

Nomination form International Memory of the World Register

Utrecht Psalter

ID Code [2014-25]

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

Few illuminated manuscripts have been studied so intensively as the Utrecht Psalter. It is unique, with its deceptively Late Roman character, its 166 illustrations of the 150 psalms and 16 canticles, its revolutionary dynamic style, and its visual messages about proper rulership. On several accounts, the production of the Utrecht Psalter was a defining moment in Carolingian culture.

It forms a crucial link between Late Roman art and its Carolingian 'translation'. Compared with earlier extant manuscripts, the rich palette of motifs displayed in the Utrecht Psalter is overwhelming. The illustrations reflect the violence and warfare of their own time, but are also meant for moral instruction, apparently for a (future) king. The Utrecht Psalter was the first visual 'mirror of princes'.

The Utrecht Psalter has left a lasting legacy. It was produced c. 830 in or near Reims in northern Francia, at time the heart of Western civilization. Its style and iconography directly influenced many manuscripts, in northern Francia in the 9th century, and in Canterbury from 1000 to 1200. No other illuminated manuscript has exercised such a profound artistic influence over such a long period of time. It is a key manuscript of Christian art, and deserves to be acknowledged as belonging to the memory of the world.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Utrecht University

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Legal owner of the Utrecht Psalter

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Dr. Bart Jaski, keeper of manuscripts, Utrecht University Library

2.4 Contact details

<i>Name</i>	<i>Address</i>
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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Utrecht Psalter: Utrecht, University Library, Ms. 32.

3.4 History/provenance

The Utrecht Psalter was most likely made in Reims or nearby Hautvillers at about 830. This date is suggested by comparison with other manuscripts, notably the Ebbo Psalter, which was made in Hautvillers for Ebbo, archbishop of Reims from 816 to 835 (and briefly from 840-1, before he was banished again). It is unknown who commissioned the manuscript and for whom, but both persons must have belonged to the highest Carolingian elite. Scenes from the Utrecht Psalter appear in other manuscripts and ivory book covers made in northern Francia from c. 830 to 900.

In c. 1000 or before the Psalter arrived in Canterbury, where it directly inspired the production of three highly elaborate psalters: the Harley Psalter (c. 1010), the Eadwine Psalter (c. 1160) and the Paris Psalter (c. 1190). The Utrecht Psalter itself contains a few drawings and pen probes from this period.

Afterwards, the Utrecht Psalter resurfaced in the extensive collection of the famous English book collector Robert Cotton (1571-1631). It acquired the pressmark Claudius C. 7, and was rebound in red morocco (leather) with the coat of arms of Cotton in gold. Added to this binding were twelve leaves, fragments of a Gospel book made in Northumbria in the early 8th century. In 1629 or 1630 the Utrecht Psalter and six other manuscripts, were borrowed by Thomas Howard (1585-1646), Earl of Arundel. In 1642 Arundel went to the Netherlands, and his extensive art collection followed suit.

After Arundel's death his wife was forced to sell many of the famous paintings in the collection. It appears she sold the Utrecht Psalter as well, for in 1716 it had come into the hands of the Utrecht patrician Willem de Ridder. He lived opposite St John's Church in the city centre, where the university library was then housed. His sister requested him to donate the manuscript to the city of Utrecht, and a testimony of this donation is also written in the manuscript itself. The city council in their turn gave it to the city library, which also functioned as the university library, where it is still kept.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address
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4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	
Bart Jaski	Heidelberglaan 3, 3584 CS, Utrecht, The Netherlands	
	Postal address:	
	PO Box 80124, 3508 TC, Utrecht, The Netherlands	
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4.3 Legal status

The Utrecht University Library is the custodian of all the academic books, documents and other media pertaining to Utrecht University, and which all students, staff and other members of Utrecht University, as well as those with a library card, are entitled to borrow or consult. The University Library was founded in 1584 as the public library of the city of Utrecht, which became the university library with the foundation of Utrecht University in 1636. The keeper of manuscripts, dr. Bart Jaski, is directly responsible for the care of the Utrecht Psalter.

4.4 Accessibility

The Utrecht Psalter is kept in a large vault in one of the depots of the Utrecht University Library. The depots are secured and properly climatized to store old and precious manuscripts and books. The Utrecht Psalter is a so-called 'restriction manuscript', meaning that it can only be viewed in the reading room of the Special Collections with the authorization of the keeper of manuscripts. On average it is on public display once every ten years, the last time in 2007 (Brussels). In 2016 the 300th anniversary of the donation of the manuscript to the city of Utrecht will be celebrated by an exhibition in Museum Catharijneconvent, the Dutch museum of Christian art in Utrecht.

In 1996 the manuscript was the main item in the exhibition *The Utrecht Psalter in medieval art. Picturing the psalms of David* in Museum Catharijneconvent. On that occasion, a CD-ROM with a digitised version of the Utrecht Psalter was produced, in which the text of the 150 psalms and 16 canticles (in four languages) was linked to the depictions of the psalms and canticles in the manuscript. Although innovative for its time, the CD-ROM is now no longer compatible with modern software, and the website on which the annotated digitised version was later placed is not supported anymore by modern browsers. At the end of 2014 a new website will be published with an annotated edition of the complete manuscript, together with videos and extensive information about the Utrecht Psalter. The URL is that of the old website, psalter.library.uu.nl. For this purpose, the manuscript was digitised anew, and the digitised pictures (without annotation or the like) have already been published, together with a short introduction (<http://bc.library.uu.nl/node/599>), to make it available for study. The images can be viewed in great detail (with advanced zoom), they can be downloaded, and one can make a PDF of the entire manuscript. The web pages about the Utrecht Psalter have an average of 1000 visitors a month from all over the world.

The Utrecht Psalter was reproduced in photographic facsimile in 1873, at the request of the British government. In 1984 a colour facsimile was published (by ADEVA, Graz). In 1932 (DeWald) and 1994 (Koehler and Mütterich) published facsimiles of the illustrations only.

4.5 Copyright status

The Utrecht University Library stimulates open access to scientific data, and considers itself to be the custodian rather than the owner of cultural heritage. This means that we provide digital images of our books and manuscripts, including the Utrecht Psalter, at a low reproduction fee (average € 1.- per scan), and that we do not charge any copyright costs, even if the images are used for commercial purposes.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

The authenticity of the Utrecht Psalter has never been questioned. Identity and provenance have been reliably established.

5.2 World significance

'Its paradoxical unions of a concrete vision, vigorous draftsmanship, and obviously inherited traditions has attracted the admiration and interest of scholars all over the world' (Benson 1931, p. 13)

'The verve and artistic skill displayed in the drawings rend the volume one of the most remarkable products of the entire Middle Ages' (Lowe 1952, p. 237)

The Utrecht Psalter is one of 'the most famous and frequently reproduced among all Carolingian manuscripts, indeed among illuminated manuscripts of any period' (Nees 1997, p. 847)

The experts are in no doubt that the Utrecht Psalter is an extraordinary manuscript, almost a league on its own, even in the context of the entire manuscript production of the medieval period. Its unique status has been reaffirmed by each new generation of scholars from the middle of the 19th century onwards, when the Utrecht Psalter was rediscovered.

However, there are a number of aspects about the manuscript which remain uncertain. Although scholars agree that it must have been produced in Reims or nearby Hautvillers (where the Ebbo Psalter was made), the datings have ranged from 823 (Alibert 2009) to 845 or even later (Chazelle 1997). Who ordered it remains unknown, although archbishop Ebbo (816-835, 840-841) of Reims is usually so credited. As the recipient Louis the Pious (son of Charlemagne, and emperor 814-840) or otherwise Louis' son, the young Charles the Bald (823-877) is often suggested. We can be sure that the commissioner and recipient were people of the highest Carolingian elite (see further 5.3.3 below).

What is it that makes the Utrecht Psalter so special and unique, and so important in the history of Christian art and Carolingian culture? And how can its important influence be assessed? The five principal arguments for counting the Utrecht Psalter among documentary heritage of world significance are as follows:

- 1) The whole production of the Utrecht Psalter, with its extensive iconographic programme, combined with the high quality of the drawings, is unique among the extant Carolingian manuscripts.
- 2) The revolutionary new style of the drawings. The Utrecht Psalter is the epitome of the sketchy, dynamic way of drawing which is characteristic of the influential Reims school of manuscript illumination.
- 3) The Utrecht Psalter contains the most complete cycle of psalm illustrations inherited from the Late Roman period. Parts of this cycle are also found in Byzantine and Western manuscripts. The artists have used the basic material, but have given the illustrations a Carolingian twist, skilfully combining the old and the new.
- 4) The Utrecht Psalter provides us with a window on the Carolingian way of thinking. The choices of the artists reflect a preoccupation of themes revolving around good and evil in their own time, especially with regard to violence, warfare and the exercise of kingship. The Utrecht Psalter can be regarded as the first visual 'mirror of princes', with a specific message for the ruling elite.
- 5) The significant influence of the style and iconography from c. 830 to 1200, at first in northern Francia, later in England. No other illuminated manuscript has enjoyed such a prolonged and important direct influence as the Utrecht Psalter.

These five principal arguments are discussed in more detail below:

1) Visually, the Utrecht Psalter looks almost exactly as a manuscript from the Late Roman period of the 4th or 5th century. It is comparatively large and broad in size, and the psalm texts are written in three columns in a fine *capitalis rustica*. This was the script of the Late Roman empire, but it was also used as a script, usually for chapter headings and the like, in the Carolingian empire. The first line of a psalm is written in a larger uncial script (for the first seventeen psalms in gold), and the titles of the psalms and the first letters of a psalm verse are written in uncial letters in red. Uncial script has its roots in the Late Roman period also. The drawings imitate a Late Roman style, and especially the buildings, landscapes, animals, the dress of the figures and the iconography of symbols such as the sun and the moon or figures such as Atlas carrying the earth, closely resemble their depiction in Late Roman art. Only the 'B' of *Beatus vir*, the beginning of the first psalm, does not look Late Roman, but is a product of the Hiberno-Saxon way of decorating letters in manuscripts. And only a closer inspection reveals several Carolingian elements, such as the water organ on fol. 83r. It appears that a conscious effort was made to produce a manuscript which reflected the Late Roman grandeur the Carolingian elite was so keen to emulate. Like no other illuminated manuscript, the Utrecht Psalter symbolises the rediscovery of Late Roman and antique art in the Carolingian period.

At least eight draughtsman were given the task to illustrate the 150 psalms and 16 canticles. The 16 canticles are liturgical songs, prayers and texts which were appended to many Carolingian psalters, but in no other extant manuscript they are illustrated. Taken together, the 166 illustrations easily surpass every manuscript in scope, ambition and quality which the Carolingian empire had produced so far, and was to produce afterwards. Certainly, there are more richly decorated manuscripts, with dazzling colours and shining gold, but none with such an broad iconographic programme which provides such an intriguing visual window on the Carolingian way of thinking. For the translation of the psalm texts into images a high level of knowledge and creativity was necessary. In no other extant work the intellectual prowess of Carolingian scholarship is combined with a visual artistry to produce such astounding results. It is no coincidence that the Utrecht Psalter is one of the most studied and reproduced medieval illuminated manuscript in the world. This is shown by the high number of scientific studies which feature the Utrecht Psalter, and the 1260 hits for 'Utrecht Psalter' in Google Scholar (20-3-2014), which with regard to medieval illuminated manuscripts is only clearly exceeded by the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. A request for a reproduction of the Utrecht Psalter is made once every week on average.

2) Among the eight artists who worked on the illustrations, there is some difference in competence, and a number of drawings was not finished properly. Yet the overall style is original and vibrant. It is the epitome of the Reims school of manuscript illumination (c. 820-900), the most innovative and influential among the local Carolingian clusters of scriptoria, in which the Late Roman dynamic and naturalistic depiction of figures was not only imitated, but also developed further so as to have a lasting influence on Western Christian art.

In Christian manuscript illumination in the foregoing period we usually find decorations in the form of geometrical patterns and the depiction of a limited number of figures (Christ, David, the evangelists), in a static pose drawn with thick lines. By comparison, the Utrecht Psalter is a revolutionary explosion. It is decorated in a new style, with its agile figures, full of action and emotion, set in a sometimes surrealistic landscape. But also what is depicted and the sheer number of drawings sets it apart from its predecessors. The 166 decorations, each over the full breadth of the page, and with a rich iconographic programme in which various psalm verses are depicted, are of a kind which had not been created for centuries. It 'must have had an overwhelming impact on early ninth-century readers' (Van der Horst et al. 1996, p. 23).

3) From the period until c. 900 only a few psalters have survived which are illustrated. Comparison with manuscripts such as the Corbie Psalter (c. 800), Stuttgart Psalter (Saint-Germain-de-Prés, Paris, c. 820-830), Khludov Psalter and the Greek Paris Psalter (both Constantinople, c. 850) shows that several psalms are illustrated in more or less the same way. Most scholars agree that the artists drew on one or several illustrated psalm cycles which had been current in the Late Roman period, but which now are lost.

Yet in the case of the Corbie Psalter the illustrations are in the initials, and in the Khludov Psalter and Greek Paris Psalter they are in the margin, which severely limits what can be depicted. In the Stuttgart Psalter the 150 psalms are all decorated, albeit in a more crude, traditional style, and its lesser size and fixed borders allow for only one or two motifs to be depicted, which are often typological. By contrast, the space the artists of the Utrecht Psalter could use was broad and free, enabling them to give a panorama of motifs, which in several cases can be read from left to right in a chronological order. This reflects the layout of the few Late Roman illuminated manuscripts now extant, such as the Vatican Virgil, Vienna Genesis, Cotton Genesis and Codex Purpureus Rossanensis. The Utrecht Psalter provides the best impression of how the early psalm cycles must have looked like, also with regard to their iconography and style. However, the Carolingian artists were not slavish imitators but 'translated' the images which they found, added new elements, created new ones for most of the canticles, and refashioned the whole in such a way that the Utrecht Psalter can also be used for a visual moral instruction.

4) In the Utrecht Psalter most of the psalms are 'literally' depicted: according to the text of the psalm. Only in certain cases scenes have been added to support a typological interpretation of the psalms, expressing the thought that a psalm verse foreshadows an event from the life of Christ. For example, in psalm 115 verse 3 'I will take the chalice of salvation' is depicted by Christ on the cross with the psalmist holding the 'chalice of salvation' with which he catches Christ's blood. More common is the depiction of Christ in an almond-shaped mandorla, upheld by angels, or Christ on a round throne, motifs inherited from antique Christianity (Monfrin 2009).

There are also a couple of illustrations which are only indirectly related to the psalm text. In psalm 50 the title 'A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had sinned with Bathsheba' refers to the moment the psalm was considered to have been composed by David. It is depicted by the story in 2 Kings 12 (now 2 Samuel 12). David desired Bathsheba, and in order to cover up that he had made her pregnant, he had her husband Uriah fight in the front of the army, where he was killed. The prophet Nathan rebuked him via the parable of the rich man who stole a lamb much beloved by a poor man in order to prepare a meal for a guest. When David understands the parallel between his own behaviour and that of the rich man, he shows himself to be penitent – a very important theme in Carolingian political theory. All of this is illustrated in the Utrecht Psalter, in a more extensive way than in other illustrated psalters until the 9th century. The text of the psalm itself is not depicted. Such exceptions are usually concerned with the exercise of kingship.

Overall, the pictorial language of the Utrecht Psalter is preoccupied with the struggle between good and evil. Many illustrations deal with violence and warfare, the sufferings of the innocent and the torments that await sinners, who are usually shoved into hell by armed angels in a fashion reminding one of the work of Hieronymus Bosch. The psalmist is often depicted as a passive observer. In a number of illustrated psalms the depiction of king Saul or David highlights the role of the king in physical and spiritual warfare against the forces of evil. The evil king is usually armed and surrounded by soldiers. The choice of pictorial language suggests a readership of the political and religious elite, if not a (future) king himself.

That the battle between good and evil is a common theme is notably expressed in the first and the last illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter. The illustration of the first psalm is the only one that fills a whole page. Here the 'Blessed man' (*Beatus vir*) contemplates under the sun and in a dome-shaped portico with seven pillars (i.e. the seven pillars of wisdom) the book with the law of God. An angel is behind him, the fruitful tree at the stream below him. On the opposite a royal figure, sword in hand, surrounded by soldiers, with a demonic figure at his left side, sits at night in a gabled portico, with the damned who are led to hell below him. Between the two scenes stand the psalmist and a companion, seemingly conferring about the choices one can make and their consequences. Even without the text of the first psalm, the visual message is clear.

The additional psalm 151 appears on the final page, and here Saul is seated, sword in his lap,

surrounded by soldiers, in a gabled portico. To his right three scenes from the youth of David are depicted, with an organ, tending sheep and vanquishing Goliath. For all his majesty, it is not Saul but David who pleases God, who saves Israel, whose destiny is to become a wise king and who is also credited with composing the psalms. The lesson is obvious, and mirrors that of the first psalm: a ruler should imitate the devout servant of God, David, rather than the militaristic Saul, who appears to rely on force alone.

These and other examples show that the Utrecht Psalter serves as a visual 'mirror of princes' which converts the widely contemplated moral and religious instruction of the psalms into instruction about proper rulership in a Christian empire (Deshman 1981; Chazelle 2004; Alibert 2009). Such 'royal' lessons are not clearly present in earlier or contemporary illustrated psalters – indeed not in any illustrated manuscript from before c. 830. In this respect the Utrecht Psalter is the first of its kind. It fits in perfectly with the concepts of kingship as a ministry from God and the imitation of David as a virtuous ruler, which became current during the reign of Louis the Pious, and was fully developed during the reign of his son Charles the Bald. It was an important step in the formation of the ideology of medieval kingship.

5) The 166 illustrations in the Utrecht Psalter offer an extraordinary rich palette of motifs, both inherited from Late Roman examples (in their Carolingian 'translations') and newly created ones. Its iconography served as a source of inspiration for other manuscripts and ivory book covers. The few other extant psalters of this period usually have only three psalms decorated (1, 51 and 101), and of these the Troyes Psalter and the Douce Psalter are directly inspired by the depictions as we find them in the Utrecht Psalter. The ivories which served as book covers of the Psalter of Charles the Bald and of the Prayerbook of Charles the Bald are similarly inspired. But also in other extant manuscripts we find depictions which appear to have been copied directly or indirectly from the Utrecht Psalter, such as in the Bern Physiologus, the Hincmar Gospels, the Drogo Sacramentary, the Madrid Astronomical Manual, the Leyden Aratea, the Gospels of Saint-Aure, the Weltenberg Gospels and the Pierpont Morgan Gospels. These works come from the period c. 830-900, predominantly from Reims and Metz, which together with Tours and Saint-Amand were the main Carolingian centres for the production and export of (illuminated) manuscripts. The Utrecht Psalter is a key manuscript of this period, the first of its kind from which others drew for inspiration. Without the Utrecht Psalter the development of the iconography and style as we find them in these manuscripts would be far less easy to understand. This even applies to manuscripts of a later date, for example those produced in southern Germany around 1000 (Labusiak 2009). The Utrecht Psalter thus forms the crucial link between Late Roman art and the Carolingian interpretation thereof.

When the Utrecht Psalter arrived in Canterbury at around 1000, it served as a direct inspiration for three psalters which are among the most richly decorated from England in the period of c. 1000 to 1200: the Harley Psalter (c. 1010), the Eadwine Psalter (c. 1160) and the Paris Psalter (c. 1190). These three are beautiful and important manuscripts in their own right. Each has used the iconographic cycle of the Utrecht Psalter in its own way, and has refashioned it in its own contemporary style. Apart from these, also the Odbert Psalter (999), the Boulogne Gospels (1000), the Arenberg Gospels (c. 1010), the Canterbury metrical calendar (early 11th century), all produced in Canterbury or by Canterbury artists, show the influence of the style and iconography of the Utrecht Psalter. The same applies to the Besançon Gospels and the Prayerbook of Aelfwine (both c. 1030) from Winchester (Van der Horst 1996, p. 234-253). It can be said with certainty that no other illuminated manuscript has exercised such a profound artistic influence over such a long period of time as the Utrecht Psalter.

Finally: after the Utrecht Psalter had been acquired by Robert Cotton, and had been taken to the Netherlands by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, the manuscript was donated to the Utrecht University Library in 1716. There it was kept, unknown to virtually all scholars, until its rediscovery in the middle of the 19th century. It was noted that it included the co-called Athanasian Creed on the Trinity. The inclusion of the Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque vult ...*) as a Confession of Faith in the Anglican Church was at that time under discussion. Some

thought that the Utrecht Psalter belonged to the fourth century, and concluded that the Creed belonged to the early Christian Church and should thus be maintained in the Anglican Church. After a first report by Thomas Hardy in 1872, who dated the Utrecht Psalter to the sixth century, a controversy ensued, which finally came to be discussed in the English Parliament. It was decided to borrow the manuscript and to have it reproduced with the relatively new technique of photography. The Utrecht Psalter became one of the first manuscripts of which a photographic facsimile was produced, and this led directly to the foundation of the Palaeographical Society in London. The Palaeographical Society was to become a leading institution in the production of facsimiles of important manuscripts, so that these could be studied more easily. The facsimile of the Utrecht Psalter of 1873 and two reports in 1874 led Thomas Hardy to conclude that it should be dated to the late 5th century. The Athanasian Creed was maintained in the Anglican Church, even after in the 1890s it was conclusively shown that the Utrecht Psalter belonged to the period of the Ebbo Psalter, broadly the second quarter of the 9th century.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

- As the Utrecht Psalter has several important features, it was decided to discuss these features in a coherent way under 5.2. To avoid unnecessary repetition, in the section below reference is made to that discussion.

1 Time

During the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, Charlemagne and his successors tried to standardise the Christian liturgy, the text of Scripture, the use of correct Latin, the script, coinage and law. In the arts, Late Roman examples served as a source of inspiration. This applied not only to the copying of texts, which was crucial for the preservation of the works of Roman literature, philosophy and other sources, but also to architecture, sculpture, metalwork, mosaics, frescos and manuscript illumination. The Carolingian artists were greatly inspired by Late Roman and antique examples, but interpreted them with their contemporary concerns and issues in mind. Like no other illuminated manuscript, the Utrecht Psalter symbolises the rediscovery of Late Roman art in the Carolingian period, and is crucial to understand the development of Carolingian (manuscript) art, and the various influences that gave shape to Carolingian culture. The development of a visual 'mirror of princes' is equally important. The Utrecht Psalter is more than simply a work of art, a psalter depicted, it is a reflection of its own time, of the Carolingian way of thinking, with its concerns about the battle of good and evil, and about warfare, violence, sin, punishment and penance. It thus serves as a bridge between the Carolingian artistic and literary world, both so influential in shaping Western civilization. See further 5.2 above under 1, 3 and 4.

2 Place

The Utrecht Psalter is the highlight of the Reims school of manuscript illumination, which introduced a new style in manuscript decoration in the 9th century. This style had direct repercussions in the Carolingian scriptoria in northern France and later in Canterbury, but indirectly helped to shape the development of Western art in general.

3 People

It is not known who ordered the Utrecht Psalter to be made, but most scholars consider Ebbo,

archbishop of Reims, the likeliest candidate. He was the foster-brother of Louis the Pious (son of Charlemagne). It has been suggested that it was made for Louis the Pious or his son Charles the Bald (823-877). Certainly the iconography and style of the Utrecht Psalter was an important source of inspiration at the Court School of Charles the Bald. That the manuscript had a personal importance to Charles the Bald may be assumed from the fact that we find psalms 50 and 56 and psalms 24 and 26 in the Utrecht Psalter depicted in a similar way on the ivories which served as book covers of the Psalter of Charles the Bald and of the Prayerbook of Charles the Bald, respectively. The association with Charles the Bald is significant, for during his reign David is regularly used as a royal model in art and in literary 'mirror of princes'. The Utrecht Psalter is situated at the beginning of this development so important in Carolingian and later medieval political thought, in which the king is regarded as God's minister on earth, which brought certain rights but especially (moral) obligations with them.

4 Subject and theme

See 5.3 under 1 (Time) and 4 (Form and style) for its innovative character.

5 Form and style

The aesthetic and outstanding qualities of the Utrecht Psalter are beyond question. On the influence of its extensive iconographic programme and innovative style, see 5.2 above under 2 and 5, which concludes with the statement 'It can be said with certainty that no other illuminated manuscript has exercised such a profound artistic influence over such a long period of time as the Utrecht Psalter'.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

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6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

In many respects, the Utrecht Psalter is a unique manuscript. With its size, script, illustrations and style there is not one like it among all the manuscripts in the world. Not even those which were directly inspired by the Utrecht Psalter are quite similar.

6.2 Integrity

The Utrecht Psalter was rebound twice, in Canterbury and by the order of Robert Cotton. The original binding is thus lost to us, but the Cotton binding and the added early 8th-century Gospel leaves do reflect the extraordinary history of the manuscript.
