

Hildegard of Bingen: Some Recent Books

By Madeline H. Caviness

The year 1998, the nine hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. Hildegard near Bingen in the valley of the Rhine, provided an occasion for scholarly scrutiny of her textual, visual, and musical works, as well as more popular treatments. This review article is highly selective.

The new edition of Sabina Flanagan's book will continue to provide one of the better general introductions to Hildegard's biography and writings. In updating the first edition of 1989, when the author noted that "most of her writings still lack modern critical editions" (p. xi), a second preface acknowledges the progress made in providing these crucial sources (p. xiii); indeed most titles in the Corpus Christianorum series, as well as the best modern translations into English, post-date 1989 (pp. 217-19). The author herself is also responsible for a new anthology of a wide range of texts in translation that might well complement the present volume in the classroom (*Secrets of God: Writings of Hildegard of Bingen*, Boston, 1998). In her *Visionary Life* a biography based on Hildegard's own writings and on several contemporary accounts intersects with central chapters that describe the various texts assigned to Hildegard. The author is an unabashed admirer of Hildegard, setting her achievements in "natural history, medicine, and cosmology, . . . music, poetry, and theology" above those of "most of her male contemporaries" and particularly lauding her "visionary beauty and intellectual power" (pp. ix-x).

Flanagan's biographical chapters (1-3) are ambitious and daring given the scarcity and taciturn nature of the sources. The clarity and certainty this author conveys are both the strength and the weakness of the book, depending on the reader's needs. Although she introduces many quotations from Hildegard herself, she had to work hard at filling the gaps in order to meet twentieth-century prerequisites for a "biography," one that not only winnows the facts of the narrative from mythologies but also demands to understand causes and personal motivation. Thus Flanagan speculates whether Hildegard felt less "orphaned" by Jutta's death

The following books are the subject of this review article:

SABINA FLANAGAN, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: A Visionary Life*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. Paper. Pp. xvi, 227; black-and-white frontispiece, black-and-white plates, 1 map, and 1 table. \$18.99. First published in 1989.

LAESELOTTE E. SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen im "Liber Scivias" der Hildegard von Bingen: Die Wucht der Vision und die Ordnung der Bilder*. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 1998. Pp. vii, 238 plus 35 color facsimiles in endpaper pocket; many black-and-white figures. DM 148. Distributed by Brockhaus/Commission, Kreidlerstraße 9, 70806 Kornwestheim, Germany.

KEIKO SUZUKI, *Bildgewordene Visionen oder Visionserzählungen: Vergleichende Studie über die Visionsdarstellungen in der Rupertsberger "Scivias"-Handschrift und im Luccheser "Liber divinatorum operum"-Codex der Hildegard von Bingen*. (Neue Berner Schriften zur Kunst, 5.) Bern: Peter Lang, 1998. Paper. Pp. 316 plus 45 color and black-and-white plates and 13 black-and-white figures.

than by Volmar's "because Jutta was less educated and her approval was worth less to Hildegard. [Or] was it because Volmar was a man and thus his approval counted for more?" (p. 41) and that prior to 1141 "we may deduce that Hildegard had been for some time a frustrated writer" (p. 43). Such tendencies to construct Hildegard's character from surmises about behaviors that seem to us normative or natural do not stem from theoretical reflection on psychoanalytic frameworks (the Jutta or Volmar question, for instance, might have been dealt with in terms of object-relations theory). Nor are these surmises firmly grounded in what we know of twelfth-century value systems as they have emerged from Caroline Bynum's recent work, for instance. Despite some attempts to contextualize this unusual and enigmatic woman by reference to figures such as Guibert of Nogent, Abelard, Heloise, and Elizabeth of Schönau, overall Flanagan is not cautious enough about the cultural gap between us and Hildegard. Redeeming features, however, include the deft sketch of political conditions in the empire during Hildegard's lifetime that is one of the better things to give undergraduates to read for "context" (pp. 16–22) and the advantage that she constructs a Hildegard who is accessible to our students.

Chapters 4–8 give succinct outlines of Hildegard's various writings, beginning with the early visionary works (the *Scivias* and the *Liber vitae meritorum*) and ending with the later one (the *Liber divinorum operum*) and the letters. Although a few illustrations from the modern copy of the Rupertsberg *Scivias* and the Lucca *Liber divinorum operum* are included, no consideration is given to the genesis of these pictures until the final chapter, where Flanagan accepts that "it is unlikely that Hildegard was her own illustrator" (p. 191) even while wanting to believe that migraine auras are reflected in the images.

Saurma-Jeltsch's imposing tome, *Die Miniaturen im "Liber Scivias,"* has very different aims. The author presents a detailed description of each picture in the twentieth-century copy of the lost Rupertsberg manuscript, with a wealth of comparative material from medieval manuscripts. By indulging in a good deal of traditional source hunting she has produced a study that places the *Scivias* pictures in a broad art historical context as well as an argument as to their genesis. This and Keiko Suzuki's dissertation, which deals in addition with the thirteenth-century illuminated *Liber divinorum operum* manuscript in Lucca, are the first monographs on the illustrations to Hildegard's works since the 1930s. Indeed, these pictures had scarcely been mentioned in the German art historical literature in the interim, except for a half-dozen articles by Christel Meier following the 1979 anniversary of Hildegard's death. Evidently her reception history is a complex matter. It may be too early to claim a canon shift, but the assessments of these two recent authors may dominate the way in which Hildegard is seen to be related to the picture cycles in her books for some time to come, at least in Germany.

Most unfortunately, both Saurma-Jeltsch and Suzuki have missed an opportunity to reproduce the excellent photographs of the original twelfth-century *Scivias* manuscript that are in the Rheinisches Bildarchiv in Cologne (previously published in their entirety only in the 1928 edition of Maura Böckeler's translation and in a hard-to-find booklet by Hildegard Schönfeld in 1979). Both authors agree with the paleographical evidence that the *Scivias* manuscript that disappeared in Dresden during or after World War II (formerly Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbi-

bliothek, MS 1) was written at Rupertsberg in Hildegard's lifetime. Both authors argue that professional illuminators provided the pictures for Hildegard's text, hence distancing them from Hildegard's conception. Saurma-Jeltsch departs from accepted wisdom in dating the illuminations in this manuscript to the two decades immediately following Hildegard's death.

A lack of theoretical transparency renders Saurma-Jeltsch's inflection of iconography and contextual study somewhat baffling, despite the statements that the publication is to focus on the miniatures and their interpretation in light of medieval pictorial language ("Den Miniaturen der Handschrift und ihrer Interpretation im Licht der mittelalterlichen Bildersprache sollte die Publikation gewidmet sein," p. vii) and that the artistic context of Hildegard's manuscripts, rather than her biography, is at issue (p. 1). Such a traditional approach generally insists on as close an examination of an original as possible, and indeed the disappearance of the original *Scivias* manuscript may be one reason why these pictures had dropped out of the canon. Perhaps the reproduction of the 1927-33 copy by Josepha Knips of the Beuron school in the black-and-white text illustrations and a general tendency to ignore dating and authorship should be characterized as postmodern. Yet the text contains no hint of semiotics, deconstruction, and reader-reception theory, nor any reflection on gender, such as might betray a postmodern hermeneutics.

The human agency that created the unusual pictures in the Wiesbaden *Scivias* remains out of view, as do the specific place and time of their creation. A chapter is given to each picture, with a small reproduction of the copy at each heading that is overwhelmed by the size and number of comparisons (exceptions are pls. 61 and 97; cf. pp. 108 and 193). Scrutiny of the dates and places of origin, which are available only in the list of plates rather than in the captions, reveals that many of the comparative examples illustrated are from entirely different regions (e.g., Anglo-Saxon England, fig. 9, or Spain, figs. 22 and 24), so that they could hardly be invoked in any literal way as specific models for the Rupertsberg *Scivias*. How, then, do these juxtapositions instruct us? Questions such as date and authorship are settled in the introductory matter, without further argumentation concerning the availability of these other works to the *Scivias* designer(s). On the other hand, Ottonian illuminations that might have been supposed to lie at the root of many images in the Hildegard repertory are not especially emphasized. The Bamberg *Cantica canticorum* and *Apocalypse* manuscripts, for instance, furnish other resemblances to unusual motifs in the Hildegard manuscript than those introduced here (pp. 74-75, 80-84, and 198-99; pls. 13, 42, and 45).

Saurma-Jeltsch sets up some straw men in the introduction to clarify the need for this large book. We are told that previous studies either have regarded the illuminations as mere illustrations to the text or have indulged in ahistorical generalizations and subjective reflections (p. vii). The review of previous literature that follows in the introduction does not include the work of the specialists recently publishing in English, such as Peter Dronke, Barbara Newman, Otto Pächt, and me, but Saurma-Jeltsch does give serious attention to the article by Suzuki that preceded her book (p. 4). The sections on the style and date of the illuminations (pp. 6-11) are crucial to the argument of the whole book, though remarkably unsystematic. Most of the style comparisons would not have held up in

the art historical seminar rooms of the 1960s under the eye of authorities like Hanns Swarzenski, Ernst Kitzinger, or Hans Kauffmann. Stylistic affinities, including byzantinizing traits in the drapery, are cited in manuscripts ranging from about 1140 to 1200. To my eye the harsh wet-fold patterns that are occasionally present in the *Scivias* stem from a general Romanesque trend of the 1130s–1160s, and not from the more aggressively plastic rendering of late century; some of the paintings in the lost *Hortus deliciarum* may have been Rhenish examples of the latter, datable between ca. 1178 and 1196 (the Wolfenbüttel sketchbook has to be taken as the standard). Comparisons between Josepha Knips's copy of the *Scivias* and the nineteenth-century copies of the *Hortus deliciarum* present a double jeopardy, even where dress and armor are concerned. The ornate byzantinizing trend in the Gospels of Henry the Lion has been legitimately viewed as part of the English influence introduced by his marriage to Matilda in 1168, and that book has been dated by other scholars to 1173–75 (before Henry's exile in 1180), rather than ca. 1188, after his return, as here (p. 4). Thus if it has anything to do with the *Scivias* illustrations, it does not necessarily make the argument for their dating from the 1180s–1190s. Saurma-Jeltsch's formal analysis of the *Scivias* pictures stresses spatial effects created by overlapping forms and by modeling in some of the architectural elements, yet these could as well depend on Ottonian models as on the late-twelfth-century examples assembled in the plates. The author finds a development toward a freer rendering and fuller modeling in the third and last book of the *Scivias* but suggests that overall a highly coordinated campaign of decoration should be attributed to a single professional atelier. However, she is at a loss to localize this shop, remarking only that it could not be in Trier if Elisabeth Klemm is right in her attribution of the so-called Prayer Book of Hildegard to that center (a naive position; whoever would have supposed all the artists of the Winchester Bible were in one center if we had their work only in different books?).

The only stylistic comparison evoked by the author that rings true to my eye is with the Maria Laach Sacramentary in Darmstadt, which Saurma-Jeltsch dates 1150–65 (pl. 32), though I have elsewhere preferred to compare the *Scivias* figures to the flatter figure style of the folio illustrated in the *Zeit der Staufer* catalogue. I also prefer a similar date for the *Scivias* illuminations (1160–75), whereas Saurma-Jeltsch claims differences that to her justify a full fifteen- or even twenty-five-year interval for "development." The second half of the twelfth century is not a period in which one can chart long-term isolated traditions, and in any case such a supposition goes against the author's claim that the atelier had available a very broad repertory of models.

Other sections of the introduction are more convincing, though the late date is treated as a given. "Die Funktion der Miniaturen" (pp. 12–15) presents a view of the ways in which the pictures encode meanings and follows Suzuki in interpreting the many gaps or discrepancies between text and image as further "evidence" that Hildegard herself was not involved in their design, an a priori position. The author's formulation of the codification of signs for a medieval audience is rather rule-bound, scarcely allowing for multivalence (pp. 13–14). She would refuse the possibility that there were occasional inventions or adaptations that were so eccentric they constituted failures of communication, whereas I think the chimera figures that masquerade as God in Hildegard's works constitute such

failures. But overall the observation that there are systems for reading these images is well taken. The author portrait is next discussed, with comparative material that omits the famous Ottonian frontispiece to the *Registrum Gregorii*, a more plausible model for the *Scivias* author portrait (as Suzuki argues, p. 191). The resonance with holy figures is claimed as proof that this portrayal had nothing to do with Hildegard's stated humility, yet this common literary topos is worth evaluating in light of her letters and sermons (see Flanagan, pp. 167–70 and 172–86). In sections on the principle of order in the compositions, including the consistent placement of the east toward the top of the frame, much is attributed to intention (pp. 18–23). In fact, many of these single-column, horizontal, or L-shaped frames are dictated by the length of the list of contents at the opening of each book. Others, however, were given additional single-column or full-page frames. Because spaces for these pictures had to be foreseen in the course of writing the text, the author finally concedes that the whole program must have been devised at Rupertsberg, even though she holds to the premise that work of this technical complexity could not have been done there (p. 24). What is meant by program? Was it some textualization of desiderata to go in each space, or was it a series of sketches? I suspect the author intends the former, since she wants to attribute the designs to her mysterious "atelier."

Much of the core of the book is occupied with identifying the kinds of sources known to these illuminators. Such energetic source hunting at times gives the impression that the medieval designers and their audience knew the whole repertory of the Marburg Photo Archive. Saurma-Jeltsch tends to concentrate on motifs, rather than whole scenes or conceptual modes, which may indeed be a valid way for the designer of this completely new set of pictures to have gone about the task of inventing them. Yet such an investigation is apt to be reductive in that it sometimes passes over the new and unusual features of the compositions, and often their intellectual context. For instance, the unique image of the Trinity as interlocking walls and quoin stones has only textual explanations, though without any concern for the contemporary theological battles over the nature of the Trinity (Vision 3.7, pp. 169–70). Connections with other pictures in the book are occasionally noted, as here, but there is no systematic attempt to demonstrate the dense intervisuality that not only provides unity but also builds accumulative meaning through resonance and dissonance within the *Scivias*. And systematic contrasts with the only other full set of *Scivias* pictures, in the early-thirteenth-century recension from Salem now in Heidelberg (barely mentioned, e.g., p. 3), would have revealed much about the different mentality of the two designers.

Keiko Suzuki's book is more systematic, particularly with regard to text-image relationships, and has the advantage of treating the pictures in the Lucca *Liber divinorum operum* in depth. She developed this dense study from her dissertation, presented at the University of Bern in 1997 under the direction of Ellen Beer. It would be hard to quarrel with the wealth of detailed observations. The manuscripts are deftly introduced in chapter 2. A chapter that outlines problems of method concentrates on the relationship of the visions described in Hildegard's texts to the finished illustrations. The author supposes that textualization of the visions was necessary for teaching, and she recognizes the layering of the text, by which the description of what was seen is followed by a separate section on the

voice heard by Hildegard and then by a long excursus on the meanings of the visual/auditory experience. The author's goal is to chart the extent to which the two visionary texts (*Scivias* and *Liber divinorum operum*) are translated into images in the same or different ways (p. 41); in other words, she assumes textual primacy, as have most writers on the subject, regarding the pictures as displacing rather than representing the visions.

The Lucca manuscript is the subject of chapter 4. In contrast to the Salem *Scivias*, Suzuki finds that the *Liber divinorum operum* illustrates only the descriptions, not the interpretive allegories, even though some elements are added and others omitted (pp. 45–50). Most importantly, indications of cardinal directions supplied by the voice are ignored by the illuminators, which is taken by Suzuki as evidence that they read only the descriptions (pp. 56–59). Standard iconographies were relied on to supplement the information in the text, sometimes subverting it (as with the complex geometries of the rays of light in Vision 2, pl. 6 and figs. 11–12). There follows in the next chapter a comparison with the way the *Scivias* pictures interpret the text. Suzuki finds these artists to be quite selective, on occasion preferring to stress the unusual instead of seizing on the obvious (as in Vision 3.12, where the New Heaven and the New Earth displace heaven and hell). Among many instances of iconographic innovation, the unique nonfigural Trinity of Vision 3.11 privileges theological import derived from 3.10 over the image of Christ (p. 118), whereas in the *Liber divinorum operum* a comparable departure from the immediate text draws on a standard depiction of churches in a walled city (Vision 6). Also, *candidus* is understood as “white” in the *Liber divinorum operum* but is expressed in the *Scivias* pictures by shades of light green, silver, brownish red, and blue white as well as white. I would suggest here that the designer (who I still think was Hildegard) had in mind the connotation of glowing more than just white and gave some instructions to the painters to that effect. Directions are spelled out in book 3 of *Scivias*, with east always uppermost, and this is respected by the artists (p. 125). On the whole the *Scivias* artists are found to have translated Hildegard's visionary descriptions into pictorial form in far more subtle and imaginative ways, as in the impression of immense size achieved by cutting off part of a figure or object (pp. 133–36). The interconnectedness of the *Scivias* compositions is also noted, by which Suzuki means the use of other—even later—passages in the text to clarify the appearance of a setting, rather than intervisuality (pp. 166–67). Contrasts in the use of color, composition, and framing are the subjects of other sections; the full-page illustrations to the *Liber divinorum operum* may contain multiple scenes, whereas the variety of frames and subdivisions in the Rupertsberg *Scivias* is characterized as typically Romanesque (p. 146). Whereas the *Liber* pictures seek stability and symmetry, the *Scivias* pictures tend to be asymmetric and unstable. Nonetheless, there are some motifs held in common, such as the depiction of walls, rocks, the abyss, and scrolls (I have added the configuration in Vision 3.5 and in the *Liber divinorum operum*, Vision 5, discussed on pp. 181–82). Suzuki follows my observation that the scrolls in the *Liber* were afterthoughts, though I do not agree they were added after the manuscript was finished—rather they were incorporated into the later pages and then added to the earlier ones. I agree entirely that their function is to stress the au-

thenticity of the text (p. 180), though I have suggested they represent the voice from heaven.

Suzuki's discussion of the author portraits in the two manuscripts is characteristically more lucid and insightful than Saurma-Jeltsch's (pp. 190–93). For her, the *Scivias* image captures the inward nature of the visionary experience, seen only by Hildegard under the inspiration of the flames from heaven, whereas the *Liber* depictions enhance the authenticity of her sight. I would disagree only in that I see the later depictions as a conscious improvement on the earlier prefatory picture, in concert with the desire for canonization.

Suzuki dedicates chapter 6 to the genesis of the Lucca representations and, most importantly in light of the conflicts that now surround these issues, to the problems of dating and authorship of both manuscripts. Covering again some of the aspects of the Lucca compositions that were standard for their time, she turns to the problem of models and authorship with a useful summary of the literature (pp. 256–61). Dismissing some arguments as "subjective" (that favorite term of denigration among present German art historians for the *Intuition* that their predecessors accorded a legitimate place in *Kunstwissenschaft*), Suzuki claims that the general principles of composition (relation to text, etc.) that she has elucidated indicate that the two cycles were entirely independent, a position that is, to say the least, driven by preconceived ideas of the creative process. Furthermore she suddenly dates the last compositions in book 3 of the *Scivias* manuscript (Visions 3.12–13) after the completion of the *Liber* text, in the late 1170s (pp. 164–65). Yet, on pages 267–69, she allows the possibility that if earlier models from Rupertsberg were available to the Lucca artists, they were uncolored drawings, possibly even made after Hildegard's death. Some of the arguments for a thirteenth-century date for their conception are not valid: for instance, St. John was represented within the frame of his visions in some of the early Spanish Apocalypse manuscripts, so the concept is hardly new to the Gothic period. The seal of the cathedral of Speyer may have been in use in 1212–31, but it represents the Romanesque edifice. And even the *muldenfaltenstil* drapery, for which Chartrain antecedents are claimed, originated with Nicholas of Verdun in Cologne in the 1190s. Although I do not disagree with a probable dating of the execution of the Lucca manuscript toward the end of that development in the Rhineland (ca. 1225–35), the author's way of getting there is rather obscure!

The last consideration is whether Hildegard was directly involved in designing the *Scivias* pictures (pp. 270–76). Suzuki dismisses a priori my argument that drawings can be made during migraine auras, which she has apparently never experienced; but I have simultaneously described and made *tracings* of crenellation spectra and visual field defects, as did Charcot's patients in Paris in the last century (a balanced discussion of this issue is given by Flanagan, pp. 187–200). Other seemingly rational arguments that pile up on pages 274–75 are not worth repeating, except to say that Suzuki paints herself into a corner in that she nonetheless finds that the creativity and spontaneity in the *Scivias* illustrations would be desirable to Hildegard; which leaves one wondering once more, who could have been found to draw so well for her?

Despite my disagreements with these art historians, I hope I have represented their views fairly. One consequence of the helter-skelter around the nine hundredth

anniversary was that a good deal of work was done independently in different centers, and the discrepant results must challenge us all. Connoisseurship was never one of the most secure branches of art history, and it was one I engaged somewhat reluctantly in this postmodern era. Both Saurma-Jeltsch's and Suzuki's books lend support to the skepticism with which dating from style has been treated of late. Yet if it is to be argued that Hildegard had nothing to do with the pictures in the Rupertsberg *Scivias*, some tangible alternative has to be suggested, with a workplace, intellectual context, and other extant productions, and not some phantom atelier. As it is, the unique characteristics of the lost *Scivias*, so well elucidated by Suzuki, suggest the pictures were created in unique circumstances.