

INTRODUCTION

A TEXTILE IN the Brooklyn Museum of Art displays an intriguing vista (Figure 1). This roundel of linen and wool, edged by a wave pattern, shows on the top a bare-bodied boy with a cloth covering his loins who lies on his stomach and plays a flute. A dog sits next to him. Below them, a child stretches out an arm to the left and a dog leaps toward him from the right. The child's arm points to a woman bearing an infant on her back and gesturing (with a stick?) to a herd of sheep and goats. This herd faces a man, also largely bare bodied, who holds a staff and is seated. The purple background, now much faded, is tempered by vegetation in a few areas. A grassy patch furnishes the backdrop to the flute-playing boy, and a tree flanks the woman on the left. Plants are otherwise sparse in comparison to the humans and beasts in the image field.

This object, barely studied in Byzantine art history, does appear in a major catalogue on late antique art from 1979 titled *The Age of Spirituality*.¹ The catalogue entry places the textile in the fifth century CE with a provenance in Egypt. It is said to be one of a set of four pieces, each displaying a distinct scene involving shepherds, animals, and music-making figures, all destined to adorn a single garment. The catalogue note elaborates on the imagery on our textile—and on my own staccato description above—by positing optical, acoustic, and affective relations between the figures depicted. So we read that the boy plays the flute “while his dog listens,” and that the other dog “affectionately licks the left ear of a babe seated on the ground,” and that an old shepherd watches the woman, identified in the note as a shepherdess.² Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the note places the textile and its counterparts in a section titled “Bucolics” and closes with the pithy but suggestive observation that bucolic imagery became popular in the fourth and fifth centuries, “a period when perspective yielded to paratactic arrangements.”³

1 Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality*, 250–51.

2 Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality*, 250–51.

3 Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality*, 251.

This book examines a selection of bucolic images in Byzantium, some of which were produced and received well beyond late antiquity. As far as the literary tradition is concerned, we know that bucolic poets such as Theocritus, Virgil, Moschus, and Bion were read and cited in Byzantium, and that the mode itself was used in medieval Greek by poets such as Nonnus, John Geometres, Christopher Mytilene and John Mauropous, novelists such as Theodore Prodromos and Niketas Eugeneianos, and epigrammatists such as Cyrus and Agathias. Furthermore, literary allusions to Theocritean poetry appear throughout the Byzantine period, as Joan Burton demonstrates.⁴ Images from the visual repertoire (such as the Brooklyn textile) also evince the fundamental elements that characterize bucolic literature: that is, shepherds and goatherds with their animals, other humans, and sometimes personifications inhabiting natural spaces. However, these have never been studied as a coherent set of pictorial conventions with significant cultural, political, and religious implications in Byzantium.⁵

This book argues that the basic conventions undergirding bucolic imagery enabled it to participate in and comment on (at least) three arenas of the Byzantine thought-world at different moments in time: namely, the magnetic role of the shepherd and his voice in Orthodox salvation; phenomena related to weather; and the values associated with imperium under a particular emperor, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, and his milieu. A corollary contention is that bucolic conventions open up spheres of inquiry that entail, first, the significance of sound and the crafting of soundscapes via images to particular effects (think of the flute-playing boy on the Brooklyn textile, for example); secondly, the implications of the role of non-human animals and other species in a visual field shared with humans; and finally, the study of the subject of attention vis-à-vis an image, and the kinds of attentiveness (or otherwise) of the depicted beings in an image toward each other. The catalogue note mentioned above gestures to this last point by underscoring the tendency of bucolic scenes to display paratactic arrangements.⁶ This dimension is evident in the looseness of relations between the figures on the Brooklyn textile—a looseness that the note attempts to resolve by attributing

⁴ Burton, “The Pastoral in Byzantium,” 549–79.

⁵ Bucolic imagery has sometimes been invoked as a subset of Dionysiac imagery but has often been overshadowed by the latter. See, for instance, the very few references in the index to “bucolic” in Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art*, and Tsourinaki, “Late Antique Textiles of the Benaki Museum.”

⁶ *Parataxis* in bucolic scenes on Roman sarcophagi is also discussed in Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning and Memory in Roman Sarcophagi*, 83.

particular affects and intentions to the figures (the affectionate canine, the listening canine, and the old man watching the woman approach).

But no definite visual parameters attest to those affects and intentions as being what they are claimed to be. If anything, the image indicates the multiple *possibilities* of human and non-human optical, tactile, and/or acoustic attentiveness to each other. Simultaneously, the image foregrounds the question of how it may solicit forms of acknowledgement from its viewer in the absence of the overt parameters that usually signal importance in Byzantine art. In such a scheme, as Byzantinists well know, centre triumphs over the sides, and size is in positive correlation to significance. But the Brooklyn textile places a child, a dog, sheep, and goats at its ostensible centre, whilst displacing the largest human figures (the standing woman and seated man) to the sides, thereby hinting at other regimes of significance at play. We shall find in the subsequent chapters that bucolic imagery tends to upset our normative parameters of viewing Byzantine art and, in doing so, invites us to interrogate the validity of those parameters.

Definitions

What does the word “bucolic”—as a descriptor, genre, and mode—mean? It is derived from the Greek verb *boukoleō* which, as Kathryn Gutzwiller observes, refers to a range of acts that include cowherding, grazing, tending, guarding, soothing, beguiling, cheating, and deceiving.⁷ Despite being a rich, evolving, and capacious concept in the ancient and late antique world, the bucolic was nonetheless conditioned by the cultural understanding of what it meant to herd cows in its full connotative and denotative range.⁸ Accordingly, the fundamental criterion I use to define bucolic imagery in this book is the presence of a shepherd in a visual field. (Cowherds are not as frequently depicted, to my knowledge.)

So much for the word. The genre of the “bucolic” is, if anything, even more complex with a long history of distinguished scholarship behind it.⁹

⁷ Gutzwiller, “The Bucolic Problem,” 390.

⁸ Gutzwiller, “The Bucolic Problem,” 390.

⁹ The scholarly work on bucolic literature in the ancient and modern periods is vast. I mention here only a few representative works and their bibliographies that have been important to this study: Gutzwiller, “The Bucolic Problem”; Gutzwiller, “The Herdsman in Greek Thought”; Segal, *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral*; Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*; Schmidt, *Bukolische Leidenschaft*; Halperin, *Before Pastoral*; and Chaudhuri, *Pastoral Poetry of the English Renaissance*.

Simply put, the body of literary texts from the ancient to the contemporary period that we identify as “bucolic,” or “pastoral” (from the Latin root) owes its origins to the poetry of ancient Greece and Rome, and its major motifs are believed to have first appeared in the *Idylls* of Theocritus (third century BCE). But it was Virgil’s *Eclogues* (42–37 BCE) that inspired literary variations of the bucolic and ushered in a long and relatively unbroken tradition on the subject well into the medieval and post-medieval eras in Europe, although its medieval versions are severely understudied.¹⁰

As a mode, the bucolic may be defined most simply and succinctly as “a way of writing about life in the countryside that emphasizes the gentle, leisurely, and often pleasurable aspects of that life...the lived experience of shepherds and goatherds...its goal is less to recreate [that] reality than to create a version that seems in some way desirable.”¹¹ The presentation of the desirable rather than the “realistic” dimensions of the shepherding life imbues bucolic themes with an element of artifice. As Charles Segal puts it, “this most easeful of literary forms paradoxically has tension and antithesis as an inherent part of its mental world. Pastoral’s deliberate simplification of life, therefore, is far from simple.”¹²

Paul Holberton observes that the entire conceit of the bucolic rests on echoed allusions couched in that most un-simple of forms—song—in that most serene, but nonetheless ontologically complex setting—a sylvan landscape, which may or may not be entirely natural. Holberton underlines that that landscape not only listens to the melody (and text) voiced by its human and non-human inhabitants, but also participates in the melody by returning a refrain.¹³ That refrain may emanate “from the woods or within the song or from fellow shepherds...”¹⁴ or be intertextual or subtextual. We find similar overtones in a tenth-century description of a garden (either real or ideal) by John Geometres in which varieties of birds are said to sing in response to each other in tandem with the melody of the pines and the gushing of streams.¹⁵ These sounds, overlapping and individual, man-made and

10 Little, “Pastoral.” On studies of pastoral in the medieval era and their paucity, see also Little, *Transforming Work*.

11 Little, “Pastoral.”

12 Segal, *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral*, 6.

13 Holberton, *A History of Arcadia*, 4.

14 Holberton, *A History of Arcadia*, 4.

15 See the original text and translation in Maguire, “A Description of the Aretai Palace,” 209–11. See also Demoen, “A Homeric Garden in Tenth-Century Constantinople,” 114–27.

otherwise, are vital to the kinds of sonic (and other) interactions the bucolic mode generates.

Holberton's insight nicely brings out the entanglement of the woods with humans and non-humans through the medium of song, which is itself an amalgam of text and melody, and which could refer to past iterations that have been sung before.¹⁶ The "wood" (often with a river and its bank) is an undefined area, "a hinterland between organized life and the wild."¹⁷ The bucolic setting, in turn, is "both sheltered and natural, both habitable and remote, in time and timeless, on the cusp between the civilized and the wild."¹⁸ The connotative resonances of this particular configuration of the shepherding universe are manifold, and contain ostensible polarities between song and dialogue, music and text, leisure and work, urbanism and ruralism, art and nature, human and non-human, and the seasonal and permanent.

We might summarize all of the above by invoking David Halperin's influential theory of the bucolic mode in three main points: first, it is literature related to herdsmen and their activities, including tending to animals, making music and, sometimes, love; second, it attains significance by oppositions, the most obvious being that between natural simplicity and the power of statecraft; and third, the bucolic's essence is that of a "manner of representation...between a confused or conflict-ridden reality and the artistic depiction of it as comprehensible, meaningful, or harmonious."¹⁹ Halperin's points pertain to *literary* expressions of the bucolic. Additionally, at least two of the three listed resonate with Byzantine modes of viewing since "significance by oppositions," or the antithetical habit (of comparing and making sense of oppositional elements in an image) and of granting rhetorical coherence and comprehensibility to "conflict-ridden" imagery were habitual to elite viewers, as textual sources show.²⁰ Indeed, various types of sources suggest that viewers relished the chance to show off their verbal and visual ingenuity when confronted with complicated or straightforward images.

Studies of the bucolic as a visual category unto itself are relatively few and concentrated in the ancient and early modern epochs. Bettina Bergmann,

16 Paul Alpers' classic study of modern pastoral makes this point by referring to the "re-singing" engaged in by Virgil's shepherds, and the possibility of "revoicing." See Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, 6.

17 Holberton, *A History of Arcadia*, 57.

18 Holberton, *A History of Arcadia*, 57.

19 Halperin, *Before Pastoral*, 70–71.

20 Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*.

however, points out that the pictorial version of the bucolic is not simply (or reductively) a distinct subject matter or scene comprising shepherds and flocks in a quiet place, in a peaceful mood. Rather, in the discipline of art history, the bucolic also alludes to “certain compositional structures or relationships of pictorial features that offer spectators ‘inviting occasions’ for escape and reverie.”²¹ Bergmann examines the bucolic in relation to ancient Roman images of sacred groves, indicating that these highlight the enticement to reverie even as they underscore the dialectic between nature and civilization. To be sure, the association of pictorial bucolic with the themes of reverie, escapism, melancholic rumination and nostalgia for an ideal, better, or different life is powerful, be it in readings of sarcophagi from the Roman era or in Erwin Panofsky’s famous account of Poussin’s Louvre painting, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, in the early modern era.²²

We find strains of similar themes in more recent studies as well. In her exploration of Venetian Renaissance “green worlds,” Jodi Cranston characterizes the pictorial bucolic as images with the potential to craft intimate ambiances and generate spaces for the acts of imagining and viewing.²³ Although it is argued that idyllic reverie is not the exclusive lens through which to read images featuring shepherds in landscapes (at least in the ancient period),²⁴ Bergmann’s and Cranston’s studies do highlight a dimension important to this book’s themes. The parameters for a “green world”—that is, the image’s capacity for retreat even as its structure encourages visual ambling on the part of a viewer—foreground the problem of viewer attention alluded to earlier, and also the possibilities proffered by imagery without apparent resolutions in the form of a beginning and ending, or a definitive moral or narrative “message.”²⁵ That such images were produced and viewed in Byzantium is a challenge that we still need to grapple with seriously, given the preponderance in the scholarship of biblical and imperial images which usually do have—or at any rate, are presumed to have—clear accompanying narratives and resolutions. Here one might include the moralizing dimensions scholars tend to read even into images which evince

21 Bergmann, “Exploring the Grove,” 21.

22 See the account of bucolic sarcophagi in Allen, *The Death of Myth on Roman Sarcophagi*, 74–96, and Panofsky, “Et in Arcadia Ego,” 257–62. See also the comments in Rosand, “Pastoral Topoi,” 160–77.

23 Cranston, *Green Worlds of Renaissance Venice*.

24 Platt, “Art, Nature and the Material Divine,” 3–13.

25 Cranston, *Green Worlds of Renaissance Venice*, 10–12.

paratactical relations and which cannot be placed comfortably in the imperial or religious domains in terms of their content.²⁶

Drawing from the above insights, one may turn to the visual domain in Byzantium to define the bucolic image as one that brings together shepherds and/or goatherds making music or conversation in a landscape together with sheep, goats, dogs, and other such creatures in attendance. A bucolic image may contain all the above (and other) features or may be minimal in only depicting a shepherd and one sheep and no other creatures at all. The word “creatures” is apposite since trees, plants, flowers and even winds can, and do, constitute a bucolic scene and are often invoked in the textual sources as integral to the latter (see the Geometres description above).

This book studies depictions ranging from the literal figure of the shepherd shown with a sheep or goat slung across his shoulders (see Chapter 1), to images in which the shepherd is one figure among many (including plants and animals) who vie for, or sometimes elude, the viewer’s attention and enact narratives not immediately discernible in terms of a clear endpoint or even an end, as it were. Indeed, almost all the images studied here implicate the viewer and the depicted figures in a set of interactions that lack a definite resolution. Thus, we shall see that the image of a shepherd carrying his sheep is as much an invitation to Christian salvation (as scholarship has stressed) as it is an open-ended and contingent configuration *because* it excludes the viewer from its space and from the all-important bodily shelter of the shepherd (see Chapter 1, Figure 2). Indeed, as I demonstrate, the very power of the Good Shepherd depends upon the disposition of his audience, as the evidence attests. Similarly, a shepherd making music among his flock and other beings seems to deflect a direct visual encounter with the viewer (unlike most figures in Byzantine art), even as it is implied that the power of the shepherd’s music endures well into the viewer’s own epoch (see Chapter 3, Figure 22). And in that vein, the bucolic imagery said to adorn a Constantinopolitan windvane displays no particular “plot” or direction, but requires an ambulatory viewer who must take in the depictions against the actual and potential contingencies of the weather that this structure was intended to signal (see Chapter 2). Absolute readings of all these images are, of course, possible (as is arguably the case with any image). However, the contexts and habitus in which they were viewed indicate otherwise.

26 Ivory caskets depicting putti and erotic themes are a case in point. See the comments in James, “Eros, Literature, and the Veroli Casket,” 397–413.

No matter the visual configuration of the bucolic, it almost always contains embedded, and sometimes explicit, contradictions. The very packaging of the shepherding life as idyllic is a conceit; a temporary and deliberate illusion which can turn on itself in vengeful exposure. We find this phenomenon in many instances of bucolic poetry, such as in the description, amid beautiful peaceful surroundings, of the violent death suffered by a musical shepherd in Theocritus' very first *Idyll* (discussed in the section below). Such reversals are sometimes made explicit in the imagery as well, as discussed throughout this book. So we shall observe in the tenth-century Paris Psalter that an ideal depiction of the bucolic (Figure 22) is shattered when, upon turning to the succeeding folio, we are confronted with the image of a lion menacing the sheep herded by David (Figure 25). The bucolic setting—the imagery shows—is susceptible to radical transformation, even destruction, because of its very artificiality which cannot be sustained over a length of time.

Just as the bucolic image is often haunted by its potential disruption (via marauding lions, bad weather, or other such factors), so too can it push the boundaries of nature (*physis*) and art (*techne*) to their limits by introducing overtly manufactured objects as integral and seemingly naturalized parts of it. One example would be the *psalterion* held by David in the prefatory folio of the Paris Psalter (Figure 22). The *psalterion* is an instrument made by humans; it plays on the boundaries demarcating the products, sounds, and spaces of nature, and those cultivated by humans and, possibly, non-humans (see Chapter 3). The plethora of ekphrastic descriptions throughout the Byzantine era indicate that viewership by the elite entailed the purposeful and pleasurable transgression of the limits of *techne* and *physis*. Those categories, even whilst being recognized as distinct, were also regarded as having porous limits. Consequently, the bucolic mode is apposite for inviting both serious and playful observations regarding the layers of artifice and “nature” embedded in the images at hand, and about their contingency (on which more later in this chapter).

A word about landscape is required here. This (like the bucolic) is an art historical category that lacks the traction in the medieval era that it has received in the ancient and early modern periods and beyond.²⁷ (Note that I speak of the field of medieval *art history* specifically in relation to landscape, and not *history* which has produced more studies on the subject.) What we think of as “landscape” certainly exists in Byzantine art and would seem to

27 See the discussion and literature cited in Elsner, ed., *Landscape and Space*, 2–5. For two recent studies on landscape in medieval art, see Goehring, *Space, Place and Ornament*, and Palladino, “Dynamics of Medieval Landscape,” 13–26.

be indispensable to bucolic images (in the form of rivers, trees, etc.). However, I have not treated it as a distinct aspect of this mode for two reasons. First, in most of the images examined, landscape is scanty, operating on the level of allusion. Secondly, even in its most luxurious delineation (Figure 22), the landscape is implicated in a network of other actors, including humans, non-humans, and monuments. As Jaś Elsner emphasizes, pictorial landscapes are largely “absent of defined or intrinsic meanings except...in relation to (or in opposition to) the human constraints imposed on them by monuments.”²⁸ The landscape in Byzantine bucolic imagery takes on meaning precisely through the other elements—living and non-living, monumental and non-monumental—that constitute and appear in it.

Additionally, the very associations of escapism and nostalgia that often imbue readings of landscapes termed “bucolic” may, in turn, be yoked to the contemporary yearning for a return to a (supposedly) more responsible or innocent era, one devoid of the environmental rapaciousness and other ills that characterize the Anthropocene. Although the Byzantine period—like many others, one presumes—was invested in thinking about potential and actual natural calamities, and about different kinds of ecological relations (see Chapter 2), I do not believe the bucolic mode was overtly harnessed to maximalist concerns regarding the environment, or landscape, or other such topics. In other words, simply because this mode allowed for productive ruminations on human-nonhuman interfaces and the weather back in the day (among other things), does not necessarily mean that it was also a tool for the kind of ecological and/or environmental messaging we might assume such ruminations to have in our current scholarly moment.

The Bucolic in Text and Image

Let us now turn to a prototypical instance of the bucolic mode, the themes of which we find recurring in later versions in both text and image: the very first *Idyll* of Theocritus.²⁹ The piece lays out the conditions of the literary genre by introducing a network of musicians, voices, and musical references. A pipe-playing, unnamed goatherd asks a shepherd named Thyrsis to sing about another legendary shepherd, Daphnis, and his sorrows. Even as the musical afternoon unfolds in a setting of pine trees and bubbling springs, the poet also makes a point of including man-made objects in the scenario.

²⁸ Elsner, “Space–Object–Landscape,” 133.

²⁹ Theocritus, *Idylls*, www.theoi.com/Text/TheocritusIdylls1.html.

These are hinted at as being images, or statues, of Priapus and fountain goddesses in the vicinity, thus bringing art into the domain of nature and vice-versa. Note that this is not strictly a garden setting; indications are that this is a slice of landscape studded with images.

Importantly, the goatherd introduces a cup, or bowl, as a prize promised to the shepherd, Thyrsis, in exchange for the quality of his song. This bowl is then described as containing a self-enclosed universe of images, akin to the more widely renowned, all-encompassing shield in Homer's *Iliad*.³⁰ It is said to show a suite of scenes comprising a woman placed between two rivalrous men (perhaps her suitors), an old fisherman plying his trade and combating the elements in the process, and a lad observing the antics of two foxes as they vie for grapes. These figures are hemmed in by a sinuous pattern of ivy curling around the bowl's lip. The seeming lack of relations between the scenes coaxes a reader/listener to exercise a degree of associative ingenuity in order to tie them together. Although this interpretative gesture does not explicitly occur in the *Idyll*, recall that such exercises in rhetorical and visual acuity were habitual for elite, informed readers and viewers in the Byzantine era.

Apart from furnishing the opportunity for elaborate description, the exposition of the bowl firmly implants visual and material culture into the very heart of the *Idylls*, with Thyrsis being asked to enter into the same agonistic spirit exhibited by the male suitors, the foxes competing for the grapes, and even the fisherman fighting against the elements as he labours, on the bowl.³¹ The bowl is posited as the desired end of Thyrsis' song; he will obtain it if he sings well. It embodies the measurable, material value of the shepherd's melody and his ultimate mastery over the world of the first *Idyll*. The surrounding landscape—the pines, springs, oaks, statues, and the very air—recedes to the status of a frame for the prize of the bowl and the pictorial world depicted on and around it: one world encompassing another, just as intricate in detail, if on a radically different scale. The bowl is temporarily pushed to the forefront in the discourse whilst the “actual” landscape becomes, for a few moments, no more than a surround for this vessel.

Some of the above points resonate with the images on the Brooklyn textile (Figure 1). As in the first *Idyll*, here too we find a shepherd, shepherdess, flocks of animals, plants, and the theme of music-making. But the

30 For a fundamental and still relevant discussion of this vessel, see Gow, “The Cup in the First *Idyll* of Theocritus,” 207–22.

31 For literature on the qualities of the song and the bowl, see Frangeskou, “Theocritus' *Idyll* I,” 23–42; see 24n5 for more scholarship on this subject.

transposition of textual themes to images is expectedly more complicated. The songs and dialogues integral to the bucolic mode permit an expansive cast of characters from nymphs, Muses, men, women, children, sheep, crickets, and others to inhabit a bucolic scene, even if only as verbal or musical allusions and not actual depictions. In fact, part of the appeal of the bucolic lies in the possibilities it proffers for a wide all-encompassing reach by virtue of the sounds perceived to be embedded in it, be these shaped as conversations or songs.³² Just as in literary versions a poet could introduce any range of subjects via the imagined conversations between the characters, so too can images conjure up a spectrum of beings, some of them perhaps products of the imagination of the figures shown.

Given the above conditions, we might claim that even as the Brooklyn textile includes the fundamental components that constitute a bucolic world, the very conditions of that mode also muddy the boundaries between what may be taken as absolute depictions (of people, animals, things deemed present in the visual field) and those that are not as absolute. Some of the elements we see in an image may be understood to inhabit a different world and/or medium altogether, such as music, or words, despite their *pictorial* depiction in the medium at hand (in this case, linen and wool) (Figure 1).

So, for instance, are we to imagine that the boy, the child, and the shepherd each inhabit the image at the same moment? Or could we read some of those human (and even the animal) figures as the *subjects* of the songs being played by the boy? Alternatively, could they represent distinct temporal stages in the life of a human, with the child in the centre growing up to become the boy at the top, and then taking his seat at the bottom right as the adult shepherd?³³ All these readings are arguably valid. My point is that the very conditions of the mode enable both a simultaneous view and a cumulative one across time over the surface of the image. This principle comes to the fore in later Byzantine exemplars, which can include personifications and figures which the viewer cannot place in a purely human realm, or even in the same temporal continuum as the other figures. The Paris Psalter folio shows such beings in the form of Melody (a personification) who sits at the centre right beside David, and the figure who peeps out from behind the column (Figure 22). The latter's hidden body, in stark contrast to the full-bodied depictions of the other human forms, hints at gradual revelation or no final

32 See the discussion and notes in Allen, *The Death of Myth on Roman Sarcophagi*, 94–96.

33 I am grateful to Tina Bawden for this insight.

revelation at all, thereby alluding to figures in the process of being conjured up and/or entirely concealed. (See Chapter 3.) The processual potential of this image complicates any straightforward understanding of its temporality. In short, the bucolic mode in the pictorial domain entails an admission of its limits, such as when an image purports to represent music, or sound, and its effects. Simultaneously, the mode also opens the possibility for an image to gesture *beyond* its own medium (from linen and wool, or parchment, to music or speech).

Finally, the agonistic element so marked in Theocritus' first *Idyll* is embedded in the very composition of the textile (Figure 1). The boy playing the flute occupies the top tier even as the largest figure in the ensemble—the man with the staff—is shifted to the surface below to the right. Both figures thus may be said to vie for attention as per the normative rules regulating Byzantine art. Both also subvert the posture of rigid erectness usually assumed by the figures—emperors, members of the Christian pantheon, and/or holy people—who are allotted those particular attributes of importance. Note that the centre depicts the child playing with (or fending off?) the dog, and a herd of goats and sheep. This area may be said to constitute an emphatic rejection of the primacy usually granted to human figures with a high spiritual or social value.

The flute ushers in yet another sphere of attention that potentially competes with the rest of the surface in terms of its sonic emphasis. The old man's staff and the stick-like object in the woman's hand are effective counterpoints to the flute: all these are slender instruments designed for human hands, and media intended to communicate with various kinds of species. Do the erect postures of the goats and sheep with their heads turned in one direction signify the authority of the shepherd, as opposed to that of the flute-playing boy since the latter's supposed auditor—the dog—seems to have turned its gaze *away* from the musician? Or does that canine gaze denote instead a distinct and concentrated form of attention, even if the visible signs of that attention are not congruent with those that inform Byzantine art? All these questions underscore the lack of a gravitational force toward any single dominant figure, or element, within the composition. Attention may focus itself on, or skirt around, any of the given figures or surfaces on the textile, and this condition is enabled partly because of the relative imprecision of the subject matter and the mode it depicts.

Adding to that imprecision is also the absence of specific geographical or temporal co-ordinates. If the bucolic literary genre construes itself as

existing in a timeless present,³⁴ then the image on our textile may be said to display the same. The place and season are undefined, although it is certainly not winter. In this respect, the image aligns itself with the principle underlying many Byzantine depictions of imperial and holy figures who are also shown to occupy spaces and times devoid of specificities, their background a sheet of gold. This is usually the case even with the depiction of biblical narratives such as the Nativity or the Baptism, although some images of the Annunciation do include the seasonal markers of spring and the components of gardens.³⁵

The image on the Brooklyn textile, in contrast, operates differently (Figure 1). It oscillates between one specific moment, or duration, over which the figures behave as they do, and an unknown space and time. Bursts of green-yellow vegetation erupt around the flautist, the woman, and the man. A leafless tree looms on the far left. These markers, though much abbreviated, nonetheless attest to the desire to supply the basic contours of a landscape to constitute the bucolic. This image, therefore, is endowed with a tension between the necessity of articulating the lineaments of the mode and the simultaneous desire to empty the depiction of any single point of focus. As a consequence, *taxis*—the overpowering and pervasive principle of order, hierarchy, and rank that defines most Byzantine images³⁶—is messed up and tumbled around in this particular visual category. This occurs no matter the medium (textile, manuscript, silver, or mosaic) or the context (intimate, monumental, in an urban space, or a private garden), as the following chapters show.

The Bucolic in Byzantium

In Byzantine studies the bucolic genre has received some attention in the literary sphere.³⁷ Art historians, however, have not explored it, nor have we considered its *specific* valence in the contexts where it appears. “Bucolics” is a subsection of “The Classical Realm” in the afore-mentioned catalogue *The Age of Spirituality*; thus, the pictorial convention is recognized in its ancient form and for its continued deployment in late antiquity.³⁸ The unifying fac-

34 Segal, *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral*, 3–4.

35 Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, 50–51.

36 For a discussion of *taxis*, see Dauterman Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, 135–45.

37 Burton, “The Pastoral in Byzantium,” 549–79.

38 Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality*, 247–54.

tor here is imagery depicting shepherds and shepherdesses in media such as textiles, glass, silver, and illustrated manuscripts of Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, and Nicander's *Theriaca*.³⁹ A total of eleven images constitute this section, indicating the general paucity of examples identified as "bucolic." Yet, it does occur in other contexts and media (notably mosaic, which is missing from this section of the catalogue).

Why has the bucolic not been granted the attention I believe it deserves in the art historical annals of Byzantium? Some of the reasons are all too familiar and have already been hinted at. First, this sort of imagery is nowhere as numerous as depictions of episodes and protagonists pertaining to the Orthodox religion. Sacred icons of Christ, the Theotokos and the saints abound and have attracted a correspondingly dominant share of scholarly scrutiny. (It should be noted that even sacred icons, despite their numbers, constitute a paltry segment of what was evidently a far more diverse visual culture in the religious domain than we imagine.)

Another reason for the neglect of the bucolic, directly connected to the first, is that it is harder to define—if not iconographically, then in terms of narrative and order—than its religious counterparts. If one can characterize a "religious" image via its content, then any depiction of a character or episode from the Christian tradition qualifies as such. The Orthodoxy of such an image is measured by certain established stylistic and iconographic features which often include the niceties of a hierarchical arrangement, particular colour schemes, attributes, a defined message, and so forth. These criteria are also discernible in Byzantine imperial imagery in which the figures of emperors and empresses order the pictorial composition by occupying centre space (or spaces adjacent to Christ), looking out directly at the viewer, and bearing a set of unmistakable attributes. These figures are disposed in the visual field as per the principle of *taxis* (see preceding section).

However, Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire demonstrated that *taxis* is *not* the sole or even principal criterion for Byzantine images outside the realm of emperors and holy figures; moreover, they brought to bear a corpus of images in diverse media bereft of *taxis* for art historians to reconsider.⁴⁰ I would go a step further to argue that the very depiction of order and hieraticism we find in imagery based on *taxis* was *understood* in the era as an artificial condition that did not obtain in other kinds of worlds (such as

39 Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality*, 247–54.

40 For a discussion of this facet of Byzantine art, see Maguire Dauterman Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*.

the bucolic), inhabited by other kinds of beings. Additionally, I contend that this insight has significant implications for how visual products might have been received in the period in general, for it tempers an appropriate reverence for figures of authority with consciousness of the man-made—and thereby, contingent—structures designed to present them as such. In short, the understanding of *taxis* as artificial permits the space for reflections on the contingencies implied by, and in, an image and its reception in the era.

Contingency—here defined as the existence of an object or condition which is dependent on an unpredictable set of factors—is barely considered in the realm of Byzantine art. Again, this is because within the dominant logic governing imperial and sacred imagery, “unpredictability” is not regarded as a factor, let alone a given. What we find instead are visual structures of legitimization, and cause-and-effect, which direct the viewer to an unambiguous end, in which an emperor or a saint assumes their position because divinely ordained events have dictated that they do so. However, the notion of such absolutism in the actual political landscape of Byzantium has been recently challenged by Anthony Kaldellis, who makes the critical point that the emperor’s position was not an unmitigated given; rather, it was profoundly and continuously contingent on the approval and consensus of various groups such as soldiers, farmers, elites, and others.⁴¹ In line with this argument, I contend that contingency is rendered as a value constitutive of imperium at its very source even if it is shown to be gradually shorn off as the imperial persona develops and consolidates itself in the representations at hand (see Chapter 3). The image of the emperor thus strives to present itself as anything but contingent, despite—and probably because of—the reality that his position was anything *but* absolute, as Kaldellis argues. Contingency also helps to explain the choice of bucolic depictions for instruments relating to the weather, since this is changeable, anticipated, but also feared, and acknowledged as such, as explored in Chapter 2.

As for contingency and Orthodoxy (by the latter, I refer to the pictorial images sanctioned by the Orthodox church), the two would seem to be incompatible, for how could the grand plan designed by an all-knowing God allow for pockets of chance? Yet one could argue that, in fact, the teleological arc of biblical narratives is not intended to do away with the apprehension of chance, or danger, or indeed, luck. The horrors of the massacre of the innocents are not diminished—quite the contrary—because an informed viewer knows that Christ will escape them. Nor is the visualization of the birth or

41 Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*.

death of Christ any less awesome because one knows they were bound to occur. In tune with Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 1 argues that chains of contingency are evident in the renditions and exegeses of biblical narratives, such as that of the Good Shepherd and of Jonah and the sea monster/*ketos*. In these texts and images, corporeal well-being (whether of sheep or humans or others) is posited as being conditional upon specific kinds of voices, locations, and dispositions. Those specificities eliminate contingency and allow for the intended effects of Christian salvation to come to fruition. In advancing such arguments in relation to bucolic imagery, this book seeks to lay the ground for more sustained explorations of contingency in relation to other kinds of images in this epoch as well.

The most useful avenues in Byzantine studies for themes associated with the bucolic mode occur in investigations of nature and gardens, even if these do not deal directly with the mode per se.⁴² Henry Maguire's analysis of images of nature from late antiquity to the post-Iconoclastic period argues that Byzantine attitudes to it were ambivalent.⁴³ The ambivalence was amplified after the iconoclastic upheavals of the eighth and ninth centuries when motifs prevalent earlier were modified or made to disappear owing to a new (or renewed) consciousness of the dangers of idolatry associated with them.⁴⁴ Maguire also brings many important insights to bear on the depiction of animals in Byzantine art, especially in terms of predation and violence, and their talismanic powers.⁴⁵

This book uses several insights from Maguire's studies even as it departs from the allegorical and symbolic readings advanced therein, and the strictly theological causation traced around the existence or otherwise of images of nature. Without denying the import of allegory, symbol, and theological underpinnings, this study claims that the literal presence and visceral apprehension of animals and other creatures are vital to the meaning of the images under discussion. Furthermore, I believe that this apprehension on the part of some audiences could be untethered from anxieties about idolatry or theological matters. Sometimes an image of a tree or a bird could be appreciated for its tree-ness and bird-ness without religious or even talismanic thoughts intruding. For instance, if we look at the descriptions by

42 Littlewood, Maguire, and Wolschke-Bulmahn eds., *Byzantine Garden Culture*, and Bodin and Hedlund eds., *Byzantine Gardens and Beyond*.

43 Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*; Maguire, "The Byzantines and Nature," 181–202.

44 Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*.

45 Maguire, "Profane Icons," 19–34.

Procopios in the sixth century CE and George Pachymeres in the fourteenth century CE of an equestrian monument in Constantinople, we find that both linger lovingly on the features of the horse depicted in it. The creature's bronze immensity, the disposition of its hoofs, its readiness to advance, the straining of its head against the wind, the unruliness of its mane, the swelling of its flanks, and the motion of its bushy tail are all recounted in minute detail (especially in Pachymeres' account) with no apparent symbolism or allegory appearing in the descriptions.⁴⁶ Although one might wonder about the accuracy of these accounts, this still does not belie the fact that the *animal* was as valued a locus of viewership as its human rider.⁴⁷ There is no reason to imagine that similar kinds of responses were not possible when viewers looked at animals and other species depicted in other media as well.

Indeed, there exist period accounts (not necessarily attached to visual objects per se) that evince a deep and abiding curiosity about non-human species, their habits, and possibilities in a larger ecosystem containing humans. Scholars of late antiquity have examined facets of nonhuman creatures and the implications of their presence, forms, and actions in the literary and religious domains.⁴⁸ In Byzantine studies, Thomas Arentzen, Virginia Burrus, and Glenn Peers have explored that culture's engagement with trees and the arboreal imagination.⁴⁹ Tristan Schmidt and Przemyslaw Marciniak have delved into attitudes towards, and engagements with, distinct animal species in the era.⁵⁰ This book picks up some of the epistemic threads suggested by these studies. Just as shepherds and sheep are integral to the bucolic, so too are trees, brooks, insects, zephyrs, humans, personifications, and so forth. The appreciation of these varied beings and their ontologies on the part of a viewer (quite apart from their symbolic or allegorical values), are evident in the sources, as is the importance of their interactions.

A related dimension that crops up insistently in bucolic imagery is sound, or the possibility of its occurrence. As briefly etched above, this consists of the music played, songs sung, and stories narrated by the shepherds and other characters. It also consists of elements such as the whispering of

46 See the translation in Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 110.

47 Stavros Lazaris comments on the profound interest in animal behaviour among the Byzantines in "Scientific, Medical, and Technical Manuscripts," 85.

48 For a few recent studies, see Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*; Schaaf ed., *Animal Kingdom of Heaven*; and Neis, *When a Human Gives Birth to a Raven*.

49 Arentzen, Burrus, and Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life*.

50 Marciniak and Schmidt eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Relations in the Byzantine World*.

piners, rustling of brooks, bleating of sheep, and the humming of bees. Layered into this resounding universe are remembered or imagined sounds in the form of stories told long ago, echoes of songs, and Pan's pipes, among others. Enveloping them all is the sound of silence that descends in the shady afternoon, the time most propitious for enacting the bucolic and its bounties.

The fields of Classics and late antiquity have seen an efflorescence of sound studies.⁵¹ Byzantinists, in their turn, have broached the subject of sound in the context of ritual, monastic, and church interiors.⁵² I have found Amy Papalexandrou's approach particularly instructive in its cultivation of a rigorous, insightful sonic anthropology through a close reading of the sources, even where a precise reconstruction of a particular soundscape is not admissible.⁵³ We must shift this approach to a sphere not dominated by the concerns of Orthodoxy when we broach the bucolic world. Yet another field I find useful is that of Chinese art, specifically the category of Chinese landscape painting, in which the sounds of the elements and the implications of listening subjects and aural subjectivities intersect with some of the themes explored in this book.⁵⁴ Each chapter studies strands of sounds woven explicitly or implicitly into the images under discussion. These include the imperial voice, the sounds of wind and water, birdsong, angelic pronouncements, and the music of the psalms, all of which are critical to the intended and perceived effects of the artefacts examined.

Chapter Breakdown

This book does not purport to offer a survey of every single image that might be deemed bucolic in the Byzantine repertoire, nor is it strictly a history of bucolic art in Byzantium. It does, however, strive to introduce some of its salient themes and to underscore the variety of media and contexts in

51 A few recent examples are Nooter and Butler eds., *Sound and the Ancient Senses*; Nooter, *When Heroes Sing*; Nooter, *The Mortal Voice in the Tragedies of Aeschylus*; and LeVen, *Music and Metamorphosis in Greco-Roman Thought*.

52 Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia*; Antonopoulos, Gerstel, Kyriakakis, Raptis, and Donahue, "Soundscapes of Byzantium," 321–35; Papalexandrou, "Perceptions of Sound and Sonic Environments," 67–86; Frank, "Crowds and Collective Affect," 169–90; and Antonopoulos, "Kalophonía and the Phenomenon of Embellishment," 87–110.

53 Papalexandrou, "Perceptions of Sound and Sonic Environments," 67–86.

54 I am grateful to Lihong Liu for insights on this subject. See Nelson, "Picturing Listening," 30–55.

which such images existed throughout the era. Each chapter focuses on one image, or a small set of images, that exhibit bucolic features and encompass a thematic value. The examples I have chosen range from the intimate to the monumental. This is partly by design, since the evidence spans a spectrum of scales and functions, thus testifying to the vitality and flexibility of the mode.

Chapter 1 examines some iterations of the image of the Good Shepherd in late antiquity. A literal distillation of the bucolic, the Good Shepherd has long been regarded as a visual message of Christian salvation, encapsulating related themes such as paradisiacal fulfilment, good fortune, spiritual leadership, and peace. However, the implications of the vivid conglomeration of human and animal that the image displays, such as in the famous but understudied exemplar at Cleveland, have rarely been considered. The chapter explores similar conglomerations from the period, such as Jonah and the sea monster (*ketos*), which often appeared with the Good Shepherd in catacombs, sarcophagi, and lamps. Instead of reading these only as types of Christ (or of salvation more broadly) as has been done, I situate them within an exegetical context that underlines the salvific possibilities of the *entanglement* of distinct types of bodies, their metamorphosis, and the potential of human bodies (like Jonah's) to engage in, and also escape from, those entanglements unblemished and intact. The chapter also demonstrates the integral role of voice in the Good Shepherd and Jonah narratives; sources posit the voices of the sheep, the prophet, and the shepherd as fundamental to the entanglements and consequent salvation at hand. The chapter ends with a proposition regarding the effacement (if not total disappearance) of the human-animal combination in the Good Shepherd imagery by tying it to period concerns regarding appropriate modes of touch vis-à-vis Christ's body.

Chapter 2 studies the textual descriptions of bucolic imagery said to adorn a magnificent windvane (*anemodoulion*) that stood in Constantinople over centuries until its destruction at the hands of the Crusaders in 1204 CE. Whilst windvanes are not common in Byzantine sources, the Constantinopolitan device seems related in key aspects to its ancient counterparts such as the Tower of the Winds in Athens and the wind-clock mentioned in Varro's famous description of his aviary in Casinum. The chapter considers similar kinds of imagery on depictions of the Nilometer, an instrument designed to measure the rising levels of the Nile river. Whilst these images have been rightly—but exclusively—yoked to the larger values of abundance and fertility, I demonstrate that the bucolic principles of interspecies connectedness and sonic layering are equally prominent features and demand to be acknowledged as such in the images under study. Ultimately, the chapter contends that bucolic images were deemed suitable for scientific devices

designed to measure the elements of wind and water since this pictorial mode best articulated the contingency of human and natural relations. Part of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of winds and their relation to bucolic scenes. Considerations of wind, and sometimes air, as an existing space against and around which the world functions, inflect certain kinds of images, pushing viewers to recognize empty space, or a “background,” as a vessel for an element that is not always depicted, but which is acknowledged in texts as making and occupying such a space.

Chapter 3 is a close reading of the prefatory folio of the so-called Paris Psalter (mentioned above) dated to the tenth century CE, which depicts one of the finest and most complex examples of the bucolic via David playing to animals, a mountain, a possible nymph, and other characters in an idyllic setting. Since this folio is part of a suite of illuminations culminating in a grand, gilded image of David as a Byzantine emperor, I argue that the very source of imperium is here posited as having its roots in the bucolic world. In scripture and imperial ideology, Moses, David, and the figure of the Good Shepherd are all linked to the values of leadership; it is this association elaborated into its most granular form that we find in the Paris Psalter prefatory folio. At the same time, by virtue of its bucolic conditions, the image also features the element of contingency which is skilfully eliminated as the depictions on the following folios reinforce the principles of *taxis* appropriate to delineating the emperor. Additionally, the chapter also argues for the imperial voice as an integral component of this particular image, thereby invoking the vocal turn as fundamental to the concept and practice of imperium. The bucolic mode is harnessed as the most powerful facilitator of the imperial voice under the rule of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, the patron of the psalter, whilst drawing on a longer tradition of similar images of David and Orpheus in media such as silverware, mosaics, and textiles.

The book closes with a brief look at a pair of images from the so-called Paris Nicander dated to the tenth century CE. The *Theriaca* and the *Alexipharmaka* were authored by Nicander in the second century CE. They outline the injuries shepherds could sustain during their toils, and remedies thereof (if some rather outlandish ones). Nicander, thus, presents a decidedly dark side of the bucolic; the dangers that the mode obliquely alludes to, but which come across only via the adoption of an emphatic dialectical move away from its literal—and visual—face. We might recall that in Theocritus’ first *Idyll*, the song Thyrsis sings contains a description of the afflictions of the ideal shepherd, Daphnis, who in turn describes the terrible fates that befell Anchises (blinded by bees) and Adonis (slain by a boar). Daphnis himself pines away and dies for love. Clearly shepherds and their lives are not

free of heartsickness, danger, and death, and the mode itself tells us so, if in the most harmonious of natural surroundings banished—at least temporarily—of bees and boars.

Accordingly, the Nicander manuscript closes with such an image of serenity, showing a shepherd striding in (or out of?) a wooded landscape. This image encapsulates the open-ended nature of bucolic imagery, its lack of a clear and definite resolution, and its presentation of the artifice and contingencies underlying what appears to be an idyllic vista. It is also an invitation to the reader of this book to consider other expressions of the bucolic mode and its related themes not considered here, but which may abide at different moments of the Byzantine era and which may enrich our understanding of its visual diversity.



Figure 2. Shepherd, 280–290 CE.
Marble, 49.5 × 26 × 16.2 cm.
Cleveland, Cleveland Museum
of Art. Courtesy of the Cleveland
Museum of Art's Open Access
Initiative.



Figure 3. Shepherd, fourth–
fifth century CE (restored?).
Marble, 100 × 36 × 27 cm.
Vatican City, Vatican Museum.
© Alamy Stock Photo.