The article explores iconography of the illuminated initial letters in the tenth-eleventh century Italo-Byzantine psalter (Vatican, Barber. gr. 285). It is argued that its initial letters clearly express Byzantine attitude to personal prayer, a plea for salvation and the struggle with evil through the words of Psalms, despite the mixture of models, most of which are certainly of non-Byzantine character.

Keywords: illuminated initial letters, Byzantine psalter, psalms, salvation

A small-sized (107 × 83 mm) Greek psalter from the Vatican library, Barberini gr. 285, is an outstanding example of Italo-Byzantine art. The manuscript consists of 159 folios of parchment, gathered in quires of six, eight and ten leaves. The text is written in one column, 21-23 lines per page, in minuscule script of tiny letters in brown-grayish ink, with rubrication and headings in red ink. Each and every psalm of this modest psalter starts with a striking pen-drawn illuminated initial letter executed in the brown ink of the text or in the red ink of the headings, most probably by the scribe. Red contour lines and dots are added to emphasize the initial letters. Sometimes, inaccurate traces of blue and green colors can be seen on the draperies of the figures and bodies of some animals. Some initials are strictly ornamental, decorated with interlaces, knots, and more, others consist of human and zoomorphic figures, or of human–animal fighting, forming a letter by means of the interplay of the bodies. All lack almost entirely any Biblical or Christological narrative. The only full-page illustration, of David fighting Goliath, precedes Ps 151 (fol. 140v). Another miniature may well have existed at the beginning of the manuscript, but this is missing today together with its first pages. The exact date of the psalter remains unclear. Its script, headpieces and initial letters have been attributed to the late tenth–early eleventh century, while the main debate concerns the full-page illustration, placed in the tenth or thirteenth–fourteenth century according to its stylistic irregularities.

Stylistic and paleographic analysis clearly shows that the manuscript was made in Southern Italy, and is highly influenced by Latin decorative elements. Certain stylistic and thematic features link it to the Benevento-Capua region. This applies especially to the dog-like figures incorporated into initial letters, so common in Benedictine manuscripts produced in Monte Cassino, while deep acquaintance of Antique heritage and its reinterpretation in the Barberini initial letters may be paralleled in the eleventh–twelfth century architectural sculpture of Campania.

In this paper I wish to show that the Byzantine attitude to personal prayer, a plea for salvation and the struggle with evil through the words of Psalms, is clear, despite...

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UDC 75.057(14’04)
271.2–282–535.8
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DOI 10.2298/ZOG1438031M
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The only other illuminated psalter with initial letters securely attributed to Southern Italy – Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 41,9 dated about 120 years later than the Barberini Psalter—differs from it stylistically and conceptually. The two share some basic motifs and letter structures, which are also much more widely distributed (birds forming Alphas and Epsilon-hasta; human figures especially composing Epsilons and Kapsas; faces enclosed in Omicrons; in Paris, gr. 41 human faces and figures clearly depicted as saints, identified by a halo); however, both psalters have a unique repertoire of motifs which remain unparalleled. They rely on distinctive models and present different visual interpretations of psalms.

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Sion, here unified with the representation of the Church, in keeping with the meaning of Ps 96. 19

The inspiration for the initials on fols. 81v and 88 probably emanates from small objects originating in Byzantium. Both are set in oval frames—unusual for the manuscript as other Omicrons are round. Although the immediate association is with icons,20 the oval shape suggests cameos with the depictions of the figure of Christ, the Virgin and other sacred figures, as a model, some of which may come from Constantinople.21 These motifs are clear references to Byzantine models, which poses a problem of availability of models and artistic choices, as well as a possible apotropaic significance of the psalter to the beholder. On the other hand, blessing hands incorporated into Epsilon and Omicron, substituted by a fish, have Byzantine origins, but by the late tenth century were common in Greek manuscripts produced in Southern Italy.22

With very few exceptions the human-figured initial letters in the Barberini Psalter are anonymous. Initials Epsilon and Omicron usually become or enclose faces (fols. 17, 30, 38, 42, 44, 57, 123) and profiles (fols. 34, 40, 65, 74v, 75v, 92v, 122, 122v).23 Elements like a mouth wide open, a protruding tongue, a pointing gesture, a man in prayer, and others appear time and again throughout the manuscript. As we shall see, several motifs have precedents in other manuscripts or objects, but most of the figures are unique in appearance, and seem to have been invented especially for this psalter and inspired by a particular verse. This complicates significantly their interpretation but also testifies to an original approach and a personal touch.

Thus a human profile with open mouth and protruding tongue is depicted on fols. 34, 40, 92v, 122 and 123, but its meaning varies. Illustrating the opening verses of Ps 38 (fol. 34), it refers literally to “I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I set a guard on my mouth.” By comparison, the Utrecht Psalter illustrates the same words in another way. The Psalmist is depicted covering his mouth with his hands (fol. 22v).24 The same motif on fol. 40 (fig. 10) refers to the words “My tongue is the pen of a quick writer” (Ps 44). In Utrecht the decision was to depict a scribe writing (fol. 26). On fol. 92v two faces in profile, wearing pointed hats and turned to each other, have their mouths open with their tongues sticking out. These illustrate either “tremble people” (Ps 98) or exaltation of the Lord mentioned further on in the psalm.

This ambivalent motif of human profiles with protruding tongues goes back to Ancient Greek gorgons. In Romanesque and Gothic art it becomes closely linked to the figures and faces mostly in a negative context. Diabolic and sinful figures are frequently depicted sticking out their tongues. These also serve as a sexual symbol, for example, in Luxuria or in numerous representations of exhibitionists. Yet in addition to all this, the motif might have apotropaic significance as repelling evil.25 We will return to the meaning of the Barberini profiles later.

Human figures forming especially initial Kappa and Epsilon are depicted in prayer, approaching or gesturing to the text (e.g., fols. 33, 45, 80v). Such figures were to become very common in the eleventh–thirteenth-century Byzantine psalters, especially those written in Italy (e.g., Paris, gr. 41), but also in those from Constantinople (e.g., Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, gr. 214). A figure in prayer also appears as one of the basic components in the illuminated psalters, Byzantine as well as Latin, forming wider narratives or appearing alone on the margins usually with an emphasis on their gestures of prayer. So the figures in prayer seem to be moved into the initials from one of these schemes; this shift highlights that act, possibly relating to the general significance of the psalter as a prayer book.

In Barberini 285 the figures are not identified as saints (as in the eleventh-century Byzantine manuscripts and Paris, gr. 41) or as the Psalmsist (as in the Utrecht Psalter, fol. 71v), but as wandering persons, usually poorly dressed – perhaps a monk, with clear emphasis on human

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19 Grabar, *Les manuscrits grecs*, Pl. 60, fig. 244. For a discussion on the possible identification of the figure v. Maayan Fanar, *Byzantine Pictorial Initials*, 161–163. Around her head and neck she wears a variation of a typical middle Byzantine kerchief complemented by a diadem, with hair uncovered at the sides and one fringed edge hanging at one side. This is comparable to St. Pelagia’s representation in the tenth-century Basil II Menologium (Rome, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, gr. 1613, p. 98; M. G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th–15th Centuries)*, Leiden–Boston 2003, 77, pl. 80, 86.). In the marginal psalters a personification of Sion illustrates verses 7–8 (Chludov Psalter, fol. 100v; Theodore Psalter, fol. 130). 20 Ps 86 signifies the incarnation of Christ while Ps 92 was considered a hymn to the Kingdom of Christ; Neale and Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, III, 80, 86–7, 195–198. 21 The *Glory of Byzantium, Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era AD 843 – 1261*, Catalogue of the Exhibition, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, ed. H. C. Evans, W. D. Wixom, *New York 1997*, nos. 126–135. 22 E. Maayan Fanar, *Revelation through the Alphabet: Aniconism and Illuminated Initial Letters in Byzantine Artistic Imagination*, Geneva 2011, 99–112. 23 Grabar, *Les manuscrits grecs*, Pl. 59, figs. 235, 237–238; Pl. 61, figs. 247, 251–252. Only few can be identified as King David (fols. 12v; 16; 125v) and King Solomon (fol. 64; Ibid., PL. 60, fig. 242). 24 In the Byzantine marginal psalters Christ is depicted speaking to St. Peter (e.g., Chludov Psalter, fol. 37v; Theodore Psalter, fol. 46v). 25 “Putting out the tongue, except to a physician, has been regarded as a sign of rudeness; the ancient Bes amulets and the Gorgon’s head suggest that it is also apotropaic and it is one of the commonest attributes of human and animal heads in medieval imagery”; L.J.A. Loewenthal, *Amulets in Medieval Sculpture*; I. General Outline, Folklore 89/1 (1978) 7. Also, A. Weir, *Images of Lust, Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches*, London 1999, 103–106; C. Sütterlin, *Universals in Apotropaic Symbolism: A Behavioral and Comparative Approach to Some Medieval Sculptures*, Leonardo 22/1 (1989) 65–74.
bleness and humiliation. On fol. 80v a barefoot man in a long robe and wearing a hat approaches the text, pointing at it. The figure refers directly to the words of the Ps 85: “O Lord, incline thine ear, and hearken to me; for I am poor and needy.” While in Byzantine marginal psalters this verse is illustrated by David praying to Christ (Theodore Psalter, fol. 114), the iconography is much closer to the Utrecht Psalter where a poor and needy person is portrayed leaning on a stick as part of wider narrative (fol. 50).

On fol. 94 (Fig. 1) a poor man wearing only a cloak refers to the heading of Ps 101: “A prayer for the Poor.” 26 Another poor man forms Initial Alpha on fol. 43 (Fig. 2) opening Ps 48: “Hear these words, all ye nations; hearken, all ye that dwell upon the earth; both the sons of mean men, and sons of great men; the rich and poor man together.” 27 He is completely naked. 28 The act of listening is literally indicated by a head tilted toward the words of the psalm. This figure has a very precise parallel in the Stuttgart Psalter (fol. 163v; Ps 150). It is small, stark naked, and holds a curved strip of cloth; its body turns to the left, its head to the right. All these features appear in the Barberini Psalter too. However, in the Stuttgart Psalter the figure appears not as an autonomous unit but as a part of a scene composed of several figures, as if taken from different sources and assembled only here. The small naked figure differs from the others in its appearance and size, and seems unrelated to them. In the two manuscripts this figure may therefore derive from a common source.

In many cases the scribe/artist provides literal interpretations of the particular words of the psalm by means of the figure’s posture, emphasis on the relevant parts of the body, or an object he holds in direct reference to the adjacent verse. For example, a young man leaning on the letter stem of Π as if on a staff (fol. 121v) represents the “afflicted” person opening Ps 119. The verse is illustrated in the Theodore and Barberini 372 psalters by saintly figures of St. Catherine (fol. 167) and St. Gregory Arigentum (fol. 215v) respectively.

On fol. 139v another anonymous figure blowing a trumpet refers to the words of Ps 150: “Praise him with a sound of a trumpet,” 29 while a man holding a censer clearly illustrates the words of Ps 140: “O Lord, I have cried to thee, hear me... Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense.” The Barberini artist selects figures from all possible narrative contexts; he relieves them of their specific identity, thereby fortifying the act of prayer, not the person who prays or performs a religious duty. 30

Acts of prayer or acclamation are accordingly emphasized by enlarged hands matching the shapes of the letters. The purpose of matching the letter’s form at times deforms the figure itself, or allows only partial depiction. For example, initial Upsilon on fol. 23v is designed as the upper half of a youth’s body, shown frontally with both hands stretched upwards. He leans on a small bench. The hands are enlarged and emphasized, according to the words of the psalm: “I will exalt thee, O Lord” (Ps 29:1). 31 The same words of Ps 144:1, “I will exalt thee, my God,” are introduced by the figure of a short-bodied youth, with emphasized hands substituting the diagonal bars of initial Upsilon (fol. 135). 32 As can be seen from these examples, the letter is constructed in a pictorial convention very similar to itself, in which the hands play the most impor-

26 The same subject appears in Pantocrator 61 (Mt. Athos, Pantocrator Monastery, cod. 61), fol. 141v; Chludov Psalter, fol. 100; Bristol Psalter, fol. 165v; Hamilton Psalter, fol. 178v; Theodore Psalter, fol. 133v; and Barberini 372, fol. 170.

27 In the Utrecht Psalter this verse is illuminated by two men giving a speech to the multitude (fol. 28). In the Theodore Psalter John Chrysostom is depicted preaching to the nations (fol. 60). John Chrysostom sees in the term “earthborn” a warning to all that they are “the children of the earth... They who desire earthly inheritances. Those who are ‘sons of men’...” The children of the earth... They who desire earthly inheritances. Who are the ‘sons of men’? They who appertain to the ‘poor’ the humble.” Cf. Saint Augustine. Expositions on the Book of Psalms, in: The Nicene and post-Nicene fathers 8, ed. Ph. Schaff, Grand Rapids 1977, 169 [Ps 48 (49)].

28 Correspondence to Western models is also manifested by the depiction of genitals, which are even more emphasized in Paris. gr. 41. On positive and negative meanings of nudity in Byzantium v. E. Dauterman Maguire, H. Maguire, Other Icons. Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture, Princeton 2007, 97–134.
tant role. The rest of the body, notably the legs, plays a minor part, and may be omitted or substituted by a geometrical element.

Even further deformation of the body can be seen on fol. 89v (Fig. 3). Initial Delta is formed of the upper part of a half-naked man, shown in profile, turning away from the text. He is unclothed except for a pointed hat on his head. His hands and legless body, which form the two diagonals, are depicted touching the letter’s horizontal bar. This image, starting Ps 94, seems quite unconnected to its words: “Come, let us exalt in the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior.” A clue to this motif may apparently be found in the writing of Augustine, who explains that those who stand apart from God in their deeds depart in corruption. “But what is the word, ‘Come’? ... It is not by place, but by being unlike Him, that a man is afar from God. What is to be unlike Him? It meaneth, a bad life, bad habits; for if by good habits we approach God, by bad habits we recede from God...”33 Thus, the unlikeness to God seems to be expressed here by means of a partial, corrupted representation of the body. Augustine also refers especially to the feet: “our feet... are our affections.” The motif may well have been dictated by the shape of the letter. The ability to deform provides the scribe/artist an opportunity to express the message in such an original manner.

Another initial of this kind can be found on fol. 111v. The lower corner of initial Epsilon is replaced by the upper part of a human body presented in profile, hardly clothed, bareheaded, right hand raised upward forming the letter’s lowest horizontal bar. A leaf-shaped decoration replaces the figure’s lower part, while the letter’s vertical stem rises from the head toward the two upper horizontal bars, which join it at right-angles, and end in ax-like leaves hanging over the human. This image opens the words of Ps 115:1(10): “I believed, wherefore I have spoken, but I was greatly afflicted.” The image seems to show a literal interpretation of the psalm. The emphasized hand, raised upwards, may represent speech or prayer (as in the other images of this psalter); however, here the letter’s structure seems to be significant also. Its vertical stem penetrates the human head, and the sharp shapes of the horizontal bars give the impression of danger. At the same time, the half-figure is visibly compressed, possibly to intensify humiliation.34 In the Utrecht Psalter the psalm is illustrated with the crucifixion (fol. 67). Here a humble but anonymous person is preferred, in keeping with the overall attitude to the human figures in the manuscript.

Interplay between geometry and human forms is evident also on fol. 53, where Epsilon shaped as a sitting youth with three protruding crosses opens Ps 60.35 The verse reads: “O God, hearken to my petition; attend to my prayer.” In the Utrecht Psalter the Psalmist raises his hands toward an angel (fol. 34v), while eleventh-century Byzantine marginal psalters (Theodore Psalter, fol. 75v and Barberini 372, fol. 100v) show St. Arsenios in prayer. In our case an act of supplication prevails.

No comparisons can be found for the examples discussed last. They seem to be the fruit of the artist’s imagination—his own schemes invented for an apparently literal interpretation of the words of the psalms. These schemes are based on a combination of geometric and human elements, but contain some signs of the established vocabulary, such as emphasized hands, to represent speech or prayer. However, here invention is a blend of several pictorial sources. Partial parallels are found in the Byzantine marginal psalters, although the Barberini images do not seem to rest directly on them. Some pictorial schemes may have come from the Latin manuscripts; others repeat the ancient motifs, greatly distorted. Western influence is felt not only in choice of models but in the approach to the human figure. Nudity and the sexual organs are emphasized; the scribe/artist displays an ability to deform and metamorphose the human body by enlarging or cutting its parts, as well as constructing an impossible synergy between geometrical and figural motives in a single letter.

Human and human–animal battles constitute the major iconography of the initial letters. Human combat may be seen as a direct literal interpretation of the text. For example, on fol. 49 Epsilon is formed of two men, one trampling the other and each making gestures at the other (Fig. 4). The scene corresponds directly to the words of the psalm: “Have mercy upon me, O God, for man has trodden me down...” (Ps 55:1).36

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33 PL 37, 1217–1218; Saint Augustin. Expositions on the Book of Psalms, 467 [Ps 94 (95)].
34 Commentators explain this verse as related to martyrs; E. T. Dewald, The Stuttgart Psalter, Princeton 1930, 92.
35 Grabar, Les manuscrits grecs, Pl. 60, fig. 240.
36 The verse is illustrated in the Utrecht Psalter (fol. 31v) and Stuttgart Psalter (fol. 67v) by the Psalmist threatened by enemies. In the Theodore Psalter (fol. 69v) David stands between two men, while Christ is enthroned above. The narrative of 1 Sm 21:10–15 appears in these Psalters: Chludov, fol. 54v; Pantocrator 61, fol. 68v; Bristol, fol. 89; and Barberini 372, fol. 93v.
Initial Kappa opening Ps 109 is composed of a bearded figure in profile, wearing a hat-helmet, and seated. He makes the Greek benedictory gesture toward a hand (also in the Greek benediction) appearing from above; underfoot he tramples a head in profile (fol. 108, Fig. 5). The scene refers literally to the words of the psalm: “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” The figure thus represents “the Lord,” whose foot is placed on the head of the enemy while he receives a blessing from the hand of God.37

This psalm is of Messianic character. Its significance as such is stressed in Matthew 22:44, which cites it. In Christian thought the “Lord” who sits at the right hand could be understood as Jesus Christ.39 According to this symbolism, the seated figure in the Barberini Psalter may be interpreted as Christ, who will defeat enemies in his Second Coming. Precisely this is emphasized in the Utrecht Psalter (fol. 64v), where God the Father and Christ are depicted in one mandorla, triumphing over the defeated enemies.40 The same theme is prominent in the Stuttgart Psalter (fol. 127v), where two haloed figures are shown seated on globes and encircled by round mandorlas. The right-hand figure represents God the Father, the left-hand one the Son. Remnants of a prostrate figure can be seen under the Son’s feet.41 The seated figure, however, bears no attributes identifying it as Christ, and it differs from Christ’s depiction in the same manuscript (fol. 88). Its dress, especially the hat-helmet, is akin to those of the anonymous figures and profiles throughout the manuscript, hence they are connected. Instead of a theological context a more general idea of the power of prayer seems to be expressed.

Human–animal combat also seems directly linked to the words of Psalms, but these images, because of their quantity and the choice of motifs, lie in a wider iconographic context of sin–punishment and salvation. Human–animal battles are typical of Latin psalters, but are almost absent from Byzantine psalter illumination. The very few that do exist literally refer to the verse of the given psalm for example, a lion devouring a man illustrating Ps 7:3 (e.g., Chludov Psalter, fol. 5v, Theodore Psalter, fol. 9v, and Stuttgart Psalter, fol. 7). The fights in the Barberini Psalter are different. The artist uses images from outside the known psalter vocabulary. They appear more in the allegorical than the literal sense. For example, on fol. 22v, an initial Pi is substituted by two snakes biting a youth’s cheeks or ears (Fig. 6). The image opens the first verse of Ps 27: “To thee, O Lord, have I cried;... lest thou be silent toward me, and so I should be likened to them that go down to the pit.”

37 For more on the sources and meanings of the hand in Byzantine art v. Maayan Fanar, Byzantine Pictorial Initials, ch. IVA.

40 Chludov Psalter, fol. 114v, Theodore Psalter, fol. 151v, and Barberini 372, fol. 193v: David is depicted prophesying.
41 Dewald, The Stuttgart Psalter, 90. The two figures were also interpreted as the two natures of Christ; B. Kühnel, The End of Time in the Order of Things, Science and Eschatology in Early Medieval Art, Regensburg 2003, 31, n. 26.
The image summarizes misery in the pit by using the most common motif of snakes biting those in hell. It may be compared to that in another Greek-Italian manuscript, the early eleventh-century Homilies of John Chrysostom (Athens, National library, cod. 414, fol. 231v).

Here the initial Pi is composed of two snakes biting the ears of a bearded youth's face, shown frontally. The entire composition stands for the initial.

The motif of a human face bitten by snakes is deep-rooted and can be found in different regions and cultures from as early as ninth–eighth-century B.C. Persian art. It is also present on a Nabatean tomb at Hegra, in funerary symbolism. The ears of a human mask are attacked by two snakes. A similar iconography is seen much later on a West-Frankish bronze of the seventh–eighth centuries. A highly stylized human body is depicted, and on either side a snake (?) bites its ears.

Snakes biting humans are one of the major themes in the representations of hell at the Last Judgment, but these comprise whole human figures rather than an unattached face. One such example can be found in the eleventh-century Yilanli Kilise in Ihlara, Cappadocia: naked female figures are entwined with snakes, whose mouths bite the women's ears. Detached human heads are depicted in other scenes inside hell, which is divided into compartments. They are being tortured by worms eating their eyes or ears (e.g., the eleventh-century Paris, BNF, gr. 74, fol. 51v). In these examples snakes and worms are seen punishing sinners.

42 This image may also allude to the last words of verses 3 and 4 of Ps 27: “Draw not away my soul with sinners, and destroy me not with the workers of iniquity, who speak peace with their neighbors, but evils are in their hearts. Give them according to their works, and according to their wickedness of their devices: give them according to the work of their hands...” The ungodly were usually understood as heretics, whose actions were inspired by Satan. Commentaries on Ps 27 (28) in: Neale, Littledale, A Commentary on the Psalms I, 395. In the Utrecht Psalter, the Psalmist is seen turning to God, and people falling into hell; Vatican, gr. 1927 represents enemies falling into a pit.

43 A. Marava-Chatzinicolaoú, C. Toufexis-Paschou, Catalogue of the Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts of the National Library of Greece, III, Athens 1997, no. 12. This manuscript was dated, by means of comparisons, to the late tenth–early eleventh century. Its style is distinctly provincial and may be assigned to Italy.

44 A. G. Guidobaldi, I capitelli della basilica giustinianea della Theotokos, oggi di S.Caterina, sul Monte Sinai in Constantinopoli e l’arte delle province orientali, Milion 2 (Rome 1990) 279, note 47, fig. 17. Iconography of this kind is seen on a bas-relief from the tenth-century Armenian Church of St. Peter and St. Paul at Tatev (Siunia). The composition includes a frontal face resembling a mask and two snakes with protruding tongues, approaching the ears on each side of the face. The motif is seen as apotropaic, and originates in the legend of St. George at Xor Virap, or from the Iranian folk tale about Zahhâk: J.-M. Thierry, Armenian Art, New York 1989, 153, fig. 57.

45 Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karol der Grosse und Papst Leo III in Paderborn (exhibition catalogue) I, Mainz 1999, 366, no. VI.64. The motif probably derived from the Western representation of a fight between a human and a pair of flanking animals, as represented on the sixth- and seventh-century objects given in: Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit II, no. VII.4-VII.5. In both cases wild animals (bears) with mouths wide open bite a human around the ears. The motif is also popular in Insular art (e.g., Tully Lough Cross, eighth–ninth century, National Museum of Ireland).


Figures entwined with snakes also appear outside hell, with their evil character usually highlighted. For example, wicked emperors who persecuted saints and martyrs are encircled by a snake in the Metaphrastes monologies dated to around 1060. Here the idea of punishment is combined with the personification of evil. An example of this kind can also be found in a Latin manuscript of Raban Maur, copied and illustrated in 1023 at Monte Cassino (p. 385, book 15, chapter 6). A male figure encircled by a snake, which bites its ear, appears to represent the evil figure of Belial-Antichrist. The face bitten by snakes in the Barberini Psalter apparently belongs to the same vocabulary of motifs well-known in Southern Italy, and corresponds to the succeeding text of the psalm, combining representation of the wicked figure and the allusion to punishment for its sins.

This motif, representing punishment of the evil, contrasts with images of figures extruding from beasts' mouths and praying for salvation; this is another well known motif in the area. An example is on fol. 131v (Fig. 7). A man wearing a pointed hat and gesturing toward the text is seen emerging from the mouth of head in profile, itself protruding from a serpent's open mouth. The whole forms initial Epsilon. This triple composition can be explained by the text: “Rescue me, O Lord, from the unjust man... They have sharpened their tongue as the tongue of a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips” (Ps 139:1–3). According to Augustine, God delivers not only from enemies but also from the devil himself, represented here as a snake. The significance of a serpent as a diabolic creature goes back to Genesis 3. Christian sources identify the snake with...
the devil. For example, Justin Martyr directly connects the serpent and the devil, while explaining the etymology of the word “Satan”: “For ‘Sata’ in the Jewish and Syrian tongues means apostate; and ‘Nas’ is the word from which he is called by interpretation the serpent, i.e. according to the interpretation of the Hebrew term from both of which there arises the single word ‘Satanas’” (Dial. CIII). Snakes emphasize the evil character of the figures; they are an inseparable part of the kingdom of the devil and hell. The conclusion is that the serpent on fol. 131v has the same meaning as that on fol. 22v.

Another scene appears on fol. 112, substituting initial Epsilon. A naked man emerges from a beast’s mouth and turns to the text, his hand raised as if speaking. His tongue is emphasized by a red line. A very similar image can be found on a scribe in the margin of a Greek manuscript now in Florence. However, it is never depicted as a whole animal body, as it is in the Barberini Psalter. A comparable illustration can be found in the Stuttgart Psalter, where a human head projects from between the jaws of a lion (fol. 11v). This image, however, pertains to a different psalm and appears as a part of a wider scene (Ps 9:30).

Figures emerging from the mouths of beasts appear in the scenes of the Last Judgment, representing earth, water and air rendering up their dead during the resurrection. The allusion may also be to Jonah emerging from the sea monster, combined with a miscellany of evil images created toward the end of the tenth century. A later variation of this struggle can be found in the twelfth-century portal from S. Giovanni delle Monache, Capua. The naked body of a man with his hands stretched upward in prayer emerges from the mouth of a beast, a winged creature with lion’s head. A similar combat is seen on the archivolt from Alife, where the upper part of a human body, entwined with a snake, emerges from a lion’s maw.

An image on fol. 125 belongs to the same theme (Fig. 8). A clothed man wearing a pointed hat protrudes from the wide open mouth of a horned beast; he turns his head away from the text, but his raised hand gestures toward it. The whole substitutes the initial Epsilon in the verse “Out of the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord” (Ps 129:1). The psalm was read in conjunction with the reading of Jonah’s prayer from the belly of the whale, usually depicted as a monster. Understanding “the depths” as “hell,” and representing it as a beast, became very common in Latin manuscripts from the ninth century. The horn alludes to the horns of demons and connects this image to the satanic world. The beast’s head is leonine, similar to other heads seen throughout the manuscript. On fols. 20v (Fig. 9) and 133v a lion’s head in profile, the mouth wide open and the teeth emphasized, transects the stem of the cross to form initial Kappa. A similar image appears on fols. 69 and 133, although here the lion’s

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50 On various aspects of snakes v. Maayan Fanar, Revelation through the Alphabet, 147–164.
51 Grabar, Les manuscrits grecs, Pl. 61, fig. 249.
52 Florence, Laurenziana, Cod. conv. Soppr. 177, fol. 2v.
53 Eusebius of Caesarea explains this Psalm as a victory of those who fight in Christ and a prophecy of Christ. Commentaries on Ps 117 (118) in: Neale, Littledale, A Commentary on the Psalms III, 516; Augustine emphasizes the relation of the enemies to the devil: But are men, then, the only enemies that the Church hath? What is a man devoted to flesh and blood, save flesh and blood? But the Apostle saith, ‘We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against,...he saith, ‘spiritual wickedness in high places’; that is, the devil and his angels; that devil whom elsewhere he calleth ‘the prince of the power of the air’” (transl.: Saint Augustine. Expositions on the Book of Psalms, 557).
54 This beast’s head was transformed in Romanesque art into the beast’s mouth, representing the mouth of hell. On this subject v. D. Williams, Deformed Discourse, The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature, Exeter 1996, 141–149.
55 Glass, Romanesque Sculpture, 29–30, figs. 20, 21.
56 Ibid., 55, fig. 48.
57 “Out of depths” may refer to the sinner. In the Western Church this psalm was recited at burials, and as such has another usage as a prayer for all souls. Commentaries on Ps 129 (130) in: Neale, Littledale, A Commentary on the Psalms IV, 232–233.
58 M. McNamara, The Psalms in the Early Irish Church, Shefield 2000, 323.
59 Jonah appearing from the belly of the sea-monster is depicted in Stuttgart Psalter in the same verse (fol. 147v); As Dewald pointed out, Augustine, Gregory and Cassiodorus refer to this scene, explaining the particular verse (PL 37, 1696; 70, 939; 79, 632); Dewald, The Stuttgart Psalter, 102.
60 Diabolical figures in Byzantine art are usually depicted without horns. Their presence points to a Western model.
head is in the middle of the cross, holding it in its fearful mouth, composing initial Phi. Fol. 82v has a lion's head holding initial Tau in its mouth. The formidable profile of a lion with open mouth also appears for initial Epsilon on fol. 46v and 109v.

Reference to a lion as a diabolical force can be found in the psalter itself, although in the case of the Barberini Psalter there is no direct correspondence with specific verses. Elsewhere, the negative meaning of the lion is especially emphatic in various scenes illustrating Ps 90 (91):1-12, “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet”; Jesus is seen trampling a lion and a serpent-dragon. Nevertheless, the association between lions and diabolical forces goes beyond the text of the psalms, and rests on 1 Pt 5:8: “Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.” Paul stresses deliverance from the jaws of a lion in 2 Tim 4:17-18: “...So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack.” Here rescue from a lion is compared to rescue from all evil.

The lion may also represent “wild beasts” here, for example, those spoken of by Ignatius of Antioch: “May fire and cross and struggles with beasts come upon me, and cutting and tearing apart and racking of bones, mangling of members, crushing of the whole body, wicked torments of the devil—may I but reach Jesus Christ.”

The lion appears in Roman funerary art as a symbol of death. Its head under a cross on a sixth-century sarcophagus from Ravenna symbolizes the triumph of the cross over death. It is probably not by chance that the mouth of hell in the eleventh–twelfth-century Latin manuscript has leonine features. The image of the lion, as a symbol of hell and a diabolical force, thus seems to be based on a broad iconographic tradition, which is however more evident in Latin art, including that of Italy.

The motif of a cross appears three more times in the manuscript, once inserted into a rhomb-shaped frame of initial Omicron (fol. 86v), in reference to the words of the Psalm: “He shall say to the Lord, Thou art my helper and my refuge: my God; I will hope in him” (Ps 90). The insertion of the cross into the letter Omicron goes as far back as the sixth-century manuscripts. A Greek example can be seen in the Homilies of John Chrysostom, fol. 147. The rhomb shape is however unusual. A cross appears again on fol. 103. The horizontal bar of initial Epsilon is substituted by a hand holding a cross, opening the verse “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endures forever” (Ps 106). In all these cases the cross appears as a sign of God’s protection and mercy.

Perhaps most peculiar example is on fol. 113, where another elaborate initial appears. Two figures (of men?) stand holding a large cross, standing on a table. Both are in profile, their heads turned to the text; their hands are joined to form the diagonal stems of initial Mu. The il-

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65 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Helmstedt 75a, fol. 147, from Constantinople (?). The motif of the cross was repeatedly used in the Latin manuscripts from the sixth century on: e.g., Epistle of Paul, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cm. 6436 (Universitätsbibliothek 4°28), fol. 23, from North-Africa or Spain; Orosius, Historia Adversum Paganos, Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Plat. LXXI, fol. 62v, 102, from Ravenna; Gregorius. Regula Pastoralis, Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale, 504, fol. 4, from Rome, ca 600. It may be placed inside or above various letters (e.g., “N” in the so-called “Cathach,” a psalter from the second half of the sixth century attributed to St. Columba (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 12 R 33), fol. 6; “D” in Sacramentary of Gellone (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 12048, fol. 76v)); or it may substitute the initial “T.” V. more examples in: L. Kendrick, Animating the Letter. The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance, Columbus 1999, 79-85.

66 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Helmstedt 75a, from sixth century.

67 In another Greek-Italian manuscript, namely Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, gr. 2020, fol. 166, a rhomb-shaped “O” encloses a face. Bianka Kühl notes the use of various geometrical shapes, including rhombus, in Carolingian and Ottonian art especially concerning Maiestas Domini. In her opinion these shapes represent the four directions of the world; Kühl, The End of Time, 235-239.
Illustration relates to the verse "Blessed are the blameless in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord" (Ps 118:69), which indicates that these are two blessed (μακάριοι).\textsuperscript{70}

The image of two figures substituting the vertical stems of various initial letters already exists in the tenth-century Byzantine manuscripts (e.g., Patmos, Monastery of St. John the Theologian, cod. 33, p. 353, 358, 362). It became even more widespread in the eleventh century in a variety of texts, including Gospels and Lectionaries, and it seems popular in Italian as well as Constantinopolitan manuscripts. From the eleventh century on, Byzantine psalters traditionally use the two figures specifically in connection with the word μακάριοι, for example, in the Theodore Psalter (fol. 1, Ps 1) and in Paris, gr. 41, fol. 1 (Ps 1). The Barberini initial is thus not unusual in its appearance.

A more precise identification of the figures is difficult. Like other figures in the manuscript they lack any attributes. A scheme of two figures flanking the cross recall the tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine representation of Constantine and Helena, who are usually shown frontally with an emphasized cross between them.\textsuperscript{71} Co-emperors flanking the cross also appear on Byzantine coins, for example, the solidus of Constantine II and Constantine IV, or Constantine VII.\textsuperscript{72} The Barberini initial seems close to the representations on the coins of the Macedonian dynasty.

The headdress of the right figure in the Barberini Psalter recalls that of a priest also found in the representation of Aaron and Melchizedek in the twelfth-century Latin manuscript Odo of Asti, Commentary on Psalms from Central Italy.\textsuperscript{73} It is also comparable to that of Melchizedek in the Theodore Psalter (fol. 152, Ps 109:4). Melchizedek, a ruler and a priest-archetype of Christ,\textsuperscript{74} may appear here to emphasize the Christian meaning of the psalm. Nevertheless, this identification does not seem sufficiently attested as the psalm makes no reference to this personage. Because of the appearance of the cross, Grabar excluded the possibility of Moses and Aaron,\textsuperscript{75} who compose an initial Mu in the same psalm in Paris, gr. 41 (fol. 140). Here, the two Tablets of Law are shown between the figures, seeming to identify them. They might be the "Psalms" and any other figure discussed above and deemed "blessed," in reference to the beginning of the psalm.

It is time to summarize the above analysis. The small size of the Barberini manuscript suggests that it was meant for personal use, apparently intensive, since many letters and drawings had faded and were retouched later. There is something very intimate in them, yet at the same time archaic. The nature of the pen-drawn images and their association with the written text suggest that the psalter was designed to remind the reader of the psalms' content in a very obvious and accessible way. They serve as mnemonics, usually standing for the first word of the given psalm to help commit it to memory. They are quite clear and minimal, combining three figures at most into one sign. The vocabulary of motifs, incorporation of Late Antique spolia and the figures’ body language correspond to Western, not Eastern, aesthetics, going back to ninth-century Carolingian manuscripts. In most cases the artist seems to consciously pick up figures and schemes already associated with prayer, a cry for salvation or a plea to God, adapting them to the letter's shape.

The identity of the owner of the Barberini Psalter is unknown. However, the weighty emphasis on prayer as well as the overall depiction of these humble, anonymous figures suggest that he was perhaps a monk, whose ideal could be a wandering ascetic, so influential in tenth-eleventh century Italy.\textsuperscript{76} But he was also a warrior, endlessly struggling against evil desires. One of the types of the head-covers throughout the manuscript recalls a soldiers' helmet topped with feathers, although these are distorted (Figs. 5, 10). Such headgear was an integral part of soldiers' dress in Roman times.\textsuperscript{77} An example from the Utrecht Psalter shows how a graphic technique may create a distortion. Due to the rapid line of drawing, the helmet's feathers turn into a clump of separate short lines (e.g. fol. 13v).\textsuperscript{78} In the Barberini Psalter the helmets remain the only attribute identifying the depicted figures as warriors; no armor or weapons of any kind are drawn.

It may be argued that a warrior proves one of the basic themes in the manuscript, suggesting that this psalter may have been used in battles as a prayer book as well as a protective talisman.\textsuperscript{79} There might be yet another explanation for the perception of the praying figure as a

\textsuperscript{69} The form of this psalm is an alphabetical acrostic, and it was widely interpreted in the early Church. Commentaries on Ps 118 (119) may be found in: Neale, Littledale, Commentary on Psalms from Central Italy.\textsuperscript{70} It is time to summarize the above analysis. The small size of the Barberini manuscript suggests that it was meant for personal use, apparently intensive, since many letters and drawings had faded and were retouched later. There is something very intimate in them, yet at the same time archaic. The nature of the pen-drawn images and their association with the written text suggest that the psalter was designed to remind the reader of the psalms' content in a very obvious and accessible way. They serve as mnemonics, usually standing for the first word of the given psalm to help commit it to memory. They are quite clear and minimal, combining three figures at most into one sign. The vocabulary of motifs, incorporation of Late Antique spolia and the figures’ body language correspond to Western, not Eastern, aesthetics, going back to ninth-century Carolingian manuscripts. In most cases the artist seems to consciously pick up figures and schemes already associated with prayer, a cry for salvation or a plea to God, adapting them to the letter's shape.

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\textsuperscript{72} Some examples of these variations are represented in: Beck, op. cit., pls. 3–13, etc. Although they were still occasionally depicted in Byzantine art (usually much distorted), they are obviously copied from an ancient source since Byzantine helmets are differently shaped; D. Nicolle, Byzantine and Islamic Arms and Armour: Evidence for Mutual Influence, Graeco-Arabica 4 (Athens 1991) 299–325; idem, No Way Overland? Evidence for Byzantine Arms and Armour on the 10th–11th Century Tauris Frontier, Graeco-Arabica 6 (Athens 1995) 226–245 (both reprinted in: idem, Warriors and Their Weapons around the Time of the Crusades. Relationships Between Byzantium, the West and the Islamic World, Aldershot 2002).


\textsuperscript{75} Grabar, Les manuscrits grecs, 61.


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\textsuperscript{78} V. also helmets on fifth–seventh-century Byzantine coins; http://www.doaks.org/museum/online-exhibitions/byzantine-emperors-on-coins.

\textsuperscript{79} The sixth century psalter of St. Columba ("Cathach") was considered a relic, and in the eleventh century it was used as a talis-
warrior, namely reversion to the early Christians’ identification as "soldiers of Christ." Contrary to the Romans, their battle is not on the real battlefield but is spiritual warfare against evil and vice. This image became especially popular in connection with martyrs, and it proliferated widely in the fourth–fifth centuries. Man’s own struggle against sin and temptation became part of a cosmic struggle against Satan. It is reflected in the fifth-century Psychomachia (The Battle of the Soul), a work by Prudentius, where personifications of the Virtues struggle against vices and the Virtues triumph. Its earliest illuminated version is from the late ninth century, in it, remarkably, some of the Virtues are depicted as warriors, wearing helmets and holding weapons.

A similar conception of the war against evil forces can be found in the interpretation of the Book of Psalms. The psalter was believed to have power against diabolical forces and to enjoy apotropaic strength. Monks appealed to Scripture for protection from temptation, seeing King David as the model of a fighter against evil and an analogy for the spiritual fight that monks undergo. For example, Abba Poemen says: "if we take ourselves by the throat, and by the belly, with the help of God, we shall overcome the invisible lion." The psalter, then, was seen as the most useful tool against temptation and the devil. John Moschos (ca. 600) cited the words of Abba Marcellus the Sceiotic: "Believe me, children, there is nothing which troubles, incites, irritates, wounds, destroys, distresses and excites the demons and the supremely evil Satan himself against us, as the constant study of psalms. The entire Holy Scripture is beneficial to us and not a little offensive to the demons, but none of it distresses them more than the Psalter." Moreover, the psalter was considered the most private book, affording its owner protection in his own spiritual battle.

The apotropaic power of the psalter finds its visual representation in the fight with evil forces. This is especially common on the pages of the Insular psalters, due to the enormous importance of psalters for the Insular monastic culture; the Corbie Psalter being the earliest.

On fol. 67, for example, an anonymous holy warrior appears, fighting two monstrous beasts; the whole stands for initials "NO." These beasts, a fierce lion and a dragon-like creature, bite each other’s neck. The warrior wears a pointed helmet, somewhat similar to one of the headresses in the Barberini Psalter, and claps a sword and a shield. His actual fight appears as an allegory of the spiritual fight with satanic forces. The reader is here likened to a warrior who must struggle against evil forces, but he has his weapons: a sharp sword, a helmet, and a shield, represented as attributes to the figure. Such a struggle is attested in many other initials of the Corbie Psalter, each time opposing the warrior to his evil enemy in form of a serpent, a dragon or other monstrous creature. In all these examples the spiritual battle is depicted as an actual battle against an enemy with real weapons, illustrating Paul’s words (Eph. 6:11).

The theme is also attested in the Utrecht and the Stuttgart psalters and would to develop in the eleventh-twelfth-century Latin manuscripts. The illustration to Ps 122 in the ninth-century Utrecht Psalter (fol. 72) and that in the eleventh-century Harley Psalter (London, British library, Harley 603, fol. 65) both show the fight between good and evil, but the latter adds weapons to make it as real as possible.

The struggle is led by Christ, angels and Holy Saints, by David as a prefiguration of Christ, but also by anonymous...
nous holy warriors who will eventually merge with the holy warriors who liberate the Holy Land from Saracens (St. Albans Psalter). 96 By the twelfth century an endless combat with diabolical forces of monstrous shapes portrayed in the inhabited scrolls had become an inseparable part of the initial letters in various Western manuscripts. Thus materialization of evil calls for real weapons.

Two allegories of the satanic forces, a lion and a dragon (albeit represented as a serpent) that appear already in the Corbie Psalter are also found in the Barberini Psalter, but the warrior in the latter lacks any kind of weapon. Only helmets (in the form of pointed hats and hats with feathers) remain. Profiles with open mouth, figures turning toward the text of Psalms in prayer and supplication, as well as lack of typological and prophetical imagery, highlight the spiritual power of this Book for the individual. According to Athanasius, "he who recites the psalms is uttering the rest in his own words, and each sings them as well as if they were written concerning him, and he accepts them and recites them, not as if another were speaking, nor as if speaking of about someone else. But he handles them as if speaking about himself."97

96 For example: initial Q in the Bibel of Saint Martial of Limoges, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 8, fol. 192v; initial A, Canterbury Josephus Codex, Cambridge University Library, MS Dd. I.4, fol. 220. Lion-shaped figures also appear in Irish manuscripts, e.g., Book of Kells, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 58, fol. 130.


The visual language of the Barberini Psalter drives home the main goal of prayer: struggle against evil thoughts and deeds, personified through the basic vocabulary of images—lions, snakes, evildoers. In my opinion, the open mouths of faces in profile reinforce this message. They express an act of praying which in the end will defeat hell's mouth. These anonymous figures, so similar in appearance, help the reader of Psalms through their praying to associate himself personally with them. He is the singer who chants the psalms, he seeks salvation, his weapon is his tongue;98 and through prayer he overpowers his enemies. The repetition of motifs throughout the psalter stresses its apotropaic qualities.

East and West meet in the initial letters of the Barberini Psalter. This encounter testifies to the possibility of artistic choices and selective adaptation of models at hand to express visually the idea of spiritual battle with evil through prayer as the only way to personal salvation.

At the turn of the first millennium, East and West shared a strong belief in the imminent End of the World (around the year 6500 (AD 992) or 6533 (AD 1025), according to Byzantine calendar).99 We can only guess if the choice of such an original iconography, with its strong emphasis on the themes of personal salvation, presented very directly, were inspired by the belief of the owner of the Barberini Psalter in the impending apocalypse.

99 As Cynthia Hahn illustrates, removing the tongue became a topos in the lives of saints symbolizing saintly speech as a miracle granted by God: C. Hahn, Portrayed on the Heart, Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century, London 2001, 83–84.

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Слике спасења у Псалтиру Барберини
(Рим, Ватиканска библиотека, Barb. gr. 285)

Ева Мајан Фанар

Грчки псалтир Barberini gr. 285 из Ватиканске библиотеке, малih димензија (107 × 83 мм), датован је у позни Х или рани XI век, а пореклом је из облас蒂 Беневенто–Капуа. Реч је о изазврхадном примеру италовизантијске уметности. Иконографски програм заснован је на иницијалама који су цртани пером и које је највероватније извео писар. Неки од њих ис- кључиво су декоративни, док су други сачињени од зооморфних фигур које су, изгледа, засноване на разноврсним симболима (нпр. рр. 37, 53).

Основни облик украшеног почетног слова у рукопису јесте антропоморфи. Изузев неколико примера, људске фигуре у иницијалама рукописа јесте антропоморфни. Изузев неколико нохријанског симболици (нпр. ф. 37, 53), зооморфних фигура које су, изгледа, засноване на разноврсним симболима, у роковима IX века. Неки од њих ис-кључиво су декоративни, док су други сачињени од зооморфних фигур које су, изгледа, засноване на разноврсним симболима (нпр. рр. 37, 53).

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