Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature



MARC MICHAEL EPSTEIN

Europe's Jewish minority culture was subjected to a barrage of public images proclaiming the dominance of the Christian majority. This book is the first to explore the Jewish response to this assault in the development of a visual culture through which Jews could affirmatively construct their identity as a people. It demonstrates how medieval Jews gave voice to messages of protest and dreams of subversion by actively appropriating and transforming the quintessential symbols of the dominant culture.

Using a variety of methodologies drawn from art history, cultural studies, and the history of mentalités, this work illuminates aspects of the inner landscape of medieval Jewry as reflected in animal symbolism in text and iconography, a very rich and hitherto undiscovered realm. Marc Michael Epstein examines the ubiquitous hare-hunt and the cryptic iconography of elephants flanking the ark in the synagogue, dragons straddling the line between the divine and the demonic worlds, and unicorns that seem to have leaped directly from the christological world of the illuminated bestiary into a universe of Jewish messianic symbolism. These images, often marginal in situation, tend to be regarded as derivative of Christian art or as mere decoration, yet they are illustrative of the manner in which Jews subversively recast various symbols from their own tradition and from Christian culture. An understanding of medieval Jewish self-definition through the "secret language" of their iconography is essential for analysis of the roots of intercultural conflict and collusion in the West.

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Title page illustration from *Aesop's Fables*, Ulm, c. 1476.

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Preface

I can date my interest in the topic of animal imagery and symbolism back to my earliest expeditions with my father, an artist, to the Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park. The trips were pilgrimages of a sort that always culminated in the wonderful room of the Unicorn Tapestries, which I recall throughout the seasons: luminous in the winter sunshine, fiery in summer's glow, positively magical in the dappled light of spring and fall—all this light and color and magic amplified by richly carved wood and filtered through medieval glass. Those tapestries in their idyllic setting cast a spell over me that has inspired me from that day to this—first to explore the Middle Ages as an era rich in literary, iconographic, and historical texture, then, to seek out the role played by my own people in that era—as a minority culture, strangers in lands not their own, yet engaged in a rich and intricate relationship with the majority and its mores.

This book has come into being as a result of an almost congenital habit of meditation on oddities and incongruities, on the unexpected, on the otherness of motifs, textual and visual. I love a puzzle, a good mystery, the bracing pleasure of discovering that "one of these things is not like the others," and asking why that thing is different. I have always been intrigued by works of art whose creators' names are unknown, by so-called conventional folkloric and fabular elements that are present in a wide variety of cultures, but that vary slightly in each, and by elements in the panoply of one culture's production that seem borrowed from another's. Just as there are subtle clues in the physical presence of works of art, from delicate miniatures to monumental cathedrals, that reveal the *traces des mains* of their anonymous creators, there are clues in the elusive differences in the uses of conventional motifs that reveal *traces des mentalités* of the individuals and societies that generated them.

Origen was once asked (probably by one of those perennial and ubiquitous characters who wants to know "what you academics *do* all day?") how he occu-

pied himself as a scholar. He replied that the task of a biblical exegete is similar to that of a hunter who passes silently through the forest until he perceives a movement, and goes after its source. Origen's method, as he described it in his *Fragmenta in Evangelium* on John 1:25–30, was to scrutinize the text until he saw something move, and then to pursue it with alacrity.

This book, which begins with a childhood memory of the Hunt of the Unicorn, takes the hunt as its dominant metaphor, first and foremost, on the level of methodology. Like Origen, I hope to penetrate the thicket of anonymity and genre by examining specifically those elements in medieval Jewish art and literature that attract attention by their odd movements in incongruous contexts in order to track some of the more elusive elements in the cultural and intellectual history of the Jewish people in the Middle Ages.

Beyond its importance as a methodological metaphor, hunting figures in the subject matter of this book as well: each of the coming chapters actually discusses hunting in some measure. This is deliberate; I demonstrate the ways in which visual culture was adapted from the culture of the medieval Christian majority into that of the medieval Jewish minority. I use hunting iconography as my test case; although hunting would appear at first glance to be among the most characteristically "un-Jewish" of activities, prohibited to Jews both by rabbinic culture and often by medieval secular authorities, hunting scenes appear with startling frequency in the illumination of medieval Hebrew manuscripts, where they are particularly susceptible to being labeled as merely decorative or as unconscious borrowings. Such images stand out against their backdrop. They attract our attention. Their strangeness lures us; we impulsively join the chase, and we are led into a grove of symbolism wherein both the topos of the hunt, and the various individual manifestations of hunter and quarry we encounter along the way reveal themselves to be fraught with profound and pervasive allegorical significance.

The hunt for the particular range of quarry that fills this volume began with a survey of the corpus of surviving illuminated Hebrew manuscripts from the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries, undertaken utilizing the resources of the Center for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem and the microfilm collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. This survey generated a long list of animals whose presence in medieval Hebrew manuscripts seemed somewhat unusual or unexpected.

First, I grouped together all occurrences of each particular animal image in the medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscript corpus. I then examined the classic textual loci for these animals, systematically following each one's progress through biblical, rabbinic, and medieval sources, and in classical and Christian texts from antiquity through the sixteenth century.

In the process of research, my list was narrowed to include only those beasts concerning which it was possible to assemble a sufficient and sufficiently consistent body of corroborative textual or iconographic evidence. A good many highly interesting examples were eliminated from the list because the gaps in the corroborative materials were too wide to bridge, even with well-grounded speculation. Some of those cases are treated in the notes to this volume.

Next, my focus shifted to a survey of the iconographic representations of the selected animals in ancient art and in medieval Christian art, with particular attention to examples contemporary with or closely antecedent to the Jewish images. Finally, I reexamined the examples of animal imagery I had culled from medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, applying the evidence gathered about the place of each beast in medieval mentalités to the iconography that had previously seemed strange or incongruous in Jewish art, in order to develop a reasonable and textually grounded explanation for its inclusion in Jewish iconography.

Chapters 2 through 5 present the results of these labors, describing the origins, development, and contextual significance of four specific animal symbols, each of which addresses a major area of medieval Jewish mentalités: national self-image, the image of the Torah, God and the problem of evil, and messianism and eschatology.

In the process of working on these chapters, I found my thinking concerning the ostensible consciousness or unconsciouness of this iconography evolving as I developed, questioned, mulled over, and reworked my interpretations and was questioned by others about them. The first and final chapters, the result of these ruminations, discuss general problems of Jewish art and the place of animal iconography in it. They argue that animal symbols, beyond their inherent fascination, are of intrinsic value for the construction of medieval mentalités in general and medieval Jewish mentalités in particular. They challenge arguments that devalue Jewish art by asserting that nothing about it is intrinsically Jewish, that it means the same thing as Christian art because it is stylistically dependent upon it, and that its very status as *Jewish* art is problematic because it might not have been created by Jews. Finally, they dispute the widely held contention that animal elements in Jewish art, particularly those that are marginally situated, are, at best, mere borrowings from Christian iconography, and more likely, simply decorative.

My discussion cuts to the core of many of the established and tenacious assumptions about the derivative nature of Jewish art. Accordingly, while there may, I hope, be many who will view this work as intriguingly novel and historically plausible, others will, no doubt, regard my conclusions as tendentious and improbable overinterpretation. Since the consciousness of authorial intention can never be determined with certainty, I have aspired, at least, to present my arguments in an intellectually consistent (and coherent) manner.

This study took shape at Yale University, under the able guidance of David Ruderman, at present Joseph P. Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History and director of the Center of Jewish Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. As

this work grew and developed, David challenged and encouraged me to tighten it, to ground it, to make it fit together as an integral study. For his patience, in particular, I am truly grateful.

Professor Walter Cahn of Yale is a consummate and masterly art historian, keenly discerning and observant of both the microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions of iconography. By simultaneously warning me against overinterpretation and urging me to explore issues of national consciousness through art, he urged me toward the golden mean that transforms art into a truly useful tool for understanding the internal landscape of those who produced it.

John Boswell was a friend and adviser in the truest sense of the word, even in the throes of the terrible illness that eventually took his life. He was a superlative editor, an ever-tactful critic, but most of all, a teacher. I learned and grew from every suggestion he made to me. His keen interest in issues and methodologies that cross disciplines and extend beyond the bounds of the mainstream and the expected, as well as his grace, wit, scholarly acumen, and philological integrity proved a constant inspiration.

I was privileged to spend a wonderful year doing research at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1988–89, where I received the assistance and counsel of a number of exceptional scholars in the fields of Jewish history and history of art. I am deeply grateful to Richard Cohen, who was the first to examine my proposal; I could not have picked a wiser or more incisive critic. Likewise, Reuven Bonfil has enriched this work by urging me to ask of the material what he calls "the questions which really matter." Avraham Grossman pored cheerfully and ever-accommodatingly with me over halakhic materials and literary sources alike, most notably the torturous language of Yehudah Hadassi. Bezalel Narkiss and Elisheva Revel-Neher each took an active interest in this project in the early stages, and their suggestions with regard to matters iconographic have proved invaluable. Israel TaShema and Moshe Idel are two of a kind—fonts of information and helpful suggestion—both in terms of content and methodology. I learned more in a single bus ride with Idel about dogs, hares, and *gilgul* than I warrant I ever shall again (at least in this incarnation). The secrets revealed to me in the realm of libraries, manuscripts, and variant readings over coffee with TaShema proved invaluable.

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Dean Nancy Dye of Vassar, now president of Oberlin College, followed this research with particular interest and acuity. I have, over the years, maintained a lively exchange with Ivan Marcus at Yale about the relevance of this sort of work

for the new Ashkenazic cultural studies, and Ruth Mellinkoff and I have initiated a spirited e-mail correspondence on some of the issues dealt with herein. To Bill and Lisa Gross, collectors, scholars, humanitarians in the deepest sense of the word, go my sincerest gratitude for their warmth and interest.

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Throughout the course of my research I was fortunate, too, to have fine guides in accessing the materials necessary to complete this project. Jay Weinstein, my colleague for many years at Sotheby's, a gentleman of unfailing good humor, provided me with opportunities available to very few: to examine, work with, indeed to live with, many precious treasures of Jewish art. Like John Boswell, he did not live to see the completion of this book, but I feel blessed to have known him and to have shared the early stages of my research with him. Dr. Hartmut-Ortwin Feistel of the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin; Dr. V. Vermeersch of the Groeningenmuseum, Bruges; Anka Matijevich of the Art Institute of Chicago; Arnona Rudavsky of the Library of Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati; Eva Hovarth of the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hamburg; Iris Fishof of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Benjamin Richler of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem; Silke Schaeper of the Schocken Library, Jerusalem; Stephan Hoffman of the Universitätsbibliothek, Leipzig; Michael J. Boggan of the British Library and Linda Raymond of the Library's Oriental Collections; Charles E. Pierce Jr. of the Morgan Library, New York; Dr. Angelo Colombo of the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, Milan; Dr. Mayer Rabinowitz, Elka Deitsch, and Sharon Lieberman-Mintz of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York; Doris Nicholson and Melissa Dalziel of the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the staff of the Biblioteca Palatina, Parma; and of Beit Hatfuzot, Tel Aviv, have likewise proved to be the "keepers of the keys" to the raw materials that formed the basis for this study. They are worthy custodians all, and their knowledge is a crown for the treasures in their care.

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Last, last, and dearest—mere words are far too poor to express the sincerity of my gratitude to my kind and gentle wife, my friend, my colleague, Lisa, whose

patience has seen me through many difficult and frustrating times. This work would be considerably poorer without her incisive comments and the editorial assistance she gave unstintingly, sometimes even with the result that her own scholarly work suffered because of my deadlines. Her dedication has proved an inspiration, and I can do no less than dedicate this work to her.

פיה פתחה בחכמה ותורת חסד על לשונה משלי לאבט

She speaks with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her lips.

Proverbs 31:26

1

"If lions could carve stones . . ."

On Being a "Careful Reader"

Once a lion was journeying with a man, and each of them was boasting about himself. Along the side of the road they found a stone carving that showed a man strangling a lion. "You see!" said the man. "That proves that we men are stronger than you lions, and more powerful than any animal."

The lion replied, "Images like this are all made by you. If lions could carve stones, you would see all the lions winning!"

—*Aesop*[1]

The centrality of medieval art as a medium for revealing the mentalités of its creators, its patrons, and its intended audience is by now widely acknowledged in the field of cultural studies. Yet, while Latin manuscripts, from their codicology to their marginalia, have been analyzed at length as sources for the understanding of the inner landscape of medieval people, the illumination of Hebrew manuscripts remains relatively rich and undiscovered country.[2]

Jews were a demographic minority in the European Middle Ages, occasionally envied, sometimes despised and persecuted, usually misunderstood. In a barrage of public images, the pervasively Christian culture within which Jews lived proclaimed the dominance of Christians and Christianity over Jews and Judaism. In spite of constant reminders of their alterity, Jews created their own sense of belonging. They persevered in preserving their dignity and a positive self-perception. Their tradition, after all, continually reminded them that they were chosen by God from among all the nations of the earth; that they were the Lions of Judah.[3]

It would have been all too understandable for people in such a position, when faced with images of the accursed and rejected Synagoga or the Jewish tormentors of Jesus, to think, as did the lion in Aesop's fable, "Images like this are all made by you. If *we* were the ones making the monuments, you would see *us* in a position of dominance" (Figs. 1 and 2).[4]

Monuments of medieval Jewish art survive in small but sufficient numbers to confirm that the "lions" did in fact "carve stones." What needs to be addressed is the most important, as well as the most interesting, part of the fable: the lion's dream of what we should see in such monuments. Do we, in fact, see "all the lions winning"?[5]

From the nineteenth century to the present, most approaches to the study of medieval Jewish art have crystallized around other issues. The earliest forays into the field regarded medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts as a rich vein of evidence for the surface realia of medieval Jewish life, ready to be mined by historians. In spite of the fact that such work was often predicated upon the rather naive assumption—still held in some quarters—that Jewish art is an accurate and factual mirror of contemporary Jewish life, this archeological approach has provided us with a better, if not entirely objective, idea of what Jews wore, how they furnished their homes, performed their rituals, and celebrated their holidays.[6]

The archaeological impulse is still strong in contemporary scholarship. However, the bulk of more recent work in the field has gone in other directions. Scholarly consideration of medieval Jewish art tends to be extremely conservative, modeling itself on the traditional modes of analysis of medieval Christian art before its incorporation into what has been called "the methodological toolbox" of cultural studies.[7] Stylistic analyses of various manuscripts or of the work of specific artists and schools are common, as are discussions of the influence of the midrashic tradition on the origins of Jewish iconographic conventions and of the mechanics (though rarely of the meaning) of the apparent borrowing of iconographic motifs from Christian art.

Contrary to what one might assume, midrashic influence on medieval Jewish art is rarely attributed to active intervention in the production of the manuscripts by medieval artists or patrons who were repositories of textual or oral tradition, who read and understood midrash and commentary and incorporated details from those sources into the art they created or commissioned. On the contrary, the presence of midrashic elements is usually held to be the product of artists who somewhat thoughtlessly transcribed earlier iconographic models that originate in lost Jewish prototypes in remote and uncharted (presumably Hellenistic) antiquity, rather than from a living medieval Jewish encounter with texts and oral traditions.[8]

Likewise, stylistic and iconographic affinities of medieval Jewish art with contemporary Christian art are generally discussed as evidence of simple Jewish cultural assimilation. They are ascribed to the influence of the surrounding culture



Fig. 1. Ecclesia and Synagoga. Master of the Saint Ursula Legend. Panels from the Legend of Saint Ursula. Before 1482



Fig. 2. Jesus brought to Caiaphas. Salvin Hours, England, c. 1270. London, British Library MS Add. 48985, fol. 29r

on Jewish life, and hence on art. The logistics of such affinities are often meticulously traced, and the results reported with varying degrees of puzzlement, condemnation, or celebration, depending on the point of view and religious-political agenda of the author. Once again, artist and patron are represented as mere transcribers, covetously emulating current modes, with no indigenously Jewish motivation or understanding.

These two directions in contemporary research—midrashic analysis and iconographic comparison—have worked in concert to negate the category of medieval Jewish art, leaving no possibility for discussion of the viability of art as a touchstone for medieval Jewish mentalités. They represent medieval Jewish patrons and the artists whom they employed as both oblivious to the Jewish universe of text and commentary and blind to the heavily Christian content of contemporary iconography. We are forced to imagine these patrons and their artists either as ignorant transcribers of an ancient iconographic tradition, or as slavish imitators of their contemporaries with nothing new, nothing uniquely medieval, and certainly nothing distinctively Jewish to contribute. The phrase "medieval Jewish art" becomes an oxymoron: neither particularly medieval nor particularly Jewish, it is art that exists in pale imitation of lost and only half-remembered ancient antecedents, or assimilates itself, chameleonlike, to the colors of its backdrop. The unique and indigenous voice of medieval Jewry—so clearly audible in all other areas of Jewish cultural production in the period—has essentially been silenced and even banished from discourse on medieval Jewish art.

Thus, both the traditional archaeological approach and the more contemporary analysis of midrashic details or of apparent appropriations from Christian iconography eliminate the possibility of employing medieval Jewish art as medieval Christian art is utilized: toward the archaeology of mentalités in the study of cultural history rather than merely toward the archaeology of material culture. These approaches, in failing to transcend mere analysis of the logistics of transmission of iconographic motifs, ignore the crucial step of the transformation of those mainstream motifs into minority symbols, ofttimes transgressive ones.[9] As a result, the question of "whether the lions seem to be winning" is summarily mooted. If medieval Jewish art is neither particularly medieval nor particularly Jewish, then it is unnecessary to consider it as a minority corrective to the majority perspective, as a measure of the attitudes of Jews toward Christians in the Middle Ages. One cannot speak of medieval Jewish art as reactive if it is merely assimilatory.

What has impeded a more cutting-edge analysis of medieval Jewish art? Primarily the unresolved questions of the production history of medieval Hebrew manuscripts. The illumination of these manuscripts, like art produced by Jews in all times and places, assimilates contemporary styles and iconography, to the extent that some investigators (by and large art historians, rather than scholars of Jewish texts or history) have been moved to remark that it is often only the language of the accompanying text that enables one to distinguish "Jewish" from "Christian" illumination.[10] Any indigenously Jewish quality in medieval Hebrew manuscripts is generally denied.

Thus, at the outset, it is incumbent upon us to attempt a clearheaded assessment of the full range of authorial possibilities for the illumination of the corpus of medieval Hebrew manuscripts. In the absence of concrete documentation, there is a constellation of such possibilities for each manuscript. The questions of authorship are weighty and complex. Though I argue that the issues of Jewish patronage and Jewish audience are ultimately central, we must nevertheless begin by addressing the riddle of who actually put brush to parchment and illuminated these books. The answer to this question, at least, is uncomplicated, unequivocal, and manifestly unhelpful: in most cases we simply do not know. There is a broad spectrum of scholarly opinion on the subject of Jewish and non-Jewish involvement in the production of medieval Hebrew manuscripts.[11] The manuscripts might have been created either by Jews, by Christians working for Jews, or by Christians working entirely at their own discretion. Each option requires a slightly different problematization.

First, if a given manuscript was illuminated by Jews, we must ask if those Jews merely *adopted* contemporary Christian iconography wholesale, or if they *adapted* it to serve an indigenously Jewish reading of nature or sacred history.

Second, and on the other hand, the manuscript may have been illuminated by Christians. In such a case, the images discussed in the following chapters might be irreducible to the sort of contextualization to which I am prepared to subject them. If "medieval Jewish art" was produced by Christian artisans, then its very appellation might be disputed: Why should the iconography necessarily have any peculiarly Jewish significance? After all, would not a Christian artist simply have illuminated the manuscript in conformity with general stylistic and iconographic convention?

Under normal patronage circumstances, this seems improbable. It must be remembered that manuscripts were an extremely precious commodity in the Middle Ages and represented a substantial investment, even for a wealthy patron. It is highly unlikely that a patron employing any artist—Jewish or non-Jewish—would have given that artist complete discretion with regard to iconography, any more than a wealthy entrepreneur building a house today would leave the design entirely to the discretion of the builders or even the architect. Accordingly, the patron, and not necessarily the illuminator becomes the central figure in this equation. Even if Jews did not actually illuminate a given manuscript, its illuminators were necessarily commissioned by Jews. The question we directed at the

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hypothetical Jewish artist still stands, though it may now be directed at the ostensible Jewish patron: Why did the Jewish patron request particular scenes, iconography, and symbols?

Yet we cannot so blithely sidestep the question of the illuminator's identity. When one examines the presuppositions of the arguments made in favor of Christian illuminators, they turn out to be based primarily upon stylistic evidence: a division of labor in manuscript production, we are told, might have resulted in the coupling of a text obviously written by a Jew because of its language with illuminations "obviously" created by a Christian because of their style.

Now, it is true that there is little ground for the assumption that a particular manuscript must have been illuminated by Jews simply because the language of its text is Hebrew. But, the necessary (and seldom-considered) corollary to such an assertion is that, in the absence of specific documentary evidence of the background of the illuminator, there is likewise no reason to assume that a particular Hebrew manuscript was illuminated by a Christian because its stylistic "language" is that of the dominant majority. There is a nefarious tendency to presuppose that manuscripts exhibiting style, and in some cases, iconography characteristic of their time and place could not, a priori, have been illuminated by Jews. Even when, as is often the case, one encounters iconography in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts that contains details that suggest familiarity with midrash or commentary, it has become customary, on the basis of style alone, to propose that Christian artists simply copied this Jewish iconography, perhaps from an ancient Jewish iconographic tradition now lost. But if one conjectures Christians copying Jewish iconography, might one not just as easily postulate Jewish artists who emulated Christian style? Both are possible, and the issue has not yet been conclusively resolved.

Still, if we are to maintain that there is something indigenously "Jewish" about medieval Jewish art, the problems posed by Christian illuminators, even if working under a Jewish patron, remain complex, though not insurmountable. For instance, if one wishes to argue that medieval Jewish illumination is fraught with subversive iconography, does it not seem necessary that the art should have been the literal product of Jewish hands? It is difficult to fathom how Christian illuminators would have tolerated being commissioned to create the kind of illuminations I shall discuss in the following chapters, images that contain indigenously Jewish messages of protest and dreams of subversion directed against Christian culture. Yet why, realistically, does it seem so implausible that a Christian illuminator would have limned an image hostile to Christian society unawares, when it is so easy to imagine oblivious Jewish illuminators heedlessly adopting iconographic motifs from Christian art? The symbols I shall parse were, after all, common and fairly pervasive emblems whose indigenously Jewish meaning is not always immediately clear without some prior knowledge of Jewish texts and traditions. Such symbols may very well have been requested by Jewish patrons from Christian artisans unaware of their latent protestant or subversive content.

Third, and finally, even in the unlikely event that patrons were not involved at all and that Christians created the iconography entirely on their own, it must be recalled that the actual and intended audience for medieval Hebrew manuscripts was Jewish; we must consider not only the genesis, but the possible reception of the illumination as well. We can ask the same question of that audience that we asked of the ostensible Jewish illuminator and patron: Regardless of its origin, how might this iconography have been "read" by a medieval Jewish audience?

Ultimately, it is clear that medieval Jewish art is Jewish not because it was produced *by* Jews, but because it was produced *for* Jews—Jewish patrons and Jewish audiences. But to accept this idea is not so simple as it seems. It necessitates making a quantum leap from the opinion that medieval Jewish art is derivative and superficial to an encounter with medieval Jewish art as inherently Jewish. This leap, in turn, forces upon us the mantle of interpretation. No longer is the simple knowledge of the occurrence of transcultural borrowing or of the process by which it occurs sufficient. Such knowledge leaves us hungering for more information. We need to know to what end the borrowing was effected. The traditional view of the medieval Jewish iconographic tradition "from the outside in" requires corrective balance.[12]

One thing is certain: Jews did not commission or create art in a vacuum. Scholars of medieval art have assiduously catalogued examples of "the image of the Jew" as reflected in "the mirror of Christian art." This research has revealed an often grotesque body of material illuminating the otherness of the Jews, from the perspective, of course, of the majority culture.[13] This gallery of horrors in fact formed the backdrop against which subversive elements flourished in Jewish art of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Such elements existed in a symbiotic relationship with the perception and reception of the Jews in the majority culture and its art. They stood minimally in reaction to, and maximally in response to, "the image of the Jew in the mirror of Christian art."

It is necessary to investigate what recourse Jews in the Middle Ages might have had to express their self-perceptions, to depict their neighbors, and to depict themselves vis-à-vis their neighbors in their own art, particularly if those neighbors were polemicizing against them in literature and art. Until we address these issues, the conceptual shift from a very general perception of Jewish art as outside the mainstream to an active definition of Jewish art as the art of a minority culture, with all the attendant fascinations and methodological difficulties of such a definition, will remain a desideratum. I explore those complex but signal issues in the chapters to come. I shall demonstrate throughout what it means to "borrow" iconography, and consider what may be revealed about medieval Jewish culture by the ways in which medieval Jews borrowed it. Why did Jews borrow specific

iconographic motifs from Christian society, and what does their *adapt*ation of the motifs they chose to *adopt* reveal about their covert sentiments regarding the majority society?

It is timely to address issues such as these with respect to Jewish culture. Speculation regarding the conjunction or disjunction between the cultural productions of a society's "fringe" and its "center," its official and its grassroots culture, its majorities and its minorities, is the material of which comparative cultural studies are made in most disciplines.[14] The field of medieval Jewish cultural studies should be no exception. In fact, this sort of inquiry seems particularly relevant to the medieval Jewish context. One might expect medieval Jewish art to reflect the concerns and desires of the Jewish minority from a theological, sociological, and political perspective, anticipating the manner in which the art and literature of other Western minorities who have felt conflict, ambivalence, and defiance toward majority cultures would later reflect the concerns and desires of those societies vis-à-vis their majorities. But such expressions are not explicit in the images produced by medieval Jews: as a *persecuted* minority, they would not have been likely or able to express messages of protest or dreams of subversion in an overt manner. Leo Strauss describes the phenomenon in this way:

> Persecution . . . gives rise to a peculiar type of writing . . . in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers. It has all the advantages of private correspondence without having its greatest disadvantage—that it reaches only the writer's acquaintances. An author . . . has . . . to write in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book.[15]

It would not be unreasonable to expect that Jews in the Middle Ages might have resorted to a symbolic language to convey such messages. The problem, of course, lies in being able to perceive them—in being a "careful reader" in the Straussian sense, and in grounding these readings in culture—in iconography and in text.

In what follows, I take as the subject of my careful reading some symbols from the animal kingdom found in medieval Jewish art. Animal symbols permeate not only medieval Jewish art, but the wider sphere of medieval art as well. They are edifying examples of elements in the art of the minority culture drawn from the majority culture, yet transformed. The frequency of their appearance makes them an ideal example of transcultural borrowing. As general topoi of the majority, they are often viewed as universal motifs. But in spite of their pervasiveness in both majority and minority culture, their meanings are hardly univocal. As I shall demonstrate, the underlying symbolism of depictions of animals in medieval Jewish art, like the postulated stone-carving of Aesop's lion necessarily differs from those of animals in medieval Christian art and literature. In their minority context, such animal symbolism is host to specific, often startling, meanings and sentiments hitherto unexplored.

Because this chapter begins with a quote from Aesop, it would be well to embark upon our search for animal symbolism and its meaning in Jewish culture by pointing out that the Jewish tradition has had its own indigenous Aesops.[16] The Talmud mentions a number of outstanding fabulists, including Hillel and his pupil, R. Yohanan b. Zakkai. The latter was famous for his fox fables, his botanical fables, and the "fables of washermen."[17] R. Meir was also a renowned fabulist. He supposedly knew more than three hundred fables, but transmitted only three to his students. Despite the claim that with R. Meir's death, "the fabulists ceased,"[18] another fabulist, Bar Kappara, appeared in the next generation.[19]

The Talmud gives examples of animal fables, and is explicit concerning their political meaning. One of the most famous and typical is the fable of the fox and the fishes, in BT (Babylonian Talmud) *Hullin* 57b, narrated, interestingly, not by either R. Yohanan nor R. Meir, but by R. Akiva. The Roman authorities had forbidden the study of Torah. When R. Akiva nonetheless continued to teach, R. Pappas b. Judah asked, "Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?" R. Akiva replied with the tale of a fox who was once walking alongside a river, when he saw swarms of fish going to and fro. He said to them: "From what are you fleeing?" They replied, "From the nets cast for us by men." He said to them, "Would you like to come up onto dry land so that you and I can live together the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors?" They replied: "Are you the one called the cleverest of animals? You are not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more so should we be in the element in which we would die!" So it is with us, R. Akiva moralized to R. Pappas: If such is our predicament when we sit and study Torah, of which it is written, "For it is your life and the length of your days," if we go and neglect it how much worse off we should be![20]

Though animal imagery was a central medium of political commentary from the biblical and through the Talmudic period, scholars rarely consider the possibility that medieval Jews might have continued this tradition of pointed criticism.[21] Consequently, it is not difficult to understand the neglect in which animal iconography in medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts has languished.[22]

Medieval Jewish art, as we have seen, is considered derivative and marginal to the study of medieval Jewish culture. Animal imagery is usually situated literally in the margins of this marginal medium of expression, and is, thus, more often than not described as peripheral or secondary to the primary iconographic topoi it accompanies. Accordingly, it raises interesting questions about the possible implications of marginal space in the worldview of a culture itself considered marginal by the contemporary majority, as well as by many of its modern investigators.

These questions have too long gone unanswered. Half a century has passed since Paul Romanoff, curator of the museum of the Jewish Theological Seminary, wrote of Rachel Wischnitzer's discussion of the "Messianic Fox,"

> an interesting question in Jewish illuminated art has been raised: What is the significance of the animals appearing there, and do they have symbolic meaning? If so, they require study as to which of them belong to Jewish folk-lore and which ones were copied from or inspired by non-Jewish art. This study should be made upon examination of Jewish, Christian, and Oriental illuminations. Particular animal motifs should be likewise presented in their relation to the other animals found in the same illuminations.[23]

Romanoff's "interesting question" has not been addressed seriously despite a veritable Noah's Ark of animals in texts and iconography from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Franco-Germany, Spain, Provence, and Italy. The difficulty is that most medieval Jewish animal iconography lacks self-evident symbolic valence. Furthermore, the "meanings" for the animals that appear in art are not always explicit in Scripture or rabbinic literature; they often, in fact, stand directly counter to tradition and common knowledge. For all these reasons, it seems difficult to say anything of consequence about animal images in medieval Hebrew manuscripts. The evidence seems to favor a lack of indigenous Jewish meaning.

What, for instance, is one to make of the ubiquitous hare-hunt, present in spite of the polemic against hunting in Jewish sources and the nonkosher nature of the hare? Or of the cryptic iconography of elephants flanking the ark in the synagogue where one would expect to find lions? Or of dragons straddling the line between the divine and the demonic? Or of unicorns that seem to leap directly from the christological world of medieval tapestries into a new forest of Jewish messianic symbolism? Such images cry out for interpretation. Though they are uncommon and unfamiliar, and though obviously derivative, they appear in startlingly prominent marginal contexts.

It is specifically the issues of the iconography's apparent disjunction from its context, its similarity to Christian examples, and its marginality that will prove central in placing these images against the backdrop of the mentalités of their creators. Though this book is largely devoted to the issues of apparent contextual disjunction and appropriation, I must touch briefly at the outset on the issue of marginality.

Simply because certain images are situated in a position that is marginal or secondary to the main frame of an illustration need not imply that their meaning is peripheral. Michael Camille has presented dramatic evidence of the centrality and eloquence of the illuminated world of manuscript marginalia in the Gothic period as a forum for cultural critique.[24] His assertions translate well to the context of medieval Jewish culture. One has only to glance at the configuration of a page of Talmud to be reminded that in the Middle Ages Jewish texts were often written in the center of a given page and commentary filled the space around the text. I would argue that, particularly in medieval Hebrew manuscripts, by placing symbols traditionally used for sociopolitical commentary in such locations—traditionally the "commentary space"—artists devised an ideal shelter for sentiments they might feel the need to occlude in an environment of persecution, but that would still be accessible to "trustworthy and intelligent readers." When "commentary iconography" appears in the "commentary space" it should command our attention as careful readers. Such a conjunction cries out (in RaShI's [Rabbi Shlomo Yiẓḥaki's] favorite phrase), "Interpret me!"; it demands to be read as commentary, even if it seems unrelated to the body of the text.[25]

The issue of appropriation is more complex, particularly when attempting to discover the indigenously Jewish textual justifications for echoes of apparently Christian motifs. Yet one thing is clear from the start: it is difficult to maintain seriously that animal symbols could have had identical meanings in Jewish and Christian art. Though animal iconography may have been stylistically or representationally modeled after depictions found in the bestiaries, once appropriated by Jews, it could not possibly have borne the same symbolic valences it did in contemporary Christian art.[26] It is highly improbable, for instance, that the unicorn, symbol of Jesus, could have been appropriated wholesale and wholeheartedly into Jewish art without a requisite conceptual shift by illuminator, patron, or audience.

The necessity of such a conceptual permutation, a manifestation of medieval Jewish creativity in the realm of symbolism, is rarely recognized, and its dynamics are rarely probed.[27] Yet, if Congress were to commission a mural depicting an eagle and an American flag to hang in the rotunda of the Capitol, and a group of Latino youths were to paint a mural with an eagle and an American flag on the wall of a building in Spanish Harlem, no one would argue that both eagles and American flags mean the same thing despite their vastly different context, and few would maintain that the eagle in the *barrio* was "merely decorative." On the contrary, such a conjunction of symbols would invite interpretation by cultural historians. Both eagles, perhaps, could be understood to make symbolic reference of the ideal of the American Republic, but the one in the Capitol might be viewed as a symbol of the Republic in all its glory, and the one in the *barrio* might be read, depending on the context of its surrounding iconography, as a commentary on the dream of the Republic deferred, anger over the failure of the Republic, or hope for a more universal realization of the republican ideal.

If viable and respectable conjectures can be offered with regard to the meaning of animal symbols in the art of present-day minorities, why should anyone be disarmed by appropriations from the majority culture in the art of the medieval Jewish minority? Why is it necessary to label such borrowings "merely decora-

tive," maintaining that they mean, in effect, nothing at all? Perhaps, in fairness, it is because the production history of the manuscripts in question is still shrouded in relative darkness, and it is difficult to determine exactly how non-Jewish iconography was assimilated into Jewish art. But such a quandary, when it arises in any other field, is viewed as an invitation to speculation. Why must it silence historians of medieval Jewish art and culture?

Perhaps it is because the messages of protest and dreams of subversion to which the adaptation of this iconography gives voice can be discomfiting, distasteful, frightening. Yet it is imperative to face the anger of medieval Jews in order to acknowledge and understand medieval Jewish iconography as reactive rather than merely assimilatory, as meaningful rather than decorative.[28] With the exception of the extreme (and probably entirely theoretical) case of the totally autocratic Christian artist working for the utterly oblivious Jewish patron and audience, there is not a single one of our range of authorial possibilities that necessitates an absolute negation of meaning. Conversely, there are many openings for Jewish anger to manifest itself in all its assertiveness, and, occasionally, in its ugliness.

The arguments I shall present in the coming chapters may tend to err on the side of boldness of interpretation. But this seems to me a necessary corrective native to the sort of interpretive paralysis in which the field has hitherto found itself. Certainly I cannot be completely confident that the meanings for given iconography and the constellations of symbolic associations I propose hold true in all cases. There are most definitely instances where animal iconography serves purely decorative purposes. And even when I have made specific interpretive conjectures, were I to be asked point-blank, for instance, "Would you say that the hare represents Jacob/Israel in medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts?" I would reply with my mentor John Boswell, "Probably, sometimes, but this is obviously a difficult question to answer about the past since the participants cannot be interrogated."[29] Unlike contemporary members of Congress and Latino youth, medieval patrons and illuminators cannot be questioned about their motives. Still, we must advance the state of the question; if it is done with the prudent support of text and context, one may hope that the result will be marred neither by interpretive excess nor paralyzing caution.

Without concrete documentation of the specific dynamic of the patronage of the manuscripts in which the motifs that interest us are found, each scholar must predicate his or her investigation on certain presuppositions. Mine is relatively simple and involves no aesthetic value judgments about whether or not a given manuscript could possibly have been created by Jews on the basis of style or quality; I maintain that the illuminations examined herein are indigenously Jewish in that they were created for Jews, ultimately by artists who were at least as likely to

have been Jewish as Christian. Thus, adoption of animal symbolism from Christian art and literature into medieval Jewish text and iconography may reflect a desire on the part of Jewish artists or patrons to recover (or better, to preserve) the biblical and Talmudic topos of animal symbolism to comment on the patterns of sacred history, contemporary circumstances, and eschatological aspirations.[30] Awareness of the potential in animal allegory for political and theological exegesis seems to have inspired medieval Jews to reconcile "common knowledge" about various creatures (which was heavily imbued with Christian moralizations) with a more specialized "Jewish knowledge" about such creatures. They melded the classical Talmudic, midrashic, and esoteric traditions regarding various animals with an indigenously medieval understanding of their own immediate sociopolitical circumstances, to produce symbols that felt authentically grounded in the tradition while serving as commentary on their contemporary situation. As symbols were adopted from Christian art, they were filtered through aspects of a long-standing and rarefied symbolic consciousness and viewed against the backdrop of specific historical circumstances. These adapted symbols demand highly contextual, or "time-bound" readings.

The "time-bound" nature of these symbols makes their meanings elusive, refractory. Their context makes them fragile and ephemeral. They are difficult to decode because they address mythopoetic topoi that can no longer be taken for granted as part of Jewish consciousness in a post-Enlightenment context: Jewish chosenness and mission, the inevitability of the progress of Jewish redemption through history, and its ultimate, eschatological denouement. This explains why they did not survive into the present—why, for instance, the hare has not been adopted as the symbol of the Jewish Agency, or why the unicorn never caught on as the emblem of any of the various postmedieval messianic movements. It explains why when postmodern people encounter such symbols in medieval Jewish art, they seem to demand interpretation. Yet, for the careful reader, it is the specificity and the contextuality of the symbols that makes them useful in illuminating the medieval Jewish mind.

With what assumptions, then, ought the careful reader to embark upon an investigation of these often occluded symbols? Medieval Jewish art should be understood as a repository of the world outlook of its creators, rather than as striving toward some aesthetic ideal. It provides a forum for the intimation, often in veiled language, of sentiments deeply held but dangerous (theologically or politically) to express explicitly. In art, medieval Jews found, reencountered, and grappled with all the classical Jewish questions of self-definition: their place in history, relationship with God and their neighbors, their hopes for redemption. This internal landscape was projected upon their actual sociopolitical situation.

Medieval Jews were deeply conscious of playing what their tradition told them was a central role in the spiritual history of the world. They were suffused with

historical memory and eschatological hope. They looked back upon a time when theirs was a sovereign and majestic culture, with a holy city, a holy Temple, and spiritual tributaries in the wind's four quarters. They hoped for the restoration of that status. Throughout most of their history in the diaspora, Jews lived in a valley of reality between the twin peaks of memory and expectation—the reality of their subjugation to the nations. The cognitive dissonance between this reality and the historical memories and future hopes of the Jewish people had bred in Jewish art (as far back as Dura Europos, and probably before) unique religious and political sensibilities.

Nascent Jewish iconography blossoms in the Middle Ages; it develops and gains a voice through many of the dominant modes of expression of the surrounding culture, including the visual arts. Medieval Jews inherited from the rabbis of the Talmudic Age a finely tuned sense of irony. The ability to express their often subversive feelings in the modes of expression of the dominant culture appealed to them; their iconography reflects this in subtle, clever, and wholly fascinating ways. Expressions of protest and dreams of subversion are not uncommon when we know where to look and how to read beyond the specific symbols, to attempt to understand some of the motivations behind and the process of allegorization itself.

These images operate on many different levels simultaneously: "passing" as Christian art; "crossing over" to criticize Christian society, echoing sentiments found in Jewish literature. In asking how and why medieval Jews framed allegories depicting their pursuit by the nations of the world, allegories upholding and glorifying the "Hebrew Law," so extensively vilified in Christian culture, or allegories playing with the limitation of God's power and the thin line between good and evil, we gain a broader picture of their internal life than we do on the basis of texts alone: what comes into focus is *what was important* to the patrons, the illuminators, and ultimately to the audience of these manuscripts.

Though iconography allows for certain sentiments to be expressed simultaneously more explicitly and more guardedly than written texts do, it, too, like the rabbinic textual tradition, is haunted by the consciousness of exile and the dream of redemption. The years that separated medieval Jews from the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. did not inure them to the power of that cataclysm. On the contrary, every day's distance from that tragedy was a day longer in exile, and made their desire for vindication and restoration all the more intense. Their writing and iconography reveal depths of longing and bitterness and frustration over the length of the exile that rivaled that of the generation of the destruction itself. Medieval Jews saw history as a single closewoven fabric moving from creation to eschatology; they perceived it as repeating itself at every turn. And the Jews of Western Europe seem to have felt a particularly fierce anger over the heavy yoke of the Kingdom of Edom, which their ancestors were forced to endure when

Rome was called by that name, and to which they were subject under the domination of Christendom, the inheritor of the Roman Empire.[31] They dreamed dreams of restoration and vindication.

The dream of restoration is familiar to anyone who has heard the words: "Next Year in Jerusalem" at the conclusion of a Passover seder. But the dream of vindication is less familiar, perhaps because we chose to ignore it.[32] Yet it emerges with great frequency, implicitly and even explicitly in the Middle Ages. The centuries between the Bar Kokhba revolt and the Jewish resistance during the Holocaust were not empty of acts of bravery and defiance. Jews in the Middle Ages may have accepted the burden of exile with grace, but they did not accept it without question and without a great deal of anger, anger that required safety valves. The role of art as one of those safety valves merits serious consideration.

If we understand medieval Jewish art as a "safety valve," our eyes are opened to it in new ways. We gain an unparalleled opportunity to address issues of medieval Jewish self-definition and worldview that are essential for an understanding of the inner landscape of Europe's major medieval minority. And in surveying the contours of that undiscovered country, we can learn much that will offer a deeper understanding of the totality of Western religious mentalités.

2

The Elusive Hare

Constructing Identity

"When a Jew says he is going
hunting to amuse himself, he lies."
—Walter Rathenau

There is a slim, leather-bound manuscript in the British Library's collection that, externally, is among the least impressive of the lot. Yet when one opens this small volume, one's eye is suddenly and dramatically swept across pages whose richness of color and delicacy of design exemplify the very best and most beautiful products of the medieval illuminator's workshop. MS Add. 27210, better known as the Golden Haggadah, was made in Castile, around 1320, and indeed, it is the opulence of the shining golden backgrounds of the illuminations that is most seductive when one first encounters the manuscript.

For the moment, though, let us tear our gaze from the book's embarrassment of aesthetic riches to examine a detail that has gone all but unnoticed in considerations of its iconography.[1] This seemingly incidental iconographic element provides a window upon the place of art in the construction of medieval Jewish identity in both Spain and Franco-Germany during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

On folio 4 verso of the Golden Haggadah, in the lower righthand corner of the page is a shorthand depiction of the dramatic events of Genesis 27. Rebecca has disguised her younger son Jacob as her elder son Esau, by covering his arms with hairy goatskins, and Jacob has gone before his blind, old father Isaac to receive the blessing his brother should have received (Color Plate I). As Rebecca looks on, the aged Isaac grasps his younger son and is about to bless him. Before he does, he suspects that something is awry. "The voice is the voice of Jacob," he says, "yet the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22). Nevertheless, he tenders his benediction upon Jacob. Suddenly, Esau, the blessing's intended recipient, rushes in from the field where his father had sent him to hunt. He is armed with a bow and arrows, and bears a hare upon a club he has slung over his shoulder (Color Plate II). When he observes that he has been deceived, he breaks into "wild and bitter sobbing."

At first, the depiction of Esau the hunter hastening in from the field with the "savory meat" his father had requested seems perfectly "medieval" and perfectly appropriate. Yet what kind of meat has he brought? The hare (ארנבת, *arnevet*) is mentioned only twice in the Pentateuch, both times as part of a list of animals whose consumption is forbidden.[2] Jewish tradition has it that the Written Law of the Torah—the Pentateuch—was given to Moses on Mount Sinai together with the Oral Law, that is, all the oral interpretations of the Written Law that would form the basis for the discussions of the Talmud.[3] But rabbinic legend takes the primordiality of the Oral Law one step further and imagines that the entire generation of the Patriarchs observed both the Written and Oral Law even before they were given at Sinai.[4] This observance, of course, included the laws of *kashrut*, of kosher food; the laws that stipulated that only split-hoofed ruminants slaughtered in a specific manner with a ritual knife were permitted food. Why, then, in this illumination, should an animal that has been hunted in a ritually unacceptable manner be offered as a meal to a venerable Patriarch? And why should it be a nonkosher animal, specifically, a hare?

This detail would be easy to ignore if it were unparalleled. But the iconography of the hare-hunt is not confined to this manuscript, nor even to Spain. We find it in medieval and postmedieval Jewish art in Franco-Germany as well. The motif of the hare pursued by its hunters is mentioned in connection with medieval Ashkenazic examples of the *haggadah*, the text of the home service for the eve of Passover, by many authors of works on Jewish art. It is, to quote Landsberger, "a favorite [subject] in all haggadahs of Germany." This is somewhat of an exaggeration. The hare-hunt first appears in Ashkenaz in the fifteenth century, and is present in only a handful of manuscript *haggadot* (Figs. 3 and 4).[5] Yet the motif gains popularity with the advent of printing, and is found in at least three of the most popular early printed *haggadot*, as well as the later *haggadot* that emulated



Fig. 3. Hare-hunt. Haggadah illustrated by Joel ben Simeon, Germany, Ulm or Augsburg, fifteenth century. London, British Library MS Add. 14762, fol. 4r, bottom of page



Fig. 4. Hare-hunt. Haggadah illustrated by Meir Yafeh. Germany, Ulm, fifteenth century. Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Library, fol. 4r

their design.[6] In all these examples, the image appears either before or after the text of the *Havdalah*, the concluding prayer of the Sabbath, to be said if Passover begins on a Saturday night (Fig. 5).[7]

These hare-hunts serve as a visual parallel to a famous Talmudic mnemonic: The order of the blessings to be recited when a *seder* was held on a Saturday night was memorized by combining the initials of a series of Hebrew catchwords into a single mnemonic: *YaKiNeHaZ* (יקנה״ז). This combination comprises the initial letters of the names for the blessings over wine (*yayin*), the prayer concerning the sanctification of the festival (*kiddush*), the candle that is lit at the conclusion of the Sabbath (*ner*), the blessing declaring the separation of the Sabbath from weekdays (*havdalah*), and the thanksgiving blessing for having reached this festive season (*zeman*).[8] In lands where Judeo-German was spoken, the sound of the mnemonic *YaKiNeHaZ* called to mind the German "jag den Has" (hare-hunt) and thereby came to be illustrated as such in the *Haggadah*.[9]

Studies of illuminated and printed *haggadot* usually present the *YaKiNeHaZ* iconography as an unproblematic, and in fact, a very clear and clever use of an illustration to accompany a mnemonic (see note 7). Yet the iconography presents numerous difficulties, both in terms of its position and its content. It is true that Jewish tradition is fond of mnemonics and acrostics; there are still others in the text of the *Haggadah* itself.[10] However, this is the only illustrated example in all of Jewish tradition. It is, moreover, a vernacular mnemonic illustrated by a secular, even "non-Jewish" pastime. The uniqueness of this image, and the fact that it was assigned by the artists to such a prominent place in the *Haggadah*, when, as in any other case of variation in ritual, a mere note of explanation would have sufficed, serve to underscore its strangeness.

One might at first suppose that these scenes are a reflection of contemporary medieval Jewish practice projected backward on the illustration of the biblical narrative. But hunting by Jews was unequivocally condemned throughout ancient and medieval rabbinic literature, which viewed it as a distinctly non-Jewish activity, one of the classical excesses of the gentiles.[11] If we sought the simplest answer for the appearance of the hunt in these illustrations, we might maintain that both the tale of Jacob's blessing, and the *YaKiNeHaZ* mnemonic demanded the depiction of a hunter, and since the Jews did not normally hunt, they would have lacked a hunting iconography. Consequently, they must merely have adopted a Christian hunting motif.

Yet this is more than a mere adoption. The image of the hare-hunt seems to have had profound and pervasive allegorical significance for Jews in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While it would be easy to understand the appropriation of this iconography merely as clever or amusing, it would be wise to consider the words of Walter Rathenau with which this chapter begins, for what he says is particularly true of Jews in this period. If Jews in the wake of the



Fig. 5. Hare-hunt. Haggadah, Venice, 1609. Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America



Fig. 6. Demonic hunter. Worms Maḥzor I, Worms 1272. Jerusalem, JNUL MS Heb. 4° 781/I, fol. 170v

Crusade martyrdoms in Ashkenaz, or subject to the mob violence and dramatic vicissitudes of legal status in Spain identified with any aspect of the hunt, it would almost certainly have been with the quarry.[12]

This identification is rooted in biblical and rabbinic tradition. The Hebrew bible is replete with references to salvation from the "snares of the hunter," meaning the "clutches of evil people," and rabbinic literature is sprinkled with such allusions.[13] Genesis designates Esau as the father of the nation of Edom, which the rabbis identified with pagan, and subsequently with Christian Rome.[14] Rabbinic literature makes it clear that Esau's quarry is Jacob and Israel, and so his hunt serves as a typology for the oppression of Israel by the nations of the world.[15] Accordingly, when hunting appears in medieval Jewish literature and in art, it is often used allegorically, most commonly as a figure for the persecution of Israel.[16]

In the eleventh century, the liturgical poet Shlomo Ibn Gabirol depicts Rome as a hunter pursuing the Jews: "The hunter [Rome] put out his hand [to capture me] as did the hairy he-goat [Greece], on the day when the enemy overpowered and the City was breached."[17] Another great Spanish poet and philosopher of the twelfth century, Yehudah HaLevi, uses hunting among animals in the natural world as an allegory for the pursuit of Israel by the nations of the world. In his *Kuzari*, he depicts the subjugation of the weak by the strong as part of the divinely ordained natural order. Yet he asserts that the knowledge of the ultimate triumph of divine justice should serve as a comfort for the pursued. God certainly created the lion with ferocity and the instruments for robbing and tearing, but accordingly provided the deer and the hare with the means for flight required by their timid nature. HaLevi presents the hunt of the weak by the strong as part of God's plan, and stresses that one must be accepting of the many times the hunt ends in this world with the weak devoured by the strong. Since God is "the Rock, whose doings are perfect . . . this too, is for the best."

According to HaLevi, Israel's patience in accepting the present order will be her ultimate salvation; her acceptance of the exile and subjugation as punishment for its sins will cleanse her from those very sins and cause her to merit the end of the exile. Jews are admonished not to sink into utter despair in contemplating their sociopolitical situation, but instead to recall God's salvation in the past to find hope for the future: "One will have no difficulty in picturing how we may recover our greatness." HaLevi urges his coreligionists to meditate specifically upon the events of the Exodus as evidence of God's once and future redemption, even as they accept the punishment of exile:

> For our greatness is much effaced among the nations, and our memory is forgotten, as it says, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed" (Ezek. 37:11)—let one (therefore) think upon the Exodus from

> Egypt, and upon all which is said in (the text) "How many measures of goodness has the Omnipresent bestowed upon us!" (*Haggadah*).[18]

The loss of a dignified Jewish identity, on the other hand, can only lead to decline and degradation. "For it is written: 'O worm Jacob' (Isa. 41:14)—what can remain of a man who has become a worm in his grave?"[19]

HaLevi's is the most elaborate exposition of the hunting metaphor in medieval Hebrew literature, and, in spite of its quietism, it provides an extremely ingenious prescription for medieval Jews. It provides Jews with a way of contending with the parallel and seemingly contradictory responsibilities of accepting the burden of exile and pursuit by the nations of the world as part of the divine order and as punishment for their sins, without losing hope.[20] It charged them with simultaneously envisioning their salvation, their vindication, and their prophesied and destined future greatness. This passage is important to us for three reasons: it incorporates hunt imagery as metaphor for the pursuit of Israel by her enemies, it recalls the Exodus as a nexus of collective memory and of the anticipation of the once and future salvation of the Jewish people, and it very compellingly and explicitly makes almost a commandment of maintaining a positive Jewish identity.[21]

Just as the theme of the hunt finds its way into medieval Jewish texts, hunting iconography is surprisingly common in medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, where it also may be read allegorically.

A clear example of the pervasiveness of the hunt allegory in the context of medieval Jewish iconography is the illustration of the liturgical poem for the holiday of Shavuot, beginning *Ayelet ahuvim matnat Sinai*, which refers to the Torah as the "loving doe."[22] Though the poem does not depict the doe in a hunting context, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the text is often illustrated with a hunt scene, in which baying dogs pursue a doe, occasionally followed by the strange figure of a "demonic hunter" (Fig. 6).[23] In these depictions, the symbolism of the "loving doe," is broadened, and transformed into an emblem of the people of Israel.[24] It was probably difficult for the medieval Jewish audiences of these Rhenish manuscripts to think of Shavuot without recalling the terrible martyrdoms that had occurred at that season in 1096. And it was painfully natural for them, in imagining the doe that symbolizes the people of Israel, to conceive of a doe that, rather than running free and unfettered, was pursued by demonic hunters and dogs, clearly representative of the enemies of Israel.[25]

The allegorical significance of hunts and hunting in medieval Hebrew texts and iconography explains their frequency of appearance despite the prohibitions of hunting in Jewish law. Why, however, was the hare chosen so frequently as the hunt's quarry?

The *YaKiNeHaZ* mnemonic specifically necessitates a hare-hunt, so one might be tempted to "excuse" the appearance of this motif in that context. But the hare

appears in other hunt scenes in medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. In folio 1v of the Schocken Bible, an early fourteenth-century German manuscript, a roundel depicting Esau (from a group at the beginning of the book of Genesis) shows him bearing a hare tied to a spear (Fig. 7). Besides these Ashkenazic examples, the hare, as we have seen, appears in the depictions of Esau's hunt in the Golden Haggadah and in other Sephardic manuscripts created a century before the first illustrated *YaKiNeHaZ* mnemonic, and outside of the linguistic contexts where the mnemonic would have made sense as a bilingual pun.[26] In the mid-fourteenth-century Aragonese *Sarajevo Haggadah*, for instance, two full miniatures are devoted to Esau's hunt and return. Although he goes out and hunts birds with his bow, when he returns, it is with none other than the inevitable hare slung over his shoulder (folios 9v and 10r; Figs. 8 and 9).[27]

Since hares are present throughout the entire corpus of medieval Hebrew manuscript illumination, it is tempting to read the hares that are prominently represented in almost all Jewish depictions of Esau's hunt as examples of generic nature painting or the incorporation of fabular or folkloristic motifs.[28]

The difficulty is that this multiplication of hunted hares in the iconography of Esau's hunt in Hebrew manuscripts stands in odd contrast with the almost complete dearth of hares in Christian representations of the same motif. A comprehensive survey of contemporary Christian illuminations, as well as paraphrases and adaptations of the Bible text, reveals that in the vast majority of cases, Esau's quarry is a deer or, less commonly, birds.[29] The *primary* mode of depicting this scene in Jewish illumination, which, at first, seemed to be an obvious adaptation by Jews of a Christian pictorial or textual tradition is, in fact, almost totally lacking in Christian texts and iconography. The hare in the iconography of Esau's hunt appears to be an indigenously Jewish motif.[30]

It is perplexing, then, that we catch not the slightest scent of a hare in the rabbinic exegetical traditions describing the hunt of Esau. In fact, the idea that Esau's "savory meat" should be a hare resonates strangely in a *halakhic* or *aggadic* setting for a number of reasons. The *midrashim* explain that in sending Esau out to hunt for him, Isaac (in a manner consistent with the myth of the pre-Siniatic religious observance of the patriarchs) took great pains to specify that the catch be ritually slaughtered, and that it be neither an unclean beast, nor one which had died by itself, nor had been bitten by a carnivorous beast nor even stolen from its rightful owner.[31] The same sources acknowledge that the single virtue of the villainous Esau was his unwavering filial piety.[32] The idea that Isaac would have eaten nonkosher game, or that his devoted son Esau would have fed his father a hare is notably at odds with rabbinic imaginings of the scene.

Most of the classical midrashic works, from *Bereshit Rabbah* (400–500 C.E.) to *Sefer HaYashar* (fifteenth century), and most of the commentators from Sa'adia Gaon (892–942) to Ovadiah Sforno (1475–1550) take for granted the kosher



Fig. 7. Esau the Hunter. Schocken Bible, Southern Germany, Swabia, fourteenth century. Jerusalem, Schocken Library, MS 14840, fol. 1v



Fig. 8. Esau hunts birds. Haggadah, Aragon, mid-fourteenth century. Sarajevo, National Library Heb. MS 1, fol. 9v (top)



Fig. 9. Esau returns with a hare. Haggadah, Aragon, mid-fourteenth century. Sarajevo, National Library Heb. MS 1, fol. 10r (top)

nature of Esau's hunt, and seem unconcerned with the particular type of game with which Esau ultimately returned. The few that describe the hunt at all are notable for their insistence that both the hunted animals and the hunting method were in accordance with rabbinic law. *Bereshit Rabbah* mentions that Esau netted both deer and birds, but an angel set them free.[33] *Midrash Tanhuma* states that he went after deer, but Satan set them free.[34] One version of *Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer* does mention that Esau was successful in netting and slaughtering a deer.[35] These sources stand in stark contrast to the iconography. Thus, perplexingly, Christian iconography consistently supports the rabbinic texts that depict Esau as hunting kosher animals, while Jewish iconography ignores them, transgressively undermining rabbinic tradition by placing the hare in Esau's hands.

The only rabbinic source that indicates that something was awry—not kosher, so to speak—in the nature of Esau's hunt is a very early one; the *Targum Yerushalmi* 1 (Pseudo-Jonathan),[36] which relates that the chase was unsuccessful and that Esau was compelled to kill a dog and to prepare its flesh for his father's meal:

> The word of God detained (*'ikev*—a pun on the name of Jacob—*Ya'akov*) him from pure quarry, and he found a single dog and killed it, and he also made a dish out of it. . . . And Isaac was seized by a great fear when he heard the voice of Esau and the odor of his cooking as it rose up in his nose was like the odor of the flames of Gehenna.[37]

This *aggadah* depicts a thoroughly corrupt Esau utterly disregarding what the rabbis were certain would have been Isaac's wishes. Since it is unique in rabbinic literature in specifically rejecting the elaborate mythology regarding the character and the religious observance of the Patriarchs, a likely area to probe for parallels would be Karaite exegesis. Karaite sectarians maintained the absolute inviolability of the Written Torah, and rejected both the legal and aggadic aspects of the Oral Law. Karaite interpretation of the story of Esau's hunt and Jacob's blessing, thus, ought to presume neither the Patriarch's preobservance of an Oral Law not recognized by the sect, nor to impute to Esau an extrabiblical filial piety.

It is, in fact, in a Karaite text that we first net the elusive hare. The *targum* we have been discussing is paraphrased in the central work of medieval Karaite exegesis, Yehudah Hadassi's *Eshkol HaKofer*, begun in 1148. This work gathers Karaite commentary on the six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah, oftimes with the expressed purpose of polemicizing against rabbinic texts and Rabbanite mores. The material is codified in alphabetic acrostics under the rubrics of the Ten Commandments, the "headings" under which they were given at Sinai. Under the rubric of the ninth commandment "You shall not bear false witness" we read:

> (The Rabbanites) slandered Isaac, saying that he would eat carcasses of animals which had died on their own, and animals which had been killed by other beasts,
>
> The game of his son Esau, which he had hunted with arrows, with the sword and the spear, thus they taught,
>
> As it says: (Genesis 27:2) "Take your gear, your quiver and bow."
>
> They elaborated upon the biblical text and said that Esau returned unsuccessful from his hunting, and took small, impure beasts, such as dogs and a hare and the like, and he cooked them as a savory dish by his own hand, and brought them to Isaac his father. And when he (Isaac) tasted them, the dogs began to cry out and to bark in his dish before Isaac your child. When Isaac heard their voice he was frightened, panicked and shaken,
>
> As it says: (Genesis 27:33) "Isaac was seized with very violent trembling."[38]

One might have assumed that *Eshkol HaKofer* might have celebrated this *aggadah* from the *targum* for its apparently "Karaite" qualities—a lack of emphasis on Isaac's preobservance of the Oral Law and a refusal to depict Esau as a paragon of filial piety in apparent contradiction of the biblical text. Yet, in spite of these ostensibly appealing characteristics, the implication that Isaac would have consumed (or even nearly consumed) *ragoût des petites chiens* was libelous to Karaite eyes, and the *aggadah* becomes an object of derision, an example of the reprehensible distortions of the Written Torah bred in the interpretive phantasms of benighted Rabbanite exegetes. The legend appears, in fact, under the rubric "You shall not bear false witness" which heralds it as a Rabbanite "slander" of the patriarch Isaac.[39]

The inclusion of the hare in Hadassi's paraphrase may testify to his preservation of a hitherto unknown variant reading of the *targum*.[40] Yet it is more likely that the hare is Hadassi's own invention. For Hadassi, the *ragoût* did sufficiently convey the repugnance of the Rabbanite depiction of the scene. It is only when he cooks up a hare as the *pièce de résistance*, does he feel he has sufficiently plumbed the depths of the depravity of Rabbanite libel.

But whether the hare initially appears in a lost variant reading of the *targum*, or whether it sprung fully formed from the head of Hadassi—"merely corroborative detail intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and insufficiently shocking narrative"[41]—it remains a minutium in a vast Karaite polemic. It seems unlikely that it would have been known to the illuminators of the manuscripts of the medieval Rabbanite mainstream.

Thus, Esau's hare is an "orphaned image." It cannot trace its ancestry from the venerable tradition of rabbinic textual exegesis. It is certainly not the product of

an intermarriage between Jewish and Christian iconography, since it does not appear in Christian sources. Nor does it appear to be an illegitimate child, created by Karaites and reappropriated by Jews. It is an example of an indigenously medieval Jewish motif. Much as HaLevi had done in his passage on the hunt as metaphor in the Kuzari, the illuminators of Jewish books privileged the hare alongside, or even above the gentle and innocent beasts that abound among kosher animals, some of which, like the deer, have a venerable tradition as classical symbols of Israel.[42] Their interest in creating a sort of "iconographic exegesis" linking Esau's hunt with contemporary historical circumstances was so strong that they did so in spite of the fact that no rabbinic text features the hare.[43]

I believe that the choice of the hare as a symbol for Israel was a conscious iconographic contribution to the construction of medieval Jewish identity, a response to currents of symbolism in the dominant culture that was at once utilitarian and theologically motivated. The hare had a negative meaning for medieval Christians. It stood as a symbol for homosexuals, and by extension, for Jews.[44] Thus, Christians, who were the hunters, had defined the Jews, their quarry, as hares: the majority culture imposed the symbol upon the minority. Once branded with this sign of calumny, Jews set about very matter-of-factly to redeem it and transform it from an emblem of infamy to a superlative metaphor for Jewish self-definition. In the hare one finds a specific combination of traits that go beyond a general docility and innocence, and that strongly identify it with the positive (or at least the pragmatic) image medieval Jews had of themselves: Hares, though relatively timid, are long of ear and fleet of foot. They are sensitive to the portents of danger, swift in escaping when they must. Hares are able to leap long distances, cross borders and frontiers. In short, they are adept at surviving. The hare is also a universally fabled trickster, often depicted as despoiling its would-be despoilers. These are all traits that would tend to be identified negatively in the majority culture, yet positively in minority society.[45]

The Jewish reappropriation of the symbol of the hare is effected in an atmosphere charged with theological polemic. The doctrine of supersession, the idea of the election of the younger brother in place of the elder, was omnipresent in the later Middle Ages. Jews were constantly aware that their birthright was being claimed by Christians, who at the same time, accused them of deviousness and duplicity stemming back to Jacob's deception of his brother. Jews adopted the image of the hare not only because it was pragmatic to do so, but because they saw in the symbol a reflexive and intrinsically Jewish critique, directed specifically at Jacob in his dealings with his brother. It answered Christian accusations of duplicity, yet it allowed Jewish claims of election to stand. Like the hare, Jacob has the reputation of being clever, sly—a trickster who can blend in, and change his form and identity.[46] *Ya'akov*—Jacob—means "deceiver," and Esau, whom he dupes by altering his identity on two occasions, is of the opinion that Jacob's

name suits him.[47] Later, Jacob's reward and punishment are accomplished by means of switched identities. First, he is punished by having his chosen bride, Rachel, switched for her less desirable sister Leah by Laban, their father (Gen. 29:21–30). Then, he is rewarded when he earns his fortune as a result of his ability to alter the appearance of Laban's sheep (Gen. 30:37–43).

Likewise, according to the aggadic tradition, it is not only Jacob himself, but Jacob's descendents who suffer because of the fraternal breach caused by his concealment of his identity. They ultimately triumph and merit redemption when repentance effects a repair of that breach and when a concealed identity is revealed: Jacob's deception of Esau, though it earns him a blessing, causes Esau to break into "wild and bitter sobbing" (Gen. 27:34), and he comes after Jacob with murderous intent. As a result of the chain of events set into motion by the pain that Jacob causes his brother through his lie, Jacob must flee the Land of Israel. This flight is understood in the tradition as the first stage of the great exile of the Jewish people. The exile is not concluded until Jacob's descendant, Mordekhai, is punished "measure for measure" and made to echo Esau's "wild and bitter sobbing" (Esther 4:1) because of the deception of his ancestor.[48]

So much is noted in the midrash. But it remains for us to observe the way in which the *tikkun*—the repair of this act—is effected. Mordekhai must prevail upon Esther, who had been concealing her "kindred and her people" (Esther 2:20) to reveal her true identity. Only then, through Esther's revelation of her identity, is the deception wrought by Jacob through concealment of his identity "undone," and the process of redemption from the Exile is begun. According to rabbinic tradition, the first herald of redemption is Esther's son, Darius, who paves the way for his successor, Cyrus, to permit the rebuilding of the Temple and the repatriation of Jerusalem by the descendants of Jacob.[49] The emblem of Darius's Medo-Persian Empire is the *shafan*, the daman or hyrax, which, like the hare, unites the signs of clean and unclean animals. Rabbinic tradition understands the *shafan* as an appropriate symbol for Darius, who was "of pure descent on his mother's side, and impure descent on his father's side."[50]

Just as the midrash regards the *shafan* as an appropriate sign for the mixed genealogy of Darius, the hare may, for medieval Jews, have seemed an appropriate attribute for the ambiguous moral character of Jacob. As the biblical representative of that class of animals which chew the cud, but which have no true hoofs, the hare recalls Jacob's deception of his father. Though internally, it is pure ("The voice is the voice of Jacob"), it is specifically its hairy paws that distinguish it in a negative manner from clean animals ("yet the hands are the hands of Esau" [Gen. 27:22]). The symbolism of the hare is manifestly consonant with Jacob's conflicted character and fortunes, and emblematic of the chain of concealment and revelation, of switched identities, of honesty and prevarication that constitutes his life's history.

In choosing the hare as a symbol, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Jews create a visual parallel to Yehudah HaLevi's textual prescription: by using the iconography of the trickster hare and linking it with Jacob, they acknowledge that their contemporary state of subjugation to Edom is in some measure one of the continuing repercussions of Jacob's deception. In doing so, they indicate that they have internalized the theodicy that accepts Jewish exile and persecution, in HaLevi's paraphrase of the classical terms, as a consequence of their own sins and those of their ancestors. At the same time, they transform what is a sign of calumny in Christian culture into a positive symbol, a new and indigenously medieval, indigenously iconographic one, in response to that very same state of subjugation. With the acceptance of the symbol comes the assertion that the Jews have "paid their dues" for the deception of their ancestor. This strategy accords with HaLevi's mandate for the maintenance of a positive Jewish identity.[51]

Considering all this, it should come as no surprise that the theme of reversal pervades the depiction of the ultimate outcome of the hare-hunt in medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts.

Images of anthropomorphic hares inhabit what is called in Latin the *mondus inversus*—a sort of topsy-turvy world—primarily in Spanish manuscript *haggadot*. Such "drolleries" are usually ignored by scholars of Jewish art,[52] yet when they appear in general medieval art, they are taken quite seriously as expositions of proverbs or fables, or as contemporary social criticism.[53] The image of a timid hare frightening or vanquishing a knight, for instance, was a satirical attack on the vice of cowardice in medieval Christian art (Fig. 10).[54] But what of hares that are clearly anthropomorphic in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts? Are they more than simply humorous or interesting? Might not timid hares in a situation of dominance be read *politically* in medieval Jewish art?

A depiction of a hare being served a drink by a dog, which seems like a typical example of *mondus inversus* iconography, appears as an upper marginal illustration for a page from a Spanish *haggadah* of 1471 (Fig. 11).[55] The lower margin depicts the Israelites slaving in Egypt, and the text rubric reads "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." The implication here is, "We *were* slaves, but one day the Egyptian dogs will serve us!" (Color Plate IV).

On another leaf in the same *haggadah* is a hare hunt (fol. 20v; Color Plate V). The hunter blows a horn, and has a hare slung over his spear. Directly behind the hunter is an ape, and above the ape is a "demonic hunter" similar to the ones we encountered in Ashkenaz. The upper marginal illumination depicts a hare blowing a hunting horn opposite a dog, and above the ape, a dog bringing a shivering and naked man a cloak. Just as the lower register of images on the page illustrating the text "We were slaves . . ." may be interpreted as the zone of the present and the top as the zone of eschatology, here too, the bottom register represents historical reality, wherein the Jewish people are relentlessly pursued by the hunter, who,

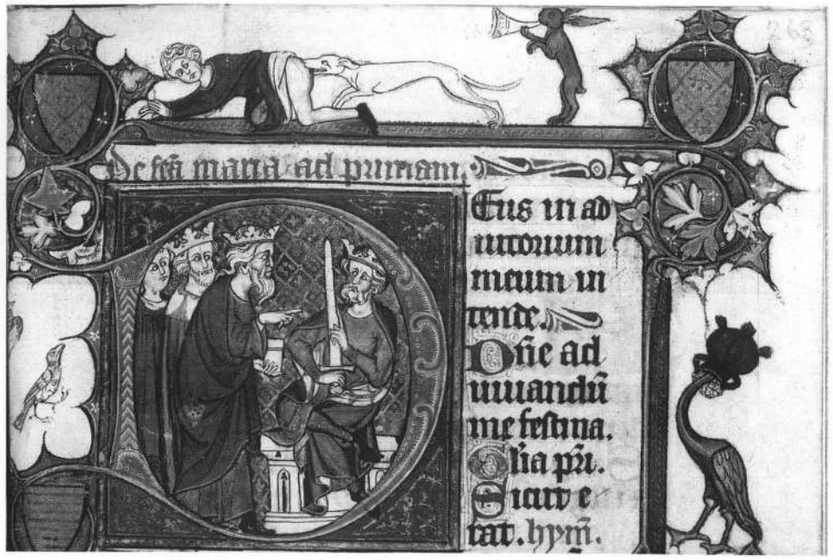


Fig. 10. The vice of cowardice. Psalter of Yolande de Soissons, Amiens use, north French, late thirteenth century. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, M 729, fol. 268



Fig. 11. Hare being served a drink by a dog. Haggadah, Barcelona, mid-fourteenth century. London, British Library MS Add. 14761, fol. 30v (detail of top margin)

being less than human, is associated with the ape (there is an ape-hunter depicted on fol. 18r of this same manuscript) and the demonic hunter. The top register anticipates the messianic future, when Israel will vanquish her foes through the "horn of salvation," and acts of kindness will be performed even by Israel's former pursuers.

This manuscript also contains a fascinating depiction of a hare, standing upright and wearing the traditional Spanish-Jewish hooded "sarbal" beating a barking dog on the head while being served a drink by a creature with the face of a "demonic hunter" in a robe and hood (fol. 26r; Fig. 12). This illustration appears directly over the words from the text of the *Havdalah*, the liturgy for the end of the Sabbath, which speak of God as separating "the sacred from the profane . . . Israel from the nations." If we read the hare as "Israel" and dog and the "demonic hunter" as "the nations," this illumination seems to represent the eschatological capitulation of both the temporal and clerical oppressors of the Jews.[56]

These iconographic imaginings of the outcome of the hare-hunt were developed in the context of the rabbinic tradition of tales of past redemption and future promise. This visual tradition provides ample corroboration of the words of the prophet, which must have rung stridently in the ears of medieval Jews: "Assuredly, all who wanted to devour you shall be devoured, and every one of your foes shall go into captivity; those who despoiled you shall be despoiled, and those who pillaged you I will give up to pillage" (Isa. 30:16). We have seen how a different perspective on the hare—a minority perspective—a reversal of the negative symbolism found in Christian culture, empowered Jews to transform it into a symbol of national identification. In iconography such as this, a different vista on history—a world seen from the perspective of future glory rather than present exile—enabled Jews of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to envision a time to come in which the pursued could triumph over their pursuers.

The confluence of all this medieval symbolism may be demonstrated in an example of iconography produced during repressive regimes in more modern times. The seventeenth-century synagogue of Hodorov, in what is now southern Ukraine, is one of the many magnificent painted wooden synagogues that were not spared the destruction of wars and pogroms. Its walls were first painted in 1651 by Israel b. Mordekhai Lizinski of Yaritchow with what was perhaps the richest and most vibrant swarm of animals and plants ever to appear in Jewish art. It was "renewed and beautified" in 1714, and at other times throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The old photographs that remain of the synagogue, and the reconstruction of part of its ceiling in Beit HaTfuzot, the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv, reveal that every inch of wall was covered with brilliantly painted monkeys, sheep, wolves, lambs, unicorns, dragons, turkeys, a myriad of creatures, each with its own personality.[57] These lush decorations provide illuminating parallels with the medieval art we have been examining. In the center



Fig. 12. Hare being served. Haggadah, Barcelona, mid-fourteenth century. London, British Library MS Add. 14761, fol. 26v (detail of top margin)

of the ceiling at Hodorov, in the midst of a beautiful zodiac cycle, is a crowned double-headed Hapsburg eagle, resplendent in golden feathers (Fig. 13). The eagle dates from shortly after the time of the Polish partition of 1772, and represents the person or the authority of the Austrian autocrat,[58] who would have been at that time the notoriously anti-Jewish Empress Maria Theresa.[59] In spite of the fact that the empress was not at all loved by the Jews, they attempted to win her favor by flattering her and including her image in a great many works of art.[60] This image might easily be viewed as yet another rather obsequious tip of the hat to Her Imperial Majesty, were it not for the fact that in each of the eagle's claws it grasps a hare, still alive and running (Fig. 14).

In the context of our discussion, the image appears, at first, to be another representation of the Jewish people in the snares of their enemies. Yet, if one stops to consider the quotation that runs around the periphery of the circle in which this image appears, it seems to contradict such a reading: "Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings, gliding down to his young, so did He spread His wings and take him, bearing him along on His pinions." This is Moses' blessing of the Children of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:11. It depicts God's protection of Israel through an allegory of the protective father eagle. The image seems now to be one of fawning flattery.[61] Certainly the Jews would be quick to point out to any official inquirer the equation of the empress's protection with that of God. Among themselves, however, they would likely look literally at the wider picture—and at the allegory it represents—at the context of the eagle, who sits, as we have said, within the circle of the zodiac. They would certainly remember the verse from the prophet Ovadiah, read in the synagogue on the sabbath on which the Torah portion *Va-Yishlakh* (Gen. 32:4–36:43) is read: "Should you nest as high as the eagle, should your eyrie be lodged 'mong the stars, even from there I will pull you down—declares the LORD" (1:4).

This is the verse that is truly implied by the physical placement of the depiction; it is the verse intended to be "read" along with the image.[62] Here, the eagle is a reference to Edom, the "Wicked Kingdom" against whom the prophecy is directed (see the Conclusion). Just as the golden crown on the eagle's head is a decoy to distract attention from the hares in the eagle's cruel talons, so is the verse that accompanies the image a decoy. Once again, the hares do indeed represent the Jewish people—oppressed by the inheritors of Esau, the dominant culture and its representative—but, like the hare, still very much alive and running. It is not insignificant that this verse is read on *Shabbat VaYishlakh*. In *VaYishlakh*, Jacob adopts a politically astute subservient and conciliatory tone with his brother; he styles himself Esau's servant, even though he knows that in the fullness of time he will have dominion. This is just what the artist at Hodorov was doing. Though the "official diplomatic" text surrounding the eagle is so apparently flattering to

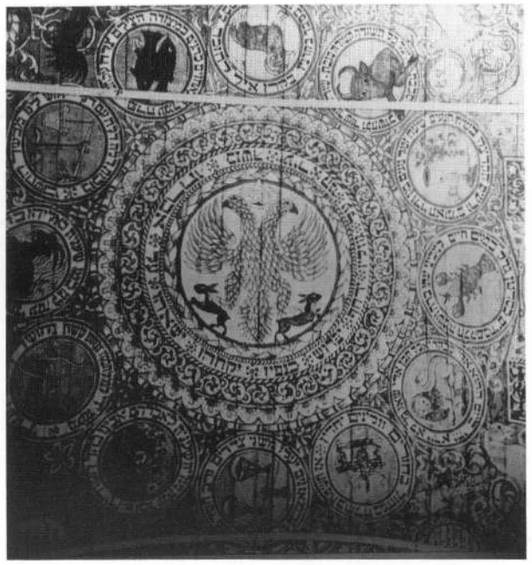


Fig. 13. The Austro-Hungarian eagle. Ceiling of the synagogue of Hodorov, Ruthenia (Reissen), Ukraine, built 1642, painted in 1651, restored 1714 (detail of dome interior)



Fig. 14. Hares in the talons of the eagle. Ceiling of the synagogue of Hodorov, Ruthenia (Reissen), Ukraine, built 1642, painted in 1651, restored 1714 (detail of dome interior)

the government, the hares remind us of another eagle—the eagle of Edom—who will be thrown down from his nest and replaced by Jacob and Israel.

Thus, in the era of a repressive monarch in Eastern Europe, we witness the resurfacing of the same anti-Christian polemic we have been observing in iconography of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Each of these monuments speaks a similar message: "Our enemies are hunting us, crushing us, oppressing us."

At the same time, they also represent statements of pride and protest: It must have seemed unfair to Jews who had often experienced the antithesis of Christian love that Christians merited world dominion by virtue of merit of the unwavering filial devotion of their ancestor Esau.[63] By placing the hare in Esau's hands, the artists "bring evidence" against Esau: He has failed to keep his end of the covenant. He has spurned filial piety by pursuing game that was specifically in contradiction to the desires of his father, and that symbolically represents his pursuit of Jacob. Therefore, his descendents have lost their "legal right" to their dominant status. The hare, his quarry, symbolizes the diverse qualities—physical and spiritual—of Jacob, and by extension, of Israel: Sometimes in its outward appearance, Israel is impure—timid and relatively weak at best, deceitful and sinful at worst—yet, it is always pure at heart.

The complete polemic allegory, then, based on the biblical and midrashic relationships filtered through the medieval iconography, might read something like this: Christianity, in pursuing, capturing, and attempting to destroy the physical essence of the Jewish people—that most frail, timid, and hare-like of nations—has forfeited the opportunity to receive the blessing obtained by Jacob, the representative of the spiritual essence of the Jewish people. It is true that the hare, the physical Israel, is small and defenseless. Furthermore, Israel is not entirely blameless, having debased herself through her deceptions. Yet, like the hare, Israel is a survivor. She is not so weak or so debased as Esau thinks. She is fleet-footed and clever, and even when caught in the eagle's talons she is still alive and running, destined to be redeemed by God. In the eschatological denouement, when the tables will be turned, like the hares triumphing over their hunters in the topsy-turvy world of the Spanish haggadot, the descendents of Jacob will survive, and ultimately, will triumph.

Let us conclude by returning to the hunting allegory in the *Kuzari*, which provides a useful point from which to review the various aspects of the hare-hunts we have encountered in a political/theological perspective: Like HaLevi, these artists use hunt imagery as an allegory for the pursuit of Israel by her oppressors. Each of the three types of hare-hunt iconography appears in the *haggadah*, the book in which the story of the Exodus, prescribed by HaLevi for meditation, is canonized as the locus classicus of collective memory. Finally, each of these examples of hare-hunting iconography takes a potentially despairing image and turns it on its

head; each serves in a different way to inspire hope and to foster a positive collective consciousness. First, in the illustrations of the *YaKiNeHaZ* mnemonic, the hares are pursued, but never caught. The message of the pursued eluding the pursuers is that Israel can escape her enemies, even in this world. Second, in the illustrations of Esau's hunt, and its variant on the ceiling of Hodorov, the hare is caught, but it is still alive. It in fact triumphs over the entire process of the hunt. The symbolism here hints that the physical aspect of Israel may be oppressed and constrained, but the hunters cannot kill the spiritual aspect of Israel. Those who are pursued gain dominion over the pursuers in spite of being caught by them. Third and finally, in the images of the "topsy-turvy world," the whole pretext of the hunt is reversed, and now the pursued pursue their former pursuers. This seems to refer to the messianic hopes of Jews for the ultimate restoration.

Here is a tentative reconstruction of the origins and the odyssey of the hare-hunt: The hunt motif as an iconographic allegory, often with the "demonic hunter" as its perpetrator, originated as an illustration for the liturgical poem *Ayelet Ahuvim* in Ashkenazic *maḥzorim* (festival prayerbooks) in the wake of the Crusade martyrdoms. In Spain, cycles of Genesis illustrations preceding the texts of illuminated *haggadot* of the early fourteenth century provide the first medieval forum for the depiction of the complete panoply of biblical figures, including Esau, who is depicted as a hunter. The hare appears here for the first time, as Esau's quarry. This may occur under the influence of HaLevi's inclusion of the hare in the hunting passages in the Kuzari, and his prescription of the *haggadah* as a fountainhead of collective memory. The hare's transformation is both pragmatic and theological—a negative symbol for Jews becomes a positive one through an emphasis on the qualities it possesses that would have appealed to a persecuted minority and dismayed a dominant majority, and its appearance in the story of Jacob and Esau serve to answer Christian claims of supersession. In Spain, the hare becomes the quarry of choice for Esau and a symbol for the Jewish people, as is evident in the illustrations of anthropomorphic hares and hares triumphing over their pursuers.

Ashkenazic illuminators of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are exposed to the hare-hunt in Spanish models. They are eager to assimilate it because they see it as an amplification of their own indigenous allegorical hunting iconography, which by this time had become somewhat dated. Though the martyrdoms of 1096 continued to be an open wound in the Ashkenazi psyche, by the early fourteenth century other crises, notably, the downturns in Jewish legal status, heightened the self-identification of Ashkenazic Jewry with the generation of Egyptian servitude. Hence, the *haggadah*, rather than the *maḥzor* became the book in which to express messages of protest and dreams of subversion. Ashkenazic Jews had no tradition of Genesis cycle illustrations preceding the *haggadah* text, or of *mondus inversus* illustrations in which to situate the hare-hunt. Nonetheless, they "heard"



Fig. 15. Hare-hunt. Haggadah, Prague, 1526 (YaKiNeHaZ)



Fig. 16. Hare-hunt. Haggadah, Augsburg, 1534 (YaKiNeHaZ)

in the motif echoes of the *YaKiNeHaZ* mnemonic, which, like the hunt of Esau, appears at the beginning of the *haggadah*. The motif of the hare-hunt, thus, does not *originate* as an illustration for the *YaKiNeHaZ* mnemonic. It *ends up* there because of a confluence of symbolic and linguistic associations, and moves from there to Hodorov, where we see it as part of a well-developed allegorical system.

With the revolution of printing, it is no longer possible to view the *YaKiNeHaZ* image as merely a clever, if static, iconographic pun; the allegorical potential of the hare-hunt does not elude the Ashkenazim, and the image does not remain frozen for long. Witness the hare-hunt used as a *YaKiNeHaZ* illustration in the earliest illustrated printed *haggadah*, the Prague Haggadah of 1526 (Fig. 15). A hunter drives a group of hares into a net. Compare this with the next illustrated *haggadah* printed, the Augsburg Haggadah of 1534 (Fig. 16). Just as the printing press has broken through the constraints of the laborious diffusion by hand and mouth of the message of the *haggadah*, so has the image broken the confines of its manuscript model, and the hares have escaped, literally breaking through the bonds of the net. Read in light of the foregoing, all of these monuments—in both Franco-Germany and Spain—proclaim a similar message; a message of hope very much in the spirit of the *haggadah*'s own *She'lo ehad bilvad*: "More than one nation has attempted to destroy us, but God has saved us from their hand."

3

The Elephant and the Law

Lex Militans

If one sees an elephant in a dream, wonders will be wrought for him; if several elephants, wonders upon wonders.

—*Berakhot* 56b

The elephant is the most wondrous of creatures in shape, in height, in appearance.

—*Mishlei Shu'alim* Fable 107

When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say, "Advance, O LORD! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!"

—Numbers 10:35

Nearly half a century has passed since the appearance in the *Art Bulletin* of William S. Heckscher's "Bernini's Elephant and Obelisk." Heckscher's contextual reading of the eponymous monument, erected in 1667 on the Piazza della Minerva in Rome, reveals the intellectual process through which Bernini recast the symbolism of the elephant from its traditional *trionfo* context to a celebration of divine wisdom. Heckscher's examination of the emblematic and historical sources of the work's "apparently incompatible elements" serves to elucidate the synthesis intended by Bernini in what Heckscher called "this startling combination of baroque elephant and pagan stone in front of a church" (Fig. 17).[1]

A similarly "startling" juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous elements appears in a setting that only slightly postdates Bernini's project, yet is considerably removed from it in geography and intellectual milieu; also public, yet manifestly more intimate; emanating not from the epicenter of Counter-Reformation Catholicism, but from the burgeoning spiritual capital of Europe's preeminent minority culture. Elephants appear on the walls and in the domes of painted wooden



Fig. 17. Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Elephant and obelisk, 1667. Piazza Della Minerva, Rome

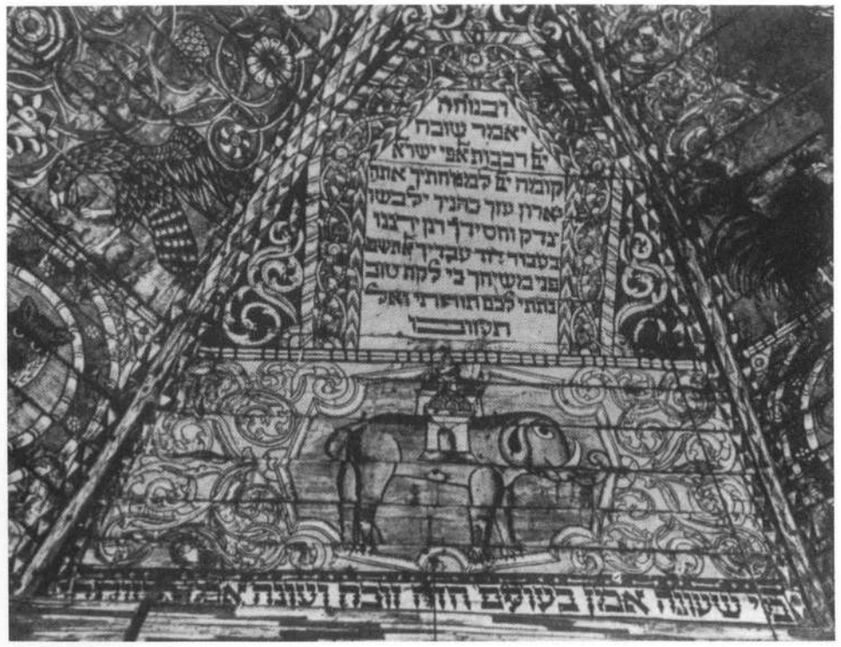


Fig. 18. Elephant. Wall painting from the synagogue formerly at Gwozdziec, Ruthenia (Reissen), Ukraine, built 1640 (detail of dome interior)

synagogues in early eighteenth-century Poland, in spaces that are near to or flanking the Ark of the Law (Figs. 18 and 19).[2]

It is surprising that elephants, which seldom figure in rabbinic literature and not at all in the Bible itself, should appear in a Jewish setting, let alone in proximity to the central focus of the synagogue, the Ark of the Law.[3] It is stranger still how little attention these unusual images have received; although few in number, they are found time and again in compendia of photographs of the art of the wooden synagogues. They share this neglect with their counterparts in medieval Jewish art, such as the magnificent elephant on the opening page of the book of Deuteronomy in the so-called Duke of Sussex Pentateuch, a South German manuscript of the early fourteenth century, now in the British Library (Color Plate VI)[4] and an elephant that opposes a dragon in the Worms Maḥzor I, a festival prayer book completed in 1272, housed in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem (Color Plate VII).[5] These images, with so little apparent intrinsic Jewish meaning, tend once again to be dismissed as "merely decorative" or "borrowed" from the surrounding culture.[6]

As common and familiar as hares were to the medieval landscape, elephants were uncommon and unfamiliar. Jews would have had plenty of opportunities to observe hare-hunts, and it is no wonder that Jews adopted and adapted the image of the hunted hare as an allegory for their pursuit by the nations and their ultimate triumph over them. But even if the occasional elephant made its way to Europe, the elephant-hunt was completely alien to the actual experience of medieval European Jews and Christians. The European Christian world was familiar with elephants mostly through descriptions found in various versions of the bestiary:[7]

> The Elephant's nature is that if he tumbles down he cannot get up again. Hence it comes that he leans against a tree when he wants to go to sleep for he has no joints in his knees.[8] This is the reason why a hunter partly saws through a tree, so that the elephant, when he leans against it, may fall down at the same time as the tree. As he falls, he calls out loudly; and immediately a large elephant appears, but it is not able to lift him up. At this they both cry out, and twelve more elephants arrive upon the scene: but even they cannot lift up the one who has fallen down. Then they all shout for help, and at once there comes a very Insignificant Elephant, and he puts his mouth with the proboscis under the big one, and lifts him up. . . . When the Big Elephant arrives, i.e. the Hebrew Law, and fails to lift up the fallen, it is the same as when the Pharisee failed with the fellow who had fallen among thieves. Nor could the Twelve Elephants, i.e. the Band of Prophets, lift him up, just as the Levite did not lift up the man we mentioned. But it means that Our Lord Jesus Christ, although he was the



Fig. 19. Elephant. Wall painting from the synagogue formerly at Hodorov, Ruthenia (Reissen), Ukraine, built 1642, restored 1714 (detail of dome interior)



Fig. 20. Saddled elephants in a paradisiacal setting. Mosaic from the synagogue at Ma'on at Nirim, c. 530 C.E. (detail). Jerusalem, The Israel Museum

greatest, was made the Most Insignificant of All the Elephants. He humiliated himself and was made obedient even unto death, in order that he might raise men up.[9]

The bestiary's tale of the capture of the elephant is adopted for the first time into Hebrew literature a work already familiar to us, Yehudah Hadassi's *Eshkol HaKofer* (1184).[10]

> The best of the ivory bearers [elephants] have no knees in their legs.
>
> And when they come out of the water, they live on the land, and graze in their pastures.
>
> They are caught cleverly by your people: They cut around those trees, and [when] the tired elephants come to sleep, to rest from the weight of their bodies upon them, the trees break and fall and they too [the elephants] fall to your earth.
>
> Furious, tired, they lie upon the earth.
>
> Then men come and fix their trunks to the ground with rings. Since they cannot rise from the ground, it is thus possible to catch them through their wisdom.
>
> And then they place a ring and [a rope made of] reeds in his trunk, and they drag him over the ground and lead him as one would lead a domestic [lit. "land"] animal [Cf. Gen. 1:25].
>
> Upon his back men ride and engage in war against their enemies. With his trunk he destroys buildings and city walls like a tower, like a wall he goes before your warriors.

In the thirteenth century, the hunt of the elephant appears in a rather odd "fable" among those presented by Berechiah HaNakdan in his *Mishlei Shu'alim*, *Fox Fables*.[11] This lengthy tale, which I shall soon examine in greater detail, may be summarized as follows: A hunter is unsuccessful in hunting an elephant, "the most wondrous of creatures, in shape, in size, in appearance." He enlists the aid of some local friends and relations to capture the beast. That evening, the hunter makes certain he is not seen, throws his cloak over his head, and rides the elephant toward a village. He is observed by reapers in the field who hide from him until he passes, believing him to be a demon, then rush into the town, where they warn the inhabitants to flee. The man then summons the friends and associates he had initially called to his aid and they pillage the town. After he has done this ten times, he calls the inhabitants of the pillaged towns before him, and tells them he can rid them of the scourge that has been terrifying them by exorcism, in exchange for half the booty he recovers. They agree and he does; Berechiah's epimythium describes this as a parable of a divinely precipitated change of fortune.

What are we to make of the similarities between these three examples of (apparently) natural historical, folkloric, and fabular writing? In the bestiary versions, the elephant, representing mankind, is snared by the devil, caught in sin, and unable to rise up. The unsuccessful attempts to raise the beast are a general paradigm of the inefficacy of attempts at the salvation of humanity through the Jews before the advent of Jesus.[12]

Both Hadassi and Berechiah adopted this bestiary account, but they obviously had to adapt it. The elephants in the tale are used to illuminate a doctrine that would simply not have been appropriate in a Jewish context, Karaite or Rabbanite: the dogma of original sin and the fall of humankind, who could be redeemed only by the Christian Savior. Still, there was at least one small allegory within the larger allegorical framework that seems to have made sense to Jews: the "Big Elephant" as a symbol of the "Hebrew Law," the Torah. Elephants appear in this context in both medieval Jewish art and literature, not simply as emulations of those in the bestiary, but as a complex, textually interdependent response to Christian use of the animal as a symbol of the Law, and often for polemic ends.

Let us begin with an examination of Hadassi's adaptation. The exact recension of the bestiary that was before Hadassi when he wrote his polemic is unknown. In fact, it remains unclear if he used a bestiary at all, or some other source of natural historical information that preserved bestiary traditions.[13] The elephant is mentioned among other animals in a part of the text that ostensibly discusses the bounty and variety of the sixth Day of Creation, but that, it has been pointed out, often moves in implicitly polemic directions.[14] Hadassi uses the bestiary tale of the capture of the elephant as an allegory for the struggle of the Karaites against the Rabbanites. Each of the elements of the bestiary tale paraphrased in *Eshkol HaKofer* may, in fact, be read as symbolic of an element in the Karaite-Rabbanite debate. No explicit moral is drawn from the information presented. However, the bestiary's account is artfully re-presented and the overt morals of the bestiary have been jettisoned or redefined to fit the context of the Karaite-Rabbanite polemic.

The first "fact" about elephants mentioned here is that even the best of them have no knees in their legs. In the context of the Karaite-Rabbanite polemic this might hint at the controversy regarding genuflection at prayer. The most obvious distinction between the liturgical actions of Karaites and Rabbanites is that the Karaites have preserved from the ancient ritual of the Jerusalem Temple eight distinct and essential forms of physical adoration that are practiced in full at various points in the liturgy, whereas the Rabbanites have maintained only a few of these, reducing them to vestigial, quasi-symbolic liturgical gestures.[15] Karaites understood the practice of genuflection as an indication of humility, as well as a historical link with the Temple and a declaration of purity of custom and reliance upon ancient authority.[16] Because it is unable to bend the knee, the elephant can be identified as a

symbol of the Rabbanites, who have arrogantly abandoned the true ancient Jewish position of prayer at the behest of their rabbis. Even "the best of" the Rabbanites lack humility—they no longer bow down before God—and have forsaken the historical chain of tradition that is recalled by the act of genuflection in prayer.

When we first meet them, the elephants are depicted as emerging from the water. *Eshkol HaKofer*, in fact, places the elephant among animals "born of the water," seeming to imply that the elephant is an amphibious animal.[17] This point is made in some of the bestiaries, which describe the elephant's birth on an island in the sea as an allegory for the Garden of Eden and its capture as an allegory for original sin. Hadassi would have had no need to create an allegory about original sin and the Garden of Eden. The focus of his polemic would, more likely, have been the contemporary debate over the nature and use of the Torah. In contemporary Hebrew literature, water never represents the Garden of Eden,[18] but often symbolizes the Torah.[19]

Thus, when one first glimpses Hadassi's elephants, they are engaged in an act of abandonment. They are coming out of the water. So do the Rabbanites abandon the pure and unadulterated words of the Torah, which is compared to water. It is the encompassing nature of water—the fact that it, like the Torah, forms a total and self-sustaining environment—to which it seems Hadassi is alluding here. When the elephants emerge from the sea to live on land, they enter an existence guided by arguments from tradition that, according to the Karaites, is a human, or earthly, as opposed to a Divine or heavenly creation. Once there, the elephant-Rabbanites "graze in their own pastures"—they follow the desires and advice of their own hearts—which runs contrary to that which God desires of them.

The text then follows the account of the capture of the elephant as set down in the bestiary tradition. In this case, of course, the Karaites are the hunters and the Rabbanites the elephants. The hunters cut partially through the trees upon which the elephants are wont to lean (line 4). The tree is another important medieval Jewish symbol for Torah.[20] Here, in contrast with the sea, which denotes the Written Law and the land, which symbolizes the arguments from tradition, the tree represents the false synthesis of the Law and tradition. Its roots reach down to the sea of the Written Law, but it grows up out of the earth-bound chain of tradition. The Rabbanites organize their misunderstandings of the Written Law into this tree, a branching superstructure of the inventions and fabrications called the Oral Law. This admixture is what they refer to as the Tree of Life.[21] It is this "tree" that the Karaites cut through with their argument.

The tired elephants, who come and lean upon the trees for support represent the Rabbanites, who seek "support" for their views from the Torah.[22] The tree breaks under the weight of the elephants—the entire Rabbanite "Torah" collapses. Just as the weight of the elephant taxes a tree with a shaky and easily

undermined foundation, the Rabbanites have overburdened the text. They have taxed the Written Law by overinterpreting it in the Oral Law. Though the Law itself is perfect, their knowledge of it is imperfect, and their interpretations have already been undermined and cut through by the superior textual understanding of the Karaites and the superior logic of their arguments.

The elephants, furious and exhausted, lie on the ground. Then "men" come, and fix their noses to the ground with rings. So the Rabbanites, having left the purity of the Written Torah, and having found the grafted and bastardized "Tree of Life" they depend upon to be easily undermined and unable to support their arguments, remain stubbornly "attached" to the arguments from tradition. The men fix their trunks to the ground with rings. The Karaites direct their anger[23] toward the arguments from tradition. They point out to them that an exclusive dependence on the Oral Law is the cause of their downfall. The use of rings is symbolic of the fact that the Rabbanites remain "wedded" to the Oral Law, or, in a more biblical sense, that they are "slaves" to that Law."[24]

Since the elephants cannot rise from the ground, it is easy to catch them with their own logic. The Rabbanites cannot get over their dependency upon the Oral Law, which keeps them earthbound. Even though they claim the Written Law as their own, they have neglected it, and can be outmaneuvered using it.

In the last lines, the elephant is transformed from a negative symbol of the Rabbanites into a positive symbol of "captured" Rabbanite teachings (enemy secrets, as it were): the elephant is subjugated by placing a ring and a rope made of reeds in his trunk. Now harnessed as the servant of mankind, it is used as a war animal.[25] The captured Rabbanite teachings and arguments are now the property of the Karaites. The arguments and polemics are "wedded" to them with a ring, signifying mastery or possession, and led by a rope made of reeds—the material of which quills for writing polemics are made. These teachings become part of the Karaite arsenal, and serve the Karaites well in their future battles with the Rabbanite enemy.

Hadassi is obviously selective in the manner in which he draws upon elements common to the bestiary tradition. He carefully chooses his materials, using specific and sometimes obscure or peripheral "facts" that fit the points he wishes to make regarding the process of Karaite-Rabbanite polemic, from the baiting of the Rabbanites with quotes from their own Scriptures to the appropriation of Rabbanite arguments for use in future polemics.

What of Berechiah's fable? At first reading, the hunter comes across as an unambiguously evil and exploitative character, and certainly not a hero. Yet Berechiah's epymythium reads as follows:

> The parable concerns a wise and calculating man, who is ready to pursue his sustenance. He is tired each day, and finds no rest for his soul, and nothing is accomplished by his toil, as was the case of the lone man and the elephant.
>
> But when the King's word comes to him, to cause his fortune to wax great, to raise him higher and higher, like the master of the elephant, to greatness, he must restrain his hand from cheating and stealing, in whatever field he works in, just as the man did with the booty he was as zealous as a lion to return half. If his beginning was troubled, his end changed greatly. He dines upon savory fare, and his righteousness stands forever.

If one rereads the tale with the benefit of having read the epimythium, the fact that Berechiah desires to paint the hunter as the hero becomes clear. But why? Has Berechiah really been blinded by the hunter's belated and ambivalent action to the distinctly ignoble circumstances of his initial appropriation of the treasure? The hunter was a thief, though a resourceful one. And a thief who publicly and deliberately entraps people into giving up half of their property for the purpose of removing a problem he himself created is not only a thief, but an extortionist. The behavior of the extortionist is arguably more deserving of moral opprobrium than that of a pilferer who comes and goes under cover of darkness.

Berechiah portrays the hunter's return of half of the booty as an act of selflessness, for which his "righteousness stands forever." Yet, there is something distinctly odd about this epimythium. It seems extraordinarily serendipitous—almost as if it was "tacked on and squeezed into place." The fact that the hunter returns half the booty is certainly not, as Berechiah asserts, an act of selflessness, an act for which the hunter's "righteousness stands forever." It is a cynical ploy by which the hunter preserves his good name and makes it seem as if he has honestly come by the wealth he will now enjoy.

Besides the fact that its epimythium is ambiguous at best, this is, in other ways, an odd sort of a fable. It exhibits very few of the standard fabular characteristics. It oscillates between the genres of natural history and crime fiction. In fact, this genre confusion emerges from the fact that the tale is, in fact, a fable married to an episode from the bestiary literature.

Can Berechiah's fable, though not so faithful to the bestiary text, be read in a similarly polemic manner to the passage from Hadassi? The more one studies the disjunction between the tale and its epimythium, the more one comes to view Berechiah's presentation of the tale as one that simply describes a divinely initiated change in fortune as a vast, and perhaps disingenuous oversimplification.

Is it possible that Berechiah, a writer who was such a shrewd critic of human nature, could so grossly misjudge the disposition of the central character in the tale? How could it be that such a masterly interpreter of meaning in fables, such a skilled translator of their inner sense from one cultural context to another missed the point of such a simple story? Could he not have derived any one of a number

of epimythia more appropriate than the bland and uninsightful one he presents here?[26] At the very least, one might have expected Berechiah to paint this fable as a commentary on the cowardliness of the hunter. On another level, he might have noted that the tale is about the cooperation of the many accomplishing easily what the greatest efforts of the lone individual could not. Berechiah knew justice from injustice. The very purpose of much of *Mishlei Shu'alim* is to draw distinctions between the two and to correct misjudgments that favor the powerful and corrupt. For Berechiah to use the words, "his righteousness endures forever," the biblical locus classicus describing a person who obeys the commandments and gives freely to the poor (Ps. 112:3) to describe a brigand and a violator of the commandments is distinctly ironic.

Irony, of course, is the key here; Berechiah's disappointingly lackluster moral conceals a deeper critique that he deliberately obscured. Lest this assertion and the upcoming analysis seem tendentious, it should be emphasized at the outset that this critique—and even the covert form in which it appears—is the foundation and mortar of Berechiah's entire fabular edifice. It is encapsulated in his proem, which represents itself as programmatic for the entire work and its reading. The proem describes how Fate's Chariot turns topsy-turvy the expected order of things: it "confounds the righteous until they are consumed . . . charges upon the good and humbles them, upon the evil and delivers them." Berechiah does not mince words in describing the situation he beholds all about him:

> When it [the wheel of Fate] sees truth standing in the plain and laying her hand to the spindle, it smites her in the fifth rib and lifts the sickle against her feet and hews them off and crushes them, flesh along with the bone. It degrades her from being the mistress, as though she had conceived in harlotry and had become blemished and bowed down. Instead, it loves Falsehood, and to him extends the golden scepter, and summons him into its presence, and he finds grace and favor in its eyes; it sets him up upon his feet and adorns him with comely shoes and brings all his friends and kinsmen near and keeps his enemies and them that scorn him afar, until the workers of iniquity have ascended.

Berechiah is clearly distressed by this state of affairs. How does he propose to combat it? Through the use of fables, which operate on more than one level. "His proverbs are his allegories," says the book's epilogue, regarding these fables, "his poesy strengthens the meek, abases the proud, and causes haughty heads to stumble." The wise understand the allegorical meaning of the fables; they "esteem them as the chiefest spices." In other words, though those with untutored palates may find a "square meal" of conventional moral lessons satisfying, the wise *gourmand* can negotiate the subtleties of the spicing—the allegorical subtext—that brings out the true character of the repast: the deeper critique framed by the fable. And yet, "to scorners and evildoers they are but broom." Those who cannot perceive the allegorical dimension of the fables see them as broom—a plant useful to sweep cobwebs out of corners but not for much more. The "scorners and evildoers" think that Berechiah has written his fables exclusively to disseminate moral instruction, to sweep away ethical cobwebs. But they are mistaken. While Berechiah admits that his work appears on the surface to be derivative, he hints that there is a hidden agenda that will be "understood by him who understands":

> Verily these parables are current upon the lips of all earth's progeny, and men of diverse tongues have set them forth in a book. But my practices are different from their practices, for I have enlarged and augmented them with like and similar matter, in verses and poems, like sapphires veiled. Whoso reads them will attain many things choicer than fine gold and precious rubies, as the eyes of them that look forthright will perceive.

Deeper meanings are there to be mined, but they are like "sapphires veiled"—accessible only to "the eyes of them that look forthright." Berechiah expresses his intention to "commit to secret discourse the words with which [he is] filled." Berechiah characterizes his mode of discourse as "secret." Paraphrasing Ezekiel 3:1 and Judges 14:14, he invites the astute reader to discern his intention: "I say to him under whose eyes my writing shall come, 'Eat this scroll, for out of the eater shall come forth meat, and sense shall issue from the sensible.'"

By charging the reader to "eat this scroll," Berechiah demands that he filter the fables through his own consciousness, to become what Umberto Eco has called the "ideal reader," the one who comes closest to apprehending the *intentio auctoris*, the meaning intended by the author.[27] By describing the work as a scroll, a *megillah*, Berechiah is able to suggest resonances of "unrolling": of the revelation of hidden truths. The *megillah* par excellence is, of course Megillat Esther, the Scroll of Esther, which, as shall be seen, also finds an echo in the proem. In the book of Esther, these resonances of revelation are augmented by the subtext of the book (noted in Chapter 2), a subtext of hidden and revealed identities and reversals of fortune.

Who are the "intended readers" of this scroll? Berechiah's fellow Jews: "Out of the eater" refers to Samson's riddle in which a dead lion becomes the home for a colony of bees (Judg. 14:14). When the "dead" lion (the subjugated Lion of Judah, as will become evident below) "digests" this work, these fables will make sense; they will literally be "abuzz" with meaning, since their hidden meaning will emerge from the consciousness of the intended reader. But Berechiah feels it necessary to admonish the reader that an authorial intention actually exists: "Let

him who reflects on my fables not say, 'As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools,' a mass of dreams and vanity; for only from the wicked does wickedness come forth, but from the deliverers, deliverance."

Berechiah is fearful lest the reader attempt to ascribe to him merely the *pshat*, the literal meaning of the fable. He encourages the reader to assume the existence and fertility of an authorial imagination and symbolic awareness. He stresses that his fables are not presented for the purposes of mere amusement. If the reader discerns a deeper allegory, he is absolutely correct in doing so, and should not suppose that it emerges only from an *intentio lectoris*—from his own involvement or fantasy as a reader.

Berechiah's stated intention in collecting these fables is expressed in the proem. It is "to strengthen hands that are weak"—to provide not only comfort, but ammunition to the downtrodden. He asserts that he speaks of "creeping things that crawl upon the ground; [because] these are for a similitude for them that walk on earth." One recalls Yehudah HaLevi's words in the *Kuzari*: "For it is written: 'O worm Jacob' (Isa. 41:14)—what can remain of a man who has become a worm in his grave?"[28] Berechiah finds himself faced with a world in which HaLevi's fear of the loss of a dignified Jewish national self-perception has almost come to pass and has nearly led to decline and death. In fact, he begins his proem with the phrase, "How could I bear to see their perishing?" Though he is clearly referring to the words of his fables, he may also be understood, on the basis of the rest of the proem, to be expressing his anxiety for the souls of his coreligionists. This opening is a paraphrase of a pivotal verse from the book of Esther (8:6). This verse, which in the liturgy of Western Europe is traditionally read in the cantillation of the Book of Lamentations,[29] introduces the highly evocative word *Eykhah* (How?), the first word of the Book of Lamentations, together with the Lamentations cantillation at the very moment when Esther realizes that she must reveal the truth about her identity in order to save her people from a *hurban*—a mass destruction. This is an appropriate rubric for a work written in response to what Berechiah describes as a spiritual *hurban*, which he feels can only be remedied by a strong dose of the truth and a revelation of the manner in which truth and reality have been exchanged for falsehood and deception. He begins his collection with the tale of the lion and "how they changed his honor for shame." The lion is none other than the subjugated Lion of Judah. "How the mighty are fallen!" Berechiah seems to lament.

But why are the "hands weakened," and why do the people formerly compared to the Lion of Judah now resemble "a creeping thing"? Who are the "workers of iniquity" Berechiah intends to combat?

It might be argued that Berechiah is criticizing the rich among his own people; to be sure, some lines of the proem certainly could be read in this manner. Yet, there seem to be many critiques of Christian society as well. These are not exactly

"like sapphires veiled." To one familiar with medieval polemic literature against Christianity, they are strikingly familiar:

> They bless lips that utter abomination, and curse the speakers of verity. Evil is like good, hag like virgin, Like sweet, bitter, light like darkness. Berechiah curses and abjures the times and their fortunes, small or great. Better a dry crust with toil, apart from them, than to share a heritage with them.

This type of rhetoric bears a marked resemblance in tone, if not in exact content to the aggressive, vituperative stance of *Sefer Yosef HaMekaneh* and *Sefer Nizahon Vetus*, polemics written in northern France and Germany in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.[30] Berechiah exposes what he perceives to be the ulterior and nefarious motives of Christian charity toward the Jews:

> Brotherly kisses are hooks in their jaws; they that hope for sweet council of friendship will find them evil, slanderers in secret. . . . [He] that deals treacherously [is] very happy. With flattering lips he destroys his neighbor; he embraces and kisses him, and he flatters him with his mouth, but in his heat there lurks iniquity, his ambush is within him. He is drenched in wickedness, and he supplants every brother by the heel.[31]

He describes the spiritual and economic pillage of the Jewish community:

> They have framed slanders to cut off suckling and sprigs and twigs from the poor and needy and all who do not do as they do. Weapons of war are in their mouths: Their lips are swords, their teeth spears and darts, to reduce the humble to be trampled like the mire of the streets.

He further asserts that "They that honor God are lightly esteemed, but their pursuers are fleet of foot." Berechiah describes himself as one of the pursued, "a vagabond upon an island of the sea" (a turn of phrase taken as a reference to his English provenance).

This, then is Berechiah's program: to expose the inequities that Christianity has perpetrated upon the Jewish people, particularly in his own time and place, when Christian Hebraism usurped the Hebrew Bible and when amicable relations between Jews and Christians could turn poisonous overnight in the face of religious or economic conflict. He intends to make his points through fables that conceal (sometimes not too subtly) an allegorical subtext concerning the manner in which reality is turned upon its head, and "every head has been rendered a tail, and every rogue and thief has attained dominion."

Back to the fable itself: here, Berechiah's use of biblical quotations might be viewed as mere rhetorical flourish. Yet, as is evident from the manner in which he manipulates language in the proem, he was a poet skilled at formulating intricate plays on words and biblical verses. In many cases, these reveal meanings and associations Berechiah intended to convey to the astute reader.[32]

Berechiah's portrayal of the hunter in this fable is a verbatim appropriation of the description of Esau as "an expert hunter, a man of the field" from the biblical narrative of Jacob's blessing, already familiar to us. Berechiah directly quotes that scriptural locus because he wants the reader to note that the hunter he represents is none other than the archetypal hunter Esau. Yet the image of Esau the hunter was not the only image of a hunter available to Berechiah. Considering his glowing praise of the hunter in the epimythium, if Berechiah wished to quote a verse completely out of context, the verse describing Nimrod, "a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD" might have been even more appropriate for one whose "righteousness endures forever" than one describing merely "a skilled hunter, a man of the outdoors." Yet there is a reason Berechiah chose the verse describing Esau.[33] The use of this phrase immediately evokes for the medieval Jewish reader a cunning, evil character, associated explicitly in rabbinic literature with Christianity. Berechiah is a poet whose appropriations of biblical verses can be witty, revealing, or surprising, but are always carefully selected, and he picked the verse describing Esau over the one describing Nimrod because he desired to portray the hunter allegorically as the personification of Christianity.

Logically, if one allows the use of this verse to alert the reader to the possibility that the hunter is a personification of Christianity, one might surmise that the elephant represents the Jews. Were this the case, Berechiah would merely be reformulating the classic critique of rapacious Christians setting out to destroy Jews. It is true that like most fabulists, Berechiah tells stories in order to present universal and eternally relevant epimythia. Yet, if Berechiah's work were only a foil for comparison with that of other fabulists, he would hold no unique interest for medieval historians of Jewish mentalities. The historian's task is to address the elements in Berechiah's fables that seem to allude to his historical moment.

But if one seeks explicit historical allusions in the fables of Berechiah, one is sure to be disappointed. Fabulists, after all, were social critics, and in most political atmospheres, social criticism requires discretion, since the critics often oppose the corrupt norms of the power structure of society, or expose the foolishness of the masses. Fabulists were also self-consciously part of a chain of historical transmission, and as such, were somewhat committed to the integrity of the tales and texts they disseminated (if only to the minimal extent of wanting to recount a fable in the way they had heard it). The details might be altered in order to "tell a better tale," but rarely would they be altered with the intent of making them more explicitly relevant to contemporary historical circumstances. Fabulists utilized

more subtle forms of emphasis than the alteration of epimythia or traditional storylines to refer explicitly to contemporary realia. Given the presupposition of subtlety and discretion, it is unreasonable to expect Berechiah to allude overtly to specific historical events. But when one detects a discreetly placed emphasis in the description of one of the characters in a given tale (as in the case of the hunter who is described in terms of Esau) one may observe the manner in which Berechiah managed to use traditional forms and universal epimythia to level particular critiques about his own time and place. A subtle clue like this one, once grasped, serves to contextualize the fable.

While one level of the meaning of this narrative hinges on the description of the hunter in terms of Esau, the fable does not merely address the broad complaint of the persecution of Jews by Christians. The subtlety and specificity of Berechiah's critique—that it may point specifically to the changes in the patterns of Jewish-Christian polemic Berechiah witnessed in his own era—can only be appreciated if the elephant is again understood to represent the Torah.[34] Then, the "subterranean" allegory emerges with consummate clarity: Christianity, personified by Esau the Hunter, at first attempts to combat and destroy the Torah. When this fails, the Church enlists the aid of many scholars and interpreters (the people of the town) to "master the Law" and triumphalistically terrify the opponents of Christianity (the Jews), gathering up all their intellectual treasures—even those which were most secretly hidden—and lording it over them. The "mother and children" (Mother Church and her faithful) rejoice over these treasures. This occurs "As the sickle was raised against the standing grain" (Deut. 16:9; at the beginning of the Omer period) a time significant for the elephant to appear if one understands it to be a symbol of the Law, and a date significant for the Law to be attacked, since some of the most gruesome Crusade massacres and martyrdoms took place during this time, or on Shavuot itself. Ultimately, the Christians reject half of their newfound wealth (the teachings of the Oral Law), but the riches they have gained through their corrupt use of the Torah (the exegesis of the Written Law), they keep for themselves. In the words of Berechiah's own proem,

> Alas! Truth, which stood fast, hath been snared in a gin, and the vile have mounted upward while the gentle have descended to the pit. Every head has been rendered a tail, and every rogue and thief has attained dominion. The ways of truth are curtailed and hidden, but deception is augmented and conspicuous.

Truth: curtailed and hidden; deception: augmented and conspicuous. It is almost as if Berechiah includes, in the critique offered by his proem, a guide to reading his fables. A disjunctive epimythium would be perfectly understandable in this context. Berechiah used the contrast between the unmitigated evil of the

hunter's actions and the flowery praise for him in the epimythium to comment on what he perceived to be an ironic disjunction between events and their perception in his own historical setting, a disjunction he laments vociferously in his proem. In the fable Berechiah depicts a tragic situation as it actually appears. In the epimythium, he depicts the manner in which the villains are perceived. The pairing of the fable and the epimythium are part and parcel of the critique. It is a technique familiar to twentieth-century investigative journalism, which often pairs an "objective" account of an event with descriptions from various perspectives to point out the biases of those perspectives. Berechiah's complaint, as I have mentioned, is not the standard one: that the Christians have persecuted the Jews physically, socially, and legally. As a thirteenth-century Englishman, he was painfully aware of the *intellectual* rape of his people, and it is upon this that he chooses to concentrate. The epimythium illustrates with ironic precision Berechiah's anger over the contemporary situation. Theological usurpation and extortion are condoned. They are, in fact, seen as part of a divinely ordained change of the fortunes of Christianity from persecuted minority to dominant culture. At the same time the Church "graciously" allows the Jews leave to repossess their own Scriptures after they have stolen and abused them.

In light of the literary evidence of the use of the elephant as a symbol for the Torah, what are we to make of the elephants that appear in Jewish art? One of the only early appearances of elephants in Jewish art is on a mosaic floor of about 530 C.E. in the synagogue of Ma'on, at Nirim, Israel (Fig. 20).[35] Here elephants are featured among a variety of more familiar symbols from the natural world and from Jewish ceremonial: a menorah, a shofar, a lulav and etrog, grapevines, lions, palm trees, birds free and in cages, a hen with an egg. The arrangement of these animals on the pavement is not of the "peaceable kingdom" type, wherein natural enemies are grouped together to evoke a state of eschatological harmony; rather, they appear like medallions on a carpet or a textile. Most of the symbols are iconographically appropriate to this specifically liturgical setting. The elephants, by far the most exotic beasts portrayed, are a significant exception. Some clues to their meaning emerge from their mode of depiction and their placement. In spite of their exoticism, the elephants are among the beasts that exhibit signs of domesticity; they are wearing saddles or saddlecloths. Furthermore, their position on the floor is striking. They appear directly under two palm trees, facing east and positioned at the bases of an imaginary triangle with the presumed place of the Ark of the Law. One might, thus, view them as symbolic of the Torah: powerful, yet harnessed in the service of humanity, associated with the Tree of Life, and with the Ark of the Law.

Elephants appear again in a liturgical architectural setting only in the eighteenth-century paintings in the Polish synagogues mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The destroyed synagogues of Gwozdiec (built 1640) and Hodorov

(begun 1642, painted 1651, restored 1714) both in Ruthenia (Reissen), formerly Poland, now Ukraine, feature the elephant motif.[36] In the synagogue of Gwozdiec, two elephants bearing howdas appeared on the east wall of the dome, surmounting and flanking the Ark of the Law, the elaborately decorated cabinet that contains the scrolls of the Torah. One of these elephants appeared directly beneath the text of the verse chanted when the scroll was removed from the ark during the synagogue service: "When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say, 'Rise up, O LORD! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!'" (Num. 10:35; my trans.). The other appeared beneath the verse used when the Torah was replaced in the ark: "Advance, O LORD, to Your resting-place, You and Your mighty Ark! Your priests are clothed in triumph, your faithful ones sing for joy" (Ps. 132:8–9).

At Hodorov, there were also two elephants, here bearing castles and without an associated text, but accompanied and, ultimately, interpreted by other images.[37] The elephants appeared on the north and south walls of the dome, forming a visual triangle with the ark. Each stood within a roundel surmounted by two small birds and supported by four storks, two of them nesting, and two killing serpents (Fig. 21).

There is a precedent for the inclusion of animal images in the context of the synagogue ark. The prototype of the synagogal Ark of the Law was the Ark of the Covenant, which, according to tradition, rested in the desert tabernacle and later in the Jerusalem Temple. It was supposed to have held, among other things, the second set of tablets of the Ten Commandments, carved by Moses, along with the fragments of the first Tablets, inscribed by God's own finger, and shattered by Moses in response to the sin of the Golden Calf (Exod. 25:10–22). This ark was borne by four Levites whenever the Israelites traveled, and it was surmounted by two winged, angelic figures called *kruvim*, usually translated as "cherubs" (Fig. 22; Exod. 25:18–22). With the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians this ark disappeared, but its memory is preserved in the synagogue ark (Fig. 23).

In ancient Jewish art, depictions of the synagogue ark often show it surmounted by two birds (Fig. 24).[38] The implication is clear: just as the "untouchable" Ark of the Covenant, which contained the divine law from Heaven, was surmounted by depictions of winged angels of the celestial realm, so the synagogue ark, its terrestrial analogue and the repository of the Torah scroll—the earthly and touchable incarnation of the divine law—is surmounted by depictions of winged creatures of the earthly realm, usually doves, which symbolize the divine presence. Sometime in the Byzantine period, or perhaps earlier, the ark began to be accompanied by the figures of lions as well. The Aramaic word for Law, or Torah, is אוריתא (*'orayta*), which can become, through a switch in position of a single letter and its vowel, the word אריותא (*aryavayta*), "a pair of lions."[39] The use of lions

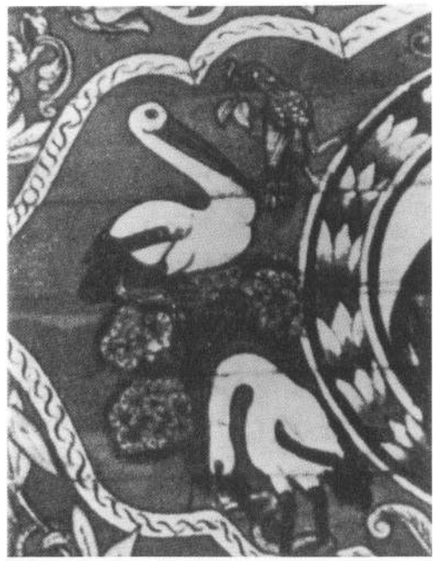


Fig. 21. Storks nesting and killing serpents. Wall painting from the synagogue formerly at Hodorov, Ruthenia (Reissen), Ukraine, built 1642, restored 1714 (detail of dome interior)



Fig. 22. Ark of the Covenant reconstruction



Fig. 23. Synagogue Ark, c. 1666. Scuola Grande Tedesca, Venice



Fig. 24. Birds surmounting the Torah Ark. Mosaic. Synagogue at Beit Alpha, c. 517–18 C.E. (detail)

may have begun as a sort of visual homonymic pun, which joined the circle of associations of the strength and invincibility of the lion with the circle of associations of the Torah, and helped transform the violent biblical image of the lion into the postbiblical image of a lion whose violent qualities are put to good (i.e., defensive) purpose (Fig. 25).

Thus, the traditional animal symbols of choice to accompany the Ark of the Law were birds or lions. The juxtaposition of elephant and ark seems, at first, to be as startling as that of elephant and obelisk. But upon closer inspection, in the wall paintings of the synagogue of Gwozdiec, the text of the Torah service and the images converged to associate the elephant explicitly with the Ark of the Covenant and with the Ark of the Law. If one understands the elephants to be symbolic of the two arks, the combination of images at Hodorov may be read as a rebus of sorts for the identical scriptural verses cited above the images of the elephants at Gwozdiec: the Hebrew word for stork is *hassida*, which also means "righteous" or "faithful." In midrashic exegesis, storks are associated with the Levites on the basis of the verse in the farewell blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:8: "And of Levi he (Moses) said: 'Let Your *Tummim* and *Urim* be with Your faithful one' *(hassidekha)*."[40] Thus, the four storks represent the four Levites who accompanied the ark on its journeys (Fig. 21). The birds on top of the roundel represent the *kruvim* on top of the ark, as we have seen they do in many ancient and medieval settings as well as elsewhere in Hodorov and other Polish synagogues (Fig. 26). The storks killing the serpents allude to the text "'Rise up, O LORD! May Your enemies be scattered," whereas the nesting storks allude to "Advance, O LORD, to Your resting-place." The end of this verse, "your faithful ones will sing for joy," supports this, since the word used for "faithful ones" is again *hassidekha*, upon which the storks are obviously a visual pun.[41]

Clearly, the creators of these early eighteenth-century wall paintings associated the elephant with the Torah. Even if the creators of the sixth-century mosaics had made the same association more explicitly, it would exceed the bounds of reasonable speculation to propose causal links between the iconography of ancient synagogues and their early modern Polish counterparts, though distant influence is certainly arguable.[42] Happily, an intermediary iconographic tradition exists between the Nirim mosaics and the wall paintings in the synagogues of Gwodiez and Hodorov. The elephant and the Torah are associated in medieval Hebrew manuscript painting in a manner that parallels their equation in medieval Hebrew literature.

The Duke of Sussex Pentateuch features a stunning full-page initial-word panel for each of the five divisions of the Pentateuch. Each one of these pages is composed of the opening rubric of the book, with illuminations in German Gothic style.[43] These decorations are so similar in style to those found in Christian manuscripts that the question of their relevance in a Jewish context has generally been



Fig. 25. Lions and birds flanking the Torah ark. Gold glass, third or fourth century. Jerusalem, The Israel Museum

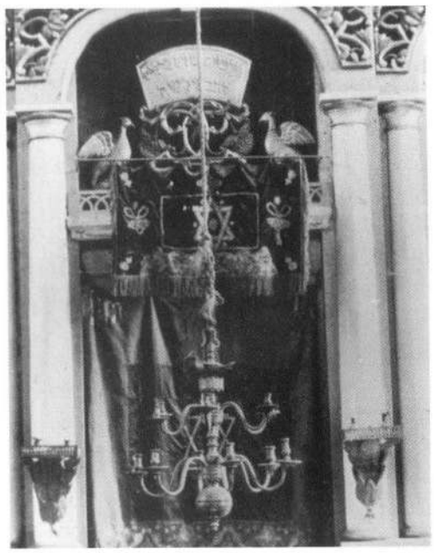


Fig. 26. Synagogue Ark, David Friedlaender, 1810. Wyszogrod, Poland. (detail)

downplayed or ignored. The elephant that appears in the center of a hexagram, bearing a crown-shaped howdah upon its back, and surrounded by a group of animal hybrids and grotesques on the full page initial-word panel opening the Book of Deuteronomy (fol. 238r) has been considered to be merely a decorative element (Color Plate VI). Joseph Guttmann has written that "were it not for the Hebrew word, it would be difficult to tell the difference between this page and those from German Latin manuscripts of the fourteenth century" with their "expressive grotesqueries." The elephant has no intrinsically Jewish meaning, it was "probably modeled after a depiction in a Bestiary." Furthermore, Guttmann asserts, the hexagram would not become the quintessential symbol of the Jews until centuries later; during the Middle Ages it was "known and used as a magical symbol in both Christianity and Islam."[44] Guttmann's reading, thus, rather perfunctorily dismisses any possibility of an intrinsically Jewish context.

It is true that the illumination is very similar to German Gothic manuscripts in style and that the depiction of the elephant, like other contemporary nonbestiary depictions of the elephant, devolves from bestiary models. On closer inspection, however, the "expressive grotesqueries" reveal themselves to be iconographically significant, and certainly indicate an understanding of the textual context on the part of the creator of the work. No German Gothic manuscript devotes a full-page illumination to the opening rubric of each of the books of the Pentateuch, nor does any German Gothic manuscript place the elephant in such a prominent place on the page illustrating the opening rubric of the book of Deuteronomy. Guttmann's dismissal of a Jewish meaning on the basis of similarities between this illumination and those in German Latin manuscripts of the fourteenth century cannot be maintained if one looks anywhere beyond the specific qualities of style: line, color, disposition, and obvious dependence on models in the bestiary or elsewhere. It ignores the context of the illumination: what the function of the page and its place in the text suggest concerning the reading of the iconography. As soon as one begins to place this illumination in its proper context, there is no mistaking it for a contemporary Christian illumination. One notes that the same elements that Guttmann deems foreign appear in central and important positions and merit inquiry into their significance. As in the case of Hadassi's acrostic and Berechiah's fable, there is certainly an adoption of topoi deriving from the bestiary, but in iconography, as in literature, there is a process of adaptation concurrent with that adoption.

The illumination opens the book of Deuteronomy, which had, since ancient times, been the symbol of the totality of the Torah itself. Deuteronomy was called *Mishneh HaTorah,* the "repetition (or encapsulation) of the Law," because Moses' orations therein not only recapitulate the narrative of the Israelite experience in Egypt and in the desert, but also present a digest of the laws given to the Isra-



Color Plate I. The blessing of Jacob. Golden Haggadah, Castile, 1320. London, British Library MS Add. 27210, fol. 4v, lower right



Color Plate II. Esau the hunter. Golden Haggadah, Castile, 1320. London, British Library MS Add. 27210, fol. 4v, lower right, detail



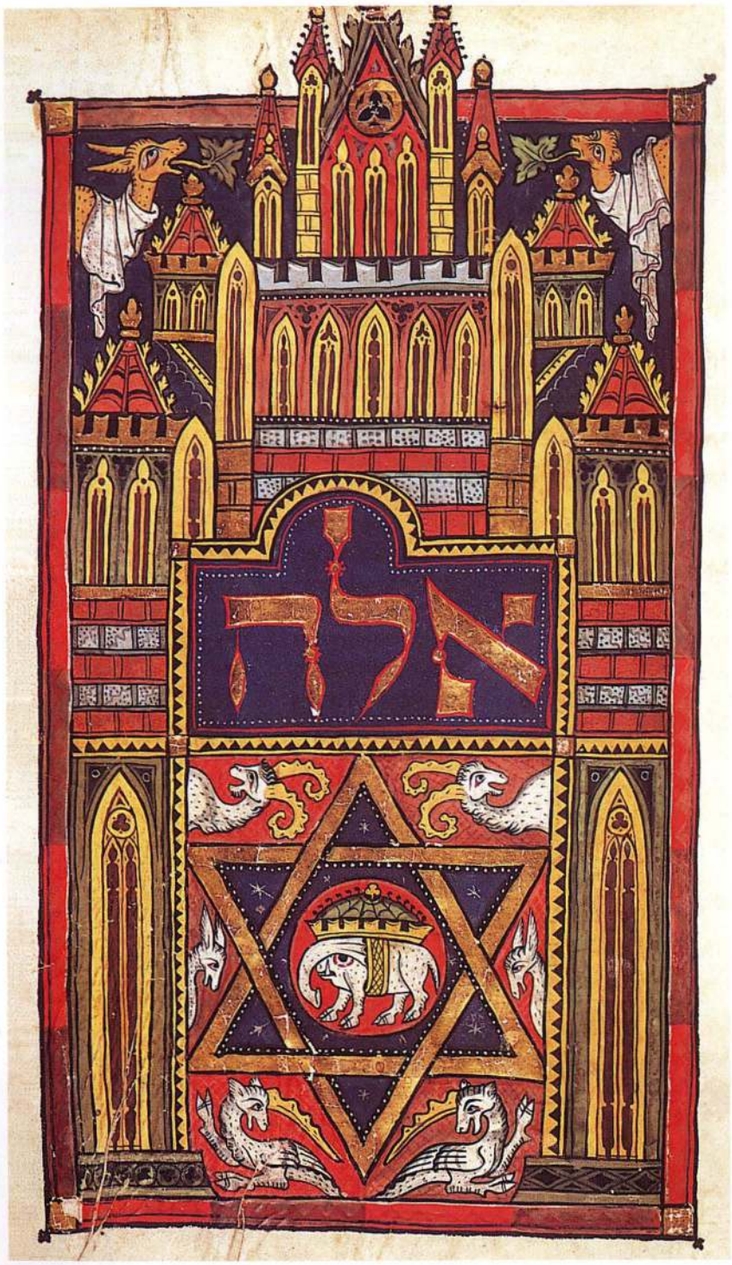
Color Plate III. Opening folio of Genesis. Schocken Bible, Southern Germany, Swabia, fourteenth century. Jerusalem, Schocken Library MS 14840, fol. 1v (detail)



Color Plate IV. Israelites in bondage. Haggadah, Barcelona, mid-fourteenth century. London, British Library MS Add. 14761, fol. 30v



Color Plate V. Historical and eschatological hunts. Haggadah, Barcelona, mid-fourteenth century. London, British Library MS Add. 14761, fol. 20v



Color Plate VI. The elephant as a symbol of the Torah. Opening folio of Deuteronomy. Duke of Sussex Pentateuch. South Germany, c. 1300. London, British Library MS Add. 15282, fol. 238r



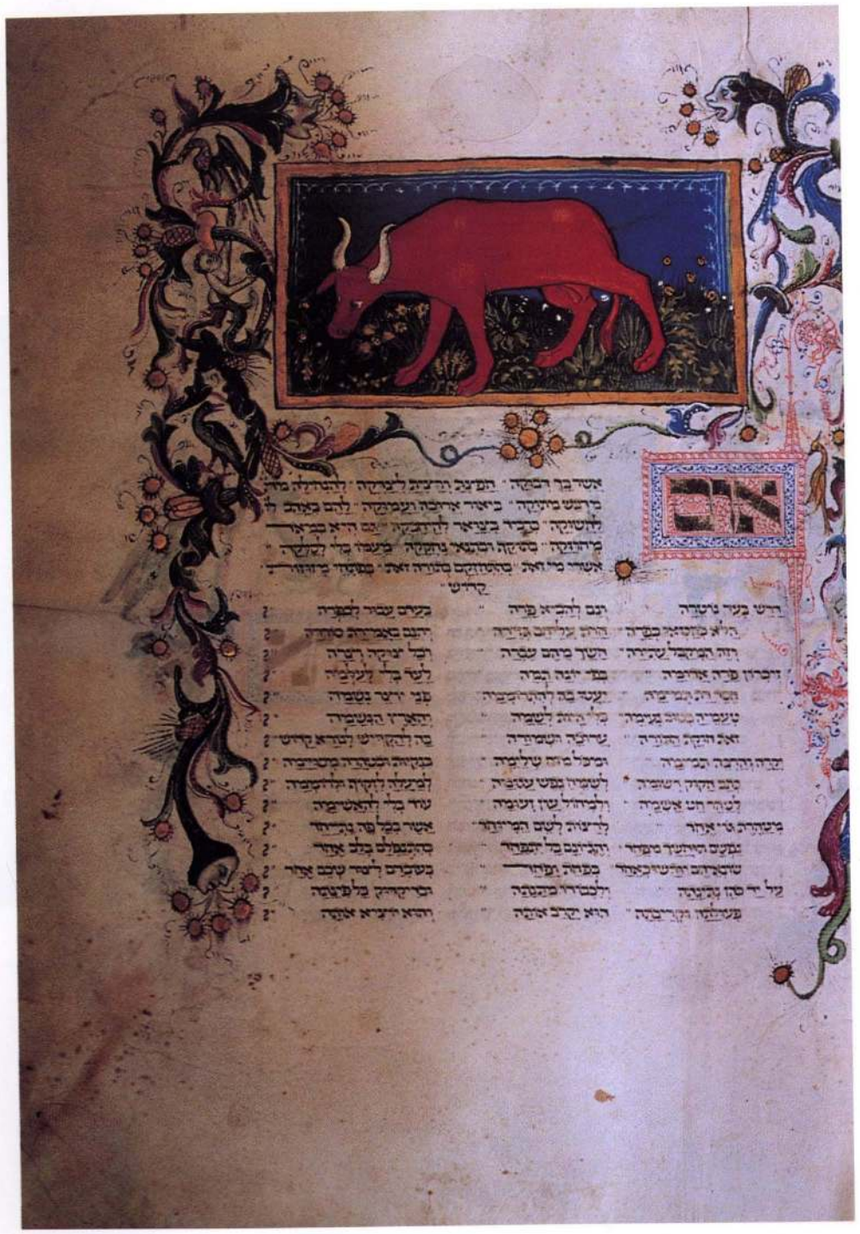
Color Plate VII. The liturgical poem *Adon Imnani,* illustrated within the framework of the revelation on Mount Sinai. Mahzor, Worms, 1272. Jerusalem, JNUL MS Heb. 4 781°/I, fol. 151r



Color Plate VIII. The Israelite encampment. Opening folio of Numbers. Duke of Sussex Pentateuch. South Germany, c. 1300. London, British Library MS Add. 15282, fol. 179v



Color Plate IX. Lion and Unicorn. Ceiling of the synagogue of Hodorov, Hodorov, Ruthenia (Reissen), Ukraine, built 1642, restored 1714. Reconstruction, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, Tel Aviv



Color Plate X. The Red Heifer. Mahzor, Roman rite, 1441. Jerusalem, Schocken Library MS 13873, fol. 76

elites in the two previous books of the Pentateuch.[45] The elephant, symbol of the Torah, is both the physical center and the central focus of the page. Only the forequarters of all the accompanying grotesqueries are depicted; the elephant alone appears as a complete figure, within a red roundel in the middle of a hexagram. Indeed, the crown-shaped howda on the elephant's back may be an early representation of a Torah crown.[46] It is appropriate that such a powerful symbol of the Torah should be placed in the most prominent of positions on the title page of the book that represents the totality of the Torah.

The symbolism of the hexagram mirrors that of the elephant in this context. Guttmann is correct in maintaining that the so-called Star of David (or "Seal of Solomon," as it was known in the Middle Ages) did not become the Jewish symbol par excellence until much later. And he is correct that medieval Jews, particularly those in southern Germany, knew the hexagram as a magical symbol. They used it widely on magical diagrams and amulets. But even magical usages do not exist in a contextual vacuum. According to Gershom Scholem, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the time of the creation of this illumination, the hexagram was the symbol of the angelic name Taftafiyah.[47] This is one of the names of Metatron, the primary angelic intermediary between heaven and earth,[48] the "teacher of Torah in the Divine Academy."[49] The shape of the hexagram, with its upward- and downward-pointing triangles, serves as a visual metaphor for the function of Metatron as intermediary.[50] In medieval German Jewish culture, the hexagram, like Metatron himself, was associated with the Torah. In popular magical use, it was often drawn on the obverse of the parchment upon which was written the text of the *mezzuzah*, the scroll required on every doorpost in every Jewish home.[51] The mezzuzah was itself symbolic of the totality of Torah. The hexagram, through its association with Metatron, the mezzuzah, and Torah, refers to the protective power of Torah. Though it does not yet stand as a symbol for the Jewish people or Judaism, it nonetheless acquires a specifically Jewish meaning based on its broader symbolic associations. That meaning is related to the comprehensiveness and inviolability of the Torah. The conflation of the elephant with the hexagram on the opening page of the book of Deuteronomy, far from being a merely whimsical decoration, is an integrated and sophisticated symbolic construction.

The example of the elephant in the Duke of Sussex Pentateuch may be compared with the earliest known appearance of an elephant in an illuminated Hebrew manuscript, that in the Worms Maḥzor, in order to point to what seems to be a continuity of meaning for this image from the late thirteenth through the early fourteenth centuries. Adopted again from a bestiary context, the elephant we interpreted as a symbol of Torah in a hermeneutical and magical context in the Duke of Sussex Pentateuch may be interpreted as a symbol of

Torah again, this time in the context of liturgical poetry and the festival cycle. Folio 151r of the Worms Maḥzor contains the text of a liturgical poem called a *yozer* for the first day of Shavuot (Color Plate VII). The poem is titled *Adon Imnani* ("The Lord was my faithful companion") and it is written in the "voice" of the Torah herself.[52] She describes her preexistence as God's companion before the creation of the world, and how God entrusted her to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. The text is displayed within a rounded arch flanked by Gothic towers. Above the arch is a depiction of Moses receiving the Torah at Sinai. The illumination is now half-lacking due to the cropping of the margins, but it is similar enough to those in the other surviving festival prayer books of medieval Ashkenaz (Franco-Germany) to make a relatively accurate reading possible.[53] Moses' lower body appears at left, kneeling, with another kneeling figure, possibly Joshua, below him. All these figures wear long shifts, pointed shoes, and conical "Jewish hats." Their appearance is very similar to the figures in the so-called Bird's Head Haggadah; they are beaked and have small beards. At the center of the badly cropped upper register, the bottom halves of the two tablets are still visible. On the upper right, a trumpet descends (presumably from a cloud or from the hand of an angel),[54] and at the far right there are three standing figures. Two similar figures occupy each of the two towers on either side of the arch, and two other figures appear at the bottom center of the page. Excluding Moses, the figures number ten. This numeration was obviously planned by the original illuminator, who provided each figure with a banderole, symbolic of speech, in order to indicate that the ten figures personify the *asseret hadibrot*: the first ten "words," or commandments given at Sinai. A slightly later scribe has made this association more explicit by inscribing the text of each of the commandments in the banderoles.[55] The upper register of the arch contains grotesque dragons, which appear in nearly all other illustrations of this particular *yozer* in surviving illuminated *maḥzorim*, and which add a surprisingly menacing element to this scene.[56] The arch is supported by two animal figures in the badly cropped and frayed lower margin; on the left, a dragon, on the right, an elephant (Fig. 27). The dragon caryatid, though badly damaged, still evinces a distinctly camel-like in appearance (Fig. 28). The elephant is what one might call a standard bestiary type, much like the one depicted in the Duke of Sussex Pentateuch (Color Plate VI).

As we shall see, the serpent or dragon in ancient Judaism was an ambivalent creature, so powerful that it was almost a threat to divine power (see Chapter 4). In the medieval period, it became a symbol of evil for both Jews and Christians, representing specifically those forces in the universe that threatened and stood in opposition to divine power and divine law. The dragon symbolized the domination of the universe by the power of fate and predestination, and the consequent



Fig. 27. Elephant, from an illumination accompanying the liturgical poem *Adon Imnani*, illustrated within the framework of the revelation on Mount Sinai. Maḥzor, Worms 1272. Jerusalem, JNUL MS Heb. 4° 781/I, fol. 151r, detail



Fig. 28. Dragon, from an illumination accompanying the liturgical poem *Adon Imnani*, illustrated within the framework of the revelation on Mount Sinai. Maḥzor, Worms 1272. Jerusalem, JNUL MS Heb. 4° 781/I, fol. 151r, detail

alienation of humanity from God and the Torah in the absence of any reprieve through proper religious action and of any necessity for an ongoing relationship with the divine. The dragon often appears in medieval Ashkenazic liturgical manuscripts in a position of subjugation, symbolic of the fact that the precentor and his congregation have conquered their belief in fate as read in the motion of the stars actuated by the whim of the celestial dragon, and have placed their destiny in the hands of God alone (see Chapter 4). The unusual, distinctively camel-like shape of the dragon is very much in keeping with the tradition connecting the dragon with the primordial serpent of Eden. The serpent, according to Jewish legend, took the shape of a camel.[57]

Thus we find the elephant associated with the Torah, and the dragon in general; this camel-shaped dragon in particular is associated with the very archetype of evil. Accordingly, when the ancient topos of the enmity between elephant and dragon appears in medieval literature, the lines are very clearly drawn. In Christian lore, the elephant battling the dragon comes to represent Jesus who, dying, vanquishes death.[58] How are an opposing dragon and elephant to be understood in a Jewish context?

The illuminator of the Worms Maḥzor adopted the anti-Jewish, anti-Law symbolism of the elephant as it was represented in Christian culture and Karaite polemic, and adapted it in very much the same way Berechiah HaNakdan had done. As might be expected in the pietistic climate of thirteenth-century Ashkenaz, the statement the illuminator made in doing this was not a political, but a spiritual one. The illumination evokes the classic locus of the enmity between elephant and dragon to emphasize the conflict between the sinister forces of evil and the force of divine law. The dragon, at left, is in the "sinister" position; in the subsequent development of kabbalistic symbolism, this becomes the side of the forces of *Din* (Judgment, or Fate),[59] and the elephant, representing the Torah of mercy appears on the right, the side ultimately associated with *Hessed*, or Lovingkindness.[60] The conflict between these beasts literally supports the framework of Torah. Though the Torah is *bestowed* on Mount Sinai (as illustrated at the top of the page, the part of the book that would have been closest to the synagogue ark as the book was used) it is only when the Torah is actualized as a force for combating evil in the world (as illustrated at the *bas-de-page*, the part of the book closest to the precentor) that it is *owned* by the Jewish people—transformed from a "gift" to an "inheritance." It is the Torah's potential to triumph over evil that makes it the perfect gift from God to God's beloved people, but it is the use to which it is put that earns Israel the right to call the Torah its own. This theme, with the elephant prominently displayed as a sort of *lex militans,* is appropriate for an illumination that surrounds a poem describing the power and importance of the Torah, and that was intended for the holy day celebrating the revelation of the Torah. It is

particularly appropriate to the philosophical world of *Hassidei Ashkenaz*, and to the sociopolitical climate of the latter part of the thirteenth century. It forms a parallel with the elephants in the sixth-century Ma'on mosaic, with the elephant on the opening page of the Book of Deuteronomy in the Duke of Sussex Pentateuch in the late fourteenth century, and with the elephants accompanying passages from the Torah service in Polish synagogues of the seventeenth century.

In all these cases, used as a symbol of Torah, which is traditionally understood to be the font of divine wisdom, the elephants are in some sense also analogous to Bernini's use of the elephant as a symbol of divine wisdom, though they emerge from different intellectual wellsprings.

Like Bernini's elephant, the elephants in Jewish art are part of a body of fragile contextual symbols that are somewhat opaque to the modern viewer. In using the elephant as a symbol of divine wisdom, Bernini interwove a revived interest in antique motifs with currents in contemporary philosophy. In the case of Jewish usage, the question of origins is more obscure, and the transmission of the motif of the elephant and the law in liturgical architectural settings from sixth-century Israel to seventeenth-century Poland is difficult to trace. But the mediating stratum of medieval text and illumination considerably obviates that difficulty: Ashkenazic Jewry traced its family traditions, its customs, its liturgy, and its legalistic method not to Babylonia, but to the Land of Israel. In all these areas, there was a remarkable fidelity to *minhag Erez Yisrael*—the ancient custom of the Land of Israel.[61] It is conceivable that an apparent association of the elephant with the Torah in synagogue mosaics in the Land of Israel in ancient times might have had some resonance in a similar equation on the part of Jews in medieval Franco-Germany. Along with familial, customary, liturgical, and legal consciousness, it is not inconceivable that much of the symbolic consciousness present in the custom of the Land of Israel made its way into Franco-Germany.

Whatever the ultimate origins of this symbol, what existed as a suggestion in sixth-century Israel flourished between the late eleventh and the fourteenth centuries in Ashkenaz as a response to the Christian bestiary. It peaks in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, in response to Christian moralization of the animal kingdom. During this period, as Christians became increasingly interested in the *hebraica veritas*, Jews faced heavy pressure to engage in polemics about the nature of the Law with Christians who knew the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. Their anger over the "appropriation" of their texts by these opponents is often palpable. They responded by reappropriating the Christian readings of their texts and reading them against Christianity, as well as by reading Christian texts polemically—writing critiques of the Gospels, and parodies of the life of Jesus.[62] Jews also joined Christians in reading the Book of Nature as Scripture. This was not a new phenomenon. Moralization of the animal kingdom had very

ancient Jewish roots, but it was abandoned as Christian typological readings began to flourish (see Chapter 1). In the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries, Jews began again to moralize nature in an attempt to reconcile "common knowledge" (which was heavily imbued with Christian moralization) about various creatures with a Jewish context. And they felt free to apply their readings to polemic purposes.

In reading Hadassi and Berechiah, and in examining the medieval illuminations, that sense of freedom—the innovative, often impressionistic sense of polemic and pride—is evident. By the time the elephant as a symbol of Torah appeared in the early eighteenth-century Polish synagogue paintings, the complexity and subtlety of its meaning had been forgotten, because the sociopolitical context had changed.[63] Like most of the animals that appear in the synagogue paintings, the elephants are individual symbols, rather than parts of a larger and more complete allegory. The artisans of the Polish synagogues were the final inheritors of a possibly ancient tradition concerning the elephant as a symbol for the Torah, a tradition whose meaning, particularly in a polemic context, was quickly fading. That is precisely why their treatment of this motif was more explicit than that of their medieval predecessors. The placement of the elephants in proximity to the ark in the synagogues, as well as the verses that accompany the elephants at Gwozdiec and the charming "rebus" of storks and birds surrounding the ones at Hodorov seem intended to bolster the viewer's understanding of a symbol that was becoming obsolete.[64]

I am neither so bold nor so foolish to suggest that every elephant appearing in Jewish art is a symbol for the Torah. Indeed, there are as many images of elephants that may mean something else, or that may, in fact, be merely decorative. I only mean to illustrate by these examples the fact that the Jewish iconographic tradition is primarily a manifestation of Jewish literary culture and historical circumstances, the result of the filtration of the specific experience of Jews as a medieval minority through what one might call their midrashic imagination. This is a phenomenon supported by convincing historical and literary evidence, and the burden of proof falls upon those who would argue that these images are simple, unconsidered appropriations.[65]

Certainly, however, by the twentieth century, the image of the elephant had become extinct in the canon of Jewish iconography. It joins a series of images that represent the "ephemera" of Jewish symbolic consciousness. Nonetheless, the very fact of their extreme contextuality makes them useful tools in understanding medieval Jewish mentalités. The process of their adaptation illuminates the more general phenomenon of Jewish adaptation in a Christian cultural context in the Middle Ages. At the same time, their highly contextual status also explains why these motifs declined outside the context of a traditional Jewish society besieged by Christian polemic and in competition with Christian moralization.

Appendix: The Elephant and the Man of the Field (Hunter)

"If one's beginnings were troubled, his end will change a great deal."

1. The elephant is the most wondrous of creatures, in shape, in size, in appearance, for he is full of bones, and the circumference of his tusks are awesome.

2. His neck is 200 cubits long and comes out from the center between his shoulders and from his chest, to search out the what and wherefore of things.

3. He plucks his food into his mouth in a single sweep—he is a full wagon loaded with destruction.

4. A city and its inhabitants ride upon him, his mouth stretches up to his back, so he can bear a burden. His steps are huge strides.

5. A skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors, [Esau; cf. Gen. 25:27] was tracking game, when the elephant, with his shape, size, and appearance, came out towards him.

6. The man went forth and approached him, and on his thigh he bore a sword. When the elephant approached him, he gnashed his teeth at him, and opened his bottomless mouth, and cast him off a far way.

7. And the man, exhausted and overwhelmed, walked knock-kneed [lit. with his thighs touching] to set the dogs upon him to bite him—[since] blood is not atoned for save by the blood of him who shed it.

8. That man then considered if perhaps he could cast him down by his net. So he spread the net and the ropes, and made toils and snares in the forest, and chased him until he came there, but the elephant broke and tore them and utterly destroyed them.

9. Then he whetted his sword—perhaps he could approach him to fight him. And he approached him and attacked him and sought to kill him, seeking an opening against him.

10. Just as he lifted up his hand against him and prevailed, his sword crumbled and broke like pottery. And he saw that he could not prevail against him, so he cried for all the people to assemble.

11. And he said: "Mine is this elephant. I have desired him and set my hopes on him (lit., 'my face upon him I will cast [*apil*—a pun on *pil*, elephant]'). For I was incapable in my cleverness of capturing him with my net and my snare or with my sword or with my bow.

12. And I, as I am bereft, so am I bereft. Run after him—perhaps you will catch him. You can confound him with terror and fear, and the mixed multitude which is in his midst. —Whet your desire to rule him."

13. So they quickly cast him [*yafiluhu*—a further pun on *pil*, elephant] into their pit, and they captured him in their zeal and their anger, and brought him to his master, the man of the field.

14. And the man said in his heart that he would rule him with hard labor, and humble his heart with toil, and he mounted upon his back, and said to him:

15. "Why have you done thus, to walk forwardly with me[66] in furious anger and rebelliousness. You cast me behind your back, therefore snares and nets encompass you."

16. And, checking that there was no one about [lit., "no stranger with him"], he covered his face with his cloak, and rode the elephant until sunset.

17. As the sickle was raised against the standing grain [Deut. 16:9] the reapers saw him, and they hid from him in the forest, the sinews of their loins were woven together, for they thought the demon had appeared in their fields.

18. And they said to each other: "We have seen the demon on his horse!" And they screamed and cried all the night, with a voice of great consternation, for behold, a great, dark dread had fallen upon them.

19. Lamentation held them in its grip until they came to an inhabited city, and they said: "Remove every stranger and sojourner to cause the demon to flee from us. Are you for us or for our adversaries?"

20. The entire city flew into chaos about them, and they said: "We will not fight satyrs and demons, because we will become a laughing-stock." So they left their tents, their cattle and their sheep, and ran for their lives, both men and women, from that place.

21. Then the man with the elephant came there, and found their tents as they had been left, filled with all kinds of treasures, gold and silver, sheep and cattle.

22. And he sent for and fetched his friends, and he called to him all his kinsmen, and they removed from the city every desirable thing, whether in chest, in tower or in press [Lev. 26:21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 40, 41].

23. Over the best of the sheep and the cattle and the fatted bulls mother and children [cf. Job 40:17] rejoiced, and the city was left waste, bereft of man and beast, without the multitude of sheep and cattle, as if a king had come upon it to lay waste to it.

24. And he went and came to another town, and did to it as he had done to the previous one, and so to a third and a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth, until he came to the tenth, and he was satisfied, and where all he had ransacked was for devouring.

25. And he went home, rich, and in peace, and let them know what his fee would be for exorcising by use of names the demon which had devastated the land. They pledged to give him half the booty, if he would return the other half to them. So did the man do, and they forgave him for all he had done previously.

26. The parable concerns a wise and calculating man, who is ready to pursue his sustenance. He is tired each day, and finds no rest for his soul, and nothing is accomplished by his toil, as was the case of the lone man and the elephant.

27. But when the King's word comes to him, to cause his fortune to wax great, to raise him higher and higher, like the master of the elephant, to greatness, he must restrain his hand from cheating and stealing, in whatever field he works in, just as the man did with the booty—he was as zealous as a lion to return half. If his beginning was troubled, his end changed greatly. He dines upon savory fare, and his righteousness stands forever.

4

Harnessing the Dragon

A Mythos Transformed

Why is [the word "dragons"] written *HaTaninim* (plural) and not *HaTanin* (singular, since the Leviathan was reputed to have no mate)? Lest one should say "It is a god," as it says (Job 41:25)
"When he raises himself up the mighty are afraid"

Numbers 21:8–9: "The serpent" corresponds to God.
—R. Yehudah HeHasid on Gen. 1:21, Num. 21:8–9

Dragons have held an almost irresistible fascination for every human culture since the dawn of consciousness.[1] Medieval Jewish society was no exception. Dragons appear frequently in both its literature and iconography. They have received little attention due, once again, to the pervasive attitude that any startling, creative, or unexpected element in the cultural production of medieval Jewry must have originated in Christian culture, and that, in a Jewish context, it must serve a purely decorative or conventional function. That twentieth-century people are not used to thinking of dragons as particularly Jewish, however, should not preclude the exploration of their iconographic significance in medieval Jewish art and literature. On the contrary, we ought to examine the use of dragons as manifestations of medieval Jewish creativity in the realm of theology and symbolism. Representations of dragons in art and literature are no mere survivals of a "universal mythic consciousness," incompletely sublimated and subjugated. They are played

upon, they surface again and again, almost as if to trouble the observer into theological self-examination.

The dragon is particularly interesting because it often seems to serve as a metaphor for metaphysical things whose meaning is veiled. Yehudah HaLevi, in *Sefer HaKuzari* expresses it this way: "The dragon is a symbol of the world of the intellect, because by this name are known those hidden things which are impossible to perceive with the senses."[2]

Though they may point to "hidden things," dragons are themselves difficult to hide. They are conspicuous even in the Bible, where they are the very first animals created by God in the first chapter of Genesis, the first creation account or the "P" source. (Gen. 1–2:4a). "God said: 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.' God created the great sea monsters and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind."[3]

All other creatures are mentioned generically by species: "the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle . . . and all the creeping things" (Gen. 1:26). But the dragons are identified by name; they are called *taninim* (singular *tanin*): dragons, or "great sea monsters." They are the only creatures that receive names before Adam is given the task of naming the animals (Gen. 2:20).

P's conscious designation of the great dragons as the first of YHVH's creations certainly may be seen as an attempt to fashion an alternate mythology to those of the Ancient Near East. The great *taninim* are undoubtedly the most impressive of the pre-Adamite creatures enumerated in Genesis. The balance of the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings paint a composite picture of the *taninim* as huge "fiery" or poisonous animals with the capacity to swallow a human being. (Isa. 51:9; Job 7:12; Jer. 51:34; Deut. 32:33). However, they were not coterminous with the Creator, but were God's creatures, and hence never coregnant. The *tanin* frequently and fiercely conflicts with God, rising up from the Deep,[4] to attack the very Throne of God. (cf. Job 41:25 and note 4). An analogue to the *tanin* is the Leviathan, the awe-inspiring "elusive" or "twisting serpent" mentioned in Isaiah, Job, and Psalms. Like the *tanin*, its fate is ultimately to be subjugated by God, who either fights, vanquishes, or interestingly, "sports with" it. (Isa. 27:1; Job 3:8 and 40:25; Ps. 104:26). The dragon thus remains God's subject, and God's Throne, as we shall see, remains secure.

The unique, awesome, and threatening nature of the biblical sea-monster made it an appropriate symbol for tyrannical human oppressors. God chose to transform Moses' staff into a *tanin* rather than into some other powerful beast because, as a figure of arrogance and power, the *tanin* was an appropriate symbol for Pharaoh himself (Exod. 7:9, 10, 12). Ezekiel refers to the Egyptian Pharaoh

of his own time as the "mighty *tanin*, sprawling in its channels, who said, 'My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.'"[5] According to Exodus, Moses' *tanin* swallows up all the *taninim* created by the Egyptian magicians, symbolizing Pharaoh's dominance over all of the lesser powers.[6] In the case of both Exodus and Ezekiel, the *tanin* is ultimately vanquished: Moses' *tanin* is transformed back into a staff with the Name of God inscribed upon it,[7] and the *tanin* that represents Pharaoh in Ezekiel is hauled up from its channels and flung into the desert. (Ezek. 29:4–5). This image of the vanquishing of the *tanin* finds parallels in other biblical texts, and will prove crucial to an understanding of the dragon as a liminal symbol, situated upon the ambiguous dividing line between the divine and the demonic (Ps. 91:3, 84:3).

The "J" source, or second creation account, in Genesis 2, mirrors the "P" source in introducing a prototypical reptilian figure (Gen. 2:46 and following). The first animal J mentions by name is the *nahash*: the "primordial serpent" of the Garden of Eden (a dragonlike creature, as we shall see).[8] Like P's *taninim*, it is the only animal singled out for individual mention in this account. In fact, the primordial serpent is the first creature to which Scripture devotes a narrative. The image of the serpent as a crafty, evil tempter presented in that narrative, and its correlation with the *tanin*, figure prominently in the development of the image of the dragon.

Nahash is also the generic term for serpent in the Bible, but perhaps thanks to the powerful image of the serpent limned in Genesis 2, the *nahash* often attains dragonlike proportions and powers. But the interchangeability of the terms *nahash* and *tanin* is already clearly evident in Exodus, where on one occasion Moses' staff changes into a *tanin*, as I mentioned, but on another, into a *nahash*. Usually used in a metaphorical, or natural historical context (Gen. 49:17; Ps. 58:5 and 140:4; Deut. 8:15), the very term *nahash* ("hissing" or "whispering") carries with it connotations of craftiness, poisonousness, and punishment.[9]

Dragons are quite prominent in rabbinic literature, and the attitude of tannaitic and amoraic culture toward these creatures directly informs their manifestations in medieval texts and iconography. In the legends of the Talmud and in the midrashim both the serpent and the dragon embark upon their odyssey through the history of Jewish ideas as indigenous archetypes of evil and power.[10] In these sources, as in Exodus, the terms *nahash* and *tanin* are often interchangeable: a Talmudic source may refer to a *tanin*, and its midrashic retelling may refer to a *nahash* or vice versa.[11] This interchangeability is used to bolster and corroborate the hints found in the biblical sources that the serpent is a reduced dragon.

The primordial serpent is cursed after it tempts Adam and Eve: "On your belly you shall crawl," God tells it, "and dust shall you eat" (Gen. 3:14). The fact that

the serpent seems not always to have been a crawling beast leads the rabbis to conjecture that originally it "stood out distinguished and erect like a reed, and had legs . . . it was the size of a camel."[12] The midrashim elaborate upon the manner in which, after its crime, the serpent is brought to trial by God, and is punished with the loss of its legs and its stature.[13] Because the serpent "set its eyes on that which was not proper for it—sought what it was not granted," observes the Talmud, "what it possessed was taken away from it."[14] But the serpent's crime was not simple deception of Adam. It sought to have sexual relations with Eve, and, thus cuckolding Adam, to usurp his place as God's image and representative on earth.[15] This attempt to assume the place of Adam is, in effect, an attempt to usurp the place of God.[16]

The threat to Adam's supremacy posed by the serpent of the Garden of Eden in rabbinic legends amplifying the J account is implicitly paralleled by the threat to God's supremacy posed by the *tanin* in those elaborating upon the P account. In the latter, the *tanin* rallies the mysterious forces of "the Deep" to usurp the divine throne, and is subjugated by God.[17] Another aggadic parallel is the threat posed to God's supremacy by the fall of the unnamed angelic prince (Satanail/Lucifer), formerly the most favored in Heaven, when he becomes jealous of the first man and refuses to do homage to the "image of God." He is cast out from before the cosmic throne.[18]

The serpent of the Garden of Eden, the *tanin*, and Satanail/Lucifer all receive similar punishments for their rebellions. They are, in each case, reduced from what they once were. The Edenic serpent was once essentially a dragon; now it has become a mere snake. It must crawl on its belly and eat dust like a worm.[19] Satanail/Lucifer, a prince of angels and favorite of God becomes HaSatan, the hinderer, God's tool and instrument. And the rabbis reduce the *tanin* by almost completely disregarding that fearsome and awful rebel of the Urzeit in favor of the Leviathan. The Leviathan is God's servant, but ultimately it is relegated by the rabbis to the Endzeit, where, though certainly a powerful beast from a human perspective, it is a divine plaything. For the amusement of the righteous who denied themselves the pleasures of the circus and of gladiatorial contests in this world, God arranges a battle between the Leviathan and its terrestrial counterpart, the monster Behemoth. The Archangel Michael delivers the coup de grâce, butchering both beasts for the delectation of the audience at an eschatological banquet.[20] Though the snake, the Leviathan and Satan are each associated with wiliness, power, and cruelty, they are reductions of the Serpent, the *tanin* and Satanail/Lucifer, transformed from powerful rebels against God into servants whose power is harnessed and who do God's bidding.

Rabbinic tradition, following the lead of Scripture, evinces a clear desire to vanquish and reduce the dragon, transforming it into a mere serpent or a bluster-

ing but ultimately subduable monster. Yet, just as the modern-day snake retains the vestiges of the physiological infrastructure of its prehistoric legged ancestors, so does the serpent of rabbinic literature retain vestiges of the biblical dragon's tremendous and unchecked strength and power. In the rabbinic legend, the serpent is often seen as an agent of fate.[21] Since it sealed the fate of human beings by being party to their fall, the serpent continues to serve as the agent of God in punishing them.[22] In a number of legends we learn that "the Divine Will is carried out through a serpent," as in the case of the Roman persecutor who is bitten by a snake as he relieves himself in a privy;[23] and that "a serpent never bites unless it is ordained."[24]

In some instances, the serpent is not content merely to act as the agent of God in carrying out the fate of human beings. Indeed, it seems as if the serpent and its alter egos, the dragon and the Leviathan, begin to take on some divine characteristics themselves. For instance, the serpent seems to have tremendous power over life and death. In one source, planetary influence upon fate and "fate to be bitten by a snake" are mentioned together.[25] A snake is said to be the keeper of a miraculous stone that has dominion over life or death.[26] The Angel of Death himself is named Leviathan.[27]

In more dramatic illustrations of this phenomenon, rabbinic tradition not only attributes quasi-divine powers to the serpent, but, perhaps under the influence of or in response to Gnosticism, transforms the land-bound, dust-eating serpent into a cosmic figure. In a famous and exceedingly strange passage in Numbers, Moses is said to have made a serpent out of copper in order to remove a plague of "fiery serpents" from the Israelites in the desert (Num. 21:6–10). He "mounted it on a standard," and all who gazed upon it were healed. The midrash understands the words "*sim oto al ness*"—"mounted it on a standard"—as "cast it up by a miracle," that is, he threw it up into the very vault of heaven, where it remained and was the determinant of the fate of the Israelites, for whosoever gazed up at it would live, and whosoever did not would die.[28] The so-called celestial serpent, dragon, or Leviathan, is a powerful motif in rabbinic literature. The world is said to rest upon the fins of the Leviathan, or the Leviathan is seen as a serpent encircling the world.[29] A huge snake encircles the bier of a righteous person;[30] the righteous person surrounded by the snake is a microcosmic parallel to the world encompassed by the cosmic serpent, since "*zaddik yesod olam*": a righteous person is the foundation of the world" (Prov. 10:25). A snake likewise encircles the machinery of Solomon's throne and by squeezing it sets it in motion.[31] This wondrous mechanical throne was a symbolic model in miniature of the universe, so the function of the snake that animates it is analogous to the function of the celestial serpent.[32]

The well-known Ancient Near Eastern mythic motif of a serpent or a dragon of prodigious size becoming, in essence, the vault of heaven, forming the nexus

of the sphere of the constellations, finds an echo in rabbinic sources, where it is theologically cleaned up and harnessed to the service of a monotheistic Rabbinic Judaism. In Ancient Near Eastern mythology, after the battle between the god and goddess Kingu and Tiamat, the dragonlike Tiamat's upper body becomes the vault of the heavens. In rabbinic legend, Behemoth and Leviathan, who are not gods or co-regents, but creatures, battle; and the skin of the Leviathan forms a sparkling canopy over all the world.[33] Thus, it is not surprising that Jewish commentators, when discussing matters astronomical, saw the celestial dragon as the vault of heaven to which the signs of the zodiac are affixed. In that position, it can assert its dominance over all powers in the universe, even to the extent of swallowing the sun.[34] By controlling the zodiac, as we shall see, this dragon can affect the course of fate.

Scripture itself is remarkably explicit in recounting how the serpent of copper was preserved and worshiped as a god until it was finally destroyed by King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4). Some strata of rabbinic tradition have similarly few qualms about emphasizing the vestigial qualities of the snake that link it with the primordial serpent and the rebel-dragons, depicting the snake as continuing its attempt to usurp the place of God as the one who determines fate. In the midrash, God avers that mankind was ruled "yesterday by My will—but now by the will of the serpent."[35] The rabbis' response to this "threat to God" is not to repress such statements, but to acknowledge the potential danger of the power of the serpent while attempting to limit it. The Talmud, for instance, admonishes that if one is praying and a snake winds round one's heel one should not stop the prayer, but "concentrate upon one's Father in heaven."[36] Likewise, there is the assertion that "it is not the dragon (or serpent) that kills, but sin that kills."[37] It appears from the evidence in the Talmud and midrashim that there was indeed a conception of a cosmic serpent or dragon that controlled the fate of mankind in some unspecified way. This power was awesome, potentially impinging upon the sovereignty of God; hence one finds statements that attempt to limit the dragon's influence. That influence is ultimately illusory and the texts emphasize the potential of each individual through the observance of the law of God, to alter his or her fate.[38] Medieval texts, particularly mystical works and commentaries, attempt similarly to mitigate the power of the dragon.

Shabbetai Donnolo, an Italian physician of the tenth century, commenting on *Sefer Yezirah*, a mystical text of the third century, brings the idea of the relationship between the dragon and fate into the medieval world. *Sefer Yezirah* states: "The *t'li* (dragon)[39] is in the universe like a king on his throne, the sphere (or cycle) is in the year like a king in his country, the heart is in a living being like a king in war."[40]

Donnolo's commentary, called *Hakhmoni*, describes how the heart gives moral order to the internal universe, the year gives order to time and the physical uni-

verse, and the dragon rules over the metaphysical, fated aspects of the universe such as the movements of the constellations, thus appearing to control all the other factors as well. For Donnolo and other kabbalists, the great twisted serpent is the axis upon which the fate of the universe, as determined by the constellations, is hung.[41] Some identify it with the constellation Draco.[42] The dominant paradigm of Donnolo's age depicted the heavens as comprising a celestial sphere in which the terrestrial one floated. It had a celestial equator, situated directly above the terrestrial equator, and celestial Poles, situated directly above the earth's Poles. The heavens were stationary, but the sun moved through them from west to east over the course of the year. The circle traced upon the celestial sphere by the annual path of the sun as it moved through the heavens (or as moderns would express it, by the plane of the earth's orbit around the sun) is called the ecliptic, and the ecliptic has its own North Pole. The constellation Draco surrounds this ecliptic pole. In doing so, it winds through all the houses of the zodiac, and all the stars appear to "hang" from it.[43] The *t'li* is also understood as the inclination between two celestial planes. In astronomical terms, this is the obliquity, the inclination separating the ecliptic and the celestial equator.

The commentators aver that, as an ovoid with pointed ends, it looks vaguely like the body of a huge fish, and hence is identified with the *t'li*. This furthers the association of the *t'li* with sea creatures such as the *tanin* and the Leviathan.[44] The two points, or "nodes" where the equator intercepts the ecliptic are the points of equinox. The vernal equinox is referred to as "the head of the dragon." The autumnal equinox is called "the tail of the dragon." These nodes are depicted as knots in the star charts.[45] Sa'adia, Al-Bargeloni and Maimonides refer to the *t'li* as *Al Jaz'har*, Persian for "knot" or "node."[46]

Other sources use the word *t'li* to designate the obliquity between the orbit of a planet or a satellite, such as the moon, and the ecliptic.[47] Like the points where the equator intercepts the ecliptic, the two points at which the orbit of a planet or satellite intersect with the ecliptic are called nodes. In this case, the "head of the dragon" is the ascending node (where the planet or satellite passes south to north); the "tail of the dragon" is the descending node (where the planet or satellite passes north to south).[48] The lunar nodes, the points at which the orbit of the moon passes through the ecliptic, are the points in the moon's orbit where an eclipse of the sun or the moon can occur. Hence, the midrashic image of the dragon who swallows the sun.[49] These nodes are deemed astrologically significant by R. Abraham Abulafia, who writes that the head of the *t'li* indicates merit, while the tail represents liability.[50]

According to some kabbalistic works, *T'li* is a place under the firmament called *Vilon*, inhabited by beings who are humanoid, but behave like angels. These beings are imbued with divine wisdom, and have the power to impart it to human beings. *Tli* as cosmological locus rather than an animal of some sort, thus serves

as intermediary between the divine and the world, in the same way that the celestial dragon does.[51]

One of the most startling identifications of the *t'li* is in *Sefer HaBahir*: "What is the *t'li*? It is the likeness before the Blessed Holy One. It is thus written, 'His locks are hanging.'"[52]

The literal sense of this seems to be that the *t'li* is the image that is most prominent before God, since it is the largest constellation and is at the uppermost part of the celestial sphere. However, the *Bahir* seems to imply that God is related to this "likeness" by more than a steady gaze: God and the *t'li* seem to mirror each other. The quote from the Song of Songs is about God himself, in the guise of the Beloved. Just as his locks hang, so does the *t'li*, imitating God's appearance, as it were. The words "likeness" and "before," which recall the Second Commandment,[53] in this context point out the danger of close equivalence between the "likeness" and the "Holy Blessed One." Idolatry directed at this image was certainly understood to be a possibility. Maimonides and others assert that the *t'li* was idolatrously worshiped in ancient times. R. Isaac of Acco identifies the *t'li* specifically with Baal.[54]

Thus, the commentaries on *Sefer Yezirah*, and the astronomical/astrological texts paint the picture of the *t'li* as an enormous dragon that controls the constellations, has positive and negative astrological influences, can be related to the *tanin* and the Leviathan, and perhaps, even to God's self, or, more accurately, to an idolatrous "challenger" to the Divine Throne.

According to Donnolo, the dragon only appears to rule over all. In fact, it was placed in its position by God, who has ultimate dominion over the universe and fate. And it is obvious that only through a relationship with God can one affect one's destiny. Donnolo extends this paradigm to the microcosm: he compares the function of the celestial dragon to that of the spinal cord in the human body, its head to the brain and its tail to the sexual organs.[55] By taming one's internal dragon, that is, by maintaining a proper balance between reason (represented by the brain) and instinct or emotion (represented by the sexual organs), one can theurgically affect the celestial dragon and alter one's fate. For Donnolo, the dragon represents not only power over good and evil in the world, but the ability of human beings, by teaching their internal dragons "proper behavior" as it were, to control good and evil in the self, and thus to affect their fate.

Donnolo's commentary was an important influence on the theology of the German Jewish pietists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries known as *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. They, like Donnolo, manifested a desire to harmonize free will and determinism in their biblical commentaries as well as in their mystical tradition.[56]

The comments of Eleazar of Worms on the creation of the *taninim* (Gen. 1:21), are typical of this concern on the part of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* to harmonize free will and determinism by limiting the power of the dragon.

> And God created: Leviathan, upon whose fins the entire world rests. . . . And in the time to come God will command Michael and Gabriel to hunt him, and he will stand on his tail before them, and his head will reach the Throne of Glory. They will flee from him immediately, until he is destined to fall at the hands of Jonah. (Marginal note: This is the beast of which Job said, "And he is the ruler of all, the King of the children of pride" [Job 41:26], since even the proud angels fear him). And therefore, there is a hint here to "truth" (*Emet*—אמת) [in the final letters of the words] "And God created, (Va YibrA ElohiM ET" for all the things which have been said regarding him are all true. And who will eat him? People of truth who are involved with the Torah of truth.
>
> The *taninim*: According to the plain sense they are great creatures, long and simple, and fire comes out of their mouths. Thus they live in water and pits (wells) and this is why it says (Psalms 148:7b) "*taninim* and all ocean depths." And it says in Isaiah (27:1) concerning the Leviathan "the Elusive Serpent," and . . . "the Twisting Serpent," and (it adds) "He will slay the *tanin* of the sea."
>
> Behold, the *tanin* is not the Leviathan, for it says "It was You who crushed the heads of Leviathan" (Psalms 74:14) but it says "It was You . . . who smashed the heads of the *taninim*" (Psalms 74:13b) distinguishing two types [of monsters]. Thus, it was necessary to add the particle ET to include the Leviathan. . . . "*taninim*" in gematria equals "The Great Leviathan."[57]

Eleazar begins by making a distinction between the Leviathan and the *taninim*. The Leviathan is the beast upon whose body the world rests. In this sense the Leviathan is a parallel to the celestial serpent. The Leviathan will be hunted in the future, when "his head will reach the Throne of Glory," that is, when he attempts to claim the celestial realms and usurp the throne of God. The primeval *taninim*, on the other hand, have the appearance of conventional medieval dragons, serpentlike and fire-breathing. The *taninim* were destroyed, but the Leviathan will be preserved until "the time to come"—the eschaton.

The end of the passage is more difficult. Eleazar seems to erase the distinction he has drawn between the Leviathan and the *taninim* by showing how the two are equivalent in gematria, the mystical hermeneutical process that substitutes number and number combinations for the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. "Equivalent" is indeed the operative term here: the mathematics of this equation do not work out exactly. תנינים (*taninim*) [*sic*] = 550, whereas הלויתן הגדול (*HaLeviatan HaGadol*) = only 549. In the context of gematria, however, this does not negate the possibility of their conceptual equivalence. An imperfect numerical correspondence can indicate approximation rather than duplication of the terms whose numerology is being compared. Eleazar understood the force of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and their power to create and destroy worlds.[58] He uses gematria to demonstrate the transformation of *taninim* into *HaLeviatan HaGadol* as a literary metaphor for the creative operations of God. In crushing the rebellion of the *taninim* during the creation, God had, as if recombining letters by gematria, reordered the factors of the primordial rebel-dragon's "personality." The dragon of eschatology was the Leviathan, which, while "great," was still ultimately a servant of God, thus allaying all fears of usurpation.

The great teacher of Eleazar of Worms, R. Yehudah HeHasid, is even more direct in explaining and allaying fears about the powerful dragon. On the same verse he remarks:

> *Hataninim*: Why is it written *Hataninim* (plural) and not *Hatanin* (singular, since the Leviathan was reputed to have no mate)? Lest one should say "It is a god," as it says (Job 41:25) "When he raises himself up the mighty are afraid." So it is written in the plural form, for the only truly singular One is the Blessed Holy One.[59]

The phrase "Lest one should say 'It is a god,'" is quite startling. R. Yehudah here implies that the dragon assumes divine proportions and when it attempts to usurp the celestial Throne, even the angels tremble. This is incontrovertible evidence that there was an awareness among the pietists that the mythic power of the dragon could grow out of proportion.

The celestial dragon also appears in the mystical literature of the pietists, once again in connection with the serpent of copper. In his biblical commentary, Eleazar of Worms quotes the midrashic passage that Moses "threw the serpent up and it stood miraculously in the atmosphere of the world."[60] That this midrash was known in his circle and related to the celestial serpent is obvious from a passage in the mystical treatise *Sodei Razaya*, ascribed to Eleazar, but most probably a work of his school.

The passage in question describes King Solomon's throne as an earthly parallel to the celestial throne. Connections between the prototypical and the actual, and parallels between heaven and earth and macrocosm and microcosm (like those espoused by Donnolo) appealed to the pietists. They embraced the Talmudic principle that "everything above is paralleled below."[61] Since one could not speak precisely about the awesome contents of God's abode, one would describe earthly parallels as a way of hinting at the celestial splendor.

As I mentioned, midrashic tradition describes how the machinery of Solomon's throne was set into motion by a giant serpent. This serpent is identified by the author of *Sodei Razaya*, who asserts that it was none other than "the serpent

Moses made."[62] Moses's serpent, flung into heaven, and the serpent on King Solomon's throne are one and the same. They both represent the celestial serpent affixed to the very throne of God. If this serpent performs a function on the divine throne analogous to the one it performs on Solomon's throne, it is powerful indeed, for then it would make the machinery of God's throne move—it would literally run the universe.

But this serpent of Moses, which moves the celestial throne, is not merely a serpent. Regarding it, Eleazar's teacher, R. Yehudah HeHasid had said:

> The serpent corresponds to God. . . .[63] [During the plague of serpents] God said, "Make a *saraf*," and Moses did not wish to, so God said, "*I* will have mercy upon mine!" Thus it is written, "and Moses made a serpent," corresponding to God.[64]

God commands Moses to make a *saraf*: a serpent. But *saraf* is also the term for fiery angel, and Moses fears that the people will worship it improperly. God is exasperated. "Very well, then," God thinks, "I myself will have mercy upon mine." The theologically careful Moses fashions a healing serpent as a homeopathic remedy of sorts, the cure coming through the instrument of disease. (On how this worked, see note 87.) But, R. Yehudah informs us, the image of the serpent corresponds to God's self! Taken in conjunction with their other statements expressing fear that the *tanin* might be divinized, it seems that the major figures of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* felt the ancient problem of the power of the celestial dragon still to be a relevant one, and expressed it in terms very much like those of *Sefer HaBahir*, and *Sefer Yezirah* and its commentaries. How did they propose to contend with it?

One of the weirdest and most interesting discussions of dragons in the literature of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* relates to this question. The text is in the Bologna manuscript of *Sefer Hasidim*:[65]

> There is a noxious beast (or demon) which is called *Drakon* in the Greek language. If he is smote by a sword, he will not be damaged, but if there should come against him (someone) born of a dragon, that one can smite him. . . . The dragon who married the King's daughter said, "I fear no one except the dragon born of the princess, and he is in the prison-house." The King said to the son of the princess, "I will make you a free man and you will leave prison. Go and take your father's sword and sit beneath the bed of the Queen."

What happens next is very strange. The dragon comes into the bedchamber and has sexual relations with the queen, whereupon the prince springs out from under the bed and destroys him. The text continues:

> The Queen didn't tell anyone that the dragon had had sex with her, for fear that if she said that the dragon was her husband, her human husband would be dead and she would have been [*sic*] poor and abject and without luck all her days. Instead she said, "He came in the guise of the King, with the royal crown upon his head!" i.e., in the manner to which she was accustomed.

The text goes on to describe dragons who appear to women disguised as their husbands and how dangerous these are. However, it concludes, these

> . . . noxious beasts do not attack anyone except someone who has attacked them, or if he or his ancestors wrote charms or callings-up or did magic or asked dream questions. Therefore one should not do these things or rationalize, "I will do this to save a life"—do callings-up or charms, for this is not wisdom. It shortens a person's life and the life of his descendants, and one shouldn't put a life in jeopardy in order to save a life.[66] For it is written (Deut. 18:13), "You must be wholehearted with Lord your God." One shouldn't do anything except pray to God for any illness and disease, or trouble, or problem.

In the literary context of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, there is precedent for understanding a dragon that disguises itself as a human being in terms of a most powerful indigenous archetype: the "primordial serpent." The Bologna manuscript of *Sefer Hasidim* relates how the primordial serpent "used to walk around on two feet and looked a bit like a human being."[67] Moreover, the details of the tale correspond with the midrashic elaborations on the account of the temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent in Genesis 3. Seen from this perspective, the king in the tale represents God, or more accurately, his "image" and agent—Adam. The princess or queen, who copulates with the dragon, corresponds to Eve, who, according to the midrash, copulated with the primordial serpent. The son of the serpent and Eve is mankind, imprisoned in mortality, but given a chance by God to earn freedom from it (*Olam HaBa*—eternal life in the World to Come) if he vanquishes evil.

The claim of the queen to have mistaken the serpent for the king is paralleled in legends that state that the serpent took the form of Adam when seducing Eve in order to prey on her credibility. To demonstrate that such a deception is possible, we have the description of the manner in which dragons can appear as husbands in order to deceive wives. The moral of the story appears to be that one should not be beguiled by dragons in human or divine clothing, nor fear that one's spouse and protector (God) will die. One should not involve oneself in magical practices or shortcuts. One should not consort with the dragon, for it is God who is the arbiter of all fate; one must vanquish the dragon and abandon all practices except the pious worship of the true God.

This tale draws upon an eclectic variety of sources, both Jewish and non-Jewish.[68] In its final redaction it is in many ways a paradigm of the grapplings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* with the issues of free will and determinism, their ambivalent relationship with magic, and their elaborate metaphysical speculation. For them, the dragon was real, and they understood the world as remaining very much within its coils. Yet they believed, in accord with the traditions of the Talmud, the midrashim, and the commentaries on *Sefer Yezirah*, that it is not the dragon itself but God, the master of the dragon and of all other created beings, who holds the power to alter fate. To God alone should prayer and supplication be addressed.

The important dragons and dragonlike creatures in Jewish literature appear only rarely in iconography; there are, for instance, no depictions of the primeval dragons in Jewish art.[69] When dragonlike creatures are illustrated, as in the case of the serpent of copper or the primordial serpent, there is nothing to distinguish them from their analogues in Christian manuscripts. The primordial serpent, for instance, may be depicted with a female human head, in direct conformity with Christian iconographic tradition (Fig. 29).[70] Likewise, the serpent of copper is depicted as a winged dragon, which is one of the conventions for its appearance in Christian art (Fig. 30).[71] The only inherently and explicitly Jewish dragon that appears in Jewish art is the Leviathan. It is generally depicted as a large fish alongside the Behemoth or engaged in the eschatological battle with that creature (Fig. 31).[72] However, apropos of the function of the Leviathan as ourabouros, the serpent whose body forms the sky or is wrapped around the earth, and in accordance with its designation in Isaiah 27:1 as "the twisted serpent," the Leviathan is often depicted with its head touching its tail (Fig. 32).[73] On Eastern European and Middle Eastern popular-style hallah covers for the Sabbath and on synagogue ceilings, the Leviathan is depicted enclosing other elements—the Behemoth, or the city of Jerusalem, a microcosm of the world as a whole (Fig. 33). This motif may allude to the Messianic "day which is totally Sabbath," when peace will be spread over the city of Jerusalem and over the whole world, just as the Leviathan's skin will be spread as a canopy over the righteous (Fig. 34).[74]

Most of the dragons that appear in medieval Jewish art are very similar in appearance to the grotesques found in the margins of medieval Christian manuscripts. This has led to their designation as purely decorative elements, and to the neglect of their consideration as inherently Jewish symbols, in spite of the fact that the dragon is such a powerful indigenous archetype in the ancient and medieval literature of the Jews. If one refrains from arbitrarily assuming that these dragons have no association with the textual context or with the iconographic context of the larger illustrations on a given page, one may begin to perceive some visual analogies between these illustrations of dragons and the more cosmological textual uses of the dragon as a fulcrum between the divine and the demonic.[75]

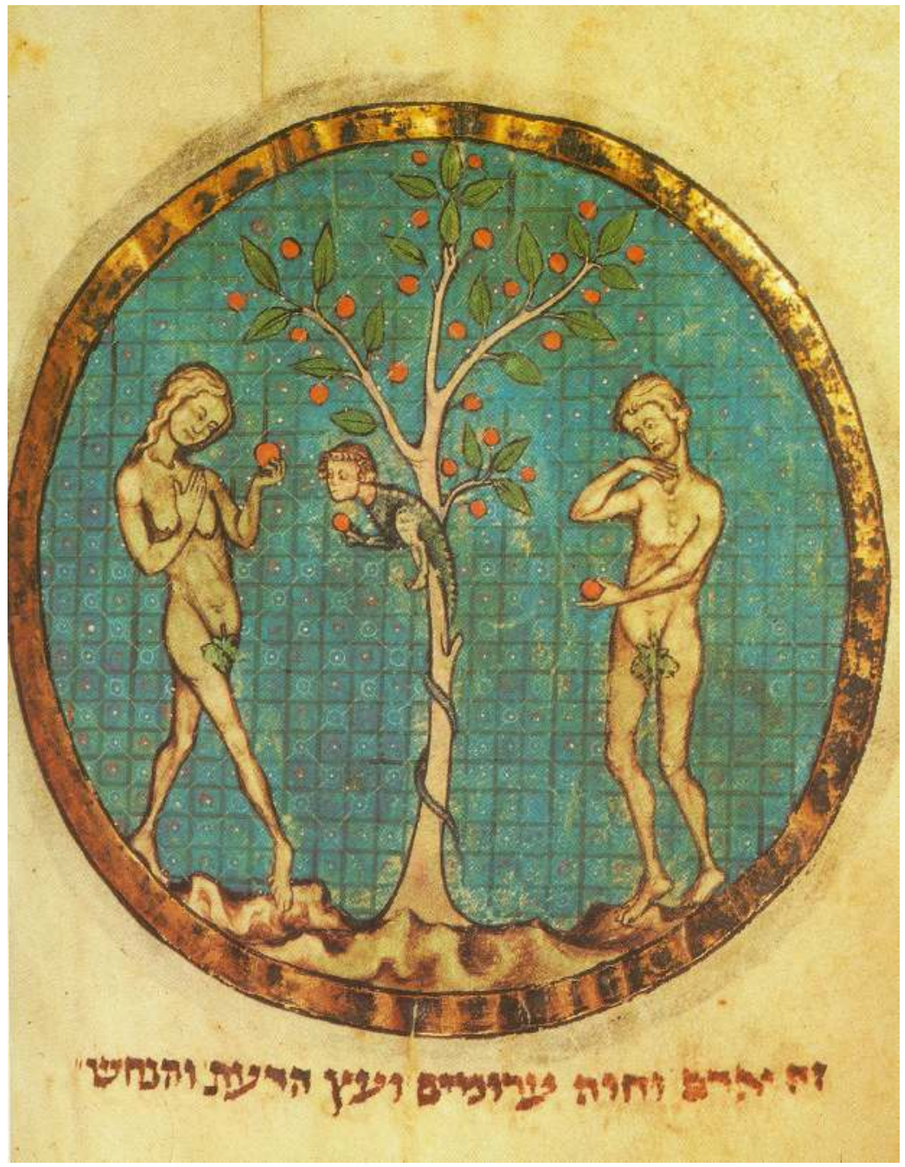


Fig. 29. The primordial serpent with a female head. Hebrew Miscellany, Troyes (?) c. 1280. London, British Library MS Add. 11639, fol. 520v

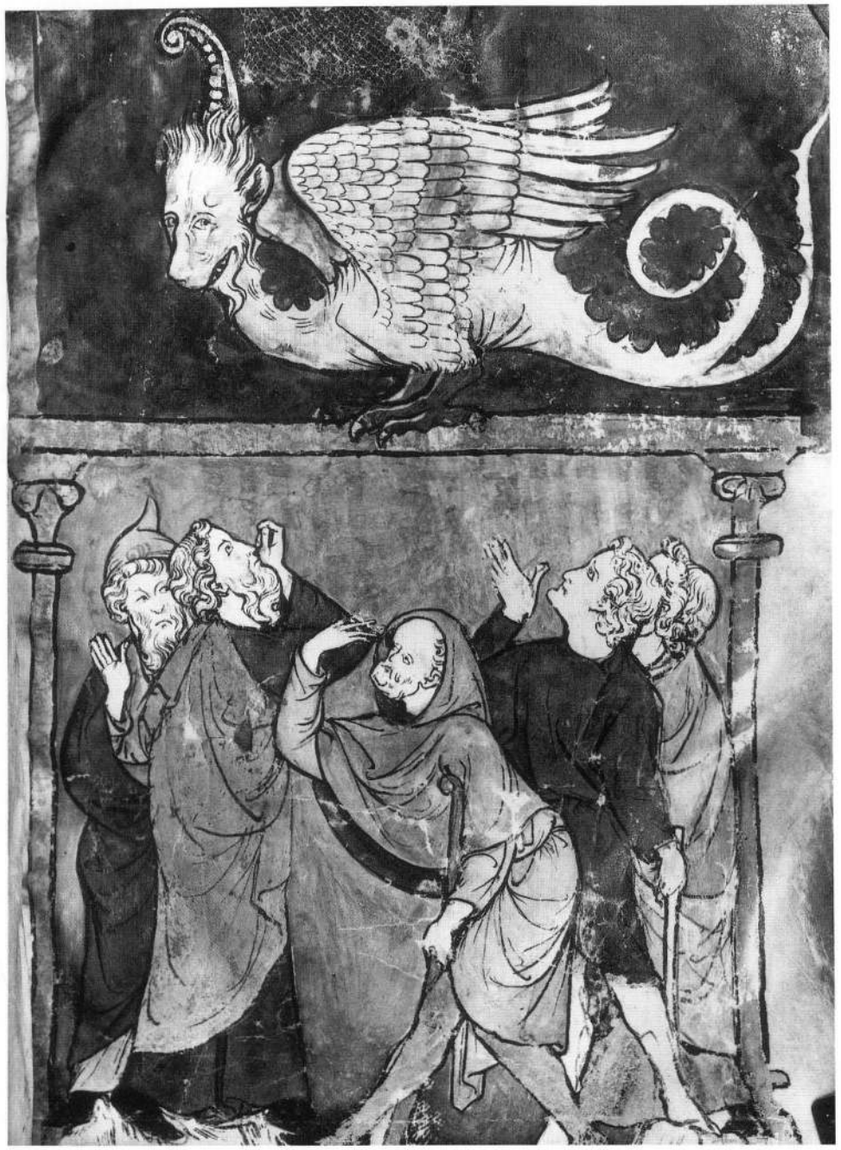


Fig. 30. The copper serpent as a winged dragon. London, British Library MS Add. 11639, fol. 742v



Fig. 31. Leviathan battling Behemoth. Maḥzor. Upper Rhine, first quarter of the fourteenth century. Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS V. 1102/II, fol. 181v



Fig. 32. The eschatological Banquet. Bible, Germany, Ulm (?) 1236–38. Milan, Bibliotheca Ambrosiana MS B.32 INF (vol. 3), fol. 136r



Fig. 33. Woodblock print of Leviathan encircling Shor-HaBar. From R. Lilientwlowa, *Sweita Zydowskie w Preszіosei l Terazniejszosci*. Crakow, 1908.



Fig. 34. Leviathan encircling the Tomb of the Patriarchs at Hebron. Hannah Rivkah Herman, Embroidered Hallah cover, Jerusalem, 1876. Jerusalem, The Israel Museum

Threatening, demonic dragons and a protected Israel are a theme that pervades medieval Jewish art. The liturgical poem *Adon Imnani* for the first day of Shavuot is illustrated with dragons in nearly all its appearances in important Franco-German illuminated mahzorim.[76] In a thirteenth-century example, dragons, some of which look very much like those on the facade of the cathedral of Troyes, seem to have been added merely for decoration, but if one observes their position, one notes that they are menacing the Israelites, yet are unable to touch them as they receive the Torah and are sprinkled with the blood of purification by the priest at the altar (Fig. 35).[77] This may again allude to the desire to have Jews focus on the law and worship of God rather than attempt to appease the cosmic dragon, and to the belief that one will be protected from all such demonic creatures if one directs one's prayer to God alone.[78]

If the dragons were merely decorative, one might assume that they would be ubiquitous. Yet, in the entire group of surviving medieval *maḥzorim*[79] this is one of the very few places such dragons do appear. Furthermore, they exhibit remarkable seriousness of purpose for grotesques; they do not double over on themselves or contort to fit the space, their attention is always fixed on the Israelites no matter which direction their bodies are facing. In some cases, they do more than merely threaten: they literally gnaw at the architectural foundations, symbolically attempting to destroy the foundations of Torah.

On the opening page of the Book of Numbers in the Duke of Sussex Pentateuch (fol. 179v), there are four knights holding banners with the symbols of the major tribes camped around each of the four sides of the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Color Plate VIII). They are flanked by four hybrid grotesque dragons, three of whom are winged, and by two smaller dragons of the two-legged variety, one of which is winged. These have been termed "merely decorative" in the literature.[80] Yet their size and prominence, as well as the fact that the standard-bearers are specifically depicted as knights may hint that the artist intended the dragons as personifications of the difficulties the Israelites encounter in the saga of the book of Numbers. Perhaps they represent the fiery serpents in the desert. Or, as the human parts of the hybrids seem in some cases to correspond to caricatured ethnic types, perhaps they represent the occupants of the Land of Canaan whom the Israelites would vanquish in battle. As the dragons rage outside, the knights stand calmly within small golden aedicula lined with red. Thus the artist evokes a sense of divine protection commensurate with the spirit of both the biblical verse, "[God] led you through that great and terrible wilderness in which there were venomous serpents" (Deut. 8:15) and the eschatological prophecy of Zechariah 2:9, "And I will be for you, says God, like a wall of fire around you."[81] These hybrids are not "merely decorative" elements. If we are to look at this iconography as a sort of text, how might we read them? They serve as protagonists, introducing a narrative tension into a static and hierarchical tableau. They convert the



Fig. 35. The liturgical poem *Adon Imnani*, illustrated within the framework of the revelation on Mount Sinai. Maḥzor, Ashkenaz, c. 1250–60. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Or. 321, fol. 127 (photo by permission of The Bodleian Library, Oxford)

whole scene from a mere diagram of the relative positions of the Israelite tribes around the Tabernacle to a representation that summarizes in iconographic shorthand the entire premise of the book of Numbers—the various trials the Israelites faced in the desert, and how God preserved them from these perils. It is appropriate that such a shorthand depiction of the predominant theme of God's protection in the book of Numbers should appear with the opening rubric of the book.

The iconographic tradition provides its own solution for the problem of the threat to faith, Torah and even divinity posed by the dragon. When understood in the context of the texts they illustrate, some of the many images of dragons in Jewish manuscripts may represent the conquered *t'li*. In an Ashkenazic *maḥzor* from the second half of the fourteenth century, there is an elaborate and lovely arch framing the words to the *Kol Nidrei* prayer. There is a kneeling figure in this architectural framework, and all seems appropriate and right given the solemnity of the liturgical context for which the text is intended (Fig. 36).[82] The entire lower register of the page is dominated by two huge dragons with tails intertwined, who gnaw at the pillars of the arch within which the words appear. What are such large grotesque dragons doing in such a prominent place on such an important page? There is a tradition that there are two intertwined *t'lis*—one male and one female—corresponding to the plural *taninim* of Genesis and the two serpents mentioned in Isaiah. Perhaps in this illumination the blue dragon at the right represents the Pole or Draco (related to the constellation and hence celestial blue), and the red dragon at the left represents the coiled serpent, or the ecliptic (related to the luminaries, hence fiery red). A red and a blue dragon, also intertwined, illustrate a liturgical poem in the fifteenth-century additions to the same manuscript (Fig. 37). In this instance, the blue dragon is depicted above the red dragon, corresponding accurately to the relative positions of Draco and the ecliptic on the celestial sphere. In the case of both of these illuminations, when related to the broader context of text and illustration, the dragons are symbolic of the reader and his congregation having conquered their belief in fate as read in the motion of the stars moved by the whim of the celestial dragon. The dragons illustrating the liturgical poem refer to the text, "Happy is the nation for whom this is not so—from its God and redeemer it will garner a blessing." This is a play on the words of Psalm 144:15: "Happy is the people for whom this is so." Thus, happy is the nation whose fate is not determined by the celestial dragon; from God alone will it receive its blessings. The dragons of the *Kol Nidrei* page relate to both the central illustration and the text. Though the apparently capricious and destructive forces of fate seem to gnaw at the underpinnings of faith (just as the threatening dragons discussed above were gnawing at the very foundations of Torah), the reader and his congregation realize that on Yom Kippur, their fate is in the hands of God alone.

These illustrations acknowledge that the dragon exists; he is part of the



Fig. 36. Kol Nidrei with dragons. Maḥzor, Germany, second half of the fourteenth century. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung MS or. 388, fol. 69r



Fig. 37. Intertwining dragons. Maḥzor, Germany, fifteenth century. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung MS or. 388, fol. 263r

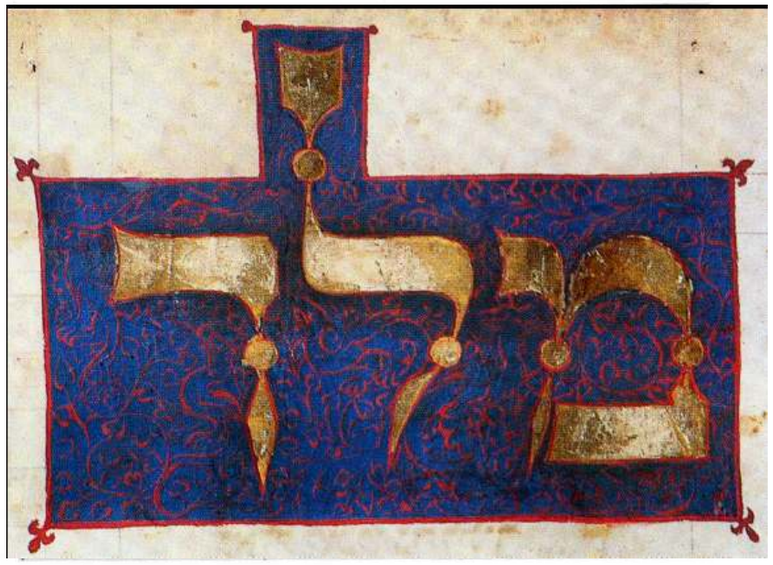


Fig. 38. *Melekh* incipit with hidden dragons. Maḥzor, northeast France, late thirteenth century. Private collection, fol. 116r

universe, but he is a servant. His job is to uphold the structure of the constellations in their orbits; he is the foundation of the cosmos, but he is not its ruler, nor is he the arbiter of fate, for fate can be altered only by the power of "*Tshuvah, U'T'fillah, U'Z'dakah*"—repentance, prayer, and charity.

Another example, with a very similar message is found in northeastern French mahzor of the late thirteenth century.[83] It is the illuminated catchword *Melekh* (King) beginning the liturgical poem *Melekh Amon Ma'amarkha MeRahok Muzav* (Fig. 38).[84] This is a *piyyut* for the second day of Rosh HaShanah, a day upon which the poetic mood begins to shift from the celebration of the creation of mankind to the theme of Judgment as the cycle of the year moves toward Yom Kippur. The poem is based on *Pesikta Rabbati* 40,[85] which, in turn, is an excursus of several verses in Psalm 119:89–96:

> The LORD exists forever; Your word stands firm in heaven. Your faithfulness is for all generations. You have established the earth; it stands. They stand this day to [carry out] Your rulings, for all are Your servants. . . . I am Yours; save me! For I have turned to Your precepts. The wicked hope to destroy me, but I ponder Your decrees. I have seen that all things have their limit, but Your commandment is broad beyond measure.

This psalm asserts the primacy, the "firm foundation" of God's "word"—God's laws, as opposed to cosmic anarchy—in the heavens and on earth.[86] It forges a stern distinction between the divine laws and the servile and limited status of the heavenly bodies. The medieval Jewish commentators on this verse assert that it is God's will, rather than astrological conjunction, that orders the Universe, and they celebrate the psalmist's complete faith in God.[87]

Like the psalm, *Pesikta Rabbati* 40 and the *piyyut* promulgate a theology that proclaims that, while God's justice is ordained of old, it is constantly tempered with mercy. "Your Merciful Name is exalted," writes the poet, "even as you sit in Judgment."[88] This context, with its image of a God who sits in judgment, yet who always acts with mercy, recalls an aspect of the dragon that has not yet been discussed, and which is found in RaShI's interpretation of Lamentations 4:3, "Even the *tanin* offers the breast": "Even the *tanin* offers the breast and suckles its young: Even though it [the *tanin*] is cruel, it uncovers its breast."

The ambiguous image of a cruel dragon who cares for its young is a striking and important one, for it stands in answer to those who would assert that a God who is stern in judgment can have no mercy. This is the ultimate harnessed dragon, its mythology intact on the one hand, but dramatically declawed and domesticated on the other, a figure of stern justice and yet, at the same time, of parental mercy. It is a far cry from the primordial rebel-dragon, but it seems appropriate for the illustration of poem recited on the day that innaugurates the season wherein

Jews remind God that "we are Your children and You are our Parent."[89] The sources of the *piyyut*, with their emphases on the power of God over all the celestial and astrological powers, and the text of the *piyyut*, with its emphasis on mercy within judgment, are brought together by the image of the dragon. In the illumination of the initial word, a network of violet vines on a blue ground forms the well-hidden figures of dragons, like the powerful and ancient elements of the myth itself, the images of the dragons are hidden, subjugated by the sovereign power of God, represented by the word *Melekh*. Yet, these domesticated dragons form a visual analogy with the idea of mercy within justice that is presented in the poem. This strongly corroborates the tensions that develop in the classical literature between the dragon as cosmic serpent and arbiter of fate, and divine law, which it always seems ready to overthrow. However, a new element is present here: just as in *Sefer HaBahir*, the dragon here is the mirror image, so to speak, of God.

This is the mythic substratum that the rabbinic tradition has had to deal with all along: the powerful intermingling of the divine and the demonic that will simply not go away. The negative repercussions of what the *Bahir* calls this "likeness" are evident in many contexts. It was because of its divine likeness that the primordial serpent was able to deceive Eve, that the copper serpent became an object of idolatry, that the *tanin* was such a threat to God, that the serpent on God's throne has such power, and that the psalmist and the kabbalists must, each in their own way, assert God's dominance over the cosmic serpent. But here, finally, the disturbing mythos of the dragon is harnessed theologically.

The traditional Jewish morning liturgy praises God, "who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates everything." This is a paraphrase of Isaiah 45:7, which contains a theology so profoundly difficult and disturbing that if pronounced every morning it would make all but the most pious tremble and go back to bed. The original verse reads, "I am the Lord and there is none else, I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil." In many ways, the odyssey of this verse into the liturgy parallels the odyssey of the dragon mythos. Isaiah's words represent a biblical negation of the mythic consciousness which asserted that there were two (or more) powers in heaven. Even though the scriptural verse deconstructs and demythologizes that paradigm, the idea of praising a God who created evil was too much for the rabbinic creators of liturgy, and so they paraphrased it, employing "everything" as a euphemism for "evil." But to readers who know Scripture, the subtext is still there. Such readers understand that God is the author of everything, including evil, and they are either troubled by that, or they take comfort in it; the choice is theirs. The biblical statement has been softened, but it still retains its original rebuke. A theological compromise has taken place.

A similar process takes place in the case of the dragon. As we have observed,

the dragon of Scripture was originally a god in its own right, but is transformed first into God's creature, then into a subjugated rebel against God. First in biblical, and later in rabbinic tradition, it is harnessed, but the harness does not hold. It is almost as if the dragon is constantly straining at the bit to escape, to get out and to attack God or to usurp God's place. Gradually, during the Middle Ages, a cold peace is struck with the underlying mythic elements of the image of the dragon. The dragon now becomes a theological metaphor for God's self, a positive image, but, almost sadly, a domesticated one.[90]

5

"The Horn of His Anointed"

From History to Eschatology

A Jew passes by with the face of Christ
He cries: Calamity is on us
Let us run and hide in the ditches.
—Marc Chagall

Let us imagine ourselves back at the Cloisters, where we began our journey, charmed by the lyricism and magic of the Unicorn Tapestries. If we wander back into the gallery where those tapestries are hung, after having looked at perhaps a hundred different narratives of events in the life of Jesus, throughout the museum, we have been prepared to view the tapestries in the manner in which medieval people did—as yet another retelling of the tale of Christian salvation. It is clear that the drama of the Incarnation, the Annunciation, the Passion, and the Resurrection is being echoed in the tale of the hunt, the capture, the death, and the resurrection of the unicorn.

So what are we to make of the unicorn that appears in the synagogue of Hodorov? Flanking the dome where the double-headed eagle grasping the hares sits within the circle of the zodiac, in one of the most prominent places on the north wall of the synagogue, is the image of a lion struggling with a unicorn (Color Plate IX). Lions and unicorns have been "fighting for the Crown," since time

immemorial. They oppose each other on heraldic devices and in nursery rhymes, as well as throughout the entire panoply of medieval art.[1] The topos of the lion's conflict with the unicorn was certainly current in the art of the cultures that surrounded the Jews in the medieval and early modern eras.[2] But when, like the elephant, it appears in medieval Hebrew manuscripts and in synagogue decoration of the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, it is difficult to decode.[3]

Unicorns are the fantastic beasts whose christological resonances are clearly evident even to the theologically untutored. Thus, it is inevitable that unicorns, even more so than dragons, seem consummately alien when they appear in Jewish iconography. But, they do appear there, and their presence must be accounted for.

Because the individual meanings for the lion and the unicorn become so heavily pervaded with christology in the medieval period, the interpretation of the conflict between the lion and the unicorn in a Jewish context will depend upon the ability of Jews to claim one small corner of a pervasively christological motif to suit their own allegorical purposes, as in the case of the elephant. Ultimately, like the unicorn that represents the Christ, the unicorn in the synagogue is a messianic figure, linking the present-day reality of human existence with the redemptive, eschatological future. We shall find, however, that the Jewish unicorn is the ultimate transgressive reaction against the unicorn as the symbol of the Christian messiah.

The unicorn is not the only animal in Jewish tradition to bridge the gap between history and eschatology. For the rabbinic imagination, the poetic twilight of the eve of the very first Sabbath is the setting for the formation of ten mysterious and enigmatic new creations:

> Ten things were created on the Sabbath eve at twilight. They are: The mouth of the earth; the mouth of the well; the mouth of the ass; the rainbow; the manna; the rod; the Shamir; letters; writing; and the tables of stone [of the Ten Commandments]. And some say also destructive spirits; Moses' grave; and the ram of our forefather Abraham. And some say also tongs, which are made with tongs.[4]

Some of the new creations are etiologies of things the rabbis understood to exist, but were not explicitly delineated in Scripture, such as the location of Moses' grave, and the origin of demons. Others represent solutions to conundrums whose answers are known only to God, such as the provenance of the first tongs (since tongs require tongs for their manufacture). Still others are miraculous "signs" from God, including the rainbow, the staff of Moses (Exod. 4:17) and the manna. Language, too, composed of *otiot* (letters/signs) falls into this category, and so we have the stone Tables of the Covenant, the *luhot habrit*, inscribed with the Ten

Commandments, the letters that composed the Commandments, and the form of writing in which they were written. Still others are both miraculous signs and liminal objects: the mouth of the earth that engulfed Korah and his fellow conspirators (Num. 16:32) is the gateway between earth and Gehenna; The mouth of the well that provided water for the Israelites in the wilderness is the gateway between earth and the Abyss; the mouth of Balaam's donkey (Num. 22:28) is what places it on the dividing line between the dumb animal and the human being.

Finally, there are two living creatures in the list of the twilight creations of the first Sabbath eve that, according to midrashic tradition, connect history with eschatology. The first is the ram that appears from heaven at the precise moment that Abraham is about to sacrifice his son. Replacing Isaac as the sacrifice, it becomes the instrument of his salvation (Gen. 22:1–19). Legend has it that not a single part of the body of this ram went to waste. The ashes from the parts burned upon the altar formed the foundation of the inner altar of the Temple, whereon the burning of incense on Yom Kippur took place.[5] The ram's sinews formed the strings of David's harp, its skin became Elijah's girdle, and each of its horns became a shofar. One of these was blown on Mount Sinai at the time of the Giving of the Torah, and the other will proclaim the end of the Exile and the arrival of the Messiah.[6] Each of these functions contains an eschatological hint: Isaac is the type of the resurrected body, recalling the Resurrection of the Dead; David is the ancestor of the Messiah, Elijah is his forerunner and messenger.

The second creature is the Shamir. In the biblical text, it does not appear to be a living being.[7] Both the biblical context and the translations (*targumim*) seem to indicate that the Shamir was a type of hard stone, generally translated "adamant." By this the text seems to mean diamond or any stone at the top of the scale of hardness, suitable for use as a superlatively hard stylus.[8] The Shamir is mentioned in the Talmud, but not identified explicitly as animal or mineral.[9] The idea of the Shamir as a small animal or worm took hold in the Middle Ages.[10] Medieval legend maintains that the Shamir-worm had the quality of being able to split stone, either by glancing at it, basilisk-like, or by gliding over its surface.[11] The worm had been used by Moses in cutting the stones for the priestly breastplate. Since no metal blade could be used to hew the stones to be used in the construction of the Temple, the Shamir replaced conventional tools.[12] According to Talmudic and medieval legend, the Shamir was hidden in the lair of the demon Ashmedai in the mountains of darkness. King Solomon sent his captain of the guard, Benaiah b. Jehoiada to seek it out, and with much effort and many precautions, he managed to bring it to Jerusalem.[13] After the completion of the Temple, the Shamir disappeared,[14] but the construction of the Messianic Temple will presumably require its reappearance.[15]

Not one of these seemingly miraculous objects, supernatural phenomena, or fantastic animals is actually mentioned in the text of the first chapters of Genesis. Yet each materializes—often startlingly, always wonderfully—in the sacred story

as it subsequently unfolds. *Mishnah Avot* balances a concern to preserve the sense of spontaneity, strangeness, and wonder inherent in these marvels with a desire to construct them as an integral part of the narrative and process of the primordial creation. Thus, they are depicted as having been brought into existence at a temporally liminal moment: the eve of the Sabbath at twilight. As the very last creations, they straddle the threshold between the era of creation and the hour of redemption, between the this-worldly days of Creation and the Sabbath, the "Essence of the World to Come." This concern on the part of the rabbis is fully articulated by Maimonides in his commentary on this mishnah, in which he sought, characteristically, to mediate between the miraculous and the rational. He maintains that the rabbis wished to include such apparently extraordinary breaches of natural law as part and parcel of the Creation in spite of their apparently supernatural qualities. They desired, by means of this enumeration, to underscore that nothing, no matter how prodigious a marvel, can exist outside the laws of nature and of God. Even wonders and miracles are, in fact, aspects of the natural world that were created by God as part of (albeit at the very last hour of) the week of Creation. They were subsequently preserved until the appropriate historical moments for their revelation.[16]

Maimonides' comments illuminate two interrelated aspects of medieval Jewish consciousness.[17] The first is a fascination on the part of medieval Jews with what they perceived to be an inherently miraculous reality pulsing beneath the surface of the quotidian. The second is the medieval Jewish understanding of creation, history, and eschatology as a continuum, with the world moving toward its preordained redemption in patterns that are both cyclical and linear. The pervasiveness of these mentalités may be illustrated by a most elegant example from the commentary of RaShI on the Bible, an example that coincidentally adds another creature to our growing list of animals which bridge history and eschatology.

RaShI's great genius lay in his ability to apply to the study of the biblical text a consistent faith in an inherently miraculous subtextual reality: the Torah had been transmitted directly by God, and every word and letter contained a universe of meaning. Accordingly, RaShI felt a mandate to interpret each "jot and tittle" of the text, and he could, with consummate clarity, impute transcendent meaning to even the driest grammatical observation in a manner so effortless that it encouraged students to feel that his exegesis was an authentic recovery of meanings inherent in the text as it was transmitted at Sinai.

In his commentary on Exodus 4:20, RaShI illustrates the manner in which this attention to the meaning and sacrality of every particle of the biblical text illuminates a course of sacred history that is both linear and cyclical:[18]

> Moses took his wife and his sons, mounted them on the donkey (החמור *hehamor*), and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God with him.

RaShI takes as his exegetical point of departure the word "the ass (*he-hamor*)." The minuscule grammatical particle "*he-*," which signifies the definite article, is represented by a single Hebrew letter, an aspirate, with no tonal identity beyond that of its attendant vowel. The object of the definite article here is neither a king (*Ha-Melekh*) nor a sacred place (*Ha-Mishkan*), but a lowly donkey, to which it is appended in a manner that would ordinarily not attract attention. Yet RaShI's commentary imparts an emphasis to the particle "*he-*" that "reveals" an understanding of the place of this particular donkey in history and in eschatology:

> The donkey: That is; the [same] donkey which Abraham saddled on his way to the binding of Isaac, and the one upon which in the future the King Messiah shall be revealed, as it says: ". . . Humble, riding on an ass." (Zech. 9:9)

RaShI here uses an aggadic connection present in *Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer*.[19] But he ingeniously links it with a seemingly simple grammatical explication demonstrating how the humble definite article literally transfigures the plebeian donkey and is transfigured by it, much in the same way as Abram of Ur is transformed to the Patriarch Abraham by the addition of the Divine ה. The donkey, transmuted by the definite article, becomes a symbol of profound historical and eschatological significance, standing at the very center of the process of Jewish redemption. Tangibly and affectingly, Moses' movement toward his preordained role as redeemer of the people of Israel is linked with the movement of Abraham, the first Jew, toward his decisive role in the drama of the near slaughter and rescue of his son. At the other end of history, the donkey accompanying Moses on his mission of salvation parallels the slow, but inevitable progress of the Messiah toward the gates of Jerusalem for the ultimate redemption.

RaShI illustrates the longing for deliverance among Jews in the Middle Ages by employing this simple donkey, chosen and transformed into "*The* donkey," as an allegory for the progress toward redemption. This advance is in constant danger of being forestalled, of course; by Abraham's potential lack of faith, by Moses' self-doubt, by mankind's evil or indifference. But it is the very same donkey that moves, slowly, determinedly, with plodding perseverance, inexorably through history, toward personal, national, and finally, universal deliverance (Fig. 39).[20]

This facility in linking the past, the present, and the eschatological future with a single symbol is undeniably a product of premodern mentalités.[21] The postmedieval world is, by and large, bereft of the sweeping sensibilities represented by RaShI's interpretation of Moses' donkey.

Nor would moderns, when considering an equally elusive and enigmatic animal, the *Parah Adumah*, or Red Heifer of Numbers,[22] be likely to consider this odd beast as anything more than an interesting case in the anthropology of sym-



Fig. 39. Moses' "Flight into Egypt." Golden Haggadah, Castile, 1320. London, British Library MS Add. 27210, fol. 10v, upper left



Fig. 40. The Ram of the Akedah. Maḥzor, Germany, c. 1250–60. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321, fol. 184

pathetic magic, or as an extended metaphor with rather vague echoes of eschatological triumph. For people of RaShI's time, however, the Heifer was, in fact, another animal that served as a link between history and eschatology. The Heifer (a product of natural generation and hence, not mentioned in Mishnah *Avot* 5:6), is the subject of an entire Talmudic tractate, *Massekhet Parah*: the ashes of a completely red cow were the only means of purification for priests and people exposed to ritual impurity resulting from contact with a dead body (*tum'at hamet*).[23] Paradoxically, just as the *Parah Adumah* rendered the ritually impure pure once again, it rendered those ritually pure priests who were engaged in the preparation of its ashes impure by the process of preparation.[24] The precise manner in which this occurred was a mystery so impenetrable that King Solomon himself was puzzled by it.[25] But while the literal mechanics of the process seem deliberately obscure and wondrous, the process as a whole was viewed as an allegory representing the reversal of apparently immutable and inevitable realities. It is understood, for instance, to atone for or reverse the sin of the Golden Calf. Just as Israel had sunk to the lowest level of impurity possible by means of worshiping the Golden Calf, so, by means of this *parah*, would she be restored to the highest level of purity.[26] The *parah* comes also to represent the nations that oppress Israel, particularly (in its redness) Edom, whose destruction will purify Israel.[27] Though Israel is downtrodden and forced into impurity by Edom, she will be purified by her triumph over Edom, and by God's destruction of the "Wicked Kingdom."

In rabbinic eschatology, the *parah* served a purpose similar to, but more urgent than that of the Shamir. Stone can be hewn by methods other than iron tools, so the Shamir is only theoretically necessary for the rebuilding of the Temple. The *parah*, however, would be practically and absolutely necessary:[28] For RaShI, Moses' donkey was not merely a symbol or an object-lesson, but an actor in the ongoing process of the revelation of divine truth, which was understood to continue until and culminate with eschatology. Likewise, the *Parah Adumah* was not merely an impenetrable ritual mystery or a metaphor for hopes and dreams of restoration. Since the sources assert that the Temple must be restored by people in a state of purity, the restoration of the ritual of the Red Heifer was, in fact, the necessary perquisite and precondition of the restoration of the Temple.[29]

The Donkey, the Ram, the Shamir, and the *Parah Adumah* each appear at critical junctures in the covenantal, cultic, and royal process of redemption of the Jewish people. Their paths intersect with those of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, and the Messiah.[30] All these animals, bearers of indigenously Jewish meaning, appear primarily in the textual tradition, but the donkey, the ram, and the heifer are occasionally represented iconographically (Figs. 39 and 40 and Color Plate X).[31] Yet none appears on the ceiling of a synagogue.

The unicorn, however, in spite of the fact that it is generally more familiar as a Christian symbol, appears often in medieval Jewish art, and is featured often and

prominently in the public liturgical setting of the synagogue in the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. This is because in spite of its later christological associations, the unicorn was initially an indigenously Jewish symbol. Like the donkey, the ram, the Shamir and the *Parah Adumah*, the unicorn is a fantastic beast that wends its way through the redemptive history of the Jewish people. The midrashic tradition associates unicornlike creatures with Adam, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, and the Messiah.[32]

The biblical beast associated by ancient and medieval authorities with the unicorn is the *re'em*. Modern translations, basing themselves on philological and zoological studies, usually interpret *re'em* as "wild ox."[33] The *re'em* is described in Scripture as a horned creature, yet it is nowhere explicitly stated that it had but a single horn. The fact that ancient and medieval grammarians countenanced the stretch of grammatical imagination necessary to understand the *re'em* as a one-horned beast corroborated an ancient and medieval tradition of Jewish legendary accounts in which it was viewed as a great and powerful unicorn of exalted strength and warlike mien.[34] In the list of tribal totems, the *re'em* is associated with Joseph. Moses' blessing of the tribe of Joseph describes the tribe (personified as Joseph himself) "like a firstling ox[35] in his majesty. He has horns like the horns of the wild-ox. With them he gores the peoples, the ends of the earth one and all. These are the myriads of Ephraim, Those are the thousands of Manasseh."[36] An aggadic account describes the first coins of the very first Jewish Commonwealth, those of Joshua (the descendent of Joseph), as featuring the image of a *re'em* and an ox.[37]

The other unicorn in Jewish tradition is a singular creature called the *tahash*. According to rabbinic tradition, the *tahash* was spotted or gaily colored, and bore a single horn on its forehead. It was created exclusively to provide one of the types of skin covering the *Mishkan*, the Desert Tabernacle.[38] When it had served this purpose it disappeared, never to reappear. Yet the precise nature of the *tahash*, like that of the *re'em*, occasioned lively debate in rabbinic literature.[39] The *targum* calls it *sassgavna*. RaShI's etymology of this name indicates that it rejoiced (*sass*) and adorned itself in its beautiful skin (*gavna*).[40]

Rabbinic sources associate both the warlike and eschatological *re'em*, and peaceful, docile, and self-sacrificing *tahash* with actions that lead to the salvation of Israel: As the symbol of Joseph, the *re'em* is explicitly associated with empowerment and salvation, particularly when it appears as an analogue of the ox.[41] In rabbinic literature, *re'em* and ox often appear in apposition because of their many parallel characteristics. The biblical text wherein Jacob describes (or traditionally "blesses") Joseph actually seems to speak of a composite creature, with the physical majesty of an ox, and the horn (or horns) of a *re'em*: "[Joseph is] like a firstling ox in his majesty, [his horns are] like the horns of the *re'em*." Such a creature recalls the "one-horned bulls" of Persepolis.[42] Ox and *re'em* are often mentioned

together in connection with the vanquishing of enemies, and their particular strengths are understood to mirror each other. RaShI quotes *Sifre*: "the ox is strong, but his horns are not sharp, and the *re'em* has sharp horns, yet its strength is not great. Joshua received the strength of a ox and the keenness of the *re'em*'s horn."[43] This representation of the ox and the *re'em* as being "two sides of the same coin" illuminates Joshua's legendary choice of the unicorn on the obverse and the ox on the reverse of the coins of the first commonwealth. Besides the fact that Joshua descended from Joseph, the association of the ox and *re'em*, both animals renowned for vanquishing their foes and thus associated with salvation, would render their depiction on coins celebrating the conquest of the Land of Israel particularly appropriate. The enemy of both the ox and unicorn is the lion.[44]

The *tahash* on the other hand performs a function in history which is apposite to that of the Leviathan in eschatology. Its entire raison d'être is to sacrifice itself so that its skin might be spread over the historical Tabernacle in the Wilderness, paralleling the way in which the Leviathan's skin will form a "tabernacle of peace," at the end of time over all the world and over Jerusalem—a metaphor for God's ultimate and Messianic protection (see Chapter 4).

The two guises of the unicorn were familiar to Christian lore and iconography.[45] Two distinct species of unicorn, the monoceros (Gk. *μονοκρτξν*) and the unicorn proper (Lat. *unicornus*) were noted by naturalists, based on the Greek and Latin translations of the Hebrew *re'em*. The monoceros is a fierce and pugnacious rhinoceros-, horse-, or goatlike beast. The Septuagint version of Psalms 22:22, "Save me from the lion's mouth, from the horns of unicorns" reads "*Σξσ ν με κ στ ματοψ λ οντοψ καο π κεπ τξν μονοκρτξν τ ν ταπε νξσ ν γου*,"[46] and some Christian writers and iconographers associated the monoceros with the perfidious Jews.[47]

The unicorn proper is a docile, swift creature, difficult to capture, but highly prized because of its horn. The legend's centerpiece is the account of the unicorn's capture. A woman is enlisted to wait in a grove, half-clothed, for the appearance of the unicorn, which would emerge from the forest to engage in erotic play with her. Thereupon the hunters lying in wait would spring out and capture the beast. The earliest versions of the legend cast either a young maiden or a matron as seductress. But beginning with the account of *Physiologus* in the third century, the seductress is most often a virgin, because the unicorn has become a type of the Christ. Typologically, thus, the virgin becomes the Virgin, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the hunters by which the unicorn is "betrayed" are the Jews.[48]

The gentle and elusive unicorn, formidable in beauty and self-sacrificing toward a higher goal resembles the *tahash* who gives up its life so that its skin can form the covering for the Tabernacle wherein atonement is accomplished. The unicorn, in a clear typology for the redemptive mission of Jesus, gives up its life

to provide its horn that can detect and neutralize the poison of serpents. By contrast, the violent and unpredictable monoceros finds its parallel in the *re'em*.

Descriptions of the unicorn as a rare or even a unique beast in Christian lore are similar to (and perhaps even dependant upon) Jewish accounts of the *tahash* and of the one-horned goat of Adam, as well as in the *aggadot* about the *re'em* Noah had to tie to the ark because it was so huge.[49] Like those who asserted that the primeval dragon was a singular creation, there were some who asserted that only one *re'em* was created, "in order that the entire world not be destroyed."[50] There are few singular symbols in the Bible; most come in pairs or groups. Uniqueness seems to be the prerogative of God's self, God's temple, God's people, God's land. In Christian tradition, the uniqueness of the unicorn is associated with the uniqueness of the "only-begotten Son of God." The unicorn's horn, antidote to the poison of serpents, is likened to the cross, the source of Christian salvation from the serpent who is the Devil. In Jewish sources, the uniqueness of the unicorn is associated with the uniqueness of Israel, and the power of its single horn with Israel's salvation. Israel is called "a unique nation on earth,"[51] and one of the poetic metaphors for her redemption is God's "raising the 'horn' of His annointed one,"[52] that singular "horn" being symbolic of the pride or strength of the Messiah or of Israel herself.[53]

Unicorns appear in a number of guises in medieval Hebrew manuscript illumination.[54] The most common depiction is that of the swift and gentle unicorn in the by now familiar position of the victim of a hunt (Fig. 41). Just as the stag-, hare-, and elephant-hunts in Jewish art serve as metaphors for the Christian pursuit of the Jews or for the appropriation of the Torah, the scenes of the unicorn-hunt may be understood as statements of pride, defiance, and, perhaps, more than a little sadness. Yet in some ways, these images far exceed the stag-, hare-, and elephant-hunt iconography in their subversiveness.

The transgressive boldness of a Jewish appropriation of the image of the suffering and pursued unicorn is striking since the unicorn-hunt in Christian iconography specifically symbolizes the Passion of Jesus: his pursuit and suffering at the hands of the Jews. In making this symbol their own, medieval Jews reverse the roles of persecutor and victim in the most radical manner. In the case of the hare-hunt, the very characteristics of the minority victim calumniated by the majority culture are reclaimed as positive attributes.[55] In the case of Berechiah's fable of the elephant-hunt, the hunter is ironically celebrated to emphasize the injustice of a society that glorifies the oppressor and ignores the victim. But the case of the hunt of the unicorn is a unparalleled: in a Christian context, the believing viewer is meant neither to denigrate the quarry, nor to celebrate the hunter, but to sympathize with the victim, with Jesus. In adopting this iconography, Jews dare, in effect, to reclaim and re-Judaize the role of the suffering servant, the unique mes-



Fig. 41. Hunted unicorn. Pentateuch, Brabant, 1310. Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 97r

siah—the place of Jesus himself. This is very much in keeping with the Jewish reclamation of the allegedly christological passages from the Hebrew Prophets in polemic literature of the period.[56] The images of the unicorn-hunt are meant to be startling: they are the medieval equivalent of Chagall's *White Crucifixion*, created some five hundred years later. In that work, Jesus, wearing a *tallit* as a loincloth, is crucified in a shtetl above the flames that ascend from a burning wooden synagogue (Fig. 42).[57] What Karl Plank has written about that image might apply to the image of the unicorn-hunt in Jewish art. To depict such a hunt and to reverse its valences was

> to confront a . . . taboo . . . to do so required the victim to draw from the oppressor's cultural tradition. And the potential for being misunderstood would be enormous: by fellow victims who would perceive apostasy and betrayal instead of solidarity, by oppressors who would hear forgiving consolation instead of indictment.[58]

Obviously, it is theologically essential that the unicorn be captured in Christian literature and iconography. Jesus as unicorn certainly conforms to the type of the *tahash*, the unicorn who is willingly sacrificed in order to effect redemption. But what of the hunted unicorns in Jewish art? In some sense, they, too are *tahashim* since their pursuit leads to an eschatological denouement.[59] On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the unicorn is never acutally captured in any Jewish image of the unicorn-hunt. The unicorn—magical, swift, free, unique, and impossible to capture—may have been the most powerful image medieval Jews could have conceived to illustrate both their plight and their hopes as "a singular nation on earth," protected by a singular God.

The protected and unconquerable nature of the unicorn in Jewish art leads one to suppose that these images represent *re'emim*, usually associated with pride, strength, and redemption in the textual sources. Unicorns that are unquestionably *re'emim* appear in medieval and later Jewish art either alone, mirrored in a heraldic fashion by other *re'emim*, or in conflict with men or with other beasts.[60] It is a *re'em*, in fact, that is engaged in battle with the lion on the ceiling of Hodorov.

But the image at Hodorov is problematic. If the unicorn represents the Jewish people, or symbolizes their redemption, why is the lion, popularly perceived as the Jewish symbol par excellence, an unambiguously positive symbol depicted in conflict with it?

The popular perception of the lion as a primary Jewish symbol seems to emerge from the fact that the lion represents Judah, the leader of the tribes. In the midrashic tradition, the Lion of Judah can, in fact, become a messianic symbol.[61] As we have discussed, beginning in the Byzantine period in the Land of Israel, lions begin to appear in conjunction with the Ark of the Law in synagogues. Though

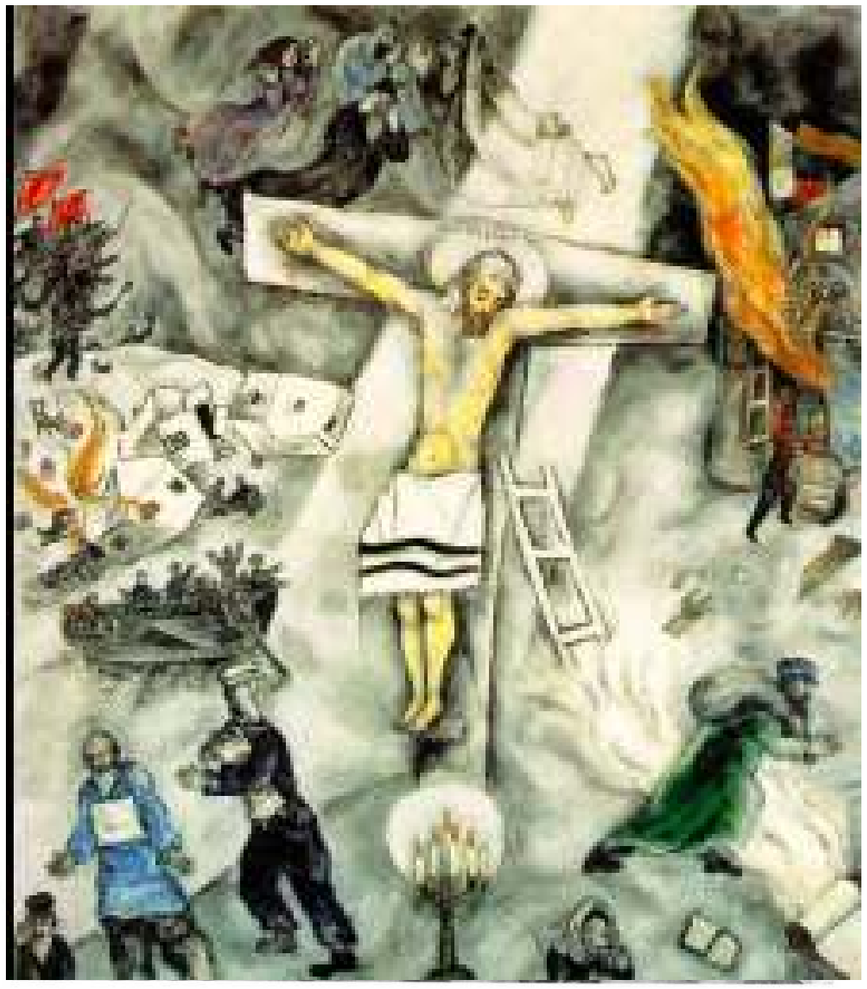


Fig. 42. Marc Chagall, *White Crucifixion*. The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Alfred S. Alschuler

these most likely originate in the visual homonymic pun whereby "a pair of lions" (אריותא) is equated with Torah (אוריתא),[62] common wisdom asserts that these lions are the "Lions of Judah," though they are not referred to as such in any textual source.

In spite of the fact that Judah has primacy over all the tribes of Israel, is the paradigm of Jewish leadership, and represents the special, "royal" status of the Jewish people, he has a rival—already in the biblical text—in the pure and innocent Joseph, who was able to remain untainted even when in Egypt. The lion of Judah meets his match in the *re'em* of Joseph.

What are the qualities of Joseph that stand in diametric opposition to those of Judah? The Judah/Joseph dichotomy was a favorite topic among kabbalists and hassidim, and would certainly have been familiar to many of the Jews who worshiped and studied at Hodorov: Joseph represents transcendence, reaching up from the pit and the prison house to attain the throne through pure inviolability.[63] In some ways Joseph (who, through his purity, always seems to be set apart from earthliness), usurps the place of Judah, who is always involved in the violence and tearing of this world. Jews do not bless their children on Friday nights with "May God make you like Judah" [who allowed Joseph to be sold into slavery and slept with his daughter-in-law], but with "May God make you like Manasseh and Ephraim" [the two sons of Joseph, who maintained their Jewish identity even in the land of their enemies].

The Lion of Judah and the *re'em* of Joseph each represent salvation of a different sort. Talmudic and midrashic eschatologies depict two successive Messiahs. The first is the Messiah of the House of Ephraim, the offspring of Joseph, often called the Messiah Son of Joseph. He is a great warrior and begins the task of vanquishing Israel's enemies. According to the Talmudic *aggadot*, he is the Messiah referred to by Deutero-Isaiah as the "Servant of the Lord" who suffers at the hands of the enemies of Israel, and is killed in the decisive eschatological battle.[64] Subsequently, the Messiah of the House of Judah, the Messiah Son of David, emerges to rebuild the world according to the rule of divine law, a world that dwells in the shade of God's canopy of peace and security.

These two stages of the messianic future emerge from parallels between the life and mission of the Messiah and that of Moses, who died before his mission was fully accomplished.[65] They are paralleled in Christianity by the so-called first and second coming, the first involving God's incarnation in the historical continuum, a divine messiah, the second with the revelation of the Messiah as part of the Godhead itself.

Joseph, as the link between the mundane and transcendent worlds, is well represented by the unicorn, his symbol, a creature both mundane and transcendent. It appears at all crucial junctures of Jewish history to perform relatively mundane tasks, yet the tasks it performs are specifically those that actualize an influx of

transcendence. The *tahash*/unicorn is an appropriate symbol for the suffering and pursued aspects of the Messiah Son of Joseph, while the *re'em*/monoceros symbolizes his military prowess. Like the Messiah Son of Joseph, the unicorn links history and eschatology. All of these aspects of the unicorn make it an apt symbol of the Messiah Son of Joseph for Jews. These same qualities make it appropriate to represent the Jesus of the "first coming" for Christians—human, yet divine, vanquishing evil through his death. The lion is an appropriate Jewish symbol of the Messiah Son of David, who comes of Judah's line, and reigns in royal majesty. In Christianity, the lion represents the divine Christ, the Eternal King.

The interpretation of the conflict between the lion and the unicorn as symbol of the rich, complex, and somewhat esoteric discussion of the Judah/Joseph dichotomy is one that might be plausible if the image adorned a kabbalistic prayerbook.[66] But we must consider that this iconography appears primarily in East European synagogues, in a visual culture that developed in a sociopolitical climate that was particularly difficult for Jews. Here, rather than reading the lion in its transformed positive sense as the Lion of Judah, it may be more appropriate to read it in terms of its more common biblical, Talmudic, and midrashic meaning: as a symbol of the rapacious nations of the world.

Popular perceptions aside, in the vast majority of Jewish sources the lion is an unambiguously negative symbol. It has been pointed out that God is compared to a lion in Scripture, but this is only when God is angry, when God turns against the Israelites, becoming their enemy. In Lamentations, the lion becomes a symbol of God's attack upon the Jewish people (3:10), a topos employed by the prophet Amos as well (3:12, 5:19). Even the famed Lion of Judah is described in the biblical text as violent and bloodthirsty: "Judah is a lion's whelp; On prey, my son, have you grown. He crouches, lies down like a lion, Like the king of beasts, who dare rouse him?" (Gen. 49:9). The lion is depicted as a ferocious, rapacious beast, whom it would be best to avoid. It is no wonder then, that the majority of references to lions in Scripture and rabbinic literature associate them with the enemies of Israel.[67] Proverbs depicts the lion as a metaphor for the wicked preying on the innocent (28:15) and Jeremiah describes Israel as "scattered sheep, harried by lions" (40:17), the enemies of the Jewish people. *Midrash Tehillim* offers the following interpretation of a reference to lions in the Psalms:

> In [the Psalm verse that states] "The young lions roar after their prey (Ps. 104:21)," the "young lions" (*k'firim*) are the nations that deny (*kofrim*) the Holy Blessed One. R. Hanina bar Papa said: The "young lions" are the nations roaring to tear Israel to pieces.[68]

Yehudah HaLevi, as we have seen, uses the lion as a metaphor for the rapaciousness of the nations of the world.[69] *Yah Ribon 'Olam*, a *piyyut* of Yisrael b. Moshe Najara (d. Gaza 1621), though late, is another familiar locus for this idea: "Save your nation," the hymn supplicates God, "from the mouth of the lions."[70]

At Hodorov, contextual considerations certainly tend to corroborate the idea that the unicorn (situated, like the elephant in the Worms Maḥzor, on the right of the composition) represents the Jewish people, "a singular nation on earth," or their representative, the Messiah Son of Joseph, locked in the decisive eschatological conflict with the lion, at left, which represents the nations. The lion and unicorn are flanked by the eagle representing the empress, and surrounded by many other images of animals preying on each other.

The unicorn was the chosen symbol of Israel at Hodorov because the Jews who worshiped and studied there were likely to have seen themselves at a specific stage of the history of redemption, and in need of a particular kind of salvation. *Midrash Tehillim* recounts that David was once pursued by a lion. He came to a mountain and climbed it, until he reached the highest peak and he was saved from the beast. But it turned out that the mountain he had climbed was no mountain at all, but a gigantic *re'em*, and the highest peak was this unicorn's horn. It was then that David prayed, "Save me from the lion's mouth, hear me from (or through) the horns of unicorns"; in other words, "Save me from the nations which seek to devour me. Hear me through the intercession of the Messiah who is called the "horn of salvation."[71] This verse from the twenty-second Psalm, which was interpreted by Christians to refer to the sufferings of Jesus at the hands of the Jews, had, nonetheless an inherently Jewish story attached to it. David, in immediate physical danger, prays not for the Messiah who will spring from his own loins, the Messiah Son of David, the Messiah of rebuilding, restoration, and peace. He calls upon God to recall the Messiah Son of Joseph, the Messiah of vengeance and salvation, the one who will redeem the Jewish people from immediate danger, and restore to them the physical and political security that is necessary before the Messiah Son of David can rebuild the world.

At Hodorov, we once again witness the adoption of iconography from the dominant culture, adapted in a manner that emphasizes a specific constellation of meanings appropriate for its particular context. Hodorov is situated in a region in which Jewish communities were torn asunder by the pogroms and false Messianic uprisings of the seventeenth century. This image was created at a time when there seemed to be no rationale, no justification for the incredible turmoil and destruction that had only recently swept through the region, the memory of which was still fresh. Jews speculated that these sufferings could actually be the Messianic struggles prophesied throughout their tradition, called *hevlei Mashiah*, the "birthpangs" of the Messiah.[72] They yearned for the swift revelation of the Messiah Son of Joseph, who would soon pave the way for the era of the Messiah Son of David.

Here, on the wall, the Messiah Son of Joseph, symbolized by the unicorn, fights

the eschatological war with the nations, symbolized by the lion. The lion seems literally to have the upper hand. Yet it is oblivious to the fact that this seeming advantage is actually part of the divine plan. As he enters into the struggle, he kills the unicorn, the Messiah Son of Joseph, yet at the very same time he sounds the "horn of salvation," the "great Shofar" that will herald the redemption of the Jewish people and of the world (cf. Isa. 11:12).

In this final glance at the figures from the synagogue at Hodorov, the image seems frozen. The lion and the unicorn appear to be locked forever in the throes of their ultimate battle. These animals—and indeed all the animals whose symbolic meaning we have uncovered—recalled to the Jews who prayed beneath them the fact that they were still, as yet, unredeemed. Though their eyes may have grown accustomed to the darkness in which they lived, the power of these symbolic images provides eloquent testimony to the hope for that better and brighter world that was ever the dream of the Jewish soul and imagination.

Conclusion:

Wishes, Dreams and Aspirations

Art is not based on actuality,
but on the wishes, dreams and aspirations of a people.
—Bernard Berenson, *Rumor and Reflections*

It is intriguing that Bernard Berenson, the consummate connoisseur and aesthete, should have argued that the artistic impulse flows from the wellsprings of national aspiration rather than from the fountains of pure imagination or aesthetic sensibilities. Berenson was Jewish, but he spent his life fleeing his Jewish identity and, like many critics of his time, he felt that the Jewish genius was for the word rather than for the image.[1] Yet his definition of art may be applied to medieval Hebrew manuscript illumination with striking accuracy.

After the razing of the Second Temple, the Jewish mode of expression was predominantly literary, since the rabbis were awakened by the *hurban*—the destruction—to the necessity of promoting the portable and literary aspects of Jewish culture, rather than centering Jewish life around physically static monuments. They utilized midrashim and fables as the repository of their wishes, dreams, and aspirations. Yet at Dura Europas, and in other places in which Jews saw their physical presence beginning to take firmer root, one observes the development of a

fascination with the power of iconography not merely to represent the world, but to express ideas, in much the same manner as midrash or fable.

In medieval Jewish iconography we witness what is to a great extent a continuation of a venerable legacy. Many of the literary and iconographic religious and political formulations that emerge from medieval European Jewish culture are familiar from the ancient period, but all take on fresh meaning. If some of the medieval iconographic "refrains" sound familiar from the milieu of the Talmud and the midrashim, it is because medieval Jews created them to sound that way, just as they modeled contemporary dirges and the chronicles of the destruction of the communities of their day upon the biblical Book of Lamentations, and love poems to God upon the Song of Songs.[2]

The experience of the Middle Ages also allowed the anger of Jews as a minority, as well their view of history as both linear and cyclical, to be carved in stone—to become sufficiently ensconced in the tradition to be fully represented in their literary and iconographic productions. A strong sense of exile and persecution, but at the same time, a faith in the inevitability of the survival, and indeed of the triumph of the Lions of Judah pervades medieval Jewish culture. Once one is attuned to them, one sees these ideas represented in medieval Jewish art in striking and often startlingly explicit ways. In spite of the discomfort that some of the more polemic symbols may generate in an age that styles itself ecumenical, there should arise no desire, no matter how well intentioned, to rewrite history in order to accommodate nostalgia for a nonexistent past or fear of an uncertain future. Jews, in particular, ignore the anger of their medieval ancestors at their own peril: by attributing anger to *tsey* (others) but never to *unz* (themselves) they maintain a sense of cultural superiority that is at the very least exclusionary, and at the very worst, racist. In either case, poor (or perhaps wishful) history can be damaging. As Jews distance themselves from medieval Jewry's feelings of anger and rebelliousness they abdicate their position as a population that ever has been and ever continues to be a minority. This certainly serves its purpose, since now the *tsey* with whom most Jews wish to associate themselves is the *tsey* of belonging, not of otherness, the mainstream and not the underdog. But we cannot escape the anger. Here is a simple example that actually ties together many of the issues touched upon in this book. It is both familiar and, upon close examination, completely appalling or completely expected, depending on one's stance on the issues we have been reviewing.

One of the best-loved hymns in the Jewish liturgy is *Maoz Zur* (Mighty Rock). Like the Pledge of Allegiance, it is familiar to every schoolchild even before the words are comprehensible. But it must be recalled that this liturgical poem was composed in the mid-thirteenth century for the festival commemorating Jewish self-liberation from the yoke of foreign domination. On Hannukah, Jews of

Ashkenazi extraction all around the world light the candles and sing *Maoz Zur*. They may even do so in tender video vignettes proclaiming holiday greetings on local cable channels across the country. Yet how many modern Jews (or their neighbors) have contemplated the actual and rather frightening meaning of the words: *le'et takhin matbeah mizar hamnabeah*,

> When You will have prepared the slaughter
> of the blaspheming foe,
> then shall I complete in song,
> A Hymn for the Dedication of the Altar.

To the fourteenth-century poet's mind, Hannukah (the Dedication of the Altar) cannot be truly and wholeheartedly celebrated until such time when God will wreak horrific vengeance upon the latter-day enemies of the Jewish people. Each verse describes the destruction of a successive group of oppressors, but the end of the first verse, which serves also as the refrain, is particularly bloody. It is nonetheless rivaled by the sixth and final verse of the poem, which dates to around 1500 (the terminus ante quem of the main body of this study), and is totally chilling in its explicitness:

> Bare your Holy Arm,
> And bring about the final redemption,
> Avenge the blood of your servants, take revenge upon the evil nation,
> For salvation is long in coming for us,
> And there is no end to days of evil,
> Repel the Red One in the deepest shadows,
> Establish for us the seven shepherds.[3]

These are unlovely words, but they are quintessentially medieval ones. They are an exceedingly explicit manifestation of sentiments Jews normally had to suppress. The damning specificity of the terms "Red One" and "evil nation" Edom—Christian Europe—stand out in stark relief, and through them, the anger of late medieval Ashkenazic Jewry is palpable. One can sense the anger Jews of the late Middle Ages must have felt when they called for the destruction of Christendom and the hope they had of the reinstitution of prophetic leadership. The hymn's popularity—what preserved it long enough to appear on televised holiday greetings at the end of the twentieth century, long after the meaning of its words have been forgotten—was undoubtedly the fact that it is an exceedingly explicit manifestation of sentiments Jews normally had to repress.

Both the anger and the hope, irksome for both Jews and Christians in our mod-

ern ecumenical climate, are explicit in medieval polemics, and surface occasionally in poetry. I hope this book has made clear the degree to which it permeates and affects Jewish art around the time of the composition of *Maoz Zur*.

But it is essential to note that neither the anger nor the hope is new. There is a continuum of sentiment throughout Jewish history. Had Jews under Roman domination known the hymn, they would, perhaps, have felt the impact of these words no less strongly than their medieval counterparts. Likewise, these sentiments were not diminished when *Maoz Zur* was chanted by inheritors of medieval Jewish culture—eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jews under Russian and Polish domination. Though the irony inherent in the juxtaposition of the words of the hymn with the ecumenical lighting of Hanukkah lamps on television is lost on the majority of American Jews, the irony inherent in the juxtaposition of the words of the hymn with the lighting of Hanukkah lamps patriotically surmounted by the Austro-Hungarian eagle would certainly not have been lost on those Russian and Polish Jews. It would have been at that moment that their ardent and sincere desire to be solid and respected citizens of the empire would, perhaps, have clashed with the often bitter experience of the Jew in exile.

The basic undertone of this long-standing continuum of sentiment is univocal, best couched in the classic language of the Lamentations of Jeremiah—the cry of anguish and incredulity overlaid with a pragmatic acceptance and broader vision that emerges from the very first destruction of Jerusalem. Like the Jews who witnessed that tragedy, medieval Jews are very much aware that they live in an age in which "the crown has fallen from our head" (Lam. 5:16); like them, they avow that God, not their enemies, is ultimately the master of history and of their fate: "Alas! The LORD in His wrath has shamed Fair Zion, has cast down from heaven to earth the majesty of Israel" (2:1). At the same time, there is an acknowledgment of their own responsibility for the actions that have led to God's chastisement: "Jerusalem has greatly sinned, therefore she is become a mockery" (1:8). There is a voice of protest against the harshness of the inequity of the exile, a plea for restoration, an appeal to the memory of more righteous generations (but oddly, no promise of good behavior—perhaps emphasizing the unconditional nature of the covenant): "See O Lord, and behold, to whom You have done this! (2:20).... Remember O Lord, what has befallen us; Behold and see our disgrace! (5:1).... Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back; Renew our days as of old! (5:21)."[4] Equally important, however, is the dream of vindication: "Rejoice and exult, Fair Edom, Who dwell in the land of Uz! To you, too, the cup shall pass, You shall get drunk and expose your nakedness" (4:21).

Overt messages of protest and explicit dreams of subversion such as those expressed in *Maoz Zur* are rare. The purpose of this study has been to examine the more common, though less explicit, expressions of such messages and dreams in Jewish text and iconography with a critical eye, to determine how borrowed mo-

tifs are ironically used and how symbols are constructed or creatively manipulated to suit contemporary circumstances and perennial hopes. Though the perspective on both Jewish art and text as sources for Jewish history has been somewhat different than the approaches usually taken, I hope that the vista revealed has proved interesting and thought-provoking.

The conclusions we have reached herein as a result of the examination of animal motifs are intended as examples of the sorts of readings that are called for on all levels of art and text, both contextual and "subtextual." I have attempted to present representative examples of the manner in which medieval Jewish authors and artists were able to contextualize symbols by choosing carefully which of a panoply of traditional symbols they would apply in a particular situation. Their palette was broad, but their choices reflected the best metaphors they could choose to comment upon the specific circumstances at hand. The examples I chose span the liturgical year, which provided the linking microcosmic chronological reality of medieval Jewish life, while at the same time encompassing the most overarching and macrocosmic categories of spiritual and sociopolitical reality. One might imagine a cyclic continuum in which each of the animal examples explored in the preceding chapters appears at a specific point in the medieval Jewish liturgical sequence, and in which each point relates to the others in the continuum: The hare is an image that appears predominantly in a Passover context: it illumines the construction of Jewish collective identity at a time of year when Jews commemorate their becoming a people. The elephant illustrates the liturgy of Shavuot and represents the Torah, and the defense of "Torah" in polemical contexts. The dragons and fiery serpents challenge and ultimately confirm the power of God as sovereign and judge, and as arbiter of life and death, themes associated with the Days of Awe.

Various types of dragons put in "guest appearances" in other liturgical contexts, reinforcing the position of the Days of Awe as a sort of chronological and conceptual fulcrum between Passover and Shavuot (the festivals of historical reminiscence) and Sukkot (the festival of eschatological expectation): Fearsome dragons appear as challengers to the authority of Torah in illustrations for the Shavuot liturgy, and the Leviathan as divinely subdued dragon appears as the "plaything" of God in illustrations accompanying the Sukkot liturgy. The dragons accompanying the Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur liturgy (the dragons of Tishrei, whose astrological sign is *moznayim* [the balance]) are, in fact, the dragons of balance—balancing the concepts of male and female, celestial and terrestrial, Sovereign and Parent.

Finally, the *tahash* and the *re'em* represent the various aspects of the festival of Sukkot, the festival of Tabernacles: The *tahash* is associated with the historical Tabernacle, and with the eschatological Tabernacle of Peace. The *re'em* engages in the eschatological battle with the nations of the world, a battle that tra-

ditionally takes place in the period of Sukkot, as the choice of the *haftarah* depicting the battle of Gog and Magog for the final day of Sukkot makes clear. The unicorn is a symbol of Messianic redemption, vengeance, and in a very profound sense, a symbol of the nations' acknowledgment of the God of Israel, since medieval Jews have appropriated the paramount symbol of Jesus as the symbol of Jewish messianism.

Though these symbols can be linked with a large degree of specificity to particular liturgical settings and contexts of cultural self-definition, they may at the same time be found in almost identical form in wider medieval culture. In fact, the universalism of the symbols is the element actively manipulated in the particularistic context: Aesop's fable has come alive: we witness lions carving stones, and they do so in ways that seem, exoterically, to be in confluence with the modes of the dominant culture, so much so that they have been deemed by most observers to be wholesale appropriations of those modes. But upon closer examination, what is most telling are the subtle differences between Jewish iconography and the more general sources upon which it draws. When the lions carve stones, we do, in fact, see the lions winning.

Yet it is well to note that their triumph is not proclaimed with the clamor of trumpets, but in a still, small voice—a voice that, in fact, may not be immediately discernable to the casual observer. The triumph is to be found in the subtle differences between the apparently identical art of minority and majority. When examined by careful readers, by conscientious and astute observers, the larger differences between medieval Jewish and Christian worldview are accentuated. The small but significant shifts that separate the art of the medieval Jewish minority from that of the Christian majority are apt signifiers for the wider gulf that separates Jewish and Christian culture—and the respective wishes, dreams, and aspirations of each—in this period. In an age in which those larger distances have been broached by many, such subtle shifts are almost undetectable because we assume a priori and on the basis of our own experience that Jewish culture "simply" emulates that of its neighbors. Yet if we adopt and truly assimilate a view of medieval Jewry as a genuine minority culture, we can probe the nature and dimensions of that emulation. In so doing, a rich and fascinating tapestry unfurls itself before us, a tapestry depicting a territory of the imagination where lions carve stones, hares triumph over their hunters, elephants herald the reappropriation of cultural treasures, all-powerful dragons become tamed playthings, and the horn of salvation is raised from the dust; where the breath of every living thing praises God and speaks for Israel.

The tapestry teems; it overflows with the story of a particular minority's wishes, dreams, and aspirations, but in many ways it is paradigmatic of the plight of all minorities. Its warp and woof are anger and hope, and the often painful patterns woven into it are repeated, in different shades and hues, as long as the gulf remains

between "us" and "them," between oppressors and oppressed, between haves and have-nots. This tapestry, and all others like it, is simultaneously fascinating and full of sadness. As fascinating as such tapestries are to study, one hopes for the day when there will be no need to weave any more, and when the ones that have been woven over millennia will have outlived their usefulness and will be removed from the walls of their particular castles, to continue their lives as nothing more than interesting and provocative pieces in the museum of human memory.

Notes

Chapter 1. "If lions could carve stones . . ."

1. The source of this tale is Avianus's twenty-fourth fable, "*Venator et Leo*," which is, in turn, dependent on Babrius 194, as is the Aesopic prose version. See Perry 1952: 1, no. 284; *Babrius and Phaedrus*–Perry 1965: 479, no. 284.

2. Many studies that use art as a historical tool rather than as mere illustration, have become standards in the undergraduate curriculum. See for example Duby 1981 and Duby 1986. Duby uses art as a tool in cultural anthropology in Aries and Duby 1988. See also Le Goff 1990. More specialized is Le Goff's article on Saint Marcellus of Paris and the Dragon (Le Goff 1980). Michael Camille takes the next logical step in the study of medieval art as a key to mentalités in his scholarship. (Camille 1989a, Camille 1989b). His *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Camille 1992), is discussed later in this chapter. Work along the lines of Camille's is a real desideratum in the field of medieval Jewish art; the aim of this book is to rectify the underrepresentation of such approaches.

3. The lion is the biblical metaphor of choice for Judah, the leader of the tribes: "Judah is a lion's whelp" (Gen. 49:9) In medieval commentaries, such as that of RaShI (*Ra*bbi *Sh*lomo *Y*izhaki of Troyes, 1040–1105) we have, for example: "The Community of Israel is likened to a lioness" (RaShI on BT *Sotah* 11b) When Jacob ben Asher (c. 1270–1343) composed his *Arba'ah Turim (Tur)*, the great code of Jewish law, he paraphrased a famous maxim from Mishnah *Avot* 5:20. as its opening rubric: "One should be brave as a lion to arise in the morning to perform the service of one's Creator" (Karo 1874: 1:5a). Ben Asher's choice of an animal metaphor for the introductory statement of a Code that encompasses all aspects of human life testifies to a consciousness of the value of animal symbolism, which played a significant role throughout the Middle Ages. Joseph Karo maintains and elaborates upon this rubric in the opening lines of his *Shulhan Arukh*, the classic sixteenth-century abbreviation of the *Tur* (Karo 1874), which demonstrates that this metaphor for the Jewish people had survived through the Middle Ages.

4. On the image of Synagoga, see Seiferth 1970. The Judensau is discussed in Shachar 1974. For medieval examples of the Jewish tormentors of Jesus, see Blumenkrantz 1966, and Mellinkoff 1993. A specific (and startling) late medieval example is one of Bosch's last works, *Christ Bearing the Cross* (1515–16) in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent.

5. Aesop's fable of the lion and the man, with which this essay begins, is not only an appropriate reminder for latter-day scholars of the issues that need to be addressed in the field of medieval Jewish art: Its *political* undertones did not go unnoted by Jews in the Middle Ages and beyond. In none of the non-Jewish versions is the clear contrast between the dominant and the subservient extended in so political/theological a direction as it is in two Jewish versions, one medieval and one postmedieval.

In the retelling of the fable by Berechiah b. Natronai HaNakdan (England [?], thirteenth century), the lion, in representing the supposed underdog, appears to be a symbol for the Jews. Berechiah alerts his readers to this fact by peppering his version of the tale with some subtle emphases, additions, and amplifications: the fact that the man is a hunter, which is only noted in the title of the Avianus fable, is emphasized in the text of Berechiah's

retelling. This amplification is significant in terms of the traditional portrayal of the enemies of the Jewish people as hunters. Berechiah explicitly identifies the image of the man in the monument as that of a king sitting on a throne, while the lion crouches before him in submission. In the retelling, then, men are represented as rulers before whom the lions must submit and as hunters whom the lions must outwit, a fairly accurate "thumbnail sketch" of the dominant modes of interaction between Jews as a minority culture and the majority culture in the Middle Ages. The underlying moral here seems to be one that asserts the ultimate triumph of the Jews even though present circumstances seem to place them in a position of submission or a state of active persecution. However, just as in the case of several of Berechiah's other tales, the fable is surrounded by a promythium and a moral that serve to conceal the true direction of its social, political, and religious critique. (The Hebrew text is found in Berechiah, *Mishlei Shu'alim*–Haberman 1946: 64–65. An English version may be found in Berechiah *Mishlei Shu'alim*–Hadas 1967: 101–2. Finally, an English paraphrase with notes on comparative folklore is contained in Schwartzbaum 1979: 303–6).

A later retelling of the fable is that of Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (called the BeShT, 1700–1760); it also differs in important and significant details. The BeShT was once asked why the Bible relates the wrongdoings of its heroes. Would it not be better to represent good people as being invariably good? He answered that if the Bible failed to indicate the few sins of its heroes, we would not see them as real people, and we might doubt their goodness. He illustrated this concept with a fable similar to that of the Lion and the Hunter: A lion taught his cubs that they were the strongest and bravest of animals and should fear naught from any other creature. Once, the cubs went for a walk and entered a ruined castle, where they saw a mural depicting Samson rending in twain a lion cub (Judg. 14:5). They ran to their father crying, "We have seen a creature stronger than ourselves, and we fear him!" The old lion told his cubs that the picture ought to assure them that the race of lions is the strongest of creatures, for when once a stronger creature appears, it is portrayed as a miracle. The moral of the tale is that "exceptions prove the rule" (text paraphrased by Schwartzbaum 1979: 303, and is quoted from *Keter Shem Tov* 66b in Newman 1944: 159–60, no. 66).

Like Berechiah's version, the fable told by the BeShT is at odds with its promythium and moral. The body of the fable seems to fail completely in illustrating the point of the promythium: the necessity of portraying the faults of biblical characters. Disjunction between promythium or moral and the body of a fable are clues that a nonliteral interpretation may be necessary. If the interpretation applied to Berechiah's fable in order that it may reflect a subject population's dream of vindication is allowed to stand here, the BeShT's underlying motive in recounting the fable becomes clear. He seeks to present a theological response to a difficult conundrum. When the BeShT discusses the necessity of portraying the faults of biblical characters the disjunction between the ideal image of a venerable hero or Patriarch, and the realities of his behavior, he is simultaneously addressing another disjunction as well. This is the disjunction between the ideal status of Israel as God's chosen people, and its present state in the world. The fable is his attempt to explain why the rulers of the nations of the world should dominate Israel when dominance over them was precisely what was promised to the Jewish people. He concludes that the fact that the nations rule over Israel is a "miracle," a circumstance conceived, ordained, and sanctioned by God for God's own purposes. Still, it is a temporary phenomenon, intended to display God's power in the universe, and, in this case, to punish Israel for its disobedience. Ultimately, God's promise to Israel will be fulfilled. (The hare-hunt motif in Jewish art, discussed in Chapter 2, is another symbolic topos for this theodicy.)

6. More recent work is considerably more sophisticated, pointing to the inherent limitations of the use of iconography as a tool without application to texts, and demonstrating how the study of texts may be conscientiously paired with the study of iconography. Horowitz 1986a is a critique of earlier scholarship, particularly of Metzger 1982. It questions the reliability and applicability of methodologies used in that work for the study of medieval Jewish culture, and serves as a programmatic essay for the field, suggesting that a text-based methodology is necessary to ground conclusions made on the basis of iconography. Horowitz provides an example of such methodology in another article, where conclusions reached on the basis of a marriage between textual and iconographic methods yields insightful results. (Horowitz 1986b). Jewish art in the modern period, particularly that created and collected in Erez Israel is the subject of Cohen 1990.

7. On the concept of the "methodological toolbox," see O'Flaherty 1980: 5.

8. Weitzmann 1971 is a classic instance. See also the many examples in the *Journal of Jewish Art* (1974–85) and *Jewish Art* (1985–present), which

are published by the Center for Jewish Art at Hebrew University, and exemplify this approach.

9. Simon Schama's exploration of the Golden Age of the Netherlands remains one of the strongest models of a synthesis of all the methodological tools of the new cultural history from art history to social demographics. It provides, if not all the answers about a block of "cultural time," then at least the keys for seeking them out (Schama 1988). The time is ripe for such methodologies to be applied to the study of medieval Jewish cultural history.

10. Gutmann 1978: 77; and Narkiss 1969: 29, 31, 104.

11. The best recent summary of the authorship question may be found in Suckale 1988: 123–34. Suckale outlines the various scholarly camps of opinion with regard to Jewish and Christian artists working on Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. His own contention is that the artists of the manuscripts he discusses were not Jewish, but he cites the range of opinions, from Gabrielle Sed-Rajna and Kurt and Ursula Schubert's firm contention that the manuscripts originate from Jewish hands, to Bezalel Narkiss's and Joseph Gutmann's nonexclusion of Christian illuminators, to Therese and Mendel Metzger's ascription of an important Hebrew illuminated miscellany to a Parisian Christian studio.

Occasionally, one comes across a Latin caption in a Hebrew manuscript, but this is just as likely to be an explication of the illumination penned by a later Christian owner as it is to be an instruction to a Christian illuminator (Suckale 1988: 130). More problematic are seemingly obvious "errors" in depicting Jewish customs in illuminations, which can lead researchers to conclude that such illuminations cannot possibly be the work of Jews. Elliot Horowitz has demonstrated that in several cases where artists were assumed to be non-Jewish because of "errors" they made in depicting Jewish religious practices, the illuminations actually reflect practices that, although they have since fallen into desuetude, were current at the time of the manuscripts' production. Thus, these "errors" serve only to prove that the manuscripts were not illuminated by twentieth-century Jews, but they may well have been created by medieval Jews, or if not by them, then under their very explicit direction (Horowitz 1986a: 77–79).

12. Such a corrective balance should not encourage a total retreat into the Jewish world and mind, while discounting the outside influence. Critiques were leveled on these grounds against Bonfil 1994, at the Association for Jewish Studies meeting (Boston, December 1994), and against Yuval 1993 to which an entire issue of *Zion* (59 [1993]) was devoted. I disagree with the critics, and feel that neither of these works is parochial in the least.

13. There are a number of landmark studies on this theme, which emerges from the earliest forays into the concept of alterity in medieval Christian culture. The most comprehensive work in the area of the image of the Jews in Christian art remains Blumenkrantz 1966, and Mellinkoff 1993. More specific studies include Camille 1989a with its chapter on "the idols of the Jews" (165–96), and Lewis 1986.

14. Overviews and historiography of the *Histoire des Mentalités* movement and the *Annales* School include Chartier 1988, Burke 1992, Carrard 1992, and Muir and Ruggiero 1991. Among the many proponents of these methods, the work of Carlo Ginzburg is exemplary for its use of iconography and material culture as a key to mentalités. The types of information mined in Ginzburg 1980 and in Ginzburg 1983 are frustratingly sparse when one discusses Jews in the Middle Ages. Ginzburg's methodologies in using art and folklore as sources for history, as evident in two later books and a collection of essays (Ginzburg 1985, Ginzburg 1990, Ginzburg 1989), might be profitably applied to medieval Jewish culture, rich as it is in both art and folklore.

15. Strauss 1952: 25.

16. While animal fables as such are absent from biblical literature, the Bible is rife with animal symbols, and botanical fables appear at two politically crucial times in the Bible (Judg. 9:8–15; 2 Kings 14:9, 2 Chron. 25:18).

17. Mishnah *Sofrim* 16:7; BT *Sukkah* 28a; *Baba Batra* 134a; Mishnah *Sofrim* 16:6.

18. BT *Sanhedrin* 38b-39b; BT *Sotah* 49a. On Talmudic fables, see Schwartzbaum 1965; Stern 1991.

19. *Kohelet Rabbah* 1:3.

20. This fable is relevant to the ensuing chapters of this study in that it plays upon the filial connection of Jacob and Esau, the legendary ancestors of Israel and Rome. It is to this connection that the fox is referrring to when he says "you and I can live together the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors."

21. The lack of sociological analysis exists in spite of the fact that the idea that political sensibilities were only shallowly hidden in fabular literature was recognized in ancient times. Phaedrus (c. 15 B.C.E.—C. 50 C.E.) explains the origins of the fable in the context of class oppression:

> Nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus,
> brevi docebo. Servitus obnoxia,

quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,
affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit,
calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.

(Now I will explain briefly why the type of thing called fable was invented. The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure under the guise of jesting with made-up stories.) (*Babrius and Phaedrus*–Perry 1952: Book 3, Prologue 33–37)

22. Two of the standard introductory texts on the illumination of Hebrew manuscripts often mention animal "decorations," "grotesques," or "marginalia," but rarely assert that these motifs could be anything besides decorative; see Gutmann 1978: 22, 25, 31, 59, 77, 82, 84, 90, 114, 118; and Narkiss 1969: 66, 67, 74, 76, 82, 88, 94, 100, 104, 110, 112, 128, 138, 154, 156, 158.

With regard to literature, the common wisdom holds that medieval Hebrew fables are universal gems presented in a Jewish setting, but have nothing particular to teach us about Jews. This type of purely literary analysis seems de rigeur in the field of "Jewish folklore," a field devoted mainly to literature, and too often, regrettably, divorced from cultural-historical studies. Some excellent work has been produced, but it is essentially the organization and presentation of raw material, and it is in need of contextualization. It only begins to be helpful to students of history once the historian works with it in its historical-cultural context. Compare, for instance Yassif 1984 with Bonfil 1989. As far as animal symbolism is concerned, the lack of application to context is especially disappointing. See Shoshan 1963 and Shoshan 1971. The classic work in this genre is Noy 1976. See also Daube 1973; and the many works of the late Haim Schwartzbaum, listed in *Yeda-'am* 22 (1984): 10–19. Animal tales are also mentioned in almost all the major compilations on the history of Hebrew literature, yet none of these deals with the significance of the specific animals in more than a summary manner. Even more recent scholarship falls short on this score. In Yassif 1987 the author discusses a number of important etiological animal tales, as well as some instances of central and symbolic animals embedded in the Ben Sirah tale, but he does not comment on the political implications beyond the folkloric motifs. Such commentary might have been particularly interesting on the passage in which Ben Sirah (paraphrasing the midrash) cites animals as symbols of the four wicked kingdoms (223–226).

To these preliminary forays, compare the sophisticated discussions of animals and their meaning in general medieval iconography in studies such as Cronin 1941 and Henderson 1987.

23. Romanoff 1941.

24. Camille 1992.

25. Randall 1966; Camille 1992. Some very tentative speculations on the relationship between marginal image and text in a single Hebrew manuscript are to be found in Sed-Rajna 1979.

In O'Flaherty 1988, the author demonstrates the potential richness of cultural "marginalia." She argues that the myths, rather than the formal histories of cultures often illuminate their mental structures most clearly. She specifically chooses small details that relate to larger archetypes, the "marginalia," of the myths, so to speak, as a key to understanding "other peoples' myths" in the ways that they understood them.

It is widely acknowledged that the unfamiliar and unexpected (as manifested in marginalia, "grotesques," fantastic beings, and odd details in fables and bestiaries) are potential keys to unlocking some of the secrets of the medieval imagination, and self-perception, and the underside of conventional political and theological rhetoric. Some studies in general medieval art and symbolism that depend upon such materials are Freeman 1976, Friedman 1981, Friedmann 1980, Bernheimer 1952, Janson 1952, and Williamson 1986. If such "mythic," "fabular," or "fabulous" forms allowed the majority culture of the Middle Ages to find expression for these mentalités, they would have been no less likely to have been a refuge for the sentiments of those who represented the "other" in society, particularly if the concomitant realia fit the Straussian model discussed above.

26. On Christian symbolic mentalitiés in medieval art, see Chenu 1968 and Eco 1986: 52–64. For a direct Jewish appropriation from the Christian bestiary and its odyssey through the history of Jewish mentalités, see Chapter 3.

27. Medieval kabbalah amplifies, reinterprets, and creatively manipulates often neglected symbols in classical Jewish literature to create indigenously medieval understandings. In the same way, medieval Jewish authors and illuminators and their patrons seem to have amplified, reinterpreted, and creatively manipulated traditional understandings of uncommon and unfamiliar symbols like these animals in ways that may been influenced by their experience in their indigenously medieval context.

28. Works such as Bonfil 1988 and Bonfil 1989 and Marcus 1982 and Marcus 1996 are forcing us to face the anger of medieval Jews.

29. See Dunlop 1994.

30. It is often tacitly assumed that animal symbolism must have migrated *from* Christian culture *into* Jewish culture. Of course, much of "Christian" animal symbolism originally emerges from the Hebrew Bible. It is, in fact, possible that even apparently indigenously Christian typologies, such as the moralizations of the Physiologus—the major source for the medieval bestiary—may have been influenced by ancient Jewish works, particularly works of the Alexandrian school, such as the *Alexander*, a pseudo-Philonic work that has survived only in an Armenian translation. Here, the nature and behavior of animals is moralized for the same Alexandrian Jewish audience for which Philo had allegorically interpreted biblical history. The ancient and indigenously Jewish tradition of natural allegory represented in this text was appropriated by Christians in the early centuries of the Common Era and never reclaimed by Jews, perhaps because it was perceived by them to have become "tainted" by christology. See Peters 1898, Wellmann 1930, and Pseudo-Philo–Terian 1988.

The same thing happened with the biblical hermeneutical strategy of *remez*, typological allegory, which essentially goes undercover in Jewish exegesis once it becomes the dominant mode of interpretation among Christians. The dynamic wherein Jews develop a particular interpretive strategy, then abandon it once it becomes too much associated with Christian thought, may help illuminate the parallel issue of the "borrowing" of symbols from Christian iconography in Jewish art.

There are fairly isolated (and very interesting) examples of medieval Jewish typological allegorical exegesis. For the example of Nahmanides, see Funkenstein 1993: 98–100.

31. See Cohen 1967.

32. One might note that a group of curses headed "Pour out your wrath upon the Nations" are also a part of the seder liturgy often written out or explained away in self-consciously modernizing reworkings of the Haggadah. See the Conclusion for a discussion of the polemic edge of the popular Hannukah hymn *Maoz Zur*.

Chapter 2. The Elusive Hare

1. See the description of the miniature; Narkiss 1970: 1:25, wherein no special notice is taken of the strangeness of the hare-hunt image.

2. Lev. 11:6: "The hare—although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is unclean for you"; Deut. 14:7: "But the following, which do not bring up the cud or have true hoofs which are cleft through, you may not eat: . . . the hare." In medieval literature, the hare becomes associated with and often synonymous with the *shafan*, daman, or hyrax, mentioned appositively in the verses cited, since the hyrax was unknown in Europe. Compare the modern Hebrew *shafan*, "rabbit" versus *arnevet*, "hare."

In the Septuagint, the hare is only mentioned obliquely as "the fleet-footed one." Talmudic legend has it that this was because Ptolemy Philadelphius, who ordered the translation, had a wife whose name sounded like λαγοσ, the Greek word for hare. The translators are reputed to have made the change because they were afraid that the king might say, "The Jews have mocked me by putting my wife's name as an unclean beast in the Pentateuch" (BT *Megillah* 9b; JT *Megillah* 1:11 [14b]).

3. This idea, of course, is subject to a variety of interpretations and limitations, but is formulated most broadly by R. Joshua b. Levi (JT *Peah* 2:1 [7a]), who declares that all rabbinic teaching, including ideas that scholars would later promulgate, were miraculously given to Moses on the mountain. Compare also BT *Berakhot* 5a.

4. One of the primary aims of the entire Book of Jubilees, for instance, is to furnish "proof" that the patriarchs observed the laws that were subsequently revealed to Moses. Jubilees 33:16 seems to be an exposition of this doctrine of the "gradual revelation" of the Law. "For ordinance and judgment and law had not been revealed till then as completed for everyone, but in your days it is like the law of appointed times and days, and an eternal law for everlasting generations" (trans. O. S. Wintermute, in Charlesworth 1985: 2:119).

While it is agreed that the patriarchs observed laws later given to Moses at Sinai, the questions of the number and type (ceremonial or ethical) of laws they observed is debated. The example of Abraham is instructive. Jubilees, of course, eagerly promulgates the idea of Abraham's observance of ritual laws such as that of tithing (13:25–27). Certain authoritative tannaim and amoraim view Abraham as having observed the ethical laws (for example, the Noachide Laws) with the addition of a single ritual commandment (circumcision). (Mishnah *Hullin* 7:7; Yoma 28b). Philo interprets Genesis 26:5 as referring more comprehensively to the laws of the Torah observed by Abraham. See Philo, *De Abrahamo*–Colson and Whitaker 1962: chap. 8, sect. 46 (6:26–27).

Later commentators interpret this verse as referring only to the ethical, but not to the ritual laws of the Torah. See RaMBaN–Chavel 1959: 149–51, Ibn Ezra–Vayzer 1976: ad loc., and Chajes 1836: 24–28b.

5. Cincinnati Haggadah: fol. 4r; Ashkenazi Haggadah fol. 4r. Cf. Metzger 1973: 98–103.

6. Prague, 1527; Augsburg, 1534; and Venice, 1609; see Yaari 1960: nos. 6, 9, and 35, respectively.

7. Müller and Schlosser were the first to note the conflation of the hare-hunt with this text (Müller and Schlosser 1898: 237). B. Italiener mentions the scene (*Darmstadter Pessah-Haggadah*. 1927–28, 1:39). Roth 1961: 65 follows his lead, as does Landsberger 1971: 143. Likewise, see Goldstein, D. 1985:11. Yerushalmi 1975: pls. 15–16 seems to be the first to note the possibility of a deeper symbolic/political message beyond this level of meaning.

8. There is a controversy in the Gemara over the specific order and combination of these liturgical elements (BT *Pesahim* 102b–107a). In utilizing the order YaKiNeHaZ, the haggadah follows the opinion of Rava.

9. Such is the theory, at least, of all the scholars mentioned in note 7.

10. The two other mnemonics in the haggadah are the Order of the Seder, and Rabbi Yehudah's mnemonic for the Ten Plagues. The Order of the Seder, traditionally recited at the beginning of the *haggadah*, is itself a mnemonic, and there were a variety of versions of the Order. The one currently used by both the Sefardic and Ashkenazic communities is *Kadesh U'rhaz*, composed by R. Samuel of Falaise (Sir Morel, Falaise c. 1250) in the thirteenth century. This and other examples are given in *Haggadah Shelemah*–Kasher 1967: 77–82.

R. Yehudah was a prominent tanna of the second century whose mnemonic for names of the Ten Plagues (D'Ts'Kh, A'D'Sh, B'A'H'B) is attested by a (late) aggadic tradition found in *Shemot Rabbah* 5:6 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977, 5:89), *Shemot Rabbah* 8:3, quoted in the name of R. Yehudah (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977, 5:121); *Midrash Tanhuma Va'era* 9 quoted in the name of R. Yehudah (*Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 98a); and *Midrash Tanhuma Tazriah* 8 quoted in the name of R. Yehudah bar Ami (*Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 205a).

It is quite possible that R. Yehudah did, in fact, originate this mnemonic, as his paramount pedagogic concern was to avoid errors in teaching; he states (Mishnah *Avot* 4:16), "an error in teaching amounts to intentional sin." He is known to have created other mnemonics with the express intention of promoting clarity and ease of memorization "lest one err" (Mishnah *Menahot* 11:4). This was an accepted practice, and the Talmud comments upon the didactic function of brevity and abbreviation: "A person should always teach his pupils in an abridged manner" (BT *Pesahim* 3b).

11. R. Simeon b. Pazi had interpreted the first verse of Psalms (1:1), "Happy is the person who has not . . . stood in the way of sinners" as referring to the person who refused to attend the contemporary gladiatorial contests between animals (BT *Hullin* 60b). RaShI's gloss on this is that it refers to "hunting with dogs for sport and entertainment." RaShI stands clearly within the mainstream of the medieval Jewish tradition of opprobrium regarding hunting. Yet, there is an instance where, in interpreting a statement in the Mishnah sanctioning the wearing of chains on Shabbat by animals accustomed to do so, RaShI interprets these animals as hunting dogs (RaShI on BT *Shabbat* 51b). R. Meir of Rothenberg (MaHaRaM, Worms, 1215–Ensisheim, Alsace, 1293) probably erroneously, perceives this as condoning the owning of such animals, and their use in hunting. He comments: "But I, the author, declare that whosoever hunts animals with dogs, as do the gentiles, will not be allowed to participate in the Feast of the Leviathan" (the eschatological Feast of the Righteous, which culminates in the ultimate hunt, that of the Leviathan by the Angel Gabriel) in MaHaRaM, *Shaare teshuvot*–Blokh 1967: no. 27). This sentiment is amplified by R. Isaac of Vienna (Bohemia, c. 1180–Vienna, c. 1250) in R. Isaac of Vienna, *Or Zaru'a* 1862: 2:17, fol. 37b.

In Spain, R. Joseph b. Meir HaLevi Ibn Migash (RI Migash, Seville, 1077–Lucena, 1141) states: "It is forbidden to eat of animals which have been hunted with a bow and an arrow, even if a Jew has slaughtered them according to halakhah" in Ri Migash *Sefer she'elot u-teshuvot* 1990: no. 206. It is unclear here whether the discussion involves a Jewish hunter or not. R. Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret (RaShBA, Barcelona, 1240–1305) is more lenient with regard to the issue of benefit from animals killed by hunting, and it is clear in this case that the discussion is of a Jewish hunter: "Hunters of beasts and of birds are forbidden to hunt non-kosher ones intentionally, but if they happen to [kill them by accident], they may sell them" (RaShBA *Sheelot u-teshuvot* 1957–59: 3:223). Maimonides, though he interprets the statement in BT Shabbat 51b similarly to RaShI (*Mishneh Torah, Sefer Zmanim, Hilkhot Shabbat* 10:22 [RaMBaM *Mishneh Torah*–Kafah 1980–84, 3:76]), condemns fowlers for causing wanton destruction of God's creation for no useful purpose. See references to hunting under *Zayid* in Lampronti 1961: *Ot Zaddik VeHelek M'Ot Kuf*: 21–22 and cross-references. The author provides citations for licit "hunting" of animals or insects which are threatening in some way.

Of course the fact that the *halakhic* sources assume a clearly disapproving stance with regard to hunting is no proof that medieval Jews did not hunt. Hunting dogs are often present in medieval Jewish miniatures, and accounts of Jews hunting occasionally crop up in the literature of the period. But such instances are few and far between. There are those who subscribe to the theory that proscriptive *halakhah* is, at the same time, descriptive of the realia it attempts to proscribe. Such historians might, in fact, see the injunctions against hunting as an argument for the occurrence, if not the prevalence of hunting among medieval Jews. I am indebted to Robert Stacey of the University of Washington, Seattle, for bringing to my attention a medieval plea roll account from England that tells of a party of Jews in procession to a wedding. They are mounted, with the bride at their head, and their dogs follow closely by. Suddenly, a deer starts out of the forest, and the Jews break away from the procession, net it, and, using a large knife, proceed to slaughter it "*in propria more suo*, —according to their custom." This is a strange account indeed, assuming it actually happened. The fact that the non-Jewish writer notes that a net was used, and that they slaughtered the deer in a way that, at least, seemed strange to him (we have no way of knowing if he actually knew exactly what Jewish "mores" were with regard to slaughter) may indicate that the Jews were hunting for food rather than for sport, but also that they seemed to enjoy the sport of it in any case. It forms a parallel with the account of the Jews of Colchester in England participating in the hunt of a doe, apparently after the dogs of the knights had flushed it into the city streets from the countryside, (Jacobs 1896: 226, Abrahams 1911: 376–77).

12. See Chazan 1987.

13. Jer. 5:26–27; Ps. 140:6; Isa. 24:17–18, among others. For rabbinic literature see note 11.

14. The connection of Esau, Edom, Rome, and Christendom is central to this study. In Gen., Esau is represented as the father of Edom, the nation from which Rome and, subsequently, Christianity emerged. The designation of Esau as Rome first appears in an aggadah of the period following the Bar Kokhba War (132–135 CE), in JT *Ta'anit* 4:8 [68b]; *Bereshit Rabbah* 63:7 and 65:21 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 3:14 and 3:52–53); *Midrash HaHefez*–Havatselet 1981: 188 (Gen. 25:23); *Midrash ha-gadol Bereshit*–Margoliyot 1947: 1: 436–37 (Gen. 25:23); *Tehillim*–Buber 1891: 80:4 (181b–182a), among other places. Following the Hadrianic persecutions it is extremely widespread in the sources, and in the Middle Ages, "Rome" takes on the specific meaning of "Christendom." Esau was ruddy, Edom means "red," and Christianity was bloodstained. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 63:8, (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 3:15); *Midrash ha-gadol Bereshit*–Margoliyot 1947: 1: 439–40 (Gen. 25:25) and RaShI–Chavel 1982: (Gen. 25:25). The issue of chosenness plays a part here, on an eschatological level. Jacob's election over the apparently favored Esau prophesies the ultimate election of the Jews over all the nations of the world (particularly over the Christians), even though it seems that the latter are now dominant (*Bereshit Rabbah* 66:4 [*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 3:58], among many others). See Cohen 1967.

15. *Torah Shlemah*–Kasher 1938: 4, nos. 137–41, 1095–96; on *Bereshit Rabbah* 66:5 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 3:59; *Midrash Abkir* Gen. 27:3 (as quoted in *Yalkut Shimoni*); and *Midrash ha-gadol Bereshit*–Margoliyot 1947: 1:467–68 (Gen. 27:3).

"Jacob" is first used in apposition to "Israel" to indicate the people of Israel in Genesis 49:7. The name is used thus throughout the Pentateuch and is especially common in the Prophets.

16. This is not surprising as most hunt scenes are used metaphorically. In general, the medieval world viewed the hunt in a number of metaphorical contexts. One such topos is that of the holy hunt, most common in the case of the hunt of the unicorn. See Shepard 1930: 41–69. The love-chase was another prevalent topos, for which see Thiebaux 1974. It is interesting to note that the "cerf amoreus" from which the book takes its title, mentioned by Thiebaux as originating in the text of an anonymous late thirteenth-century poem (p. 11), is, in fact, none other than the *ayelet ahuvim* of Proverbs 5:18, discussed below. Thus Jewish and Christian allegories of the same period ultimately depend on the same source for different purposes.

The metaphorical meanings of the hunt were mined by Jews, who did not produce illustrated hunting treatises or chronicles describing contemporary hunts. Thus, a scene of a Jewish bridal procession, from an Italian *mahzor* of the late fifteenth century (London, British Library MS Harley 5686, fol. 27v) for instance, includes a depiction of a man shooting a bird directly above the head of the bride. This is clearly a reference to the capture of a woman's virginity in love or marriage, an idea explicitly associated with bird-hunting in secular love and marriage poetry and art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Falconing in particular seems to have been associated with love. See Friedman 1989, which also discusses literature.

17. *She'eh Ne'esar*, a *seliha* for the Seventeenth of Tammuz, ascribed to Ibn Gabirol in Davidson 1964: no. 2008.

18. HaLevi *Kuzari*–Even Shmuel 1972: 110 (3:11).

19. HaLevi *Kuzari*–Even Shmuel 1972: 109–10 (3:11).

20. This is not mere resignation, but a reflection

of the understanding that the oppression of the nations is a much milder chastisement and purgative than are the fires of Gehenna. This sentiment is presented quite powerfully, in *Torah Shlemah*–Kasher 1938–: 4, nos. 137–41, 1095–96; on *Bereshit Rabbah* 66:5 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 3: 59). The text, in fact, uses Esau's hunt as a specific metaphor for the pursuit of Israel by the nations:

> Whenever Israel moves some distance away from the Holy One, Blessed be He, then Esau "comes in from his hunting" (Gen. 27:30), i.e., from his persecuting Israel. For thus did the Holy One Blessed be He instruct the Heavenly Court: "Whenever Israel sins, if it is yet meritorious, let it fall into Esau's hands . . . but if Israel has no further merit, it is to fall into Gehenna.

21. It also mentions the hare specifically. In describing the hunt as metaphor, Yehudah HaLevi uses the standard image of the pursuing lion as a symbol of the powerful, or of the enemies of Israel. On this topos, see Chapter 5. HaLevi's secondary images include the wolf as pursuer, the spider pursuing the fly, and little fishes pursued by big fishes. The symbols of the pursued are the hare and the doe.

Deer, both male and female, are symbolic of Israel. The word means both "deer" and "beauty," so it is understandable how, in cases such as the verse, "beautiful Israel" (2 Sam. 1:19), the words might be interpreted "the deer, Israel," and in verses relating to "the beautiful land" (for example, Dan. 11: 16) the words might be interpreted "the land of the deer." For examples of this sort of association, see *Midrash Tanhuma Re'eh* 8 (*Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 320a). The doe, *ayala* (more properly, gazelle), which is the word used by both HaLevi and the author of *Ayelet Ahuvim*, has similar associations with Israel, particularly in the Song of Songs.

22. Davidson 1964, no. 2960, a *yozer* for the second day of Shavuot, written as a double alphabetic acrostic by Simeon b. Isaac: "The loving doe (cf. Prov. 5:18), the gift of Sinai."

23. Darmstadt Maḥzor, fol. 150v; Leipzig Maḥzor, fol. 151r; Michael Maḥzor, fol. 99r; Tripartate Maḥzor, part 2, fol. 49r; Worms Maḥzor I, fol. 170v.

24. See above, note 22, and 2 Sam. 1:1. For a further example of a signifier that shifts between being a symbol of the Torah and a symbol of the people Israel, namely the elephant, see Chapter 3.

25. The image of the free and unfettered deer is used as an image of the soul in Ps. 42:2.

26. Predictably, the YaKiNeHaZ mnemonic is not illustrated with a hare-hunt in any Spanish manuscript of the Haggadah. A case in point is fol. 24v of the Barcelona Haggadah, where an entire page is devoted to the instructions for the case of Passover beginning on Shabbat and the word YaKiNeHaZ. The mnemonic is accompanied by a swirl of marginal illumination, from which hares are conspicuously absent.

27. Sarajevo, National Library, fols. 9v, 10r.

28. There are idyllic pastoral scenes in Jewish manuscripts in which hares populate landscapes. See the Darmstadt Maḥzor, fol. 126r and the Rothschild Miscellany, fols. 45v, 79v, 103r et passim. There are hares battling dragons, and serving as judges on an anthropomorphic tribunal, as in the Rothschild Miscellany, fols. 339v, 341r. There are also topsy-turvy hare-hunts in which hares pursue their hunters. These occur most notably in the Barcelona Haggadah, see especially fols. 25r, 31r. Also striking is the illustration of hares besieging a castle of wolves in the First Kennicott Bible, fol. 442v. All these occurrences, except the case of the hares as judges, which come to illustrate a specific narrative, have approximate or exact parallels in Christian manuscript illumination. For hares in landscape see, for example the Morgan *Livre de La Chasse*, fol. 15v) For a hare astride a dragon he has vanquished see fol. 58v of the *Speculum Beate Mariae Virginis*, North French, late thirteenth century, location at present unknown, formerly in the A. Chester Beatty Collection; see Millar 1927–30, 2:66ff., figs. 193–412. For hares vanquishing their foes, there are very numerous examples, including one in fol. 121v of the De Kievraing Hours, one in fol. 74 of the London Roll-Chronicle, and one on fol. 46 of a Franco-Flemish Book of Hours from the early fourteenth century in the Walters Gallery of Art.

29. In Christian manuscripts of the period, generic illustrations of "Esau the huntsman," or depictions of Isaac sending Esau out to hunt or receiving a bowl of cooked food from him after the hunt are common enough, but in these Esau is only rarely depicted with a hare. Scenes of Esau's actual hunt or his return with game slung over his shoulder are less common in Christian manuscripts. A survey of monuments in the Index of Christian Art reveals twenty-one images of Esau actively hunting or returning from the hunt with game, as opposed to nearly twice that many depicting Esau generically and without quarry as an armed hunter. As is the case with any investigation utilizing the Index, this survey is by no means exhaustive, but it is representative.

When Esau is shown hunting, or returning from the hunt, his quarry is usually a deer

Ashburnham Pentateuch, fol. 25r (Gebhardt 1883: pl. IX)
Arras Bible, fol. 4v
Morgan Old Testament Compendium, fol. 4r (Cockerell 1927: fol. 4r)
Oxford Moralized Bible, fol. 17v. (Laborde 1911–27: pl. 17)
Velislaus Miscellany, 14th century (Prague, University Library MS XXIII C. 124, fol. 28r [See Velislai Biblia (1970) pl. fol. 28r])
Rovigo Picture Bible, fol. 17r (Folena and Mellin 1962: pl. 33)
Fresco Decoration, late 14th century (Pistoia, Casa Tonini, Wall 2)
Saint Gall Weltchronik, fol. 21v (Escher 1935: fig. 32)
Zava Antiphonary, fol. 52v (*Ill. Mss. Oesterreich*, VI 1917: f. 17, p. 19])

Esau is also shown hunting birds

Monreale, Cathedral, 12th century: Cloister, S. Gallery, W. Capital 100. See Salvini 1964, illustration facing p. 302
Fresco Decoration (Palermo, Cappella Palatina, Nave Wall N, Zone 2)

In one instance, he shoots upward and off the page, presumably, but by no means definitely, at a bird

Zurich Weltchronik, fol. 37r bottom (Escher 1935: fig. 5)

By contrast, Esau is depicted as hunting a hare only twice in known Christian manuscript illuminations. The first example is in the earliest known illustrated Bible manuscript, the fifth–sixth-century Vienna Gen., fol. 8r. Here, Esau returns from hunt with a hare on his spear; see Wellesz 1960: pl. 4. The second is on fol. 14v of the Egerton Gen., a fourteenth-century, apparently English work. The text of the manuscript is from the *Historia Scholastica* (though that work does not specify what game Esau hunted) and its illustrations are so riddled with midrashic details and "Jewish" iconography (much of which is not attested to by the text) that it is not impossible that the artist received his information from some Jewish or, given the locale and the date, some judaizing source.)

Also worthy of comment, and perhaps worthy of further study is the illustration in an early printed Bible, the Cologne Bible of 1479. The woodcuts for this edition include certain midrashic details (the five animals at the vine of Noah, for which compare *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 21b. It is unclear whether the illustration of Esau's hunt depicts him hunting deer or hares. We see the hindquarters of a hare darting into a hole in the right foreground, and Esau hunts in a small copse where another pair of hindquarters is seen fleeing into the foliage. It is possible that the animal Esau hunts amid the trees is a deer. The manner in which he is armed (with his "quiver and bow," in accordance with Gen. 27:3) is more appropriate to a hare-hunt. A spear and net were more commonly used to hunt deer. This is evident if one examines contemporary hunting literature, particularly Gaston Phoebus's *Livre De La Chasse* (Gaston Phoebus 1854: 18:3, 174–75,) and hunt illustrations such as the December woodcut in the Book of Hours published by Thielman Kerver in Paris 1504. In both cases, deer hunters are depicted with swords and spears, rather than bows, which are generally used to hunt smaller game. Nonetheless, Esau is usually depicted with a bow, and he certainly uses it to hunt deer in the manuscripts cited above, so little may be concluded about Esau's quarry from his weapons. Whether the quarry in this case is hare or deer, the fact that the artist depicts neither animal in a clear and unambiguous manner, certainly seems to indicate that he may be straining between two traditions.

It is interesting to note that both the Egerton Gen. and the Cologne Bible are late medieval works that were heavily influenced by Jewish literature and midrashic convention. It is almost as if it takes a Jewish influence to introduce the hare, about which Christians would ordinarily never have given a second thought, into Christian art.

The Index yielded only two other appearances of Esau with a hare in a Christian setting, and these are in architectural decoration. These are both somewhat ambiguous. In the twelfth-century mosaics in Monreale Cathedral, Esau hunts birds (Kitzinger 1960: pl. 41), yet returns with hare, as he does in the Sarajevo Haggadah, discussed above. Likewise, in the frescos dating from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in the town of Torri in Sabina, in the church of S. Maria in Vescono (Nave Wall, Right, Zone 2), Esau is depicted hunting a hare with a bow. This fresco has suffered extensive damage, and the hare certainly seems to be some-

what retouched. In the adjacent frame, he returns to his father with the hare on pole. Isaac seems startled as his gaze rests directly upon the hare on the spear. It is possible that the original depiction was similar to the one at Monreale, showing Esau hunting birds or a deer, yet returning with a hare. This would account for Isaac's surprise being directed at Esau's quarry.

Walter Cahn describes the animal Esau bears at Corbeil as "venison," and though it is difficult to determine with any certainty, it may, in fact, be a hare; see Cahn 1973: fig. 5.

The survey of literature included Old French, Old English, and Catalan Bible versions. The Gothic versions of the Old Testament are fragmentary and do not include the passage in question. The major paraphrases of the Bible, namely Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, Guyart DesMoulins's *Bible Historiale*, and Vincent DeBeauvais's *Speculum Historiale*, which often include midrashic details or paraphrases of material heard from or read in the books of Jews, do not mention the hare. Manuscripts of the Moralized Bible show Esau returning from the hunt with a deer (cf. the Parisian example mentioned above), and the moralization is strictly an internalized Christian one relating to the clergy.

A further problem when discussing Esau with relation to any of these texts is that Jews and Christians had directly opposing views of who Jacob and Esau represented typologically. For medieval Christians, Esau was typologically equated with the Jews and Jacob with the Christians. This idea has its origins in the Letters of Paul (particularly Rom. 9:4–16, and Heb. 12:16–17). Important medieval Christian allegorical commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures, such as Pseudo-Hugh of Saint Victor's *Allegoriae in Vetus Testamentum* 2:11 (Pseudo-Hugh *Allegoriae*–Migne 1850, 175:619) and Isidore of Seville's *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum* 23 (Isidore *Quaestiones*–Migne 1850, 83:255–58) concentrate on the question of chosenness, cast in the light of the standard theological/typological question of who represents "verus Israel." The fact that Esau, formerly favored, was rejected in favor of Jacob, seemed for Christians to parallel the rejection of the Old Law, and the people of the Old Law in favor of the New Law and those faithful to it. For the Jewish understanding of this issue via genealogy, see note 14.

30. Nonetheless, one should be careful not to assume that every appearance of a hare ought to be accorded deep symbolic significance. On occasion, hares will appear as decorative elements in a naturalistic landscape. This is particularly common in Hebrew manuscripts of the Italian Renaissance. Here, the motif is clearly influenced by illustrations in non-Jewish books such as the many manuscripts of Gaston Phoebus's *Livre de La Chasse*, and perhaps by copybooks of animal figures designed for illuminators. Hares as the specific victims of hunts have been the subject of art since ancient times, and they appear frequently in medieval Jewish manuscripts, though only in the contexts discussed herein. The hare as a symbol can be polyvalent even within this context: There is an example of a hare in the fifteenth-century *Ashkenazi Haggadah* of Joel b. Simeon (fol. 10v). This hare, which is composed of micrographic Hebrew letters, appears to be on a chain with a hook, and is sitting directly on the only line of text of the haggadah that mentions Esau, and the only line that mentions Jacob and Esau together! But the commentary encompassed within the body of the hare discusses the extraordinary fertility of the Israelites in Egypt, so one must reserve any pronouncement on the artist's intention.

31. *Bereshit Rabbah* 65:13 *Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 3:43); *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 46a (*Toldot* 8). *Midrash Abkir* Gen. 27:3 (as quoted in *Yalkut Shimoni*–Haiman 1973–91: Gen. 27:3) states:

> The Hebrew word for venison (ZeYDaH) consists of (the consonants) Z, Y, D, and a redundant letter H. Isaac was saying to Esau: "Bring me either birds (Zipporim,) one of the ten (Y = 10) varieties of clean animal [cf. Deut. 14:4–5], or fish (Dagim) . Further more, avoid the five (H = 5) acts which render ritual slaughter invalid: do not pause while cutting, press on the knife, burrow into the throat, cut the throat organs too high up, or tear them."

32. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 65:16 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977, 3:46), where R. Simeon b. Gamaliel compares Esau's filial piety to his own, and finds Esau's devotion to his father "a hundred times greater"; see also *Sefer Hasidim*–Margoliyot 1957: 341, among many others, particularly *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46, 1:146b. This interpretation may derive from the fact that Esau's response to Isaac's summons in Gen. 27:1 ("Here I am") parallels exactly Abraham's response to God's summons in Gen. 22:1, the ultimate model of acquiescence to paternal will, in this case the will of God. Esau holds his father in esteem similar to that in which Abraham held God. According to the sources mentioned above, it is, in fact, Esau's reward for his filial piety that his children will acquire dominion over the entire world.

33. *Bereshit Rabbah* 67:2 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977, 3:61), in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi.

34. *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 47a (*Toldot* 11).

35. See *Midrash ha-gadol*–Schechter 1902: 1:431, quoting *Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 32, in a version not present in printed editions.

36. Not later than the seventh–eighth centuries C.E., though much material is earlier.

37. Gen. 27:31 and 33. See *Targum Yerushalmi* I [Pseudo-Jonathan]. (Neophyti–Diez Macho 1968: 1:169–71). Compare *Bereshit Rabbah* 67:2 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977, 3:61); *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 47a (*Toldot* 11); *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46, 1:144a; and Recanati 1840–41: 28b, who discusses the dog as a symbol of the evil powers of the *sitra ahra* in relation to Ps. 22:21.

38. Hadassi 1836: 133a (Alphabet 62).

39. Hadassi's presentation of an authentic rabbinic *aggadah* in order to expose its patent absurdity anticipates similar tactics in Christian anti-Jewish polemics in the wake of the dissemination of the *Pugio Fidei* of Raymundus Martinus, c. 1280. (cf. Marti 1687). On this climate in general, see Funkenstein 1972. On specific forgeries, see the classic Baer 1942 and Lieberman 1939.

It should be noted that although the Karaites claimed to avoid all but a strictly literal interpretation of Scripture, *Eshkol HaKofer* is full of not-strictly-textual interpretations, and even contains several "midrashim" of sorts woven into the retelling of the biblical narratives. Ginzberg 1909, for example, quotes *Eshkol HaKofer* as a midrashic source no less than fifteen times. For midrashic and folkloric motifs in the work see also Scheiber 1948.

40. Many of the passages quoted by Christian authorities for the purpose of polemicizing against alleged midrashic absurdities contain minor but significant interpolations. And some of these interpolations—usually the less flagrantly christological of them—are, in fact, testified to in variant readings. A survey of surviving manuscripts of the *Targum Yerushalmi I* to determine if a variant reading including hares exists is still a desideratum.

41. To paraphrase W. S. Gilbert's Pooh-Bah in act 2 of *The Mikado* (1885).

42. In HaLevi's extended hunting allegory, the doe, the classical symbol of Israel is mentioned only once, and quickly drops out of the discussion, so that wherever a pursued animal is again mentioned, it is specifically the hare. There is an interesting iconographic instance of the hare being used as a "shorthand" symbol for the Jewish people. In the appearances of the *yozer Adon Imnani* in important illuminated *maḥzorim*, one often finds a full-scale illustration of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Moses is depicted, often with Joshua and the elders, and the Israelites are shown at the foot of Mount Sinai. In some cases, the margins of these compositions are filled with dragons that break through the marginal space to impinge upon the narrative space of the illumination, and seem to be "threatening" the Israelites; cf. Laud Maḥzor fol. 127v; Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor, fol. 202v. In the Darmstadt Maḥzor, fol. 126r, the entire illustration is much simplified: Moses alone appears with the tablets. Rather than depicting all the Israelites being threatened by many dragons, a single dragon attacks a single hare. Here, the hare represents the Israelites in a "symbolic shorthand."

43. While it is widely acknowledged that medieval Jewish illuminations are often dependent upon contemporary realia for their artistic style, and for the architecture, clothing, and settings that appear in them (Horowitz 1986a) their narrative iconography is generally regarded as being firmly based in midrashic traditions, traceable or lost. One is understandably reticent to link meaning in symbolic or narrative iconography with contemporary realia; implying that an iconographic detail is, in essence, a contemporary "midrash" on historical realities is often difficult to prove definitively. Yet there are cases like this one, in which a lack of midrashic justification for an extremely pervasive motif underscores its strangeness, and perhaps its importance, and for which there are supporting materials that seem to point to a more current significance. In such cases, short of imagining a "lost tradition of exegesis" to obviate the problem, the only way to truly explore such ideas may be along the treacherous path of the interplay between contemporary events and iconography. The resultant reconstruction of the commentary/critique/exegesis implicit in the iconography will never appear particularly dramatic or openly subversive. To present completely radical rereadings seems a farfetched and self-indulgent glazing-over of the medieval stratum with modern (mis)conceptions of what that stratum is all about. If one proposes to reconstruct mentalités of which medieval people have only left evidence by context and by association, it is necessary that the reconstruction be presented in traditional terms, at the same time serving to move the midrash beyond itself and into the realm of historical realia in a convincing and unforced manner.

44. The bestiarists deemed the hare's sex to be ambiguous, and its mode of reproduction is strange. They included the hare in a group of several beasts that they asserted had been declared unclean in the Mosaic law because of their alleged sexual deviance. This group also includes the hyena and the

weasel. The "sexual hypocrisy" of the hare became a cipher for the alleged sexual immorality of homosexuals. The sexual deviance of other animals in the group, most notably the hyena, was connected with the "moral hypocrisy" of the Jews. Boswell 1980: 137–43, clarifies the link among these animals, homosexuals, and Jews by pointing out an interesting passage on the hyena from the Morgan Bestiary, fol. 4: "Although Jews and gay people were often tacitly linked in later medieval law and literature as nonconformists threatening the social order, such explicit comparisons [as the one made in the bestiary] were relatively rare."

Since the alleged hypocrisy of Jews and homosexuals was conflated by the bestiarists, one wonders whether, in the popular conception at least, the hare as a Christian symbol for the immorality of homosexuals might have been taken as applying to the immorality of the Jews as well; see Boswell 1989.

The association of hares with homosexuality is not unknown in late medieval kabbalah. An example of a clear adoption from a Christian context; Eleazar b. Moses Azikri (1533–1600) wrote that one who is involved in homosexual relations is reincarnated as a hare (Azikri 1836: 141).

45. Hadassi 1836: 24b (Alphabet 44) compares the Rabbanites to *shafanim* (variously translatable as damans, hyraxes, badgers, conies, or rabbits) in a negative manner. He depicts them as a confused rabble with mixed and bastardized customs, food for the noble Karaite lions, who desire that God deliver them into their hands. This passage appears among a group of animals whose traits appear as symbols of the habits, mores and legal approach of Rabbanite Jew:

> The *shafan* is a folk without strength. (Prov. 30:26).
>
> O white hares and red, each different from the other in appearance, in custom, and in variegated color of skin—"the lions (the Karaites) roar for prey, seeking their food from God" (Ps. 104:21)—to feed upon you!

46. A classic investigation of the hare as transformative symbol in world folklore is the second part of Layard 1944.

The hare's quick and clever mien makes him particularly pervasive in scenes of anthropomorphic topsy-turvyism, and the subject of far more marginal hunt-reversal illustrations than any other animal. Among numerous examples, see the hares capturing a dog, bringing him before an ape-judge, and carting him away to the gallows in the Smithfield Decretals, fols. 62v–64r. There are hares shooting dogs and carrying them away on a stick between their shoulders on fol. 161v of the Gorelston Psalter. A hare hunts a dog in the Pontifical of Reynaud de Bar, fol. 35v; a hare hunts a lion with a spear in the Breviary of Marguerite de Bar, fol. 283. Finally, a hare with a crossbow, is about to shoot a man who has fled into a tree, on fol. 81v of the Bruges *Romance of Alexander*. Some Jewish parallels are to be found in Metzger and Metzger 1982: 211–12.

47. Jacob deceives his brother in Genesis 25: 29–34 and in Genesis 27:5–30. In the latter instance, Esau exclaims: "Was he, then, named Jacob (*Ya'akov*) that he might supplant me (*y'akveyni*) these two times? First he took away my birthright, (*bekhorah*) and now he has taken away my blessing! (*berakhah*)." The theme of switched identities pervades even the language here. The former case is that of Esau's birthright (*bekhorah*), the latter is that of his blessing (*berakhah*) from Isaac. The fact that these two words are identical, but that their identities have been changed with a switch of two letters is noted in the *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–56, 1:145a, which provides analogous examples.

48. *Bereshit Rabbah* 67:4 (*Midrash Rabbah* – Mirkin, 3:63)

49. Cf. *Esther Rabbah* 1887: 3a; 13b (1:1; 8:3), based on the inaccurate historical information in Dan. 9:1, where several Dariuses are conflated.

50. See also *Vayikrah Rabbah* 13:5 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin, 7:146).

51. Yehudah HaLevi had called for the acceptance of persecution as divinely ordained because of the sins of the nation, coupled with the assertion of a positive self-image and a faith in the ultimate reversal of the contemporary atmosphere of oppression and hatred. In a manner parallel to and presaging the way in which reality would be turned upside down in the ultimate messianic redemption, the medieval Jewish sources we are examining reversed the meaning of this negative image of the hare and turned it not only into a positive symbol, but into a new and indigenously medieval one, responding to the historical circumstances of the era. The introduction of a new symbol, a seemingly radical move, was accomplished very much within a traditional Jewish view of the world and of the Jewish relationship to the oppression of non-Jews: By choosing the hare, which recalls the deceptions of Jacob, and specifically the ways in which he attempted to elude his brother the hunter, it also includes the classic critique of Jewish sinfulness—articulated in the Musaf Amidah of the Festival Liturgy—"because of our sins, we were exiled from our land." What is radical here is not the fact that a new symbol was introduced, but how it was introduced. This is an example of some medieval Jews acting to claim for themselves a seemingly relevant symbol even though it is one that seems inappropriate in a Jewish context, and had, in fact, been used against them.

This represents a proto-messianic redemption of an unclean animal: these Jews are, in essence, consciously paralleling the actions of God, as it were, who will "restore" the pig to Israel in the future. This parallel is a particularly apt one, for the idea of the "restoration" of the pig had a sociopolitical context as well. The Roman kingdom was called *hazir*, possibly because the symbol of the Roman legion in Erez Israel was the boar (*Avot de-Rabi Natan*–Schechter 1945: 50b). The midrash asks: "Why is Rome called *hazir*?—Because it will eventually restore (*mahazeret*) the 'crown' [the kingdom] to its [rightful] owners" (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1887:4b [1:9]; *Vayikrah Rabbah* 13:5 [*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin, 7:149]). This statement was commonly interpreted to refer to the "restoration of the pig to Israel"; that is, in messianic times, pork would be permitted to Jews. (But see R. Bahya on Lev. 11:8, where he asserts that this is a "general misprision" [Bahya 1984: 2:458].) In its original context it speaks to the very same topsy-turvy reversal of dominant and subjugate roles being played out in the case of the hare; see Recanati 1840–41: 49b. Also relevant is the interpretation presented in *Midrash Tehillim* 146:4 of the verse, "The LORD releases the bound" [or "permits the forbidden"] (Ps. 146:4) [*Tehillim*–Buber 1891: 268a, esp. n. 4.])

But medieval Jews have justification for effecting a proto-messianic redemption of an unclean animal. Such a transformation is suggested in the philosophical framework of "redemption through suffering." Recall that Yehudah HaLevi argues that the Jews are punished by persecution because of their sins. Yet it is their acceptance of their role as the victims of the hunt—their understanding that their fate is to be chased (exiled) and subjugated (persecuted) as punishment for their sins—that will cleanse them from those very sins. In the same manner, the hare, though unclean, is transformed by the process of its becoming the victim of the hunt into an appropriate symbol for Israel.

52. Inversion is a standard technique in fabular lore, and in the case of fables, which already utilize inversion, an author's role may consist of selecting from a range of possible extant treatments of a fable a version that best suits his moral. In some cases, there are several possible fables with a similar moral, and an author may choose to select one that already utilizes inversion, rather than recasting a fable de novo. See Odo-Jacobs 1985: 1–63. A similar motif in literature is dealt with quite interestingly in Gutwirth 1981, which focuses on a poem of Solomon Bonafed, written in Spain in the fifteenth century, thus roughly contemporary with the manuscript in question.

53. See Randall 1966 and Camille 1992 for the best discussion of the proverbial and social-satirical meanings of these motifs. The motif of the anthropomorphic hare enjoyed considerable longevity; cf. Tenniel's illustrations of the White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865).

54. Particularly vivid illustrations of this are to be found in the series of virtues and vices sculpted and depicted in sculpture and stained glass in the various French cathedrals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as well as in manuscript illumination. At Notre Dame in Paris, Cowardice is thus represented in both in stone on a porch and in a rose window illustrated in Mâle 1913: 121, fig. 65. A charming manuscript example may be found on fol. 184 of the Psalter of Gui de Dampierre. Another is in a Book of Hours, Therouanne use, illustrated in Mâle 1913: 123, fig. 67.

55. Barcelona Haggadah, fol. 30v.

56. The demonic hunter represents the "secular" (temporal) aspect of the oppression of Israel. He has the air and presence of a court official, and the fact that he is serving wine may identify him as a chamberlain or a steward. The barking dog, along with the many other barking dogs in this manuscript, may refer to "sacred" (clerical) oppression, specifically that of the Dominicans (*domini canes*, "hounds of the Lord") who included many Spaniards among their ranks, many of whom were authors of anti-Jewish tracts and sermons during the fifteenth century. (The most explicit depiction of the Dominicans as dogs is to be found in the Florentine fresco dated around 1355 in the Church of S. Maria Novella [Spanish Chapel, south wall right, zone 3.] There the image is an "Allegory of the Church Militant and Triumphant" in which spotted [brown and white?] dogs attack foxes or wolves that carry away lambs as above Saint Dominic debates with and converts Jews and heretics.)

One should not think that these sorts of formulations were beyond the artist of the manuscript. Once one begins to consider the marginal illustrations in relation to text and context, it becomes evident that while there is no doubt that many of the marginal illustrations have only purely decorative significance, the artist seems to have been concerned in many cases with making the illustrations correspond in some measure to the text. On folio 51r, for example, there is what one might take to be ex-

tremely generalized and conventional marginal decoration around the text describing the Ten Plagues. Yet one can clearly pick out a small green frog directly above the word "Frogs" in the text. This sort of correspondence provides the basis for the assumption that depictions such as the ones chosen above, even when isolated within a lively and complex assortment of images on a given page or in a given margin, may, indeed bear the significance imputed to it here.

57. See Breier, Eisler, and Grunwald 1934: 51ff.

58. The eagle is no longer the single-headed Polish symbol, but the crowned, double-headed eagle of the Hapsburgs. On the history and significance of the eagle as a political emblem, see Boreau 1985. Boreau mentions the Austrian Imperial eagle only in passing, as his chapter on the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries is primarily concerned with eagles in emblem books. However, the Austrian eagle is included in his chart of "Eagles as National Symbols in the Contemporary World (After 1800)," and the Hapsburg eagle is illustrated on p. 111.

59. Her hatred for the Jews found frequent expression in expulsions, attempted and realized. In 1777, she declared, "There is no plague worse for the state than this nation, because of its deceitfulness, its usury" (EJ 11:991). She despised Poland in general, regarding it as "nowhere" (Boreau 1985: 7).

60. See for example the medal in honor of her revocation of the edict expelling the Jews of Prague, struck by the Dutch Jews in 1745 (New York: Jewish Museum, and see EJ 11:991). A magnificent megillah, now in the collection of Yeshiva University Museum contains her portrait (see Sotheby's Sale 5462, lot 189, illustrated). The portrait of the empress appears three times, twice near verses associated with Vashti, and once above the gallows Haman is building at the suggestion of his wife Zeresh. Of course, Esther is also mentioned in the megillah. As in the case of the eagle, the interpretation could vary depending upon the audience.

61. One is reminded of Ezekiel Landau's famous eulogy for the Empress Maria Theresa, printed in Prague in 1780; see Saperstein 1987. I tend to view this eulogy (and all other expressions of public praise for known anti-Jewish figures) with a great deal more suspicion of covert subtext than does Saperstein; see the Conclusion.

62. In the case of the eagle at Hodorov the artist has nowhere explicitly stated his intention. Huberman 1979: 56, takes the inscription literally, in direct contradiction to Breier, Eisler, and Grunwald 1934: 58, asserting that the eagle represents "a higher power" who is actually lifting up and protecting the Jews. This is certainly the *pshat*, if we translate *pshat* as the "simple" or "apparent" meaning. But *pshat* is more accurately the "contextual" meaning, and all contextual evidence seems to militate against this reading. Here, it is, in fact, necessary to read beyond the level of *pshat*, and even beyond the merely symbolic level, the level of *remez*, to the level of allegory, the level of *drash*. All the layers of text, both explicit and implied, must be examined together with all the layers of iconography. Only then may it be possible to glimpse something of the intention of the artist. And only then does the important political message of hope and of protest so manifest in his consciousness and in the consciousness of his audience, but necessarily veiled in symbols from the animal world, become perceptible.

63. *Sefer Hasidim*–Margoliyot 1957: 341; and particularly *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46: 1:146b. See note 14.

Chapter 3. The Elephant and the Law

1. Heckscher 1947: 155.

2. Davidovich 1968: pl. 11, 16.

3. The elephant is not native to the land of Israel or its environs, and so is never mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Ivory, which was imported from the East, and used in thrones and precious furniture, does appear (1 Kings 10:22; 2 Chron. 9:21; 1 Kings 10:18, 10:22; Song of Songs 5:14, 7:5; Amos 3:15, 6:4; 2 Chron. 9:17; Ps. 45:9; Ezek. 27:6, 27:15). Even when Job wishes to describe the most awesome of beasts, he chooses the *behemot* (the hippopotamus) as the paradigm of strength and destructive possibility (Job 40:15ff). Elsewhere, the lion and the *re'em* (possibly the wild ox, or unicorn) appear as the most powerful of beasts. The first appearance of elephants in Jewish literature is in the Hellenistic period: the Books of Maccabees describe the use of elephants against the Hasmonean guerillas by the Syrian-Greek armies. Their frightening view of the animal (see 1 Macc. 6:43, 3 Macc., 5–6, passim) stands in contrast to its treatment by the ancient natural historians, who chronicled its habits and proclivities with awed appreciation (see "Elephant" in the index to Aelian *De Animalibus*–Scholfield 1972, 3: 410–11, and see Pliny *Historia Naturalis*–Rackham 1983: 3:2–29). The Talmud also mentions elephants, mostly in the context of the comparative description of extremes of size, or of absurd or extraordinary situations. Though reference is made to the "wonderful" nature of the elephant, it is generally accounted a domesticable wild beast, a beast of burden: see *Mishnah Kilayim* 8:6; BT *Bava Batra* 22a; *Bekhorot* 8a; *Berakhot* 55b, end, 56b–57a, 57b, 58b; *'Eruvin* 31b; *Kiddushin* 25b-26a; *Me'ilah* 21a; *Menahot* 69a; *Shabbat* 77b, 23a. By the Middle Ages, with the elephant's introduction as a curious gift for Western emperors from Eastern potentates, the monstrous and destructive beast of the Books of Maccabees is largely forgotten.

4. Fol. 238.

5. Fol. 151r.

6. Gutmann 1978: 77; Narkiss 1969: 29, 31, 104.

7. This translation is according to White 1954: 24–28, White's version of the thirteenth-century Cambridge Bestiary. It is very similar to the text of the Harley Bestiary quoted with emendations according to other Latin texts in Druce 1919: 5–7. This excerpt contains the material that is directly related to the texts on elephants in the medieval Jewish tradition. It is the subject of extensive discussion in Druce 1919 and Hecksher 1947: 165. However, it is by no means the primary segment in the bestiary's narrative. The complete text presents the story of the elephant as an allegory of the fall and redemption of mankind. It begins by describing the elephant as the model of chastity. A male and female elephant (Adam and Eve) require the fruit of the mandrake (identified as the Tree of Knowledge) to arouse their sexual desire. This segment was less "useful" to Jewish expositors of the text, as its central theme was original sin, an indigenously Christian theological concept.

8. On the history of the idea that the elephant has no joints in its knees, see Druce 1919: 28–29; *Physiologus*–Sbordone 1936: cap. 43; Lauchert 1889: 34–35; 271–73.

9. The primary part of the bestiary's account is based on the account of the *Physiologus*, written in Alexandria between the second and fourth century. For the debate over authorship, place of origin, and date of that work, see *Physiologus*–Curley 1979: x–xxi. For the elephant tale as it appears in the Greek *Physiologus*, see Sbordone: cap. 43. For the Latin version see the translation of F. Carmody's recensions of the b and y versions in *Physiologus*–Curley 1979: 29–32. The considerable elaborations on the fate of the fallen elephant originate in the Middle Ages.

10. *Eshkol HaKofer* is a thinly disguised polemic throughout. Even its title, a paraphrase of Song of Songs 1:14, has a dual meaning. In its original context it means "a spray of henna blooms," but here it can read "I will weigh out (in judgment) the heretic."

There has been relatively little scholarship on this work. Leon Nemoy asserts that the best general essay on Hadassi is that of Solomon L. Skoss, in the German *Encyclopedia Judaica* 7 (1931): cols. 773–78. It seems to have been an unrealized dream of Nemoy's to produce an edition and translation. In 1971, he wrote an introduction to a facsimile edition of the Eupatoria 1836 printing of *Eshkol Ha-Kofer* whose meaning he admits (with humbling forthrightness), "requires a sustained effort on the part of the reader to comprehend" (Nemoy 1971: i). Like Skoss, Nemoy's introduction to the facsimile describes the form of the work, its difficulty, and the fact that it was censored by Christian authorities. Nemoy touches very broadly upon the polemic thrust of the work. But aside from an analysis of the anti-Christian polemics in the censored alphabets (Bacher 1896; Scheiber 1941), no one has attempted a serious study of the work's anti-Rabbanite polemics. Avraham Grossman of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem graciously assisted me in an analysis of the possible polemic content of the alphabets in which animals appear. It was his opinion that while these alphabets represent a sort of Karaite cosmology, they do so in a way in which the elements of the universe they describe are often enlisted in the service of barbed and bitter comments on Rabbanite mores.

11. It is Fable 107 in Berechiah, *Mishlei Shu'alim*–Haberman 1946: 118–20. For a revised translation, see appendix to this chapter. Schwartzbaum 1979: 519 has pointed out the affinities of this story with that of the "Brave Little Tailor" or "Seven at One Blow." In this tale, the timid introvert is accounted a hero due to accidents that turn a situation to his advantage or coincidences that make it appear as if he is extraordinarily brave; cf. Thompson 1932–36: motif B 557.11.2. This fable certainly contains elements that provide very general parallels with the motif Schwartzbaum mentions, but the similarities end there. For such an apparently straightforward narrative, "The Elephant and the Man of the Field" contains a glaringly inconsistent moral. This makes it considerably more ambiguous than the story of the "Brave Little Tailor."

12. The unsuccessful attempts to raise the elephant are also presented as a typological analogy to one of the parables of Jesus, that of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30–37). The big elephant, Law personified, is paralleled by the Pharisee in Jesus' story. The twelve elephants, who band together to attempt to aid the fallen, are the Prophets—the moral voice outside the Law, yet bound to it. In the parable, they correspond, appropriately, to the Levite. The Most Insignificant of Elephants represents

the outcast in Jesus' parable, the Samaritan, or the "stone that the builders rejected" that "has become the chief cornerstone" (Ps. 118:22). Since the Jews have rejected the Messiah, it is only through the gentiles that salvation will flourish. The Most Insignificant of Elephants represents another "outsider": Jesus himself, born "poor and in a manger," the Most Insignificant of the Jews.

13. See Scheiber 1948. It is possible that Hadassi was familiar with Muslim sources as well, but this is beyond the scope of the present investigation.

14. The word "polemic" is somewhat misleading. The work is clearly anti-Rabbanite, but it was created for a Karaite audience, and as such is not a public polemic. The arguments can be rather subtle, and the guiding principal seems to have been "those attuned to the subtext will understand." Nonetheless, the symbols used herein would have had to be comprehensible to both Rabbanites and Karaites.

15. The Karaite forms are the bending of the head, the bending of the upper part of the body until it touches the knees, kneeling, a violent bowing of the head, complete prostration (proskynesis), the raising of the hands, standing, raising up the eyes to heaven. See Bashyazi 1870: 104b, and compare Deinard 1878: 86. In post-Talmudic times, the Rabbanite liturgy prescribed sudden and complete prostration only in the *avodah* of Yom Kippur (three times), and once each in the *aleinu* prayer of *mussaf* on both Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. The vestiges of the more demonstrative acts of physical adoration that were performed at the time of the Temple survive in the daily of *tahanun*, (which now consists merely of resting the head upon the arm), the nominal bending of the knees during the Amidah and *aleinu* prayers, and the benedictory raising of the hands by the priests during *birkat kohanim*.

16. See Bashyazi 1870: 104b.

17. Along with the peacocks and apes of 1 Kings 10:22. It seems that the bestiarists' placement of the elephant among water animals was on the basis of some transmitted observation. It is an empirically true fact of nature that elephants are almost completely amphibious. Pliny alleges that elephants "link themselves four or five together into a sort of raft, and holding up their heads to serve as sails, are carried on the waves" (Pliny *Historia Naturalis*–Rackham 1983: 3:29 [chap. 8, sec. 13]). For Hadassi, the conclusion that elephants are amphibious seems to have come from a misreading of the text in 1 Kings 10:22. The elephants (or ivory) like the apes and peacocks, did come from the sea; that is, they came in boats from Tarshish. Hadassi extends this to mean that they were sea-creatures. Whether Hadassi read the text to coincide with the bestiary's description, or whether this is an error, or a deliberate (and total) misunderstanding of elephants, peacocks, and apes is difficult to determine.

18. It may represent a number of other things, including the wicked Kingdom of Edom, and Gehenna; see *Tehillim*–Buber 1891: 223a–224a on Ps. 104:20–23.

19. See, for ecample, BT *Baba Kamma* 17a: "And water symbolizes nothing as much as Torah" *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:3 (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1887: 6a): "The Torah is allegorically compared to water." BT *Ta'anit* 7a: "Just as water leaves a lofty place and goes to a lower place, so do words of Torah." *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 336a (*Ki Tavo* 3): "Just as water is essential for the existence of the world, and just as a person purifies himself in it, and just as a person could not plant a tree or build a house without it, just as it is not found in pipes of silver or gold, but of pottery, so is the Torah." *Sifrei*–Finkelstein 1939: 107–114 (*Eikev* 48): "Just as water is always free, so are words of Torah." *Eliyahu Rabbah*–Ish-Shalom 1902: 105 (cap. 18): "Just as water gives life to all the inhabitants of the earth, so do words of Torah. Just as it is with water—the foundation of the world is water, if there was no water, the world would not be able to exist, so it is with Israel and the Torah." *Tehillim*–Buber: 223b: "'There is the sea, vast and wide' (Psalm 104:25)—This is Torah." *Bahir*–Margoliyot 1951: 4 (para. 3): "The word sea always points to the Torah, as it is said, "Its measure . . . is broader than the sea" (Job 11:9). Of course, the reason that water or the sea is taken as a symbol of Torah may be similar to the reason the world is compared to a sea—for the "diversity of things that in [it] are gathered'; cf. the statement of Ben Bag Bag in Mishnah *Avot* 5:22: "Turn it over and over, for everything is contained within it."

The popular phrase used to describe the depth and breadth of Talmudic literature—*yam haTalmud*—the sea of the Talmud, may owe its origin to symbolic formulations such as these.

20. The origin of this symbolic equation, is of course, the verse in Proverbs 3:18: "She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds on to her is happy." In the original context, the subject is Wisdom, but it is obviously equated with Torah, and this equation is made explicit in the midrashic statement "The Tree of Life is the Torah," found, among other places in *Vayikrah Rabbah* 35:6 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977, 8:182) and *Eliyahu Rabbah*–Ish-Shalom 1902: 3 (cap. 1). This symbolism is further developed in the thirteenth century, in the Zohar (*Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46: 1:193a), and becomes a major aspect of kabbalistic symbolism, wherein both the Godhead and the Torah are visualized in treelike forms. Also in the thirteenth century, Moses De Leon, the redactor of the *Zohar*, writes in his *Sefer HaRimmon*:

> For the Torah is called the Tree of Life. . . . Just as a tree consists of branches and leaves, bark, sap and roots, each one of the components can be termed tree, there being no substantial difference between them, you will also find the Torah contains many outward and inward things, and all form a single Torah and a tree, without any difference between them. . . . And although among the sages of the Talmud, one forbids what the other allows, one declares a thing to be ritually clean which another terms impermissible, one says this and another that, nevertheless, it is necessary to know that the whole is one unity. (DeLeon 1987: 131, newly translated for this study; see also 89, 92)

21. Water and earth represent elemental polarities. If one were to mix water and earth, depending on the consistency of the earth, one would either create mud, a slippery and unpleasant material, or a mixture in which the silt would eventually settle out of the water. To the Karaite mind, in the same way, if one were to attempt to mix the Written and Oral Law, the result would be a repugnant quagmire, or a settling out of incompatible elements. For Karaites, the true Written and the false Oral Law exist in a total elemental polarity. Hadassi appropriates the Rabbanite metaphor of the tree representing the Torah as an opportunity to use the Oral Law against the Rabbanites. In the case of trees the primary means of unifying diverse species is through grafting. Thus, the Rabbanites have grafted the Oral Law onto the Written Law. The product may appear as a coherent and viable *davar hadash (res novum)* but the technique of grafting is, in fact, prohibited by Rabbinic Law itself (BT *Kiddushin* 39a, Mishnah *Kilayim* 1:7).

22. The word used—*l'hishae'n*—is a synonym for *lismokh*; both mean to lean on in both a literal and in an exegetical sense.

23. The word *appam* is a double entendre. It means both "their noses" and "their anger."

24. Cf. Deuteronomy 16:17, where slaves have their ears pierced; see Levenson 1993.

25. For the saddled elephant, see BT *Berakhot* 56b end and 57b, where a dream of a saddled elephant is interpreted negatively. This is very perplexing, in that it is unclear why a saddled elephant should be a worse sign than an unsaddled one. In fact, one might think that a saddled elephant would be a more auspicious sign since it testifies to a human harnessing of a greater power for some useful purpose. Yet, if the Talmud understands the elephant to symbolize "wonders" (*pla'im*) it is possible that it here inveighs against the attempts of humankind to "harness" wonders; there are things that are beyond the ken and capacity of human beings to comprehend or to tame, and those things should remain wonderful. This has a precedent in the biblical tale of Jacob's wrestling with the angel, who refuses to tell him his name (Gen. 32:30). It is even more explicitly paralleled in the story of the annunciation of Samson, where Manoah, Samson's father, seeks to know the name of the angel who announces Samson's birth. "You must not ask my name," the angel replies, "for it is 'unknowable' (or 'wonderful') [*peli* again]" (Judg. 13:18).

26. Of course, the entire argument of this book is based on intentionality. To maintain that biblical phrases are used carelessly or merely "decoratively" by Berechiah would be akin to proposing that though the illuminator of a manuscript created brilliant and highly contextually significant text illustrations, any illustration in his manuscript not directly linked to the text had no other function than to serve as mere decoration. On the problematics of this approach, see Chapter 1.

27. See Eco 1992: 63–66ff.

28. HaLevi 1972: 109–10 (3:11).

29. See Beimel 1929; Binder 1949.

30. See Berger 1979: 167–230, 106–64, and notes. See also 69–70 and 257–58.

31. Literally "each brother deceives Jacob." This phrase is a clever double pun. On one level it is a play on Christian dogma's assertion that Jacob is Christianity and has supplanted Judaism as Jacob grasped Esau's heel: if this is so, says Berechiah, it has done so "by the heel": by treading Jews into the ground. On another level, it mocks Christianity's assertion that Jews and Christians are brothers at all: each so-called brother only deceives Jacob/Israel; see Chapter 2.

32. Behind even the most proverbial rhetorical devices may lurk deeper (and occasionally more troubling) meanings than the standard associations. When one uses the aforementioned metaphor of "the sea of the Talmud," for instance, one means to indicate the vastness of the Talmudic corpus. Yet even a vast sea is not always placid and welcoming. The sea in general and the sea of the Talmud in particular, is not without its billows and swells, and those who cannot swim in it may find themselves sinking. Likewise, the "Tree of Life" in the Garden of Eden brings death to whosoever would touch it in contradiction to God's will.

33. Genesis 10:8: "Cush also begat Nimrod, who was the first man of might on earth. He was a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD, hence the saying, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD.' There are, of course, negative midrashic associations regarding Nimrod. Nimrod's very name contains the root, "to rebel"; see BT *Pesahim* 94b, and compare Philo Judaeus, *De Gigantibus*, chap. 15, sec. 66 (Philo–Colson and Whitaker 1949–62: 2:478–79.) The building of the Tower of Babel, for instance, is ascribed to Nimrod in BT *Pesahim* 94b, BT *Avodah Zarah* 53b; BT *'Eruvin* 53a; *Bereshit Rabbah* 23:7 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin, 1:180), 26:4 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin, 1:193), 42:4 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin, 2:123); *Pirkei Rabi Eliezer* 1803: Cap. 34, and Josephus, *Antiquities* Chapter 1, 4:2 (Josephus 1926–65, 4:53–54). For Nimrod's idolatry and other crimes, see in particular *Sefer HaYashar*–Dan 1986: 64ff. For a comprehensive listing of sources, see Ginzberg 1909, 1:177–81; 5: 198–204.

34. It might be argued that this elephant is a fearsome beast, and the description of it as an engine of destruction would be inappropriate for a symbol of Torah. The descriptions in the first part of the text are intended to convey the grandeur of the elephant—and the potential of its crushing power as an adversary. This is appropriate for a description of the Torah in a *polemic* context. "When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say, 'Advance, O LORD! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!" (Num. 10:35). Recall, again, that the Talmud is called "a sea." Was this metaphor chosen to convey the calm lapping of water on a sandy beach, or a huge, potentially insurmountable ocean filled with churning waves?

35. Now in Jerusalem, the Israel Museum. See Sed-Rajna 1985: 90.

36. These synagogues were destroyed in pogroms prior to World War I, and in the interwar period, along with the majority of the wooden synagogues of Eastern Europe. The remaining handful of synagogues were destroyed during World War II. All that remains of the buildings is a relatively meager collection of black-and-white photographs in various books, most notably Breier, Eisler, and Grunwald 1934, Piechotka 1959, and Yaringa 1993, with their extensive bibliographies. It is likely that the motif was present in other synagogues of which no photographs have survived. There are drawings indicating that the synagogue of Jablonow, for instance, to the south of Hodorov, whose inscriptions dated it between 1718 and 1727, but which was probably older, was decorated with a painting of an elephant and castle on the west wall, directly opposite the ark, and surmounting the text for the Torah service. The Jablonow elephant was accompanied by other symbols of the Torah, such as bears climbing a tree to steal honey, which R. Wischnitzer calls "a peasant motif with a Jewish connotation," citing the fact that "the Torah was likened to sweet honey" (Wischnitzer 1964: 131).

37. Davidovitch 1968: pls. 15 and 16. The text below the image was a continuous one that ran around the entire wall and bore no evident relation to this specific image.

38. A pair of birds crowns the ark in the sixth-century mosaic of Beit Alpha (Fig. 24); see Avi-Yonah 1981: 58, pl. 11:8. At Hodorov, the motif of the lion battling the unicorn was depicted within an arch surmounted by two birds, which may represent the *kruvim*. The wooden doors of the ark at Suchowola in Lithuania (1747) were carved with a pair of birds; see Wischnitzer 1964: 135. Likewise, the late eighteenth-century ark at Wyszogrod was surmounted by birds flanking the biblical quotation regarding *kruvim*, and the slightly older ark at Luck was topped by a pair of wings; see Loukomski 1947: 109 (Wyszogrod), 108 (Luck). Though griffins are generally sun symbols, they appeared over the eighteenth-century Dubno ark, and both birds and griffins appeared in the contemporary synagogue of Starkonstantynow. Here, more properly, the griffins flanked an oculus above the ark through which the sun shines, and the birds flank the ark itself (Loukomski 1947: 130; 131). These are only a few examples among a great many of birds and other winged creatures surmounting the ark.

39. The word *'orayta* is also the origin of the juxtaposition of the menorah with the lions and the Torah scrolls. The menorah is a symbol of light, *or*, which is also related to the Torah through the word *'orayta*, and to lions through the word *aryavayta*.

40. Deut. 33:10 reads, "They [the Levites] shall teach your Torah to Jacob, and Your instructions to Israel," establishing a further link between the storks, which represent the Levites, and the elephant which represents the Torah. This connection is made explicit in *Tehillim*–Buber 1891: 222b (Ps. 104:14).

41. In the context of the beginning of the verse ("Your priests are clothed in triumph"), "your faithful ones" has been interpreted as referring specifically to the Levites. See *Targum Onkelos*, one of the two Aramaic paraphrases in standard editions of the Hebrew Bible with commentaries, on this verse: "Your loyal Levites will sing praises over your sacrifices," and Ibn Ezra in standard editions: "*Your faithful ones:* These are the Levites who sing (praises)."

42. Davidovitch 1982: 13–26, argues cogently for a "chain of tradition" between the ancient synagogue mosaics of the Land of Israel and the diaspora, and the decorated wooden synagogue ceilings of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries in Poland. His thesis is compelling; one can plainly see antique motifs resurfacing in Polish synagogue art. Yet neither Davidovitch nor others, despite exhaustive efforts, have succeeded in showing exactly where these motifs spent the Middle Ages and how they spanned the continents.

43. According to Narkiss 1969:104, the style is similar to that of the Aich Bible of 1310 (Kremsmunster, Stiftsbibliothek COD 351–354).

44. Gutmann 1978: 77.

45. The phrase *Mishneh HaTorah* is found in Deut. 17:18. The Septuagint translates it as Deuteronion, the "second" or "repeated Law," whence the English "Deuteronomy."

46. For this suggestion, I am grateful to Bracha Yaniv of Bar Ilan University, who is in the process of investigating the viability of this hypothesis.

47. According to Scholem 1971, Taftafiyah is the name that shields the person who calls upon Metatron, hence the association with a seal or a shield. The name Taftafiya was already popular in German mystical texts of the thirteenth century. It seems to occur for the first time in *Sefer Hag'vul*, by the kabbalist David ben Judah. Though he resided in Spain, was a descendant of the RaMBaN, and seems to have derived the philosophical underpinnings of his kabbalah from that school, he was also a descendant of R. Yehudah HeHasid, and it seems likely that his traditions of practical magic came to him by way of Germany.

48. Margoliyot 1945: 94–97, 100–107.

49. BT *Avodah Zarah* 3b.

50. The hexagram is a schematic portrait of Metatron in the tradition of such symbolic representations, which can be found in various medieval magical compendia. The fact that the form of angels is indicative of their functions and qualities is demonstrated quite clearly by compendia that contain "angelic portraits." In one such manuscript, for instance, the angel in charge of the miraculous abridgment of journeys is described as having the shape of "a chariot with horses," and in a seventeenth- to nineteenth-century manuscript is actually shown as a rather skinny nag eating grass; see the magical compendium offered for sale by Sotheby's New York, 25 June 1990, lot 53, ill.

51. Deut. 6:6–9.

52. *Adon Imnani Ezlo Shkheni, Yozer* for the first day of Shavuot; alphabetical acrostic, signed *Shimon bar Yizhak Hazak Amen* (Simeon bar Isaac Ben Abun, born Mainz, c. 950). See Davidson 1924: 24, no. 484.

53. See the examples in Sed-Rajna 1983: pls. 19–21.

54. Corroborated by the Bird's Head Haggadah: fol. 22v, see Narkiss 1969: 96, pl. 28.

55. For similar treatments, see Sed-Rajna 1983: pls. 19–21. The illuminator may have intended the scrolls to remain blank, with the figures representing or personifying the commandments; in that case, the fact that the commandments themselves were not originally inscribed may respond to an ancient and traditional reluctance to emphasize or privilege the Ten Commandments over the rest of the Torah.

56. Cf. Laud Maḥzor, fol. 127v (Sed-Rajna 1983: fig. 39); Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor, fol. 202v (Sed-Rajna 1983: fig. 40); Darmstadt Maḥzor, fol. 126r (Sed-Rajna 1983: fig. 37). Here the illustration is much simplified: Moses alone appears with the tablets, and a single dragon attacks a hare, a symbol of the Jewish people; see Chapter 2. While dragons might at first be taken as ubiquitous decoration, this is one of the very few places in the entire group of *maḥzorim*, that they appear. Furthermore, they exhibit remarkable seriousness of purpose for grotesques: their attention is always fixed on the Israelites, no matter which direction their bodies are facing. In some cases, they do more than merely threaten; they literally gnaw at the architectural foundations, by extension attempting to undermine the very foundations of Torah.

57. *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:1 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 1:134).

58. See the typological comparison between 1 Macc. 6:43, and Jesus on the Cross in the *Speculum*–Lutz and Perdrizet 1907: Cap. 24, lines 91–98, pl. 48. The connection is made even more explicit in the Renaissance; see Pincinelli 1678: 199, no. 306. The dragon/elephant enmity is first mentioned by Pliny, 8:11–12 (Pliny *Historia Naturalis*–Rackham 1983: 3:26–29): the "dragon" (a large snake, probably a python) drops down upon the elephant from a tree and attacks it in its tender areas—eyes, mouth, and trunk—while attempting to crush it in its coils; the elephant is suffocated, or suffers a fatal bite which sends it crashing to the ground, crushing the "dragon" in the process. In Aelian, 17:44 (Aelian *De Animalibus*–Scholfield 1972: 3:377), the elephant's enemy is the rhinoceros, which rips open the elephant's belly.

59. Scholem 1974: 123–28.

60. Scholem 1974: 11, 121–22, passim. The right/left or Judgment/Mercy dichotymy is Zoharic, of course, and one must be cautious not to cast it back to the pre-Zoharic world of thirteenth-

century Ashkenaz. Yet this image points clearly to such a distinction, and reminds us that a full investigation of its pre-Zoharic roots remains a desideratum.

61. Ta-Shema 1987.

62. Berger 1979: 167–230.

63. Nonetheless, some of the medieval elements may have survived, if in diluted form. Berechiah's fables were circulated in Polish Jewish communities, and both Hodorov and Gwodiec are within close proximity of the town of Halicz, the only town in southern Galicia with a large Karaite community in the nineteenth century; see Fahn 1870: 2–16.

64. Two further examples of the elephant used in the context of Torah are worth mentioning. In the seventh column of a lovely northern Italian megillah in the collection of Michael and Judy Steinhardt of New York, there is an illustration adapted from the Rome, 1618 edition of Ceasare Ripa's *Iconoglogia*. The original illustration for "Religione" depicts a woman astride an elephant. In the megillah, though all the other images were adapted from Ripa with their feminine characters, the figure with the elephant has been transformed into a male. He wears a turban and tefillin, and holds a beautiful Italian-mantled Sefer Torah in his arms. Dr. Iris Fishof, chief curator of Judaica and Jewish Ethnography at the Israel Museum has pointed out to me that the collection houses an illuminated folio with the text of Grace After Meals, executed by in 1755 Samuel Dreznitz, and described by her in Dan. 1988: 133–36. There she notes that among the other illuminations:

> In the center, within an ornamental framework, is a depiction of a round table, covered by cloth, and topped by an elephant. Above the table is an inscription: "This is the table that is before the Lord" (Ezekiel 41:32). This citation is in accordance with the Ethics of the Fathers, that . . . if three have eaten at a table and have spoken words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten at the table of the Lord. (Avot 3:4)

The words of Avot 3:4 are:

> Three who have eaten at a single table and have spoken at it (literally, "upon it") words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten at the table of the Omnipresent, as it is said, "And He said to me, 'This is the table that is before the Lord.'" (Ezekiel 41:32)

Fishof's contention seems to me to be perfectly correct, and it is reinforced by a reading of this elephant as a symbol of Torah, so that we have, again, in rebus form, a table "upon" which is displayed the symbol for "words of Torah." Compare this elephant with the one bearing the "Regina Ebrea" in the 1480 depiction of the alchemical pageant for the Sforza wedding by Nicola d'Antonio degli Agli, 1480 Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Urb. lat. 899, fol. 90.

65. On this phenomenon in general, see Chapter 1.

66. A paraphrase of Exodus 17:11 (the battle of the Israelites with Amalek).

Chapter 4. Harnessing the Dragon

1. On the origin of the dragon concept see Jonathan D. Evans, "The Dragon" in South 1988: 26–58, esp. 30–31.

2. HaLevi *Kuzari*–Even Shmuel 1972: 184 (4:24).

3. Genesis 1:20–21. The development of the depiction of dragons in postbiblical Jewish literature and art from sea-creatures to creatures with both piscean and avian attributes is certainly due to the influence of the art and literature of the societies in which the Jews lived. But it may ultimately be precipitated by the fact that the "great *taninim*" were created on the fourth day of Creation, the day upon which both birds and fish are created.

4. The *taninim* are located in "the Depths" or "the Deep," with which they occasionally appear in poetic parallelism; cf. Psalms 148:7, "Praise . . . *taninim* and all depths."

5. Ezekiel 29:3, and see 32:2. This description, and all of Ezekiel's other pronouncements regarding the contemporary Pharaoh resonate with associations with the archetypical Pharaoh, the Pharaoh of Moses' time.

6. Another interpretation, and one that is most appropriate in terms of the final argument of this chapter, might be that the *tanin* of Moses' staff represents God, whose Name is inscribed on the staff, and who subjugates all lesser powers. Both interpretations can coexist because of the intensely ambiguous and ambivalent relationship I shall demonstrate exists between divine and demonic power.

7. Representing the ultimate dominance of God over the power of the dragon, which will be discussed further below.

8. The term "primordial serpent" is a direct translation of the Hebrew *nahash hakadmoni*. See, for example *Bereshit Rabbah* 23:12 (Midrash Rabbah–Mirkin 1977: 174).

9. Eccles. 10:8. The *saraf* and the *tan* are two creatures that, due to confused etymologies and translations, are often mistakenly included among dragons in postbiblical literature. The *saraf*, whose name means "burning," in some contexts indicates one of the class of *serafim*, "fiery angels" (Isa. 6:2, 6). In other contexts, it implies a poisonous (burning, or literally fiery) snake (Num. 8:15, 21:6). The *tan* is a wild canine, probably a jackal. There is a difference of only a single letter between its plural form (*tanim*) and *tanin*. This is most notable in an instance in Lamentations 4:3 where, although *tanim* is clearly meant (and is so amended in public reading: *kr'i*), the written text (*ktiv*) is retained as *tanin*. The Septuagint consistently translates *tanim* as *drakon*. Many later translators and commentators repeated its error, mistakenly bringing under the rubric of "dragon" a great number of references to a howling, solitary mammal of the wilderness, and further confusing the issue of what exactly the term means.

10. In the Talmud and in the various midrashim, there are descriptions of the natural history of serpents, of the primordial serpent (BT *Sotah* 9b), and of the tanin as the primordial water dragon and the Leviathan as the eschatological plaything of God. (BT *Bava Batra* 74b, *Bereshit Rabbah* 7:4 [ed. Mirkin, 47–48]). There are fantastic tales of serpents of prodigious size (BT *Nedarim* 28a, BT *Shevu'ot* 29a), and halakhic concerns regarding poisonous serpents whom it is feared will taint drinking water and wine; see, for example, BT *Bava Kama* 115b. These last, halakhic serpents are the most numerous, but following closely behind are the many references to the serpent as the instrument of punishment by God, and the serpent or dragon as a magical or cosmological arbiter of fate. It is clear that often when the text speaks of serpents, it can refer to dragons as well; *Drakon* is a Greek loanword, and is rarely used. *Tanin* is usually used with specific reference to primordial water dragons, so the word for serpent is often used to refer to beasts conventionally regarded as dragons. *Nahash* (serpent) is by far the most common term.

11. Compare Exodus 4:3, 7:15 with Exodus 7:9, 7:10. This may occur even within the text of the Talmud itself; see BT *Berakhot* 33a and see RaShI on the biblical verses quoted. Such interchangeability is present in other languages and linguistic contexts as well, as for example in the case of the Old English "Wyrm," which means both snake and dragon.

12. *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:1 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1:134).

13. See, for example *Bereshit Rabbah* 20:4–5 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1:146–48).

14. BT *Sotah* 9b.

15. Ibid., obliquely, and see BT *Shabbat* 146a.

16. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:10 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1:55–56). Cohen 1989 is a comprehensive treatment of this theme.

17. See, for example, Wakeman 1973 and Day 1985. The image of God as having "killed the *tanin* which is in the sea" (Isa. 27:1), is far less common than that of God's "crushing the heads of the *taninim* on the water" (Ps. 74:13, among other places). This is an Ancient Near Eastern image of subjugation which has echoes in iconography. Many are the bas-reliefs of Egyptian or Assyrian kings placing a foot on the head—"crushing the head"—of a prostrate enemy, not killing, but subjugating him, making him, as it were, his plaything: "The Leviathan you have formed to sport with" (Ps. 104:26). Thus, the pattern appears to be one of reduction that destroys rebelliousness but preserves power (albeit on a less awesome scale), and subjugation rather than eradication.

18. The earliest source for the fall of Satan is 2 Enoch 29:4–5: "One from the order of the archangels [identified as 'Satanail' in manuscript P] deviated, together with the division that was under his authority. He thought up an impossible idea, that he might place his throne higher than the clouds which are above the earth, and that he might become equal to my power. And I hurled him out of the height, together with his angels" (Charlesworth 1985: 1:148). This angel was called Lucifer by the church fathers, due to a misapplication of Isaiah 14:12. See Davidson 1967: 176.

19. *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:1 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1:134–35).

20. Cf. Eleazar b. Kallir, *"VaYipathu Sha'are Eden Gan,"* Carmi 1981: 227–32.

21. Had humankind not fallen, the serpent would have been the servant of humanity (BT *Sanhedrin* 59b; *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:1 [*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1:134–135]).

22. The "snake of the rabbis" punishes lawbreakers; for it there is no remedy (BT *Shabbat* 110a). One who gives a legal decision in the presence of his teacher (thus attempting to usurp the teacher's prerogative), "deserves to be bitten by a snake" (BT

Eruvin 63a). A man encounters a series of troubles, but his meeting with a serpent is the culminating one that makes him forget all others (BT *Berakhot* 13a). Slanderers are punished by fiery serpents because the serpent was the archtypical slanderer (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:22 [*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 10:237]).

23. *Kohelet Rabbah* 1887: 14b (5:5).

24. *Kohelet Rabbah* 1887: 15a (5:8). The serpent does not only punish evildoers: it may also dispatch heroes to their death. In doing God's will in a way that seems to be part of the natural order, a serpent is sent to kill Bar Kokhba so that the Romans should not have the satisfaction of believing that they killed him (*Eykhah Rabbah* 1887: 21a [2:4]).

25. BT *Shabbat* 110a.

26. BT *Bava Batra* 74b.

27. BT *Bava Batra* 16a.

28. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:23 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 10:238).

29. This world-encircling serpent, which parallels the Greek *ourabouros*, finds an echo in various midrashic accounts. Cf. *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* 9; *Midrash Aseret HaDibberot* 2 (Jellinek *Beth HaMidrasch* 1853–77: 1:63).

30. BT *Bava Metsiah* 84b-85a.

31. Cf. *Midrash Kisseh VeIpodromin shel Shlomo HaMelekh* (Jellinek *Beth HaMidrasch* 1853–77: 5:35).

32. Jellinek *Beth HaMidrasch* 1853–77: 2:83–85, and Gaster 1968: 209, for a complete listing of sources, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

33. See Wakeman 1973: 16–22, and *Midrash Hadar Zekenim* 1986:11 (Gen. 3:21).

34. BT *Avodah Zarah* 8a.

35. *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:9 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1:141). In presenting the image of a servant whose power seems to threaten to eclipse that of his master, midrashim on the dragon invite comparison with those that present a similar image of Moses. If ever the reputation of a servant seemed to impinge on the power of his master even when that master was God, it was Moses, called the "man of God," who was liable to be seen as a "man-God"; cf. Ps. 90:1. Moses compares himself both to a serpent (*Shemot Rabbah* 3:12 [*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 5:78–79]) and to the Leviathan (*Tanhuma*–Warsaw 1910: *VaYera* 3) as a servant of God, and in light of the traditions concerning the serpent and the Leviathan, this appears to be an apt comparison; among all the prophets it was Moses who came closest to being considered quasi-divine. The rabbis, who need to establish their own authority, deal with the problem of the frightening power of Moses by playing up the very human side of his character, and asserting that his gravesite was never revealed for fear it become a temple to his worship rather than to the worship of God (*Midrash Lekakh Tov*–Buber 1880: Deut. 36:4).

36. BT *Berakhot* 30b.

37. BT *Berakhot* 33a.

38. The desire to limit the power of the serpent may shed light on the only actual occurrence of the word "dragon" in the entire Talmud. The discussion occurs in BT *Avodah Zarah* 42b. The Mishnah there teaches that the image of a dragon is grouped with the images of the sun and moon as a depiction that must be "cast into the salt sea" should it be found on a vessel, since it is considered idolatrous. A *baraita* (extracanonical mishnah) insists that all planets except the sun and moon are "permissible" as are all faces except the human face, and all figures except the dragon. There is a further discussion of what exactly constitutes a dragon. Some say it is a creature with scales "between its joints." Some specify the joints of the neck, but the joints of the vertebrae seem to be the accepted placement. RaShI on this text comments that the dragon is "like a snake," and says that it has hair between its joints, perhaps still attempting to reconcile mammalian and reptilian characteristics.

BT *Avodah Zarah* 42a mentions that if a dragon-shaped vessel is found, and the head of the dragon has been removed, one may only use the vessel if it is certain that the head was removed by a non-Jew. Why should this be? It may be that Jews believed that they could take a magical shortcut to alter their fate by breaking the power of the cosmic dragon in effigy, rather than by the conventional path of piety. Such images were prohibited because they were suspect of having been employed for idolatrous purposes by Jews who clearly believed that it was the dragon and not sin that killed. While such idolatry was expected of non-Jews, resort to magical shortcuts by Jews was deemed inappropriate; or, perhaps, feared effective.

39. The word *t'li* seems to be related to the verb TLH: to hang. (*Targum* and RaShI to Gen. 27:3, 98). The word is *hapax legomenon* in the Bible. It occurs in the tale of Esau's hunt, when Jacob tells Esau, "Take your gear, your *t'li* and bow" (Gen. 27:3). The biblical word *t'li* has been interpreted as a "hanging" sword, a quiver, or a *bola* (a line with a ball that hangs from its end). In commentaries on *Sefer Yezirah*, *t'li* has been identified with the *Nahash bari'ah* of Job 26:16, 68; the *Nahash bari'ah* and *Nahash 'akalaton* of Isa. 27:1; as well as with the *Tanin* or Leviathan.

For an enumeration of speculations on the nature of the *t'li* in the bible and in commentaries on *Sefer Yezirah*, see Kaplan 1990: 232ff. For sources on the etymological bases of the word *t'li* and an exploration of the celestial dragon's astrological/astronomical significance, see Harkavy 1887; Gefen 1925; and Ish Shalom 1987.

40. *Sefer Yezirah* 1860: 118 (cap. 6:1, para. 42). The triad of the dragon, the sphere or cycle, and the heart is the culmination of *Sefer Yezirah*. Note that this triad is remarkably similar to that mentioned in the Talmud as idolatrous; BT *Avodah Zarah* 42b.

41. See Gikatilla 1989: 2:254; Cordovero 1906: 100a (21:8). See also *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46: 1:125a, and the JTS manuscript of Abraham b. Mordechai Azulai's *Or HaHamah* on that citation in the Zohar. For what follows on Donnolo the author is indebted substantially to Sharf 1976.

42. *Raziel* 1865: 18b; RaMbaM in standard editions of JT *Avodah Zarah* 19a (3:3): the constellation here, as in the *Commentary* of R. Ovadiah M'Bartenura and the *Mordechai* on *Mishnah Avodah Zarah 3:3*, represents an idolatrous deity.

43. Ptolemy 1952: 235. The *Almagest* is found in Hebrew translation (though Ptolemy's authorship was suppressed) as *Mishpetai HaMazalot*. A particularly striking illuminated manuscript of the heavens based on the Almagest is Sassoon MS 823 (Astronomical Tables by Jacob b. David b. Yom Tov Fu'al) (cf. Sassoon 1932: 2:1043; no. 823). See also Langerman, Kunitzsch, and Fischer 1988.

44. Dunash on *Sefer Yezirah* 1902: 69; Saadia on *Sefer Yezirah* 1972: 59–60; Al-Bargeloni on *Sefer Yezirah* 1885: 209.

45. In Sassoon MS 823, for instance, Draco is depicted replete with its two nodes, on fol. 112, and with only one "knot" on fol. 118.

46. Sa'adia on *Sefer Yezirah* 1972: 59–60; Al-Bargeloni on *Sefer Yezirah* 1885: 209; Maimonides on JT *Avodah Zarah* 19a (33).

47. *Baraita di-Shemuel* 1932: 8a (2); *Sefer Tekhunah*: 101–4; Ibn Ezra–Vayzer 1976: Exodus 3: 15, 25–34, particularly the end, and Job 28:3; and Moscato 1866: 54a (4:23).

48. See, for example, the diagram in Eleazar on *Sefer Yezirah* 1883: 12b, where the ascending node is labeled "head of the dragon," and the descending node is called "tail of the dragon."

49. BT *Avodah Zarah* 8a.

50. Abraham Abulafia *Or HaSekhel*: fol. 41a (4:1).

51. See Vital 1966: chap. 8, 403.

52. *Bahir*–Margoliyot 1951: para. 106, on Song of Songs 5:11.

53. Exodus 10:3–4: "You shall have no other Gods *before Me*. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters below the earth."

54. RaMBaM, *Mordechai* (840) to JT *Avodah Zarah* 3:3 (19a). Isaac of Acco, *Ozar Hayyim*: fol. 6a. See also JT *Shabbat* 9:1 (57b), *Avodah Zarah* 3:6 (22a), and RaMbaN on BT *Shabbat* 83b, "*Zeh*."

55. Donnolo–Castelli 1880: 20.

56. Both Donnolo's ideas and those of the Hasidim concerning free will and determinism sprung from the same Talmudic roots, "All is foreseen, but the right of choice is granted." *Mishnah Avot* 3:15.

57. Rokeakh 1978–86: Gen. 1:21.

58. Though it contains a great deal of astrological and astronomical information, Eleazar's Commentary on *Sefer Yezirah* is especially and essentially concerned with the creative and destructive power of the Hebrew alphabet; Eleazar on *Sefer Yezirah* 1883: 22ff.

59. Yehudah HeHasid on the Torah 1974–75; Genesis 1:21.

60. Rokeakh 1978–86; Numbers 21:8. Eleazar ascribes the plague of serpents in the desert to the fact that Israel "slandered their Creator, like the (primeval) serpent."

61. *Shemot Rabbah* 33:4 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977 6:90–91), and see *Sefer Hasidim*–Margoliyot 1957: 205.

62. *Sodei Razaya* 1936: 24. The author quotes a midrash whose source is now lost.

63. ". . . and 'the *saraf*' to Moses."

64. Yehudah HeHasid on the Torah 1974–75: 184 (Num. 21:8–9).

65. *Sefer Hasidim*–Margoliyot 1957: 319, no. 469.

66. BT *Ohalot* 87a.

67. *Sefer Hasidim*–Margoliyot 1957: 579.

68. Such as the legend of the birth of Alexander, who was said to be the offspring of a queen and a dragon.

69. Though elemental dragons occasionally appear, as in an illustration of the earth opening up to swallow Sodom and Gommorah (Troyes [?] Miscellany: fol. 740v), clearly based on contemporary Christian depictions of the mouth of Hell.

70. Troyes (?) Miscellany: fol. 520v. Yet in Spanish Haggadot, the serpent is depicted in a completely reptilian manner; cf. Golden Haggadah: fol. 1v; Sarajevo Haggadah: fol. 3v; Sister Haggadah: fol. 2r.

71. There are essentially two ways in which the serpent can be depicted in medieval Christian art. One is as a snake suspended or draped over a pole, which is overtly christological. A famous example is the mid-twelfth-century walrus-ivory cross from Bury St. Edmunds, now in the Cloisters, N.Y.; see

Jones 1991. Significant later examples are to be found in the block-book editions of the Biblia Pauperum (Schmidt 1959), where it may appear with its typological companions, the Crucifixion and the Binding of Isaac (Avril 1987: pl. e.) The Cologne Bible of 1479 has a similar depiction; here the stick is not forked, but actually forms a Tau-cross. The other manner of depicting the copper serpent is as a dragon or winged snake upon a platform supported by a column or columns. Examples include the opening initial for the Book of Numbers in the Stavelot Bible (Dynes 1978: pl. 23), as well as the Bible Moralisée (Laborde 1911–27: pl. 81), and the Visconti Hours (Meiss and Kirsch 1972: pl. 123). This depiction may go back to ancient prototypes such as the crowned, winged serpent depicted on the walls of a Pompeiian villa (Hogarth and Cleary 1979: 83). It is also the chosen model of the sculptor of the famous Copper Serpent in the Basilica of Saint Ambrose in Milan (*Mythologies* 1991: 2: 682). The only depictions of the copper serpent in medieval Hebrew manuscript illumination, follow this convention rather than that of the hanging serpent (Troyes [?] Miscellany: fols. 120v, 742v). Although this might lead to speculation that the tradition is originally even of Jewish origin, it is more likely that this mode of depiction, which may have ancient pagan roots (cf. Pompeii), may have been adapted because it is not christological.

72. See Gutmann 1968. One of the more striking images is that of the Troyes (?) Miscellany: fol. 518v.

73. See the thirteenth-century depiction of the Messianic banquet in the Ambrosian Bible: fol. 136r.

74. For example, a depiction of the Leviathan enclosing Hebron (a parallel to the huge snake that encircles the bier of a righteous person [BT *Bava Meziah* 84b–85a]) is embroidered on a Sabbath hallah cover by Hannah Rivka Herman, Jerusalem, 1876 (Jerusalem, Israel Museum. illus. in Ungerleider-Mayerson 1986: 122 bottom right). The Leviathan encircling the Shor HaBar appears in a Polish block print of the nineteenth century (British Library; see Goldstein 1987: 117). The Leviathan encircling a city was painted in the dome of Gwodziec synagogue in 1640 (Davidovich 1968: pl. 13). Davidovich identifies the city as Worms, presumably since Worms was depicted resting on a dragon as a pun on its name. (Compare the city labeled as Worms depicted with a dragon in the Mogilev Synagogue; Wischnitzer: 1964: 142, pl. 123). But that image is not a dragon; it is clearly a fish. It is, furthermore, accompanied by the verses recited after the *'Aleynu* prayer, "You will not fear sudden terror, or the disaster that comes upon the wicked (Prov. 3:25) [if they] hatch a plot—it will be foiled; agree on action—it shall not succeed, for the LORD is with us (Isa. 8:10). Till you grow old, I will still be the same; when you turn gray, it is I who will carry; I was the Maker, and I will be the Bearer; and I will carry and rescue [you]" (Isa. 46:4). These verses are certainly appropriate either in an aggadic context that describes the Leviathan as the "bearer" of the earth or the heavens, or in an ethical/philosophical context that demands that one not fear "sudden terror or the disaster which comes upon the wicked" if these be the effects of the twisting and lashing of the servant or Leviathan, but to trust only in God, for "the LORD is with us."

75. It must be remembered, however, that the cosmological understanding of the dragon, its association with God and with fate, was never completely explicit in any of the literature examined above. For instance, both the mystical text *Sefer Yezirah*, and the opaque exegesis and legends of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* were intended only for initiates of elite groups adept at mining symbolism in search of secrets. It would follow then, that when that symbolism was expressed in art, it might be done in a comparably opaque manner.

76. Cf. Laud Maḥzor: fol. 127v, described in the text following; Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor: fol. 202v; and the Darmstadt Maḥzor: fol. 126r, where the illustration is much simplified: Moses alone appears with the tablets, and the "threatening dragons" are accordingly simplified; a single dragon attacks a hare. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this hare as a symbolic representation of Israel.

77. Laud Maḥzor: fol. 127v.

78. The presence of dragons at Mount Sinai is certainly also linked to the idea that though "the snake came to Eve and cast his filth upon her" (see BT *Shabbat* 146a; *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46: 1: 28b; 1:122b; 1:126a; 1:145b among many other places), "When they stood at Mt. Sinai, Israel's filth was cleansed (literally 'ended'), [but] the nations which did not stand at Mt. Sinai, their filth was not cleansed" (See *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46: 1: 26b; BT *Avodah Zarah* 22b, among many others). This has obvious parallels in the Christian doctrine of original sin exculpated by Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. Iconographically, one would expect to see fleeing, rather than threatening, dragons if this were the context of the illuminations.

79. The important Ashkenazic maḥzorim of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries include the Michael Maḥzor, the Laud Maḥzor, the Worms Maḥzor I and II, the Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor, the Leipzig Maḥzor, the Darmstadt Maḥzor, and the Tripartite Maḥzor.

80. Narkiss 1969: 104.

81. These verses are, in fact, linked together in *Shemot Rabbah* 24:4 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977, 5:274), implying that the Israelites were protected by a wall of (supernatural) fire, just as appears to be the case in the illumination.

82. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung MS or. fol. 388.

83. This maḥzor is in a private collection in France. It is described in Sed Rajna 1994: 172, no. 68. Fol. 116r, discussed here, is illustrated in the catalogue for the sale of Fine Judaica at Christie's Amsterdam, 21 June 1989: 145 (Lot 390).

84. See Goldschmidt *Maḥzor* 1970: 1:47.

85. *Pesikta* Braude 1968: 702.

86. See Ibn Ezra on this verse.

87. Ibn Ezra, on this verse: "They stand as servants to do your will." His commentary on this section of the Psalm emphasizes the adherence to God's laws to the [implied] exclusion of viewing the heavenly bodies as forces with independent power over fate. This is amplified by David Altschuler in the eighteenth-century commentary *Mezudat David* Psalm 119:89–91 (standard editions of the Hebrew Bible with commentaries): "Even if the heavenly bodies and their powers indicate that [things be] worse or better, behold, the decree of Your word is what stands in the heavens, and it nullifies their instruction. . . . Each day all the heavenly bodies and their powers arise to do Your bidding according to Your command—even if their instruction should [appear to be] the reverse [of Your will]—because they are all Your servants and are all compelled to perform the decree of the Omnipresent." A similar attitude may be found in the medieval commentators on the serpent of copper. They apologetically profess that it was not the serpent itself, but that when the Israelites gazed upward they directed their hearts to their Father in Heaven, which was effective in stopping the plague. They desired to paint the experience of the Israelites with the serpent of copper in the desert as an eloquent testimony to the weakness of human beings in often idolizing the instrument, rather than the source of salvation; see RaShI, for example, on Num. 21:8, quoting BT *Rosh HaShanah* 29a (RaShI–Chavel 1982: 470). The disjunction between these attitudes and those of kabbalists and philosophers may be due to the audiences for which the works were intended.

88. Literally, "Your Name," here referring to the Name HVYH, which represents God's mercy. (Goldschmidt *Maḥzor* 1970: 1:47, n. 1).

89. Cf. *Ma'ariv*, Eve of Yom Kippur. See Davidson 1964, 2:45. The origin of this *piyyut* is *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 2:17.

90. The idea that God may be rhetorically compared to a creature is an accepted one among some exegetes, though it was opposed by some philosophers, such as Maimonides. See RashI on Exodus 19:18 (RaShI–Chavel 1982: 241): "Scripture offers human beings a pattern which is well-known to them. . . . [Hosea 11:10:] 'As a lion He [God] does roar.' But who gave the lion power if not He, and yet Scripture compares Him [only] to a lion! But, [the reason is] that we describe Him by comparing Him to His creatures in order to make intelligible to the human ear as much as it can understand."

Chapter 5. "The Horn of His Annointed"

1. Cf. the nursery rhyme based on the British coat of arms (Baring-Gould and Baring-Gould 1962: 103, no. 123; Caroll/Gardner 1960: 277–91). Unicorns are depicted routing lions more frequently than lions are depicted chasing unicorns; Anglo-French Psalter: fol. 221v; Queen Mary's Psalter: fol. 190v. The latter situation occurs in a manuscript that also depicts the unicorn routing a lion; missal, use of Saint-Jean, Amiens, illuminated by Pierre de Raimbaucourt: fols. 128v; 41r. A particularly beautiful depiction of a lion routing a unicorn is to be found in a fourteenth-century English manuscript of *De Nobilitatibus Sapientus et Prudentius Regnum*: fol. 46v.

2. In most symbol-systems, the lion represents the sun, which vanquishes the unicorn, the symbol of the moon, symbolizing the "victory" of the solar over the lunar calendar. On the possible roots of this enmity in ancient astronomy, see Suhr 1964. But the conflict's traditional outcome would have had little resonance for Jewish viewers, as the Jewish calendar is corrected to the sun-cycle but most certainly dominated by the moon. Thus, for Jews, in contrast to their neighbors, the unicorn/moon was regnant rather than vanquished. The midrash does speak of a reduction in the size and stature of the moon, but this is a myth explaining the smaller size and brightness of the moon relative to the sun, whereas the lion/unicorn myth seems to serve as an explanation for the triumph of a solar over a lunar calendar. (On the legend of the reduction of the size/light of the moon, see the extensive bibliography in Ginzberg 1909, 5:34–36). This is emblematic of the inapplicability of "universal" mythological motifs in an indigenously Jewish context.

3. Synagogue from Horb, Germany, late eighteenth century, a gift of the Bamberg City Art Collection on permanent exhibition in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; see *Monumenta Judaica* 1964: #E 260, 281, 324. Gwozdziec, dome; see Davidovitch

1968: color plate tipped in between 40 and 41; Wyszogrod, west wall with "Children's Choir" above the entrance, artist David Freidland, dated 1810. (Davidovitch 1968: pl. 7); Hodorov, north vault of the dome; see the photograph of the reconstruction in the Diaspora Museum, Tel Aviv, in Wigoder 1986: 11.

4. *Mishnah Avot* 5:6. The mouth of the earth (Num. 16:32); the mouth of the well (Num. 21:16–18); the mouth of the donkey (Num. 22:28); the rainbow (Gen. 9:13); the manna (Exod. 16:15); the rod (Exod. 4:17); the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 32:15f.). *Mishnah Avot* is the classic nexus for this quotation, but a similar passage also appears in BT *Pesahim* 54a, with some variations. The Gemara there identifies the holders of the divergent opinions; see also *Midrash Tannaim* 1909: 219; *Avot De Rabbi Natan*–Schechter 1945: 48a (*Nussah* B); *Pirkei Rabi Eliezer* 1803: cap. 19.

5. See *Pirkei Rabi Eliezer* 1803: cap. 31, where the prooftext is from Exodus 30:10.

6. *Pirkei Rabi Eliezer* 1803: cap. 31. R. Bahya on Exod. 19:13 (Bahya–Chavel 1984, 2:171), states that the Ram was resurrected after having been burnt to ashes. On the resurrection of animals in particular connection with the Covenant of the Pieces, see *Midrash HaGadol* Gen. 15:9 (*Midrash ha-gadol Bereshit*–Margoliyot 1947, 1:240), which represents a tradition apparently known to Sa'adia; see Ginzberg 1909, 5:229 n. 113).

7. The word appears in Jeremiah 17:1, Zech. 7:12, and Ezekiel 3:9.

8. Among the philologist/zoologists associated with the Wissenschaft des Judenthums movement, Cassel maintained that the Shamir was a stone (Cassel 1856), but Löw refuted this assertion (Löw 1870–71).

9. The Mishnah and Gemara tend toward regarding the Shamir as a stylus of some sort, since it groups it with the engraving, the script and the Tablets of the Law (*Mishnah Avot* 5:6, discussed above, also BT *Pesahim* 54a). Rabbinic literature is ambiguous as to the specific nature of the Shamir, preferring to comment upon its size and function. BT *Sotah* 48b describes it thus: "The Shamir was created as big as a barley grain, and it has existed since the day of Creation, and no hard thing can resist it. How is it preserved? It is kept covered with tufts of wool and placed in a leaden tube filled with barley bran"; see also JT *Sotah* 9:20 and *Tosefta Sotah* 15:1 (*Tosefta*–Lieberman 1973: 238–39, consult with Lieberman 1973: 758–59).

10. See RaShI on BT *Pesahim* 54a; Maimonides on *Mishnah Avot* 5:6 and *Mahzor Vitry* 1963: 540.

11. The exact action of the Shamir is described variously: "They wrote with ink on the stone and they brought the Shamir, and the marks which were outside were shown to it, which caused the stone to split by itself like a date which splits by itself during the summertime, and nothing is missing of it, or like the earth which divides itself during the wintertime in places and nothing is missing" (BT *Sotah* 48b). The Jerusalem Talmud takes its descriptive metaphor from the literary rather than the agricultural realm: "They would show it to stones, and they would open up before it like the pages of a codex" (JT *Sotah* 9:20).

12. Cf. BT *Sotah* 48b.

13. This tale is told at length in BT *Gittin* 68a, and has parallels in rabbinic literature; cf. JT *Sanhedrin* 2:6 [12b]; *Pesikta Rabbati* 29a; *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 169a [*Ahare Mot*]; *Tehillim*–Buber 1891: 176a–77a (78:12); Gaster 1968: 75, no. 114. It is extraordinarily popular in the Middle Ages. See *Maaseh Book* 1934: 183–90, no. 104, and the extensive lists of post-Talmudic sources in Ginzberg 1909, 4:299–300 n. 86, and Gaster 1968: 207–209.

14. *Mishnah Sotah* 9:12; *Tosefta Sotah* 15:1.

15. Presumably the Third Temple will be built without metal implements. Since the Shamir is included in a list at the end of *Mishnah Sotah* 9:12 of things present in the Temple that have disappeared, and that supposedly, will be restored.

16. See RaMBaM on *Avot* 5:6 (RaMBaM on *Avot* 1961: 182).

17. These conceptions were not unique to medieval Jewry—they had existed in earlier strata of Jewish literature—but they were cultivated and developed to a high degree in the medieval period.

18. RaShI–Chavel 1982: 185.

19. Based on *Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer*, 30:1.

20. The donkey does appear in illuminated and printed *haggadot*, usually as the mount of the Messiah; cf. Washington Haggadah: fol. 19v, and the printed *haggadot* from Mantua, 1560 [*Shfokh Hamatkha*], Venice 1609 [*Adir Hu*], and Amsterdam 1662 [*Shfokh Hamatkha*], among others. Its appearance is no doubt also sanctioned by the fact that it links Abraham, Moses, and the Messiah, the three important redemptive figures mentioned or implied in the text of the *haggadah*.

21. It would, of course, be unfair to assert that with the scientific revolution, all of the ancient and medieval sense of immanent transcendence—that is, of the transcendent metaphysical qualities believed to be inherent in the natural world—vanished unceremoniously. A good late example of these sensibilities is Cohen 1707. Thomas 1983 argues elo-

quently for the continued symbolic valence of the animal kingdom in Ritvo 1987 understands animals in the Victorian age in terms of their value as signifiers: the manner in which the Victorians viewed and classified animals as pets or property, prey, vermin, or exotic object-lessons in the success or potential peril of British imperialism is most illuminating with regard to the progress of and alteration in medieval sensibilities. Yet, it seems true that religious wonder about animals or associations of animals with sacred history was increasingly paralleled by appreciations of different types: awe inspired by the aesthetic beauty of animals or wonder at the complexities of their biology and behavior, as revealed by science. The primary mode for understanding animals shifted from an allegorical to a biological model (Thomas 1983: chap. 2).

22. A heifer is properly a cow that has never calved, but the Bible refers simply to a *parah*: a cow. Various midrashim, as will be evident below, imply that a cow was chosen because it is, in fact, the mother of a calf. Nonetheless, the Mishnah *Parah* 2:4 is of the opinion that a cow that has been mounted by a bull is unfit for the purposes of this ritual. Read in light of the halakhah, the midrash would refer to an animal that has the *potential* to be the mother of a calf.

23. There is some debate as to precisely what was defined as "red," and how completely "red" the animal had to be. See Mishnah *Parah* 2:5, and the discussion in the Gemara.

24. For an extended anthropological discussion of the concept of "purity" and "impurity" (*tum'ah* and *taharah*), particularly their role as liminal states, see Eilberg-Schwartz 1990: 182–86; 195–216, and bibliography.

25. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:3 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 10:222); *Yalkut Shimoni*–Haiman 1973–91: para. 759.

26. See, for example, *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 283b (*Hukkat* 8), where even the reversal of the sex of the animal in question is taken as symbolic of the reversal of the process of impurity: "Why should it be that all the [other] sacrifices are [of] male [animals] and this one is [of] a female?—Let a cow come and atone for the sin of the calf ['*egel*-(masc)]." *Pesikta Rabbati* 14:14 uses an analogy to make the same point somewhat more graphically: "There was a maidservant's child who polluted the king's palace. The king said, "Let his mother come and wipe up the excrement." In the same way, the Holy Blessed One said: "Let the mother of a calf come and atone for the deed of the [golden] calf" (*Pesikta* Braude 1968: 292). Compare *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 147b–148a (*Tezaveh* 10); RaShI on Exodus 29:1, (RaShI–Chavel 1982: 295) and Mizrahi's gloss on RaShI in which he cites this parable as the source of RaShI's comment.

27. *Pesikta Rabbati* 14:15 (*Pesikta* Braude 1968: 293). See also *Yalkut Shimoni*–Haiman 1973–91: *Hukkat* para. 759. Elsewhere in the same chapter, the *parah* represents Israel herself. *Pesikta Rabbati* finally explains the process of the preparation of the *parah* as an allegory for the redemption of Israel through her suffering, but this seems to be an alternative rather than a dominant strand of exegesis even within the piska. For a similar treatment, see *PRK* 1962: 54–77, passim.

28. This is implicit in statements such as the one in *Shemot Rabbah* 19:2 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 5:221–22):

> May I wholeheartedly follow your laws [*hukekhah*]" (Ps. 119:80). This refers to the statute of the paschal lamb, and the statute of the *Parah Adumah*, which are similar to one another. And which is greater? The [statute of] *parah*, since one may be in a lower state of purity to consume the paschal lamb [lit., since those who consume the *Pessah* require it].

The paschal lamb, in other words, does not require the Temple nor a state of complete purity; those who consume the paschal lamb would still be unsuitable to enter the Temple without the purification of the *Parah Adumah*.

29. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Taharah*, *Hilkhot Parah Adumah* 3:4 (RaMBaM *Mishneh Torah*–Kafah 1980–84, 7:131): "Nine cows were prepared . . . the Second Temple was destroyed. . . . The tenth will be prepared by the King Messiah, may he swiftly be revealed, Amen. May it be God's will" (see also *Yalkut Reuveni* 1995: *Hukkat*). Maimonides' statement is based in the mishnaic tradition which has it that nine cows were prepared. Moses prepared the first, and Ezra the second. Simeon the Righteous and Yohanan the High Priest each prepared two. Elyehonai b. Hakof, Hananel the Egyptian, and Ishmael b. Fiabi each prepared one (Mishnah *Parah* 3:5). Ibn Shuei'b on the Torah 1523: fol. 88c quotes this Mishnah with the addition of a statement that the Messiah will furnish the tenth *Parah Adumah*. This statement is not found in the extant Mishnah text, but it is certainly implied, and it probably is the origin of the tradition, which is recorded in the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Yalkut*. *Pesikta Rabbati*, in its final, allegorical exegesis (14:15), understands purification in "the time to come" to take place at the hands of God alone. The contrast made here is between purification at the

hands of God, and purification at the hands of the priests, but the exact means of purification—that is, still through a *parah* or without such an intermediary—is not explicit from the text.

30. These animals actually fall into two groups: the donkey and the ram are associated with Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, and the Messiah; and the Shamir and Heifer with Moses, Solomon, and the Messiah.

31. Depictions of Abraham's and Moses' donkey are not physically distinguished in any particular manner, but what is distinct about them is the very fact that they are portrayed in spite of their incidental nature, and the fact that they figure so centrally in the monuments in which they appear.

The donkey of Abraham first appears in Jewish art in the sixth-century mosaic at Beit Alpha (Kitzinger 1965: 9; pl. 10) and can also be found in medieval Spain in the early fourteenth-century Golden Haggadah (fol. 4v). It likewise appears in Franco-Germany (Poligny Pentateuch: fol. 283v; Darmstadt Mahzor: fol. 202v; Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor: 2, fol. 46v).

The donkey of Moses is prominent in the depiction of Moses' "Flight into Egypt" in some Spanish Haggadot (Golden Haggadah: fol. 10v; Rylands Haggadah: fol. 14r). The scene corresponds to contemporary iconography of the flight of the "Holy Family" into Egypt, except for the fact that the female figure (here Moses' wife, Tsippora) carries two children here.

The Ram appears in all the above-mentioned loci of the donkey of Abraham, as well as appearing without the donkey. It can be found in the Poligny Pentateuch, as well as in the Bird's Head Haggadah: fol. 15v, and in the Troyes (?) Miscellany: fol. 521v. Depictions of the donkey of the Messiah have been discussed above in note 20.

The ram also appears in depictions of the Akedah, and comes to illustrate various *piyyutim* for Rosh HaShanah in several Ashkenazic *maḥzorim* (Tripartite Maḥzor: fol. 5v; Laud Maḥzor: fol. 184r). In none of these loci is the ram distinguished in any way besides being caught in the thicket by its horns. However, in the mosaics of Beit Alpha, as well as in the Golden Haggadah, the ram is suspended from the thicket, as if to suggest divine intervention, or, perhaps, to allude to the fact that the *hapax legomenon 'ayil ahar* (Gen. 22:13) may allude to the position of the ram. The ram of the Akedah in the Sarajevo Haggadah (fol. 8r) is also *ahar* in the sense that it faces away from Abraham and looks over its shoulder at him. The *Parah Adumah* is occasionally illustrated in conjunction with the reading of the pericope *Parah* on one of the four special Sabbaths preceding Passover (Num. 19:1–22). The Shamir, for its part, seems never to be depicted in iconography.

32. See the fine summary of midrashic literature in Jung 1953: 438–43. For an interesting Renaissance Jewish perspective, see Ruderman 1988.

33. The theory that the *re'em* was meant to be the aurochs or *Bos Primigenius* is subscribed to by Tristram 1867: 146–50 and Lewyson 1858: 128–29, 149–51. With regard to the unicorn's status as a single-horned creature, see Godbey 1939: 256–96.

34. It is possible that the *re'em* became a unicorn by virtue of the fact that the vocalization of the word *KRNY* in Psalm 92:11 is traditionally read as *KaRNi* "You raise my horn [singular] high like that of a *re'em*," in spite of the fact that all other biblical references to the *re'em* describe it as having more than one horn. The reading of *KaRNi* here is confirmed by all the authoritative massoretic manuscripts and there are no variations in any of the translations, where the expected emendation would be *KaRNai*. The fact that this prospective emendation, though it might have made contextual sense, does not appear elsewhere in the Bible, seems to have discouraged actual emendation. Yet some medieval Jews were so convinced of fact that the *re'em* was a one-horned beast, that they proposed emendations to the other texts to make them conform to this image. RaDaK *Shorashim* 1847: 340 proposes an emendation to the biblical text of Deut. 33:17: "It should say *re'emim*, since the *re'em* has but one horn." His justification of this fact is the fact that each other reference to "horns" (plural) accompanies a reference to *re'emim* (plural). Thus, for RaDaK, references to the "horns" of unicorns are references to groups of unicorns, each individual unicorn possessing only one horn, but the group of unicorns possessing "horns." This solution is a blatant distortion of grammar, but it seems that, in this case, RaDaK's attachment to the traditional conception of the single-horned *re'em* obviates, to a certain extent, his normally conservative sense of grammatical integrity. Elijah Levita, in his comments on *Sefer HaShorashim* (in RaDaK *Shorashim* 1847: 439) calls these grammatical gymnastics into question. "There are some also who interpret *re'em* as the creature which has a single horn on its forehead, and this, too is incorrect, since it says, 'And the horns of the *re'em* are His horns' [Deut. 33:17] from which it may be understood that [the *re'em*] has more than one horn." In reality, Levita has merely chosen a different verse as his grammatical prooftext; he does not choose to deal with the verse cited by Kimhi at all. This interpretation, couched in the language of grammatical correction, may, in fact reflect Renaissance skepticism with regard to the unicorn.

35. JPS *Tanakh* 1985 incorrectly translates *shor* as "bull," by way of poetic contrast. A bull is called *par*. See RaDaK *Shorashim* 1847: 297; Jastrow 1903: 2:1212; Ben-Yehudah 1908–59: 10:5128.

36. "These" and "Those" are understood by the translators of the PS *Tanakh* 1985 to mean "the one horn" and "the other horn," respectively. However, this seems to be the origin of the tribal symbols of Ephraim and Manasseh: Ephraim, mentioned first, corresponds to the bull, mentioned first; which is his symbol. Manasseh, mentioned second, corresponds with the *re'em*, mentioned second, which is his symbol. Wischnitzer 1951 discusses the depiction of the standards of Manasseh and Ephraim in later Jewish art. She cites a Modena ketubah of 1669 which depicts a unicorn as the emblem of the tribe of Manasseh. One might add to her numeration a Veronese ketubah of 1695 at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (no. 117).

37. *Bereshit Rabbah* 39:11 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 2:98); BT *Baba Kamma* 97b. See *Sifre* on *Zot HaBerakhah* (*Sifre*–Finkelstein: 353), quoted also by RaShI in his discussion of Deut. 33:17 (RaShI–Chavel 1982: 601): "His firstling ox: The King who will emerge from him is Joshua, whose strength will be as great as an ox in order to conquer many kings." Legend has it that Joshua was an exceedingly large and ox-like man; his mount, it is related, was a ox of enormous strength. The unicorn, on the other hand, was the symbol of Gideon, the Judge from the tribe of Manasseh who overthrows the Midianites.

38. *Tahash* appears as a type of animal skin in Exodus 25:5, 26:14, 35:7, 35:23, 36:19, 39:34; Numbers 4:6, 4:8, 4:10, 4:11, 4:12, 4:14, 4:25, and Ezekiel 16:10. It is a proper name in Genesis 22:24.

39. BT *Shabbat* 28b:

> What conclusion was reached in the matter of the *tahash* which existed in the days of Moses? R. Elaya said: "R. Simeon b. Lakish said, 'R. Meir used to say, "The *tahash* which lived in the days of Moses was a singular creature [*bri-'ah mepnei atsmah*—or a separate species—lit., a creation of its own kind], and the sages were unable to decide if it was a wild or a domestic species. It had a single horn on its forehead, and it was prepared at that moment for Moses, and he [used its skin to cover] the Tabernacle, and it was hidden away." Since he says it had a single horn, it follows that it was a ritually acceptable animal, since R. Yehudah says, "The ox which Adam, the first man sacrificed, had but one horn on its forehead, as it is written (Ps. 69:32): 'That will please the LORD more than oxen, than bulls with horns and hooves.'" The word used [in that prooftext] is read *makrin* [having horns]. R. Nahman b. Isaac said, "The word is written *makren* [having a single horn: thus, it follows that the *tahash*, being a one-horned animal, is a pure animal.]" We may also derive from the same verse that [the *tahash*] was a domestic [since the verse mentions oxen and bulls with horns and hooves, rather than creature with paws and claws.] At the same time, there is such a thing as the *Keresh*, which is a wild animal, and has only one horn, [so] one might [just as easily] assert that it was a wild animal.

JT *Shabbat* 2:3 (16b-17a):

> R. Eleazar asked, "How is it possible that the Tent of Meeting was made from [the skin of] a ritually unacceptable animal? —Behold, scripture says, 'And *tahashim* skins.'" R. Judah and R. Nehemiah and the Rabbis had the following discussion: R. Judah said, "[*Tahash*] refers to a violet color." And R. Nehemiah says, "[*Tahash* refers to] ermine fur." And the sages say, "[*Tahash* refers to] a type of ritually acceptable beast, which lives in the desert." Both R. Eliezar b. Yose and R. Abbahu, who cited R. Simeon b. Lakish, said, in the name of R. Meir: "God created a type of ritually acceptable beast [sic: *k'min hayah tehorah*] in the desert. As soon as the work for the Tabernacle was done with it, it was hidden away." R. Avin says, "Its name was *Keresh*." R. Hosea taught, "It was one-horned [since it is written (Ps. 69:32)]: 'That will please the LORD more than oxen, than bulls with horns and hooves.'" Scripture spells the word "with horns," *makren*—"having a single horn."

Pesikta Braude 1968: 648 (33:10) and *Kohelet Rabbah* 1887: 4b (1:9) both have variations. As might be expected, the various opinions are attributed slightly differently. *Kohelet Rabbah* descibes the *tahash* as a large beast *hayah gedolah* (perhaps a misreading of JT's *g'deylah bamidbar*, "it grows in the desert," since it leaves out the information about the desert) and adds the detail that the beast's horn was "on its forehead," indicating that at least this historical stratum of the tradition regarded the *tahash* as a unicorn rather than a rhinoceroslike creature. This is implicit in the identification of the

tahash with the *Keresh*; in the Babylonian Talmud the beast is only "like a *Keresh*," but in the midrashim, perhaps through the influence of the Jerusalem Talmud it comes to be a *Keresh*. This linkage may be helped along by the association of the word *Keresh* with the word *kerashim*: boards for the sides of the Tabernacle (Exod. 26: 15, 18). Perhaps in a Greek-speaking environment, the word *keresh* could also be associated with the Greek word *κερασ*, or horn, as in *μονοκρτξν*).

40. In this he follows *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 140a (*Terumah* 6), where R. Yehudah asserts that the *tahash*'s skin comprised six colors. R. Bahya on Exodus 25:5 asserts that the *tahash*'s skin was "wonderfully and miraculously illuminated" (Bahya–Chavel 1984, 2:264).

A more incidental unicornlike creature known to Jewish lore is a one-horned goat "whose horn was formed before its hooves" offered by Adam as the stars came out at the waning of the first Sabbath. See BT *Shabbat* 28b; BT *Avodah Zarah* 8a; *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, chap. 1 (*Avot de-Rabi Natan*–Schechter 1945: 4a); *Pesikta Rabbati* 33 (*Pesikta* Braude 1968: 154a); *Midrash Tehillim* 39:3 (*Tehillim*–Buber 1891: 128b). *Avot de Rabbi Natan* states that the ox which Adam offered, the bullock which Noah offered, and the Ram which Abraham sacrificed all were created with their horns prior to their hooves. This initially seems like a rabbinic foray into embryology, but it seems to emerge from the legend that the first animals sprang forth from the ground, and hence, the horns would have emerged before the hooves. See Ginsberg 1909: 5: 116 n. 108; 78 n. 21.

41. It is interesting to note that Ezekiel (16:10) describes the shoes of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness as being "of *tahash*—leather." These shoes, which miraculously never wore out (cf. Deut. 29:4), were thus made of the same material used to cover the holy Tabernacle, in some sense a statement about the sanctity of the people of Israel.

42. C. 520–450 B.C.E. These bulls are clearly two-horned beasts in profile, Nonetheless, they appear like unicorn-bulls to the eye, and are the most powerful images of the lion-bull conflict in ancient art. They are found on the triple portal and the north stairway of the *apadana* of the Royal Palace; see Wilber 1989: pls. 16 and 17; fig. 52, and Beer 1977: 12–13.

43. RaShI, Deut. 33:17, quoting *Sifre*, 353 (RaShI–Chavel 1982: 601). If this is poetic parallelism, one is led to consider whether or not "ox" and *re'em* are synonyms, and whether these verses, then, originally referred to a single creature.

44. See *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 68a (*Vayigash* 3). The enmity between the lion and the unicorn is a well-known subject of art and literature; see note 1. The enmity between the lion and the ox is manifested in early Jewish iconography; see, for example, the Beit Alpha synagogue mosaics, where a lion and an ox affront each other on the west side (Kitzinger 1965: 9, pl. 13).

45. The most comprehensive work on the unicorn remains Shepard 1930. The best work on unicorn as religious allegory is Einhorn 1976. For the unicorn in medieval art, see Freeman 1976. A work with a fascinating, rather sweeping but never entirely convincing thesis is Williamson 1986. Beer 1977 fuses artistic analysis with literary citations. Brown 1881, while dated, is still useful. Two fine encyclopedia entries on the subject are Wehrhahn-Stauch 1958 and Brandenburg 1959.

46. Though the Vulgate has "salve me ex ore leonis et [a cornibus unicornium humilitatem meam] (*Iuxta LXX*) [et de cornibus unicornium exaudi me] (*Iuxta Hebr*).

47. This seems fairly explicit in the illustration of Ps. 22:22 in the Stuttgart Psalter: fol. 27 (illustrated in Freeman 1976: 37, pl. 21).

48. The account of Physiologus may be found in *Physiologus*–Curley 1979: 51. See also Curley 1980: 1–10. Patristic writers who make the christological associations of the unicorn explicit include Ambrose (Ambrose *Patriarchs*–McHugh 1972: 270–73) and Basil (Basil *Exegetic homilies*–Way 1963: 204–5), as well as Tertullian, where, in discussing Deuteronomy 33:17, he explains that "Christ is meant by this [animal] and the horn denotes Christ's cross" (Tertullian *Adversus Marcionem*–Evans 1972: 225).

Iconographic parallels are to be found in depictions of the virgin with the unicorn in the iconography of the Late Middle Ages, where the virgin is unmistakably the Virgin, and where all the associations with the Bride in the Song of Songs are emphasized. (For a detailed exposition of this subject, see Salzer 1967.) The Virgin receives the unicorn in a "garden enclosed" among lilies and roses, often next to a closed fountain, and other iconographic paraphernalia associated with the Song of Songs; see Shepard 1930: 41–70, passim. The unicorn is followed by the angel Gabriel, who blows a horn that symbolizes the unicorn's "horn of redemption," and heralds the incarnation of Jesus. The beauty of the famous unicorn tapestries at the Cloisters in New York, is that they eschew this sort of heavy-handed approach in favor of a more subtle treatment. In the fifth tapestry of the series a young hunter blows a horn as the unicorn attacks the hunters who pursue him, wreaking great damage. This young hunter, of course, is none other than Gabriel himself. His scabbard reads "Ave Regina C(oelerum)" (Hail Queen of Heaven), a paraphrase of his words to the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation. The sixth tapestry, the next tapestry in the series (of which only a fragment survives) depicts the unicorn with its forefeet in the lap of the virgin, and here, too, there is a hunter blowing a horn; see Freeman 1976: 22, 102–5.

49. See South 1988: 5–26, passim.

50. This gigantic form of the *re'em* is found in *Tehillim*–Buber 1891: 98a (22:28), and in *Aggadat Karne Re'emim* 1881. According to Eisenstein 1915: 2:504, it appears in *Ein Ya'akov* 1516 (the first edition) as an appendix to the legends from JT *Hagigah*, but it does not appear in subsequent printings. The *aggadah* is based on the statement in BT *Shabbat* 107b, repeated in BT *Avodah Zarah* 3b, that "The Holy Blessed One provides food for the entire world, from the horns of *re'emim* to the eggs of lice (from the largest to the smallest of creatures)":

> And what are the "horns of *re'emim*? It is a ritually acceptable animal, and there are two in the world, one male and one female, one in the East and one in the West, and once every seventy years they mate. And when the male mounts the female, the female turns her head and bites the male and kills him, and he dies, and the female is pregnant for twelve years. Until the twelve years are up, she walks on her legs, and grazes and drinks water, but when the twelfth year begins, she falls on her side, and can no longer rise. Then God provides for her in His mercy, and spittle drops from her mouth like a flowing spring, and grass grows all around [the ground below her mouth], and she grazes on it for a twelvemonth, she turns from side to side and grazes. Thus it is written, ". . . who gives the beasts their food, to the raven's brood that for which they cry" (Ps. 147: 9). After a twelvemonth, her womb splits and two [young] emerge, a male and a female. One goes to the East and the other to the West for seventy years. And they do not add to [this number of couplings over] the years, in order that the entire world not be destroyed. (Eisenstein 1915: 2:504)

Thus, according to this legend, there is actually only one *re'em* in the world for twelve out of every seventy years, and for the remainder of the time, the species is functionally unique, in that it is comprised of only a single pair.

51. 2 Samuel 7:23. Used also in the Sabbath Liturgy (*Minhah Amidah*).

52. 1 Samuel 2:10, in its context a reference to the king, but liturgically a reference to the King Messiah (Weekday *Shaharit Amidah*: "May You speedily cause to flourish the offspring of David Your servant, and raise his horn through your salvation").

53. On the use of the word "horn" as metaphor and in realia, see Süring 1980.

54. There are some that illustrate specific scenes in the many manuscripts of *Meshal HaKadmoni*, a book of animal fables written in the twelfth century by Yizhak b. Solomon Ibn Sahulah. The section of interest here is a tale of two animals. One is the *'acco*, usually understood to be the ibex, or "wild goat" (*Caora segagrus*); cf. Deuteronomy 14:5. Called *ya'alah* in Aramaic, equivalent to the Hebrew *ya'el* in 1 Samuel 24:3, Psalms 104:18, Job 39:1. RaDaK *Shorashim*, 1847:144, has *'acco* as the equivalent, which he translates as "camozza," or ibex. RaShI and Hizzkuni on Deut. 14:5 (RaShI–Chavel 1982: 647; Hizzkuni–Chavel 1988: 662) translate "Asstanbok" in Old French. The other is the *'ofer*. This word appears only in the Song of Songs, where it is not the name of a discrete animal, but an adjectival noun that appears in conjunction with the noun it modifies. It means "fawn of" or "young of." Thus, Song of Songs 2:9, 2:17, and 8: 14 refer to "*'ofer ha'ayalim* (a young stag, literally "the young of the stags"), and 4:5 and 7:4 refer to "two fawns, twins of a doe"; that is "the fawns . . . of a doe." (JPS *Tanakh* 1985 has "gazelle" for *zviah*, but the word simply means a female deer or antelope. Since *ha'ayalim* is translated with the generic "stag" rather than "gazelle" or "antelope," *zviah* has been translated consistently.)

In rabbinic literature, the word *'ofer* comes to symbolize the strength of a young, male animal, and young men are referred to metaphorically, as *'oferim*. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 14:6 (*Midrash Rabbah*–Mirkin 1977: 1:105): *Midrash Yelamdenu* Num. 23:10); *Yalkut Shimoni*–Haiman 1973–91: para. 766; *Eliyahu Rabbah*–Ish-Shalom 1902: 21.

The illustration at the head of chapter 68 of *Meshal HaKadmoni* bears the caption "A picture of the *'acco* and the *'ofer*—a bundle of myrrh," and depicts a unicorn at the right speaking to a ram at the left; see, for example, *Meshal HaKadmoni*–Zamora 1953: 261. At first glance, the unicorn here seems merely to be an illustration of a text that mentions it. It is a relatively static image, indistinguishable from the unicorn of Christian iconography. Yet the importance of this illustration should not be underestimated. *Meshal HaKadmoni* is the

only known work of medieval Jewish literature in which the author himself illustrated the first manuscript with vignettes explicated by rhymed couplets. He wrote in his introduction:

> And I saw fit to illustrate it with pictures to [promote] understand[ing] and to teach, to keep the attention of the little ones, and to give rest through its beauty to the tortured ones. And perhaps their hearts will be drawn to the [First] Principle, as [though led] by an ox-goad. And they will remove from their hearts the books of deceit, the heretics and the Epicureans. (*Meshal HaKadmoni*–Zamora 1953: 7)

Though the original manuscript is lost, all subsequent manuscripts demonstrate a certain homogeneity of iconography. This carries over to the printed editions of the work, which was the first Hebrew book to be printed with illustrations (Soncino: Brescia, 1491). Unlike the bestiary tradition, where depictions of various animals are often labeled ("Hic est unicornus"), there are few cases in which the identity of an animal in a medieval Jewish illumination is made clear by the illuminator. Because this illustration and its caption are essentially as the original author created them, they seem important in light of what they may contribute to the understanding of what medieval Jews thought they were depicting when they depicted a unicorn.

Regrettably, the consistency of the transmission of the illustrations falls short when it comes to depicting one of these two animals. While one is unfailingly a unicorn, the other varies from a ramlike to an antelopelike creature. Thus, one of these animals obviously made a strong impression on the illustrators; it was clearly known and understood by them to be a unicorn. The other was less important, and could assume any number of shapes within the general range of wild and domestic ruminant quadrupeds.

This presents a dilemma. Which of these animals did the artist understand to be the *'acco* and did he intend as the *'ofer*? Rachel Wischnitzer's assertion that the *'ofer* is the unicorn is unsatisfying. She maintains that this is the case on the basis of a late targum of Song of Songs 2:9, where the word *'ofer* is translated as *'urzila*. In Wischnitzer 1951: 152, she presents this theory in the name of Dr. Abraham Berger of the Jewish Division, New York Public Library. Ms. Wischnitzer concludes: "We know the term *urzila d'rema* from *Zebahim* 113b, where it denotes the young of the *reem*. Thus, the *'ofer* became a *reem* and was illustrated as a unicorn."

Actually, the word *'urzila* in the targum is simply a direct translation of the modifier *'ofer* in the sense of "young" (Jastrow 1903: 1:33). Thus, *urzila d'rema* in BT *Zevahim* 113b simply means "the young of the *re'em*." It is clear that the author of the *targum* intended the translation *urzila d'alya* to indicate "a young stag."

Though Wischnitzer's theory emerges from a grammatical error, the medieval grammarians themselves disagree on the nature of these animals. Kimhi calls the *'acco* "the wild goat" and the *'ofer* "the young of the antelope or the deer." If the *'acco* is a wild goat, or ibex, then depicting it as a ram would be appropriate, particularly in light of the fact that "*'ofer*" comes to mean strength, and the *re'em* is certainly a paragon of strength. On the other hand, Sa'adia Gaon maintains that the *'acco* is the male of the *re'em*. Levita, in his additions to Kimhi, quotes Sa'adia, but objects to his definition on the grounds that it was impossible for the male of a given species to be fit for consumption, whereas the female is unfit. (From this it is possible to determine that Levita viewed the *re'em* as a ritually unacceptable animal.) Still, Sa'adia's interpretation is the only one that makes any explicit connection at all between the *'acco* and the *re'em*. This might make sense in terms of the placement of the figures: Since the direction of the iconography in Hebrew manuscripts usually follows the direction of the language, the unicorn, the righthand animal, would be the *'acco*, and the ram or antelope would be the *'ofer*. However, it is unwise to build overmuch on such confirmation, since this is not a hard-and-fast rule, and is often violated even in other illustrations for this text. Further clues emerge from the text itself. It describes the *'ofer* as a wise and generous teacher, and the *'acco* as his friend and student. The *'ofer* spots a hunter approaching and advises that the two of them move to safer ground, but the *'acco* maintains that one cannot die except at the time appointed by the forces of fate. The *'ofer*, on the other hand, demonstrates a pragmatic faith in God rather than in planetary conjunctions; God will protect, but one should not place oneself in dangerous circumstances: God protects the pursued, by virtue of the fact that they are being pursued, not because they sit still and wait for fate to work itself out. One might assume on the basis of the text that the relatively passive *'acco* is the wild goat because his willingness to go "like a sheep to the slaughter" reveals the fact that he is a cousin of passive and domestic goats and sheep, whereas *'ofer* is the unicorn, since it exhibits the unicornlike characteristic of removing itself with all due speed from dangerous situations. The problem is further complicated by the fact that later authorities, such as Leone Modena, explicitly identify the *'acco* with the unicorn (*Zemah Zaddik*–Zamora 1949: 101.) Still, the sources remain at an impasse, and it is difficult both to identify which of these beasts is the unicorn, and to determine why the author chose to use a unicorn in this particular tale.

55. For a reversal of a traditionally negative image through an appropriation in a positive context, see the comment on Song of Songs 1:5, "I am dark but comely": "Indeed, am dark—but in my very darkness I am comely"; cf. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1887: 8b (1:5). And see the reversals effected in the case of both hare (Chapter 2) and elephant (Chapter 3).

56. Berger 1979, passim.

57. See Amishai-Maisels 1982: 103. Chagall said, "For me, Christ always symbolized the true type of the Jewish marytr. That is how I understood him in 1908, when I used this figure for the first time. . . . It was under the influence of the pogroms. Then I painted and drew him in pictures about ghettos, surrounded by Jewish troubles, by Jewish mothers, running terrified holding little children in their arms." Lenemann 1977: 4.

58. Plank 1987.

59. There is a multicolored (striped) unicorn in the Parma Bible: fol. 92v.

60. Unicorns on the *re'em* model can be found in defensive poses. Generally, they are rearing with their heads lowered, and their horns pointing forward. See, for example, the micrography in the Vatican Hebrew Bible of 1294: fols. 743r, 829r; and the Paris Hebrew Bible with similar micrography: fol. 72v. See also the unicorn in a late thirteenth-century Ashkenazic Bible in London: fol. 268r, bottom margin; the Brabant Pentateuch: fol. 97r; and the Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor, fol. 132r.

Some rather strange unicornlike creatures appear in a pair of late fifteenth-century German *haggadot* which may owe their origins to the same model-book. (Second Nuremberg Haggadah: fol. 30r; Yahudah Haggadah: fol. 27r) In these, the horn is straight and smooth, but flared at the end like an elephant's trunk. The unicorn rears forward adversarily. These rather whimsical, yet threatening creatures presage the strangely horned unicorns in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, painted 1503–4 (Prado, Madrid).

A pair of Spanish unicorns in the so-called Cervera Bible: fols. 441r; 399r have wild and defiant appearances combined with interesting giraffe-like bodies. Finally a fragmentary late thirteenth-century Italian Bible manuscript: fol. 76r, depicts a unicorn with a horselike body, split rear hooves, and front legs like lion's paws. Its horn is thin and slightly curved.

Unicorns in conflict with other animals are rarer in Jewish art, but one might perhaps add the affronted unicorns mentioned by Rachel Wischnitzer (Wischnitzer 1951: 153) as representative of unicorns fighting each other, though the image is rather static and heraldic in nature (see Gwozdziec, dome, in Davidovitch 1968: pl. 12). These unicorns are only mildly threatening in appearance, but the unicorn can appear in active conflict. In a Perugian Bible from 1398 to 1405: fol. 21r), the opening of the book of Deuteronomy is illustrated with a depiction of a unicorn attacking an armed man. This is clearly a reference to Deuteronomy 33:17: "like a firstling ox in his majesty, He has horns like the horns of the wild-ox. With them he gores the peoples."

Depictions of unicorns fighting other beasts are common in Christian and Muslim art. Some medieval Muslim examples include affronted, winged unicorns depicted on an Arabian ivory casket of around C.E. 1000, now in the cathedral of Pamplona, Spain, in Beer 1977: pl. 22, and various depictions of monoceros or rhinoceroslike unicorns, (called *karkadans*) including one on a thirteenth-century Persian wall tile in the Berlin Islamic Museum, illustrated in Ettinghausen 1950: pl. 16. The *karkadan* appears in illuminated manuscripts in the East as well; cf. Beer 1977: pl. 41. Some examples from Christian art are the rearing unicorn fighting a man depicted on a thirteenth-century (?) frieze in Strassbourg Cathedral (Beer 1977: pl. 51). Wild men are known to fight unicorns, as on an early fifteenth-century woven tapestry from Strassbourg, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Beer 1977: pl. 52), and unicorns appear as the mounts of wild women in a number of places, some of which depict them challenging wild men (Beer 1977: pl. 81, from a Goblein tapestry from South Holland c. 1500–1510). The unicorn is also the mount of Chastity in her battle with Immodesty, mounted on a bear, for which see the late fifteenth-century broadside in the Albertina Kupferstich-sammlung, Beer 1977: pl. 104. See also Freeman 1976: 40–42.

61. Cf. *Midrash Lekah Tov* Genesis 49:9 (*Midrash Lekakh Tov*–Buber 1880, 1:235a): "Judah is a lion's whelp (Gen. 49:9): . . . who fears nothing. A lion has roared, Who can but fear? (Amos 3:8) . . . this is the King Messiah. . . . Lo, a people that rises like a lion, Leaps up like the king of beasts (Num. 23:24) . . . in the days of the Messiah the nations will bow down to him."

62. See Kauffmann 1897 for a discussion of the problem of lions in the synagogue and halakhah.

63. I make the assumption that at least some of the Jews who prayed and studied at Hodorov were familiar with kabbalistic symbolism on the basis of the many kabbalistic inscriptions on the walls

of the building. Joseph is called *yesod* or *tsaddik*. See BT *Yoma* 35b and *Zohar*–Margoliyot 1940–46 2:258a.

64. See, for example, JT *Sukkah* 55b, BT *Sukkah* 52a. See also *Sefer Hekhalot* (Jellinek *Beth Ha-Midrasch* 1853–77, 5:187–88); Hai Gaon, *Responsum* in Ashkenazi 1854: 59a–61a; *Midrash Lekakh Tov*–Buber 1880, 1:258a–259a.

65. See, for example, *Kohelet Rabbah* 1887: 4b (1:9).

66. See above and *Tanhuma*–Buber 1885: 68a (*Vayigash* 3).

67. The leaps of poetic imagination necessary to transform the lion into a positive symbol are often quite vast. Judah's violence seems to be exonerated because it is directed against his enemies. But what of Mishnah Avot 5:20, wherein "R. Judah b. Tema says, 'Be brave as a lion . . . to do the will of your father in Heaven.'" The lion's "bravery" in the natural world is alleged to consist not of zealousness in religious observance, but of zealousness in hunting and fighting. In evoking the lion's "bravery" the Talmud must transform a negative metaphor: first the lion's facility at hunting and fighting is reinterpreted abstractly and anthropomorphically as "bravery." The lion's "bravery" is then held up as an example in comparison with the zealousness of human beings in a totally different sphere of activity. What R. Judah b. Tema really means is that the Jew should be as punctilious in religious observance as the lion is in tearing and devouring, but the use of the mediating anthropomorphism of "bravery" mitigates this rather trouble-some association, making the force rather than the nature of the lion's actions the issue. This is a case of the use of the lion as a metaphor on the basis of its qualities in the natural world, but one in which the content is considerably forced.

68. *Midrash Tehillim* 104:17 (*Midrash Tehillim*–Braude 1959: 174).

69. HaLevi *Kuzari*–Even Shmuel 1972: 110 (3:11).

70. Davidson 1964: no. 1098.

71. *Midrash Tehillim* 22:28 (*Midrash Tehillim*–Braude 1959: 321–22).

72. Cf. BT *Ketubot* 111a.

Conclusion

1. "The Jews like their Ishmaelite cousins the Arabs, and indeed perhaps like all pure Semites (if such there be) displayed little talent for the visual, and almost none for the figurative arts . . . To the Jews belonged the splendours and raptures of the word" (Berenson 1952: 54).

2. See Yerushalmi 1982, and the essay by R. Bonfil in Ruderman 1992, wherein he illustrates how the old, in an age of transition, can often serve to purposefully mask the new.

3. The phrase is from Micah 5:2, and the shepherds, according to BT *Sukkah* 52b are Adam, Seth, Methuselah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David.

4. See Levenson 1993.

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