Commenting the Psalter in Eleventh-Century Constantinople: an Image of the Paralipomena Ieremiou in the ‘Theodore Psalter’

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Artistic evidence is rarely closely connected to the core business of textual transmission, yet in medieval illuminated manuscripts we have gradually come to recognize the close relationship between text and image, and this recognition has guided much recent scholarship not only in the Byzantine field. In his paper for this colloquium, my colleague Brian Møller Jensen refers to an article in the seminal issue of *Speculum*, dedicated to ‘New Philology’, wherein the ‘total’ approach to the study of the text and its carrier, with a renewed attention to the varieties of each taken individually and combined together, is advocated. Stephen Nichols’s passage is indeed illuminating and poses a challenge that particularly applies to the project I am undertaking within the Ars edendi programme at the University of Stockholm. Allow me then to quote it once more, and at greater length, so that the foundations for what follows may not only be solidly grounded in Nichols’s assumptions, but also receive and take up his challenge of discovering the ‘double literacy’ of these medieval products. According to Nichols,

It is evident that the philological practices that have treated the manuscript from the perspective of text and language alone have seriously neglected the important supplements that were part and parcel of medieval text production: visual images and annotation of various forms (rubrics, “captions”, glosses, and interpolations). […]

The manuscript folio contains different systems of representation: poetic or narrative text, the highly individual and distinctive scribal hand(s) that inscribed the text, illuminated images, coloured rubrications, and not infrequently glosses and commentaries in the margins or interpolated in the text. Each system is a unit independent of the others and yet calls attention to them; each tries to convey something about the other while to some extent substituting for it. […]

The rubric … does not simply “explain” or describe what is to be found in the miniature or passage it introduces. Appropriating to itself the role

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of commentary or directed reading, the rubric focuses the attention at specific moments, telling us what it is we are to see in the visual scene or laying out the narrative thrust of the verbal text. [...] A miniature we admire as a work of art in its own right also represents a scene in the poetic narrative, now transposed from the verbal to the visual medium.¹ So far so good. In what follows, we will highlight the interaction between the marginal miniature, its role as a commentary to a specific verse from the Psalter, and the captions appended to it, seeking to demonstrate their interrelation and to highlight the importance of this occurrence within the transmission history of the text chosen.

But Nichols's analysis goes further. It suggests that images and text stage a kind of battle on the page, each claiming attention to itself; and that in this struggle consists the 'dynamic of the medieval manuscript matrix'. It 'involves cognitive perception of two kinds of literacy: reading text and interpreting visual signs. This double literacy involves mimetic repetition to the extent that the visual art repredicates the poetic text'.² This multiplication of voices coming from the manuscript page should give rise to a more complex hermeneutics to capture their individual role as well as their concerted effort to express meaning, often residing in the dynamics of their mutual interplay.

I would like to give you an example of my approach to these issues by looking at an image from the ‘Theodore Psalter’, so-called from the name of its scribe, who declares in the colophon to be priest-monk at the monastery of St John Stoudios under Abbott Michael Mermentoulos. He dates his work precisely to the year 1066. This Byzantine Psalter has been the object of an electronic edition by Charles Barber of Notre Dame University, in collaboration with the British Library, where the ms is kept under the shelfmark Addit. 19352, in the year 2000. The production of this CD-ROM with full-page, full-colour images has enabled free and repeated perusal of this ancient object, although the previous study by Sirarpie Der Nersessian, despite its cropped black-and-white plates, remains valuable. New technology has again superseded Barber’s production, and recently this manuscript has been made integrally available online by a bold project of the British Library to place a conspicuous number of Greek manuscripts in the public domain. Handily, I can here refer to the web address for the image, contained at fol. 36r, that is the object of this study as well as to the descriptive page of this ms online.³

This seems to be the only attested image inspired by the text of the Paral-

² Ibid., p. 8.
³ http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_19352_f036r
ipomena Ieremiou. It is interesting to note that the extant manuscript tradition of this text begins in the late tenth/early eleventh century, precisely around the time of its ‘use’ as an iconographical source for the Theodore Psalter. While the survival pattern may be purely accidental – for example, the ‘Letter of Aristeas’ too is first attested in an eleventh-century ms – when read together this evidence would appear to indicate at the very least that there was a particular interest in this apocryphon around that time, if not that the recension of the tale as we have it is actually medieval rather than late antique.\(^5\)

In her study of the Theodore Psalter, Der Nersessian drew attention to the uniqueness of this representation inspired by an apocryphal narrative in the panorama of Byzantine art:

Cette miniature du psautier de Londres est un exemple unique, car […] on n’a jamais introduit dans un texte religieux une scène empruntée entièrement à un apochryphe biblique, et de plus un apochryphe aussi peu connu que le Reste des Paroles de Baruch.\(^6\)

One may question whether the text was really as ‘little known’ as Der Nersessian assumes. The fact that the imagery on the Psalter page merely alludes to the apocalyptic story, with the aid of succinct captions, presupposes a basic knowledge of the plot, so that the whole account could be recognized merely through the select elements offered by the pictures.

In this paper I will examine in detail this selection of images and their accompanying captions in the Theodore Psalter. Attention will be drawn both to the iconographic and the verbal choices in relation to the textual tradition of this narrative. What was their relation on this page and with the Psalter text? What can it tell us about the composition and about the readership – of this manuscript and of the apocalyptic text itself? How does this choice fit into the wider discourse of the Psalter imagery?

It is beyond doubt that the text used in the captions comes from the Paralipomena Ieremiou or ‘The Rest of the Words of the Prophet Jeremiah’, one in a constellation of narratives inspired by the biblical book of Jeremiah, and like it dealing with the deportation of the Jewish people to Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem. While other closely-related works, such as the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, stress the lamentations and the visionary aspects of the prophetic revelations during the deportation, in an earnest tone, the Paralipomena


\(^5\) Schaller, p. 688: ‘Der Text ist spät, beginnend mit dem 10/11 Jh., aber breit Überliefert’.

Jeremiou is at once less gloomy and less coherent. Its narrative appears formed out of previous narrative units juxtaposed or imperfectly welded together, with many folkloric elements, aetiological notices (e.g. on the Samaritans) and even fabulistic components (such as a talking eagle). While the redactor may have been a single mind, his composition does not reveal fine literary qualities, and while a serious theological intent is assumed, its contours are awkward and difficult to clarify. One may well wonder whether this rough-and-ready story about the prophet Jeremiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile of the Jews to Babylon was ever more than a medieval entertainment, perhaps a lighter story to accompany the legends of the saints in the Menaion, appropriate to both the memory of Jeremiah’s martyrdom (1 May) and to the commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem (4 November). An in-depth study of these feasts in relation to the Paralipomena remains a desideratum, given the text’s transmission in liturgical manuscripts.

However, the use that the illustrator of the Theodore Psalter makes of this story is all but light-hearted. One indication of his serious intent can be gathered precisely in the depiction of the eagle with outstretched wings at the upper right corner of fol. 36r. Unlike the Aesop-like talking eagle in the Paralipomena, this eagle flies, silent, bearing the message to Jeremiah in the shape of a scroll attached by a ribbon to its feet. This bird is also carrying a long necklace painted in a bluish colour, apparently adorned with protruding shapes: these are the figs she is also taking to Jeremiah. The drawing and painting of this rather detailed eagle clearly preceded the writing of the caption, as the wings are each embedded in the text of the caption that was written across them.

It is this long caption that begins to tell the story, not in the form of direct speech from the eagle, but rather as a sketchy summary of the whole Paralipomena narrative. This caption reads:

ὁ ἀετὸς ἀποστελλόμενος εἰς Βαβυλῶνα παρὰ τοῦ Βαροῦχ κομίζων τ(ὸν) Ἰερεμίαν σῦκα ἐκ τ(ὸν) ἀγρὸν τοῦ Ἀγρίπα μετὰ κ(αὶ) γράμματο(ν) ἀπὸ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα· ὄντα εἰς Βαβυλῶνα μετὰ τὸν αἰχμαλωτισθέντα λαὸν.

The eagle being dispatched by Baruch to Babylon carrying figs from the field of Agrippa, together with a letter from Jerusalem, to Jeremiah who was in Babylon with the captive people.

Attention can be drawn to some details in this visual synthesis and its verbal synopsis, which appear as original departures when compared with the text of

7 For a detailed comparison of these related texts, see P. Bogaert, ‘Les Paraleipomena Jeremiæ et l’Apocalypse Syriaque de Baruch’, in idem, L’Apocalypse de Baruch, sc. 144–145 (Paris, 1969), I, pp. 177–223. Bogaert concludes that the Paralipomena depend on the Syriac Apocalypse without the need to postulate a common antecedent for them.
8 Cf. Schaller, p. 669.
9 Schaller, 688, 693–4. See also see Turdéanu, SVTPS 5, 1981, 319f.
'The Last Words of Jeremiah' as edited by Kraft and Purintun. It has to be kept in mind, however, that their text is but a partial edition, and that a more definitive edition is still awaited and may modify the perspective taken here. The necklace represented around the eagle’s neck is a string of figs, those figs that kept fresh in the prophet’s basket for 66 years, that is, during the time elapsed between the destruction of Jerusalem, when the Jews departed to Babylon, and the day when this message was sent. However, the fig–string resembles the dried-figs chains common in the Middle East, an object that seemed more easily something to hang from the neck than a basket, which appears in the illustration below – a basket could conceivably have been ‘carried’ on the eagle’s beak. Secondly, although the text edited by Kraft and Purintun says that the letter was also tied to the eagle’s neck, here the letter is hanging from the eagle’s feet – again perhaps a representation more realistically inspired by the practices of medieval airmail.

The relevant passage in the narrative is highly dramatized, culminating in Baruch’s address to the eagle sent on its way:

Καὶ ἄρας Βαροὺχ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, καὶ δεκαπέντε σῦκα ἐκ τοῦ κοφίνου τοῦ Ἀβιμέλεχ, ἔδησεν αὐτὰ εἰς τὸν τράχηλον τοῦ ἀετοῦ, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ:

Σοὶ λέγω, βασιλεῦ τῶν πετεινῶν, ἀπελθε ἐν εἰρήνῃ.

And Baruch, having taken the letter, and fifteen figs from the basket of Abimelech, tied these to the eagle’s neck, and said to it: ‘I tell you, o king of birds, depart in peace!’

In comparison, the ms illustration and caption are sober and to the point, and seem to be made ad hoc for this illustration. If – and one ought in any case to be tentative about this – the base text behind our illustration was the version of the Paralipomena edited by Kraft and Purintun, there was a degree of interpretation and adaptation going on in the transition to its visual, condensed use in the Theodore Psalter; alternatively, the source text for the Theodore Psalter illumination was a modified version of the published one.

While the syntax of the caption phrase is somewhat contorted, it manages

10 R.A. Kraft and A. Purintun, Paralipomena Jeremiou, Society of Biblical Literature: Texts and Translations, 1, Pseudoepigrapha Series 1 (Missoula, Montana, 1972); the text is now available online from the TLG site (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae).
12 One could compare the inscriptions accompanying the paintings at the Basilica of Damokratia at Demetrias, Thessaly, where the Genesis Septuagint text is adapted for the painted inscription: see G.W. Bowersock, Mosaics as History: the Near East from late Antiquity to Islam (Cambridge, Ma and London, 2006), p. 19, referring to the work by Christian Habicht on this fifth-century monument.
13 Besides the syntax, the caption displays an instance of haplography in the Roman name Agrippa, written with only one pi. The possessions of Agrippa surrounding Jerusalem,
to mention all the relevant characters and place-names in just one sentence. The winged messenger is sent by Baruch from Jerusalem to Jeremiah in Babylon. The eagle carries the figs from the field of Agrippa and the letter written for Jeremiah. As harbinger of hope to the people captive in Babylon, the representation of the eagle has effectively summarized the essence of the story in the *Paralipomena Ieremiou*, standing as a symbol for the Jewish people captive in a foreign land. It has also set the context for the image below: what were these figs for? What did the letter say? The answers lie in the continuation to this story.

The illustration that fills the lower margin covers several of these topics. Here the captions are short, while the visual component is predominant. It is a beautiful, irenic image, set in a bucolic background framed by the personified river – Jordan – that flows below the images delimiting a lower boundary for them. An atmosphere of relaxed bounty is conveyed in this delicately painted scene, depicting peace-time activities, as often encountered in contemporary illuminated mss, and birds and grazing sheep and goats, characteristic of this ms’s imaginific and ornamental vocabulary. Three groups of figures arranged horizontally from left to right can be identified:

1. two farmers;
2. a building at the centre;
3. a man lying under a tree.

There is also an upper register to this image in the form of an enthroned Christ in the firmament, to which we shall return below.

There are no farmers in the *Paralipomena* narrative, yet their presence here is more than merely ornamental, as their function is not only evident in the depiction, but is also underscored by the caption: ‘γεωργοὶ’. A clue to understanding their function might be found in their activity. While the one on the left is reaping corn with a scythe, thereby perhaps alluding to a specific season of the year – late spring or early summer – the farmer to the right is using a spade to dig up the ground. I suggest that this activity of engagement with the earth is alluding to the first part of the narrative, or even to its silent dénouement: on hearing of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, Baruch and Jeremiah remove the sacred vessels from the temple, and bury them in the ground outside the city.14 This action is particularly emphasized in the narrative, in

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14 The episode is inserted in a tradition about hiding the sacred vessels, cf. M.F. Collins, ‘The
two stages. First, in the exchange between Jeremiah and God, God formulates a powerful speech addressed to the earth itself:

Τί θέλεις ποιήσω τὰ ἅγια σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας;
Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος·
Ἄρον αὐτὰ, καὶ παράδος αὐτὰ τῇ γῇ λέγων.

'Ακουε, γῆ, τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ κτίσαντός σε, ὃ πλάσας σε ἐν τῇ περιουσίᾳ τῶν υδάτων, ὃ σφραγίσας σε ἐν ἑπτὰ σφραγίσιν ἐν ἑπτὰ καιροῖς, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα λήψῃ τὴν ωραιότητά σου. Φύλαξον τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας ἕως τῆς συνελεύσεως τοῦ ἠγαπημένου.

[Jeremiah] What should I do with the holy liturgical vessels?
And the Lord said to him:
Take them and consign them to the earth saying:

“Listen, O earth, to the voice of him who created you, who has placed you within the perimeter\(^{15}\) of the waters, who has sealed you with the seven seals in seven portions, and after these things understand your beauty! Guard the objects of the liturgy until the meeting with the beloved.”

In other words, God dictates a liturgy by suggesting the words that need to be uttered as his command is being performed. Perhaps the presence of a watery frame to the picture in the form of the personified river is partly suggested by these rather enigmatic words concerning the relation between earth and water spoken to a personified Earth.\(^{16}\)

In the second stage, the earth takes on an active role in fulfilling God’s command, when she receives the vessels willingly, ‘swallowing them up’ as if to protect them:

Ἱερεμίας δὲ καὶ Βαρούχ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὸ ἁγιαστήριον, καὶ ἐπάραντες τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας παρέδωκαν αὐτὰ τῇ γῇ, καθὼς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς ὁ κύριος. Καὶ εὐθέως κατέπιεν αὐτὰ ἡ γῆ.

Jeremiah and Baruch went to the temple and having taken the vessels of the liturgy consigned them to the earth according to what God had told them. And the earth swallowed them willingly.

What is interesting, in my opinion, is that the earth-motif is not introduced as one of the folkloric departures of Paralipomena with respect to the more earnest texts, but rather is a motif fully expressed and elaborated upon already hidden vessels in the Samaritan tradition’, Journal for the Study of Judaism 3 (1972) 97–116, at pp. 102–3.

\(^{15}\) Bogaert translates this word in its etymological sense as ‘environnement’: p. 203 and n. 1.

\(^{16}\) See the comments in Bogaert, p. 204, suggesting a parallel with the seven seals of the Apocalypse. It may also be significant here that Ps. 32 (33), 7 refers to the distinction between sea and dry land.

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in the Syriac apocalypse, ch. 6, where the same action, prayer and even the concluding phrase concerning the earth’s willingness to oblige in the ‘swallowing’ are fully present:

“And I saw him descend into the Holy of Holies, and take from there the veil, and holy ark, and the mercy-seat, and the two tables, and the holy raiment of the priests, and the altar of incense, and the forty-eight precious stones, wherewith the priest was adorned and all the holy vessels of the tabernacle. And he spoke to the earth with a loud voice:

“Earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the mighty God, 
And receive what I commit to you, 
And guard them until the last times, 
So that, when you are ordered, you may restore them, 
So that strangers may not get possession of them. 
For the time comes when Jerusalem also will be delivered for a time, 
Until it is said, that it is again restored for ever.” 
And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up.17

In this passage from the Syriac apocalypse, the connection between the finding of the vessels and the restoration of Jerusalem is made in less cryptic language, and because of this we may suggest that the action of the farmer in the Theodore Psalter image could be precisely that of unearthing the precious hoard at the end of the narrative.

It will serve our argument better to turn now to the figure reclining under a tree to the far right of the picture, and to try and piece together the fragmentary caption that accompanies him. According to the narrative,

’Ὁ δὲ Ἀβιμέλεχ ἤνεγκε τὰ σῦκα τῷ καύματι, καὶ καταλαβὼν δένδρον, ἐκάθισεν ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ ἀναπαῆναι ὀλίγον. Καὶ κλίνας τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν κόφινον τῶν σύκων ὕπνωσεν κοιμώμενος ἔτη ἑξηκονταέξ.

Abimelech picked the figs in the heat, and having found a tree, sat under its shade to rest a little. And having reclined his head on the basket of figs he fell asleep, remaining asleep for 66 years.

Both the tree and the basket of figs suggest that this is the moment captured in this image. It is an important moment. It is in fact the centrepiece of the story. But who is the reclining figure? Unfortunately, the caption in the lower right margin has been trimmed in the rebinding of the codex. What remains of it can tentatively be transcribed as follows18:

See the passages set in parallel in Bogaert, p. 188.
18 I had provided a transcription of the caption in my article, ‘Navigando per il Salterio: rifles-
1. ὁ Β[α
2. ρου[χ
3. κο[ι
4. με(νον) [. 
5. κέ(φ) [. or νέ(λ)[.. 
6. σύ(κ)[α ..
7. ἀγρῶ[. or perhaps αἰρῶ[ν..
8. παρά τοῦ Ἰ(ε/o)ρ[. [εμίου/δανοῦ]
9. διὰ τούς ἀρρώ(στους) [ (ῦ)
10. πνωσεν [. . . (ἔτη ξς \(\text{ἑξηκονταέξ)?})

The main problem in this caption is that it seems to name the reclining character as Baruch. The first few extant letters, which, presumably, have no need to be filled with longer lacunas in the margin, where just one or two letters were trimmed, read ‘Baruch’ reasonably clearly. The next word is already more problematic. From the sense of the story, the participle κοιμώμενος would seem to fit well, but neither the accent visible on the first syllable nor the abbreviation, which normally indicates the ending ‘ον’, particularly support this conjecture. Line 5 is equally problematic, my initial suggestion that κεφ could stand for κεφαλὴν having a double inconvenience, namely, too many letters pushing towards the right margin, besides the uncertain reading of both consonants, that can also be read as nu and lambda respectively. A modicum of certainty returns with the figs, the word for which, in the plural, appears to occur at l. 6.

Was there a version of the story where Abimelech did not figure? Indeed, the Syriac Apocalypse offers a version without Abimelech, but also, it must be said, without figs\(^\text{19}\). While the source cannot therefore be directly this Syriac version, there may be an intermediate stage in the transmission where the Abimelech episode, by some scholars regarded entirely as an interpolation,\(^\text{20}\) was welded into the main narrative, including figs, but excluding this secondary character. This must, of course, remain a hypothesis, an alternative to the thesis that the painter, and with him the author of the captions (whether the same or a different individual), just made a mistake in this identification. The fact that the captions were tailor-made for the images does not help their reconstruction, as parallels with the published Greek text are not forthcoming.

The next few lines do not help much either. None is easily readable, or can
be reconstructed with certainty.

I owe to Filippomaria Pontani the suggestion that the word on l. 9 may be reconstructed as ἀρρώ(στους), meaning 'sick'.

In fact, at ch. 13, sect. 21, Abimelech is sent by Jeremiah to gather figs in the field of Agrippa, and then to choose a few to give to the sick among the people (to heal them). He says:

Ἄρον τὸν κόφινον, καὶ ἀπέλθε εἰς τὸ χωρίον τοῦ Ἀγρίππα διὰ τῆς ὁδοῦ τοῦ ὅρους, καὶ ἑνεγκὼν ὀλίγα σύκα, δίδου τοῖς νοσοῦσι τοῦ λαοῦ.

Take the basket and go to the field of Agrippa via the mountain road, and having taken a few figs, give them to the sick of the people.

This passage is repeated almost unchanged following the description of Abimelech’s falling asleep under the tree, and his waking up again: at ch. 5, sect. 22, it is part of Abimelech’s account to the first passer-by to whom he narrates his extraordinary experience of waking up to an unknown land, after what he thought was but a short sleep. He asks:

Πόση γὰρ ὥρα ἐστὶν, ἀφ᾽οὗ ἀπέστειλέ με ὁ πατήρ μου Ἰερεμίας εἰς τὸ χώριον τοῦ Ἀγρίππα ἐνέγκαι ὀλίγα σύκα, ἵνα δίδωμεν τοῖς νοσοῦσι τοῦ λαοῦ.

How long has it been, since my father Jeremiah sent me to the field of Agrippa to take some figs, that I may give them to the sick of the people?

In both cases, the word for sick is 'nosoi', so once more the caption has departed from the text and introduced its preferred language. If this reading is correct, it would be interesting to find a manuscript variant where the synonym ‘arrostoi’ occurs. Finally, it is Jeremiah who distributes the figs brought by the eagle to the sick people in Babylon, and their curative powers prepare the Jews for their return to Jerusalem. The same expression is used again.

In the narrative, Abimelech is confused by the fact that the figs are still oozing milk, a sign for him that not much time has elapsed, whereas in fact 66 years have passed since he fell asleep. Because of this, he cannot recognize anyone in town. The figs are thus for him the tangible sign of the miraculous nature of the events. Although this is not spelt out in the illustration, the men-

21 My initial reading of the extant letters was ‘arra-’. The only word containing the syllable arra in the text was Εἰ ἦσαν οἱ καταρράκται τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατελθόντες ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς, which did not fit this context. I then suggested that the term ἀραβόν, Ἰνος, ὁ Semitic, prob. Phoenician word, Hebr. Herabon, frequently written ἀραβῶν, appears to offer a plausible reading, the figs being given as a gift, but also as a pledge of God’s promise to redeem the captives out of Babylon and restore Jerusalem. This might have reflected the use of this word in a Semitic version of this story.

22 One more instance at ch. 7, 37, has the same phrase; on the curative power of figs, cf. Is. 38, 21: Bogaert, p. 183, n. 1.

23 On Rabbinic parallels to this miraculous sleep, cf. Bogaert, pp. 196–8, where Abimelech takes the place of Honi or Onias in Talmudic tradition.
tion of figs in the caption and the presence of the basket in the image both allude to the central role of figs in the story.

Let us now move on to the building that marks the city of Jerusalem, as the caption specifies. This is a restored, towering Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is throughout Jewish and Christian narratives at once a historical and a metaphorical entity. Can one discern which of the two perspectives is more prominent in this instance? The text itself appears to keep this duality open, when it juxtaposes the ‘real’ experience of Abimelech, waking up to the restored city and temple. The historical narrative plane and the metaphorical, or anagogical, go hand in hand throughout the story, as Wolff points out. Abimelech’s sleep is a figuration of death before the final resurrection, while Baruch’s long wait in a tomb clearly parallels the theme of awakening as resurrection. At the same time, the return of the Jews to the earthly city of Jerusalem prefigures the salvation of the just in the heavenly counterpart. Even the dialogue makes explicit this ‘Doppelschichtigkeit’, when Abimelech contemplates the promise of a heavenly Jerusalem in his valetudinary remark to his informer: ‘May God illumine your way to the city above, Jerusalem!’ The combination of language here has been thought to be markedly Christian by comparison to the language in Gal. 4, 26: ‘But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.’

On one hand, the eschatological perspective is suggested by the figure of God, enthroned in the arc of heaven above. At the same time, that representation of divine power demarcates the zone below as earthly. There is also another hint to the significance of this image, which should form the basis of our understanding of the miniature’s role in the Psalter, namely, the Psalter verse to which it is closely connected:

Ps 32 (33), 10: The Lord disperses the counsels of the nations, he sets at naught the thoughts of the people and he sets at naught the counsels of the rulers.

It is evident that the rulers in question here are the earthly ones, and the juxtaposition invites us to contextualize the image of Jerusalem in the historical circumstances of the eleventh century.

Events such as the Arab destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009 had brought the Holy City to the centre of international attention and interest.

25 Bogaert, pp. 211–12, does not find even this argument in favour of a Christian milieu conclusive. On the contrary, this remark is quoted among the signs of a wider Christian influence on the text than usually admitted by scholars: De Jonge, p. 55.
26 The Talmud used an episode of miraculous sleep (with Honi, see above) to comment on Ps. 126, 1: ‘When Jehovah freed the captives from Zion, it was like a dream’: Bogaert, p. 197 (Talmuds of Babylon and of Jerusalem; cf. also Midrash Tehillim: W.G. Braude, _The Midrash on Psalms_, New Haven, 1959, ii, 307–8). B. Heller, ‘Éléments parallèles et origine de la Légende de Sept Dormants’, _REJ_ 49 (1904), 190–218.
For this reason, as it has been argued, the balance between Jerusalem’s two significances tipped over in favour of its earthly consideration at this time. While Harris saw the Bar-Kochba revolution as a possible motivation behind the writing of the apocryphon, its choice as illustration for this Psalter resonates with contemporary significance. This would fit with the overall purpose of the illustrated Psalter, conveying a politico-historical message and engaging with contemporary issues through the otherwise atemporal and unchanging biblical medium.

While the caption defines the city as simply ‘Jerusalem’, the text calls it the ‘polis’ in marked contrast, here, with the Syriac apocalypse, where Jerusalem is called Zion. Zion is never used in the Greek version of the Paralipomena. While the Zion of the Psalms is in this Psalter usually interpreted as meaning the Church, the referent for Jerusalem is the earthly polis, and a close parallel with Constantinople – and by extension with its rulers – is therefore implied.

Another significance that could be read in the image of the river Jordan is that of acting as boundary for the people’s return to their hometown: at the river’s crossing, all those who wish to return to Jerusalem must give up their foreign spouses (ch. 8). It is interesting that the passage in question presents Jordan as the place for discrimination, employing once more the word ‘seal’ as in the passage on the waters with the seven seals quoted above. According to Bogaert, the passage of the Jordan is a symbol for Baptism, again a concept underlined by the use of ‘seal’ referred to its waters.

To conclude: the commentator to the Psalms in the Theodore Psalter has gone out of his way to choose an original source with which to illustrate Psalm 33. No previous connexion between the apocryphon and the psalm verse seems to have pre-existed, since in Jewish literature the text was associated with Psalm 126. The illustrator’s/commentator’s choice has fallen on the Paralipomena Ieremiou in a version close to, but probably not identical with, that published by Kraft and Purintun. Although Anni Hentschel has shown that fuller editorial work still needs to be carried out on this text, the fully edited text will either resemble a version closer to the formulations of the captions, and without Abimelech, or it will confirm the impression that the captions were independ-

28 J. R. Harris, The Rest of the Words of Baruch (London, 1889). His hypothesis is rejected by Schaller as ‘ein reines Phantasieprodukt’ (p. 686).
30 Bogaert, pp. 206–7 and nn. 1, 1–2 respectively. According to Bogaert, the milieu of these ideas is ‘judeo-christian’: “il s’agit […] de judéo-chrétiens qui ont conservé des exigences judaïques et les mettent comme condition au baptême chrétien.”
ent departures from the text.

By selecting portions of the narrative, the illustrator/commentator of the Theodore Psalter has presented the story in its salient traits, without privileging the folkloric elements more than was necessary to clarify his source. Rather, he has placed to the foreground issues concerning the reconstruction of Jerusalem, linking the story to a specific Psalm verse that brings out its political, more urgent, connotations within the specific contemporary context: the recent destruction of the Holy Sepulchre and the formation of the Crusading ideology. At the same time, in the image of the enthroned Christ in heaven, the Psalm commentary has not disregarded the metaphorical and eschatological connotations to the story as well.

The essence of this story had to be captured and appreciated via the image-and-captions shorthand, and its presence witnesses therefore to the popularity of this narrative in the eleventh century beside and beyond the extant manuscript witnesses of similar date. Its choice on the part of the compiler, and its ‘consumption’ within the Christian, monastic circles of the capital of Byzantium in the second half of the eleventh century make the milieu of its diffusion and its target audience quite clear: at this stage of its transmission, at least, it appears to have had nothing to do with Gnostic tendencies. However, its Jewish or perhaps Judeo-Christian origins, about which most commentators agree, lead us to two considerations.

First, that this narrative was chosen also in view of its wider cultural and religious connotations, spanning from Jewish Haggadah\(^{32}\) to resonances of the Sura of the Cave in the Koran, alluded to in the theme of miraculous sleep and awakening. Second, we must contemplate the possibility that the image, though unique for us, may have had a pictorial model for the eleventh-century painter. This model may have been a Jewish one, as the later witnesses to illuminated Haggadahs allow us to postulate further lost paintings in this genre from the earlier centuries. After all, the tenth and eleventh century also witnessed an intense interest in the Psalter on the part of Jewish and Karaite exegetes, which may lie in the background to these Christian creations.

These elements all contribute to enlighten the motives behind such an unusual choice of commentary on the Psalm. The use of apochryphal elements or narratives is not, in itself, unprecedented in Byzantine iconography, but that of this peculiar version of Old Testament-inspired apocalypticism reverberates with contemporary concerns around the city of Jerusalem, and recalls the Christian and Jewish interest in this city as immanent and transcendent around the 60s of the eleventh century, when a wave of millenarian fervour swept through Palestine.

In the interpretation of the Theodore Psalter, the *Paralipomena* are read as serious reading. If the beauty of the illustration conveys a peace that has in it

32 Significant is the title to J. Herzer, *Die Paralipomena Jeremiou: Studien zu Tradition und Redaktion einer Haggada des frühen Judentums*, TSAJ 43 (Tübingen, 1994).
no naïf traits despite its candid naturalism, the single images struggle with their appended, eroded captions on the page to convey their meaning related to the psalm text. By looking closely at their interaction, we have tried to glimpse at the effects of this ensemble on its contemporary audience. Manuscript pages such as this can lead us in an unmediated way to the medieval reader’s world, more clearly than what the interpretation of words and their manuscript as text-carriers are capable of telling us after such a long time.