
Scenes in Stone: Newly Discovered Mosaics from the North Aisle in the Huqoq Synagogue*

ABSTRACT This article is the first publication, description, and identification of the floor mosaics in the north aisle of the early fifth-century synagogue in the village of Huqoq in Lower Eastern Galilee. The north aisle is arranged in individually framed panels organized in two superposed rows of nine panels each for a total of eighteen. While many are only fragmentarily preserved, each panel seems to have depicted a figure or episode from the Hebrew Bible (aside from a Hebrew-language donor inscription at the east end of the aisle). Aided by labels in Hebrew or Aramaic citing phrases from biblical verses as well as by the regularity of the overall design of the north aisle, we have been able to identify the subject matter of eight of the eighteen panels and to propose reconstructions for three others. Most significant—and surprising—among the scenes are two groups of four panels that depict episodes from the book of Daniel: the four beasts of Daniel 7 and the story of the three youths in Daniel 3. These multipanel scenes, which were placed at the west and east ends of the aisle respectively, frame the composition as a whole. Other extant panels depict a male youth leading a leashed wild animal (Isa 11.6), two spies returning with grapes from the Valley of Eshcol (Num 13.23), and the showbread table from the tabernacle (Lev 24.6). We situate the visual strategies employed in the north aisle mosaic within the development of biblical narration across a wide range of contemporaneous media. We argue that the Huqoq panels not only participated in Mediterranean-wide practices for the representation of narrative in the visual arts but also make an important contribution to our understanding of the dynamic nature of artistic exchange across the boundaries of media in Late Antiquity. Moreover, the panels provide precious evidence regarding the religious outlook, cultural orientation, and social position of the synagogue community at Huqoq. In particular, the panels depicting scenes from the book of Daniel emphasize both the threat posed by “foreign” empires to the people of Israel and their ultimate defeat at the hands of God and his warriors. This theme is likewise present in the nave and east aisle of the synagogue, especially in the Samson panels, the Crossing of the Red Sea,

*The editors are pleased to have the opportunity to publish in *SLA* for the first time the images and analysis of these Huqoq mosaics. We would like to note that the article was submitted for peer review prior to Boustan’s tenure as co-Editor of *SLA* and that the integrity of the double-blind review process was maintained throughout.

Studies in Late Antiquity, Vol. 5, Number 4, pp. 509–579. electronic ISSN 2470-2048 © 2021 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://sla.ucpress.edu/content/permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/sla.2021.5.4.509>

and the Elephant Mosaic. We suggest that these panels, taken together, celebrate Jewish heroic and even martial values that were themselves very much in keeping with the emerging ethos of imperial Christianity in the Theodosian age. **KEYWORDS** synagogue mosaics, village of Huqoq, late Roman Galilee, biblical narrative, late antique Judaism

Since 2011, Jodi Magness has directed excavations in the ancient Jewish village at Huqoq in Lower Eastern Galilee.¹ The excavations are bringing to light a monumental, Late Roman (early fifth century CE) synagogue paved with vivid floor mosaics depicting a series of figural (mostly biblical) scenes.² To date, most of the mosaics in the east aisle and nave have been excavated and published. This article presents the first publication of the mosaics in the north aisle, which were uncovered during the 2018 and 2019 excavation seasons.³

The subject matter of the Huqoq mosaics departs in significant ways from what has been considered the common repertoire of images found in other synagogues in Galilee. In previous publications, we grappled with these differences by situating them within a series of distinct, but not mutually exclusive, contexts.⁴ By placing the Huqoq synagogue at the center of a series

Versions of this research were presented at the Archaeological Institute of America annual meeting (January 2020), the Early Biblical Interpretation Seminar of Oriel College, University of Oxford (February 2021), and the Department of History of the University of Haifa (March 2021); we would like to thank the audiences present on each of those occasions for their engaging and illuminating comments and questions. We are particularly grateful for the thoughtful feedback on earlier iterations of this paper that we received from Peter Brown, Elena Dugan, Martha Himmelfarb, Ruth Kolarik, Jodi Magness, Hindy Najman, Hillel Newman, and Nomi Schneck as well as from the two reviewers for this journal. We thank Feixue Mei for producing the reconstruction drawing included in the illustrations. We would also like to express our sincerest thanks to Dean Michael Steiner, College of Arts and Sciences, Northwest Missouri State University for photo subvention. Naturally, all errors remain our own.

1. The excavations are sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the following consortium members (as of 2020–2021): Austin College, Baylor University, Brigham Young University, and the University of Toronto. For comprehensive preliminary reports, see Jodi Magness et al., “The Huqoq Excavation Project: 2014–2017 Interim Report,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 380 (2018): 61–131; Jodi Magness et al., “Huqoq (Lower Galilee) and Its Synagogue Mosaics: Preliminary Report on the Excavations of 2011–2013,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 27 (2014): 327–55. For links to publications and media coverage, see <http://huqoq.web.unc.edu>.

2. See popular summaries in Jodi Magness et al., “Inside the Huqoq Synagogue,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 45.3 (2019): 24–38; Karen Britt and Ra’anana Boustán, “Artistic Influences in Synagogue Mosaics: Putting the Huqoq Synagogue in Context,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 45.3 (2019): 39–45, 68.

3. We thank Jodi Magness for her permission to publish these mosaics.

4. Most recently, Magness et al., “Huqoq Excavation Project,” 92–118, which cites previous publications on the mosaics.

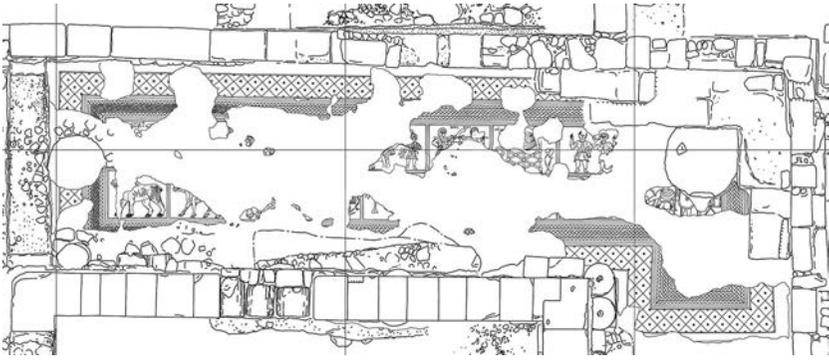


FIGURE 1. Huqoq synagogue plan, north aisle. Plan prepared by Slava Pirskey, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

of concentric circles, we found that its mosaics reflect a number of intersecting local, regional, and transregional trends in mosaic production.

Just when we felt we were making progress in our understanding of the Huqoq mosaics, we had the rug (or, in our case, the pavement) pulled out from under us in the 2018 season. The mosaics uncovered in the north aisle differ as starkly in their composition and organization from the panels excavated in the east aisle and nave as those portions of the floor do from the vast majority of the mosaics found in other synagogues. In an effort to regain our footing, we contend in the present study with the surprising diversity across the various sections of the Huqoq pavement by deliberately turning inward to consider the mosaics in the north aisle within the immediate context of the Huqoq synagogue itself.

The mosaics excavated in the north aisle employed sophisticated visual strategies to structure, organize, and mediate the act of viewing.⁵ The north aisle is arranged in individually framed panels organized in two superposed rows of nine panels each for a total of eighteen scenes (Figure 1). This arrangement differs from the panels that have been uncovered to date in the other portions of the building, which have large single panels that extend across and fill the space of the nave and aisles.⁶ An additional characteristic

5. Our use of phrases such as “the act of viewing” and “the viewing experience” situates our approach to the study of mosaics within the context of *visuality*, a method that we find effective for attending to the widest range of experiences and ideas that shaped the perception of objects by people in the past. For the development of *visuality* and its implications for ancient and medieval art history, see Robert S. Nelson, “Introduction: Descartes’s Cow and Other Domestications of the Visual,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–20. See also Alexa Sand, “Visuality,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 89–95.

6. The only exceptions are the rows of three smaller panels placed at both the north and the south ends of the nave; these rows contained wreathed inscriptions in the central panel and heraldic

that sets the panels of the north aisle apart from those in the east aisle and nave is the preservation of Hebrew or Aramaic inscriptions labeling the scenes. Each of these labels is a citation of a portion of a verse from the Hebrew Bible.⁷ We argue that such diversity in the size and arrangement of the mosaic panels conditioned how viewers would have moved through—and thus experienced—the carefully differentiated spaces within the Huqoq synagogue.

Our decision to begin the article with a section that explores the relationship between the physical locations of the mosaics in the synagogue and the viewing experiences of synagogue-goers in those spaces is an acknowledgement of the dynamic interaction that occurs between buildings and their users.⁸ The act of viewing would have been first of all synoptic—the floors, walls, columns, ceiling, and furnishings would have been visually taken in by synagogue-goers.⁹ As they advanced through the building, various spaces and lines of sight would have been revealed, concealed, and framed by architectural elements and surfaces that mediated the viewing experience. It is challenging, within the context of an ongoing archaeological excavation, to reconstruct how floor mosaics may have operated in concert with other components of the building's architecture to shape the

creatures in the two flanking pendant panels. But the primary function of these rows at the northernmost and southernmost ends of the nave is to frame the five scenes in the nave. Moreover, these rows are not configured in a superposed arrangement.

7. The distribution of labels across the north aisle raises the possibility that the mosaics in the other aisles were also labeled—and, indeed, just such a label was uncovered in the west aisle in 2019. The excavation of the synagogue's west aisle started in the 2019 season but has not been completed. The initial findings are described in Jodi Magness et al., "Huqoq-2019: Preliminary Report," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 132 (2020): www.hadashot-ESI.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25880&mag_id=128.

8. See the foundational formulation in Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 142–44, esp. 143: "Interpretation comes later, almost as an afterthought. Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes, and distances to be covered. It is produced with this purpose in mind; this is its *raison d'être*." The novelist Hisham Matar, *A Month in Siena* (New York: Random House, 2019), 12, elegantly captures the somatic experience of architecture by reminding us of "the transformative possibility of crossing a threshold. We never think of this, of how our sense of being is subtly changed by walking into even the most inconsequential of buildings or transitioning from one room to the next."

9. A focus on the utility of architecture as a site of activity can lead archaeologists and art historians to conceive of architectural decoration as texts that must be read in order to be understood. When used as the sole method for approaching imagery on floors, walls, ceilings, and other architectural surfaces, this approach flattens the interpretive possibilities to an intellectual exercise. On the advantages and disadvantages of treating religious architecture and architectural decoration as text, see Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 121–33.

viewer's experience.¹⁰ This challenge is especially acute in cases such as ours in which so little of the building's superstructure remains intact. Nevertheless, we indicate to the extent possible the architectural features of the Huqoq synagogue that would have conditioned the viewer's encounter with the mosaics.

Following an analysis of the overall layout of the north aisle, we turn to the central task of this article, the initial description, identification, and interpretation of the mosaic panels themselves. Although a majority of the panels in the north aisle are preserved only in small fragments, the figural and inscriptional remains of the mosaic are sufficient to enable us to determine conclusively the subject matter of eight of the eighteen panels. In addition, based on our preliminary understanding of the formal organization of the north aisle mosaics as a group, we are able to propose cautiously the subjects of three further panels, which are in particularly fragmentary condition and lack an obvious thematic or narrative context. Unfortunately, absent further archaeological discoveries at Huqoq or elsewhere, it is unlikely that scholars will be able to reconstruct the subjects of the remaining seven panels. Still, we believe that our identifications and reconstructions of many of the individual panels can serve as a basis for determining and exploring the broader themes to which the north aisle mosaic gives expression, especially within the larger context of the synagogue's pavement as a whole.

Our process leverages the known panels to identify the unknown panels. We begin with a close comparison of the known panels to depictions of the same subject in contemporary media from a variety of contexts, both visual and textual. Next, we analyze the mosaic fragments in the unknown panels adjacent to the known panels in an effort to correlate the contents of the fragments with elements of the iconography and compositions observed in the comparative materials. Finally, we situate the overall compositional strategies employed in the north aisle mosaic within Mediterranean-wide developments in biblical art in Late Antiquity. This analysis not only provides support for our reconstruction of the more fragmentary sections of the north aisle mosaic but also demonstrates that craftspeople working across different regional, cultural, and religious contexts and in various artistic mediums drew on a common set of visual idioms and strategies to depict scenes or episodes from the biblical and classical traditions. The Huqoq pavement suggests that

10. For a study that carefully considers the spatial dimensions of the viewing experience in an exceptionally well-preserved late antique synagogue, see Karen B. Stern, "Mapping Devotion in Roman Dura Europos: A Reconsideration of the Synagogue Ceiling," *American Journal of Archaeology* 114 (2010): 473–504.

floor mosaics have much to contribute to our understanding of developments in narrative art.

In the course of our description of the north aisle mosaics, we offer a preliminary assessment of their thematic content and meaning. Several of the panels in the north aisle echo themes and ideas that are found elsewhere in the building. The panels depicting scenes from the book of Daniel emphasize both the threat posed by “foreign” empires to the people of Israel and their ultimate defeat at the hands of God and his warriors. This theme is likewise present in the nave and east aisle of the synagogue, especially in the Samson panels, the Crossing of the Red Sea panel, and the Elephant Mosaic.¹¹ The north aisle heightens this rhetoric of conflict and redemption by setting the narrative of Israel’s victory over its enemies within an explicitly messianic and even eschatological framework. In our view, however, the Huqoq mosaics do not reflect an acute messianic consciousness on the part of the community nor an eschatologically oriented social movement in this region of the Galilee. Rather, we argue that the panels represent responses to the hardened imperial structures of the Theodosian age and its new ideologies of (increasingly biculturalized) rulership. The Huqoq mosaics celebrate Jewish heroic and even martial values that were themselves very much in keeping with the emerging ethos of imperial Christianity.

1. FRAMING THE NORTH AISLE: BORDERS AND TRANSITION ZONES

Because the sequence and arrangement of the panels in the north aisle are crucial to our analysis, before discussing each of the individual panels we first consider the framing and narrative strategies that set the north aisle apart from the rest of the synagogue’s mosaic pavement while also lending it an internal coherence of its own. The portions of the mosaic floor located between the east and west aisles of the synagogue and the north aisle are poorly preserved (Figure 2).¹² Nevertheless, these *transition zones* offer clear indications that the program in the north aisle was conceived in formal terms as distinct, but not isolated, from the rest of the mosaic floor. These zones,

11. On the Samson panels, see Magness et al., “Huqoq (Lower Galilee),” 348–53. On the Crossing of the Red Sea panel, see Magness et al., “Huqoq Excavation Project,” 102–6. On the Elephant Mosaic, see Karen Britt and Ra’anan Boustan, *The Elephant Mosaic Panel in the Synagogue at Huqoq: Official Publication and Initial Interpretations* (Portsmouth, RI: *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 2017).

12. Damage to the pavement in these two areas was caused by the collapse of the superstructure after the synagogue’s abandonment and by later building and occupation activities.



FIGURE 2. Huqoq synagogue plan. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

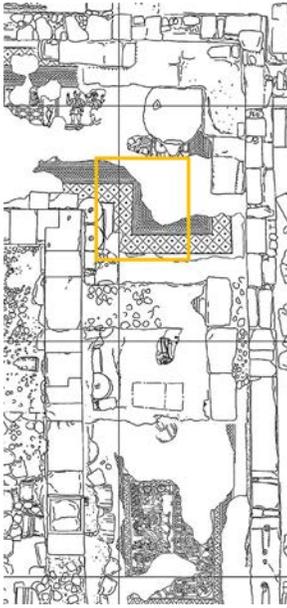


FIGURE 3. *Left*, Huqoq synagogue plan, detail of north end of east aisle (indicated). *Right*, Huqoq synagogue, inner and outer borders in transition between east and north aisles. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

together with a complex series of inner and outer borders framing the north aisle, formed a coherent set of spatial and visual cues that accentuated the discreteness of the north aisle and thereby intensified the viewing experience. Our observations about these transitional zones build on the insight that in floor mosaics, just as in other mediums, borders direct, guide, and frame the visual response of the viewer. They order the spatial arrangement of an image by simultaneously categorizing the space internally and by *stratifying* the field of view.¹³

The transition between the east and north aisles begins at the north end of the east aisle, where the prominent placement of borders signaled to the synagogue-goer passage from one space to another. The border is composed of an inner and an outer border (Figure 3). The outer border consists of a monochrome (black tesserae on white ground), geometric diamond pattern.

13. Verity Platt and Michael Squire, "Framing the Visual in Greek and Roman Antiquity: An Introduction," in *The Frame in Classical Art: A Cultural History*, ed. Verity Platt and Michael Squire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3–99, esp. 32–33.

The polychrome inner border is composed of a multicolor guilloche framed by bands of red crowstep motif. The border runs north to south before turning west (left) at a 90° angle to frame the mosaic panels in the north aisle. The north end of the west aisle of the synagogue likely also followed this arrangement, although that portion of the floor was not preserved.

In both cases, the transitions from the two side aisles to the north aisle seem to have been marked by a small mosaic panel. These panels were not preserved on the east or west side of the synagogue, making it impossible to determine their subject matter and orientation. Despite the damage, it is apparent from the configuration of the borders still preserved at the north end of the east aisle that the transition to the distinctive format of mosaic panels in the north aisle began with the visual delineation of these transitional zones.

The sense of movement from one area of the synagogue to another would have been heightened by the fact that the guilloche border that encloses the east aisle panels ended by crossing the aisle just below the wide border that demarcates the transitional space.¹⁴ There thus would have been two thick borders running across the north end of the east aisle, creating a pronounced visual barrier between the spaces. This barrier operated as a type of threshold or liminal space poised between the side aisles, on the one hand, and the north aisle, on the other.¹⁵ Viewers standing in this area of the aisle, with the borders at their feet, would have observed a narrowing of the floor mosaic as they looked north that would have been akin to the experience of gazing through an open door. This narrowing effect was achieved by expanding the size of the border, while simultaneously reducing the scale of the panel it surrounded.

The sense of passing through a doorway would have been heightened by the vertical surfaces that flanked the viewer: the synagogue wall to one side

14. The removal of a balk over this area in a future season may contribute to our understanding of the border framing the east aisle mosaics, if the pavement under it is preserved.

15. For the application of the notion of liminality to thresholds and other transitional spaces within churches and other religious buildings in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "Introduction," in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 1–6; Emilie M. van Opstall, "General Introduction," in *Sacred Thresholds: The Door to the Sanctuary in Late Antiquity*, ed. Emilie M. van Opstall (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1–27, esp. 4–6. On the relationship of the aisles to the nave in early churches, see Urs Peschlow, "Dividing Interior Space in Early Byzantine Churches: The Barriers between the Nave and Aisles," in *Thresholds of the Sacred*, 53–72.

and, to the other side, the raised stylobate, which would have formed a low partition between the nave and aisle.¹⁶ In Palestinian synagogues, the floors are notable for their vibrant mosaics containing biblical and nonbiblical scenes. By contrast, Palestinian synagogue walls (including Huqoq's) were covered with painted plaster that did not typically contain depictions of figural imagery.¹⁷ While the vertical surfaces would have worked together with the floor mosaics to contribute to the contraction of space sensed by the viewer, the design of the floor mosaic is the pivotal element that signals a transition from one area to another. The smaller sizes of the panels in the north aisle relative to the other panels in the synagogue likewise conditioned how viewers engaged with them. The dimensions of the pavement of the north aisle including the borders are 3×11.38 m. The dimensions of the pavement of the north aisle excluding the borders are 1.53×9.86 m. The individual panels measure, on average, $73 \text{ cm} \times 1 \text{ m}$. By contrast, the panels in the nave were many times larger, measuring as much as 4.1 m^2 (Figure 4).¹⁸ The large size of the panels that extended across the nave meant they were viewed as they were being walked on. The same situation obtained for the mosaics in the east and west aisles, although their large scale meant they could also have been viewed from the nave through the columns on the stylobate. By contrast, the placement of a wide monochromatic outer border around the smaller panels in the north aisle formed an external space from which to view the superposed panels without walking on them. This arrangement of borders and frames in the north aisle thus fostered a viewing experience that was simultaneously more regimented and more intimate than in the nave, while also affording viewers a synoptic overview of the individual panels in their totality.

16. Martin Wells is the Huqoq Excavation Project's architecture specialist. For discussion of the synagogue architecture, see Magness et al., "Huqoq Excavation Project," 86–92 and Magness et al., "Huqoq-2019."

17. Shana O'Connell is the Huqoq Excavation Project's painted plaster specialist. For discussion of the painted plaster uncovered in the synagogue, see Magness et al., "Huqoq Excavation Project," 88–91. For a recent discussion of the aesthetic balance struck between wall and floor decoration in late antique synagogues and churches, see Rina Talgam, "From Wall Paintings to Floor Mosaics: Jewish and Christian Attitudes to Figurative Art," in *Jewish Art in its Late Antique Context*, ed. Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 97–118, esp. 104–6.

18. The eastern portions of the nave panels are entirely missing due to the late medieval reuse of the building. The measurements supplied here are based on reconstructions and, therefore, close estimates of the dimensions of the individual panels. The zodiac cycle is the largest panel, measuring 4.1 m^2 . The Red Sea scene is the smallest, measuring $4.1 \times 1.3 \text{ m}$.



FIGURE 4. *Left*, Huqoq synagogue plan, south nave (indicated). *Right*, Huqoq synagogue, aerial view, south nave. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by Griffin Higher Photography, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

Beyond the disparate formal qualities in the design and organization of the mosaics throughout the synagogue, there are significant differences in the way the stories are told in the panels.¹⁹ The enormous panels in the nave offer abridged representations of their biblical narratives through the depiction of a single episode. This does not mean that these panels are sparsely populated—to the contrary, they are densely populated scenes that reflect an interest in creatures of the natural world as well as in classical mythology; both are pervasive throughout the synagogue’s mosaics. A good example is the Jonah panel, which depicts the moment in which the prophet, having fled aboard

19. Approaches to the interpretation of Jewish and Early Christian art in Late Antiquity has again become a subject of debate. See Robin Jensen, “Compiling Narratives: The Visual Strategies of Early Christian Art,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23 (2015): 1–26, who is sharply critical of Jaś Elsner, “Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Ancient Jewish Art and Early Christian Art,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003): 114–28. On the historiography of Roman art, including Elsner’s contributions, see Richard Brilliant, “Forwards and Backwards in the Historiography of Roman Art,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 20 (2007): 7–24. For a recent rehearsal of some of the issues, see Scott Harrower, “Visual Exegesis at ‘The World’s Oldest Church’: A Case Study for Historiography,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 22 (2018): 456–79.

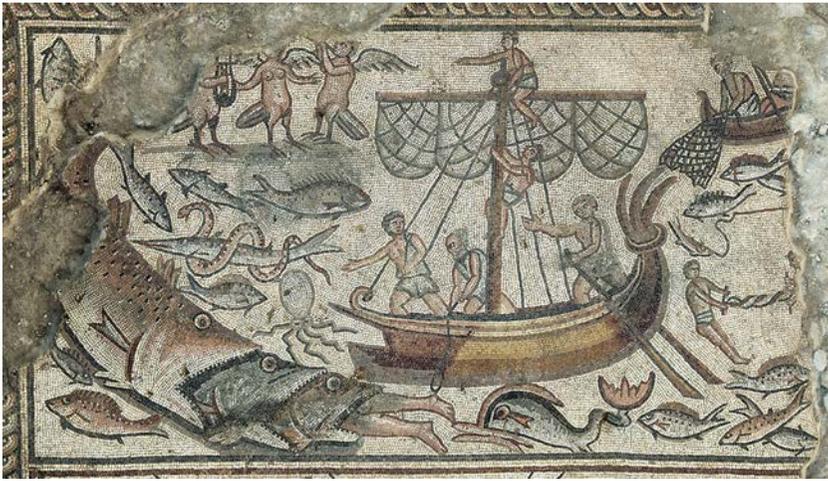


FIGURE 5. Jonah panel, Huqoq synagogue, nave. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

a ship from his divinely appointed mission of announcing the destruction of Nineveh, is cast into the sea by his shipmates (Figure 5).²⁰ This episode is set within a crowded scene of marine and maritime imagery that includes harpies/sirens from classical mythology as personifications of storm winds. Unlike the Jonah cycles in catacomb frescoes and marble statuettes, which depict multiple episodes (episodic narrative) from the story, the Huqoq scene is a synecdochal presentation that uses a single episode to evoke an expansive narrative.²¹ It is reasonable to suggest that the episode depicted in the mosaic was a careful choice that invested the mosaic with a particular emphasis.

In contrast to the panels in the nave, the large panels in the east aisle are grouped into pairs of related imagery which, due to their side-by-side placement, would have been “read” sequentially (Figure 6).²² Thus, for example,

20. For full discussion of the mosaic, see Magness et al., “Huqoq Excavation Project,” 111–15.

21. See Jensen, “Compiling Narratives,” 15, which identifies the synecdochal use of a figure or episode as a characteristic of early Christian art. On depictions of Jonah in a variety of media, see Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 172–73. For catacomb paintings: Norbert Zimmerman, “Catacomb Painting and the Rise of Christian Iconography in Funerary Art,” in *Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. Robin Jensen and Mark Ellison (London: Routledge, 2018), 21–38. For sculpture: Heidi Hornik, “Freestanding Sculpture,” in *Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. Robin Jensen and Mark Ellison (London: Routledge, 2018), 73–85.

22. Magness et al., “Huqoq (Lower Galilee),” 348–53.

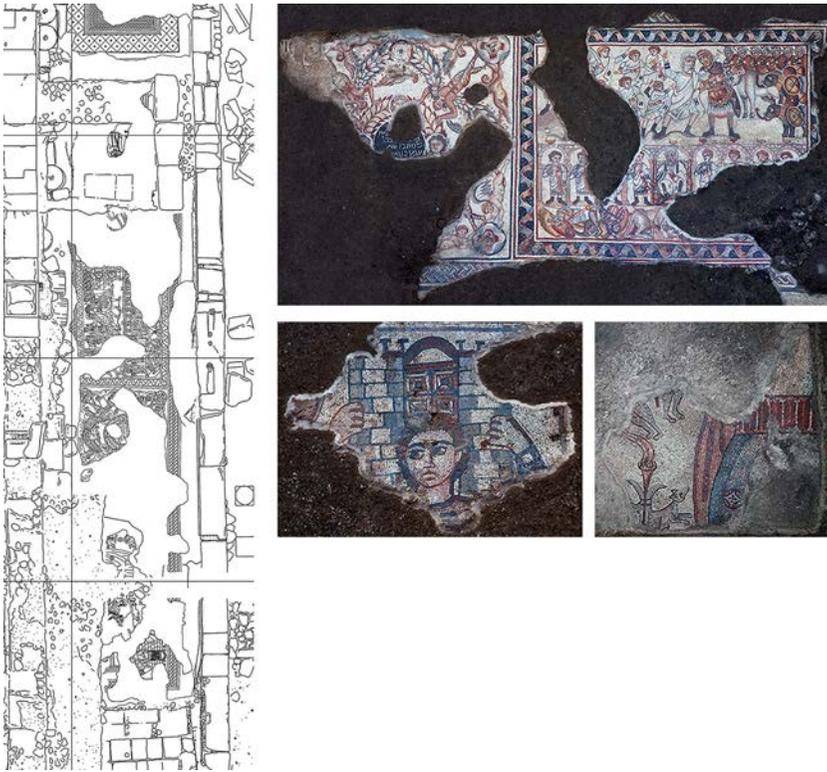


FIGURE 6. *Left*, Huqoq synagogue plan, east aisle. *Right*, details of mosaics, Huqoq synagogue, east aisle. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

the Samson panels at the south end of the east aisle—the first depicting Samson and the foxes (Judg 15.4–5) and the second Samson and the gate of Gaza (Judg 16.3)—offer a straightforward example of episodic narrative. The narrative techniques employed in the Elephant Mosaic and Commemorative panel, which are immediately to the north of the Samson scenes in the east aisle, are more complicated. Their placement and formal elements make clear that they were conceived as a pair, thereby juxtaposing the multi-episode narrative in the Elephant Mosaic with a static commemorative arrangement and inscription in its pendant panel.²³ Nevertheless, the aisle is paved with large individual panels placed next to each other that could be read from near or far. As we will see, the visual strategies for depicting images, themes, or

23. Magness et al., “Huqoq Excavation Project,” 92–98.

stories from scripture used in the north aisle mosaics diverge even more significantly from those of the nave and east aisle.

2. THE MOSAICS OF THE NORTH AISLE

We have been able to securely identify the subject matter of eight of the eighteen figural panels in the north aisle and propose reconstructions for three others. Moving from west to east, these panels include the four beasts of Daniel 7, a male youth leading a leashed wild animal as described in the prophetic vision in Isaiah 11, two spies returning with grapes from the Valley of Eshcol, the showbread table from the wilderness tabernacle or Jerusalem temple, three male figures with raised right arms and hands (which we identify as Daniel's three companions—Hanania, Mishael, and Azaria—from Daniel 3), and, finally, soldiers holding shields and spears (likely from the same episode in Daniel 3). In addition, a fragment of a *tabula ansata* containing a Hebrew-language donor inscription is located next to the panel with soldiers.

Our description of the panels proceeds from west to east for several reasons. First, because the four panels in the west end of the aisle depicting the four beasts of Daniel 7 can be securely identified, we believe it makes sense to work from panels whose subject matter is certain to more fragmentary or no longer extant panels that require educated speculation to reconstruct their content. Second, our movement eastward corresponds to the direction in which the sequence of the four beasts of Daniel unfolds. A final advantage of beginning with these four panels is that, because they occupy both top and bottom rows, they provide a basis for understanding the arrangement of all the panels in the north aisle.

The Four Creatures of Daniel 7

The four panels at the west end of the north aisle represent a distinct and coherent group of scenes. Each of the figures in these panels is drawn from the same, brief biblical passage: the account of four monstrous creatures rising from the sea with which Daniel's famous night vision opens in Daniel 7 (Figure 7).²⁴ Our description of these four panels follows the textual

24. The scholarly literature on Daniel 7 is vast. On the textual and visual sources and the rhetorical function of the theriomorphic imagery of the chapter, see especially Andrew Remington Rillera, "A Call to Resistance: The Exhortative Function of Daniel 7," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138 (2019): 757–76, esp. 769–70; John J. Collins, "Stirring Up the Great Sea: The Religio-Historical Background of Daniel 7," in *Seers, Sybils, and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*

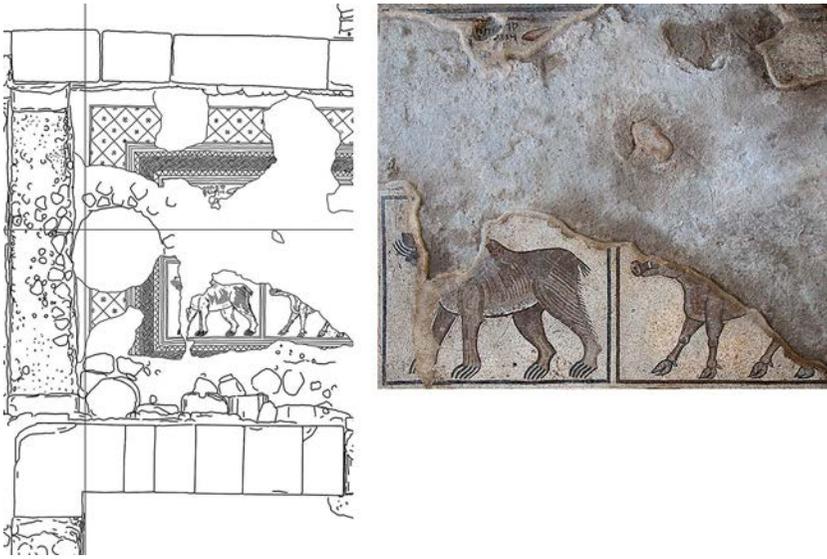


FIGURE 7. *Left*, Huqoq synagogue plan, detail of Daniel 7 panels, west end of north aisle. *Right*, Daniel 7 panels, Huqoq synagogue, west end of north aisle. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

sequence in which the monstrous creatures appear in the vision, namely, top-to-bottom and west-to-east. We argue that this sequence fits with the textual tradition while also enabling us to reconstruct the arrangement and sequence of the panels in the north aisle more generally, especially where the mosaic has suffered extensive damage or is no longer extant.

At the center of the westernmost panel in the top row, an Aramaic inscription is partially preserved.²⁵ The inscription reads קדמיתה | דינשר לה [...]

(Leiden: Brill, 1997), 139–55; Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 294–99; Paul A. Porter, *Metaphors and Monsters: A Literary-Critical Study of Daniel 7 and 8* (Lund: Gleerup, 1985), 13–29; Thorne Wittstruck, “Influence of Treaty Curse Imagery on the Beast Imagery of Daniel 7,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 100–102; Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 208–17.

25. It is worth highlighting that this inscription is the only inscription in the Huqoq synagogue excavated thus far that uses Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Thus far, no inscriptions in Greek have been discovered. The choice of language and genre in the nonbiblical inscriptions in the Huqoq synagogue deserves sustained attention. For now, it is worth noting that, in our view, the use of Aramaic in this particular inscription was determined by the language of the reference text in Daniel 7 rather than reflecting the special local currency of Aramaic at Huqoq, a phenomenon that we do observe elsewhere in synagogues in both Palestine and Syria. On Aramaic as a distinctive vehicle for

citing Daniel 7.4 (“The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings”; קַדְמִיתָא כְּאַרְיֵה וְגַפִּיּוֹן דִּי־אַשְׁרָ לָהּ).²⁶ The verse describes the first of the four beasts of Daniel’s vision. To the right of the inscription, an animal’s tail is the only part that remains of what was apparently a winged lion. The position of the curved tail makes clear that the creature faced toward the left (west) side of the panel.

The panel beneath the winged lion depicts a bear-like creature in profile view, striding toward the left (west). The bear-like features of the animal and especially the three objects that protrude from its mouth permit it to be identified as the second creature described in Daniel 7.5: “Another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, had three tusks (or ribs) in its mouth among its teeth and was told, ‘Arise, devour many bodies!’” (NRSV). The biblical text is itself unclear concerning the nature of the three objects (parallel curved rows of black tesserae) protruding from the creature’s mouth. The difficult Aramaic word עֲלֵעִיזִין might refer to the “ribs” of an animal of prey that the creature is devouring.²⁷ Alternatively, it might refer to an anatomical attribute of the creature itself with which it will devour its victim (i.e., tusks or fangs).²⁸ Based on the inscription labeling the scene with the lion-like creature (see the previous paragraph), it is likely that a similar inscription, which is not preserved, accompanied this panel as well.

Returning to the top row, the mosaic in the panel located next to (east of) the winged lion panel is not preserved; however, it presumably depicted a leopard with some of the attributes described in Daniel 7.6. This suggestion

local practices of commemoration and memorialization, especially in the synagogue at Dura, see Karen B. Stern, “Memory, Postmemory, and Place in the Synagogues of Roman Syria,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 62 (2019): 53–85, esp. 68–72.

26. Although the bottom row of the inscription is badly damaged, the reading of the inscription is not in doubt. We thank Haggai Misgav for his help in deciphering this inscription.

27. The LXX already renders the phrase into Greek as “three ribs” (τρία πλευρά). For the three objects protruding from the creature’s mouth as the ribs of the prey that the creature is devouring, see A. E. Gardner, “Decoding Daniel: The Case of Dan 7.5,” *Biblica* 88, no. 2 (2007): 222–33, and the earlier scholarship cited there.

28. For the objects as tusks or fangs, see the comparative Semitic analysis in R. M. Frank, “The Description of the Bear in Dan 7.5,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959): 505–7, who notes that this interpretation already appears in the writings of the tenth-century polymath Se’adyah ben Joseph, Gaon of Sura. See also Hartman and Di Lella, *Book of Daniel*, 209, whose identification of the objects as tusks is based on the highly questionable source-critical analysis of the passage in H. Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1948), 5–23.

is based on the subject matter of the panels that we just described and on the content of the mosaic panel located directly beneath it.

In the bottom row, below the leopard and to the right (east) of the bear-like creature, a partially preserved panel depicts a boar-like creature in profile view facing left (west). Only its front lower body, three legs with cloven hooves, and elongated snout and mouth are preserved. Despite its damaged state, the panel clearly depicts the creature described in Daniel 7.7: “After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns” (NRSV). It is likely that an inscription, which is not preserved, also labeled this panel.

The depiction of the fourth beast in the form of a pig or, more likely, a wild boar is extremely significant. The biblical text—whether in the original Aramaic or in its various translations—nowhere likens the fourth beast to a specific animal or to a hybrid of two animals, as it does for each of the previous three. The dual identifications of the fourth beast with Rome *and* its depiction as a swine-like creature—either a pig (חזיר) or a wild boar (חזיר יער)—emerged within Jewish discourse only in the Roman imperial period, from the first to the fourth centuries, although the exact chronology of this process remains debated.²⁹ The Jewish association between Rome and a swine or boar may, at least in part, have been a response to its use as one of the emblems of the Roman legion X Fretensis, which was stationed in Judaea during the conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE and remained in the city until the late third century.³⁰ But this identification was certainly also the product of

29. For a well-reasoned chronology of these traditions, see Misgav Har-Peled, “The Dialogical Beast: The Identification of Rome with the Pig in Early Rabbinic Literature” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2013), esp. 230–38, who concludes that, while the identifications of Rome with Esau, the fourth beast of Daniel 7 with Rome, and Rome with a swine developed piecemeal from the late Hellenistic period on, the full equation of Rome = Esau = the fourth kingdom = a wild boar only appears for the first time in sources from the late fourth and early fifth centuries. It is worth noting that the dating of the earliest textual sources for this tradition is consistent with the dating of the Huqoq synagogue to approximately 400 CE as proposed by Magness and her team. Compare the earlier chronology in Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Jerusalem against Rome*, trans. Robyn Fréchet (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 211–21; Hadas-Lebel, “Rome, ‘Quatrième Empire,’ et le symbole du porc,” in *Hellenica et Judaica: Hommage à Valentin Nikiprowetzky*, ed. André Caquot, Mireille Hadas-Lebel, and Jean Riaud (Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 297–312.

30. This influence was first suggested in Théodore Reinach, “Mon nom est Légion,” *Revue des études juives* 47 (1903): 172–78. For synthetic treatment of the archaeological evidence for the presence of the X Fretensis in Jerusalem and its environs up until the end of the third century, as well as for the legion’s use of the boar as one of its most distinctive emblems, see Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah,

scriptural exegesis, which drew associations between Rome and the characteristics of swine or boar that appear in the Hebrew Bible. Two passages proved especially generative in establishing the resemblance of the fourth beast to a wild boar: first, the kosher laws in Leviticus that list the pig among the unclean animals (Lev 11.7) and, second, the extended metaphor in Psalm 80 that recounts plaintively how Yahweh has permitted the wild boar (חֲזִיר מִצְרַיִם) and other creatures to ravage the “vine” that he had lovingly transplanted from Egypt to the land of Israel (Ps 80.14).³¹ The notion that the pig was the avatar of a rapacious Roman Empire, which is first attested in rabbinic sources, also found expression in the liturgical poetry of the synagogue (*piyyut*) from the sixth and seventh centuries.³²

That Jewish exegetical tradition identified the fourth beast with a boar already in the late fourth century is also apparent from patristic sources of the

Aelia Capitolina: Jerusalem in the Roman Period in Light of Archaeological Research (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 19–50; Weksler-Bdolah, “Aelia Capitolina: The Roman Colony and Its Periphery,” in *Judaea/Palaestina and Arabia: Cities and Hinterlands in Roman and Byzantine Times*, ed. Achim Lichtenberger, Oren Tal, and Zeev Weiss (Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2019), 81–93. The boar appears on various artifacts discovered during excavations in Jerusalem. For circular roof tiles stamped with the emblem of the boar, which is depicted beneath the war galley and the abbreviation LEGXF, see Hillel Geva, “Stamp Impressions of the Legio X Fretensis,” in *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem, Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1969–1982*, vol. 2: *The Finds from Areas A, W and X-2, Final Report*, ed. Hillel Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2003), 409 (discussion), 420, plate 17.1, T2 and 422, plate 17.3, T45 (figures); Benny Arubas and Haim Goldfus, *Excavations on the Site of the Jerusalem International Convention Center (Binyanei Ha’uma): A Settlement of the Late First to Second Temple Period, the Tenth Legion’s Kibworks, and a Byzantine Monastic Complex* (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2005), 7, fig. 2. For the legion’s emblem of the boar on the reverse of bronze coins of Aelia Capitolina from the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, see Ya’akov Meshorer, *The Coinage of Aelia Capitolina* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1989), 28–29, cat. nos. 4 and 30.

31. Rabbinic sources attesting this identification first appear in fifth- to sixth-century midrashic compilations from Palestine, but the specific traditions are attributed to named rabbis of the third and fourth centuries and thus may be somewhat older; see especially *Beresbit Rabbah* 65.1 and *Leviticus Rabbah* 13.5; also worth consulting are *Sifre Numbers* 316–317; *Midrash on Psalms* 80:6; *b. Pesahim* 118b. For detailed analysis of all the relevant rabbinic sources, see Har-Peled, “Dialogical Beast,” 132–238.

32. For one example, among many, see the extended description of the fourth beast as a destructive and disgusting “boar-like” creature (וּמְשֻׁרֵת דְּחִיר) in Poem Nine of a *qedushta* for the Day of Atonement by Yannai (sixth century), titled “From the first the serpent bit us, head of vipers” (מִרֵאשִׁית נִשְׁכַּח רֵאשִׁית פְּתָנִים), lines 17–21. For the text, see Zvi Meir Rabinovitz, ed., *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai According to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays: Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary* (Hebrew), vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1985), 219–20. For translation and discussion of this composition within a wider treatment of the four-empire theme in *piyyut*, see Tzvi Novick, *Piyyut and Midrash: Form, Genre, and History* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 149–67, esp. 161–62.

period. Most notably, Jerome of Stridon (d. 420) in his commentary on Daniel 7.7 notes that “the Hebrews believe that the beast which is here not named is the one spoken of in Psalms: *A boar from the forest laid her waste, and a strange wild animal consumed her*” (Ps 79.14, according to LXX and Vulgate, = MT 80.14).³³ Jerome himself rejects the “Jewish” identification of the fourth beast with the boar, claiming instead that Daniel refrained from likening the fourth to a specific animal in order to indicate that the Roman Empire would destroy or subjugate all other nations and thereby come to possess the whole gamut of the most ferocious qualities of the animal world.³⁴ Nonetheless, his comment provides further confirmation that the panels depicting the four beasts of Daniel 7 in the Huqoq synagogue participated in the widening diffusion among both Jews and Christians of the image of the fourth beast as a specifically Roman boar.³⁵

The historical value of the panel at Huqoq depicting the fourth beast cannot be overstated, as it preserves the earliest visual expression of this image in either Jewish or Christian contexts. More importantly, its presence on the floor of a synagogue in a rural village suggests that, by the late fourth and early fifth centuries, this interpretation of Daniel’s apocalyptic vision was familiar to Galilean Jewish communities well beyond rabbinic circles.

The presence of the four beasts of Daniel 7 in the north aisle mosaic raises general—and, indeed, far-reaching—questions regarding the religious ethos of the synagogue community at Huqoq. From an early date in the excavations at Huqoq, it has been argued that the pair of panels depicting the exploits of the biblical figure Samson that was uncovered in the east aisle in 2012–2013, only a few years after a different Samson scene was found in the synagogue in the nearby village of Khirbet Wadi Hammam, gives expression to the “messianic expectations,” “apocalyptic worldview,” and “eschatological hopes” of

33. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Daniele* 2.7a, in *Hieronymus: Commentariorum in Daniele libri III*, ed. F. Glorie, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCL) 75a (Turnhout: Brepols, 1964), 842–43: “Hebraei quod hic tacitum est in Psalmis dictum putant: *Vastavit eam aper de silva, et singularis ferus depastus est eam.*” Translation from *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 76.

34. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Daniele* 2.7a (CCL 75a:842): “Romanum regnum nulli bestiae compararit, nisi forte, ut formidolosam faceret bestiam, vocabulum tacuit ut, quidquid ferocious cogitaverimus in bestiis, hoc Romanos intellegamus.” For analysis of this passage and for further patristic sources that attest this identification, see Jamie Kreiner, *Legions of Pigs in the Early Medieval West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 163–66; cf. Har-Peled, “Dialogical Beast,” 199–202.

35. On the strong affinities between Jewish and Christian conceptions of the “Roman boar” in the fourth to sixth centuries, see Kreiner, *Legions of Pigs*, 160–68.

the Jewish communities of Lower Eastern Galilee during the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁶ This line of thought builds on a venerable tradition of scholarship that identifies acute messianic or eschatological expectations in the visual programs of synagogues from Late Antiquity, ranging from the third-century frescoes in the Dura Europos synagogue to the fourth- to sixth-century mosaics of synagogues in the Galilee.³⁷ This interpretation of Samson as a redeemer figure who “encouraged hope in the community’s imminent eschatological deliverance” might be bolstered by subsequent discoveries in the Huqoq synagogue’s north aisle of panels depicting scenes from the book of Daniel as well as an end-of-days scene from the book of Isaiah.³⁸

We have reservations, however, regarding a messianic interpretation of the Huqoq mosaic program. In the first instance, we largely concur with the criticisms that have been leveled against programmatic readings of synagogue art, which too often flatten the complexity, intertextuality, and multivocality of a building’s visual ensemble—that is, its “copious chaos”—into a simple, clear, and unified message.³⁹ One might rightly argue that interpreting specific panels as messianic does not necessarily require imposing a similar programmatic reading on the mosaic pavement as a whole. We agree that the rhetoric of messianism and eschatology represents an important facet of Jewish visual culture in Late Antiquity. But it is one thing to argue that certain motifs, figures, or narratives could be invested with messianic

36. See Matthew J. Grey, “‘The Redeemer to Arise from the House of Dan’: Samson, Apocalypticism, and Messianic Hopes in Late Antique Galilee,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 44 (2013): 553–89; also Matthew J. Grey and Jodi Magness, “Finding Samson in Byzantine Galilee: The 2011–2012 Archaeological Excavations at Huqoq,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013): 1–30. The phrases in quotation marks are used throughout these studies.

37. On Dura, see, for example, Rachel Wischnitzer *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). On Sepphoris, see Zeev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message through Its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005), esp. 55–197, 225–62; Ze’ev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, *Promise and Redemption: A Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1996).

38. The quotation is from Grey, “‘Redeemer to Arise from the House of Dan,’” 588. For discussion of the scenes from Daniel 3 and Isaiah 11, see below.

39. For the phrase “copious chaos” and insightful criticism of much scholarship on the Dura synagogue, see Annabel J. Wharton, “Good and Bad Images from the Synagogue of Dura Europos: Contexts, Subtexts, Intertexts,” *Art History* 17 (1994): 1–25, esp. 15; Wharton, *Refiguring the Post-Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem and Ravenna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 43. For a critique of programmatic readings of the synagogue mosaics that seek to determine their “clear and simple message” and some suggestions for alternative modes of interpretation, see Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 248–59.

significance and another to claim that they give expression to an acute and active form of messianic expectation or even provide evidence for a distinctive form of apocalyptic-eschatological Judaism within Galilean society.⁴⁰ It is this latter version of the messianic interpretation of the Huqoq mosaics that we find most difficult to accept, for we must always bear in mind that rich and elaborate forms of messianic discourse could be perfectly at home within “quietist” political and religious ideologies.⁴¹

In fact, we maintain that the choice of scenes and themes in the Huqoq mosaics, including the Daniel panels, should be viewed within the context of the increasingly durable imperial structures of the so-called Theodosian age (approximately 375–450 CE) and its emergent ideology of Christian rulership. This period saw the rapid crystallization of the ideological desire *and* institutional capacity of both church and state to classify, manage, and, in some cases, subject to targeted acts of violence various dissident religious groups with whom they might feel themselves to be in conflict, including Jews.⁴² While the Jewish communities of the Galilee, whether rabbinized or not, were increasingly marginalized from Roman public life in this period, they do not seem to have embraced active messianic movements or leaders for which there is virtually no evidence. Jewish culture and society in the Theodosian age should not be viewed through the lens of the heated eschatological climate of the late sixth and seventh centuries.⁴³

40. Considerable care must be taken with the terminology that is used to characterize these expressive forms, ideas, or social movements. We reserve the term *apocalyptic* for sources that either engage with literature in the apocalyptic genre or for motifs or figures linked to the revelation of hidden or secret knowledge. The term *eschatological* should be used when referring to the end of times or end-times scenarios. The term *messianic* is perhaps the broadest of these three, as it can refer to any text, idea, motif, person, etc. that is associated with the actions or qualities of a messianic redeemer.

41. See Vered Noam, “Will This One Never Be Brought Down?: Reflections of Jewish Hopes for the Downfall of the Roman Empire in Biblical Exegesis,” in *The Future of Rome: Roman, Greek, Jewish, and Christian Visions*, ed. Jonathan J. Price and Katell Berthelot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 169–88, who stresses that, despite deep continuities in Jewish messianic themes and ideas from Second Temple sources to rabbinic literature, the significance of these elements is shaped by their broader discursive contexts.

42. See especially Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II, 408–450* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 116–29; Christopher Kelly, “Introduction: Rethinking Theodosius,” in *Theodosius II: Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. Christopher Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3–64, as well as the essays by Jill Harries and Richard Flower in this volume.

43. For the heightening of the anti-Roman rhetoric in Jewish sources from the late sixth and seventh centuries, see Ra’anan Boustán, “Immolating Emperors: Spectacles of Imperial Suffering and the Making of a Jewish Minority Culture in Late Antiquity,” *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 207–38. On the departure of the new Jewish apocalyptic writings of the late sixth and seventh

Instead, we argue that several of the Huqoq mosaics articulate a subversive counter-history that sought to integrate gentile dominion—under Egyptian, Philistine, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman rule—within a sacred history of Israelite political and military power.⁴⁴ The Daniel 7 panels depicting the sequence of four empires may even have provided viewers with a rhetorical framework within which to place the litany of foreign nations depicted in defeat in several of the other panels at Huqoq.⁴⁵ Together, these panels may have expressed the very real anxieties that were felt by Jewish communities in late fourth- and fifth-century Galilee. But their narratives of divinely guided resistance to foreign domination also celebrated ideals of heroism and martial valor that both reflected and promoted the crystallization—and even hardening—of Jewish communal identity that occurred precisely in this period at least in part in response to the intensifying Christianization of the “Holy Land.”⁴⁶ The Huqoq mosaics thus appear to commemorate the heroic deeds of military figures from both the biblical and the historical past whom the rabbis of third- to fifth-century Palestine were at best ambivalent about and often overtly critical of.⁴⁷ The apparent

centuries from earlier Jewish and rabbinic traditions, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: A History of the Book of Zerubbabel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Alexei Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

44. The gentile nations we name correspond to the following panels: the Egyptian army drowning in the Red Sea; Samson carrying the gate of Gaza and Samson and the foxes; the three youths of Daniel 3; the Elephant Mosaic; and the four beasts of Daniel 7.

45. On the addition of Egypt (as a fifth kingdom) to the four-kingdom paradigm of Daniel 7 in rabbinic literature and *piyyut*, see Novick, *Piyyut and Midrash*, 160–65. It is also worth suggesting that the Daniel panels in the north aisle, including the scenes from both Daniel 3 and Daniel 7, may be in direct dialogue with the specific scene depicted in the Elephant Mosaic. In this case, the symbolic resonances of the Danielic scenes may have strengthened the association of the scene in the Elephant Mosaic with the visit of Alexander the Great to Jerusalem, as suggested by Jodi Magness, or with an episode from the Hasmonean wars of liberation or conquest, which we find more plausible. The possible connections between these panels deserves fuller consideration elsewhere.

46. On the “ideology of community” that underwrote the institutional structures of the largely autonomous synagogue communities that emerged in the late fourth and early fifth centuries as reactions to Christianization, see Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 275–89.

47. The ambivalent or negative attitudes in rabbinic literature toward military-political leaders encompasses both biblical figures such as Samson and historical figures such as the Hasmonean rulers or Simon bar Kokhba. See Vered Noam, *Shifting Images of the Hasmonians: Second Temple Legends and Their Reception in Josephus and Rabbinic Literature*, trans. Dena Ordan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. 199–210, 219–21; Katell Berthelot, *In Search of the Promised Land? The Hasmonean Dynasty between Biblical Models and Hellenistic Diplomacy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 395–426; Richard G. Marks, “Dangerous Hero: Rabbinic Attitudes toward Legendary Warriors,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983): 181–94.

celebration of violent resistance to gentile power in these mosaics offers scholars a valuable new lens through which to conceptualize the relationship between synagogue communities in villages like Huqoq and Wadi Hammam and the various forms of Jewish religious expression found in textual sources from Late Antiquity, from rabbinic literature to synagogue liturgy and scriptural recitation to apocalyptic and mystical writings in Hebrew.⁴⁸

Fragmentary Panels

The two mosaic panels located to the west of the Isaiah scene in the top row and the two in the bottom row (a total of four panels) are extremely damaged (Figure 1). Based on the preserved patches of mosaic, it appears that animals and floral/vegetal objects were depicted in these panels.

Male Youth with Leashed Animal

A panel located in the center of the top row depicts a male youth leading a wild animal, perhaps a wolf, on a leash (Figure 8). A Hebrew inscription placed between the youth and the wild animal confirms the scene as a depiction of Isaiah's prophetic vision in Isaiah 11. The inscription reads וְנָעַר קִטּוֹן בְּרֶגְלֵי בָּם, citing (in *plene* spelling) the last clause of Isaiah 11.6: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a young child shall lead them (וְנָעַר קִטּוֹן בְּרֶגְלֵי בָּם)" (NRSV, slightly modified).

The youth is dressed in a white knee-length tunic with long sleeves. The tunic is gathered at the waist by a light red belt. The tunic is embellished with red circular *orbiculi* near the hem, red oval *segmentae* on the shoulders, and red decorative bands on the sleeves near the wrist. On his feet, he wears short black ankle boots. One foot is oriented toward the right, the other to the left. His head is in three-quarter view as he turns to look at the leashed animal on his left. He holds the leash, which overlaps his torso, in his left hand. Although his right arm is poorly preserved, it is possible to determine that it was raised in the air. A scrap of a black and red object appears above the youth's head; although it is impossible to identify this feature on its

48. On the numerous strands of Jewish cultural expression—both textual and visual—that persisted throughout Late Antiquity and their complex modes of interaction, see Ra'anan Boustan, "Afterword: Rabbinization and the Persistence of Diversity in Jewish Culture in Late Antiquity," in *Diversity and Rabbinization: Jewish Texts and Societies between 400 and 1000 CE*, ed. Gavin McDowell, Ron Naiweld, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (Cambridge: OpenEdition Books, 2020), 286–99.

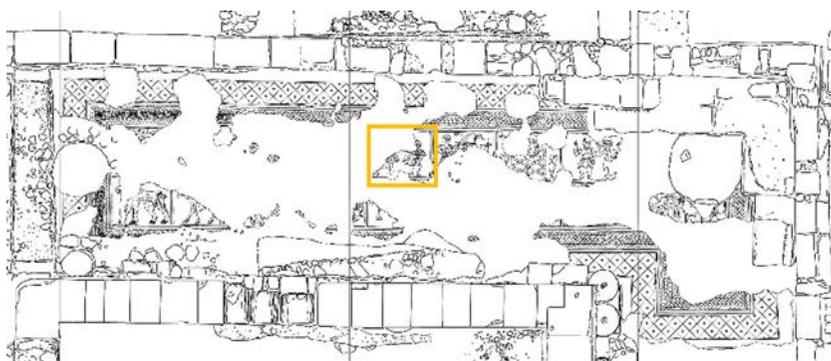


FIGURE 8. *Top*, Huqoq synagogue plan, male youth leading leashed animal (indicated), north aisle. *Bottom*, male youth leading leashed animal, Huqoq synagogue, north aisle. Plan prepared by Slava Pirskey, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

own, the bifurcation of the leash, which splits off to the north, suggests that there was another leashed animal above the one located to the youth's immediate right.

Visions of harmony between discordant pairs of ordinarily antagonistic animals (predator and prey, carnivore and herbivore, wild and domesticated) from Isaiah 11.6–8 and 65.25 were given visual expression in numerous late antique floor mosaics in scenes commonly referred to as the Peaceable Kingdom.⁴⁹ These scenes invariably focus on the peaceful coexistence of the animals or the transformation of carnivores into

49. For a basic overview of this theme with bibliography, see Sheila Campbell, "The Peaceable Kingdom: A Liturgical Interpretation," in *Fifth International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics: Held at Bath, England, on September 5–12, 1987*, part 2, ed. Roger Ling (Ann Arbor: Journal of Roman

herbivores. It is striking that, aside from the newly discovered example found at Huqoq, none of the other Isaiah scenes depicts the child who will guide the pairs of animals mentioned in the verse (Isa 11.6) or, for that matter, the infants who cavort near the dens of poisonous snakes (Isa 11.8). The unparalleled pictorial content of the panel in the north aisle at Huqoq works in concert with the scriptural legend to emphasize the centrality of the youth to the action of the scene. Rather than pairs of antithetical animals arrayed symmetrically around an object, often a plant or a vessel, the animals in the Huqoq panel appear to be positioned one behind the other and both in direct relation to the child, who serves as the focal point of the composition. The depiction of a child in this panel is also noteworthy when considered alongside the scenes of the three youths from Daniel 3 (see below) at the east end of the north aisle. These are the only images of children and adolescents uncovered to date in the Huqoq mosaics and might suggest that their inclusion in panels located in this area of the synagogue was intentional.⁵⁰

A majority of pavements depicting scenes of the Peaceable Kingdom are in churches in Arabia and Cilicia, but there is also one associated with the synagogue at Meroth in Upper Galilee—the only other Isaianic scene uncovered thus far in a synagogue complex (Figure 9). As its iconography is very different from the Huqoq mosaic, it offers a good entry to the discussion of this group of mosaics. In the *beth midrash* adjacent to the synagogue at Meroth, the partially preserved mosaic, dated to the seventh century, has an intact Hebrew inscription at the top of panel that identifies the scene.⁵¹ The inscription (זאיב וטלה ירעו כאחד) is an excerpt from Isaiah 65.25: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.” While most of the animals’ bodies are missing, enough is preserved to see that a wolf (left-hand side) and a lamb (right-hand side) once gazed at each other over the vessel placed between them.

Archaeology, 1994), 125–34. See also Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 211–14; Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues, and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 88–90.

50. Hagith Sivan, *Jewish Childhood in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), xxiii–xxvii, 211–63, proposes multiple functions for the depiction of children in synagogue frescoes and mosaics. Generally, according to Sivan, “Placed in public, specifically in sanctuaries, these pictures aspire to connect biblical myths with contemporary beholders and biblical childhood with children viewers” (xxiii).

51. Talgam, *Mosaics of Faith*, 325. See also Rina Talgam, “Remarks on the Mosaics of the Synagogue and Beth Midrash” (Hebrew), in *Meroth: The Ancient Jewish Village*, ed. Zvi Ilan and Emanuel Damati (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, 1987), 149–53.



FIGURE 9. Peaceable Kingdom mosaic, Meroth synagogue, Galilee, Israel, *beth midrash* (study hall). Photo by Zev Radovan, Bible Land Pictures.

This compositional arrangement—confronted animals peacefully facing each other around an object—is repeated in a number of church pavements in Arabia (Figure 10). In a room on the north side of the Acropolis Church at Maʿin (modern Jordan) (dated to 719/720 CE), a lion and zebu depicted facing each other around a tree are accompanied by a Greek inscription at the top of the panel: “And the lion will eat [straw] like the ox” (Isa 65.25 or 11.7).⁵² At nearby Madaba, a mosaic dubbed *The Mosaic of the Paradise* depicts a lion and zebu facing each other as both eat from a bush.⁵³ There are three other pairs of facing animals in this panel; however, the animals in these pairs are identical to each other: two rams, two hares, and two geese. In the absence of an inscription, the Peaceable Kingdom is just one of a number of interpretive possibilities for this mosaic.⁵⁴

52. Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 200–201, identifies the inscription as Isaiah 65.25; however, the same phrase appears in Isaiah 11.7. The bodies of the animals were partially erased during an iconoclastic intervention in the building.

53. Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 128. The undated mosaic, located in the Madaba Archaeological Museum, is in situ; however, it is now isolated from its original context.

54. For peaceable kingdom interpretation, see Blake Leyerle, “Monks and Other Animals,” in *The Cultural Turn in Late Antique Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, ed. Dale Martin and Patricia Cox Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 150–74, esp. 159.



FIGURE 10. Peaceable Kingdom mosaic, Acropolis Church, Ma'in, Jordan. Photo by Gabriel Rodriguez, © Trustees of Columbia University, Media Center for Art History, Department of Art & Archaeology.

The depiction of Peaceable Kingdom scenes in the mosaics of three churches in Cilicia attests to the popularity of this theme in that region.⁵⁵ At the east end of the nave in the Necropolis Church at Anemerium, the bema mosaic (mid-fifth century) depicts a leopard and kid facing each other around a tree.⁵⁶ In the partially preserved Greek inscription at the top of the panel, Isaiah 11.6 has been reorganized to read: “[and the] little child will lead

55. See Campbell, “Peaceful Kingdom,” 125–34, which connects the pavements with church liturgy, specifically baptism. Compare Michael Gough, “The Peaceful Kingdom: An Early Christian Mosaic Pavement in Cilicia Campestris,” in *Mansel'e Armağan = Mélanges Mansel*, ed. B. Akurgal and U. Ahadır Alkım, vol. 1 (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Publications, 1974), 411–19, esp. 419, which suggests that the theme of peace would have been particularly resonant in the area during the Christological debates of the late fifth century.

56. Sheila Campbell, *Mosaics of Anemerium* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 46–47. Campbell suggests that a second pair of animals was originally depicted in the missing northern half of the mosaic (47).

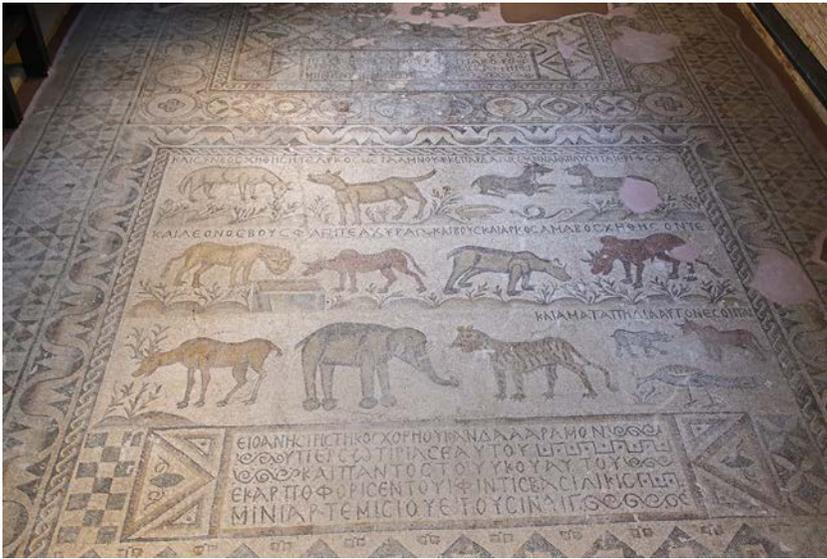


FIGURE 11. Peaceable Kingdom mosaic, Church at Karlik, Cilicia, Turkey. Photo courtesy of Dick Osseman, www.pbbase.com/dosseman.

them, and the leopard will lie down with [the kid].”⁵⁷ A similar reworking of the inscription occurs in the church at Karlik, which has the most complete version of all the known Peaceable Kingdom scenes (Figure 11).⁵⁸ The mosaic (late fifth or early sixth century) is divided into three registers with an inscription of Isaiah 11.6–8 running along the top of each register. Below the inscription are pairs of animals corresponding to the text of the inscription above. The wolf and lamb and the leopard and kid appear in the top register. The lion and ox and the cow and bear are shown in the middle register. A pair of animals that is not mentioned in the biblical verse, the stag and elephant, is depicted in the bottom register. It is noteworthy that, unlike the other pairs of animals in the mosaic, the stag and the elephant are not predator and prey. In this panel, the inscription transposes the cow and bear (Isa 11.7) clause with the little child (Isa 11.6). In the Cathedral of Korykos, a partially preserved mosaic (fifth century) at the east end of the nave depicts

57. James Russell, *The Mosaic Inscriptions of Anemurium* (Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), 70–74; Campbell, *Mosaics of Anemurium*, 48–49.

58. Gough, “Peaceful Kingdom,” 416–19.

a lioness, a leopard, and a ram.⁵⁹ The fragment of inscription from Isaiah 11.6 (“The leopard will lie down with the kid, and a little child will lead them.”) preserved in the mosaic identifies the subject of the mosaic.

As a group, the Peaceable Kingdom mosaics demonstrate that artistic license was often taken in the compositions of these scenes. While some are abridged, others exceed the contents of the biblical verses; however, the little child does not appear in any of the scenes. Thus, the Isaiah panel in the Huqoq synagogue is unparalleled in its depiction of the child. Moreover, the child holds a leash and therefore literally leads the wild animals. The presence of the leash suggests that a hierarchical relationship obtains between the child and the animals that is absent from the animal-only scenes.⁶⁰

Two Spies Return with Cluster of Grapes from Wadi Eshcol

A panel in the center of the top row of the north aisle mosaics depicts two male figures carrying a pole on their shoulders (Figure 12). A disproportionately large cluster of grapes is tied to the pole by a rope. At the top of the panel, a Hebrew inscription identifies the scene as a depiction of the episode of the spies returning with a grape cluster from the Valley of Eshcol, which is recounted in Numbers 13.⁶¹ The well-preserved label cites the phrase *בְּשֵׁנִים בְּמִוֶּט בְּשֵׁנִים* (“on a pole between two of them”) from Numbers 13.23. The left-hand spy wears a long-sleeved red tunic gathered at the waist with a red belt. The figure’s legs and feet are not preserved. His head is depicted in three-quarter view, which is consistent with the pair’s movement toward their left (right-hand side of the panel). The right-hand spy is dressed in a blue tunic with long sleeves. He raises his left arm to grasp the end of the pole in his left hand. The rest of the figure is not preserved.

59. Ernst Herzfeld and Samuel Guyer, *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*, vol. 2: *Meriamlik und Korykos* (Manchester: Publications of American Society for Archaeological Research in Asia Minor, 1930), 106–107 and plate 104.5. Michael Gough, “A Temple and a Church at Ayaş (Cilicia),” *Anatolian Studies* 4 (1954): 49–64.

60. On the types of relationships between humans and wild animals, see Patricia Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 119–54, esp. 126.

61. The version of the episode also appears in Deuteronomy 1.19–46 (esp. 1.24–25) and is alluded to in Numbers 32.9. On the dating of the various sources of the narrative, as well as its final redacted forms within the Pentateuch, see Jaeyoung Jeon, “The Scout Narrative (Numbers 13) as a Territorial Claim in the Persian Period,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139 (2020): 255–74. On the cultural work accomplished by the narrative, see Ilana Pardes, “Imagining the Promised Land: The Spies in the Land of the Giants,” *History and Memory* 6 (1994): 5–23.

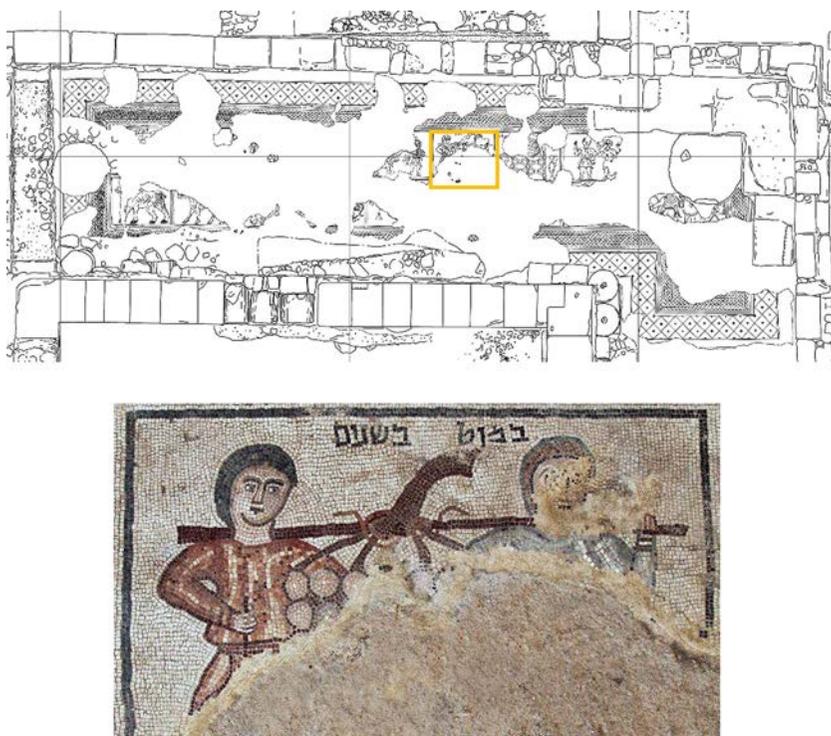


FIGURE 12. *Top*, Huqoq synagogue plan, two spies carrying cluster of grapes (indicated), north aisle. *Bottom*, two spies carrying cluster of grapes, Huqoq synagogue, north aisle. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

While scenes of grape harvests and winemaking abound in late antique art, depictions of the two spies carrying grapes are relatively rare. The iconography of the Two Spies scene broadly corresponds to the extensive corpus of vintage scenes. Most of these scenes are nonnarrative in character and instead embody concepts of abundance and good fortune that made them appealing for use across domestic, civic, and religious contexts.⁶² In certain settings, grapevine and vineyard scenes have acquired significance beyond their generic

62. On grape harvest and winemaking scenes as evocations of prosperity and propitiousness, see Henry Maguire, "The Good Life," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. Glen Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 238–57.

overtones of bounty, thereby underscoring the multivalent nature of this imagery.⁶³ For example, the frequent appearance of grape harvests and wine-making in the late antique relief sculptures of synagogues and mosaic pavements of churches indicate that such scenes served as symbolic expressions of communal flourishing and solidarity.⁶⁴ This social function corresponds to the numerous allusions in Jewish and Christian scriptures to the people of God as vines and vineyards (e.g., Ps 80.8–9; Isa 5.7; John 15.1–5).⁶⁵

Thus, while the oversized proportions of the grapes in the various depictions of the Two Spies scenes in both Jewish and Christian contexts evoke the theme of abundance, these scenes are not generic expressions of prosperity. Rather, they invoke a specific place, the Promised Land, which was laden with historical and spiritual significance for late antique Jews and Christians, who viewed themselves as the successors of the Israelites.⁶⁶ The return of the spies with grapes produced in the Promised Land provided proof of God's

63. The scholarship focuses mainly on funeral contexts. See Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 59–61, fig. 16; also Jaś Elsner, "Perspectives in Art," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, ed. Noel Lenski, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 255–77, esp. 270. On the vintage scenes in the vault mosaics in the Mausoleum of Santa Costanza, Rome, see Liz James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World from Late Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 155–82. For scenes of viticulture on sarcophagi, see Paul Zanker and Björn Ewald, *Living with Myth: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 163–73. For scenes of grape harvest and winemaking on Jewish sarcophagi, see Erwin Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953–68), 2:26–27, 3: fig. 789 (sarcophagus in the Vigna Randanini catacomb); 2:41, 3: fig. 820 (sarcophagus cover in the Torlonia catacomb); also Adia Konikoff, *Sarcophagi from the Jewish Catacombs of Ancient Rome: A Catalogue Raisonné*, rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990), 29–32.

64. The synagogue at Chorazim in Galilee has sculptural reliefs depicting vintage scenes; see Natalie May, "The Décor of the Korazim Synagogue Reliefs" (Hebrew), in *The Synagogue of Korazim: The 1962–64, 1980–87 Excavations*, ed. Ze'ev Yeivin (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000), 100–117 (English summary, *52–*53). The examples of vintage scenes in floor mosaics of churches in Palestine and Arabia are numerous. Selected examples include Church of Al-Khadir, Madaba (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 129–31); Church of S.S. Lot and Procopius, Khirbet el-Mukhayyat (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 153; 164–65); Church of Deacon Thomas, 'Ayun Musa Valley (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 180–81; 187); Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Rasas (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 238–39); Chapel of Elias, Maria, and Soreg, Gerasa (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 296).

65. See Jennifer Metten Pantoja, *The Metaphor of the Divine as Planter of the People: Stinking Grapes or Pleasant Planting?* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

66. On the "internalization" (94) of the desert by Christians and its relationship to the Promised Land, see Claudia Rapp, "Desert, City, and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86 (2006): 93–112, especially 102–3. See also Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 178–79, for connections between baptism, resurrection, and the Promised Land.



FIGURE 13. Companions of St. Ursula sarcophagus, lid, two spies carrying cluster of grapes, Crypt of the Abbey of St. Victor, Marseilles, France. Photo by Shay Tressa DeSimone, www.flickr.com/photos/escrivateur/28764525464/in/album-72157674962018910.

redemptive power; moreover, after the hardships of the Sinai desert wilderness such extraordinary abundance would have evoked the Garden of Eden (stressing here the paradisiacal quality of the Promised Land). Accordingly, these scenes not only illustrate biblical narrative but also symbolize restoration.

The Huqoq mosaic stands apart from other representations of the Two Spies scene as the only example discovered to date decorating a religious building. The other examples—none precisely dated but all late antique—occur on objects intended for individual or private use. These scenes are remarkably consistent in their compositions, even if they differ in the details of pose, clothing, and facial hair.

The Two Spies scene appears on the side of the Companions of St. Ursula Sarcophagus, now in the crypt of the Abbey of St. Victor, Marseilles (Figure 13).⁶⁷ On the sarcophagus, which contains scenes from the Old Testament and New Testament, the Two Spies scene is located next to a depiction of the Miracle at Cana, in which Jesus transformed water into wine. The spies carry on their shoulders a pole from which hangs a huge grape cluster. While the right-hand spy on the sarcophagus is similar in pose to the right-hand spy in the Huqoq panel, the left-hand spy is rendered in profile rather than frontally.

67. Geneviève Drocourt-Dubreuil, *Saint Victor de Marseilles: Art funéraire et prière des morts aux temps paléochrétien (IVe–Ve siècles)* (Marseilles: De Boccard, 1989), 47–57. See also Jaś Elsner, “The Christian Museum in Southern France: Antiquity, Display, and Liturgy from the Counter-Reformation to the Aftermath of Vatican II,” *Oxford Art Journal* 32 (2009): 181–204.



FIGURE 14. Relief fragment from Hebron, two spies carrying cluster of grapes. Louis-Hugues Vincent, “La grappe d’Echkol,” *Revue biblique* 11 (1902): 600–601.

A small fragment of a relief found in Carthage, likely from a sarcophagus, depicts the Two Spies.⁶⁸ While the scene is incompletely preserved, the subject matter is unmistakable due to the presence of the right-hand spy who supports on his shoulder the pole and the enormous grape cluster hanging from it. In this version of the scene, the right-hand spy, rendered in three-quarter view, turns his head to look back at his companion (now missing).

The two spies are the subject of a small relief discovered near Hebron (Figure 14).⁶⁹ The scene conforms to the same basic formula used in the other compositions depicting this episode. There are, however, a few noteworthy details that distinguish it: the pole suspended between the two spies bends slightly under the weight of the massive grape cluster, the spies’ poses indicate the effort required to carry their heavy load, and the right-hand spy appears to be carrying an object (unidentifiable) in his left hand.⁷⁰

The bottom of a gilded glass cup from a Roman catacomb, now in the Oliveriano Archaeological Museum in Pesaro (Italy), depicts the two spies dressed in togas (Figure 15). The spies gaze at each other over the large grape cluster suspended between them from the pole supported on their shoulders.⁷¹ A scene that is nearly identical to the gilded glass cup appears

68. Asher Ovadiah, “The Relief of the Spies from Carthage,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 24 (1974): 210–13.

69. Louis-Hugues Vincent, “La grappe d’Echkol,” *Revue biblique* 11 (1902): 600–1.

70. Vincent, “La grappe,” 600.

71. Antonio Brancati, *Origine e sviluppo del Museo oliveriano di Pesaro* (Venice: Marsilio Editore, 1995), 8; fig. 11.



FIGURE 15. Gilded glass cup bottom, two spies carrying cluster of grapes. Photo courtesy of Oliveriano Archaeological Museum, Pesaro, Italy, www.oliveriana.pu.it/index.php?id=14761&L=558.

in a Coptic textile, known as the Elias Curtain, now in the collection of the Abegg-Stiftung Museum (Riggisberg, Switzerland).⁷² Finally, the scene appears on a number of Roman terracotta oil lamps.⁷³ This body of comparative evidence, while limited in scope and diffuse in provenance, establishes that the Two Spies panel at Huqoq conforms to a considerable degree to the broadly shared iconographic tradition for this biblical scene, especially in its familiar emphasis on the oversized proportions of the grapes.

At the same time, the Two Spies panel at Huqoq departs in significant ways from exegetical or narrative treatment that this episode typically receives in the Jewish textual tradition. This mismatch is intriguing because several of the other biblical scenes at Huqoq have striking affinities to the treatment of these narratives within the midrashic compilations of Late Antiquity. Particularly noteworthy are the panels at Huqoq that depict the fourth creature of Daniel 7 as a wild boar (discussed above), Samson as a giant, and Jonah the

72. Sabine Schrenk, "Der Elias Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung," in *Begegnung von Heidentum und Christentum im Spätantiken Ägypten*, Riggisberger Berichte 1 (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 1993), 167–81.

73. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 1, pt. 3 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1914), cols. 169–71; Oskar Wulff, *Altchristliche und mittelalterliche byzantinische und italienische Bildwerke*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1909–11), 249, no. 1252; plate 61. We would like to thank Jocelyn Burney for calling the Wulff book to our attention.

Prophet as being swallowed by a series of three fish.⁷⁴ This pattern of correspondence between visual and textual tradition does not, however, hold for the Two Spies panel. To be sure, some early Jewish sources—from Philo of Alexandria in the first century CE to the rabbis of Late Antiquity—regularly emphasize the gigantic size and immense weight of the grape cluster from the Valley of Eshcol, but these sources multiply the number of spies involved in carrying the grapes and the number of poles used to transport the cluster.⁷⁵

For example, the late antique or early medieval midrashic collection known as *Pesiqta Rabbati* contains a teaching that modifies the language of the biblical account in Numbers 13 before commenting on the verse:

Eshcol, and there they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes—it had to be borne on a carrying frame which was made up of two ordinary frames [to give it sufficient length] and two more frames [under these to give them sufficient strength] (Num 13:23). Sixteen men, it is said, were needed to carry this branch with its single cluster of grapes; they carried it in the special way workers do, that is, the sixteen men were grouped in four gangs.⁷⁶

For the authors of this midrashic tradition, it was important to stress that the size and weight of the cluster necessitated a more elaborate mechanism than a single carrying pole. The number 16 in this source is rather more hyperbolic than the numbers given in the other rabbinic traditions, which generally limit the number of carriers to no more than 12 in keeping with the number of the spies. Like the passage in *Pesiqta Rabbati*, these rabbinic sources underscore

74. For correspondences between midrashic sources and the Samson and Jonah panels at Huqoq, see Magness et al., “Huqoq Excavation Project,” 111–15; on Samson as a giant in visual and textual sources, see also Uzi Leibner and Shulamit Miller, “Appendix: A Figural Mosaic in the Synagogue at Khirbet Wadi Hamam,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 23 (2010): 252–56.

75. See, for example, Philo, *De vita Mosis* 1.220–231; *ṯSotah* 8.6; *ḡSotah* 7.5 (21d); *Tanḡuma Shelaḥ* 8–9; *Tanḡuma Buber Shelaḥ* 15–16; *Pesiqta Rabbati* 27, §1; *Numbers Rabbah* 16.14; *bSotah* 34a. Compare also Philo, *De mutatione* 224–227, *De somniis* 2.169–171; Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 3.302–305. On the treatment of the episode of the spies in Philo, see Louis H. Feldman, “Philo’s Version of the Biblical Episode of the Spies,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 73 (2002): 29–48. To our knowledge, there is no recent scholarly study dedicated specifically to the theme of the grape cluster from Eshcol in ancient Jewish visual and literary culture in general or in rabbinic literature in particular.

76. *Pesiqta Rabbati* 27, §1. We have slightly modified the translation in William G. Braude, trans., *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 540, which translates the *editio princeps*. For the Hebrew text, see Rivka Ulmer, ed., *Pesiqta Rabbati: A Synoptic Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati Based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps*, vol. 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997–2002), 662–63, which numbers this passage §2.



FIGURE 16. Jewish woodcut map, pairs of spies carrying grape clusters, Mantua, Italy. Image courtesy of Zentralbibliothek Zürich.

that two or more poles were used to transport the cluster, often also envisioning at least two men holding each end of the poles.⁷⁷

We would suggest that the basic symbolic meaning of the scene of the spies carrying the grape cluster differed fundamentally between late antique visual culture and rabbinic literature. Whereas the visual image seems to have evoked the abundance of the Promised Land, rabbinic sources connect the episode to the themes of slander and betrayal, which are central to the biblical account. Within the rabbinic tradition, the enormous size of the cluster not

77. See especially *ySotah* 7,5 (21d); *Tanḥuma* Shelah 8–9; *Tanḥuma Buber* Shelah 15–16; *Numbers Rabbah* 16.14; *bSotah* 34a. The famous medieval French exegete Rashi (1040–1105 CE) synthesizes this broad strain of interpretative tradition in his biblical commentary in a gloss on Numbers 13.23: “*It had to be borne on a carrying frame by two of them.* If it has be carried on a frame, don’t I already know that it needs to be carried by two people? What the verse is saying is, ‘it had be borne on a carrying frame—on two frames!’ It took ten of them to bring back this fruit—two on each pole of each frame, making eight; one carried a pomegranate; and one carried a fig. Joshua and Caleb carried nothing, since the others’ whole point was to show that the fruit was so bizarrely huge that the inhabitants must be huge also” (translation from Michael Carasik, ed. and trans., *Numbers: The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2011], 94–95).

only led those who labored under its weight to lose heart but also provided tangible proof to the Israelites of the alarming stature of the giants who inhabited the land of Canaan. The earliest extant image that reflects this distinctive rabbinic tradition of the cluster carried on multiple poles, each held by a pair of spies, appears in a Jewish woodcut map produced in Mantua circa 1560, which depicts the Exodus and the wanderings of the Israelites to the Promised Land (Figure 16).⁷⁸ The Two Spies panel at Huqoq could not be further from this midrashic tradition in its presentation of the episode.

Showbread Table

A partially preserved panel located in the top row in the eastern half of the aisle depicts the showbread table, identified by an inscription, alongside other implements of the sacrificial cult of Yahweh (Figure 17). At the center of the panel stands the table flanked on the left-hand side by an oval object, which would have originally been part of a pair of cymbals. Near the bottom right-hand side of the cymbal is a tiny segment of rope or chain connecting it to the second (nonextant) cymbal. On the right-hand side of the table is a slender pitcher, which, like the table and cymbal, might also have carried cultic associations, evoking the vessels containing oil or wine that were used in the Jerusalem temple.⁷⁹

While the showbread table and other cultic items are mainstays of mosaic floors in late antique Jewish and Samaritan synagogues, their iconographic context at Huqoq is distinctive. In other synagogues, most notably the Jewish synagogue at Sepphoris and the Samaritan synagogue at el-Khirbe, the showbread table appears within an elaborate depiction of cultic elements, especially the architectural façade of the Temple as well as other cultic utensils, altars, various animals, grain, oil, and wine offerings, and even priestly personnel. At Huqoq, the Showbread Table panel is the only cultic or sacrificial scene preserved from the wider program of the north aisle, which is occupied

78. The map is held in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich, U 3, 2. On the map and its sources, see Pnina Arad, "Cultural Landscape in Christian and Jewish Maps of the Holy Land," in *Maps and Travel in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period: Knowledge, Imagination, and Visual Culture*, ed. Ingrid Baumgärtner, Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, and Katrin Kogman-Appel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 74–88, esp. 80–85 and figs. 3 and 4.

79. On amphorae and vases as visual allusions to cultic vessels from the Jerusalem temple, see Orit Peleg-Barkat, "Interpreting the Uninterpreted: Art as a Means of Expressing Identity in Early Roman Judaea," in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, ed. Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 27–48, esp. 39–41.

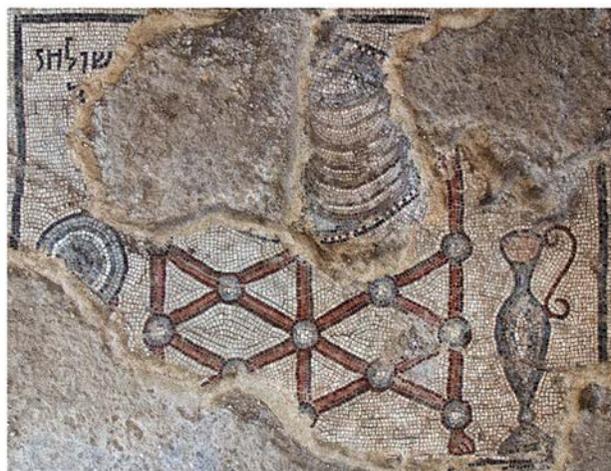
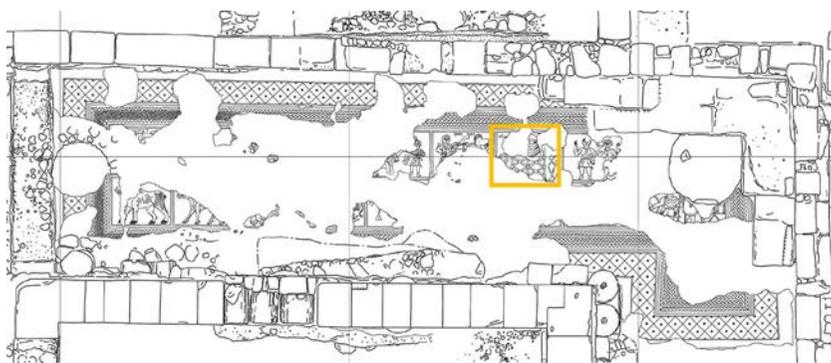


FIGURE 17. *Top*, Huqoq synagogue plan, showbread table (indicated), north aisle. *Bottom*, showbread table panel, Huqoq synagogue, north aisle. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

by a range of biblical episodes that are not otherwise drawn directly from the sphere of the sacrificial cult.

In the upper left-hand corner of the panel, a partially preserved Hebrew inscription reads either שלחן טהור or השלחן הטהור.⁸⁰ The label appears to cite a portion of the phrase על השלחן הטהור (“on the pure table”) from Leviticus 24.6. The phrase “pure table” likely refers to the “pure gold” with

80. The overdot on the *resh* indicates that, while six tesserae of the \aleph are preserved (of a likely nine original tesserae), the letter is badly damaged. The six extant tesserae of the final letter are highly consistent with the letter *resh* but are highly inconsistent with the form of a final *mem* (ם), with which both the words להם and הפנים conclude.

which the table is overlaid (cf. Exod 25.24, 37.11), but it is distinctive to the Holiness Code (Lev 17–26). The label thus reflects the nomenclature for the showbread table employed in this section of Leviticus, rather than other, more common phrases found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.⁸¹

The top of the table is rendered in tilted perspective to provide a clearer view of the items on the tabletop. The left-hand side of the tabletop is not preserved, while the right-hand side holds what appears to be six round loaves of bread. If, as seems quite likely, a second stack of six loaves sat on the left-hand side, the requisite number of twelve loaves would have been placed on the showbread table (e.g., Lev 24.5–6). A blue tablecloth or a covering for the bread appears to be raised to reveal the loaves. According to Numbers 4.7–8, the showbread table was to be covered with a blue tablecloth and the bread on the table along with the vessels were to be covered with a red cloth.

The Huqoq table conforms to the depiction of the showbread table in late antique Jewish art, not with its description in the Hebrew Bible or its representation in late Second Temple period art. At the same time, isolated elements of the Huqoq panel correspond to aspects of descriptions of the table preserved in Jewish textual tradition, both within the Hebrew Bible and in sources from the centuries following the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE.

The design of the showbread table is set out, either prescriptively or descriptively, several times in the Pentateuch.⁸² The discrepancies between the text and the Huqoq table are evident from the detailed prescriptions for the design of the table in Exodus 25.23–28 (NRSV):

You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold around it. You shall make around it a rim of a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim. You shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four

81. Compare, for example, *עַל־הַשֻּׁלְחָן לֶחֶם פְּנִים* at Exodus 25.30 and *עַל שֻׁלְחַן הַפְּנִים* at Numbers 4.7.

82. The most detailed descriptions in the Pentateuch of the showbread and its appurtenances, as prepared for and used in the wilderness tabernacle, appear at Exodus 25.23–30, 37.10–16; Leviticus 24.5–9; and Numbers 4.7–8; see also the descriptions of the showbread table in the Jerusalem Temple at 1 Kings 7.48; and 2 Chronicles 23.11 and 29.18. On the showbread table within the context of biblical descriptions of the sacrificial cult, see the classic study of Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), esp. 156–57, 216–24.

legs. The rings that hold the poles used for carrying the table shall be close to the rim. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these.

The sole correspondence between the Huqoq table and the biblical instructions is its wooden construction. From the description, we know that the table should have rings fastened to its four corners and, therefore, that it would have been square or rectangular in shape, not round like the Huqoq table. Moreover, according to the description in Leviticus 24, the twelve loaves of bread would seem to have been laid out in two rows with six loaves in each row (שְׁתַּיִם מִעֲרֹכֹת יֵשׁ הַמְּעֻרְכֹת) [Lev 24.6] rather than stacked in two piles of six loaves each, as in the Huqoq panel.⁸³

The showbread table was among the most widely recognized and symbolically potent of the cultic vessels from the Jerusalem temple.⁸⁴ The few surviving representations of the showbread table in late Second Temple period art are rectangular in shape.⁸⁵ The earliest example appears on the obverse of a bronze coin, a *prutah*, struck in 40/39 BCE during the reign of the Hasmonean king Mattathias Antigonus (Figure 18).⁸⁶ The image shows

83. The biblical locution, however, is ultimately ambiguous. It is worth noting that in rabbinic sources the loaves of the showbread are generally said to have been arranged on the table in two stacks or piles of six loaves each, as at Huqoq, rather than laid out in rows; see, for example, *mMenahot* 11.5; *tMenahot* 11.14; *bMenahot* 94b, 96a; but cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.142, 255. For brief discussion of the visual and textual sources for the arrangement of the loaves, see Zeev Weiss, “Set the Shewbread on the Table Before Me Always’ (Exodus 25:30): Artistic Representations of the Shewbread Table in Early Jewish and Christian Art,” in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, and the “Other” in Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers*, ed. Douglas Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2007), 381–90, esp. 386–87; Ursula Schubert, “Die rabbinische Vorstellung vom Schaubrottisch und die Bibel von S. Isidoro de Leon, a.d. 960 (Real Colegiata, cod. 2, fol. 50r),” *Artibus et Historiae* 9.17 (1988): 83–88. With the discovery of the Huqoq panel as well as Steven Fine’s forthcoming research on the history of Samaritan depictions of the showbread table, this topic deserves fresh attention.

84. Rachel Hachlili, “Why Did the Menorah and Not the Showbread Table Evolve into the Most Important Symbol of Judaism?,” in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, ed. Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 189–211, esp. 194–95.

85. Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah: Evolving into the Most Important Jewish Symbol* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 6–12. Interestingly, late medieval representations of the showbread table are rectangular in shape as exemplified by folio 12v of a Bible (Ms. Hebr. 71) in the National Library of Lisbon. For discussion and illustration, see Joseph Gutman, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting* (New York: Braziller, 1978), 51, plate 6.

86. See Hachlili, *Menorah*, 6, fig. 1.1. See also Steven Fine, “Jewish Art and Biblical Exegesis in the Greco-Roman World,” in *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art*, ed. Jeffrey Spier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 32; cat. no. 32. For discussion of the coin’s Hebrew and Greek legends, see Ya’akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins: From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba* (New York / Jerusalem: Amphora Books / Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2001), 54–56.



FIGURE 18. Bronze Hasmonean coin with menorah and showbread table. Photo by Zev Radovan, Bible Land Pictures.

two stacks of loaves (six per stack) on a rectangular, four-legged table. A rectangular showbread table is among the cultic implements incised in plaster graffito uncovered in the excavation of a first-century CE mansion in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter.⁸⁷ The showbread table appears to the right of the menorah and below the temple altar in the plaster fragment. In this version, the table is depicted as a rectangular box supported on small legs. The most distinctive attributes of the table are its square raised corners. The Spoils of Jerusalem relief on the Arch of Titus (ca. 81 CE) in Rome contains the best known representation of cultic implements from the second Jerusalem temple.⁸⁸ The rectangular showbread table depicted in the relief stands on legs that terminate in claw feet.⁸⁹ Similarly, the Huqoq table legs end in claw feet. During the Bar Kokhba Revolt of the second century CE, Jewish images struck over Roman coins feature the showbread table placed between the inner columns of the Jerusalem temple's tetrastyle façade.⁹⁰ These coins present a different view of the table by depicting the short side

87. Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Shikmona Publishing and Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 147–49, fig. 154. See also Lihi Habas, “An Incised Depiction of the Temple Menorah and Other Cult Objects of the Second Temple Period,” in Geva, *Jewish Quarter Excavations*, 2:329–42. Hachlili, *Menorah*, 6, fig. 1.2, briefly discusses the graffiti.

88. On the form of the showbread table in the spoils panel of the arch, see Michael Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen* (Mainz: Ph. von Zabern, 1983), 50–53, figs. 34 and 35; also Leon Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: A Re-Investigation* (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Rom, 1991), 71–92.

89. Hachlili, *Menorah*, 8, figs. 1.3, 1.5.

90. Ya'akov Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, vol. 2 (Dix Hills, NY: Amphora Books, 1982), 264, no. 1; 272, no. 53.

of the rectangular structure rather than the long side that appears in the previously discussed examples.⁹¹

Images of the showbread table in late antique art show that iconographical conventions shifted from a rectangular structure with four legs to a round structure with three legs, similar to the example from Huqoq.⁹² The closest parallels to the Huqoq showbread table are the round versions that appear in the synagogue frescoes at Dura Europos and in the floor mosaics at Sepphoris and el-Khirbe. The table identified as the showbread table in the third-century Dura frescoes appears below the menorah in the Encampment of the Israelites / Miraculous Well panel located in the middle register of the synagogue's west wall.⁹³ The small round table is gold in color and is supported on three legs that terminate in claw feet.⁹⁴ The table's top is empty, without any loaves of bread or other cultic implements. Aside from their circular shape, the Huqoq and Dura tables (if the Durene table is, in fact, a showbread table) have little in common.

91. For the identification of the showbread table on the coins, see Dan Barag, "The Table of the Showbread and the Temple on the Bar-Kokhba Coins" (Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 20 (1987): 59–62; Barag, "New Evidence for the Identification of the Showbread Table on the Coins of the Bar Kokhba War," in *Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Numismatics, London, 1986*, ed. Ian Carradice (London: International Association of Professional Numismatists, 1989), 217–22. Fine, "Jewish Art and Biblical Exegesis," 32, shares Barag's view that the object depicted on the coins is the showbread table. Hachlili, *Menorah*, 9, is not persuaded by Barag's identification but does not offer an alternative.

92. There is no scholarly consensus concerning the reason for the change in the shape of the table. Hachlili, *Menorah*, 12, suggests that the late antique examples imitate contemporary furniture. Rina Talgam, "Similarities and Differences between Synagogue and Church Mosaics in Palestine during the Byzantine and Umayyad Periods," in *From Dura Europos to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine and Ze'ev Weiss (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2000), 104, proposes that the change in depictions of the showbread table between the square versions in the Second Temple period and the round versions in Late Antiquity was an effort to distinguish the showbread table from the rectangular altars erected in church sanctuaries. Weiss, "Set the Shewbread on the Table Before Me Always" 386–87, maintains that the shape of the showbread table in the Sepphoris synagogue was not intended to "precisely describe its actual appearance in the Tabernacle or Temple" but rather to symbolize it.

93. For a succinct review of the debates and a more nuanced interpretation of this scene, see Kära Schenk, "Temple, Community, and Sacred Narrative in the Dura-Europos Synagogue," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 34 (2010): 195–229, esp. 212–16.

94. The identification of this object as the showbread table is not unanimous. Carl H. Kraeling, in *The Synagogue: The Excavations at Dura Europos*, Final Report 8, pt. I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 119, identified it as the showbread table. Hachlili, *Menorah*, 12, fig. 1.11, likewise identifies it as the showbread table. Weitzmann, *Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue*, 67, suggests that it is the incense altar.



FIGURE 19. Showbread table, Sepphoris synagogue, Galilee, Israel, nave. Alamy.

The showbread table depicted in the mosaic pavement of the synagogue at Sepphoris bears a closer resemblance to the one at Huqoq (Figure 19).⁹⁵ The Sepphoris table is round, supported on three legs, and covered by a cloth. The fringed tablecloth is adorned with four circles, each embellished with cross-hatching. Like the Huqoq example, the Sepphoris table is rendered in tilted perspective to provide a clear view of the loaves on the tabletop. But unlike the Huqoq loaves, which are arranged in two stacks, the Sepphoris loaves are placed individually in three rows across the tabletop. Two censers appear

95. Weiss, *Sepphoris Synagogue*, 91–101.



FIGURE 20. Showbread table, El-Khirbe Samaritan synagogue, West Bank, Palestinian Authority, nave. Photo courtesy of Steven Fine and Yeshiva University Israelite Samaritans Project.

above the showbread table in the Sepphoris panel. The Sepphoris showbread table is part of a series of mosaic panels located between the zodiac cycle and the bema that are related to the ritual offerings made in the Tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple.⁹⁶ The Huqoq panel incorporates imagery found in some of the other Sepphoris panels, namely the pair of cymbals located below the basket of first fruits in the panel adjacent to the showbread table. Extensive damage to the panels located in the row below the showbread panel at Huqoq makes it impossible to determine if there were once additional scenes connected with the Tabernacle and temple in the north aisle.

The floor mosaic in the Samaritan synagogue at el-Khirbe near Sebaste contains a panel depicting the showbread table amid other cultic imagery associated with the Tabernacle (Figure 20).⁹⁷ Similar to the Huqoq showbread table, el-Khirbe's round three-legged table is constructed of wood. Between the legs of the table, wooden slats cross to form large Xs, a simplified version of the lattice pattern used in the Huqoq showbread table. The inlaid

96. For a review of the various interpretations of these panels in the context of the overall mosaic program, see Talgam, *Mosaics of Faith*, 282–83. Talgam also offers her own interpretation (283–93).

97. Yitzhak Magen, "Samaritan Synagogues," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, ed. Frederic Mann and Eugenio Alliata (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), 193–239, esp. 200. See also Talgam, *Mosaics of Faith*, 333–35; Reinhard Pummer, "Synagogues—Samaritan and Jewish: A New Look at Their Differentiating Characteristics," in *The Samaritans in Historical, Cultural, and Linguistic Perspectives*, ed. Jan Dusek (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 51–74.

gemstones on the legs and rim of the el-Khirbe table give it a lavish appearance. The table holds two loaves of bread and the vessels described in Exodus 25.29–30.⁹⁸ The space between the showbread table and the menorah in the el-Khirbe panel contains an incense shovel and the top part of a jug (the rest of the object is missing) that has been identified as “possibly an oil jug.”⁹⁹ Significantly, the Huqoq showbread panel depicts a jug in precisely the same spot as the el-Khirbe mosaic. This shared iconography may reflect the close pairing in the biblical text of the showbread table with jugs (תִּשְׁקָה, sing. הַשִּׁקָּה) that were used for libations (e.g., Exod 25.29, 37.16; Num 4.7).¹⁰⁰

The showbread table panel at Huqoq has certain affinities with those in the Sepphoris and el-Khirbe synagogues, including their shapes, elements of construction, and the objects placed on the tabletop, while differing in other details. Moreover, the Huqoq showbread table panel includes ritual objects—the cymbals and the oil jug—that appear in the mosaics at Sepphoris and el-Khirbe, suggesting that the visual vocabulary allowed for a high degree of flexibility in the arrangement of these scenes.

The Three Companions of Daniel

Similar to the four panels at the west end of the north aisle, the four panels located at the east end of the aisle appear to form a group that together depicts a unified biblical passage, specifically, another episode from the book of Daniel. The panel located in the top row near the east end of the north aisle contains two standing male figures with raised right arms and hands (Figure 21). To the right-hand side of the middle figure there was originally another (third) standing figure whose raised right arm and hand are preserved. All three figures point directly upward with the index fingers of their right hands.¹⁰¹ The number of youths, their Persian dress, and their gestures suggest that the scene depicts Hanania, Mishael, and Azaria, the three young companions of the Judean seer Daniel, who defy the order from the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar to worship a gigantic golden statue (Dan

98. Talgam, *Mosaics of Faith*, 324.

99. Talgam, *Mosaics of Faith*, 324.

100. On the functions of the “libation jugs” within the sacrificial cult, see Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 156, 216–17.

101. The raised hands of the youths with index fingers pointing upward are similar to the forceful gesture made by the high priest in the Elephant Mosaic located in the east aisle of the Huqoq synagogue. We thank Ivri Bunis for drawing our attention to the use of the same gesture in Islam as a symbol for the Oneness of God.

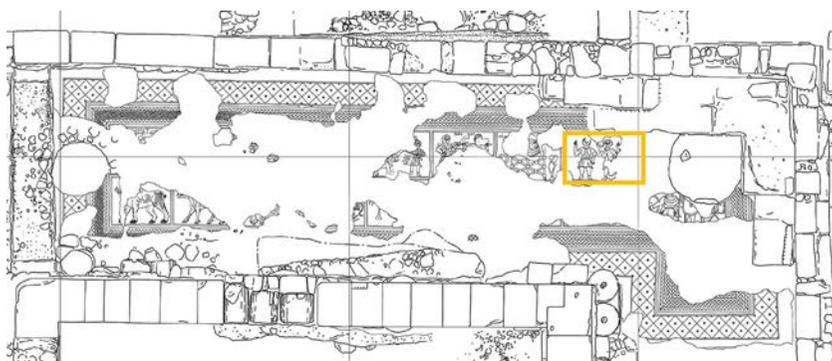


FIGURE 21. *Top*, Huqoq synagogue plan, three youths' refusal to worship (indicated), north aisle. *Bottom*, three youths' refusal to worship, Huqoq synagogue, north aisle. Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

3.1–18) and subsequently survive the fiery furnace to which they are consigned (Dan 3.19–30).¹⁰²

The panel *might* depict the three companions of Daniel inside the fiery furnace, a scene that has many parallels in Jewish inscriptional and textual sources and in early Christian art, including a late fifth- or early sixth-century pavement in the church at Ya'amun in northern Jordan, the only other example of this scene in a floor mosaic (Figure 22).¹⁰³ Nevertheless, we argue

102. On the narrative in Daniel 3, see Collins, *Daniel*, 176–94.

103. Most notably, the names Hanania, Mishael, and Azariah appear at the end of the list of human and Israelite ancestors (which is interposed by a list of the zodiac signs and the names of the



FIGURE 22. Three youths in the furnace, Church at Ya'mun, Jordan, north aisle. University of Oxford, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, record by Pawel Nowakowski, *Cult of Saints*, E02662, cls.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02662.

below that the absence of several key features in the Huqoq panel militates against identifying the scene as showing the three youths inside the furnace.

The episode from Daniel 3 depicted most frequently in art is the three companions cast into a furnace for their obstinate refusal to commit what

months in Hebrew) in the fifth- to seventh-century inscription of the 'En-Gedi synagogue (line 8). For the text of the inscription, see Joseph Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1978), 105–9. For recent discussions, see Jodi Magness, “The En-Gedi Synagogue Inscription Reconsidered,” *Eretz Israel* 31 (2015): 123*–31*; Steven H. Werlin, *Ancient Synagogues of Southern Palestine, 300–800 C. E.: Living on the Edge* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 114–27. On the mosaic from the church at Ya'mun, see Nizar Turshan and Mohammad Nassar, “A Mosaic of the Book of Daniel in the Ya'mun Church,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 51 (2011): 340–49; Nizar Turshan and Melinda Loyd, “Ya'mun Church from the Sixth Century A.D. to the Twelfth Century A.D.,” in *Ya'mun: An Archaeological Site in Northern Jordan*, ed. Mahmoud El-Najjar (Irbid: Yarmouk University, 2011), 152–59; 175–76. For the scene in Christian visual culture more broadly, see Carlo Carletti, *I tre giovani ebrei di Babilonia nell'arte cristiana antica* (Brescia: Paideia, 1975); Kathleen Irwin, “The Liturgical and Theological Correlations in the Associations of Representations of the Three Hebrews and the Magi in the Christian Art of Late Antiquity” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1985); Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 79–84.

they viewed as an act of idolatry.¹⁰⁴ The earliest examples of the scene, which date from the late third to the beginning of the fourth century, feature the companions in a variety of poses engulfed by flames.¹⁰⁵ Initially, the scene in the furnace served as a synecdochal visual formulation that invoked the entire narrative of Daniel 3. In keeping with the burgeoning narrative trend in fourth-century art, depictions of Daniel's companions begin to incorporate additional details such as a rectangular brick furnace and servants who tend to the fire.¹⁰⁶ In some cases, the interest in narrative also led to an expansion

104. For examples in a variety of media, see Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, cat. 5A–B, 175–76 (catacomb painting); cat. 13, 184–85 (glass); cat. 42, 210 (sarcophagus); cat. 77, 262–63 (silver reliquary).

105. Examples include Cubiculum 7, Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, late third or early fourth century; a terracotta lamp produced in North Africa, third century; and a fragment of a sarcophagus lid from the Camposanto Teutonico, Rome, late third century. On the catacomb painting and lamp, see Colum Hourihane, “De Camino Ignis: The Iconography of the Three Children in the Fiery Furnace of Ninth-Century Ireland,” in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 63; figs. 1 and 2. On the sarcophagus fragment, see Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, Giuseppe Bovini, Hugo Brandenburg, et al., *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1967), 1:894. In the case of the terracotta lamp, the three young men are accompanied by an angel. On the presence of the angel or man in scenes of the companions in the fiery furnace, Kathleen Corrigan, “The Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace: An Early Byzantine Icon at Mt. Sinai,” in *ANAΘHMATA EOPTIKA: Studies in Honor of Thomas F. Mathews*, ed. Joseph D. Alchermes et al. (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2009), 93–103.

106. Hourihane, “De Camino Ignis,” 63–64. There are many examples in a wide range of media. Selected examples of painting and mosaic include orant youths in a rectangular furnace flanked by servants who feed the fire in Cubiculum A, Via Latina Catacomb, Rome, ca. 320 (Antonio Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb: A Unique Discovery of Early Christian Art*, trans. Iain Inglis [New Lanark: Geddes and Grosset, 1991], 151–52, fig. 144); orant youths with an angel or man in a rectangular furnace with a servant stoking the fire in the Exodus Chapel in the Necropolis of el-Bagawāt, Egypt, mid-fourth century (Ahmed Fakhry, *The Necropolis of el-Bagawāt in Kharga Oasis* [Cairo: Government Press, 1951], 58–59, fig. 42 and plate 17); and three orant youths with a fourth figure in a rectangular furnace in the middle register of the dome mosaic, Mausoleum and Villa of Centelles, Tarragona, mid-fourth century (Gillian Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Functions, and Patronage* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003], 154–56). Selected examples of relief sculpture: sarcophagus lid with three orant youths and a bearded man in a rectangular brick furnace, Rome, early fourth century, Capitoline Museum (Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, cat. 42); sarcophagus lid with three orant youths in a rectangular furnace with a fourth figure to the right-hand side of the furnace alongside a crouching servant stoking the fire, Rome, early fourth century, Vatican Museo Pio Cristiano (Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 80–81, fig. 24). Selected examples of metalwork: three youths in non-orant poses flank a fourth figure without the presence of flames or furnace, San Nazaro silver reliquary, Milan, fourth century, Milan Diocesan Museum (Ruth Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004], 104–5); three orant youths in a rectangular furnace that is being tended by a servant, Capsella di Brivio, silver ovoid casket found in northern Italy, fifth century, Louvre Museum (Galit Noga-Banai, *Trophies of the Martyrs: An Art Historical Study of Early Christian Silver Reliquaries* [Oxford: Oxford

of the repertoire of imagery associated with the Danielic story to include depictions of the youths' defiance of Nebuchadnezzar's order to worship his golden statue.¹⁰⁷ It is notable that neither the flames nor the furnace is represented in the Huqoq panel depicting Daniel's companions. Moreover, the distinctive hand gestures made by the youths in the Huqoq panel—one hand pointing down and one up—may also suggest that the figures are gesturing toward the idolatrous image, as they do in examples of this scene carved on several fourth-century Christian sarcophagi. The absence of flames or furnace and the youths' hand gestures suggest that the scene should be identified as the refusal of the three youths to worship the idol.

The relief sculpture on the late fourth-century Sarcophagus of Stilicho typifies the general composition of the refusal-to-worship scenes (Figure 23).¹⁰⁸ The statue is rendered not as the sixty cubit high golden colossus described in Dan 3.1 but as a Roman imperial portrait bust set on a column pedestal. In the sarcophagi, the sculpture and pedestal generally form the axis around which the scene revolves. On one side of the pedestal, Nebuchadnezzar is depicted, either seated or standing, and usually gestures toward the statue to signal his command to worship it.¹⁰⁹ The Babylonian

University Press, 2008], 38–39). Selected examples of glass: three writhing orant youths in a rectangular brick furnace, silver and gold gilt glass plate from the Ursulagartenstrasse, Cologne, third to mid-fourth century, British Museum (www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_S-317; for discussion and comparison with the contemporary Podgoritza cup, which also features the companions of Daniel, see Paul Corby Finney, *Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], 284–86, figs. 7.4, 7.5); a fragmentary glass bowl with gold glass medallions has the orant youths flanked by flames depicted separately in individual medallions, Rome or Germany, second half of the fourth century, British Museum (Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, cat. 13).

107. Dan 3.1 does not specify whether the statue depicted a god or the king. On the imagery, see Carletti, *I tre giovani ebrei*, 64–87; Max Wegner, “Das Nabuchodonosor-Bild: Das Bild im Bild,” in *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, ed. Ernst Dassmann and Karl Suso-Frank, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980), 528–38; Robin M. Jensen, “The Three Hebrew Youths and the Problem of the Emperor's Portrait in Early Christianity,” in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, ed. Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 303–20. See also Hourihane, “De Camino Ignis,” 64–65.

108. The Sarcophagus of Stilicho is now part of the medieval pulpit in the Basilica of St. Ambrose, Milan. On the pulpit, see Anat Tcherikover, “The Pulpit of Sant’Ambrogio at Milan,” *Gesta* 38 (1999): 35–66, esp. 49. For a discussion of the companions' refusal to worship scene on the sarcophagus, see Jensen, “Three Hebrew Youths,” 303–4, fig. 2; also Hugo Brandenburg, “La scultura a Milano nel IV e V secolo,” in *Milano, una capitale da Ambrogio ai Carolingi*, ed. Carlo Bertelli, *Il millennio ambrosiano* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 1987), 80–129, esp. 101–2.

109. While Nebuchadnezzar is depicted standing on the Sarcophagus of Stilicho, he is often shown seated. See, for example, the sarcophagus lid from the San Sebastiano catacombs, Rome, early fourth century (Finney, *Invisible God*, 83); sarcophagus lid from the Vatican cemetery, late fourth



FIGURE 23. *Left*, Sarcophagus of Stilicho, Church of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan, Italy. *Right*, Sarcophagus of Stilicho, lid, detail of three youths' refusal to worship. CC BY 2.0. Photo by Richard Mortel, www.flickr.com/photos/prof_richard/48807566731. Detail photo courtesy of Stuart McCunn, www.flickr.com/photos/archstanton/31708383710.

king is often accompanied by soldiers wearing Roman military dress and holding shields, as depicted on the Sarcophagus of Stilicho. On the other side of the pedestal, the three youths make emphatic gestures that communicate their refusal to follow the king's order. While the refusal-to-worship scenes adhere to the same basic compositional formula, they differ in their details. Most notably, the presence and number of soldiers as well as the gestures and poses of the youths vary considerably from work to work, as demonstrated by a comparison of the Sarcophagus of Stilicho with the sarcophagi of Adelfia (Figure 24), the Chaste Suzanne, and Flavius Julius Catervius and Septimia Severina.¹¹⁰

Based on these parallels, we suggest that the Huqoq panel depicting the three companions of Daniel comprised half of a refusal-to-worship scene,

century (now lost, known from a seventeenth-century engraving by Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotterranea* [Rome, 1632; new edition, Rome: Quasar Edizioni, 1998], 63, and also Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, et al., *Repertorium*, 1:28); frescoes in the Hypogeum of Santa Maria in Stelle, late fourth century/early fifth century (Fabrizio Bisconti and Matteo Braconi, "L'ipogeo di S. Maria in Stelle: il programma iconografico e le vie significative," in *La pittura romana nell'Italia settentrionale e nelle regioni limitrofe*, ed. Flavia Oriolo and Monika Verzár [Trieste: Editreg di Fabio Prenc, 2012], 141–48, esp. 144).

110. The Adelfia Sarcophagus (ca. 350) was found in the catacombs below the Church of St. John, Syracuse, now in the Museo archeologico regionale Paolo Orsi, Syracuse; see Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, et al., *Repertorium*, 2:20. For the Chaste Suzanne Sarcophagus (ca. 350), Musée de l'Arles antique, see Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Susanna as a Type of Christ," *Studies in Iconography* 20 (1999): 101–53. For the sarcophagus of Flavius Julius Catervius and Septimia Severina (late fourth century), Cathedral of San Catervo, Tolentino, see Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, et al., *Repertorium*, 2:148; Aldo Nestori, *Il mausoleo e il sarcofago di Flavius Iulius Catervius a Tolentino* (Vatican: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1996).



FIGURE 24. Sarcophagus of Adelfhia, bottom left-hand side, three youths' refusal to worship, Syracuse Archaeological Museum, Sicily. Wikimedia Commons, Sibeaster.

which unfolded horizontally across the two easternmost panels in the top row of the north aisle (Figure 25). The mosaic in the easternmost panel (adjacent to the one containing the three youths making emphatic gestures) is not preserved. If we are correct, the missing mosaic in the easternmost panel originally depicted Nebuchadnezzar, either seated or standing, gesturing toward a statue, most likely also a portrait bust on a pedestal.

Our reconstruction of this pair of panels in the top row is supported by the remains of the two poorly preserved panels immediately beneath them. At the top of the panel located directly below the three companions refusing to worship, a fragment of mosaic is preserved that contains what appears to be part of a Phrygian hat identical to the one worn by the middle of the three youths in the refusal panel in the top row. Moreover, the panel in the bottom row also preserves the base of a rectilinear structure just inside its lower border (Figure 25). These fragments, one might reasonably speculate, belong to a scene depicting the three youths in the rectangular brick furnace, an episode that follows the three youths' defiance of Nebuchadnezzar's order.¹¹¹

Similar to the refusal to worship scene spread horizontally across the two panels in the top row, it seems likely that the pair of panels in the bottom row likewise depicted a single episode from Daniel 3. The partially preserved panel located in the bottom row at the eastern end of the north aisle depicts three

111. For a well-preserved example of the rectangular brick furnace, see the Christian sarcophagus lid fragment (first half of the fourth century) found near the Basilica of San Sebastiano that depicts Noah in the ark next to the scene of the three companions of Daniel in the fiery furnace, Vatican Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. 31471: www.catacombsociety.org/pio-cristiano-vatican-museums-early-christian-sarcophagus-collection/nggallery/image/20877.

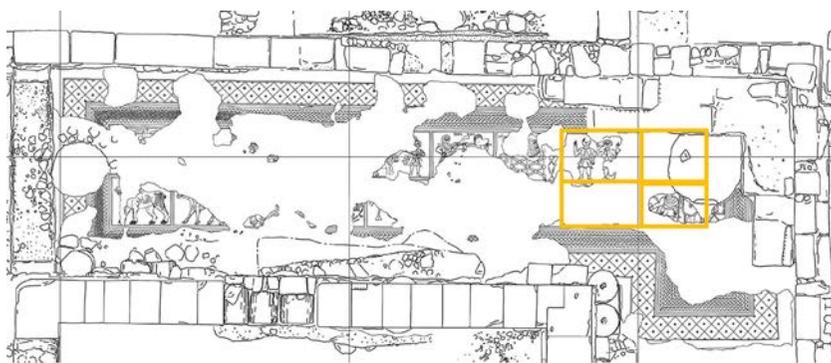


FIGURE 25. *Top*, Huqoq synagogue plan, Daniel 3 panels (indicated), north aisle. *Bottom*, reconstruction of Daniel 3 panels, Huqoq synagogue, east end of north aisle (shaded areas extant). Plan prepared by Slava Pirsky, courtesy of Jodi Magness. Reconstruction drawing prepared by Feixue Mei.

soldiers wearing Roman military dress and holding shields and spears. The middle soldier's right arm and hand are extended, overlapping the blue shield of the left-hand soldier, as he gestures toward something to his right. In our view, the middle soldier's gesture draws attention to the three youths in the furnace in the adjacent panel, thereby underscoring the lateral relationship between the two panels. The middle soldier may be Nebuchadnezzar, who is often depicted in the military dress of a late Roman emperor on Christian sarcophagi. For example, the soldiers in the scene at the end of the sarcophagus of Flavius Julius Catervius and Septimia Severina bear a striking resemblance to



FIGURE 26. Sarcophagus of Flavius Catervius and Septimia Severina, end, detail of three youths' refusal to worship, Cathedral of San Catervo, Tolentino, Italy. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. Photo by Jim Forest, www.flickr.com/photos/jimforest/3112287173.

those in the Huqoq panel: the Babylonian king, flanked by two armed soldiers, makes the same gesture as the middle soldier in the mosaic (Figure 26).¹¹²

Our reconstruction of a narrative cycle based on Daniel 3 in the panels at the east end of the north aisle has parallels in Christian sarcophagi. The sarcophagus cycles likewise revolve around the defiance and consignment to the furnace episodes, which, as previously noted, can vary in their details (Figure 27).¹¹³ Examples of such cycles include the sarcophagus lid fragment (ca. 300–332) from the catacombs of Domitilla in Rome and the left-hand side of the lid of the now lost sarcophagus (late fourth century) from the Vatican cemetery.¹¹⁴

112. See Jensen, "Three Hebrew Youths," 317–19. Compare Jaś Elsner, "Rational, Passionate, and Appetitive: The Psychology of Rhetoric and the Transformation of Visual Culture from Non-Christian to Christian Sarcophagi in the Roman World," in *Art and Rhetoric in Roman Culture*, ed. Jaś Elsner and Michel Meyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 316–49, esp. 334–36, who identifies the scene as the Three Magi before Herod, but the composition of the scene is more consistent with depictions of the defiance of the three companions.

113. In addition to appearing together, the defiance and furnace episodes can also appear individually as discussed above.

114. For the Domitilla sarcophagus fragment, see Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, et al., *Repertorium*, 1:692; also Josef Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di



FIGURE 27. Sarcophagus lid fragment, left-hand side of lid, three youths' refusal to worship and their consignment to the furnace, Catacombs of Domatilla, Rome. Josef Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Archeologia Cristiana, 1932), 2: plate 202.1.

If this reconstruction is correct, there was a symmetrical arrangement of scenes from the book of Daniel in the east and west ends of the aisle. There are, however, certain differences of composition between the two groups of four panels. At the west end of the aisle, each of the four beasts of Daniel 7 is placed in a separate panel. The arrangement of the panels from top to bottom and west to east follows the textual account. The narrative of Daniel 3 in the east end also unfolds from top to bottom, but its two sequential scenes—the refusal of the youths to worship and their consignment to the furnace—are composed of a pair of panels that complement and complete each other. This subtle variation whereby scenes stretch horizontally across two panels does not detract, however, from the overall effect generated by bookending the space of the north aisle with two balanced groups of panels drawn from the same biblical book. As we have noted, the central theme of Daniel—negotiation with and resistance to imperial power—resonates with the emphasis on violent confrontation with gentile forces in the nave and east aisle mosaics. Moreover, with the depiction of the fourth beast of Daniel 7 as a wild boar, the north aisle suggestively extends the paradigmatic biblical narratives of conflict with Babylon and Greece into the Roman present of the Huqoq community.

Tabula Ansata

A fragment of a Hebrew inscription in a *tabula ansata* is preserved at the east end of the north aisle. The tabula ansata, which would have been approximately 1.5 m in length, ran alongside the top and bottom rows of superposed

Archeologia Cristiana, 1932), 1:23, plate 8.1. The Vatican sarcophagus is known from a 17th-century engraving by Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, 63; see also Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, et al., *Repertorium*, 1:28.



FIGURE 28. *Tabula ansata* inscription, Huqoq synagogue, east end of north aisle. Photo by James Haberman, courtesy of Jodi Magness.

panels (Figure 28).¹¹⁵ The inscription is oriented toward viewers standing with their backs against the east wall of the aisle; in other words, each line began at the northern edge of the *tabula ansata* and ended at its southern edge. Only the very left-hand (southern) edge of the inscription is preserved; however, it is clear that the *tabula ansata* would have run alongside both rows of panels. Like *tabulae ansatae* in mosaics more generally, this example was “integrated seamlessly into the overall programme” of the north aisle.¹¹⁶ The legible portions of the inscription read:

115. The preserved fragment of the *tabula ansata* measures 39.7 × 35 cm. We estimate that the original size of the *tabula ansata* was approximately 40 cm × 1.5 m. The *tabula ansata* was enclosed by the same simple frame used for all the panels in the north aisle. The length of the *tabula ansata* would have been equally divided between the top and bottom rows of panels.

116. The phrase is from Sean V. Leatherbury, “Framing Late Antique Texts as Monuments: The *Tabula Ansata* between Sculpture and Mosaic,” in *The Materiality of Text—Placement, Perception*,

[...] ¹¹⁷עַת

[...] ¹¹⁸נַחֻם

[...] אַת כֵּל

[...] ת

[...] אַמֶּן סֵלֵה ¹¹⁹י

The inscription, which employs dedicatory language familiar from other late antique synagogues in Palestine, honors donors who contributed to the synagogue. One of the donors seems to have carried the common man's name Naḥum or Tanḥum.

3. THE NORTH AISLE MOSAICS AND EMERGING FORMS OF BIBLICAL NARRATION IN LATE ANTIQUITY

It should be evident by now that the configuration of scenes in the north aisle of the Huqoq synagogue—in particular, their arrangement in two superposed rows of framed panels of equal size, surrounded by a broad series of outer borders—is highly distinctive, both within the immediate context of the Huqoq synagogue and within the wider corpus of synagogue mosaics from Late Antiquity. We turn now to consider the expressive and experiential work performed by the visual strategies employed in the north aisle as well as their place within the development of biblical art between the third and fifth centuries. We find that, despite its surprising formal features, the north aisle mosaics at Huqoq participated in Mediterranean-wide developments for the representation of scriptural images, episodes, and narratives across the visual arts.

and Presence of Inscribed Texts in Classical Antiquity, ed. Andrej Petrovic, Ivana Petrovic, and Edmund Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 380–404 (here 390). As Leatherbury makes clear, *tabulae ansatae* in synagogue mosaics carried the same meanings and conformed to the same patterns of use as in other mosaic contexts (382).

117. Two tesserae of both the ץ and the ן are preserved, as indicated by the overdots. The reading, while highly speculative, is consistent with Aramaic verb forms in the third person feminine perfect (e.g., קִבַּעַת).

118. The overdot indicates that only two tesserae of the ך are preserved and, moreover, both fall at the edge of the extant section of mosaic. It should be noted additionally that the form of the final letter more resembles a ך than a ך (compare the ך in סֵלֵה in the final line of this same inscription). The reading is, therefore, highly uncertain.

119. The overdot indicates that, while as many as three or four tesserae of this letter may be preserved, they are severely damaged. Still, the reading would be consistent with the repetition of the word אַמֶּן at the end of some inscriptions.

Our comparative analysis leans most heavily on the four panels in the Daniel 7 cycle at the west end of the north aisle as this portion of the mosaic is sufficiently well preserved to give us a high level of confidence in both our identification of the panels' subject matter and their narrative sequence. Wherever possible, we consider the visual strategies employed in other panels in the north aisle, in particular the Daniel 3 cycle which we have reconstructed as a bookend to the Daniel 7 panels.

Within the immediate context of the north aisle mosaics, the four panels depicting the creatures from Daniel 7 play a critical role in our efforts to conceptualize the thematic and compositional strategies employed in this part of the building. They establish that scenes or episodes from a single biblical book or narrative could be spread over multiple panels in the north aisle. As noted above, a similar technique is likewise employed in the east aisle with the two adjacent Samson panels, although the viewing experience was decidedly different in these two spaces. Whereas the large Samson panels were "read" horizontally across the length of the east aisle, the Daniel 7 panels were "read" vertically from top row to bottom row.

The arrangement of biblical subject matter within individual frames in superposed rows in the north aisle at Huqoq has some formal affinities to the famous multi-tiered wall paintings of the synagogue at Dura Europos.¹²⁰ But ultimately the similarities are limited: whereas the Dura frescoes boast three rows of panels above a painted dado, the panels at Dura are offset from each other rather than directly aligned and are of varying widths to accommodate a wider range of narrative content.¹²¹

In our view, the closest extant parallels for the arrangement of the north aisle mosaics, especially the Daniel 3 and Daniel 7 panels, are wall mosaics in

120. On the frescoes from the Dura synagogue, especially on the use of frames/framing, see Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 251–54. See also Warren Moon, "Nudity and Narrative: Observations on the Frescoes from the Dura Synagogue," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (1992): 599–603, who connects the framed fresco panels to *pinakes* and observes that both frames and *pinakes* were "direct borrowings from Roman artistic practice" (603). The continued use of framed panels arranged in registers in wall paintings of the region is demonstrated by a fresco in the eighth-century Umayyad palace at Qusayr 'Amra depicting craftsmen and builders organized in a grid of 32 framed panels spread over 4 registers. On these frescoes, see Garth Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 251–57; Hana Taragan "Constructing a Visual Rhetoric: Images of Craftsmen and Builders in the Umayyad Palace at Qusayr 'Amra," *Al-Masâq* 20 (2008): 141–60.

121. The panels have been widely interpreted as narrative, although they have been described as "more iconic than narrative" by Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 180.

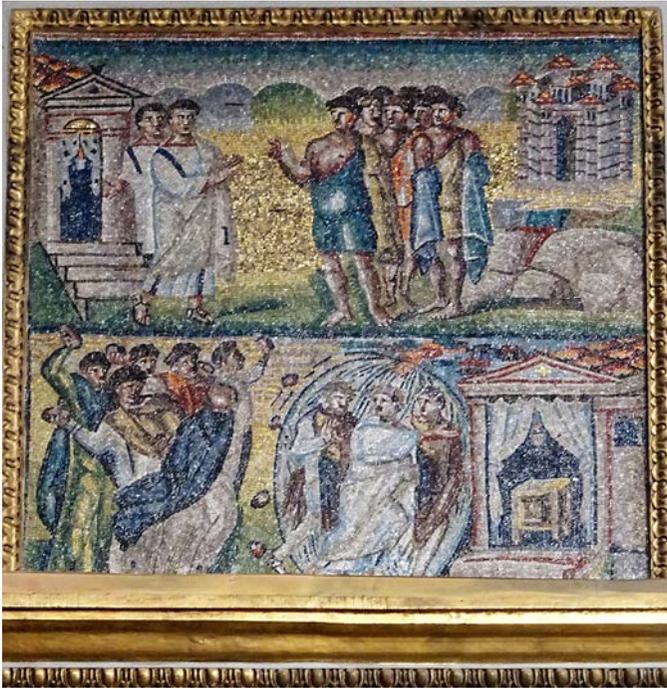


FIGURE 29. Mosaic with revolt against Moses and stoning of Moses, Aaron, and Joshua, Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, Italy, nave wall. Photo courtesy of Laurens Dragstra, corvinus.nl/2018/02/04/rome-santa-maria-maggiore.

an early Christian church in Rome and a small group of late antique illuminated manuscripts.¹²² It has long been observed that the early fifth-century nave mosaics in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore and miniatures from the Vatican Virgil and Quedlinburg Itala exhibit some similarities in composition and style.¹²³ Comparison of the Daniel 3 and Daniel 7 panels at

122. Our focus on comparanda located in the western Mediterranean is not intended to suggest a direct link between art produced in Italy and lower Galilee. We presume the existence in other parts of the Mediterranean of similar materials that either have not been discovered or no longer survive. Unlike the eastern Mediterranean, the political upheavals in medieval Italy were not accompanied by dramatic religious changes affecting the maintenance of early Christian churches or the collection and preservation of significant portable objects.

123. Quedlinburg Itala, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Ms. theol. lat. fol. 483; Vatican Virgil, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Ms. Vat. lat. 3225; cf. Virgil Romanus, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Ms. Vat. lat. 3867; Iliad Ambrosiana, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ms. F.205 P. Inf. The similarities among these four manuscripts and the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics were observed in Hermann Degering and Albert Boeckler, *Die Quedlinburger Italafragmente* (Berlin: Cassiodor Gesellschaft, 1932), 165–93.

Huqoq with this array of materials suggests that in Late Antiquity analogous narrative techniques were employed across a range of artistic mediums. These affinities not only illuminate the mechanisms for artistic exchange among craftspeople but also demonstrate how floor mosaics, as exemplified by the Huqoq panels, participated in these narrative trends.

The nave of Santa Maria Maggiore preserves 27 (some damaged) of its original 42 mosaic panels that depict episodes from the Hebrew Bible.¹²⁴ The mosaics focus on the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua, whose activities are illustrated in sequentially arranged scenes. Most of the panels contain two episodes that unfold vertically from top to bottom as, for example, in a south wall panel that depicts at the top the Israelites threatening revolt against Moses (Num 14.2) and at the bottom the stoning of Moses, Aaron, and Joshua (Num 14.10) (Figure 29). And yet, these episodes appear clustered together within a single square frame rather than distributed across multiple framed panels like the Daniel 3 and Daniel 7 scenes at Huqoq.¹²⁵ Moreover, the next panel in the nave depicts a narrative sequence that is not directly connected to the scenes from Numbers 14.¹²⁶

The late antique manuscript most often linked with the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics is the Vatican Virgil. The manuscript was most likely produced in Rome prior to the mid-fifth century, although its exact date remains uncertain.¹²⁷ It is, in our view, most prudent to think of the two works as contemporaneous. Despite their different subject matter, the Santa

124. Beat Brenk, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1975). For other interpretations of the mosaic program, see Margaret Miles, “Santa Maria Maggiore’s Fifth-Century Mosaics: Triumphal Christianity and the Jews,” *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 155–75; Suzanne Spain, “‘The Promised Blessing’: The Iconography of the Mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore,” *Art Bulletin* 61 (1979): 518–40.

125. The fifth-century borders of the Santa Maria Maggiore nave mosaics are partially visible in a number of panels and resemble the plain, simple borders of the Daniel 7 panels as well as the frames of the miniatures in the late antique manuscripts that we discuss below. On the original setting of the nave mosaics, see Richard Krautheimer, “The Architecture of Sixtus III: A Fifth-Century Renaissance,” in *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss, (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 291–302 and figs. 3, 4, 6.

126. The panel depicts the death of Moses on Mt. Nebo (Deut 34.5) in the upper register and the commission to Joshua (Joshua 1.1–9) in the bottom register.

127. See Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), who states that “the Vatican Vergil might as easily date from 350 or 450 as 400” (568); also Cameron, “Vergil Illustrated between Pagans and Christians: Reconsidering ‘the Late-4th c. Classical Revival,’ the Dates of the Manuscripts, and the Places of Production of the Latin Classics,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004): 502–25. But compare David Wright, *The Vatican Vergil: A Masterpiece of Late Antique Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 91, who favors a date circa 400 CE.

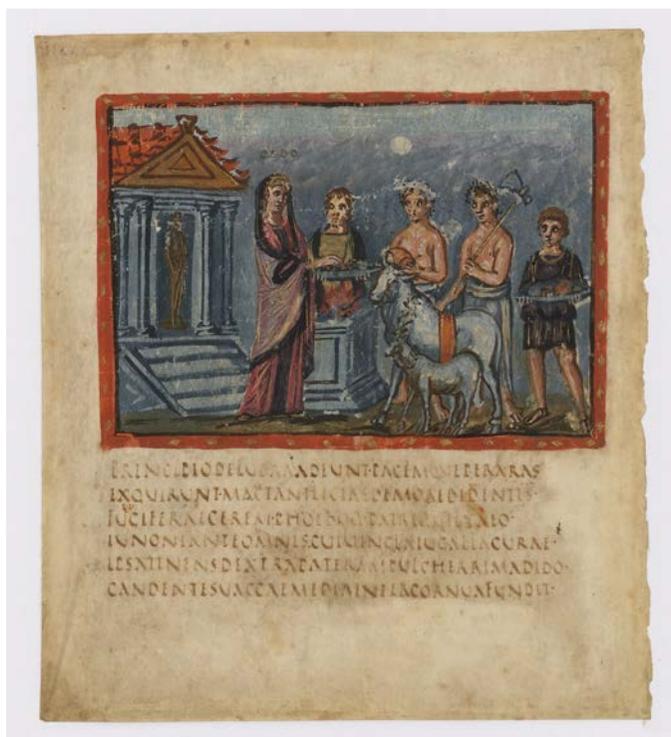


FIGURE 30. Vatican Virgil, folio 33v, Dido sacrificing. Photo © Vatican Apostolic Library.

Maria Maggiore mosaics and the Vatican Virgil have striking formal similarities. To take one notable example, the miniature depicting Dido sacrificing (Vatican Virgil, fol. 33v) and the south nave mosaic depicting the Israelites threatening Moses with revolt and the stoning of Moses, Aaron, and Joshua are set in remarkably similar shallow settings that incorporate architectural structures positioned in an identical fashion (Figure 30). Moreover, Moses and Dido assume the same pose and gesture.

At the same time, the two works exhibit important differences, underscoring the variety of pictorial strategies that were employed to depict narrative cycles in manuscript miniatures, mosaics, and other mediums. Thus, whereas each episode in the Vatican Virgil is individually framed, the mosaics from Santa Maria Maggiore consist mainly of superposed episodes within a single frame.¹²⁸ Moreover, while the majority of the Vatican Virgil's

128. In this respect, the layout of the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics has more in common with miniatures from the fifth-century *Iliad* Ambrosiana than the Vatican Virgil. See Ernst Kitzinger,



FIGURE 31. Vatican Virgil, folio 1r, miniature from *Georgics*. Photo © Vatican Apostolic Library.

surviving illustrations are half-page miniatures, there are a few full-page miniatures, and, crucially for the present study, one folio (fol. 1r) is divided into six heavily framed panels arranged in two columns (Figure 31). These six panels depict imagery related to the verses in *Georgics* 3.1–15, arranged horizontally from right to left.¹²⁹ The placement of nonnarrative but

Byzantine Art in the Making: Main Lines of Stylistic Development in Mediterranean Art, 3rd–7th Century (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 68. The standard treatment of the manuscript is Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, *Hellenistic-Byzantine Miniatures of the Iliad (Ilias Ambrosiana)* (Olten: Urs Graf, 1955). Bandinelli proposed that the manuscript was produced in Constantinople between 493 and 508 (33). Kurt Weitzmann, *Late Antique and Early Christian Book Illumination* (New York: George Braziller, 1977), favors fifth-century Alexandria as the date and place of production (47).

129. Wright, *Vatican Virgil*, 9 and 122. The scenes include two pastoral ones (Apollo and Pales); Herakles slaying Busiris; Hylas being pulled into the spring by nymphs; Latona and the serpent on Delos; and the poet's triumph.



FIGURE 32. Quedlinburg Itala, Sig. Ms. theol. lat. folio 485, 2r, Samuel, Saul, and Agag, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin. Wikimedia Commons, Dsmdgold.

sequential episodes in individually framed panels in the Vatican Virgil is similar to the Daniel 3 and Daniel 7 mosaics at Huqoq, which are likewise individually framed and organized in two columns. Moreover, the panels in our reconstruction of the Daniel 3 cycle have a horizontal configuration that is comparable to the scenes depicted in Vatican Virgil, folio 1r. There are, however, differences as well; the Huqoq Daniel cycles contain fewer panels (four instead of six) and, in the case of the Daniel 7 cycle, the panels are configured vertically, not horizontally.

While the general similarity in the design of folio 1r of the Vatican Virgil to the Daniel 3 and Daniel 7 mosaics is clear, another manuscript, the Quedlinburg Itala, bears an even closer resemblance to the Huqoq panels.

The Quedlinburg Itala is one of the oldest surviving illustrated biblical manuscripts.¹³⁰ Based on its strong compositional and pictorial similarities with the Vatican Virgil, most scholars agree it was produced in Rome during the first half of the fifth century.¹³¹ The original codex contained the complete Book of Kings; however, only five of its folios are preserved, comprising six pages of text and four pages of illustrations.¹³² The four pages of illustrations hold fourteen individually framed miniatures. Three of the pages contain four miniatures arranged in two columns—precisely the same arrangement as the Daniel 3 and Daniel 7 panels in the Huqoq synagogue. The fourth page of illustrations contains two miniatures of unequal size arranged vertically. The miniatures placed on an individual page are related to each other, depicting episodes from the same story (Figure 32). For example, in folio 2r, the events of 1 Samuel 15.13–34 are arranged in four superposed framed panels that were read horizontally from left to right, akin to the Daniel 3 cycle, not vertically like the Daniel 7 panels. In the top row, in the left-hand panel King Saul pours a libation at an altar while Samuel arrives in a chariot, and in the right-hand panel Saul grasps Samuel’s cloak. In the bottom row in the left-hand panel, Agag prays for mercy before Samuel and Saul, and in the right-hand panel Samuel kills Agag.

As noted, we have discussed the Daniel 7 panels at greater length than the other north aisle panels because their secure identification and *relatively* better preservation permit analysis and comparison that have implications for our understanding of the mosaics not only in the north aisle but also in other parts of the synagogue. The striking formal affinities between the Huqoq mosaics, the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics, and late antique manuscripts are suggestive and raise important questions about the process involved in artistic exchange across media during this period. Theories about the use of illuminated manuscripts as sources for the dissemination of biblical imagery in other media, which were championed by Weitzmann, were long a staple of scholarship.¹³³ In recent decades, the absence of evidence in

130. Inabelle Levin, *Quedlinburg Itala: The Oldest Illustrated Biblical Manuscript* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 11.

131. Levin, *Quedlinburg Itala*, 70.

132. Levin, *Quedlinburg Itala*, 16, estimates that there were originally over 200 folios in the manuscript. She reconstructs the size of the pages as 32.3 × 28.7 cm, or roughly square in format.

133. See, for example, Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 143, where Weitzmann declares, “it follows that the archetype for the Dura synagogue paintings was an illustrated manuscript and that the frescoes so far as their compositional layouts are concerned are derivative.” For an earlier

support of this paradigm has been widely acknowledged, even while scholarship on the sources and diffusion of biblical imagery has reached an impasse.¹³⁴

In our view, floor mosaics are poised to make an important contribution to our understanding of the nature of artistic exchange in Late Antiquity. They attest to remarkable continuity within traditions of narrative representation across the boundaries of media. Illuminated manuscripts appear to be neither the ultimate source of these traditions nor the vehicle for their circulation. Instead, floor mosaics of the fourth- to seventh-century Levant illustrate the dynamic nature of the creative process among craftspeople who may have worked in a specific medium but unmistakably inhabited the same cultural world. We prefer not to speculate on the use of late antique manuscripts as archetypes or models for wall and floor mosaics. To do so contributes to the problematic ways in which ancient books have historically been used in the study of images, an issue addressed by Annabel Jane Wharton in her critique of scholarship on the Dura synagogue frescoes.¹³⁵ Nearly fifty years ago, Ernst Kitzinger expressed reservations about the hypothesis that illuminated manuscripts functioned as prototypes for other media and instead proposed that ad hoc pictorial guides were the “common link between the work of the illuminator and that of the mosaicist or fresco painter.”¹³⁶ In making this proposal, Kitzinger was on slightly firmer ground:

articulation of the same view, see Weitzmann, “The Study of Byzantine Book Illumination, Past, Present, and Future,” in *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 1–60, esp. 22–31.

134. See especially John Lowden, “The Beginnings of Biblical Illustration,” in *Late Antique and Medieval Art of the Mediterranean World*, ed. Eva Hoffman (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 117–34, esp. 124–28, who refutes the priority of ancient books in the development of biblical narrative and instead proposes that illustrated biblical manuscripts were preceded—and influenced—by cycles of biblical imagery in churches. Lowden distinguishes narrative in Christian manuscripts from narrative in classical manuscripts “as parallel and broadly synchronic developments” that both emerge after church frescoes and mosaics (128). He does not address the broader context for the narrative impulse (of which cycles in churches were but one part) in Late Antiquity, writing: “In conclusion, I propose that the illustrated bible manuscript was a response to a Christian demand for and love of sacred images that had been developing with increasing momentum through the fourth and fifth centuries. I think public art, in the form of the large and conspicuous cycles of biblical images that began to appear in churches around 400, must have changed attitudes.” Lowden’s suggestion, however, does little more than turn Weitzmann’s thesis on its head. But the notion that artistic exchange operated as a one-way transmission—from one medium to another—problematically divides late antique narrative into a number of fixed categories that can be treated separately.

135. Wharton, “Good and Bad Images,” 1–25.

136. Ernst Kitzinger, “The Role of Miniature Painting in Mural Decoration,” in *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann et al. (Princeton: Princeton University

there are traces of evidence for such guides and their circulation during the period with which we are concerned. At the beginning of the fifth century, Paulinus of Nola, who was in the process of constructing churches in southern Italy, exchanged *picturae*, likely sketches, along with *tituli* and verse inscriptions from the decorative programs of his churches at Nola and Fundi with his friend Sulpicius Severus, who, likewise, was involved in building churches in Gaul.¹³⁷ While Kitzinger was not immune from privileging books, he was clearly aware of the potential pitfalls of that approach:

In my opinion there can be no doubt that to a fifth-century beholder mosaic panels such as those in figs 17 and 18 [from Santa Maria Maggiore] must have conjured up visual associations with illuminated books with which he was familiar. I am aware of a potential fallacy here: framed miniatures of the kind we find in our three codices [Vatican Virgil, Virgil Romanus, and Quedlinburg Itala], with figures in landscapes and atmospheric settings, perpetuate a tradition that, in turn, was rooted in monumental painting. But this tradition belongs to a much earlier period. Muralists of the fourth and fifth centuries had not maintained it. For a viewer of that period the format, particularly when applied to a sequential series of stories, must have suggested an illustrated codex.¹³⁸

Although Kitzinger was correct in suggesting that the fourth and fifth centuries were a time of profound artistic transformations, his suggestion that the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics were designed to evoke an illuminated manuscript deserves scrutiny.¹³⁹ First, it is far from clear that a significant number of people in the late Roman world, including mosaicists and muralists, would have been familiar enough with expensive illustrated books to make such an association.¹⁴⁰ Another difficulty is that only a small number of buildings from the fourth and fifth centuries have preserved walls, making it

Press, 1975), 99–142 at 109, where he also described these pictorial guides as “utilitarian drawings or paintings” that were “considered expendable and must have been subject to a very high rate of attrition.” On the other hand, Brenk, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken*, 178–80, proposes that artists worked from the same modelbooks. The implication seems to be that standard modelbooks were in circulation, although no evidence has been found for their existence.

137. Paulinus of Nola, *Epistle 32* in *Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola*, vol. 2, translated by Patrick Gerard Walsh (Westminster, MD: Newmann Press, 1966–1967), 134–59.

138. Kitzinger, “Role of Miniature Painting,” 127–28.

139. Kitzinger, “Role of Miniature Painting,” 132.

140. Craig Kallendorf, *The Protean Virgil: Material Form and the Reception of the Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 47, notes that there are more manuscripts of Virgil than any other classical author, but “surprisingly few” are illustrated.

impossible to draw broad conclusions about the frescoes or mosaics that may have covered them. Floor mosaics, however, survive in larger numbers, and those uncovered in the eastern Mediterranean in particular suggest the robust continuation of artistic traditions from the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, traditions that Kitzinger erroneously believed were maintained solely in manuscript illumination.¹⁴¹ For example, we know now that there was widespread interest in mythography and historiography as attested by the presence of these subjects in floor mosaics in public (religious and nonreligious) and private buildings.¹⁴²

A comparison of the Huqoq mosaics generally and the Daniel 7 panels specifically with contemporary wall mosaics and illustrated books suggests that craftspeople working across a range of mediums had recourse to a repertoire of shared strategies for the visual representation of narrative cycles and nonnarrative imagery. The flexible and at times idiosyncratic assortment of features that we observe in late antique art militates against the notion of direct copying (slavish imitation). This pattern of similarity and difference instead reflects the creative combinations that occur when craftspeople, living in environments saturated with visual imagery, process and sort through the ideas around them to formulate visual idioms that are well-suited to their particular medium as well as to specific projects.

Foremost among these shared strategies was the sophisticated use of framing to structure, organize, and mediate the viewing experience.¹⁴³ Frames placed around both individual panels and groups of panels lend these works

141. To be fair, the corpus of Near Eastern floor mosaics was much smaller when Kitzinger formulated his theories.

142. On this subject, see Ra'anan Boustán and Karen Britt, "Historical Scenes in Mosaics from Late Roman Syria and Palestine: Building on the Seleucid Past in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 14 (2021): 335–74. Selected mosaic examples include the Elephant Mosaic from the Huqoq Synagogue (Britt and Boustán, *Elephant Mosaic Panel*); the Foundation of Antioch and Apamea Mosaics, from Apamea (Marek Titien Olszewski and Houmam Saad, "Pella-Apamée sur l'Oronte et ses héros fondateurs à la lumière d'une source historique inconnue: une mosaïque d'Apamée," in *Héros fondateurs et identités communautaires dans l'Antiquité, entre mythe, rite et politique*, ed. Maria Paola Castiglioni et al. [Perugia: Morlacchi 2018], 365–415); She-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus Mosaic, Monastery at Frikyā (Komait Abdallah, *Les Mosaïques Romaines et Byzantines de Syrie du Nord* [Beirut: Presses de l'ifpo, 2018], 59–64); Hippolytus Hall, Madaba (Michele Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan* [Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 1992], 51–63, 66–7). For additional examples, see Glen Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 31–63.

143. See discussion earlier in this article on pp. 514–16. For a treatment that further problematizes the issue, see Jaś Elsner, "Framing the Objects We Study: Three Boxes from Late Roman Italy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 71 (2008): 21–38.

a general appearance of similarity, even if only at the level of overall design. And yet, the significance of the overall design cannot be overstated: the viewer's initial encounter with visual art, regardless of medium, is broad and sweeping, establishing basic expectations regarding the formal conventions of a given work.¹⁴⁴

In the nave of the Huqoq synagogue, the frames enclose a series of large panels of visibly different sizes arranged symmetrically around the central panel. The viewer not only would have easily understood that each framed panel depicted a different narrative due to the clarity of the synecdochal subject chosen for representation but also would have recognized the rhythmic pattern of the panels as a whole.¹⁴⁵ A different, but equally recognizable strategy is used in the east aisle. In this area of the synagogue, the orientation of the panels conveys the nature of their relationship: the two Samson panels are both oriented in the same direction, toward the nave, thereby forming a pair of episodes centering on a single biblical figure.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, the Elephant Mosaic and Commemorative panel, which are oriented in the opposite direction, toward the east wall of the synagogue, form their own distinct unit of pendant panels that complement each other stylistically and symbolically.¹⁴⁷

In contrast, in the north aisle, where the space is filled with a series of square panels of the same size and orientation, a different approach was required. Here, the wide borders that frame the north aisle communicate the discreteness of the space within the building while simultaneously lending a sense of coherence to the panels that they enclose. This arrangement presented a different problem: How was a viewer to discern the narrative structure of the panels if they were all the same size and orientation?

Under these circumstances, the use of inscriptions in the individual panels provided a vital visual cue that aided the viewer in recognizing topical or

144. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McCleod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15–147, whose concept of the *parergon* offers an important theoretical apparatus for understanding the work performed by frames. For a recent discussion of Derrida's use of *parergon*, see Paul Duro, "What Is a Parergon?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77 (2019): 23–33.

145. On the essential role of frames in late antique and medieval narrative programs, see Wolfgang Kemp, "The Narrativity of the Frame," in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11–23.

146. Magness et al., "Huqoq (Lower Galilee)," 348–49.

147. Magness et al., "Huqoq Excavation Project," 92–98, fig. 30.

thematic groupings into which the scenes are organized.¹⁴⁸ The use of text in the north aisle mosaics is in keeping with the proliferation of nondedicatory inscriptions in sacred spaces in the fourth century and lasting throughout Late Antiquity.¹⁴⁹ In the Daniel 7 panels and throughout the north aisle, the inscriptions take the form of phrases drawn from verses in the Hebrew Bible. This juxtaposition of brief scriptural citations with biblical images or episodes is a feature of the visual programs of a small group of churches and synagogues in the late antique Mediterranean, both east and west.¹⁵⁰ This small corpus of image-text pairings differed in many respects from the lengthier and often freely composed verse *tituli* (literally “titles”) that accompanied cycles of biblical scenes in some late antique churches, especially in the west.¹⁵¹ They are also distinct from the brief place names and other identifiers that labeled topographic sites, especially cities, in floor mosaics such as the sixth-century Madaba map and the border of the eighth-century nave pavement of the Church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Rasas (the Roman *Kastron Mefaa*).¹⁵² At the same time, as Sean Leatherbury rightly argues, sharp lines should not be drawn among these inscriptional types. Depending on their visual presentation and their placement in relation to the images with which they were paired, each kind of inscription could serve an array of overlapping functions, ranging from more straightforward identification or explanation to more

148. Because the excavations at Huqoq are still ongoing, the brief discussion here of the forms and functions of the synagogue’s inscriptions, and especially of the juxtaposition of text and image in the panels, in the north aisle is necessarily provisional. Our analysis is indebted to recent work on inscriptions as “material texts” and their dynamic relationship to images in late antique and medieval visual culture. For overviews of this increasingly sophisticated body of scholarship, see Sean V. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity: Between Reading and Seeing* (London: Routledge, 2020), esp. 1–8; Antony Eastmond, “Introduction: Viewing Inscriptions,” in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. Antony Eastmond (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–9.

149. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 189–92.

150. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 205–15. Scholars continued to emphasize the “rarity” of scriptural citations in synagogue inscriptions well into the 1990s; see, for example, Zvi Ilan, “The Synagogue and Study House at Meroth,” in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, ed. Dan Urman and Paul V. M. Flesher, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 256–88. This position is in need of revision in light of recent archaeological discoveries as well as our increasing awareness of the affinities and fuzzy boundaries in the use of biblical inscriptions in church and synagogue mosaics, especially in Arabia, Palestine, and Syria but also extending to sites such as Mopsuestia in Asia Minor.

151. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 192–205. Many of these cycles of *tituli* are only known from the literary tradition, and the relationship between these later texts and the inscriptions that may have adorned church buildings is highly uncertain.

152. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 185–89; also Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 1–30.

subtle forms of interpretation through focalization and particularization. At the same time, in every case, the material presence and performativity of the inscriptions also enhanced the viewer's engagement with the images.¹⁵³

In the panels in the north aisle at Huqoq, the extant biblical inscriptions (phrases from Dan 7.4, Isa 11.6, Num 13.23, and Lev 24.6) are not enclosed in frames but rather are fitted within or around the images with which they are paired. While the words of the texts are composed of black tesserae set against the white background of panel, the precise placement of the inscriptions in relation to the image—at times immediately above, at times to one side, and at times nestled within—shifts from panel to panel. This variation stands in contrast to—and is perhaps enabled by—the stark and clear borders that delimit each of the panels throughout the north aisle. This juxtaposition between the outer frame of the panels and their interior flexibility stands in illuminating contrast to the placement of the inscription in the Peaceable Kingdom panel in the church at Karlik (discussed earlier), where the excerpted Greek text of Isaiah 11.6–8 is inscribed in long lines that extend the full width of the panel (Figure 11). Thus, in addition to its discursive function, the inscription also provides the composition an internal visual structure, supplementing the minimal groundlines and vegetation on which the confronted pairs of animals stand. At the same time, the inscription also signals to the viewer the precise extent of the imagery that is associated with the biblical verses. At first glance, the third line of the inscription seems incongruously placed on the far right-hand side of the bottom register (rather than beginning on the left-hand side as it does in the top and middle registers). But, upon closer inspection, the logic of the relative placement of text and image becomes perfectly clear: the inscription provides viewers a visual cue that only the imagery at this end of the register is part of the Peaceable Kingdom scene depicted in the above registers. By placing the young bear and ox on the right-hand side of the register, they are visually linked with the adult bear and ox directly above in the middle register. The visual arrangement of the inscription renders the text and image mutually dependent and thereby communicates that the other animals in this register fall outside the scope of the biblical verses (as mentioned above).

Perhaps the most important function of the inscriptions in the north aisle is the assistance that they provide the viewer in grasping the organization and sequence of the panels. Most notably, the presence of an inscription in the

153. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, esp. 203–5 and 226–27.

Daniel 7 panels, in particular the phrase “The first was . . .” in the left- and top-most panel, bolstered the viewer’s understanding that the narrative unfolds vertically from the top row to the bottom row and from left (west) to right (east). In addition, all the creatures in the Daniel 7 panels are oriented in the same direction (west), which underscores their direct interdependence.¹⁵⁴

As our examination of the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics and the illuminated manuscripts has made clear, various options existed in the fifth century for the depiction of narratives. The Huqoq synagogue appears to have availed itself of a full range of narrative strategies in its floor mosaics, thereby participating in a tradition that continued without interruption in floor mosaics of the region.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have presented the mosaics in the north aisle of the Huqoq synagogue for the first time. We have paid special attention to the arrangement and composition of the panels, both individually and as a group. In addition, wherever possible, we have identified the biblical scenes depicted in the panels—or, in a few cases, proposed identifications based on the panels’ fragmentary remains and their relative placement within the north aisle. In the process, we have suggested an interpretation of the scenes that is consistent with themes that are expressed repeatedly in other panels of the Huqoq pavement.

Despite the damage that hinders the tasks of reconstruction, identification, and interpretation, the mosaics of the north aisle possess remarkably regular features. Visual unity achieved through the panels’ uniformity in size, arrangement, subject matter, and use of biblical labels was enhanced by the use of borders and transitional zones. The configuration of the borders that enclose both individual panels and the group of panels in the north aisle diverge from other parts of the building. The north aisle, with its smaller, more numerous, and more tightly bounded panels, formed an internally coherent unit separate from the rest of the pavement. The experience of viewing the north aisle was profoundly different from that of the nave and east aisle, where the large panels invited one to walk across them for a complete view, thereby immersing the viewer in the scenes. In the north aisle, the

154. In the larger mosaic fragment preserved in the panel adjacent (east) to the fourth beast panel in Daniel 7, the legs of an animal indicate that it was oriented to the east, perhaps signaling a new narrative grouping.

configuration of the borders as well as the panels generated an entirely different viewing experience, one that detached viewers from the scene rather than immersing them in it.

At the same time, the scenes depicted in the panels of the north aisle resonated with many of the themes that are given expression in the other parts of the synagogue. A particular emphasis of the scenes in the north aisle is the threat to Jewish identity and practice posed by gentile rulers, the potency of Jewish heroism, and the divinely sponsored defeat and even destruction of foreign imperial powers. These concerns are most apparent in the two balanced groups of Daniel panels in the east (Dan 3) and west (Dan 7) ends of the aisle. The panels that overtly invoke messianic or eschatological redemption infuse this cluster of themes with added intensity. This obviously holds true for the Isaiah and Daniel 7 panels but also perhaps for the scene from the Valley of Eshcol, with its evocation of the Promised Land, and even the showbread table, which may gesture to the future restoration of the cult.

But we have cautioned against viewing the inclusion of messianic or eschatological imagery within the Huqoq mosaic as a reflection of active messianic social movements within Palestinian Jewry or, for that matter, as an expression of a putative “apocalyptic Judaism” that is somehow denominationally distinct from a “rabbinic Judaism.” Rather, we have suggested that the messianic or eschatological imagery and figures in the mosaic program are elements within a broader effort to project a heroic Judaism within the context of late Roman Palestine, particularly in the Theodosian period. The increasingly intrusive actions of the state and the intensifying presence of the church in the region fostered a heightened sense of displacement within Jewish communities—and with it a climate of internal solidarity.

On this interpretation, the scenes of God’s victories over the enemies of Israel or of God’s retributive justice in the Huqoq mosaics are not coded expressions of fervent messianism but are varied facets of the mosaic’s celebration of God’s saving power. While potentially subversive, this “martial posture” was hardly revolutionary. Instead, it constituted a suitably complex and measured response to the hardening social and political structures that were emergent in the late fourth and early fifth centuries as well as to the visual language through which imperial Christianity broadcast its legitimacy. ■