



# Affinities between the Imagery in the Utrecht Psalter and Late Antique Galilean Synagogue Mosaics

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This essay will highlight the iconographic and stylistic affinities between the Utrecht Psalter and the recently uncovered synagogue mosaics of Late Roman Galilee. The varied iconographic motifs as well as the »Hellenistic« style of these synagogue mosaics support the notion that a rich artistic milieu existed among the Jews who lived in the Galilee at that time. I will argue that such a milieu could, logically, have given rise to manuscript illustration as well as to the many figurative synagogue mosaics that have now been uncovered. I hypothesize that in such a milieu an illustrated Hebrew manuscript of the Psalms could have been created, a manuscript that would then have served as the ultimate model for the Utrecht Psalter, arguably the most brilliant work of art from the Carolingian period.<sup>1</sup>

The Utrecht Psalter was produced between 816 and 835 at the abbey of Hautvillers near Reims, France. The illustrations have long been appreciated as having been executed in a style reminiscent of Hellenistic art.<sup>2</sup> They are, for the most part, literal renditions of the words of the psalms. However, in numerous places the Latin text does not accord with the images. It is this discrepancy that propelled me to study the Utrecht Psalter images in relation to the Latin text and then to the original Hebrew version of the psalms. The results of that study are set down in my book *Hebrew Psalms and the Utrecht Psalter: Veiled Origins*.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Utrecht Psalter Annotated Edition, MS 32; Dufrenne 1987; Koehler 1994; Van der Horst 1996; Utrecht Psalter, 22–84.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Van der Horst 1996; Utrecht Psalter, 44–49.

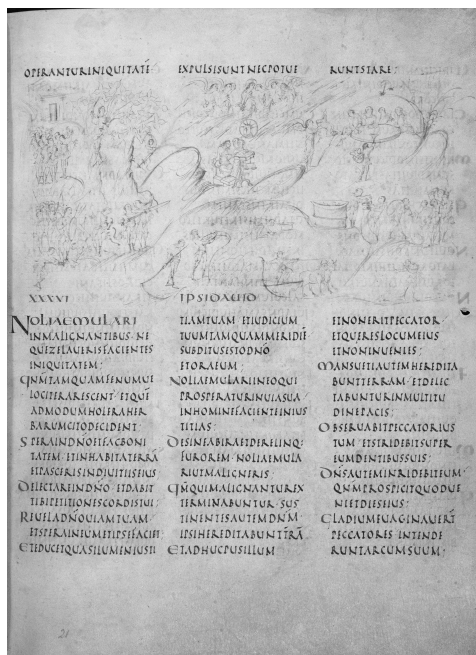


Fig. 1: Psalm 36–37, fol. 21r. Utrecht Psalter  
(Utrecht University Library, MS 32)

How could the Hebrew words of the Psalms, rather than the accompanying Latin Gallican text, have been the basis for the illustrations in the Utrecht Psalter? Two decades ago Koert Van der Horst observed that the Carolingian artists who executed the Utrecht Psalter were not copying their images from an illustrated book of psalms. The images had arrived at Hautvillers drawn on loose sheets. The fact that the images were not accompanying the psalm text explains why the artists initially placed the first couple of images in the wrong place vis-à-vis the Latin text. The artist had to erase the first few images he had set down and add another folio for the drawing accompanying Psalm 1.<sup>3</sup> Given this anomaly, I surmised

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Van der Horst 1996, 43–44.48–9. Van der Horst shows that the draftsman began his work with a mistake and placed the drawing for Psalm 1 in the space intended for Psalm 2. Then he placed the drawings for Psalm 2 and 3 in the spaces intended for 3 and 4. The three drawings had to be erased and replaced with the correct ones.



that if the images did not accompany the Latin text of the Psalter, they could have originally illustrated a different text. What I demonstrated in my book is that the text that the psalm images originally reflected was an illustrated Hebrew book of psalms.

One of the ways I demonstrate this is by showing when the Psalter image accords only with the Hebrew, and not with the Latin text at all. An example of this can be found in the illustration to Psalm 36/37, fol. 21r (Fig. 1).

The Hebrew text of this psalm presents us with the idea that the righteous will succeed and the evildoers will fail and be »cut down«. Verse 2 tells us that »Like grass [the evildoers] will be swiftly cut down [ymmalu]«<sup>4</sup>. The root of this verb is *mem*, *vav*, *lamed*, and the word literally means »to circumcise«. It can also mean »to cut off like grass«<sup>5</sup>. The Targum gives us the metaphor that the evil-doers will be »cleared«, again a notion that is related to grass being cleared away.<sup>6</sup> The *Midrash* likewise corroborates the metaphor of the cut grass. »For they [the wicked] shall soon be cut down like the grass.«<sup>7</sup>

At the center of the image on fol. 21r is the illustration that correspond to this verse (Fig. 1a).

One man sharpens his scythe while another is about to sweep his beneath the grass. The use of the word in verse 2 to mean »will be cut« accords only with the Hebrew text. The Latin words referring to the grass describe it as »withering«, »drying up«, and »dying« (*arescere*, »to dry up« or »to wither«; *decider*, »to fall down« or »to die«): *Quoniam tamquam foenum velociter arescent, et quemadmodum olera herbarum cito decident*. »For they shall shortly wither away as grass, and as the green herbs shall quickly fall.« The idea of grasses »withering« (not »being cut«) is expressed in the commentaries of the church fathers as well.<sup>8</sup> Thus, since it is only the Hebrew text that gives us the notion of grass being cut, it is more likely that the visual metaphor of the harvesters using scythes to

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One result of this error was that Psalm 1 had to be inserted as a single leaf.

<sup>4</sup> Schapiro/Mykoff/Rubin 1998, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Brown 2008, 4135.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Stec 2004, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Braude 1959.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine 2005, Expo. Ps. 37, para 3; Cassiodorus 1990, Exp. Ps. 1:358; Cf. Theodoret 2000, Commentary, 101: 222.

»cut down« the grass/evildoers derived from a model dependent on a Hebrew text rather than on the Latin.

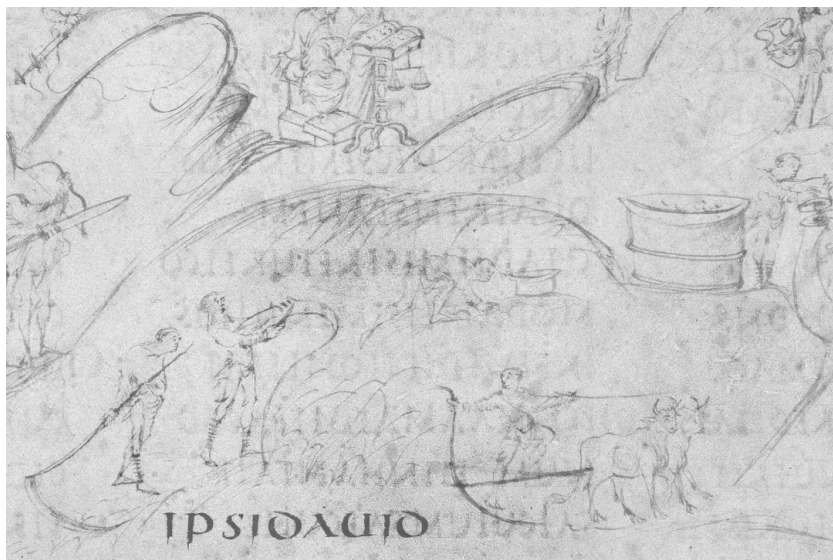


Fig. 1a: Psalm 36–37, fol. 21r (detail)

The Biblical Hebrew text, however, was not the only source relied on by the artists who illustrated the hypothetical Hebrew Psalm Book. Sometimes a motif in the imagery is illuminated by the *Targum*, the Midrash, or the Talmud. On occasion, it is the iconography displayed in various works of Jewish art that served as a model for the imagery and thus provides clues to the original meaning of an illustration. As an example of the relationship between Jewish art and the motifs in a possible Hebrew illustrated Book of Psalms, I will focus on one psalm, 67/68 on folio 37 verso, which I analyze in my book (Fig. 2 and 2a).

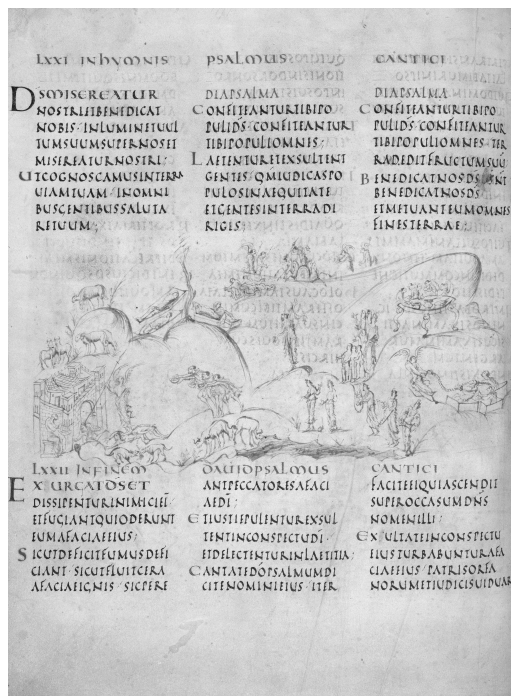


Fig. 2: Psalm 67–68, fol. 37v. Utrecht Psalter  
(Utrecht University Library. MS 32)

Psalm 67 (Latin version), 68 (Hebrew version) presents us with a variety of motifs spread across the page. Each motif corresponds to a verse or verses in the text. In the center is David, the one who will sing this song (verse 1). He stands upon a little hill and stretches his arm up toward a figure riding in a chariot drawn by four horses and flanked by angels. The charioteer's face is characterized by an angry scowl, and he holds what may be a torch in his right hand. Until the publication of my book, the fig



Fig. 2a: Psalm 67–68, fol. 37v (detail)

ure was identified as Christ.<sup>9</sup> However, a problem presents itself when one realizes that the charioteer has no halo as Christ does in the other illustrations in the Utrecht Psalter. Furthermore, in only one instance in late antique or medieval art do we find a possible Christ figure riding a chariot: that is the so-called Christos-Helios mosaic beneath in the tomb of the Julii under the Vatican.<sup>10</sup> So if this charioteer was not originally meant to be Christ, what figure could he have been based on? I will argue that there was indeed such a charioteer in the model (the loose sheets), and that he must have been very much like the figure that appears in nine Galilean late antique synagogue mosaics, and thus could have been present in a Jewish source.

It is clear that the figure in the chariot reflects four of the verses of the Psalm: »Let God arise« (verse 2); »Extol Him Who rides upon 'aravot (verse 5b), 'aravot being translated as »the clouds«, »the skies« »the seventh heaven« »sunset«;<sup>11</sup> »The chariot of God is twice ten thousand« (verse 18); Chant hymns »to Him who rides the ancient highest heavens«

<sup>9</sup> Cf. DeWald 1934; Koehler 1994, 105. See also »Utrecht Psalter Annotated Edition«; The patristic sources reference a chariot-riding or ascending Christ in their commentaries: Augustine 2005, Expo. Ps. 68:18 para. 4 and para. 21; Theodoret 2000, 386f.; Ewald 1964, 50; Eusebius 1857, PG, vol. 23, col. 701.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kessler/Zacharias 2000, 166f. One other exception may be a mosaic copied in a seventeenth-century watercolor. The watercolor is discussed in Kessler/Zacharias 2000.

(verse 34a). The art-historical material reviewed below as well as the Hebrew text and the Midrash all support the idea that a rider in a chariot drawn by four horses could have been present in a Jewish model. At least nine Galilean synagogue floor mosaics display just such an image, one reflective of the Greco-Roman sun god or Helios.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned above, Galilee is the place where, I believe, a late antique illustrated Hebrew book of psalms might have been created, a book that could have served as the model for the Utrecht Psalter images. I will argue that the motif of the chariot-riding sun god in the mosaic pavements could have inspired the representation of the chariot rider in the model for this illustration.

So far, the earliest example of a Helios mosaic discovered in a synagogue is at Hammat Tiberias, dated to the fourth century. Beth Alpha, created in the sixth century, is more simplified and abstract. In the Sepphoris synagogue (early fifth century) the motif of the sun god is rather complicated, for instead of the human form of Helios, the sun itself is pictured riding in the chariot.<sup>13</sup> The newly-discovered Huqoq sun god has yet to be fully published, but in that mosaic as well, a chariot was driven by four horses and is placed against a celestial background.<sup>14</sup>

The chariot rider at the top of the Utrecht drawing can be compared to the images of Helios in these synagogue mosaics. As at Hammat Tiberias the Utrecht driver is positioned more or less frontally, looking toward our left, and raising his right hand.<sup>15</sup> In both images the rider wears a cloak. The Hammat chariot and horses are almost completely destroyed, but at Sepphoris, Beth Alpha, and Huqoq four horses with prancing legs are depicted much as they are in the Utrecht image.<sup>16</sup> As in the Psalter, the chariot at Sepphoris is pictured from the front and moves toward the viewer,

<sup>11</sup> Berlin/Brettler 2014, 1265–1435. Cf. Berlin/Brettler 2014, 1340, note 5b; Schapiro/Mykoff/Rubin 1998, 120, note 68:5; Feuer 1985, vol. 1, 827, note 5. For the root of 'avarot as »the place of the sunset« see Brown et al. 2008, 787, #6164. Hereafter BDB.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Magness 2019, 61–131; Magness 2018, 106, note 59 for the most up to date list of the sun god formula on synagogue floors; see also 106–108, figures 41–42.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Talgam 2014, 264–319, for illustrations of the mosaics of Hammat Tiberias, Sepphoris, Beth Alpha, and fragments of Susiya and Huseifa.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Magness 2014, Figs. 41–42.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Talgam 2014, 265 and 271.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Talgam 2014, 286, for Sepphoris; Talgam 2014, 299, for Beth Alpha; Magness 2014, 108, for Huqoq.

though the horses are shown more or less in profile. And, in both the mosaic and the manuscript, the horses seem to be prancing on their hind legs while their front legs are raised up. The lines at the bottom of the inner circle surrounding the sun at Sepphoris have been interpreted as the sea, so the chariot can be imagined as coming out of the waters and climbing up into heaven. In Beth Alpha the charioteer rides in the sky. The Utrecht chariot is also shown in the sky, coming up from behind the clouds. At Sepphoris, Beth Alpha and Huqoq celestial symbols surround the central sun symbol or the sun god figure.

Scholars have offered many possible interpretations of the meaning of the visual figure of this chariot-rider.<sup>17</sup> Some have given him a mystical interpretation; others have seen him as an affirmation of God's power in nature or history. Some view him as just an aesthetically pleasing image with no particular religious meaning. Other interpretations include seeing Helios as representing the celestial as opposed to the earthly realm. He is viewed as influenced by Hellenized Judaism as opposed to a rabbinically-dominated Judaism. It has also been proposed that he represents a minor deity. Among the suggestions, however, and most controversially, is that the figure is a symbol of God Himself. Indeed, in late antique Galilee some Jews might have thought of the divine »form« as being akin to the sun in a chariot.<sup>18</sup> In 2 Kings 23:11 we read that the king »took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entrance of the house of the Lord [...]; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire«. There are grounds to suspect that in post-biblical Judaism, contradictory notions about the »shape« of God existed, for anthropomorphic allusions to various parts of God's »form« are present in rabbinic literature as well as in the Bible.<sup>19</sup> Among the forms imagined by the rabbis for the Deity is the sun.

To be sure, in late antiquity, or in other periods, Jews made no actual physical objects or statues to worship.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, they would condemn the worship of such physical object. Leviticus 19:4 warns: »Turn ye not unto the idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods«, a sentiment cor-

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Levine 2003, 92f., 247–251; Levine 2013, 319–322; Weiss 2005, 231–235; Smith 1996, 268–295; Goodman 2003, 135; Talgam 2014, 268–295.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Goodman 2003, 133–139.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 136–138.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Urbach 1959, 149–165, esp. 157–159.

roborated by Deuteronomy 27:15: »Cursed be the man that makes a graven or molten image.« A physical object, however, is not the same as a mosaic or a drawing. And we know that by the third century, there was a certain tolerance for paintings, even on the walls of a synagogue such as Dura Europos, where the hand of God appears several times. The Galilean synagogue mosaics featuring the sun god represent a similar acceptance. That attitude could have given rise to a drawing of the chariot-riding Helios in an illustrated Hebrew version of Psalms just as well as in a mosaic pavement. Hence, the Hebrew text and the rabbinic commentary lend support to the proposal that the sage advising those preparing the hypothetical late antique model of the Utrecht Psalter could have suggested the motif of the chariot-rider as a visual analogue for the figure described in the verses of this psalm.

Verse 5b amplifies the image of God »arising« in verse 2. It portrays Him riding into the »place of the sunset«. »Extol Him Who rides in 'ar-avot.«<sup>21</sup> In rabbinic literature *'avarot* is used as the name of the seventh heaven, and some modern biblical scholars have arrived at a similar understanding of the word.<sup>22</sup> So one reading of 5b could be, Extol Him Who rides »in the clouds« or »in the seventh heaven«<sup>23</sup>. Then 5b continues: »YAH [the Lord] is His Name; Exult in His presence.« So in the text of the psalm and in the rabbinic interpretations, the figure riding in the place of the sunset is indeed understood as the Lord.

The midrashic commentary elaborates on the anthropomorphic imagery of the Lord riding in the sky. A commentary on verse 5 reads, »*Extol Him that rideth upon the skies* (verse 68:5). Like a man riding a horse and guiding it over the plain, the Holy One, blessed be He, rides upon the skies. As Moses said, »*He who rideth upon the sky is thy help*.«<sup>24</sup> The commentary then cites Deuteronomy 33:26, but does not quote the text, which actually reads: »There is none like God, riding through the heavens to help you, through the skies in His Majesty.« Hence the rabbis who wrote the Midrash demonstrate that metaphorically, they viewed the Lord anthropomorphically, like a »man« riding a horse in the sky. The metaphor of God riding upon the clouds is found elsewhere in Jewish Scripture. For

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Brown 2008, 787.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Stec 2004, 129, note 4.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Schapiro/Mykoff/Rubin 1998, 120 note 68:5; Stec 2004, 129.

<sup>24</sup> Midr. Teh., Ps. 68, sect 3; Braude 1959, 539.

instance, in Isaiah 19:1 we find, »Mounted on a swift cloud, the Lord will come to Egypt.« And Psalm 18:10 reads, »He bent the sky and came down, thick cloud beneath His feet.«

The God who rides the sky is explicitly envisioned in a chariot in verse 18: »The chariot of God is twice ten thousand, thousands of *shin'an*.« The word is unclear, but Jewish commentators have suggested that »*shin'an*« are angels.<sup>25</sup> In the Targum the image evoked in verse 18 is also understood as angels: »The chariots of God are twice ten thousand of blazing fire; two thousand angels lead them.«<sup>26</sup> Though angels flanking an image of Jesus or of God's hand are common in the Utrecht Psalter, the four angels flanking the chariot rider depicted in this illustration accord well with the tradition expressed in the Midrash and Targum. Hence, I propose that a late antique model coming from a Jewish milieu could very well have depicted a representation of a chariot-riding figure flanked by angels. I conclude that such a motif was what the ninth-century artist saw in his model. It was not his intent to draw the image of Christ at the top of this illustration.

In the upper left are four figures reclining in sarcophagi. To what words in the Hebrew text could they refer? DeWald points out that verse 7 of the Latin Vulgate and the Gallican text of the Utrecht Psalter can be translated as, God »bringeth out them [...] that dwell in sepulchers«, a phrase that is not present in the Hebrew.<sup>27</sup> I suggest, however, that the figures in the sarcophagi were indeed present in a Jewish model, for they can be illuminated by the *Targum*, the Midrash, and the Talmud. They reflect the Aramaic or the Midrashic commentary on verses 9–11 of the Hebrew text: »The earth roared – even the heavens dripped [rain] before the Presence of God. This is Sinai – before the Presence of God (verse 9).« The presence of God at Sinai had overawed the Children of Israel; their bodies had grown limp and lifeless.<sup>28</sup> Then, according to the translation of the Targum, God »sent down the dew of revival upon them«<sup>29</sup>. »You [God] restored your revival [life] in it.«<sup>30</sup> This is understood to mean that God

<sup>25</sup> Midr. Teh., Ps. 68, sect.10; Braude 1959, 544f.

<sup>26</sup> Stec 2004, 131; see also Gruber 2007, 457, note 62.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. DeWald 1934, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Feuer 1985, 832, vol. 1, note 10.

<sup>29</sup> Stec 2004, 129.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 130, note 14.



sent down upon the Israelites »the dew of revival«, by which He restored life, a fitting analogue for figures rising from sarcophagi. The Midrash expounds on verse 9–10 in a similar manner: *The earth trembled* (Ps. 68:9) and at once all the living in the Land of Israel died: But the dead came to life as the Holy One, blessed be He, dropped the dew of resurrection on them, for the verse goes on to say *The heavens also dropped [dew] at the presence of God* (Ps 68:9).<sup>31</sup> The »dew of life« is referenced further on in the Midrash when the sages elaborate on a phrase in 68:10:

»A bounteous rain (Ps. 68:10). When the ministering angels saw that the breath of life had flown out of the children of Israel, they asked the Holy One, blessed be He: ›To whom wilt Thou give the Torah, to the dead or to the quick?‹ At once the Holy One, blessed be He, waved out rains of life over the children of Israel so that they should receive the Torah with abounding spirit.«<sup>32</sup>

The Talmud also refers to the »resurrection« motif when commenting on verse 10 that says, »A generous [bounteous] rain did You lavish [pour out], O God.« The Talmudic reference is:

»R. Joshua b. Levi also said: At every word which went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, the souls of Israel departed, for it is said, My soul went forth when he spake [sic]. But since their souls departed at the first word, how could they receive the second word? – He brought down the dew with which He will resurrect the dead and revived them, as it is said, ›Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, Thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary.«<sup>33</sup>

If one looks closely at those lying in the sarcophagi, it is apparent that the figure on the far left appears deceased and shrouded; next to him is one whose head is no longer wound in a shroud. The two tombs on the right hold men who have awakened and are beginning to move upward; they were dead but the »generous rains« revived them. That »awakening« is the interpretation suggested by the Targum, the Midrash and the Talmud. The Latin text, which includes the word »sepulcher«, need not have been the inspiration for the motif of the men gradually awakening in their tombs. It could have been a Jewish model informed by the Jewish commentary. This is one example of an alternative interpretation of a motif, an interpretation dependent on the Jewish texts. The rest of the motifs in

<sup>31</sup> Midr. Teh. Ps. 68, Sect. 5; cf. Braude 1959, 540.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Babylonian Talmud 1935, Book 3, 88b, lines 25f.

the illustration are consonant with both the Latin and the Hebrew versions of the psalm.

The charioteer in the chariot drawn by horses in a celestial environment is one example of a Jewish art historical source. The image of the four sepulchers can be explained by Jewish textual source even though they are not mentioned in the psalm itself. There are also a number of instances where there is no Latin reference at all that can explain an image. Such an instance can be found in the upper right corner of the illustrations to Psalm 1, where four serpents emanate from the devil's head and a snake twines around each leg.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 3, Psalm 1, fol. 1v. *Utrecht Psalter*  
(*Utrecht University Library. MS 32*)

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Utrecht Psalter Annotated Edition*.

The devil is positioned to the right of the enthroned »wicked« man, whose counsel the »happy« man does not follow (verse 1) (Fig. 3a). In his right hand the devil grasps two serpents that rise toward the head of the wicked man. In his left hand he holds more snakes. This group is related to verse 1. It illustrates the fact that the blessed man »walked not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the path of the sinful, nor sat in the seat of scorners«. [underlining mine] Those are the evil ones whose ways the blessed man shunned. In the Latin text the last phrase tells us that the blessed man does not sit »*in cathedra pestilentiae*«, »in the seat of pestilence«, and scholars have seen the snake-wielding figure as a personification of that pestilence.<sup>35</sup> The Hebrew text does not use the word »pestilence« here. It rather employs the term for scorners, *letsim*. Thus the meaning in the Hebrew is that the blessed man does not sit »in the seat of scorners«<sup>36</sup>. Nowhere in the Hebrew psalm itself serpents are mentioned; nor does the Latin text refer to them. It is the Midrash that connects the serpent with the wicked man who sat in the seat of the scorners:

»Adam said: ›If I had not walked in the counsel of the serpent, how blessed I would have been! [...] If I had not stood in the way of the serpent, how blessed I would have been! [...] If I had not sat in the seat of the serpent, a seat of scorn, how blessed I would have been!‹«



Fig. 3a, Psalm 1, fol. 1v (detail)

<sup>35</sup> Cf. DeWald 1934, 4; Utrecht Psalter Annotated Edition, fol. 1v. This online edition uses that standard Vulgate translation. I have consulted the Gallican text in the Utrecht Psalter as well, and I have noted any differences that relate to this study.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Brown 2008, #539, #3887 and #3944.

And this section of the Midrash concludes: »It follows from this that the serpent was a scoffer [or a »scorner«].«<sup>37</sup> So it is the Midrash that confirms that one of the attributes of the wicked man – that he sits in the »seat of the scorner« – is illustrated by the presence of the serpents, for the Midrash names the serpent as a scoffer/scorner.<sup>38</sup> A few sentences further the Midrash once again equates the serpent with the wicked. »*Not so the wicked* (Ps 1:4) – that is the serpent.«<sup>39</sup> [underlining mine] So, the »wicked« is once again the »serpent«. The Latin text uses the word »*pestilentialiae*«, i.e. »pestilence, plague«. It does not use the word for »serpent«. Nor do any of the church fathers connect the serpent with the wicked or with the scorners.<sup>40</sup> The Midrash, however, offers a convincing explanation of why we find the serpents in conjunction with the wicked man who, unlike the blessed man, is a scorner, and »sits in the seat of the scornful«.<sup>41</sup>

The above are three examples of many others that show how the Jewish sources accord more precisely with the imagery in the Utrecht Psalter than does the Latin text or the writings of the church fathers. The examples of the primacy of Jewish textual and visual sources that I discuss in

<sup>37</sup> Midr. The., Ps. 1, sect. 9; cf. Braude 2008, 12f.

<sup>38</sup> The Hebrew word for scoffer/scorner in the Midrash is »letsan« and its root (l-w-š) is the same as the root for »letsim«, the term used in verse 1 for »scorner«.

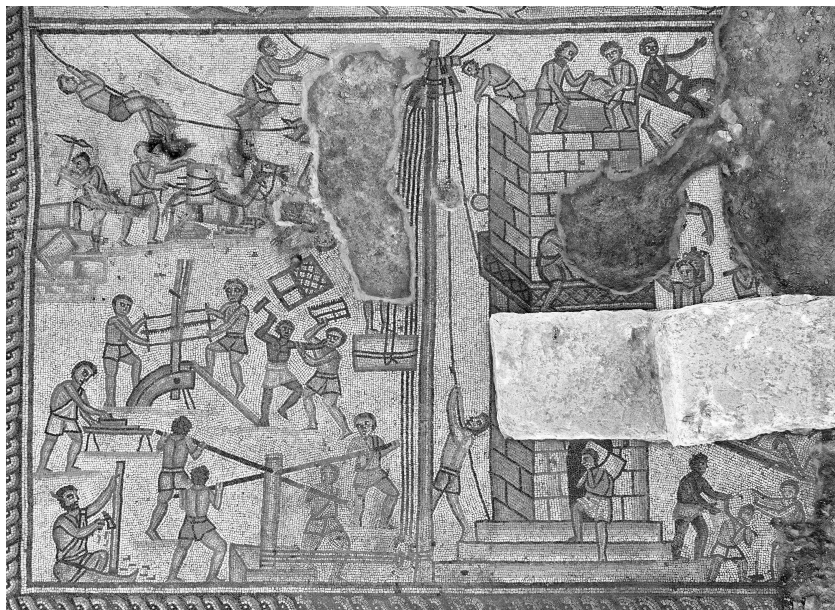
<sup>39</sup> Midr. Teh., Ps. 1, sect. 9; cf. Braude 2008, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Blaising/Hardin 2008; Ancient Christian Writers 1990, Commentary 3–6; Basil of Caesarea 1963, 156–163; Cassiodorus 1990, Psalms 48 and 48; Theodoret 2000, Psalm 48.

The church fathers commenting on the use of the word »pestilentialiae« generally assume it means a disease, or a harmful doctrine. Augustine references the serpent as having beguiled the »man of earth«, i.e. Adam and his wife. He does not connect it with the scoffer/scorner (cf. Augustine 2005, En. Ps.; Psalm 1). Basil of Caesarea also calls pestilence a disease or an evil, but he does not mention serpents (cf. Basil 1963, 156–163). None of the other church fathers associate the wicked man with the serpent (cf. Cassiodorus 1990, 48f.; Theodoret 2000, 48).

<sup>41</sup> In addition to the images discussed above, the Utrecht Psalter and the synagogue mosaics also share motifs of river gods, earth mother goddesses, basilicas and circular planned classical architectural structures, and small sun gods in the sky counterbalancing moon goddesses wearing crescent headgear. Nearly every picture has figures wearing typical antique garb. The armor on the soldiers, however, has been shown to be Carolingian. There are also personifications such as Mercy, Anger, Kindness, etc. the kinds of figures typical of a Greco-Roman repertoire, a repertoire common in late antique Galilee.

my book strongly suggest that the loose sheets that were copied at Hautvillers ultimately relied on an illustrated Hebrew manuscript of the psalms.



*Fig. 4, Magness, Huqoq synagogue mosaic panel of the building of the Tower of Babel.*

Where could such a late antique Jewish manuscript have originated? I believe it is most likely that the ultimate model for the Utrecht Psalter was created in Roman Palestine, and specifically in the Galilee. With the spectacular discoveries over the past few years of the mosaic panels at Khirbet Wadi Hamam and Huqoq we are now presented with proof that the Jews of late antique Palestine were familiar with a rich repertoire of imagery from the Bible, the Commentary, the Targum, and indeed from secular imagery. Mosaic panels depicting the »Building of the Tower of Babel« (Fig. 4), Jonah and the Big Fish, the Drowning of Pharaoh's Soldiers, Noah's Ark, and scenes relating to Samson have been uncovered in the

synagogue mosaics of the Galilee.<sup>42</sup> There are also »secular« scenes, such as the panel of the Commander and the Priest that decorates the floor of the Huqoq synagogue.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the iconographic similarity existing between the Galilean mosaics and the imagery of the Utrecht Psalter, a stylistic affinity is also apparent. For the purposes of this essay, I will highlight that aspect of the style that relates to the spatial organization of the compositions. I will be discussing the style as it appears mainly in the illustration to Psalm 67/68 (Fig. 2). However, all the illustrated folios can be consulted at the Utrecht Psalter website.<sup>44</sup> Huqoq and Wadi Hamam have mosaic panels that are set in rectangular compositions (Fig. 4). Such compositions characterize nearly all the images of the Utrecht Psalter as well. The figures in these rectangular composition in both the psalter and the mosaic panels are strewn throughout the surface with no diminution in size to convey distance. For instance, in the Huqoq »Building of the Tower of Babel« the individuals, object or groups of figures are placed over the whole surface of the rectangular panel (Fig. 4). In the mosaics a line or lines indicating the »landscape« often support the figures or groups. The same is true for the psalter, as in the illustration to Psalm 67/68 (Figs. 2 and 2a). The figure of David appears on a hillock, as do the four tombs on the left. The table of the righteous on the right hovers above lines meant to indicate the ground. In the mosaics the figures are organized so that they are supported by ground lines often composed of three or four rows of tesserae of a light yellow or beige color. As in the psalter they also give the impression that the groups or figures are supported by small »hillocks«. Small or medium-sized hills form little shaded »platforms« upon which the figures or structures sit, stand, or even »dance«, just as with the mosaics. These compositional ground lines or »platforms« in the mosaics mean that the rectangular mosaics can be best seen from only one point of view, a quality that naturally characterizes the images in the manuscript as well.

In addition, in both the mosaics and the psalter three-quarter views abound and sometimes a full view of a figure's back is present. Active poses are displayed. See for instance the climbing, battling and scraping

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Leibner/Miller 2010, 238–263; Magness 2014, 61–131.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Magness 2014, 93–95.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Utrecht Psalter Annotated Edition, University of Utrecht Library; see: <http://psalter.library.uu.nl/page?p=0>.

activities of the builders in the Huqoq Tower of Babel scene (Fig. 4). We have a similar level of active engagement displayed in many of the scenes of the Utrecht Psalter. See the gesturing, bowing, groveling, pulling figures on fol. 37v (Fig. 2 and 2a). In both the mosaic and the psalter, though the proportions of the parts of the body are generally accurate, the figures are arbitrarily sized. In both the mosaic and the psalter, some figures have dark lines around them. In general, however, there is some attention to interior modelling. See, for instance, the brief modeling on the figures battling in the center of the Huqoq mosaic, and the modeling on the tunics of the instrumentalists in the lower right of the psalter illustration (Fig. 2). The individual objects likewise reveal a certain attention to three-dimensionality, as in the shading of the tower in the Huqoq panel or the emblematic city of Jerusalem with its buildings in the lower left of the psalter folio (Fig. 2) or the throne in the upper fight of fol. 1v of Psalm 1 (Fig. 3a). This lingering presence of certain modelling techniques shows that some aspects of the Hellenistic style had not been forgotten by either the late antique mosaicists or the manuscript illustrators.

One of the questions I raise in my book is, what could the relationship have been between the artist drawing images to accompany a late antique illustrated Hebrew Book of Psalms and the artists responsible for creating the mosaics? It is important to understand that these mosaics, crafted in tesserae, were dependent on underdrawings. After the first rough layer of plaster was laid down on the floor, a simplified drawing of the images was created. Then, when the first coat was dry, and on finer plaster, a more refined drawing was done, one that indicated the appropriate colors of the figures and objects. Thus, the artists who created those underdrawings had to be skilled craftsmen. And indeed, as is evident in the mosaic panels, many of them were. The figures they created were often »Hellenistic« in style, with well modeled forms harmoniously proportioned, and figures making energetic gestures, as do the two women below David (Fig. 2 and 2a).

I have argued that the Utrecht Psalter has strong affinities with the Galilean synagogue mosaics. They both exhibit certain stylistic elements that evoke »Hellenistic« art and they both display iconographic motifs consonant with Jewish art, the Hebrew or Aramaic texts, or with the Jewish commentaries. Both have compositions that spread out the figures and objects, and supports them on hillocks. The imagery of the synagogue

mosaics and the psalter neglects to take account of recession, or of the naturalistic sizes of the figures, objects, and structures. All of this points to the strong possibility that the synagogue mosaic panels reflect the compositions in a late-antique illustrated Hebrew manuscript of the Psalms. These newly discovered mosaics provide strong evidence for an analogous art form on parchment being present in late antique Galilee. The full argument for the affinity between late antique Galilean mosaic panels and the images in the Utrecht Psalter is laid out in my book, *Hebrew Psalms and the Utrecht Psalter: Veiled Origins*.

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## Figures

- Fig. 1: Psalm 36–37, fol. 21r. Utrecht Psalter, Utrecht University Library. MS 32.  
Fig. 1a: Psalm 36–37, fol. 21r (detail).  
Fig. 2: Psalm 67–68, fol. 37v. Utrecht Psalter, Utrecht University Library. MS 32.  
Fig. 2a: Psalm 67–68, fol. 37v (detail).  
Fig. 3: Psalm 1, fol. 1v. Utrecht Psalter, Utrecht University Library. MS 32.  
Fig. 3a: Psalm 1, fol. 1v (detail).  
Fig. 4: Magness, Huqoq synagogue mosaic panel of the building of the Tower of Babel.