gregory may also have known). And is it not a

seeing the devil and you: the awareness of himself
true observation of our actual human condition that we know much of the world through what we have read and heard? And since we must "see" what we read in order to know it, why wouldn't those images be what we see when we recollect our reading in order to understand a new situation? The dragon and the little black boy, in short, are real, as real as reading and knowing and judging.

The visions in Gregory's *Life of St. Benedict* all have a pedagogical purpose. This is in keeping, of course, with the nature of the dialogue genre itself, designed, as I observed, for learning and reflective conversation, and not as "objective" history. In this process, the focus is on Gregory's pupil, Peter, just as in the accounts of the visions of the two wayward monks the focus is on their pedagogical effectiveness. And as successful pedagogy, educating the citizens of the city of God, they make masterful use of many tools in the craft of rhetoric.

Even the most rapturous of the saint's visions is made a focus for Peter's continuing lessons in the way of meditation, rather than merely cited as a proof of Benedict's sanctity or evidence of his "psychological make-up." Gregory's purpose remains pedagogical and rhetorical: to show Peter the final stage of meditative praxis, when the mind, absorbed in God, is raised up, enlarged and expanded until it can see the whole universe at a glance, and looking down from above, sees how small the world really is. Gregory's description of the vision should not, I think, be taken as simple mimesis. It invokes the ancient literary device of the philosopher's flight or *kataskepos*, pressed into hagiographical service.⁴⁹ Nor is this the only literary matter shaping this very carefully crafted account.

Benedict was watching and praying alone before the night office in his room on the uppermost floor of the tower of his monastery, his companion Servandus one floor below and the other monks in their dormitory, when the saint suddenly saw all the world as though gathered up in a single sun's ray, and the soul of one of his fellows carried to heaven in a fiery ball, like Elijah:

When the time of silence had come, venerable Benedict went up to his chamber on the second storey of the watchtower, his dean Servandus was located in the one below, which was connected to his by stairs. There was a larger building facing this tower, in which the disciples of both rested. The man of God, Benedict, urgently keeping watch [instans uigiliis] while his brothers yet slept, had anticipated the hour of the night office.⁵⁰

Notice how carefully Benedict is positioned in this scene in relation

to all the other actors. Servandus has "located" himself in the *locus* just below but connecting with Benedict's chamber, just as Benedict has located himself in the tower. "Down" and "up" are the key spatial orientations in Gregory's shaping of the story. Benedict is in the top of the monastery watchtower, as his disciples sleep, facing him below in their dormitory.

Benedict's watchfulness is underscored. So is the motif of sight. Every detail of this carefully envisioned scene invites rich harmonies with the *dicta et facta memorabilia* which Peter should carry in his mind: the watchmen and watchtowers of the Psalms and Isaiah and the Song of Songs, the shepherds at the nativity, the watchfulness of Jesus over his sleeping disciples, the lives of other saints. Even the seemingly mundane staircase, *ascensus*, connecting the lower to the higher storeys, presages the moment to come – for those who remember the story of Jacob's dream. This is a scene carefully located and colored within the established ways of meditative prayer.

Gregory continues:

While he was standing at his window and beseeching almighty God, all at once, as he was reflecting in the dead of the night, he saw a light from on high put to flight all the shadows of night, and to shine with such splendor that the light which radiated among the shadows seemed to vanquish the day. And another wonderful thing followed in his sight, for, as he told it himself afterwards, the whole world was drawn up [adductus est] before his eyes as though it were gathered up [collectus] in one ray of the sun.⁵¹

The *mira res*, the event wondrous to look upon, is sudden, yet neither unconscious nor unprepared. The careful locating of the saint, temporally (in relation to the canonical hours) and spatially (in relation to the rest of his brothers), is a most striking feature of this account. Only by following the path, the monastic way, the implication seems to be, can the goal of *visio Dei* be achieved, however momentarily.⁵² Benedict is engaged in meditation, *respiciens*, "looking back" over matters reflectively and recollectively. And the marvelous sight itself incorporates the rhetorical and mnemonic principle of *brevitas*, brevity for the purpose of copious "dilation," the word Gregory uses.⁵³ This is the lesson which Peter, with Gregory's help, is able to discover in Benedict's wondrous sight. As one's mind enlarges, *dilatatus est*, in holy contemplation, the whole world becomes "gathered up," *collectus*, into a single ray of intense light. "Gathering" is a favored word in later monasticism for recollective,

meditative reading, undoubtedly because of the *etymologia* (philologically correct in this case, for *colligere* was actually fashioned from *con + legere*) that links it to *legere*, the verb meaning both "gather up" and "read."⁵⁴

7. (RE)BUILDING THE NEW JERUSALEM: CONSTRUCTION BY VISION

The literary, recollective nature of such pedagogy by vision is apparent also in the example I would like to examine next. This incident in the *Life of St Benedict* is a bit different from the ones we have just looked at, for it is not an incident of literary allusion expressed as encountering an image remembered from reading. Rather, it equates a visionary image with bodily presence, and since it is also an early and influential instance of a type of "construction dream" that became conventional in later monasticism, it is worth pausing over. Well-known examples of such dreams include the vision of St. Aubert (eighth century) for the building of Mont-Saint-Michel, and the vision of Gunzo (twelfth century) for the building of a larger monastery at Cluny, a dream I want to examine in detail in my next chapter.

Benedict was asked to found a new monastery on the estate of a nobleman, near Montecassino. He sent a founding group of his monks, promising them that on a particular day he would come to show them where and how to build the various components of the new monastery. Before dawn on the appointed day, both the abbot and prior of the new foundation had a dream in which Benedict appeared and showed them where and how to build each place in the new establishment:

During that very night, before the promised day dawned ... the man of God appeared to them in their dreams [in somnis], and showed them plainly where they should build each place [of the monastery]. And when each of them had risen from their sleep [a somno], they told each other what they had seen. But not entirely giving full faith and credit to that vision [visioni], they continued to wait for the man of God, as he had promised to come in person. And when the man of God did not come at all on the appointed day, they went to him very perturbed, saying: "We expected, father, that you would come, as you promised, and show us where we should build what, and you did not come." He replied, "What are

you saying? Did I not come as I had promised?" And they said, "When did you come?" And he replied, "Did I not appear to each of you as you were sleeping and mark out each building location? Return, and as you heard [audists, though some *manuscripts* read uidists] by means of your dream [per uisionem], so construct each building of your monastery."⁵⁵

This story seems quite clearly to equate an image mentally seen with corporeal presence, a kind of saintly teleconferencing in which Benedict's dream appearance is regarded as having the same cognitive authority as a physical visit. From the monks' failure to recognize the equivalence of the two kinds of manifestation, it is apparent that it was problematical to suppose that dream images and physical visitations were always the same.

Benedict however rebukes the monks' hesitation in this instance. He does not claim – and this needs to be underscored – that he has indeed come physically to them. What he promised was that he would come and show them where and how to build: "et die illo ego uenio, et ostendo uobis in quo loco . . . aedificare debeatis." And this is just what he did. What Benedict objects to about his monks is not that they can't tell the difference between a *visio* and a *somnium*.⁵⁶ Nor does either he or Gregory explain his visit as an instance of bodily extromission or telekinesis, though both they and their audiences probably held some belief that such things were possible, at least for saints. What Benedict criticizes the monks for is being unable to make the remembered literary connections that authenticate and originate the motif of giving construction plans for divinely sanctioned buildings via a vision – the prime originators being Moses, Ezekiel, and St. John.

After hearing this story, Peter asks Gregory exactly the question that we moderns would be inclined to ask: how was the saint able to travel such a distance in order to give his reply to those sleeping, so that they recognized and heard him in their vision?⁵⁷ Gregory does not respond by trying to give a scientific explanation, of the sort we would insist on – he observes only that the spirit is more mobile than the body.

The real explanation of this story comes when the student, Peter, recalls the most apt set of Biblical parallels to the story. Like a good teacher, Gregory gives him a clue: he reminds Peter that the prophet Habakkuk was corporeally transported from Judea to Chaldea in order to dine with the prophet Daniel (Daniel 14:32–38): "If Habakkuk could cover such a distance bodily in an instant to take a meal to his

fellow-prophet, what sort of miracle would it be if father Benedict were to go in spirit and tell what was necessary to the spirits of his brothers while they were in a quiet state [quiescentium]?"⁵⁸ The verb chosen, *quiescere*, suggests the "quiet" mental state of contemplation, most appropriate to *visiones*. But the monks' state is ambiguous, since the word *somnus* ("sleep") is used earlier. As we have seen, such ambiguity persists in later accounts of monastic visions.

One puzzle has been solved only to put forth another. For the reference to a prophet in Chaldea sets another enigma to Peter and even more importantly to us. Neither Peter nor the monks reflect on the building vision itself, which is, after all, the main point of the story. They each get distracted by how and in what manner Benedict could make his appearance. Notice that Gregory does not mention the obvious and closest parallel to the vision: Ezekiel's sight (while he was in exile in Chaldea) of the new Jerusalem, measured out for him with a measuring-rod, building by building, by the man with a brazen countenance, so that by remembering these measurements he could reconstruct the city after the Return (Ezekiel 40). This is a planned "oversight" of the same sort as Prudentius' failure to cite by name the obvious master-text for *Psychomachia*, the verses from Ephesians about putting on the whole armor of God. It is not mentioned so that a reader can invent it on his own, thereby giving his mind both delight and instruction.

Gregory answers the novice Peter's curious question by a curious answer, giving him the farthest-out, the most obscure, link of a chain that should lead him to the far more important, central matter of the story he has just been told. It is an example of what Peter of Celle, so much later, calls "religious curiosity," the sort of literary puzzle-solving that can lead to ethical good as well as serving as a test of one's ingenuity and "character." Habakkuk having been set on Peter's recollective fishing-line (as a parent might bait a child's hook), it is then up to Peter – and to us – to reel in the rest of the fishes: Daniel (Habakkuk's host in Chaldea), Ezekiel (via the keyword "Chaldea," and also via Daniel's association with apocalyptic visions), Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem, John's vision of the Heavenly City – and all of these "things" linked together finally in the "new Jerusalem" trope, that was also implicated (pleated or enfolded) in the buildings and meditative life of every monastery. The obvious but distracting conundrum of telekinesis "conceals" the far more significant "secret" of the story.⁵⁹

I suspect that some readers will consider my having discovered a reference to Ezekiel in this exchange to be "far-fetched" (it is, literally) and thus to be "stretching" the meaning of the text. But this is to strain at gnats while missing the substance – exactly the sort of thing Gregory rebukes in Peter and in the monks of the original incident. The text of Ezekiel is the "inventor," or "starting-off place," with which Benedict's puzzled monks should have associated their visionary experience in order to recognize and judge the authenticity of their own construction dream. Their dullness, like Peter's curiosity about the physics of telekinesis, is rebuked and corrected by Gregory's reminder of the story of Habakkuk's visit to Daniel. Gregory is too aware of his readers' cognitive need to be puzzled and delighted simply to give us all The Answer (and thereby encourage tendencies towards mental laziness). At the end of the episode, Peter assures Gregory that his mental doubt has been wiped clean by his master's reply; we can only wonder still whether he has indeed "gotten it," or whether this is only the temporary triumph of a still befogged mind that, by solving the minor issue, has missed the obvious.

8. THE MNEMOTECHNIC OF 'PICTURE'

Aeneas, washed ashore at Carthage after a great storm, comes unseen into the city and into the temple to Juno which Dido has erected "rich in gifts and the presence of the goddess" (*Aeneid* I. 447). Here, to his amazement, he sees a series of pictures on its walls, each showing a scene of the battle for Troy:

[he scans each object,] while he marvels at the city's fortune, the handicraft of the several artists and the work of their toil, he sees in due order the battles of Ilium, the warfare now known famously throughout the world, the sons of Atreus, and Priam, and Achilles, fierce in his wrath against both. He stopped and weeping cried: "What land, Achates, what tract on earth is now not full of our sorrow? ... So he speaks, and, *groaning often*, grazes his soul upon the insubstantial picture [animum pictura pascit inani].⁶⁰ (My emphasis)

Notice that Aeneas weeps. His memory process is pricked by the act of weeping, and this in turn enables him to recollect, and, recollecting, to let his soul graze and then, after inventing and composing here, to tell his story to Dido later at the material feast.

The verb Virgil chose, *pascere*, "to graze," is an allusion as well to the rumination of meditating. But if the act of weeping and groaning – *compunctio cordis*, the emotional trigger – is necessary to invent, so too are the *picturae* he beholds, the orderly series of scenes of Troy, from one to another of which Aeneas walks. The action is presented by Virgil as an actual event, but it mirrors the practice, commonplace to Virgil and his audience, of rhetorical composition located in the pictures of *memoria*.

Memorial cultures are also story-telling cultures, and their typical picture-artifact is also a story-artifact. The artifact makes present – in memory – the occasion for a composition, the "starting-point" of recollection, as these mural paintings do for Aeneas, as his shield recollects the lives of the Greeks to Achilles. The careful technique of the artificer is often stressed when these "pictures" are described, for the craft of memory is being addressed. It is surely no coincidence that the early fifth-century (BC) poet Simonides of Ceos, supposed "inventor" of the ancient mnemonic art of picturing images in backgrounds, was also identified (by Plutarch and others) with the maxim that poetry is verbal painting, painting silent poetry.⁶¹

A number of works, both Roman and medieval, begin with a picture, and the technique has acquired a name, although the one used by scholars is modern, *Bildeinsatz*.⁶² *Bildeinsatz* starts off a work by addressing the memory of both the fictional onlooker and the reader/hearer with a summary of the principal "matters" of the work to follow, seen as a set of painted or sculpted, embroidered or mosaic images. Cicero's *De natura deorum* begins with a cosmic "picture"; so, far more elaborately, does Martianus Capella's treatise on the liberal arts, with its picture narrative of *The Wedding of Mercury and Philology*. Lady Philosophy's robe is another example; so too is the intricate beginning picture of Dame Nature in Alan of Lille's Boethian poem, *The Complaint of Nature*. The technique is common still in the fourteenth century: I described in *The Book of Memory* friar Robert Holcot's *picturae*, which he says he placed mentally on the *initial* of verses in Hosea in order to remember the themes of the commentary, clearly as his invention tool for sermons and lectures involving these texts.⁶³ And *pictura* is commonly used also as a synonym of *mappa*, "map."

In several texts, a compositional *pictura* takes the form of a vision seen by the author, as it does in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. A good example is the beginning of Prudentius' account of the

martyrdom of St. Cassian of Imola (not to be confused with John Cassian), a Christian grammarian whose martyrdom consisted in being stabbed to death in the arena by the pens of pagan school boys. In this poem, the nature of the *pictura* which Prudentius sees is somewhat unclear. The poet depicts himself as a pilgrim visiting the saint's tomb-shrine. He lies prostrate before it, weeping:

As I tearfully recalled my wounds and all the trials of my life and pin-pricks of suffering, I raised my face to heaven, and opposite me stood [a] portrait [imago] of the martyr, [painted] in brilliant colors [fucus colorum picta], bearing a thousand wounds, his whole body torn, and displaying flesh ripped with tiny puncture marks. Around him, a pitiful sight, countless boys pierced his limbs with strokes from their small styli, with which they were accustomed to engrave their wax tablets and take down in dictation their school-master's lesson.⁶⁴

"The picture recalls the story," "historiam pictura refert" (line 19), as the verger of the shrine says. We recognize in the sequence of Prudentius' meditation the common monastic meditative way, the visionary's *compunctio* (literally echoed in the picture of the martyr's pierced body) leading to weeping and lying prostrate, and then lifting up his face towards Heaven, seeing the saint's painted picture, the action which starts off his composition.

Saint's shrines, like some of the Jerusalem pilgrimage sites, could be outfitted with paintings. Perhaps one of these is what Prudentius saw here. On the other hand, he may well have seen the martyr in the way that visitors to Babylas' tomb saw the very face of that saint. Prudentius is as uninterested in the "scientific" nature of what he saw as Gregory is in that of the monk's dragon or Boethius is in that of the apparition of Lady Philosophy. It is rather the story and ensuing meditation which his seeing recalls that is significant. The picture of St. Cassian does not merely "help" Prudentius to meditate, it *enables* his mind, setting it in the right inventive "tracks."

9. THE PICTURE AS COGNITIVE MACHINE

In her essay on how visual aids were used in ancient education, Eva Keuls has described how the initiating figure of *Bildsinsatz* was used first in the deliberative homilies of Pythagorean and Stoic orators. It is not hard to see the relationship of rhetorical picture-making to the textbook advice to an orator to fashion *imagines agentes* grouped

narratively as scenes within background places, whose relative positions cue the order and subjects of his composition.

Other scholars also have connected the use of mental imaging for pedagogical purposes with these same two philosophical schools, which had so great an influence on Hellenistic education.⁶⁵ But the figure is not confined solely to childhood education. It is a trope of rhetorical invention (though not defined separately in ancient handbooks) that gained great importance in the monastic way of meditation as the initiating picture or vision upon which a meditator focussed his attentive memory work.

Bildsätze have the rhetorical quality called *enargeia*. Often the figure is also conflated with ekphrasis, the description of a building or other artifact (such as the Temple of Juno in *Aeneid* I). Ekphrasis, as we have seen, provides a meditative occasion within a work; it slows down, even interrupts, the established *ductus* of a work, and often sends a reader in a new direction. But narrowly defined (which is a good place to start, though I wish to broaden the definition shortly), a *Bildsinsatz* differs from an *ekphrasis* in two ways. It is at the beginning of a work (or of a major division or change of subject within a long work), a trope of the introduction whereas ekphrasis can occur at any point. And because of its location, it acts as the elementary foundation, the *dispositio* of what follows. Introductory rhetorical pictures serve as orienting maps and summaries of the matters which are developed within the work. They provide its *memoria rerum*. Every once in a while they are found at the end of a work, in the position which we now expect; but the beginning is far more common, probably because a reader can hold the picture in mind as a way of recognizing the major themes of what follows (one needs always to keep in mind that reading, particularly before the fifteenth century, was most often reading aloud, though this is not a critical point for my purposes here).

Placement is crucial. The images' relative locations within the picture arrangement ring changes on the three basic modes of associative recollection: they may be "the same," they may be "opposite," they may be "neighborly" or "contiguous."⁶⁶ In memory technique, these adjectives refer primarily to an image's relative position in a common scene, rather than to a conceptual relationship. And their placements set up the associative paths and chains onto which one "hooks up" – in various directions – additional material from these foundational images: hence, as we have seen, the

basic metaphor in the word *error*, a matter of not minding the path and so getting lost.

Secondly, the orienting picture may be, but need not be, a work of art. Whereas ekphrasis always purports to be a meditative description of a painting, sculpture, or the façade of a building, the initiating compositional *pictura* can also describe a schematized landscape in the form of a world map, or a figure like Lady Philosophy, or just about any of several *formae mentis* in common monastic use: a ladder, a tree, *rotae*, a rose-diagram. The rhetorical figures called ekphrasis and *Bildeinsatz*, in other words, are types of the cognitive, dispositive topos called *pictura*, which is the more general term. The most general terms of all for this cognitive instrument would include words like *ratio* and *schema*.

Maps were also commonly called *picturae*. As P. Harvey has written of them, the maps we find in medieval books (see Plate 1) and in large parchment charts "are best understood as an open framework where all kinds of information might be placed in the relevant spatial position."⁶⁷ Isidore of Seville defines a picture as "an image expressing the semblance [speciem] of some thing" which, when seen again, will recall to mind some matter that one wants to remember. The "good" of a picture, its underlying aesthetic principle, is thus understood in terms of its role in cognitive function: a picture is for remembering, and its value is dependent on how it serves this function. *Pictura*, Isidore continues, is etymologically related to *pictura*, that is, an image for the purpose of shaping or fixing something in the mind.⁶⁸

Two things in particular stand out in Isidore's account of a picture. It is, he says, distinct to pictures that they have colors, including lights and shadows. These various colors are the fictive order of a work, what fashion it into a "picture." Though it is not a term he uses, rhetorical *ductus* is assumed here, the movement through the order of a picture marked out by means of its colors, as the verbal colors move one through a speech. A picture's colors do not simulate nature, but are conceived of "diagrammatically," as indeed they are in medieval *mappaemundi*. For example, the Red Sea was often painted as an oblong red shape, as it is in the Saint-Sever Beatus (Plate 1). This served as an immediately evident orienting device, whose red color on the map is not an attempt to show the actual color of the water, but is a rebus of its name, as well as being (as all agreed) the most memorable of colors.⁶⁹

And also, like words, pictures are cognitive in nature; their degree of mimetic realism is emphatically not a quality of importance to Isidore. Pictures are constructions, fictions, like all ideas and thoughts. And in the same way as words, pictures are made for the work of memory: learning and meditation. *Pictura* is a cognitive instrument, serving invention in the same manner as words do.

The assumption that learning requires the use of picturing was a venerable one in Hellenistic pedagogy: every historian of Roman education has remarked on it. But Eva Keuls has noted that, with all the literary evidence surviving of a "visually evocative technique" for starting off and organizing an oration or a treatise, there is only one clear piece of evidence of the use of a visual aid in ancient oratory. The matter to which scholars have mostly directed their inquiries is whether the common use of verbal pictures also implies the use of material aids to teaching and learning, sometimes realized as wall charts, but more often as the murals, mosaics, sculptured friezes, columns, and elaborately articulated façades that were found everywhere in Roman towns.⁷⁰

For example, the famous marble Iliac frieze in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, dating from the first century, is but the most commonly discussed of Roman reliefs and paintings that recall and retell stories. The organization of this composition follows some familiar mnemonic organizational principles: the center of the composition is occupied by a scene of the destruction of Troy, as it is the "principle," the nodal event of the story web. Around this center are scenes that epitomize the matter of the *Iliad*, book by book, but with emphasis placed upon the *first* book. An epitome of this initial book, in seven scenes, runs in a continuous register along the top, above the central "story" of Troy's destruction and Aeneas' escape. Books 2-12 of the *Iliad* (now missing) ran in descending order along the left side, and 13-24 ascended along the right side. So, one would read this tablet from left to right across the top; look left and down, and then right and up, in a more-or-less counter-clockwise movement.⁷¹

This pride of place given to the center in mnemotechnical pictures carries through the Middle Ages: for example, a number of people who describe their technique of making a mental "picture" for their composition begin with a central image. In Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca Noe mystica* this is a square in the center of his mental "page," the square (derived from the square shape of the Heavenly City) which forms the building unit for the rest. Much later, Bishop

Bradwardine writes in his instructions for constructing mnemonic “scenes” that one should “look” first to the central image as the “starting-point,” and then to the right and to the left, returning each time to the center, in order to recall the order of the cueing images.⁷²

There is much debate as to who might have used such an artifact as the Capitoline tablet. Earlier scholars thought it might have been made for schoolboys as an *aide-mémoire*. This suggestion has now been rejected by some scholars, perhaps too quickly. Richard Brilliant suggested instead that it was a “Classics Comics” of its day, made “for a vulgar clientele that cared little for learning.”⁷³ He based this conclusion on the fact that the scenes depicted alter the “pace” and “saliency” of the original text, producing plot “distortions.” This would be a handicap, if the tablet were designed to “illustrate” in the modern sense, or to “substitute” for the text in the way that a “Classics Comic” sought to do. But if it were designed as a set of reminder-cues, made to order for a patron who knew the text already but wanted the picture summary as a meditational/mnemonic instrument, its “distortions” need not be seen as only vulgar: they may represent mnemonically significant choices for the patron.

The debate among Roman historians over the use of this object, and many others like it, seems to me to incorporate a flawed assumption about the relationship of images and texts – that picture books are for the textually unsophisticated, either children or vulgarians. Richard Brilliant himself contradicts his suggestion that the Capitoline tablet was made for a vulgar audience when he analyzes the central scene of Troy’s destruction, which is dominated by multiple appearances of Aeneas (a minor figure in Homer), culminating in his taking ship for Italy. As Brilliant says, the *Iliad* narrative is by this means “charged with a substratum of Roman iconography” that transforms it “into a preface to Roman history” consistent with contemporary Augustan aspirations. The Iliac frieze thus both recalls *summam* a text already known and invites further reflection, a sort of tropology of pagan history.⁷⁴

An artifact like the Iliac tablet would not have been used to best effect by students memorizing the text for the first time. They did that by other means, including chanting and bodily postures, perhaps like the davening one still sees in rabbinical and Koranic schools. Nor can it reasonably “substitute” for knowing the epic poem, for the whole point was to be able to quote and recognize the words.

But a summarizing picture could have value for teachers and others

who already knew the words but might usefully wish to be reminded of where they were in the overall story by means of visual cues, a sort of map. In a long text with many divisions and episodes, like the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* – and also the Pentateuch and other Biblical material – such a finding tool could be quite useful for someone who had occasion to interpret these texts.

It has been claimed that mnemotechnical principles were used in constructing the program of *picturae* of the Utrecht Psalter, made in the ninth century.⁷⁵ Scholars have hesitated to accept this explanation fully, however, precisely on the grounds I have discussed here in respect to the Iliac tablet. But if the manuscript were designed for pedagogical and reading use (which seems probable, since it is not lavishly colored), it would have been used most probably in situations where students already knew the syllables of the Psalms by rote. The pictures cue the chief phrases of each psalm for further commentary and exegesis, and would probably be more useful for inventing meditative homilies and prayers than they would to someone just learning the sounds of the words for the first time. In monastic culture, after all, the Psalms were one of the bases of one’s life-long memory work.

10. PICTURA: A TROPE OF MONASTIC RHETORIC

The initiating convention which had no distinguishing name in ancient rhetoric was sometimes given one by Carolingian writers. It was called, unsurprisingly, *pictura*, a usage perhaps influenced by the Patristic Latin idiom I examined earlier, (*de*)*pingere in corde*.⁷⁶ A *pictura* is a composition of images, either actualized in a visual medium or described in words for the eye of the mind. For instance, this is how, in the eighth century, Bede described some of the treasures brought to England from Italy by Benedict Biscop, to be installed on the walls of St. Peter’s church in the monastery at Wearmouth:

[Benedict Biscop] brought home pictures of holy images [picturas imaginum sanctorum] to equip [ad ornandum] the church of blessed Peter the apostle, which he had built; namely, the image [imagine] of the blessed mother of God . . . and also of the twelve apostles, by means of which he might gird the vault of the said church with a construction of [painted] wood-panels [which] led [ducto . . . tabulato] from wall to wall; images of the Gospel story with which he could furnish [decoraret] the south wall of the church; images of the