

THE EMPEROR AND THE IDYLL

THE OPENING FOLIO of the Paris Psalter (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France [BnF], MS gr. 139, or Parisinus graecus MS 139) displays a lush pastoral vista (Figure 22). A stream flows toward the edge of the folio, its fluid curve abruptly interrupted by the rich frame as though to hem it in. A youth labelled Mt. Bethlehem (or rather, with the words “Mt. Bethlehem” inscribed on the rocky ledge below him) stretches in the immediate foreground. A dog looks off to the right and sheep graze. Black and white goats gather in the immediate foreground along the stream and its bank, with some beasts seemingly unconscious of what passes behind them. There, in the near centre of the visual field, a man leans languorously with an instrument and a monumental figure beside him. Melody (or rather, a figure identified as such by the inscription next to her) rests a hand on his back in a gesture of surprising intimacy. Surprising, because a posture of such relaxed proximity is rare in Byzantine art where kings are concerned. The man is David, identified by his abbreviated name etched on the rock upon which he is seated. He is destined to rule the Israelites and is a prototype of the ideal ruler for generations of Byzantine emperors.¹

Since the psalter is a deluxe manuscript made during the so-called “Macedonian Renaissance,”² and commissioned by one of the greatest patrons of Byzantine art—Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (reigned 945–959)—the choice of the David cycle as the opening suite of images makes sense.³ But what is Melody’s role in this scene? Why is she allowed so prominent and proximate a place in relation to the Ur-king? What do the animals

1 See Maguire, “Images of the Court.” For the Macedonian dynasty under discussion here, see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 192–200; Magdalino, “Basil I, Leo VI, and the Feast of Elijah,” 193–96; Magdalino and Nelson eds., “Introduction,” 22–23; and Kalavrezou, Trahoulia, and Sabar, “Critique of the Emperor,” 199.

2 Some studies on art in the Macedonian Renaissance are Weitzmann, “The Classical Mode,” and Maguire, “Epigrams, Art, and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance,’” 105–15, with n1 for more bibliography on this phenomenon.

3 The major study on the Paris Psalter remains Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter*. A recent study is Wander, “The Paris Psalter,” 90–103. For a bibliography on the manuscript, see Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium*, 70–71.



Figure 23. David between Wisdom and Prophecy. Paris Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS gr. 139, fol. 7v. Courtesy of the BnF.

contribute to the impact of the image, apart from constituting a typical bucolic scene? Who is the figure peeping out from behind the column? And from a broader perspective, what is the role of the bucolic in this image and the relationship between an emperor and the represented idyll?

This chapter's immediate aim is to answer the above questions regarding this sumptuous image. The larger goal is to delve into the imperatives for depicting the *first* avatar of a biblical—and thereby, ideal Byzantine—sovereign (David) in a bucolic context and setting, and why the culminating image of David as emperor (Figure 23) differs so vastly from the prefatory



Figure 24. Adam and the animals, ca. 400 CE. Ivory.
Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello. © Art Resource.

one (Figure 22). Where the previous chapters located the significance of the bucolic in relation to Orthodoxy and weather-watching in late antiquity, this one explores its dynamics in relation to imperial power in the Middle Byzantine era, both in terms of its appearance in the psalter's opening image as the source of that power, and through the theme's occurrence in a few other manuscripts commissioned during Constantine VII's reign (see also the Epilogue). Although images of David as a musician certainly exist in the Byzantine repertoire prior to the psalter, no other extant composition depicts him in quite such a posture, nor so elaborate a setting. Indeed, the

image constitutes not just a literal expression of the conventions governing the bucolic; it is also structured compositionally so as to conjure a world apart, an “occasion for escape and reverie,”⁴ as captured in David’s pose and his gaze, the direction of which is indeterminate in relation to the directness of normative images of Byzantine emperors (even if David, in this image, has not yet assumed the imperial state). One is reminded here of Glenn Peers’ reading of a somewhat similar image, of Adam among the animals on one part of an ivory diptych now in the Bargello, Florence, where Adam looks out into an indefinite space with a dreamy look, but where the animals, in contrast, are “restless and roiled” (Figure 24).⁵ The intimacy of the world of humans and other beings as conjured up in the Paris Psalter folio is perhaps all the more emphatic for its display in a manuscript intended for close contemplation. It is my argument that this folio constitutes the most powerful visual expression of the bucolic in the tenth century CE, and that such a setting is intentionally posited as the primary source and facilitator of imperium.

The leitmotif of voice reappears as an integral factor in the deployment of the bucolic, with the qualification that in this chapter, it is a specifically imperial attribute, referring to the literal sounds issuing from the (any) emperor’s vocal organs or through the agents at his disposal, be they other human beings, letters, decrees or proclamations.⁶ As Mel Evans puts it in a study of Tudor royalty, “the realization of power...relies on its creation and actualization in discourse, spoken and written, through which it is perceived as legitimate and authoritative. Power and language are thus closely connected, not just in terms of what is said, but *how* something is said.”⁷ Thus “voice,” as I use it here, also refers to the discourses shaped in speech or writing in an oral culture which, in turn, shape the destiny of an empire.⁸ My designation of the imperial voice refers to a constant value, prized and refined over generations of emperors, but used in varying modes by the individuals at hand (and appraised by contemporary critics such as Michael Psellos). Constantine VII’s voice, as we shall see, assumes

4 Bergmann, “Exploring the Grove,” 21.

5 Peers, “Adam’s Anthropocene,” 161–71.

6 “Voice” in medieval culture is intertwined with and inseparable from “text” or “writing.” See Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature*, 2–3.

7 Evans, *Royal Voices*, 2.

8 For a gendered perspective on royal voices and the power of the acoustic, see Layher, *Queenship and Voice*.

a distinctively pedagogical tenor when it appears in treatises and letters attributed to him.

The intersection of the bucolic, the vocal, and the imperial is vividly apparent in the suite of images comprising the prefatory folio of the Paris Psalter. This suite begins with David the shepherd and psalmist (as discussed above), and culminates in the vision of David as a ruler of Byzantium. The reader or viewer leaves through a narrative originating with a seated shepherd making music in nature via his instrument to a standing emperor presented *en face*, holding an open book, in a comparatively minimal setting; from the expression of music and voice (via the *psalterion*) on the opening folio, to scripted and verbalized text when, after a series of images, we finally encounter David the emperor holding an open book with one specific psalm (Psalm 71) inscribed on it (Figure 23). This last image, combined with the words of Psalm 71, was persuasively read by Hugo Buchthal as a reference to Constantine VII addressing his successor, Romanos II.⁹ Additionally, I argue that the transition from the first folio to the last is a telling commentary on the procedures implicit (and sometimes, explicit) in becoming God's divine representative on earth. These procedures entail a narrative movement originating from an image which is emphatically bucolic in order to culminate in an image which is decidedly imperial. In the process, music and voice are also enshrined in the final instance as the written words of the psalms.

My observations signal a departure from the existing scholarship on the imperial image writ large. At the same time, they are in alignment with recent arguments regarding the role of the emperor in the Byzantine political landscape. Anthony Kaldellis makes a strong case for the empire being akin to a republic with each emperor posited as a mediator and custodian of its spaces, rather than its absolute ruler.¹⁰ Equally important is Kaldellis's claim that the emperor required the consent and broad support of various groups in order to maintain the *politeia*. This network of consensus and support—"election ratified by universal consensus"¹¹—rather than self-identification with Orthodoxy or as God's appointee, determined the emperor's position and success. In concrete visual terms, the emperor had to be acclaimed by his people at *every* instance of his public appearance, and

⁹ Buchthal, "The Exaltation of David," reprinted with postscript in Buchthal, *Art of the Mediterranean World 100 to 1400*, 190.

¹⁰ Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 43.

¹¹ Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 95.

not just at the start of his reign when such acclamations were customary. Kaldellis says, “Most of the time things went well, producing what historians call ‘ceremony.’ At other times, the result was ‘history.’”¹²

Where imperial *images* are concerned, the field has produced excellent studies on the subject, but these (and generally the field of premodern art history) concentrate on this image at its literal level—that is, as pictures of the emperor with various accessories attesting to that state.¹³ We see mostly “ceremony,” in Kaldellis’s deployment of the term, with the dominant line of interpretation concentrating on the literal mechanics of the depictions—that is, as pictures of the emperor with the equipment unequivocally attesting to his office. Few direct (or even indirect) visual cues signal the status of the emperor as anything but absolute.¹⁴

Where the opening folio of the Paris Psalter is concerned, the line of argument hitherto laid out invokes the image’s classical and biblical resonances with the legendary musicians of yore, Orpheus and Thamyris, and David’s—and by extension, the Byzantine emperor’s—mastery over the natural domain through their music-making. Furthermore, the entire image has been read as an imperial panegyric, a paean of praise to the emperor.¹⁵ This is certainly one important interpretation and sustains associations with voice as per my argument, since panegyrics were usually meant to be declaimed.

However, little notice has been paid to the fundamental dynamics *between* the beings displayed in the Paris Psalter scene, other than their obvious identities as prophet-king, personifications, animals, etc. Nonetheless, it is surely significant that hardly any beings on the prefatory folio, other than David, are categorically human. The fact that the animals are *not* uniformly shown in attitudes of submission and that, in some cases, they seem to pay minimal attention, is telling.¹⁶ An image that shows David playing the *psalterion* in, and to, nature, with the view of demonstrating his

¹² Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 106.

¹³ Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, and Walker, *The Emperor and the World*.

¹⁴ One extremely unusual set of images that directly speak to the contingencies of the imperial position, amounting to a critique of individual emperors, is to be found in the manuscript known as the Madrid Skyltizes. See Boeck, *Imagining the Byzantine Past*. See also the comments on the undermining of the imperial image in the Hippodrome in Chatterjee, *Between the Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 58–67.

¹⁵ Maguire, “Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art,” 217–21.

¹⁶ Brian Madigan makes a similar point regarding an image of Orpheus and the animals, as discussed in a later section. See Madigan, “An Orpheus among the Animals at Dumbarton Oaks,” 405–16.

mastery neglects to show all components of said nature as being appropriately in attendance. Here we should also recall the Bargello ivory which, despite its ostensible depiction of Adam naming, and thereby asserting his dominance over, the animals, instead pictorially invests those beasts with an energy that is anything but submissive.¹⁷ Thus, the animals on the ivory and on our psalter, in accordance with recent tenets in zoopoetics, actively shape—and also seem to reject—the regimes of attention usually required by imperial authority.¹⁸

Even as the animals refute the appropriate kind of attentiveness to the future king in the Paris folio, they furnish visual templates for the other characters and are not, by any means, mere accessories to the scene. The triad of sheep, goats and dog in the foreground are reconstituted by the triad of David, Melody and the tree sheltering them. David loosely echoes the dog's (rather more erect) posture, whilst the figure peeping from behind the column repeats that of the sheep positioned in front of it (Figure 22). Thus, the animals urge a reconsideration of the role of non-human species (including the many personifications included in the psalter) in moulding a vision of imperium. This vision does not conform to normative images of that state, but provides a starting point for it.

Finally, encompassing all the above observations, this folio accords with Bettina Bergmann's remarks about the persistent challenge posed by a pastoral landscape to a viewer since the latter is usually invested with internal conflicts; the consequence of this is that the act of viewing, according to Bergmann, is rendered conflict-ridden as well.¹⁹ These conflicts may range from the usual and obvious polarities of nature and artifice that inform the bucolic, to the very compositional structures informing a bucolic scene: those pictorial features that "invite occasions" for escape and reverie (see the Introduction).²⁰ In our image, the areas of "conflict" may be designated as those which do not align with normative conceptions of Byzantine imperial art: the flickering foci of visual attention displayed by the animals, the intriguing sharing of the central space both by David and Melody, and the off-centre direction of David's gaze reinforced by Melody's straightforward engagement of the viewer. These "conflicts" are gradually and intentionally resolved across the pictorial arc of

17 Peers, "Adam's Anthropocene." See also Cox Miller's comments in *In the Eye of the Animal*, 4–5.

18 On zoopoetics, see Driscoll and Hoffmann, "Introduction: What is Zoopoetics?" 1–13.

19 Bergmann, "Exploring the Grove," 20–46.

20 Bergmann, "Exploring the Grove," 21.

this suite of images, to present an emperor whose posture, gaze, and action accord with those of his peers in the broader repertoire of Byzantine art. In doing so, the visual narrative initially acknowledges the element of contingency underlying the Byzantine imperial office; a contingency which seems to fly in the face of our usual ideas of the emperor's position, but which was an ever-present factor, as Kaldellis has shown. The final image eliminates any hint of contingency. It is composed in accordance with other Byzantine imperial images, but in defiance of the *actual* conditions of that state.

The Psalmic Voice

The Greek verb *kosmein*, usually taken to mean “to arrange in order” or “to adorn,” also refers to the act of separating mingled flocks by goatherds.²¹ This meaning acquired specifically religious undertones in the early Christian era with Jesus Christ figured as the good shepherd tending to his sheep, which, in turn, are figured as Christ's apostles or followers.²² The integral element guiding the “sheep” is Christ's instruction conveyed through his voice. This instruction is further transmitted through the apostles, or a bishop, to a congregation, and thence to the wider world. The voice is a major component binding the bishop to his flock and vice-versa (see Chapter 1).

Where the psalms are concerned, however, we find an even greater emphasis on the role of the human voice in salvific instruction. Basil the Great underscores the ubiquitousness, indeed naturalness, of the human voice in engaging in song. This is why God's instruction was packaged in musical form (according to Basil) and easily sung and transmitted in the home, or even in the marketplace. Basil also underlines choral singing as a powerful means of crafting social bonds and for reconciling enemies (*Homily 1: On the Psalms*). Voices joined together in hymn could shape a powerful experience of community and “soundscapes of salvation.”²³ In the Syriac church, for instance, women's choirs fulfilled a primary instructional mission via their sung hymns, a role that was often denied to women in the Orthodox church.²⁴ All of which is to say that a fundamental constituent of the Christian *oikoumene* is the contagious voice, charismatic enough to carry from its source outward to a larger collective.

²¹ Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 63.

²² See Chapter 1.

²³ Münz-Manor and Arentzen, “Soundscapes of Salvation,” 36–55.

²⁴ Harvey, “Singing Women's Stories in Syriac Tradition,” 171–89.

The book of Psalms contains more statements in the voice of the first person than any other. Relatedly, the “I” of the Psalms was interpreted by medieval exegetes as diverse personae, such as the just Christian, the repentant sinner, martyr, prophet, or even Christ himself.²⁵ Psalm composition and utterance are activities intrinsically dependent on vocalization and the poetics of voice.²⁶ This vocal component is enshrined as a potent instrument for organizing the world in submission to the all-powerful.²⁷

The Paris Psalter, in particular, invokes issues of vocality since the opening folio could be interpreted as the expression of music and the composition of the psalms and the culminating folio of this suite displays text, but also the text or psalm voiced and/or sung or perhaps even read in silence.²⁸ Melody, or pure sound detached from words, still obtains even in this culminating folio owing to the fact that the text is a psalm. Such a possibility is implied again in Basil’s homily mentioned above where he refers to the quality of the melody which, by its sweetness, can enable the singer or listener to benefit from the psalm’s words without directly perceiving the import of the latter.²⁹ Basil distinguishes between the words and the melody even as he imbricates the two in the formation of the Christian self. Moreover, Gregory of Nyssa’s treatise on the psalms remarks that melody is not a simple, unchanging voice, but rather a blending of the separate strands of the universe into a harmonious whole.³⁰ Melody, therefore, is the means of uniting individuated vocal and other kinds of sonic elements.

Early Christian commentators often used musical images to express the harmonious integration of different parts of the cosmos.³¹ Eusebius compared the cosmos to a lyre made of strings of different pitch, “some for the high notes, some for the low, some loose, some taut, some in between,” yet all well-tuned in a perfect melody, like the distinct regions of the earth.

25 Sears, “The Iconography of Auditory Perception,” 29. See also Origen, *Homilies on the Psalms*, trans. Trigg, 13.

26 See the comments of Furey, “Impersonating Devotion,” 12.

27 Voice, imbricated in studies of sound and song, has more sustained treatment in the western medieval rather than the Byzantine context. See Leach, *Sung Birds*, and Lears, *World of Echo*.

28 For a full exploration of orality and vocality, see Zumthor, “The Vocalization of the Text,” 273–82.

29 Basil the Great, *Homilies on the Psalms*, in *Letters and Select Works*, ed. Schaff.

30 Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, trans. Heine, 28.

31 See Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 61–68.

For Gregory of Nazianzus, the most melodious music is to be found in the voices of nature (*Homily* 2.24). Gregory compares creation to a beautifully made lute. He asks, “For how could this Universe have come into being or been put together, unless God had called it into existence, and held it together? For everyone who sees a beautifully made lute, and considers the skill with which it has been fitted together and arranged, or who hears its melody would think of none but the lute maker, or the lute player, and would recur to him in mind, though he might not know him by sight” (*Homily* 2.4).³² Here, not only does Gregory yoke the very concept of creation and its arrangement to a musical instrument, he also allows the sense of sound to overtake that of sight since the creator/lute player’s countenance is not of import so much as his music. Indeed, Gregory states that one may not even know the lute-player by sight despite hearing his melody, thereby asserting the consciousness of things that may not be immediately—or at all—visible to a listener.

The opening image of the Paris Psalter might encompass Gregory’s notion of the act of creation as one of its reference points, with David and Melody literally attracting and summoning up various components of the world through music-making, much as nature gradually gathered around Orpheus when and as he played (Figure 22). The entire image, by virtue of being the very first we encounter in the Davidic narrative, might be regarded as processual, coming into being, with components as yet unseen but soon to make themselves visible as creation proceeds. This reading accords well with the relatively faint outlines of the architecture comprising the cityscape in the background, awash in blue, in contrast to the subsequent folios in which architectural details stand out rather more sharply and the shades of blue recede. Right by the architectural structure, we find etched the outlines of what may be hills or rocky outcrops which in turn give way to tall green cypresses on the right. The darker and lighter shades of blue comprising the hazy backdrop reappear in the foreground, shading the stream, and tying together sky/mist and water. A dark shade of blue also characterizes Melody’s robe stretched tightly around her legs. The hue assumes its strongest outlines when featured on a figure that appears to be human, but is in fact a personification, thereby underlining the ambiguity of some of the characters assembled on the folio and Melody’s critical role in this pictorial space.

32 See the text and comments in Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred in Byzantium*, 68.

The enigmatic figure peeping from behind the column has often been read in the scholarship as the nymph Echo.³³ If we scan the image from foreground to background, then Echo (if such is indeed her identity) would be the figure placed furthest in depth on the folio, and the only one whose body is not shown in its entirety. The column with the cloth around it (possibly a votive dedication) and the cauldron atop (might this allude to ancient cauldrons also dedicated as votives to the sanctuaries of ancient gods and goddesses?) would seem to substitute for that body. This column might allude to similar objects bearing vessels, curtains, cloths, and/or vases dedicated by worshippers that we find delineated in Roman wall-paintings. Such structures usually designate a sacred grove in the pre-Christian dispensation and are located in landscapes categorized as idyllic-sacral.³⁴ The category has been critiqued and deconstructed by Jaś Elsner.³⁵ For our purposes, Elsner's argument entails an appreciation of scenes such as these as a "rich invitation to narrative with implicit questions like which figure...is active? How do the animals relate to the people? How does all the fauna relate to the flora and the buildings?...In 'sacro-idyllic' painting monument and landscape are experienced by people and animals within the picture, whose own experiences viewers vicariously and perhaps voyeuristically assimilate or comment on...looking into a world separate from them."³⁶ This is a concise encapsulation of the many themes and questions that animate any bucolic scene; they also distil the attitude of the putative Echo who seems to be looking voyeuristically from the background behind the column into the middle- and foreground of the folio.

The columnar structure at the top right is perhaps an allusion to the columns and other such structures often found in Roman wall paintings of groves and similar landscapes. Adjacent to this columnar structure is an object that is not clearly identifiable. However, its contours and perspectival position most closely resemble a lectern such as we find accompanying the figures of the evangelists at work in illuminated gospel manuscripts. In these cases, the empty or half-empty manuscript folios still being written on by the evangelist, usually allude to the material process of the gospel book taking shape and coming into being over time; a process the viewer/reader

33 See the comments and bibliography in Wander, "The Paris Psalter," 94.

34 Carroll, "'The Sacred Places of the Immortal Ones,'" 2–20.

35 Elsner, "Space-Object-Landscape," 133–84.

36 Elsner, "Space-Object-Landscape," 163. This complements Bergmann's observation about the pastoral being a represented space that enables escape and reverie.

is invited to follow to its end by leafing through the subsequent folios. So too could the lectern-like structure in our psalter refer to the shaping of the manuscript as a material and textual product, following upon the vocal composition of the psalms by David on the opening folio.

Echo, or the half-hidden figure, is also implicated in this processual narrative. Without an inscription, the figure could assume any number of identities, and it is possible that such open-endedness was intentional, given that some of the other figures are labelled. Could this open-ended gesture also suggest the possibility of elusive figures, half-seen and little-understood, that inhabit even a well-ordered world such as the one a Byzantine emperor might rule over? Such a thematic—of universal and individual vocal strains still coming into formation, filled with non-human species along with human counterparts—resonates well with this image as the logical initiator of the suite. The *locus amoenus* represented is not just a space generative of music and the psalms (via Melody and David), but can also allude generally to narrative potential via the voice. We find precisely such a space described in the contemporaneous tenth-century hagiography of St. Theoktiste of Lesbos in which the narrator describes meeting an ascetic on the island of Paros, who bids him to sit among some fallen blocks and columns in a thick green grassy spot with a gushing freshwater spring; a place “filled with quiet and suitable for godly tales.”³⁷ Vocal expression, be it in the form of songs or stories, seems to be a natural feature of such settings. In the Paris Psalter, the soundscape is especially resonant on the opening folio since, in the succeeding folios, most of the surrounding characters and settings are gradually shorn off until nearly none of the non-human species (nor their imagined sounds) are to be seen anymore. We find, finally, the sort of well-ordered sonic world where each figure is identified and positioned so as to convey its role and status in the pictorial scheme, and in which it is the emperor who transmits an unequivocal message via the psalm on the open book (Figure 23).

A look at this trajectory of images and David's position in it reveals the modes in which his (and the viewer's) psalmic personae are developed visually. The first folio displays a person who is shepherd, musician, and a future king. As one leaves past it, these personae give way to others: David as warrior, as a rival to Saul, and as Byzantine emperor. In each of these, David moves, fights, stands erect, and gradually shifts to the very centre of the space in the folio, the other beings making way for him to assume that position. Thus, over time the depictions restore the normative hierarchies of

37 “Life of Theoktiste” in *Holy Women of Byzantium*, ed. Talbot, 106.

scale and position structuring Byzantine art so that the culminating folio is a perfect exemplar of an imperial image in this tradition. And even as the vocal component recedes in some of the folios, we find it emphatically restored in the final folio as a fitting bookend to the first.

The role of Melody is significant here, not just in relation to the psalms, but also because of her imposing position in the opening folio. As already mentioned, David intriguingly eludes the viewer's gaze owing to his pose and tilted head. The only being who looks directly out of the image is the statuesque Melody; an erect, casually commanding figure. She sits in contact with David, her body supporting his as the backrest of a throne might. Yet Melody detracts from any suggestion of submission for even as her body almost merges with that of David, she retains her autonomy. Among all the attributes, or personifications, we encounter in the following folios, Melody is the one whose physical presence is closest to David. By being the very first attribute, and through her unusual proximity to the protagonist, one might well argue that Melody is advanced as integral to the formation of a ruler in the making. She might also be read as a figure that exceeds her own form, much like the personification of the Nile could be read as the deity, but also as the Nile waters flooding over and filling the entire surface of the image (see previous chapter). By dint of indicating music, Melody too could be perceived as occupying a far more expansive and diffused space than the literal area to which her figure is circumscribed.

Also note that David and Melody perform their oral and aural roles under the aegis of a tree, and that vegetation reappears on the final folio with David as emperor, which is decidedly odd in an imperial image. But if we recall that the very first psalm likens a blessed person to a tree "planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:3), and if we further consider that in the earliest Christian gospel (Mark 8:24) "trees...provide a visual baseline for humanity in the eyes of a newly sighted man,"³⁸ then the trio of David, Melody, and tree (man, personification, and plant) presented here as an interspecies conglomerate would seem to be an intentional move. (Recall here too that psalter illustrations often present the literal pictorial transcriptions of the words of the psalms.) In this ensemble, the vocal labours of the human and the personification aspire toward the condition of the plant for all humankind as a blessed and fruitful state ("Blessed is the one...that person is like the tree planted by streams of water"). We may also find here an intentional

38 Arentzen, Burrus, and Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life*, 4–5.



Figure 25. David defending his flock. Paris Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS gr. 139, fol. 2v. Courtesy of the BnF.

throwback to the classical tradition: Socrates and Phaedrus rest under a plane tree to discourse on the subject of love, with the tree's shade and the idyllic ambience specifically invoked by Socrates as an inspiration to think and speak.³⁹ The ecology outlined here inspires the desire for vocal expression which is carried outwards to the viewer to emulate, elaborate upon, and perpetuate, much as song/voice and the psalms are expected to do (see earlier section).

39 Arentzen, Burrus, and Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life*, 21–23; Cotton, “Gardener of Souls,” 242–54; Schmidt, “From the Moly Plant to the Gardens of Adonis,” 173; and Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*.



Figure 26. David being anointed. Paris Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS gr. 139, fol. 3v. Courtesy of the BnF.

The second folio of the suite shows David abandoning his languorous seated pose as he stands to spring into action against the lion attacking his flock (Figure 25). David occupies the near-centre of the image with a personification of Strength (*Ischus*) right behind him. Strength stretches out an arm and touches the prophet-king and endows him with her attribute. The blue hazy horizon is now replaced by a sharp, craggy backdrop. Yet another Echo-like figure occurs here on the top right, this time showing itself from behind the rocks. Is it the same being, or someone different? Once again this area of the folio allows for an open-ended quality carried over from the first one. This image forcefully pinpoints the fragility of the bucolic setting outlined in the previous folio, so easily shattered with a flick of the hand as one turns



Figure 27. David fighting Goliath. Paris Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS gr. 139, fol. 4v. Courtesy of the BnF.

the page and confronts the impending threat of the lion. The contingency of the idyll is vividly realized as one moves forward from it.

A word about the *psalterion* which lies flung to the ground on the left as David leaps to his flock's defence. The word *psalterion* does double-duty by signifying both the instrument and the psalter, the very book in which we see the images laid out.⁴⁰ Given the Byzantine elites' (and possibly also non-elites') propensity for enjoying puns, it is unlikely that this homonym

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Kristoffel Demoen for this insight.

would have gone unnoticed. The purple wrap, signifying David's royal stature to come, is also discarded and forms a support for the *psalterion*. Even as David's person anticipates royalty, the tangible attributes of that state are shown in the form of the instrument and the cloth on which it rests. The *psalterion* assumes the status of a royal attribute in its coupling with, and occupation of, the cloth. It reappears in the final folio in David's hand, this time in the form of a psalter book (*psalterion*), resonant with the music and words the instrument (*psalterion*) enabled in the first folio. The *psalterion* thus is the literal and figural link between the first and the final image in this cycle.

By the third folio, David is wrapped once again in the purple as he is anointed by Samuel, his father and brothers in attendance with the personification of Meekness pointing toward him (Figure 26). Meekness towers over the other figures, but is at a bodily remove from David, unlike Melody and Strength. The next depiction, of David fighting Goliath, is a dynamic scene of battle with the prophet-king visualized twice: once in the background with the figure labelled Force as he hurls his weapon at Goliath, and then in the middle ground at the centre as he decapitates the giant (Figure 27).

The fifth folio removes David to the far right, behind King Saul, as one of the daughters of Israel dances in the foreground. The inscription contains the words, "Saul hath slain a thousand, and David ten thousand," (1 Kings 18:7), thus marking Saul's jealousy of David even as it indicates David's superiority (Figure 28). The next two folios decisively return David to the centre of the picture field with the sixth showing David's coronation (Figure 29). An unlabelled figure holds the crown over his head as he stands with sceptre in hand, facing the viewer frontally. The background now rejects the hues evident in the previous folios and is of a uniform gold. Then comes the closing image where the prophet-king stands with the clarity and regal insistence of a Byzantine emperor, clad in the red boots signifying that state, holding the psalter as book rather than as instrument, as he did in the first folio, and freed of seemingly extraneous elements except for two select figures, Wisdom and Prophecy, intended to reinforce his authority (Figure 23). Now the background is of a fitting and tangible golden hue, appropriate to an imperial figure. This is in stark contrast to the opening folio with its shades of blue and the indistinct background merging nature and architecture.

Given the opulence of the manuscript, its evident expense, and the selection of figures and colours in it, there can be no doubt that each composition was carefully planned, and that a specific sequence of visual effects was staked out. This sequence comprises a range of characters, even whilst retaining David as the main protagonist. It is also clear at a glance that the prefatory folio is the richest in terms of the sheer categories of characters



Figure 28. David with Saul. Paris Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS gr. 139, fol. 5v. Courtesy of the BnF.

and elements it displays, if not in numbers. These include animals, personifications, plants, a river, a landscape, and the cityscape in the distance. This is a vision of the bucolic as a rich and expansive, enveloping space, much as we saw on objects such as the lamp and sarcophagi in Chapter 1. The bucolic setting on this folio works in antithesis to the settings laid out in the subsequent folios, which progressively emphasize the urban via architectural details. Such a gradual “cleaning up” of the bucolic is strikingly evident in the final image, where David and the personifications occupy only pedestals with vegetation as a backdrop, and flowers punctuating the foreground.



Figure 29. The coronation of David. Paris Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS gr. 139, fol. 6v. Courtesy of the BnF.

The cast of characters is also reduced in comparison to the first folio. Finally, the psalmic voice buttresses this series on both ends, being depicted as music in the first folio and inscribed as text (and potentially also music) in the closing one.

The Bucolic Mode and Attention

Musical images with motifs akin to our Paris Psalter folio exist in the Byzantine repertoire, with lyre- or harp-playing figures usually perceived to be Apollo or Achilles, if they are not explicitly identified as David. The Apollo/Achilles reading depends on the context, though often this is too amorphous to be pinned down with any certainty. The musician in Achilles is just one facet of a personality that combines harmony and belligerence, contingent on the circumstances at play. Later in the tenth century, we find objects that juxtapose music and war, lyre and sword, in relatively tight pictorial compositions, as seen in the silver inkpot currently in Padua. Like the figure of Achilles, these objects testify to the acknowledgement of seemingly antithetical themes in coexistence. They allude to a spectrum of possibilities between the extremes of war and peace, picturized as obedience by the sword in the one case, and submission to music in the other.⁴¹

An overarching interpretation of such images hinges on the polarities of civilization and its opposite, and the imperative of maintaining the former against the pernicious effects of the latter. By extension, scholarship assumes this is a perfect subject for imperial consideration. Take for instance, the Great Palace mosaics of Constantinople, several of which depict scenes of pastoral life (Figure 30).

Along with these, we also find images relating to the rural life and the hunt (which are distinct from bucolic compositions as defined in this book). Sarah Bassett characterizes the mosaics as “a series of easily readable, readily understandable images...The effect was the unambiguous articulation of subject matter and with it ease of visual comprehension.”⁴² Despite recognizing the discontinuous nature of mosaics laid out on a pavement, Bassett reads these ultimately as unified by their consistent visual style, and as transmitting a statement of imperial order imposed by the elimination of the harmful elements inimical to the pastoral idylls laid out.⁴³ The problem with this reading is that it takes style as the dominant guarantor of a clear narrative intention. In fact, while the subject matter of individual episodes in the mosaics may be comprehensible, in their arrangements and in their very pictorial relations to each other, they remain profoundly unclear, in part because of the seeming lack of visual attention the characters (human and non-human) bestow on each other.

⁴¹ Chatterjee, “The Gifts of the Gorgon,” 211–21.

⁴² Bassett, “The Great Palace Mosaic,” 97.

⁴³ Bassett, “The Great Palace Mosaic,” 89–100.



Figure 30. Floor detail, fourth–sixth century CE. Mosaic, The Great Palace Mosaic Museum, Istanbul. © Alamy Stock Photo.

James Trilling, in contrast to Bassett, advances several persuasive implications regarding the impossibility of viewing the entire program in one instance; the lack of an in-built orientation by which to follow the pictorial sequence; and the thematic resonances between Virgil's *Georgics* and the mosaics, which, whilst offering glimpses of the paradisiacal state, also posit graphic reminders of the contingencies preying on said paradise (figured in one case via the image of a lamb carried away by a wolf despite the presence of a shepherd).⁴⁴ Trilling further observes that in several cases, the palace mosaic imagery “suggests neither a central focus nor a spatial progression capable of enforcing a symbolic order on its imagery...there is no visual indication that the artist intended to show a decisive resolution.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Trilling, “The Soul of the Empire,” 32, 68–69.

⁴⁵ Trilling, “The Soul of the Empire,” 59.

Figure 31. Shepherd and figures, plate, fifth or sixth century CE. Silver. St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum. © Alamy Stock Photo.



Although Trilling also settles on an imperial propagandistic reading of the mosaics, his insights are pertinent both to a consideration of how certain kinds of images might have been viewed, and the imperial resonance of those that decline to depict the literal bodies of emperor/s. Indeed, the point about the lack of a “decisive resolution” militates against some of our most cherished assumptions about Byzantine and premodern art in general, since these are usually interpreted in the light of concrete statements regarding God, empire, and piety. The bucolic mode, however, visually presents precisely the sort of equivocal relations Trilling observes in the palace mosaics. (See more on this theme in the Introduction.)

A good example of such relations is the silver plate currently at the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (Figure 31).⁴⁶ Dated to the fifth or sixth century CE, it displays a seated shepherd with a dog, two rams, and plants at different phases of bloom. The conjunction “with” in the preceding sentence masks the difficulty inherent in determining the precise relationship between the depicted man and the beasts, for while the shepherd’s staff denotes the former as master and nurturer of the latter, their postures signal a moment in their relationship when such a designation is not easily apparent. The dog occupies the space between the man’s legs, its body twisting emphatically toward him. One leg is raised in a gesture not unlike the raised fingers of humans denoting speech in Byzantine art. This canine

⁴⁶ Chatterjee, *Between the Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 189–90.

seems to be engaged in a dialogue with the shepherd, or at the very least to respond to him bodily. The rams, on the other hand, are more detached. The seated animal turns its head toward the man, but is its attention drawn by the human being or the bifoliate plants sprouting between them? The standing ram chews on a leaf of the tree whose branches flourish in the upper surface of the plate. Those branches reach out toward the shepherd as if to court his attention, unlike the stiffly erect, stunted plants below. And what of the shepherd himself? Does he admire the tree or respond to it? Does he converse with or sing to the dog or the rams? Does he simply look on the scene or somewhere beyond it? In an earlier work, I had suggested that the image opens up many possibilities in terms of sound; it could evoke voice, song, poetry, a command, or the sounds of the animals, or—I suggest now—even silence.⁴⁷ The hint of possible interactions, or the lack of them, complicate this soundscape on several levels.

The above point inevitably problematizes any simple reading of the image as depicting a shepherd in a landscape with animals. To dismiss the plants as mere setting is to disregard their insistent height (the tree) and centrality (the plants and the tree), both of which are the routine signifiers of importance in Byzantine art. By the same token, we cannot but give the animals their due, constituting as they do the entire right surface. To read them as merely creatures submissive to the shepherd would hardly do justice to the variations of their poses and vibrancy of their bodies. Though exceeding the plants and animals in height even when seated, this shepherd is not construed as a commanding figure. For one, the attention of each animal wavers, even if each ultimately faces the shepherd. For another, the very twists in the bodies of the dog and the seated ram signal a situation, or a moment, when those beasts are in tension with their ostensible visual focus. The regimes of attention depicted here are multiple and sometimes in conflict, detracting from an exclusive focal point that may underpin the power relations at play. Attention to the supposedly dominant human is not guaranteed by, or perhaps even a condition of, this image.

One might well ask at this point what, if any, examples exist of attentive animals in Byzantine art? For that matter, how is attention visualized even among the human species in this tradition? The imperial domain offers good ground to explore this question, positing as it does an individual supreme above all others and, therefore, designed to command maximum attention. The emperor is almost always frontally positioned and central, and towers over all others.

47 Chatterjee, *Between the Pagan Past and the Christian Present*, 190.



Figure 32. Greek gospels, twelfth century. Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks, MS 5, fol. 14. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC. Courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC.



Figure 33. Orpheus and the animals, fourth century CE. Marble, table stand. Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum. © Alamy Stock Photo.

Frontality and centrality are key factors in ensuring that he receives his due by arresting the audience's gaze, even if that gaze then moves on to other areas of the visual field. The principle is similar to that of images of Christ Pantokrator placed above critical thresholds such as at Hosios Loukas and the Chora monastery; these images tower above the viewer and address them directly with frontal gaze and a text from the Gospel.

What place do animals have in this economy of visual attention? We might begin with a somewhat common motif, namely birds and other beasts depicted atop canon tables in

Byzantine *tetraevangelia* (four gospels). Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks, MS 5 is a good example: across the seven-odd folios on which the tables are spread out, we find birds and sheep/rams (in two cases), flanking an object, usually a fountain, sometimes a cross. These animals are positioned such that their attention to the central object is unmistakable; their gazes and stances are directed toward it (Figure 32). In the two cases where they face away, the regularity of their bodies and gazes on each side signals a corresponding concentration outward. These are clearly not animals engaged in whimsical, playful modes; they are placed and depicted in relation to their surroundings such that their attention to the object is registered by the viewer.

A category of images useful to gauging the matter of animals paying attention, or otherwise, is in the Orpheus and Davidic tradition which depicts an unusually skilled musician attracting an audience comprising distinct species.⁴⁸ The object believed to have been a table stand, now located in Athens, and dated to the fourth century CE (Figure 33), shows the musician

48 For a comprehensive study of Orpheus in the medieval era, see Boardman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*.

Figure 34. Orpheus and the animals, fourth-seventh century CE. Polychrome wool and linen, 15.1 × 15.0 cm. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC. Courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC.



(whether read as Orpheus or David) facing slightly towards the viewer's right and surrounded by real and mythical animals in a tightly laced network. Right below the musician's feet is a panel depicting carved beasts, some of whom are engaged in battle (not shown in the image published here). The stand on which the carving rests shows a lion attacking a deer-like creature, its mouth bearing down on the latter's throat. Once again, we find the polarities of aggression and peaceable coexistence as reflected in the Great Palace mosaics mentioned earlier. However, peaceful coexistence in this case also signifies rapt attention, with almost each creature positioned to look towards the musician. The very few who do not look at Orpheus, stare out at the viewer. It is he, and his music, that hold the beasts at bay from each other and coax them into the compressed mesh around him.

The examples above indicate the variations in gaze and posture that a musical scene of this type entails: in the case of the table stand, attention is signified by creatures uniformly positioned toward the musician, apart from a very few not disposed thus. Brian Madigan points to the implications of similar states of wavering attention in his study of a textile fragment from Dumbarton Oaks (Figure 34).⁴⁹ This *segmentum* is deeply abraded on the left. But we get a glimpse of a musician with his instrument surrounded by

⁴⁹ Madigan, "An Orpheus among the Animals at Dumbarton Oaks," 405–16.



Figure 35. Orpheus and the animals, sixth–seventh century CE. Wool and linen. Princeton, Princeton Art Museum, New Jersey. © Art Resource.

various creatures, including a giraffe, on the right. The composition is bound within a roundel, right outside which reptilian beasts occupy the spandrels by the thinly outlined rectangular border. These reptiles face inward as if to turn the viewer's attention toward the events within the roundel.

Madigan persuasively argues that the centaur on this textile (and the figure of the god Pan playing his syrinx on other similar textiles) serve to signal the limits of Orpheus' power, the latter's failure in retrieving Eurydice, and his impending destruction at the hands of the Furies. Such a reading takes us from the usual thematization of the musician's magnetism to a proleptic message indicating instead his failure. Orpheus' musical powers are shown to be useless regarding the very person he wishes to attract most (namely, Eurydice). For the purposes of my argument, Madigan's point hinges on the very possibility of the ambivalent attention of non-human figures such as Pan. On the *Dumbarton Oaks segmentum*, the presence of the centaur introduces a competing instrument into the music-making milieu and seems to gesture away from the centre (hands and legs prancing in the opposite direction from Orpheus), perhaps to the approach of another, more persuasive master (in this case, Dionysios and his rowdy entourage).⁵⁰

50 Madigan, "An Orpheus among the Animals at Dumbarton Oaks," 405–16.

Another textile fragment very similar in style and content, currently at the Princeton Art Museum, seems to replicate the Dumbarton Oaks composition but with different animals and, more intriguingly, a different figure in command (Figure 35). Instead of Orpheus (identified in the Dumbarton Oaks fragment through his clothes, especially the Phrygian hat), this figure seems to be half-naked and might even be female. To be sure, any strict identification of the musicians on either of the fragments is impeded by the lack of identifying inscriptions. Nonetheless, it is telling that difference was intended and underlined. This difference attests to the flexibility deemed intrinsic to the musician and the range of personae the latter could assume.

The examples examined above proffer nodes of potential and actual inattention in the visual field via the animals' gazes and postures, and the figure of the centaur. Yet, in their overall structures the musical scenes present the same principles of frontality, centrality, and larger scale with subordinate humans and non-human figures, as we find in imperial and Pantokrator imagery. In comparison, the prefatory folio of the Paris Psalter depicts a relative looseness of relations between the ensemble of David and Melody on the one hand, and the animals in the audience on the other. The sheep, goats, and dog are positioned in equivocal attitudes in relation to David. Even the goat and sheep turned toward the musician do not engage in overt actions with him. The beasts' seeming self-possession, however, does not mean they cannot appreciate the import of the melody and/or Melody, since sound does not require *en face* interaction. Indeed, the unsettling irony of this image is that its most commanding figure—the one who stares us directly in the face—does not require visibility in order to register its presence. In consonance with this observation, we find in the sources directly attributed to Constantine VII, an acoustic consideration which is *as* important as visibility: that is, paternal and imperial instruction through the emperor's voice. This configuration of the imperial voice makes it the medium whereby the various contingencies of rule may be addressed and, perhaps, mitigated.

The Porphyrogenetos' Voice

The most compelling evidence of the commitment to voice and instruction is contained in the proem to the *De administrando imperio*. This document was a manual on domestic and foreign policy specially compiled by Constantine VII for his son, Romanos II, and one of the major achievements of the former's reign. It begins thus, "A wise son makes glad a father, and an

affectionate father takes delight in a prudent son. For the Lord gives wit/sense to speak in season, and adds an ear to hear...Now listen to me."⁵¹

The verb *akouein* (to listen) repeated in the very first lines of the proem, forges the ideal relations required to maintain the continuity and longevity of rule, positing the heir to the throne as a listener. The kinship between father and son is here contingent on the latter assuming the position of one who listens to his predecessor; the father/emperor as one who passes on advice worthy of being heard. The proem goes on to delineate the contents of the entire document: the differentiation of nations, and how to conciliate or attack them. Right after this précis, Constantine VII states, "For so shall they quake before you as one mighty in wisdom...your lips shall be bridled, and as darts shall your words wound them to death."⁵² Words become veritable weapons; an appropriate stance for an emperor who, unlike his combative grandfather, the emperor Basil I, never once accompanied his troops into battle, nor wrote a military treatise like his father Leo VI did, and who had to spend much of his reign sharing the throne with a co-emperor.

The first chapter that follows the proem, and deals with the Romans' required attitude to the Pechenegs, opens with the exhortation:

Hear, now, my son, those things of which I think you should not be ignorant...and if in setting out my speech I have followed the plain and beaten track of speech...and simple prose, do not wonder at that, my son. For I have not made a display of fine writing...but rather have been eager, by means of everyday and conversational narrative to teach you those things of which I think you should not be ignorant.⁵³

This apology for the simple narrative composed in accordance with the patterns of oral speech is yet another instance of the significance accorded to the imperial/paternal voice in shaping policy and fortifying rule across generations.

And so it continues. When we come to the belligerent Bulgarians (Chapter 12), once again the son is urged "to fix your mind's eye upon my words and learn those things which I command you, and you will be able in due season as from ancestral treasures to bring forth the wealth of wisdom, and

51 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, 45.

52 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, 47.

53 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, 49.

to display the abundance of wit.”⁵⁴ Only by listening to—indeed, visualizing—the father’s words can the successor cultivate his own voice, itself an imperial treasure polished and passed down over generations from one’s ancestors. Appropriately, what follows in the chapter are difficult situations requiring the negotiation of imperial regalia with enemy nations, all of which, as per Constantine VII’s advice, may be successfully managed with persuasive stories conveyed by speech via the emperor and/or his agents.

In the context of the bucolic genre in which animals of a few restricted species feature, a passage in Chapter 12 draws parallels between nations or races, and animals. “For just as each animal mates with its own tribe, so it is right that each nation also should marry and cohabit not with those of other race and tongue (*alloglosson*) but of the same tribe and speech (*homophonon*).”⁵⁵ Notice the emphasis on a common speech, or voice, as *phone* may refer to either, as a category for sorting out ethnicities and also zoological species. Voice enables speech which in turn develops into language, or tongue (*glossa*). Bloodlines are sustained by animals mating within their own tribe. By the same token, as per Constantine VII, voice not only transmits a treasury of instruction; it holds entire communities together in the semblance of a nation, or race, be it human or non-human. In this respect, the imperial voice assumes—or attempts to assume—a kinship with the psalmic voice which, we recall, has the potential to form bonds across Christendom.

Prerona Prasad shows that even apart from the *De administrando imperio*, all the major treatises compiled by or under the patronage of Constantine VII are undergirded by the conviction of the importance of instruction from father to son, or emperor to successor.⁵⁶ The *Vita Basilii* (Life of Basil), the official biography of his grandfather, specifically notes that the lack of a palace upbringing was no impediment to Basil as a ruler, for his father had instructed him in all excellent and praiseworthy things. The monumental compilation of past and possibly current ceremonial practices in the *De ceremoniis* demonstrates the same concern. The preface to the third treatise on military expeditions as laid out in the Leipzig manuscript, contains a declaration about the impossibility of being an emperor on the basis of natural abilities alone. Rather, it is contingent on *instruction* by one’s predecessor

54 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, 67.

55 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, 75.

56 Prasad, “Splendour, Vigour, and Legitimacy,” 235–47.

(or father) in the noble precepts constituting imperial rule. Prasad contends that in Constantine VII's scheme, both bloodline and intellectual transmission were the most valuable predictors of worthy rule.⁵⁷ I would extend this argument by stating that the former (bloodline), under Constantine VII, was squarely contingent on the latter (intellectual transmission) with an emphasis on *vocal* transmission and reception.

Even in the centuries after Constantine VII's particular interventions in this arena, voice continues to garner no small significance in the making and breaking of emperors. The polymath, Michael Psellos, consistently lists the vocal (and by extension rhetorical) qualities of individual emperors along with their physical attributes.⁵⁸ The peculiar powers of the imperial voice also find mention in verse. In one long poem, John Mauropous talks about the momentous effect that hearing the word *basileus* had on him, and then proceeds to mention the equally momentous effects that an imperial countenance and voice can have on a viewer and listener. He mentions one incident when the emperor glanced his way and spoke to him, which combination (view and voice) apparently transformed him forever.⁵⁹ In another poem, Mauropous characterizes a dead emperor as being primarily "without voice".⁶⁰ Moreover, in an interesting transfer of power (and, therefore, blame), several period historians attribute the outbreak of iconoclasm, or the destruction of holy images in the empire, to the influence of the words of the master of the imperial choir (*protopsaltes*) on the arch iconoclast, Emperor Leo V.⁶¹ The one who trains and conducts voices is thus held to account as the primary agent for one of the most divisive events in Byzantine history.

The opening folio of the Paris Psalter, with its strong presentation of Melody and music-making and by virtue of the psalms it contains, reflects the principle of voice, music, and speech at a literal level. By positioning this as the first episode in a narrative that culminates in the imperial image,

57 Prasad, "Splendour, Vigour, and Legitimacy," 235–47.

58 Michael Psellus, *Chronographia, Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, trans Sewter.

59 John Mauropous, Poem 54 "When he made his first acquaintance with the ruling family," in *The Poems of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, ed. and trans. Bernard and Livanos, 427–31.

60 John Mauropous, Poem 81 "Funeral verses on the grave of the emperor," *The Poems of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, ed. and trans. Bernard and Livanos, 473.

61 Engberg, "The Emperor Leo V, his Choir Master, and the Byzantine Old Testament Lectionary," 83–86.

the suite of images makes a pictorial argument for voice, music, and speech also as foundational for imperium (Figure 22). Indeed, the seemingly inattentive attitudes of many of the creatures testifies to the difficulty of cultivating a voice that is both imperial and commanding. However, the figure behind the column stands testimony to music's far-reaching powers which can still command or conjure up figures that may prefer to have remained hidden. Read thus, the autonomy of Melody makes sense. David is *her* instrument, even as the *psalterion* is his medium. Melody—and thereby, sound—clearly dominates here without it having been transcribed to text. Or, to put it another way, Melody's productions via David are significant enough to need such transcription in due course, when he attains the state of emperor. Voice, too, shall attain a different state—that of script—by the end of this suite of images.

Accordingly, when we encounter David once again on the last folio of the suite, the setting is emptied of all extraneous figures and accessories (Figure 23). Curiously, vegetation still sprouts in the background which, to my knowledge, is extremely unusual in imperial imagery. The green leafy backdrop hints at the tree, and the bucolic ambience, that opened the manuscript, thus maintaining a link with that initial image. This ambience is pushed behind to clear space for the emperor, but still imposes its presence by inhabiting the same area as the normative gold background. Thus, the bucolic continues to set the scene for the imperial voice to function and perform. That voice is now squarely directed to and focused on Psalm 71 in the open psalter. The personification of Prophecy stretches out a hand and points to the text in the open book with impressive assurance and superiority (her hand is on top whilst David's is at the bottom). Melody is now clearly inscribed as speech on that book. Both the opening and closing images, organized around music as sound and later, as speech and text, are bookends to the other activities that propel David the shepherd to imperial status.

Personifications and Voice

The personifications in the psalter's imagery need some further discussion, particularly in light of their vividness, their impact on vocal participation and modulation across the folios, and in their introduction of an entirely new category—or species—into the manuscript. As Walter Burkett shows, personification is a complex phenomenon that unfolds at linguistic, poetic, religious, speculative or other levels, and can enable a productive intermingling

or confusion between them.⁶² In our psalter, the visual personifications introduce layers of complexity by probing the limits of the pictorial representation of humans and non-humans alike. All the personifications are depicted as human figures, but they are clearly not of this particular species; they simultaneously encompass and go beyond it. More specifically, personifications connote both human characteristics and voice.⁶³ Their very names introduce an additional vector of reading into the folio, inscribed as these are sometimes (but not always) on a different axis from that identifying the human figure (e.g., Melody is inscribed vertically whereas David's name is horizontal). The act of naming these figures invokes the range of powers and possibilities associated with bestowing appellations.

Speaking names enables a variety of verbal—and thereby, visual—connections that may not otherwise be apparent. Naming is also sometimes a means of mastering complexity and imposing order.⁶⁴ But alternatively, the personifications' names and visual depictions may furnish the launching pad for related ideas and discourses, and even poetical elaborations not immediately visible on the surface.⁶⁵ The personifications' very presence introduces a complementary—and sometimes competitive—tenor as they assert themselves in the same visual field where the human figure (David or whomever) is assumed to be the main focus. They can work either to contain the narrative in a tight clarity or to enable its extension in a host of verbal-pictorial connections.

In the Paris Psalter the personifications' consistent autonomy is striking. The imposing body of Power/Ability (*dynamis*) in the David cycle, or the well-known figures of Night (*nyx*) and Dawn (*orthros*) on folio 435v as they accompany the prophet Isaiah are not beings to be ignored (Figure 36). In the David cycle, specifically, the personifications bespeak the close association with the shepherd boy and his steady march toward kingship, even as they assert their own sovereign status. This is also very much the case when David becomes the emperor, as discussed above in the case of Wisdom and Prophecy. The distinction between the would-be king, and the ideal qualities required to assume that state, is aligned with a key component of

⁶² Burkett, "Hesiod in Context," 3.

⁶³ Furey, "Impersonating Devotion," 13.

⁶⁴ Murray, "The Muses," 151–52, 159.

⁶⁵ Ruth Leader discusses late antique mosaics of abstract values and paideia, or the cultural education rooted in classical education in Leader, "Name Labels on Late Antique Mosaics," 48–50. See also Magdalino, "Cultural Change?" 32.



Figure 36. The prayer of Isaiah. Paris Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS gr. 139, fol. 435v. Courtesy of the BnF.

Constantine VII's vision, which stated that natural abilities were *not* enough to qualify one for the throne, no matter how impressive these were. (Recall that this precept is explicitly declared in the preface to the third treatise on military expeditions discussed above.)⁶⁶ To put it another way, things like Strength, Ability, Wisdom, and Melody (which, to emphasize again, stands

⁶⁶ Prasad, "Splendour, Vigour, and Legitimacy," 235–47.

first in the line of personifications pictured) are all extrinsic. Their discretion and independence suggest that even if they happen to be innate to the imperial person, they still demand a degree of careful cultivation and control by him.

Where the personifications do not accompany figures with imperial import, they still hold the potential to displace attention from the ostensible main figure. Folio 435v is a good example; it depicts the prayer of Isaiah with the words “Out of the night my spirit awakes early for thee, O God” on the facing folio (Figure 36). Stephen Wander points out that the text of the canticle in the psalter omits the first words “where our soul seeks you,” thus literally showing Isaiah turning away from midnight-blue Night to the rosy little figure of Dawn who runs up to greet the prophet.⁶⁷ An alternate reading, however, could take into account the gestures and poses of the figures and the parallel narratives these craft alongside Isaiah’s prayer. Night’s foot protrudes slightly from the frame, as though she were about to step out of the visual field. Yet she remains firmly embedded in it, a patch of darkness swirling aloft a starred blue cape. If this is a figure in transition to Dawn, and the awakening of Isaiah’s spirit, it is still very much present and a reminder of the temporal and physical stages of Isaiah’s prayer. It is also a reminder of other psalms and books of the Bible which exhort not a turning away from Night, but a constant meditation on God’s law through its temporal expanse and through the day. As for Dawn, the cheerful little figure is shown in motion, still stepping (perhaps running?) and gesturing toward the prophet who does not regard him. Yet, a direct line connects Night’s and Dawn’s countenances. Perhaps Dawn addresses its majestic counterpart, cutting across Isaiah? Could the dialogue between Isaiah and God reflect a simultaneous dialogue that occurs between Night and Dawn? These are necessarily speculative points (since various other interactions might be drawn between the figures and their surroundings). But they underscore the flexibility inherent to imagery that includes personifications and the fertile ways these might have been harnessed by the reader and viewer in their reception of the folio.

⁶⁷ Wander, “The Paris Psalter,” 92–93.

The Message in the Landscape

The bucolic dimension of the Paris Psalter was clearly not an isolated phenomenon in the visual repertoire of the epoch. The contemporaneous Leo Bible, a deluxe manuscript dated to the tenth century CE, depicts on one of its opening folios (2v) an unusual image of Moses seated in a landscape in front of a group of animals and writing in an open codex (Figure 37). This is part of a Creation cycle shown in three registers with the serpent's temptation of man delineated at the bottom, and an abraded middle frieze teeming with fishes. The marine animals seem more distracted than their terrestrial counterparts who stand firm and face Moses. But as with the inattentive creatures on the Paris folio, even in the Leo Bible one beast turns its head in the opposite direction whilst another gazes directly out of the frame at the viewer. The epigram on the borders of the image proclaims:

He who timelessly supports the clay, the substratum of the earth, and sustains the heaven like a curtain from above, within time places the sea in the midst, and forms in a fitting way a speaking animal. After that, as Moses writes, the snake there, out of envy, creeps up to speak to the image of God.

David Olster places this image in the context of elite classical education and the relations between man and language as painstakingly worked out after the upheaval of iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries CE.⁶⁸ This is certainly evident from the allusion to the “speaking animal.” Equally pertinent and not coincidental, I would argue, is the sustained image of *speech* as it comes to define man, here cast as the image of God. Speech also signifies the serpent's perfidy through his address to Adam. The image deemed best to serve the varying powers and effects of speech, is cast here in a version of the bucolic mode with Moses as a type of herdsman, albeit one who inscribes his words instead of—or along with—speaking them aloud.

The prefatory folio of the Paris Psalter, whilst being far more verdant and laden with many characters, is similar to the Leo Bible folio in positioning a human vis-à-vis non-humans with a sonic component mediating the relations among them. These images, appearing on folios positioned at or near the beginning of their respective manuscripts, constitute a statement about the bucolic mode as an essential condition for leadership. Simultaneously, they posit the bucolic setting as intrinsic to the formation and transmission of language and vocal forms (music, speech, text). Whereas the image from

⁶⁸ Olster, “Byzantine Hermeneutics After Iconoclasm,” 438.



Figure 37. Moses and his flock; the serpent in Eden. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. gr. 1, fol. 2v. By permission Zereis Facsimiles.

the Leo Bible performs a commentary on the shaping of language after a theological and political crisis, the opening folio of the Paris Psalter elaborates on the contingencies inherent to that fundamental component of Byzantine imperium: the emperor's voice and its reach.



Figure 38. Shepherds in the countryside.
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France,
MS supplément
gr. 247, fol. 47v.
Courtesy of the BnF.



Figure 39. Shepherds in the countryside.
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France,
MS supplément
gr. 247, fol. 48r.
Courtesy of the BnF.