

SILENUS AMONG THE JEWS?
ANTI-JEWISH POLEMICS IN NINTH-CENTURY BYZANTINE
MARGINAL PSALTERS*

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In her book *The Image of the Jew in Byzantine Art*,¹ Elisheva Revel-Neher showed that the image of the Jew in Byzantium was fundamentally different from that in the West. Portrayals of Byzantine Jews do not display overt signs of hatred and are commonly characterized by objects that reflect real Jewish life, such as *tefillin* and *tallit*. Caricatures of Jews are rare and in fact exist only in the ninth-century marginal Psalters, namely the Chludov Psalter (Moscow, State Historical Museum, cod. 129) and the Pantocrator Psalter (Mount Athos, Pantocrator Monastery, Pantocrator, cod. 61).² These predate occurrences of caricatures of Jews in Western art, which only began to appear in the thirteenth century.

The illuminations of the Chludov and Pantocrator Psalters have been studied extensively. A detailed analysis of their polemical and typological character was undertaken by Kathleen Corrigan,³ who suggests that they represent the visual aspect of the anti-Jewish polemics that flourished from the early days of Christianity. Expressed in the *Adversus Iudaeos* literature, anti-Jewish polemics became especially relevant in anti-iconoclastic writings.⁴ In another article, Corrigan concentrates on caricatures of the Jews showing that there are basically two types, both employed in the marginal Psalters to make the evil character of the Jews intensely clear: the “‘Semitic’ type, figures depicted in profile

* I am grateful to Mati Meyer for her valuable comments on this chapter.

¹ Revel-Neher (1992).

² The miniatures of the Chludov Psalter were published in a facsimile edition: Ščepkina (1977). A set of the miniatures of the Pantocrator Psalter can be found in Dufrenne (1966) and Pelekanidis, Christou, Mauropoulou-Tsioumis, Kadas, Katsarou (1979), hereafter: *Treasures III*.

³ Corrigan (1992).

⁴ The long lapse of time is explained by Corrigan as a deliberate revival of the old anti-Jewish argumentation for use against other enemies, especially the iconoclasts; Corrigan (1992), 61; Brubaker (1993), 181–182. Paul Speck in his *Ich bin's nicht* lists texts circulating in Byzantium in the post-iconoclastic period that blamed the “others” for Iconoclasm; Speck (1990).

with an exaggerated physiognomy, and the “Silenic” type, based on the ancient iconography of Silenus.⁵

The anti-iconoclastic polemics in the two manuscripts have generally been considered equivalent in character, message, and effect. The present study suggests that whereas in most aspects the scenes of the Chludov and Pantocrator Psalters largely correspond and they apparently use common pictorial sources, the manuscripts differ somewhat in their representation of Jews. In the Chludov Psalter Jews are associated with pagans, both being similarly caricatured. In the Pantocrator Psalter the Jews are treated as a distinct and hostile group, thus emphasizing a specifically anti-Jewish attitude. Although the doings of iconoclasts and Jews are evidently equated in the two manuscripts and in some cases iconoclasts are even identified with Jews by an inscription,⁶ images of iconoclasts, also caricatural, belong to another type of caricature.⁷ I attempt to show that the nuances in the depiction of Jews in the two Psalters reflect these variant intentions. The discussion may also shed some light on the problem of dating the two manuscripts, a problem widely debated and still unsolved.⁸

Both Psalters depict numerous Jewish figures, usually identified by the caption or the theological context of the scene. There is a clear distinction between the representation of Jews in “historical” scenes,⁹ for example, the Exodus from Egypt and the Wandering in the Desert (illustrating Ps. 77, 105),¹⁰ and in scenes of typological and polemical content, taken mainly from the New Testament. In various ways the latter reflect not only anti-Jewish, but also anti-iconoclastic, polemics.

⁵ Corrigan (1998), 351–360. On the Jewish caricatural types see there, 353. Suzy Dufrenne was the first to distinguish the two types; Dufrenne (1965), 94.

⁶ E.g., Iannis is called the Jew (IANNHΣ...IOYΔAIOI...; Chludov, fol. 35v). The application of the term “Jew” to other enemies of Christian Orthodoxy was prevalent from the days of early Christianity (e.g., Nestorius was called “the new Jew” during the Council of Ephesus). In the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 the iconoclasts were described as “godless Jews and enemies of truth”; Cameron (1996), 269.

⁷ The iconoclasts, especially in the Chludov Psalter, are closely associated with images of devils. Compare, e.g., the depiction of Iannis (Chludov, fol. 35v) with that of the demon on the same folio.

⁸ The Chludov Psalter may have been illuminated at the time of Patriarch Methodius (843–847), i.e., directly after the Iconophile triumph. The Pantocrator Psalter, of a more erudite character, has been ascribed either to Methodius’s period or to that of Photius (858–867; 877–886). On the date of the Psalters see especially: Ševčenko (1965), 52–60; Walter (1987), 217–222; Corrigan (1992), 124–130; Brubaker and Haldon (2001), 44.

⁹ Dufrenne (1965), 94; Corrigan (1998), 353.

¹⁰ The numbering of the Psalms corresponds to the Septuagint usage.