

## David Ganz

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# Writing in Gold: On the Aesthetics and the Ideology of Chrysography

Mercredi 21 avril |  
12h15-13h45

Writing in gold has almost completely escaped the attention of art history. Whereas the semantics and the materiality of gold used in works of goldsmithery as well as in illuminations and panel paintings have been frequently discussed, the fact that gold has been also applied to embellish texts, be it single initials and titles as well as entire chapters and volumes has drawn relatively sparse comment. The scope of this lecture is to critically evaluate the specific reasons for the use of gold as writing material in the Western Middle Ages. Particular weight will be given to gold script's luminosity and its potential to resist a fast and effortless reading of written notation. As a discussion of several cases from the early medieval period will show, the use of gold ink for letters, words and entire books powerfully unmask the ideal of transparency which for a long time has been considered the most characteristic feature of writing.



Court school of Charles the Bald, *Incipit of the Book of Psalms, Psalter of Charles the Bald*, 869. Parchment, 24,0 x 19,5 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Ms. lat. 1152, fol. 4v

**David Ganz** is Professor for Art History of the Middle Ages at the University of Zurich. After having been a Doctoral Fellow at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, he earned his PhD from the University of Hamburg in 2000. As a Postdoc, Ganz was a member of the Research Group "Cultural History and Theology of the Image in Christianity" at the University of Münster. In 2006 he did his habilitation at the University of Konstanz and in 2013 he joined the faculty of the Institute of Art History in Zurich. Starting with the monumental decoration of Roman churches in the Baroque period (the subject of his first book, *Barocke Bilderbauten*, 2003), Ganz has researched and published on a broad variety of topics which comprise pictorial models of the representation of visions in the Western Middle Ages (*Medien der Offenbarung*, 2008) and the particular role of decorated book-covers as "garment" of medieval liturgical books (*Buch-Gewänder*, 2015). Since autumn 2020, he is the head of the SNSF-project "*Textures of Sacred Scripture. Materials and Semantics of Sacred Book Ornament in the Western Middle Ages, 780-1300*".