

Evan A. Gatti

***The Rotolo con Atti degli apostoli di Vercelli*
Acts of the Apostles and the Arts of Imitation**

The *Rotolo con Atti degli apostoli di Vercelli* (hereafter the *Vercelli Rotolus*) is comprised of three sheets of vellum glued together and organized into two rows depicting 18 vignettes. The vignettes depict twenty-seven scenes derived from the *Acts of the Apostles* (Acts 2-21). Two distichs, included on either end of the drawing, suggest it was made to preserve the painting in a church that many scholars believe to have been the Cathedral of Sant'Eusebio in Vercelli. But the *Vercelli Rotolus* is more than something that once was; it is also a material object that has survived and in doing so preserved the ways and mechanisms by which scenes from *Acts* were translated from written and spoken text into a visual language. In this essay, I will argue that by examining the *Vercelli Rotolus* as a liminal object in a specific material format, we see how the text of *Acts* could be harnessed as a model for orthodoxy, declaring the value of adhering to clerical knowledge and the importance of relying on clerical expertise. This can be seen in the multiple scenes of baptism depicted in the *Vercelli Rotolus*; scenes which I will argue appear out of order if one is following the Vulgate text of *Acts*. This reordering creates an alternating rhythm between baptismal iconography and the scenes of apostolic preaching or teaching. If we remember that the drawing is purported to be a re-presentation of architectural frescoes, we also notice that these baptismal scenes would have appeared in visual proximity to the altar, where the celebrant performed the liturgical rites in the tradition of the apostles.