Abstract: As depictions of the Holy Spirit appearing to Christ’s followers and filling them with speech, images of Pentecost engage critical themes in medieval visual culture: the relationship between image and epigraph (titulus), and the visualization of ruach (pneuma, spiritus) and the senses. This article examines two miniatures of Pentecost in Ottonian manuscripts, the Codex Egberti (ca. 980) and the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert (late tenth century). These case studies show two differing visual interpretations of Pentecost in the context of the Ottonian debate concerning “spiritual seeing” and demonstrate the ways that artists invoked the senses other than sight in order to create images of mystical experience.

Keywords: Pentecost, Sensorium, Ottonian miniatures, Tituli, Wind, Synaesthesia

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This article focuses on two miniatures representing Pentecost, on folio 91 of the Codex Egberti (ca. 980) and on folio 29 verso of the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert (late tenth century). The decision to treat the two miniatures together is due to the contrast in how they treat the iconographic theme. By examining the differing visual interpretations of these images of the Pentecost, this article will contribute to current research questions about medieval visual culture: the debate concerning “spiritual seeing” during the Ottonian period, the relationship between image and epigraph (titulus), and the visualization of ruach (pneuma, spiritus) and the senses. Because the theme of Pentecost is particularly receptive for these research questions, the case studies from the Codex Egberti and the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert are exemplary for the broader interdisciplinary issues of the visual medium and the senses.

The Pentecost iconography in the Codex Egberti (ca. 980): vita communis

The Codex Egberti (ca. 980) was commissioned by Egbert, who was archbishop of Trier from 977 until his death in 993 and was also chancellor to Emperors Otto I and Otto II. Its political and artistic influence was considerable. The manuscript is important in the history of Western art on account of its immense wealth of miniatures. Produced in the renowned Ottonian workshop of Reichenau, the codex contains 60 full-page miniatures showing the life of Christ in accordance with the Gospel accounts. The final miniature in the collection represents Pentecost. The codex is not only important for the quantity of images, but also very much for its formal and iconographical innovations. The miniaturists are exceptionally skilled at cutting through to the essentials: their compositions are always clearly readable, the background is kept abstract and the figures and motifs are reduced to the minimum needed to convey the narrative. Occasionally the artists also use epigraphs and tituli. They give the figures emotion in the play of hands and give them life in the subtle exchange of glances. These qualities form the basis for the formal and iconographical innovations of the Codex Egberti.

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Pentecost with communis vita, Codex Egberti, Stadtbibliothek, Trier, ms. 24, fol. 103, ca. 980
The Pentecost miniature on folio 103 illustrates the pericope for *Dominica Sancta Pentecostes* (John 14, 23–31) on folio 102 verso, but is iconographically based on Acts 2, 1–11 (Fig. 1). The Gospel cycle thereby comes to include a representation actually based on a different book of the Bible. The epigraphs read as follows: 1. *Spiritus hos edocens. Linguis hic ardet et igne. 2. Communis vita. 3. Qua causa tremulis conveniunt populi.* 1. The Spirit teaches them. It burns in tongues and fire. 2. Common life. 3. Which is why the people come together trembling.

The miniature’s composition is divided into two parts; in the upper area, the apostles are housed in a seven-arch arcade. In line with the iconographic tradition, Peter is at the centre. Acts locates the event of Pentecost in a dining space. The benches that are integral parts of the architectural setting, however, show affinities with the iconography of council meetings. Pentecost becomes a prototype for the learned assembly of the Church and its representatives. The number of arcades, seven, refers to the number in the architectural setting, however, thereby comes to include a representation actually based on Acts 2, 1–11 (Fig. 1).

In blue and green alternate, Pentecost containing the qualities of both hope and glory. Furthermore, by using these colour conventions the miniaturist suggests the meeting of the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem, *Jerusalem terrestris and Jerusalem caelestis*.

The lower area of the composition mirrors the upper row with nine figures in a semicircle. They refer to verse 14: “Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say’”. The men stand on mounds of bare earth “outside” the architecture. The hand gestures – opened towards the viewer – convey the themes of speaking and amazement. The contrast between upper and lower, between architecture and nature, reinforces the idea that a New Jerusalem is being founded: the apostolic “architectural” *Ecclesia* contrasts with the as yet “uncultivated” land of the pagans.

At the centre is an octagonal well or pond containing sixteen golden balls or discs (coins? hosts?). The epigraph *vita communis* probably refers to Acts 4, 32–35 on the holding of possessions in common:

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

The *vita communis* refers to the institution of the ecclesiastical community through the Pentecostal event, but in this miniature could also refer specifically to monastic communal life. It is notable that Peter wears a tonsure. There is, furthermore, a historical argument. In 930 a reform began in the monastery of Gorze, in the diocese of Metz, central to which was the monastic *communis vita*. The Codex Egberti may have come under the influence of these new emphases.

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5 See also Chavannes-Mazel, “Paradise and Pentecost” (n. 3), pp. 133–134.


9 Compare the Echternach Pericones Book, c. 1000, Bremen, Staatsbibliothek, Hs/b. 21, fol. 72v (Der Egbert Codex; Fig. 1.15); *Sacramentary of St. Gereon*, c. 1000, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 817, fol. 77 (Chavannes-Mazel, “Paradise and Pentecost” [n. 3], Fig. 6); Echternach Pericones Book, 12th century, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. 9426, fol. 104v; Chavannes-Mazel, “Paradise and Pentecost” (n. 3), Fig. 8.
The font-like pond in the centre of the composition alludes unmistakably to iconographic representations and architectural ground plans of baptismal fonts and baptisteries. In the early-medieval narrative and visual traditions the font naturally had an extremely rich meaning that extended from the complex of symbols surrounding baptism (by the Holy Spirit) to the synecdochal evocation of Paradise and the Heavenly Jerusalem /Fig. 2/. “Flumen (of paradise) est spiritus sanctus” says Ambrose (c. 340–397) in his De Spiritu Sancto 10. The Sacramentarium Leonianum (seventh century) includes prayers for the benedictio fontis on Easter Saturday 11. At the beginning, the Holy Spirit is invoked and asked to wash away all that is impure, all “stains of sin”. “Hic omnium peccatorum maculae deleantur”. The baptismal font becomes the fountain of life, the regenerative water and purifying stream that comes from the wound in Christ’s side (“sit fons vivus, aqua regenerans, unda purificans qui te una cum sanguine de latere suo produxit”). The one who is baptized is compared with one reborn of an immaculate womb: “ut, sanctificatione concepta, ab immaculato divini fontis utero in novam renata creaturam progenies caelestis emergat”.

With its golden “coins” that resemble eucharistic hosts, the baptismal font in the Codex Egberti is related to the eucharistic fountain or the fons pietatis 12. The concept of the fons pietatis was already mentioned by Gregory the Great (540–604). He compares Christ with a source of mercy in which we, sinners, must immerse ourselves in order to wash away our sins 13. In the seventh-century Gelasian Sacramentary, Christ is venerated as the fons pietatis that must save us from our sins 14. John Chrysostom (354–407) says that the water (from the wound in Christ’s side) is the image of salvation that springs from the body of Christ. The body of Christ is like a source of eternal life, says the Church Father 15. An inscription that was applied to the Lateran Baptistery some time around 440, during the time of Leo the Great, reads: “Fons hic est vita qui totum dilitat orbem / Sumens de Christi vulnere principium” 16. In this way the font is also brought into connection with the Holy Sepulchre. This association was made early on. Augustine (354–430) says: “Propter sepulturam: Conseputi sumus Christo per Baptismum in mortem”. One must enter into the death of Christ and purify oneself in the sacrifice in order to rise up as one newly born 17.

The emphatic presence of a (baptismal) font in the centre of the composition means that the Codex Egberti interprets Pentecost not only from the perspective of the social model of monastic community, but also from a paradisial-baptismal tradition with resonances of redemption by Christ’s sufferings. The fact that this is the closing miniature in the manuscript reinforces the eschatological relationship between Pentecost, fons pietatis and the perspective that the apostolic Church provides on the Heavenly Jerusalem.

**Vision and speech in the Codex Egberti**

Above Peter’s head the upper margin of the miniature has a patch of gold leaf applied, branching into twelve beams: the Holy Spirit descending upon the twelve apostles. This motif from the Book of Acts is usually represented by a dove, sometimes in combination with the manus Dei /Fig. 3/ 18. Furthermore, the beams are usually more clearly separated to the heads of each of the twelve apostles. The Codex Egberti deviates from these conventions. Nor is there any trace of tongues of fire above the heads. It is possible that this extremely pared-down solution results from a conscious iconographic decision, and by extension expresses a position on the role of the image and the Pentecostal epigraphy in the medium of the manuscript.

The miniature was produced during what is known as the tenth-century wave of iconophilia, which went further than the initial debate that had arisen at the court of Charlemagne (742–814) 19.

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10 De Spiritu Sancto, i, c xvi, 156, Patrologia Latina 16, col. 740.
14 Georg Manz, Ausdrucksformen der lateinischen Liturgiesprache bis ins elfte Jahrhundert, Beuron 1941, p. 196.
17 Augustini Opera Omnia, Patrologia Latina 40, col. 257.
18 For example (1) the Evangelary of Henry the Lion, 1185–1188, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guefl, ms. 155 Noviss 2°/München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 30055, fol. 112v, with Mary present and (2) Sacramentary of St. Gereon, c. 1000, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 817, fol. 77; Chavannes-Mazel, “Paradise and Pentecost” (n. 3), figs 20 and 6.
19 For a thorough contextualization (something beyond the scope of this article), see Lawrence G. Duggan, “Was art really the ‘book of the illiterate’?”, in Hageman/Mostert, Reading images and texts (n. 3), pp. 9–62; see also Ann Freeman, “Scripture and images in the Liibi Carolini”, in Testo e immagine nell'alto medievio, Spoleto 1994, p. 163.
2/ Fountain of Life, Evangeliary of Godescalc, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, ms. nouvelle acquisition latin 1203, fol. 3v, 781–783
The problematization of figurative language in Western Europe shows the influence of the Byzantine debates about images (such as in the Second Council of Nicaea, 787). The early Carolingian definition of an image, necessarily operating at a disadvantage within a model of knowledge based upon the word, could not be maintained. Pope Hadrian II (792–872), under the influence of the iconophile position of the early ninth century, defended “spiritual sight” (Council of Paris, 825). The image transcends narrativity and can become the vehicle of a higher sight. That higher sight is accompanied by the artist’s hand itself, which is capable of weaving levels of interpretation into the image. Such visual power was celebrated in Ottonian artistic milieus well into the tenth century. Augustine (354–430) had formulated three levels of interpretation, but these were now applied in the context of the image. Words can be read without being understood. That is purely physical sight. There is also a spiritual sight, in which the words are interpreted by an intellectual mediator. This was often a scholar who expounds the text. Finally there is true intellectual sight, which takes place in the mind, free of all sense impressions, such as line, colour, sound, smell or taste. This is where God can be beheld. According to Augustine, this sight requires an intellectual power to distinguish things from their material nature in the virtue of the purely spiritual. This is the looking that takes place immediately in the spirit.

These transitions from corporeal sight to spiritual vision are important dynamics in the medieval and early modern exegesis of sight and insight as early as the Venerable Bede (673–735). In his Homily 11.15, he says: “For indeed all those who believe, whether they be those who saw Him in the flesh, or those who believe after his Ascension, share in the most benevolent promise as writes Matthew: ‘Blessed are the pure of heart for they will see God’”. Matthew 5:8, is indeed a central phrase in these reflections on spiritual seeing. The route to the ultimate vision in the spirit is cumulative. The iconophiles of the 10th century followed Augustine in regarding the image as the perfect mediator to the intellectual force and the virtue of the purely spiritual. The codex is, by extension, the carrier of this spiritual sight. In the manuscript the word is consummated, opened, unveiled and revealed in the visual medium, not in the verbal. In spiritual sight the visual medium is eschatological: in spiritual sight, the image gets the “last word”.

The Sacramentary of St. Gereon, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, ms. lat. 817, fol. 77, ca. 1000
The new theoretical position of images affected Ottonian iconography and led to ingenious interpretations of biblical texts with an eye to their visual power. The function of the tituli and the epigraphs in the picture plane was newly ambiguous. In the first wave of theoretical debate, the Libri Carolini referenced the epigraph as an argument for the weakness of visual language. After all, was it not the word, and the word alone, that could give unequivocal meaning to the ambiguous image: “This is Venus” or, “This is Mary”? In the definition of “spiritual seeing”, however, the relationship between image and epigraph became intertwined. The titulus “speaks”, it is the vox of the imago and provides an auditive element to the optical framework. The “new” spiritual seeing operates at the level of synaesthesia, with a particularly active coupling of the optical and the auricular.

In the Codex Egberti there are also letters that partake in the visual idiom, and are cleverly worked into the iconographic grammar. The materiality of the gold leaf links the unknowable, still unformed word, to the known and formed word. The gold leaf is the highest “colour” of God. This process of spot to line to letter – the genesis of writing and thereby also of speech – mirrors the secret of Pentecost: the breaching of the world of tangibility and form that generates speech, knowledge, and insight. In the miniature this emanation literally breaks the word edocens in two: edo- (to bring out, come to light, produce from the mind) and cens- (to speak solemnly). The Edocere of Pentecost literally takes place by breaking the word open to its core. The result is that the codex combines seeing and hearing. The miniature “speaks” through the gold leaf and the tituli. The letters are the material representatives of speech, and beyond speech the representatives of a visible invisibility. Wenzel also refers to Augustine in this respect: “Foris enim cum per corpus haec fiunt, aliud est locutio, aliud visio: intus autem cum cogitamus, utrumque unum est”. “When these things are done outwardly by means of the body, then speech and sight are different things; but when we think inwardly, the two are one”. It is precisely this core thought that is revalued in Ottonian manuscript art in the debate over “spiritual sight”.

The Codex Egberti presents an iconography of Pentecost that is typological (the fons pietatis), monastic (vita communis reform) and framed by an intellectual view on the agencies of the image, the word and tituli that contribute to a specific “spiritual seeing”.

I would now like to compare this interpretation with another example of Pentecost in the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert (end tenth century).

21 De civitate Dei, Corpus Christianorum Secundae Series 448, p. 856. The standard work is by Henri de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale: Le quatre sens de l’Écriture, Paris 1959, passim.
30 Other miniatures in the Codex Egberti also interweave text and image in inventive ways. On folio 91 with the Noti me tangere (Ronin, “Egbert Codex”, p. 178) no physical touch between Christ and Mary Magdalene is depicted, but the miniaturist does ensure that Christ’s hand touches the titulus Maria. He therefore ‘touches’ her in the name Mary. When, according to John’s Gospel, Christ addresses Mary by name, she recognizes him as Rabbiouni. By connecting the titulus to Christ’s hand, the miniaturist is able to convey that Mary was not physically touched but was reached spiritually through the word (and understanding) that Christ gave her by calling her; touching the titulus is equalized with speech (and hearing). This principle is developed in Barbara Baert, “The Pact between Space and Gaze: The Narrative and the Iconic in Noli me tangere”, in Fiction sacrée: spiritualité et esthétique durant le premier âge moderne, Ralph Dekoninck, Agnès Guiderdoni, Émilie Granjon eds, Leuven 2013, pp. 243–270.
4/ Benedictional of Archbishop Robert, Bibliothèque Municipale, Rouen, ms. v 7, fol. 29v, late 10th century (?)
The Pentecost iconography in the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert: multilingualism

In the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert (Winchester Abbey, late tenth century) the full-page miniature of Pentecost is filled with a complex architectural construction /Fig. 4/. An arch rests on two massive pillars. The lowest section of the pillars supports a second arch formed by the apostles. Peter can be recognized by his keys and his tonsure. The top section with the arcade is supplemented with various geometrical figures. In the circle is the manus Dei, in the mandorla below it the dove of the Holy Spirit. The circle evokes the cosmic eternity of God. The mandorla is a very ancient representation of the most holy. It divides the timeless world from the temporal. The scheme therefore indicates an epiphany: the descent of a secret into the material world. The mandorla schematizes the breaking open of reality, literally “split”, to reveal the endless vacuum behind it. Another notable detail is the double arch that marks the transition from the dove to the apostles. This geometrical structure in combination with the mandorla may evoke the Trinity.

A sea of flames escapes from the dove’s beak, spreading to the heads and even to the lips of the apostles. Unlike in the Codex Egberti, the motif of the fiery tongues and the miracle of the tongues descending on the apostles is here very much in focus. The Pentecost in this Benedictional thematizes speech not by bringing together image and tituli, but by placing the focal point in the midst of a great red, flaming baptism of fire. In his Pentecost and Linguistic Self-Consciousness in Anglo-Saxon England: Bede and Aelfric, Kees Dekker links the miniature to the commentaries and homilies of Aelfric (c. 955–c. 1010) who was schooled in the same abbey. In his homilies Aelfric laid great stress on the miracle of multilingualism. In his view, precisely into this multilingualism the actual foundation of the Church was generated.

Behind the apostles is a slender column that accentuates the vertical axis of the manus Dei and the dove. The column symbolizes the cosmic centre or the umbilicus mundi: it ties together the three cosmic zones: earth, heaven and underworld. The column is the axis of the world, the axis mundi. This axis is a Mythic phantasm pointing to a centre in which the separated natural world and supernatural world(s) run together and are united. In the words of Mircea Eliade: “Seldom do we find a more pathetic avowal that man cannot live without a ‘sacred centre’ which permits to ‘cosmicize’ space and to communicate with the transhuman world of heaven”. Some speak of a suspension of the passage of time, a stillness at the eye of rotation. The axis mundi brings centre and order to the world. Without the axis no way could be found, only going astray would be possible. The axis has a centrifugal attraction that links humanity to the rotation of the cosmos itself. There is no symbol more universal in cosmogony that this ur-phantasm of the pole, the column, the tree.

In Christianity the axis mundi finds a counterpart in the symbol of the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life

32 Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, v. 7 (396), fol. 29v; Chavannes-Mazel, “Paradise and Pentecost” (n. 3), p. 132, Fig. 15. The dating is controversial; David N. Dumville, Liturgy and the ecclesiastical history of late Saxon England, Woodbridge 1992, p. 87, dates it to the second quarter of the 11th century, but it is dated to the late 10th century by Anton von Euw, “Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, Ms. v.7”, in Vor dem Jahr 1000: Abendländische Buchkultur zur Zeit der Kaiserin Theophanu, Anton von Euw, Gerd Bauer eds, Cologne 1991, no. 46, p. 158.
34 For closely related iconography from the same workshop, see the Benedictional of Aethelwold, London, The British Library, Ms. Add. 49598, fol. 67v; Chavannes-Mazel, “Paradise and Pentecost” (n. 3), Fig. 5; Robert Deshman, The iconography of the full-page miniatures of the Benedictional of Aethelwold, Princeton 1995, Fig. 27.
36 Mircea Eliade, Australian religions: An introduction, Ithaca 1973, pp. 51–53. The Athilpa tribe in Australia takes its axis mundi, the kauw-wauw, everywhere. The proximity of the pole gives the tribe peace in the face of chaos. The pole breaking would be a sign of the approaching end of the world. The anthropologists B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen once witnessed the drama of the pole breaking. The members of the tribe were seized by fear, wandered round aimlessly, and finally sat on the ground to await death; Barbara Baert, Navel: On the origin of things, Ghent 2009, p. 59.
and the axis mundi each evoke Paradise and by extension the Heavenly Jerusalem (as the fons pietatis did in the Codex Egberti)\(^9\). The iconography of Pentecost is receptive to the axis mundi/Tree of Life archetypes at the levels of both form and content /Fig. 5/. From a compositional point of view, the column and the tree of life are powerful symbols of the centre\(^40\). And at an interpretive level, they optically establish the transcendental link to the divine and the invisible. By adding these symbols of life, the Pentecost iconography is charged with a cosmic significance that goes beyond the mother text and fertilizes the image with an ur-symbol\(^41\).

In the miniature in the Benedictional only three base colours are used beneath the gold highlighting: red, blue and green. The colours refer to the natural elements fire, water/air and earth/vegetation. Red is the main liturgical colour for Pentecost: the fiery tongues; even the hair of the apostles are saturated with red pigment, as though their heads and brains indeed were absorbed by the immense power of this sea of fire. Blue has associations with wind, air, and baptism. The green is also applied to the axis mundi, making explicit the relationship with the Tree of Life. The three base colours are repeated in the arch on which the apostles sit. The arch calls to mind Christ’s rainbow throne in the Last Judgment. In this context the motif expresses “the apostles’ ability to exercise Christ’s judicial authority in this world as well as in the new world”\(^42\). Here there is another possible link to Aelfric’s homily, in which he says: “and on this day all believing men became gods, just as Christ said: ‘I said you are gods’; and you are all children of the highest; the chosen ones are God’s children, and also gods, not by nature but through the gift of the Holy Spirit”\(^43\).

**Ruach and scent in the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert**

In the Benedictional miniature a contrast is achieved between the centre and the periphery, between stillness and movement, between the monumental structure of the architecture and the lushness of the vegetation. This *horror vacui* is created by the exuberant acanthus leaves that grow over everything like visual groundcover. The movement in the iconic space is also remarkable: leaves curl over the pillars with virtuosity, the hems of the apostles’ clothing flap upwards in capricious pen strokes, and the curtains on the two towers that crown the whole waft out playfully and wrap themselves around the slender columns\(^44\).

Unlike the interpretations in the Codex Egberti, the Benedictional Pentecost shows an excess of optical dynamism. Just as the story mentions wind, the stylistic result is an exceptionally mobile surface that blows in all directions. This makes it hard for our eyes to rest on any one spot, but is counterbalanced by the geometrical anchoring of the composition on the central axis. The gaze is cast back and forth between stability and being overwhelmed, between the visual registration of a *Gestalt* and being lost in the details. It is as though the miniaturist would make us aware of the mysterious meaning of Pentecost by means of this double visual affect. The Holy Spirit is not only iconographically present in the form of the dove, the whole formal approach within the optical framework suggests a dynamic breathing out of his power\(^45\). The idiom is *itself* pneumatic. In this miniature, Pentecost is a cosmic event in which time and space collapse into one another at the moment of a single overwhelming (visual) gust of wind. This pneuma still combines, in the underlying Hebrew concept *ruach*, the meanings of voice (of God, as in Genesis 1), thunder, wind and the human in a single semantic space\(^46\).

According to Daniel Lys, the concept *ruach* that appears in the book Genesis as the breath/wind of the creator God, reflects a typically Semitic understanding of the interaction between human and environment, between individual and God\(^7\). The author indicates that the Old Arabian root for wind (*raha*: to breathe) incorporates the idea of getting bigger and shrinking, of spatial extension and reduction, just as we fill our lungs with air and then let it escape\(^48\). *Ruach* has to be understood from the perspective of its rhythm, of the fact that as a principle of life it is not static, but always dynamic. “Donner de l’air, c’est à dire de l’espace (d’où ‘intervalle’) pour pouvoir respirer (d’où ‘soulagement’) dans une situation critique”\(^49\).

David Abram adds another perspective in relation to *ruach* in his *The Spell of the Sensuous*. The author analyzes the complex of air, breath, wind and *ruach* in the light of the transition from oral culture to script. Air is, in principle, invisible, and for an oral culture the air/wind is “the archetype of all that is ineffable, unknowable, yet undeniably real and efficacious”, of what is unknown but nevertheless “there”\(^50\). “Is it possible that a volatile power once propitiated as a local storm god came to be generalized, by one tribe of nomadic herders, into the capricious power


41 A golden streamer is attached to the column. This motif is unclear, but it does strengthen the archetypically rotating dynamic of the axis mundi. Ernst Gombrich writes about rotation as the most important form of dynamics in design; “We follow, I believe, not with the eyes, but with the mind”; Ernst Gombrich, The sense of order: A study in the psychology of the decorative art, Oxford 1979, p. 139.

42 Dekker, “Pentecost” (n. 35), p. 366, n. 77.

43 Chap. i. xxi, 198–208; Dekker, “Pentecost” (n. 35), p. 369; Aelfric is here probably paraphrasing Psalm 81, 6, which is cited by Christ in John 10, 34.

44 It is not clear whether this is an allusion to the curtain of the Temple. The motif of the curtain also appears in the context of the Annunciation. In a Marian context the relationship with the Temple curtain is explained by the apocryphal writings in which she wove the Temple curtain out of purple wool. An example is the Sinai icon (Monastery of St Catherine, c. 1100), on which Mary carries a spindle with purple wool (fig: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Annunciation_Icon_Sinai_12th_century.jpg). One thread emerges from the spool and runs over the still unborn Jesus shown in Mary’s womb; Barbara Baert, “The Annunciation revisited: Essay on the concept of wind and the senses in late medieval and early modern visual culture”, Critica d’arte, 47/48 (2012), pp. 63–74.

45 Alessandro Nova, The book of the wind: The representation of the invisible, Ithaca 2011, p. 36 indicates that since the early Christian period, and especially in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian (306–373), the wind, the Holy Spirit and pneuma are regarded as an image of God and the impossibility of seeing Him, just like the wind, which is transparent and therefore not directly ‘depictable’ but only indirectly, for instance by waving grass or flapping textiles. This image of transparency serves as an argument both for the iconoclast (“If artists are not in a position to convey the features of a colorless phenomenon, how could they be in a position to represent divinity?”, p. 37) and for the Ottonian iconophile theorists of the image (“The Transparency of the phenomenon is compared here to the invisibility of the Holy spirit; paradoxically, it is the impalpable air, which we do not see directly, that makes us understand that a superior reality exists, invisible but eternal and as real as the terrestrial world”, p. 36).


48 Old Arabian distinguishes rih (wind) and ruh (spirit). Hebrew does not; Lys, Rîach (n. 46), p. 24. In contemporary Jewish culture the idea is still current that God had to make himself as small as possible (concise) to make the universe possible; with thanks to Prof. Dr. Dov Zeevi, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

49 Lys, Rîach (n. 46), p. 21.

of the encompassing atmosphere itself? That it was experienced not as an abstract power entirely outside of sensuous nature, but as the unseen medium, the ruach, the ubiquitous wind or spirit that enlivens the visible world"^{51}.

Abram indicates that the spoken word (and the sung word especially) is conceived of as “structured breath”, which gives air and wind a linguistic-semantic potential. The principle of air/wind communicates, it “thinks”, and breath structures this in speech within the communication between person and nature, between human and God^{52}. Hence ruach as breath, spirit and wind – that sometimes seems to come from all directions – makes time a spatial given^{53}.

People can carry different “levels” of ruach within them. The prophets are the most privileged bearers of ruach^{54}. Ruach, just like psychij, is a principle of life that dwells in the head. This provides the logic to the Rabbinical practice of consulting a dead person through the skull^{55}. Hair growth (as with bearded prophets, or long-haired Samson) is an emanation of strong ruach forces. Visions, for example, are caused by the ruach in the head. At Pentecost the apostles have fallen subject to this power: they speak in all languages and in tongues, and in the miniature in the Benedictional their heads and hair literally glow with this fiery potential.

Ruach is an elixir of life that belongs to both God and man. Through ruach the human being can know God, reach him; he can be human^{56}. This is why ruach is so close to Theophany^{57}. As ruach is fundamentally involved in the movement of air in space, ruach in the Bible is linked to odour, to perfumes, and thus to sacrifices and the honour paid to God.

Research into the impact and meaning of odour as part of a model of knowledge has long been underestimated^{58}. Nevertheless, in ancient, oral cultures – as well as in late antique and medieval epistemology – rites and models were developed in which scent (incense, oils, flowers) occupied a prominent place^{59}. Odour is an ephemeral element that reaches us through the air^{60}. Winds carry odours with them, but so do the mouth and speech. An odour is phantasmic. In the sacral context odour plays a crucial role as an evocation of, and a way of recognizing, the divine. The unseen God manifests himself through his voice and through scent, and is worshipped with the scents of sacrifice, incense, herbs, perfumed oils^{61}. Perfume is a medium that allows people to move between the now and the transcendent^{62}. Odour may be only the fifth sense in the Platonic model, it is nevertheless an exceptional sense of knowledge^{63}. Odour evokes insights in a flash: as an anamnesis, as an intuition^{64}. Odour is also the pre-eminent binding agent of synesthetic apprehension^{65}.

The specific scent-pneuma connotation is not made explicit in the Book of Acts, but the biblical commentaries and apocryphal writings did not fail to mention the emphatic presence of odour in the events of Pentecost. However, in the article The Odor of the Spirit at Pentecost Henry Cadbury defends the position that in the (Eastern and gnostic) patristic commentaries on Pentecost retain an articulation of odour as a wind archetype^{66}. Both the commentaries of Ephraim the Syrian (ca. 306–373) and the Armenian translation of the Syrian Catena contain various references to odour and perfume. Ephraim says:

"Vox superna et odor internus et linguae quae inter nos loquentur. Vox et odor omnesque linguae quibus iam ante vos loiumur. Et e voce quam auditiss, et odore fragrantiæ quem accipitis, et omnes linguis quas loquimur et auditis" (Codex 571, ii, 29).

And the Catena includes the phrase six times: A sweet smell exhaled from the violence of the wind and filled all the house (1). And how did the wind fill the house? Evidently with a sweet odour and brilliant light (2). In various forms it appears for not a wind and smell and light only, but tongues visible they saw, and these like fire, to indicate many persons through fire (3). The voice which came from heaven was audible to all citizens, and the smell which exhaled from the violence of the wind collected the many together (4). These same people whom we dread sound stirred and the fragrant smell led gathered together (5). And to us is witness the violent sound which resounded, and the sweet odor which exhaled and the strange tongues we speak (6).

The author wonders what intertextual and typological basis could underline the emphatic manifestation of scent in the exegetical commentaries on Pentecost^{67}. The relationship between the manifestation of God in a space that is “filled” (ruach, wind, odour, etc.) can be found in Isaiah 6: 4: “the house was filled with smoke, and of incense”. John 12 specifies: “the house was filled with the odor of the ointment”. John uses the word pnon, which is usually translated as wind. Pnon is interesting, because it also means scent. Augustine (345–430) rendered it flatus, but Cyprian of Carthage (ca. 200–258) had still earlier used spiritus. Ephraim combines the ideas of voice (wind) and tongue with that of odour^{68}. 
Henry J. Cadbury writes: “The odor is a particularly satisfactory symbol for a god because of its real but refined sensory character. It is less tangible than hearing as hearing is less tangible than seeing, and while all three of these senses often share in the theophany, the coming and the going of the goddess, the margins of her visibility are to be detected by smell rather than by sight.”

With its references to nature (acanthus, column/tree of life) and emphatically green coloration, the Benedictional evokes the sense of smell in an optical way. The miniature’s dynamic-pneumatic total effect is as it were a visual pendant to the intangibility but nevertheless all-pervading quality of the oculus and odour in a space. Furthermore, we know that medieval celebrations of Pentecost made use of flower, fresh herbs and other fragrant, aromatic foliage. In medieval churches in Canterbury and in Visby (Gotland) oculi have been preserved: a round window or “eye” generally in the vaulting or high in the walls. At Pentecost the oculus was edged with red flowers. By means of these sweet-scented attributes God is invited, invoked. Sometimes celebrations included the releasing of a live dove through the oculus. This also throws new light on the geometrical “openings” – the oculus? – of the manus Dei and the dove in the miniature in the Benedictional.

51 Abram, The spell of the sensuous (n. 50), p. 249.
53 Ibidem, p. 23.
55 Onians, Origins (n. 46), p. 103.
56 Alexandre Leupin, “The impossible copula (humanities and Judaism-Christianity)”, Rhetoric: Society Quarterly, 29/3 (1999), pp. 11–20, p. 24, develops a psychoanalytical and sexualized reading of ruin. The Hebrew Bible, the Torah, posits that the very copula of Being is outside language. For me, for Freud, for Lacan, what this means is that this copula is unconscious. It is replaced by a linguistic fiction. The verb ‘to be’, in other words, is the first and most important metaphor. What creates meaning is in fact God’s ruin, literally His breath, and thus His speech. (Nietzsche says: esse is to breathe).”
57 Lys, Rüch (n. 46), p. 31.
58 I explored the visual hermeneutics of odor (and taste) for the first time in Barbara Baert, An odor, a touch, a smell: Impossible to describe: Nehi me tangere and the senses, in Religion and the senses in early modern Europe, Wietse de Boer, Christine Goetller eds, Leiden 2012, pp. 109–152.
60 See Canticle 4, 15–16: “Awake, o north wind and come, o south wind! Blow upon my garden. That its fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to this garden, and eat its choicest fruits”.
62 Mark M. Smith, Sensing the past: Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching in history, Berkeley 2007, p. 62: “Scent is to reveal truth, incense is to enjoy devotion”, p. 63 “when it came to expressions and practices of religious faith especially, smell operated in tandem and enjoyed a rough equality with hearing and seeing, and at times, it trumped both”.
64 In the prologue to the Liber Floridus, smell and taste appear as metonyms of knowledge. The author wants to offer the reader the honey that the bees collect from flowers in the garden. He also refers to the etymology of sapere as sapor, which consequently inserts the notion of taste and smell into the heart of wisdom, or sapientia. The notion of the bees and the garden is of course topical: it refers to paradise. However, this reference to the locus amoenus defines smell and taste as primordial senses of a lost world. We can see how Lambert is interested specifically in the prototype of scent as a “knowledge-generating sense”. This is why he refers to the Legend of the Road, a story that was profoundly embedded and widely disseminated in medieval culture. It mirrors precisely the importance that odour gains in the more intuitive and cosmological realms of deeper insight. In the legend, Seth returns to paradise to collect healing oil from the Tree of Life in order to cure the dying Adam. However, the angel Michael instead gives him a branch of the Tree of Knowledge. Seth – like the aforementioned dove – becomes the carrier of a twig from which a new covenant will grow. As Adam smells the branch, he feels contented and falls into the deep sleep of death. In the Gnostic sources for this motif, the scent of the branch does even more: it offers him universal knowledge, the gnosis Adam desired and transmitted to Seth; Karen de Coene, Naxelsicht: Regeneratie en kosmologie in de middeleeuwen, doctoral thesis, Leuven 2006, p. 68; Barbara Baert, “Adam, Seth and Jerusalem: The Legend of the Wood of the Cross in Medieval Literature and Iconography”, in Adam, le premier homme, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani ed., Florence 2012, pp. 69–99.
67 Ibidem, p. 238.
71 The oculus is also represented in the iconography of the Annunciation. In the altarpiece of Gentile da Fabriano (c. 1421–1425), a ray of light emanating from God’s chest penetrates into Mary’s room through a six-lobed oculus and strikes her below the heart, where the shape of the window is reflected on her lower body. The ‘eye’ of Mary’s room is repeated as an optical photogram: she bears the divine light of a supernatural impregnation in an entirely pictorial fashion. The light has descended into painterly virtuosity: the subtle golden rays, the hidden energy of the dove and the optical resonance of a window on textile, which turns Mary’s belly into a kind of ‘receptive eye’ of ‘wind-ness’; Barbara Baert, “Wind und Sublimierung in der christlichen Kunst des Mittelalters: die Verkündigungs“, Das Münster: Zeitschrift für Christliche Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, 66/2 (2013), pp. 109–117, Fig. 10; Barbara Baert, “The annunciation and the senses: Late medieval devotion and the pictorial gaze”, in Late medieval devotions: Images, instruments and the materiality of belief, Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan eds, Dublin 2014, Fig. 6, forthcoming.
72 Johann Heinrich Trippis, Das handelnde Bildwerk in der Gotik, Berlin 2000, pp. 141–145; the author suspects that the custom goes back to the 10th century. The oculus was also used to enact the Ascension with statues.
By way of conclusion. Pentecost as a visual synaesthesia?

Gregory the Great (540–604) says:

“Visus quippe, auditus, gustus, odoratus, et tactus, quasi quaedam viae mentis sunt, quibus foras veniat (...) Per hos eternim corporis sensus quasi per fenestras quasdam exteriorem quaeque anima respicit, respiciens concupiscit”

“For seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching are, as it were, ways of the mind, by which the mind goes beyond itself (...) For through these bodily senses the soul views, as it were through windows, the things exterior to it, and on viewing them longs after them”.

Gregory the Great links the sensorium and the co-operation of the senses with the desire of the soul: synaesthesia.

David Chidester identifies three reasons for synaesthetic experience being regarded as an efficient medium for contact with God. Synaesthesia is claimed to be “more immediate, compelling and highly charged”; “more transcendent, extraordinary and super-natural” and finally “more unified, complete, total and all-encompassing”. The connection between synaesthesia and spirituality was already made by Augustine in his Confessions, and its origins might lie in the Eastern desert fathers who showed a more than average interest in descriptions bordering on mysticism in which some senses passed into others or, more radically, all five senses imploded into an exceptional, overwhelming experience. Augustine writes that we never say things like: “Hear how it flashes”, or “Smell the light it gives”, or “Savour how it shines” or “Feel how it glitters” (Confessions, x, 39). Augustine follows his analyses by asserting that nevertheless in the experience of the soul and spiritual surrender, there is a convergence of hearing and seeing. “And in the innermost centre of the human heart he [Augustine] maintains that hearing is sight and sight is hearing. It is seeing beyond seeing; hearing beyond hearing.” When the Egyptian monks listened to Abbot Pachomius, it seemed to them as though a great light shone through his words. One Life of the saint specifies: “All the brethren were like men drunk with wine and (...) saw the words coming forth from his mouth like birds of gold, silver and precious stones, which flew over the brethren in secret and went into the ears of many of those who listened well”.

Clinical psychologists distinguish two types of synaesthesia: selective (hearing becomes seeing and vice versa) as described by Augustine, and radical (all the senses are drawn into a single vortex) as described by Gregory the Great and the desert fathers. The first type is to some extent still rationally filtered given that hearing and seeing are regarded as the highest senses of knowledge in the classical Western hierarchy. The second type testifies to an all-consuming experience such as in anachoresis. The contributions to knowledge through touch, scent and taste are left out of account in the first type. Radical synaesthesia leads to a total experience that is much closer to a mystical emotion or even to raptus.

In the visual interpretations of Pentecost in the Codex Egberti and in the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert respectively, we can recognize traces of both types of synaesthesia in form as well as in content. The Codex Egberti interprets Pentecost in the perspective of hearing and seeing. The miracle of multilingualism springs from the subtle but effective splitting of a single word – EDO-CENS – which produces the suggestion of “to produce from the mind” alongside “to speak”. The benedictional is a visual transport of movement and wind. Pentecost is here interpreted as a voracious whirlwind of dynamike. The miracle does not come from a split word but bursts from the eye of the storm.

Whatever option the artist’s mind takes for the miraculous event of Pentecost, he must depict the almost undepictable. The desire of the soul in synaesthesia can be compared to the desire of taming and exploring the visual medium as such. It is precisely this desire that forms the artistic raison d’être; the artist’s hand will have to go on working forever, for the ultimate consubstantiality of the visual with God. There is the undertaking of a pact: a desire that “sets open” the visual medium, turns it into a window on the world just like the golden letters that split, or just like the oculus that is a doorway to wind and scent. The hermeneutics of the visual as opening, desire and hope articulates the essence of Pentecost and the limits and the paradoxes of what the visual arts can and cannot achieve.

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73 Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, xx/i, Patrologia Latina 76, col. 189; Palazzo, Les cinq sens (n. 65), p. 350.
78 Chidester, “Symbolism” (n. 75), p. 46.
Summary/Seslání Ducha svatého v Codexu Egberti (cca 980) a v Benedikcionálu Roberta z Jumièges (konec 10. století). Vizuální médium a jeho smyslové vnímání


Ať už umělec přistoupí k jakékolik možnosti znázornění Seslání Ducha svatého, musí se vypořádat se zobrazením takřka nezobrazitelného. Touha duše po synestezii může být přirovnána k touze po zkrocení a zkoumání samotného vizuálního média. Je to přesně tato touha, která utváří umělecké raison d’être; umělčova ruka bude muset pokračovat v práci navždy, k dosažení nejzazší konsubstanciality vize a Boha.