

Seeing the Eucharist: The Gospels of St Augustine and the Last Supper

St Thomas Fifth Avenue, Sunday 19th October

Felicity Harley McGowan



Detail: Folio 125 v

Gospels of Saint Augustine

University of Cambridge, *Corpus Christi College*, MS 286

Possibly produced in Rome, ca. 500 – 599 CE (according to paleographic evidence)

- vellum
- 265 sheets (or folios), h. 245 x w. 190 mm (these have been trimmed)
= book of reasonable size, could be handled
- fine uncials on lines ruled with dry point
- tinted drawings (no gold or purple as one would find in high-quality books)

* some parts of the book are lost

(including several leaves and two quires, containing further illustrations)

* the original binding is unknown

(the book was rebound in 1949 with goat skin over oak board at The British Museum)

* the book was in England by the late seventh or eighth century when insular scribes added running headers to the text identifying each book and Latin captions to the individual images.

The sixth-century Gospels of Augustine of Canterbury are the oldest surviving illustrated Latin Gospels in the world, and the oldest non-archaeological artefact of any kind to have survived in England. The main text is written in Uncial, a majuscule script with rounded, unjoined letters from which modern capital letters are derived. There are no spaces between words, an innovation that was introduced only later in the seventh century by Irish scribes. A change in the shape of the lettering from the Gospel of Mark to that of Luke indicates that there was more than one scribe who contributed to the book.

The miniature of the Last Supper, within the context of a Passion cycle, is one of the earliest surviving representations where the story of the Last Supper is told pictorially to recall the institution of the Eucharist.



Folio 125 v illustrating part of a Passion cycle